

Plotinus and the 'Eye' of Intellect

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A common theme in Plotinus' discussions in the *Enneads* of the nature and function of his second hypostasis, Intellect (νοῦς), is the analogy of vision (ὄψις) to the two levels of Intellect's intuitive activity, both its intellection (νόησις) of the Forms and its supra-intellectual apprehension of its source, the One. It is one of the determining characteristics of the Plotinian Intellect that in its hypostasization from the One its intuitive activity closely approximates sensory vision in that, as the seeing subject is separate from what it sees, so Intellect is logically separate from what it "sees", i.e. the multiple Forms.¹ Intellect, he insists, is thought, and thought, in whatever form it takes, entails a distinction of subject from object.² As we shall see, separation, albeit of a different sort, also marks the supra-intellectual apprehension, in which, although the One is immediately present to Intellect, νοῦς falls short of identification with its source. Hence both the intellectual and supra-intellectual intuitions of νοῦς in certain important respects resemble perception (αἴσθησις). That Intellect is determined in this way is, in turn, the crux of Plotinus' denial of any sort of thinking to the One, which, being absolutely simple, necessarily lacks any mode of theoretical separation.³

Within these analogies two terms associated with Hellenistic theories of perception, ἐπιβολή (ἐπιβάλλειν) and προσβολή (προσβάλλειν), occur with some frequency and carry special significance. In the tradition of Hellenistic philosophy these terms denote the visual "thrust" of the eye outward toward the objects of perception,⁴ for Plotinus, as we shall have occasion to see later,

1. For the purposes of this paper the most important passages expressing this idea are *Enn.* III.8 [30].9-11; V.3 [49].10-11; V.5 [32].7; V.6 [24].5; VI.7 [38].37-39.

2. Plotinus states this most emphatically in V.3.10.

3. Cf. especially V.6.5 and VI.7.37-39.

4. Cf. D. E. Hahm, "Early Hellenistic Theories of Vision and the Perception of Color", in P. K. Machamer and R. G. Turnbull, eds., *Studies in Perception. Interrelations in the History of Philosophy and Science* (Columbus 1978), 66.

J. Bussanich, *The One and its Relation to Intellect in Plotinus. A Commentary on Selected Texts, Philosophia Antiqua* Vol. XLIX (Leiden 1988), 94f., has recently argued against J. Rist's, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Cambridge 1967), 50, assessment that ἐπιβολή carries a technical sense in the *Enneads*. According to Bussanich (commenting on III.8.9 19-22), Plotinus opts for ἐπιβολή as a term denoting a non-intellectual apprehension precisely be-

they have more to do with the intentionality of vision, and refer to the eye's direct focus upon or attention to the external perceptual⁵ (or, by analogy, intelligible) field. More generally, they represent non-discursive apprehension on the perceptual, intellectual and supra-intellectual levels; as Plotinus explains in VI.3[44].18.8ff., although the intuitions (ἐπιβολαί) of Intellect (νοῦς) are simple while αἴσθησις gives only a variety of information, both perception and intellection are alike in that neither uses detailed judgment (λόγος), so that both possess immediate clarity. Thus perception in certain formal respects possesses the intuitive immediacy of νόησις.⁶ Of greater interest in these parallels, however, is a more specialized term of the Epicurean theory of perception which Plotinus employs as the more specific analogue of the intuitive "vision" of νοῦς, the ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή or "comprehensive perception" in which the eye sees a compound object by embracing all of its properties in a single glance, as distinguished from its focussing on the properties individually in a series of separate perceptions. Several commentators on the *Enneads*, in particular Becker,⁷ have recognized the

cause it has no noetic connotations, the "root meaning" of ἐπιβάλλειν being "to fall or cast upon." Moreover, that προσβολή is synonymous with ἐπιβολή in Plotinus counts for Bussanich as evidence "... confirming that the latter is hardly a technical term." As for his first point, I will show in what follows that, while it is true that at times Plotinus focusses on the root meaning of the term, this is by no means the primary reason for its inclusion in both noetic and non-noetic contexts. Secondly, quite to the contrary of Bussanich's reasoning, the fact that προσβολή is a synonym of ἐπιβολή (see below, note 8) is a further point in favor of rendering the latter in a technical sense. For προσβολή has its own history in Hellenistic thought as a specialized term closely paralleling the Epicurean ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή: (1) in Stoicism προσβολή denoted actual visual contact through the medium of air and (2) in Hellenistic theories of vision μία προσβολή referred to the eye's ability to grasp small and relatively simple objects directly in a single apprehension (cf. Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Sensu* 3 [p. 60, 5f. Wendland]): ὡς ἀπαξ καὶ μιᾶ προσβολῇ καὶ ὡς ἐν ὄραν τὸ ὀρώμενον; see W. Jaeger, *Nemesios von Emesa. Quellenuntersuchungen zum Neuplatonismus und seinen Anfängen bei Poseidonios* (Berlin 1914), 28, 35, and 39, Cf. also C. Becker, *Plotin und das Problem der geistigen Aneignung* (Berlin 1940), 18ff., who compares the meaning of προσβολή in Stoic optical theory with its earlier use in Plato (*THEAET.* 153e.)*SOPH.* 246a) in reference to the eye's contact with external objects. It would thus have seemed natural to Plotinus to employ both terms interchangeably.

5. Cf. IV.4 [28].8.6, .6.1.16 and 7.6.16.

6. Cf. also I.3 [20].5.22.

7. In Becker, 14ff., where he discusses these terms extensively. Although there are certain points on which I disagree with it (see below, n. 8), Becker's analysis is on the whole, I think, accurate. Yet it falls far short of being a thorough account, treating the terms in a very general way. The same can be said of W. Beierwaltes, *Plotin. Über Ewigkeit und Zweit* (*Enneade III 7*) (Frankfurt am Main 1967), 58, n. 42, 83, and 276.

role of the ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή in Plotinus' formulation of the visual analogy, yet none has looked closely at what his use of the term can reveal to us about his doctrine of Intellect's intuitive powers. This is unfortunate, for not only is the use of this term a prime example of Plotinus' practice of adapting the vocabulary of Hellenistic thought to his own system, it is also important for our understanding of the manner in which he utilizes sensory models to illustrate and clarify the nature of Intellect. It is my purpose here to offer an analysis of Plotinus' use of ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή (and ἀθρόα προσβολή, its synonym in the *Enneads*)⁸ from each of these standpoints, with particular attention payed to how he employs these terms as expressions of the two phases of Intellect's intuitive vision, both the intellectual self-vision of νόησις, a level of intuition in which the notion of internal separation and multiplicity is compatible with Intellect's fundamental unity, and its more unified apprehension of the One. In discovering why he found this terminology to be an appropriate analogue to Intellect's intuitive vision, we shall gain a better understanding of how he interpreted the dynamics of that vision.

We shall begin by examining a passage which is our only direct evidence in the *Enneads* of the manner in which he construed the Epicurean ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή as it pertains to perception. At the beginning of the short treatise *On Sight* (II.8[35]) Plotinus considers the various attempts of five philosophical schools to solve the well-known optical problem as to why objects seen at a distance appear smaller.⁹ Among these is the Epicurean view, according to which we must, if we are to perceive the true size of an object, look at each of its parts when it is close to us (1.9-12). In dismissing this view, Plotinus makes the following observation:

Things near to us, whenever they have parts, and our look (ἐπιβολή) toward them is comprehensive (ἀθρόως γίνεται) and all the forms of the parts are not seen, appear smaller in proportion as each part escapes observation; but when

8. On this point I part company with Becker, who claims, on the basis of the technical use of προσβολή in Stoicism, that in Plotinus προσβολή and ἐπιβολή carry distinct meanings, the former representing the eye's actual striking the object of vision and the latter having the more limited sense of the eye's projection toward its field of vision. In fact, both terms have the same twofold meaning of (1) a projection or thrust and (2) the consequent apprehension or intuition. That they are synonymous is clear from the fact that ἀθρόα προσβολή (or προσβολή alone) occurs in contexts identical to those in which Plotinus uses the traditional ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή (e.g. III.8.10.31ff., V.5.7.8 and .10.8).

