

## The Platonizing Sethian Background of Plotinus's Mysticism

# Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies

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# The Platonizing Sethian Background of Plotinus's Mysticism

*By*

Alexander J. Mazur

REVISED EDITION

by Dylan M. Burns, with Kevin Corrigan, Ivan Miroshnikov,  
Tuomas Rasimus, and John D. Turner



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*For Sasha*





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## Editor's Preface to the Present Volume

The present monograph is a revision of Dr. Alexander J. 'Zeke' Mazur's 2010 doctoral dissertation (submitted to the Committee on the History of Culture, University of Chicago, August 2010), a pioneering work in the study of Plotinus and his relationship with Gnosticism, particularly with reference to the Coptic Gnostic works discovered near Nag Hammadi, Egypt, ca. December 1945. Many scholars, including myself, obtained copies of the long-awaited dissertation as soon as they were available and were impressed by its depth and originality. In 2011, Dr. Mazur submitted the dissertation to Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies for publication, and the series' managing editor at the time for Nag Hammadi, Prof. Einar Thomassen, accepted it on a provisional basis. This was welcome news, as anyone who had read the dissertation understood that it is a truly significant contribution to the study of Plotinus as well as the philosophical import of the Nag Hammadi Codices.

Following his tragic, unexpected death in August 2016, Dr. Mazur's notes and work-in-progress were given to his mentor and collaborator Prof. Jean-Marc Narbonne. Together with Prof. Narbonne, Prof. John D. Turner (†2019) went about the task of sorting through Dr. Mazur's (digital) *Nachlass* so as to determine what might be brought to publication. Thanks to the efforts of Prof. Narbonne as well as Dr. Francis Lacroix, a set of Dr. Mazur's studies focused principally on Plotinus's treatise *Against the Gnostics* (*Ennead* 11.9[33]) has already been published in English,<sup>1</sup> with an abridged version in French to follow in the Collection Budé. Meanwhile, at the June 2017 conference of the International Society of Neoplatonic Studies in Olomouc, Czech Republic, Prof. Turner and I agreed that Mazur's dissertation was already sufficiently developed to be published without significant editing of content, that Mazur himself would have wanted to see its publication (given proper editorial care), and that we should undertake editorial work on its style and formatting.

It was not difficult to organize a circle of Dr. Mazur's friends and colleagues who agreed to share the assignment. Over the course of 2018–2020, Prof. Kevin Corrigan, Dr. Ivan Miroshnikov, Dr. Tuomas Rasimus, and Prof. Turner very generously contributed their time, expertise, and effort in editing this book for style and formatting. I shared in their labors and coordinated the team,

---

<sup>1</sup> Zeke Mazur, *Introduction and Commentary to Plotinus's Treatise 33 (11.9) 'Against the Gnostics' and Related Studies*, edited by Francis Lacroix and Jean-Marc Narbonne (Zetesis; Laval: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2019).

with the invaluable support of my assistants at the Freie Universität Berlin, Elisabeth Koch, Janik Petersdorff, and Philipp Scharfenberger. It is thanks to these individuals that Dr. Mazur's brilliant dissertation has enjoyed a worthy *κόσμησις* and finally been made available to the scholarly community beyond those who had access to the original Chicago dissertation, in a state that should invite the engagement of scholars of Neoplatonism, Nag Hammadi studies, and related fields.

Prof. Turner and I agreed from the start that the best way to respect Dr. Mazur's work was to change as little of the Chicago dissertation as possible—to clean up what was already there, permitting the treasures this *silēnos* already conceals to shine all the more. Thus, we have not significantly edited Mazur's arguments or interpretations of evidence, nor his prose. Nor have we added reference to any of the significant secondary literature on Plotinus and the Gnostics which has appeared in the last decade.<sup>2</sup> Rather, the team, to the best of its ability, corrected typos and references, controlled the Greek and Coptic text, removed the occasional spurious reference (never with significant effect on Dr. Mazur's argument), and standardized references, formatting, and bibliography. Details regarding references and translations are found on the following pages.

The relationship between Gnosticism and later Platonism, and in particular the thought of Plotinus and Porphyry, is one of the most exciting and promising trajectories of research today for scholars of later Greek philosophy, ancient Christianity, and Coptology alike. With the passing of Dr. Mazur in 2016 and Prof. Turner in 2019, the investigation of this trajectory has lost two of its

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2 Monographs include Jean-Marc Narbonne, *Plotinus in Dialogue with the Gnostics* (Studies in Platonism, Neoplatonism, and the Platonic Tradition 11; Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011); Nicola Spanu, *Plotinus, 'Ennead' II 9 [33] 'Against the Gnostics': A Commentary* (Studia Patristica Supplement 1; Leuven: Peeters, 2012); Dylan M. Burns, *Apocalypse of the Alien God: Platonism and the Exile of Sethian Gnosticism* (Divinations; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Sebastian Gertz, *Plotinus. Ennead II.9: Against the Gnostics: Translation, with an Introduction and Commentary* (The Enneads of Plotinus; Las Vegas; Zürich; Athens: Parmenides Press, 2017); Nicholas Banner, *Philosophic Silence and the 'One' in Plotinus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). Volumes of papers with relevant studies include but are not limited to Kevin Corrigan and Tuomas Rasimus, with Dylan M. Burns, Lance Jenott, and Zeke Mazur (eds.), *Gnosticism, Platonism, and the Late Ancient World: Essays in Honour of John D. Turner* (Nag Hammadi and Manichaeon Studies 82; Leiden: Brill, 2013); *Gnosis: Journal of Gnostic Studies* 1–2 (2016); Helmut Seng and Giulia Sfamena Gasparro (eds.), *Theologische Orakel in der Spätantike* (Bibliotheca Chaldaica 5; Universitätsverlag Winter: Heidelberg, 2016); Helmut Seng, Luciana Soares Santoprete, and Chiara O. Tommasi Moreschini (eds.), *Formen und Nebenformen des Platonismus in der Spätantike* (Bibliotheca Chaldaica 6; Universitätsverlag Winter: Heidelberg, 2016); Chiara O. Tommasi, Luciana Soares Santoprete, and Helmut Seng (eds.), *Hierarchie und Ritual: Zur philosophischen Spiritualität in der Spätantike* (Bibliotheca Chaldaica 7; Universitätsverlag Winter: Heidelberg, 2018).

greatest minds and advocates. It is the hope of the 'friends of Zeke' who edited the present volume that its publication will stimulate others to reflect further on Plotinus, his mysterious friends, and the significance of the Nag Hammadi texts for our understanding of religion and philosophy in late antiquity and beyond.

*Dylan Michael Burns*

Berlin-Charlottenburg, 5 May 2020

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No words of thanks are sufficient to convey my gratitude towards my three principal dissertation advisors—Michael Sells, Kevin Corrigan, and John D. Turner—without whose groundbreaking scholarship, gentle guidance, personal kindness, and, not least, *patience*, this project could not have been accomplished. I would also like to thank Jonathan Z. Smith for his initial support for this project in its embryonic stage, and also for many fruitful conversations over the years.

There are also several eminent scholars to whom I am indebted for criticism, suggestions, conversation, or encouragement concerning one or another aspect of this project in various phases of its development over the past several years; these include, *inter alia* (and in no particular order), Gregory Shaw, Jean-Marc Narbonne, Michael Williams, István Perczel, Rob Berchman, Cristina D'Ancona, Garth Fowden, Gerald Bechtle, John Finamore, John Dillon, Karen King, Einar Thomassen, Luc Brisson, Nicola Denzey, David White, and the late Steven Strange, though there are surely others I have omitted. All of the (undoubtedly very many) errors in this work are nevertheless my own responsibility.

Finally, on a more personal note, I would like to thank my parents for their irrationally consistent support of my work, but also, the diminutive leontocephaline Fedya, for his melancholy but furry company, and of course my dearest wife Sasha, for her superhuman bibliographic labors, but also without whom none of this would have been possible.

*Zeke Mazur*

Cambridge, MA, 2010

## Editor's Note on References, Editions, and Translations

The style guide used by the editorial team for this volume was the SBL Handbook of Style (2014), although some of Dr. Mazur's preferences remain unchanged: for instance, primary sources are almost never abbreviated, but given with full Latin title. A list of the abbreviations that are used throughout are found below.

Only those primary sources which are quoted in the text are listed in the bibliography. Primary sources are listed in the bibliography by modern editor or translator, with the exception of Plotinus himself (under "Plotinus"). Greek sources appear to have been translated by Dr. Mazur, presumably with reference to available translations.

Dr. Mazur's treatment of the text of Plotinus merits special mention. He quoted the Greek text of Plotinus according to the *editio maior* of Henry and Schwyzer (H-S<sup>1</sup>), while adapting the translations of Armstrong in the Loeb Classical Library. However, Armstrong's Greek text is based upon the *editio minor* (H-S<sup>2</sup>), not the *editio maior* (H-S<sup>1</sup>), and includes other emendations not found in H-S<sup>1</sup>. In cases where the text of Armstrong does not agree with that of H-S<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Mazur has usually (but not always) opted for Armstrong. Accordingly, where the two editions differ, the team has indicated the discrepancy by putting the reading rejected by Mazur in brackets. Thus, "τῇ αἰσθήσει [H-S<sup>1</sup>: διαθέσει]" (at VI.9[9].7.17–21) means that here, Armstrong's text does not agree with H-S<sup>1</sup>, and Mazur has preferred Armstrong's αἰσθήσει to H-S<sup>1</sup>'s διαθέσει. Conversely, "Εἰ [Armstrong, LCL: "Ετι]" (at V.8[31].11.1–19) means that here, Armstrong's text does not agree with H-S<sup>1</sup>, and Mazur has preferred H-S<sup>1</sup>'s Εἰ to Armstrong's "Ετι.

Coptic sources are with reference to the editions published in the Coptic Gnostic Library (CGL) published by Brill (Robinson 2000), except for the 'Platonizing' Sethian texts, where Dr. Mazur preferred the editions of the Bibliothèque Copte de Nag Hammadi (BCNH) published by Les Presses de l'Université Laval and Peeters (Barry, Funk, Poirier, and Turner 2000; Funk, Poirier, and Turner 2000; Funk, Poirier, and Scopello 2004), at times with further reference to the *oeuvre* of Turner, as noted. Word division of the Coptic text follows the rules outlined in Till 1941. Translations of Coptic sources are usually those found in CGL, unaltered or slightly modified, as noted; the 'Platonizing' Sethian texts appear to be translated by Mazur himself. Sigla in the treatment of the Coptic text follow the Leiden Conventions, with the exception that the ellipse ... is used to mark skipped text, while [...] marks a lacuna of three letters or more (rather than three dots indicating a lacuna of three letters).

# Abbreviations

ACPP	<i>Anonymous Commentary on Plato's 'Parmenides'</i>
<i>Ap. John</i>	<i>Apocryphon of John</i>
BCNH	Bibliothèque Copte de Nag Hammadi
BG	Berlin Gnostic Codex (P. Berol. 8502)
CGL	Robinson, ed., Coptic Gnostic Library
Cod. Bruc.	Codex Brucianus
<i>Disc. Seth</i>	<i>Second Discourse of the Great Seth</i>
<i>Gos. Eg.</i>	<i>Gospel of the Egyptians</i>
<i>Gos. Phil.</i>	<i>Gospel of Philip</i>
<i>Gos. Thom.</i>	<i>Gospel of Thomas</i>
<i>Gos. Truth</i>	<i>Gospel of Truth</i>
<i>Great Pow.</i>	<i>Concept of our Great Power</i>
H-S <sup>1</sup>	Henry-Schwyzzer, <i>Plotini opera. Editio maior.</i>
H-S <sup>2</sup>	Henry-Schwyzzer, <i>Plotini opera. Editio minor.</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
MSR	mystical self-reversion
MUO	mystical union with the One
NHC	Nag Hammadi Codices
<i>Paraph. Shem</i>	<i>Paraphrase of Shem</i>
PNE	Pronoetic Efflux
<i>Teach. Silv.</i>	<i>Teachings of Silvanus</i>
<i>Testim. Truth</i>	<i>Testimony of Truth</i>
<i>Three Forms</i>	<i>Trimorphic Protennoia</i>
<i>Tri. Trac.</i>	<i>Tripartite Tractate</i>
<i>Val. Exp.</i>	<i>A Valentinian Exposition</i>
<i>Wis. Jes. Chr.</i>	<i>Wisdom of Jesus Christ</i>
<i>Zost.</i>	<i>Zostrianos</i>

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# Author's Preface

[*Abstract to the Chicago Dissertation*]

The essential point of this book is to demonstrate that a crucial element of Plotinus's thought—his conception of mystical union with the One—cannot be understood solely within the conventional history of philosophy, or as the product of a unique, *sui generis* psychological propensity, but rather must be reconceptualized in the broader context of contemporaneous Gnostic thought and praxis. The conclusion is that Plotinus tacitly patterned his mystical ascent to the One on a type of visionary ascent ritual that is first attested in Gnostic sources. These sources include the Platonizing Sethian tractates *Zostrianos* (NHC VIII,1) and *Allogenes* (NHC XI,3) of which we have Coptic translations from Nag Hammadi and whose Greek *Vorlagen* were known to have been read in Plotinus's school.

The argument has three essential components: First, [1] Plotinus's ascent towards union involves a contemplative reversion upon the “center-point” of the self, which is, in effect, a hypernoetic and hyperontic aspect of the supreme principle—the One—that abides within the human subject. At the penultimate moment, just prior to the ultimate union or coalescence with the supreme principle, Plotinus describes an experience of a sudden, luminous vision of this transcendental self. [2] This momentary self-apprehension deliberately recapitulates the first eternal moments of ontogenesis, in which the prenoetic efflux from the One reverts to its source—its former self—to acquire delimitation and independent subsistence as hypostatic Being-Intellect. In fact, Plotinus considers these two moments of self-apprehension—the one mystical, the other primordial—to be homologous or even identical, and he believes the transcendental principle within the self to be consubstantial with the prenoetic efflux of the One. Finally, [3] a very similar schema—one that identifies the primordial and mystical moments of self-apprehension—is prominent, and in many ways more explicit, in the Coptic versions of the Platonizing Sethian ascent tractates whose Greek antecedents were read and critiqued in Plotinus's circle (as well as in related Platonizing Sethian treatises), and in earlier, “classic” Sethian, Hermetic, and Valentinian literature). The Sethian tractates describe an ascent through the complex metaphysical armature mediating between the cosmos and the unknowable, transcendent deity. As in Plotinus, the Sethian aspirant undertakes a mystical self-reversion and experiences a moment of self-apprehension during the final stages of the ascent; this is explicitly described as a residual, indwelling imprint of the



reflexive self-manifestation of the transcendent deity during the first eternal moment of ontogenesis. Despite their different approaches and much-discussed philosophical disagreements, the resemblance between Plotinus's mysticism and these Gnostic comparanda are too robust to be coincidental, and suggest that Plotinus developed his own mysticism in close dialogue with contemporaneous Gnostics. This conclusion suggests that we must reconceptualize the nature of the relationship between sectarian praxis and academic philosophy in late antiquity, and accord to the former a far greater agency than is usually assumed.



# Introduction: The Gnostic Background of Plotinus's Mysticism

## 1 The Fundamental Problem of Plotinian Mysticism

### 1.1 Introduction

Plotinus (~205–270 CE) occupies a position of enormous importance—what E. R. Dodds called a “nodal point”<sup>1</sup>—in the course of European intellectual history. Yet Plotinus’s greatest influence has not been upon academic philosophy *senso strictu*, but rather upon the history of religions.<sup>2</sup> One of the most striking and apparently original aspects of Plotinus’s thought—the “end and goal” (*telos ... kai skopos*) of his life and philosophy, according to Porphyry—was his notion of a full-fledged *mystical union*: that is, the conjunction, assimilation, coalescence, or complete identification of the innermost core of the human subject with the transcendent One ‘above’ Being and Intellect.<sup>3</sup> In several passages throughout the *Enneads*, Plotinus describes this event as an overwhelmingly intense subjective experience that culminates a contemplative ‘ascent.’ At the climactic moment—to give one example—the aspirant “neither sees nor distinguishes nor imagines two, but as if having become another and not himself nor belonging to himself there, having come to ‘belong’ to [the One], he is one, as if having attached center to center”;<sup>4</sup> or, in another passage, “[T]here was not even any reason or thinking, nor even a self at all, if one must say even this; but he was as if snatched away or divinely possessed, in quiet solitude and stillness, having become motionless and indeed having become a kind of

1 Dodds 1960, 1; see also Cilento 1974.

2 So pervasive are Neoplatonic conceptions in contemporary religious discourse that virtually every expression of ‘spirituality’ consciously or unconsciously draws upon language and conceptions that can be traced back either directly to Plotinus, or indirectly to him via late antique pagan and Christian interpreters such as Porphyry, Augustine, and pseudo-Dionysius.

3 This notion of the First principle had ultimately derived from a conflation of the Good beyond Being in *Respublica* 509b9 and the absolute One of the First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides* 137c ff.

4 Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.9[9].10.14–17: Τότε μὲν οὖν οὔτε ὁρᾷ οὐδὲ διακρίνει ὁ ὁρῶν οὐδὲ φαντάζεται δύο, ἀλλ’ οἷον ἄλλος γενόμενος καὶ οὐκ οὐδὲ φαντάζεται δύο, ἀλλ’ οἷον ἄλλος γενόμενος καὶ οὐκ αὐτὸς οὐδ’ αὐτοῦ συντελεῖ ἐκεῖ, κάκεινου γενόμενος ἓν ἐστὶν ὥσπερ κέντρῳ κέντρον συνάψας. [See complete passage in Appendix A1].

stasis.”<sup>5</sup> It must be emphasized that we are not dealing with a mere rhetorical flourish or a conventional metaphor, but rather with something that Plotinus understood to be a discrete, transformative *event*. He repeatedly implies that he has himself experienced mystical union with the One first-hand<sup>6</sup>—he often makes cryptic intimations to the effect that “whoever has seen, knows what I mean”<sup>7</sup>—and Porphyry provides objective confirmation that his teacher attained such a union on four occasions while the two men were together: “[For Plotinus] the end and goal was to be united to, and to approach, the god who is above all things; and he attained this goal four times while I was with him, in an unutterable actuality and not in [mere] potentiality.”<sup>8</sup> This remarkable notion of a mystical union has been enormously influential not just on the subsequent Neoplatonic tradition—for example, echoes may be found in the theurgical ideas of both Iamblichus and Proclus—but also upon what I will call, for lack of a better word, the “mysticism” at the heart of the medieval Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions. In this sense Plotinus is undoubtedly an innovator. Since a similarly robust notion of mystical union did not exist in the prior philosophical or orthodox theological traditions, we may credit Plotinus with the introduction of this concept to Western theological discourse.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the notion of *unio mystica* has become so commonplace that it is very easy to neglect the historical importance of Plotinus in this

5 VI.9[9].11.11–16. ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ λόγος οὐδὲ τις νόησις οὐδ’ ὅλως αὐτός, εἰ δεῖ καὶ τοῦτο λέγειν. Ἀλλ’ ὥσπερ ἀρπασθεὶς ἢ ἐνθουσιάσας ἡσυχῇ ἐν ἐρήμῳ καὶ καταστάσει γεγένηται ἀτρεμεῖ, τῇ αὐτοῦ οὐσίᾳ οὐδαμῇ ἀποκλίνων οὐδὲ περὶ αὐτὸν στρεφόμενος, ἐστὼς πάντῃ καὶ ὅλον στάσις γενόμενος.

6 E.g., Plot. I.6[1].7.1–14; VI.9[9].7.14–26, 9.50–60, 10.9–21, 11.8–25; III.8[30].10.31–35; V.8[31].11.1–19; V.5[32].8.3–23; VI.7[38].34.8–21, 36.10–21; V.3[49].17.28–38, etc. [See complete passages in Appendix A].

7 E.g., VI.9[9].9.46–47.

8 Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 23.14–18: Ἐφάνη γοῦν τῷ Πλωτίνῳ σκοπὸς ἐγγύθι ναίων. Τέλος γὰρ αὐτῷ καὶ σκοπὸς ἦν τὸ ἐνωθῆναι καὶ πελάσσαι τῷ ἐπὶ πάσι θεῷ. Ἐτυχε δὲ τετράκις που, ὅτε αὐτῷ συνήμην, τοῦ σκοποῦ τούτου ἐνεργεῖα ἀρρήτῃ καὶ οὐ δυνάμει.

9 Despite the seminal nature and eminent originality of his thought, it is generally recognized that it did not develop in a vacuum, but emerged from a prior tradition of Middle Platonic interpretation. The relative influence of this prior tradition with respect to his own original contribution—and the vexing question of Plotinus’s immediate sources—remains a perennial topic of debate primarily because the evidence for Middle Platonism remains so fragmentary. Convincing antecedents for Plotinus’s mystical union cannot be found in any of the usual Middle Platonic suspects, such as Philo, Maximus of Tyre, Numenius, Alcinous, Apuleius, and so on. Dodds 1965, 84 points out Plotinus’s originality in this respect, although he attempts to distinguish the ‘genuine’ mysticism of Plotinus from Gnostic, magical, and mysteriosophic comparanda that I believe comprise the immediate context of Plotinian mysticism. I have discussed the relation of Plotinian mysticism to contemporaneous ritual praxis extensively in two articles—Mazur 2003 and Mazur 2004—and these articles may be considered a point of reference for this introduction.

regard. The background of Plotinus's mysticism therefore merits more careful and sustained attention than it has received.

The fundamental question at the origin of this dissertation, then, is this. If indeed we take seriously Plotinus's accounts of his own contemplative ascent and mystical union with the One (hereafter, "MUO"), we may wonder [a] what, then, in practical terms, was he *doing*—or what did he *think* he was doing—on the extraordinary occasions when he achieved such a union? And [b] how, and in what terms, can this practice be understood, and in which religious or intellectual context, historically speaking, should it be situated?

Any attempt to answer these questions immediately confronts several complexities. First, what exactly Plotinus was doing *in practice* remains largely enigmatic because his many passages describing mystical ascent consist primarily of evocative allusion rather than practical detail. More problematic for the historian of philosophy, however, is the fact that according to Plotinus's explicit statements, the act of union itself necessarily exceeds the parameters of conventional—i.e., discursive—philosophical praxis.<sup>10</sup> The One is hyperontic and hypernoetic, as it is the source of both Being and Intellect; its absolute unity renders it inaccessible to ordinary intellection, which entails at least the minimal logical duality between subject and object of knowledge. In Plotinus's schema, the mystical union with the One occurs only after a lengthy process of preparation, a philosophical 'ascent' involving a progressive purification of the soul from extraneous concerns and gradual assimilation of the individual consciousness to the hypostatic Intellect. Until this point, discursive philosophy is necessary, but in order to ascend beyond this level and attain the ultimate moment of unity with the One beyond Intellect and even Being itself (MUO), the ordinary self-knowing of *Nous* must be discarded, and the knowledge of the intelligible realm that the aspirant had so assiduously struggled to obtain through the practice of dialectic must be rejected in increasingly radical acts of negation or abstraction (*aphairesis*). Plotinus often describes the ultimate moment of MUO with the traditional Platonic language of divine possession or even erotic frenzy; and yet while Plato had used these images metaphorically to describe the heights of dialectical philosophy, Plotinus clearly uses them to indicate something quite different: an extraordinary, non-rational state of consciousness, or "ecstasy" (*ekstasis*). Whatever he means by this, it is certain that the final stages of ascent fall outside the purview of conventional philosophical praxis. If we are to understand Plotinus's notion of mystical union from an intellectual-historical perspective, we must broaden our horizon to

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10 E.g., VI.9[9].4.1–3.

include conceptions and methods beyond those of the narrow confines of an 'internalist' history of philosophy.

The depth of the problem is evident from Pierre Hadot's admission, even after decades of rigorous and impassioned research on Plotinus's mysticism, that he remains utterly bewildered about its nature.<sup>11</sup> The past century has seen a proliferation of studies exploring the relation of Plotinus's mysticism to his metaphysics, and more recent scholarship has also come to a substantial appreciation of the philosophically rigorous aspects of Plotinus's mystical thought.<sup>12</sup> There remains a deep reticence, almost anxiety, about the practical side of Plotinian mysticism, for which, I suspect, there exists a rather simple explanation.<sup>13</sup> Plotinus's experience of union with the One is undoubtedly, but ambiguously, integrated with his 'objective' metaphysical system, but his account of this experience at some point leaves aside objective metaphysical discourse and passes into the more inscrutable realm of what is today often considered a kind of psychological phenomenology. While we can follow the general sweep of Plotinus's discursive arguments up to a point, there is some imprecise moment in the course of his mystical passages when the sense of the text soars beyond our ability to follow, so to speak, from 'within' the narrative logic; we suddenly find ourselves on the 'outside,' having become mere spectators of something for which we have no fund of personal experience, nor even conceptual categories, on which to rely.<sup>14</sup> To be clear: the problem is not merely that of the supposed incommunicability of *any* subjective experience; rather, it is that Plotinus appeals to certain extraordinary *kinds* of subjective experience to which we ourselves—or so we think—do not have access.<sup>15</sup>

11 Hadot 2001, 134: "Mais en quoi consiste réellement l'expérience elle-même, et comment s'explique-t-elle? C'est cela le plus important et je suis totalement incapable de le dire. J'ai essayé, par mes travaux sur Plotin, d'apporter des éléments de réponse. Mais c'est une bien mince contribution, car le problème est gigantesque." While Hadot's humility in this regard is rare among Plotinian scholars, he is not alone in this sentiment; see Meijer 1992.

12 Most notably, Lloyd 1990. For a review of the literature, see Bussanich 1994 and the summary in Mazur 2003.

13 That is, besides the recent scholarly skepticism concerning the category of religious *experience* itself.

14 In the context of Plotinus's passages describing ascent to the One there are a number of discrete transition-points at which the objective language of metaphysics is suddenly supplanted by appeals to subjective (mystical) experience; thus, for example, I.6[1].9.6–7; VI.9[9].4.11–16; 9.46–47, 11.7, VI.5[23].7.4–13; V.8[31].11.1; V.5[32].7.29–35; VI.7[38].22.1–5, 31.1–17, 34.11–12; VI.8[39].15.14; V.3[49].17.28–32. The sudden shifts of language of these and other similar passages deserve further study. Also interesting is his intimation at I.3[20].1.13–19 of a second phase of philosophical practice that transcends dialectic.

15 Although he does frequently appeal to sexual experience to express MUO to one who has not experienced it; on the non-metaphorical aspect of Plotinus's erotic imagery, see Mazur 2009.

## 2 Problems with the Prior Scholarship on Plotinian Mysticism

While the topic of Plotinus's mysticism has received a great deal of scholarly attention—at least from those scholars who do not believe this aspect of his thought to be an embarrassing and irrelevant concession to sub-philosophical irrationality<sup>16</sup>—it has rarely been treated with the rigorous philological and historical attention that it deserves. On the one hand, the subtleties of language and the doctrinal ambiguity that often permeate Plotinus's descriptions of the final stages of ascent are open to innumerable misinterpretations, and these passages have too often simply been dismissed as the meaningless stutterings of a mystic struggling vainly to communicate an ineffable experience. On the other hand, in the occasional studies in which Plotinus's mystical texts have been examined with sufficient attention, they have been analyzed primarily for their doctrinal rather than their practical content, and the questions addressed usually pertain more to contemporary controversies in comparative epistemology than to Plotinus' own concerns. Plotinian mysticism itself has therefore been studied in virtual isolation from its own religio-historical context.<sup>17</sup>

### 2.1 *The History of Philosophy and the Study of Mysticism*

A more general methodological problem that has beleaguered the previous research is the intrinsic discomfort of the discipline of the history of philosophy with claims to non-discursive knowledge and ineffable experience (not to mention the popular association of 'mysticism' with unphilosophical mystification or imprecision).<sup>18</sup> In an attempt to preserve Plotinian mysticism for the history of philosophy, properly speaking, and/or as a topic of intelligible discourse, scholars have sometimes wanted to understand MUO as merely the apex of a progressively abstract process of reflexive cogitation; thus, many influential scholars have tended to emphasize and perhaps exaggerate the intellectual aspect of the final stages of union, however exceptional they grant such a cognitive process may be.<sup>19</sup> And yet, while it is certain that identification with the hypostatic Intellect is necessary for MUO, it is not sufficient; Plotinus

16 As does, for example, Gerson 1994, 218–24.

17 There have been a few exceptions, often little noticed, such as Cumont 1921–22; see discussion in Mazur 2003; idem 2004.

18 Notable exceptions include, *inter alia*, Sells 1994, esp. ch. 1 [on Plotinus]) and Rappe 2000.

19 Thus, for example, according to Hadot 1980; similarly, Beierwaltes 1987, 39–49: Plotinian *ekstasis* is “das Resultat der bis zu ihrer Spitze hin geführten Reflexion, aktiver *Überstieg des Denkens* über sich selbst ...”; see also idem 1985. While not entirely inaccurate, these descriptions tend to de-emphasize the extraordinary, hypernoetic, and transcendent aspect of Plotinian MUO.

makes it clear that it is not the ordinary Intellect that attains the One, but rather some more mysterious, internal faculty: the “inner” Intellect, the “loving Intellect,” the “Intellect which is not Intellect,” and so on. Indeed, Plotinus frequently emphasizes that the intellect must be entirely discarded at the moment of union: “if you want to grasp the ‘isolated and alone,’ *you will not think*”; since “*it is not thought, nor is there any thinking about it*”;<sup>20</sup> “one wishing to contemplate what transcends the intelligible will contemplate it *once he has quit the intelligible*”;<sup>21</sup> “because it is Intellect, it looks, when it looks [at the One], with *that of itself which is not Intellect*”;<sup>22</sup> and many other examples of the non-intellective aspect of MUO abound.<sup>23</sup> Therefore it seems insufficient to explain Plotinus’s actual practice of MUO as merely a heightened, exceptional form of ordinary philosophical contemplation. Not only does this risk misinterpreting the subtleties of Plotinus’s own thought, but it also reinforces the internalist explanation for his mysticism, which in turn enables what is, I believe, an erroneous historical decontextualization. There is a real, practical ambiguity here that deserves more direct attention than it has previously received.

Conversely, however, Plotinian MUO is sometimes understood to be an inapproachably subjective, ineffable, or private experience beyond the range of objective scholarly inquiry, an experience which only an exceptional individual like Plotinus himself—one endowed with some unique psychological or spiritual propensity—could attain. Contributing to this view is the notion that “*unio mystica*”—of which Plotinus’s is considered a paradigmatic example—is a nearly universal, cross-cultural human psychological phenomenon, one which needs no further explanation than the presentation of a flurry of putative analogues.<sup>24</sup> This assumption has created all kinds of mischief. First,

20 V.3[49].13.32–33: ἡ ἔρημον καὶ μόνον ἐὰν ἐθελήσῃς λαβεῖν, οὐ νοήσεις; 13.36: οὐτ’ οὖν αὐτὸ νοεῖν οὐτ’ ἔστι νόησις αὐτοῦ.

21 V.5[32].6.19–20: καὶ ὁ θεάσασθαι θέλων τὸ ἐπέκεινα τοῦ νοητοῦ τὸ νοητὸν πᾶν ἀφείς θεάσεται.

22 V.5[32].8.22–23: ὅτι ἐστὶ νοῦς, οὕτω βλέπει, ὅτε βλέπει, τῷ ἑαυτοῦ μὴ νῶ.

23 Thus, *inter alia*, VI.9[9].11.11; VI.7[38].35.33–36, 35.44–45. That noetic language was often used in Plotinus’s time to describe non-discursive approaches to transcendental reality is indicated by its occurrence, for instance, in the *Chaldaean Oracles* (frag. 1, 2, 115, and 116); in the case of the *Oracles*, however—which is assumed to be a ritual (theurgical) and not a ‘philosophical’ text—few would attempt to argue that the noetic language *actually* refers to discursive and / or philosophical thought.

24 This assumption is made both by those who believe in a “common core” underlying all mystical experience and also those who believe the cultural and religious context determines the experience. S. Katz 1978 has argued that the subjective experience(s) underlying the various polymorphous accounts are invariably mediated by prior theological assumptions, and that no unmediated experience (of the sort Plotinus claims to have had of the One) is possible. My own position on this matter is neither “constructivist” nor “perennialist”; rather, while I believe that there is insufficient epistemological justification



Plotinus's MUO has often been examined from the phenomenological perspective of (what are now outdated) comparative theories of mysticism;<sup>25</sup> much of the discussion has therefore been focused on its classification according to R. C. Zaehner's simplistic and now-outmoded categories of "monistic" or "theistic" mysticism, which are especially unhelpful in the case of Plotinus.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps, more importantly, the assumption of the universality of "mystical union" has served to de-historicize Plotinus's own mystical union by undercutting its relative uniqueness and chronological priority and thus masking its seminal influence upon the subsequent tradition of theological discourse to which it is then anachronistically compared.<sup>27</sup>

Yet there are in fact several reasons to doubt that Plotinus's mysticism was congenital or the result of a particularly unique propensity. First, along with this view come certain implicit assumptions often tacitly drawn from comparison with Christian mystics, for whom, it is believed, the mystical ecstasy is typically spontaneous or involuntary—almost convulsive—and cannot be consciously willed or induced, even if it sometimes occurs after long periods of prayer.<sup>28</sup> Whether this is an accurate representation of the nature of Christian mysticism in general or not, the subtle implication of the repeated comparison

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for Katz's claim that there is no such thing as unmediated experience, this nevertheless does not mean that "unio mystica," in the strict sense, is a universal human psychological phenomenon; rather, it is a *concept* with a specific and potentially traceable history, a history in which Plotinus plays a significant if not foundational role; see my discussion in Mazur 2003. Also *contra* Katz, see, for example, S. B. King 1988 and Adam 2002.

- 25 See the observations of Bussanich 1997. The influence of S. Katz's neo-Kantianism has led those sympathetic to both Plotinus and to Kant to misinterpret the former so as to harmonize his views with the latter. For example, Arp 2004, unsatisfied with the theistic / monistic dichotomy, but under the strong influence of Katz, has tried to argue for a kind of middle way, a "mediated union" that does not transcend the intellect. This position seems to me entirely untenable and requires a complete inversion of Plotinus's explicit statements.
- 26 The monistic / theistic distinction has even been used to support (what I believe to be a largely misleading) distinction between Plotinian and Gnostic mystical metaphysics; thus Elsas 1975, 256–59).
- 27 The relative novelty of Plotinus's mysticism is noted, for example, by Armstrong 1967, 195.
- 28 One might take as typical the 16th-century Spanish mystic John of the Cross. Referring to direct contact with God, John of the Cross writes, "A man is incapable of reaching this sublime knowledge through any comparison or imagining of his own, because it transcends what is naturally attainable ... God usually grants these divine touches, which cause certain remembrances of him, when the soul is least expecting or thinking of them ... Since this knowledge is imparted to the soul suddenly, without exercise of free will, a person does not have to be concerned about desiring it or not. He should simply remain humble and resigned about it, for God will do his work at the time and in the manner he wishes" (from *The Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, Book 2, in *Collected Works*, 195–96).

of Plotinus to this later tradition is that his experience was of a similar kind.<sup>29</sup> Yet this kind of paroxysmal or involuntary experience is in fact quite foreign to Plotinus. While he does occasionally suggest that the ultimate stage of union must be awaited quietly after the necessary propaedeutic exercises<sup>30</sup>—thus preserving the absolute *autarkeia* of the transcendent principle itself<sup>31</sup>—his account of the final phases of ascent suggests a deliberate control of consciousness, a meditative discipline with several discrete stages, paradoxically including both the aphairctic negation of cognition and, simultaneously, acts of deliberate visualization and the evocation of intense affective experience. When the One ‘arrives,’ it may do so “suddenly” (*exaiphnēs*), but it does not just spontaneously appear.<sup>32</sup>

Second, that Plotinus’s mysticism was not simply a matter of his innate psychological constitution is suggested by Porphyry’s biographical anecdote (*Vita Plotini* 3.7–17) about Plotinus’s search for a teacher in his 28th year. According to Porphyry, Plotinus became despondent while making the rounds of the most respected teachers in Alexandria, until a friend eventually referred him to Ammonius Saccas, with whom Plotinus stayed. After studying under Ammonius—his virtual guru—for eleven years, and acquiring a complete mastery of philosophy, he was *still* not entirely satisfied in his quest for knowledge, and set out on (an eventually abortive) expedition to Asia to learn about

29 Here I will not get involved in the debate between the competing ‘perennialist’ and ‘contextualist’ interpretations of mystical experience, a debate that has arisen following S. Katz’s initial argument that mystical experience itself, and not merely its expression, is entirely conditioned by the cultural or religious context of the mystic. I suspect this debate has actually served as a mask for a deeper (but equally fruitless) debate between theistic and nontheistic positions. The tacit assumption is that two experiences can only truly be the ‘same’ if there really *is* a common object of the experience. But what would it mean for two different people’s experience to be ‘the same’? What would it mean for one person’s experience to be ‘the same’ on two occasions? As with all human phenomena, there are both similarities and differences between any two experiences.

30 E.g., VI.1[10].12.14–20; III.8[30].9.22–29; V.5[32].8.1–5.

31 In VI.8[39].7 Plotinus emphasizes the One’s autonomy even during MUO; he would appear to share this theological concern with Christian mystics but also, significantly, with Iamblichus’s defense of theurgy. In other words, we should not confuse Plotinus’s (primarily theological) concern to preserve the One’s autonomy with any *practical* implications about the final stages of ascent.

32 Although he sometimes gives a past tense account of what must be his own experience (e.g., VI.9[9].11.8–22), we also find recurrent uses of hortatory language (e.g., VI.9[9].7.17–23; 9.50–60; III.8[30].9.29–32), as well as instructions in the imperative (e.g., I.6[1].8.3–4; VI.9[9].7.2–3; V.1[10].3.1–6) and the future tense (e.g., V.5[32].5.3–13) in his descriptions of the final ascent, which suggests he is adjuring his readers to follow in his path. The description itself intimates a deliberate and highly structured technique, as we will see in Chapter 2.

Indian and Persian thought. Now however much this might conform to some of the conventional *topoi* of philosophical *paideia* in late antiquity,<sup>33</sup> the account of his pre-Ammonian depression and restless seeking does not sound like the story of a man who already in his youth was attaining regular union with the One and thus living the “life of the gods and divine and blessed men.”<sup>34</sup> Were it the case that Plotinus had been attaining mystical union in his earlier years, we can be sure that Porphyry would not have neglected to mention it. Indeed, he says nothing about when Plotinus first attained such a union, only that he did so four times during the six years that the two men were together (although we know from his early-period treatises—most importantly, his ninth, but also, possibly, his first and sixth<sup>35</sup>—that Plotinus had already attained union prior to Porphyry’s arrival in Rome). The union with the One was, it would seem, something Plotinus had developed over time, possibly under the tutelage of Ammonius or from other contemporaneous influences. Moreover, that mystical union was, at least in theory, the result of a specific technique—one that could be taught and learned—is suggested by Porphyry’s (possibly suspect) claim to have been able to experience union with the One himself on a single occasion during or before his sixty-eighth year.

