

# Plotinus' Idealism and the Problem of Matter in *Enneads* vi.4 & 5

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Twentieth-century philosophy has tried to disassociate science from metaphysics. Logical Positivism, in fact, argued that metaphysics is unrelated to science — indeed, that it is devoid of any cognitive meaning whatsoever. In Ancient Philosophy, however, science and metaphysics are intertwined. This is especially true in the Platonic tradition, where metaphysical objects (e.g., Beings, or Forms) are the causes (αἰτίαι) and sources (ἀρχαί) of things in Becoming. In Plotinus' Neoplatonism, the causes of the world of Becoming are his so-called hypostases: the One, Intellect (or Being), and Soul. Plotinus thus shares with Classical Platonism the idea that the causes of this-world — hence, the grounds for scientific understanding — are not material things or sensible objects. In contrast to Classical Platonism, however, Plotinus' Neoplatonism is strongly Idealistic. It not only adopts immaterial principles as its true causes, but it also denies any positive reality to matter.<sup>1</sup> The corporeality (or materiality) of this-world is to be identified with its multiplicity and its sensible extension or mass;<sup>2</sup> and Plotinus insists that the sensible world owes its existence and nature solely to the hypostases, renouncing even Plato's receptacle of Becoming.

I have, of course, grossly simplified Plotinus' views on matter. I do not intend, however, to offer a detailed account of his views on matter in this essay.<sup>3</sup> Rather, I shall adjudicate a recent debate

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1. Plotinus summarizes his view on (prime) matter as: "The opposite of all form is privation and privation always exists in another and has no existence by itself" (i.8.11.1-3). Thus, as John Rist comments regarding the fact that Plotinus sometimes appears to endorse some sort of receptacle for the hypostases' emanation: "matter cannot be isolated as any kind of pre-existent darkness, for there is no pre-existence [to the hypostases' causation or emanation] either temporally or ontologically" (*Plotinus: The Road to Reality*, Cambridge University Press, 1967; p. 117). And A. Hilary Armstrong insists that "Plotinus is not a metaphysical dualist. Matter is produced by the principles which come before it, and so, ultimately, by the One." ("Plotinus," *The Cambridge History of Later Greek*. . . , ed., A. H. Armstrong, Cambridge University Press, 1970; p. 256.)

2. Defined negatively, matter is associated with not-Being, non-actuality, or indeterminateness. On its positive relation to sensible mass (ὄγκος) or size (μεγέθος), see *Ennead* ii.4.6.15 and iii.6.7.13-14.

3. For further discussion of Plotinus' views on matter, including his distinction between intelligible and sensible matter, see John Rist, "Plotinus on Matter and Evil," *Phronesis* 6 (1961) 154-166, and "The Indefinite Dyad and Intelligible Matter in Plotinus," *Classical Quarterly* 12 (1962) 99-107.

over whether Plotinus preserves the negative side of his Idealism (its rejection of matter) in *Ennead* vi, Treatises 4 and 5, and explain somewhat how Plotinus articulates the positive side of his Idealism (its insistence that our cosmos is nothing but an image or derivation from the hypostases). As we shall see, using the former, narrower topic as an occasion for the more general topic of how Plotinus articulates his Idealism in fact conforms to Plotinus' own tact in vi.4 & vi.5. For, the main question of those treatises is just how our so-called material world could be nothing but an image of the immaterial hypostases; and Plotinus answers this question by clarifying some main features of his positive doctrine of this-world's descent from the hypostases.

The principals in the recent debate alluded to are Jonathan Lee and Dominic O'Meara. Lee initiates the debate by charging that in his *Structures hiérarchiques dans la pensée de Plotin*<sup>4</sup> O'Meara holds that in vi.4 & 5 Plotinus attributes to matter a nature (or reality) of its own independent of the hypostases' eidetic (Lee calls it) causation of our cosmos. Lee proceeds to elucidate what in these treatises suggests this intrusion on Plotinus' Idealism and argues that the troublesome passages do not justify O'Meara's interpretation of Plotinus. In his response, O'Meara holds that Lee misunderstands what in vi.4 & 5 led to his interpretation and proceeds to defend his earlier attribution of a material principle to Plotinus.

The Lee/O'Meara debate is an excellent starting point not only for examining *Ennead* vi.4 & 5 but for clarifying Plotinus' Idealism generally, because they focus on two of Plotinus' key concepts for describing this-world's relationship to the hypostases and for analyzing Classical Platonism's notion of *participation*. In particular, Lee focuses on the Plotinian idea that this-world stands to the hypostases as a *recipient* of their unity, Being, and life; and O'Meara focuses on the Plotinian idea that this-world *turns* or *looks towards* the hypostases for unity, Being, and life. Although I shall discuss these two ideas solely as they are found in vi.4 & 5, my discussion of them will suggest how Plotinus understands Platonic participation in his *Enneads* generally.

I shall close my introductory comments with two reasons why adjudicating the problem of matter in vi.4 & 5 and articulating his Idealism — or at least some of its main features — are important. Both of these reasons are hinted at in my opening paragraph. The first is that Plotinus' strong Idealism is one of the principal ways in which his Neoplatonism departs from Classical Platonism. The second is the relation between his strong Idealism and his intentions regarding the sensible or "material" cosmos. Let me briefly elaborate on this second reason.

4. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975.

Plotinus' epistemology has a decidedly mystical bent. To know the hypostases is to become one with them (or perhaps *vice versa*); and since (as Plato and Aristotle both held) the highest knowledge is knowledge of the highest principles, the Plotinian philosopher strives to ascend to the One — the highest or first of the hypostases — and to become one with it. The ascent to the One, Plotinus' mystical bent, and his "negative theology" of the One's nature are recurring and well-known themes in his *Enneads*. They are also the subject matters of some of its most stirring passages and sources for the general perception of Plotinus' Neoplatonism as essentially a mystical and other-worldly philosophy which has little if any concern for this-world or the Classical Greek concerns over scientific understanding of it. Plotinus' Idealism is at least as central (and recurrent) to his Neoplatonism as are his mysticism and the "other-worldliness" of his hypostases, however, as demonstrated by his persistent attempts to maintain and explain it (for example, in vi.4 & 5); and his dogged adherence to his strong Idealism is not explained by his mysticism and other-worldliness. One need not deny matter's reality, or insist that this-world is *nothing but* an image or a descent from the hypostases, in order to be a mystic or to maintain the existence of immaterial causes. Plotinus is so deeply committed to his Idealism, rather, because it allows him to argue, for example, that this-world is<sup>5</sup>

a whole, all beautiful and self-sufficient and friends with itself and with its parts, both the more important and the lesser, which are equally well adapted to it. (iii. 2.3.7-9; Armstrong)

The upshot of Plotinus' Idealism, in other words, is not to reject this-world and to seek escape from it, but to save it. Plotinus conceives our cosmos to be thoroughly rational, ordered and unaffected by any principle or cause which (on the Platonic construal of matter) promotes irrationality and disorder in its motion, processes, or nature; and this conception is based upon his strongly Idealistic denial of matter and insistence that our cosmos is nothing but an effect of the hypostases' vertical (I shall call it) causation. It is for this reason that I intimate in my opening paragraph that Plotinus is firmly a part of the Platonic tradition's concern over scientific understanding.

