

The Metaphysical Origin of the Principles of Logical Thought in Plotinus' Emanative System¹

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I. INTRODUCTION

In his early work *On Dialectic* Plotinus articulates one of the ways in which he breaks with earlier philosophical traditions, namely, in his rejection of the study of logic as essential, or even beneficial, to philosophy. Logic is criticized by Plotinus for its petty demand for detail and precision. The result of placing too great an emphasis on logic is that one loses sight of philosophy's essential concern with real things as opposed to "bare theories and rules."² His criticism is not merely that abstract logic is a waste of time, whereas a study of subsistent being would better serve genuine philosophical inquiry. Plotinus' claim is more extreme: reality at a certain point parts ways with the constraints of logical principles. That Plotinus' higher metaphysical principles transcend logical restraints³ has been argued for by scholars such as A.C.

1 This is a version of a paper presented to Mount Allison's Phoenix Colloquium and Dalhousie Classics Department. I am grateful to all those who attended for their thoughtful engagement, especially for the challenging questions posed by Eli Diamond and Liam Gilbert-Walsh, and the enlightening comments of the knowledgeable Wayne J. Hankey. Thanks are also due to Lloyd Gerson for taking the time to read and comment upon the essay; his challenging comments helped me to clarify several points.

2 *Enn.* I.3.5,10-11. Translations from all of Plotinus' *Enneads* except for *Ennead* V.5 are taken or adapted from A. H. Armstrong, trans., *Plotinus Enneads*, 7 vols., *The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980-1988).

3 There is a general consensus concerning the transcendence of the One, but there is some debate concerning the transcendence of the Intellect.

Lloyd,⁴ S. Gersh,⁵ S. Ahbel-Rappe,⁶ and E.R. Dodds.⁷ My intention in this essay is to articulate more clearly the limits of logical or rational inquiry⁸ with the purpose of establishing how and why rational inquiry nonetheless plays a prominent role in Plotinus' philosophy. To this end, it is necessary to begin by precisely identifying the scope of the logical principles, particularly the principle of non-contradiction, established by Aristotle as the highest of principles. Once the limits of the principle of non-contradiction are established, it will be possible to examine the principle's point of origin within Plotinus' emanative system, thereby clarifying how and where this logical principle should and should not be treated as obtaining in Plotinus' thought.

II. ENNEAD V.5 ON THE INTELLECT AND THE PRINCIPLE OF NON-CONTRADICTION

In *Ennead I.3: On Dialectic* Plotinus expresses his disdain for the study of logic *qua* logic. As training for rational thought, the philosopher is prescribed the study of mathematics. Mathematics, while rational in method, points the budding

4 A.C. Lloyd, "Non-Discursive Thought: An Enigma of Greek Philosophy," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, 70 (1969): 261-74. Lloyd argues that the thought of the divine Intellect is not only non-discursive but also non-propositional. His position was attacked in R. Sorabji, "Myths About Non-Propositional Thought," in *Language and Logos: Studies in Ancient Greek Philosophy Presented to G.E.L. Owen*, ed. M. Schofield and M. C. Nussbaum (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 295-314. Lloyd then responded with a fuller account of his position in A.C. Lloyd, "Non-Propositional Thought in Plotinus," *Phronesis* 31, no.3 (1986): 258-65.

5 S. Gersh clearly and succinctly summarizes the debate between Lloyd and Sorabji and argues in defense of Lloyd in *Neoplatonism After Derrida: Parallelograms* (Boston: Brill, 2006), 161-62.

6 S. Ahbel-Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism: Non-discursive Thinking in the Texts of Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

7 E. R. Dodds, "The Parmenides of Plato and the Origin of the Neoplatonic One," *Classical Quarterly*, 22, no. 3/4 (1982): 129-42. For an interesting discussion of Dodd's intellectual struggle with the value of this Neoplatonic "irrationalism," see W.J. Hankey, "Re-evaluating E.R. Dodd's Platonism," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philosophy* 103 (2007): 499-541.

8 I am using the terms "logical" and "rational" inquiry interchangeably to refer to the kind of argumentation which proceeds on the understanding that logical principles determine what can and cannot be asserted to be true.

philosopher's attention to, and builds his confidence in, the existence of the immaterial.⁹ An over-estimation of the value of logic, Plotinus argues, prevents one from grasping the immaterial and transcendent nature of the metaphysical principles. Dialectic, as the highest expression of philosophy,

...leaves what is called logical activity, about propositions and syllogisms, to another art, as it might leave knowing how to write. Some of the matter of logic it considers necessary, as a preliminary, but it makes itself the judge of this, as of everything else, and considers some of it useful and some superfluous, and belonging to the discipline which wants it.¹⁰

That there are limits to the scope of logic is very clear; unfortunately, Plotinus does not state exactly at what point philosophical inquiry must abandon the strictures of logic. The context makes it very clear that the contemplation of the One transcends logic and rational inquiry,¹¹ but the relation between logic and the divine Intellect remains somewhat hazy.

It was not until later that Plotinus tackled this difficult question of the relation between the Intellect and the principles of rational inquiry. Though he abandons any direct reference to the study of logic, *Ennead V.5: That the Intelligibles are not Outside the Intellect, and on the Good*, thirty-second in Porphyry's chronological ordering, gives a detailed account of how and why the divine Intellect must also transcend the ultimate logical principle.¹²

Ennead V.5 begins with a description of the manner in which the divine Intellect has knowledge, that is to say, how the Intellect is an intellect. The divine Intellect is the archetypal Intellect and is thus the perfection of the nature of the intellect which we as humans experience in a more imperfect form. He offers an argument based on the perfection of the Intellect *qua* intellect which results in a

9 *Enn.* I.3.3,6-10. Cf. Plato, *Republic* 522c ff.

10 *Enn.* I.3.4,18-25.

11 *Enn.* I.3.4,16-18.

12 Translations of *Ennead V.5* are taken or adapted from Lloyd Gerson, trans. and commentary, *Ennead V.5: That the Intelligibles are not External to the Intellect, and on the Good* (Zurich: Parmenides Publishing, 2013), hereafter referred to as Gerson, *Ennead V.5*.

series of corollary conclusions about the nature of that divine hypostasis. As the title suggests, the primary goal of the first section of the work is to establish that the intelligibles exist in the Intellect in a state of perfect unity.¹³ This claim of unity requires establishing how and why the Intellect is not subject to the principle of non-contradiction (hereafter PNC), for if the Intellect were subject to the PNC, the Intellect's simultaneous and unqualified identity of a multiplicity of intelligibles would be impossible. To fully understand the implications of this denial of the PNC, the claim must be grasped as a part of Plotinus' broader argument.

