

# Is *Tolma* the Cause of First Otherness for Plotinus?

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In the *Enneads* of Plotinus the procession of the many from the One is a diffusion of life, being and power, attended by growing otherness and ontological loss. This rising otherness manifests the differentiation and ranking of generated beings and the level of multiplicity within each. Beginning with the minimal fissure of Intellect which is one-many, otherness expands to the one-and-many of soul, reaching a peak in the teeming multiplicity of the world of sense. This loss—the nether aspect of the emanation<sup>1</sup>—is neither a degeneration of the One, which is inexhaustible, nor evil. What is the cause of such otherness? Is it *tolma*—described varyingly as the centrifugal principle that thwarts contemplation, the apostate will to otherness and the audacious exteriorization comparable with Augustine’s *superbia*?<sup>2</sup>

## PLOTINIAN TOLMA

Plotinus himself marvels at so great a contrast between the One and its efflux—“It is a wonder how the multiplicity of life came from what is not multiplicity” (III.8(30).10). Earlier, in V.1(10).6 Plotinus describes this basic query—“How from the One ... anything else, whether a multiplicity or a dyad or a number, came into existence, and why it did not on the contrary remain by itself”—as something “repeatedly discussed” by the “ancient philosophers.” Later, in V.2(11).1, Plotinus himself echoes a version of this query, claiming in answer the supreme transcendence of the One—“It is because there is nothing in it that all things come from it: in order that being may exist, the One is not being, but the generator of being.”

1. In the scholarship on Plotinus, there is a tradition of opposition to the use of “emanation” to depict the irradiation of activity and generated beings from the One. Alternative terms, deemed more appropriate, are “derivation” (O’Meara), “devolution” (Deck), “effulguration” (Stoehr) and “procession” (Bréhier). Scholars including Müller, Armstrong, O’Meara and Reale have objected to “emanation” because metaphors detract from rational and genuine philosophy. In this work I will use “emanation” interchangeably with “procession,” qualified by Rist’s warning that the limited metaphorical language of “emanation” can never give us a full grasp of the nature of the One. J.M. Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (London: Cambridge U Press, 1967) 71.

2. N.J. Torchia, *Plotinus, Tolma, and the Descent of Being* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993) 139–50.

In the scholarship on Plotinian otherness and *tolma*, Rist reinforces this onus on the One by arguing that it is primarily the “nature of the One,” or its largesse that accounts for the rise of the Many in Plotinus’ system—and not *tolma*.<sup>3</sup> Yet, besides this divine munificence, there are two subsidiary causes of otherness. First, there is the progenitor’s overflow of activity, which fecundates the making and carves out a seminal otherness between itself and its progeny. Second, the contemplation of the progenitor by the unformed progeny reinforces this otherness. Thus contemplation (*theoria*) serves not merely *epistrophic* and ontological purposes but also generative ones. Its inadvertent results are creative in the special sense of making (*poiesis*) and not action (*praxis*), when the progeny or work of contemplation is posterior to the object of contemplation. Into this scene, Plotinus introduces *tolma*—yet another instrument of otherness.

Plotinus inherits the Pythagorean idea of *tolma*, which inheres at all levels of generated beings in the *Enneads*—from Intellect to sensible matter—thus establishing itself as an irrational mark within a rational metaphysics. As Armstrong points out, Plotinus’ use of *tolma*, a “very Gnostic-sounding word,” has a demonstrable Hellenic philosophical history underlying it.<sup>4</sup> By the third century AD, it is already in wide circulation and has been used with diverse connotations, by the Hellenic and Hellenistic traditions, Plato, the Neopythagorians, Middle Platonists, Alexandrian, Hermeticists, and Gnostics.<sup>5</sup> *Tolma* gains a pejorative connotation starting with the Neopythagoreans, for whom it is identified with the Indefinite *Dyad* and represents a will towards otherness and multiplicity in opposition to the unity of the One. Thus various members of the Neopythagorean school of Middle Platonism term the *Dyad* “*tolma*.”<sup>6</sup> As Rist and Torchia note, this identification of *tolma* with the *Dyad* implies that the emergence of plurality is now a sin and primal differentiation is equated with evil, deficiency and non-being. Yet, they also note that for Plotinus, the Indefinite *Dyad*—or in Aristotelian terms, “intelligible matter”—itself is not *tolma* as it was for the Neopythagoreans.<sup>7</sup>

3. J.M. Rist, “Monism: Plotinus and Some Predecessors,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 69 (1965): 340.

4. As Armstrong notes, Baladi and Rist have discussed thoroughly those passages in which Plotinus directly uses the *tolma* of Intellect and Soul or language expressive of the same idea. See A.H. Armstrong, “Gnosis and Greek Philosophy,” in *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978) 116. A more recent and comprehensive work is Torchia’s *Plotinus, Tolma, and the Descent of Being*.

5. Torchia, *Plotinus* 11–36.

6. Torchia, *Plotinus* 43.

7. Rist, “Monism” 338, 340, 343; Torchia, *Plotinus* 43.

Some commentators see *tolma* as essential in eliciting descending ranks from the One. Thus for Armstrong all existence depends on “a kind of radical original sin” or the counter-*epistrophic tolmatic* wish for autonomy that produces otherness. *Tolma* is the “necessary condition” for the occurrence of the “even, inevitable flow” of “eternal reality” from the One.<sup>8</sup> An incipient otherness is displayed by Intellect and its “ontological interval” with respect to the One is essential if anything other than the One is to exist. Variations of this view are echoed by Baladi, Merlan and Torchia.<sup>9</sup> Yet, notwithstanding its inherent willfulness and significance to first otherness, *tolma* in these views is not sovereign. The One itself is somehow paradoxically responsible for the surge towards multiplicity.<sup>10</sup> In contrast to the Gnostics, who use guilt and wantonness to explain the world’s evils, for Plotinus, self-will is, as Sinnige notes, ordered by divine decree.<sup>11</sup> There is thus a tension regarding the generation of otherness “by and from the One,” manifested in Plotinus’ two disparate ways of accounting for plurality—the negative in which generation results from an audacious act of *tolma* and the positive in which emanation results from the One’s plenitude—summed up respectively as “the “falling away” from the One, implying voluntarism, and the “overflowing” of the One, implying the involuntary and necessary by Merlan, who considers Plotinian emanation to be an alliance between these pessimistic and optimistic accounts.<sup>12</sup>