But most importantly, the conventional but anachronistic comparison of Plotinus to the later traditions of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic mysticism—traditions which themselves are either directly or indirectly dependent, historically speaking, upon Plotinus himself—presupposes the absence of more proximate historical comparanda. Thus it is often assumed that Plotinus’s mysticism was a virtually unique, almost *sui generis* phenomenon.<sup>36</sup> As I will attempt to demonstrate in the subsequent chapters, this is plainly incorrect. For while Plotinus’s descriptions of the final stages of the ascent towards mystical union with the One are apparently unique in the academic philosophy of the time, they do in fact have extremely close (but hitherto

33 E.g., Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone* 2; Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 1.28; Iamblichus, *De vita pythagorica* 11–19, etc. On the *topos* of the would-be student trying many teachers before settling with one, see Whittaker 1997.

34 At VI.9[9].11.49 he describes the life of one who attains union as θεῶν καὶ ἀνθρώπων θείων καὶ εὐδαιμόνων βίος.

35 At I.6[1].7–9 and IV.8[6].1 MUO is implied but not stated; the first clear account is at VI.9[9].4 ff.

36 This despite the vague echoes in earlier Platonic language and *topoi*, in both Plato himself (e.g., *Respublica* 7.517a–c; *Phaedrus*, 246d–248b; *Phaedo* 107d–111c; *Symposium* 210a–211c; *Epistulae vii* 341b–d), and in various Middle Platonists (e.g., Numenius, frag. 2 des Places; Alcinoüs, *Didaskalikos* 10.4–6; Maximus of Tyre, *Dissertationes* 11.10–11).

almost entirely neglected) parallels in his immediate intellectual and religious milieu.<sup>37</sup> Plotinus's mysticism shares many features with contemporaneous currents of Gnosticism, and especially the variety of Platonizing Sethianism with which he was certainly familiar, as well as a broad range of earlier Gnostic and Hermetic thought that we may suppose he encountered during his education in Alexandria from about 233 to 244 CE.

### 3 Platonizing Sethian Visionary Ascent and the Historical Context of Plotinian Mysticism

Among Plotinus's contemporaries were certain Gnostic sectaries who had received training in philosophical schools and who were familiar with Platonic thought but who nevertheless did not believe that Plato himself had attained knowledge of the ultimate reality. This ultimate reality they understood to be a hypertranscendent and fundamentally unknowable deity. Although they read philosophical treatises (*suggrammata*), they composed pseudonymous revelations which they attributed to ostensibly pre-Platonic visionaries who had been able to ascend beyond the heavens to attain direct experience of this deity. Thus Chapter 16 of Porphyry's biography of Plotinus: "In [Plotinus's] time, among the Christians, there were, on the one hand the multitudes and on the other hand, heretics (*hairetikoi*) who departed from the ancient philosophy, those around Adelphius and Aculinus, who had acquired many treatises (*suggrammata*) of Alexander the Libyan and Philocomus and Demostratus and Lydus, and who proffered apocalypses (*apokalypseis*) of Zoroaster and Zostrianos and Nikotheus and Allogenes and Messos and others of the kind, misleading many, and themselves misled, that Plato had not attained to the depth of intelligible essence."<sup>38</sup> According to Porphyry, these apocalypses were read and vigorously critiqued in Plotinus's circle. Coptic translations of Greek tractates entitled *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* were discovered among other Gnostic texts at Nag Hammadi in 1945, and they have subsequently been classified as belonging to a Platonizing subset of the broader category of Sethian literature. These two texts—as well as other related Nag Hammadi tractates not mentioned by Porphyry—reveal significant parallels with key aspects of

37 Elsewhere I have suggested that Plotinus's conception of mystical union itself was broadly derived from ritual techniques designed to conjoin the soul of the practitioner with a deity; see Mazur 2003; idem 2004.

38 Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 16.1–9 [see complete passage in Appendix D1].

Plotinus's mysticism. Both *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* purport to be first-hand narratives of an eponymous visionary who undertakes a ritualized, contemplative 'ascent' out of the cosmos and thence through a successive series of metaphysical strata. Each ascent culminates in an ultimate apprehension of the transcendent principle(s). Although the Platonizing Sethian ascents are framed not as philosophical expositions but rather as mythical prototypes for soteriological ritual—and consequently contain much traditional Sethian nomenclature and seemingly 'unphilosophical' jargon—they nevertheless exhibit many crucial conceptual details and even technical terms that also occur in Plotinus's supposedly original conception of mystical ascent to the One. As I will attempt to demonstrate, the Platonizing Sethian tractates provide detailed elaborations of a sophisticated technique of 'interiorized'—or rather, contemplative—ritual ascent, whose essential structure also comprised the framework of Plotinus's own ascent, but about which he is far less explicit. Although the evidence suggests that the Platonizing Sethian tractates circulated in Plotinus's Roman seminar too late (in the mid 260s) to have themselves influenced Plotinus's mystical thought in the period in which he wrote his earliest treatises, it appears virtually certain that the vector of transmission of this particular mystical doctrine moved from the Gnostics to Plotinus rather than the other way around, since many features that occur in more sophisticated formulations in the Platonizing Sethian tractates are also to be found in embryonic form throughout a wide variety of demonstrably pre-Plotinian Gnostic sources. Indeed, these parallels indicate that far from being the result of a unique, idiosyncratic propensity, Plotinus's mystical ascent to the One was situated within a precise intellectual-historical context, that of the Platonizing Sethian Gnostics, and can only be adequately understood in relation to this context.

In historical terms, then, the central hypothesis of this monograph is that Plotinus developed an extremely sophisticated conception of mystical ascent—supposedly the most private or subjective aspect of his thought—from contemporaneous Gnostic ritual praxis and that he did so in close dialogue with Gnostic sectaries who were situated (in sociohistorical terms) outside the conventional academic milieu. This hypothesis challenges several entrenched but often tacit orthodoxies in the history of philosophy. The first such orthodoxy is the common (but deeply problematic) presumption of a clear dichotomy between 'real' (i.e., discursive) philosophy (or 'real' religious mysticism) and ritual praxis. As a consequence of this presumption, Plotinus's contemplative mysticism has often been contrasted with the rituals of theurgy practiced by his supposedly less-rational and more superstitious successors,

such as Iamblichus and Proclus,<sup>39</sup> while it has instead been brought into connection with the accounts of medieval mystics, who, as we have seen, are typically understood to be passive participants in some more exalted but spontaneous psychological state (or, divine epiphany, depending on the interpretation). According to this logic, although a certain amount of propaedeutic asceticism may be required, a ‘genuine’ mystical union cannot (and indeed for theological reasons *must* not) be ritually induced.<sup>40</sup> Although Plotinus too insists that the final moment of union requires a kind of passive receptivity, (i.e., one shouldn’t “chase after” the One),<sup>41</sup> the assumption that a ‘real’ mystical union is necessarily spontaneous—something that just ‘happens’—has obscured the fact that his descriptions of the final phases of ascent nevertheless imply a specific technique—a *praxis*—with several identifiable components. Moreover, because scholars have tended to define ‘ritual’ as a performative action involving physical objects and bodies, specific contemplative techniques that require no outwardly observable actions are excluded, by definition, from the category.<sup>42</sup> This arbitrary definition has served to obscure the profound interrelationship between Plotinian contemplation and the Gnostic ritual ascent procedures upon which, I suggest, he modeled his mysticism, and whose reflection may be detected just under the surface of his text.

Furthermore, Plotinus’s involvement with contemporaneous religious traditions in general—and with Gnosticism in particular—has often been minimized or underappreciated due to a scholarly tendency to try to preserve him for the history of what is taken to be ‘genuine’ philosophy (or religious mysticism).<sup>43</sup> Compounding this is the pervasive assumption of the intellectual priority of academic philosophy over revealed religion. In other words, when a similar insight is known to have occurred more or less simultaneously

39 Dodds 1965, 86 provides the classic (and still unquestioned) formulation of this common view: “[Plotinus’s] approach is severely intellectual, not physiological as in some oriental sects or sacramental as with some Christian mystics. He prescribes no breathing exercises, no navel-brooding, no hypnotic repetition of sacred syllables; and *no ritual is needed to provoke the experience*” (italics added). Likewise, Armstrong 1967, 259–60: “There is no place in [the mystical religion of Plotinus] for rites or sacraments: nor are there any methods of prayer or meditation or devices for concentrating or liberating the mind such as are used by both theistic (Christian and Moslem) and non-theistic (Vedantin and Buddhist) mystics.”

40 Thus Dodds 1965, ch. 3; Dupré 1996, 22; cf. also Armstrong 1967, 260–61; Hadot 1986, 245.

41 V.5[32].8.3.

42 I have discussed this at greater length in Mazur 2004, 42–44.

43 In Mazur 2003 and 2004, I have previously suggested that Plotinus’s mysticism had a close relationship with contemporaneous ritual praxis and the theurgy developed by his successors; see also Shaw 1999.

in both an academic-philosophical system and an ostensibly 'revealed' textual tradition, in the absence of evidence confirming otherwise, the transmission is presumed to have been from the former community to the latter, and not *vice versa*,<sup>44</sup> even to the extent of constructing complex and increasingly improbable genealogies of entirely hypothetical but supposedly 'lost' texts. Yet as the history of science has come to recognize over the past half-century, significant, formative concepts in the sciences emerge not only from the internal logic of a field but also from a broader cultural context, through a process of intellectual 'osmosis.' A parallel process can easily be perceived with other aspects of Plotinus's thought. It is often the case that the structure of one aspect of his thought follows a paradigm drawn from another domain of knowledge, one which he might or might not explicitly acknowledge.<sup>45</sup> Generally recognized examples of this kind of transposition in Plotinus's thought might include something as subtle as his tacit encryption of Aristotelian or Stoic physical theory in terms of Platonizing metaphysics, as occurs throughout the *Enneads*, but it might also take the less philosophical (and less obvious) form of, for instance, a model of procession drawn from contemporaneous embryology.<sup>46</sup> The evidence to be presented in the chapters that follow suggests that certain influences from outside the sphere of academic philosophy have much more causal agency in the development of central aspects of Plotinus's thought than has hitherto been appreciated.

Another entrenched orthodoxy that this hypothesis will challenge concerns Gnosticism itself and its role in the development of Plotinus's thought. It is universally recognized, and undeniable, that there is at least *some* historical relationship between Plotinus and the Gnostics.<sup>47</sup> However, throughout the

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44 For instance, Dillon 1999a calls the Gnostics the "magpies of the intellectual world of the second century." I think an amusing (but historiographically useful) future project would be to collect all the best value-laden terms of abuse which contemporary scholars have casually applied to the Gnostics in otherwise rigorously objective scholarship!

45 This general phenomenon has been theorized by the historian of science Michael Polanyi (Polanyi 1966, 3–25).

46 I have suggested this in Mazur 2009 and also in an unpublished conference presentation, "Embryological Themes in Platonic Ontogenesis," presented at the SBL "Rethinking Plato's *Parmenides*" seminar in Washington DC in 2006.

47 Historically speaking, this is indubitable: Plotinus admits he counted certain Gnostics among his *philoi*, and Porphyry reports that Gnostic tractates were read and critiqued in Plotinus's circle. Moreover, one of the treatises the sectaries proffered, *Zostrianos* (of which we have an apparent Coptic translation from Nag Hammadi) was considered philosophically important enough to warrant a 40-book refutation from Amelius, Plotinus's long-winded senior student. In his treatise 11.9, *Against the Gnostics*, Plotinus himself criticizes both general doctrines and specific terminology which has been confirmed

first half of the 20th century the majority of scholars have tended to see this relationship as primarily adversarial (as is emphasized by Porphyry's *Vita Plotini* 16), and to understand Plotinus's own attitude towards the Gnostics to be encompassed by his philosophical critique of specific Gnostic doctrines: a critique explicit in his anti-Gnostic treatise (II.9[33]) and the other three tractates of the so-called *Großschrift* (III.8[30], V.8[31], and V.5[32]), but also implicit in sporadic arguments throughout the rest of his works. According to the accepted view, Plotinus's encounter with Gnosticism would be restricted to a brief 'crisis' in his school during the period Porphyry was there (Plotinus's "middle" period, roughly 263 to 269). This crisis had been precipitated, supposedly, by the appearance of apocalypse-bearing Gnostic sectaries among his auditors in Rome, and it had obligated Plotinus to refute their positions in the *Großschrift* and also to encourage his senior pupils to do the same. Thus the extent of Gnostic influence on Plotinus would be tangential and largely negative. It should be mentioned, however, that there were a few early 20th-century scholars who took exception to this view. Thus Hans Jonas and Henri-Charles Puech—both, incidentally, influenced by the emergence of phenomenological approaches in the history of religions—emphasized the fundamental similarities between Plotinian and Gnostic metaphysics and attributed these similarities to a shared late antique Alexandrian *Zeitgeist*.<sup>48</sup> This view has also had more recent proponents.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, the assumption persists even today that Plotinian philosophy represents some essential antithesis of contemporaneous Gnosticism. Indeed, historians of philosophy have often uncritically adopted categories of analysis and polemical strategies devised by Plotinus and his circle: a tendency, moreover, compounded by a persistent negative evaluation of Gnosticism that is perhaps also subliminally influenced by the polemic of the Patristic heresiologists, who were, so to speak, the eventual historical 'victors,' and who thus set the terms of all subsequent discourse. Thus Gnosticism has been commonly (but wrongly, in my opinion) assumed to be not only unphilosophical in its use of lurid and inchoate mythology, but also fundamentally irrational, nihilistic, anti-cosmic, pessimistic, and so on, by contrast with both Platonism and also with the more 'orthodox' strains of Judaism and Christianity. An unfortunate consequence of the common negative evaluation of Gnostic thought has been to conceal from scholarly gaze not

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first-hand by the Platonizing Sethian treatises *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* and by accounts of some more distantly related Valentinian systems.

48 Jonas 1954; idem 1967; idem 1971; Puech 1938 and idem 1960; also J. Katz 1950, who sees in Plotinus a "Gnostic *manqué*," and de Vogel 1953.

49 E.g., Sinnige 1984; idem 1999; Jufresa 1981; also, Quispel 1968; idem 1996; also, idem 2000: "Plotinus was a Gnostic."



only its creative and innovative nature, but also the actual depth of its interpenetration with contemporaneous academic philosophy.

Since the focus of this monograph is specifically upon Plotinus's ascent to union with the One, I will not get deeply involved in the more general discussion of the broad relationship between Plotinus and Gnosticism. However, I should say that my research over time has gradually led me to recognize a fundamental proximity between Plotinus's system and the vast and somewhat imprecisely-bounded body of interrelated philosophico-religious thought known as 'Gnostic.' I would suggest that a judicious approach to the evidence shows that it is very difficult to distinguish between the essential structures of Plotinian and Gnostic thought. To be precise, although there are certainly some genuine philosophical differences between Plotinus and his immediate Gnostic opponents (and not merely differences of rhetorical mode or discursive method),<sup>50</sup> one nevertheless should not take the anti-Gnostic vehemence of Plotinus's circle at face value. Rather—to revive the now unfashionable opinion of Hans Jonas—this polemic is primarily an attempt at self-identification through the firm demarcation of what amount to subtle doctrinal differences among intersecting intellectual communities whose common metaphysical presuppositions and general worldview offer far more similarities than differences. Furthermore, this commonality extends more broadly beyond Plotinus's circle and his Platonizing Sethian interlocutors to the relation between philosophical schools and the phenomenon of ancient 'Gnosticism.' The innumerable Gnostic theological systems that proliferated in late antiquity frequently shared both terminology and conceptual structures with those systems elaborated in contemporaneous academic philosophy, especially, but not limited, to Platonism (there also seem to be Aristotelian, Stoic, and even Epicurean influences). There are, of course, some broad distinctions as well; thus, for instance, while certain ideas might be common to academic Platonists and to Gnostics, the latter tend to express them in a more mythical rhetorical mode, and to accord textual authority as much to Biblical scripture (i.e., the book of Genesis) as they do to foundational philosophical texts, such as Plato's *Timaeus* and *Respublica*, which they certainly read, while interpreting all these sources somewhat irreverently, if not subversively.<sup>51</sup> More importantly, Gnostic texts are often concerned more with providing a practical

50 In Mazur 2005 I have expressed my views on Plotinus's philosophical opposition to the Gnostics.

51 Uncommitted to any particular tradition of scriptural or philosophical interpretation, the Gnostics made no attempt to harmonize incongruities in their various source-texts, but rather foregrounded inconsistencies as contrapuntal fodder for theological speculation. This is close to Couliano's 1992 interpretation; see also Williams 1992a.

template for salvation than with the rational justification of a metaphysical system. But even granting differences of these sorts, these two types of community may be understood to have shared a common thought-world, if not always a common self-identification, and it was this shared thought-world itself that would have provided a fixed point of agreement in relation to which specific issues could be debated.<sup>52</sup> As is by now well known, there have been substantial challenges to the very category of ‘Gnosticism’ itself;<sup>53</sup> but even if one retains the category in the broadest sense—as, I believe, is unavoidable<sup>54</sup>—its precise conceptual and socio-historical contours are far more ambiguous than has usually been imagined. As I will suggest in the conclusion, no absolute categorical boundary can be drawn between ‘Gnosticism’ and ‘Platonism’ in the period before Plotinus’s circle made the debate with the Gnostics a *cause célèbre*; and they did so, I suggest, not so much because of doctrinal disagreement, but simply because of the putative association of these sectaries with the threat to traditional ‘Hellenic’ philosophy presented by the sudden burgeoning of Christianity in mid third-century Rome.

## 4 The Current State of the Research

### 4.1 *The Status Quaestionis*

Until the full publication of the Nag Hammadi corpus in the late 1970s, the possibility of substantial cross-fertilization between Plotinus and the Gnostics had rarely been entertained. Despite the 1964 publication of Hans-Joachim Krämer’s *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik*—which situated Gnostic (primarily Valentinian) protology in the context of Middle Platonic and Neopythagorean speculation on derivational schemata—it was often not even admitted that Gnosticism itself had a serious philosophical content, let alone any influence on academic philosophy. As recently as 1978, A. H. Armstrong could write that the influence of Greek philosophy as a whole upon Gnosticism is “not

52 Consider Cornford’s observation (1950, 29): “No dispute can be carried on unless both parties have some fundamental standpoint on which they agree. This common basis is the last thing of which they are likely to be aware. Hence in the philosophic debate it is apt to pass almost wholly unmentioned.”

53 Various recent corrective attempts, most prominently those of Williams 1996 and K. King 2003, have succeeded in questioning the negative evaluation of Gnosticism primarily by calling the whole category itself into question, either by dissolving it into a broader, more pluralistic notion of Christianity (King) or by reclassifying it as a special kind of biblical mythology (Williams).

54 With Pearson 2004, 201–23.

genuine, but extraneous, and, for the most part superficial.”<sup>55</sup> Today, however, in the light of the publication of the complete edition of the Nag Hammadi corpus and a number of important studies and colloquia, this is no longer a tenable position.<sup>56</sup> More recent scholarship has gradually begun to take the interaction between Greek philosophy and Gnosticism seriously, and in the past three decades it has become increasingly evident that the major currents of Gnosticism were closely interwoven with the academic Middle Platonism and Neopythagoreanism of the first two centuries of this era, particularly in regard to doctrines of first principles and the transcendental interpretations of Platonic metaphysics. Indeed, not only does it now appear that Gnosticism is permeated with Greek philosophy, but a number of recent studies have suggested that specific aspects of Gnostic thought were influential in philosophical circles and that Plotinus derived a number of features of his thought from his encounter with Gnostics in his immediate milieu.<sup>57</sup> Over the past two decades, the joint work of John Turner and Kevin Corrigan has suggested that the Platonizing Sethians were situated on the cusp of certain central debates within the academic-philosophical milieu and that they may even have caused Plotinus to revise some of his positions in light of Gnostic ideas.<sup>58</sup> This monograph attempts to build on this important but still nascent body of scholarship and simultaneously address hitherto neglected aspects of Plotinian mysticism.

#### 4.2 *The Problem of the Relative Chronology of Plotinus and the Platonizing Sethians: A Brief History of the Debate*

Although it has only a peripheral bearing on my essential argument, one final issue that must be addressed is that of the relative chronology of the Greek *Vorlagen* of the extant Coptic texts of *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* with respect to Plotinus himself. This topic is of such complexity that it cannot be dealt with fully here. The brief summary that follows will hardly do the topic justice; it is primarily intended for readers unfamiliar with the history of this research. The issue is as follows. Although Porphyry says that tractates with entitled

55 Armstrong 1978, 101. The rest of the passage: “We are dealing with the use of Greek ideas, often distorted or strangely developed, in a context which is not their own, to commend a different way of faith and feeling, not with a genuine growth of any variety of Gnosticism out of philosophy, whatever some ancient heresiologists may have thought.”

56 Beginning with the Plotinus symposium at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in 1984, published as Bos 1984; also, the International Conference on Neoplatonism and Gnosticism at the University of Oklahoma in 1984, published in Wallis and Bregman 1992.

57 See, *inter alia*, Robinson 1977; Turner 1980; idem 1986; Jufresa 1981; Böhlig 1981; Abramowski 1983b; Pearson 1984; Sinnige 1984; idem 1999; Attridge 1991; Bos 1994.

58 See Turner 2000a; idem 2000d; idem 2001; idem 2004; idem 2006; idem 2007; Corrigan 2000a; idem 2000b; see also Bechtle 2000; Narbonne 2008.

*Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* were read in Plotinus's circle during the 6-year period that he was there, roughly 263–269 CE, we cannot be absolutely certain that the texts read in Plotinus's circle—and attacked in the so-called *Großschrift* (II.1.8[30]. v.8[31], v.5[32], and II.9[33])<sup>59</sup>—were the precise *Vorlagen* of the tractates we possess. Therefore one needs to consider at least the *possibility* that the Greek *Vorlagen* of our Coptic versions of *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* postdate Plotinus, since their *terminus ante quem* is well after his death, in about the mid-fourth century when the Coptic codices were buried at Nag Hammadi. Ultimately I happen to believe (along with Turner and Corrigan) that the balance of evidence suggests that the Coptic tractates *are*, more or less, translations of what was available to Plotinus and his entourage. But there have been several important challenges to this view, and they deserve at least a brief discussion in the context of the history of the scholarship.

The problem initially arises because both *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* (along with the related *Three Steles of Seth*, which is not explicitly mentioned by Porphyry) contain references to various specific features that supposedly occur only later, in post-Plotinian Neoplatonism, which suggests some non-coincidental connection between these texts. The most important of these features is what is probably a permutation of the so-called “noetic -Being, Life, Mind triad” that is only implicit in Plotinus, but which became formalized in post-Plotinian Neoplatonism, and is especially evident in Marius Victorinus and Proclus writing in the fourth and fifth centuries CE respectively. Moreover, the first term of the triad, described with the unusual term *huparxis* (“Existence”), occurs in a corresponding position in both the Platonizing Sethian tractates and in later Neoplatonic formulations, but does not occur with the abstract sense of “existence” in Plotinus and rarely occurs prior to the later Neoplatonists. Apart from the Platonizing Sethian literature, the first clear instance of the Being (*huparxis*)-Mind-Life triad occurs in the anonymous Turin commentary on Plato's *Parmenides* (=ACPP), long believed to be post-Plotinian, where it is employed to relate the first and second “Ones” of the first two hypotheses of the *Parmenides* (142b–44e) in terms of metaphysical derivation. This text was first edited by W. Kroll in 1892 and later re-edited and attributed to Porphyry by Pierre Hadot in his momentous *Porphyre et Victorinus* in 1968. According to Hadot, it was Porphyry who had introduced the noetic triad to Neoplatonic discourse. In additional support of this thesis, Hadot also adduced somewhat more tenuous evidence for a similar version of the noetic triad supposedly described in a lost Porphyrian commentary on the *Chaldaean Oracles* whose traces he detected in later Neoplatonists such as Proclus and Damascius. Hadot's

59 Thus identified by Harder 1936.

Porphyrian thesis, while never attaining unanimous acceptance, has nevertheless cast a long shadow over the subsequent scholarship, and it provided the sole chronological reference point—aside from Porphyry’s own testimony in the *Vita Plotini*—for the initial interpretation of the relationship between Plotinus and the Platonizing Sethians. To be specific, the similarity between the triad in the ACPP and the Platonizing Sethian tractates suggests some relationship of dependence: but in which direction? If one accepts Hadot’s attribution of the ACPP to Porphyry (or a later author, as some have suggested)<sup>60</sup> one confronts a dilemma. Either one must credit the Platonizing Sethians with the introduction of the triad to later Neoplatonism, or one must argue that the Sethians were themselves dependent upon Porphyry (or a later Neoplatonist), and that they necessarily postdate Plotinus. The latter option—I will call it the “redaction hypothesis”—requires that [a] the texts read in Plotinus’s circle in the 260s were *not* the extant versions of *Zostrianos* and / or *Allogenes*; that [b] post-Plotinian Platonizing Sethians were familiar with the thought of Porphyry or a subsequent Neoplatonist who would be responsible for the ACPP, and that [c] these Gnostics composed pseudonymous tractates taking some Porphyrian or post-Porphyrian ideas into account while naming these redacted tractates after the titles of the very same texts that Plotinus, Amelius, and Porphyry himself had so thoroughly critiqued.

In the years since the publication of the facsimile editions of the Nag Hammadi codices in the 1970s, this dilemma has served to bifurcate scholarship. The former possibility—that the Platonizing Sethian tractates were indeed pre-Plotinian and had influenced later Neoplatonism—was first suggested in 1973 by John Sieber with respect to *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* and Michel Tardieu with respect to the *Three Steles of Seth*.<sup>61</sup> In an important 1980 article, John Turner suggested that the triadic metaphysical schema of the Platonizing Sethians had influenced Plotinus and later Platonists.<sup>62</sup> However, the seeming implausibility of the redaction hypothesis did not deter other scholars from defending it with arguments of increasing ingenuity, all of which depend upon a post-Plotinian dating of the ACPP. The redaction hypothesis itself was first formally introduced in 1983 by Luise Abramowski, who accepted Hadot’s attribution of the ACPP to Porphyry and suggested that the extant *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* were the result of dialogue between Plotinus’s circle

60 Thus, for instance, Edwards 1990.

61 Sieber 1973; Tardieu 1973; Robinson 1977. For the history of scholarship see Tardieu 1996, 11–12; Turner 2000d, 201–14.

62 Turner 1980; here 335 n. 8, Turner briefly called into question Hadot’s attribution of the ACPP to Porphyry, suggesting instead that *Allogenes* was the source of the Existence-Life-Mind triad.

and the Gnostics, although she admitted that Porphyry himself may have borrowed a few specific terms from the Gnostics.<sup>63</sup> This hypothesis was presented more emphatically still by Ruth Majercik in 1992, who rejected Abramowski's suggestion of exchange between Porphyry and the Gnostics, and argued instead for a unidirectional transmission from Porphyry to the authors of the extant *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*. Among other arguments, Majercik adduced a series of close verbal parallels between certain passages describing the triad in *Zostrianos*, and Marius Victorinus's *Adversus Arium*, a text which Hadot had thought to be dependent at least in part on Porphyry's hypothetical commentary on the *Chaldaean Oracles*. According to Majercik, the Gnostics had revised their tractates in a Porphyrian direction in an attempt to appeal to the Roman philosophical intelligentsia.<sup>64</sup>

Needless to say, this opinion was not universally accepted. A number of important studies in the 1990s and early 2000s began to call into question Hadot's attribution of the ACPP to Porphyry and thus shifted the focus of research towards a possible Middle Platonic context for the Platonizing Sethian tractates. To begin with, in 1996, Michel Tardieu and Pierre Hadot jointly published the results of their protracted analysis of the parallels between the Coptic text of *Zostrianos* (64.14–75.21) and the Latin of Marius Victorinus's *Adversus Arium* (1.49.9–40, 50.5–16) that had been first mentioned by Majercik. The result was the discovery of a common source that consisted of a negative- (and

63 Abramowski 1983a; eadem 1983b; followed by A. Smith 1987, 763 and n. 292: "... the 'Neoplatonic' strands in these texts [*Zost.* and *Allogenes*] show clearly how those with such gnostic views could have worked with, influenced, or have been influenced by Plotinus and Porphyry."

64 Majercik 1992, 486 concludes: "The similarities in these passages are so close one is led to conclude that the author of *Zostrianos*, like the authors of *Allogenes* and *Steles Seth*, had access to the same Greek source used by Victorinus. If Hadot is correct about Victorinus, that source would be a commentary of Porphyry on the *Chaldaean Oracles*. If this is so, then *Allogenes*, *Steles Seth*, and *Zostrianos*—in the form in which we now have them—could not have been the same texts known to Plotinus. Given the fact that Amelius and Porphyry both attacked the 'revelations' of *Zostrianos* and Zoroaster in particular, it is reasonable to suggest that the gnostics in Rome—in light of this criticism—revised their revelations (or produced new revelations) to conform more closely to the teachings of the great Porphyry—a politic way to gain intellectual credibility in Roman philosophical circles." The question of whether a text like the extant *Zost.*—or even *Allogenes*, for that matter—would actually have garnered any credibility, she does not address. Since Plotinus's objections in 11.9[33] appear to target many features, even specific technical terms, that are actually evident in the extant *Zost.*, the case for the redaction hypothesis is difficult to make. Not so with the extant *Allogenes*, which seems not to contain any doctrines recognizable in Plotinus's critique, has omitted many of the ritual elements, and has systematized the metaphysical system of *Zost.* For this reason, Turner (e.g., 2000b: 214–15) sees *Allogenes* as a subsequent revision of *Zost.*

affirmative-) theological treatise that was based on the *Parmenides*—and that, like the ACPP, contained an exposition of the transcendent “One” in terms of a unified triad with the powers of Existence, Life, and Mind—but that all the same was not identical to the extant ACPP. On the basis of an extensive philological analysis of the terminology in the parallel passages—and especially in light of its rather un-Neoplatonic designation of the supreme principle as a *pneuma*—Tardieu determined that the source was Middle Platonic, and tentatively proposed Numenius (fl. late second cent. CE) as a candidate for its author. Whether or not one agrees that the author can be determined with precision, the importance of this discovery was manifold. First, if Tardieu is correct that this common source is to be situated in the context of pre-Plotinian Middle Platonism, then one may explain the presence of features such as the noetic triad in the Platonizing Sethian corpus without recourse to Porphyry or any post-Plotinian source. And if this is the case, not only is the attribution of the ACPP to Porphyry called into doubt, the entire foundation of the redaction hypothesis is undermined.<sup>65</sup>

During roughly the same period, a number of studies began to challenge Hadot's own earlier arguments more directly. In 1999, Gerald Bechtle published a new translation and commentary of the ACPP in which he argued against Hadot's suggestion that the Commentary necessarily presupposed a Plotinian conception of the One. Bechtle located the commentary in a pre-Plotinian current of metaphysical speculation on the *Parmenides*, a current that was not, as Hadot had argued, necessarily Neoplatonic, but was already evident, Bechtle suggested, in the thought of second-century Neopythagoreanizing Middle Platonists such as Numenius and Nicomachus of Gerasa, and possibly also in earlier thinkers going all the way back to Speusippus in the Early Academy. Meanwhile, a number of relevant studies emerged from Turner's SBL seminar on Gnosticism and Later Platonism held from 1993 to 1998. Most important were two articles by Kevin Corrigan (2000a and 2000b) that converged upon the issue from two separate angles. In “Platonism and Gnosticism: the Anonymous Commentary on the *Parmenides*: Middle or Neoplatonic?,” Corrigan argued that the premises of Hadot's argument for dating the ACPP after Plotinus were based on a misreading of Plotinus himself. Hadot had argued that the ACPP presupposes a Plotinian doctrine of both One and Intellect, but nevertheless relates them by means of a system of triadic derivation and mutual participation that

65 On this point Tardieu's conclusions (1996, 112) are emphatic: “Le *Zostrien* que Plotin et ses disciples ont connu était donc bien le même qui celui que nous lisons aujourd'hui en copte. L'hypothèse de deux rédactions de l'Apocalypse de Zostrien, l'une préporphyrienne (perdue), l'autre porphyrianisante (NHC VIII,1), est une vue de l'esprit.”

would supposedly have been foreign to Plotinus, who—according to Hadot—distinguished sharply between the first two hypostases, thus better preserving the One's transcendence. Against this view, Corrigan suggested that a more nuanced reading of Plotinus reveals subtle intimations of a doctrine of the relation between One and Intellect that is not as clearly distinct from the ACP as Hadot had supposed. Since this notion could already be found in Plotinus himself, Hadot's Porphyrian hypothesis would hardly be necessary to explain the ACP. Corrigan then suggested that certain triadic derivational schemata were tacit in both Plotinus and explicit in the fragments of Plotinus's senior pupil Amelius, and that triadic metaphysical schemata were already emerging in Middle Platonism. Finally, addressing the interaction between Plotinus and the Platonizing Sethians, Corrigan noted that aspects of the *Großschrift* presuppose and respond to various details of the extant Platonizing Sethian treatises (further confirming that our texts reflect those read in Plotinus's circle). In "Positive and Negative Matter: the uncovering of Plotinus's dialogue with the Gnostics," Corrigan suggested that Plotinus's extremely subtle doctrine of matter—and especially his gradual rehabilitation of matter in later treatises—reflects a debate with both Aristotle and the contemporaneous Platonizing Sethians. Following from Corrigan's conclusions, Turner (in "The Setting of the Platonizing Treatises in Middle Platonism") suggested that Platonizing Sethian speculation on the noetic triad—with its mediatory term of Life—may have been the catalyst for Plotinus's development of intelligible biology and his progressive emphasis in later, post-*Großschrift* treatises on "life" as a principle mediating the emergence of Intellect from the One.<sup>66</sup>

The hypothesis of a substantive dialogue between Plotinus and the Platonizing Sethians lies at the foundation of the present monograph which is greatly indebted to the work of Turner and Corrigan. It is appropriate, however, that I explain my own attitude towards the chronological issue.<sup>67</sup> I happen to believe that the redaction hypothesis is incorrect, and I suspect that it is at least in part motivated by the *a priori* assumption that Gnosticism is necessarily derivative from 'real' philosophy and not *vice versa*: an assumption, amusingly,

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66 Turner 2000d, 223 asks rhetorically, "could it be that the gnostics themselves were the catalyst that precipitated the Middle and Neoplatonic focus upon life and vitality as a designation for the median phase in the movement from an original static unity to the manifestation of a demiurgic intellect or world soul that administers the physical world of becoming? Could certain gnostic speculations on Life have urged Plotinus and his immediate predecessors to concentrate on developing a prefigurative intelligible biology out of the thought of Aristotle and Plato?"

67 Especially in light of more recent attempts by Majercik 2005 to defend the redaction hypothesis, and Zambon's 2002 critique of Bechtle.



that may be traced all the way back to Patristic heresiological discourse itself.<sup>68</sup> I cannot present the entirety of my arguments against it here—this will be the topic of a future study—but the following brief points are worth making. [a] Almost all arguments for the redaction hypothesis depend on parallels. Yet parallels themselves do not indicate the direction of transmission. Indeed, the *a priori* assumption that Porphyry (or another Neoplatonist) is the original source results from unfamiliarity with the wider Gnostic context of the Platonizing Sethian literature. I believe that it is possible to locate virtually all of the supposedly Porphyrian innovations in a wide variety of other Gnostic sources, many of which are demonstrably pre-Plotinian. These features often are far more at home in a Gnostic context than they are in Porphyry's thought. [b] This is also the case with the ACPD itself, which I believe is pre-Plotinian and, more radically—in partial agreement with the recent suggestions of Tuomas Rasimus<sup>69</sup>—perhaps even *itself* a production of Platonizing Sethian or other Gnostics. In a future philological analysis I will attempt to demonstrate that almost every unusual technical term that occurs both in the ACPD and in other, unquestionably Porphyrian works, may be found in demonstrably pre-Plotinian—and usually Gnostic or Christian—sources of the second or early third centuries CE.<sup>70</sup> [c] The redaction hypothesis posits that the extant

68 Thus Hippolytus (*Refutatio*) attempts to derive each Gnostic sect from a different philosopher: Simon Magus from Heracleitus, Basilides from Aristotle, and so on.

69 Rasimus, "Gnostic Authorship for the Anonymous *Parmenides* Commentary?: A Study of the Interaction between Gnostics and Plotinus's Seminarists," unpublished paper presented at the annual meeting of the SBL in San Diego (in the seminar on "Rethinking Plato's *Parmenides* and Its Platonic, Gnostic and Patristic Reception") in 2007. [Editor's note: a revised version of this paper was later published as Rasimus 2010.]

70 To give but a few examples: ACPD 1.4–5: τοῦ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν ὄντος θεοῦ (Hadot considered this to be a signature of Porphyry) = *Ap. John*, BG 22.19–22: (πισοῦτε...) [πιστω]σι ριζῆ πτηρῆ; NHC II 2.27: (τῶνας...) [ἐμν] πιστωσι ριζῶς; 2.28–29: παῖ ἐταῶσι νηοῦτ] ε ἄγω ἡεωτ' ἡπ[τηρῆ]; also *Wis. Jes. Chr.* NHC III 118.25. ACPD 2.13–14: δι' αὐτὸν γὰρ καὶ τὸ ἐν καὶ μονάς (not in Porphyry) = Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 1.15.1 (text Rousseau and Doutreleau 1967): τῇ Μονότητι συνυπάρχειν Ἐνότητα, ἐξ ὧν δύο προβολαί, καθ' ἃ προεῖρηται. Μονάς τε καὶ τὸ Ἐν. ACPD 2.14–16: καὶ οὕτως οὕτε ἐκπίπτειν εἰς κένωμα ἐνέσται οὕτε τολμᾶν τι ἐκείνῳ προσάπτειν (κένωμα does not occur in Porphyry) = Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpta Theodoto* 31.3–4 (text Sagnard 1948): Ὁ δὲ βουληθεὶς Αἰὼν τὸ ὑπὲρ τὴν Γνώσιν λαβεῖν, ἐν ἀγνωσίᾳ καὶ ἀμορφίᾳ ἐγένετο. Ὅθεν καὶ κένωμα Γνώσεως εἰργάσατο. ACPD 2.16–17: μένειν δ' ἐν ἀκατάληπτῳ καταλήψει (this does not occur in Porphyry) = Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 6.8.70 (text Stahlin 1960): καίτοι φασὶ τινες τὸν σοφὸν ἀνθρώπον πεπεῖσθαι εἶναι τινὰ ἀκατάληπτα, ὥς καὶ περὶ τούτων ἔχειν τινὰ κατὰληψιν. ACPD 3.6: πρὸς τὸν ἐνθουσιασμόν τραπέντες: ἐνθουσιασμός with the literal sense of divine possession occurs 3 times in Porphyry, *Letter to Anebo*, in each case with a negative connotation that cannot be reconciled with its use at ACPD 3.6. See Chapter 4, Part 4 for a complete discussion of the most important of these terms, ACPD 2.20: προ{σ}έννοιαν.

*Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* represent revisions of earlier tractates in light of the criticisms of Plotinus and his pupils so as to present a greater appeal to philosophical circles. Leaving aside the question of whether these extant tractates would, in fact, have appealed to philosophers of the time—and the more serious problem of why the redacted treatises would have been named after those very treatises so thoroughly debunked by Amelius and Porphyry himself—it is certain that they contain a significant quantity of material that has no obvious parallel in Plotinus or Porphyry. Therefore, even if one were to grant the redaction hypothesis, one would probably have to accept that this additional material preserves aspects of the original versions of these texts.<sup>71</sup> [d] But most importantly—although I remain convinced that the extant Platonizing Sethian tractates *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* are, in essence, pre-Plotinian—the question of their precise dating relative to Plotinus is not critical for my argument. For I do not attempt to show that Plotinus was dependent on these texts, which, if the conventional narrative is to be accepted, only began to circulate in his seminars in the 260s, rather, a familiarity with the essential structure of Platonizing Sethian ascent praxis is evident from his very earliest treatises onward, and cannot be the result of a brief encounter in his middle period. The Platonizing Sethian corpus itself is critical for my argument only in the sense that it provides a wealth of evidence for an extraordinarily sophisticated mystical epistemology whose ancestors Plotinus undoubtedly shared; and to extend the genealogical metaphor, the Platonizing Sethians are neither Plotinus's parents *nor* his children, but rather, perhaps, his first cousins, if not simply estranged siblings. Indeed, whatever the precise relationship, chronological or otherwise, we will eventually see that this material is more at home

71 This gives rise to an intermediate possibility, such as that proposed most recently by Rasimus, that although the extant Platonizing Sethian tractates accurately represent those read in Plotinus's circle, they were nevertheless written by sectaries who were already attending Plotinus's seminar. The tractates would thus be the products of an ongoing dialogue and would reflect revisions based on Plotinian criticism. While this is an attractive hypothesis, I cannot agree for the simple reason that contrary to a pervasive scholarly assumption, Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 16 does not indicate that Gnostic sectaries ever actually attended Plotinus's classes. If it did, one would have expected to find it in the chapters discussing Plotinus's auditors (chs. 7–10), but Porphyry inserts it between two accounts of philosophical opponents who corresponded with Plotinus from a distance. Moreover, the brief passage of Augustine's *Epistle* CXVII.5.33 mentioning both Christians and practitioners of magic among Plotinus's auditors, cited by Brisson 1992, 272, (i) does not mention Gnostics and (ii) is probably taken from the *Vita Plotini* itself. While Gnostics may have attended Plotinus's seminar, there exists no evidence for this and therefore no argument should be founded on this premise.

in pre-Plotinian Platonist or even a classic (second century) Gnostic context than in that of post-Plotinian Neoplatonism.

### 4.3 *Methodological Considerations*

This brings us to a final methodological note. I should clarify that my goal is twofold: first, to understand Plotinus's own mystical thought in its own right, and second, to situate it in its proper intellectual and religio-historical context. Neither question, I submit, is answerable in isolation. Yet as the debate surrounding the ACPD has shown, the textual history of this body of literature is extremely difficult to determine. It is often not possible to date individual Gnostic texts precisely in either relative or absolute terms. The essential structure of my argument therefore does not rest upon precise chronology or specific textual dependencies—although I certainly make a few specific claims—but rather a multiplicity of factors which demonstrate broad, if often subterranean, currents of thought over time. Each text, then, provides a small and often somewhat opaque window onto that current, but frozen at a particular moment whose precise temporal coordinates are often uncertain. Nevertheless, I believe that a careful and sympathetic examination of enough of these 'windows' will eventually provide a rich, synoptic view of the contours and nature of that current.

# The Structure of Plotinus's Ascent to Mystical Union with the One

## 1 Introduction

It is commonly recognized that Plotinus envisioned the approach towards mystical union with the One in terms of a contemplative “ascent” or “introversion”—the process can only be expressed in terms of spatial metaphors—in which the transformation of consciousness, broadly speaking, and that of ontological status are correlative or even identical. Yet what this actually means in practice remains largely obscure. I would suggest that a careful examination of Plotinus's accounts of the final moments of mystical union with the One (hereafter MUO) reveals that he conceived of the ascent as a complex but relatively consistent meditative technique: a *praxis*. The principal argument of this book concerns the precise situation of this praxis in both Plotinus's own system of thought and in its broader historico-religious context. Eventually, in later chapters, I will attempt to demonstrate that this technique deliberately mirrors his conception of the first eternal moments of procession from the One (Ch. 3); and that, despite the fact that he expressed the mystical ascent, inasmuch as possible, in the traditional language of Academic Platonism, he developed it in close dialogue with contemporaneous Gnostics, especially Platonizing Sethians, who employed comparable rituals of contemplative ascent (Ch. 4). Before proceeding with the main current of my argument, however, it will first be necessary to understand in some detail what I take to be the basic structure of Plotinus's mystical praxis itself. The purpose of the present chapter is therefore to provide an initial descriptive (or ‘phenomenological’) analysis of Plotinus's passages describing MUO,<sup>1</sup> and especially to demonstrate therefrom that Plotinus envisioned the process most generally as an interiorization, a reflexive journey into and, paradoxically, *beyond* the self. What is most important for the eventual progression of my argument (in Chapter 3) is the following observation: at the culmination of the mystical introversion one first encounters and unites with not the supreme principle itself (the One

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1 I have therefore chosen to concentrate in this chapter primarily on first-order thematic analysis of the texts. I will address the second-order interpretation and engage more thoroughly with the scholarship as it pertains to my argument in later chapters.

or the Good) but rather some transcendental aspect of one's own self—a self *above* Being and Intellect—that is connate with, but not identical to, the supreme principle; and further, the ultimate union with the latter occurs only when this transcendental self is dissolved or annihilated.

1. *An Analytic outline of the phases of ascent towards Mystical Union with the One (MUO).* A close reading of Plotinus's accounts of the final ascent towards mystical union with the One (MUO)<sup>2</sup> gives the impression that he is struggling to find words to describe a series of fully-formulated<sup>3</sup> mental images that, however richly conceived, still elude precise expression in determinate language. It thus appears that his conception of MUO derives as much from non-discursive visionary experience as from the interior discourse of metaphysical speculation. Nevertheless, these mystical accounts share many common features. While certain terms and phrases do tend to recur, the commonalities may be found less in the precise terminology than in the essential structure implicit in each passage, a structure that remains relatively consistent despite the diversity of rhetorical contexts in which these passages occur. I would therefore suggest that Plotinus had a relatively unified conception of the ascent, both in terms of a more or less 'logical,' if somewhat counterintuitive, sequence, and as a series of events unfolding through time, a kind of experiential narrative of the inner metamorphosis undertaken by the mystical aspirant in the moments immediately preceding and 'during' the ultimate union.<sup>4</sup> I further suggest that this process may be usefully analyzed into a sequence of several meticulously articulated (yet sometimes overlapping or mutually-implicating) phases.<sup>5</sup> Although not every MUO passage describes each phase in equivalent

2 I take the following passages of the *Enneads* to be paradigmatic of Plotinus's accounts of mystical ascent and / or MUO: I.6[1].7.1–20, 9.6–25; IV.8[6].1.1–11; VI.9[9].3.14–27, 4.1–30, 7.1–23, 9.24–60, 10.9–21, 11.4–25, 35–45; III.8[30].9.19–32, 10.28–35; V.8[31].11.1–19; V.5[32].4.1–12, 7.31–8.23; VI.7[38].31.5–35, 34.1–23, 35.1–45, 36.10–27; VI.8[39].15.14–23, 19.1–16; V.3[49].4.4–15, 17.16–39. [See selection of complete mystical passages in Appendix A].

3 This may be said of much of Plotinus's writing, even in non-mystical contexts, and it is consistent with Porphyry's description of his method that seemed to involve copying down fully-formulated thought from his mind (*Vit. Plot.* 8.8–12).

4 I say "during" in full awareness that according to Plotinus's metaphysical schema (if not his experiential evocation), MUO must take place entirely "above" time, which only obtains at the level of Soul; e.g., IV.4[28].15–16; III.7[45].11.

5 This unorthodox methodology requires some explanation. The superimposition of new analytic categories onto Plotinus's own mystical accounts (and not the mere reproduction of his own terminology) will be helpful for two reasons. First, while Plotinus envisions the process according to what is, in my opinion, a relatively consistent structure, he tends to avoid fixed terminology; this is probably a result of his incessant striving to express, as richly as possible, a reality that in his own view eludes the grasp of definite language. By naming certain more or less constant features, we will be able to examine and discuss them intertextually.

detail or in precisely the same order, it appears that all the phases are generally implicit in his conception of the process. In what follows I shall attempt to delineate these phases.

## 2 Phase A: Catharsis

It is often noted that Plotinus frames the entire ascent as a cathartic process in which the soul sloughs off its extraneous accretions so as to reveal an essentially divine core.<sup>6</sup> In specifically mystical contexts, however, he often describes a discrete act which is reiterated at successive levels throughout the process; I will call it phase A, *catharsis*. Most strikingly, at a moment which presupposes the identification of the mystical subject with the hypostatic Intellect, Plotinus advises an extraordinary act of self-purification, often evoking it with the venerable terminology of *aphairesis*, “taking away,” “subtraction,” or “abstraction.”<sup>7</sup>

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Second, he typically allows the principle elements of his system—especially in the context of the mystical ascent—a dynamic and somewhat fluid identity; therefore, one could be led badly astray by an overly strict reliance on Plotinus’s own, often unsystematic, terminology (although in Chapter 3 we will see that careful philological analysis of his mystical language is very revealing). Yet one should not assume that his use of apparent paradox and the lack of consistent or explicit terminology implies vague or unsystematic thought, and here the assignment of independent analytic terms may help to clarify aspects about which he is perhaps deliberately ambiguous. I have thus chosen to sacrifice, perhaps sacrilegiously, some of his own nuance for the sake of heuristic clarity. My enumeration of phases is not intended to force Plotinus’s fluid and evocative expression—drawn no doubt from lived experience as well as from metaphysical doctrine—into unnaturally rigid, formal categories, but only to illustrate the subtle intertextual parallels between highly complex and varied accounts. There are of course places where he does in fact genuinely contradict himself, and I would prefer in these cases to accept the incommensurability of the text and avoid any a-historical harmonization.

- 6 The entire Plotinian philosophical ascent, including the propaedeutic assimilation to Intellect, has itself been understood as a process of self-purification; thus Trouillard 1955a; idem 1955b. One should recall that the initial stage of the ascent (which, one might presume, initially overlaps with ordinary discursive philosophical practice; e.g., I.3[20].1.14–19) had originally entailed turning the focus of one’s awareness away from the external, corporeal senses, and then away from the lower psychic faculties—the passions and even dianoetic reasoning—so as to actualize the noetic aspect of one’s soul, which is eternally, although not always consciously, in contact or even consubstantial with the hypostatic Intellect (e.g., IV.8[6].7–8; V.1[10].10.21–30; 11.4–12.14; VI.4[22].14.17–22; V.3[49].3.21–29; 6.18–22; I.1[53].8.1–8, 13.7–9). The end result is a conscious but nondiscursive assimilation of the aspirant with the hypostatic Intellect in a state of mind, so to speak, that transcends mundane cognition and may itself already be understood as a form of mystical union; thus Hadot 1988.
- 7 There is a substantial discussion of Plotinian *aphairêsis* in the literature. Although the terminology is originally Aristotelian, Plotinus seems to have borrowed this concept from a more

This appears to involve both a cognitive aspect—the purification of one's conception of the One from any contamination with multiplicity, including one's awareness of the formal delimitations of Intellect or lesser ontological strata—and a corresponding ontological aspect—the dismissal from one's own self (the locus of mystical subjectivity) of any thought, any knowledge, and indeed, any mental activity whatsoever.<sup>8</sup> At one point (III.8[30].10.31–32), Plotinus even exhorts one to “remove” Being itself (whatever this might mean in practice). This ultimate *aphairesis* thus paradoxically represents a virtual undoing of the progressive identification with the intelligible world that one has previously struggled to attain through dialectical praxis and subsequently through other, possibly non-discursive, modes of contemplation. As with other aspects of the final approach to the One, this process suggests some feature of meditative practice, yet it is also consistent with Plotinus's transcendental epistemology, for in order to attain the One—to ‘grasp’ it in some non-intellectual sense—one must reject even knowledge itself to achieve an unencumbered unity of the self that resembles the absolute unity of the One.<sup>9</sup>

### 3 Phase B: Mystical Self-Reversion

The theme of catharsis thus situates the final ascent to MUO within the general framework of the rest of Plotinus's philosophical practice. In mystical contexts, however, one also frequently finds references to the catharsis accompanied

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proximate tradition of Middle Platonic negative theology and Neopythagorean arithmological speculation (a clear example occurs at VI.9[9].6.3–5, cf. Alcinous, *Didaskalikos* 10.5). See Carabine 1995; Mortley 1986, 2:45–62; Whittaker 1969b; Krämer 1964.

8 I.6[1].7.4–7, 8.24–25, 9.8–11; VI.9[9].4.7–10, 4.33–34, 6.51–2, 7.17–20, 9.50–52, 11.8–11; III.8[30].9.32, 10.31–32; V.8[31].11.4, 11.11; V.5[32].7.31–32; VI.7[38].34.3–4, 35.7, 35.33–34, 36.15; VI.8[39].19.4; V.3[49].17.38.

9 Since the One admits of no multiplicity at all, not even the minimal duality implied by the logical differentiation between subject and object of *self-cognition*—e.g., III.9[13].9, V.6[24].6.30–31, VI.7[38].39.13–41.38 and V.3[49].10.6—it cannot be an object of knowledge even to itself, and is thus entirely hypernoetic, “beyond Intellect”; although occasionally (e.g., V.4[7].2.16–19, VI.7[38].39.1–4 and V.3[49].10.41–44) there are hints that the One has some ineffable kind of self-awareness or “touching” (*epibolē*) of itself. The importance of similarity here derives from the traditional theological interpretation of the Empedoclean axiom to the effect that like is known by like (D-K frag. 109) and also has more proximate Middle Platonic roots in the goal of *homoiosis theou* (e.g., Alcinous, *Didaskalikos* 28.3–4) that had originally derived from Plato, *Theaetetus* 176b, as well as Aristotelian epistemology—in which knowledge of incorporeals involves the identity of subject and object—that had already been ‘theologized’ by pre-Plotinian commentators such as Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De anima* 86 ff (see also *infra*, pp. 168–169, n. 87).

by descriptions of an acute, reflexive re-focusing or contraction of awareness upon itself or, more metaphorically, an “inward” reversion towards the essential core of the self.<sup>10</sup> I will call this crucial aspect of the ascent (phase B) *mystical self-reversion* (henceforth also MSR). Plotinus expresses this moment with a variety of spatial metaphors involving introversion, self-withdrawal, or self-contraction; among numerous examples, one might consider the following as paradigmatic:<sup>11</sup> I.6[1].9.7: “go back *into yourself* and look” (ἀναγεῖ ἐπὶ σαυτὸν καὶ ἴδε); IV.8[6].1.1–2: “awakening *into myself* and coming to be outside of all other things but *within myself*” (ἐγχειρόμενος εἰς ἑμαυτὸν ἐκ τοῦ σώματος καὶ γινόμενος τῶν μὲν ἄλλων ἔξω, ἑμαυτοῦ δὲ εἴσω); VI.9[9].7.17–18: “[the soul] must *turn completely to the within*” (δεῖ ἐπιστραφῆναι πρὸς τὸ εἴσω πάντη); III.8[30].9.29–31: “The intellect ... must (so to speak) ‘*withdraw backwards*’ and surrender itself to what lies behind it” (δεῖ τὸν νοῦν οἶον εἰς τοῦπίσω ἀναχωρεῖν καὶ οἶον ἑαυτὸν ἀφέντα τοῖς εἰς ὀπισθεν αὐτοῦ); V.8[31].11.10–11: “running *into the within*” (δραμὼν δὲ εἰς τὸ εἴσω); V.5[32].7.32: “Intellect ... *contracting into its interior*” (συναγαγὼν εἰς τὸ εἴσω). In this phase, the reflexive subject—the mystical aspirant—seems to be a labile faculty of the individual that is described either as the soul having

10 However this ‘self’ is understood; the issue has been controversial. For a robust interpretation of the Plotinian ‘Self’ as the true person or determinative core of individual identity, see especially O’Daly 1973, but also Dodds 1960 and Armstrong 1977; for a more cautious, minimalist approach, Sweeney 1992, who fears that interpreters have wrongly imputed a well-developed concept of self to Plotinus, especially since the term is now so laden with modern psychological connotations; Sweeney repeats the commonplace that the Greek language has, technically speaking, no word for person or self as such (pronouns such as the intensive *autos* and the reflexive *hauton* are not truly substantive). For our immediate purposes, there is no need to solve the problem of whether or not Plotinus had a fully-formulated concept of ‘person’; my use of the word ‘self’ simply reflects the goal of Plotinus’s reflexive self-seeking, which is perhaps merely, as Sweeney thinks, “what one really is.”

11 Other examples of MSR include I.6[1].5.5–6, 8.3–4, 9.1; VI.9[9].3.20–21, 4.26–28, 11.38–39; V.1[10].12.13–14; V.8[31].11.3, 17; V.5[32].8.9–13; VI.7[38].31.8, 35.20–21, 36.10–11; VI.8[39].18.1–2; V.3[49].4.9–11; I.8[51].2.23–25. MSR is sometimes, but not always, expressed with the terminology of *epistrophē* and its cognates: thus *epistraphēnai* at VI.9[9].7.17, *epistrophēi* at V.8[31].11.9, *trepōn* at V.5[32].8.11, *epistrapheisa* at VI.7[38].31.6; but other terminology such as that of self-contraction and the frequent mentions of reflexive cognition or motion *eis* to *eisō* appear to mean virtually the same thing. Aubin 1963 has traced the long history of the term *epistrophē* prior to Plotinus, and it is well known that in later Neoplatonism it became almost a technical term. However, *epistrophē* denoting a turning to the self (*pros hauton*) occurs surprisingly rarely in pre-Plotinian philosophical literature (one might compare Maximus of Tyre, *Dissertationes* 11.10); Aubin 1963, 93–111 observes that it does occur prominently in Valentinian Gnosticism. In Chapter 4 *infra*, I will suggest that Plotinus adopted this concept, if not the precise terminology, largely from contemporaneous Sethian Gnosticism, where it had almost a technical role in the process of ascent.



assimilated itself to the hypostatic Intellect, or instead, as a special modality of Intellect itself,<sup>12</sup> but Plotinus also occasionally refers to the experiential subject of self-reversion with ambiguous pronouns whose grammatical gender vacillates even within the same sentence,<sup>13</sup> which suggests that throughout the course of its ascent the mystical subject is never entirely coextensive with either its psychic or its noetic modality.

Whatever the precise identity of the mystical subject, the motif of self-reversion is consistent with both Plotinus's metaphysics and with some variety of contemplative praxis.<sup>14</sup> With respect to metaphysics, MSR deliberately recapitulates, in a single instant, the entire centripetal thrust of Plotinian reality.<sup>15</sup> It is often noted that Plotinus employs a geometrical model in which both the universal hypostases—One, Intellect, and Soul—and their microcosmic analogues within the human individual are represented by a center-point (*kentron*) and an encompassing series of concentric circles or spheres.<sup>16</sup> Since (according to this model) the center-point corresponding to the One abides “within” the circles, the “ascent” to the One entails an introversion towards one's own “center-point”; here the spatial metaphors of ascent and introversion

12 For the mystical subject identified as soul, I.6[1].9.2–3; IV.8[6].1.1–11; VI.9[9].7–11; VI.7[38].31, 35.1–19, 35.33–40; as *nous*, V.5[32].7.21–8.23; VI.7[38].35.19–33. The mobility of the Plotinian subject, the locus of consciousness, has long been recognized; thus, for example, Dodds 1960.

13 E.g., VI.9[9].7.17–19: ἀφεμένην...ἀγνοήσαντα.

14 The emphasis upon self-knowledge is a philosophical commonplace and is implicit throughout the *Enneads*. However, in mystical contexts, even when Plotinus describes the self-reversion in apparently cognitive terms he does not mean to imply the normal self-knowing at the level of Intellect—that is, the *Nous* perpetually perceiving its own eidetic constituents—but rather indicates a distinctly superior and more concentrated type of self-reflection whose goal is the causal principle of Intellect itself, a transcendental faculty above form and delimitation. The motif of self-knowledge as a path to God reflects an amalgam of common philosophical tropes: first, a post-Hellenistic, Middle-Platonic interpretation of the Delphic exhortation “know yourself” (*gnōthi sauton*), possibly derived from the (pseudo-?) Platonic *First Alcibiades* 133c, on which see Courcelle 1971; second, the Aristotelian notion of God as a self-knowing intellect (e.g., *Metaphysica* 1072b) and the immortality of the human soul when participating in the Active Intellect (*De anima* 430a); and finally, the Stoic conception of a god or daimon within the individual soul.

15 Evoked, for example, at VI.6[34].1.9–16.

16 E.g., IV.7[2].6.13–15; IV.2[4].1.24–29; VI.9[9].8; VI.1[10].7.7–9, 11.10–12; II.2[14].2; IV.1[21].16; VI.5[23].4.21–22, 5.4–6; IV.4[28].16.20–31; III.8[30].8.36–38; VI.7[38].15.24–30; VI.8[39].11.28–30, 18; I.7[54].1.23–24. The infinite multiplicity of points comprising the circles “grow out” (*exephusan*: VI.8[39].18.13) from an *archē*, the unique center-point, just as the hypostases and all of reality unfold from the absolutely simple One. This image has been discussed by Rappe 2000 (esp. 103–6) and Sinnige 1975.

converge.<sup>17</sup> As with the motif of catharsis, Plotinus therefore seems to be suggesting that we must seek out and conjoin with some aspect (or an image, or a trace) of the One that abides within ourselves, at the very center-point or apex of the individual;<sup>18</sup> although it should be pointed out that ordinarily, despite the One's universal immanence, the One and the center-point of the self are not precisely consubstantial (a crucial point to which I shall return shortly). Moreover, a significant (though often overlooked) feature of the self-reversion is that Plotinus almost always describes it in either explicitly or implicitly erotic terms; the reversion towards one's true self (i.e., one's "center-point") is typically impelled by an (auto-)erotic desire for the beauty of the One that is in some way reflected, so to speak, from this same self.<sup>19</sup> With respect to praxis, the concept of self-reversion, like that of catharsis, is redolent of a type of meditation in which exterior sense-perception and accidental psychic dispositions are ignored as the focus of awareness is instead re-oriented "within," at the "center-point" of one's own consciousness: although in this case, the common spatial metaphor provides little additional information about the nature of the experience itself.

#### 4 Phase C: Autophany

That the mystical self-reversion (MSR) is not simply another way of describing catharsis is also confirmed by Plotinus's more positive descriptions of the ensuing phase.<sup>20</sup> At the penultimate (or, more strictly speaking, antepenultimate)

17 Although one should note that Plotinus is not absolutely committed to this particular spatial metaphor, and as if to emphasize its merely heuristic nature sometimes actually reverses it, so that the One is *outside*, rather than inside, all things; e.g., VI.8[39].18.2–3: τὸ γὰρ ἔξω αὐτός ἐστι.

18 E.g., III.8[30].9.23: ἔστι γὰρ τι καὶ παρ' ἡμῖν αὐτοῦ; VI.6[34].18.48–49: ἵχνος αὐτοῦ παρ' αὐτοῦ ἔχοντα.

19 E.g., I.6[1].5.5–8; VI.9[9].4.18–20; VI.7[38].31.5–18, 34.1–16; V.3[49].8.29–31. I have discussed this theme in Mazur 2008.

20 MSR should be distinguished both from the *epistrophē* that occurs at every stratum of Plotinian reality and also from the mystical catharsis. It is often assumed that self-reversion and catharsis are simply two ways of describing the same process using respectively positive or negative metaphors; indeed, the shedding of psychic and intellectual accretions to reveal what is truly oneself might also be described as a refocusing of attention on the center of the self. Yet while Plotinus's descriptions of self-reversion occasionally overlap with catharsis, the two processes are nevertheless not conceptually identical: MSR entails a crucial moment of self-reflection and self-objectification not implied by the purely negative process of catharsis. The importance of the moment of self-objectification intervening between the initial catharsis and the final union with the

moment of ascent, immediately prior to the ultimate attainment of the One, the self-reversion culminates in a sudden (*exaiphnēs*)<sup>21</sup> experience of what Plotinus almost always describes as a luminous vision, a vision whose object most often is not the ultimate goal (that is, the One itself) but rather, one's own self.<sup>22</sup> I therefore call this moment an *autophany* (phase C): a self-manifestation. Thus, for example, I.6[1].9.22–25: "... if *you see yourself* having become this ... having become vision ... this alone is the eye that sees the great beauty" (εἰ τοῦτο γενόμενον σαυτὸν ἴδεις, ὅψις ἤδη γενόμενος... οὗτος γὰρ μόνος ὁ ὀφθαλμὸς τὸ μέγα κάλλος βλέπει); VI.9[9].11.43–44: "*if one should see oneself* having become this, one has oneself as a likeness of that [One]" (εἴ τις οὖν τοῦτο αὐτὸν γενόμενον ἴδῃ, ἔχει ὁμοίωμα ἐκείνου αὐτόν); V.5[32].8.12–13: "[Intellect] *sees, first of all, itself*, having become more beautiful and glistening" (εἶδε μὲν τὰ πρῶτα καλλίω γενόμενον ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἐπιστῖλβοντα). Occasionally, however, Plotinus says that the self and the One appear simultaneously; thus at VI.9[9].9.56–58: "Here, at this point, *one can see both him and oneself* as it is right to see: the self glorified, full of intelligible light—but rather itself pure light, weightless, floating, having become—but rather, being—a god" (ἑαυτὸν μὲν ἡγλαίσμενον, φωτὸς πλήρη νοητοῦ, μάλλον δὲ φῶς αὐτὸ καθαρὸν, ἀβαρὴ, κοῦφον, θεὸν γενόμενον, μάλλον δὲ ὄντα); and at VI.8[39].19.1–2: "one should take hold ... of that [One] itself, and *one will also see himself*" (λαμβάνετω τις οὖν ἐκ τῶν εἰρημένων ἀνακινηθεὶς πρὸς ἐκεῖνο ἐκεῖνο αὐτό, καὶ θεάσεται καὶ αὐτός). In certain cases, the vision of the self is coincident with, but still distinct from, the initial glimpse of the One,<sup>23</sup> while in others some aspect of the One is said to appear "within" the beholder (described as either the self or the soul):<sup>24</sup> thus VI.7[38].31.8–9: "[the soul] saw, stricken, as it were, and she was conscious of having something of it in herself" (εἶδε δὲ οἷον πληγεῖσα καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ [H-S<sup>1</sup>: αὐτῇ] ἔχουσα τι αὐτοῦ συνήσθετο); 34.12–13: "[the soul,] seeing it appearing suddenly *in herself*" (ιδούσα δὲ ἐν αὐτῇ [H-S<sup>1</sup>: αὐτῇ] ἐξαίφνης φανέντα); 35.19: [a god] "*who filled the soul of the contemplator*" (τὴν ψυχὴν ἐμπλήσας τοῦ θεωμένου); VI.8[39].15.14: "If ever we too, ourselves, should *see within ourselves* some nature of such [a kind as the Good]" (εἴ ποτε καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν αὐτοῖς [H-S<sup>1</sup>: αὐτοῖς] ἐνίδοιμέν τινα φύσιν τοιαύτην). This leaves some ambiguity about whether the object of the vision is actually the true "self," itself, or a distinct, separate principle that is nevertheless seen "within," or reflected from,

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One is typically underappreciated by commentators who conflate the aphairctic and the epistrophic processes.

21 V.5[32].7.34; VI.7[38].34.13, 36.18–19; V.3[49].17.29; cf. Plato, *Symposium* 210e; *Ep.* 7 341c.

22 Other examples of autophany include I.6[1].9.16; VI.9[9].9.56, 10.9, 11.10; V.8[31].11.3, 11.10; VI.7[38].36.10–11.

23 VI.9[9].9.55–56; VI.8[39].19.1–3; cf. also VI.5[23].7.9–17 and V.8[31].10.39–44.

24 VI.9[9].4.18; VI.7[38].34.12; VI.8[39].15.14–23.

the self. Indeed, for this reason, it has not always been recognized that the first moment of vision in Plotinus's mystical accounts is usually only a propaedeutic glimpse that precedes the final vision or union.<sup>25</sup>

## 5 Excursus: A First Meditation on the Identity of the Mystical Subject

Despite Plotinus's elaborate evocations of the autophany with the vibrant language of intense subjective experience, the precise identity of our "center-point"—i.e., the now-divinized<sup>26</sup> self that is the object (and thus also, presumably, the subject) of the autophany—remains ambiguous and deserves further consideration. The most common features Plotinus attributes to the autophanous self—features that are both prerequisites for union and also in some sense aroused by proximity to the One<sup>27</sup>—are as follows: (a) a unity, simplicity, and solitude<sup>28</sup> (resembling the absolute singularity of the One), (b) brilliant luminosity,<sup>29</sup> (c) purity,<sup>30</sup> (d) beauty<sup>31</sup>—the beauty that impels one towards an auto-erotic union—and the (e) love (or erotic longing) inspired by this beauty.<sup>32</sup> Plotinus also describes acts of consciousness at this penultimate phase with numerous other terms drawn from bodily experience that are, in a strict sense, 'illegal' when talking about the transcendent realm (such as "running," "sitting," and "resting"), and he less frequently imputes various other striking qualities to the transcendental self—such as (f) a new kind

25 Besides the examples I have cited here, I would also suggest that a number of additional passages describe an autophany (phase C) at the penultimate stage of ascent without necessarily describing MUO; thus IV.8[6].11–11; VI.9[9].4.15–21; V.8[31].11.1–19 (although this may also describe later phases as well), and VI.7[38].35–7–19 (nota bene, elsewhere in ch. 35, Plotinus *does* describe MUO); however, a full defense of this reading would require more space than would be appropriate for this chapter. [A possible future project might involve a running commentary on Plotinus's mystical passages in chronological order, with detailed analysis and argument about each of these passages].

26 E.g., I.6[1].9.32–33; VI.9[9].9.58; V.5[32].8.9–13; V.3[49].4.10–13.

27 At V.5[32].8.13 the autophanous aspirant is rendered more beautiful "because he is near" (ὡς ἐγγύς ὄντος αὐτοῦ); at VI.7[38].22–23, Plotinus implies that an erotic efflux from the One stimulates the Intellect's mystical love for it in return.

28 I.6[1].9.18; VI.9[9].10.10, 11.8–9, 11.23; V.8[31].11.5, 13.

29 I.6[1].9.18; VI.9[9].4.20–21, 9.57–58; V.5[32].7.31–34, 8.14; V.3[49].17.28.

30 I.6[1].9.16; VI.9[9].3.26, 3.34, 9.58; V.5[32].7.33.

31 I.6[1].5.5; IV.8[6].1.3; V.8[31].10.34, 11.3; V.5[32].8.12; VI.7[38].31.8–11, 33.1–3, 34.10, 36.16; although elsewhere (at VI.9[9].11.16) he implies the aspirant has transcended beauty altogether.

32 I.6[1].5.7; VI.9[9].4.18–20; VI.7[38].31, 34.1–22; 35.24.

of “life,”<sup>33</sup> (g) stillness or “standing” (*histēnai, stasis*),<sup>34</sup> (h) strength (*menos, hrōnnunai*),<sup>35</sup> (i) wonder (*thauma, thambos*),<sup>36</sup> and (j) waking,<sup>37</sup> among others (I will discuss these at greater length in Chapter 3). This ensemble of features might conceivably be thought to identify the autophanous self as the Intellect, which ordinarily, of course, engages in reflexive self-contemplation, and which Plotinus similarly characterizes as divine, luminous, beautiful, unified, and so on.<sup>38</sup> Yet—one must be quite emphatic on this point—the autophanous self is not simply equivalent to the hypostatic Intellect. For one thing, Plotinus is sometimes (but not always) explicit that the subject of self-reversion (phase B) originates at the level of Intellect but surpasses it at the moment of autophany (phase C); at one point he says that the fully autophanous Intellect—that is, the self at the penultimate moment prior to the final MUO—has become even *more* beautiful.<sup>39</sup> More importantly, however, Plotinus occasionally describes the autophanous self in paradoxically apophatic terms and insists that at this point the self has become utterly formless, without determinate quality, thus quite distinct from his ordinary descriptions of Intellect. A clear example of this occurs in Plotinus’s first treatise, at I.6[1].9.19–22,<sup>40</sup> where he says that the luminous, autophanous self is “not measured by magnitude nor circumscribed into diminution by shape nor, conversely, expanded into magnitude by unboundedness but everywhere unmeasurable because greater than all measure and better than all quantity” (οὐ μεγέθει μεμετρημένον οὐδὲ σχήματι εἰς ἐλάττωσιν περιγραφὸν οὐδ’ αὖ εἰς μέγεθος δι’ ἀπειρίας αὐξηθέν, ἀλλ’ ἀμέτρητον πανταχοῦ, ὡς ἂν μείζον παντὸς μέτρου καὶ παντὸς κρείσσον ποσοῦ).<sup>41</sup> This remarkable description

33 IV.8[6].1.4, VI.9[9].9.47 (cf. II.49); III.8[30].9.32; VI.7[38].31.4, 31.32–33, 36.12 (cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 31b1).

34 IV.8[6].1.7; VI.9[9].7.2, II.15; (cf. 4.9, 5.29); III.8[30].9.25, 27; V.5[32].8.11 (cf. VI.7[38].35.36–40).

35 V.5[32].8.13; VI.7[38].22.15, 31.32; cf. I.6[1].9.26.

36 I.6[1].7.16; IV.8[6].1.3; III.8[30].10.31; V.5[32].8.25, 12.10; VI.7[38].35.7–9.

37 I.6[1].8.26; IV.8[6].1.1; VI.9[9].3.24; V.5[32].12.10; VI.7[38].22.15.

38 Elsewhere, in pre-MUO contexts (e.g., V.8[31].9.1–18, 10.32–43, 11.1–20; VI.7[38].15.24–32; cf. also VI.4[22].7.22–47) Plotinus advises what might be called a guided meditation exercise in which one must visualize oneself at the point of identity with the hypostatic Intellect (the noetic cosmos), in the form of a resplendently beautiful, luminous sphere; here the common Platonic metaphor of cognition in terms of vision coalesces with what appears to be actual visionary or photic experience; see esp. Dillon 1986; idem 2002, and Rappe 2000.

39 V.5[32].8.12–13; V.8[31].11.1–3, where the subject is *tis hēmōn*, not specifically the Intellect.

40 Other examples include, for example, VI.9[9].4.7–10, II.8–12; III.8[30].9.32; VI.7[38].33.1–3, 34.2–8.

41 One should note that this is not the self at the ultimate moment of MUO, but the penultimate moment prior to the vision of the One: this is identified later in the treatise, at

of the autophanous self suggests a kinship less with the Intellect (itself characterized by measure, limit, and form),<sup>42</sup> than with the supreme principle itself, and seems to echo the apophatic description of the absolute One of the first hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides* (139b–140d),<sup>43</sup> a source from which Plotinus also draws to embellish his accounts of the One in later treatises.<sup>44</sup> The positive (cataphatic) and apophatic descriptions of the autophanous self would thus appear to be in some tension.<sup>45</sup>

At this point it may be also useful to recall that Plotinus frequently suggests that contact with the One occurs through a special faculty of the self,<sup>46</sup> described as an extraordinary aspect of Intellect, or an aspect of Intellect that paradoxically transcends Intellect altogether. Thus, for example, at VI.9[9].3.27, the One is attained through the “primary [part] of intellect” (τοῦ νοῦ τῷ πρώτῳ); at V.3[49].14.14–15, the “inner intellect” (ὁ ἐνδον νοῦς); at III.8.[30]11.22 and VI.7[38].33.30, the “trace” (ἵχνος) of the Good in the Intellect (or, similarly, at VI.6[34].18.48 and VI.7[38].18.3, its “trace” in *all* things); at V.5[32].8.22–3, some part of intellect which is *not* intellect (τῷ ἑαυτοῦ μὴ νῷ); and at VI.7[38].35.19–25, the “loving intellect” (νοῦς ἐρῶν) as distinguished from the ordinary (thinking) intellect. We may compare these examples to Plotinus's various hints that the essential self that appears during the autophany transcends Intellect prior to the final state of MUO. At VI.7[38].31.8, the soul, having seen and fallen in

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1.6[1].9.25, as the “eye that sees the great beauty”; though I would concede that strictly speaking *some* kind of vision and union are not mutually exclusive.

42 E.g., VI.9[9].3.36–40, V.1[10].7.21–26, VI.7[38].17.39–40, 33.37–38; VI.2[43].21.11–16. On this passage see also Susanetti 1995: 161: “La luce in cui l'anima si trasforma—luce non misurabile da alcuna grandezza, non soggetta a diminuzione per effetto di una figura che la circoscrive né, all'opposto, soggetta ad accrescimento per mancanza di limite (*apeiria*)—è alla identica all'infinità stessa del principio primo.”

43 Cf. esp. 140d: “Then it will partake neither of one measure, not of many, nor of few, nor will it partake at all of the same, nor will it ever, apparently, be equal to itself or to anything else; nor will it be greater or less than itself or another” (οὔτε ἄρα ἐνὸς μέτρου μετέχον οὔτε πολλῶν οὔτε ὀλίγων, οὔτε τὸ παράπαν τοῦ αὐτοῦ μετέχον, οὔτε ἑαυτῷ ποτε, ὥς ἔοικεν, ἔσται ἴσον οὔτε ἄλλῳ· οὔτε αὖ μείζον οὐδὲ ἔλαττον οὔτε ἑαυτοῦ οὔτε ἐτέρου). [Trans. H. N. Fowler, LCL].

