

**UNITAS MULTIPLEX
AS THE BASIS OF PLOTINUS' CONCEPTION OF BEAUTY:
AN INTERPRETATION OF *ENNEAD* V.8**

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The essay first succinctly points out shortcomings in previous interpretations of Plotinus' notion of beauty. Beauty is to be connected primarily with Intellect, which is to be understood as a special unity in diversity. The section of the essay devoted to aesthetics is therefore preceded by a short analysis of Intellect's unity and diversity. The hypothesis about the primary relation of beauty to the Intellect is then corroborated by a reading of *Ennead* V.8 and further developed. The emphasis is on three basic aspects of beauty: its being a unity of a mixture whose character is shared by all ontological levels; its function of referring to what is above it; and its fundamental accessibility. Though Plotinus opposes the Stoic notion of beauty as symmetry and stresses beauty's simplicity, it follows for him that beauty has the character of *unitas multiplex*, albeit a special one.

Unitas multiplex als Grundlage von Plotins Auffassung von Schönheit. Eine Interpretation von *Enneade* V.8

Der Beitrag thematisiert zunächst kurz die Schwächen, die die Interpretationen von Plotins Auffassung von Schönheit in der Fachliteratur aufweisen. Schönheit ist vor allem mit dem Intellekt zu verbinden, und dieser ist als spezifische Einheit in der Mannigfaltigkeit aufzufassen. Dem Hauptteil des Beitrags wird deshalb eine kurze Analyse der Einheit und Mannigfaltigkeit des Intellekts voran gestellt. Aufgrund einer Interpretation von *Enneade* V.8 wird die oben erwähnte Hypothese über die primäre Bindung der Schönheit an den Intellekt im Text nachgewiesen und ihre Interpretation vertieft. Drei Grundcharakteristika der Schönheit werden hervorgehoben: 1. die Tatsache, dass die Schönheit die Einheit einer Mischung ist, die alle ontologischen Ebenen umfasst, 2. ihre Funktion als Verweis auf etwas Höheres und 3. die ihr inhärente fundamentale Zugänglichkeit. Obwohl Plotin sich also gegenüber der stoischen Auffassung von Symmetrie abgrenzt und die Einfachheit der Schönheit betont, hat die Schönheit bei ihm den Charakter einer – gleichwohl spezifischen – *unitas multiplex*.

General histories of aesthetics usually present Plotinus' conception of beauty as a theory intentionally competing with the concept of beauty based on symmetry and harmony. For example, Władysław Tatarkiewicz, the author of the still largest history of aesthetics¹ and an important work on the history of key aesthetics

To Professor Filip Karfik with deep gratitude.

¹ Władysław Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, vols. 1–3 (The Hague: Mouton; Warsaw: Polish Scientific Publishers, 1970–75).

concepts,² believes that Plotinus is a critic of the 'Great Theory,' according to which 'beauty consists in the proportions of parts, more precisely in the proportions and arrangement, or, still more precisely, in the size, quality and number of the parts'.³ Plotinus' theory was, according to Tatarkiewicz, intended as a supplement or, rather surprisingly, even an explanation of the Great Theory, by referring to such an idea of beauty, which makes it possible to allow for the fact that even simple things can be beautiful. From the perspective of Plotinus' own system, then, Tatarkiewicz characterized beauty as a manifestation of ideas or archetypes, that is, as Intellect.⁴ Elsewhere, Tatarkiewicz claims that for Plotinus beauty is an expression of the soul,⁵ though it is not quite clear from his interpretation how the two claims are related.⁶ It is interesting that in some cases Tatarkiewicz notes that beauty for Plotinus is linked to the question of unity and diversity,⁷ though he always considers beauty as *unitas multiplex* to be a fundamentally different, indeed competing, theory of beauty with regard to the Great Theory,⁸ of which Plotinus is, in his version, ultimately a reformer.⁹

Similarly, Katharine Everett Gilbert, in her renowned *History of Esthetics*, presents Plotinus as an opponent of the conception of beauty based on harmony, and summarizes his conception by referring to the theory of participation in the idea mediated by the soul.¹⁰ Despite the fact that, unlike Tatarkiewicz's interpretation, Gilbert's relatively concise interpretation is accurate, it is not particularly helpful.

² Władysław Tatarkiewicz, *A History of Six Ideas: An Essay in Aesthetics*, trans. Christopher Kasparek (The Hague: Nijhoff; Warsaw: Polish Scientific Publishers, 1980).

³ *Ibid.*, 125; Władysław Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, vol. 1, *Ancient Aesthetics*, trans. Adam and Ann Czerniawski (The Hague: Mouton; Warsaw: Polish Scientific Publishers, 1970), 319.

⁴ Tatarkiewicz, *History of Six Ideas*, 137, 151; Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 1:319–20.

⁵ Tatarkiewicz, *History of Six Ideas*, 126, 137; Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 1:319.

⁶ Tatarkiewicz himself also notes this ambiguity, though he attributes it to Plotinus. See Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 1:320.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:319–20.

⁸ Tatarkiewicz, *History of Six Ideas*, 136.

⁹ I will ignore other points of contention. For example, Tatarkiewicz sees a difference in Plato's and in Plotinus' conceptions of beauty; Plato, he argues, completely rejects sensuous beauty, whereas Plotinus acknowledges it (*History of Aesthetics*, 1:318; *History of Six Ideas*, 130). Beauty, for Plotinus, is, apparently, exceptional in that only beauty constitutes the link with a perfect world, by which Tatarkiewicz probably means Intellect (*History of Aesthetics*, 1:318). Also, in his interpretation, the founders of the Great Theory are the Pythagoreans, from whom it was then adopted by Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics and, by means of Plotinus' supplementation, Pseudo-Dionysius, and eventually by all philosophers of the Middle Ages (*History of Six Ideas*, 125–27). On the last point, see note 17 below.

¹⁰ Katherine E. Gilbert and Helmut Kuhn, *A History of Esthetics* (New York: Macmillan, 1939), 111–18.

Gilbert has ignored the fact that participation in the idea is special in Plotinus because each idea is all the other ideas and the whole, in other words Gilbert has not fully appreciated the special nature of the hypostasis of Intellect. If, then, worldly beauty is the embodiment of the idea of beauty, it is also the embodiment of the Intellect as a whole. If, then, we wish to understand what beauty is, we must ask that question about the Intellect as well.

Unlike general histories of aesthetics, specialized articles by leading Plotinus scholars do not claim that the question of beauty in Plotinus is exhausted in the question of participation in the idea. They note that the special nature of Intellect, thanks to which each of its parts is like the whole and the whole is like each of its parts, enables these scholars to call Intellect *per se* the primary place of beauty. For this premise, Werner Beierwaltes has assembled all the necessary material, starting correctly from the fact that beauty is primarily characterized by intelligibility, indeed that it is Intellect itself. Thanks to participation in the idea of beauty, form enters into matter and, consequently, the beautiful thing becomes an organized whole.¹¹ This uniting of diversity is also the basis of being of individual things, with being and beauty merging in Intellect.¹² Beierwaltes continuously points to the special dynamic unity of Intellect, in which everything different (the individual ideas) is continuously united into simplicity of Intellect, which is pure self-reflection.¹³ Nowhere in this work, however, does he ever take the step that is available, that is, to understand beauty as the special unity in diversity, which is represented by Intellect. Similarly, Pierre Hadot understands that in uniting with Intellect the soul enters the realm of beauty. Also to great effect he quotes a famous passage from the *Enneads* V.8.4, according to which everything becomes everything else in Intellect.¹⁴ In other words, Hadot understands the special nature of Intellect, which he sees as quite simple and at the same time dynamically all-encompassing, in other words, diverse.¹⁵ He too therefore is on the verge of understanding beauty as a *unitas multiplex* of a special nature, which is given by the distinctiveness of the hypostasis of Intellect. But he does not take this substantial final step either, though the gathered material would be up to the task.