9. É. Bréhier, *Plotin: Ennéades* t.II (Paris 1924-38), Notice, 97ff., discusses the views of the schools cited by Plotinus.

all parts are seen, we measure the objects accurately and know how large they are. (1.39-43)

Plotinus is speaking of our vision of compound objects (ποικίλα) near to us: when our perception (ἐπιβολή) is a comprehensive whole (ἀθρόως γίνεται), our eye does not select out all of the object's forms individually. The effect is the same when objects are at a distance. In the case of hills containing a number of houses and trees, to use Plotinus' own example (33ff.), we can accurately measure the dimension of the whole if we focus our eyes on each part (e.g. a tree or house), but not if we take in all the parts at a single look (ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή). What precisely Plotinus means by the term ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή can, I think, be understood by comparing it to a similar statement in Epicurus' *Letter to Herodotus*. There, in discussing the relation of the properties of bodies to their essential nature, Epicurus distinguishes two modes of perception. We can, on the one hand, perceive each of the properties of a body individually through their ἴδιαι ἐπιβολαί, or separate means of being perceived, although they do not exist independently of the body. But the body as a whole (τὸ ἀθρόον) is not perceived apart from its properties, insofar as it is our comprehensive apprehension (ἀθρόα ἔννοια) of a body's individual properties which allows us to say of it that it is a body.¹⁰ This distinction of perceptual modes is based on the differing foci of the eye: we may direct our vision more narrowly to one or another of the various properties of an object (ἴδιαι ἐπιβολαί) or more broadly to the object perceived as the aggregate of those properties, so that the perception can be described as an comprehensive whole embracing discrete sensations of the object's individual properties (ἀθρόα ἔννοια).

Basically the same distinction expressed in very similar terminology is found in a quite different context in two passages in the *Letter* where Epicurus discusses proper philosophical methodology. At the beginning¹¹ and again at the end¹² of the *Letter*

10. καὶ ἐπιβολὰς μὲν ἔχοντα ἰδίας πάντα ταῦτα ἐστὶ καὶ διαλήψεις, συμπαρακολουθοῦντος δὲ τοῦ ἀθρόου καὶ οὐθαμῆ ἀποσχίζόμενα, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὴν ἀθρόαν ἔννοιαν τοῦ σώματος κατηγορίαν εἰληφότα. (69,8ff.[p. 42 Bailey])

11. Καὶ τοὺς προβεβηκότας δὲ ἰκανῶς ἐν τῇ τῶν ὅλων ἐπιβλέψει τὸν τύπον τῆς ὅλης πραγματείας τὸν κατεστοιχειωμένον δεῖ μνημονεύειν. τῆς γὰρ ἀθρόας ἐπιβολῆς πυκνὸν δεόμεθα, τῆς δὲ κατὰ μέρος οὐχ ὁμοίως. βαδιστέον μὲν οὖν καὶ ἐπ' ἐκεῖνα συνεχῶς, ἐν τε μνήνῃ τὸ τοσοῦτον ποιητέον, ἀφ' οὗ ἢ τε κυριωτάτη ἐπιβολὴ ἐπὶ τὰ πράγματα ἔσται καὶ δὴ καὶ τὸ κατὰ μέρος ἀκρίβωμα πᾶν ἐξευρήσεται, τῶν ὀλοσχερωτάτων τύπων εὖ περιειλημμένων καὶ μνημονευομένων. (35, 7ff.[p. 18 Bailey])

12. καὶ γὰρ καὶ καθαρά ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ ποιήσει πολλὰ τῶν κατὰ μέρος ἐξακριβομένων κατὰ τὴν ὅλην πραγματείαν ἡμῖν, καὶ αὐτὰ ταῦτα ἐν μνήνῃ τιθέμενα συνεχῶς βοηθήσει. τοιαῦτα γὰρ ἐστίν, ὥστε καὶ τοὺς [καὶ τὰ] κατὰ μέρος ἤδη ἐξακριβοῦντας ἰκανῶς ἢ καὶ τελείως εἰς τὰς τοιαύτας

Epicurus states his preference for the general overview (ἄθροα or κυριώτατη ἐπιβολή) to the partial investigation (ἢ κατὰ μέρος ἐπιβολή) of philosophical doctrine. Here Epicurus assures Herodotus that if the essential truths of his system are understood and remembered, an accurate knowledge of its detail (τὸ κατὰ μέρος ἀκριβωμα) will naturally follow. Thus a "survey" of the "whole nature" of his system is required first before analysis of its details is undertaken. For adequate understanding of any doctrine one must at all times be able to assign each of its elements to its proper class. The proper philosophical strategy, then, is to keep the ἄθροα ἐπιβολή constantly in mind while examining the individual facets of a topic. The clear implication is that the ἄθροα ἐπιβολή is a kind of measure or standard by which to test the accuracy of individual propositions of philosophy, providing a more accurate means than the partial view of determining truth.¹³

In Epicurus, then, ἄθροα ἐπιβολή corresponds to two levels of knowledge: to perception, in which context it denotes the "whole" perception encompassing the separate properties of a thing, and to theoretical knowledge, where it represents a comprehensive overview of philosophical doctrine on which the accuracy of investigation of the individual claims of that doctrine is dependent. These contexts are related, however, to the extent that both articulate the distinction between the whole and the partial views. Now it is just this distinction which Plotinus has in mind in II.8.1. In what follows, therefore, it will be important to keep in mind that in his employment of the Epicurean ἄθροα ἐπιβολή Plotinus is referring not to a casual glance which simply overlooks the details of a thing, but to a total perception which includes all of the forms of the perceived object within itself, although the forms themselves are not the foci of the eye. And in keeping with the theoretical sense given the term by Epicurus, ἄθροα ἐπιβολή, as

ἀναλύοντας ἐπιβολὰς τὰς πλείστας τῶν περιουσιῶν ὑπὲρ τῆς ὅλης φύσεως ποιῆσθαι. (83, 5ff. [p. 53-4 Bailey]).

13. It is perhaps worth noting that, according to Diogenes Laertes (x, 31), the later followers of Epicurus (οἱ Ἐπικούρειοι) added αἱ φανταστικαὶ ἐπιβολαὶ τῆς διανοίας to Epicurus' original list of the criteria of truth (the original criteria were αἱ αἰσθήσεις, προλήψεις, and τὰ πάθη). G. Striker, *Kριτήριον τῆς φαληθείας*, *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen*, I (Göttingen 1974), 67, views this addition as an attempt on the part of later Epicureans to counter the Stoic καταληπτικὴ φαντασία.

C. Bailey's (*Epicurus. The Extant Remains* [Oxford 1926], Appendix) early analysis of the role of ἐπιβολή in Epicurus' theory of knowledge is now generally disregarded. For more recent interpretations, see D. Furlley, *Two Studies in the Greek Atomists* (Princeton 1967), A. Manuwald, *Die Prolepsislehre Epikurs* (Bonn 1972), 37f., 43, n.1, and 115ff., 206ff., J. Rist, *Epicurus: An Introduction* (Cambridge 1972), 25 and E. Asmis, *Epicurus' Scientific Method* (Ithaca and London 1984), 124ff.

the comprehensive view, is anterior to (and so superior to) its component partial apprehensions. As we turn next to consideration of Plotinus' theory of Intellect's two phases of intuitive vision in the *Enneads*, we shall see that both aspects of this distinction are central to his purpose in formulating his various visual analogies. For in his discussions of the intellectual and supra-intellectual intuitions ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή is the "whole view" which supercedes the partial comprehension of inferior grades of knowledge and is in this sense the standard of a higher truth.

The Intellectual Vision

Plotinus begins the second of the two treatises "On Difficulties Concerning the Soul" (IV.4[28]) by asking whether soul, having reached the intelligible world, has any memory of its experiences while embodied. His answer is that it cannot, both because as its attention is turned toward intelligible reality it can think only of that reality and nothing else, and because νόησις is timeless and all intelligibles are present at once, so that there can be no temporal succession of events. The unity of soul's thought, he says, approaches that of Intellect:

What then prevents the soul from having even this comprehensive intuition of what is a comprehensive whole (Τί οὖν κωλύει καὶ ταύτην τὴν ἐπιβολὴν ἀθρόαν ἀθρόων γίνεσθαι). Does it see them as some one thing? No, it is rather as if all the intuitions were of the many seen at once. For since the vision is varied, the intellection must also be multiple and varied and the intuitions many, just as there are many sense-presentations (αἰσθήσεις) of a face (the eyes, nose, etc.) all seen at the same time. (1.20-25)

It is clear from what Plotinus says here that the ἐπιβολή ἀθρόα ἀθρόων is a single immediate apprehension of all intelligibles. In the higher soul, the multiple intelligibles are not seen at once as one thing (ὡς τινος), but as many things seen at the same time (ὡς πολλῶν ὁμοῦ), just as all of the αἰσθήσεις of the various features of a face are seen at the same time as (the single apprehension of) a face. This is exactly the sense which Plotinus gives to ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή in II.8.1 and there is therefore little question that Plotinus is employing the Epicurean comprehensive apprehension as an analogue of νόησις. Although the intelligible Forms are multiple, both Intellect and the intellectual soul can "see" them, as it were, at one glance by an intuitive power analogous to the eye's ability to form a comprehensive image of a face from its discrete features.¹⁴ Such I take to be the sense of ἀθρόος here: insofar

14. Cf. both IV.7 [2].6, where Plotinus employs the same example of

as there are multiple objects of intellection, the unity of the intuitive ἐπιβολή at this level is not pure or simple, but a collective one-in-many. In referring to both the intuitive ἐπιβολή and the Forms as ἄθροα, Plotinus distinguishes νόησις both from discursive thought which is inferior to it, and from the supreme simplicity of the One.¹⁵ Explicitly, he contrasts the comprehensiveness of the ἄθροα ἐπιβολή with the particularity and multiplicity of discursive thought (διέξοδος) which is characterized by "transition from one thing to another" (μετάβασις ἀφ' ἑτέρου ἐπ' ἄλλο: 16). Implicitly, he subordinates the imperfect unity of νοῦς to the absolute simplicity of his First Principle.