44 E.g., VI.9[9].3.36–45; VI.7[38].32–34. One might also compare this to Plotinus's refusal to predicate either limit or unlimitedness of the One at V.5[32].10.18–11.5 or his insistence that it is not confined by shape at V.1[10].7.20. In a further analysis of the transcendental self in Chapter 3 we will also see that this description resembles the somewhat more desultory but roughly similar shapelessness and indefiniteness of “intelligible matter” prior to its “turning” and its imprinting by the One at II.4[12].3–5.

45 This tension does not, however, render these utterances meaningless; see Sells 1994, 19–22 for a discussion of Plotinus's “double-proposition semantics” when referring to reality beyond the binary determination of Intellect.

46 This has long been noted in the scholarship; the notion of the “One in us” has been discussed at length by Beierwaltes 1965.

love with “something of him [the One]... *within herself*,” (ἐν αὐτῇ [H-S<sup>1</sup>: αὐτῇ]... τι αὐτοῦ), later, at VI.7[38].34.3–4, “sets aside all shape which she has, and *even whatever of the intelligible might be in her*” (ἀποτίθεται πᾶσαν ἣν ἔχει μορφήν, καὶ ἥτις ἂν καὶ νοητοῦ ᾗ ἐν αὐτῇ).<sup>47</sup> At VI.8[39].15.14–21, Plotinus says explicitly that there are times in which we might “see within” (*enidoinen*) ourselves a light in the form of the Good (ἀγαθοειδοῦς) that is “*greater than that according to Intellect*, having that above Intellect [within], not imported [from without]” (μειζονος ἢ κατὰ νοῦν, οὐκ ἐπακτὸν τὸ ὑπὲρ τὸ νοεῖν ἐχούσης); we eventually ascend to and become this light: that is, the autophanous self.<sup>48</sup> One may also compare several statements to the effect that contact with or vision of the One occurs by means of a mysterious principle (*archē*) or power (*dunamis*) within the self that is not precisely the Intellect but is connate with the supreme principle; thus at VI.9[9].3.20–22, he says one must “ascend to the principle in oneself and become one from many so as to be a spectator of the principle and the One” (ἐπὶ τε τὴν ἐν ἑαυτῷ ἀρχὴν ἀναβεβηκέναι καὶ ἐν ἐκ πολλῶν γενέσθαι ἀρχῆς καὶ ἑνὸς θεατὴν ἐσόμενον); and later, at VI.9[9].4.27–28, that the contact with the One occurs by “likeness” (ὁμοιότητι) and “by means of a power in oneself that is connatural with that which comes from him [the One]” (τῇ ἐν αὐτῷ [H-S<sup>1</sup>: αὐτῷ] δυνάμει συγγενεῖ τῷ ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ). Later in the same treatise, at 8.10–22, Plotinus puzzles as to whether one is really seeking the center-point of the soul or instead “another” (*allo*) center, “in which all centers, as it were, coincide” (εἰς δὲ πάντα οἷον κέντρα συμπίπτει), but he immediately rejects the geometrical analogy, specifying that the soul is similar to a circle only in the sense that there is “within it and around it the ‘ancient nature,’ and [the soul comes] from such a thing” (ἐν αὐτῇ καὶ περὶ αὐτὴν ἡ ἀρχαία φύσις, καὶ ὅτι ἀπὸ τοιούτου);<sup>49</sup> and says that it is “by means of this [center] we conjoin ourselves at the center of ourselves to the center, as it were, of all things” (τούτῳ συνάπτομεν κατὰ τὸ ἑαυτῶν κέντρον τῷ οἷον πάντων κέντρῳ), which is to say: we attain MUO. Likewise at V.1[10].11.6–7, insisting on the immanence of the One, Plotinus affirms that there must not only be the true Intellect within us (ἐν ἡμῖν), but also the

47 Also III.8[30].9.29–32 where the subject of MSR is Intellect which must then “not be entirely Intellect” (although here the autophany is not specifically mentioned).

48 The inner, hypernoetic light mentioned in this passage should not to be confused with the supreme principle itself, which could never be merely *agathoeidēs*, or, for that matter, *anything-eidēs*.

49 In a much later treatise, I.8[51].7.8, Plotinus defines the “ancient nature” (ultimately a reference to Plato, *Symposium* 192e9) as the underlying matter prior to its being ordered by Form, and says that this matter is the source of evil. This hints vaguely at the notion, to be defended in later chapters, that the transcendental self is in some way equivalent to the first prenoetic efflux from the One, i.e., intelligible matter, on which see n. 124 *infra*.

principle and source and god of Intellect (τὴν νοῦ ἀρχὴν καὶ αἰτίαν καὶ θεόν); and at 11.13–14: “by means of some such thing among those within ourselves, we too are attached, are together with, and depend upon [the One]” (τῷ γὰρ τοιοῦτῳ τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐφαπτόμεθα καὶ σύνεσμεν καὶ ἀνηρτήμεθα). I would therefore conjecture that Plotinus equated what I will henceforth call the transcendental self<sup>50</sup> of the autophany (phase C) with both the paradoxical hypernoetic faculty of Intellect on the one hand, and on the other hand, with the center-point, *archē*, or *dunamis* of the One within the self that somehow enables one to attain MUO.<sup>51</sup>

## 6 Phase C<sup>2</sup>: Self-Unification

In any event—whatever the actual identity of the transcendental self—the autophany (understood as a discrete moment of self-apprehension) comprises only the proximate goal of the mystical self-reversion. Plotinus is ultimately not content with even the minimal duality of subject and object inherent in perception; he exhorts one to coalesce with the beautified image of oneself and thus attain the superior unity of complete self-identity,<sup>52</sup> in a preliminary unification that almost always precedes—but which is often too quickly conflated with<sup>53</sup>—the ultimate union with the One. Thus, to the aforementioned

50 Following the terminology of H. Jonas.

51 As I will argue more comprehensively in the next chapter, Plotinus understood this special, hypernoetic faculty through which one attains MUO to be in some sense equivalent to both the transcendental self and, simultaneously, the pre-perceptual, prenoetic visionary efflux of the One (and / or intelligible matter and the indefinite dyad) that emerges at the very first eternal moment of procession. Here I am in essential agreement with Perczel 1997, who has suggested that the paradoxical faculty of Intellect which perceives the One (i.e., the *nous erōn* and its kin) are in fact aspects of a principle of Plotinian metaphysics intermediate between One and Intellect, a principle that Plotinus derived from the One-Being of the second hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides* (142b–e). [Speculations on this intermediary domain between the hypertranscendental first principle and the second, noetic, principle were common in the period just prior to Plotinus; examples may be found in the *Anonymous Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* (if we accept Tardieu, Bechtel and Corrigan's pre-Plotinian dating) and, as we will see in ch. 4, in the Sethian Platonizing treatises read and critiqued in Plotinus's circle.]

52 An act often described, yet again, in explicit, though usually undertranslated, auto-erotic terms.

53 Among those who do not clearly differentiate Plotinus's statements of self-unification from those of MUO are Rist 1967, 226, and O'Daly 1973—committed as he is to equating the transcendental self and the One—and also (somewhat surprisingly, given his extremely careful attention to the text) Bussanich 1988, 183ff.



passage at VI.9[9].3.20–22 in which one must first “become one from many” in order to attain the One, one may add the following: I.6[1].9.16–17: “you, pure, ‘*come together*’ with yourself, having no impediment to thus coming towards one” (σαυτῷ καθαρὸς συνεγένου οὐδὲν ἔχων ἐμπόδιον πρὸς τὸ εἰς οὕτω γενέσθαι); VI.9[9].10.10: “he will ‘*be together*’ with himself as such” (αὐτῷ τοιοῦτω συνέσται); 11.8: “*he too was one himself*” (ἦν δὲ ἓν καὶ αὐτὸς). The transition from autophany (phase C) to self-unification is particularly evident in V.8[31].11, a passage which has been usually been interpreted to describe union with the Intellect but which also, arguably, describes the penultimate stage of MUO;<sup>54</sup> thus, at 11.3–4: “he presents himself [to himself] and looks at a beautified image of himself, but dismisses the image though it is beautiful, *coming into one with himself*” (ἐαυτὸν προφέρει καὶ εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ καλλωπισθεῖσαν βλέπει, ἀφείς δὲ τὴν εἰκόνα καίπερ καλὴν οὖσαν εἰς ἓν αὐτῷ ἐλθὼν); 11.10–12: “from the beginning he perceives himself, so long as he is different; but running into the within, he has everything, and leaving perception behind in fear of being different, *he is one there*.” (ἀρχόμενος αἰσθάνεται αὐτοῦ, ἕως ἕτερός ἐστι· δραμὼν δὲ εἰς τὸ εἶσω ἔχει πᾶν, καὶ ἀφείς τὴν αἴσθησιν εἰς τοῦπίσω τοῦ ἕτερος εἶναι φόβῳ εἰς ἐστὶν ἐκεῖ). One may understand this moment of self-unification as a sub-phase of the autophany (I will call this phase C<sup>2</sup>), since the former is often mentioned in close proximity to the latter,<sup>55</sup> but the account of self-unification also frequently coincides with or supervenes immediately upon the final union with the One (what I will henceforth call phase E), since it is, presumably, this utterly simple and unified modality of the individual that allows one to unite with the One through its similarity (*homoiotēs*) to the latter.

However, we should conclude neither that Plotinus imagined the self-unification (phase C<sup>2</sup>) to be actually equivalent to MUO (phase E) nor that he thought the transcendental self to be identical to the One. In fact Plotinus tends to distinguish—at least in conception—between the moment of self-unification (C<sup>2</sup>) and the ultimate phase of MUO (phase E). To be precise, in several passages, Plotinus suggests that even once one has attained an absolute self-identity (phase C<sup>2</sup>), one has not yet reached the ultimate stage of union (MUO). For example, at I.6[1].9, the blatantly transcendental, autophanous self into which one transforms oneself (thus phase C<sup>2</sup>) is simply capable of “seeing” the supreme principle (“the eye that sees the great Beauty”), but is not

54 That this passage describes, if not MUO itself, then at least the penultimate stage of MUO, is made clear by comparison with distinctly parallel language in the next treatise of the *Großschrift*, V.5[32].8.9–13; this latter passage describes an autophany of a beautified aspirant (one having been assimilated to Intellect) that is unquestionably in the context of MUO.

55 I.6[1].9.15–18; VI.9[9].10.10; cf. also V.8[31].11.4–5, 10–12.

itself described as having actually attained the final state of MUO at the moment it unifies with itself. At v.5 [32].8.12–13, Plotinus indicates a (temporal?) sequence in which the autophany clearly precedes the union, since the autophanous intellect “sees *first of all* itself” (εἶδε μὲν τὰ πρῶτα...ἑαυτὸν) prior to the final moment of MUO.<sup>56</sup> The initial *men* clause—unusually rare in Plotinus’s Greek—that describes the autophany longs for a contrastive *de* clause to complete the experience with a final vision of the One, but in the next few lines (8.13–23)—undoubtedly conscious of the inadequacy of words here—Plotinus coyly avoids describing the final state with a retreat into paradoxical and apophatic language that implies union without stating it explicitly. Moreover, the notion of mere proximity implied by the inclusion of the explanatory phrase “because he is nearby” (ὥς ἐγγυς ὄντος αὐτοῦ) indicates that we have not yet arrived at the ultimate union. Similarly, at vi.9 [9].9.55–10.21, a simultaneous vision of both the One *and* the self (i.e., the autophany, phase C) clearly precedes the description (at 10.14 ff.) of both the self-unification (phase C<sup>2</sup>) and the ultimate coalescence (i.e. MUO proper, phase E), which are also mentioned separately but in the same breath. Specifically, at 10.9–11, Plotinus conflates autophany and self-unification: “And so seeing himself, then, when he sees, he will see as such, or, rather, he will “be together with” himself in such a manner and will perceive as such, having become simple” (ἑαυτὸν μὲν οὖν ἰδὼν τότε, ὅτε ὁρᾷ, τοιοῦτον ὄψεται, μᾶλλον δὲ αὐτῷ τοιούτῳ συνέσται καὶ τοιοῦτον αἰσθήσεται ἀπλοῦν γενόμενον). Curiously, there is no mention of the One that one has beheld just recently (in the preceding lines, 55–60) together with the autophanous self (ὁρᾷ...κάκεινον καὶ ἑαυτὸν), and in fact Plotinus does not explicitly mention MUO proper until the following lines, which even now (at least initially) remain silent about the One and begin with an elaboration on the self-unification: thus 10.14–17: “And so, *then*, the seer neither sees nor distinguishes nor imagines two, but as if having become another and not himself nor belonging to himself there, having come to belong to that, he is one, as if having attached center to center” (τότε μὲν οὖν οὔτε ὁρᾷ οὐδὲ διακρίνει ὁ ὁρῶν οὐδὲ φαντάζεται δύο, ἀλλ’ οἷον ἄλλος γενόμενος καὶ οὐκ οὐδὲ φαντάζεται δύο, ἀλλ’ οἷον ἄλλος γενόμενος καὶ οὐκ αὐτὸς οὐδ’ αὐτοῦ συντελεῖ ἐκεῖ, κάκεινου γενόμενος ἓν ἐστὶν ὥσπερ κέντρῳ κέντρον συνάψας). The seer (*to horōn*) with which the sentence begins is the autophanous and self-unified subject of the union in the preceding lines, and yet here Plotinus subtly shifts the union from that of the self with the *self* to that of the self with *another*. The “other” to which the seer comes to identify (and belong) is undoubtedly the One, although Plotinus does not state this explicitly; indeed, this reticence to even mention the supreme principle in

56 Following H-S<sup>1</sup> and all translators, who read *ta prōta* adverbially.

this most crucial of passages may reflect an awareness of the inadequacy of determinate language for describing a transition from duality into absolute unity. This passage thus evokes a fluid progression from the self-unification (phase C<sup>2</sup>) following the autophany to the absolute union with the One (phase E).

## 7 Phase D: Annihilation

Lest one still suspect the transcendental self to be unproblematically equivalent to the One, Plotinus often insists that once one has experienced the final self-unification (phase C<sup>2</sup>)—a moment which at first glance had seemed to be more or less coextensive with MUO—even this self, too, must be rejected in a terminal moment of utter self-negation, dissolution, surrender, or displacement; henceforth I will refer to this phase as *annihilation*, (phase D).<sup>57</sup> Plotinus presents this phase as an annihilation of the self most clearly in VI.9[9], a treatise which is especially concerned with emphasizing the unity and hypertranscendence of the One. This is suggested first with the striking emphasis on the abdication of knowledge—an “unknowing”—following the self-reversion at VI.9[9].7.18–21: “*un-knowing*’ all things (both as he had at first, in the sensible realm, then also, in that of the forms) and even ‘*un-knowing*’ himself, [the soul must] come to be in the vision of that....” (ἀγνοήσαντα τὰ πάντα καὶ πρὸ τοῦ μὲν τῇ αἰσθήσει [H-S<sup>1</sup>: διαθέσει], τότε δὲ καὶ τοῖς εἶδεσιν, ἀγνοήσαντα δὲ καὶ αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ θεᾷ ἐκείνου γενέσθαι). Similarly—as we have just seen—at VI.9[9].10.15–16, at the final moment of union, the aspirant is “as if *having become another and not himself* nor belonging to himself there” (οἷον ἄλλος γενόμενος καὶ οὐκ αὐτὸς οὐδ’

57 The term annihilation may seem tendentious given the controversy on this issue. I use it deliberately to make clear where I stand. There is no amount of rationalization or equivocation that can negate the force of Plotinus’s repeated and explicit emphasis on this point. I am therefore in agreement with Mamo 1976, Bussanich 1988, and Meijer 1991—but against a surprising majority of scholars—that at the moment of MUO the self is dissolved, even if it is able to reconstitute itself afterwards (though I disagree with Bussanich’s view that once attained, MUO is actually a permanent state). The reluctance of many scholars to admit the dissolution of the self seems to be based on the implication that if the subject is destroyed then experience and memory of the event are impossible. The term annihilation also has deliberate (if unfortunately Orientalizing) connotations, for one cannot help but notice—possible historical influences aside—a somewhat superficial parallel with other mystical traditions, such as, for example, the Sufi conception of union with God as the extinction (*fana’a*) of the self. In Chapter 1, I cover the history of the application to Plotinus of concepts borrowed from the study of comparative religion, and especially Zaehner’s singularly unhelpful dichotomy between “theistic” and “monistic” mysticism.

αὐτοῦ συντελεῖ ἐκεῖ); also, at 11.11–12: “there was neither reason nor any thought, *nor, entirely, a self*, if one must say even this” (ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ λόγος οὐδέ τις νόησις οὐδ’ ὅλως αὐτός, εἰ δεῖ καὶ τοῦτο λέγειν); at 11.23, the union is an “*ekstasis ... and a surrender of oneself*” (ἔκστασις...καὶ ἐπίδοσις αὐτοῦ), perhaps in fact signifying “ecstasy,” but also, surely, a “standing outside” or radical displacement of even the transcendental self. The imagery of self-surrender recurs at 111.8[30].9.29–32, where the mystical subject (described as Intellect) must “*give itself up*, as it were, to what lies behind it” (ἀφέντα τοῖς εἰς ὀπισθεν αὐτοῦ) and “not be entirely Intellect” (μὴ πάντα νοῦν εἶναι); and at 5.8[31].11.17, the aspirant must “*immediately surrender himself to the within*” (ἧδη αὐτὸν δοῦναι εἰς τὸ εἶσω). At 51.7[38].35.33–34 the soul’s vision occurs “as if *confusing and annihilating the intellect* abiding within her” (οἷον συγχέασα καὶ ἀφανίσασα μένοντα). In later accounts Plotinus tends also to emphasize the dissolution of the subject’s identity with paradoxical statements whose logical structure takes the form “the X that attains ΜΥΟ is not X”; thus 5.5[32].8.22–23: “because it is Intellect, *it looks, when it looks, with that of itself which is not Intellect*” (ὅτι ἐστὶ νοῦς, οὕτω βλέπει, ὅτε βλέπει, τῷ αὐτοῦ μὴ νῶ); 51.7[38].35.42–45: “Therefore the soul does not move, then, since that [One] does not either; *nor, therefore, is it soul*, because that [One] does not live, but is above life; *nor is it intellect*, because it does not think either” (οὐδὲ ψυχὴ τοίνυν, ὅτι μηδὲ ζῇ ἐκεῖνο, ἀλλὰ ὑπὲρ τὸ ζῆν. οὐδὲ νοῦς, ὅτι μηδὲ νοεῖ). These passages suggest that in a final, paradoxical recapitulation of the initial catharsis (phase A) one must reject not only the Intellect but even the hypernoetic self-identity that one had thus far so assiduously sought to attain.<sup>58</sup>

## 8 Excursus: Second Meditation on the Identity of the Mystical Subject

At this point let us take a brief detour from the ascent to try yet again to identify the enigmatic mystical subject somewhat more carefully. If we are to take seriously Plotinus’s numerous statements that the true self not only surrenders its identification with both soul and Intellect, discarding them like spent booster-rocket stages, but also burns itself up in the sun, so to speak (i.e., dissolves its own self-identity at the moment of ΜΥΟ), it follows that even this self cannot *ever* be truly identical to the supreme principle, even if we grant that

<sup>58</sup> It should be pointed out that Plotinus never uses the specific word *aphairein* or its cognates to describe the annihilation of the self, although one might assume that the self is tacitly included in his exhortation *aphele panta* at 5.3[49].17.38.

during the union itself some other, more strictly ineffable, locus of subjectivity survives the momentary dissolution of the transcendental self and allows the aspirant to experience and remember the union.<sup>59</sup> It also means that the “center-point” or *archē* of the self to which one must revert—the luminous, divine self of the autophany—never precisely corresponds *either* to the Intellect *or* to the One. Rather, it abides in a shadowy liminal domain—one that is expressly “forbidden” according to Plotinus’s more dogmatic statements<sup>60</sup>—somewhere “above” the hypostatic Being-Intellect but still slightly “below” the One. This further entails that the mystical subject *qua* subject of experience is not entirely coextensive with the hypernoetic, transcendental self, from which it must dissociate itself in order to take the very last step (in the annihilation, phase D) towards MUO (phase E).<sup>61</sup>

That the mystical subject must reject and surpass even the transcendental self will perhaps be clearest from two passages besides those cited immediately

59 Plotinus is of course aware of the difficulties this entails; thus VI.9[9].10.19–21, 11.6–7.

60 E.g., VI.1[10].6.22–23, 49; but see also II.9[33].1, in direct response to the Gnostic postulation of a multiplicity of ontological gradations mediating the derivation of the intellectual (second) principle from the transcendent (first) principle. Plotinus’s own reluctance to discuss explicitly the subsistence of the transcendental self on this level may result from his awareness of and evident anxiety that this is very close to certain Gnostic ideas and even violates certain metaphysical principles of his own that he developed precisely to distinguish himself from the Gnostics (more about this in Chapter 4).

61 A final question remains, however: center-points and traces of the One aside, could Plotinus’s anthropology admit a faculty of the self above what he normally considers to be the true person: that is, the individual soul potentially at the level of Intellect; e.g., I.1[53].10), or even, as he sometimes suggests (e.g., V.7[18].1.1–7), the Form of the individual actually in the Intellect? The issue of whether Plotinus believed in Forms of individuals is controversial—see, *inter alia*, Blumenthal 1966 and Armstrong 1977—but this is actually a slightly different question, since it concerns a hypernoetic, rather than a noetic, self. There are a number of subtle hints (though hardly proofs) that the answer is affirmative; one might consider V.3[49].4.11–12, where Plotinus suggests that one who has attained the level of Intellect can undertake a further self-reflection “no longer as a human being but having become entirely other” (οὐχ ὡς ἀνθρώπων ἔστι, ἀλλὰ παντελῶς ἄλλον γενόμενον); also, at III.4[15].6.4–5, Plotinus appears to grant the possibility that a person who acts according to Intellect has a guardian *daimōn*—the individual’s principle of activity abiding on an ontological plane immediately superjacent to the one on which one ordinarily acts—that is itself a “god ... above Intellect” (θεός... ὑπὲρ νοῦν); one might then compare to this Porphyry’s account (*Vit. Plot.* 10.21–22) of the evocation of Plotinus’s own personal *daimōn*, which turned out to be a (full) god (θεός) and not merely of the “race [or genus] of demons” (τοῦ δαιμόνων... γένους). While I agree with Bussanich (against O’Daly) that it is hard to see how Plotinus could have envisioned *two* distinct hyperontic, hypernoetic substances, self and One, one could perhaps with difficulty imagine some kind of non-dualistic superimposition at a hyperontic level “above” the distinction between identity and difference.

*supra* under “Phase D: Annihilation.” First, one might consider the description of ΜΥΟ at VI.9[9].11.38–45, where Plotinus says that one who has already transcended Being and substance (11.41–42: οὐκ ἐν τῷ ὄντι...οὐκ οὐσία, ἀλλ’ ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας, echoing Plato, *Respublica* 509b9) has still not yet attained the ultimate moment of union, which only occurs after a final extroversion, a movement *out of oneself*: “if one *goes on from oneself* as an image to an archetype” (11.44–45: εἰ ἀφ’ αὐτοῦ μεταβαίνοι ὡς εἰκῶν πρὸς ἀρχέτυπον),<sup>62</sup> only then does one reach “the end of the journey” (τέλος...τῆς πορείας). This in turn may shed light on an earlier passage in the same chapter, that of the famous simile of the *adyton* of the temple (11.18–33), in which Plotinus compares the final approach to the One to the experience of a devotee who enters into the inner sanctuary (*adyton*) so as to commune directly with the divine after having contemplated the cult-icons standing outside, which become “secondary objects of contemplation” (δεύτερα θεάματα) upon the devotee’s re-emergence. In this analogy—one which already occurred in I.6[1].7 and which he repeats in the very next treatise, at V.1[10].6.12–15—the icons outside the temple would appear to correspond to the Forms within the Intellect, while the “intercourse there with the [divine inside the *adyton*]” (*tēn ekei sunousian pros ... auto*) implies a direct encounter with the One above Intellect (i.e., ΜΥΟ). Yet if the statues represent the Forms in the hypostatic Intellect, what does the *adyton* itself represent? On the one hand, that the *adyton* transcends Intellect is suggested by its greater ‘interiority’ with respect to the statues (the Forms). On the other hand, as Pierre Hadot has argued, the *adyton* itself cannot be taken to represent the One, since in the simile the god corresponding to the One is seen *inside* the *adyton*; it could hardly be the *adyton* itself that is contemplated.<sup>63</sup> There is a hint, however, at line 31, where Plotinus refers to the *adyton* itself as the “source and principle” (πηγὴν καὶ ἀρχήν: borrowing from Plato, *Phaedrus* 245c9); he then says that one sees “principle with principle and like ‘comes together’ with like” (ἀρχὴν ἀρχὴν ὁρᾷ καὶ συγγίνεται καὶ τῷ ὁμοίῳ τὸ ὅμοιον). Hadot proposes that the *archē* to be seen is the One and that the *archē* by which it is seen is the transcendental self, the “One in us” (we may recall VI.9[9].3.20–22, where Plotinus similarly calls the indwelling principle an *archē*);<sup>64</sup> thus the *adyton* represents simultaneously

62 Meijer 1992, 311 correctly cites this passage against O’Daly 1973 in favor of a complete dissolution of the self in ΜΥΟ.

63 Hadot 1994, 209–12, for whom the entire temple-simile may also be understood as a model of the concentric levels of the human self.

64 Hadot 1994 also compares this use of the word to the *archē* of the emergent Intellect prior to its being “filled” or impregnated by the “true” *archē* that fills it (i.e., the One) at VI.7[38].16.32–35; indeed, in my opinion, Plotinus understands these *archai* to be virtually identical.

the *archē* of the soul, the “One in us,” and the means by which the One is seen. In other words, in this image—which is based upon Plotinus’s usual concentric model—the statues represent (i) the realm of Intellect, the *adyton* represents (ii) the transcendental self; the entrance to the *adyton* represents (iii) the self-unification (C<sup>2</sup>) “above” Intellect, an entrance into our hypernoetic self; and the vision *within* the *adyton*—described as, among other things, an *ekstasis*, *haplōsis*, and *epidosis autou*, suggestive of self-dissolution—thus represents (iv) the paradoxical surrender and annihilation of the self (phase D) necessary for MUO and perhaps also MUO itself (phase E). We may therefore conceive of the ambiguous locus of mystical subjectivity—the subject which progressively identifies with ever more unified modalities of self-reflection until transcending perception and even self-identity—as a “traveling subject in the logic of mystical ascent”.<sup>65</sup> a subject which ultimately surrenders any delimitation whatsoever in its implosion into the infinitude of the One. We will see that an understanding of the perplexingly fluid identity of this conscious principle is crucial for our grasp of Plotinus’s system in both its processional and reversion phases.

## 9 Excursus: On Beauty

Among other enigmatic aspects of the transcendental self is its relation to beauty. As we have already seen, in several passages Plotinus describes the autophanous self as having become more beautiful, both as a result of one’s proximity to the One and, conversely, as a prerequisite for union. Thus at 1.6[1].9, the goal of both catharsis (phase A) and self-reversion (phase B) is ultimately to reveal the true beauty of the self (here described as the beauty of the soul); thus, at 9.32–34, “one must first become all godlike and beautiful if one wishes to see God and Beauty” (γενέσθω δὴ πρῶτον θεοειδὴς πᾶς καὶ καλὸς πᾶς, εἰ μέλλει θεάσασθαι θεόν τε καὶ καλόν). At 1V.8[6].1.1–11, Plotinus recounts his own experience of seeing an “extraordinarily wondrous beauty” (θαυμαστὸν ἡλίκον ὁρῶν κάλλος) within himself. At V.8[31].11.3 one looks at a “beautified” (καλλωπισθεῖσαν) image of oneself; at V.5[32].8.13 the autophanous Intellect sees itself “become more beautiful” (καλλίω γενόμενον) at the moment of auto-phany; and at VI.7[38].34.10, the soul has prepared herself by making herself “most beautiful” (μάλιστα καλήν). Now it is interesting to note that in a number of these passages, the object of union is called not by its ordinary names, i.e.,

65 Per Kevin Corrigan’s apt description of the mysterious agent of ontogenesis as the “traveling subject in the logic of generation” (Corrigan 2000a, 148).

the One or the Good, but rather Beauty or the Beautiful itself. In 1.6[1].9.25, the transcendental self is able to see “the great Beauty” (τὸ μέγα κάλλος), which, “generally speaking” (ὀλοσχερεῖ...λόγῳ: 1.6[1].9.39), is identified with the Good; but subsequently, at 9.41–44, Plotinus expresses some uncertainty about whether beauty and the Good are actually on the same level or whether Beauty is inferior.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, at 5.5[32].8.10–11, Plotinus says that immediately prior to the autophany, the aspirant (described as the Intellect) is looking “at nothing else but the Beautiful” (εἰς οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἢ πρὸς τὸ καλὸν βλέπων). But what precisely is meant by *to kalon* here? It is important to note that although the Good or the One is not mentioned explicitly in this passage, the ultimate object of the eventual vision or union is indeed the supreme principle, i.e., the unnamed object of contemplation “surmounting” (ὑπερσχών) the Intellect in the preceding lines (8.8–9). So is *to kalon*, then, to be related to this very same first principle, and thus also to the ambiguously transcendent “great Beauty” or “the primary Beautiful” (*to mega kallos*, *to proton kalon*) in the visionary ascent of 1.6[1].9? Or is the Beautiful merely to be identified with the inherent beauty of the hypostatic Intellect that is contemplating itself, a beauty that is inferior to the One but on the same level as Intellect (as he will insist later in the same treatise, at 12.10–38, and as he has previously implied elsewhere in the *Großschrift*, at 5.8[31].8–11)? Indeed, in the early account of ΜΥΟ at 6.1.9[9].11.16, the aspirant transcends beauty at the ultimate stage: “he was not among the beauties, but had already even run up above beauty” (οὐδὲ τῶν καλῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ καλὸν ἤδη ὑπερθέων). Against this one might juxtapose the more transcendental aspects of beauty that are evident in an account of ΜΥΟ running over several chapters of a later treatise, 6.1.7[38].31–36. Here beauty is unambiguously an “attribute” of the ultimate, transcendent goal of the mystical ascent, although it is curious that throughout chapters 31 to 35, when Plotinus mentions this goal it is almost always with some circumlocution involving beauty;<sup>67</sup> the Good (*to agathon*) is only mentioned by name at 35.36, during the final ΜΥΟ itself. Initially, at 32.5–24, Plotinus describes the supreme principle in apophatic terms adapted primarily from the attributes of the One in the second part of Plato’s *Parmenides*; the intent here is clearly to emphasize its transcendental formlessness and consequent desirability, and thus to highlight the extraordinary quality of the soul’s love for it. Nevertheless, in the

66 A similar uncertainty about the status of Beauty relative to the first principle persists through Plotinus’s later period as well, see e.g., 5.1.2[43].18.1–8.

67 At only one point (33.22) does he refer to *to agathon* explicitly, but only in an ambiguous periphrasis, ultimately drawn from Plato (*Philebus* 60b), equating the primal beauty to the “nature of the Good” (*hē tou agathou phusis*).



remainder of the passage (32.27–39), Plotinus emphasizes more positively that its formlessness is actually a special kind of beauty: it is an unlimited “beauty above beauty” (κάλλος ὑπὲρ κάλλος), the “generator of beauty” (τὸ γεννῶν... τὸ κάλλος), the “flower of beauty” (καλοῦ ἄνθος), the “beauty-making beauty” (κάλλος καλλοποιόν), the “principle” (ἀρχή) and limit (πέρας) of beauty, and, at 33.20, the “hyperbeautiful” (τὸ ὑπέρκalon); these qualities render it loveable.<sup>68</sup> He then insists (at 34.1–13) that we must ourselves be similarly formless and beautiful. The ambiguous status of beauty—an ambiguity which has roots in Plato’s own thought<sup>69</sup>—thus corresponds to a similar ambiguity in the locus of the transcendental self, which, as we have seen, shares both positive aspects of the Intellect and more transcendental or apophatic aspects of the One. It is possible that Plotinus is employing the rather fluid status of beauty to mediate the liminal space between the intelligible and hypernoetic realms, and it appears to be noncoincidental that the transcendental self similarly participates in this ambiguous and labile principle.

## 10 Phase E: Union with the One

Let us now return to the progress of the ascent itself. We have already seen that even the transcendental self, beautiful though it is, must ultimately be dissolved. Yet in fact our “journey”—to use Plotinus’s own term—does not end there, since the annihilation is essentially coterminous with the ultimate state, that of *ΜΥΟ* proper. The nature of the union itself has been the subject of an extensive controversy not only because of various theological and metaphysical assumptions subtly informing the discussion but also especially because at this point in the texts Plotinus’s language often becomes frustratingly vague and allusive, even paradoxical; accurate readings may be adduced to support contradictory positions. Often the moment of ultimate union is implied but not stated,<sup>70</sup> and one has the sense that Plotinus is deliberately trying to

68 At 33.22–26, Plotinus makes an analogy between the formlessness of the first principle and the experience of a human lover, who, he says, can only be said to be in love when an “impression” (*typos*) of the beloved arises in his soul even during the absence of the beloved. In other words, just as ordinary human love requires a kind of phantasmic awareness without a perceptible object, so also love for the One requires some kind of inner apperception—an autophany?—without even any intelligible object. This peculiar analogy seems to be based on what must have been a contemporaneous theory of love; see e.g. Plutarch, *Amatorius* 759c.

69 The ambiguous status of beauty in Plotinus’s conception has recently been noted by Stern-Gillet 2000.

70 E.g., at v.5[32].8.14ff.

avoid the use of any determinate verbal expression to describe it. In certain passages, however, Plotinus describes it in terms that suggest an absolute unification, coalescence, or even identity of the mystical aspirant and the One; thus at VI.9[9].11.4–6: “there were not two, but the seer himself was one in relation to the seen, for it was not really seen, but unified” (ἐπεὶ τοίνυν δύο οὐκ ἦν, ἀλλ’ ἐν ᾧν αὐτὸς ὁ ἰδὼν πρὸς τὸ ἑωραμένον, ὡς ἂν μὴ ἑωραμένον, ἀλλ’ ἡνωμένον); at VI.7[38].34.13–14: “there are no longer two, but both are one” (οὐδ’ ἔτι δύο, ἀλλ’ ἐν ἁμῶ).<sup>71</sup> In this moment the aspirant must reject even the minimal duality inherent in perception and somehow “become” the One, whatever this means in terms of either metaphysics or subjective experience. Since intellection cannot, strictly speaking, be predicated of the mystical subject in this state, Plotinus struggles to find non-cognitive language to articulate this phase. He employs several overlapping and sometimes conflicting metaphorical images, whose complexity often challenges the more philosophical interpretation of MUO as an absolute, undifferentiated unity.<sup>72</sup> But this presents a methodological problem: how should one interpret Plotinus’s various terms connoting either contact or identity with the One? Are they all meant to indicate the ultimate phase? Is one set of expressions metaphorical, the other literal? Or do his occasional statements of identity represent the ultimate state of union, while the phrases denoting contact, which are more prevalent in the text, only imply a preliminary stage along the way? Certainty on this point is not possible; in my judgement, while Plotinus considers MUO to be in fact an instant of absolute unity, he nevertheless understands this moment to involve a certain time-less complexity, a unified process that is divided into a multiplicity only in our

71 My own view is closer to that of Meijer 1992, Bussanich 1988, and Mamo 1976, who interpret Plotinus to mean that there is a complete identity attained at the final stage. The majority of scholars, including, *inter alia*, Hadot 1986, Beierwaltes 1985, Armstrong 1977, O’Daly 1973, Arnou 1967, and Rist 1965, take the union to be either approximate or metaphorical and / or impute to Plotinus the view that the mystical subject in fact retains its distinct identity even at the moment of MUO. Of course it is also true that such a question would be philosophically moot for Plotinus himself, since in the hypernoetic realm the dichotomy between identity and difference dissolves. I therefore will avoid belaboring this rather abstract issue.

72 In my opinion, however, these are not arbitrary metaphors—nor, arguably, does the qualification ‘metaphor’ carry much significance, since, after all, *any* language used to describe the hypernoetic realm must be inherently ‘metaphorical.’ Despite their seeming incompatibility, these images are in fact very closely related and may be understood as different aspects of a single, essentially *erotic*, conception of MUO; on this see Mazur 2009. I therefore disagree entirely with Bussanich’s (1988, 183) claim that “Plotinus does not choose to represent the union itself in erotic terms.”

conception of it.<sup>73</sup> We will examine some of these images of MUO in greater detail in Chapter 3, but for the moment I will provide a few examples of what I take Plotinus to be saying about the ultimate stage of the ascent.

## 11 Vision and Light

Despite Plotinus's attempts to transcend the language of perception at the moment of MUO, he often reverts to imagery of vision, while still insisting it involves some other, exceptional mode of sight.<sup>74</sup> Often the mystical subject coalesces with the object of vision, an object that is described as itself pure light without a source.<sup>75</sup> Sometimes Plotinus seems to imply that one becomes the faculty of sight itself.<sup>76</sup> Plotinus's imagery of vision to describe the encounter with the supreme principle thus recapitulates the earlier autophany (phase C).<sup>77</sup>

73 In other contexts Plotinus often appeals to the need for temporal discourse to express atemporal process; e.g., v.1[10].6.19–23; v.8[31].12.24–26; v.1.7[38].35.28–30.

74 I.6[1].8.25–26: "... do not look, but shutting your eyes, as it were, change to and awaken another [faculty of] sight" (μή βλέπειν, ἀλλ' οἷον μύσαντα ὄψιν ἄλλην ἀλλάξασθαι καὶ ἀνεγείραι); v.1.9[9].11.22–23: "another way to see" (ἄλλος τρόπος τοῦ ἰδεῖν); v.1.7[38].35.39: "blessed perception and vision" (μακαρίαν διδούς αἴσθησιν καὶ θέαν). The use of vision-imagery in philosophical context to express the apperception of true reality is evident in Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, of course, but also in more proximate Middle-Platonic sources such as Numenius, frag. 2 des Places. As I will discuss later, similar imagery of vision occurs in the more ritualized context of contemplative ascent in Sethian Gnosticism.

75 v.5[32].7.31–35; v.1.7[38].36.19–25; v.3[49].17.32–37. This has been discussed esp. by Beierwaltes 1961.