I believe that one must take this last step and link the question of beauty in Plotinus with the question of the special diversity and simplicity of Intellect, that is,

¹¹ Werner Beierwaltes, 'The Love of Beauty and the Love of God', in *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman*, ed. Arthur H. Armstrong, *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest* 15 (London: Routledge, 1986), 299–300.

¹² *Ibid.*, 302.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Pierre Hadot, *Plotinus, or The Simplicity of Vision*, trans. Michael Chase (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), 37. See also my analysis of the relevant chapter below.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 39–40.

to look at beauty through the prism of the question of unity and diversity are. In this article I start from an analysis of *Ennead* V.8, 'On the Intelligible Beauty', and I outline Plotinus' conception of beauty through this prism. This will require continuously taking into account the distinctive nature of Plotinus' thought, which develops in a constant struggle for expression while concentrating fully on the subject of his investigation, which brings with it the necessity always to contextualize carefully all his premises. Rather than a shortcoming of his thought, Plotinus' free use of terms¹⁶ is an expression of its precision. Using *Ennead* V.8, I endeavour to show that beauty in Plotinus' system is of the nature of an all-permeating mixture and it acts as a reference to something higher, which is accessible to everyone at a basic level. In this respect it runs through all ontological levels. The bond between beauty and Plotinus' metaphysical plan requires at least a brief outline of Plotinus' conception of Intellect, which is key to the interpretation of this beauty and which I present before analysing V.8.¹⁷ My aim here is therefore not a systematic explanation of Plotinus' conception of beauty throughout the *Enneads*, for that is a task that would exceed the scope of this article.

I. INTELLECT AS *UNITAS MULTIPLEX*

For a full presentation of the hypostasis of Intellect one would need to consider it from the perspective of its genesis, its (productive) lingering in itself, and its repeated return to the One. For the purposes of this article, however, an outline of the very activity of the actualized Intellect, that is, of the Intellect already established by a 'conversion', or 'turning back' (*ἐπιστροφή*) to the One will suffice, and that too will be markedly axiomatic.¹⁸ Plotinus approaches his

¹⁶ The application of terms depending on context is a typical feature of Plotinus' thought. One and the same term can therefore mean something quite different depending on the context, just as a whole statement can sometimes not be uttered in a certain sense, whereas in another it can. See also p. 186 below and note 49. This contextual and perspectival use of language stems from Plotinus' understanding of the nature of language. See in particular the famous passage from *Enn.* VI.7, in which Plotinus presents the ways of making a statement about the One. For an overview of this topic, see also Arthur H. Armstrong, *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus* (1940; repr., Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1967), 6–28.

¹⁷ In my opinion, (although in this article the premise remains only a proposal for future consideration), Plotinus is following on not from the Great Theory as Tatarkiewicz asserts, but from the traditional Greek understanding of beauty as *unitas multiplex*, no matter how much it assumes a special form in Plotinus' original system.

¹⁸ The conception of Intellect that I subscribe to and the question of its emergence and return to the One may usefully be compared in particular, to Eyjólfur Kjalar Emilsson, *Plotinus on Intellect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Armstrong, *Architecture*; John Bussanich, *The One and Its Relation to Intellect in Plotinus: A Commentary on Selected Texts*, *Philosophia Antiqua* 49 (Leiden: Brill, 1988), and, lastly, Hadot, *Plotinus*.

description of the activity of the actualized Intellect from several sides. Their common point appears to be the question of unity in diversity. For, from the perspective of the participation in the One, the actualized Intellect cannot be absolute unity, because Intellect would in that way become the One itself, which means that it would be transcending itself in the form of 'epitrophic' Intellect. As the first derivation from the One, however, it must have the greatest possible share in the unity of the One, and is therefore unity in diversity.¹⁹ The *unitas multiplex* of Intellect is, however, so strong that it is not merely a unified diversity like, for example, soldiers forming a military unit. Plotinus, by contrast, is greatly concerned to emphasize the paradoxical nature of Intellect, which he compares to the relationship between a theorem of science and science as a whole (see, for example, III.9.2, IV.3.2, IV.9.5, V.9.8, and VI.2.20). He is convinced that each individual axiom contains a whole science, because it is causally bound to the other scientific axioms with which it creates its system. In that sense, each part of the special whole of science is itself the whole and the whole is also each individual part, because they are its content. Intellect is therefore a strongly unified unity in diversity and each worldly *unitas multiplex* is only an imitation of this original. Naming this second hypostasis the One-many (ἐν πολλά), compared to the previous the One (ἐν), and the following 'the One and the many' (ἐν καὶ πολλά), Plotinus has inventively captured the intensity of the unity of Intellect.

He offers two explanations for the diversity of Intellect. On the one hand, Intellect is essentially double, as the subject-object relation (for example, in V.4.2 and V.3.10). On the other hand, he repeatedly emphasizes the plurality of the objects of its intellection (νόησις), that is, the plurality of ideas (for example, in V.3.10 and VI.7.39). These two answers may be understood, however, as essentially united: we must only assume that the difference in the order of the subject-object relation somehow implies a difference in the object of the thinking of Intellect itself.²⁰ Intellect needs to be understood as itself thinking that it itself is.²¹ That means that it is essentially a composite in the sense that the subject's self-reflecting comprises the reflecting subject itself, and that the subject is thus part of the reflected object.²² It is therefore the same diversity that distinguishes the subject from the object and the object as such. It is of

¹⁹ As Emilsson has aptly put it (*Plotinus on Intellect*, 109), Intellect does the second best thing – it is a whole of the parts.

²⁰ I am indebted here to Emilsson's interpretation in *Plotinus on Intellect*.

²¹ Emilsson's formulation (*ibid.*, 109). This is an important shift from Aristotle's conception of the divine mind. His god does not think itself as a thinking act.

²² Perhaps that is also why Hadot is reluctant to use the term 'reflection' for the life of Intellect. Because, after all, the immediacy of its noetic activity escapes this categorization. See Hadot, *Plotinus*, 41.

course the One that is the true object of the intellection of Intellect, its desire, and final cause, but Intellect cannot truly think it, because of the absolute transcendence of the One. In its desire for the One, the Intellect therefore thinks the One in a way that it divides itself into the thinking subject and an image of the One, which it contains and is also itself. By means of the act of thinking it therefore does not reach the desired object itself, but reaches itself as the subject-object.²³ That is why it is no contradiction when Plotinus states that Intellect desires the One and also itself. The desire of the potential Intellect, that is, Intellect not yet established in a logical genetic construction, although in reality always already constituted Intellect, is therefore one and has only two aspects. Although it is the desire for the One, it is articulated as the desire for its own analogical self-sufficiency. Intellect can, however, achieve it only insofar as its own nature allows it to, that is, it can only be submaximally unified, to be true *unitas multiplex*. Plotinus' conception of thinking thinking about itself, reflexivity, contains this special loop or rolling up into itself, which enables one to conceive of two differences within reflexivity as being one and the same.

Intellect itself, as the whole of the ideas and also each individual idea, is therefore the content of Intellect, which Plotinus also expresses by talking about ideas as individual Intellects. As we have seen, he endeavours to think about the relations between ideas using an analogy of science in relation to the individual theorems of science (see, for example, VI.2.20 and V.9.8). In that sense, his premise in VI.2.19, according to which the lower genera emerge by the differentiation of the higher ones, is quite understandable. This differentiation is described more precisely in III.8.8 and also V.3.10 as unfolding (*ἐξελίσσῳ*) and as movement (*κίνησις*), process (*πρόοδος*), or activity (*ἐνέργεια*) in VI.7.13. The activity of self-thinking therefore takes places as going to the lowest species and returning to the highest genera.²⁴ Consequently, Intellect thinks everything at once, but differentiatedly. Intellect is thus completely transparent to itself; individual ideas/thoughts have self-awareness and each of them is both itself and the whole. That means that each idea is completely without

²³ Emilsson, *Plotinus on Intellect*, 108.