The argument of this essay will be in six sections. The first will introduce Plotinus' hypostases and his theory of the vertical causation of our cosmos. It will gloss over numerous subtleties in Plotinus' metaphysics and side-step numerous points for scholarly

5. *Ennead* iii.2.3.7-9, A. H. Armstrong translation in Loeb Classical Library. All remaining references in this essay to the *Enneads* are to the Oxford Classical Texts editions.

debate. Nonetheless, it is important to have an initial understanding of Plotinus' metaphysics as background to my more deliberate discussion of vi.4 & 5. Section II will sketch main features of the Lee/O'Meara debate, thereby acquainting us with the reasons why there seems to be a "problem of matter" in vi.4 & 5 for those of us who maintain that Plotinus is a strong Idealist. I shall then turn to the text of vi.4 & 5. Section III will explain the nature of Plotinus' topic in these treatises and articulate initial features of his resolution of that topic. Sections IV-VI will further develop Plotinus' Idealistic resolution. These three sections will focus, respectively, on the centrality of otherness or Difference to Plotinus' Idealism, on the role of Soul in his resolution (and also Lee's notion of reception), and on the nature of Intellect and its relation to the One insofar as these are also central to his resolution (as well as O'Meara's notion of turning or looking towards the hypostases). A brief, final section will summarize my discussion.

## I

Plotinus conceives Becoming's relation to the hypostases to be that of an image to an archetype which produces it; and he cautions us against construing this to imply that the hypostases' production of our cosmos presupposes a material base in (or on) which our cosmos is imaged (unlike, for example, when a man produces his image in a mirror) or to imply that this-world and the hypostases are separate entities or sets of entities (as in the case of a man and his reflection in a mirror).<sup>6</sup> The conception's main point, rather, is that our cosmos depends on the hypostases for its existence and also its nature (as an image in a mirror does depend on its archetype for its existence and character).<sup>7</sup> It also conveys the fact that the true causes of this-world are, however, not themselves parts of it. The hypostases do not exist in space and time but are eternal and invariant; and their production of this-world is not a cosmological process that begins in time or proceeds from material elements. The hypostases are not material things nor sensible objects; and nor are they mere abstractions from the world of sense experience. Rather, they are presupposed by it and by any understanding we might have of it.

I have termed Plotinus' theory of the hypostases and their relation to this world his theory of vertical causation. It may also be

6. See *Ennead* vi.4.10.

7. For a fuller discussion of the notion of imaging in Plotinus' theory, see John H. Fielder, "Chorismos and Emanation in the Philosophy of Plotinus," *The Significance of Neoplatonism*, ed., R. Baine Harris, State University of New York Press, 1976; pp. 101-120.

called his theory of emanation or procession. The term 'vertical causation' indicates that our cosmos is the product of a higher reality — that its existence and nature result from eternal, invariant principles which are neither parts of it nor separate entities from it. The term 'emanation' reminds us of Plotinus' image/archetype conception of this-world's relation to the hypostases and emphasizes that our cosmos owes its existence and nature *solely* to the hypostases and their effectiveness. The term 'procession' emphasizes the related fact that our cosmos is not a separate entity (or set of entities) from the hypostases but is the final outcome (or end-product) of a process beginning in the hypostases themselves.<sup>8</sup> This process could not be temporal; nor could it be a process in which the hypostases themselves actually change in any way since, as we have noted, they are eternal and invariant. Rather, 'process' here connotes that (1) Plotinus' trinity of true causes is itself ordered in such a way that (2) Intellect (or Being) is explained or understood through the One, Soul is explained or understood through Intellect and the One, and this-world is explained or understood through Soul, Intellect and the One. Accordingly, the relation between this-world and the hypostases (and among the hypostases themselves) is genuinely causal insofar as a cause is that which explains the existence and nature of its effect. However, it is not a "horizontal" relation obtaining between entities but a "vertical" relation between entities (*viz.*, individual things) and principles through which they are known or understood. As we shall see in vi.4 & 5. This idea that our cosmos is a (final) outcome of a vertical process beginning in the hypostases allows Plotinus to maintain the *prima facie* paradoxical doctrine that the hypostases themselves are and eternally remain distinguishable from (and prior to) Becoming, yet they enter and are present in it — as, we might say, the axioms of arithmetic are present in a computation or the laws of logic are present in a deduction.<sup>9</sup>

But how could the sensible cosmos be nothing but an image of the hypostases? In particular, I have claimed that Plotinus intends

8. Plotinus emphasizes that each lower level in the vertical process is wholly a derivation from its higher-ups and not a separate entity from them, for example, in ii.9.3.8-13 and iv.3.4.8-9. Plotinus thus insists that bodies are just images, traces, or shadows (εἰκόνες, ἴχνη, or σχιαί) of true reality (see i.6.8.7-8 and vi.7.7.30); and, as F. M. Schroeder says regarding the hypostases themselves, "each hypostasis images the hypostasis superior to itself" so that, for example, the "image of the One is Nous [Intellect] itself" ("The Platonic Parmenides and Imitation in Plotinus," *Dionysius* 2 (1978) 51-73; pp. 61 and 69).

9. As John Rist argues, Plotinus maintains that each hypostasis is present in what comes after it in the sense of "the presence of a cause 'in' its effect" (*Eros and Psyche*, University of Toronto Press, 1964; p. 80).

to save this-world; and this requires him to accept the reality of change, extension (hence, so-called materiality), and the diversity of things in this-world. Yet he does not embrace Plato's receptacle of Becoming to explain change and extension, and nor does he accept the ultimate reality of diversity in Being (or Form) to explain the diversity of kinds of things there are in this-world. Like Parmenides, Plotinus' understanding of reality leads ultimately to the One. Unlike Parmenides, however, Plotinus' One is not a sterile "well-rounded sphere," but the first principle, cause, or source of existence.<sup>10</sup> It is in the causal effectiveness of the One that Plotinus finds a source for the emergence of Being and ultimately extension and Becoming. Causal effectiveness implies the existence of something other than (though not separate from) the cause, and this otherness-from implies a difference- or departure-from. Consequently, Plotinus maintains what might be called a principle of vertical emergentism, according to which effects of the One must be other-than, hence different-from, it in nature. The One's effects are not utterly opposed to it, however, since this would require a principle that provides matter for the complete opposing. Instead, the One's effects are other-than and different-from it through being weaker or more limited in their natures than the absolute, utterly unbounded One.<sup>11</sup> Being and ultimately extension are thus to be understood as weakenings of the One's nature as it displays its causal effectiveness.

Since the One is the cause even of Being, its nature lies beyond Being. It therefore cannot be comprehended through any determinate concept. It transcends all description, definition, or delimitation.<sup>12</sup> It is appropriate to call it the One, or to refer to it as absolute unity, however, because the outcome or image of its causation is always unity. The One's first effect is Being (or Intellect). Unlike the One, Being does not transcend *all* definition or limit. At the same time, it is defined solely by its primal otherness from the One; it is nothing apart from its primal otherness

10. The One, Plotinus maintains, is the "fount of life, fount of Intellect, source of Being, cause of Good, root of Soul" (vi.9.9.1-2).

11. Plotinus argues that "what proceeds [down] is not equal to what remains" (iii.8.5.17) and that "the prior is always different from (ἕτερον) the subsequent" (1.18); for, "what is generated must always be of the same sort (ὁμογενές) as its originator but it becomes weaker (ἀσθενέστερον), ultimately fading away, as it proceeds down" (11.23-24). Moreover, since this procession is from the One, this means that anything other than the One must be weaker (ἐνδεέστερον) than it (v.3.15.9-10). Concerning determinate things in this-world — e.g., a horse — Plotinus thus maintains that these proceed from the lowest activity of Intellect by means of deficiency (ἐνδεές) or weakening (ἐλάττων) (vi.7.9.34-42).