76 Perhaps imagined as a visual ray of light. Besides its sense of the faculty of vision, the word *opsis* denotes a visual ray (LSJ 1282b, 11.e). Plotinus's imagery of mystical vision may have been derived from contemporaneous optics. According to Plato's theory of extromission (*Timaeus* 45b–d), with which Plotinus seems to be familiar (even if he does not entirely concur; see IV.5[29].2), light rays emerging from the eyes comprise the initial, active, moment of vision, an outflow *away from*, rather than towards, the eventual percipient; seeing and projecting light are therefore not mutually exclusive. Among other examples of the mystical subject becoming a visionary faculty is that of the *nous erōn* at v.1.7[38].35.23–24, which, as Perczel 1997 has recognized, is *itself* a kind of vision or contemplation (*hē thea*). A similar transformation into sight itself (*opsis*) occurs in certain passages that I believe refer not to MUO proper but only to the self-unification (phase C<sup>2</sup>); thus I.6[1].9.22–23; v.1.7[38].35.15.

77 While the context sometimes makes clear whether he has in mind the initial glimpse of the autophany or the more transformative moment of MUO, they are not always so clearly distinct; the difference is perhaps most evident in v.1.7[38].22; among other instances of autophany which are less easily differentiated from MUO is the simile of the visitor beholding the master of the house in v.1.7[38].35.7–16.

## 12 Ennead VI.9[9].11.22–25 [See Complete Passage in Appendix A8]

One example of this occurs at VI.9[9].11.22–25 in the simile of the *adyton* we have just discussed. Here Plotinus describes the supreme principle itself that is the object of the “intercourse” (*sunousia*) in the *adyton*—and not only the mystical experience of the devotee, as is often thought<sup>78</sup>—as “perhaps not an object of contemplation, but *another way of seeing*” (τὸ δὲ ἴσως ἦν οὐ θέαμα, ἀλλὰ ἄλλος τρόπος τοῦ ἰδεῖν), and then qualifies this mystical “seeing” with six terms whose subtle semantic ambivalences are virtually untranslatable: “ἔκστασις καὶ ἀπλωσις καὶ ἐπίδοσις αὐτοῦ [H-S1: αὐτοῦ] καὶ ἔφεσις πρὸς ἀφήν καὶ στάσις καὶ περινόησις πρὸς ἐφαρμογήν....”<sup>79</sup>

## 13 Ennead VI.7[38].36.10–26 [Appendix A16]

Other accounts of MUO (phase E) describe a vision of light without a source or an object, as at VI.7[38].36.18–21: “[One] suddenly beholds, not seeing how, but the vision fills his eyes with light, not having made him see something else by means of it, but the light itself was the thing seen” (εἰσεῖδεν ἐξαίφνης οὐκ ἰδὼν

78 The *ou theama* in line 22 refers back to the *auto* in line 21, i.e., the supreme principle within the *adyton*. This reading is favored only by Harder 1956 and Hadot 1994, while Bréhier 1938, Armstrong 1988, Meijer 1992, Bussanich 1988 and most other interpreters take *theama* to mean the event rather than the object of vision. But of course the two are not mutually exclusive. Becoming the One means co-experiencing the One's own form of transcendental vision. I therefore agree with the spirit, but not the letter, of Bussanich's assessment that in MUO, the aspirant shares the “rich inner life” of the One and that mystical vision at this stage can be thought of as the One's ineffable *self-vision* seen from a different perspective. Where I disagree is that I do not think the One's “rich inner life”—a repeated theme in Bussanich's brilliant and complex works (1987, 1988, 1996)—can be truly said to be “inner” with respect to the One; my eventual thesis, to be elaborated in Chapter 3, is that, *contra* Bussanich, the One's reflexive activity, even its ineffable form of self-vision or “touching,” or self-loving, represents the incipient procession *from* the One and cannot be clearly distinguished from the pre-thinking of the emergent pre-Intellect (nor, for that matter, from the erotic or visionary experience of the hypernoetic subject at the ultimate stage of MUO). The One's selfward-directed “life” is not, as Bussanich supposes, some ineffable process occurring “within” a discretely-bounded domain, something like—to extend Plotinus's non-metaphorical imagery of intelligible biology into the realm of pure metaphor—mitochondrial division occurring entirely within a cell nucleus; it is rather like cell-division itself. In my view, therefore, the non-perceptual vision at the moment of reabsorption into MUO is therefore not internal to the One but rather reiterates the first eternal moments of ontogenesis.

79 I will discuss the implications of these important terms at length *infra*, in Chapter 3, part 2, pp. 125–135.

ὅπως, ἀλλ' ἢ θέα πλήσασα φωτὸς τὰ ὄμματα οὐ δι' αὐτοῦ πεποίηκεν ἄλλο ὄραν, ἀλλ' αὐτὸ τὸ φῶς τὸ ὄραμα ἦν).

#### 14 Ennead v.3[49].17.28–38 [Appendix A19]

Sometimes the vision is of light that sees itself, as at v.3[49].17.28–38: “Then, one must believe one has seen, when the soul suddenly takes light; for this—this light—is from him, and he is it.... this is the true goal for the soul, to touch that light and to see it by itself, not through the light of another, but [to see the light] itself, through which it also sees” (τότε δὲ χρὴ ἐωρακέναι πιστεύειν, ὅταν ἡ ψυχὴ ἐξαίφνης φῶς λάβῃ· τοῦτο γάρ—τοῦτο τὸ φῶς—παρ' αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτός.... τοῦτο τὸ τέλος ἀληθινὸν ψυχῇ, ἐφάπασθαι φωτὸς ἐκείνου καὶ αὐτῷ αὐτὸ θεάσασθαι, οὐκ ἄλλου φωτί, ἀλλ' αὐτό, δι' οὗ καὶ ὁρᾷ).

#### 15 Excursus on v.3[49].17–28

Here MUO occurs, again “suddenly,”<sup>80</sup> as the soul “taking” light. It is significant that this *particular* light—which Plotinus emphasizes (*touto gar—touto to phōs*)—both issues from, and yet is also identical to, “him,” i.e., the supreme principle (*par' autou kai autos*),<sup>81</sup> much as the One's own pre-reflexive outflow at the first moment of ontogenesis is still somehow identical to its source. Following Kirchhoff, Henry-Schwyzler and subsequent editors have tended to delete the parenthetical *touto to phos* (“this light”), but in so doing neglect a crucial implication:<sup>82</sup> namely, that Plotinus emphasizes this particular light to

80 Armstrong thinks that the suddenness of the experience is intended to underscore its unexpectedness (LCL 444:135, n. 1), but it appears to me that the emphasis of the passage is not on the absence of anticipation of its arrival but the brevity (or perhaps atemporality) of its duration that does not permit discursive analysis in real time. The intention is to demonstrate the divine and transcendental nature of this experience that requires faith or immediate certainty (*chrē ... pisteuein*) at the moment of vision (*tote*) rather than discursive reasoning (*sullogizesthai*), which only takes place later (*husteron*) once the experience has passed; cf. also the parallel in the nondiscursive apprehension of the soul in the intelligible realm at iv.3[27].18.19–23 and iv.4[28].7.2–5.

81 Although Plotinus uses the masculine pronoun here it is certain from the previous lines (17.10–14) that he is referring to the One.

82 Why does Kirchhoff want to delete this? It is acceptable grammatically, but more importantly, this construction is reminiscent of a similar epexegetis emphasizing the identity of the object of mystical vision at vi.7[38].35.7 (*ekēinon idēi ton theon*). To his credit, Oosthout 1991, 182 and n. 1 retains the parenthesis in his translation.

differentiate it from another light he has previously mentioned. For earlier in the treatise, at 12.40–44, Plotinus describes the first product of the One as an illumination which, like the light from the sun, is not really cut off from its source but which all the same is *not* identical to it (*oud' au tauton autōi*); in this passage the noetic light is the fully-determined Intellect. By contrast, at 17.29–30, the transcendental light—what must surely correspond to the first prenoetic efflux of the One—is both from the One and yet *still identical to it*: an identity that in the earlier—pre-mystical and fully discursive—context Plotinus specifically denied to the light that generates the fully-fledged hypostatic Intellect.<sup>83</sup> In this latter context he is insisting (somewhat dogmatically) upon his doctrine of the absence of intermediaries between hypostatic realities; in chapter 17, however, as in mystical contexts elsewhere, the delimitations and boundaries between ontological strata dissolve while the strata themselves simultaneously expand into a richer sequence of overlapping micro-articulations. Plotinus describes this experience<sup>84</sup>—the soul's “true goal” (*to telos talēthinon*)<sup>85</sup>—with his recurrent language of physical contact (*ephapsasthai*) and also with a series of expressions that are intended to emphasize the identity of subject and object and recall the similar photic experience of MUO at V.5[32].7.31–35: here the goal is to “see it [the light] by itself [the light],” while at V.5[32].7.33, one “sees it by itself” (θεάζεται...αὐτὸ καθ' ἑαυτό); here, one must see “not by the light of another,” while at V.5[32].7.32–33: one sees “not another light in another” (οὐκ ἄλλο ἐν ἄλλῳ φῶς). But what does all this this mean? Plotinus could simply be stating the obvious: the vision of the One comes to the soul as a (noetic) light, and that unlike other non-luminous objects but much like the

83 One might also consider the previous line (V.3[49].12.42–43) where there is a suggestion, albeit expressed negatively, of more than one light: “... he does not exteriorize the outshined away from himself—or we will make another light prior to light....” (οὐκ ἐξώσαντα ἅπ' αὐτοῦ τὸ ἐκφανέν—ἢ ἄλλο φῶς πρὸ φωτὸς ποιήσομεν).

84 In the next sentence, Plotinus compares the experience of this light to that of “another god whom someone called to his house” who then “comes and illuminates.” The identity of this “other god” is unclear, but he is almost certainly referring to a particular genre of late antique ritual praxis known as *phōtagogia*, designed to summon a deity in luminous form into one's house for a private visionary encounter. I have discussed this in Mazur 2003, 46–47. The statement that “if he did not come he would not have illuminated” (*ē mēd' elthōn ouk ephōtisen*) is perplexing, given Plotinus's insistence elsewhere on the fact that the One neither comes nor goes anywhere, but his intention may be to stress that the luminous vision itself—perhaps an actual photic experience as a result of a prolonged period of meditation—must be interpreted as the god's (non-spatial) manifestation even prior to any kind of reasoning about the experience. One might also consider his earlier playful mention of an *epōidē* in this context.

85 One is reminded of Porphyry's claim (*Vit. Plot.* 23) that Plotinus's own *telos* and *skopos* was MUO.

sun, this particular object of vision is not seen by reflected light, but by its own light; and he does in fact make this comparison explicitly in the next sentence (17.37). Yet this reading is problematic, since the indeterminate referent of the second *auto* (line 36, found in most but not all manuscripts) seems to correspond to the prior accusative *auto* (i.e., the light) in line 35, the direct object of *theasasthai*.<sup>86</sup> If we retain the accusative *auto* and take it either as a reflexive or an intensifier (“itself alone,” “its true self”), the outcome is somewhat peculiar: the soul’s goal is “to see it [the light] by [the light] itself, not by the light of another, but [to see] *itself, the same* [light] through which it [the soul? the light?] also sees.” Here the verb *theasasthai* remains indeterminate, being both in the middle voice and in the infinitive, while the subject of *horai* is not specified. The subject of the vision slides from the soul to the light, creating something of a semantic vortex, opening an infinite regress of meaning; thus, in this very moment, the *soul sees the light seeing itself*.<sup>87</sup> This may be understood as a reiteration of autophany (phase C) at a transcendent level of unity; we may recall that Plotinus typically describes a moment of self-perception at the penultimate phase of ascent but not—with important exceptions—at MUO proper, where even the most minimal self-perception creates a potential duality of subject and object. He therefore appears to be employing a subtle linguistic ambiguity in order to conflate the subject and object of vision more completely than a logically unambiguous sentence would allow.

## 16 Ennead v.5[32].8.18–21 [Appendix A12]

Here Plotinus redescribes the vision in terms of the union: “And if it were possible also for Intellect itself to remain nowhere ... it would have been gazing at that one eternally; or rather, not gazing, but being one with that and not two” (καὶ εἰ οἷόν τε ἦν καὶ αὐτῷ τῷ νῷ μένειν μηδαμοῦ... ἦν ἂν αἰεὶ ἐκεῖνον βλέπων· καίτοι οὐδὲ βλέπων, ἀλλ’ ἐν ἐκείνῳ ὦν καὶ οὐ δύο).

86 One might expect here instead of *auto* another dative of means, *autōi*, which would reinforce the previous *autōi* in line 34 and similarly contrast with the *allou phōti*; this would yield instead the semantically redundant but logically unambiguous phrase “to see it by itself, not by the light of another, but *by* that by which it also sees.” Indeed, the grammatical inclination to emend *auto* to *autōi* had already tempted Volkmann in 1884, and even Armstrong (LCL 444:178), who leaves the H-S<sup>1</sup> text as it stands, renders the sentence as a tautology: “... not by another light, but *by* the light which is also its means of seeing.”

87 We may recall that earlier in the treatise, at 8.23, Plotinus also refers to the vision of Intellect as “light seeing light.”

## 17 Convergence of Center-Points

One also finds the geometric image of the convergence of the center-points of circles (one of his most frequent models of reality elsewhere in the *Enneads*).

*Ennead* VI.9[9].8.18–22: “Lifting ourselves up means of what is not submerged in the body, by this [center] we conjoin ourselves at the center of ourselves to, as it were, the center of all things, just like the centers of the greatest circles with the center of the surrounding sphere” (τῷ δὲ μὴ βαπτισθέντι τῷ σώματι ὑπεράραντες, τούτῳ συνάπτομεν κατὰ τὸ ἑαυτῶν κέντρον τῷ οἷον πάντων κέντρῳ, καθάπερ τῶν μεγίστων κύκλων τὰ κέντρα τῷ τῆς σφαίρας τῆς περιεχούσης κέντρῳ, ἀναπαυόμενοι)

*Ennead* VI.9[9].10.16–17 [Appendix A7]: “[the seer] having come to belong to that, is one, as if having attached center to center” (κακείνου γενόμενος ἓν ἐστὶν ὥσπερ κέντρῳ κέντρον συνάψας).

## 18 Sexual Intercourse

Plotinus also employs the erotic image of a kind of transcendental, non-corporeal sexual intercourse, which culminates not merely in the intimate proximity that terrestrial lovers ordinarily attain but in the absolute unification that they ideally seek;<sup>88</sup> even when it is not explicitly sexual, Plotinus tends to describe the contact with the One with the related physical language of conjoining, touching or grasping, commingling, penetrating, and receiving, and so on.<sup>89</sup>

*Ennead* VI.9[9].4.16–19 [Appendix A5]: “If someone has *not* come to the object of contemplation, and his soul has *not* had an awareness of, nor experienced, the glories there, nor had in himself (as it were) the erotic experience, from the vision, of a (male) lover coming to rest in the (male) beloved....” (εἰ δὲ μὴ ἦλθέ τις ἐπὶ τὸ θέαμα, μηδὲ σύνεσιν ἔσχεν ἢ ψυχῇ τῆς ἐκεῖ ἀγλαΐας μηδὲ

88 Also see VI.9[9].9.20, 44–46. As I shall discuss in Chapter 5, this is consistent with the (auto-) erotic desire that initially motivated MSR.

89 Among many other examples: VI.9[9].10.17: συνάψας; VI.9[9].11.24: ἔφεσις πρὸς ἀφήν; VI.9[9].4.27: ἐφάψασθαι καὶ θίγειν (cf. VI.8[39].21.29); VI.9[9].9.19 and VI.7[38].39.19: ἐπαφή; V.3[49].10.42: θίξις καὶ οἶον ἐπαφή; III.8[30].9.21–22: ἀλίσκοιτο ἐπιβολῇ ἀθρόα; VI.7[38].35.21: ἐπιβολῇ; 40.2: οἱ προσαιψάμενοι; I.6[1].7.13: συγκερασθῆναι; VI.9[9].11.7: ἐμίγνυτο; cf. VI.7[38].34.15: συγκρίναι; III.8[30].10.32–33: βαλὼν πρὸς αὐτὸ καὶ τυχὼν ἐντὸς αὐτοῦ; III.8[30].9.29: κομιούμεθα; VI.7[38].35.22: παραδοσχῇ. One might also note the sexual connotations in the Greek usage of even the more innocuously abstract-seeming verbs such as συνεῖναι (e.g., VI.9[9].9.45), συνιέναι (VI.8[39].18.11) and συγγίνεσθαι (e.g., VI.9[9].7.21, 11.32; cf. VI.8[39].7.52–53).



ἔπαθε μηδὲ ἔσχεν ἐν ἑαυτῷ οἶον ἐρωτικὸν πάθημα ἐκ τοῦ ἰδεῖν ἐραστοῦ ἐν ᾧ ἐρᾷ ἀναπαυσαμένου...).

*Ennead* VI.9[9].9.50–55 [Appendix A7]: “... it is necessary to put the other things away and stand in this alone, and become this alone ... in order that we may embrace with the whole of ourselves, and have no part with which we do not touch god” (...ἀποθέσθαι τὰ ἄλλα δεῖ, καὶ ἐν μόνῳ στήναι τούτῳ, καὶ τοῦτο γενέσθαι μόνον...ἵνα τῷ ὅλῳ αὐτῶν περιπτυσώμεθα καὶ μηδὲν μέρος ἔχοιμεν, ᾧ μὴ ἐφαπτόμεθα θεοῦ).

*Ennead* VI.7[38].34.13–16 [Appendix A14]: “for there is nothing between nor are there still two, but both are still one; nor could you still make a distinction while it is present; an imitation of this is also lovers and beloveds down here, wishing to be blended...” (μεταξὺ γὰρ οὐδὲν οὐδ’ ἔτι δύο, ἀλλ’ ἐν ἁμφῳ· οὐ γὰρ ἂν διακρίναις ἔτι, ἕως πάρεστι· μίμησις δὲ τούτου καὶ οἱ ἐνταῦθα ἐρασταὶ καὶ ἐρώμενοι συγκρίναι θέλοντες...).

*Ennead* VI.7[38].35.23–32 [Appendix A15] “... and that [first] vision is of the sober intellect, but the [other] is *itself* the loving intellect, when it has become frenzied, ‘drunk from the nectar’; then loving, having been expanded into enjoyment in satiety.... For seeing that [One], he had [i.e., conceived] offspring and was conscious both of their being born and their being within him ...” (...καὶ ἔστιν ἐκεῖνη μὲν ἢ θέα νοῦ ἔμφορος, αὕτη δὲ νοῦς ἐρῶν, ὅταν ἄφρων γένηται μεθυσθεὶς τοῦ νέκταρος· τότε ἐρῶν γίνεταί ἀπλωθεὶς εἰς εὐπάθειαν τῷ κόρῳ· καὶ ἔστιν αὐτῷ μεθύειν βέλτιον ἢ σεμνοτέρῳ εἶναι τοιαύτης μέθης.... καὶ γὰρ ὁρῶν ἐκείνον ἔσχε γεννήματα καὶ συνήσθετο καὶ τούτων γενομένων καὶ ἐνόντων-).

## 19 Excursus on VI.7[38].35.23–32

This passage describes two powers (*dunameis*) of vision belonging to Intellect: first, the ordinary, “sober” Intellect, which eternally thinks by contemplating its contents (the Forms); and second, the “loving Intellect” (*nous erōn*), which looks at (or is itself the vision of) what transcends it (i.e., the One) by means of a special kind of apprehension, one that Plotinus describes as a kind of “touch” (*epibolē*) and reception (*paradochē*). As we have seen elsewhere, there is a suggestion that only a paradoxically non-intellectual faculty of the Intellect is able to attain the One. The erotic modality of Intellect is superior, being “intoxicated” into a mystical-erotic ecstasy with the prenoetic efflux, the outflow of “nectar” from the One.<sup>90</sup> The haptic or even subtly erotic dual activity—*epibolē*

90 The image is drawn from Plato, *Symposium* 203b ff., which Plotinus also elaborates in III.5[50].7.1–9, 9.1–23.

suggests an active, instantaneous touch, while *paradochē* suggests a passive reception<sup>91</sup>—designates the non-or hyper-noetic contact with the One, and the subtly sexual connotation of these two terms is further accentuated by the statement that in the moment it sees the One, it conceives offspring (*esche gennēmata*) and becomes aware of their generation within himself. On the one hand, the Intellect's vision of its own "offspring" corresponds to its normal self-thinking, while on the other hand, it sees "that by the power by which it was going to think" (ἐκεῖνο δὲ ἣ δύναμει ἔμελλε νοεῖν: 35.32–33), which suggests that the hypernoetic apprehension of the One is related to the Intellects' original generation as a product of the self-reversion of the One's own emergent prenoetic energy (I will return to this in Chapters 3).<sup>92</sup>

There are also other examples of erotic imagery to denote MUO that are slightly more subtle and have consequently not been remarked by commentators; one example occurs at VI.9[9].10.17–18, where Plotinus has just described MUO as a convergence of center-points of circles, and then compares this perfect union to a pair of unmentioned terrestrial subjects: "For down here, too, having 'come together' they are one, but two when separate" (καὶ γὰρ ἐνταῦθα συνελθόντα ἓν ἐστι, τό τε δύο, ὅταν χωρὶς) [see Appendix A7]. Although the neuter *sunelthonta* would seem to depend on the *kentra* of the preceding line, it is unlikely to mean the convergence of the center-points in actual geometrical diagrams of circles "down here," as many interpreters have thought (what would this mean?). Rather, Plotinus is tacitly comparing MUO—yet again—to the copulation of lovers, making a subtle reference to the traditional belief—a belief evident already in Aristophanes's fantastical image of hemispherical lovers seeking reintegration as a spherical whole in Plato's *Symposium* (189d–192e), but also common in Plotinus's literate Roman milieu<sup>93</sup>—that lovers seek through sexual intercourse (at least ideally) the fusion or unification of two separate personae into a single entity.<sup>94</sup>

91 The most useful analysis of these terms occurs in Perczel 1997; see also discussion in Ch. 4.

92 However, Plotinus is careful to point out (at 35.29–30) that Intellect does not vacillate between the two modalities over time; rather, both are eternally active at different ontological levels: "it always has thinking while it also has not thinking but looking at that in another way." (τὸ δὲ ἔχει τὸ νοεῖν αἰεὶ, ἔχει δὲ καὶ τὸ μὴ νοεῖν, ἀλλὰ ἄλλως ἐκεῖνον βλέπειν).

93 E.g., Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 3.1079ff.

94 One therefore should supply "lovers" as the implicit subject of this sentence, referring back to the earlier discussion of terrestrial loves (*tōn entautha erōtōn*) at 9.40, and contrasting these with the "truly beloved" (*to alēthinon erōmenon*) who is "up there" (*ekei*) at 9.44.

## 20 Rapture or Spatial Displacement

Plotinus also uses another, quite opposite, spatial image, that of being raised up entirely out of place altogether.

*Ennead* VI.7[38].35.36–40 [Appendix A15]: “But the Good is extended over [the soul and Intellect] and adapted to the constitution of both of them, running over them and uniting the two, it is upon them, giving them blessed perception and contemplation, having raised them so much as to not be in place, nor in another thing in which something is naturally in another” (ἐκταθέν δὲ τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἐπ’ αὐτοῖς καὶ συναρμοσθέν τῇ ἀμφοτέρων συστάσει ἐπιδραμὸν καὶ ἐνώσαν τὰ δύο ἔπεςτιν αὐτοῖς μακαρίαν διδοὺς αἴσθησιν καὶ θέαν, τοσοῦτον ἄρας, ὥστε μήτε ἐν τόπῳ εἶναι, μήτε ἐν τῷ ἄλλῳ/, ἐν οἷς πέφυκεν ἄλλο ἐν ἄλλῳ εἶναι).

## 21 Excursus on VI.7[38].35.36–40

Here we have a description of what appears to be the final moment of MUO proper with a number of strikingly active features attributed to the supreme principle (Plotinus explicitly calls it the Good). (1) The notion of the One being “extended” (*ektathen*) has a peculiarly expansive feel to it, since extension is typically applied to the generation of lower hypostases (although it is occasionally also predicated of the Intellect, e.g. earlier in the treatise at VI.7[38].17.40).<sup>95</sup> (2) The verb *sunarmosthai* is peculiar here as it is applied to the One; one would imagine it would more typically describe the inferior principle adapting to the superior, rather than *vice versa*. One might also note its vaguely sexual connotation: that of joining in wedlock.<sup>96</sup> (3) Again, as with *ektathen*, the qualification *epidramon* applied to the One emphasizes a peculiar metaphor of spatial extension, stretching itself over the united soul and Intellect; one might also note the use of the verb “to run” (*trechein*) applied in mystical contexts elsewhere, not to the supreme principle as in this case, but rather to the aspirant (e.g. VI.9[9].11.38: *dramousa*; V.8[31].11.10–11: *dramōn*). (4) The notion of vision and perception (*aisthēsis*) is surprising; while Plotinus often employs the language of vision to indicate transcendental apperception and even MUO, he specifically rejects the duality implied by *aisthēsis*. (5) The verb *hairein* recalls the Intellect “loving to be around that” (ἀγαπήσας τὸ περὶ

95 If we accept Theiler’s emendation from the ms. *ekstasei*. One might compare a more positive use of *ekteinein* in terms of the soul’s prayer to the One at V.1[10].6.10: τῇ ψυχῇ ἐκτεῖνασιν ἑαυτοὺς εἰς εὐχὴν πρὸς ἐκεῖνον.

96 LSJ 1699a.

ἐκεῖνον εἶναι) that had been similarly “raised up” (ῥῥθῃ) at VI.7[38].31.5; this corresponds to the power of the One to attract its subsidiaries back to itself. The One has “hoisted” (*aras*) them entirely out of place (*topos*) itself, even out of intelligible place which—in another reversal of the concentric model and ultimate rejection of spatial metaphor altogether, Plotinus says is “within” the supreme principle, itself entirely uncontained.

*Ennead* VI.7[38].36.15–18 [Appendix A16]: “At that moment one dismisses all learning and up until that one has been led by instruction and firmly settled in the beauty in which one is—up until this point one thinks—but having been hoisted up out of it by (as it were) the wave of Intellect itself, raised to the heights above it as if surging....” (ἐνθα δὴ ἐάσας τις πᾶν μάθημα, καὶ μέχρι τοῦ παιδαγωγηθεὶς καὶ ἐν καλῷ ἰδρυθεὶς, ἐν ᾧ μὲν ἐστὶ, μέχρι τούτου νοεῖ, ἐξενεχθεὶς δὲ τῷ αὐτοῦ τοῦ νοῦ οἶον κύματι καὶ ὑψοῦ ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ οἶον οἰδήσαντος).

## 22 Excursus on VI.7[38].36.15–18

Having rejected intellection, MUO supervenes, but paradoxically, it is the Intellect itself which is the vehicle of its own self-transcendence, quite opposite from the previous example in which the supreme principle is responsible for the displacement. Using a peculiar liquid metaphor, Plotinus says that the mystical subject is “carried up out of” (*exenechtheis*) what is presumably the Intellect “by (as it were) the wave of Intellect itself” (*tōi autou tou nou hoion kumati*), which corresponds to the frequent motif of displacement in an annihilation (phase D); having been raised “to the heights above [Intellect]” (*hupsou hup’ autou*)—i.e., having become hypernoetic—“as if surging” or “swelling” or “becoming engorged” (*hoion oidēsantos*)—a word with immediate erotic undertones<sup>97</sup>—“he suddenly beholds” (*eiseien exaiphnēs*), “not seeing how” (*ouk idōn hopōs*); the object of vision is not explicitly stated (in fact as we know, the One cannot strictly speaking, be an object) but we know from the context that this moment of vision corresponds to MUO (phase E). Plotinus frequently makes reference (e.g. at V.5[32].7.31–35) to both the “sudden” (*exaiphnēs*) appearance of the One and the perplexity it causes. It is also interesting to compare the evocative imagery of “surging” and being “carried aloft” by a wave with the similarly expansive and fluid erotic imagery of the *nous erōn*’s intoxication, filled with nectar and “expanded into happiness” (*haplōtheis eis eupatheian*) by its fullness.

97 The erotic connotation of *oidein* is evident from its use in Plato, *Phaedrus* 251b.

At *Ennead* VI.9[9].11.12 [Appendix A8], one also finds the imagery of divine possession: “He was as if snatched away or divinely possessed” (ὥσπερ ἀρπασθεις ἢ ἐνθουσιάσας).<sup>98</sup> As with certain other phrases describing MUO,<sup>99</sup> Plotinus evokes the moment of unification with a somewhat paradoxical pair of opposing terms; in this case *harpazein* suggests the displacement of the mystical subject, its abduction into the divine, while *enthousiazein* conversely implies the penetration of the aspirant by the deity. The implication is that a simple spatial metaphor is insufficient to describe this level of reality.

## 23 Cultic Praxis

As we have seen, Plotinus describes MUO with an image drawn from traditional religion, that of entering a temple.

*Ennead* VI.9[9].11.16–21 [Appendix A8]: “He was not among the beauties, having already ascended beyond even the chorus of virtues, just like someone enters into the interior of the *adyton* having left behind in the *naos* the cult-statues which, upon his emergence back out of the *adyton*, become the first things [encountered] after the the object of contemplation inside, and the intercourse there not with cult-statues or icons, but with the thing itself ...” (οὐδὲ τῶν καλῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ καλὸν ἤδη ὑπερθέων, ὑπερβάς ἤδη καὶ τὸν τῶν ἀρετῶν χορόν, ὥσπερ τις εἰς τὸ εἶσω τοῦ ἀδύτου εἰσδὺς εἰς τοῦπίσω καταλιπὼν τὰ ἐν τῷ νεῷ ἀγάλματα, ἃ ἐξελθόντι τοῦ ἀδύτου πάλιν γίνεται πρῶτα μετὰ τὸ ἔνδον θέαμα καὶ τὴν ἐκεῖ συνουσίαν πρὸς οὐκ ἄγαλμα οὐδὲ εἰκόνα, ἀλλὰ αὐτό). Although this is the only clear use of this image to describe MUO proper, at I.6[1].7.6–7 he describes the entire cathartic ascent to the supreme principle in terms of some type of mystery-rite in which the devotee undresses and ascends into the temple in the nude. At V.1[10].6.9–15, he invokes the image of someone praying to the god within the temple (the One) by contemplating the cult-images (*agalmata*)—i.e., the Forms—that stand outside.<sup>100</sup>

98 One might also compare the image of the god “filling” or “impregnating” the soul at, VI.7[38].35.18–19, which I tend to think describes autophany (phase C) rather than MUO itself (phase E); see Hadot 1988, 341–42.

99 E.g., VI.9[9].11.23; VI.7[38].35.19–22.

100 Dodds 1965, 94–96 notes an interesting parallel in Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpta Theodoto* 27 (Sagnard 1948) which describes the Jewish High Priest doffing his clothes while entering the Holy of Holies.

## 24 Phase E<sup>2</sup>: Desubjectification

Finally, I would like to point to yet another curious aspect of the mystical ascent that is concomitant with both the annihilation (phase D) and MUO proper (phase E). We have seen that Plotinus often describes the final union as a rejection of perceptual experience, with its implication of logical duality, however minimal, between subject and object. Yet sometimes, rather surprisingly, instead of simply rejecting the language of perception altogether, he reverses the terms; at the moment of union one must abandon one's subjectivity and become, instead of a perceiving subject—which has been annihilated or dissolved and no longer subsists as such—a perceived *object* for another subject: an object whose principal activity is often described rather disconcertingly in the extroversive terms of expansion and effluence rather than with the imagery of self-concentration and introversion that has thus far characterized the entire ascent. I call this aspect of union—the radical extinction of subjectivity and the switch in perspective to that of another—a *desubjectification* (or phase E<sup>2</sup>, since it appears to be a corollary of the union itself). Consider, for instance, Plotinus's audacious statement at VI.9[9].10.11–12: “perhaps one should not say, ‘will see,’ but ‘*was seen*’” (τάχα δὲ οὐδὲ « ὄψεται » λεκτέον, « τὸ δὲ ὀφθέν »),<sup>101</sup> or, a few lines later (at 10.15), in the moment of annihilation, his claim that one becomes not oneself but “another,” *allos*.<sup>102</sup> Similarly, at V.8[31].11.17–19, at the moment of union (if this in fact describes MUO and not merely self-unification, phase C<sup>2</sup>), Plotinus says that one becomes “instead of a seer, *the object of contemplation* of another contemplator, *shining out* with the kind of thoughts that come from there” (γενέσθαι ἄντι ὁρῶντος ἤδη θέαμα ἑτέρου θεωμένου, οἷς ἐκεῖθεν ἔχει ἐκλάμποντα τοῖς νοήμασι). The annihilation of self-identity and the abandonment of ordinary subjectivity at the moment of MUO corresponds to a shift from a centripetal to a centrifugal dynamic. Thus at VI.9[9].11.23, Plotinus describes the final moment of MUO with the enigmatic terms *ekstasis*, *haplōsis*, and *epidosis autou*, all of which (as I will attempt to demonstrate in greater detail in Chapter 3) have an extremely subtle semantic ambivalence between two completely different meanings, one, the more obvious, connoting the annihilation of self-identity (phase D) but another, less

101 A claim whose boldness Plotinus himself remarks: “the statement is audacious!” (*tolmeros ho logos*). One is reminded of the similar audacity (and resultant misfortunes) of Sufis such as al-Hallaj.

102 In this light one may also interpret an perplexing passage earlier in the same treatise (VI.9[9].7.22–23) in which Plotinus says that once one has been sufficiently unified with the supreme principle, one should “come announcing [the union] also to another” (ἔχειν ἀγγέλλοντα...καὶ ἄλλῳ).

easily recognized, suggesting self-expansion, outward motion, and dissolution (phase E) [This informs my translation in Appendix A8]. In the account of MUO at III.8[30].9.29–32, after mentioning the Intellect's self-surrender to the One (phase D), instead of describing the moment of union itself, Plotinus immediately launches into an exposition of Intellect's own procession as the "first life" (ζωή πρώτη) and as an "activity in the outgoing of all things" (ἐνέργεια...ἐν διεξόδῳ τῶν πάντων). A related idea may be found at VI.7[38].36.21–23, where Plotinus describes the moment of MUO as an effluent ray (*augē*) of light without a percipient, which, he says in the next breath, itself generates the subject-object distinction only "later," ontologically speaking, at the inferior level of Intellect.<sup>103</sup> The subject of MUO has thus dissolved into the visionary radiation from the One itself (which itself never becomes, properly speaking, a fully actualized subject), to be seen by *another* subject: either an aspect of one's own, pre-MUO, self, or perhaps another person altogether. The mind reels trying to grasp the semantic vortices in these remarkably subtle Plotinian passages, whose emphasis is less upon static repose with the supreme principle than of the first eternal moments of procession from it (I will build upon this theme in the next chapter).<sup>104</sup> This curious reversal of orientation preserves the sense of dynamic process that Plotinus strives to express even at the ineffable moment of undifferentiated unity.

## 25 Conclusion

To recapitulate: briefly, I have suggested that Plotinus's conception of the process of MUO may be understood in terms of several phases: a *catharsis* (phase A), involving first the propaedeutic abandonment of sense perception but then also the emptying of formal relations and delimitations from one's consciousness, which subsequently is reiterated throughout the ascent but is also punctuated by *self-reversion* (phase B), involving a further stage of either

103 Οὐ γὰρ ἦν ἐν ἐκείνῳ τὸ μὲν ὀρώμενον, τὸ δὲ φῶς αὐτοῦ, οὐδὲ νοῦς καὶ νοούμενον, ἀλλ' αὐγὴ γεννώσα ταῦτα εἰς ὕστερον καὶ ἀφεῖσα εἶναι παρ' αὐτῷ. That this refers to the period of union and not the One in general requires justification. The *ekeinōi* does refer to the One, not the state of MUO, but the imperfect verb (*ēn*) emphasizes a particular temporal period (that of the moment of MUO under consideration) rather than a more general state of the One.

104 One might also compare an earlier passage, at III.8[30].8.31–38, describing the Intellect's attempt to contemplate the One (presumably in a mystical context), which slides into a description of ontogenesis; or even Plotinus's curious comment, in quite a different context (II.9[33].9.51–52) that "that which is above Intellect is immediately to fall outside of Intellect."

self-contraction or self-cognition which culminates in a sudden moment of *autophany* (phase C), involving first (i) the sudden vision of, or within, one-self, and then (ii) the subsequent rejection of the duality of perception in favor of (C<sup>2</sup>) a *self-unification*, i.e., coming into a complete identity with one's transcendental—hypernoetic and hyperontic—self, a faculty which subsists in an intermediary realm between Intellect and the One; and finally, a terminal instant in which the *annihilation* (phase D)—i.e., the rejection of even this self-identity—the *union* (phase E)—i.e., the coalescence of the aspirant and the One—and the *desubjectification* (E<sup>2</sup>)—i.e., the abandonment of subjectivity and the reversal from contraction to expansion—all coincide. One should note that although these phases may be distinguished analytically, in Plotinus's accounts one typically finds complex passages that integrate several phases seamlessly, even in the sweep of a single sentence, or recursive repetitions of these phases at several successive levels, which suggests that the praxis itself should not be understood as consisting of discretely separated stages, but rather as a continuous, dynamic process that the inherently static terms of determinate language can only struggle to convey.



