

The One and the Many: Part I: The One

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This study will proceed according to two primary objectives. The first, to be explicated in the present instalment (Part I), is to adduce as far as possible *how it is* that the One, in the philosophy of Plotinus, generates that which comes forth from it. The second objective, which shall be presented in Part II, is to discern *what it is* that must thereby come forth from the One. The second objective will be dependent upon the first, since the “how” relative to the generation from the One will entail the general character of the “what.” It will be necessary to discern how the One, in its very remaining or abiding as an exclusive simplicity, can be understood to entail the generation of that which is most primarily generated; that which is primarily generated will be a series of simple unities prior to (and the basis of) all being and intellection.

I. OBJECTIVE: ON THE QUESTION CONCERNING HOW THE ONE GENERATES

Regarding the question concerning how it is that anything at all arises from the One, Narbonne has written:

Plotin inaugure en effet un nouveau type de questionnement sur l'être, un questionnement, à vrai dire, d'une radicalité sans égale dans toute l'histoire de la philosophie grecque.¹

Narbonne asserts that Plotinus differs radically from Plato and Aristotle in suggesting that being should even need a foundation.² As Narbonne puts it,³ this fundamental question of Plotinian metaphysics asks: ‘how is it that that which is exists?’ If it is indeed necessary that all things be traced back to the One (which assertion we will soon examine), then this is not only the fundamental question of Plotinian metaphysics, but of all metaphysics, and if metaphysics is the most fundamental science, then we do not speak in hyperbole when we say that the question as to how anything comes from

1. Narbonne, *La métaphysique de Plotin*, 26.

2. Ibid. 58.

3. Ibid. 26.

the One is simply the first and most fundamental question. Heidegger's "question of the meaning of Being," for example, is derivative and cannot be advanced without turning to the question of the One.⁴

The question is perhaps raised most distinctly by Plotinus in V.1 [10]. Having established the dependence of Soul and Intellect upon the One, Plotinus writes:

For the soul now knows that these things must be (ἀνάγκην), but longs (ἐπιποθεῖ) to answer the question repeatedly discussed also by the ancient philosophers, how (πῶς) from the One, if it is such as we say it is (τοιούτου ὄντος, οἷον λέγομεν τὸ ἔν εἶναι), anything else, whether a multitude or a dyad or a number, came to existence (ὑπόστασιν ἔσχευ), and why did it not on the contrary remain by itself, but such a great multiplicity flowed from it (ἐξερρή) as that which is seen to exist in beings, but which we think it right to refer back to the One (ἀνάγειν δε αὐτὸ πρὸς ἐκεῖνο ἀξιούμεν). (V.1 [10] 6.3–8)⁵

The beginning of this passage indicates that we already know it is *necessary* that all things do *in fact* arise from the One. The end of the passage tells us that this knowledge is possessed inasmuch as we agree it is necessary that it is before these. This prioritizing of the One can be traced back to the end of the *Parmenides*: ἐν εἰ μὴ ἔστιν, οὐδὲν ἔστιν.⁶ Plotinus expounds the necessity of the One at the beginning of VI.9 [9]:

It is by the one that all beings are beings [...] For what could anything be if it was not one? For if things are deprived of the one which is predicated of them, they are not those things. (VI.9 [9] 1.1–4)

This idea is most clearly expressed by Proclus in the first proposition of *The Elements of Theology*: "Every manifold in some way participates unity."⁷ If the One is prior to all, it is necessary that all things are produced or somehow arise from it. Therefore it is known that all things arise from the One but, as Plotinus writes, the soul yearns or longs to provide an answer as to *how* (πῶς) this happens.

The difficulty that Plotinus faces is captured in the phrase: "if it [the One] is such as we say it is." (V.1 [10] 6.5) This is because, in tracing all

4. Heidegger's ontology remains, so to speak, "within the Aristotelian horizon," but it simply takes Being as matter/potential to be the true meaning of being.

5. All citations from Plotinus, both English and Greek, will be from Armstrong's translation of the works of Plotinus unless otherwise indicated. All such citations of Plotinus will be referenced in text.

6. *Parmenides* 166c (from Plato, *Opera*, Book II).

7. Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*. In part II we shall demonstrate how Neoplatonic henology is able to overcome the Aristotelian objection, in *Metaphysics* λ 1003^b 25–35, that it is no different to say "one man" than to simply say "man."

things back to the One, Plotinus finds himself with a principle that is really defined in terms of simplicity.⁸ Thus the crux of the difficulty is that it does not seem possible for anything to arise from such a principle without placing certain differentiations into it upon the basis of which it may be understood to produce something; in that case, however, one will no longer be speaking about the same simple principle. Bréhier presented this as the *quaestio vexata* of Plotinus' philosophy.⁹ Strictly speaking it is the vexing question for any philosophy or scientific theology that seeks to demonstrate how all things can arise from a single principle. That which we have described as the most fundamental question has turned out to be the most vexing and thus also the *most pressing*.

Finally, the great multiplicity, which we know must come to exist, is said to "flow out" (ἐξεργύη) from the One. This idea that things "flow out" from the One is quite frequent in the writings of Plotinus, especially in conjunction with what is known as his theory of "emanation," which does indeed come up later in the same chapter (V.1 [10] 6.28–36). The theory of emanation essentially describes this flowing from the One in terms of solar radiation (περίλαμψιν) which does not involve any deliberate activity or loss of power on the part of the One.