Epicurean influence is also evident, although to a lesser extent, in chapter eight of IV.4, which presents a more detailed picture of the nature of this comprehensive unity of νόησις and its relationship to the Epicurean ἄθροα ἐπιβολή. There Plotinus, in denying that celestial souls have memory (μνημῆ) of the events of their bodily existence, contends that we need not remember all that we perceive if much of it is incidental or irrelevant to the soul's primary ends, and furthermore that it is not necessary to focus our attention upon the details of our sense experience (τῷ κατὰ

soul's ability to form a single (comprehensive) perception of the various parts of the face to prove its incorporeal and unitary nature, and VI.7.14.8ff., where, conversely, the analogy of the face as one thing with several parts rather than an undifferentiated mass illustrates the principle that νοῦς is not a simple unity but a unity-in-diversity.

The source for the analogy is almost certainly Plato's *Protagoras* 329D: cf. M. Schaerer's comments in P. Henry, "Une Comparaison chez Aristote, Alexandre et Plotin", *Les Sources de Plotin*, Entretiens Hardt 5, (Vondoeuvres-Genève 1957), 446.

15. Plotinus employs ἀπλή ἐπιβολή, "simple apprehension", to refer to Intellect only once in the *Enneads*, in VI.3.18.12, and there only to distinguish it from perception. Intellect is simple, but what is absolutely simple (τὸ πάντῃ ἀπλοῦν) must be beyond νοῦς (V.3.11.28; 13.17 and 35). Cf. A. H. Armstrong, "The Background of the Doctrine 'That the Intelligibles are Not Outside the Intellect'", in *Les Sources de Plotin*, 409f.

In Proclus ἀπλή ἐπιβολή, which he distinguishes from ἡ κατὰ σολογισμὸν ἐπιβολή, is apparently intended as the equivalent of Plotinus' intellectual ἄθροα ἐπιβολή (*In Alc.* 246,15ff. and *De prov.* 30. 1ff., both of which are based on *Enn.* IV.4.1.14ff.; also ἄθροα ἐπιβολή: *In Parm.* VI, 156 and *In Tim.*, 92d); cf. R.K. Klibansky, *Plato Latinus*, Vol. III (London: in aedibus Instituti Warburgiani 1953), 92; W. Beierwaltes, "Das Problem der Erkenntnis bei Proklus", *De Jamblique a Proclus*, Entretiens Hardt 21 (Genève 1975), 173, n. 2. But Beierwaltes notes that ἐπιβολή functions in these Proclan passages as a description of the knowledge of the Ideas in the νοῦς of soul, while for Plotinus it represents the "Akt des zeitfreien, absoluten νοῦς" (185). However, his statement that Plotinus' ἄθροα ἐπιβολή has the sense "einer Aufhebung der Differenzstruktur des zeithaften Denkens und Sprechens" must be qualified, for Plotinus would not want to say that in Intellect all "Differenzstruktur" is eliminated.

μέρος αἰσθητῶ τὴν ἐπιβολὴν ποιεῖσθαι) whenever the thought or knowledge (ἢ νόησις καὶ ἢ γνῶσις) of them is more effective, since such knowledge of the whole encompasses all of the particulars of perception. This is conceptually similar to Epicurus' ἀθρόα or κυριωτάτη ἐπιβολή of *Her.* 36,2ff. — where, as we have seen, it is theoretically antecedent to detailed knowledge (τὸ κατὰ μέρος ἀκρίβωμα) — so that it is tempting to see at least indirect influence. Moreover, what Plotinus says here concerning the difference between νόησις or γνῶσις and ἢ κατὰ μέρος ἐπιβολή in certain important respects echoes his discussion of the ἐπιβολή ἀθρόα ἀθρόων of Intellect and soul in the intelligible world in chapter one. In the first place, in both passages he employs the Epicurean distinction between whole and partial views to show that the higher soul, like Intellect, has no need of memory of temporal events. According to IV.4.8, celestial souls possess a unified γνῶσις which embraces all of the particulars of their sense experience; in like manner Plotinus construes the ἐπιβολή ἀθρόα ἀθρόων of Intellect and the soul having ascended to the intelligible world as a knowledge encompassing all intelligible reality in a unified "vision" and so transcending the pluralization of discursive thinking. And in both passages this higher knowledge is due to the superior ability of the higher soul's contemplative vision to supersede the many partial thoughts associated with discursive thinking in order to achieve a "whole view" comprising the multiplicity of those thoughts. Thus common to both passages is the idea that souls in the intelligible world achieve a level of concentration (ἐναπέρεισις: IV.4.1.27) which allows them to go beyond the narrower focus of perception and discursive thought, both of which are divided and temporal, toward attainment of an immediate grasp of Being comprehending all intelligibles.

The Supra-intellectual Vision

Plotinus' technical use of the Epicurean ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή of perception as the analogue of νόησις in IV.4 is all the more remarkable for the fact that it is unparalleled in the *Enneads*. We do, however, find a number of other passages where the same term represents Intellect's simpler, non-intellectual intuition of the One. This higher intuition is thus likened to a mode of vision, but one which is clearly superior to Intellect's intellectual contemplation of the Forms.¹⁶ As we analyze these passages, we shall be confronted with two problems of interpretation. There is, first of all,

16. The influence of this concept of a higher intuition of Intellect has been detected in later Neoplatonism. P. Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus* Vol. 1 (Paris 1968), 126ff., finds in the *Parmenides Commentary*, which he attributes to Porphyry, reference to a faculty of intuition which allows the

the obvious and more general difficulty arising from Plotinus' application of the visual model to such higher order intuition. We have seen that νόησις, with its inherent dualism of subject and object and its nature as a one-in-many, suggests to Plotinus a ready parallel to sensory vision, to which it corresponds in these and other respects. But Plotinus emphatically claims that the same cannot be said of Intellect's apprehension of the supremely simple One, which he insists is a kind of seeing, but one such that in its act of seeing Intellect produces neither the separation nor the multiplicity associated with νόησις. We need, then, to know what extraordinary visual experience Plotinus had in mind; indeed, we need to know how he could conceive such an experience as vision at all. The second problem stems from Plotinus' division of Intellect's apprehension of the One into two modes of vision corresponding to two distinct moments of Intellect's eternal process of self-generation, viz. its departure or procession from the One, when the inchoate νοῦς has not yet realized its nature as Intellectual Principle, and its return or reversion to the One, when, as Plotinus is fond of saying, Intellect ceases to be νοῦς by transcending itself to come into direct contact with its source.¹⁷ Although he is never clear as to the relationship between these moments of Intellect's intuitive vision, most commentators view them as but two aspects or phases of the same vision. But, as will become clear in what follows, the visual models employed by Plotinus to illustrate these moments are in context and emphasis so markedly divergent that he appears to be describing two different visual acts, a fact which would seem to lead us to just the opposite conclusion, that these are ontologically distinct states of Intellect's process of self-generation and so separate modes of intuition. We shall need, then, to examine these disparate models closely to see what light they might shed on this question.

As for the first of these interpretive problems, it is clearly the case that ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή (προσβολή), when it is the analogue of Intellect's higher intuition, no longer carries the special sense which

soul to see what transcends the intelligible, and speculates that Porphyry found the basis for this faculty in Plotinus' accounts of Intellect's vision of the One. J. Rist, "Mysticism and Transcendence in Later Neoplatonism", *Hermes* 92 (1964), 215f., judging this claim of relationship "insufficiently documented" and the relationship itself "difficult to discern", argues instead that Proclus' ἀνθος τοῦ νοῦ is more likely a development of Plotinus' higher Intellect, which "has almost assumed the status of a superior hypostasis."