Ennead V.5 begins with one of Plotinus' favoured patterns of argument. This argument-form is derived from various passages in the Platonic dialogues concerning the nature of the forms, the dialectic of the *Parmenides* perhaps most relevant among them.¹⁴ Arguments of this type begin by examining a given property or entity in itself, or according to its form. The form of any property or entity must be purely itself, without participating in its opposite. From this state of purity, a series of corollary statements can be derived.

Applying this argument-form to the intellect, Plotinus begins with the idea of intellect itself, that is, intellect which does not participate in its contrary. He does not state what positive properties pure Intellect entails,¹⁵ but instead identifies it through what it cannot be. The Intellect cannot be "ἀνοηταίων," a participle translated as "unintelligent" by Armstrong and as "unthinking" by Gerson.¹⁶ From this negative we can grasp the

13 This is the perfect unity of a complex entity, surpassed only by the "unity" of the One, which has no complexity, and thus has no "parts" which require unification. The One is thus a unity in an equivocal sense. See *Enn.* V.5.6.

14 Socrates introduces the concept of the pure form of the like and unlike early in the dialogue at 129b-c, but the method of expounding the consequences of positing a pure form are put into practice in *Parmenides*' dialectical examination of contradictory hypotheses beginning at 137c.

15 Cf. *Enn.* V.9.5.

16 On the translation of "ἀνοηταίων" see Gerson, *Ennead* V.5, 60. Cf. Armstrong, *Plotinus* *Enneads*, vol.5, 155. Gerson's translation is more literal, while Armstrong's captures the sense that the perfection attributed to the Intellect is not simply that it is a thinking Intellect, but an Intellect which thinks *truth*.

positive, namely, that Intellect is purely and perfectly thinking. That the Intellect should be identified using a verbal form is unsurprising, since the Intellect is frequently identified as an active power.¹⁷ Pure intellect is purely intelligent or thinking and therefore does not participate in unintelligence or in any of its particular expressions. This pure intellect is the divine Intellect itself.¹⁸

From the claim that true Intellect is pure intelligence several corollaries follow. First, the Intellect has no share in error or false belief, since error and false belief are subsets of unintelligence.

Next, Plotinus extends the implications of the Intellect's perfection by introducing the distinction between having knowledge and acquiring it. He will show that the various ways of acquiring knowledge all entail imperfection, and so must be denied of the perfect Intellect.

The second corollary thus states that the Intellect "...must, therefore, always know and not ever forget..."¹⁹ The perfect Intellect neither proceeds from ignorance to knowledge, nor does it lose or forget what it knows, since both the process of learning or gaining knowledge and that of forgetting suggest that there is a point in time at which the Intellect was not perfectly intelligent, and thus not itself *qua* perfect intellect.²⁰

The third corollary, following from the second, states that none of the particular methods of coming-to-know which are familiar to us are applicable to the perfect Intellect: "...its knowledge must not be conjecture, or uncertain, or like something heard at second hand."²¹ The reason for this denial is more obvious in cases where beliefs would not properly be called knowledge, such as a guess or belief based on hearsay; but the denial extends more broadly to any process of coming-to-know, including even demonstration, insofar

17 Plotinus frequently identifies Intellect with δύναμις, e.g. *Ennead* III.2.2.

18 *Enn.* V.5.1,1-3.

19 *Enn.* V.5.1,3-4.

20 *Enn.* V.5.1,3-10.

21 *Enn.* V.5.1,4-6.

as any such process presupposes a prior period of ignorance.²² Consequently, lacking any process of coming-to-know, the Intellect's knowledge must be immediately self-evident to it: "Actually, our argument maintains that everything is self-evident to it."²³

The divide between the intellect as we experience it and this pure Intellect now comes to the fore. For us, self-evident knowledge seems elusive; for the divine Intellect, it is all-pervasive. We have knowledge by way of coming-to-know, a process which always depends upon some external source. To establish this point, Plotinus has us consider as a central case the common idea that certainty originates from sense-perceptions:

For even sensibles, though they seem to bring with them the most self-evident conviction, do not, in fact, convince us that their apparent existence is in underlying subjects rather than in our experiences, and that they are not in need of intellect or discursive reasoning to make judgments about them. For even if it is agreed that the sensibles are in their underlying subjects, the apprehension of which sense-perception will bring about, what is known by means of sense-perception of the object is a reflected representation of the thing; it is not the thing itself that sense-perception receives, for that object remains eternal.²⁴

Sense-perceptions, as they exist within the imagination, are naturally accompanied by certainty in the veracity of their representation; we instinctively trust that, when we see a red apple, there is before us an apple which is indeed red. But even if there is some correspondence between the image of a red apple in my mind and the red apple itself, it is evident that the red apple and my image of it are two distinct things. What I know is not the apple, but the sense-image of that apple. My apparent knowledge of the apple is thus mediated: the image in my mind acts as a mediator between my mind and the object itself.

22 *Enn.* V.5.1,6-8. Plotinus in this case, as elsewhere, seems at first to concede something to his opponents. Perhaps the Intellect does at times proceed by demonstration? And yet, how could a distinction be made between what is inherent to it and what is not? Ultimately, it is clear from this passage and elsewhere (i.e. *Enn.* V.5.2,9-14, V.9.5,1-5) that the Intellect cannot be said to proceed by demonstration, for such a procedure would imply a preceding state of ignorance, and would thus be contrary to its perfect nature.

23 *Enn.* V.5.1,7-8.

24 *Enn.* V.5.1,12-19. Plotinus had here the Epicureans in mind (see Armstrong, *Ennead V*, 156n1). Cf. Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians* II.9, I.203 and Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 10.32.

This mediation between the subject and object of knowledge necessarily introduces imperfection in the state of knowing, since mediated knowledge is not really knowledge of the object, but knowledge of the mediator. The awareness of this imperfection of our knowledge brings us to the fourth corollary, that the pure and perfect Intellect has no recourse to mediation in its knowing, since mediation necessitates imperfection of knowledge.²⁵ The implication of this absolute absence of mediation is that the subject and object of knowledge of the divine Intellect are identical with each other.²⁶ There can be no idea or image which represents the object of thought, since any representation would mediate between the Intellect and the object of which it thinks. The Intellect which thinks and the object which is thought of must be absolutely unmediated or, in other words, absolutely identical. This fourth corollary brings us to the primary subject matter of the *Ennead*: that the intelligibles, the objects of knowledge, are not outside of the Intellect, but rather are identical with it.