Plotinus attempts to justify this notion of circum-radiation by saying that "all things when they come to perfection produce; the One is always perfect and therefore produces everlastingly." (V.1 [10] 6.38–39) Why is it that the perfect necessarily produces? Plotinus indicates that that which is perfect will be in some way superabundant (ὑπερπλήρης) such that it overflows (ὑπερ-εργύη) and in this overflow "make something other than itself." (V.2 [11] 1.9) The specific reason the One is perfect and overabundant is that it neither needs nor has anything and, presumably, this not-needing anything would be the basis upon which it can give or produce everything. The problem with the image of overabundance is that usually when something overflows, it is because it "has" its fill and more than its fill, such that the excess overflows its limit, but the One does not have anything at all.¹⁰

Since the "excess" cannot possibly come from anything other than the One itself, it must be the case, insofar as the notion of emanation is accurate,

8. It is certainly the case that Plotinus and other Neoplatonists will sometimes say that the First principle is not even "One" or "Good," but this is not to deny that the One is simple as much as it is intended to avoid making the Principle into a mere number or, for that matter, to prevent it from becoming too attached to *any kind* of proper name. "One" is true of the principle in terms of both being first or prior and in terms of being simple.

9. Bréhier, *La Philosophie de Plotin*, 40.

10. The One/Good does not have any thing and gives what it does not have; see V.2 [11] 1.5–10, V.5 [32] 13.8–9, VI.7 [38] 15.18–19 and V.3 [49] 15.19–20.

that the One's very unity is excessive to itself without implying any difference from itself. Could anything be less possible? It is our objective to demonstrate that it is not impossible.

II. ON NECESSITY AND PERSUASION

In the writings of Plotinus one can discern two different ways or modes in which transcendent realities are discussed; one of the ways produces necessary arguments about these realities, while the other persuades the soul about these realities by reproducing them within the limits of soul's discursive capacity.

We have already come upon this epistemic distinction when discussing the passage from V.1 [10] 6. Since all things can be traced back to the One it is necessary *that* all things come from the One but this does not allow the soul to conceive of *how* this is possible. The distinction between necessary and persuasive accounts of the transcendent can be clearly discerned in VI.4 [22] 4, VI.5 [23] 11, VI.7 [38] 40, VI.8 [39] 12&13, and V.3 [49] 6.¹¹

1. *Necessity and Persuasion Relative to Intellect in V.3 [49]*

In V.3 [49] this distinction arises while defending the possibility of self-knowledge from sceptical critique. The basic critique, given by Plotinus at the very beginning of the treatise, is that for something to know itself it is necessary that one part know another part.¹² In this way, the part that knows is not that which is known and the part that is known does not know.¹³ In chapter 5, Plotinus defines Intellect as that in which being and knowing are the same and argues that such knowing must exist if there is really such a thing as truth. In chapter 6, however, it is asked whether or not this sort of argument activates belief (ἐνέργειαν πιστικῆν) (6.9) and the response is:

No, it has necessity (ἀνάγκην), not persuasive force (πειθῶ); for necessity is in Intellect but persuasion in the soul. It does seem that we seek to persuade ourselves rather than to behold truth by pure intellect. (6.10–13)

Persuasion requires that we “contemplate the archetype in the image.” (6.18) We must think Intellect according to the highest capacity that we

11. All of these passages will be discussed in the following sections, except VI.4 [22] and VI.5 [23]; the former, however, will be discussed in Part II.

12. This problematic is logically identical to Aristotle's argument against self-motion in *Physics* VIII. 257^a 30–258^b 10, repeated in *On the Soul* 406^a 5–10. Aristotle, of course, would have denied that this argument could be applied to the divine Intellect as it does not involve motion. Nevertheless, this thinking is said to necessarily think itself (*Metaphysics* λ 1074^b 32–34) and this thinking “deals with that which is best in itself” (*Metaphysics* λ 1072^b 18). Evidently, then, some “part” of it is being known by some other part.

13. See Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians*, I 310–12 for his own articulation of the argument.

have as embodied soul: διανοητικὸν (discursive intelligence). This discursive reasoning is in conformity with Intellect:

But since the things which it speaks are above, or come to it from above, whence it also comes itself, it [self-knowledge] could happen to it, since it is a rational principle and receives things akin to it, and fits them to the traces in itself, in this way to know itself. (6.27–28)

We know that which is above by means of what comes to us from above. By knowing in this way, soul also knows itself because, in fitting the illumination from above to its potential to receive (the traces present in it), it realizes the potentiality to become what it is. It is therefore precisely by way of persuasive accounts of the transcendent that we revert to Intellect, as far as the human is able, and thereby revert to ourselves.

In V.3 [49] 5 the conclusion that being and knowing are the same was only maintained as the condition for the possibility of real truth. The Sceptic is not forced to concede to such a necessity and would be completely justified in accusing Plotinus of being a dogmatist had that been the end of the argument. Plotinus knows that what the Sceptic really wants, insofar as the scepticism is sincere, is to be able to literally *conceive* of this self-knowing. Since the persuasive account of Intellect is evidently intended to re-produce the higher, it is no accident that the second account of Intellect in V.3 [49], in chapters 10–11, will produce a discursive account of the *very birth of Intellect relative to the One*. It is true to say that the soul must give birth to Intellect according to its own discursive nature.

2. *Necessity and Persuasion in VI.8 [39]—The “Birth” of the One*

The central question of VI.8 [39] concerns the independence and freedom of the One. Just as V.3 [49] appears to be responding the sceptical critique of Intellect, VI.8 [39] is responding to a religious critique of the One.¹⁴ Plotinus’ concern here, we think, is to defend the doctrine of the One from those who would say that it cannot be identified with divinity itself.

The specific objection to which Plotinus is responding holds that the One seems to be determined either by necessity, and thus enslaved, or by chance, and thus haphazard. Plotinus will first proceed by way of necessity, according to which the One neither determines itself (8.11) nor wills itself (9.48) since both attributions would undermine the One’s simplicity. The first objection, that the One is enslaved to necessity, is eliminated by explaining that the One is “altogether unrelated to anything” (8.14) and that it is “defined by

14. In the Introductory Note to his translation, Armstrong suggests that it is a specifically Christian objection.

its uniqueness, and not of necessity.” (9.11) With respect to the charge that it just “happened to be” (9.1) as it is, Plotinus explains that the One did not just happen to be “because it really did not come to be.” (10.21) Then, in chapter 11, it is argued that we must not allow our imagination and its need to assume a pre-given place, to impose itself upon the One, for the One did not “happen” in some pre-given place. Only within a pre-given situation can something happen by chance. Once we remove the imagination, it becomes evident that, strictly speaking, only negative statements can be made about the One (11.35).