The principle question explored in this paper concerns the significance of *tolma* in Plotinian metaphysics. Although Armstrong points to *tolma* as the “root of all multiplicity,”<sup>13</sup> the overall purpose and effects of *tolma* may

8. A.H. Armstrong, *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 1970) 242, 244.

9. Baladi points out that the vast ontological gulf between the One and its effects cannot be bridged by emanation alone. *Tolma*, a secondary principle is needed to provide the procession of being, plurality and otherness. Similarly Torchia suggests that *tolma* provides a “pivotal” role in the emergence of Intellect from the One. *Tolma*, a “metaphysical principle in its own right,” derived ultimately from the One, is yet treated as a separate element. Torchia, *Plotinus* 37, 46.

10. Armstrong claims that Plotinus’ reading of the Pythagoreans, may have led him to conclude that the “ultimate responsibility” for *tolma* must lie with the One itself—thus implying that *tolma* cannot be bad. Armstrong, “Gnosis” 117.

11. Th. G. Sinnige, *Six Lectures on Plotinus and Gnosticism* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999) 72–73.

12. P. Merlan, *From Platonism to Neoplatonism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1953) 114. In Torchia’s words, “In order to generate at all, the One must produce something *other than itself*. However, that which is other than the One must be inferior and limited in relation to its source.” See Torchia, *Plotinus* 41. For other comments on this tension see also A. Smith, “Eternity and time,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. L.P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 1996) 210 and Armstrong, *Cambridge History* 242–43.

13. *Plotinus Ennead V*, trans. A.H. Armstrong (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U Press, 1984) 10, n. 1.

be subsidiary. While indeed irrational, *tolma* may not be the primary source of otherness. Inherently barren and an obstacle to contemplation, *tolma* cannot beget. If anything, *tolma* reduces fecundity. Is *tolma* then redundant to a prior, more seminal otherness that defines descending ranks? Is *tolma* indeed a *culpable* will to apostasy? Two conclusions emerge. First, grounded as it is in expediency—and not apostasy—the first otherness of real beings is non-*tolmatic*. Second, only at levels below real beings does *tolma* have the potential for evil.

#### TOLMA OF INTELLECT

The *tolma* of Intellect may differ from its lower expressions. Nevertheless, it remains archetypal or “primary,” on which, *tolma* at lower levels depend.<sup>14</sup> Plotinus depicts the *tolma* of Intellect—expressed as a volitional desire for an existence autonomous with respect to the One—directly or by inference in the following *Enneads*.<sup>15</sup>

1. There is One here also, but the One is the productive power of all things. The things, then, of which it is the productive power are those which Intellect observes, in a way cutting itself off from the power; otherwise it would not be Intellect. [V.1(10).7]
2. Here Plotinus uses the verb form of *tolma*—its nearness after the One has kept Intellect from “dividing itself, though it did somehow dare to stand away from the One.” [VI.9(9).5]
3. For when it contemplates the One, it does not contemplate it as one: otherwise it would not become Intellect. But beginning as one it did not stay as it began, but, without noticing it, became many, as if heavy [with drunken sleep], and unrolled itself because it wanted to possess everything. [III.8(30).8]
4. ... and on the other side he has established what begins with his son in the place after himself, so that he comes to be between the two, by the otherness of his severance from what is above, and by the bond which keeps him from what comes after him on the lower side. [V.8(31).13]<sup>16</sup>

14. Armstrong, “Gnosis” 118.

15. Torchia notes that III.8(30).8 and V.8(31).13 do not use “*tolma*-language” directly, but the arrogance implicit in the motion away from the One hints at a *tolmatic* spirit. Torchia, *Plotinus* 49. In these passages Intellect seems to produce its own otherness with respect to the One, as is implied by the strong volition in will-laden terms like “cutting itself off,” “dare to stand away,” “unrolled itself,” and “severance.” In VI.9(9).5 Intellect executes an *inexplicable*, audacious and apostate desire to sever from the One—it *somehow* dared to stand away from the One. As Merlan notes in Torchia’s citation, here an implication of voluntarism can be detected in both *tolma* and *apostanai*. Torchia, *Plotinus* 47.

16. Here Intellect, symbolized by *Kronos*, is between the One (represented by *Ouranos*) and Soul (represented by *Zeus* and *Aphrodite*).

The scholarship on Intellect's *tolma* is divided. Armstrong points out that the "original giving-out," or generation of the hypostases (Intellect and soul), are acts of *tolma* ("illegitimate self-assertion")<sup>17</sup> or negatively voluntary. The One's production of a desire to be other than itself is the basis of Intellect's *tolma*—thus highlighting, as Torchia notes, the "paradoxical character" of Intellect's detachment from the One in terms of a generation that is both determined and voluntary. For Torchia, *tolma* is instrumental in the initial emergence of the *Dyad*, when Intellect appears in obscurity as a pre-intellectual entity, but also present in the latter's contemplative vision of the One in the second phase. *Tolma* remains necessary in maintaining this separation of the *Dyad*, once Intellect is fully delineated by the One. Thus, otherness originates in the One, yet Intellect is voluntarily other than the One.<sup>18</sup>

Rist countermands this line of thinking. The Plotinian One, he points out, differs in many ways from the Monad of Neopythagoreanism. It is infinite in power and can therefore produce otherness that is less good, or in a non-moral sense, worse than its cause. For Plotinus, he adds, all otherness is in others with none in the One, for the One is quite unlike and unaffected by its products. The overflowing of the One that gives rise to plurality is the effect of infinite power and exists eternally. The "range of products" from the One is infinite and includes what is not the One itself. The first product is Intelligible Matter or the Indefinite *Dyad*, but it has not sinned in coming into existence. It is produced, not because of its own free-will but because of "the nature of the One itself." Thus, Rist concludes, for Plotinus, it is not because of *tolma* that the many arise from the One, but rather due to the nature of the One which generates. This separation of *tolma* from the *Dyad* means that sin is not necessarily present with plurality.

