

The Problem of Omnipresence in Plotinus

Ennead VI, 4-5: A Reply

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In a recent issue of this journal, J. S. Lee claims that in my book, *Structures hiérarchiques dans la pensée de Plotin* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), I am guilty of some "seriously mistaken" interpretation of Plotinus.¹ He finds in particular that in my reading of Plotinus *Ennead VI, 4-5* [22-23] I give to prime matter a causality which results in dualism, a dualism of material and "eidetic" causality: "The sensible world itself has a positively specifiable nature (and existence) which is causally independent both of the *eide* and of psychical activity. . . The existence and nature of the sensible world are *not* completely (and solely) explainable in terms of a theory of eidetic causation."² In this article I would like to indicate very briefly the inadequate grounds on which Lee imputes this heresy to me and to present a fresh reading of *Ennead VI, 4-5* in general and of an important text in *VI, 5, 8* in particular which is central to Lee's case against me.

I

The evidence on the basis of which Lee believes I attribute a causal dualism to Plotinus is the following short sentence in my book (p. 68): "On trouve. . . dans *VI 5* la notion d'un 'rapprochement' de la matière vers l'Idée, par lequel peut se réaliser la constitution des formes sensibles." As is clear from the context, this sentence merely sums up my preceding discussion of *Ennead VI, 4-5* and in particular of what Plotinus says at *VI, 5, 8, 15-22* (I translate as literally as possible):

But now to speak more accurately, we must posit, not that form (εἶδος) is as if locally separate and that form (ιδέα) becomes visible in matter as if «mirrored» in water, but that matter from all directions as if touching and then again not touching form (ιδέα) by the rapprochement (πλησιασμῶ) has throughout itself from form (εἶδος) as much as it can take, there being nothing in

1. J. S. Lee, "The Doctrine of Reception According to the Capacity of the Recipient in *Ennead VI, 4-5*," *Dionysius III* (1979), pp. 79-97.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 84-5.

between, form (ιδέα) not running through it or over it but remaining in itself.³

My brief sentence indeed does little more than paraphrase this text, in relation to which it should be understood. How then, from such a modest beginning, can my sentence take on in Lee's eyes the ponderous panoply of dualism and material causality, a suitable opponent perhaps for the monism and "eidetic" causality which Lee wishes to champion on Plotinus' behalf? One suspects that there may be straw-man mongery at work!⁴ More seriously, Lee's case against me is based, as I hope to show, on a failure to understand VI, 5, 8 at some points. As VI, 5, 8 relates to a specific context, namely the main argument of VI, 4-5, I will first attempt to present this argument (Section II) and will then discuss VI, 5, 8 in the light of the main argument of VI, 4-5 and in relation to what it might have to say about "eidetic" or material causality in Plotinus (Section III).

II

The starting-point of *Ennead* VI, 4-5 is the problem of how soul is omnipresent in corporeal reality (πανταχοῦ τῷ παντί VI, 4, 1, 1).

3. Δεῖ δὲ νῦν ἀκριβέστερον λέγοντας μὴ οὕτω τίθεσθαι ὡς χωρὶς ὄντος τόπου τοῦ εἶδους εἰθ' ὥσπερ ἐν ὕδατι ἐνορᾶσθαι τῇ ὕλῃ τὴν ἰδέαν, ἀλλὰ τὴν ὕλην [εἶναι] πανταχόθεν οἷον ἐφαπτομένην καὶ αὐτὴ οὐκ ἐφαπτομένην τῆς ἰδέας κατὰ πᾶν αὐτῆς ἴσχειν παρὰ τοῦ εἶδους τῷ πλησιασμῷ ὅσον δύναται λαβεῖν οὐδενὸς μεταξὺ ὄντος, οὐ τῆς ἰδέας διὰ πάσης διεξελθούσης καὶ ἐπιδραμούσης, ἀλλ' ἐν αὐτῇ μενούσης (ed. Henry-Schwyzzer, ed. maior III, p. 167). All translations from VI, 4-5 are mine; I have sought above all fidelity to the Greek.