12. On the One's nature, see, for example, ii.9.1.1-3, v.3.13, and v.5.13; and also Rist, *Plotinus*, pp. 25-27.

as the One's first effect. Defined just by its otherness, Being is wholly *self-defined*.<sup>13</sup> It is thus eternally and invariantly identical to (or the same as) itself, and it is thereby the most perfect determinate unity possible (*viz.*, eternal self-identity). At the same time, however, Intellect already establishes the "vertical" principle that anything other than the One cannot be just absolute unity. For, the One's effectiveness, and so also Being's primal otherness or self-definition, is continuous and unbounded.<sup>14</sup> As a result, Being (Intellect) is an eternal multiplicity of Intellects since it is continuously or unboundedly (self-)defined by its otherness. Intellect is thus both eternally itself and also an unbounded multiplicity of selves. This does not mean that Intellect is an aggregation of diverse parts or distinctly individuated selves. It is a singular existent, never departing from its self-identity. Yet it also includes or *is* itself many times over (or continuously). This implicit multiplicity in Intellect's nature does the job for Plotinus of Plato's many diverse Forms; it is the basis in the vertical process for diversity in kind among things in this-world.

Self-identity is the first effect of, or the primal otherness from, the One but not the last. In its unboundedness, the One's causality effects or "images" every level of unity possible. After Intellect, the next effect is Soul. Like Intellect, Soul is still an eternal and invariant unity; but its unity is weaker than Intellect's.<sup>15</sup> Like In-

13. On Intellect's self-identity through *self-definition*, see ii.9.1.47-52, v.1.4.26-35, and vi.7.41.18-21. The third of these passages, in particular, glosses Intellect's self-definition in terms of the unity of its activity or intellectual "motion" from the One with itself, the "object" of that activity. The second glosses Intellect's Difference as manifest in the fact that this activity, though identical to its object, does establish an implicit *duality* in the descent between the act of otherness from the One and the establishment of a hypostasis (*viz.*, Intellect) that is other than the One.

14. Plotinus summarizes Being's relation to the One in his principle that "all Beings *are* Beings on account of [their] unity" (vi.9.1.1). For more on Being's relation to the One, see vi.7.16 & 17 and v.1.6. In this latter chapter, Plotinus anticipates my discussion in Section VI of vi.5.4 by describing Intellect as a circumradiation (περίλαμψις) of the One that is thereby *continuously engendered* (ἀεὶ γεννώμενον) by the One (11.28-30). This emanation account of Being's relation to the One is to be extended down throughout the vertical process, wherein, Plotinus argues, every real thing produces out of its own substance and power another surrounding existence (ἐξηρητημένη ὑπόδοταις) related to it as an image to an archetype (11.31-34) — until we reach sensible or corporeal things, which are wholly effects, images, or traces of reality that are too weak to be realities or hypostases themselves.

15. Soul is perhaps the most difficult of the hypostases to pin down in Plotinus' text. In iv.3.5, Plotinus characterizes Soul as the level in the vertical process at which it moves from the compactness of Intellect to multiplicity (see II.9-17). Whereas Intellect possesses Being "all at once,"

tellect, Soul is a singular existent that is also a multiplicity of selves due to its continuous self-identity; but Soul's self-identical nature expresses further the One's effectiveness as this implies movement towards *another*. The many souls implicit in Soul are not just self-identities (Beings) but powers (δύναμεις); and power entails movement towards something other than itself. As a result, Soul is both eternal and yet also the vertical cause of Becoming. For, Becoming is that which in being itself is also in motion.<sup>16</sup> A tree, for example, is a self-identity (i.e., a tree) which, while remaining identical to itself (i.e., in remaining a tree), is continuously changing and growing (i.e., is moving *from* one state *towards another*). When we descend from Soul to its vertical effect (Becoming), we reach the final effect of the One's causation. For, the next logical step would be to a world with no self-identity or unity at all, and this would indeed be in complete opposition to the One. But such a world does not exist. Our cosmos *is* a unity and not an absolute multiplicity. It, and things in it, are self-identities, albeit moving and changing ones.

## II

Lee bases his understanding of the problem of matter in vi.4 & 5 on passages where, he believes, Plotinus suggests (1) that individual things in this-world receive their life (souls) and Being from the hypostases and (2) that the *kind* of soul and Being an individual receives is determined by a capacity it possesses to receive that kind of soul and Being. Lee believes this notion of recipient capacities to be implied when Plotinus says, for example, that Soul

contains the sensible universe, or, better, the *Psyche* [Soul] is the universe. Moreover, being something greater than bodily nature, the *Psyche* might reasonably be thought to give no more than a little to the universe: as much of it as the universe is capable to receive. (vi. 4.5.8-11; Lee's translation)

As further examples, Lee quotes two passages where Plotinus makes similar claims about this-world's relationship to Being:

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Soul possesses it "one after another" (or sequentially). As a result, Soul is "one power that is one in such a way that it is also many in another [viz., in this-world as its vertical effect] and does not possess all things in a single intellection" (iv.4.1.33-35).

16. Alternatively, we can say that Soul's vertical causation of Becoming further expresses the otherness or Different inherent in the One's effectiveness since spatial movement (κίνησις), for example, just is being perpetually in a Different (ἀεὶ ἕτερότα) (vi.3.22.43).



Thus, if many things desire Being, it is clear that they desire it as a whole; so that if a thing is able to participate in Being, then it participates in it, to the extent that it is capable, as a whole. (vi.4.8.38-40; Lee's translation)

. . . it is as if matter is, on all sides, touching (and yet not touching) the *idea*. By this approach, matter itself comes to possess from the *eidōs* all that it is capable to receive, since there is nothing between them. The *idea* neither passes through nor is diffused throughout the whole of matter, but remains in itself. (vi.5.8.17-22; Lee's translation)

These passages suggest, Lee believes, that our cosmos (or things in it) possesses certain capacities to receive (or participate in) life and Being *prior* to the process of vertical causation; and this suggests that vertical causation presupposes the operation of a principle other than the hypostases — in particular, a material principle.

Lee's solution to this problem for Plotinus' Idealism distinguishes between primary and proximate matter and between two stages in or aspects of the vertical process. The first stage is the production of individual things. Lee argues that this stage does not presuppose (primary) matter. Since the vertical order includes Being (hence, the Forms), moreover, this first stage does not produce bare individuals but natured individuals (i.e., proximate matter). Because they are natured, these individuals each possess a capacity to receive a particular kind of soul and Being in the second stage of the vertical process; and, Lee's argument concludes, it is this second stage that Plotinus has in mind in passages that attribute recipient capacities to things. Lee summarizes his argument as follows:<sup>17</sup>

What is at issue here is not the relation between [primary] matter and the intelligible world but the relation between sensible body [or proximate matter] and the intelligible world, and, since body as such has a positively specifiable nature as a result of its [first stage] eidetic causation, the claim that body is such as to receive the intelligible world to the extent that it is capable need not involve Plotinus in any sort of causal dualism.

Let us now turn to O'Meara's response.

O'Meara maintains, as I read him, that Lee misidentifies what in vi.4 & 5 questions Plotinus' Idealism. Plotinus' main contention in vi.4 & 5, O'Meara argues, is that to resolve the main topic of those

17. "The Doctrine of Reception According to the Capacity of the Recipient in *Ennead* vi.4-5," *Dionysius* 3 (1979) 79-97; p. 89.

treatises (viz., omnipresence) we must recognize "not that Being is present *both* to itself and to others, but that Being is present to itself and that *others are present to it*."<sup>18</sup> The key passages are not those where Plotinus mentions recipient capacities but those where he indicates that<sup>19</sup>

[r]ather than conceiving of the intelligible as "coming down," being present in, and working on the sensible, we must now envisage the sensibles as "looking up," "going towards" and being present to the intelligible.

According to O'Meara, these passages do not merely articulate Plotinus' resolution of the omnipresence topic, they also indicate a shift in Plotinus' own conception of this-world's relationship to the hypostases. And since this purportedly new conception is intended to be a general resolution of Plotinus' main topic, Lee is wrong to interpret passages where Plotinus mentions recipient capacities to be addressing proximate matter only.<sup>20</sup>

If we attempt to tie Plotinus down to one or other type of matter, we are in danger of forcing him to argue for a position not envisaged in, and not relevant to, his argument. In fact, if anything, Plotinus has in mind both prime and proximate matter in VI,5,8,15,22 [for example]; to be precise, he has in mind matter *in general*, including the matter of fire (prime matter) and the matter of other sensible things (proximate matter).