Reflecting on quotation 2 (VI.9(9).5), Rist contends that an excusable Intellect dares to stand apart from the One only after it has already been generated through the generosity of the One and that it does so on grounds of expediency, not *tolma*—for the passage does not concern the generation of Intellect *per se*, or its "coming to stand apart" but rather its attitude once it has been generated or is actually "standing apart." That Intellect "dared" does not mean it "recklessly broke away." Rather, it "faced up" to "living apart after its generation—indeed it had no option."<sup>19</sup> Such a lack of option

17. Armstrong, *Cambridge History* 242.

18. Torchia, *Plotinus* 42–45, 47, 49.

19. While agreeing with Rist's contention that Intellect has "no option" but to remain apart from the One, Torchia disagrees on two grounds—first that Rist bypasses the tension between the optimistic and pessimistic attitudes towards otherness in the *Enneads* as a whole and second, that it is irrelevant whether the passage refers to *Nous*' "coming to stand apart," or its "actual standing apart," once it has been generated by the One. While Rist opts for the latter alone, Torchia argues that in both cases, *Nous* must show a "desire or *tolma*" to be other than

and Intellect's consequent *tolma*, is not a "guilty act" by Intellect that caused its own fall, but the "inevitable result" of the One's generosity.<sup>20</sup>

Such key phrases—like "no option" or "inevitable result"—signify necessity and point to a crucial non-*tolmatic* cause of Intellect's voluntary quest for autonomy from the One—that of expediency. Intellect seeks a descent from the One on the expedient ground that it cannot bear the full power from the One (VI.7(38).15). Expediency entails both voluntarism and necessity, but no audacity. Thus Rist can conclude that Intellect "must stand apart from the One, but it does not *will* to be separate."<sup>21</sup> Contrary to Torchia's contention—that *tolma* is present in both phases of Intellect's formation from the One—here *tolma* is understood to appear only after Intellect has already returned in contemplation to the One to derive its form as Intellect. In order to receive this power of the One, Intellect must first, on grounds of expediency and not *tolma*, descend from one to a state of multiplicity, thus reinforcing the explicit otherness carved out already in the first phase. There are thus two moments of pre-*tolmatic* otherness between Intellect and the One—the first non-voluntary otherness flowing from the One and the second carved out voluntarily and expediently by the pre-Intellectual entity. Neither is *tolmatic* and both are, in fact, anterior to Intellect's added *tolmatic* descent from the One.

The otherness in these two phases perhaps reflects a still prior wedge of otherness—that between the two activities of the One. In V.4(7).2, Plotinus tells us that each thing has a dual activity—the primary, which belongs to substance and is generated from the perfection in it, and the secondary, which goes out from substance. At levels below the One, multiplicity and otherness begin with the primal, anterior, non-voluntary otherness that appears by necessity between these two activities of the progenitor. While

the One. *Nous'* *tolma* plays a double role. It starts *Nous'* "standing apart" or audacious drive towards otherness. However, *tolma* is needed by *Nous* even after it emerges for it requires an act of *tolma* to sustain it as a distinct hypostasis. In the absence of *tolma*, *Nous* and everything else would be subsumed by the One. See Torchia, *Plotinus* 50–52.

20. Rist, "Monism" 339, 340–43.

21. Rist, "Monism" 341–42. Rist ties *tolma* itself with expediency—he holds that Intellect's *tolma* is "not a guilty will for separation but a 'facing up' to necessity." Devoid as it is of audacity, the will to expediency, though voluntary, is not *tolmatic*—it is a sign of acumen concomitant with the emanative architecture that Plotinus requires. Conversely, although necessary, *tolma* is not limited by the measure inherent in expediency. In fact, its audacity can contradict expediency—it can cause otherness to exceed limits imposed by expediency. While expediency doles out otherness according to strict needs, *tolma* wrings it out in excess, in accordance with anti-*epistropic* desires. Thus although *tolma* is necessary—especially among real beings in the context of emanation—it is not expedient and conversely, expediency is not *tolmatic*, for it is not audacious. Contrary to Rist's interpretation, here *tolmatic* motions are considered separate and somewhat redundant to both otherness and expediency.

the first reflects the substance of the progenitor, the second, produced with necessity from the primary as its image, emanates outward with necessity—it must “in everything be a consequence of it, different from the thing itself” (V.4(7).2). Insofar as it is this second, lesser activity that makes and constitutes the progeny, this latter is substantially lower and hence *other* than the progenitor. At levels below the One, this interval between image (second activity) and original (first activity) constitutes a primal otherness that devolves upon the progeny as the voluntary otherness the latter seeks in order to accommodate with expediency the inherent otherness it inherits from its progenitor. Thus the wedge between its two activities is reflected in the wedge between the progenitor and its progeny. Where the offspring of Intellect are concerned—even if *tolma* had not appeared—there would remain this intrinsic, exculpable otherness, appearing with necessity between the two activities of Intellect. This devolves upon its progeny (soul) in the form of the latter’s voluntary quest for otherness on grounds of expediency. *Tolma* now seems an added, almost redundant source of otherness—and the only one with the potentiality for culpability.

The generation of Intellect from the One is more complex, for the One admits of no otherness.<sup>22</sup> Were it to stir through its generative activity, the One would garner otherness, but as Plotinus tells us in V.1(10).6, the One does not move, for there is no end for it to move to. Remaining continually turned to itself it generates in the silence of perfect continence. This fecund silence is not the barren stillness that Plotinus rejects in IV.8(6).6—“Not a single real being would have existed if that one had stayed still in itself.” The foreshadowing of otherness latent in the integral One is perhaps a primal intimation of the rungs of otherness to emerge. In the same passage, Plotinus speculates that if the One had not generated but remained alone, “all things would have been hidden, shapeless within that one.” The latent otherness among these potentially discrete hidden shapeless things perhaps manifests itself later as the otherness inherent in the limited multiplicity of the noetic world. It begins with a wedge between the One’s activities. Notwithstanding the absence of otherness in the One, in V.4(7).2 there is already a seminal wedge distinguishing the One’s two activities, as evinced by Plotinus’ use of “coexistent.” While the “Principle” (the One) abides, “the activity generated from the perfection in it and its coexistent activity acquires substantial existence.” This wedge devolves upon the first of the two phases that Torchia refers to—the phase of out-flow of the second activity from the One to generate the pre-intellectual unformed entity.