Having completed the negative account of the One according to necessity at the end of chapter 11, chapter 12 marks the transition into the mode of persuasion: “for again the soul is not the least persuaded (πεισθεῖσα) by what has been said.” (12.2–3) That is to say, Plotinus has not yet allowed his critic to *conceive* of the One as divinity itself. This transition is complete in chapter 13 when Plotinus writes: “we must now depart a little from correct thinking in our discourse for the sake of persuasion (πειθοῦς).” (13.4–5) Here the nomination of the Principle switches from “the One” to “the Good.”¹⁵ In this persuasive account, limited by the qualifying οἶον (“as if” 13.50), it is possible to speak of “choice” and “will” relative to the Good “so that our discourse has discovered that he has made himself.” (13.55) The Principle is subsequently described as self-love (15.2) and, moreover, “if we may say so, borne to his own interior.” (16.13) This activity of the One is also described as a holding to itself (16.19) and, perhaps most succinctly, as a “self-directed activity (ἡ ἐνέφρητα ἢ πρὸς αὐτόν).” (16.28) Conceived in this way, the One is born in us as divinity itself: *if* we must think of it as coming to be in some way, we must think of it as existing simply *of itself*.

3. *Necessity and Persuasion Relative to the Causality of the One in VI.7 [38]:*

The Doctrine of the Two Acts

In VI.7 [38] we witness the transition from strict necessity to persuasive discourse relative to the *causality* of the One. In chapter 39, a long discussion on the Principle ends with negative conclusions about the One such that we must be content to say that it “will stand still in majesty.” (39.29) In the following chapter, encouragement is needed “if discourse can indicate it in any way at all (πῆ οἶόν)” (40.4) and so “necessity (ἀνάγκη) must have persuasion (πειθῶ) mixed with it.” (40.4) How then do we persuasively and thus discursively speak about the One? Plotinus proceeds to reiterate what is

15. There is also a shift in gender from neuter to feminine, but which Armstrong translates as masculine.

now generally known as the “doctrine of the two acts.”¹⁶ The most early and frequently cited instance of this “doctrine” can be found in V.4 [7]:

But how, when that [the Principle] abides unchanged (μένοντος), does intellect come into being? In each and every thing there is an activity which belongs to substance (ἔστι τῆς οὐσίας) and one which goes out from substance (ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας); and that which belongs to substance is the active actuality (ἐνέργεια) which is each particular thing, and the other activity derives from that first one, and must in everything be a consequence of it, different from the thing itself. (V.4 [7] 2.27–30)

This is essentially a formalization of the theory of emanation. It is clear that the first act is identical with the thing itself but that its nature is such that the second act necessarily follows. The passage does not tell us *what* this act is, but it at least presents the condition which must be fulfilled if we are to demonstrate how it is that anything can arise from the One; the few Plotinian scholars who have made such attempts have in fact employed the doctrine of the “two acts.” That this doctrine should arise relative to the need for persuasion justifies its use in such “*how* questioning” but those who have employed it have not, in our judgment, taken sufficient notice of the psychic nature of such accounts and of the way in which they must still be limited relative to necessity.

In both V.4 [7] 2 and VI.7 [38] 40 the two acts use terms and relations that, strictly speaking, are proper to Intellect. In V.4 [7] 2.13 the Principle is in fact called the “Intelligible” and is described not only in terms of act but also substance. In VI.7 [38] Plotinus writes that “all thinking comes from something and is of something.” (40.6) One kind of thinking, while having its ground (ὑποκείμενον) in its cause, produces a “superstructure” (ἐπικείμενον) as the actuality of that ground’s potency. The other kind of thinking goes out from its cause accompanied by a substance of its own. The active actuality of the second act no doubt indicates Intellect coming forth *from* the One while the superstructure of the first act would be relative to the first act *of* the One. This exposition of the “doctrine of the two acts” is more explicit than the earlier one from V.4 [7] in that it provides a *description* of the first act and, moreover, a description of its proper *result*. The result of the first act is not merely the second act, but its own determination *qua* superstructure. This result, however, is still constrained by way of analogy with Intellect because

16. This doctrine was first made into a theme of scholarly discussion by Rutten in his paper, “La doctrine des deux actes dans la philosophie de Plotin.” It has since been employed by many scholars with respect to the problem of procession: Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*; Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus*, 2 vols; D.J. O’Meara, *Plotinus: An Introduction to the Enneads*; Narbonne, *La métaphysique de Plotin*; Lacrose, *L’amour chez Plotin*; Pigler, *Plotin—un métaphysique de l’amour*; Ritsuko Okano, “How Does the One Generate Intellect?” and K. Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*.

the simplicity of the One would be greatly compromised were it a substrate upon which a superstructure was formed by some kind of self-actualizing activity. Moreover, it would be indiscernible in relation to Intellect, since this is specifically how Intellect determines itself.

Since the “doctrine of the two acts” falls within persuasive arguments as opposed to arguments from strict necessity, it is a mode of thinking about the One in which discursive reasoning is applied to it. In addition to discursivity we have now found that persuasive reasoning about the One *entails some analogy from Intellect*.