Note that this total identity between the Intellect and what it thinks does not imply absence of complexity. This is not an identity of un-differentiables, since Plotinus says both that the Intellect thinks itself, and that it thinks the forms;²⁷ however, this differentiability is not like to any we are used to speaking of, that is to say, it is not a difference between substances, parts, time, or other accidental qualities. This complexity of the unity of the Intellect is expressed by Plotinus as 'one-many' (ἓν πολλά). The language Plotinus finds appropriate for expressing this difference between the facets of the Intellect is that of powers: multiple powers are attributed to the Intellect which exist in a state of identity, but which find different expressions in what emanates from the Intellect.²⁸

25 *Enn.* V.5.2,14-16. See also *Enn.* III.8.8,1-11 and V.3.10,23-37. See Gersh, *Neoplatonism after Derrida*, 153-164 for a clear exposition of this passage and a discussion of the non-discursive structure of the Intellect.

26 *Enn.* V.5.1,6-62. See also *Enn.* V.5.9.5, where he states this identity of subject and object even more strongly. Cf. Plato, *Seventh Letter*, 342ba-d.

27 See *Enn.* V.9.8.

28 *Enn.* V.3.12.

There are a few elements of the above discussion which call for a more detailed consideration. The first is the purported absence of the process of coming-to-know in the divine Intellect. This claim has far-reaching consequences. The absence of process implies an absence of what he frequently refers to as discursive reasoning (*διάνοια*).²⁹ Human reasoning is discursive, that is to say, it proceeds from premises to conclusion. Premises and axioms, which are defined by their role in the process of coming to know the truth of a conclusion, do not exist in the divine Intellect, not as such.³⁰ The distinction between premises and conclusion are absent from an Intellect which needs no reasons to be given for the truth it holds. Even more radically, this lack of process in thought means that there is a complete absence of predication:

[The intelligibles in the divine Intellect] are not 'premises' or 'axioms' or 'sayables' (*λεκτά*); if they were, straightaway they would be referring to things different from themselves, and they would not then be the things themselves...³¹

The *λεκτά* here refer to the Stoic concept of predicative statements, or verbal significations which refer to states of affairs.³² Thus, by denying that the intelligibles are *λεκτά*, Plotinus is indicating that in the thought of the divine Intellect, the intelligibles are not subjects of which a property is predicated. The ontological distinction between substance and property, and the corresponding logical distinction between subject and predicate, does not exist within the Intellect.³³ The mode of thought of the divine Intellect is evidently very distant from the common human intellectual experience, which makes heavy use of such distinctions.³⁴

29 See *Enn.* IV.4.1,12-16 or V.8.6,1-15. This term is frequently discussed in the literature. See n.4 above, as well as E. K. Emilsson, *Plotinus on Intellect* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2007), 176 ff.

30 *Enn.* V.5.1,26-32. Here Plotinus characteristically argues using a series of questions, expecting a negative answer. He states this denial that the Intellect proceeds from evidence to conclusion more explicitly at *Enn.* V.5.2,14-16.

31 *Enn.* V.5.1,38-40.

32 I am setting aside the category of incomplete *λεκτά* on the grounds that they imply a completion and thus an implicit predication. On *λεκτά*, see A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol.1 (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1987), 195-202.

33 See Lloyd, "Non-Propositional Thought in Plotinus," 258-65.

34 For a discussion of the way in which our discursive thought is an

The rest of *Ennead* V.5 continues with a discussion of the implications of this identity of the intelligibles with the Intellect. For our purposes, it is sufficient to articulate his conclusion. The intelligibles are not in the Intellect as parts contained within a whole. The intelligibles are identical with the Intellect, full-stop.³⁵ To convey the weight of this claim requires the force of repetition: by 'intelligibles' we are not referring to images of some realities exterior to the divine Intellect, but to the realities or objects-being-known themselves. What appear to us as multiple objects, called intelligibles, exist in complete unity with the divine Intellect.

Several apparent problems arise from this claim. The most evident of these is the implicit violation of the PNC which arises from attributing unity to contrary forms: the Intellect is both one and many (or more precisely, one-many), Intellect and intelligibles, without difference of time, respect, or any other qualification which would prevent the violation of that principle.³⁶ Plotinus goes on to address this concern, although somewhat less clearly than we might hope.

Ennead V.5³⁷ gives us Plotinus' most explicit statement about the relation between contradictions and the Intellect:

So, the real truth is also not [the Intellect's] being in harmony with something else, but with itself, and it says³⁸ nothing else

outward and dispersed articulation of the unified thought of the Intellect, see *Enn.* IV.3.30.

35 This would seem to imply many absurd conclusions, for example, that just is identical with unjust, or that $5+3=8$ is the same as thinking that $5+4=9$ (thanks to Lloyd Gerson for drawing my attention to this point). The former case is more easily dealt with, since for Plotinus there are no forms of negatives such as "unjust." Mathematics raises more difficult cases calling for a lengthy study of Plotinus' theory of number in the Intellect, something beyond the scope of this paper.

36 Although certain contradictions are asserted of the Intellect, one should not assume that *all* contradictions can be asserted of it. To repeat my example from above, the Intellect is not both just and unjust, since there are no forms of negative qualities for Plotinus; the unjust is not a proper intelligible.

37 For an interesting exposition of this passage with an emphasis different from my own, see E. K. Emilsson, "Cognition and Its Object," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. L.P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 217-49.

38 While I agree with Gerson that we cannot ultimately be meant to take "λέγει" literally, I have kept Armstrong's more literal translation in this

besides itself, but what it says, it is, and what it is, this is also what it says. Who, then, could contradict³⁹ it? And from where would one draw the contradiction? For the contradiction being brought forward⁴⁰ would rely on the identical thing said before, and even if you were to provide something else, it is brought in line with that which was said originally and it is one with that. For you could not find anything truer than the truth.⁴¹

From this passage, we learn that any contradictory or inconsistent statements about the Intellect cannot be put forward by the Intellect itself, since “it says nothing beside itself.” Contradictions, where they are introduced, must come from some outside agent. We learn furthermore that such contradictions must be produced by an agent which proceeds discursively from prior to posterior statements. This agent must be the human intellect. So much is clear. The conclusion is likewise clear: any contradiction between true claims concerning the Intellect will necessarily be resolved. One may say both ‘x’ and then ‘not x’ about the Intellect, but both are made in reference to a single truth, and thus the contradiction necessarily—if rather mysteriously—dissolves.