# The Identity of Prenoetic and Hypernoetic Subjects in Plotinus

## 1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter (Ch. 2), we have seen that Plotinus envisioned the complex structure of ascent towards mystical union with the One (ΜΟΟ) in terms of several sequential stages. Most importantly, the penultimate phase of the ascent comprises a sudden, reflexive manifestation of one's transcendental self (phase C), followed by a further self-concentration or coalescence with this self (phase C<sup>2</sup>); while the ultimate phase requires even the hypernoetic self to be utterly dissolved (phase D) in union with the first principle (phase E): a union that however complete it may be still retains a certain degree of complexity (phase E<sup>2</sup>). Remaining to be explored in greater detail are (a) the precise situation of this schema in the context of Plotinus's own metaphysics; (b) its intellectual-historical background; and finally (c) its practical implications in the context of contemplative praxis. The present chapter will address only the first question, that of (a) the relation of this mystical scheme to the rest of Plotinus's thought; for it is only through an adequate grasp of this issue in its immediate philosophical context—itsself quite enigmatic and the source of much scholarly controversy—that we will be able, in future chapters, to address (b) the broader intellectual-historical background and (c) the practical implications of this doctrine. The essential thesis of this chapter is that in Plotinus's conception, the final phases of mystical ascent bear a noncoincidental homology with the first moments of primordial ontogenesis, that is, the process by which the One generates Being and Intellect. More specifically, I will suggest first, that Plotinus envisioned the sudden luminous vision of the transcendental self at the penultimate moment of ascent—the autophany—to be virtually indistinguishable from, and indeed even identical to, the primordial self-apprehension by which the prenoetic efflux from the One acquires limit and definition as Intellect; and second, that (as I have already intimated in Chapter 2) he believed the transcendental self and prenoetic efflux to be connate or even consubstantial. This chapter is divided into three sections, following this introduction (Part 1). Part 2 establishes the basic schema of Plotinian ontogenesis and discusses certain philosophical complexities to which this schema gives rise; Part 3 makes a detailed structural

and philological comparison between the descriptions of the first moments of ontogenesis and the final stages of mystical ascent; and finally, Part 4 confirms their virtual identity with a close reading and lexical analysis of a single early-period account of the very last moment of MUO. In the chapter that follows (Ch. 4), we will see that this interpretation of Plotinus's mysticism is confirmed by the existence of a virtually identical conception in contemporaneous Platonizing Sethian Gnosticism, in which the close connection between soteriological (or mystical) ritual praxis and metaphysical doctrine is made far more explicit. Specifically, certain Platonizing Sethian tractates from Nag Hammadi—especially *Allogenes* and *Zostrianos*, whose Greek antecedents were known to have been read in Plotinus's circle—*explicitly* identify the moment of self-apprehension at the liminal phase of primordial ontogenesis with that of the contemplative ascent towards the transcendent deity. As I will argue in detail in the next two chapters, Plotinus must have developed his own conception of the final stages of MUO in extremely close, constructive dialogue with these very sectaries: thus belying the long-standing interpretation of his mysticism as a unique, *sui generis*, deeply personal affair, in some sense isolated both from the rest of his metaphysics and from the religious praxis in his more general social and intellectual milieu. For the moment, however, let us return to Plotinus himself.

## 2 Plotinian Ontogenesis

### 2.1 *The Importance of Plotinian Ontogenesis for the Interpretation of Mystical Ascent*

Thus far we have seen that at the penultimate phase of mystical introversion towards MUO the aspirant experiences a sudden, luminous self-apprehension: the autophany (phase C). This crucial, liminal moment demarcates the aspirant's transition through the subtle boundary separating the realm of Intellect and Being from the utterly hypernoetic and hyperontic domain proper to the One. In other words, prior to the autophany, the mystical subject may be understood as having been assimilated to the *Nous*; the *subject* of the self-reversion therefore begins as Intellect, but the *object* of the autophany—to which the subject must also be in some sense identical—transcends Intellect. For we have seen that after having come to complete identity with the transcendental self in the moment of self-unification (C<sup>2</sup>), the subject has surpassed both Intellect and Being and abides in the unutterable region—we might call it an “interhypostatic” domain—“above” the Intellect but “below” the One. At this point, one may notice that the self-reversion and autophany at

the final stages of the mystical ascent are intriguingly reminiscent of Plotinus's descriptions of the very first eternal moments of ontogenesis, in which the second hypostatic principle (Being-Intellect) unfolds from the entirely transcendent first principle (the One-Good) through a parallel, yet in this case primordial, act of *epistrophē*, followed by a similarly transformative moment of self-apprehension.<sup>1</sup> Here I would suggest that the correspondence between the mystical self-reversion (MSR) of the aspirant and the reflexive, ontogenetic activity of the prenoetic efflux—what I would call the *primordial* self-reversion (PSR)—is too robust to be coincidental. In what follows, I would like to demonstrate conclusively what I have previously noted in passing (in Ch. 2): specifically, that according to Plotinus, (a) the transcendental self—the hypernoetic subject subsisting at the penultimate phase of the mystical ascent—has derived from, and is thus consubstantial or even identical with, the liminal, prenoetic efflux (hereafter PNE for short) of the One: the PNE in a phase both prior to and coincident with its reflexive vision, and further, that (b) the self-reversion and autophany of the mystical subject deliberately recapitulates the primordial *epistrophē* and delimiting vision of the PNE with which the aspirant must consciously come to identify.<sup>2</sup> In order to grasp this, however, it will first be necessary to understand Plotinus's curious account of ontogenesis in some detail and delve into certain problems in his metaphysics that might seem, at first glance, to be at some remove from his mysticism.

## 2.2 General Outline of Plotinian Ontogenesis

In the most general sense, Plotinus describes the genesis of the second hypostasis (Intellect-Being) in terms of an unbounded effluence or indefinite power or potentiality (*dunamis*) that overflows from the One and then “reverts” upon its source—often this act is described with the terminology of *epistrophē*—at which point it apprehends the One, and is thereby defined so as to acquire independent subsistence as Intellect and Being.<sup>3</sup> How one is supposed to understand this ostensibly metaphorical model, however, is far from obvious. Least

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- 1 I call this process “ontogenesis” for the sake of clarity, but I mean by this term the original generation of anything at all from the One, including both Intellect and Being indiscriminately, rather than Being alone. Although Plotinus typically considers both Intellect and Being to be coextensive, one should note there are instances—e.g., V.2[11].1.11–12—where he seems to make a subtle distinction between the generation of these two aspects of the second hypostasis.
  - 2 In Chapter 5, I will suggest that Plotinus intends this to occur in the context of mystical or visionary ritual praxis.
  - 3 Plotinus's most important descriptions occur at V.1[10].7.2–6, V.2[11].1.7–13, II.4[12].5.28–39, V.5[32].5.16–19, and VI.7[38].16.10–35, 17.12–26 [see passages in Appendix B].

problematic for modern interpreters has been Plotinus's use of the language of *process*, one involving spatial movement and temporal events, in order to evoke what he intends to be taken as an eternal activity whose different phases comprise a logical rather than temporal sequence. In other words, ontogenesis does not take place in time but instead is *always* occurring.<sup>4</sup> What has proved slightly more troublesome is that although in some sense Plotinian ontogenesis may be considered a cognitive, or rather *pre*-cognitive process, since the result is, after all, an intellectual principle—and occasionally Plotinus does in fact use noetic terminology to describe this unfolding—he most often uses concrete, spatio-temporal imagery drawn from physical processes, such as, for example, the radiation of light, the effluence of liquid, the uttering of sounds, or biological reproduction (e.g., conception, parturition, and growth). This imagery—slightly embarrassing for some interpreters—has typically been considered to be a metaphorical expression of a doctrine that might otherwise be described in the more abstract, properly 'philosophical' terms of causality, activity, and so forth. Yet attempts to rephrase Plotinus's schema with such terminology have often either resorted to different but equally metaphorical language or devolved into a kind of a-historical-philosophical hermeneutics that is probably quite remote from Plotinus's own patterns of thought.<sup>5</sup> The complexities confronting the interpreter are further compounded by the fact that (as with the mystical passages) Plotinus's terminology is often fluid and varies according to whether he intends to emphasize the static or the dynamic aspect of the system. His language often becomes infuriatingly oblique precisely where conventional philosophical discourse would seem to demand almost mathematical precision. Finally, and most problematically, in descriptions of hyperontic and hypernoetic reality—explicitly beyond the distinction of identity and difference<sup>6</sup>—Plotinus frequently makes contradictory statements,

4 Plotinus himself is explicit about this at v.1[10].6.19–22.

5 As we have also seen in the case of his mystical passages, Plotinus's ideas about ontogenesis cannot be fully understood without these putative metaphors. For despite their ostensibly 'unphilosophical' packaging, these accounts are in fact his most straightforward explication of his system. It is my opinion that his occasional (in fact remarkably rare) explications of this process in more conventionally abstract-seeming philosophical terminology may be understood as a second-order rationalization of a pre-existing system to which he has already committed himself for other reasons. The impressive labors of Lloyd 1987 to interpret Plotinian ontogenesis in terms of a purely logical argument founded principally on Aristotle's notions of the actualization of Intellect by its objects and the relation of *dunamis* and *energeia*—thus repackaging Plotinus's thought in ever more abstract, nearly analytic terminology—remain unpersuasive from a historical perspective. This is not to say, however, that Plotinus does *not* owe a great deal to Aristotle.

6 VI.2[43].8.40.

affirming what he denies elsewhere, and *vice versa*. Any discussion of Plotinian ontogenesis, then, must take these initial difficulties into account.

This being said, let us now turn to some key texts.<sup>7</sup> The paradigmatic expression of Plotinus's ontogenetic schema occurs in two consecutive early-period treatises, chronologically numbers 10 and 11, both of which explicitly depend upon a central act of *epistrophē*;<sup>8</sup> thus we find at V.1[10].7.2–6: “First, [we must say that] it is necessary for what has come to be, to somehow *be* that [the One], and to preserve much of it, and to be most similar with respect to it, just as is also the light of the sun. But that is not intellect. And so how does it generate Intellect? *Because with its reversion to it [or itself], it was seeing, and this seeing is itself Intellect.*” (πρῶτον μὲν, ὅτι δεῖ πως εἶναι ἐκεῖνο τὸ γενόμενον καὶ ἀποσφᾶζειν πολλὰ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἶναι ὁμοιότητα πρὸς αὐτό, ὥσπερ καὶ τὸ φῶς τοῦ ἡλίου. ἀλλ’ οὐ νοῦς ἐκεῖνο. πῶς οὖν νοῦν γεννᾷ; ἢ ὅτι τῇ ἐπιστροφῇ πρὸς αὐτὸ ἑώρα· ἢ δὲ ὅρασις αὕτη νοῦς) [see the passage in Appendix B3]; and again, more or less similarly, at V.2[11].1.7–13: “And this is, as it were, the first birth: for being perfect (as it [the One] seeks nothing, has nothing, and needs nothing), it (as it were) overflows, and its overflow has made another. *What has come into being turns back towards it [or itself] and is filled [or impregnated] and by looking towards it [or itself], this becomes this Intellect as well.* And its standing towards that one makes Being, while its looking towards it is Intellect. So since it stands towards it so that it should see, it becomes simultaneously Intellect and Being.” (καὶ πρώτη οἷον γέννησις αὕτη· ὃν γὰρ τέλειον τῷ μηδὲν ζητεῖν μηδὲ ἔχειν μηδὲ δεῖσθαι οἷον ὑπερερρῦν καὶ τὸ ὑπερπλήρες αὐτοῦ πεποίηκεν ἄλλο· τὸ δὲ γενόμενον εἰς αὐτὸ ἐπεστράφη καὶ ἐπληρώθη καὶ ἐγένετο πρὸς αὐτὸ βλέπον καὶ νοῦς οὗτος. καὶ ἡ μὲν πρὸς ἐκεῖνο στάσις αὐτοῦ τὸ ὃν ἐποίησεν, ἡ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸ θέα τὸν νοῦν. ἐπεὶ οὖν ἔσθη πρὸς αὐτό, ἴνα ἴδῃ, ὁμοῦ νοῦς γίγνεται καὶ ὄν). [Appendix B4].

As anyone familiar with Plotinian studies is well aware, the interpretation of these and other similar passages has been the subject of considerable controversy. The problems arise because Plotinus's seemingly periphrastic constructions leave a frustrating uncertainty as to the identity of the subject of the primordial *epistrophē*. We may be relatively certain that the process begins with the One and ends with the fully-fledged second hypostasis, Intellect-Being; and

7 See text and translation of complete passages in Appendix B.

8 His very first account of ontogenesis occurs at V.4[7].1–2, a short treatise entirely devoted to this topic, but V.1[10] and V.2[11] comprise a more natural point of departure because the terminology in V.4[7] is nonstandard—e.g., he calls what appears to be the entirely unknowable One a “*noēton*,” attributes to it supposedly ‘illegal’ cognitive abilities, and also intimates the juxtaposition of an Indefinite Dyad between One and Intellect, thereby violating his own putative axiom denying interhypostases. For this reason scholars have tended to see this as an anomaly of his early period.

it is also certain that at some point during this process some kind of *epistrophē* occurs. But, what, exactly is the subject of this *epistrophē* and / or of the vision? Moreover, what is the *object* of the vision? Much of the controversy here has centered upon the grammatical ambiguity of a single line of the first of these passages, at V.1[10].7.5–6—πῶς οὖν νοῦν γεννᾷ; "Ἡ ὅτι τῇ ἐπιστροφῇ πρὸς αὐτὸ ἑώρα· ἡ δὲ ὁρασις αὐτῇ νοῦς—which has served as a focal point for various interpretations of the entirety of Plotinus's ontogenetic schema. Interpreters have tended to subscribe to one or another supposedly exclusive options: namely, either that [A] the One is the subject of both γεννᾷ and ἑώρα, and the αὐτό should therefore be taken as the reflexive αὐτό (to which it is now emended in the revised Henry-Schwyzzer edition), thus giving the sense: "by the One's reversion to itself, it saw, and this seeing is Intellect"; or, conversely, that [B] the Intellect is the subject of ἑώρα (requiring an abrupt change of subject from the preceding sentence), in which case the personal pronoun αὐτό is nonreflexive and refers back to the One, thus implying, "by the Intellect's reversion towards the One, the Intellect saw, and this seeing is Intellect."<sup>9</sup> The controversy surrounding V.1[10].7.5–6 also extends to the interpretation of a similarly problematic passage earlier in the treatise, at V.1[10].6.15–19, in which Plotinus denies motion to the One by insisting that anything that is moved must have an end towards which it is moved, and since the One can have no end other than itself, "one must not posit that it [sc. the One] is moved, but if anything comes to be after it, it is necessary that it come to be while *that* has eternally reverted towards *it* [or *itself*]" (ἐπιστραφέντος αἰεὶ ἐκείνου πρὸς αὐτὸ ἀναγκαῖον ἐστὶ γεγονέναι). Again, scholars have commonly chosen one of two possible interpretations: either the demonstrative ἐκείνου refers to the One and the αὐτό is reflexive (here again, H-S<sup>2</sup> have now emended it to αὐτό), which means the One is eternally reverted towards itself; or ἐκείνου refers to the Intellect and αὐτό to the One, in which case it is the Intellect eternally turned towards the One. With certain exceptions, interpreters who take the One to be the subject

9 Thus, in favor of [A]—i.e., that the One reverts to itself, and its vision is Intellect—we find (no doubt *inter alia*) Müller 1878–1880, Bréhier 1931, Becker 1940, Harder 1956–1971, Hadot 1963; 1968a, Beierwaltes 1967; 1985, Rist 1967, Schwyzzer 1969, Graeser 1972, Canta Cruz 1979, Henry and Schwyzzer<sup>2</sup> 1964–82, Bussanich 1988 (though he thinks this is nonstandard for Plotinus), and Okano 2005; in favor of [B]—i.e., that the Intellect reverts to the One—are Ficino 1492, Bouillet 1857–1861, Volkmann-Schluck 1941, Cilento 1947–1949, Henry (in discussion of Schwyzzer 1960), Krämer 1964, Aubin 1963, Beutler and Theiler 1960–1967, Deck 1967, Theiler 1970, Igal 1971b, Henry and Schwyzzer<sup>1</sup> 1973, O'Daly 1973, Szlezák 1979, Atkinson 1983, Armstrong (LCL 444), Lloyd 1987, Gerson 1997, O'Brien 1997 (with qualifications), D'Ancona 1997 and Emilsson 1999. As will be discussed later, Corrigan 1986 has argued that the subject of the first sentence is the One while that of the second is indeterminately both One and Intellect.

of the *epistrophē* at V.1[10].7.2–6 have correspondingly tended to see the One as the subject in V.1[10].6.15–19.<sup>10</sup>

### 2.3 *Philosophical Considerations*

Strong arguments, both philosophical and philological, have been put forth in support of both positions, but the depth of the problem will immediately become evident simply from a perusal of the impressive scholarly talents arrayed on opposite sides of the issue.<sup>11</sup> Here, however, let us briefly pull back for a broader perspective. Setting the philological issue aside—for grammatically speaking, these passages, as they stand, can more or less reasonably admit either interpretation (and a detailed discussion could on its own easily fill an entire book!)—the fundamental problem may be reframed in more general terms. How, one might ask, can the One produce something other than itself? The question is nontrivial because the paradoxical exigencies of Plotinus's henology require the first principle to remain uncoordinated with the second while still somehow serving as the latter's original cause.<sup>12</sup> To be more specific, the One must (in some way) 'generate' Intellect, but this act of generation is complicated by a tension between two points of Plotinian doctrine—I will call them 'axioms'—which he occasionally states as principles throughout the *Enneads*, but which he often contradicts in practice. [1] First, in several places, Plotinus insists almost dogmatically upon the absence of intermediaries between hypostases: (i) Intellect, and only Intellect, must come immediately

10 Proponents of the first option—that Intellect comes into being while the One is eternally reverted to itself—include Ficino 1492, Bouillet 1857–61, Müller 1878–80, Bréhier 1931, Hadot 1963, Rist 1967, Schwyzer 1969, Igal 1971b, Harder 1956–1971, Henry and Schwyzer<sup>1</sup> 1973, Blumenthal 1974, Armstrong (LCL 444), Lloyd 1987; proponents of the second option—that Intellect comes into being while Intellect is reverted to the One—include only Cilento 1947–49, Henry (in Schwyzer 1960), Krämer 1964, Theiler 1970, and Atkinson 1983.

11 One might also note the sometimes disproportionate vitriol certain scholars have expressed with respect to their positions in the face of clearly ambiguous and even self-contradictory textual evidence; thus, for example, O'Brien 1997.

12 Thus, paradoxically, the Intellect might be thought responsible for its auto-generation: a point emphasized by Lloyd 1987. One is reminded of pre-Plotinian Gnostic theologies involving a self-generating second principle, on which see Whittaker 1980; Hadot 1968, 1:298–300. A debate about whether the One or Intellect is primarily responsible for the generation of the second hypostasis focused upon a similar ambiguity of grammatical subject at V.1[10].7.10–11, ὡν οὖν ἐστὶ δυνάμεις, ταῦτα ἀπὸ τῆς δυνάμεως οἷον σχιζομένη ἢ νόησις καθ'ορᾶ, which Armstrong (LCL 444:35) translates as “the things, then, of which it [the One] is the productive power are those which Intellect observes, in a way cutting itself off from its power”; on this see esp. Schroeder 1986.

‘after’ the One, (ii) with nothing else intercalated “in between.”<sup>13</sup> An implicit corollary of this, perhaps given more weight by the subsequent interpretative tradition than by Plotinus himself, is that (iii) the hypostases must be discrete and not conflated with each other, nor multiplied or subdivided within themselves;<sup>14</sup> although one should note that he sometimes makes statements that equivocate on this issue. [2] Second, Plotinus explicitly denies both motion and change to the One, and in certain passages rejects the possibility that it can direct will, attention, knowledge, or activity towards anything, even itself;<sup>15</sup> though here too, he occasionally breaks his own rule. Of course this latter axiom must be qualified, since the One must be the ultimate source or cause of everything; but it is clear that any overzealous attempt to preserve the overwhelming transcendence of the first principle will compromise the explanation of its causality; while conversely, any detailed account of ontogenesis risks diminishing its transcendence. These two putative axioms—[1] the absence of intermediaries, and [2] the immutability of the One—inevitably govern and complicate both his own discussion of ontogenesis as well as the entire scholarly controversy surrounding the issue. This is not to say that Plotinus (and his various modern interpreters) do not regularly violate one or another of these axioms. Quite the contrary: just as *any* discourse about the One ultimately violates the rules of a strictly apophatic theology, so also any explanation of Plotinian ontogenesis necessarily equivocates with respect to these axioms. An anxiety about this philosophical equivocation tacitly underlies the entire discussion.

Now let us return to v.1[10].7.5–6. On account of axiom [2], proponents of [B]—that Intellect is the subject of the reversion and of the vision—insist that the One cannot, properly speaking, “revert” to or apprehend itself, since this

13 Thus v.1[10].6.48–49: ὁρᾷ δὲ αὐτὸν οὐ χωρισθείς, ἀλλ’ ὅτι μετ’ αὐτὸν καὶ μεταξὺ οὐδέν, ὥς οὐδὲ ψυχῆς καὶ νοῦ: (“[Intellect] sees [the One] not having separated, but because *it is next after him and nothing is in between*, as there is nothing [between] Soul and Intellect”); or later, v.3[49].12.29–30: “For it [the One] did not as it were ‘want’ the Intellect to come to be, since (if this were the case) the Intellect would come to be with the ‘wanting’ having come to be between it [the One] and the generated Intellect” (οὐ γὰρ οἶον προθυμήθη νοῦν γενέσθαι, εἴτα ἐγένετο νοῦς τῆς προθυμίας μεταξὺ αὐτοῦ τε καὶ τοῦ γεννηθέντος νοῦ γενομένης). See also v.4[7].1.1–8; v.1[10].6.41–42, 10.1–5; 11.9[33].1–2; v.3[49].12.28–30.

14 See also v.4[7].2.1–11; v.5.[32].13.34–36; 11.9[33].1.16–26; 1.8[51].2.21–32. In fact this relationship is substantially more complex than can be elaborated here; for example, Plotinus often implies a non-reciprocal identity between superior and inferior hypostases: e.g., 11.9[13].9.3–4: “The first itself is not around anything, but the other things are around it” (περὶ οὐδὲν γὰρ αὐτὸ τὸ πρῶτον, τὰ ἄλλα δὲ περὶ αὐτὸ).

15 E.g., *inter alia*, v.1.9[9].6.42–44; 11.9[13].7, 9; v.1[10].6.17–28, 11.8–9; v.6[24].6.3–5; v.3[49].10, 12.28–39; 1.7[54].1.



implies some minimal movement—or equivalently, an unacceptable subject-object duality—within the absolute unity of the One. In support of this position, one may, of course, adduce the numerous passages in which Plotinus denies to the One not only any kind of motion but even self-knowledge. Still, if one accepts [B], the text demands further explication, for how can the hypostatic Intellect-Being first arise through its *own* reversion towards, and vision of, the One? In other words, what would be the point of Intellect's reversion to the One if it (the Intellect) *already* existed? Conversely, how can Intellect revert if it does *not yet*—atemporally speaking—exist? A common solution to this problem is to take the subject of the *epistrophē* and of the ensuing apprehension—i.e., the proximate agent of the generation of Intellect—to be neither the One nor Intellect properly speaking, but rather an intermediary prefiguration of Intellect emanating from the One, something I will henceforth call the “prenoetic efflux,” or PNE.<sup>16</sup> In support of this view one might point to a number of passages in which Plotinus suggests that some kind of effluence from the first principle is the primary subject of the reversion—thereby conforming to axiom [2] concerning the immutability of the One. In earlier treatises—with important exceptions—Plotinus tends to be somewhat reticent about the PNE,<sup>17</sup> but elsewhere, primarily in later works, we find several ontogenetic passages that begin *in medias res*, with a richer description of what may already be an independent entity, an indefinite potentiality that turns back towards the One to be limited and defined by its recursive vision.<sup>18</sup>

16 I intend the term “prenoetic efflux” (PNE) to serve as a generic placeholder that is somewhat less prejudicial than the common terms “pre-Intellect” or “inchoate Intellect,” since these formulations overemphasize, in my opinion, the *already*-noetic aspect of what Plotinus describes in a variety of ways, often without any noetic terminology whatsoever.

17 He often refers to it with the periphrasis *to genomenon*; besides v.1[10].7.3 and v.2[11].1.10, one might consider v.6[24].5.5–11: “For thinking is not first either with respect to being or to honor, but second, and is what has come into being *while the Good subsisted and moved what has come into being towards itself*: it was moved and saw” (τὸ γὰρ νοεῖν οὐ πρῶτον οὔτε τῷ εἶναι οὔτε τῷ τίμειον εἶναι, ἀλλὰ δεύτερον καὶ γενόμενον, ἐπειδὴ ὑπέστη τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ <τὸ> γενόμενον ἐκίνησε πρὸς αὐτό, τὸ δ' ἐκινήθη τε καὶ εἶδε). We encounter here *two* uses of *genomenon*, first to describe *to noein* (presumably coextensive with *nous*), and second to refer to the first incipient PNE. Although here Plotinus does not use the literal terminology of *epistrophē*, a comparable process is implied by the One's adduction of its first prenoetic efflux (PNE) back towards itself; this PNE then becomes thinking (*to noein*) upon apprehending its source.

18 E.g., III.8[30].11.1–7, VI.7[38].16.10–35, 17.12–26, and v.3[49].11.1–16 [see Appendix B14]. Even in these cases, however, the subject of the reversion is often grammatically ambiguous; see, *inter alia*, VI.7[38].16.11–22 and v.3[49].11.1–10 [texts in Appendices B10, B14]. In the latter passage Plotinus appears to describe an attempt of the already-existing (“multiple”) Intellect to apprehend the One, but immediately slides into a somewhat poetic

Yet here we confront the other horn of the philosophical dilemma. If one conforms to axiom [2] by attributing the reversion not to the One itself but rather to its *effluence* (the PNE), then the latter becomes a *de facto* second principle prior to Intellect, and consequently risks violating axiom [1] that (i) requires the next principle immediately ‘after’ the One to be Intellect, with which the pre-epistrophic PNE is not yet identical, and/or (ii) prohibits intermediaries ‘between’ hypostases. Plotinus himself does not explicitly resolve this problem,<sup>19</sup> nor, to my knowledge, have modern scholars confronted it directly. However, it has been at least implicitly recognized. Several interpreters have adopted the un-Plotinian term “inchoate Intellect” to describe the initial pre-epistrophic effluence of the One.<sup>20</sup> This subtle semantic device subsumes the putatively ‘heretical’ conception of an interhypostatic principle between One and Intellect into an expanded category of Intellect that includes both predeterminate and determinate phases, so as to bring this position into conformity with axiom [1] requiring that nothing but Intellect follow immediately after the One. According to this model—never proffered explicitly by Plotinus himself<sup>21</sup>—the One simply generates a *kind* of intellect, an imperfect prototype, which must still revert to its source to become the hypostatic Intellect properly speaking. Nevertheless, it still remains unclear how the One can produce anything other than itself, and/or to what extent its first *aporroia* can be called an intellect of any sort. In other words, to maintain that the One generates even the so-called inchoate Intellect merely pushes the problem of the genesis of Intellect further back up the causal chain, so to speak, towards an infinite regress.<sup>22</sup>

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description of the original genesis of Intellect; in fact there is disagreement as to whether these passages describe the primordial vision of the One or the mystical vision of the ascending aspirant having been assimilated to the Intellect.

- 19 Plotinus does however sometimes admit that it *is* a problem, generally framing it as the question of how the One can provide what it does not itself contain; see, *inter alia*, VI.7[38].17.1–3 and V.3[49].15.1–12.
- 20 Apparently following Igal’s 1971a coinage “*inteligencia incoada*,” the term occurs in Atkinson 1983, Schroeder 1986, Bussanich 1988, Emilsson 1999, now also 2007, and Okano 2005. Lloyd 1987 uses the similar construction “Intellect / Pre-Intellect.”
- 21 Although Plotinus never explicitly calls the PNE an intellect *per se*, one possible example supporting this view might be V.3[49].11.13–14 (see Appendix B14), in which he distinguishes between “this Intellect” (*houtos ho nous*) that apprehended (*epebale*) the One—presumably the PNE—and the (ordinary) *nous* that by grasping (*labōn*) the One became *nous* and *ousia* and *noēsis*.
- 22 Also in favor of [A] is the fact that the mechanism of reversion itself seems to be an attempt not only to account for the normal self-reflexive activity of Intellect, as O’Daly 1973 and others have pointed out, but also to explain the generation of anything else besides

#### 2.4 *The Emergence of the Prenoeitic Efflux (PNE) and the Double-Energeia Doctrine*

In response to this problem, many interpreters have tended to place a great deal of emphasis upon an aspect of Plotinus's thought that has come to be known as the double-*energeia* doctrine: namely, that everything has both an internal (or intrinsic) and an external (or extrinsic) activity.<sup>23</sup> The first, "internal" activity constitutes a thing's own substance or essence (*ousia*), while the second, "external" activity departs from its substance and is merely an incidental effect—an "image" (*eikōn*) or "trace" (*ichnos*)—of the prior internal activity.<sup>24</sup> The so-called inchoate Intellect is thus to be explained—it is argued—as an external *energeia* of the One, an inadvertent by-product that just naturally happens to flow from it like light from the sun (Plotinus often makes use of this analogy); and once externalized, this PNE *qua* external *energeia* reverts to its source, while the One itself, appropriately, "remains eternally turned to itself" (Armstrong's translation), in the sense that it remains unchanged, self-directed, and immobile.<sup>25</sup> Now it is true that in two early discussions of ontogenesis—one, in his very first, at v.4[7].2.27–38, and another in the context of an especially imaginative account at v.1[10].6.29–37—he rationalizes the emergence of Intellect as just such an extrinsic *energeia*, comparing it to heat from fire or cold from snow, and also declares axiomatically that everything that attains maturity or perfection (*teleia*) reproduces itself, presumably in order to explain the generation of Intellect from the ever-perfect One in terms of 'biological' necessity.<sup>26</sup> However, it is far from certain that his occasional appeals to more abstract, quasi-Aristotelian terminology either reveal his own fundamental understanding of the process of ontogenesis, or do much to resolve the underlying philosophical problem. On the contrary, the problems generated by this doctrine proliferate like the heads of a hydra, and lead one to suspect it is an *ex post facto* rationalization—if not merely

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the One without imputing to the first principle any outward-directed activity or attention to its inferiors.

23 E.g., *inter alia*, Schroeder 1986, Lloyd 1987, 1990, Emilsson 1999, 2007, following the seminal discussion of Ruten 1956.

24 Passages which mention this doctrine include v.9[5].9.8.11–19; v.4[7].2.21–37; v.1[10].6.28–53; iv.5[29].7.13–23; ii.9[33].8.11–19; vi.2[43].22.26–29; v.3[49].7.13–34. This doctrine was perhaps loosely derived from Aristotle's notion of the relation between actuality and potentiality.

25 It is for this reason that even a small subset adherents of [B] with respect to v.1[10].7.2–6 have occasionally thought that v.1[10].6.15–19 nevertheless refers to the (in this case immobile) reversion of the One upon itself. Hadot, an adherent of a qualified position [A], identifies this with the One's "remaining" (*menein*).

26 This seems to be a vague echo of Aristotle, *De gen. an.* 732–733b.

another, equally metaphorical, analogy<sup>27</sup>—for a doctrine of ontogenesis he held for quite different reasons.<sup>28</sup> More importantly, however, while Plotinus may envision the emergent PNE to be in some sense an *energeia* of the One, he certainly does not think that it simply springs into existence from the One as a

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- 27 Emilsson 2007, 27 most clearly expresses the (in my view) arbitrary preference for this seemingly more abstract, philosophical model over that of ‘emanation,’ which is rejected as ‘metaphor’: “... even if the physical phenomena are used as analogies or metaphors for causation at the intelligible level, double activity as such is not to be taken as a mere analogy or metaphor.” But can we actually take this model to be non-metaphorical? For the doctrine concerns activities that explicitly comprise and depart from *ousia*. How seriously and ‘un-metaphorically’ Plotinus is willing to apply this to the case of the One, most explicitly *epekeina tēs ousias*, is unclear; he may well be ‘metaphorically’ transposing a model taken from the intelligible and physical world onto the One in precisely the same way he does with the more plainly physical imagery of ‘emanation.’ One might also wonder if there could be *any* discourse about hypernoetic reality that would *not* be in some sense ‘metaphorical.’
- 28 The fundamental difficulty with this explanation is that Plotinus’s accounts of the emergence and reversion of the PNE are significantly richer and more ambiguous—and thus more philosophically problematic—than can be adequately explained with appeal to this doctrine. There are substantial arguments against taking this as the unique non-metaphorical model of ontogenesis. (i) The physical examples of external *energeiai* that Plotinus offers, such as heat from fire, do not serve to explain the most common feature of these accounts, that of the reversion itself. As Emilsson 1999, 284 notes heat or cold hardly need to revert to their sources to be what they are. Moreover, these examples require action upon an already-existing substrate; in the case of the primordial ontogenesis, however, there is nowhere ‘external’ to the One ‘prior’ to its overflowing; the One’s supposedly ‘external’ activity must itself comprise both the effect and the substrate upon which the effect acts. (ii) The notion of not merely one but two such *energeiai* deriving from the absolute unity of the One seems to complicate, not resolve, the issue. (iii) Plotinus’s explicit statements to the contrary are problematic. Emilsson is compelled to admit that elsewhere (at v.6[24].5.3) Plotinus explicitly denies *any* sort of *energeia* to the One, and specifically rejects that a double-*energeia* can be attributed to it. Finally, (iv) although Plotinus sometimes describes the emergent PNE in terms that would be appropriate for an *energeia* of the One—for example, as an indefinite act of vision, as a kind of unbounded life or as a radiation of light—he also occasionally attributes to it qualities that cannot easily be interpreted as the first principle’s (even “external”) activity, vaguely negative qualities that seem to be even more radically opposed to the nature of the One than do principles such as intelligence and existence which the One merely transcends. Thus, for example, the PNE is a “dyad” (*duas*: v.4[7].2.8; v.1[10].6.7); it is “another” (*allo*: v.2[11].1.9); it is a “movement and otherness” (*kinēsis kai heterotēs*) that produces “intelligible matter” (*en tois noētois hulē*) that is “not yet good” (*oupō agathon*) and is “unilluminated” (*aphōtiston*) prior to its reversion (11.4[12].5.28–38); and, finally (at 11.1.8[30].8.32–35) it “forgets itself” (*elathēn heauton*) and is “weighted down” (*hebarēmenos*) to the point that it “unraveled itself” (*exelixen hauton*). Could this really be the *energeia* of the One? See also the cautions of Bussanich 1988, 42, 164–65) concerning the application of the double-*energeia* doctrine to the One.

wholly independent, externalized principle, “cutting itself off, as it were, from the [One’s] power,” as he says of the post-epistrophic, delimited Intellect.<sup>29</sup> On the contrary, certain passages would suggest the initial, indefinite phase of the PNE and the One itself are virtually indistinguishable.

## 2.5 *The One and the Prenoeitic Efflux (PNE) as Aspects of a Complex Continuum*

This requires further precision. In several accounts of ontogenesis, Plotinus describes the gradual emergence and epistrophic activity of the PNE with a complexity that is in tension with both axiom [1] prohibiting intermediary principles as well as with axiom [2] denying that the One any sort of movement. Returning to V.1[10].7.2–4 (Appendix B3), we may observe that Plotinus calls the emergent PNE *to genomenon*, “the thing that has come to be,” but then—in an under-remarked phrase—he qualifies it with three attributes whose logical order suggests a progression from identity with the One towards mere similarity: (i) “it must”—remarkably—“*somehow be that [One]*” (δεῖ πως εἶναι ἐκεῖνο), (ii) “preserve much of it” (ἀποσώζειν πολλὰ αὐτοῦ), and, finally, (iii) “be most closely similar to it” (εἶναι ὁμοιότητα πρὸς αὐτό). The explicit statement of qualified identity with the One with which the description begins is strengthened by the (often misunderstood) line that follows (line 5), ἀλλ’ οὐ νοῦς ἐκεῖνο: “but *that is not Intellect*.”<sup>30</sup> Although the referent of the *ekeino* in this line is not specified, most interpreters have assumed it refers to the One itself. It is more likely, however, that Plotinus’s point is not to state the obvious—namely, that *the One* is not Intellect—but (*alla*) rather what is somewhat more surprising: that the just-mentioned *to genomenon*—i.e., the PNE—has proceeded from the One to some minimal degree, and yet whatever it is, it is *still* not Intellect.<sup>31</sup> Now there also remains some ambiguity about the implicit subject of the verb in the next line, “how does *it* generate Intellect?” (πῶς οὖν νοῦν γεννᾷ;), which presumably refers to the same subject as that of the subsequent *epistrophē*. We have previously noted the two commonly-proffered candidates, [A] (the One)

29 V.1[10].7.11: ἀπὸ τῆς δυνάμεως οἶον σχιζομένη.

30 Atkinson 1983, lx,156–57—who translates “But the One is not Intellect. How on earth then, does it produce Intellect?”—follows Igal 1971b in taking this as a hypothetical interjection by an unmentioned interlocutor, rather than a statement of Plotinus’s own position; this is rightly refuted by Bussanich 1988, 36–37. Even if it were not doubtful that *ekeino* refers to the One rather than the just-mentioned PNE, Armstrong (LCL 444) who translates “But Intellect is not that Good,” cannot be right in taking the negative as a predication of *nous* rather than *ekeino*.

31 This is also supported by analogy with VI.7[38].16.14: οὐπὼ νοῦς ἦν ἐκεῖνο βλέπων, ἀλλ’ ἔβλεπεν ἀνοήτως. This also challenges the common interpretation that the preceding sentence (ἔτι δεῖ πως εἶναι ἐκεῖνο..., V.1[10].7.2) simply refers to Intellect; thus d’Ancona 1999, 248.

or [B] (Intellect itself), both of which, as we have seen, present philosophical obstacles. But there is a third, simpler option: that the subject is yet again the *genomenon* of the previous line, which would then be the emergent PNE.<sup>32</sup> The PNE is therefore also the subject of the *epistrophē* in the next sentence. In this case, the PNE cannot be unequivocally identified with Intellect (not even with a putatively inchoate one), but begins in a state of identity with the One and only gradually progresses towards a differentiation, however minimal, that is sufficiently distinct—either ‘during’ or ‘prior to’ its reversion—as to be described as merely “most like” the One.<sup>33</sup>

One may detect a similar complexity in the ontogenetic passage of the next treatise, at v.2[11].1.7–13 (Appendix B4), where Plotinus intimates a number of intermediate stages. The One overflows (ὑπερέρρῳ), and “its overflow has made another” (τὸ ὑπερπλήρες αὐτοῦ πεποίηκεν ἄλλο). Then, “what has come into being turns back towards it” (τὸ δὲ γινόμενον εἰς αὐτὸ ἐπεστράφη). Seeing it, it is “filled,” at which point it becomes Intellect. The passage has two possible interpretations. One possibility is that Plotinus is describing two separate intermediaries—to *hyperplēres* and to *allo*—prior to Intellect proper: a flagrant violation of the putative axiom [1]. In this case, the latter of the two, the “other,” is the subject of the subsequent reversion, and the sequence would thus progress from (i) the One to (ii) the “overflow” to (iii) the “other” and finally to (iv) Intellect. Another possibility is that the phrase *to de genomenon ... epestraphē* is an exegetical restatement of the mechanism by which the overflow produces the “other.” In this case, “what has come to be” (*to genomenon*) refers back to the first incipient phase of overflow, and the “other” refers in turn to the now-differentiated subject having already perceived its source, with the reversion simply a more detailed description of the generation of the “other.” In either case, that the activity of “overflowing” is attributed to the One suggests a close proximity, if not identity, between the One—itsself a hyperplenitude—and its “overflow”; but it is the overflow that either becomes or creates an “other,” which is now, tautologically speaking, a distinct principle. Thus again, as with v.1[10].7.2–6, we find what appears to be a gradual progression of the

32 An option favored explicitly by Schroeder 1986 and O'Brien 1997.

33 This is, of course, in tension with the proclamation in the previous chapter of the same treatise, at v.1[10].6.41–42, that Intellect follows immediately upon the One, as well as with similar denials of intermediaries elsewhere; indeed, Plotinus often vacillates on this issue. An example of Plotinus's equivocation on this point is provided by v.6[24].5.5–11, where he insists that intellection (*to noein*) is the second principle immediately following the One, but in the same breath describes its generation from a prior intermediary, *to genomenon*.

emergent PNE from identity with the One to discrete alterity, although it remains unclear whether the alterity precedes or results from the reversion.