17. Cf. A. H. Armstrong, "Eternity, Life and Movement in Plotinus' Accounts of νοῦς", 70ff. and J. M. Rist, "The Problem of «Otherness» in the *Enneads*", 83, both in *Le Néoplatonisme. Colloques Internationaux du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* (Paris 1971).

it has in IV.4 when applied to the unity-in-diversity of intellectual vision. Of its meaning in this new context we get some idea from a passage in the treatise *That the Intelligibles Are Not Outside the Intellect* (V.5 [32]), several chapters of which are devoted to an extensive account of the nature of Intellect's intuitive vision of its source. The text in question, coming in chapter ten, shows strikingly similar terminology to that of IV.4:

Who, then, would grasp its whole power at once (ὁμοῦ)? For if one did grasp it as a whole, why would one differ from it? Does one then grasp it partially (κατὰ μέρος)? But you who perceive it will perceive it wholly (προσβαλεῖς . . . ἀθρόως ὁ προσβάλλων), but you will not announce it as whole. If not, you will be Intellect thinking (νοῦς νοῶν), and if you happen upon it, it will escape you, or rather you will escape it. But whenever you see (ὄρας) it, see it as a whole. But whenever you think (νοῆς) it, whatever you remember of it, think that it is good . . . (6-12)

Here ἀθρόως προσβάλλειν denotes the total vision of the "whole" superseding the partial (κατὰ μέρος) view which comes from looking at the trace of the Good as it is reflected in the derivative intelligibles. The whole view provided by Intellect's vision of the One alone is thus logically prior to νόησις (or νοῦς νοῶν), νόησις being in a nontemporal sense a "later" vision involving a kind of reminiscence of the "earlier" whole vision. This is again the Epicurean distinction between the whole and partial views. Yet here the intellectual vision, which in IV.4 is an ἐπιβολή ἀθρόα ἀθρόων superior to the partial (κατὰ μέρος) vision of discursive thinking, becomes the partial view when contrasted with the ἀθρόα προσβολή of Intellect's non-intellectual contemplation of the One. In other words, just as discursive thinking is partial vision in relation to Intellect's "whole" view of the Forms, so νόησις is partial vision in relation to the "whole" view of the One. Thus thinking (νόησις) is secondary to immediate seeing (ἀθρόα προσβολή), and represents Intellect's "escape" from the Good and its turning "outward" toward the Forms. By referring to the non-intellectual vision as ἀθρόα Plotinus is not of course implying that it is, like νόησις, a unity-in-diversity; he simply means that, relative to each other, νόησις and ἀθρόα προσβολή are, respectively, Intellect's "partial" and "whole" views of the One.

Let us now turn to several texts in the *Enneads* which show more specifically what sort of visual experience this higher ἀθρόα προσβολή is. I begin with a passage in 111.8 [30].9 where Plotinus reveals his sensitivity to the difficulties associated with applying his visual model to a non-intellectual apprehension:

If knowledge of discrete things comes through νοῦς and we are able to know νοῦς by νοῦς, by what sort of ἐπιβολή ἀθρόα are we to grasp what transcends the nature of νοῦς? To the person whom we must show how this is possible, we shall say that it is by that which is similar in us. (18-22)

The likeness of the Good in us is the trace (ἵχνος) of the Good which, as Plotinus says in chapter eleven, the "archetype" has granted to νοῦς as the ultimate object of its vision, thus giving it its nature as a seeing power (19-23). Here we have a very important component of Plotinus' doctrine of Intellect: what determines Intellect as a thinking power is its intrinsic desire to "see" what is initially an indistinct trace of the One within it, which is the One's "gift" to Intellect. The One is therefore the natural perfection or fulfillment (τελείωσις) of Intellect's ὄψις in just the same way as the perceived object is the τελείωσις of perception (.11.7-9).¹⁸ But if in all of its activity Intellect is ultimately looking toward the One, then the Forms are never strictly speaking the intended or primary objects of its vision; its native desire is always to look beyond intelligible Being to the One in isolation.¹⁹ To attain this higher and simpler intuition requires that Intellect transcend itself by going beyond νόησις. That this is an entirely different and unique mode of vision is clear from Plotinus' assertion that we cannot perceive what transcends us by applying our minds to it (νοῦν παραστησάμενοι), since νόησις only leads us to Being and the Forms; "rather, Intellect must, so to speak, turn back and, facing both directions, release itself to what is behind it and there, if it wishes to see that [sc. the One/Good], it must not be all Intellect" (111.8.9.29-32). Intellect thus "sees" the One, not in the manner of the noetic ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή by a focussing of its "eye" in active concentration, but by self-abandonment and cessation of all intellectual activity. Thus one of the distinguishing aspects of the supra-intellectual ὄψις, which we shall have occasion later to explore more closely, is that the concentration (ἐναπέρεισις) characteristic of intellectual vision is at this level forsaken.

So far we have a description of the essential elements of Intellect's higher intuition. It is some extraordinary mode of unified vision (ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή), which is far different from the noetic ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή in that νοῦς, by virtue of self-transcendence, is no longer "all intellect" and so does not "see" intellectually. Plotinus says much the same thing elsewhere in the *Enneads*, referring to this intuition as another way of seeing (ἄλλος τρόπος τοῦ ἰδεῖν: VI.9

18. Cf. V.1[10].6.47-8, .7.6-7., VI.7.31.20-21 and .33.7ff.

19. On this idea see R. Arnou, "L'acte de l'intelligence en tant qu'elle n'est pas intelligence. Quelques considerations sur la nature de l'intelligence selon Plotin", *Mélanges Joseph Maréchal*, t.II (Paris 1950), 251.

[9].11.22; cf. VI.7 [38].35.30-1: ἄλλως ἐκεῖνον βλέπειν) made possible by Intellect's self-transcendence, a non-intellectual vision (cf. VI.7.16.14: ἔβλεπεν ἀνοήτως) by which νοῦς achieves a presence superior to knowledge (παρουσίαν ἐπιστήμης κρείττονα: VI.9.4.3-4). But specifically what sort of intuitive experience are we to imagine this vision to be? Does Plotinus have in mind, as he does for νόησις, a mode of sensory vision to which this different way of seeing can be compared? Indeed, he gives us two such analogues: in V.5.7 and V.3 [49].11 he likens Intellect's vision of the One to different modes of sensory vision, both of which are distinguished from the modes of ordinary perception (αἴσθησις) because they are more immediate and unified. These analogies have to do with the two moments of Intellect's self-generation, its procession from and reversion to the One, when Intellect's intuitive activity transcends its intellectual vision of the Forms. They illustrate, with much greater clarity than can be found in other accounts in the *Enneads*, what νοῦς, as subject, experiences in this "other form of seeing." It will therefore be helpful to examine both analogies in some detail.

1) *The Inner Vision: V.5.7*

V.5.7 is a remarkable account of the process by which Intellect, in its return to the One, comes to see the One without looking at it. Plotinus begins by saying that seeing is composed of two parts, the form of the perceived object visible to the eye and "that through which the eye sees the form", i.e. light, which he describes as also visible but distinct from the form of the object and as the cause of our seeing the form. Because the illuminating light of perception is seen in and on the form, our vision of it is indistinguishable from our vision of the object; it is a con-perception (cf. συνορώμενον, 5) of form and light in which our attention is directed not to the source of illumination, but to the illuminated object. Such by analogy, Plotinus continues, is Intellect's vision of the One as illuminating light in and on the Forms.²⁰ By this vision, of course, Plotinus means νόησις, the ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή of Intellect seeing the intelligibles "at one glance"; thus νόησις brings with it a vision of the light of the One, but only insofar as it is reflected in the Forms it illuminates. However, when he attempts

20. That the One is a light illuminating the Forms is a recurrent image in the *Enneads* and is especially frequent in VI.7: cf. .17.36-7, .22.1ff., .30.32f., .31.1ff., .36.15. In VI.7.41.1ff. Plotinus compares the Good to an eye which is itself light and argues that if thinking is light (φῶς) and if light does not seek light, then the Good does not desire to think. By implication, without the external light of the Good to illuminate the objects of its vision, the eye of Intellect would be blind.

to account for Intellect's higher apprehension of the One apart from the Forms by using the same model of normal perception, he finds the model no longer applicable:

But when there is nothing else besides the light itself, the eye sees it [alone] by an comprehensive look (ἀθρόα προσβολῆ) . . . and yet even then the eye sees the light as it is present in something else; perception (αἴσθησις) cannot grasp the light when it is isolated and not within another thing. (8-11)

Plotinus' point is that normal perception (αἴσθησις) while appropriate as the visual model of νόησις, is inappropriate as the analogue of this higher vision, since in ordinary perception the eye, as it looks toward an external object, must rely on an external source of illumination. Although light is in itself perceptible (αὐτὸ αἰσθητόν), there can be no discrete vision of it in and of itself, since αἴσθησις is incapable of discerning the source of sight apart from the object seen. He goes on to say that, even if we liken the higher vision of the One to seeing a purely visible object (ὄρατόν μόνον) — the sun, for example, conceived as nothing but light, i.e. there being no substantive body underlying sunlight — so that the object is not seen through the forms of other objects it illuminates, the analogy once again fails to the extent that the object, in this case the sun's light, is apart from the mind (13-21). What is needed as an accurate analogue, he thinks, is a kind of perception in which the eye in some manner transcends the things it sees and looks directly at the source of light reflected in them.