4. It appears that my interpretation of Plotinus becomes dualist by arguing, so Lee claims (p. 79), that the "causal 'rapprochement'" (referred to in my brief sentence quoted above) stems from Plotinus' use in VI, 4-5 of the doctrine of "reception according to the capacity of the recipient" (*recipitur secundum modum recipientis*, as Medieval Latin has it). For this argument Lee refers to my *Structures*. . . pp. 56-60, where in fact no such argument will be found. Lee's use of the word "dualism" appears to me to be a little confusing. If the word is to be anything more than a vague slogan, it must surely mean an opposition between causes of a comparable order. To speak, for example, of a dualism between form and matter in Aristotelian substance would be somewhat peculiar and misleading. Yet the dualism Lee seems to have in mind would be that between the causality of matter (as substrate receptive of form) and that of form. The plausibility that this dualism might have breaks down if we remember that matter, prime matter, is itself a product of form (cf. *Structures*, p. 50). A more plausible dualism would be one between matter endowed with an independent efficient and/or formal causality on a par with, and in opposition to, the causality of the Plotinian form. Lee may possibly have this dualism also in mind.

The problem arises from difficulties we have in reconciling the omnipresence of soul in the corporeal world with the non-corporeal, size-less (ἀμεγέθης) nature of soul and with the indivisibility of soul implied by its sensory unity (δόμοπαθής). Is it "that the body of the whole is of this size, soul having in its nature to be divided in bodies?" (1, 1-3). This suggestion is not considered further here by Plotinus.⁵ It seems open to the objection he makes to the possibility mentioned next, i.e. that it involves giving soul size. "Or is < soul > omnipresent of itself, not being where it is led forth by body, but body finding it (σώματος εὐρίσκοντος αὐτήν) omnipresent prior to it. . .?" (1, 3-5). But if soul has neither size nor parts, what sense is there in speaking of it as omnipresent and yet having no size? (cf. 1, 11-12). If then soul's being everywhere appears to be in conflict with its unextended size-less indivisible nature, Plotinus does not believe however that the consistency of these doctrines is in question. The problem lies rather in *our* difficulty in understanding them. Hence his task in *Ennead* VI, 4-5 will be to make comprehensible for us (σαφές καὶ εὐπαράδεκτον) the omnipresence — prior to or in bodies — of an incorporeal unextended and indivisible nature.⁶

Plotinus' aim in VI, 4-5 is thus a limited one — he need not deal with a whole range of questions concerning the specific functions of soul, such as are discussed in IV, 3-4 — and is formulated along lines that lead him to dealing with the question of psychic omnipresence in a wider context, that of the problem of the omnipresence of intelligible being in the corporeal world. This problem is approached in a manner that shows Plotinus has in mind Plato's *Parmenides*, notably the passage (131ac) where Parmenides calls on Socrates to show how the same Form is present in many particulars.⁷ Socrates, we remember, suggests in

5. It was used earlier as a treatment of the same problem in IV, 1 [21], 8-22, where it represents an interpretation of Plato *Tim.* 35a1-2. In passing over it here, Plotinus is not discarding the *Tim.* passage which in fact he reads a little later (VI, 4, 4, 26-32) in a way consonant with his solution to the problem in VI, 4-5. See already IV, 2 [4], 1, 44-59, 62-76; 2, 39-42, 49-52, and my *Structures*, p. 53 n. 4.

6. Cf. 1, 29-34. H. von Kleist, "Zu Plotins zweiter Abhandlung über die Allgegenwart der Intelligibeln in der wahrnehmbaren Welt. *Enn.* VI, 5," *Philologus* 42 (1884), p. 54 reports himself as having shown in his article in the Flensburg program for 1881 (which I have not been able to see) that Plotinus in VI, 4 has *two* aims: to prove and to make more comprehensible intelligible omnipresence. However only the latter is suggested in VI, 4, 1 and the proofs that are later given are a means of making the doctrine more comprehensible.