²⁴ Such a conception of the activity of Intellect would perhaps also be at least one way of answering the question of the existence of the ideas of individuals, which arises because of mutually contradictory claims of the various *Enneads*. The ideas of individuals could be kinds of *logoi* of universal ideas, into which these develop in the movement of emerging, which, however, remain at the level of Intellect, because they are immediately 'rolled back up into' general structures of relations. This rough notion could then also at least indicate the direction of possible considerations about the individuality of the soul in Intellect during its ascent – the soul could thus maintain at least a certain degree of individuality, without splitting the unity of Intellect.

reference to anything external, which it would otherwise comport with as its image. Ideas are not true; they are the truth. In that sense Intellect is situated on the boundary of language; it is not discursive in the manner of the psychic *logos*, but is an intelligible structure of mutual relations, which are reflected by language.

These elementary facts about Plotinus' hypostasis of Intellect have to suffice at this point. What is central to my purpose is its character of unity in diversity *par excellence*, conceived in the manner of theorems of science. This outline now makes it possible to use an analysis of V.8 to reconstruct Plotinus' conception of beauty.

II. ENNEAD V.8: ON THE INTELIGIBLE BEAUTY

II.1. THE WAY TO SPIRITUAL BEAUTY, PLOTINUS' CONCEPTION OF BEAUTY IN *TEXNH* (V.8.1)

Whereas in I.6, Plotinus asks what beauty is in general and develops an answer with regard to the beginner reader, in V.8 he turns to the advanced reader, who has already managed to behold the spiritual cosmos.²⁵ Together with the advanced reader, Plotinus wishes to contemplate the question of the manner of attainability of beauty of Intellect. He assumes that the person who beholds beauty of Intellect will also be capable of a spiritual relationship with the One. We may understand this as follows: to behold the beauty of Intellect really means to understand Intellect as such, and, for Plotinus, to understand something means to be able to articulate the causes of the relevant thing,²⁶ that is, to establish it as an emerging activity, constituted in itself and returning²⁷ or as an internal and external activity.²⁸ With Intellect, that therefore means being able to contemplate it in relation to the One.

As a guideline to understanding the means of attainability of beauty of Intellect, Plotinus compares an unworked stone with a statue, by which he endeavours to lead his reader to spiritual beauty as the cause of the beauty of the sculpture. He therefore proceeds similarly as in I.6, from the sensuous upwards. The statue that he has in mind must not, however, be made as a portrait of a specific person, but, instead, on the basis of all beautiful people, which means according to an

²⁵ I assume that I too can consider the reader of *Estetika* advanced.

²⁶ Michael F. Wagner, 'Plotinus on the Nature of Physical Reality', in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 130.

²⁷ Maria Luisa Gatti, 'Plotinus: The Platonic Tradition and the Foundation of Neoplatonism', in Gerson, *Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, 10–37.

²⁸ Emilsson, *Plotinus on Intellect*.

idea. Such a statue, brought to this mode of beauty, will be beautiful, or more precisely, it will be only as beautiful as the sculptor has succeeded in giving form to the matter of the stone.²⁹ This comparison with unworked stone then provides Plotinus with an argument for indentifying the form and cause of beauty, because if matter itself were the cause of the beauty of the statue, the unworked stone would have to be equally beautiful. Matter itself is not even the mediated cause of the beauty of the statue in the sense that the pertinent form would already be in it and the matter would, so to speak, yield to the statue.³⁰ Rather, according to Plotinus, the one who spiritually contemplates, that is the craftsman (*τεχνίτης* or, here, *δημιουργός*), invests the matter with form.³¹ We have to understand this identification in connection with Plotinus' conception of all reality as contemplating and fruitful, that means as contemplation, as it is interpreted particularly in III.8.³² The unity of the two aspects, the noetic and the creative, is well captured in Greek by the expression *τέχνη*. Plotinus uses *τέχνη* to express that which, by means of the *τεχνίτης*, is

²⁹ Here and later in this example, I use matter in the Aristotelian sense with regard to the forming principle, that is, not in the technical sense of matter (*ύλη*) as the most remote emanation of the One. For stone is *ύλη* already formed by the idea of stone by means of the world-soul. Generally, however, with regard to the forming principle, Aristotelian matter as the diversity unified by form represents properties that Plotinus attributes to *ύλη* as such.

³⁰ It contains only the idea of stone, not, for example, the idea of man, which would not invest the sculpture with man until the *τεχνίτης* did so. See below.

³¹ The Greek words *τεχνίτης* and *τέχνη* I leave untranslated, because the English equivalent, 'art', may in this case be misleading. The Greeks understood the term *τέχνη* as the 'ability to produce things so long as it was a regular production based on rules' (Tatarkiewicz, *History of Six Ideas*, 50). Consequently, *τέχνη* came out of the definition of intellectual activity and was linked to knowledge, not to inspiration, intuition, or imagination. For such an area of work, the Greeks reserved the term *μουσική*, in which the *μουσικός* communicated with the gods and was inspired by them. That is also testified to by the fact that *μουσική* arose from the traditional ritual purification, which used imitation to represent order and the Greeks called *χορεία*. See Robert Parker, 'Greek Religion', in *The Oxford History of the Classical World*, ed. John Boardman, Jasper Griffin, and Oswyn Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 254–74. *Τέχνη* was therefore something definitely learnable, which is in direct contradiction to later theories of the artist-genius. Nor was *τέχνη* primarily linked with beauty. The definition of beauty as the common denominator of most kinds of art, as we understand it today, was not settled on until after many debates in the late eighteenth century. See Paul O. Kristeller, 'The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics II', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 13 (1951): 19–20.

³² According to this, everything stems from contemplation, participates in contemplation, and aims towards it whenever possible. After all, Intellect, the structure of intelligible forms, is everything, and it is everything only in so far as it participates in it. But Intellect is also the self-relating movement of contemplation. Consequently, everything that participates in Intellect also participates in its internal activity – contemplation – and is, in that sense, alive. The being of every thing becomes, on the model of Intellect, the active performance of self-relation.

linked with the idea according to which the *τεχνίτης* creates. *Τέχνη* is the human form of participation in Intellect; it is the spiritual means of knowing, but lacks the quality of being immediately all-encompassing, unlike its model. It is through his productive knowledge, his participation in *τέχνη*, that the *τεχνίτης* is able to form the matter and portray a person at all. Beauty in *τέχνη*, which Plotinus talks about further in the text, is therefore beauty in contemplation, and what is contemplated, the ideas themselves in a weakened form, is the ideas themselves, that is, Intellect. With his participation in *τέχνη* the *τεχνίτης* makes himself similar to Intellect, to productive self-contemplation. That is why Plotinus can say that beauty in *τέχνη* is a higher beauty and only lower beauty enters the sculpture and to the extent that the matter of that link, the body, submits to what is created, in other words, to the extent that the sculpture participates in the idea, which it makes present in the world. The idea is present in the world, however, in the form of the reason-principle (*λόγος*), which the *τεχνίτης* invests in the thing.³³ *Τέχνη* as the cause of the beauty of its products, allowing them participation in what it itself has, in beauty, is more beautiful than its products. Plotinus immediately identifies this with a higher degree of unification, and, to illustrate his point, uses analogies such as decreasing body strength, heat, and potency while they diffuse into space. This corresponds to Plotinus' hierarchic understanding of the universe.³⁴ And one could also formulate his idea by saying that the cause is always homogenous with what is caused, in the sense that it lends it what it itself has, but the caused can only accept this character of its cause in a weakened form. Plotinus wishes to apply this principle of the superiority of the cause universally, and illustrates it here with the example of *μουσική* as the cause of the one who is a *μουσικός*. Indeed, he even mentions a kind of other-worldly *μουσική*, which is the cause of worldly *μουσική*.³⁵

³³ John Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 84–102.

³⁴ Dominic J. O'Maera, 'The Hierarchical Ordering of Reality in Plotinus', in Gerson, *Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, 66–81.