22. There is no distinction within the One between what it is and that it is, or between its essence and existence (VI.8(39).12).

This seminal wedge between the One's two activities is born, not out of *tolmatic* desire, but the emanative architecture of the One's overflow and its concomitant requirements of expedience. Armstrong identifies the desire for separate existence characteristic of the Indefinite *Dyad* as the desire to *be* at all, which in turn entails the *epistrophic* return to the One.<sup>23</sup> Yet, while this desire to *be* entails otherness, this need not be *tolmatic*, for *tolma*, an apostate gesture, calls for more—it calls for a misguided and culpable *rejection* of the prior. That this seminal otherness is non-*tolmatic* is proved by the prevalence of necessity and absence of volition. The second activity is produced by the primary with *necessity* and it emanates outwards also with necessity (V.1(10).6, V.4(7).2). It is also proved by the silence attendant upon the One's production of Intellect—a silence that demonstrates the sheer absence of any *tolmatic* exteriorization.

The seminal wedge between the integral One's first activity and its iconic "coexistent" second activity devolves upon the distinct otherness in each of the two phases of Intellect's formation from the One. In V.2(11).1 the overflow of activity or "superabundance" of the One makes as its amorphous image "something other than itself" and this wedge of otherness is non-*dyadic* or non-*tolmatic*, but *expedient*, for it devolves further upon this pre-Intellect and facilitates the duality required for the latter's first contemplation of the One. So far, there is no voluntarism. Voluntarism appears in the second phase, when the pre-Intellect reinforces the otherness it inherits in the first phase, through its expedient volition towards a descent from the One to the many—without which it cannot hold the full power (to generate) it receives from the One in contemplation. It chooses to break up this power, on grounds of expediency, thereby gaining a non-*tolmatic* otherness that is for the first time *volitional* and descends from unity to one-many—"But from the Good himself who is one there were many for this Intellect; for it was unable to hold the power which it received and broke it up and made the one power many, that it might be able so to bear it part by part" (VI.7(38).15). Intellect's *tolma* only adds further to these forms of prior otherness.

Such a criterion of expediency may be at work even in quotation 3 (III.8(30).8). Intellect's desire to possess everything is the direct cause of its distention and further descent from unity to multiplicity and evokes dismay in Plotinus—"How much better it would have been for it not to want this, for it became the second!" Intellect *begins* as one, but unravels into multiplicity and a seemingly culpable distention. Thus Intellect's will towards otherness is viewed by Torchia as a "blameworthy act"—this passage is indicative of a "slothfulness and moral laxity" on the part of Intellect.<sup>24</sup> Yet, here too,

23. Armstrong, *Cambridge History* 243.

24. Torchia, *Plotinus* 48.



there are perhaps tones of an exculpable expediency, so that the extent of the influence of *tolma* on Intellect's voluntarism remains arguable. That Intellect contemplates the One, not as one, has more to do with Intellect's incapacity to bear the raw fullness of the One (as in VI.7(38).15) than invidious and audacious ambition. Intellect has an instrumental need—in order to be Intellect, it cannot contemplate the One as one—it must fall from unity. This flavor of expediency is underscored by Plotinus' use of "otherwise"—"otherwise it would not become Intellect"—and by the fact that Intellect does not notice its initial transition from unity to multiplicity—"without noticing it, became many"—implying perhaps that it did not culpably intend this descent. Thus Armstrong notes that the language here suggests more a sort of "drunken absent-mindedness" than "audacious rebellion."<sup>25</sup> Unlike the individual souls of V.1(10).1, ignorant of their noble origin directly as a result of their willful and audacious revelry, Intellect's not noticing its descent may indicate—not *tolma*—but its own inherent limitations. Being unable to hold the full power from the One, it cannot know the state from which falls—it is unaware of its beginning as one and transition to the many. Intellect's desire to possess everything perhaps adds to this initial otherness and "unrolls" it further. In fact, it remains doubtful if even this desire to possess everything is *tolmatic* for this stems from an integrative urge that accomplishes the noetic unity inherent in Intellect's one-many. It does not stem from a disdain for the One or longing for that which is inferior to Intellect.<sup>26</sup> Thus Rist regards Intellect's urge to possess everything to be necessary rather than voluntary—"Once produced, it has no option but to will to possess all. As generated Being, that is the best it can will. Hence there is no deliberate choice of falling away."<sup>27</sup>

#### *TOLMA* OF SOUL

The same reservations regarding Intellect—that *tolma* may not be the cause of *first* otherness—apply to soul. The prime cause of the otherness between Intellect and the hypostasis soul is perhaps the otherness between the two activities of Intellect. This otherness then devolves upon soul's first non-*tolmatic* otherness with respect to Intellect, manifested in the difference between the one-and-many of soul and the "one-many" of Intellect. The former exceeds the noetic otherness of the latter—thus demarcating and ranking soul below Intellect. Thus in V.2(11).1, there is already a non-*tolmatic* wedge between the two activities of Intellect, with the hypostasis soul being

25. Armstrong, "Gnosis" 118.

26. Torchia holds the contrary view that *Nous'* desire to possess all things is wrong because it facilitates the emergence of the manifold. Torchia, *Plotinus* 48–49.

27. Rist, "Monism" 342.

the second activity, or “multiple power” poured forth by Intellect, mimetic with respect to it and “springing” forth from its first activity or substance. The hypostasis soul then does not need *tolma* to carve out its primary otherness with respect to Intellect. Its separateness from Intellect is decreed by an exculpable and expedient emanative necessity.