7. On the *Parmenides* in relation to VI, 4-5 see my article, "Numenius and Plotinus: Some Points of Comparison," *Phronesis* 21 (1976), pp. 120-3

explanation the example of the presence of day in many places. Parmenides responds with a counter-example, a sail stretched over many individuals, which implies division of Form in its presence in particulars. The counter-example is let stand, it appears, by Socrates and thus constitutes a serious and seemingly unresolved objection to the Theory of Forms.⁸ As far as we know, Plotinus' Platonic predecessors were aware of the problems involved in the relation between Forms and particulars, but they made no attempt to deal with them.⁹ *Ennead* VI, 4-5 is in fact the first serious attempt we know of after Plato to face the problem put by Parmenides to Socrates and to deal with it squarely.

Plotinus immediately presents (VI, 4, 2) his solution to the problem of the omnipresence of the intelligible in the sensible, returning again and again throughout VI, 4-5 to the problem and its solution and dealing with various objections and secondary questions along the way. This somewhat diffuse and circular compositional structure of VI, 4-5 contrasts with the clear epagogic order of some of Plotinus' treatises,¹⁰ and with the sequential treatment of a list of problems that we find in others.¹¹ However this circular composition, by the renewed and varied exercise of the mind that it offers, suitably matches Plotinus' object of making our minds more able and ready to comprehend (*παραδέχεσθαι*) the doctrine of intelligible omnipresence.¹² Rather than rehearsing

(where earlier literature is cited and further evidence given); F. M. Schroeder, "The Platonic Parmenides and Imitation in Plotinus," *Dionysius* II (1978), pp. 51-3. J. Fielder, in *Apeiron* 12 (1978), pp. 2-4.

8. This is not the place of course for a discussion of how seriously Plato might have viewed his Parmenides' objections or of whether or not Plato ever met them. On the latter question, cf. J. M. Rist, "The Immanence and Transcendence of the Platonic Form," *Philologus* 108 (1964), pp. 225-32; Schroeder, *loc. cit.*

9. Cf. Alcinous [Albinus] *Didaskalikos* X, p. 166,4-5 Hermann. "The complacency of the later Platonists about the theory of Ideas is, as it stands, extraordinary, considering the powerful arguments that Aristotle had directed against it" (J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, London-New York 1977, p. 48). Some of Aristotle's criticisms were made by Parmenides in the *Parmenides*.

10. I, 6; V, 1; VI, 9, for example.

11. IV, 3-4; VI, 1-3, for example.

12. The somewhat diffuse and repetitious composition of VI, 4-5 led von Kleist (*supra* n.6) to attempt a reordering of the argument of VI, 4-5. R. Beutler and W. Theiler (*Plotins Schriften*, vol. Iib, Hamburg 1962, p. 396) suggest that the "Mühsamkeit" of the structure of VI, 4-5 derives from "[the fact] dass hier nicht in dem Masse Vorarbeiten vorlagen, wie etwa zur Psychologie." Recourse to this suggestion and to von Kleist's reordering might not be so pressing if I am right about the relation between Plotinus' purpose in, and the compositional structure of, VI, 4-5.

with each chapter this therapy of the mind, I will attempt to isolate from Plotinus' repeated statements of his solution the major features of this solution.