4. *The First Act of the One as Self Loving/Willing according to Narbonne, Lacrose, and Pigler*

From what has been established in the persuasive accounts of the One in VI.7 [38] 40 and VI.8 [39] 13&15–16, we could well arrive at the sort of conclusions about the One which are represented by Lacrose, Pigler, and Narbonne. These scholars have attempted to interpret *how* the Plotinian One is the cause of all things, and they have drawn primarily upon the positive descriptions of the One from VI.8 [39]. Lacrose and Pigler have described the first act most specifically as self-love. Lacrose writes:

Et par cet acte premier et ineffable [...], l'Un accomplit éternellement un retour sur soi, manifesté par son 'amour de soi', qui est à l'origine de tout ce qui existe ou subsiste.¹⁷

The One's act of self-love is understood in a similar way by Pigler, for whom love is that:

sans quoi la procession des êtres n'aurait pu avoir lieu. L'Érôs se diffuse en effet lorsque l'Un, “se tournant vers lui-même,” engendre par ce mouvement, sans en être altéré ni amoindri, la totalité du Réel qui découle de lui.¹⁸

Pigler's argument maintains that this self-love is “*une certaine motion du Bien*”¹⁹ which is the basis of procession, continuity, and conversion.²⁰

17. Lacrose, *L'amour chez Plotin*, 113. In this he appeals not only to the passages in VI.8 [39], where the One is described as possessing a self-directed activity, but also to Hadot's translation of V.1 [10] 7.5–6, in which Intellect would be produced by way of a self-reflexivity of the One. Armstrong's translation renders this same passage to denote something like intelligible matter returning to the One and becoming intellect. For a history of the debate over the rendering of this passage See Ritsuko Okano, “How Does the One Generate Intellect? Plotinus, *Ennead* VI [10] 7.5–6?” French scholars are generally on the same side as Hadot, while English scholars are generally on the same side as Armstrong.

18. Pigler, *Plotin—un métaphysique de l'amour*, 17–18. This renders the self-love of the One as “the rule of procession.” See pp. 22 and 57.

19. *Ibid.* 18. See VI.7 [38] 39.19.

20. *Ibid.* 20.

It is argued that the love of the One is self-diffusive,²¹ but, aside from the typical notions of emanation, we are not given a technical explanation as to *how* this is the case. The self-love of the One could very well be regarded as a “fulfilling perfection,” from which there could be a continued overflow insofar as it is *reflexive*, that is to say, structurally indistinguishable from Intellect. In addressing the problems inherent in this description relative to the pure simplicity of the One, Pigler also wants to maintain that this love is a vision “sans objet”²² and altogether intransitive.²³ In that case, however, it is no longer certain how the One would overflow or, for that matter, why its love is still a self-love.

Another related approach emphasizes the One as freedom and self-willing. Narbonne first discusses how the One can be regarded as a power. This power, characterized as a pure act, is the self-activity of the One: “Pure activité, agir désincarné, l’Un se détermine et se substantifie lui-même,”²⁴ and even “se communique à lui-même.”²⁵ It is in such fashion that the One freely wills itself and engenders itself. In avoiding the more negative ways of speaking about the One,²⁶ Narbonne considers the Principle “beyond being” in that “l’Un est au-delà de l’existence déterminée,”²⁷ while matter is below all determination. Since the One is determined only by itself, this is meant to indicate that the one is beyond being *passively* determined by anything other than itself, and it is in this sense that it is beyond all necessity and thus perfectly free.

According to Narbonne, the “doctrine of the two acts” implies that there must be something which acts *in itself* as the condition of having a productive act.²⁸ It would be in this sense that the One “is borne to his own interior.” (VI.8 [39] 16.13) From this premise, Narbonne concludes that “l’auto-engendrement de l’Un est une pré-condition de la production du monde.”²⁹ That which is new and remarkable in Plotinus, he says, is not a principle by *causa sui*, as such notions had already been in circulation,³⁰ but:

21. Ibid. 18, 57, 62.

22. Ibid. 54 and 67.

23. Ibid. 52 and 69.

24. J.-M. Narbonne, *La métaphysique de Plotin*, 85.

25. Ibid.

26. He makes especial reference to Bréhier’s paper “L’idée du néant et le problème de l’origine radicale dans le néo-platonisme grec.”

27. Narbonne, *La métaphysique de Plotin*, 81.

28. Ibid. 64.

29. Ibid. 105.

30. Ibid. 94. Specifically among the Stoics; Narbonne’s interpretation of Plotinus in *La métaphysique de Plotin* draws heavily upon Stoicism as understood by Hadot.

le transposition de l'idée de l'auto-causalité dans les catégories de la volonté et de la liberté, opérant ainsi une dénivellation au sein du divin entre le vouloir et l'être, la puissance et l'acte.³¹

Thus the One, for Narbonne, is the pure act or power that causes itself by willing itself.

5. *Persuasion Limited by Necessity*

While we accept the use of analogy when attempting to discern *how* the One is the cause of all things, we hold that it is both possible and necessary *to negate anything about the analogy that would destroy the unity of the One*. Plotinus indicates as much in that the One, even as a pure act, left substance outside himself (VI.8 [39] 19.18–19). In the final chapter of VI.8 [39], it is said that this inward act or will “generated nothing further in himself.” (21.18) Therefore, even in this persuasive and discursive mode—in which we speak of an imagined “birth” of the One in order to conceive or give birth to it in ourselves—it is still necessary, in the final analysis, that it be *limited* by the mode of necessity. This is not the same thing as to simply “take everything back” but rather to negate that which *directly contradicts* the results obtained by the arguments from necessity. There are two senses in which arguments from necessity do not permit one to say certain things: something may contradict necessity or necessity may simply be unable to demonstrate it. When we proceed according to persuasion, we seek to derive that which is not provided by necessity, but not that which contradicts necessity.

6. *The Doctrine of Aspect*

In this study, we shall borrow the vocabulary of “tense aspect” to distinguish the results obtained by the two ways according to which we may speak about the transcendent. In the arguments according to necessity, one attempts to think the eternal without any implication of discursive motion. The results of the arguments are apodictic and absolute (unconditional), but also they are either abstract or apophatic because they do not re-produce the higher in the lower. We shall call the result of this kind of argument the “simple aspect” of the object, because it tries to speak of the eternal without implying temporality.

In the arguments according to persuasion, one attempts to think the eternal by introducing the discursive motion of psychic activity. The results of the arguments are synthetic and relative (to reasoning animals), but also they are concrete and positive because they proceed by reproducing the higher in the lower; this is, at once, the reversion of the lower toward the higher. We shall

31. Ibid. 103.

call the result of this sort of argument the “progressive aspect” of the object, because it introduces logical sequences (duration) within the eternal.