So to find the precise analogue to the nature of Intellect's vision of the One Plotinus turns his attention to the completely internalized experience of the eye (πάλιν ἐπὶ τὸν ὀφθαλμὸν ἰτέον), or more specifically to a peculiar mode of vision in which the illuminating light is not external to the observer. He cites two examples of the "occasional" phenomenon of the eye seeing an earlier internal, self-derived light coming suddenly and with greater brilliance than is provided by external illumination: (1) at night in darkness a light from within the eye may at times "leap" out before it, and (2) on such occasions as (a) when, although we close our eyelid not wishing to see anything, our eye still puts forth light, or (b) when by squeezing our eye we see the light within it. Plotinus is thinking generally in terms of his own theory of perception, adapted from Plato's *Timaeus* 45b-46c,²¹ according to which vision

21. Applying the principle that like is known by like, Plato asserts that vision occurs when light streaming from the eyes meets the light projected from the object of vision. It follows from this view, however, that vision is cut off at night when the eye's light meets with what is dissimilar to it, i.e. darkness; the same thing happens, Plato says, when the eyelids

occurs through a process of *sympatheia*, when light internal to the eye is emitted and meets with a similar light given off by the object of vision.²² In the two examples mentioned here, however, where this internal light is likened to the illuminating light of the One itself, the eye's light is not directed outward, but is the sole source and object of a completely internalized vision. This mode of "perception", he thinks, is similar to Intellect's vision as it turns back to the One, hides itself from all externals and, withdrawing within itself, sees nothing, yet achieves the truest form of sight:²³ a vision which is not of light reflected in something else, but of an internal light in total isolation, pure and appearing in a flash of brilliance.²⁴ Nor is it to be sought, but must be awaited in tranquility. It is, Plotinus says, an enlightenment for which we can and must prepare, but which ultimately gives itself as the sole object of vision. As the kind of separation characteristic of αἴσθησις vanishes in this extraordinary mode of sensual vision, so, too, Intellect ceases to think and now effortlessly sees the One, which before it had grasped in and on the Forms, as the illumination of its very essence. Thus Intellect's reversion to the One approximates an internal coincidence of sight with its intrinsic power of light (the trace of the One within Intellect) and thus stands in contrast to normal vision — and, by analogy, to νόησις — directed outward toward external objects and their source of illumination.²⁵ But such

are shut. Plotinus in V.5.7 is obviously taking great liberties with this theory. Cf. II.4[12].5.10ff. for a similar comparison of νοῦς with the "light-formed eye" (ὀφθαλμὸς φωτοειδῆς) which directs its gaze toward the external light. The reference to the "luminous" eyes of animals in IV.5[29].7.24ff. is likely taken from Aristotle, *De Anima* 419a 2-6.

22. On the *sympatheia* doctrine, see R. Arnou, *Le désir de dieu dans la philosophie de Plotin* (Paris 1921), 147f., H.J. Blumenthal, *Plotinus' Psychology. His Doctrine of the Embodied Soul* (The Hague 1971), 78, and E.K. Emilsson, *Plotinus on Sense-Perception: A Philosophical Study* (Cambridge 1988), 36-62. Emilsson regards the doctrine as a "modification" of the *Timaeus* theory and "conceptually kindred" to Galen's theory of perception.

23. Cf. VI.7.33.23-4: no lover (including the lover of the Good) is truly in love until he can generate in himself an impression (τύπον) of his beloved which is not perceptible (οὐκ αἰσθητόν). On Intellect's ability to see without seeing, see Arnou, 257.

24. Cf. V.3.17.15ff. Plotinus also refers to an internal light of the soul which itself becomes ensouled when soul permeates and enters into it (IV.5.4.10ff.). Elsewhere (II.4.5.8) he equates the rational principle (λόγος) with light and matter with darkness.

25. A very unusual expression of the same idea occurs in VI.7.35.15-16 where, in describing the soul's contemplation of the Good, Plotinus says that, through the continuity of soul's vision (τῷ συνεχεῖ τῆς θεάς), what was before its visual object (τὸ ὀρατόν) becomes now its very power of vision (ὄψις). Cf. also VI.7.15.25ff., .36.21, and VI.9.7.2-3.

coincidence is not to be confused with identity, since Intellect and the light within it remain distinct.

Several aspects of this higher vision associated with Intellect's reversion to the One merit additional comment. A major contention of Plotinus in V.5 is that there is no place (τόπος) in which Intellect's "eye" can find the One. The "whole vision" is therefore of a Principle which is nowhere, neither being in anything nor occupying space. From this principle Plotinus makes two corollary claims. First, if the One is nowhere, Intellect cannot actively look for it (.7.31-8.6). The non-intellectual ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή (προσβολή) is thus conceived as a passive vision, one which, as we have noted, is not sought but awaited in perfect quietude and cessation of active concentration. Only those minds fully suited for the vision will receive it, yet ultimately the vision gives itself to the Intellect as the sole object of its view, appearing "suddenly" when νοῦς has withdrawn within itself and is not looking beyond itself toward anything.²⁶ Secondly, in the ultimate vision Intellect comes into the immediate presence of the One by virtue of its ability to transcend itself. But such self-transcendence is by necessity only temporary and Intellect naturally returns to itself by reverting to intellectual activity. In V.5.8 Plotinus gives two reasons for this. First, and more simply, νοῦς cannot remain permanently "in nothing" and so must depart from the One. Secondly, if indeed Intellect were able to stay in that nowhere and behold the One eternally, its intuitive experience would not be one of vision at all, but of perfect union with its Principle. Plotinus thus makes explicit what is consistently implied in his use of the visual model, that at all levels of its activity νοῦς is a seeing power, and so must remain distinct from what it sees. Hence, νοῦς never achieves complete and permanent union with the One. If there is to be vision, Intellect and the One must in some sense be separate, not merge in unity (22).²⁷ Intellect is able to see the One "by that part of itself which is not Intellect" (τῷ ἑαυτοῦ μὴ νῶ: 23), yet it is still so determined by its nature as a seeing power that it necessarily departs from its source and, becoming νοῦς again, is drawn

26. Compare with this claim Plotinus' statement in VI.8 [39]. 19.10-12 that, because there is no "where" to the presence of the One, it appears to one contemplating it as though before the eyes of the soul (οἷον πρὸ ὀμμάτων τῆς ψυχῆς), so that wherever he looks, he sees the One.

27. For an opposing view cf. Bussanich, 18Off. Going against the current of Plotinian scholarship, he argues for the permanent identity of the soul with the One and sees nothing inconsistent in Plotinus' employment of the language of vision to describe this mystical experience, since the soul's vision of the One has "merged" with the One's own self-vision, in which there is no distinction of subject and object (he cites VI.8.16.18-21). His interpretation, however, is contradicted by the texts cited here.

toward contemplation of the multiplicity of the intelligible world. We come to understand from this passage, then, why Plotinus applies the visual model to the supra-intellectual intuition of νοῦς; even in its return to the One, νοῦς remains apart from the object of its contemplation, and so "sees" the One as other than itself, thus falling short of identification with it. Still, as we are about to see, this otherness is of a different kind from that which defines Intellect's relationship to the "external" Forms.