Plotinus denies that contradictions asserted about the Intellect can remain unresolved. But this denial of contradiction in reference to the Intellect could be taken in two different ways. It could be interpreted as an assertion that the Intellect is totally logically consistent such that anyone who speaks with reference to it must, if speaking truly and clearly, speak in a manner consistent with the nature of the Intellect and with all that can truly be said about it. On such an interpretation, any contradictory statements would result merely from a lack of clarity or veracity. Once clarified or corrected, no contradiction would remain.

passage, rather than Gerson’s “express,” since it is consistent with the imagery of speaking present throughout the passage.

39 I am following Armstrong here in translating “ἐλέγξειε” and related terms as “contradict” as opposed to Gerson’s “refute.” The two concepts are closely related, since to refute is to contradict by way of argumentation.

40 I have altered Gerson’s translation of φερόμενος to “being brought forward.”

41 *Enn.* V.5.2,18-25.

Some scholars would likely favor such an interpretation; at the very least, many implicitly endorse such a reading by analyzing the structure of the Intellect using the PNC, attempting to put everything which Plotinus tells us about the Intellect into a logically coherent account.⁴² Consider, for example, Emilsson's apology in his introduction to *Plotinus on Intellect*: "I hope to have avoided attributing blatantly contradictory views to Plotinus..."⁴³ Emilsson recognizes that some apparent contradictions are intentional on Plotinus' part, but attempts to find grounds within the text to qualify and resolve them. Similarly, A.C. Lloyd declares that "no Greek Neoplatonist wittingly countenanced propositions about anything real which were in breach of the law of non-contradiction."⁴⁴ But must we not at the very least consider the possibility that Plotinus' explicitly contradictory statements are intended as such, that they cannot and should not be resolved? If the Intellect transcends the principles of logical consistency, then to qualify all contradictions would be a failure to grasp fully the Intellect's transcendent status.⁴⁵

The appeal of an approach which treats all contradictions as rhetorical devices, meant to encapsulate a difference between us and the divine but never meant to be taken seriously *per se*, is undeniably appealing: this approach makes an analysis of the Intellect far easier to articulate. However, such an interpretation is

42 Few speak directly of the question of the applicability of the PNC or of logical principles to the divine Intellect. Implicit positions can be found, rather, in the healthy body of literature on the question of whether or not the Intellect is propositionally structured. Lloyd and Gersh argue that the Intellect is *not* propositionally structured (see n.4), a position which I take to be compatible with my own, notwithstanding Lloyd's own denial that Plotinus ever intentionally violates the PNC (see n.44). Scholars such as Sorabji take the Intellect to be propositionally structured, and attempt as far as possible to reconcile any apparent contradictions in Plotinus' account of the Intellect (see n.4).

43 Emilsson, *Plotinus on Intellect*, 20.

44 Lloyd, *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1990), 26.

45 It should be said that Emilsson offers a subtler reading of Plotinus' contradictory statements than the line I have quoted might suggest. The quote, however, does represent a certain approach to Plotinus which might in the end be self-defeating.

left to contend with a great multitude of passages in which Plotinus describes the Intellect in an explicitly contradictory manner, without concerning himself to resolve the contradiction.⁴⁶ Consider, for example the opening lines of *Ennead* V.9.6 (emphasis mine):

Let it be granted, then, that the Intellect is the real beings, possessing them all not as if [they were in it] as in a place, but as possessing itself and being one with them. “All things are together” there, and none the less they are separate.⁴⁷

or this passage from VI.2.15 in which “being” refers to the Intellect:⁴⁸

For being is not first being and then in movement, nor is it first being and then at rest; nor is rest a passive affection of it; and same and other do not come after it, because it did not become many afterwards, but was what it was, one-many; but if it is many, it is also otherness, and if it is one-many, it is also sameness.⁴⁹

These contradictory statements which pervade the *Enneads* are unquestionably intentional on Plotinus’ part. They cannot be explained away as a mere failure of clarity. We are therefore forced to consider a more complex reading of the above passage from V.5 in which he addresses the relation between the Intellect and contradictions.

One possible reading takes the passage to indicate that two statements which are contradictory from the perspective of human inquiry can both be said truly of the Intellect without actually implying a contradiction.⁵⁰ In other words, though the statements are contradictory, the contradiction lies not in the nature of the Intellect, but in our discursive articulation of the nature of the Intellect. Indeed, this interpretation makes better sense of Plotinus’ choice of expression in the above passage, since he emphasizes that the source of the contradiction must be an intellect which proceeds discursively. It also accounts for the manner in which the contradictory statements are resolved, not by qualifying the statements—as in the case of an Aristotelian *aporia*—such as to

46 *Enn.* V.9.6,1-4.

47 *Enn.* V.9.6,1-3; 8-9.

48 *Enn.* VI.2.19,17-21.

49 *Enn.* VI.2.15,11-16.

50 Plotinus considers the Intellect at times from the perspective of the human intellect or soul, and at other times from the perspective of the Intellect itself. See Gersh, *Neoplatonism After Derrida*, 154.

make the statements no longer contradictory, but in an assertion of the perfect truth of the subject. The resolution of the contradictory statements is not to be found in further discursive reasoning, but rather by contemplating the transcendent truth of the Intellect. But what exactly does this mean? How can contradictory statements be unqualifiedly true? Does this not imply that the divine Intellect violates the highest principle of reason, which seems in discord with the claim of its absolutely perfect intelligence?

I will suggest an alternative approach, one which avoids rather than resolves the problem of the assertion of contradictions. Instead of considering the Intellect to be violating the PNC, we should consider the Intellect to be outside the scope of the PNC, specifically because the prerequisites necessary for its application are not present.

Before proceeding to an explanation of this claim, it should be noted that if the Intellect transcends but does not violate the PNC, it does not follow that all contradictions can be asserted of the Intellect. Only *certain* statements which are contradictory from the perspective of discursive reasoning can be made truthfully about the Intellect. How one distinguishes between the contradictions which can be asserted and those which cannot requires a thorough examination of Plotinus' thought and his complex reading of Platonist metaphysics. How he can justify making such a distinction, however, will be suggested further on. First, however, we must establish how exactly the Intellect transcends the structure of the PNC.