Precisely what O'Meara intends to conclude from all of this, however, is unclear. One would expect him to conclude that Plotinus is giving up on his Idealism, e.g., because this-world's looking up, going towards, or being present to the hypostases presupposes the existence of something to do the looking, the going, or the making itself present-to. Indeed, O'Meara does say that "Plotinus has the production of sensible forms depend on an aspect proper to matter."<sup>21</sup> No sooner does he say this, however, than he also invokes a two-stage notion of vertical causation and claims that "the line of causality 'going down' both *produces* and *is mediated by* one 'going up'."<sup>22</sup>

Despite the unclarity of his conclusion, O'Meara does move the discussion forward, first, by indicating that to understand passages where Plotinus appears to embrace a material principle we must understand his overriding discussion of omnipresence and,

18. "The Problem of Omnipresence in Plotinus' *Ennead* vi.4-5: A Reply," *Dionysius* 4 (1980) 61-74; p. 68, his italics.

19. O'Meara, p. 68.

20. O'Meara, p. 71.

21. O'Meara, p. 73.

22. O'Meara, p. 73; my italics.

second, by calling our attention to potentially troublesome passages where Plotinus depicts this-world as looking up, going towards, or being present to the hypostases. These passages are especially troublesome because they seem to contradict other passages in vi.4 & 5 where Plotinus claims that Soul and Being enter and are present throughout our cosmos. O'Meara himself does not believe that Plotinus maintains these latter claims throughout vi.4 & 5 but intends to reject them. O'Meara's main reasons for this seem to be two: (1) the fact that in vi.4 Plotinus emphasizes Being's self-identity or total presence *to itself* more than to our cosmos; and (2) the fact that this-world's looking or turning towards the hypostases contradicts (hence, logically rejects) the notion that the hypostases enter and are present throughout this world. Neither of these reasons is convincing, however. The first may be true, but it does not entail that Plotinus is denying that Being is still present to this-world (as well as to itself). The second reason is simply false. The fact that this-world in some sense turns towards the hypostases does not logically entail that they cannot also enter it. O'Meara himself, we have seen, implies that vertical causation has two distinguishable (though not separate) stages; and it would not be inconsistent for Plotinus to maintain that in the second stage this-world looks or turns towards, or is present to, what has entered or become present to it in the first stage. Even if the problems raised for Plotinus' strong Idealism by Lee and O'Meara are resolved, however, this would not fully defend Plotinus' Idealism. Lee's defense is inadequate because it does not address a fundamental question: how *is* Plotinus able to conceive our cosmos to be an image of the hypostases without invoking a material principle, hypokeimenon, or receptacle? How *does* Plotinus preserve in vi.4 & 5 the view that this-world is nothing but a final image of or procession from the hypostases? This question cannot be dismissed as simply irrelevant to Plotinus' concerns in those treatises. For, Plotinus himself believes that defending and explaining his Idealism is central to resolving his omnipresence topic. I now turn to that topic and the text of vi.4 & 5.

### III

Plotinus' Idealism is not a side-issue raised by certain isolated passages in vi.4 & 5. Plotinus himself understands the omnipresence topic as challenging him to explain his Idealistic vertical causation theory. He begins vi.4 by articulating his notion of omnipresence as the claim that Soul, for example, is present everywhere throughout the universe (*πανταχοῦ τῷ παντί πάρεστιν*) (vi.4.1.1) and by setting as his topic explaining how this is so.

He indicates, however, that this amounts to asking how “what is immaterial and without magnitude is able to go forth to multiplicity” (vi. 4.1.30-31). This is now the main question of vi.4 & 5. For, as Plotinus sees it, if he explains how what is immaterial (the hypostases) goes forth to multiplicity (our cosmos), he will have explained how the hypostases are omnipresent.

Elsewhere in vi.4 & 5 Plotinus does phrase his question differently. At one point, he asks “how the same can exist over all things — that is, how each of the many objects of sense experience can participate in the same in various places” (vi.4.7.1-3); and later he asks “how can the non-extended reach over everything corporeal, which has determinate size” (vi.5.11.1). One might question whether Plotinus intends these different phrasings of his question actually to be equivalent to the original. One might argue — à la O’Meara — that in claiming that the hypostases exist over and reach over this-world Plotinus is giving up his initial claim that they go forth to it. The best response to this argument, however, is a closer examination of how Plotinus’ discussion develops in vi.4 & 5. For, certainly the ideas of existing over and reaching over do not necessarily exclude the idea of going forth. We might say, for example, that sunlight both goes forth to the Earth while also existing or reaching over it.

In vi.4.2 Plotinus explicitly confronts us with the strong Idealism he intends by claiming that the hypostases go forth to this-world:

On the one hand, there is the True All [i.e., the hypostases]; on the other hand, there is the image of this All, which has the nature of being visible. The Real All is included in nothing [else], for nothing is prior to it. However, whatever comes after it [viz., its image] must be included in it if it is to exist, and indeed depends on it since without it it could neither rest nor move [i.e., not exist]. (vi.4.2.1-6)

The thesis that our cosmos is a wholly dependent image of the True All continues throughout vi.4 & 5. Plotinus does not discard it later on. But why is there a problem here? If the so-called material cosmos — the world of multiplicity, extension, or sensible objects — is included in the True All, does this not explain how this-world is a result of it “going forth”? The second of the three phrasings of Plotinus’ question (quoted earlier) best indicates the potential problem Plotinus sees. Whereas the first and third refer to the True All negatively (as immaterial, without magnitude, and non-extended), the second refers positively to it as (always and everywhere) *the same*. Wherever the True All exists, it is always the same. How could the True All both remain always and everywhere the same and yet have *multiplicity* be the outcome of its going forth? This feature of the hypostases’ omnipresence is not

a new idea introduced by Plotinus in vi.4.7. It is already found in vi.4.2, where Plotinus tells us that the True All "never departs from itself in any way but always satisfies itself and is the same as itself" (vi.4.2.13-16). And when taken together with the claim that the True All includes this-world and goes forth to it, this declaration of the True All's invariant self-sameness leads Plotinus also to assert in vi.4.2 the *prima facie* paradox that although our cosmos is an image of the True All, it "does not detach a part from it but finds it within itself since *it has entered without having gone outside of itself*" (vi. 4.2.19-21; my italics). Thus, it is clear already in vi.4.2 that Plotinus intends to hold both that the True All enters into or goes forth to multiplicity in producing our cosmos while also remaining self-identical. But how is this possible?

Plotinus clarifies his problem further in vi.4.3, where he also introduces what Lee interprets as the notion of recipient capacities in outlining his solution to that problem. Plotinus begins the chapter with the question:

Should we think of it [the True All] as itself being present or as remaining within itself but sending forth powers from it to all things and in *this* way being called omnipresent? For, on this [second] view, souls are said to be like rays so that it remains fixed within itself while these are sent forth from it to exist throughout living things. (vi. 4.3.1-6)

This passage contrasts two ways in which the True All could be said to be omnipresent. The first says that it is just itself present throughout this-world. The second says that its omnipresence is effected by souls, or powers, emanating from it into the world of living multiplicity. Plotinus does not, however, argue for one of these ways to the other's exclusion. Instead, he argues that the second way does not in fact exclude the first. More precisely, he takes up the second and argues that it in fact upholds the first, insisting that it does not "fragment Being" from (or in) its self-abiding presence to this-world. Plotinus' reason is that the True All (especially, for now, Being) *appears* to become fragmented because to something whose own diminished unity does not preserve Being's invariant self-sameness but is able to hold onto only a certain amount of this, Being becomes (or functions as) a specific Form (see vi.4.3.6-13). Being appears to become fragmented, in other words, (1) because our cosmos is diminished or weak in unity, (2) because our cosmos therefore cannot preserve or hold onto (Lee says "receive") Being in its utter self-sameness, and (3) because Being therefore functions vis-à-vis our cosmos *as if* it were a multiplicity of Beings (or Forms). The vehicle for this apparent fragmentation of Being is the powers of Soul that emanate from it as it proceeds to this-world. Plotinus concludes his denial that this

emanation excludes Being's own presence by inferring from the *apparent* character of Being's fragmentation that it remains "wholly present if it is present at all and, being present to the totality [of this-world], wholly present to each individual" (vi.4.3.29).