³⁵ This example is not, however, fully analogical to the previous causal order in *τέχνη*. Not only do we have here an other-worldly *μουσική* as the cause of its worldly counterpart, which could perhaps be interpreted as the aforementioned distinction between the knowledge of Intellect and its image, human knowledge, but the causality of the *μουσική* and of the man of the muses is not analogical to *τέχνη* and its product. Perhaps here, however, Plotinus wishes only to illustrate the superiority of the cause, as we saw above, and was not so concerned with finding a precise analogy. Moreover, *τέχνη* is the cause, for example, of a statue mediated through a sculptor, and so he could be called the cause of the sculpture, and sculpting itself, that is, the *τέχνη*, could be called the cause of his sculptural nature.

That is why Plotinus opposes those who do not sufficiently appreciate art for its imitative nature.³⁶ His objection is, on the one hand, that nature itself is an imitation of something higher, that is, the ideal world of Intellect, and, on the other hand, he believes that the object of art's imitation is the same as nature's.³⁷ To make a statue, as Plotinus said earlier, means not to portray a specific person,³⁸ but to imbue the physical with the idea itself.

II.2. BEAUTY IN NATURE, THE TURN TO THE BEAUTY OF THE SOUL (V.8.2)

Plotinus, however, now wants to leave the field of art and to turn to perceptible nature itself, the seeming subject of the imitation of art. Here too he inquires into the cause of beauty and, as in *τέχνη*, he rejects the notion that it could be matter (represented here by menstrual fluid). Nor is a physical property, like colour or shape, the true cause of the beauty of an object of nature, as when Plotinus refuses to acknowledge stone as the mediating cause of the beauty of the statue. Also with regard to objects of nature, the true source of their beauty is therefore the idea in which the relevant thing participates. Plotinus supports his premise with a brief debate with an imaginary opponent, whom he first grants that matter (here *ὄγκος* – mass) can be beauty, but only in order to entangle him immediately in an aporia. For, in such a case, the reason-principle (*λόγος*), which the opponent acknowledges as the productive principle in contrast to matter, would not, as its opposite, be beautiful. Considering the principle of the superiority of the cause, however, this implication is completely

³⁶ According to Rist, this concerns Plato himself, whose negative attitude to depicting *τέχνη* appears particularly in Book X of the *Republic*. On the other hand, Plato leaves open the possibility of its rehabilitation and so his attitude to the whole question is not so straightforward. For more on this complicated question, see Julius M. E. Moravcsik and Philip Temko, eds., *Plato on Beauty, Wisdom, and the Arts* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982), and also Jakub Jinek, *Gerechtigkeit zwischen Tugend und Gesetz* (Saarbrücken: SVH, 2009). For Rist's conception, see Rist, *Plotinus*, 184.

³⁷ Consequently, one cannot agree with Schubert, according to whom Plotinus appreciates the beauty of nature more than *τέχνη*. According to Schubert, the soul, or the life that the soul gives to things, should be the distinguishing criterion. There is, however, no reason to assume that the *τεχνίτης* could not in principle be equal to the abilities of nature. Plotinus, moreover, puts great emphasis on the fact that nature and *τέχνη* are on the same level as far the aspect of *μίμησις* is concerned and he also thematizes the idealizing aspect in *τέχνη*. For his conception, see Venanz Schubert, *Plotin: Einführung in sein Philosophieren* (Freiburg: Alber, 1973), 67.

³⁸ To this I would at least add 'in a way that is accessible to our senses', because it is, I believe, conceivable that a sculptor creates a statue of a specific person. Plotinus, moreover, admits this variant in the immediately following lines, when he talks about a statue of Zeus that has not been made according to having perceived something with the senses, but according to how it would be if he appeared to the sculptor's eyes. The statue of Zeus is thus his ideal portrait, which means that it has been created according to an individual idea.

unacceptable to Plotinus. Moreover, the same idea may make both the small and the great beautiful, so it depends, as Plotinus asserts, neither on the quantity nor on the size of matter. Another argument that Plotinus brings in to support his position makes reference to a certain elegance with which one can avoid the question of how visual phenomena find their way into our souls if our eyes are so small. From Plotinus' perspective only form enters us, not matter itself, and so the question of eye-size is irrelevant.³⁹ Ultimately, Plotinus again discusses the principle of the superiority of the cause, but this time only with regard to homogeneity. For, according to him, if the cause of beauty were ugly, it could not create its opposite, and if it were neither beautiful nor ugly, why it begets the beautiful rather than the ugly would not be comprehensible. But if we look at nature in the right way, that is, looking into its core, as it were, and not at its outer expression, that is to say, looking at the reason-principle (*λόγος*), rather than at the motion that it causes, we then understand that nature is actually beautiful, and therefore so is its cause. Plotinus then compares the confusion of the ordinary person, who does not see spiritual beauty behind the outer façade of nature, to Narcissus' fatal misunderstanding.⁴⁰

And the view inside, of the area of *logos*, also serves Plotinus as a stepping stone to a higher path, to the beauty of the soul. The beauty of spiritual virtues, the sciences, actions, and souls in general, he considers incomparably higher than the beauty of bodies, regardless of how large. According to Plotinus the view of the spiritual beauty of an ugly person is a sufficient reason to call him or her beautiful, and anyone who did not wish to do so, would not, according to him, be able even to see himself or herself as beautiful. Such a person would therefore remain on the sensuously perceptible level and would deceive himself or herself just like Narcissus. Plotinus again emphasizes that in this work he will not turn to such a reader, but to the kind of reader who sees spiritual beauty or has seen it at least once. In such a case, Plotinus makes an appeal to recall the experience that can kindle the required insight from the sensory to the spiritual.

II.3. THE BEAUTY OF THE SOUL AS A STEPPING STONE TO THE BEAUTY OF INTELLECT (V.8.3)

Plotinus begins Chapter 3 with a summary: nature too, not just art, contains the reason-principle (*λόγος*) through which the physical thing is beautiful and in

³⁹ It must be added that Plotinus' own position raises far more difficult questions. For example, how can something that is not spatial be present in the physical, that is, how can the soul be present in the body? Plotinus repeatedly struggles with questions of this kind, for example, in IV.9.

⁴⁰ For further discussion of this, see also I.6 and the interpretation in Margaret R. Miles, *Plotinus on Body and Beauty* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 44.

both cases it comes from the soul. The soul is necessarily, then, more beautiful according to the principle of the superiority of cause. Beauty of the soul is evident especially in virtuous souls, for they, by means of their purification, approach beauty itself, primary beauty, Intellect. And Plotinus again repeats his standpoint from Chapter One: beauty inspires one to contemplate its cause. Here, however, we must expand our interpretation of this standpoint. It is no longer possible, as it had been with Intellect, to identify the understanding of the beauty of the soul with the understanding of the soul as such. For the soul, unlike Intellect, can also be ugly, that is, when it mixes with the body and imitates it.⁴¹ We cannot interpret Plotinus' premise as anchoring the soul at a higher ontological level with the aim of understanding its being. Here the reference to the cause must be based far more on the character of beauty itself. Since we still lack a full view of Plotinus' theory of the beautiful, however, let us for the time being only take note of this thought, which will turn out to be central.

At this stage, the beauty of the soul serves Plotinus anyway only as a stepping stone to a description of Intellect itself. He first of all, however, mentions the difficulty that each such description has. Intellect is by nature on the boundary of speech, by which it is graspable yet is not graspable. Intellect is not graspable to the extent that it is a model of speech, and is in this sense beyond speech. Intellect is graspable to the extent that speech reflects the immanent structure of Intellect. To catch sight of Intellect is, according to Plotinus, possible therefore by one's own inner purification and understanding of one's own part nature, like a found piece of gold that we must wash and also understand that we do not have all gold, just some of it. Intellect can therefore be a starting point within oneself, which one must imitate with all one's soul. Plotinus suggests, however, that one should begin by investigating Intellect in the gods. Intellect in them has a stronger effect and is more visible, which also means, however, that they are more beautiful. It is also true for the gods that they draw their beauty from participation in the idea and not from a beautiful body. Plotinus differentiates between two kinds of god, both of whom have in common superiority over the human soul, that is to say, greater proximity to Intellect. The gods of the first kind live in heaven, and raise their heads above the outer edge of heaven in order to catch sight of the content of Intellect.⁴² The gods of the second kind, merge with ideas themselves, and, as Plotinus figuratively

⁴¹ Never entirely, of course; not by its highest part, which is part of Intellect.