Let us consider the articulation of the principle of non-contradiction in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, which states that "it is not possible for the same thing to belong and not belong at the same time to the same thing and in the same respect..."⁵¹ In this articulation "belonging" (ὑπάρχειν) has the primary sense of the relation between properties and a substance, but consequently also governs the structure of logical predication.⁵² This articulation

51 Aristotle, *Meta.* 1005b19-20.

52 Aristotle holds that the PNC belongs to being *qua* being (*Meta.* 1005a23-25), but much of his argument for the PNC assumes that language reflects the structure of being, or at least of complex beings.

of the PNC presupposes the presence of certain elements. The principle is articulated in terms of (a) propositional language (subject-predicate), as well as (b) a corresponding structure in the being of the things spoken about (substance-property). If these are pre-requisites for the relevance and applicability of the PNC,⁵³ then its limitation in respect to the divine Intellect quickly becomes clear.

We have established that for Plotinus the Intellect does not think in terms of predication. Its perfect state prevents the presence of such distinctions, since perfect knowledge is a state of unmediated identity with what is known. The Intellect can equally be said not to exist or be structured according to the corresponding ontological distinction between substance and property, since its thought is identical with its being.⁵⁴

The result of this perfect unity of subject and object in the Intellect is that any law or principle governing predication becomes meaningless in respect to the Intellect. To state the point differently, the Intellect does not have the potential for contradiction, similar to the way a thought doesn't have the potential to be square or any such property which requires extension for such potencies to be present. Plotinus' claim about the Intellect is not the denial of internal contradiction such as one might attribute to the thoughts of a wise person, but rather a denial that the divine Intellect has the potential for contradiction.

This is a subtle but important distinction. The Intellect does not violate the principle of non-contradiction; rather, the Intellect does not even fall within the jurisdiction, so to speak, of the PNC, or any of those principles derived from it. The reason that this distinction is so important is that it explains how Plotinus can use logical arguments, even at times when discussing the Intellect, while rejecting logic and logical principles as the highest standard of philosophic inquiry. The nature of the Intellect is not self-contradictory; rather, the Intellect transcends the realm of propositional thought within which the PNC has meaning.

53 Cf. Aristotle, *Meta.* 1051b18-1052a12.

54 *Enn.* V.5.2.18-20.

III. THE EMANATION OF LOGICAL THOUGHT

A case has now been made for the divine Intellect's transcending the principles of logical reasoning because it lacks the requisite qualifications. Plotinus does not, however, deny that logical thought is inherent to human thought or that it plays a beneficial role in our approach to the truth, even the truth about the Intellect itself. In particular, human reasoning, insofar as it is related to beings which exist according to the subject-predicate structure, reflects truth about the world. If the Intelligible realm transcends logical principles, while the lower realms do not, then it seems that something happens in the process of emanation from the Intellect which results in this different mode of thinking. We must examine how the *prerequisites* for the applicability of logical principles are bound up with the process of the Soul's emanation from the Intellect in order to explain the origin of logical thought within Plotinus' emanative system.

In *Eternity and Time* (*Ennead* III.7) Plotinus explains the nature of eternity and time by articulating them as an expression of the emanative relation between the divine Intellect and the Soul, the third hypostasis. To understand this complex discussion of emanation, it is necessary briefly to review the basic structure of Plotinus' emanative system.⁵⁵

Intellect emanates from the One, the ultimate source of all things, as a kind of overflowing from that absolutely transcendent principle. As that which is emanated, the Intellect becomes other than the One. Otherness, and thus multiplicity, come to be, having their source in the Intellect's relation to the One. However, since the Intellect is like the One—it contemplates and is thus filled by the One—this multiplicity exists as the highest expression of unity that a multiplicity can attain. Plotinus accordingly designates it as the “one-many” (ἐν πολλά).⁵⁶ Moreover, the Intellect also mimics its own source by emanating a further hypostasis from itself. Similar to the first stage of emanation,

55 I am drawing my account primarily from *Ennead* V.2-3.

56 See *Enn.* VI.2.15,11-16, quoted above.

the second results in a state of being which imitates its source without attaining the same degree of perfection and unity.

The Soul emanates from the Intellect. In the Intellect, there are a multiplicity of forms or powers which are active without being subject to change, and which are multiple without being in any way divided, thus mimicking the unity and perfection of the One. The Soul, on the other hand, mimics both the unity and multiplicity of its source. The multiplicity of the Intellect, which is a necessary consequence of being other than the One, is embraced by the Soul for its own sake, resulting in being which attains unity through differentiation and division from what is other. The unity of being one thing in the realm of the soul is in part an expression of *not being* something else. What exists as a perfect unity of multiple powers in the Intellect becomes a multiplicity of individual, separate unities in the realm of the Soul. Hence, division and separation arise, as do time and change, as we learn from *Ennead* III.7.⁵⁷

In *Ennead* III.7 the emanation of the Soul is articulated particularly from the perspective of its existence in time. Following the definition of time in Plato's *Timaeus* as a "moving image of eternity,"⁵⁸ Plotinus identifies time as the life of the soul, an imperfect imitation of the Intellect's eternal life. Examining *Ennead* III.7 shows that (1) the distinction between subject and predicate and (2) thinking as a process of coming-to-know both arise in the emanation of time from eternity.

What, then, are eternity and time according to Plotinus, and what specifically is their relation to the emanative system?

Eternity and time, we say, are two different things, the one belonging to the sphere of nature which lasts forever, the other to that of becoming and of this universe; and at once, and as if by a fairly continuous application of our concept of them, we think that we have a clear and distinct experience of them in our own souls, as we are always speaking of them and using their names on every occasion. Of

57 As A. Smith notes, Plotinus coins a verbal form of time to describe the Soul's relation to time: "the soul temporalized itself" ("Eternity and Time," 210); Plotinus articulates time as something derivative which arises alongside the Soul.

58 Plato, *Timaeus* 37d6-7.

course, when we try to concentrate on them and, so to speak, to get close to them, we find again that our thought runs into difficulties...⁵⁹

Plotinus next proceeds dialectically, starting from common opinions of the philosophers,⁶⁰ then drawing out the problems which arise from those opinions to point his readers towards a more satisfactory solution.⁶¹ I will focus on the most relevant passages.