What remains now is the only form of *tolma* that is not redundant—soul’s *polupragmatic* nature—which literally connotes being busy in a disproportionate sense and has been translated and understood by scholars as a type of inordinate engagement.<sup>28</sup> This irrational nature plagues the edifice of soul (the genus-species structure)—but not Intellect. Thus *tolma* gets exacerbated to the *polupragmatic* form of exteriorization when it reaches the level of soul. In III.7(45).11, notwithstanding its incipient contemplation of Intellect, the hypostasis soul is, to begin with, already in a state of discursion and imbalance, cleaved into the one-and-many, as demonstrated by its lowest position in the hierarchy of the hypostases. Into this scene appears soul’s *polupragmatic* nature.

5. 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. [III.7(45).11]

In this quotation, where soul is at an incipient noetic level, its eternal “restlessly active” nature (*phuseôs polupragmônos*), also alluded to in III.4(15).1 as soul’s self-extrusive, progenitive motion, is expressed in a movement that is an affront to the aspiratory circumambulation of soul around the One (IV.4(28).16). This “officious” nature prompts soul’s second motion—a

28. Ficino renders this *polupragmatic* nature as *negotari* and Deck as “involvement with many things.” See J. N. Deck, *Nature, Contemplation and the One* (Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 1967) 23. Hans Jonas translates it as “a nature which was forward,” and Beierwaltes as “busy.” Schürmann understands it as “doing much”—“doing things that are foreign to it instead of doing the one thing that avails: being satisfied with beholding the One.” He also understands it as “curious”—because it connotes an eagerness to see what happens outside eternity—and compares it with Augustine’s *curiositas*, which corresponds to a busyness that creates restlessness. See R. Schürmann, “The Philosophy of Plotinus. Doctor Reiner Schürmann’s Course Lectures,” inventory established by Pierre Adler (New York: New School U, Dept. of Philosophy, 1994) 48–49 (photocopy). It is this exteriorizing curiosity with respect to novelty that Trouillard describes as the act by which soul, abandoning its search for the necessary being within itself, projects itself outwards towards “new things and new states.” See J. Trouillard, “The Logic of Attribution in Plotinus,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 1 (1961): 130–31. Torchia coins the term *polupragmatic* and holds the literal meaning of *polupragmôn* to be “doing many things,” or “being busy after many things at once,” but in concrete terms to connote an “officious, meddling, or fastidious character” or an “over-excessive concern” with many details all at once. Torchia, *Plotinus* 75–76.

motion that stirs time out of its *logoic* fore-life. Until now, despite its discursion and imbalance, soul remains at its noetic level,<sup>29</sup> for as Strange notes, this “officious” nature exists in the intelligible world,<sup>30</sup> and as Schürmann points out, this principle of restlessness pertains to the restful seed of time in the soul still in Intellect, causing soul to break through Intellect’s repose.<sup>31</sup> This *polupragmatic* nature is *tolmatic*—through its “venturesomeness” or “indiscreet curiosity”<sup>32</sup> it swerves soul away from priors towards novelty. All levels of soul are, as a result, exteriorized into further discursion.<sup>33</sup> This does not induce soul’s discursion as such, for soul has already launched into its higher discursion, manifested in the disquiet of its power. All this does is perhaps exacerbate the otherness soul already has and distend its discursion further, prompting that crucial motion of soul which catapults time from its fore-life and extrudes soul out of its essence towards that which is ever new. Without soul’s decline and violent self-extrusion, time and the world of sense could not have appeared.<sup>34</sup> Soul’s willful descent here is reminiscent of a much earlier work, V.1(10).5, where Plotinus points to soul’s *tolmatic* capacity for desertion—“soul exists among the intelligible realities in close

29. Contrary to the interpretation in Torchia’s *Plotinus* (72)—that the first manifestation of soul’s *tolma* occurs at the level of the World Soul—here *polupragmatic* nature is ascribed mainly to the hypostasis soul. This is more akin to the interpretation of Strange, for whom, Plotinus speaks of the hypostasis soul as the generator of time, “unquiet power” applies to “soul in the intelligible world,” and “we” to the “individual rational soul,” which is identified with the hypostasis soul because of Plotinus’ doctrine of the unity of soul. See S.K. Strange, “Plotinus on the Nature of Eternity and Time,” in *Aristotle in Late Antiquity*, ed. L.P. Schrenk (Washington, DC: The Catholic U of America Press, 1994) 48–50.

30. Strange, “Plotinus on Eternity and Time” 48.

31. Schürmann, “Philosophy of Plotinus” 49.

32. Torchia, *Plotinus* 78. Notwithstanding the difference between a *polupragmatic* nature and a *tolmatic* one—the former connotes wrongful curiosity and *ennui* rather than the audacity of the latter—the two are related asymmetrically. While a *tolmatic* nature need not be *polupragmatic*, a *polupragmatic* nature expresses the willful exteriorization of *tolma*. As Schürmann, “Philosophy of Plotinus” (49), points out, the principle of exteriorization bears different names in Plotinus—not just the curiosity characteristic of the *polupragmatic* nature, but also boldness (*tolma*), self-determination (*autexousion*), and “first otherness” (*prôtè heterotès*).

33. *Tolma* afflicts also the matter of the sense world (III.6(26).14), the human intellect when it directs itself towards matter (I.8(51).9) and the part of the lower soul that is in vegetal life (V.2(11).1). Finally, *tolmatic* expressions are also implicit when souls descend through narcissistic self-love (V.1(10).1, IV.4(28).3, IV.3(27).12).