In vi.4.3 Plotinus thus clarifies the problem raised in vi.4.2 to be a question of how Being can remain unfragmented or self-same in its presence to this-world (and so to everything in it) and still include this-world's multiplicity within itself. And Plotinus' initial solution is that Being's multiplicity is not real but apparent, owing to the fact that as Being proceeds to this-world by means of powers of Soul it is present to each of the diverse things in the cosmos it produces as if it were a certain kind of Form. This initial solution is not convincing, however; Being's fragmentation surely cannot be *merely* apparent. The multiplicity of Being found in this-world must *somehow* actually be included in Being as its cause or principle, even if not in the way it might at first appear. Plotinus has suggested, of course, that Being is the cause of multiplicity because it proceeds to this-world by means of a multiplicity of souls that emanate from it. But why does a multiplicity of souls emanate from it and why is the outcome of this emanation a multiplicity of diverse kinds of living things? This must somehow be due to the nature of Intellect itself if this-world is to be nothing but an image of the True All. Plotinus is aware that further detail is needed, and the next chapter (vi.4.4) introduces the key concept in his fuller account.

#### IV

Plotinus begins vi.4.4 by asking:

But *how* do we account for both Being [itself] and the Beings [or Forms] — for the multiplicity of Intellect and the many souls — if Being is everywhere *one* and is not an aggregate of Form and Intellect is *one* and Soul is *one*? (vi.4.4.1-3)

The only new idea introduced by this passage is that Soul, like Being, is also truly *one*. Plotinus continues to maintain in vi.4.4 that Intellect is truly *one* (eternally self-same) while somehow including multiplicity, and he also continues to accept the multiplicity of souls claim that was central to the emanation view of vi.4.3. His question, of course, is how he can consistently maintain all of this; and his fuller answer is that multiplicity is included in Being just "because of Difference and not as in some place" (vi.4.4.23). Similarly, the multiplicity of souls emanating from Intellect are not to be thought of as diverse parts of the hypostasis Soul. Instead, "the *one* Soul exists in such a way that it includes all souls within

it; and," Plotinus adds, "the nature of such a thing is unbounded" (vi.4.4.45).

The key concept to explain how Being includes multiplicity is otherness or Difference (ἕτερος or διάφορος). Intellect is an invariably "fully satisfied" self-identity. It is a singular existence that is not "fragmented into parts." Its nature does include Difference, however, and this explains the sense in which it does actually include multiplicity. It also explains why its emanation (Soul) also includes multiplicity and why the ultimate outcome of its vertical causation is a diversity of kinds of things in this-world.

To discuss fully how Being's nature includes Difference and Difference's effects in the vertical process, we would need to examine a number of relevant treatises in the *Enneads*. Enough is said in vi.4 & 5, however, to give a plausible and sufficiently clear account of Difference and its effects to understand Plotinus' defense of his strong Idealism in these two treatises. By itself, however, that account would still not be adequate. It would show how diversity in the kinds of things there are depends solely upon the True All; but, as I complained regarding Lee's argument, it would not show how Plotinus avoids the Platonic conundrum of how immaterial principles can cause our so-called material world without presupposing a hypokeimenon or receptacle of some sort. For this, let us first pursue a bit further Soul's role in the vertical process and also Plotinus' concluding remark in vi.4.4 about the unbounded (ἄπειρον) nature of Being and Soul. I shall begin by returning to Lee's problem of recipient capacities.

## V

A recipient capacity, as understood by Lee, is an individual thing's capacity to receive (subsequent to its production) a particular kind of soul and Being — e.g., a human soul and humanity, or a horse soul and horseness. This interpretative concept, abstracted by Lee from his interpretation of certain passages in vi.4 & 5, is not completely misguided insofar as Plotinus is concerned with the fact that this-world contains a diversity of kinds of living things — human beings, horses, fire (Plotinus is an animist), and so forth. At the same time, however, it suggests that individual things in this-world are receivers of a multiplicity which, within Soul and Being themselves, is just a diversity of *kinds* of souls and Beings, and that individual things function as receptacles (albeit natured ones) whose role in the vertical process is to lie in wait for Soul and Being to enter this-world and then to select (as it were) whatever kind of soul and Being is determined by their natures or "capacities." Now it is true that this-world's role in Plotinus'

vertical process is a passive one — not because it is a receptacle (or set of receptacles) which lies in wait for the hypostases, however, but because this-world is solely an effect of the vertical process and is not in any way a (vertical) cause. Thus, when discussing vi.4.3, we saw that this-world's contribution to the final outcome of the vertical process is just its weakness or diminished unity rather than a matter of its somehow selecting or detaching various items from the True All.

This-world's wholly passive contribution to the vertical process could be more clearly expressed by translating 'λαμβάνειν' as 'to grasp' or 'to hold onto' rather than as 'to receive' (as Lee does). Understanding Plotinus to conceive this-world to be an effect of the True All which is capable of grasping or holding onto it less than fully rather than to be a receptacle which lies in wait, selects, and receives various items from it also captures more perspicuously Plotinus' main point in the three passages quoted in Section II from Lee's article. Recall that these three passages read, in part (and amending Lee's translation of 'λαμβάνειν'):

(1) Being something *greater than* bodily nature, the Soul might reasonably be thought to give *no more than* a little to the universe: *as much of it as* the universe is capable to grasp.

(2) If a thing is able to participate in Being, then it participates in it, *to the extent* that it is capable, *as a whole*.

(3) Matter itself comes to possess from the Form *all that* it is capable to grasp.

All three of these passages focus on a *degree* or *amount* to which this-world is able to grasp Soul and/or Being. There is no obvious reference to any capacity to grasp this or that *particular* (kind of) *item* from Soul and/or Being. Now at the beginning of vi.4.5 Plotinus says that the True All's *greatness* lies in the *unboundedness* mentioned at the end of vi.4.4 — i.e., in the fact that Intellect and Soul include multiplicity while each remains truly *one*. This does bring multiplicity into the discussion; but we have already seen Plotinus denying that this multiplicity is an aggregation of various parts, or diverse items, within Soul and Being. Accordingly, Plotinus cannot have in mind that our cosmos is a receptacle which receives various diverse items from Soul and Intellect. His main point in these passages is just that this-world falls short of the True All's greatness or unboundedness — albeit not completely, but to a degree — or that this-world is capable of holding onto the True All's greatness only to a degree and not fully. That this does, however, relate to the fact that our cosmos contains a diversity of



kinds of living things can be seen in vi.4.9-11, where Soul's role in the vertical process comes to center stage.