⁴² In the *Phaedrus* Plato discusses these gods, which some interpreters have identified with the Moon, the planets, and perhaps also with the Earth (Pl. *Phdr.* 246d6–249d3). For an interpretation of the gods as heavenly bodies and the Earth, see Heitsch's commentary in Ernst Heitsch, ed., trans., *Phaidros*, by Plato (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 101.

states, live in another heaven, but do not have to look anywhere, because they immediately see all the contents of Intellect, which they themselves are, because, as we have seen, Intellect is of the nature of self-thinking, which it itself is. Plotinus describes this situation to great effect by showing that the individual ideas of earthly existences are the same: everything is everything in Intellect; man is an animal, a plant, the sea, the earth, and the heavens, and vice versa.

II.4. INTELLECT: TRUE BEING, CLEARNESS, PART AND WHOLE (V.8.4)

Plotinus devotes Chapter Four to the special *unitas multiplex* of Intellect. First of all, he describes it with reference to Homer as the easy life of the gods, for whom the truth is a mother, a nurse, existence, and sustenance.⁴³ He then adds the characteristic predicates of Intellect – true being, intuition, transparency, the total absence of darkness, clearness to the core without resistance, which he eventually summarizes poetically as: *φῶς [φανερός] φωτί*, 'light is transparent to light'.⁴⁴ The following passages relate to the inner linkage of Intellect with itself, to each of its parts being a whole, on the model of scientific theorems. Plotinus repeats these characteristics many times and illustrates them with the example of the Sun and the stars, the great and the small, which he makes identical to each other. Though he states that 'the mover does not trouble [the movement] in its going by being different from it [and] rest is not disturbed, for it is not mingled with that which is not at rest',⁴⁵ Plotinus insists that all parts of Intellect are absolutely distinct from each other and thus fully determined. He therefore characterizes Intellect as a differentiated unity of everything, which I have tried to formulate as a simultaneous procession (*πρόοδος*) towards the lowest species and a return (*ἐπιστροφή*) to the highest genera, owing to which Intellect thinks everything both at once and differentiatedly. Plotinus therefore endeavours to think of both moments as parts of the same process, which he inventively expresses with the parable of walking over ground that is itself the walker, and perhaps even better by comparing the simultaneity to an ascent, during which the person ascending is followed every step of the way by his or her own starting point. Consequently, the beauty of Intellect is not relative in any sense, but is truly beautiful, for it is not in anything that would itself not be beautiful.

Plotinus then describes contemplation, which is proper to Intellect, with reference to the mythical figure of Lynceus,⁴⁶ who had the ability to see through

⁴³ Hom. *Il.* 6.138.

⁴⁴ Armstrong's rendering. See Plotinus, *Ennead V*, trans. Arthur H. Armstrong, Loeb Classical Library 444 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), V.8.4.6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, V.8.4.12–13.

⁴⁶ One of the Argonauts. See *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), s.v. 'Argonauts'.

solid objects. Plotinus adds that this is not a look that could satiate itself with its object, since the term 'to satiate' implies a previous emptiness, but *there* everything is eternal and inexhaustible and lives the best life. For this nature of immediate accessibility and the uncoveredness of everything to everything Intellect may legitimately be called true wisdom, which, however, is not an accidental characteristic of Intellect, but is Intellect itself. Knowledge sits only beside and below this wisdom, as Justice sits beside the throne of Zeus, because knowledge on the human scale only aspires to the inclusion of everything in everything and moves in the speech structure of the gradual identification of the subject and its predicate by means of a copula. Moreover, we often wrongly understand this speech structure of human knowledge as an accumulation of various claims. Plotinus is not so interested here in worldly knowledge, but instead inquires into the possibilities of the means of knowledge, which Intellect has, that is, its wisdom, which it itself is. He even considers the contemplation of this question to be central to remaining faithful to Plato's legacy, which at this point he advocates and which is based on understanding knowledge that is not different from that which it itself is in.⁴⁷

II.5. THE FOUNDING OF WISDOM IN INTELLECT, INTELLECT AS A BEAUTIFUL IMAGE (V.8.5)

Plotinus then undertakes a journey to self-relating contemplation and self-thinking, which is intrinsic to Intellect. His starting point is that all creation takes place according to some wisdom, in other words according to some plan, with a certain intention or aim. An example of such a creation is of course the individual *τέχναι*,⁴⁸ whose knowledge Plotinus describes, however, as diversity composed into unity. That is why craftsmen skilled in their field turn to the wisdom of nature, which is unique and which they take apart into diversity for their purposes. If we put this wisdom on the level of nature itself, we have already sufficiently explained Plato's requirement for the special means of thinking of Intellect: not to be one thing in another. But if, together with Plotinus, we distinguish between the reason-principle (*λόγος*) in nature and, on the other hand, nature itself, that is, between the means of being of ideas in the lower part of the soul and the soul itself, then we must inquire into the source of the *logos*, which is that very plan (and therefore wisdom) according to which nature realizes its potential as productive. Here too, according to Plotinus, one may reply that the reason-principle established itself from itself, but if one

⁴⁷ See Pl. *Phdr.* 247d7–e1.

⁴⁸ For my explanation of the Greek understanding of this concept, see note 31.

denies this as Plotinus does, the reason-principle must come from Intellect and we must ask again where Intellect got it from. Here, finally, according to Plotinus, is the source of all wisdom, wisdom itself, which is at the same time all individual beings. And vice versa: all beings are wisdom, from which their dignity and reality originate. Consequently, those beings, which are not identical with wisdom itself, cannot, according to Plotinus, even be real. At the end of the chapter, Plotinus endeavours to describe wisdom, which is Intellect and resides in Intellect's immediate inclusiveness of everything in everything, using a contrast between scientific theorems and beautiful images. He now turns away from his otherwise standard parable involving science and its axioms and believes he can express the *unitas multiplex* of Intellect even better⁴⁹ by comparing it to a beautiful image, because it better captures the immediateness of the view of the whole together with the ordered nature of diversity. But he immediately destroys this parable too, when he seeks to understand images quite paradoxically not as painted, but as real or true (*ὄντα*).

II.6. THE WISDOM OF THE EGYPTIAN SAGES, WISDOM AND ORDERLINESS (V.8.6)
 Plotinus, however, develops his comparison of wisdom to a beautiful image in Chapter 6 by referring to the practices of the Egyptian sages, who, to convey wisdom, did not, according to him, use letters imitating the successive nature of uttered speech, but pictures. These enable an overall insight and do not turn to the dianoetic and bouletic parts of the soul. The successive thinking of speech can, however, be derived from these images for the specific purposes of explaining individual phenomena, as was the case with *τεχνῖται*, who turned to the wisdom of nature. According to Plotinus, if we wish to glimpse the beauty of things, we must look at the wisdom in them, which endows them with orderliness.