34. Schürmann, “Philosophy of Plotinus” (49), points to the irrational origin of time, and the ontological loss that results from soul’s *polupragmatic* nature—“... time is of irrational origin, a product of a restless, centrifugal principle, whose audacity results in ontological loss.” Yet, if the impact of this centrifugal principle is carefully calibrated, the result is perhaps more nuanced than an outright ontological loss, for although there is a *tolmatic* departure from the higher world, there is also an unbroken tie to this world, through aspiratory mimesis of Intellect.

unity with them, unless it wills to desert them.” If soul indeed deserted its noetic ground, this would merely exacerbate the pre-*tolmatic* seminal otherness that defines it,<sup>35</sup> quite as much as Intellect’s *tolmatic* desire adds to its otherness with respect to the One. A full desertion is infeasible for then soul would lose its noetic ground altogether and could no longer be soul.

Two conclusions follow about the *polupragmatic* nature of soul in III.7(45).11. First, it is indeed the cause of first otherness between the realm of becoming and soul, even though it does not beget this realm, for it is inherently barren, hinders contemplation and saps fecundity. What begets is neither *tolma*, nor the motion of soul, but the fecundity of the *logoi* borne by soul. Perhaps soul’s *polupragmatic* nature does no more than direct and exacerbate the down-flow of soul’s second activity—not “to itself or in itself”—but out of itself where it lies in “making and production” (III.7(45).12), thus propelling its fecund *logoi* into the generative act. It is perhaps in this sense alone that soul’s restlessness facilitates the appearance of time and the world of sense. Second, while it may lead to ontological loss and cause soul to extrude out of itself and decline towards its progeny, this restless nature is not evil, for the edifice of soul operates at the pre-evil noetic species level when it generates—unlike V.1(10).1, where the generative act of individual souls is associated with the beginning of evil.

In a second passage indicating the imbalance of the hypostasis soul, Plotinus claims the following.

6. For because soul had an unquiet power, which 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.

[III.7(45).11]<sup>36</sup>

Commentators have equated soul’s “unquiet power” with its *tolma*.<sup>37</sup> Yet, there is here an unmistakable flavor of the same expediency that prompted

35. Referring to V.1(10).5, where soul would remain with the divine except for its “intentional apostasy,” Torchia notes that this and other similar passages call to mind *Nous* “standing apart” from the One (VI.9(9).5). Torchia concludes that *Nous* and soul are both “guilty” of “estranging themselves” from “higher principles of unity.” Torchia, *Plotinus* 72.

36. In general Plotinus uses power (*dunamis*) in positive ways that temper multiplicity—the power from the Good, which Intellect is unable to hold and breaks up into many (VI.7(38).15), the power gained by abiding above (IV.3(27).6) and participating in the Good (III.2(47).3), and Intellect’s power for disinterested generation (III.2(47).2). Plotinus also uses quietude in positive ways that indicate unity (III.2(47).2, III.7(45).11, III.8(30).6). Thus it would be ideal if soul possessed both power and quietude, or, a quiet power—which it does when it ascends to the One.

37. Strange, “Plotinus on Eternity and Time” (48), suggests that the “unquiet power” of soul is its faculty of desire, based on a comparison of III.7(45).11 with IV.7(2).13 (beginning), IV.3(27).7 and VI.8(39).2. He ties the association of the fall of soul from the intelligible realm

Intellect to descend. Thus the cause of soul's unquiet power may precede its *polupragmatic* nature. The hypostasis soul's balance of the same and the other has "dissolved" into the separate one-*and*-many, unlike the indissoluble one-many of Intellect.<sup>38</sup> It is perhaps this exculpable pre-*tolmatic* imbalance that accounts for soul's "unquiet power" more than its *polupragmatic* nature. Soul's disquiet indicates that it has ceased abiding entirely above. Soul can no longer imitate the "perfect quietude" of Intellect, even as it imitates Intellect's fall from the unity of the One. Just as Intellect breaks up the power of the One and makes this one power many, so that it might bear it part by part (VI.7(38).15), the hypostasis soul now copies Intellect and does not want "the whole to be present to it all together," thus implying that it prefers a fragmented, discursive series of images of the real objects of knowledge it already knows. This refusal of the whole is a sign of expediency and acumen—like Intellect, soul accommodates the erstwhile "whole" to its fallen state and limited powers, so that it too can bear it bit by bit.<sup>39</sup>

In a third passage, Plotinus uses the analogy with the *logos* in the seed to describe the weakening imbalance of the World Soul—an analogy he repeats for Intellect in III.2(47).2.

7. And, as from a quiet seed the formative principle, unfolding itself, advances, as it thinks, to largeness, but does away with the largeness by division and, instead of keeping its unity in itself, squanders it outside itself and so goes forward to a weaker extension; in the same way Soul, making the world of sense in imitation of that other world, moving with a motion which is not that which exists There, but like it, and intending to be an image of it, first of all put itself into time, which it made instead of eternity, and then handed over that which came into being as a slave to time, by making the whole of it exist in time and encompassing all its ways with time. [III.7(45).11]

The *tolma* of soul-genus seemingly affects the World Soul enough to weaken it when it generates time and the world of sense. Unlike the One and Intellect, whose very act of producing involves rest (*stasis*) (V.2(11).1), and unlike IV.3(27).6 where likewise, the World Soul itself abides in itself, here the added factor of the hypostasis soul's *polupragmatic* nature causes the World Soul to extrude itself forth out of itself, and thus out of *stasis*, into a

with its desire to rule itself in III.7(45).11 with the fall of soul in V.1(10).1. Strange also identifies soul's unquiet power of desire with its *polupragmatic* nature. Torchia equates soul's *tolma* with its "unquiet power," and applies restlessness to its "inquietude." Torchia, *Plotinus* 71, 75.

38. D. Nikulin, "Plotinus on Eternity," in *Le Timée de Platon*, ed. A. Neschke-Hentschke (Paris: Éditions Peeters Louvain, 2000) 29.