Plotinus argues that the common-sense definition of eternity as that which lasts forever, while coming close to the truth, fails to capture the necessary transcendence of that mode of existence. To last forever is an expression of time, referring to a whole or un-ending period of time. Things which are observed to persist through time, however, have the problematic features of enduring change and of being subject to parts. If eternity truly and completely *lasts*, it must last *as itself*:

And if someone were in this way to speak of eternity as a life which is here and now endless because it is total and expends nothing of itself, since it has no part or future—for if it had, it would not now be a total life—he would be near to defining it.⁶²

Even if eternity were to be thought of as a subject persisting through time without any additional change, time itself would change—expressed by past, present, and future, the language of time—making eternity not lasting without limit, but rather persisting through a series of limits. Eternity, therefore, cannot be thought of as a function of time.

Eternity lasts forever not because it persists through time, but rather because it is not extended in time. Eternity is the un-extended expression of what time imitates in extension.⁶³

59 *Enn.* III.7.1,1-8.

60 For discussions of Plotinus' engagement with prior philosophers on these matters, especially Aristotle (whom he is arguing against) and Plato (whose *Timaeus*, particularly 37d-38b is his inspiration), see J. Guittou, *Le temps et l'éternité chez Plotin et Saint Augustin* (Paris: Boivin, 1933), 1-21; L.P. Gerson, *Plotinus* (London: Routledge, 1994), 115-124; A. Smith, "Eternity and Time," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 196-216.

61 On Plotinus' use of dialectic, see A. Smith, "Eternity and Time," 196-7.

62 *Enn.* III.7.5.25-28. See also *Enn.* III.7.6.13 ff.

63 *Enn.* III.7.13.24-26. Cf. *Enn.* IV.4.16.22.

What exactly is extended in time, then? For Plotinus, the answer appears to be the Soul's activity; hence, time is called "the life of the Soul."⁶⁴ He speaks of the Intellect as being alive. The life of the Intellect, however, is the activity of being itself without undergoing any kind of change or division. The life of Soul is one of process and change, a procession from one self-asserted activity to another, which results from the Soul making itself in the image of the Intellect without being able to attain the same unity:

So, would it make sense to say that time is the life of the soul in a movement of passage from one way of life to another? Yes, for eternity is life at rest, unchanging and identical and already unbounded, and time must exist as an image of eternity...[but] instead of sameness and self-identity and abiding, [there is in the Soul] that which does not abide in the same but does one act after another, and, instead of that which is one without distance or separation, [there is in the Soul] an image of unity, that which is one in continuity; and instead of a complete unbounded whole, [there is] a continuous unbounded succession, and instead of a whole all together which is, and always will be, [there is a whole] coming into being part by part.⁶⁵

The Soul falls short of the Intellect's unity for the very reason that it has separated itself from the Intellect. As a result, Soul is the seat of the power to enact coming-to-be, passing-away, and all forms of change; this procession of change is identical with the life of soul, and the extension of this life of the soul is what we call time.⁶⁶ Motion and change occur *in* time insofar as they are expressions of it, and not, *contra* Aristotle, measured by it.⁶⁷

Setting aside questions of how well Plotinus has accounted for the phenomenon of time, what is of interest to us is the way in which Soul and time bring with them the kinds of distinctions and differences we are seeking in our account of

64 *Enn.* III.7.11.43-45. This passage represents a rare moment for Plotinus in that he gives us a definitive answer to a question raised.

65 *Enn.* III.7.11.43-77, 51-56.

66 *Enn.* III.7.11.35-43.

67 *Enn.* III.7.13.1-5; Aristotle argued that time is the measure of motion (*Physics* 4.11.219b1-2 and 4.12.220b32-221a1). Guitton (*Le temps et l'éternité*, 12) eloquently summarizes Plotinus' critique: "Le défaut de la méthode d'Aristote fut de demander au mouvement, qui n'est qu'un des signes du temps, de nous renseigner sur son essence: il ne saisissait ainsi qu'un temps quantifié par le mouvement local et pour ainsi dire dénaturé."

the origin of rational thought. To this end, we must focus on the corresponding similarities and differences between the eternal life of the Intellect and the life of the Soul which is extended in time.

The Soul is said to assert its independence from its source.⁶⁸ Being in the realm of soul is thus always subject to difference. The existence of the Soul arises not merely by an assertion of its own unity, but equally through a negation of what is other than itself:

But since there was a restlessly active nature which wanted to control itself and be on its own, and chose to seek for more than its present state, this moved, and time moved with it; and so, always moving on to the “next” and the “after,” and what is not the same, but one thing after another ... [and it] does away with the largeness [of its source] by division...⁶⁹

Identity in the realm of the Soul comes about by way of negation and division. Unlike in the realm of Intellect, in the Soul for ‘x’ to be itself it must not be ‘not-x’. This gives us the first element necessary for the application of the PNC: ‘x’ is not ‘not-x’.

But this alone is not enough to establish the PNC. For the PNC to make sense, at least insofar as it is a logical principle, we must have more than a series of beings distinct one from the other. These beings must furthermore be related to each other in a manner which allows us to predicate one thing of another.

The PNC speaks of one thing belonging to another. While this relation between the predicate (what belongs) and the subject (what it belongs to) might be interpreted as including a relation of identity (i.e. an apple cannot be itself and not itself at the same time, etc.), both the articulation and application of the PNC make clear it is not limited to such statements. Specifically, insofar as it is a logical principle—one which governs not simply how things are, but how one knows the truth—it presupposes a knowing intellect which perceives things which have the potential to be in two contrary states, or to have two contrary properties. To put it differently, if the PNC governed an intellect for which there is no non-essential predication, the PNC would be reducible to the

68 *Enn.* III.7.11.12-16.

69 *Enn.* III.7.11.15-19, 25.

principle of identity. But the PNC is not the principle of identity, in that it dictates not only that 'x' cannot both be itself and not be itself, but also that a subject 'x' cannot both be and not be 'y' at the same time, where 'x' and 'y' are not convertible terms. Thus, the PNC not only dictates that the apple cannot both be itself and not itself, but that it cannot both be and not be red at the same time and in the same respect, where we know that an apple can be red, but is not necessarily so. In Aristotelian terms, the PNC governs both essential and accidental predication. Thus, as a law of thought the PNC governs an intellect which thinks about things whose properties can potentially be other than what they are. And potentiality—in the sense of the potential for an object to become something other than what it currently is—is meaningful only where change is possible, namely, in the realm of Soul.