2) *Potential Vision: V.3.10-11*

It bears repeating that the description of the eye's inner vision in V.5.7 is intended as an analogue of the fully actualized Intellect activity in its reversion to the One. We turn now to an examination of another moment in Intellect's self-generation for which Plotinus employs a quite different visual model. In the tenth and eleventh chapters of the treatise *On the Knowing Hypostases* (V.3) Plotinus describes in some detail Intellect's intuitive power as it begins its procession from the One. In this moment of its generation Intellect is inchoate or unactualized because not fully emergent from its source and so not yet νοῦς in act. He begins this section with an analysis of the otherness and multiplicity inherent in Intellect's vision (νόησις) in its fully actualized state, which he contrasts with the simplicity characteristic of both the One and the unactualized Intellect before its full differentiation from its source. For seeing to be possible, there must be more than one thing, since sight and thought are activities and motions, and the agent of all action must either act on something other than itself or be active within itself as a multiplicity (.10.21f.). All rational activity demands multiplicity, and so the active Intellect can know itself only by being a "varied eye" (ποικίλος ὀφθαλμός), ". . . for if it were to look toward what is one and partless, it would be devoid of reason" (εἰ γὰρ ἐνὶ καὶ ἀμερεὶ προσβάλλοι, ἡλογήθη: .10.32). Such a simple and partless intuition would not be νόησις, but a non-thinking, non-speaking touch (θίξις), a "pre-thinking" contact before Intellect comes to be, when it touches rather than thinks the Good (.10.43-44).

This account would seem to distinguish the non-intellectual θίξις not only from νόησις, but also from any other mode of intuition analogous to sensory sight. For here Plotinus employs the analogy of direct physical touch and contact, not, as in V.5.8 and III.8.9, of vision. Indeed, he seems to be saying that before it determines itself as a thinking principle, when it remains in direct contact with its source, Intellect is still a simple (ἀπλοῦς) entity, a state which, if we are to take seriously Plotinus' remarks earlier in this chapter concerning the multiplicity of vision, would at least appear to preclude our identifying it with any sort of intu-

itive sight, even Intellect's completely internalized vision of the One described in V.5.7.²⁸

Nonetheless Plotinus makes just this identification in the following section (V.3.11), where he construes the pre-intellectual touch in terms of the Aristotelian distinction between potential and actual vision:²⁹

Thus even this multiple Intellect (ὁ νοῦς οὗτος ὁ πολὺς), whenever it wishes to think that which is beyond it, thinks that itself which is one, but wishing to see it as simple (ἐπιβάλλειν³⁰ θέλων ὡς ἀπλῶ) it goes away always grasping something else made many in itself. So that it moved toward it [sc. the One] not as Intellect, but as sight not yet seeing (ὡς ὄψις οὐκ ἰδοῦσα), but it came away having that which it itself made many. So it desired one thing possessing indistinctly (ἀορίστως) some image (φάντασμα τι) of it within itself, but it came out grasping something else in itself which it made many. For, further, it has an impression (τύπον) of what is seen. . . . It is already Intellect when it has it [sc. the vision of the One as many] and it has it as Intellect. But before this it was only desire and impressionless sight (ἀτύπωτος ὄψις). Thus this Intellect perceived that (ὁ νοῦς ἐπέβαλε μὲν ἐκείνῳ), but having grasped it it became Intellect, always in need and always becoming at the same time Intellect and essence and thinking when it thought. (1-15)

So Intellect approaches the One as sight not yet seeing, as mere desire and sight lacking any impression, but then moves away from its source as it becomes ὁ πολὺς νοῦς, or actualized sight ("sight seeing"; ἰδοῦσα ὄψις: 11) viewing the multiplicity of its own creation. In moving from potential to actual seeing, νοῦς gives form to its undefined image (φάντασμα or τύπος),³¹ but by doing so makes it "many out of one." Plotinus places special emphasis on the contrast between the object of Intellect's pre-noetic desire for a simple apprehension of the One — which it can never

28. Cf. Bussanich, 183, who disagrees with Rist's, *Plotinus*, 222, contention that contact represents a higher level of intuition than does vision.

29. Cf. *De Anima* 417b 5-9, 424a 18, 425b 26-426a 26, 431a 4-7. For further references in the *Enneads* to potency and indefiniteness in the intelligible world, cf. III.5 [50].7 and V.3.12.1ff. See also H. J. Krämer, *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Platonismus zwischen Platon und Plotin* (Amsterdam 1964), 314 and T. A. Szlezák, *Platon und Aristoteles in der Nuslehre Plotins* (Basel-Stuttgart 1979), 58.

30. H-R Schwyzer's reading ἐπιβάλλειν is, I think, wrong for several reasons. For one, the entire tenor of the passage is the distinction of the inchoate Intellect's desire for simple *vision* of the One (for which the more common ἐπέβαλε is again used in 1. 13) and its actual pluralizing grasp of it. Bussanich, 223, has additional comments.

31. The same process is described in VI.7.15.15f. Cf. Bussanich, 224f.

attain³² — and its actual grasp in which both Intellect and its image become many. The idea of possession is a crucial component of this contrast: as potential sight νοῦς intuitively grasps its φάντασμα of the One without possessing (λαμβάνων) it, so that its image is still simple and its relation to the One is one of direct contact rather than of actual sight or thought.³³

The doctrinal basis for this analogy can be found in several earlier treatises where Plotinus equates Intellect as pre-intellectual vision with the Indefinite Dyad and with intelligible matter.³⁴ In such passages we find a similar distinction between thinking in itself (νόησις αὐτῇ = the Indefinite Dyad), which is like seeing in itself (ὄψις) in that it is indefinite (ἀόριστος), and fully actualized νόησις having been defined (ὀρίζομένη) and completed (ἀποτελειομένη) by the intelligible object (V.4 [7].2.5-10), and thus having become "sight seeing" (ὄρασις ὁρῶσα: V.1 [10].5.19). By identifying νοῦς (as ἀόριστος νόησις) with the Indefinite Dyad and likening it to the power of seeing still undefined by its object, Plotinus implies that pre-intellectual Intellect, while not engendering the actual multiplicity and otherness of the fully actualized "sight seeing", does possess these elements in undefined form. There is the same implication in the statement in V.3.11 that Intellect, when it is "sight not yet seeing" (ὄψις οὐπω ἰδοῦσα), has within itself an indefinite image of the One (ἀορίστως ἔχουσα ἐπ' αὐτῇ φάντασμα τι) which νοῦς makes "many out of one" as it realizes its nature as sight seeing. By this, I suggest, Plotinus means that ὄψις οὐπω ἰδοῦσα is distinct from its image of the One, that it is so in some undefined manner (ἀορίστως), and that this indeterminate (potential) otherness is determined (actualized) as the seeing Intellect makes of its uniform image of the One a multiplicity, i.e. envisions the One in the multiple Forms. That this is indeed Plotinus' meaning is confirmed in his discussion in II.4 [12].5.32f. of the categories of the intelligible world, the μέγιστα γένη of Plato's *Sophist* 254D ff., where he says that the categories of Otherness and Movement are first indeterminate (ἀόριστον) as they proceed from the One and are then defined when they turn back to the One and are thereby actualized. It is this indefinite Otherness which characterizes the presence of the φάντασμα of the One within Intellect when it is still "thinking in itself" (νόησις αὐτῇ) or the Indefinite Dyad. As an image in νοῦς, the separateness of the φάντασμα

32. Cf. Armstrong, *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus* (Amsterdam 1967), 69f.

33. This is the "non-intellectual seeing" (ἔβλεπεν ἀνοήτως) of VI.7.16.14.

34. See Krämer, 312ff. and Szlezák, 57ff. for the sources of Plotinus' doctrine in these passages. On the related concept of intelligible matter, cf. II.4.1-5.

from Intellect is initially undefined or potential and is then defined when Intellect becomes sight seeing. We are thus left with a paradox in V.3.10-11: although pre-intellectual νοῦς is in immediate touch with the One, such contact is nevertheless compatible with otherness³⁵ in the sense of an indefinite or potential separation of νοῦς as unactualized vision from its φάντασμα of the One. For only thus could the inchoate Intellect be unseeing *sight*. In this way Plotinus can consistently maintain that the inchoate Intellect is simple while also being a mode of ὄψις. Pre-intellectual Intellect is thus separate from the One, although in a manner different from the way in which the actualized Intellect is separate from the Forms.

We come now to the second of our interpretive problems, i.e. what Plotinus' formulation of the analogies of V.5.7 and V.3.10-11 would appear to imply about the relationship between the procession and reversion of Intellect and the intuitive powers corresponding to them. To repeat, the consensus of scholars is that the intuition of the inchoate, pre-intellectual Intellect in its procession from the One is essentially equivalent to its supra-intellectual vision in its return to the One.³⁶ Under this view, both passages turn out to be simply variant descriptions of the same mystical vision. However, the significant dissimilarity of the analogies suggests otherwise, for it is difficult to see how what Plotinus describes in V.3.11 as the inchoate Intellect's bare potency of sight can be identical to the internalized vision of the self-transcending Intellect depicted in V.5.7. Moreover, in a recent challenge to the prevailing view, John Bussanich³⁷ has argued that, because there is a

35. In V.1.6.52f. Plotinus similarly says that when Intellect is with the One it is separate from it "only in otherness" (ἑτερότητι μόνον). But contrast with this VI.9.8.35: we are present to the One when we have no otherness. On Plotinus' concept of Intellect's presence (παρουσία) with the One, see Rist, "Mysticism and Transcendence", 214.