39. This limited capacity of soul is noted by Trouillard, "Logic of Attribution" (131), as the inability of its power to bear the fullness of the pure Intellect by which it is generated, echoed later by Schürmann, "Philosophy of Plotinus" (48), as soul's inability to bear within itself "all the dense fullness of its possession."

weaker extension. It generates sacrificially—at the cost of declining towards its progeny. This distention of the World Soul indicates, as Deck notes, that there is now a relaxation of the requirements of *poiesis*.<sup>40</sup> As Torchia points out, here Augustine is comparable with Plotinus. Like Plotinus' distended Soul uncoiling itself like a seed, in Augustine, the proud soul “spews forth” its inmost good (*per superbiam intima sua*).<sup>41</sup>

However, its weakening self-exteriorization here is unusual among Plotinus' usual narratives about the powers of World Soul, which lead one to expect it to abide unchanged when it generates. As Smith notes, Plotinus often points out how the World Soul both generates and manages the world without being affected by it—without toil and without reasoning out its actions.<sup>42</sup> This seeming contradiction is perhaps part of the overall “uneasy balance” ascribed by Torchia to Plotinus with respect to individual souls—that they are “free, fallen, and culpable,” but also “determined, sent, and blameless.”<sup>43</sup>

Having ceased to abide in itself the World Soul loses power in III.7(45).11, for as Plotinus states, “it is a mark of greater power not to be affected” in what the progenitor makes (IV.3(27).6). This is its only loss of power. Notwithstanding its implicit encounter with matter in making the world of sense in quotation 7, the World Soul is protected from any contagion with respect to matter. Even if it perhaps veers towards matter, it does not contemplate it, for what it must look at during this decline is the noetic world it is copying and not the matter on which the *logoi* are to be bequeathed. Thus even as it extends to a weaker extension, its vision is directed upwards. This is consonant with Plotinus' words in II.9(33).4, that the World Soul cannot fall—“The making act of the soul is not a declination but rather a non-declination”—for if it did, it would forget the intelligibles, in which case, it could not fashion the world. Thus the only fall the World Soul undergoes is its weakening self-extension caused by its inherited *polupragmatic* nature.

Finally Plotinus implicates also the level of the individual soul. “We” *qua* souls construct time and implicitly also the world of sense.

40. Deck, *Nature* (42), suggests “The immobility of the producer is mitigated, and thus its stability in the generation of its product is impaired.”

41. Torchia, *Plotinus* 143.

42. Thus in III.2(47).2 the World Soul suffers no harm as it directs this All. In III.4(15).4, it abides, does not decline and does not worry. In IV.3(27).6 it looks towards Intellect and abides in itself as it makes. And in II.9(33).2, it “manages body” but not through discursive thinking. It orders it by the power of its contemplation of its prior.

43. Torchia, *Plotinus* 87.

8. And so, always moving on to the ‘next’ and the ‘after,’ and what is not the same, but one thing after another, we made a long stretch of our journey and constructed time as an image of eternity. [III.7(45).11]

If the “we” is taken to be the pre-embodied species level of individual souls, then in so declining, it simply echoes the *polupragmatic* nature of its genus—the hypostasis soul. It is not evil thereby, for like its parent, the “we” operates at its highest noetic level where there is no evil.

However, individual souls do carry an additional independent toll of *tolma* and even evil when they plunge into worldliness—a burden not shared by priors. There is a difference between III.7(45).11 (quotations 5–8), where *tolma* may lead to ontological loss but not evil, and V.1(10).1 (quotation 9), where *tolma* is not generative, but worldly, and yet, generation itself, along with *tolma*, first otherness and the desire for autonomy are equated with the beginning of evil by Plotinus.<sup>44</sup>

9. The beginning of evil for them was audacity and coming to birth and the first otherness and the wishing to belong to themselves. Since they were clearly delighted with their own independence, and made great use of self-movement, running the opposite course and getting as far away as possible, they were ignorant even that they themselves came from that world. [V.1(10).1]

Here *tolma* is evil because it pertains to the post-cosmic revelry of individual souls in the worldliness of the world, so much so, that they forget their divine noetic origins. The individual souls’ *tolmatic* cessation of contemplation and swerving away from Intellect, or the “father, God” by “running the opposite course and getting as far away as possible” involves more than the benign ontological loss, or limited dearth of the Good demarcating cascading levels of real beings from the One. It carries with it no shade of expedience and involves a culpable participation in evil (absolute dearth of the Good). This should exacerbate the seminal otherness already in place between individual souls and their genus.

In quotation 9 Plotinus also deems generation by individual souls the beginning of evil. This means that in generating and carving out a first otherness between themselves and their progeny, individual souls participate in evil. Such evil cannot derive from the *polupragmatic* nature inherited from their genus, for this occurs at the noetic level and connotes only ontological loss. “Coming to birth” is associated with the beginning of evil perhaps because of a different context of begetting—that of ambition. Now it is ambition that causes *tolmatic* individuation and not worldly forgetfulness of the divine.

44. III.7(45).11 pertains to all levels of soul, while V.1(10).1 only the level of individual souls.

Thus in IV.7(2).13 the descended soul becomes the individual soul when it strains to beget in isolation and grows isolated by its desire to direct a mere part of the All.<sup>45</sup> In addition to its inherited *polupragmatic* nature and the worldly *tolma* it gains through enchantment with earthly things—the individual soul can attain its own independent toll of *tolma* when it grows ambitiously autonomous and creative.

Thus otherness adopts a different hue when it comes to the realm of process. For the first time, at this moribund stage of the sequence of otherness punctuating the efflux from the One, the *first* otherness between its final progeny (time and the world of sense) and their progenitor (soul), is not begotten—but prompted—by soul's *tolmatic polupragmatic* nature. Unlike the expedient otherness demarcating echelons of real beings, this episode is not overtly expedient.