In and of themselves, the limited number of negative or abstract truths, which can be derived by way of necessity, present basic but fundamental truths about the eternal while protecting its untouchable transcendence. The simple and negative accounts prevent us from forgetting that, while the transcendent is certainly not opposed to the immanent, it always *exceeds* the immanent. It is because Hegel’s system failed to maintain this sort of negative transcendence that he presented a psycho-discursive construction of the divine as “absolute.” The negative henology of Trouillard and those who follow him have responded to Hegel by prohibiting positive discourse on the One altogether.³² We argue that progressive construction (i.e., the work of science) is permissible if it is conscious of its restricted truth domain (i.e., discursive soul’s way of knowing) and if it *does not contradict* the results of strict negative henology. Such a positive progressive construction we shall call “positive henology.”

Since we must make use of analogy limited by necessity, we must first investigate this self-completing act relative to Intellect so that we may then discern how something like this may also be true of the One.

7. *The Doctrine of Aspect Applied to Intellect*

The simple aspect of Intellect, being the result obtained when we limit ourselves to arguments from strict necessity, is simple eternity or pure monadic being. The progressive aspect of Intellect, being the result obtained when we discursively re-produce Intellect by way of persuasion, is a serially constructed superstructure of all real beings.

The most striking account of the intelligible as simple substrate can be found in Plotinus’ description of eternity in III.7 [45]: *On time and Eternity*. This simple aspect is not intended to be inclusive of intelligible reality, but only the “abiding in one (τὸ μένειν ἐν ἑνί)” (III.7 [45] 2.35) of real substance. In this view, eternal and true reality is not a multiplicity of all real beings in both their self-relation and inter-relations, but it is a single and perfect life abiding in itself:

This is being without any difference. So it does not have any “this or that”; nor, therefore, will you be able to separate it out or unroll (ἐξελίξεις) it or prolong it or stretch it; nor then can you apprehend anything of it as before or after. (III.7 [45] 6.15–17)

32. For an excellent summary of the negative henology of Trouillard and Duméry see W.J. Hankey, *One Hundred Years of Neoplatonism in France*, 154–55.

Eternity here is best understood in terms of what Proclus calls the “whole before the parts.”³³ The “whole before the parts” is the “monad” of each level or taxis in the system, and what Plotinus calls “Intellect” would be one such taxis.³⁴ Thus eternity, simple substrate—or “Being” in the Plotinian triad of Being, Intellect, and Life³⁵—can be regarded as the “whole before the parts” of Intellect.

In VI.7 [38] 13, we find what is perhaps the most vivid progressive account of Intellect, in which it produces a self-completing super-structure:

It is either itself and has not gone forward to anything, or, if it has gone forward, it is another thing as staying behind; so there are two; and if this [one of the two]³⁶ is the same as that, it remains one (μένει ἓν) and has not gone forth; but if it is other, it has gone forth with otherness and from the same and another has made a third one. [...] It is not then possible for the real beings to exist if Intellect is not actively at work, forever working one thing after another [...] But it is everywhere itself (πανταχοῦ δ' αὐτός ἐστι); so its wandering is an abiding one (μένουσιν οὖν ἔχει τὴν πλάνην). And its wandering is in “the plain of truth,” which it does not leave. (VI.7 [38] 13.18–34)

The moment of “remaining” *represents* the simple aspect as the beginning of the discursive motion that proceeds. This “going forward” is not, however, a “going out,” but it is really a “going within”; it “moves always to the interior.” (VI.7 [38] 14.16) Thus the remaining monad is the starting point of an inward progression such that it is also “the plain of truth” in which the discursive movement of otherness (the work of intellection) produces all of the real beings in a serial sequence: “one thing after another.” This remaining, as it stands in relation to the “going forward,” *should not*, however, be *identified* with the intelligible monad taken *by itself*. This will be especially true when we apply this method to the One, since “it is necessary for there to be a one by itself before the one with another” (V.6 [24] 4.8–9). It is best to identify it with the *beginning* of Intellect, as conceived in discursive reasoning, while the movement of otherness is the discursive unfolding of that beginning within itself.

The “third one” in the above is the *product* of the work which goes forward. As a whole it is the “whole of the parts,” of which each is a “whole in the parts”, since each Intellect must reflect all of the others within itself.³⁷ This “whole of the parts,” in which each part is a reflection of the whole, is the *superstructure* that unfolds and completes the simple substrate. In what way,

33. Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, Props. 66–74.

34. For Proclus, “Intellect” is divided into the Intelligible, the Intellectual-Intelligible, and the Intellectual.

35. See VI.6 [34] 7–8.

36. Armstrong’s insertion.

37. V.8 [31] 4.9–12.

however, can something *like* this be said of the One itself without merely speaking of a hyperbolic Intellect?

The persuasive mode by which Plotinus presents the “birth” of the One does not give us its first act any more than the birth of Intellect, in which the indefinite finds limit in reverting to the One, gives us its first act. It is only the beginning of the investigation, providing us with the basis upon which we can think the first act. On the one hand, the attempts made by Pigler and Narbonne do not sufficiently limit the persuasive mode by the necessary while, on the other hand, they *stop short* of investigating the proper superstructure produced by the One—they stop short of the progression as such. Thus, from the One as “born into itself” there are three steps that must be taken. First, we must offer a conception of the One purified of any element that contradicts necessity, while also making sure that this conception remains discernable relative to our conception of Intellect. Second, we must ensure that our conception can be the basis of some kind of explicating “superstructure.” Third, we must be able to discern what this “superstructure” is.

III. THE DOCTRINE OF ASPECT APPLIED TO THE ONE

This section will explain how our doctrine of aspect can be applied to the One. We shall do this by producing two “virtual triads” of the One. We call these triads “virtual” because they only prefigure Intelligible triadic motion. The first triad will only present simple results derived from necessity. While they denote three perspectives upon this aspect, these moments do not indicate any kind of act or motion on the part of the One. The second triad will present progressive results derived from persuasion (but limited by necessity) and, while they denote minimal activity and motion on the part of the One, these moments do not constitute an intelligible self-reflexive activity.