36. Bussanich, 234f., has a good summary of the literature on this question.

37. Bussanich, 231ff. My position, *contra* Bussanich, is that the pre-intellectual and supra-intellectual visions are the same. However, it can be said in support of his interpretation that the disparateness of the visual analogies in V.5.7 and V.3.11 lends *prima facie* support to his argument (the pre-intellectual ὄψις, we might say, is only the capacity for vision, while the hyper-intellectual intuition is actual—although completely internalized—sight). (I deal with this issue below). He might also have noted that if we distinguish these phases of Intellect's life then we circumvent the paradox which arises from equating them, *viz.* that in its pre-intellectual phase, when νοῦς is imperfect and deficient in nature (cf. III.5.7 and V.3.12.1ff.), it achieves a higher degree of intuitive unity than when it is fully actualized. On the other hand, Plotinus does say that the indefiniteness of intelligible matter is not something to be denigrated as

good reason to posit an ontological difference between these two moments of Intellect's self-generation, we must therefore acknowledge a corresponding distinction of the pre-intellectual from the supra-intellectual vision as well. In light of these discrepancies, I think it worthwhile to discuss briefly why, against Bussanich, I find the generally accepted interpretation convincing.

I shall limit myself to two points. First, Plotinus' remarks in VI.7.36 and VI.9.4.26-30 that the power (*δύναμις*) by which the soul reverts to the One is the same as that by which it proceeds from the One, and in III.8.9.31 that Intellect always "looks in both directions", leave little doubt as to his meaning. Secondly, if, as is clearly the case, Intellect's life is a continuous, non-temporal cycle of movement toward and away from the First Principle, it makes little sense to claim that the desire which leads pre-intellectual *νοῦς* to attempt to see the One "as simple" (V.3.11.3) is anything other than (or is anterior to) the desire of the ascendant Intellect to go beyond itself toward a supra-rational vision of the One. Indeed V.3.11, by all accounts a description of Intellect in procession, is couched in the language of reversion: in its desire to apprehend the One in its simplicity, pre-intellectual *νοῦς* is said to "move toward" it, while its movement away corresponds exclusively to its actualization as thinking Intellect. I therefore see no more than a formal difference between the pre-intellectual intuition (*ἐπιβολή*)³⁸ corresponding to this movement toward the One and the supra-intellectual *ἐπιβολή* of the reversion: ultimately, the "pre-intellectual touch" (V.3.10) and "sight not yet seeing" (V.3.11) of Intellect in procession represent the same mystical experience as, respectively, the "non-intellectual vision" (VI.7.16.14) and the "seeing without looking" (V.5.7.29-36) associated with Intellect in reversion. In both cases vision of the One is an apprehension completely internal to *νοῦς*, as distinguished from its look outward toward the "external" Forms. As for the disparateness of the visual analogies in V.5.7 and V.3.10-11, it is entirely plausible to assume that it is simply a matter of differing emphases. When focussing on the emergence of Intellect from the One, Plotinus will naturally tend to stress those aspects of that phase of Intellect's generation which make it formally distinct from the other moments. It is a mistake, however, to assert, as Bussanich does, that these stylistic idiosyncracies reflect separate and independent levels of intuitive vision.

is that of physical matter (II.4.3.1-2).

38. It is important to note that according to V.3.11.13 the inchoate Intellect achieves an intuitive *ἐπιβολή* of the One, and so is not potential vision in exactly the Aristotelian sense, a fact which Bussanich, 235, overlooks.

We are now in a position to appreciate fully how, through these various visual analogies, Plotinus attempts to illustrate the nature of Intellect's power of intuition. In νόησις the fully actualized Intellect, or νοῦς νοῶν, sees the One reflected in the Forms through a unified vision (ἄθροα ἐπιβολή) of the Forms in much the same way that the eye unifies the discrete sensations of the various parts of a face to form a single perception. Intellect's noetic intuition is thus a "comprehensive" unity, a one-in-many. By contrast, Plotinus expressly disassociates Intellect's vision of the One itself in isolation from the Forms from any experience of αἴσθησις, since νοῦς now ceases to be νοῦς, that is, it ceases active thinking and awaits the presence of the One in complete quietude. Instead, drawing from both Plato's and Aristotle's theories of vision, he likens this higher intuition to two extraordinary modes of vision corresponding to the logically distinct phases of procession and reversion: (1) in V.5.7 the activity of νοῦς in ascendance is likened to a passive vision (ἄθροα ἐπιβολή [προσβολή]), a seeing without looking corresponding to the eye's spontaneous vision of a self-generated light occurring either at night or when the eyes are closed, and (2) in V.3.11 the inchoate Intellect is likened to potential vision (ἐπιβολή) in which the eye of Intellect "touches" its internal image of the One immediately and pre-intellectually, i.e. without grasping it in a pluralizing vision. At this moment in Intellect's self-generation there is only potential or undefined separation and multiplicity, and the unity of the intuition comes closer to direct contact with what is supremely simple. It is clear from both analogies that the greater simplicity of Intellect's supra-intellectual vision is due to the more immediate presence of the One to νοῦς than it experiences in νόησις. In V.5.7 this presence is likened to light internal to the eye and is thus contrasted with the intellectual vision of the One's light seen externally in its reflection in the Forms; in V.3.11 it becomes the direct impression of the One in the eye of Intellect. Yet, notwithstanding this higher degree of unity, the One is present to Intellect either (in its reversion to the One) as transcendent light which enters Intellect unexpectedly, or (in its procession from the One) as a distinct image (φάντασμα or τύπος) within Intellect. In both cases νοῦς confronts its Principle as something other than itself.³⁹

39. Yet in his statement at the beginning of V.3.11 that the fully actualized Intellect (ὁ πολὺς νοῦς) desires to "see the One as simple" (ἐπιβάλλειν θέλων ὡς ἀπλῶ), Plotinus implies that the object of Intellect's activity is an even simpler and more unified level of intuition. What he means here can, I think, be established through reference to a remarkable account of the One's own self-awareness. In VI.7.39, a passage similar to V.3.10-11 in is polemic against the Aristotelian identification of the First Principle

So the special sense given to ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή by the Epicureans, for whom it meant a single apprehension of a plurality of individual perceptions, made it a fitting analogy for both the intellectual and supra-intellectual intuitions of the Plotinian νοῦς, each representing a level of unified experience which is consonant with Intellect's inherent otherness. Moreover, in its denotation of a collective unity of experience, this term serves to distinguish the various phases of Intellect's activity from the supreme simplicity of the One.

Plotinian Grace

The idea that vision is the mode of perception most assimilable to the higher intuitions of Intellect is, of course, the legacy of

with Intellect, Plotinus, after demonstrating that the Good has no need of self-thinking, describes the only possible form of self-awareness for a non-thinking ἀρχή:

But [if the Good *qua* Good does not think itself] as what then? Rather, there is nothing else present to it [sc. the One], but it will have some simple intuition of itself (ἀπλῆ τις ἐπιβολή αὐτῷ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἔσται). But insofar as there is no distance or distinction with respect to it, what would this perception of itself be other than itself (τὸ ἐπιβάλλειν ἑαυτῷ τί ἂν εἴη ἢ αὐτό)? (1-4)

Thus supreme self-identity, defined as the highest degree of intuitive awareness (ἀπλῆ ἐπιβολή), is the state in which the One is its own intuition of itself (τὸ ἐπιβάλλειν ἑαυτῷ). Unlike νόησις, which necessarily produces variety (ποικίλον τι: 17f.), the One's ἀπλῆ ἐπιβολή produces no distance or difference and is like a simple and wholly self-directed movement (οἶον . . . κίνημα) which, being like a touch (οἶον ἐπαφή), is devoid of the otherness associated with all modes of thinking. I suggest that this ἀπλῆ ἐπιβολή corresponds to what Plotinus describes in V.3.11 as the goal of Intellect's desire, i.e. "to apprehend the One as simple" (ἐπιβάλλειν ὡς ἀπλῶ), and so think it reasonable to assume that the simple intuition which is the object of the fully actualized Intellect's desire as it returns to its source, and which as Plotinus stresses is what it eternally but futilely strives to achieve, transcends even its pre- or supra-intellectual intuition and is just this perfectly self-identical ἐπιβολή described in VI.7.39 as attainable by the One alone. If that is indeed the case, then Plotinus' point is that Intellect desires complete identity with the One which can only come through the total simplicity of the ἀπλῆ ἐπιβολή. Thus the simplicity which νοῦς wishes to attain by necessity always eludes its grasp, since only that which is truly ἀπλοῦς — the One — can achieve absolute self-identification. Intellect can only aspire to its simple unity insofar as it is constrained by its nature as a seeing power to only a limited and brief contact with its principle and must depart from its Principle as a "varied eye" (ποικίλος ὀφθαλμός) creating distinction and multiplicity. Hence in both phases of its intuitive activity Intellect is capable at best of the inferior unity of the ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή. My view is thus at odds with that of Bussanich, 295, who claims that Intellect is capable of this ἀπλῆ ἐπιβολή.