In vi.4.9 Plotinus returns to the idea introduced in vi.4.3, that Being proceeds to this-world by means of Soul (or Soul's powers). As in Aristotle, the proximate cause of what some individual *is* is its soul. For, Plotinus maintains, "wherever the powers are, their sources [viz., Being and its multiplicity] must be there with them" (vi.4.9.43). In vi.4.10 Plotinus reemphasizes that this-world is related to the True All as a wholly dependent image of it: "it comes from it and cannot exist apart from it" (vi.4.10.14). This reassures us that the theory of vertical causation, emanation, or procession is still in place. Plotinus then makes the key statement that what he refers to as "the weaker powers" and "the higher, worthier powers" are similarly related to one another (see vi.4.10.16-17). That this notion of levels of power bears upon our present concern with diversity in kind comes out in vi.4.11, which begins as follows:

But then if Being is entirely [or in its self-identity] everywhere, why do not all things participate in the intelligible fully? Why is there a first, a second, and so forth? The presence is determined by the fitness of the subsequent [i.e., our cosmos], so that while Being is everywhere just *Being*, never departing from itself, only the empowered possess its presence. . . The firsts and seconds and thirds are thus by virtue of order and power and difference, not spatial location. (vi.4.11.1-10)

This passage begins with the by now familiar theme that this-world's multiplicity is a matter of its falling short of Being's greatness — i.e., of Being's invariant self-sameness, or true *oneness*. Plotinus ties this multiplicity to a notion of sequence, rank, or perhaps hierarchy, in which diversity in kind is conceived to be a distinction between things which are first, things which are second, and so forth. In the next sentence, however, Plotinus reasserts the fact that Being is present everywhere in this-world by means of power(s), or by virtue of things being empowered. The final sentence employs three notions in sequence, indicating that diversity in kind (i.e., in firsts, seconds, and so forth) is due just to their relative ordering, to Soul's power(s), and to Difference.

Since Soul's power(s) explain(s) Being's presence in this-world, the ordering of multiplicity as relative kinds must be due to some feature of that power.<sup>23</sup> This feature is the order of weaker and

23. Thus, Plotinus argues that the immediate cause in Soul of the sensible cosmos is order (τάξις) — "the image of wisdom in the Soul" (iv.4.10.11-13). As a result, everything that is produced and is being produced in this-world is woven together (συνπλοκή) into a rational unity (iii.2.15.2). This, I shall insist in Section VII, is perhaps the most important and least appreciated consequence of Plotinus' strong Idealism.

stronger powers of Soul introduced in vi.4.10. Since this ordering in Soul's power effects the degree to which things in our cosmos grasp Being's true *oneness*, the weakness or strength that distinguishes a given level or degree of power (hence, a particular "kind" of soul) is a function of the degree to which something it empowers attains (or "holds onto") Being's *oneness*. Diversity in kind is thus difference in the degrees to which things grasp, or have the power to grasp, Being's singularity; and Plotinus' concluding reference to order, power, and Difference reflects an ascent in the causes of this-world's multiplicity. This-world's diversity is the manifestation of an order of firsts, seconds, and so forth. This ordering of things into relative kinds is due to an order in Soul's power of weaker and stronger powers to effect participation in Being's *oneness*; and this in turn is caused by the Difference or otherness present in Being's singular nature. But *what* in all of this is empowered by Soul to participate in or hold onto Being in varying ordered degrees? Plotinus directly confronts this in vi.5.8 & 11, and he answers it by explaining further Soul's role in the vertical process.

Plotinus maintains throughout vi.4 & 5 that this-world is wholly dependent upon the True All, or is nothing but an image of it. He never abandons this fundamental expression of his strong Idealism. In vi.5.8 Plotinus addresses his related idea that the extended, diverse things in our cosmos are emanations from or illuminates of Being. He insists that this idea must not be construed to imply that our cosmos is a separate entity (or set of entities) from the True All. He insists that "the Forms [i.e., the multiplicity or Beings included in Being] do not lie separate from matter, with matter being something which is illumined by them from afar, as from somewhere above" (vi.5.8.4-6). A few lines later Plotinus clarifies his point as follows:

When we speak of illumination here, we do not intend the way in which sensible things are illuminated by sensible light. We mean just that the images being "material" and the archetypes being Forms, these are distinguishable from one another in a manner like an illuminant and that which illumines it. (vi.5.8.10-15)

In the sensible world, an act of illumination requires two entities: a thing being illuminated and the light source which illuminates it. In this-world, an act of illumination thus presupposes a thing which is illuminated. At the very least, it requires a surface or receptacle onto (or into) which the light source projects its illumination. This-world's relationship to the True All, in contrast, does not require two entities. In particular, it does not presuppose something onto (or into) which the True All's illumination

proceeds. There is only the True All and its illuminative act. The image resulting from this act does not result from the illumination acting upon or interacting with something but is just the illuminative act itself at its outcome, completion, or end. Since the image is also the so-called material world — i.e., since it is extended, has parts, and exists in sensible space and time — it is distinguishable from the immaterial hypostases themselves. For this reason, we can (and do) talk as if things in this-world are *things illuminated* by the True All. We can (and do) take the features of the True All's image which distinguish it from the True All's own nature as if they define another reality or world which the hypostases exist or reach "over" (ἐπί). But such modes of speech are not ontologically perspicuous. Nonetheless, we can still ask *why* this-world possesses these distinguishing features. Why does the True All's illumination end in presenting to us a world of bodies? Plotinus indicates his answer in vi.5.11.

Plotinus begins vi.5.11 with the question quoted earlier: "But how can the non-extended reach over everything corporeal, which possesses determinate size?" Extension and determinate size render this-world not simply a multiplicity of kinds but a multiplicity of kinds of *things* — i.e., a world of bodies, of individuals composed of parts. But size, mass, or corporeality is a function of extension; and all extension — including, apparently, spatial extension — is a function of time. Plotinus does not go into detail in vi.5.11 about time's exact place within the vertical process. In *Ennead* iii. 7.10 Plotinus characterizes time as the life of Soul as it includes (as vertical cause) continuous movement.<sup>24</sup> In vi.5.11 Plotinus does say concerning time's nature, however, that it "forever spreads outward into extension" (vi. 5.11.15); and he insists that although time is contrary to the True All, it is directly fastened to it (see vi.5.11.25-28). For, time is an expression or analog (ἀναλόγως) of "that which remains in itself, whose nature is unbounded not only in being eternal but also in power" (vi. 4.11.22-24). The True All is itself eternal. In its eternity, however,

24. Continuing the theme observed in Note 15, Plotinus argues that "since the activities of Soul are present [or image themselves] one after another in sequence, Soul produces succession (ἐφεξῆς) along with its activity. . . so that the spreading out of life includes time" (iii.7.11.36-38 & 42). Material things in Becoming are the results of this "spreading out" insofar as the defining feature of this-world is the necessity of its being "this after that" (τὸ τὸδε μετὰ τὸδε) rather than existing "all at once" (πανταχοῦ) (iv.4.16.20-21). For a fuller discussion of the nature of time in Plotinus, see Peter Manchester, "Time and Soul in Plotinus, III 7 [45], 11," *Dionysius* 2 (1978) 101-136, esp. pp. 115-133; and on the relation between time and matter, see John Simons, "Matter and Time in Plotinus," *Dionysius* 9 (1985) 53-74.

it includes unbounded power (Soul); and time is an expression of that power.

One might ask, of course, *why* the True All expresses its unbounded power in extension or spread-outness (via succession in time). I shall not pursue this here. For, the key point regarding Plotinus' Idealism is just that this-world's materiality is a function of time, and time is an effect in the vertical procession wherein first unbounded Intellect and then unbounded Soul are themselves effects of the utterly unbounded One. We can now move Plotinus' defense of his Idealism in vi.4 & 5 towards its completion by turning to the One's role in that defense. I begin by returning to the subject of Being's true *oneness* and inherent Difference.