#### TOLMA AND EVIL

*Tolma* in Plotinus' thought can range from the benign will to exteriorization causing ontological loss among real beings, to the bad audacity associated with the beginning of evil in V.1(10).1. In his late work I.8(51) Plotinus defines a privative and primal evil as "absolute deficiency" with respect to the good (Ch. 5). It is "always undefined, nowhere stable, subject to every sort of influence, insatiate, complete poverty" (Ch. 3) and a shadow compared with real being. In its *absolute* dearth of the good, anterior even to matter, evil is a "sort of form of non-existence," pertaining to things that share in non-being—not absolute non-being but only something "other than being," not non-being in terms of that which is logically distinct from being (movement, rest) but "like an image of being or something still more non-existent" (Ch. 3). Thus at one end is the One, which overflows and is good. At the other is an impotent evil that causes, not good, but privation of good. The Good and evil are opposing *archai* or extremes, but evil has no active power of promoting itself.<sup>46</sup>

45. Again in IV.8(6).4, such an isolation means weakness. When an individual soul flies from the All, stands apart in distinctness and ceases to contemplate Intellect—or "does not look towards the intelligible"—it grows weakened. It is "isolated and weak and fusses and looks towards a part," and directs the individual part with difficulty. Finally, in IV.4(28).3, if the individual soul emerges out of the intelligible world and "cannot endure unity," but embraces its own individuality ("wants to be different and so to speak puts its head outside"), it then acquires memory. Such willful and culpable individuation may indeed entail that its generation be the beginning of evil for the individual soul and that its two levels of otherness be related. Its effort to carve otherness with respect to its progeny may cause that with respect to its prior. In straining to beget and "direct the part" it individuates itself. Or, in creating otherness between itself and the "part" it thereby also incurs a *tolmatic* otherness between itself and its prior. Insofar as it is now evil, it is below the noetic species level.

46. J.M. Rist, "Plotinus on Matter and Evil," *Phronesis* 6 (1961): 159.



The “falling short of good” that Plotinus defines as evil (III.2(47).5) is an absolute deficiency—to be discerned from any limited dearth of good in that which can be perfect at the level of its own nature (I.8(51).5). In VI.6(34).1 Plotinus addresses this difference. On the one hand there is multiplicity, or a “falling away from the One” through exteriorization. On the other, there is infinity, or the “total falling away” characteristic of its “innumerable multiplicity.” Multiplicity breaks the silence of self-containment and entails a “foolish or compulsory” journey to the exterior. Plotinus claims, “A thing is multiple when, unable to tend to itself, it pours out and is extended in scattering.” That which can stem this extrusion, or abide in its outpouring becomes magnitude.

This has implications for the moral stature of *tolma*. Although a will towards otherness, noetic *tolma* cannot tend as far as infinity, for a will towards infinity would make Intellect evil and evil is precluded from real beings. Thus implicit in noetic *tolma* is a limit. One manifestation of this limit is Intellect’s self-containment when it produces, which renders it a magnitude. *Tolma* among real beings is limited by their very reality and propinquity to the One. As Plotinus tells us in VI.6(34).2, in the intelligible, number is limited like real beings. Number is not infinite but limited to “as many as the real beings.” Thus multiplicity “there” among real beings is not evil, for it is unified, limited to “one-multiple” and not allowed to be infinity or “altogether multiplicity” (VI.6(34).3). Only infinity—characterized by unlimited and exteriorized self-dissipation and the consequent “total” falling away from the One—is evil. Such infinity, untethered by limit, exists “perhaps” in time and the things which “come to be”—but not among real beings, where it is limited (VI.6(34).3). This is consonant with I.8(51).3 where Plotinus is clear that evil does not exist among real beings. Evil can pertain only to that which shares in ontological nullity—“Evil cannot be included in what really exists or in what is beyond existence; for these are good. So it remains that if evil exists, it must be among non-existent things, as a sort of form of non-existence, and pertain to one of the things that are mingled with non-being or somehow share in non-being.”

Thus *tolma* among real beings cannot be evil. At worst, it decimates being in excess of that required by expediency. *Tolma* can be evil and pernicious only below real beings, as in the case of the worldly individual souls in V.1(10).1. To use Rist’s concluding words—*tolma* in its bad sense is not equivalent to plurality *per se*, but plurality only “in proportion as it loses sight of unity.”<sup>47</sup>

47. Rist, “Monism” 343.

## CONCLUSION

An unavoidable conclusion in this paper is that *tolma* may not be the root of all multiplicity (Armstrong) and Intellect may not have come into being as a result of its *tolma* (Merlan).<sup>48</sup> *Tolmatic* otherness is preceded by moments of silent non-*tolmatic* wedges between the One and Intellect—a silence unperturbed by audacious exteriorization, for the One abides in itself as it overflows. Volition expressed through will (*boulêsis*) need not be *tolmatic*, contrary to Torchia's contention that at levels other than the One, will expresses itself as *tolma*, a blameworthy desire for otherness.<sup>49</sup> That otherness can exist for Plotinus without the aid of *tolma* and that even volitional otherness need not be *tolmatic*, indicate that it is not *tolma*, but *otherness* that is a corner stone of Plotinian emanation—for *tolma* appears on the scene when otherness is already in place. Thus noetic *tolma* remains, in the ultimate, redundant to emanation. Moreover, it is not even culpable, for volition is nestled within a necessity decreed by the One. For real beings, even *tolma*, the will to apostasy, is not itself apostate but necessary and decreed, for "necessity contains the free-will" (IV.8(6).5). Culpability is meaningless in the absence of evil. Like evil, culpability too is absent among real beings.

Yet, it is hardly likely that a serious thinker like Plotinus would infuse *tolma* into his metaphysics for idle reasons. Neither a specter, nor a jester, *tolma* perhaps serves merely as the exculpable metaphysical root and harbinger of disarray and audacity that does no harm to real beings—besides distending otherness beyond that required by expediency—but grows evil and culpable only in the embodied state, when the *epistrophic* urge is weakened and the worldliness of the world ensnares *tolmatic* attention.

48. Merlan, *Platonism to Neoplatonism* 114.

49. Voluntarism and "will" (*boulêsis*) are not used in a literal personified manner, for as Rist notes in "Monism" (342), Intelligible Matter, the firstborn of the One, has no will. Neither do the noetic levels of soul or the matter of the sense world. Thus any will at work here is, so to speak, an emanative will—at once voluntary and determined. As Torchia notes, Plotinus "inserts" will into emanation itself, thus providing an "interesting metaphysical innovation." For Torchia, the One's "will-to-be" is self-directed. But at lower hypostatic levels, will can only be directed at something other than the One. See Torchia, *Plotinus* 98–101.