Plato (*Republic* 509), and there is no doubt that in using the visual model Plotinus is in the first place following the lead of the master. But in a manner indicative of so much of his Platonism, Plotinus develops and transforms the analogy by introducing Epicurean and Aristotelian concepts and terminology and thus making it in the *Enneads* an instrument of exegesis of the nature of the activity of his Intellect and of its relationship to the First Principle. Yet one aspect of his eclecticism in this context appears to give rise to a significant doctrinal problem, to which I wish, in conclusion, to turn.

Three distinguishing marks of later Neoplatonism are its acceptance of theurgy as providing the sole means of the soul's ascent to the Divine, its diminution of the status of the soul, and a corresponding belief in soul's total dependence on the gods for salvation. It has been said that, as a consequence of their principle that union with the gods is impossible by any effort of the mind, but comes solely through the "grace" of the gods themselves, Iamblichus and those who followed him eschewed the Plotinian view that enlightenment is the responsibility of the ascendant soul and regarded the supreme intuitive vision as an exclusively passive experience.⁴⁰ Although the idea of the soul's complete dependence upon the transcendent world is surely a Iamblichian innovation, there is something like a notion of divine grace in the *Enneads* in Plotinus' discussions of Intellect's supra-intellectual vision of the One.⁴¹ In our analysis of V.5.7, for example, we found that one must not actively seek the light of the One but await its advent in quietude. And elsewhere Plotinus declares that this light is a "gift" from the One.⁴² However in some cases Plotinus seemingly lapses into self-contradiction by juxtaposing such expressions of the One's grace with language, in particular the terms ἐπιβολή and προσβολή, connoting an active vision requiring some effort on the part of Intellect. His unequivocal assertion in V.5.7-8, for example, that we must wait quietly for vision of the Good is followed in V.5.10 by his appeal to ἀθρόως ὁ προσβάλλων

40. Cf. E. R. Dodds, *Proclus. The Elements of Theology*, Second Edition (Oxford 1963), Introduction xx, n. 2 and H. Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy. Mysticism, Magic and Platonism in the Later Roman and Hermetic Corpus* (Cairo 1956), 165f.

41. On this question see A. H. Armstrong, *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge 1967), 261f., A. Smith, *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition. A Study in Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism* (The Hague 1974), chapter seven, and Rist, "Mysticism and Transcendence", 214f. and "The Problem of 'Otherness'", 84f. Like Armstrong, Arnou, "L'acte de l'intelligence", 260, n.1, emphasizes that Plotinian "grace" is not "un don personnel gratuit" but comes by necessity.

42. Cf. Smith, 109.

to strive with total concentration for a "whole vision" of it. Again, in III.8.10.31ff. Plotinus claims that one who is to come to an intuition (προσβολή) of the Good must "cast" himself upon it (βαλὼν πρὸς αὐτό) seeking the divine vision and only then come to rest within it (καὶ τυχῶν ἐντὸς αὐτοῦ ἀναπαυσάμενος); yet in the subsequent discussion of Intellect as a sort of sight we are told that it is by virtue of the One having "given" a trace of itself to Intellect that νοῦς is able to have that vision (Τὸ μὲν οὖν ἐπ' αὐτοῦ ἵχνος αὐτοῦ τῷ νῷ ὁρῶντι ἔδωκεν ἔχειν).⁴³ In both passages προσβολή retains much of its original sense of the eye's "projection" of its vision toward its intended object and, like the intellectual ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή (προσβολή) of the Forms, involves the active concentration of Intellect's "eye". Its use thus seems to contradict the expressed idea that the supra-intellectual vision is a passively received gift.

Yet I believe that we can absolve Plotinus of the charge of inconsistency in his treatment of Intellect's role in the attainment of ultimate enlightenment. For in VI.7.35 he implies that intentionality and passivity are perfectly compatible elements of the supreme vision. Intellect, he says there, sees its transcendent Principle "by an intuition and reception" (ἐπιβολῇ τινι καὶ παραδοχῇ), that is, by the concentrated look of the (albeit extraordinary) intuitive ἐπιβολή and a passive acceptance of the vision which the Good grants to it.⁴⁴ Further on he explains that the νοῦς of soul "sees first, and the vision also comes to it and the two become one" (ὁ νοῦς αὐτῆς ὁρᾷ πρῶτος, ἔρχεται δὲ ἡ θεὰ καὶ εἰς αὐτὴν καὶ τὰ δύο ἔν γίνεται: 35-6); thus, having united soul and its intellect, the Good "gives" to both a "blessed" vision (38-9). One possible reading of these statements is that the ἐπιβολή is part of the ascendant soul's preparation for the vision during which it must actively look toward the Good;⁴⁵ but, in that the Good is "nowhere" to be seen, the vision itself comes to the soul, now suited for reception of the vision, as a gift from its source in such a way that its organ of vision remains passive. Intellect thus initiates movement toward the One, but instead of grasping its φάντασμα of its source in active

43. Cf. also VI.7.16 for equally ambiguous language.

44. Bussanich, commenting on this passage, sees two possible interpretations: (a) it shows that ἐπιβολή's "... root meaning of 'casting upon' may be tempered somewhat in mystical apprehension when Intellect's ability to focus or concentrate slips away", or (b) it is Plotinus' attempt to express "... the paradoxical character of Intellect's mystical awareness of what transcends it, stressing both Intellect's supreme effort to move beyond itself and to receive what streams from the One" (95; cf. also 175 and 225). In what follows, I give a third interpretation.

45. Similarly in VI.9.4.26 Plotinus says that the presence of the One comes only to those "able and prepared to receive it" (τοῖς δέχεσθαι δυναμένοις καὶ παρεσκευασμένοις).

vision and thereby becoming νοῦς νοῶν, Intellect is able, if only momentarily, to forego all activity and so pass beyond itself, "giving itself up" to the One rather than realizing its nature as νοῦς through the intellectual ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή of the multiple Forms.⁴⁶

Indeed, such attribution of agency to what is ultimately a passive vision of the transcendent was not unprecedented. Lewy⁴⁷ calls attention to a very similar notion found in the mysticism of Philo, the Hermetic Corpus, and the Chaldaean Oracles, according to which the soul first "stretches its eye" towards God (an image used by Plotinus himself in much the same context in V.1.6.10), then passively receives the illumination of his light which comes, as in the Plotinian version, by the grace of God. The initial intentional act of the soul's "inner eye" depends upon prior cleansing and concentration, but the vision itself is ultimately provided by "...the forthcoming activity of this light's brilliance." I think it highly probable that in such passages as VI.7.35 Plotinus is drawing from the same tradition.

Submission to the transcendent will, then, is for Plotinus, as it is for later Neoplatonists, necessary for proper receptivity to the divine illumination. Yet such passive openness to grace would seem to involve as a preparatory step the very active ἐπιβολή which "later" determines its intellectual vision. Indeed, both the intellectual and supra-intellectual visions are, as Plotinus in VI.7.35.31-34 indicates, but two aspects of the same power. Thus Intellect's ὄψις in its return to the One can properly be termed an ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή insofar as that vision derives at least partially from Intellect's initial intentional "look" toward the transcendent Good. At that point, however, all active looking vanishes as νοῦς loses itself in that higher Light.⁴⁸

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46. Aristotle's theory of perception provides Plotinus with an apt analogy for this double causality: like sight in its actuality, νοῦς in one way (*qua* power of vision) determines itself, and in another is determined by the One (*qua* object of vision) (V.1.5.17ff.). Cf. Bussanich, 225.

47. Lewy, 370ff.

48. A version of this paper was presented several years ago to the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies section of the American Philosophical Association's Central Division meeting in Chicago. I am indebted to the editors of *Dionysius* for their suggestions of revisions; I found them most helpful.