## VI

*Ennead* vi.5.3 confronts us with claims about the One's omnipresence that parallel Plotinus' earlier claims about Being or Intellect. Plotinus argues, in particular, that the One is not broken into parts but enters things in its entirety (see vi.5.3.14-24). This parallel suggests a conceptual linkage between Being and One. Plotinus makes this linkage explicit in vi.5.4. There, and again in vi.5.5, Plotinus offers a simile to help explain how Intellect includes multiplicity yet remains truly *one*:

If we admit another after the One, it must be bound by it; and the next must be bound to the second and move towards it, so that the off-spring are thus fastened to it. In this way, what participates in the latter share in the former. The many Beings in Intellect are thus firsts and seconds and thirds, like one [total] sphere joined to one center, not separated by any distance but wholly present all together. Wherever the tertiaries are present, the secondaries and the firsts are thus also present. (vi. 5.4.17-24)

Earlier this notion of firsts, seconds, thirds, and so forth, functioned to capture the diversity in kind observed among things in this-world. It now captures the multiplicity in Being itself. The claim that things which participate in a secondary thereby also participate in a primary, and that things which participate in a tertiary thereby also participate in a secondary and a primary (and so forth), captures the fact that the kinds of things there are are ordered hierarchically, by genus and species. How the multiplicity in Intellect accounts both just for the final diversity in kind among things in this-world and also for their genus-species orderings can be left to one side, however, as we focus on the more important matter of what Plotinus' simile tells us about Being's nature.

Plotinus tells us that multiplicity is included in Being in a way analogous to how a number of first, second, third, and so forth spheres are included within a single complete sphere, all attached to one center (viz., the One). This center is itself without magnitude; it is utterly simple (ἀπλός) and is not itself determinate or delimited in any way. All we can say about it is that it is the center (or source) of the sphere and that what it is the center of is a sphere. The sphere itself, in contrast, is determinate. It is a sphere — the most perfect and simple solid shape possible centering around or proceeding from a point. This sphere is truly *one* — it is a single sphere — yet it includes a multiplicity. For, whatever its size, there are potentially many smaller-sized spheres nestled within it. These smaller spheres are each identical in nature (or shape) to the complete sphere; each and every one of them is also a sphere. They differ from the complete sphere and from one another only in the lengths of their radii from the center — i.e., in their distance or degree of otherness from the center. They are also identical to the complete sphere in that they are not a multiplicity of actually distinct spherical surfaces. No gaps exist within the complete solid sphere. The spheres included within it are not separated from one another by any distance whatsoever — as would be required for there actually to be surfaces. This multiplicity of inner spheres, in other words, is not generated as a sequence of distinct spherical surfaces but is implicit to the center's act of generating the complete sphere as the outcome of the radius proceeding from it. The complete sphere is thus single, homogeneous, or solid, yet it includes many smaller spheres which (1) are really *there* insofar as they are defined by the continuous succession of distances from the center established by the complete sphere's radius as it progresses towards defining that sphere, yet which (2) are not *really* there insofar as the complete sphere's radius progresses from the center in a continuous motion, not jumping from defining one surface on to defining a next and a next and so forth.

Intellect, of course, is not a shape, nor is it generated by the One through a spatial movement of some sort. When the inappropriate features of the simile are removed, we are left with (at least) the following main points: Plotinus' utterly first principle may be called 'the One' since its first effect is the most perfect determinate unity possible. This unity (Being) is other than the One just in being the most perfect *determinate* unity possible. It is a singular invariantly self-identical existent that is not composed of any distinct parts; but in the otherness or Difference from the One which defines it, there is an implicit multiplicity (or multiplication)

of its determinate unity.<sup>25</sup> For, this otherness or Difference is itself continuous and unbounded because it is the productive act of the utterly unbounded One. Thus, in vi.4.11, Plotinus emphasizes Being's *oneness* as follows:

But does this not show it [Being] to be diverse and many? But the diversity is still simple and the [so-called] many is one. For, its expression (λόγος) is one and many, and all Being is one. For, the Different is in Being and the differentiation is of Being — for, it is obviously not of non-Being and Being is never apart from the One. Wherever Being is, its unity is present with it; and the One is Being *per se* [i.e., *sans* the Different which distinguishes it from the One]. (vi.4.11.15-20)

The foregoing discussion of Being, its multiplicity, and its relationship to the One just scratches the surface of an immensely complex set of topics in the *Enneads*. It does, however, emphasize that Being's multiplicity is not an aggregation of various diverse items. This-world does not grasp Being less than fully by detaching or receiving parts from it. It does so by being a descent or weakening of Being's greatness, its true *oneness*. This also brings us to O'Meara's reason for seeing a material principle in vi.4 & 5. For, the sphere simile shows the second stage in or aspect of vertical causation to be already present in the wholly immaterial nature

25. This statement of the relationship between Plotinus' Beings, Forms, or intelligibles and the hypostasis Intellect glosses over a very complex issue in the *Enneads* — viz., whether the former exist only *in* the latter or whether they somehow *come after* it and its utter self-identity. Thus, in v.9.6 & 8 Plotinus echoes the view expressed by his sphere simile that the multiplicity of Beings is somehow within Intellect itself. In iv.3.5, however, Plotinus suggests that the Beings come after Intellect as such. He tells us that the many souls *come out of* the one Soul such that the latter is a single expression (λόγος εἷς) of Intellect, whereas the many souls that *come after* it are partial expressions (λόγοι μερικοί) just as *what occurs there* — i.e., in the case of Intellect and its Forms (iv.3.5.15-19). This viewpoint is further developed in vi.2.20, where Plotinus distinguishes two phases of Intellect — the hypostasis Intellect as such and the particular intellects (the Beings or Forms) which descend from it. I shall not fully resolve this issue here. I shall only indicate that, as I understand Plotinus, *both* of these views are correct: the Beings both exist *within* Intellect (as depicted in v.9.6 & 8 and in vi.5.4) and also *come after* or *descend from* it (as depicted in iv.3.5 and vi.2.20). For, their existence is already *implicit* in the nature of Intellect itself (as depicted in the sphere simile), but their multiplicity becomes *explicit* only as the vertical process descends from Intellect towards establishing Soul. The means for harmonizing these *prima-facie* contrary views of Intellect and its Forms are introduced in iv.5.7.13-21, where Plotinus discusses the dual inner/outer activity of every luminous source (φωτίζοντος). The upshot of this for my discussion here is just that, as I admitted early on, Plotinus' theory of vertical causation is more complex and intricate than I shall explain here.

of Being itself: “. . . If we admit another after the One,” Plotinus says, “it must be bound to it; and the next must be bound to the second and *move towards* it, so that the offspring are thus fastened to it. . .” In this second independent clause, ‘it’ refers to the One since the clause concludes with relating all of “the offspring” back to this single “it”. This passage says that the entire continuous sequence of offspring remain attached to the One since, though the proximate cause of each offspring is the one before it, each and every one of them moves or turns toward the One. But in what way do they “move towards” the One?

An intriguing suggestion is found in Aristotle, when he tells us that Leucippus and Democritus ascribed to their atoms a property they called ‘turning’ but which they then identified with *position*.<sup>26</sup> Applied to Plotinus’ sphere simile this suggests that every Being (or “smaller sphere”) remains directly fastened to the One in that each of them is defined to be a sphere by a point (or “position”) on the complete sphere’s radius. I am not claiming that Plotinus has the atomists’ notion of turning as position explicitly in mind when he says that the spheres turn or move towards the One. He may or he may not. The important point here is that this notion functions for Plotinus to secure that whatever comes from the One does not merely *come from* it but is itself a *unity* — in the sphere simile, that every Being is a sphere, or a most perfect determinate unity possible. In general, the notion of turning or moving towards functions in Plotinus’ theory of vertical causation to indicate the fact that the One is not only the efficient source of all things but is also their final cause.<sup>27</sup> Thus, for example, Plotinus argues:

*All things seek unity and possess unity and desire it. For, the One, which devotes itself to other things [i.e., is a cause], to*

26. *Metaphysics*, 985b15.