These triads are modeled after the Procline triad of limit, the unlimited, and the mixed.³⁸ The limit is that which remains or abides, the unlimited is the power which proceeds or generates, and the mixed is that which results from the return of the second to the first. The simple triad as a whole is according to “limit” and so all three moments are, as it were, “in the mode of the first” such that nothing is as yet proceeding or returning, but these moments are prefigured in the simplicity of the One itself. The progressive triad is according to the “unlimited” and, in this henological context, the unlimited will *already* be limited (just as persuasion here is limited by necessity), and this is why two triads will be sufficient to render the investigation complete.

38. Proclus, *Théologie Platonicienne*, livre III, 30–40.

1. *The Simple Triad of the One: Identity, Remaining, Exclusivity*

1.1 Identity

We already encountered the first term of this triad in the argument from necessity in VI.8 [39], where it is said that the One is “defined by its uniqueness (μοναχῶς), and not of necessity.” (9.11) Plotinus continues to explain that “this uniqueness comes from the principle itself (παρ’ αὐτοῦ).” (9.14) Again, it did not happen to be, “but this ‘had to be’ is principle of all things that had to be.” (9.16) The One “had to be” this uniqueness, not only as that one to which all things are to be traced, but this is what the “principle of all things” must be if it is the principle of all things: “For what could anything be if it was not one?” (VI.9 [9] 1.2) All things must be one and the “one of each thing,” insofar as it is that in it which is first, is that which singles it out.³⁹

The One is not the unity of a substrate which would *have* unity as an attribute—it is simply *identical* with unity *itself*. The sense in which the One is the simple and unique identity, prior to being, is expressed by Plotinus when he writes that it “is primarily self and self beyond being (πρώτως αὐτὸς καὶ ὑπερόντως αὐτός)” (VI.8 [39] 14.42). The notion of the One as self or αὐτός has been explored by O’Daly in *Plotinus’ Philosophy of the Self*. This is not, however, to make the One into a kind of thinking or super-subject; it is better, O’Daly argues, to say that “the One appears to be conceived of as the principle of pure identity.”⁴⁰

1.2 Remaining

The One is frequently said to remain or abide (μένειν); it “remains itself by itself, and seeks nothing about itself.” (V.3 [49] 10.52) That this remaining is generally not intended to be an activity is evident in the conclusion from necessity we cited from VI.7 [38]: “But he will stand still in his majesty.” (39.29) Plotinus maintains that “in order that anything else may exist, it is necessary that the One should keep absolutely quiet by itself.” (V.3 [49] 12.35–37) This simple remaining of the One is identical with excessive power:

But that it did not go was due to itself; it was not because it was hindered but because it was itself (ἀλλὰ τῶ αὐτὸ εἶναι) what did not go; and inability to go to the worse does not indicate the powerlessness of what does not go, but its not going comes from itself (παρ’ αὐτοῦ) and is because of itself. And not going to anything else has in it the extreme of power (τὴν ὑπερβολὴν τῆς δυνάμεως). (VI.8. [39] 10.30–34)

39. A more complete treatment of the One as the cause of individuation will be presented in Part II.

40. O’Daly, *Plotinus’ Philosophy of the Self*, 91. Perczel, however, is not convinced that O’Daly avoids making the One into a kind of subject. See Perczel, “L’ ‘intellect amoureux’ et l’ ‘un que est,’” 257.

It is on account of the fact that the One is simply itself that it “does not go” (remains) and this is exceeding power (ὑπερβολήν). The One remaining itself is itself excessive! It is perfect as “having never gone from itself” and evidently this pluperfect perfection is more perfect than that which is perfected upon return. Since the perfected proceeds to generate, it can be argued from necessity *that* the One should generate, but *how* does remaining perfect yield an excess? We cannot demonstrate this from necessity because this “power” here is negatively defined as “not going.” The second moment of the second triad will provide a positive conception of this power.

1.3 The One as Exclusive

That which becomes One, becomes itself. This is the henological law that exceeds all possible ontological speculation. Plotinus makes it clear that whatever has not yet become One “is not yet what one would call ‘itself’ (οὐπω ἔστιν ὃ ἄν εἴποι αὐτό)” (V.3 [49] 15.13) and, conversely, “in turning to itself it [Intellect] turns to its principle.” (VI.9 [9] 2.35–36) Moreover, “it is in looking to the Good that it [Intellect] thinks itself (αὐτὸν νοεῖ)” (V.6 [24] 5.16),⁴¹ and those “outside it” are “outside themselves (αὐτῶν ἔξω).” (VI.9 [9] 7.30) Thus, conversion to the One in no way entails a simple union whereby all things eschatologically collapse back into their principle. Such a collapse is, in fact, structurally impossible. Since the One is “itself”—in becoming “one” each thing becomes “itself.”

What is the real difference between ontology and henology? Why this apparently impossible insistence on the beyond of Being? This is the difference: *A being belongs to being as a part while a one belongs to the one as itself.* Since being is substance it is determinable and thus all participation of being *belongs* to being as one part of its inner determination. This is why Plotinus writes: “if it [the One] had substance, its substance would be its slave.” (VI.8 [39] 19.5–6) If the One were or had a substance, not only would its first act make it many, but it would fail to make each thing “itself” and thus, strictly speaking, nothing would be other than the One. From this it follows that the superstructure resulting from the progressive aspect of the One will not be *of* its substance, since substance will arise only with the second act, but of a *series of identities prior to substance.*

This logic of the One is altogether distinct from the logic of being, the logic of the determination of substance. It is the logical operation of that which is beyond determination, including self-determination. Henology does not escape ontology by turning to mere hyperbole and paradox combined with the empty pretension of doing something loftier than science; it has its

41. This, again, is how Intellect is “born” in V.3 [49] 10–11.

own logic which *strictly follows* from the One—that which turns toward the One is turned toward itself.