It is clear first of all that Plotinus finds at the root of our difficulties with intelligible omnipresence a tendency to treat the intelligible as if it were material. This, one might think, is what is wrong with Parmenides' counter-example of the sail. There may indeed be problems with saying that a *material* body is present throughout another material body, but this is a difficulty for the materialist and not for the Platonist.¹³ "There is no need to marvel at the intelligible, which is not in place, being present in all that is in place. Indeed the opposite would be amazing and in addition to this impossible, that is that having a place proper to itself it is present in another which is in place. . ." (VI, 4, 3, 23-26). Omnipresence might suggest to us a diminution and fragmentation of the intelligible in its presence in many sensibles. But diminution and fragmentation are affects (πάθη) of sensible bodies and not of the intelligible. "And the size (τὸ μέγα) of the intelligible is to be understood thus, not as <that> in a mass (ὄγκω). For if one were to subtract something from the latter, it would be small, tending towards being nothing. But there is no subtracting in relation to the former. . ." (5, 1-3). So also is division something undergone by bodies (cf. 8, 12-22) and to speak therefore of a dividing up of the intelligible in its omnipresence in the sensible is to treat the intelligible as if it were a material body. Plotinus' clearest statement of the "category mistake" in thinking the intelligible must suffer division in being present throughout bodies is found later in VI, 5, 2. The whole chapter is worth quoting, but a few excerpts will suffice for our present purposes.

But an account (λόγος) which attempts to examine what is being said, and which is not a unity, but something divided, bringing into the inquiry the nature of bodies whence it derives its principles, fragments Being, thinking it is like this, and doubts its unity since it [the account] did not initiate the inquiry from the appropriate principles. But we, for the account of what is one and total being, must adopt principles appropriate to conviction, that is intelligible principles pertaining to the intelligibles and to true Being. . . But when one discusses the intelligibles, one would do well to take as principles of one's account the nature of Being with which one is concerned, not

13. It was a difficulty Platonists and Aristotelians found in Stoic physics; cf. R. B. Todd, *Alexander of Aphrodisias on Stoic Physics*, Leiden 1976; Plotinus II, 7.

deviating, as if having forgotten, to another nature. (2, 1-9 and 19-22)

Discourse about the intelligible, therefore, must be grounded on principles proper to the intelligible, and the notion of a fragmentation of the intelligible derives from an improper use of principles peculiar to sensibles in relation to the intelligible.

If it is agreed that the problem of intelligible omnipresence can arise from an improper projection of material properties onto the immaterial and if, by reading VI, 4-5, we can accustom ourselves to avoiding this error, it is still not clear that our difficulties with intelligible omnipresence are resolved. For if the intelligible has its own sphere of principles, properties, activities, which is quite different from that of the sensible, must not this lead in fact to a *rejection* of omnipresence? If to fragment the intelligible is to treat it as a sensible, surely also to attribute to the intelligible a presence everywhere in the sensible is to give it a property modelled on the property characteristic of sensibles to be present somewhere?

It can be seen from the summary above of VI, 4, 1 that Plotinus is aware of this difficulty and indeed the solution which he proposes in VI, 4, 2 and to which he returns repeatedly goes far beyond a simple claim that the elimination of materialist assumptions about the intelligible will suffice to solve the problem of intelligible omnipresence. His solution might be divided for convenience into two parts: (i) the development of a conception of intelligible omnipresence "prior" to the body, modelled not on sensible presence but on principles proper to the intelligible; (ii) an account of how sensibles come to share in some way in the intelligible which is omnipresent prior to them.

(i) The conception of an intelligible omnipresence "prior" to bodies is first introduced in VI, 4, 2:

The whole totality <of Being> cannot be "lacking" of itself, but is filled in itself and "equal" to itself.¹⁴ And where the totality is, there it is itself, for it is the totality. . . It does not leave itself, for Being cannot be in non-being. . . It cannot be cut off from itself, and its being said to be omnipresent is clearly this, that it is in Being, thus in itself (τὸ πανταχοῦ δὲ λέγεσθαι εἶναι αὐτὸ δῆλον, ὅτι ἐν τῷ ὄντι. ὥστε ἐν ἑαυτῷ). And there is nothing surprising in omnipresence being in Being and in itself. . . But we, placing Being in the sensible world, also place omnipresence there and, thinking the sensible is large, are puzzled as to how the

14. The words in quotation marks come from the *Parmenides*; cf. my article cited *supra* n. 7.

⟨ intelligible ⟩ nature is stretched out in such a great ⟨ body ⟩ (2, 14-30).