II.7. THE CORRECT NOTION OF THE CREATION OF THE COSMOS,
 THE SELF-GROUNDING REALITY OF INTELLECT (V.8.7)
 The orderliness of the cosmos is the topic of Chapter 7. According to Plotinus, we cannot imagine the creation of the cosmos as if its plan had been gradually developed and only then was the cosmos created according to it the way *τεχνῖται* produce various objects. There are, according to Plotinus, two reasons why that is impossible. First, because that kind of plan would be unusable to

⁴⁹ In this, Plotinus' writing is to a considerable extent the embodiment of the ideal of modern hermeneutics: the flow of his ideas is a constant attempt to express *verbum interius* and he is merciless towards his laboriously constructed images, constantly seeking to express himself more precisely.

create the cosmos. Second, because it entails a false notion of the process of creation. Concerning the first reason, discursive thought (*λογισμός*), which is being considered here, exists only in the world and operates with images from experience, which it compares to the ideas that are in Intellect. Concerning the second, artisanal work implies a kind of shaping, for which one needs hands, feet, and so forth, in other words, everything that has yet to be created. This creation is derived from primary creation, and it would seem more fitting to think about comparing the former to the latter rather than the other way round. For these two reasons, Plotinus thinks that although the cosmos was created, and done so as an image of Intellect by means of the soul, it was created suddenly, all at once. Matter in the cosmos is therefore bound up with the ideas that are projected into it, from which Plotinus deduces several consequences. Foremost among these consequences is that worldly things are a mixture of ideas and matter, and that the mixture is many-layered because matter is first shaped by the forms of the elements, which are then organized into higher wholes of objects. For their mixture with matter, things perceptible to the senses are no longer pure like ideas in Intellect. That also means that they are not as beautiful.

But Plotinus immediately changes perspective from a view of matter (*ύλη*) as a denigrating element to one that accents its reality, the fact that it is not the absolute opposite of true being, but only different from it.⁵⁰ In that sense it is some kind of final form, and Plotinus can therefore understand the cosmos as a whole as the sum of ideas. Through this prism Plotinus can also again repeat his premise about creation with the least resistance, effort, and noise. For there is nothing that could resist the forms and would have to be surmounted – everything is of the same spiritual essence. As Plotinus notes at this point, man, before creation, was merely an idea of himself, and so Plotinus can even say about him that he was a creator but moved away from this state when he separated from Intellect and became but a part of the whole. If, however, he succeeds in reuniting with Intellect, he will then run the whole cosmos, as Plotinus states, referring to Plato's *Phaedrus*.⁵¹

⁵⁰ He thus touches upon the difficult question of the status of matter (*ύλη*). It seems to me that Plotinus eventually endeavours to consider matter as being simultaneously the absolute opposite and the relative opposite of the One, even though that is probably not altogether possible. Evidence of both conceptions appears in II.4.16 and II.5.5. For interesting interpretations, though not entirely comporting with my position, see Denis O'Brien, 'Plotinus on Matter and Evil', in Gerson, *Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, 171–95, and Kevin Corrigan, 'Essence and Existence in the *Enneads*', in *ibid.*, 105–29.

⁵¹ Pl. *Phdr.* 246c1–2.

Similarly to how he sought to demonstrate that it was necessary to look at *τέχνη* through the prism of the creation of the universe and at human knowledge through wisdom, which is Intellect, Plotinus now also states that we must look at the facts in the world and their mutual arrangement from the perspective of the structure of Intellect. According to him, the Earth is, for example, round solely because this arrangement of things is determined by Intellect. Any truthful conclusion that we could make in our considerations thus precedes each of our considerations in the following respect: sensuously perceptible reality is as it is because of Intellect, and Intellect is the self-grounding unity of being and of orderliness (wisdom), and excludes the question of establishing its arrangement.

II.8. THE CONCEPTION OF THE BEAUTY OF THE COSMOS AND OF INTELLECT AS AN INTERPRETATION OF PLATO'S VIEWS (V.8.8)

In Chapter 8, Plotinus takes advantage of the results of the enquiry he has made so far, in order to be fully justified in calling Intellect beautiful. It is, according to him, primarily beautiful and beautiful as a whole, and, considering that it is everything, each of its parts is beautiful, being at the same time the whole. Plotinus also for the first time, though just for a moment, brings the One into play, saying about it, because it precedes Intellect, that it does not at all want to be beautiful, or that it transcends the designation of beauty. But he returns to his thesis about the beauty of the cosmos originating in Intellect which is beauty itself, and he endeavours to present the thesis as an interpretation of Plato's propositions. In Plotinus' interpretation Plato endeavours to show through the beauty of the world perceptible by the senses the beauty of the model on which it was created, and he does so particularly in the *Timaeus*. For it is generally true, Plotinus says, that an image is beautiful whose model is beautiful. The cosmos, according to him, must therefore be considered beautiful and unique. One can reproach the cosmos only for not being beauty itself, for not being Intellect.

II.9. THE ROAD TO INTELLECT VIA AN IMAGE, THE UNITY OF BEING AND BEAUTY (V.8.9)

In Chapter 9 Plotinus undertakes his famous thought experiment, with which he again endeavours to familiarize his reader with the concept of Intellect. He appeals to the reader to try using discursive thought (*διάνοια*) to grasp the cosmos as a whole, by preserving the distinctness of its parts, while thinking about it as one, that means as a network of relations of the individual parts and the whole. From this thought, according to Plotinus, it is then still necessary to

remove all matter (but not in a way that would somehow reduce the size of the sphere in our imagination) and call upon God, who is the creator of the cosmos, in the hope that he appears. If he does appear, we shall contemplate his immensely strong unity, which, however, retains the differences of the parts, which are at once all the other parts and the whole. Plotinus then, with new force, describes the special *unitas multiplex* which is Intellect, and again emphasizes the same factors as in the preceding chapters, such as unity, distinctness, inaccessibility to the senses, inexhaustibility, unlimitedness, the character of being at once whole, the absence of corporeal substance, and the absence of the parts in the worldly sense of the word. Even though the firmament is great, it pales in comparison with the immensity of Intellect. Its power (*δύναμις*) is then particularly incomparable with the power of the corporeal substances, for example, fire, which, although it burns, destroys, propels, and helps to bring various animals into existence, is also exposed to these kinds of change. In other words, it is ontologically characterized as coming into existence and vanishing, unlike Intellect, to which Plotinus ascribes being and beauty, and accentuates their mutual conditionality, even identity. In that sense, being, like beauty, is also the object of erotic desire. Plotinus demonstrates the identity of being and beauty with the case of a thing perceivable with the senses. That thing becomes more beautiful the more it participates in an idea – for beauty was identified with the reign of form – which also means, however, the more it *is*.

II.10. THE HYPERMYTHICAL DIGNITY OF INTELLECT, ASSIMILATION, AND *UNITAS MULTIPLEX* (V.8.10)

In Chapter 10, Plotinus allows Intellect to stand out in its greatness through the prism of myth. With reference to Plato's *Phaedrus*⁵² he describes the brightness and beauty of Intellect, as it appears to souls, daimons, the gods, and Zeus, their ruler. Above them all it rises glowing like the Sun and illuminates and fills everything, turning away from itself everything low. Plotinus thus ranks Intellect above divine figures that were well known to the Greek reader and were considered by him or her to be the supreme reality. He thus again shows the majesty of Intellect. Plotinus claims, also in the spirit of Plato, that each individual sees Intellect in the perspective of his or her own nature – one person may see it as justice, another as judiciousness. Only the best – the ones who have glimpsed much of Intellect, the gods themselves, Zeus, and the souls who dwell in Intellect, those souls who are in Zeus' retinue – ultimately manage to see the beauty of Intellect as such, that is, as the special *unitas multiplex*. That is why

⁵² Pl. *Phdr.* 246d6–249d3.

they do not behold Intellect as one part of it, but as the unity of the parts and the whole, seen all at once, in itself, everywhere. Plotinus again also emphasizes assimilation to the beautiful, which develops in correlation with beholding Intellect, as is the case of the being of the soul and its unity. He again chooses an apposite parable, which preserves the verticality of spiritual motion: assimilating itself to Intellect, the soul becomes beautiful like people who, when they climb mountains, take on the colour of the soil there. Plotinus, however, as usual immediately destroys his comparison – beauty is the colour of Intellect, that is, everything in Intellect is colour and also beauty, and beauty permeates everything; it is not, so to say, only on the surface of things.