While this third term of the first triad of the One clearly prefigures the return of pre-intellectual potentiality upon the One, more importantly for the present investigation it also prefigures the third moment of the second triad of the One, as the basis upon which the *progression of unity will be excluded from the One itself*. It must now be proven that, given the remaining of the One, there must also be a progression of unitary power.

2. *The Progressive Triad of the One—Potency, Concentration, Number*

Just as we formed a triad of the simple aspect of the One, so too shall we form a triad of the progressive aspect of the One. Unlike the first triad, the terms of this triad cannot claim to be altogether independent of positive analogy from Intellect to the One. Moreover, this second triad will permit the soul to apply both its progressive and its figurative nature, in attempting to approximate itself to the One. In both cases, however, none of these additions are permitted to contradict the simplicity of the One and they are to introduce only what is necessary to initiate a positive/progressive account of the One as the cause of all things. Where the One was simple identity in the first triad, we shall find it to be the potency prior to all activity. Where the One remained still and “did not go” in the second moment of the simple triad, we shall now find it to be a kind of ἐπιβολή or inward concentration. Finally, where the One was exclusive in the first triad, we shall now find it to be essential number.

2.1 The One as Potency

Plotinus frequently presents the One as a power (δύναμις) prior to and greater than active actuality/energy (ἐνέργεια). Since the Peripatetics used the term δύναμις to denote potentiality, which is associated with matter, and ἐνέργεια was closely associated with νοῦς (Aristotle’s First principle), the way in which δύναμις is applied to the One must be distinct from both of these uses. Unlike the merely possible, the One is not the power to become all things, but to make all things.⁴² Is this, however, sufficient to distinguish power from active actuality? In what sense, then, is the One the source of all things by way of power?

In *Hénologie, Ontologie, et Ereignis*, Narbonne has in fact criticized the conception of the One as *causa sui*, by way of Proclus.⁴³ His criticism is essentially that self-causation violates the principle of identity,⁴⁴ which, ac-

42. V.3 [49] 15.34–36.

43. Narbonne, *Hénologie, Ontologie, et Ereignis*, 169–71.

44. Ibid. 170–71. Narbonne cites *In Parm* VII 1168, 19–28.

ording to our interpretation, means it violates the One itself, and that this sort of activity endangers the simplicity of the One.⁴⁵ This consideration leads Narbonne toward a conception of the One that implies its causality, without thereby contradicting necessity. With this in mind, he considers the following passage, which responds to the question, “how is the One the principle of all things?”:

By possessing them beforehand. But it has been said that in this way it will be a multiplicity. But it had them in such a way as not to be distinct: they are distinguished on the second level, in the rational form. For this is already actuality; but the One is the potency of all things. (V.3 [49] 15.29–33)

If it is claimed that the One possesses things beforehand without thereby losing its simplicity, it must be the case that they are already pre-possessed, in that the One remains itself. But what does this mean? It is really quite simple. Given the One itself, *every capacity of unity/identity is possible*. Thus we can consistently say that, given One remaining itself, every “one” is pre-possessed. We still, however, have a problem: why should there even be “every capacity” of unity?

2.2 Concentration

Plotinus’ use of the term ἐπιβολή has received much attention in Plotinian scholarship, beginning with the analysis of Rist, who claims that ἐπιβολή “may be Plotinus’ favourite word for the ‘knowledge’ of the One.”⁴⁶ The term is of significant importance in Perczel’s paper “L’‘intellect amoureux’ et ‘l’un qui est,’” in which it is primarily translated as “touching.”⁴⁷ Since the most literal meaning of the term is “laying on” or “throwing on,” the closest approximation with respect to the way Plotinus applies the term to the One may be that of “pressing-on,” from which we can discern the notion of “touch,” for touching connotes a “press.” Concerning the One, Plotinus asks: “what could its attention be other than itself?” (τὸ ἐπιβάλλειν ἑαυτῷ τί ἄν εἴη ἢ αὐτό)” (VI.7 [38] 39.4). The One itself would be this very touch/pressure.⁴⁸

45. Ibid. 172.

46. Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*, 51.

47. Perczel accepts Hadot’s translation of ἐπιβολή as “toucher.”

48. Harrington has recently shown how the term ἐπιβολή is used by Plotinus primarily in terms of knowing, and, more specifically, knowing by way of “construction.” See: Harrington, “The Drunken *Epibole* of Plotinus and its Reappearance in the Work of Dionysius the Areopagite,” 121–23. Since we are only using the term relative to the capacity of discourse to “construct” the causality of the One, this observation is not unwelcome. As we shall see below, the attempt to conceive of the One as the simplest act could just as well be an attempt to conceive of the One as the *most simple construction possible*, and that upon the basis of which all other constructions are to be made.

Later in the same chapter, in differentiating the One from Intellect, Plotinus writes: “that kind of movement, simple and all the same (ἀπλοῦν καὶ αὐτὸ πᾶν), if it is to be something like a touch (οἶον ἐπαφή), has nothing intelligent about it” (VI.7 [38] 39.19–20). Thus the One as touching is “like” a simple and self-same movement, and we take this to indicate how it must be a “self-directed activity.” (VI.8 [39] 16.28)

The character of the One as a kind of ‘pressing on’ or ‘tending toward’ itself is most purified of proto-intellectual connotations in the following passage:

There must therefore be a concentration (συστήναι) into a real one (ἐν ὄντως) outside all multiplicity and any ordinary sort of simplicity, if it is to be really simple. (V.3 [49] 16.15–16)