Intelligible omnipresence is thus understood by Plotinus as that self-contained integrity of true Being in which no part of Being lacks Being (if we may use such Eleatic language) and Being is a unity and fullness of itself. The integrity of Being is such that it is wholly present to itself and there is no deficiency or loss in Being which would diminish this total self-presence of Being. The integrity of Being thus provides the principles of Plotinus' account of intelligible omnipresence and his account therefore follows the methodological requirements of the passage quoted above from VI, 5, 2. Indeed, in the chapter which follows VI, 5, 2 and which ends with the claim, "This account is based on the matter itself, Being, not importing anything foreign ⟨to intelligible being⟩ or from the other ⟨sensible⟩ nature" (3, 30-32), we find the same attempt to derive an account of intelligible omnipresence from principles proper to the intelligible, namely the integrity of Being:

If then true Being is thus, and does not leave itself and there is no coming-to-be for it, nor is it said to be in place, it must always be thus and with itself, not leaving itself. . . neither divided nor changing in any respect. . . being omnipresent to itself (πανταχοῦ ἑαυτῷ). . . (3, 1-11)

The idea that intelligible omnipresence is an eternal unchanging being-with-itself of Being is a denial of deficiency in Being, rather than an assumption of a plurality in Being's being-with-itself. Intelligible omnipresence could then be described as a total absence (!) of ontological disintegration in Being.

(ii) Plotinus may be consistent with his own requirements in grounding his account of intelligible omnipresence on principles proper to the intelligible, but it is not clear perhaps how this may help resolve the problem of intelligible omnipresence. For the omnipresence in itself and prior to bodies which Plotinus finds in the intelligible is if anything an aspect specific to the intelligible *without relation* to sensibles, whereas the problem of omnipresence begins with an omnipresence of the intelligible *in* the sensible, i.e. a relation of the intelligible to the sensible. It would appear then that Plotinus has still to show how the intelligible, albeit present to itself, is also present throughout the sensible. However in the passage I have just quoted from VI, 5, 3 Plotinus suggests that it would be contradictory for Being both to be present to itself and present in others:

If then, not leaving itself and neither divided nor changing in any respect, it were to be both in many <other> things and one and complete in itself, the same thing being omnipresent to itself would be present in many things, which is to say that being with itself (ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ) it is not with itself (μὴ αὐτὸ ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ) (3, 8-12).

Plotinus avoids the contradiction by maintaining, 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*, participating in some way in this Being omnipresent to itself:

It remains to say that <Being> is in nothing <else>, and that others participate in it, such as are able to be present to it and to the degree that they can be present to it (3, 13-15).

The problem of omnipresence can thus be formulated somewhat differently: "But let us say again how the same thing is in all things, which is the same thing as to say how each of the many sensible things, lying in different places, is not without a share in the same <intelligible>" (VI, 4, 7, 1-3). The second aspect of Plotinus' solution will then be a demonstration of how sensibles are present to, i.e. participate in, the intelligible which is wholly present to itself.

The move from speaking of the intelligible as present in the sensible to speaking of the sensible as present to, i.e. participating in, the intelligible represents, as I have suggested elsewhere, an important "change of direction" in Platonic metaphysics. Rather than conceiving of the intelligible as "coming down," being present in, and working on the sensible, we must now envisage the sensible as "looking up," "going towards" and being present to the intelligible.¹⁵ It can be seen from the above that this change