Plotinus also immediately uses his now more precise comparison for a better description of the unity of seeing beauty and becoming it. This correlative pair no longer actually exists in Intellect, because beauty can only be seen if one becomes it. We cannot then imagine this relationship as coming out of the subject towards the object and vice versa, because Intellect is of the nature of self-thinking which it itself is. Plotinus then describes this change of understanding what seeing is as the movement of internalization and he compares the paradoxical situation at the end of this process to being possessed by one of the Muses, when one is controlled by a divine force, which communicates through one, that is, when one is, and at the same time is not, this force. One is, in so far as it is the force that is communicating. One is not, in so far as it is through one. Similarly, in Intellect one cannot talk about looking at an object, because the beheld object is itself the beholding subject, but one can, in so far as each thing in the Intellect is distinct. Both these aspects are therefore again well expressed by my designation, *unitas multiplex*.

II.11. THE INWARDNESS OF THE RELATIONSHIP TO INTELLECT, THE SUITABILITY OF THE TERM 'BEHOLDING', THE UNITY OF BEING AND KNOWING (V.8.11)

The motif of inwardness also runs through Chapter 11. Plotinus describes uniting with Intellect as leading oneself before one's spiritual gaze so that the difference between the beholder and the beheld, between the aspiring self and itself as the beautiful image, ultimately disappears in the end and the two poles become one.⁵³ The beholder becomes the object for other beholders, in other words, they unite with her or him in their own aspiration as with the whole Intellect. Plotinus here repeatedly emphasizes that the state of unity with Intellect is the true inwardness of each aspiring soul and that, by contrast, separation from Intellect may well be described as the soul stepping out of itself.

⁵³ Hadot in this respect talks about reaching self-contemplation of beauty by means of contemplation. See Hadot, *Plotinus*, 42–44.

He explicitly also considers the suitability of understanding the state of unity with Intellect as beholding: he points out that no matter how much beholding implies a relationship to what is external, the activity of Intellect cannot be described in this way, but to the extent that it expresses the non-physical self-perception, it is possible to use this designation meaningfully. As with speech structure, here too Intellect is located almost on the boundary of the meaningfulness of its own description as beholding. It is the model of using this concept and as such it both is and is not part of its semantic field.

In that sense, our uniting with Intellect, and therefore with beauty itself, is not an act of knowing. Rather, it is a return to one's own being. The unified being of the knower and the known is, however, knowledge *par excellence*, even though it is not externally so impressive as Plotinus suggests with his example of illness and health. Illness, according to him, is something external to man and this difference allows a clear distinction and in this respect determination and knowledge. Health, on the other hand, is something that essentially belongs to our being, something which we ourselves are, and we therefore often do not perceive it and are unable therefore to grasp it firmly. From the passage in which Plotinus discusses the necessity of relating to health through the unity of being and knowledge, which he calls a higher form of understanding, it is also clear, however, that this parable is largely unsuitable, because it implies a clearer knowledge of the exterior than of the interior, whereas in fact it must be the other way round. Plotinus now makes it clearer that only sense perception is that which in Intellect doubts the reality of what is contemplated. That sense perception truly does not receive any impulse from Intellect, nor can it, but one who really does behold has already long known and does not doubt what it beholds. Simple perception, in other words, cannot rightly be considered a judge in questions of being, which is anyway, according to Plotinus, evident from the fact that we can never look at ourselves entirely from outside, though we do not doubt that we exist.

II.12. INTELLECT AND ITS DESCENDENTS (V.8.12)

In Chapter 12 Plotinus provides a resume of what has so far been learnt, because he asks in its opening what is actually seen by one who achieves the special beholding of Intellect in which there is the identity of subject and object, of being and knowledge. Such a person sees a god (Cronus, as we soon find out), who painlessly gave birth to everything, holds it in himself, and manages, and enjoys his descendents, with whom he is identical and with whom he creates a unique glow. Of all Cronus' descendents, Zeus, the youngest son, necessarily emerges, and is here clearly identified with the hypostasis of soul. Zeus resembles

his father as a picture resembles its model and himself causes the creation of another cosmos, that is, the sensorily perceptible one, which he manages. This cosmos, however, emerges like a picture of a beautiful model as well, and is itself therefore beautiful. Through Zeus it participates in the beauty, being and life of Intellect, all of which must be understood as being synonymous. Like its predecessors, it is as a whole also eternal, despite being created, because Intellect and the soul are naturally, necessarily, and always characterized by their external activity. But the created nature of the cosmos, according to Plotinus, should not imply that there was time when the cosmos did not exist, because time emerged together with it. In that sense it has always existed and will continue to exist for ever.

II.13. INTELLECT AS CRONUS AND ITS MIDDLE POSITION BETWEEN URANUS AND ZEUS (V.8.13)

In the final chapter Plotinus uses his now firmly built-up position of beauty as Intellect itself, together with mythological vocabulary, in order ultimately to refer to the One itself. First of all, he repeats that Intellect transfers rule over the sensorily perceivable world to the soul, talking about Intellect as Cronus, in accordance with his earlier identification of the soul with Zeus. It would be improper for so distinguished a god to be concerned with anything lower, and so he 'only' remains calmly in himself, looking at his own beauty. Above him, however, there is still Uranus, the One, which is explicitly called the thing that does not belong to Cronus and is too great to be beautiful.⁵⁴ His position is therefore in the middle, between Uranus and Zeus, the One and the soul. Plotinus explains this middle position on the one hand by differentiation that resides in Intellect, and on the other hand by the tie that binds it. His middle position resides therefore in his being a specific *unitas multiplex*.

Intellect also provides beauty to the soul over which, in this respect, it excels. Aphrodite, the world-soul, continues in her intensive participation in Intellect and is accordingly beautiful. Individual souls, on the other hand, can increase their degree of participation in Intellect and can thus become more beautiful. Plotinus understands this movement as immersing oneself in one's innermost self, a movement synonymous with knowledge. Its culmination is unification with Intellect, a higher form of knowledge – the identity of the knower and the known. In conclusion Plotinus (as in I.6) emphasizes that Beauty is *there* (in that higher world) and comes *from there*.

⁵⁴ Which means that the One is too dignified and therefore too great to be beauty, which is Intellect; the One is the source of beauty. See also note 56.

Only now does he feel that he has already answered the key question of the whole *Ennead*, the question of the means of attaining the beauty of Intellect. The way to beauty is a turn to inwardness, understood as the movement of uniting, knowledge, and virtue, the return to the basis itself and the intensifying of one's being. But it is no surprise that in his considerations Plotinus, always on the move, is still not fully satisfied, and wishes to consider the attainability of Intellect from yet another side. Consequently, at the end of the whole work we find an appeal to make a new attempt to grasp Intellect, which is undertaken in II.9.

III. PLOTINUS' CONCEPTION OF BEAUTY AS *UNITAS MULTIPLEX*

At the end of the analysis of *Ennead* V.8, I touched upon the motif of the middle position of Intellect and I take this motif as a guideline for the overall interpretation of Plotinus' conception of beauty. It is obvious that Plotinus thinks of beauty primarily in connection with Intellect. In my interpretation, the basic characteristic of Intellect was its special *unitas multiplex*. Intellect actually moves in a certain sense on the boundary of this characterization, because the intensity of its unity makes each of its parts all the other parts, each part the whole, and the whole each of its parts. In that sense it is simple. On the other hand, Intellect is not the One itself, but only the unity of diversity, even though of an inconceivably high degree. Herein lies its middle position between the One and the soul, with the latter here representing diversity with regard to Intellect.⁵⁵ Plotinus expresses this clearly at the end of V.8 by joining the characteristics of being bound and being different. If, however, Intellect is both the highest possible unified diversity and beauty itself, then beauty too must be understood basically as *unitas multiplex*.