Narbonne cites this passage immediately after he cites the one from V.3 [49] 15. He notes the unusual use of the term συνίσταμι with respect to the One and expresses some uncertainty with respect to how it should be translated, suggesting “réunion” and “rassemblement” in addition to “concentration,”⁴⁹ but ultimately he takes the sense to indicate an “évocation exceptionnelle d’une sorte de *préfiguration* du postérieur dans l’antérieur.”⁵⁰ In this way the passage would indicate the necessity for a kind of “construction” or “super-structure” in the anterior, but Narbonne does not consider the question concerning what “anterior” must mean here. We shall take συνίσταμι more specifically as *concentration*, or rather, *concentration as the primal construction*. This is the progressive thought of the One’s “remaining still” or “not going,” such that it can now be regarded as a *simple act*, and this is the act of concentration whereby the One is *intensive* power. The One can be regarded as a “self-directed activity” and even as “borne into its interior,” if this is understood to indicate an intensive power or concentration:

From Necessity: “remaining still” or, in negative terms, “not going” (does not act);

From Persuasion: “willing itself”, “self-love,” *causa sui* (acts in a paradoxical way);

Persuasion Limited by Necessity: “pressing-on” or “concentration” (the most simple positive act).

We can find something akin to this notion of “concentration into a one” in Chrétien’s reflections on the Good in the philosophy of Plotinus:

49. Narbonne, *Hénologie, Ontologie, et Erenis*, 175.

50. Ibid. 176.

Our desire for the Good supposes that the Good has already been given as the condition of our being. This contraction [of the Good] is not absence of presence, but excessive presence for which no present could suffice.⁵¹

Chrétien finds this “contraction” of the Good not in the characterization of the Good as *συστήνωαι* (although he may not have noticed this), but in that the One “did not come as one expected, but he came as one who did not come.” (V.5 [32] 8.14–15) Again, we find here a pluperfect act in this “contraction,” and it is a helpful figure because a contraction denotes a pressing-in and pressing-in as a kind of *contact* or concentration into one, prior to all multiplicity. “Very well,” one might say, “but what has all this to do with how it is that the One can generate anything without making the One out to be multiple?” If we take progressive intensive power (concentration) without any substance in which to proceed, we will obtain the required formulation.

Taking up the “concentration into a one” as a contraction, we find that, since there is *no place* into which the One should contract, *a place would be made in this very contraction by way of displacement*: unlimited intensive power yields unlimited extensive power. The displacement will also be *like* Intellect’s inner activity, in that it will render the unfolding explication of its *nature*, but the One’s concentration excludes even its own unfolding explication. This is why “he does not even have [the] good in himself” (V.5 [32] 13.2–3), and “It is not even good for itself; for they need it, but it could not need itself.” (VI.7 [38] 41.28–29) Let us review the argument:

If...

1. The simple unitary remaining of the One must be supreme power.
2. This power as a positive act is best conceived as a “concentration.”
3. The unity is exclusive; figuratively this means that there is no “place” (substrate) within the One into which the progression may “go forward.”
4. By analogy with Intellect, we can say that the progression will be the unfolding explication of the One’s unitary nature, the “superstructure” resulting from the first act.

Then ...

Even in the progressive/positive aspect of the One, the One itself is only “the simple in the progressive,” that is to say, “concentration” conceived as a simple act, the progression of which is *excluded*. This is the very first otherness: the *exclusion of the progression of unity* from the very intensive abiding of the One itself.

51. J.L. Chrétien, *The Unforgettable and the Unhoped for*, 27.

2.3 Number

The earliest passage in which Plotinus indicates what the “superstructure” produced by the “first act” of the One might be is to be found in V.2 [11]:

All these things are the One and not the One: they are he because they come from him; they are not he, because it is in abiding in himself that he gives them. It is like a long life stretched out at length; each part is different from what comes next in order (ἕτερον ἑκάστον τῶν μορίων τῶν ἐφεξῆς), but the whole is continuous (συνεχῆς) with itself, but with one part different from another, and the earlier does not perish in the latter. (V.2 [11] 2.25–31)

Here we find a “one after another” emerging from the One in a discrete serial succession which is, as a whole, continuous or “held together.” Compare this with the following description of the progression of the essential one number in VI.6 [34]:

But if that nature generates a kind of succession (εἰ δ' ἐφεξῆς οἶον γεννώη ἢ φύσις), or rather has generated, or does not stand still at one thing of those which it has generated, but makes a kind of continuous one (οἶον συνεχῆ ἕνα ποιούσα), when it draws a line and stops more quickly in its outpouring it generates the lesser numbers, but when it moves further, not in other things but in its very own movements, it brings the greater numbers into existence. (VI.6 [34] 11.24–31)⁵²

The generation of the numbers is, in the words of Nikulin, made up of “consecutive stops,”⁵³ that is to say, *a sequence of simple acts*. The anonymous “each” produced in V.2 [11] are now identified as numbers. The unfolding of number is also described in VI.3 [44] 12.13–15, where the progression (προϊούσα) of the unit (τὸ ἓν) results in a discrete “few” when it stops quickly and “many” if it goes further. This is contrasted with the “point” whose progression results in continuous magnitudes, which are “small” or “large”. We maintain that the first essential number specifically designates the *nature* (φύσις) of the One as that which is displaced by the One as a simple concentration, but it is itself a *continuous* or ongoing act of concentration. The result of a continuous “construction into a one” is a series of discrete ones. In this way, number is not so much the simple made progressive, which would give us substance and magnitude, but the *progression of the simple*.

This generation of the whole essential number is the “superstructure” which results from the One’s first act as an intensive concentration, and it is that from which the “second act” will generate substance. The numbers are the primal identities prior to being, of which each is not a “whole in the part” (each intellect) but a “whole before the parts.” Each is number is *a* one.

52. Cf. V.5 [32] 5.2–15 for a third passage, which could be compared to both of these.

53. Nikulin, “Foundations of Arithmetic in Plotinus: *Enn.* VI.6 (34) on the Structure and Constitution of Number,” 98.

This theory, which makes essential number that which is first produced by the One, is far from the generally received reading of the text. Moreover, it is still not clear how a series of units, whose members must be “more or less one,” is possible. The central purpose of Part II of this paper will be to address these concerns.

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