15. Cf. *Structures* p. 55 n. 9; p. 56. Of course the direction "upwards" had been present implicitly ever since Plato had used the images of participation and imitation to express the relation between Forms and particulars. However, these images are found together with images of a "descent" of the intelligible in Plato, in Middle Platonism and in Plotinus' first treatises, without any awareness of inconsistency, or attempt at consistency, with respect to the metaphysical implications of these images. In having the sensible relate upwards to the intelligible, Plotinus brings it into line with the orientation of the intelligible upwards to the One, thereby preparing the ground for the continuous derivation, going from the One to matter, of the lower from the higher through contemplative relation to the higher, which is presented in III, 8 [30]. See *Structures*, p. 59 n. 24 and my article, "Gnosticism and the Making of the World in Plotinus," *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, ed. B. Layton, Leiden 1980, I, pp. 369-74.

of direction is a result of the need to safeguard the integrity of Being, from which there can be no departure. This ontological requirement also warns us that the language Plotinus uses to express the change in direction — the sensible “going towards,” “going near,” “finding,” “touching” the intelligible¹⁶ — is merely spatial imagery indicating a non-spatial relationship.¹⁷ But what then is the relationship indicated? In speaking of the sensible “going towards” the intelligible, Plotinus seems to have in mind — I will return to this in Section III — the sensible’s receptivity to and participation in the intelligible. But in referring to participation, is Plotinus merely replacing one problematic image (a spatial one) with another?

To say the sensible “participates” in the intelligible is to respect the “upwards” direction of the relationship. It is also to move from a spatial conception of the relationship (presence) to a causal conception, that of the causal dependence in which the sensible stands with respect to the intelligible. This shift from a spatial to a causal relation can be seen already in Plotinus’ first statement of his solution in VI, 4, 2:

What comes after ⟨the totality of true Being⟩ must already be in it, if it is to be, and is especially dependent on it, not being able to remain or move without it. For if one were to locate it, not as if in place. . . , but as if sustained by it [Being] and resting in it, it being omnipresent and ⟨all-⟩ supporting. . . (2, 3-11)

Plotinus here takes advantage of the meaning “in one’s power” that “in” (ἐν) can have in Greek to interpret the presence of the sensible to the intelligible as the dependence of the sensible on the intelligible.¹⁸ The image Plotinus later uses of a hand supporting a weight cleverly illustrates the causal dependence of the sensible on the intelligible and the way in which this dependence is a presence: the hand does not leave itself, of course, and yet it is present throughout that which it supports in that the latter is entirely sustained by it.¹⁹

One could go further into the analysis of the causal (participatory) relation in which sensible things stand with respect to the intelligible, an analysis which would lead to the study of other Plotinian treatises. The main lines, however, of Plotinus’ solution

16. Such language is found throughout VI, 4-5; a few instances in the first chapters will suffice here: VI, 4, 1, 6; 2, 20, 33, 38-42.

17. Cf. VI, 4, 2, 43-47; 16, 12-13; *Structures*, p. 56 n. 14.

18. Cf. *Structures*, p. 54.

19. Cf. VI, 4, 7, 9-22; IV, 3, 9, 36-48 gives, in a similar context, the image of body sustained by soul like a net in water.

of the problem of omnipresence — or rather the main lines we should follow in our thinking if this is to cease to be a problem for us — have, I believe, emerged. They might be summarized as follows. The problem of omnipresence, of how the intelligible which has no size and is indivisible is present in many sensible things, can arise from materialist assumptions about the immaterial. In particular, the supposition that omnipresence involves a dividing of the intelligible improperly projects an affect specific to sensibles onto the intelligible. Yet we are still left with the question of what intelligible omnipresence might be, if the intelligible is to have neither size nor place. Plotinus' answer, in brief, is to reinterpret "presence" on two levels, the total self-presence of the intelligible which is its ontological integrity, and the "presence" of the sensible to the intelligible which is the participation of the sensible in, its causal dependence on, the intelligible.²⁰ The intelligible is omnipresent in the sensible then in that whenever a sensible participates in the intelligible, it participates in the same integral totality of Being in which all other sensibles participate: the intelligible is thus "present" as a whole to them all. Variation in the presence of the intelligible is explained by Plotinus, not in terms of a fragmentation or parcelling out of the intelligible, but in terms of a variety in the degree to which sensibles are capable of sharing in the same integral totality.