From the intricacies of these early passages, we may begin to suspect that Plotinus envisioned a less concrete distinction between the One and the initial, pre-epistrophic modality of the prenoetic efflux (PNE) than is ordinarily admitted by interpreters seeking to establish an unequivocal or properly ‘philosophical’ account of Plotinian ontogenesis in which an independent PNE emerges from the One as a discrete “external” activity. Rather, an unprejudiced reading of the text leads one to suspect Plotinus envisioned a gradual continuum—of a sort supposedly forbidden by axiom [1]—between the One and Intellect. There is also a pervasive ambiguity about precisely where along this continuum Plotinus thought the *epistrophē* to occur. Inasmuch as the PNE can be said to be independent from the One, the One may be exculpated from participation in an ‘illegal’ reversion that would violate axiom [2] (that denies motion to the One). Yet we have seen that at least in its initial phase, the PNE also “must somehow *be* that [One]”: i.e., the incipient PNE is *identical* to the One. Thus, the hyperplenitude that comprises the One is also what overflows as another. In the logic of “emanation”—a perennial source of unease for modern philosophically-minded interpreters<sup>34</sup>—the source, overflow, and recipient, as well as the act of overflowing itself, are not readily distinguishable from each other.<sup>35</sup>

### 2.6 *The One Itself as Subject of the Reversion*

Given this apparent equivocation and the intimation that the PNE is, in its very first, incipient stage, identical to the One, it is not surprising that in later treatises we may also find several passages—in addition, of course, to the controversial ἐπιστροφέντος αἰεὶ ἐκείνου πρὸς [ἐ]αυτὸ at v.1[10].6.18—in which Plotinus seems to be stating more clearly that the One is *itself* the subject of some ineffable kind of self-reversion or—even without the explicit language of *epistrophē pros heauton*—of a more general self-directed activity, whatever this might mean in more ‘literal’ terms. On their surface, such statements themselves risk violating axiom [2] denying motion or change to the One. In the context of Plotinus’s richest and most cataphatic evocation of the nature of the One in the late-middle period treatise v1.8[39].16.12–26, he says that the

34 An unease long evident, for example, in Armstrong 1937, Dörrie 1965, and most recently, Gerson 1993. Interpreters apparently find the physical connotations of the word troubling and therefore attempt to argue it away as ‘metaphor,’ a problematic category whose use in Plotinian studies merits much more critical attention than it has received.

35 As Sells 1985 has eloquently described.

One “is borne, as it were, into his own interior” (ὁ δ’ εἰς τὸ εἶσω οἶον φέρεται αὐτοῦ); that he loves himself (οἶον ἑαυτὸν ἀγαπήσας); that the One “as it were, looks to himself, and this (as it were) ‘Being’ for him is his looking to himself” (οἶον πρὸς αὐτὸν βλέπει καὶ τὸ οἶον εἶναι τοῦτο αὐτῷ τὸ πρὸς αὐτὸν βλέπειν); finally, that the One has “an inclination of his own towards himself” (ἡ τοιαύτη νεύσις αὐτοῦ πρὸς αὐτόν) that makes him be what he is. Attempts have been made to explain these passages as metaphors that emphasize the One’s autonomy and self-constitution rather than self-directed activity *per se*,<sup>36</sup> but this becomes somewhat more difficult to maintain in light of other passages that purport to describe the One’s lack of self-thinking. For example, at VI.7[38].39.1–2 (thus in the treatise immediately preceding VI.8[39]), Plotinus says that since the One cannot properly think itself, “nothing else is present to it, but there will be some simple ‘thrusting’ by it towards itself” (ἡ οὐδὲν ἄλλο πάρεστιν αὐτῷ, ἀλλ’ ἀπλῆ τις ἐπιβολὴ αὐτῷ πρὸς αὐτόν ἔσται). The curious use of *epibolē* here recalls its earlier use in the same treatise (at 35.21) to describe the apprehension of the One by the *nous erōn* in the throes of mystical-erotic frenzy, but in another late middle-period treatise, V.3[49], Plotinus uses similar language of physical contact to describe the One’s own ineffable self-apprehension; thus at 10.41–44, he insists that an absolutely simple principle cannot think itself, but rather “there will not be thinking of it, but touching, and, as it were, an unutterable and unthinkable contact—a ‘pre-thinking’—Intellect not yet having come into being, and what is touching is not thinking” (ἡ οὐκ ἔσται νόησις αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ θίξις καὶ οἶον ἐπαφή μόνον ἄρρητος καὶ ἀνόητος, προνοοῦσα οὐπω νοῦ γεγονότος καὶ τοῦ θιγγάνοντος οὐ νοοῦντος).<sup>37</sup> The passages that impute a kind of motionless self-reversion to the One thus parallel Plotinus’s descriptions of the subsequent phases of procession, according to which each successive hypostasis is defined through its reversion to its immediate superiors and/or to the One.<sup>38</sup> In the case of the One, there can only be a centripetal, selfward impulse, or, more optimistically, an ineffable, pre-cognitive self-apprehension, there being nowhere else—nowhere ‘external’ to itself—for it to turn.<sup>39</sup>

36 Supporters of [B] who deny the One any reversion minimize the force of these passages by emphasizing Plotinus’s frequent qualification *hoion* in these passages; thus *inter alia* O’Brien 1997.

37 In the subsequent lines, Plotinus makes it clear he has the genesis of Intellect in mind; the thinker (*to nooun*) cannot remain simple, but duplicates itself in thinking itself. This has a parallel at VI.7[38].39.20, in which he describes what must be the One’s prenoetic self-apprehension as “a touch, as it were, possessing nothing intellectual” (οἶον ἐπαφή, οὐδὲν νοερὸν ἔχει).

38 E.g., V.1[10].3; V.2[11].1–2; VI.4[22].14.

39 While these passages state unequivocally—if, as is often assumed, metaphorically—that the One engages in at least some kind of self-directed activity, there are a number of other



## 2.7 *The PNE as Independent Interhypostasis*

Thus far we have seen that it is quite difficult to distinguish the initial, pre-epistrophic phase of the PNE from the One itself. And yet—to complicate matters further—despite Plotinus’s (occasionally quite strident) injunctions against intermediaries, one can also find numerous passages in which at some pre-epistrophic stage the PNE verges on becoming an independent—and thus putatively ‘illegal’—principle, what I will call an “interhypostasis”: no longer the One, but already in some sense an “other” (*allo*) subject that has proceeded far enough ‘away’ to be able, cognitively speaking, to revert towards and objectify its source. Indeed, despite his obvious reticence about interhypostatic principles, Plotinus has in fact quite a lot to say about the unutterable processes linking One and Intellect. Sometimes he refers to the PNE most generally as the unbounded *dunamis* or *energeia* overflowing from the One,<sup>40</sup> or as its “trace” (*ichnos*), but in several passages he also attributes specific qualities to it that would not ordinarily seem to be predicable of the One. We may consider the following examples:<sup>41</sup>

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less-remarked passages which may be interpreted as referring *either* to the One’s own reflexive activity *or* that of the PNE, and therefore merit re-evaluation; they seem to suggest that Plotinus did not think such a distinction to be critically important. A full discussion of all the complexities involved would consume more space than is appropriate here, but one example occurs at VI.7[38].39.13–16 (following the passage discussed earlier), again in the context of a denial of the One’s self-thinking: “But we said that there is no thinking of this [One], not [even] if one might wish to see it as another. But he, [by] thinking, became multiple: intelligible, intelligizing, moved, and everything proper to Intellect” (ἐλέγομεν δέ, ὅτι οὐ νόησις τοῦτο, οὐδ’ εἰ ἄλλον αὐτὸν ἐθέλοι ἰδεῖν. νοήσας δὲ αὐτὸς πολλὸς γίνεται, νοητός, νοῶν, κινούμενος καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα προσήκει νῶ). But for the gender of the pronouns, it would incontrovertibly refer to the One’s self-contemplation. Again we confront a logical paradox: either the initial subject is Intellect, in which case the account of self-generation is redundant, or it is the One, in which case thought is denied the One in one sentence and attributed to it in the next. The latter option, however, would seem to be preferable if we understand the One’s ‘self-contemplation’ to be contiguous or even inseparable from that of the PNE, which “becomes” Intellect while the One remains itself. Hadot 1988, 358 notes the ambiguity: “le sujet est ou l’Esprit ou le Bien dans l’hypothèse où il se transformerait en Esprit pour se penser.” A similar example may be found at III.8[30].8.31–32, in which case the subject is similarly ambiguous: “Since even when it contemplates the One [or, intransitively: “when the One contemplates”], it is not as one” (ἐπεὶ καὶ ὅταν τὸ ἐν θεωρῇ, οὐχ ὡς ἓν· εἰ δὲ μή, οὐ γίνεται νοῦς). Rist 1971 seems to be alone in taking the subject as the One.

40 The One as *dunamis pantōn*, e.g. V.4[7].1.36; V.1[10].7.10; III.8[30]. VI.7[38].17.32–33, 32.31; V.3[49].15.33; the PNE as *dunamis*, e.g., VI.9[9].5.37; V.1[10].7.14; III.8[30].11.2; VI.7[38].15.21; V.3[49].16.1–3; as *energeia*, e.g., VI.8[39].16.30; as “trace” (*ichnos*), e.g., VI.7[38].18.3; VI.8[39].18.23; etc.

41 This list is not exhaustive; the topic has never been the subject of a comprehensive study and merits future research.

## 2.8 ‘Motion’ and ‘Otherness’

The “other” of v.2[11].1.7–13 foreshadows the enigmatic account of the emergence of so-called “intelligible matter” in the very next treatise, at 11.4[12].5.28–39, in which two indefinite prenoetic principles that are the *archē* of matter—“motion” (*kinēsis*) and “otherness” (*heterotēs*), reminiscent of two of the five *megista genē* of *Sophist* 254d ff.—are said to sprout forth (*exephusan*) directly from the One prior to a reversion towards their source, at which point they acquire limit and definition.<sup>42</sup> That this originally Pythagorean doctrine<sup>43</sup> is not an anomaly of Plotinus’s early period is suggested by the fact that he similarly describes the PNE in terms of *kinēsis* both at v.6[24].5.8–9<sup>44</sup> and much later, at v.1.7[38].16.17–19.<sup>45</sup>

## 2.9 ‘Indefinite Dyad’

In a number of ontogenetic passages, he refers to another creeping interhypos-tasis, the Platonic-Pythagorean “Indefinite Dyad” (*aoristos duas*), which con-joins with or is imprinted by the One to produce Intellect.<sup>46</sup>

42 “The motion and otherness which are from the First are indefinite, and need that one so as to be defined. It is defined when it reverts towards it, but beforehand both matter and the other are indefinite and not yet good, but are unilluminated by that one.” (ἀόριστον δὲ καὶ ἡ κίνησις καὶ ἡ ἑτερότης ἡ ἀπὸ τοῦ πρώτου, ἀακείνου πρὸς τὸ ὀρισθῆναι δεόμενα· ὀρίζεται δέ, ὅταν πρὸς αὐτὸ ἐπιστραφῇ· πρὶν δὲ ἀόριστον καὶ ἡ ὕλη καὶ τὸ ἕτερον καὶ οὐπω ἀγαθόν, ἀλλ’ ἀφώτιστον ἐκείνου, 4.31–35). This passage is unique in attributing the generation of otherness directly to the One, without an intermediary such as the *hyperplēres* of v.2[11].1.9. Rist 1971 considers this “Otherness” to be philosophically incompatible with Plotinus’s mysticism; we will see that this is mistaken.

43 The association of “otherness” (*heterotēs*: originally an Aristotelian word) and motion with matter is attributed to Pythagoras and Plato by pseudo-Plutarch, *Placita philosophorum* 884c3; at *Theologoumena arithmeticae* 21.2, the Neopythagorean Nicomachus of Gerasa refers to the “primal thought of otherness” within the Indefinite Dyad (ἐτερότητας γὰρ πρωτίστη ἔννοια ἐν δυάδι).

44 “And this is thinking: a motion towards the Good that desires that one” (καὶ τοῦτό ἐστι νοεῖν, κίνησις πρὸς ἀγαθὸν ἐπιέμενον ἐκείνου).

45 v.1.7[38].16.16–19: “Indeed its very motion was filled by its being moved there, and it filled it around that, and it was not still motion alone, but motion satiated and full” (ἡ δὲ κίνησις αὐτὴ πληρωθεῖσα τῷ ἐκεῖ κινεῖσθαι καὶ περὶ ἐκεῖνο ἐπλήρωσεν αὐτὸ καὶ οὐκέτι κίνησις ἦν μόνον, ἀλλὰ κίνησις διακορῆς καὶ πλήρης.) [Appendix B10].

46 Thus v.4[7].2.4–8: “Thinking, seeing the intelligible and reverting towards it and as it were being completed and perfected from that, is itself indefinite just like sight, but is defined by the intelligible. Therefore it is also said: from the Indefinite Dyad and the One come the Forms and numbers; for this is Intellect” (νόησις δὲ τὸ νοητὸν ὁρώσα καὶ πρὸς τοῦτο ἐπιστραφεῖσα καὶ ἀπ’ ἐκείνου οἷον ἀποτελουμένη καὶ τελειουμένη ἀόριστος μὲν αὕτη ὥσπερ ὄψις, ὀριζομένη δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ νοητοῦ. διὸ καὶ εἴρηται· ἐκ τῆς ἀορίστου δυάδος καὶ τοῦ ἐνὸς τὰ εἶδη καὶ οἱ ἀριθμοί· τοῦτο γὰρ ὁ νοῦς) [Appendix B1]; also v.1[10].5.7–9: “The One is prior to the Dyad; the Dyad is second, and, coming to be from the One, has that one as definer, but is

### 2.10 *The 'Intelligible'*

In V.4[7], Plotinus refers to a prenoetic “intelligible” (*noēton*) that is the source of Intellect. He attributes to the *noēton* several ‘illegal’ characteristics more typical of Intellect than of the One, including a kind of self-apperception that foreshadows the references to the One’s enigmatic self-apprehension in later treatises. The ‘offending’ passage, at 2.15–19, reads: “[the Intelligible] is not without sensation, but all things belong to it and are in it and with it; it is entirely able to discern itself; life is in it and all things are in it and it *is* its own self-comprehension (*katanoēsis hautou*), and exists as if by consciousness (*sunaisthēsei*) in everlasting rest, and intelligizes in a manner different than intellection according to Intellect.”<sup>47</sup> Many commentators have taken the *noēton* to refer to the supreme principle itself, and therefore, see this early treatise as a youthful indiscretion or as a premature formulation of a doctrine in which he attributed to the One a kind of self-thinking that he eventually came to reject,<sup>48</sup> despite the fact that similar assertions may be found even in later treatises. Yet one might reasonably doubt that the principle here called *noēton* refers to the first principle since Plotinus distinguishes the One from the *noēton*: at 2.17, he says that the *noēton* contains all things (πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ), but later states that the One (explicitly so-called at 2.39–40) is *beyond* all things (ἐπέκεινα τῶν πάντων). The *noēton* thus appears neither as the One nor as full-fledged Intellect, but as a seminal prefiguration of the eventual complexity in the intelligible realm that Plotinus would deny the absolute One itself. The implication, then, is that the One projects both an *eikōn* of itself as a *noēton*—i.e., the One itself, but paradoxically conceived as an intelligible object<sup>49</sup>—as well as an indefinite, formless substrate that is imprinted to become Intellect proper. Both the One’s more positive and luminous radiation and the much darker, primordial indefiniteness that flows from it—which may perhaps be envisioned as dyadic

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indefinite by itself.” (καὶ γὰρ πρὸ δυάδος τὸ ἓν, δεύτερον δὲ δυὰς καὶ παρὰ τοῦ ἐνὸς γεγεννημένη ἐκεῖνο ὀριστὴν ἔχει, αὕτη δὲ ἀόριστον παρ’ αὐτῆς). Plotinus also mentions the Dyad briefly at VI.7[38].8.23; V.1[10].6.6; V.5[32].4.20–27. We can perhaps attribute Plotinus’s references to the Dyad to his desire to express the complex notion of interhypostatic process with more traditional Platonic-Pythagorean language.

47 V.4[7].2.15–19: οὐκ ἔστιν οἷον ἀναίσθητον, ἀλλ’ ἔστιν αὐτοῦ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ σὺν αὐτῷ, πάντη διακριτικὸν ἑαυτοῦ, ζωὴ ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ, καὶ ἡ κατανόησις αὐτοῦ αὐτὸ οἶονεῖ συναισθῆσαι οὔσα ἐν στάσει αἰδίῳ καὶ νοήσει ἐτέρως ἢ κατὰ τὴν νοῦ νόησιν.

48 Thus, *inter alia*, Meijer 1992. Corrigan 1986, however, has proposed that it only refers to the One *qua* object of thought—i.e., the One as thought by Intellect during its genesis—rather than the One *tout court*. Interestingly, this may be one of his rare allusions to the *Chaldaean Oracles*, where (at fr. 1.1) the supreme, quasi-transcendent first principle is called a *noēton* that can only be apprehended by the *anthos nou*.

49 Thus Rist 1962, Corrigan 1986, and Lloyd 1987.

aspects of a single, self-apprehensive PNE—would thus appear to occupy a liminal zone between the first and second hypostases.

### 2.11 *Indefinite Vision*

Plotinus frequently describes the PNE as an indefinite potentiality of vision or effluent visual ray (*opsis*) prior to its apprehension of, and definition by, its object.<sup>50</sup> The pre-epistrophic PNE is “itself indefinite just like vision” (ἀόριστος... αὐτὴ ὥσπερ ὄψις: V.4[7].2.6); while ordinary Intellect is “some kind of vision and seeing vision, it [the PNE] will be a potency having come into actuality” (ὄψις τις καὶ ὄψις ὁρώσα, δύναμις ἔσται εἰς ἐνέργειαν ἐλθοῦσα: III.8[30].11.1–2);<sup>51</sup> the PNE was “not yet Intellect while it was looking at that [One], but it looked unintellectually” (ἀλλ’ οὐπω νοῦς ἦν ἐκεῖνο βλέπων, ἀλλ’ ἔβλεπεν ἀνοήτως: VI.7[38].16.13–14); “the ‘seeing’ from there [sc. the One] is the potentiality of all things” (ἡ δὲ ὄρασις ἢ ἐκεῖθεν δύναμις πάντων: VI.7[38].17.33); prior to the epistrophic vision, it is “sight not yet seeing” (ὄψις οὐπω ἰδοῦσα: V.3[49].11.5) and “unimprinted vision” (ἀτύπωτος ὄψις: V.3[49].11.12).

### 2.12 *Desire / Longing*

In a few passages, Plotinus characterizes this incomplete vision as “desire” (*epheis*): thinking is “motion towards the Good while desiring it, for desire generates thought and consubstantiates it with itself; for desire of sight is seeing” (κίνησις πρὸς ἀγαθὸν ἐφιέμενον ἐκείνου· ἡ γὰρ ἔφεσις τὴν νόησιν ἐγέννησε καὶ συσπύεστησεν αὐτῇ [H-S<sup>1</sup>: αὐτῇ]: V.6[24].5.8–10); at V.3[49].11.12, the indefinite vision is also described as “only desire” (ἔφεσις μόνον). At VI.8[39].15.1–8, the One’s ineffable self-attraction is also said to be desire and self-love, although, as with most positive assertions about the first principle, elsewhere Plotinus also denies desire to the One.<sup>52</sup>

### 2.13 *Primary Being or “One-Being”*

Occasionally Plotinus implies that the pre-epistrophic PNE is some of kind of Being, a precursor of the determinate Being that coexists with Intellect. At V.5[32].5.16–19, we find an account of ontogenesis through *epistrophē* that echoes the earlier accounts at V.1[10].6–7 and V.2[11].1, but begins with the slight (*oligon*) emergence from the One of what Plotinus calls “primary Being” (*on prōton*): “This that is said to be primary Being, proceeding, as it were, a little

50 This is suggestive of the effluent visual ray prior to its being imprinted by the object of vision, according to the Platonic extromission-theory.

51 Also III.8[30].11.7–8.

52 At III.8[30].11.22–25 and V.3[49].12.28–39.

way from there, did not wish to come forth any more, but *having turned to the interior*, stood, and became the substance (*ousia*) and ‘hearth’ of all things.” (Τὸ γάρ τοι λεγόμενον ὃν τοῦτο πρῶτον ἐκεῖθεν οἷον ὀλίγον προβεβηκὸς οὐκ ἠθέλησεν ἔτι πρόσω ἐλθεῖν, μεταστραφὲν δὲ εἰς τὸ εἶσω ἔστη, καὶ ἐγένετο οὐσία καὶ ἐστία πάντων).<sup>53</sup> It is perplexing that the pre-epistrophic subject is any kind of Being, even “primary Being,” since this would appear to conflict with the orthodox interpretation of Plotinus’s henology in which Being (along with Intellect) comes into existence only after the sequence of stasis, reversion, and vision,<sup>54</sup> but this may be explained if one takes the *prōton* in the sense of “prior to,” since it will become *ousia* only once it reverts. He is thus describing the PNE specifically as the prototype of Being.<sup>55</sup> The reversion towards the interior (*eis to eisō*) in this case parallels the ontogenetic reversion to the One in the other passages, since (as we have seen in Ch. 2) according to Plotinus’s usual concentric model of hypostatic reality, the One abides “within,” at the center-point of the subject that emerges from it, something like the sun at the center of its corona of radiated light.<sup>56</sup> Another equation of the PNE with Being occurs

53 Interestingly, Plotinus attributes volition to the *on prōton*: it does not “wish” to proceed further.

54 The order of events that we find in the earlier accounts—first stasis, then *epistrophē*—is reversed: first, the emergent *on proton* reverts towards its interior (μεταστραφὲν δὲ εἰς τὸ εἶσω), then it stands (ἔστη), at which point it becomes substance (*ousia*) and hearth (*hestia*) of all things, which are presumably also equivalent to hypostatic Being and Intellect.

55 The nomenclature of the passage is noteworthy. *Hestia* is undoubtedly a pun made by giving the *ēta* of *estē* a rough breathing; perhaps *ousia* is similarly related to *eisō* by alliteration. “Primary Being” remains mysterious. Significantly, the term is not Plotinus’s own: *ho gar toi legomenon on touto* suggests he is borrowing it from elsewhere. But from what source? Could it be some subset of Gnostics, who comprise the principal unmentioned interlocutors of the entire *Großschrift*? The particle *toi* is also suggestive, as it apparently connotes a confidential or intimate tone that establishes a close connection with the audience (thus Denniston 1934, 537): perhaps Plotinus turns aside here to address his immediate disciples as opposed to the Gnostics on the periphery of his circle, who perhaps provided the account? This passage occurs in the midst of a speculative myth of etymological ontogenesis (5.15–28) that has parallels in classic Gnostic literature, e.g., in *Orig. World*, NHC II 100.10–101.23; Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 1.14.8. It is not inconceivable that Plotinus adopts some of this rhetoric from his silent Gnostic interlocutors even as he takes them to task for their opinions.

56 Intriguingly, one may compare this account to that of V.2[11].1.12–13, in which there is also a hint that Being precedes Intellect during the process of ontogenesis. First, (i) the PNE’s stasis with respect to the One (ἡ μὲν πρὸς ἐκεῖνο στάσις αὐτοῦ) produces Being (τὸ ὄν); then, (ii) its looking towards it (ἡ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸ θέα) makes Intellect. Yet immediately after Plotinus has so subtly distinguished these two phases, almost as if to correct himself he emphasizes their interdependence and simultaneity: “Since it stands towards it so that it should see, it becomes simultaneously Intellect and Being” (ἐπεὶ οὖν ἔστη πρὸς αὐτό, ἵνα

at VI.7[38].16.10–14: “Did it, when it was looking towards the Good, think that one as many, and himself [i.e., the subject] ‘One-Being,’ think him many, dividing him in himself by not being able to think the whole at once? But it was not yet Intellect while it was looking at that, but looked unintellectually” (ἀρα, ὅτε ἑώρα πρὸς τὸ ἀγαθόν, ἐνόει ὡς πολλὰ τὸ ἐν ἐκείνῳ καὶ ἐν ὃν αὐτὸς ἐνόει αὐτὸν πολλὰ, μερίζων αὐτὸν παρ’ αὐτῷ τῷ νοεῖν μὴ ὅλον ὁμοῦ δύνασθαι; ἀλλ’ οὕτω νοῦς ἦν ἐκείνο βλέπων, ἀλλ’ ἔβλεπεν ἀνοήτως). The subject of this implicit reversion has often been taken (against Plotinus’s explicit denial) to be the Intellect,<sup>57</sup> but as Perczel (1997) has suggested, Plotinus is referring here to an interhypostatic principle as “One-Being” (*hen on*)—a designation that he has adopted from a sub-hypothesis within the second hypothesis of Plato’s *Parmenides* 142b–e—so as to distinguish it from *both* the One *above* Being (i.e., the First principle) and the “One-Many” (*hen-polla*) that comprises Intellect proper. This is confirmed later, during the course of Plotinus’s extensive discussion of primary genera, when he refers to an apparently prenoetic principle as “the One in Being” (τὸ ἐν τῷ ὄντι: VI.2[43].17.25–26) and equates it with life, movement, and activity towards the Good: characteristics which in other passages equivalently describe the prenoetic phase of procession.

## 2.14 *Life*

Frequently Plotinus equates the PNE with an indefinite or unbounded “life,” a prefiguration of the spontaneous creativity and growth that emerges on subsequent ontological strata, including the intelligible realm, the Soul, and the natural world. We have just seen that life is an attribute of the mysterious *noēton* of V.4[7].2,<sup>58</sup> but the description of PNE in terms of life becomes much more prevalent in and after the *Großschrift*,<sup>59</sup> especially throughout VI.7[38] (chapters 16 to 18), where he insists that the PNE as indefinite life is limited and defined by its vision of the One.<sup>60</sup> This emergent prenoetic life may be related

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ἴδῃ, ὁμοῦ νοῦς γίγνεται καὶ ὄν). Yet here as in Plotinus’s ‘ordinary’ account, Being is established only after the reversion.

57 E.g., by Hadot 1988, 129.

58 V.4[7].2.16–17: ζωὴ ἐν αὐτῷ, echoing the *pantelēs zōon* of Plato, *Timaeus* 31b.

59 A point emphasized by Turner 2000d.

60 Thus for example VI.7[38].17.12–18 [complete passage in Appendix B1]: “It therefore had life and had no need of a multifarious giver, and its life was some trace of that and not its life. And so looking towards that one, it was unlimited, but having looked there, it was limited, that one having no limit. For immediately by looking towards some ‘one,’ the life is bounded by it, and has in itself boundary and limit and form; and the form was in that which was shaped, but the shaper was amorphous.” (εἶχεν οὖν ζωὴν καὶ οὐκ ἔδειτο ποικίλου τοῦ διδόντος, καὶ ἦν ἡ ζωὴ ἵχνος τι ἐκείνου, οὐκ ἐκείνου ζωή. πρὸς ἐκείνο μὲν οὖν βλέπουσα ἀόριστος ἦν, βλέψασα δ’ ἐκεῖ ὀρίζετο ἐκείνου ὅρον οὐκ ἔχοντος. εὐθὺς γὰρ πρὸς ἓν τι ἰδοῦσα ὀρίζεται

both to a qualified “life” that in certain places Plotinus attributes to the One itself,<sup>61</sup> and to the indefinite, tendril-like “life” that is similarly projected from each ontological stratum onto the subjacent one so as to establish the next hypostasis.<sup>62</sup>

### 2.15 *Intellect*

Finally, in a single passage of VI.8[39].18, Plotinus suggests that a prefiguration of Intellect abides within and /or emerges from the One as the PNE. Like the *on prōton*, there is a vaguely unorthodox feel to these statements, which are in tension with Plotinus’s repeated insistence of the One’s absolute transcendence of Intellect. Thus we find, at lines 18–22: “Thus one must grasp both Intellect and Being: coming to be from that one, as it were, poured out and unraveled and hanging out, it attests from its intellectual nature *the (as it were) ‘Intellect’ in the One that is not Intellect*” (οὕτω τοι καὶ τὸν νοῦν καὶ τὸ ὄν χρή λαμβάνειν, γενόμενον ἐξ ἐκείνου καὶ οἷον ἐκχυθὲν καὶ ἐξηλιχθὲν καὶ ἐξηρηγμένον ἐκ τῆς αὐτοῦ νοερᾶς φύσεως, μαρτυρεῖν τὸν οἶον ἐν ἐνὶ νοῦν οὐ νοῦν ὄντα). At lines 26–27, this principle is “the archetype of [the One’s] image, the Intellect in the One” (τὸ οἶον ἰνδάλματος αὐτοῦ ἀρχέτυπον, ἐν ἐνὶ νοῦν).<sup>63</sup>

### 2.16 *Excursus: Derivational Schemata and the Mediation of Transcendence in pre-Plotinian (Middle-) Platonism*

It therefore appears that Plotinus tacitly posits a labile intermediary principle or *energeia* of the One—a principle that is neither the One conceived in absolute unity, nor a fully independent noetic hypostasis—as the indefinite prefiguration of determinate Being-Intellect. The question remains ‘where’ he believed such a principle to abide: is it ‘external’ and thus ‘below’ the One (in violation of axiom [1]), or ‘within,’ and thus an aspect of, the supreme principle (in violation of axiom [2])? At this point, a brief historical detour will be instructive.<sup>64</sup> In the first 2 centuries CE, certain Pythagoreanizing Platonists

τούτῳ καὶ ἴσχει ἐν αὐτῇ [H-S<sup>1</sup> : αὐτῇ] ὅρον καὶ πέρας καὶ εἶδος· καὶ τὸ εἶδος ἐν τῷ μορφωθέντι, τὸ δὲ μορφώσαν ἄμορφον ἦν). Also VI.7[38].21.4–6: “Life is the activity of the Good, or rather, the activity *from* the Good, but [Intellect] is the activity already bounded” (τὴν μὲν τάγαθοῦ εἶναι ἐνέργειαν, μᾶλλον δὲ ἐκ τάγαθοῦ ἐνέργειαν, τὸν δὲ ἥδη ὀρισθεῖσαν ἐνέργειαν). Prenotic life also occurs at III.8[30].8.18–38, 9.32–40; VI.6[34].9.27–31; VI.8[39].16.34–35.

61 VI.8[39].7.51: ἡ οἷον ζωή; V.3[49].16.39–40: τὴν ζωὴν τὴν ἐν αὐτῷ [Nous], μίμημά τι τοῦ ἐν ἐκείνῳ [the One].

62 Thus V.1[10].3.9.

63 See passage in Appendix B13.

64 I cannot do full justice to this issue here, though I will return to a discussion of the topic of pre-Plotinian Gnostic derivational systems in the next chapter.

and Platonizing Gnostics<sup>65</sup> tended to posit an increasingly transcendental first principle or supreme, unknowable “One”<sup>66</sup> above what had formerly been considered the ultimate stratum of reality, whether that reality was conceived in terms of intelligible Forms, an Aristotelian self-thinking Nous, or a Pythagorean duality of Monad and Dyad. This progressive transcendentalization of the first principle, which split the essentially two-level metaphysics of Plato into three distinct strata, required increasingly sophisticated strategies of mediation both to explain the original ontogenesis and also, more importantly, to provide a means of establishing some connection with the ever-more elusive transcendent principle. This tendency was particularly prominent in the traditions of religio-philosophical speculation for which some kind of mystical or ritual ‘ascent’ towards the supreme principle was of central importance. We know that academic Platonists and Platonizing Sethians prior to and more or less contemporaneous with Plotinus offered solutions to the problem of ontogenesis with recourse to various mediatory principles, often triads that were simultaneously co-implicated in part or all of both first and second principles,<sup>67</sup> or to prefigurations of subsequent principles *within* the first that (at least according to the orthodox interpretation) Plotinus would have eschewed. There are intimations of such a triad in the (almost certainly pre-Plotinian) *Chaldaean Oracles*,<sup>68</sup> but a more secure example of this kind of speculation occurs in the Anonymous Turin *Commentary on Plato’s ‘Parmenides’* (ACPP), initially attributed to Porphyry by Pierre Hadot, but now demonstrated more or less conclusively, in my view, to be pre-Plotinian.<sup>69</sup> The ACPP purports to explain the relation between the first two “Ones” of the first two hypotheses of the *Parmenides* (142b–144e) in terms of derivation (not to

65 Neopythagoreans such as Moderatus of Gades (*apud* Simplicius, *In Aristotelis Physicorum* 230.34–231.27 Diels) as well as Gnostics such as Basilides (Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresiorum* 7.20–27) and Irenaeus’s Valentinians (*Adversus haereses* 1.1–2.1, 11.1–12.4). This idea possibly derived from one branch of Early Academic thought stemming from Speusippus and / or some early Pythagoreans; see Krämer 1964, 193–264.

66 Usually based on a conflation of Plato’s Good at *Republica* 509b8 (“above Being in seniority and overwhelming power”—ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος) with the “absolutely One” of the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides* (137c–142a).

67 See Corrigan 2000a, 167–70; Bechtle 2000; cf. also Whittaker 1992.

68 *Oracula Chaldaica* frs. 2, 23, 26–28, 31. Hadot 1968, 260–72 following Lewy 1956, attempts to reconstruct a Chaldaean triad of Father-Power-Intellect (on the basis of hints in Proclus and Damascius).

69 See Hadot 1961; idem, 1968b. The persuasive arguments offered more recently against Hadot and in favor of a pre-Plotinian dating—by Tardieu (who proposes Numenius was the author), Corrigan (who suggests Cronius), Bechtle, Turner, and now Rasimus (who favors Sethian authorship)—are by now well known and need not be discussed in full.



be found in Plato, but possibly stemming from an earlier Academic metaphysical interpretation). According to the commentator, the second One unfolds from the First by means of a triad of Existence, Life, and Thought: a precursor of the so-called noetic triad formalized in later Platonism but already implicit in Plotinus.<sup>70</sup> In the first phase, a prefiguration of the Second One is initially coextensive with the First One, abiding within it in the form of an unqualified or infinitival Existence (*huparxis, to einai*). In a second phase—now intriguingly reminiscent of the Plotinian PNE—the Second One emerges from the First in its modality of “Life,” or incipient thinking; and finally, in a third phase, through a contemplative reversion to its source, the Second One establishes itself as a fully independent Intellect that participates indeterminate Being (indicated by the use of the participial forms *to on* and *ousia*).<sup>71</sup> Likewise,

70 The hints of this triad in Plotinus were discussed first by Hadot 1960. It is interesting to note that each item of the triad occurs among Plotinus's varied descriptions of the PNE (at [f], [g], and [h] *supra*).

71 ACP 11–14, with Hadot 1961, 1968b; Corrigan 1987, *idem* 2000a; Bechtle 1999, esp. 181–95; 2000; Turner 2006, 2007. As Hadot noted, apart from several plainly un-Plotinian features (e.g., the First One is the “idea” of Being) one can perceive several intriguing similarities between the ACP and Plotinus's ontogenetic scheme, which similarly involves an (apparently less systematic) attribution of both burgeoning “life” and infinitival Being to the PNE. However, Hadot understood Plotinus's One to be uncompromisingly transcendent of Being and therefore concluded that the attenuated ontological transcendence of the Commentary's First One as well as the overlap between first and second principles more closely resembled a doctrine found in undisputedly Porphyrian works and elsewhere in post-Plotinian Platonism. Hadot relegated the prenoetic activities of Plotinian ontogenesis strictly to the domain of the Intellect itself, thus clearly ‘outside’ of the One; see esp. Hadot's conclusion (1968b, 1:483–84): “D'ailleurs, les premiers traités de Plotin avaient concédé l'existence dans l'Un de quelque chose qui correspondait à une activité intellectuelle, notamment une conversion vers soi. Et Plotin avait aussi envisagé l'hypothèse selon laquelle l'Un aurait été une pensée qui ne pense pas, c'est-à-dire absolue. Cet ensemble de notations plotiniennes a pu inciter Porphyre à élaborer la théorie des deux Intelligences que nous avons analysée au cours de notre étude. Mais, ce faisant, Porphyre a développé et transformé la doctrine plotinienne. Chez Plotin en effet les allusions à deux états de l'Intelligence ne sont jamais destinées à expliquer la génération de l'Intelligence, mais à faire comprendre comment l'Intelligence peut connaître l'Un. Chez Porphyre, au contraire, il s'agit de montrer que l'Intelligence préexiste dans l'Un avant de se distinguer de lui. Si l'Un-Êtant est engendré par le premier Un, c'est que ce qui dans l'Un-Êtant est purement Un coïncide avec le premier Un. La génération est manifestation et extériorisation. Chez Plotin, l'Un produit à la suite de lui-même, par mode de surabondance, d'émanation, d'acte dérivé, une réalité informe qui se constitue comme Intelligence en se retournant vers son générateur. Chez Porphyre, l'Un est déjà Intelligence sous un mode transcendant par son agir même; cette Intelligence s'engendre elle-même en se pensant comme Intelligence. Elle se retourne elle aussi, mais vers la forme transcendant qu'elle avait au sein de l'Un. Plus hérétique encore, par rapport au plotinisme, est l'identification porphyrienne entre l'Un et l'être qui sert à résoudre le même problème. Cette fois le

the Platonizing Sethian treatises—which were carefully read and critiqued at length in Plotinus’s circle—similarly describe the unfolding of the second principle from the first by means of some variety of the noetic triad. As John Turner has elaborately demonstrated, in *Allogenes* (NHC XI,3), a nearly independent, hypostatized triad of powers (called the Triple Powered One) mediates between the unknowable first principle (the Invisible Spirit) and the second, noetic principle (Barbelo), while in *Zostrianos* (NHC VIII,1)—which in most other respects shares *Allogenes*’ basic metaphysics—a similar triple power apparently abides entirely within the Invisible Spirit. In the related tractate *Three Steles of Seth* (NHC VII,5), the three powers are more closely associated with the second principle, Barbelo.<sup>72</sup> Now it is evident that there is a striking correspondence between the variety of options for the placement of the mediatory triad in these contemporaneous systems and the often subtextual ambiguity about the location of the PNE in Plotinian ontogenesis. This similarity has been obscured, however, by the tendency of orthodox Plotinian interpretation to overemphasize both the hypertranscendence of the One and the putative rejection of intermediaries. Indeed, I would suggest that the ambiguities surrounding the PNE in Plotinus’s ontogenetic schema must be understood *precisely* in the context of the variety of contemporaneous options, all of which employ some kind of supposedly un-Plotinian mediation and/or complication between first and second principles. While Plotinus tends to avoid the kinds of explicit formulae evident in the ACPP and the Platonizing Sethian tractates, beneath his ambivalent and occasionally contradictory statements one may nevertheless detect echoes of these very same derivational strategies, as well as his own quite subtle, though not always successful, attempts to work

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premier Un devient l’Idée du second Un, sa préexistence, son être et, puisque le second Un est l’Étant, le premier Un devient l’Être absolu, conçu comme un pur agir qui engendre la forme. Plotin, sans doute, n’avait pas hésité à concevoir l’Un comme une activité pure, sans sujet, mais il aurait radicalement refusé d’identifier le Principe avec une activité d’être, tout spécialement à cause de la continuité que la notion de l’être introduit entre le premier et le second Principes.” Yet as Corrigan 2000a has shown, Plotinus’s (i) intimations of a prefiguration of Intellect and Being that originate spermatically “within” the One and unfold progressively from it and his (ii) exploitation of the distinction between infinitival and participial Being to explain ontogenesis tacitly resemble the schema of the ACPP considerably more than Hadot recognized; see also Bechtle 2000. Bussanich’s observations (1987, 1988) of the complexity inherent within the One also point towards the same conclusion, although he himself does not relate this complexity to the activity of the epistrophic PNE.