27. This idea that the One is the final as well as the efficient cause of its effects is suggested by Armstrong (*Cambridge History*, p. 328), but he does not explicitly apply it to explaining what I am calling the two aspects of vertical causation. Kevin Corrigan has the right idea when he says that “the approach of body to soul is . . . a ‘going from dynamis to energeia,’” but he follows this insight up with the difficult assertion, reminiscent of O’Meara, that what “approaches from below is illuminated from above and the two different viewpoints coalesce in the real object of causal definition” (“Body’s Approach to Soul: An Examination of a Recurrent Theme in the *Enneads*,” *Dionysius* 9 (1985) 37-52; pp. 47, 49). Plotinus, in contrast, characterizes body’s turning towards Soul and its consequent grasping (*λαβόν*) of the form appropriate to its potentiality (*δυνάμεις*) as a matter of Soul, having produced body, also “raising it from its childhood” towards its full actuality (*τελείωσις*) (iii.4.1.9-10 & 16-17) — where, I am arguing, the full actuality or end (*τελός*) of everything (including body) is to be a *unity* of some sort.

whatever degree it might advance, must appear many and in some sense be many; but the primal nature and desire for the Good, which is desire for unity, truly leads towards unity and towards this nature it urges all things towards itself. For, the Good to any nature which is one is to be with itself and to be itself; and this means to be one. (vi.5.1.13-20)

The vertical order, though distinguishable into three hypostases and their final effect (this-world), is nothing but a procession from the One. In this procession, every existent coming after the One must in some way be other-than the utterly, transcendently simple One — it must in some way be a multiplicity — and yet also be truly a unity. To account for this, we can conceive vertical causation to have two stages. The first stage is the production of something other than the One — increasingly other-than as its causal effectiveness proceeds towards this-world. Since this act of production is an act of otherness from the One, it entails multiplicity. But since the One is also the final cause of the productive act, the outcome or *telos* of it will always be a unity — albeit one which includes (or in some way *is* also a) multiplicity. This completion of the productive act in a unity defines the second stage of vertical causation. The act and its outcome are not *separate* stages but two aspects of the single act of the One's producing something other than itself.

The second stage of vertical causation secures that everything that proceeds from the One is a unity of some sort. Something's "position" within the vertical order is determined by the degree to which its unity departs from the utter simplicity of the One and so the degree to which it also includes multiplicity. The earlier claim that the kinds of living things that exist are distinguished by the degrees to which they hold onto Being's greatness was not meant to imply that they only approximate *unity* without ever possessing it. They *are* (fully) unities, but in their unity they approximate Being's most *perfect* or *true* unity (to various degrees). Thus, Plotinus says, concerning this-world's relationship to unity (its *telos*):

It [unity] must remain the same as itself as the many desire to reach it. If the many move towards it, it is evident that they move towards the entirety of it. *Insofar as they are able to participate in it, they thus participate in its entirety. Its participants thus possess it as something unshared, as something not peculiar to their own Being. For, only in this way could it remain an entirety and an entirety in those in which it appears.* (vi.4.8.37-43)

Being is omnipresent because unity is omnipresent. Everything in this-world *is* just by being *one*, or a unity. *Oneness* or unity is the same everywhere and for everything; but some things are



weaker — i.e., less simple, and so more complex or multiple — in their unity than other things. This is what distinguishes them into different kinds of living things. This difference in degrees of simplicity is ultimately grounded in the multiplicity included within Being, as we can think of the many smaller spheres in Plotinus' simile as becoming increasingly more other than the One. Every sphere is equally just a sphere but each subsequent sphere is larger (has more implicit parts or potential surface points) than its predecessor. This multiplicity in degrees of otherness from the One proceeds beyond Being itself and into this-world by means of Soul's power and the degrees of power to attain true unity (or complete self-sameness) implicit, in turn, in this one power.

Plotinus thus concludes his account of how the eternally self-same goes forth to this-world by conceiving our cosmos to be (in fact) a sphere attached to Soul as its center and proximate vertical cause:

As the universe is produced, we can think of its elements being produced in one spherical shape — and not as if many makers are producing this sphere piece by piece, each cut off from the other and making a particular part of it, but as if one cause is producing it as a single entirety. (vi.5.9.1-5)

This single maker (Soul) does not produce this-world by flowing into some sort of receptacle but by just eternally being its vertical cause or source:

As an indivisible unity, the maker made the sphere, not by flowing into it, but by the sphere being attached to it. Thus, the sphere possesses one life; the sphere is established in one life; and all things within the sphere are led to one life. (vi.5.9.7-13)

Everything within the sphere of Becoming is established (*ἰδρύνειν*) by this single cause (vi.5.9.42). This single cause — this power which generates unified extension, Becoming, or life as the final outcome of the One's causation — is unbounded in its causation or power, including all degrees of power within its unity (vi.5.9.31-36). Accordingly, in producing our cosmos Soul's own "life" is "unfailing, inexhaustible, and never failing in itself — as it were, boiling over with life" (vi.5.12.8-9). It projects every degree of its power (every one of the souls it includes), producing every kind of thing (or degree of extended, organic unity) in and through time. It requires no receptacle or separate principle of Becoming since it generates time (hence, extension) as it exfoliates the True All's multiplicity in producing our cosmos.

## VII

Plotinus is a strong Idealist. He denies the positive existence of matter and maintains that our cosmos is nothing but an image of the immaterial hypostases. In vi.4 & 5 he addresses a potential problem for his Idealism. For, Plotinus maintains that the hypostases are omnipresent, meaning that whenever they are present at all they are present in their invariant fullness or self-same entirety. The One is utterly, transcendently simple. Its own nature cannot be described, cannot be defined; all we can say about it is that it is a (indeed, the first) cause and that its effects are always unities. Intellect and Soul, in contrast, are other-than the One. They are processions from it and they are truly *ones*. They are eternally self-same and are not internally fragmented into actually distinct parts; nor are they fragmented in their presence to the diverse things of this-world. Yet our cosmos is an extended multiplicity. It is composed of individuals that are made up of distinct parts, that differ from one another in form or Being, and that are continuously changing. How, then, could our cosmos be nothing but an image of the hypostases? This is the problem that Plotinus sets for himself in vi.4 & 5. In this essay, we have seen how Plotinus resolves this problem by articulating certain main features of his theory of vertical causation — though I would be the first to admit that a number of points in Plotinus' resolution cry out for further clarification and discussion.

In the course of defending his Idealism, Plotinus does not reject this-world but saves it. Sense experience presents us with a world that is ever-changing and immensely diverse. How could we ever hope to understand it? In vi.4 & 5 Plotinus moves from Soul and Becoming to Being and unity, and then back to Becoming as the living, extended, final outcome of the vertical process. As a result of this ascent-descent in vi.4 & 5, Plotinus conceives our cosmos to be a single living thing whose nature — in its entirety, in its individual constituents, and in their Becoming and interactions with one another — is wholly defined by unity and ways in which unity is held onto or manifested by Being, by Soul, and finally by this-world. Since it is nothing but an image of the True All, in other words, Becoming is thoroughly one, structured, ordered, harmonious, and the like — in a word, rational. This might not be evident in the immensely diverse, ever-changing, sometimes seemingly chaotic world of sense experience. Given Plotinus' metaphysical understanding of our cosmos' true nature, however, the Neoplatonist can confidently seek to understand in detail the true natures of all things and all processes in our cosmos without fear that it possesses irrational features that result from a material principle utterly opposed to the unity, Being, and

power of the hypostases. Plotinian Neoplatonism is one of the most stirring statements of mysticism and transcendence in Western thought. But it is also one of the strongest statements of the utter rationality and comprehensibility of our cosmos in the Platonic tradition.

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