III

The above summary of the main argument of VI, 4-5 may serve as a context of use in elucidating the difficult passage in VI, 5, 8 quoted at the beginning of this article. (*Supra* p. 61). Indeed VI, 5, 8 is an attempt to discuss a case — the participation of matter in the Forms — the consideration of which will help us grasp with less difficulty the notion of intelligible omnipresence (8,1-3). The chapter is thus controlled by its function as an illustration of the main argument of VI, 4-5 and it should be understood in this light. It is fair to say then, I believe, that in this chapter Plotinus is concerned with the problem as to how matter shares in the Forms to the degree that the treatment of this elucidates his notion of intelligible omnipresence. Indeed the difficult passage in question in VI, 5, 8 can be seen to embody the three features of the main argument of VI, 4-5 which I have noted: the critique of materialist assumptions, in this case a spatial conception of the relation between matter and Form (8,15-17); the emphasis on the integrity of the intelligible, in this case of Form (8, 20-22); the suggestion of a

20. See the distinction between two sorts of presence in VI, 4, 11, 21-23.

sharing “upwards,” by a “rapprochement” (πλησιασμῶ), of matter in Form whereby Form is omnipresent in matter.²¹ This passage is also Plotinus’ more accurate statement (ἀκριβέστερον λέγοντας) of the participation of matter in Form, as contrasted with other conceptions of that participation which he criticizes for their use of spatial (material) assumptions and their fragmentation of Form (cf. 8,4-12,35-39). Thus if we are, in Plotinus’ view, to represent the participation of matter in Form more accurately, we must discard various defective representations of this participation, reaching an interpretation of the participation which in fact embodies the notion of intelligible omnipresence.

We are now in a position, I believe, to consider what might be concluded from VI, 5, 8 concerning material or eidetic causality in Plotinus. What in particular is the “rapprochement” (πλησιασμός) whereby matter participates in Form? Does this “rapprochement” suggest a material causality? What sort of matter (prime or proximate) is involved here? The answer to this last question, I would suggest, is that it matters little to Plotinus’ immediate purposes in VI, 5, 8, 15-22 whether prime or proximate matter is involved. 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; 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).²² The issue as to whether it is

21. 8, 18-20; compare VI, 5, 8, 15-22 with VI, 4, 2, 32-38 for similarities in thought and indeed in phraseology.

22. Lee thinks (*art. cit.*, p. 94) that since lines 22-29 deal with prime matter (the matter underlying fire), lines 17-22 (where πλησιασμῶ occurs) have to do with proximate matter. This he believes follows from the statement at lines 23-24 (as he translates it): “For the account ought to handle matter as that which underlies the elements” (τὴν γὰρ τοῖς στοιχείοις ὕλην ὑποβεβλημένην ὁ λόγος λαμβανέτω), a different matter than that mentioned just before in lines 15-22. Unfortunately this argument is based on an incorrect translation of the Greek, which actually says: “For let the account take as an example [the normal sense of λαμβανέτω in this context] the matter underlying the elements.” If then prime matter in lines 22-29 is an example of matter in lines 15-22, then the latter is matter in general, neither exclusively prime nor exclusively proximate matter. At VI, 5, 11, 35-38 Plotinus says: “Not every matter (οὐ πᾶσα . . . ὕλη) shares in it, but < each > has a different < Form >, and all matter does not relate to all < Form >.” Since neither does all prime matter (ἡ πρώτη πᾶσα) relate to all Forms, but to the first of the kinds (τὰ πρῶτα τῶν γενῶν) and subsequently to other < Forms >.” Lee believes (p.95) this text confirms his case, but he ignores the second sentence where it is clearly suggested that prime matter is not

prime or proximate matter that is involved in the “rapprochement” (πλησιασμός) might arise if we take πλησιασμός to indicate some sort of causality, and wonder, consequently, what (prime or proximate matter) is responsible for it and hence for participation in the Forms. The notion of πλησιασμός in VI, 5, 8 calls for some discussion.