Insofar as the PNC presupposes the possibility of non-essential predication, then, it presupposes that the endurance of a subject through change—and also through time—are possible and meaningful. We must therefore examine more closely how the Soul, and with it time, entail change.

To understand why time entails change, we must once more revisit the perfection of the eternity of the Intellect. Similar to the Soul's relation to time, eternity is the life of the Intellect.⁷⁰ The Intellect is eternal insofar as it exists as an activity which is perfectly and completely itself.⁷¹ An activity which is perfectly itself never undergoes change, since change from a state of perfection must be a change towards what is other than perfect.⁷² Therefore, the activity of the Intellect can be subject neither to coming-to-be, nor to change from potency to actualization, nor to passing-away. This includes the absence of change of time: the Intellect has no past or future, it simply *is*. The Intellect is thus not eternal as persisting through time, but rather eternal as not being subject to it.

Once Soul abandons the perfection of its origin, asserts itself as different from the Intellect and thus abandons being a complete

70 *Enn.* III.7.2-4, especially III.7.3,35-37.

71 *Enn.* III.7.3.11-24.

72 Cf. Plato, *Republic*, 380d-381d.

unity, it also abandons the eternal or perfect being of the Intellect. By abandoning the mode of existence which is always perfectly itself, it asserts for itself the kind of being which is necessarily subject to imperfection. The Soul “wanted to keep on transferring what it saw there to something else, it did not want the whole to be present to it all together.”⁷³ The Soul’s self-assertion as an independent being constitutes the abandonment of perfection.

Though the Soul abandons perfection, it also mimics that perfection insofar as it seeks to exist at all; Intellect is the primary expression of being, and thus all existence must be derived from it in some way. Moreover, what the Soul imitates is a power, insofar as the Intellect is a δύνναμις. The expression of a power which is not perfect being, but which seeks to be like that perfect being, is the process of becoming, or change. The Soul does not attain perfection all at once. The necessary extension of that process is time itself:

Yes, for if eternity is life at rest, unchanging and identical and already unbounded, and time must exist as an image of eternity (in the same relation as that in which this All stands to the intelligible All), then we must say that there is, instead of the life There, another life having, in a way of speaking, the same name as this power of the soul, and instead of intelligible motion that there is the motion of a part of Soul and, instead of sameness and self-identity and abiding, that which does not abide in the same but does one act after another ... For this is the way in which it will imitate that which is already whole, already all together and unbounded, by intending to be always making in increase in its being, for this is how its being will imitate the being of [the intelligible world].⁷⁴

The most fundamental expression of becoming for Plotinus is that of the Soul itself in the process from existing less-perfectly towards existing more perfectly. It does so both by way of its own emanation—the Soul emanates the world of separate particular material beings—and by way of its reversion to the Intellect.

In this realm of the Soul and what emanates from it, Plotinus’ world functions much like Aristotle’s. All change requires an underlying subject which undergoes a change of property or state. Even coming-to-be and passing-away begin with some underlying

73 *Enn.* III.7.11.20-23.

74 *Enn.* III.7.11.45-59.

material or source.⁷⁵ In the case of the Soul, it proceeds from the property of imperfection towards perfection (the pair of contraries) while a subject—the Soul itself—persists. Likewise, an individual human intellect proceeds from ignorance towards knowledge, while the subject, the particular intellectual soul, persists.

We now have all the elements in place which establish the domain of the logical principles in the realm of Soul.⁷⁶ The Soul's existence expresses itself partially by way of negation—to be oneself as distinct from others— thus introducing the necessity that any being 'x' is not 'not x'. Time is the life of the soul, or the extension of the powers which the Soul embodies, resulting in the procession of its activities. As such, the Soul is necessarily subject to change and a multiplicity of distinct states. This procession of a subject through multiple states requires that many beings⁷⁷ are related to each other without being identical; in other words, it entails non-essential predication. Moreover, the change involved in this procession of activities requires that some things are predicated of others. The result is a world whose beings form a complex web of relations which are negated and yet also frequently predicated of each other; it is a world in which the law stating that something, 'x', cannot both be and not be 'y' has meaning.

It is the human intellect, not the divine one, which grapples with this complex web of beings, and which is itself subject to change through time. It is thus with this lower intellectual activity, called discursive reasoning, that the logical principles take hold. According to A. Smith, "discursive reasoning is seen as something 'extended' as it were, as 'unfolding itself' (III.7.11.24). Movement

75 See Aristotle's *Physics* I.6-7, where he argues that all change requires an underlying composite of matter and form and a set of contraries.

76 By arguing for the prerequisites for the applicability of the PNC being present in the Soul and not the Intellect, I am of course *not* arguing for the truth of the PNC. It is worth noting, however, that Aristotle's dialectical argument for the PNC in Book IV of the *Metaphysics* depends upon the PNC being a necessary presupposition of any discursive reasoning or speech. The PNC can never be deduced; it can only be shown to be presupposed by any intellect attempting a deduction or truth claim. Plotinus' divine Intellect does neither.

77 I am using "beings" broadly here to include properties which cannot exist independently of a subject, but which nevertheless exist.

is made from one idea to another."⁷⁸ And while the movement of thought is not the same as the movement of the physical world, the human intellect contemplating this lower realm must, by way of its own process towards the perfection of its being, use the PNC to grasp the identity of the beings in the physical world. It must identify any given physical entity through the negation of what it is not ('x' is not 'not x') while simultaneously navigating the fact that 'x' is not simply 'x', but is also (as an expression of its properties) 'y' and 'z'. A child must learn, for example, that cookie is different from other similar sweet things such as cakes, in part by distinguishing it from its properties, such as sweet, flat, and round.

Together these necessities give us the pre-requisites for the applicability of the principle of non-contradiction: "it is not possible for the same thing to belong and not belong at the same time to the same thing and in the same respect...."⁷⁹ Belonging (ὑπάρχειν), referring to both predication and the corresponding mode of existence, along with the identity which entails the negation of what is other, are expressions of the mode of existence in the realm of the Soul. One might rightly call the Intellect the source of the PNC, since the Soul and all that accompanies it are emanated from the Intellect; however, the PNC as an articulable law only comes to make sense outside of that higher hypostasis.