Plotinus, however, also wishes to think of Intellect as individual beings themselves, ideas or forms, which establish the being of earthly entities, and in this sense as their being. In VI.9, however, he states that the being of each existence is given by the degree of its participation in the One. We could usefully call it 'unifiedness', rather than pure unity (which belongs only to the One), because this appellation expresses the movement of bringing the many to unity, and thus captures the boundness of this unity to the many. Intellect, in this sense maximally unified, is also being in the highest degree. If Plotinus then puts Intellect (that is, as *unitas multiplex*), beauty, and being on the same level, that clearly means that the two components of *unitas multiplex* – unity and

⁵⁵ From the perspective of the system it can be claimed that the soul, which attains unity within itself, becomes Intellect.

diversity – each has a different weight. Although diversity is a condition for meaningfully calling something beautiful, it is only a necessary condition. Not everything diverse is beautiful – diversity, matter, is ugly. Diversity is, however, a condition for us to be able even to consider attributing the predicate of beauty. Unity, which has to control this diversity, is then a sufficient condition, that is to say, everything that is unified diversity is beautiful.⁵⁶

That is evident also in Plotinus' reflections on ugliness, from which he subtly distinguishes his conception of beauty. Ugliness was conceived as a deficiency of form, that is, a lack of unity and being. But it also means that it is matter as pure diversity.⁵⁷ Diversity therefore rather qualifies a thing as ugly, in other words, we have to understand it as a condition of the possibility of the predication of both beauty and ugliness. The One itself is not beautiful, that is, it is beautiful only in the sense of being the source (*ἀρχή*) of beauty. It is not beautiful because it is not unified, but already one. It makes no sense to consider beauty until one is in the realm of diversity, but only to the extent that unity asserts itself in this realm. That occurs to the maximum possible degree in Intellect, and consequently Intellect is beauty.

If, however, a part that unites each mixture (that is, everything except the One) is beauty, then we may also understand Plotinus' premise that beauty incites one to search for its own cause. In Plotinus' universe the formative principle of a mixture appears as an independent higher hypostasis. That is also why, if erotic desire (*ἔρωσ*) is the activity with which the soul of the searcher reaches for the beautiful, one may legitimately call the ultimate object of the activity the Good, which stands in relation to Intellect as a formative principle, as unity. Indeed, Plotinus asks about beauty in general, and about spiritual beauty in particular, in both *Enneads* on beauty (V.8 and I.6) during an ascent (*ἀνάβασις*), conceived as purification, the growth of virtue, and moving inward, and he reveals on each level a formative principle, a higher hypostasis, as the source of beauty in the lower hypostasis. His conception of beauty is thus also hierarchic.

It is certainly true that Plotinus often contemplates the various predications at individual ontological levels and often proceeds in an ascending order, and in this sense the question of beauty would be nothing special. Nevertheless, it seems to me – and perhaps the fact that I.6 is the first treatise Plotinus wrote

⁵⁶ The predicate of beauty is of course also granted to the One, but only in the sense of its all-encompassing nature, that is, in a sense different from the one that concerns me here. It is fair to say, like Plotinus in VI.7, that the One is 'in reality' more than beautiful (*ὑπέρκαλον*). See also Beierwaltes, 'Love of Beauty', 300.

⁵⁷ Similarly, in note 50, I point out that Plotinus balances between the conception of matter (*ύλη*) as opposite (*ἐναντίον*) and merely different (*ἕτερον*).

also suggests this – that beauty for Plotinus has a certain exclusive status that is given by its immanence to everything and by its referential character, as I pointed out earlier. Plotinus, moreover, wishes to think of beauty not only as synonymous with Intellect, being, form, and unity in diversity, but also with wisdom, life, and contemplation. I have interpreted wisdom as the immediate structured givenness of everything in everything, which is the model of the order of the world. In that sense it is expressed also in the individual parts and the whole of the sensuously accessible cosmos, and can thus address human beings on a far more basic level than, for example, the predicate of freedom, that is, on the level of the senses. That is true despite their semantic fields being in all likelihood largely identical, because both these predicates primarily characterize Intellect, of which everything is an imitation. Contemplation similarly overlaps with productive knowledge, which everything imitates and which permeates the whole cosmos, as does life, characterized in Greek thought as the organized nature of movement. And the world-soul and the individual souls bestow this movement upon the whole cosmos.

And perhaps it is this special nature of beauty, which we now understand as the interconnectedness of the all-permeating character of the mixture, the function of referring to something higher, and basic accessibility, which exposes beauty also to misunderstanding. In both the *Enneads* on beauty Plotinus warns the reader against the fate of Narcissus, who mistook the beauty of the image for reality. For if we do not perceive in sensuous beauty the reference to something higher, which is always offered, it may have the opposite effect, that is, it can 'bind' its lover to the admired ontological level. To be on the safe side, however, I leave open the question of whether this notion can truly be formulated as systematically as I just did, or whether this pitfall is not connected with matter itself (*ύλη*), and does not therefore afflict solely the sensible world (*κόσμος αίσθητός*). To determine whether Plotinus truly does warn against such a risk of blindness towards the higher, for example, concerning beauty of Intellect, requires further investigation beyond the analyzed text.

Is not my arguing that beauty is *unitas multiplex*, however, ultimately contradicting the spirit and the letter of Plotinus' reflections or writings? After all, it is he who emphasizes that even the simple can be beautiful and that beauty is not symmetry (*συμμετρία*). But the conception of beauty as the organized nature of the parts is something other than participation in Intellect (which is *unitas multiplex*). Every colour, every individual tone, is unified diversity, at the most general level to the extent that they simply *are*, that is, they participate in Intellect. But they are also unified diversity because Intellect itself is, and one can also legitimately say about them that they reflect the whole of

the cosmos, that is, they are the unity of the parts and of the whole, again to the extent that they participate in Intellect, in other words they are. They are, last but not least, also unified diversity, because they contain form (*εἶδος*), which already contains plurality in the sense we have outlined above, and unifies diversity, which is matter (*ύλη*). Plotinus therefore can also claim that beauty is *unitas multiplex*, and also insist that beauty is simple. That is possible because, on the one hand, Intellect, with the special nature of its unified diversity, and its differentiated holism, is as simple as it is diverse, and because, on the other hand, these determinations are of an ontological character and do not merge with the outer form which the theory of the organized whole stems from.⁵⁸

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⁵⁸ Plotinus' refusal, in I.6, to conceive of beauty as symmetry, must therefore be understood in connection with his ontological plan and an attempt must be made to reconstruct these arguments within this plan. That is why I consider Anton's reconstruction of Plotinus' argument and the assessment of its validity to be wanting in a number of respects. See John P. Anton, 'Plotinus' Refutation of Beauty as Symmetry', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 23 (1964): 233–37. There is no space here to devote myself to this problem, but in brief, I believe that the key to a more successful attempt is to be found in Plotinus' conception of the beauty of sensuously perceivable objects as participation in the idea of the beautiful in contrast to the theory of ugliness as the privation (*στέρησις*) of this form, that is, as materiality. With the help of this specification, one can better understand the distributive nature of beauty from the whole into the parts and thus also Plotinus' rejection of the theory of symmetry; because beauty, as the unifying form, must unite the existing parts, that is, the parts that participate in the idea and are therefore beautiful. The conception of beauty as symmetry, by contrast, assumes that the parts can constitute a higher whole, that is, a structure possessing a quality which the parts do not have. I believe that Plotinus' conception reveals itself, as in my foregoing interpretation, to be relatively traditional, though he developed it on the background of his own largely original metaphysical system. I am convinced – and this article is thus only a fragment of a larger mosaic – that unity in diversity must be considered the determining factor at least for the Greek conception of beauty. It is necessary to reconsider whether the conception of beauty as unity in diversity also appears in a certain form in Heraclitus or Empedocles, but mainly in Plato, though this hypothesis may not seem evident at first. To be sure, amongst the ancient Greek thinkers one encounters important and powerful opponents of this conception, particularly Aristotle and the Stoics. But even amongst them one should perhaps consider whether their conception is not a concealed metamorphosis of *unitas multiplex*. In no case, however, can one reasonably agree with Tatarkiewicz's notion that the Great Theory of Beauty – beauty as a ratio of the parts – is decisive for the Greeks.

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