Πλησιασμός in VI, 5, 8 clearly corresponds to the movement “upwards” of the sensible to the intelligible in Plotinus’ main argument in VI, 4-5,²³ the “change in direction” which is entailed by the integrity of Being from which there is no “departure” and to which whatever else that would share in it must come. As I indicated above, this spatial language — including πλησιασμός — cannot be taken literally. We must read from it the non-spatial relationship for which it stands. Πλησιασμός then cannot be an action in space on the part of (any sort of) matter. It clearly preserves the perfect integrity of Form and expresses the requirement that matter relate to it, not it to matter. To go further in the interpretation of πλησιασμός we must refer to equivalent language to be found elsewhere in VI, 4-5 and to Plotinus’ indications about the interpretation of such language. In VI, 4, 15, in reference to “that < sensible man > which has gone towards (τὸ προσεληλυθός)²⁴ < the intelligible man >,” Plotinus asks, “But how did it go towards < the intelligible >?” and answers “Since it had the suitability (ἐπιτηδειότης), it relates towards that for which it is suitable (ἔσχε πρὸς ὃ ἦν ἐπιτήδειον).”²⁵ The suitability involved is a capacity for reception of the intelligible (15,3). Thus “going towards” or “rapprochement” (πλησιασμός), expresses the receptivity to the intelligible in matter or in the sensible and the relation in which this capacity puts it with respect to that of which it is receptive, that in which it is able to participate.

Πλησιασμός in VI, 5, 8, we can conclude, does not imply material dualism, if by this we mean some sort of *independent*

receptive of all Forms but only of the “first”. Lee’s question (p. 93) as to how such a specific receptivity in prime matter can be consistent with the impassibility of matter to be found in other treatises is legitimate and worth investigation.

23. Above p. 68; compare πλησιασμός with γειτονεία in VI, 4, 2, 38; 15, 14 and πελάζειν in VI, 4, 14, 15-17. Πλησιάζειν already appears in IV, 9 [8], 5, 18 and a little later in IV, 3 [27], 20, 21; cf. Plato *Rep.* VI, 490b5.

24. Τὸ προσεληλυθός refers back to τὸ πελάζον in 14, 15-23.

25. 15, 1-2; compare ἔσχε with Porphyry’s term σχέσις for the relation between soul and body in H. Dörrie, *Porphyrios’ Symmiktá Zetemata*, Munich 1959, p. 87: ἐν σώματι . . . οὐχ ὡς ἐν τόπῳ . . . ἀλλ’ ὡς ἐν σχέσει, καὶ τῷ παρεῖναι, ὡς λέγεται ὁ Θεὸς ἐν ἡμῖν (compare Plotinus VI, 5, 1); *Sent.* 3, p. 2, 4-5 Lamberz.

causality on the part of matter (prime or indeed proximate).²⁶ Yet in making the receptivity of matter of whatever sort a condition of the relation with Form, Plotinus has the production of sensible forms depend on an aspect proper to matter. This is typical of the Neoplatonic *μονή-πρόδος-ἐπιστροφή* system, in which lower things come from higher things and it is in a “going” to higher things that lower things are produced. The lines of causality run both ways, or rather, more precisely, the line of causality “going down” both produces and is mediated by one “going up.” It seems to me to divide the matter up into an *opposition* between “eidetic” and material causality and to have Plotinus fight for the former camp is to be correct, in a partial way, and also to risk neglecting the complicated play of metaphysical postulates — their potential conflicts and attempted integration — that provides the life of Plotinus’ system.

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26. Cf. *supra* n.4.