IV. RATIONAL ARGUMENTATION AND OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE DIVINE INTELLECT

I have made a case for understanding logical or rational argumentation as having its place within the mode of existence and thought belonging to the realms emanated from the divine Intellect, beginning with the Soul (insofar as it is subject to change in time) and extending to the physical world. One remaining question must be addressed, however, which arises from Plotinus' use of logically coherent arguments concerning not simply the lower realms, but also in respect to the Intellect. How is it possible to offer meaningful

78 Smith, "Eternity and Time," 210.

79 Aristotle, *Meta.* 1005b19-20.

arguments about the divine Intellect which follow the dictates of logical principles if the Intellect transcends those principles?

The solution to this problem lies in recognizing that the Intellect is at first known to the discursive mind through its effects. Logical thought about the Intellect can serve, by way of something like the principle of sufficient reason, as a preliminary method for recognizing certain truths about the Intellect as a source of the sensory-world.⁸⁰ Furthermore, Plotinus uses logical arguments—following the pattern set in Plato's *Parmenides*—for the very purpose of pointing his students to the Intellect's transcendence of logic. He does so by using logical arguments to point us to the Intellect's apparently contradictory state. The contradictions are not, of course, reflective of any real contradiction abiding in the Intellect, but rather arise from the limitations of propositional language for discussing an entity which transcends the structure of the language and arguments which we are using.

Consider the central example of a contradiction attributed to the Intellect, namely, its unity and multiplicity. Each attribution can be argued for separately. The arguments run very roughly along these lines: The world consists of beings whose being is expressed as a unity. Their unity must originate from an original unity, unity in itself without relation to another—the One.⁸¹ The unity of beings, however, must originate from something which has being. This is the Intellect, whose derivative unity is a perfect unity of *being*.⁸² There are, however, also a multitude of positive properties in the world which must have a source. The source must be or contain multiplicity in some way, as the source of multiplicity. This must also be looked for in the source of being. This second argument thus points us to the multiplicity of the Intellect.

Reason, by looking for the source of the beings in the world, thus tells us that the source (the Intellect) is one, but also that it

80 *Enn.* I.3.1.1-6.

81 *Enn.* VI.6.11.

82 *Enn.* V.1.4-6; V.5.6.

is many.⁸³ For Plotinus, the resolution of this contradiction lies not with further argumentation, but instead in the recognition of the limitation of our rational method. He frequently distinguishes between a lower and higher kind of reasoning, the latter consisting of joining with the Intellect itself.⁸⁴ Having recognized the Intellect as the source of the lower realm of being (both of the unity of those beings, and of their multiplicity), we can only contemplate the Intellect directly by transcending the discursive thought which tells us this is an impossibility. The soul "...keeping quiet (for it is quiet in so far as it is present There) busies itself no more, but contemplates, having arrived at unity. It leaves what is called logical activity, about propositions and syllogism, to another art..."⁸⁵ This ultimate intellectual activity is further described in *On Nature and Contemplation* (III.8):

For the soul keeps quiet then, and seeks nothing because it is filled, and the contemplation which is there in a state like this rests within because it is confident of possession. And, in proportion as the confidence is clearer, the contemplation quieter, in that it unifies more, and what knows, in so far as it knows—we must be serious now—comes into unity with what is known.⁸⁶

The inquiry which is directed towards knowing the Intellect culminates in a change of activity, the result of which resembles—by comparison with discursive reasoning—quietude. Since this achievement consists in identity with the Intellect, the search ends in the activity of *being* the perfect and unchanging Intellect.

If, however, the goal of rational inquiry is ultimately a cessation of logical and discursive reasoning, then the highest rational principle—meaning that which must guide our inquiry—is ultimately not the PNC, but rather the Intellect itself. This apparent shift from purely logical to ontological principle makes sense given Plotinus' understanding of truth. The highest expression of

83 This is one of the expressions of the standard problem of the one and the many. Parmenides resolved the contradiction tidily by denying one side of the contradiction, denying the reality of the many.

84 See, e.g., *Enn.* I.1.9,21-22.

85 *Enn.* I.3.4,16-19.

86 *Enn.* III.8.6.12-17.

knowledge is not an external description, in propositional language, which correctly describes the cosmos. The highest expression of knowledge is, instead, a total unification of subject and object, of knower and known. In the same passage quoted above, Plotinus goes on to describe two rational principles. The lower rational principle is that of the inquiring soul, the principle of discursive reasoning; the other, higher principle, is the Intellect itself. The rational principle “must not be outside but must be united with the soul of the learner, until it finds that it is its own.”⁸⁷ Ultimately, for Plotinus, even discursive thought is guided by a principle which transcends the PNC, insofar as Intellect is what is sought.

V. CONCLUSION

It should not be denied that Plotinus recognizes the importance of logically coherent arguments. His rejection of logic as seen in *On Dialectic* is not absolute, since rational argumentation is a necessary preliminary for understanding the existence of the metaphysical principles. Logical thought does, however, have a clear limitation. Once that limit has been reached, Plotinus points us to the necessity of adopting a different method for contemplating the highest truth. His readers must therefore avoid the two extremes of always reducing his obscure and metaphorical writing style to logical argumentation, and that of abandoning all attempts to make his thought logically coherent. The Intellect’s transcendence does not mean, moreover, that one can simply assert all contradictions of the Intellect; instead, it

87 *Enn.* III.8.6.19-21. This shift in understanding of a rational principle, from a principle which dictates the structure of how we discover and judge the content of an inquiring mind (namely, claims above truth and falsity), to a principle which does not dictate about content, but instead *is* the content, can resolve a problem which arises from Plotinus’ denial of the PNC. Plotinus claims to know the source of the beings which exist in the realm of time and change by examining that realm. This method, however, seems to presuppose something like the PSR. Were the PSR conceived as a purely logical principle, it would have to be derivable somehow from the PNC. This would subject the Intellect, as the source known through its effects, to the PNC. However, the ontological presence of the Intellect to our intellects means that we do not know the cause through the effect, but rather, that the cause is directly present in the effect, if only we have the wherewithal to grasp it.

is necessary to follow the separate rational arguments which guide us to assert certain mutually-contradictory conclusions, and then, recognizing in these contradictions the limitation of discursive logical thought, set aside the principles which guided those arguments in the realization of that higher intellectual and metaphysical principle. While the Intellect is not subject to logical strictures, it does not follow that it can never appear consistent with them; however, ultimately for Plotinus the Intellect itself replaces the PNC as the highest principle of philosophical thought.