72 See, *inter alia*, Turner 2001, 512–31, 702–4.

around their inherent philosophical problems without elaborating this aspect of his thought as explicitly or as systematically as his predecessors.<sup>73</sup>

### 2.17 *How Should One Understand the Passages Referring to the One's Reversion?*

Thus far we have seen evidence for two apparently contradictory models of ontogenesis. On the one hand, as we have just seen, there are abundant but vague suggestions that an independent, interhypostatic PNE is the agent of *epistrophē*. On the other hand, we have also seen that Plotinus is not absolutely averse to ascribing some kind of self-apprehension directly to the supreme principle. But how should such statements be understood? Some interpreters have taken the handful of apparent references to the One's self-reversion to describe a more or less metaphorical act that is entirely internal to the One, or else to mean simply that it abides, immutably, within itself.<sup>74</sup> According to this view, the pre-Intellect's (well-attested) reversion is simply an image of the One's more unified and ineffable self-reversion. In this case, the One's *epistrophē* (such as it has) and that of the PNE would be distinct from each other and would have no more relation than image to archetype (an image that Plotinus does in fact frequently use).

Yet this interpretation, in my judgment, does not do justice either to a literal reading of Plotinus's text or to the complexity—and what is, I believe, the deliberate indeterminacy—of his ontogenetic thought. The notion of separate epistrophic activities respectively undertaken by the One and the PNE is predicated upon an understanding of the One as a discretely bounded domain. Here the common tendency to downplay the Plotinian imagery of “emanation” for the sake of philosophical consistency comes at the expense of understanding what he meant to say.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, Plotinus's infrequent categorical statements

73 Why not? Perhaps his accounts are constrained by his own axiomatic doctrine of the relation between hypostases to which he seems to be committed for other, more sectarian reasons (these will be discussed in the conclusion). But one might also suppose it is because of a self-conscious imitation of Plato's own putative secrecy concerning first principles. Whether or not the accounts of Plato's so-called “unwritten doctrines” have any historical validity, philosophical esotericism was certainly a venerable tradition in Plotinus's time, as attested by Numenius frs. 23 and 24 des Places; see also Gaiser 1963, Cheltonneix 1992.

74 E.g., for quite different reasons, Hadot 1986; Bussanich 1987, 1988; O'Brien 1997.

75 The temptation to crystallize unbounded Plotinian *energeiai* into clearly demarcated conceptual entities is motivated more, I believe, by a desire for philosophical rigor than by the desire to understand the way that Plotinus himself envisioned his system, and will lead far afield from what he himself probably had in mind, especially in the context of either ontogenesis or mystical ascent. The attractiveness of the double-*energeia* doctrine,

distinguishing firmly between hypostases are substantially outweighed by the more numerous and colorful evocations of indeterminacy and of the fluid continuity between principles.<sup>76</sup> Thus the common assumption that the One—which Plotinus repeatedly qualifies as unlimited or unbounded<sup>77</sup>—has a rigid boundary separating its supposedly internal activity of self-constitution from its external activity of procession cannot be correct.

### 2.18 *Identity of the Respective Activities of the One and the PNE*

On the contrary: there are forceful indications—despite the apparent violation of both axioms [1] and [2]—of a continuum or even an identity between the One's (ostensibly "internal") self-directed and / or epistrophic activity and that of the emergent PNE, which Plotinus typically qualifies as (i) "unbounded" (much like the One itself) and also (ii) not differentiated or "cut off" from its source. One intriguing indication of this occurs at VI.8[39].16, in the context of a lyrical passage evoking the One's self-causation and self-mastery.<sup>78</sup> At lines 20–21, Plotinus connects the One's self-reversion directly to Being (*to einai*): "this (as it were) 'Being,' for him, is his looking to himself" (τὸ οἷον εἶναι τοῦτο αὐτῷ τὸ πρὸς αὐτὸν βλέπειν). This has typically been taken as a metaphor for self-constitution, which accords well with the overarching context of the passage.<sup>79</sup> However, the mention of Being associated with the One's self-reversion suggests another possibility lurking in the background. We may recall that Plotinus occasionally describes the PNE as a kind of Being. This passage, then, may be juxtaposed not only with the (chronologically much earlier) passages of V.1[10].6 and 7 that attribute reversion more or less directly to the One, but also with the middle-period passages that refer to the PNE in Parmenidean terms as "One-Being" (VI.7[38].16.11–14 and VI.2[43].17.25–26)

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for example, lies less in its explanatory power (as we have seen previously) than in its utility for creating discrete conceptual categories more amenable to philosophical analysis. Possibly for this reason it is accorded an importance in the scholarship out of all proportion to its prevalence in Plotinus's text. Indeed, one repeatedly encounters a curious tension between Plotinus's occasional philosophical rationalizations and the deeper structures of thought—often drawn from physical or biological models—that would appear to inform his vision of intelligible and transcendent reality.

76 One might consider V.3[49].12, where at line 26, Plotinus distinguishes clearly between the One and its activity, but vacillates later, at line 45, when he says that the efflux is not cut off from its source.

77 E.g., VI.9[9].6.10: ἀπειρον; V.5[32].6.14–15: ἐκείνην τὴν ἀπλετον φύσιν; 10.18–19: ἀλλ' οὐδὲ πεπερασμένος [εἶναι]; 11.3–4: οὐτ' οὖν πρὸς ἄλλο οὔτε πρὸς αὐτὸ πεπεράνται; VI.7[38].17.15–16: ἐκείνου ὅρον οὐκ ἔχοντος.

78 This passage is discussed in its entirety by Bussanich 1987.

79 So it has been understood by Bussanich 1987 and O'Brien 1997.

and also, more importantly, with the enigmatic *Großschrift* passage we have just seen, v.5[32].5.16–19, in which the presubstantial “primary Being” (*on prōton*) proceeds minimally outward from the One prior to its reversion. At first glance, this juxtaposition might lead to the conclusion that Plotinus intends not only one but two prenoetic self-reversions, the first being that of the One that by looking to itself constitutes its own “as it were, being” (*to hoion einai*)—meaning, perhaps, that it simply abides—and the second, that of the already-formed but mysterious “primary Being” (*on prōton*) that produces *ousia*, (although both kinds of prenoetic Being are equivalently prohibited by the orthodox interpretation of pre-epistrophic reality). However, I suggest instead that these two passages refer to different aspects of the same process, or—one might say—to different positions along a single, recursive itinerary prior to the first moment of self-apprehension.<sup>80</sup> In other words, this describes the One’s incipient selfward gaze, an indefinite act that constitutes “primary” or indeterminate Being (*to einai*), which is, at this point, equivalent to both the One’s self-constitution and to the PNE *qua* prefiguration of Being (*on prōton*); while the actualized (yet imperfectly unified) self-apprehension of the latter constitutes the determinate (participial) Being (*on, ousia*) of the second hypostasis.<sup>81</sup> That Plotinus envisioned the “primary Being” and the One’s qualified Being to be either identical or at very least closely associated along an effluvial continuum is confirmed by a number of passages elsewhere. Earlier in the treatise, at vi.8[39].16.33–37, we similarly find Plotinus vacillating between an attribution and a denial of both *ousia* and *to einai* to the One (vaguely echoing the *epekeina tēs ousias* of *Respublica* 509b): “The [One’s] waking is transcendent of substance and intellect and sage life, *but he [the One] is these things*. He is then activity above intellect and sagacity and life, but these things are from him and not from another. *Being (to einai) is by him, then, and with him, and out*

80 Corrigan 1996, idem 2000a has suggested that this gradual shift between infinitival Being (*to einai*) and participial being (*to on, ousia*)—of the sort one finds explicitly in the ACP—*is already implicit in Plotinus and represents a deliberate mechanism for expressing the continuity of procession from the indeterminate Being “in the One” to the determinate Being (on) of Intellect apprehending its contents. Here the infinitive blepein corresponds to the infinitival Being (to einai) here associated with the One, and it connotes a potential or intended act in subtle contrast with the imperfect heōra and nominal horasis of v.1[10].7.6 and the participle blepon of v.2[11].1.10–11, all of which indicate the PNE’s already-effectuated, if ongoing, epistrophic activity.*

81 In this case we may take the qualifications *hoion* and *autōi* to suggest only that this expression of the primordial self-reversion is only an abbreviated account of a much more complex process. Since the account occurs in the context of a discussion not of ontogenesis but only of the One’s autonomy, it is not surprising that the perspective is limited to that of the One.

of him.” (ἡ δὲ ἐγρήγορσις ἐστὶν ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας καὶ νοῦ καὶ ζωῆς ἔμφορος· ταῦτα δὲ αὐτός ἐστιν. αὐτὸς ἄρα ἐστὶν ἐνέργεια ὑπὲρ νοῦν καὶ φρόνησιν καὶ ζώην· ἐξ αὐτοῦ δὲ ταῦτα καὶ οὐ παρ’ ἄλλου. παρ’ αὐτοῦ ἄρα αὐτῷ καὶ ἐξ αὐτοῦ τὸ εἶναι). Later in the treatise, at 18.18–22, Plotinus states explicitly that a prefiguration of Intellect within the One flows out of the One: “thus one must grasp both Intellect and Being: coming to be from that one, as it were, poured out and unraveled and hanging out, it attests from its intellectual nature *the (as it were) ‘Intellect’ in the One that is not Intellect*” (οὕτω τοι καὶ τὸν νοῦν καὶ τὸ ὄν χρὴ λαμβάνειν, γενόμενον ἐξ ἐκείνου καὶ οἷον ἐκχυθέν καὶ ἐξελιχθέν καὶ ἐξηρητημένον ἐκ τῆς αὐτοῦ νοεράς φύσεως, μαρτυρεῖν τὸν οἷον ἐν ἐνὶ νοῦν οὐ νοῦν ὄντα).<sup>82</sup> To this we may compare a much earlier statement at V.1[10].7.14–15—right after our original controversial passage that *at the very least* suggests an ambiguous distinction between the One and the subject of the *epistrophē*—that “Intellect’s *ousia* is, as it were, one part of something *of* it [the One] and *from* [the One]” (οἷον μέρος ἐν τι τῶν ἐκείνου καὶ ἐξ ἐκείνου ἢ οὐσία).<sup>83</sup> Can we really maintain a complete distinction between the One’s own Being and the Being that is within the One but also poured out from it? These passages indicate that—even in late-middle period treatises—it is very difficult to separate the One’s own ‘internal’ (and supposedly metaphorical) epistrophic and ontogenetic activity from that of the PNE.

## 2.19 *A Possible Solution: the PNE as ‘Traveling Subject’ Linking One and Intellect*

At this point, we may begin to suspect that Plotinus’s notion of ontogenesis is considerably more complex than can be explained by attributing the primordial *epistrophē* either to the One or to the PNE. For any purely rational or systematic approach confronts an ineluctable logical dilemma. It can be restated simply as follows: either the self-reversion is [A] attributed to the One, in which case the latter is guilty of ‘forbidden’ activities; or it is [B] attributed to the PNE, in which case the PNE itself—inasmuch as it absolves the One of any inappropriate activity—constitutes a ‘forbidden’ interhypostasis.<sup>84</sup> But it is also possible that the fundamental difficulty arises primarily from the natural philosophical temptation to rephrase Plotinus’s ontogenetic schema in terms of determinate concepts. That there should be *so much* textual ambiguity in so many of Plotinus’s ontogenetic passages, especially regarding such an

82 A similar hint of the prefiguration of all things within the One occurs at 1V.8[6].6.1–16.

83 The generative aspect of Being recurs at VI.8[39].20.27: “Being is one with the making and the, as it were, ‘eternal begetting’” (ἐν γὰρ τῇ ποιήσει καὶ οἷον γεννήσει αἰδίῳ τὸ εἶναι).

84 It might therefore appear as if Plotinus is working with a complex of eclectic notions that are, strictly speaking, philosophically incompatible, as the many philological conundrums in his ontogenetic passages might also suggest.

important aspect of his thought, suggests less an accidental equivocation than it does a deliberate rhetorical device. Indeed, I would suggest that the effort to find a fixed subject of the reversion—a subject that (i) is in the midst of a process of transformation and (ii) initially abides in a realm acknowledged to be *beyond* identity or difference<sup>85</sup>—is misguided from the outset.

With this in mind, let us again return to our original passage, v.1[10].7.6. In light of what we have seen thus far, must we really expect a fixed subject of the vision? And further, must the subject of the *epistrophē* be the same as that of the vision with which it culminates? Variations of a single, elegant solution to the textual problem have been proposed by Werner Beierwaltes (1967),<sup>86</sup> Michael Sells (1985), and Kevin Corrigan (1986):<sup>87</sup> namely, that the pronoun *auto* / *hauto* of this line has a deliberate ambiguity, a dual reference that simultaneously denotes the One's reversion to itself and / or the pre-Intellect's reversion towards both itself and the One.<sup>88</sup> Corrigan has further suggested that the

85 Identity and difference first come into being among the primary genera at the level of Intellect; thus vi.2[43].8.34–44.

86 Beierwaltes 1967, 15 n. 15; 1985; 1991.

87 Corrigan 1986, 198; Corrigan and O'Cleirigh 1987, 590–92.

88 O'Brien's 1997 denial (*contra* Beierwaltes and Corrigan) of *any* philosophical ambiguity at v.1[10].6.16–19 and 7.4–6, and his certitude that it is the PNE that reverts rather than the One—esp. 97: “the ambiguity is a purely syntactical ambiguity. The sequence of thought is clear, and is not ambiguous.... Contorted and ambiguous though the grammar may be, the sequence of thought ... is reasonably straightforward and requires no more than a return of what will be Intellect towards the One”—is unwarranted, both from the perspective of Plotinus's own thought, and by comparison with a great deal of contemporaneous Gnostic literature, to be discussed in the next chapter, in which the self-reversion of the supreme principle itself generates the subsequent stratum. One might consider two examples from Valentinian tractates found at Nag Hammadi in which the grammatical ambiguity of pronominal referents—an ambiguity that clearly survives in Coptic translation—is explicitly employed to express the relation between first and second principles (respectively “Father” and “Son”), in precisely the manner O'Brien finds so difficult to accept in the case of Plotinus. Thus [1] *Tripartite Tractate* NHC I 56.32–57.1 (text and trans. Attridge and Pagels, CGL): “The Father, in the way we mentioned earlier, in an unbegotten way, is the one in whom he [the Son? The Father?] knows himself, who begot him [the Son? / the Father?] having a thought, which is the thought of him [the Father / Son?], that is, the perception of him [the Son / the Father?]...” (ⲡⲓⲱⲧ ⲛⲟⲉ ⲉⲛⲧⲁⲛⲱⲣⲡⲓ ⲛ̅ⲭⲟⲟⲥ ⲉ̅ⲛⲛ ⲟⲩⲛ̅ⲛⲧⲁⲧⲭⲡⲁⲥ ⲡⲉⲧ̅ⲩⲥⲁⲩⲛⲉ ⲛⲙⲁⲩ ⲛ̅ⲙⲁⲩ ⲛ̅ⲙⲓⲛ ⲛ̅ⲙⲁⲩ ⲉⲧⲁⲩⲭⲡⲟ ⲛ̅ⲙⲁⲩ ⲉⲩⲩⲱⲣⲟⲡ ⲉⲩ̅ⲛⲧⲉⲩ ⲛ̅ⲙⲉⲩ̅ ⲛ̅ⲛⲟⲩⲛⲉⲩⲉⲩ̅ ⲉⲧⲉⲡⲉⲛⲉⲙⲉⲩ̅ ⲛ̅ⲧⲉⲩ ⲡⲉ ⲉⲧⲉⲧⲉⲓ ⲧⲉ ⲧⲁⲩ[57]ⲟⲛⲥⲓⲥ); similarly, [2] *Gospel of Truth* NHC I 38.6–14 (text and trans. Attridge and MacRae, CGL): “Now the name of the Father is the Son. It is he [The Father? The Son?] who first gave a name to the one [the Son] who came forth from him [the Father], who was himself [the Father?], and he begot him as a son. He gave him his [the Father's? / the Son's?] name which belonged to him; he is the one to whom belongs all that exists around him, the Father” (ⲡⲣⲉⲛ ⲁⲉ ⲛ̅ⲡⲓⲱⲧ̅ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲱⲛⲣⲉ̅ ⲛ̅ⲧⲁⲩ̅ ⲛ̅ⲩⲱⲣⲡⲓ ⲡⲉⲛⲧⲁⲩⲧ̅ ⲡⲉⲛ ⲁⲡⲉⲛⲧⲁⲩⲉ̅ⲓ ⲁⲃⲁⲕ ⲛ̅ⲙⲁⲩ ⲉⲛⲧⲁⲩ̅ ⲡⲱ

ambiguities of this and other similar passages reflect the labile identity of the subject of the reversion, which begins in complete identity with the first principle but is only distinguished as a fully-independent second principle once it has apprehended its object: an object which is, at this point, its former self.<sup>89</sup>

Yet this conjecture has wider implications for Plotinus's ontogenetic schema as a whole. The interpretation of the genesis of Intellect as the result of the metamorphosis of a conscious subject from identity with the One towards alterity by means of a process of self-objectification is further supported by the numerous passages where Plotinus suggests that the genesis of Intellect involves a failure of contemplation. Sometimes he expresses this in terms of the inability of the PNE to conceive of the One in absolute unity, at other times in terms of the general principle that even reflexive self-thinking is multiple.<sup>90</sup> In effect, the primordial activity emerging from the One—that is, the incipient PNE, from which the first principle itself cannot easily be distinguished—produces the first minimal duality through *epistrophē*, but since the reflexive locus of subjectivity has exteriorized itself with respect to its source, it is now no longer identical with the One, which remains in absolute unity and self-identity, its own immobile 'movement' forever complete with respect to itself.<sup>91</sup> This might explain why Plotinus is able to alternately affirm and deny that the One reverts to itself,<sup>92</sup> and to vacillate between optimistic and pessimistic accounts of procession. The very same process may be described as

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πε· ἀγω ἀφμεστῷ ἡνογῶνρε· ἀφτ' πεφρεν ἀραφ ετενεογῆντεφς ἡταφ πε ετεογῆντεφ ἡκκει νημ εγῶοον εαζτηφ· ἡβι πωτ·). See also the discussion in Thomassen 2006, 193–95. [These passages are also discussed below, Chapter 4, part 4—ed.]

89 Corrigan 1986, 1987. A more rigorously analytic interpretation along the same lines has recently been attempted by Okano 2005.

90 Thus III.9[13].6–9; V.6[24].1–6; III.8[30].8.31–38; VI.7[38].16.9–13, 41; VI.6[34].9.29–42; VI.2[43].6.9–20; V.3[49].1, 10–13. In these passages, Plotinus adapts various scholastic arguments—both a subtle critique of the primacy of Aristotle's self-thinking divine *Nous* (*Metaphysica* 1074b–1075a) and also an adaptation of Skeptic arguments (Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus mathematicos* 7.310–12) against the possibility of genuine, unified self-thinking, since this presupposes a duality of subject and object—into the service of what would otherwise remain a purely mythopoeic account of ontogenesis.

91 Thus V.3[49].12.35–38: "It is necessary, then, so that anything else can exist, that that [One] abide quietly by itself, or it will move prior to moving and will think prior to thinking, <or else> *its first activity will be incomplete, being only an impulse*" (δεῖ οὖν, ἵνα τι ἄλλο ὑποστῇ, ἡσυχίαν ἄγειν ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ πανταχοῦ ἐκεῖνο· εἰ δὲ μή, ἢ πρὸ τοῦ κινηθῆναι κινήσεται, καὶ πρὸ τοῦ νοῆσαι νοήσει, <ἢ> ἡ πρώτη ἐνέργεια αὐτοῦ ἀτελής ἔσται ὁρμὴ μόνον οὕσα). This has been read as contrafactual ever since Ficino's emendation, but it seems to express Plotinus's actual understanding of the PNE's ever-incomplete primordial activity, reminiscent of the famous lines of Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn*: "She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss, / For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!"

92 Denial of *epistrophē*: V.3[49].1.3–4.



either successful but transcendental self-apperception—a kind of ineffable but ever-complete “touching”—or the indefinite, imperfect vision that establishes the first moment of procession. In other words, these apparent contradictions dissolve if one conceives of the One as a kind of mathematical limit at which self-apprehension becomes so concentrated that it disappears into infinity: the ineffable point towards which various approximations approach but—at least in the context of ontogenesis—never fully attain.<sup>93</sup> To the extent that the PNE cannot be distinguished from the One, the reversion may be attributed to the One; but conversely, to the extent that one wants to avoid imputing ‘illegal’ activity to the One, one can instead attribute such activity to the agency of the incipient PNE. Yet the PNE only attains actualized alterity—as primordial Otherness, intelligible matter, indefinite life, and so on—at the precise moment that it objectifies its source.<sup>94</sup> Of course this might seem to contradict the order of events in some of Plotinus’s accounts of ontogenesis, which give the impression that alterity arises prior to the reversion, or of expansion prior to contraction, or conversely, of recursion prior to effluence, and so on. Yet here discursive language, with its inevitable implication of temporal sequence and event, potentially leads one astray: for the initial act of overflowing and the return of the overflow upon its source are, of course, simultaneous and co-implicated. The One’s ineffable self-touching has already ‘preceded’ the minimal emergence of the more obviously epistrophic PNE, which itself is nevertheless not “cut off” from the One until it apprehends its source; but of course, it already has ineffably ‘apprehended’ its source in its prior moment of identity with the One. Moreover, just as the subject of the reversion is at this point ambiguous, so also is the object of vision; for the reversion of the PNE to the One may also be understood as that of the One to itself, and *vice versa*. At this level of reality, it would seem, the law of noncontradiction dissolves; the indefinite PNE both *is* and *is not* the One, just as it both *is* and *is not* the “other.” The determinate terms of philosophical discourse are thoroughly inadequate to denote the fluid identity of this locus of ontogenetic subjectivity.

93 Thus vi.7[38].41.12–13: “If Intellect, thinking, and object of thought are the same, having become entirely one, they annihilate themselves in themselves” (Εἰ δὲ ταῦτόν νοῦς, νόησις, νοητόν, πάντα ἐν γενόμενα ἀφανιεῖ αὐτὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς).

94 See Corrigan 1986, 198: “What is important here is not only that the travelling subject is self-creative, but that the highest moment of identity with, and yet logical distinction from, the First is a necessary facet of the travelling, self-articulating subject whose fullest development as a second principle is unspecified until the end of the argument. Its identity and difference as *nous* derive from the identity and difference of the indefinite second, where the ambiguity of its nature is essential to the argument.”

### 2.20 Summary of Plotinus's Ontogenetic Schema

It is along these general lines, I believe, that we should understand Plotinian ontogenesis.<sup>95</sup> Here I will provide a brief recapitulation of this model, which runs as follows. (i) The One, which abides in absolute unity and self-containment, is nonetheless a principle of hyperplenitude. In the first eternal moment of ontogenesis, it motionlessly 'overflows' within, and perhaps 'towards,' itself. At this point the One's superabundance is not yet differentiated from the One itself. (ii) In a second eternal moment, the indeterminate, unbounded overflow—sometimes envisioned as an indefinite vision, an unbounded Life, or the prefiguration of Being, and so forth—is attracted back to the overwhelming excellence of its source, with which it is initially identical; it therefore 'reverts'—in some pre-cognitive sense—towards its point of origin. This *epistrophē*, one may note, may be considered to be a reversion both towards itself *qua* PNE, and towards the One, from which the PNE, prior to the moment of apprehension, still has not actually differentiated itself; it may therefore equivalently be described as the One's *own* self-reversion, "only an unutterable and unthinkable [self-] touching and as it were contact" (θίξις καὶ οἶον ἐπαφὴ μόνον ἄρρητος καὶ ἀνόητος). (iii) Finally, in a third eternal moment, the effluence, having reverted, apprehends its source, its former self, at which point two things happen. On the one hand, there arises the first actual duality, however minimal, of subject and object, as the PNE has become an independent 'observer' and thus the "other"; this subject is therefore extruded from the absolute unity of the One. On the other hand, the efflux itself, now having become an independent subject, is "filled" or "impregnated" by its reflexive apprehension of its former self—i.e., the One—and thus acquires definition and independent subsistence. This moment has the additional complexity that what fills and what is filled are both identical and different since the PNE is simultaneously the indefinite substrate and the luminous effluence that enforms and delimits it. Yet at this point, what formerly had been the indefinite efflux, now having been delimited, is constituted as Being and, simultaneously, Intellect, whose proper activity is self-contemplation. The One as source, as the *object* of the apprehension, itself inevitably remains unified and self-directed, "above" even the most minimal logical duality of subject and object, thus "eternally turned towards itself." But perhaps another, simpler way of imagining this schema is as a narrative of the travails of a single self-seeking subject—what Corrigan has so aptly described as a "traveling subject in the logic of generation"—whose fluid identity is reminiscent of the mystical subject we have seen in Chapter 2: beginning as the infinite power of the One, it attempts and (necessarily) fails to

95 There is certainly room for reasonable disagreement about this issue; I will not presume to settle it definitively here. A substantial monograph could be written on this topic alone.

apprehend itself in absolute unity, and therefore becomes Intellect, perpetually engaged in (what is now entirely successful) self-contemplation.

### 3 The Identity of the Hypernoetic Subject with the Prenoetic Efflux

#### 3.1 *The Homology between Primordial and Mystical Self-Reversion*

This, then, is the broad outline of Plotinus's ontogenetic schema. Now at this point, the general parallel with the pattern of mystical ascent emerges into view. Just as the mystical aspirant reverts towards him- or herself (as we have seen in Chapter 2), so also the prenoetic efflux (PNE) from the One reverts upon *its* self; and just as the mystical self-reversion culminates in a sudden moment of self-apprehension—the autophany (phase C), which also coincides with a vision of the One “in” the self—so also the prenoetic efflux (PNE) apprehends its (now former) self and/or the One at precisely the moment at which Intellect and Being first acquire definite subsistence. In each case, we encounter a strikingly similar mechanism; namely, that each moment of self-apprehension at one minimal remove from the One itself—either at the penultimate stage of the mystical return or at the second eternal moment of ontogenesis—marks a transformation of the identity of the subject as it passes between the realm of Intellect-Being and that which altogether transcends Intellect-Being. Yet Plotinus also makes clear that this structural similarity is but one element of a much deeper homology between mystical and prenoetic subjects, a homology that verges on identity. In what follows I will attempt to demonstrate this virtual identity in greater detail.

#### 3.2 *Some History of Identificationism in Plotinian Scholarship*

Before we begin, however, I should point out that I am not the first to suggest that Plotinus posited a close correspondence or equivalence of prenoetic and hypernoetic subjects. Indeed, this idea has already had a long and troubled history. In a study published over half a century ago, Jean Trouillard proposed that Plotinus envisioned a virtual identity between the soul of the mystical aspirant in its hypernoetic state and the prenoetic efflux from the One at the first eternal moment of procession. Trouillard coined the evocative phrase “extase germinale” to describe both the ecstatic experience of the self in the mystical union and, simultaneously, the literal *ek-stasis*, the “standing-outside” of the primordial effluence.<sup>96</sup> This provocative thesis was later taken up by several

96 Trouillard 1955a, 46; idem 1955b, 97–109; idem 1961; esp. idem 1955b, 109, n. 1: “Il sera difficile de ne pas conclure que l’extase est, en germe, la source implicite de la pensée elle-même.”

scholars, most notably Pierre Hadot and Gerard O'Daly, respectively writing in the 1960s and 1970s. Hadot emphasized the necessity for the aspirant to return to the ultimate source of Intellect and to relive the latter's "birth,"<sup>97</sup> while O'Daly compared Plotinus's descriptions of pre- and hyper-intellectual vision, and concluded therefrom that procession and reversion are identical and are merely temporal metaphors for what is in fact a single activity.<sup>98</sup> At one point nearly a consensus view in Plotinian studies, this thesis has since come under attack, notably by A. C. Lloyd in 1987 (though he later changed his position),<sup>99</sup> John Bussanich in 1988,<sup>100</sup> and most recently, Eyjólfur Emilsson in 2007, each for a slightly different reason. Lloyd insisted that Plotinus's account of procession and reversion (which he understood as following rationally from the double-*energeia* doctrine) had no significant relation to the mystical ascent, which (in his view) had no genuine philosophical value but instead remained at the level of sub-philosophical myth.<sup>101</sup> Bussanich put forth the most extensive critique of the thesis of Trouillard, Hadot, and O'Daly in disjointed fashion throughout his study of the relation of the One and the Intellect, arguing, in essence, that the pre-Intellect of the incipient procession should be sharply

97 Hadot 1968; 1986; 1987b; 1988; esp. 1986, 243: "thought is born from a sort of loving ecstasy in this type of drunkenness, which is produced by nonintellectual contact with the Good from which it emanates"; see also Hadot's summary conclusions (1987b, 673): "Dans l'expérience mystique, l'âme naît du Bien avec L'Esprit naissant, en qui toutes choses naissent du Bien. Avec l'Esprit naissant, l'âme 'revit sa propre genèse.' C'est peut-être dans cette perspective, que l'on peut entrevoir une possibilité de réduire le paradoxe insondable de l'expérience mystique: quel rapport peut-il y avoir entre le relatif et l'Absolu? Si en effet on postule déjà un rapport d'émanation, si l'on conçoit le relatif comme rayonnant de l'Absolu, il faut situer à ce point d'émanation l'expérience mystique."

98 O'Daly 1974, 164: "[T]he 'return' of the self to this 'coincidence'—the so-called mystical ascent—is *identical* with its incipient procession. 'Procession' and 'conversion' (or return) are temporal metaphors for the moment in which the self's originative vision of its principle—a vision that is permanent—is made conscious to itself as pre-intellectual, in an instant of unmediated contact."

99 Lloyd 1990, 169–70 and n. 3.

100 Bussanich 1988, 231–36 *et passim*.

101 Lloyd 1987, 182–86. Perhaps revealing his initial motivation for rejecting identification (its putatively "unphilosophical" nature), he writes (*ibid.*, 182–83): "the concrete relapse of the visionary from possession by the One can be described in the same terms as the abstract procession of the One to the One-many (v.5.4.10). But Plotinus does not undertake anything more detailed by way of matching steps or items within these stages. But perhaps one would expect him to only if one restricted the meaning of the genesis to such a match and so in effect read the genesis as a fable.... *This of course is not philosophy but myth unless the tale can be justified independently.* To be something other than myth and other than fable it will have to involve some sort of analysis of being and thought. This it does." [*Italics added*].

distinguished from the hyper-Intellect of the mystical ascent primarily because of subtle differences in the way that Plotinus describes them (we will return to this below).<sup>102</sup> Emilsson engaged with Bussanich's criticism in his study of the Plotinian Intellect, and conceding some (but not all) of Bussanich's points, he nevertheless ultimately rejected what he calls the "identificationist" position primarily because of the supposed philosophical absurdity of the narrative such a view would entail: if the hyper- and pre-Intellect are identical, what would be the point of proceeding from the One only to be immediately reabsorbed back into it?<sup>103</sup> In light of these critiques, I would like to make a slightly more detailed case, both structurally and philologically speaking, for the identity of mystical and primordial subjects. For solely on the basis of a careful and unbiased reading of Plotinus's text—even without regard for what appear to be conclusive Gnostic comparanda that I will adduce in later chapters—a close correspondence between the first moments of ontogenesis and the last moments of mystical ascent seems to be irrefutable.

102 Bussanich mentions Theiler 1966, 157, n. 32; Atkinson 1983, 149; Szlezák 1979, 108, 165; Beierwaltes 1985, 44–45 as subscribing to the identificationist thesis, but credits Lloyd 1987 and Schroeder 1986, 192 for making brief gestures in the "right" (anti-identificationist) direction. I would add to the former list of positive discussions of identificationism Corrigan 1987, 989–90, esp. 990: "the perplexity of shock of mystical union finds its analogue in an ambiguity of the travelling subject in the logic of generation, a subject which specifies itself and its whole structure in the course of the argument"; also Rist 1989; Hadot 1987a, and now, most recently, Beierwaltes 2006, 86: "[E]s liegt freilich an uns selbst, dieses Bild oder diese Spur des Einen in uns zu realisieren, zu 'gebrauchen,' das, was uns eigentlich 'zur Hand' (πρόχειρον) ist, als unser eigenes Zentrum uns selbst bewußt zu machen, um es mit dem Zentrum des Ganzen, dem Einen/Guten, zu verbinden (κέντρον κέντρον συνάψας), also selbst den Ursprung in uns in den absoluten Ursprung im Vollzug der universalen ἐπιστροφή zurückzuführen."

103 Emilsson 2007, 102–3: "It seems to me that Bussanich's view [i.e., anti-identificationism] is evidently right, if the idea is that the mystical experience is really reunification. In none of the places where the inchoate intellect's prenoetic experience of the One is mentioned is a complete reunification with the One suggested. On the contrary, the repeated message of the lines from V.3.11, which must be the main source for the hypothesis of the identity of the two kinds of experience, is that the unification fails. Philosophically speaking, an identification of the prenoetic and hypernoetic kinds of experience does not make much sense. We know that the inchoate intellect comes from the One. What would be achieved by having it reunite with the latter just in order to depart again? What might we suppose it gained from that which it didn't have already when it departed in the first place? It seems to me that in so far as the genesis of Intellect is concerned, the supposition of a reunification would be just a hoax that fails to explain anything that subsequently happens." Yet Emilsson goes on to express some doubts that "Bussanich's admonitions that there are indeed significant differences in language in the descriptions of the prenoetic and the hypernoetic experiences of the One suffice to show that the two are entirely different affairs. After all, there are many similarities as well."

### 3.3 *Explicit Identifications of Mystical and Primordial Subjects*

Let us first turn to the texts most often adduced in support of this identification, those passages in which Plotinus explicitly connects the hypernoetic faculty of apprehension to the primordial effluence or activity of the One. Thus, for example, as we have already seen in Chapter 2, Plotinus says at VI.9[9].4.27–29—thus at the beginning of his first extensive account of the final ascent to MUO—that contact with the One occurs “by means of a *dynamis* in oneself that is *connatural* with that which comes from it” (τῇ ἐν αὐτῷ [H-S<sup>1</sup>: αὐτῷ] δυνάμει συγγενεῖ τῷ ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ),<sup>104</sup> and then, more enigmatically, “when one keeps oneself as one kept oneself when one came from him, one is immediately able to see” (ἔταν οὕτως ἔχῃ, ὡς εἶχεν, ὅτε ἦλθεν ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ, ἥδη δύνανται ἰδεῖν). Elsewhere—at, for example, V.1[10].7.14 and III.8[30].11.2—he refers to the PNE as a *dynamis* flowing from the One, and we may begin to suspect this is the product of the One to which we are akin. To this one may also compare his description of the mystical frenzy of the “loving intellect” (*nous erōn*) at VI.7[38].35.19–23: “Intellect, too, therefore, has one power for intellection, by which it looks at the things in itself, and another for what transcends it, by means of some ‘thrusting’ and ‘receiving,’ *by which also, earlier, it saw only, and later, by seeing, also acquired intellect and is one*” (καὶ τὸν νοῦν τοίνυν τὴν μὲν ἔχειν δύνανμιν εἰς τὸ νοεῖν, ἣ τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ βλέπει, τὴν δέ, ἣ τὰ ἐπέκεινα αὐτοῦ ἐπιβολῇ τινι καὶ παραδοχῇ, καθ’ ἣν καὶ πρότερον ἑώρα μόνον καὶ ὁρῶν ὕστερον καὶ νοῦν ἔσχε καὶ ἔν ἐστι).<sup>105</sup> The sense is that the Intellect has two major faculties, one for ordinary thought and another for mystical (and paradoxically non-intellectual) apprehension; and moreover, that this latter, extraordinary mystical-erotic faculty is itself further subdivided into two ‘moments,’ the first, perhaps corresponding to the outward “thrusting upon,” a mystical apprehension of the One (also confirmed by the context), and the second, the more passive “receiving from,” a moment of ontogenetic vision by which it is first defined and thus constitutes itself as Intellect. Thus Plotinus explicitly equates the dual activity

104 One small caveat: despite the fact that Plotinus calls the One *dynamis pantōn* on several occasions, and suggests that the first product of the one is “power and extraordinary power” (*dynamis ... kai amēchanos dynamis*) at V.3[49].16.2–3, the masculine pronoun here suggests that whatever comes from the One that is connatural to the power in us is not necessarily itself a *dynamis*.

105 See complete passage in Appendix A15. One might also consider VI.2[43].11.24–26: “All souls wish to go towards one with their own substance; and the One is from both sides; and is that from which and towards which [they go]; thus [the soul] originates from the One and hastens towards the One” (καὶ ψυχαὶ πάσαι εἰς ἓν ἂν βούλονται ἵεναι μετὰ τὴν αὐτῶν οὐσίαν. καὶ ἀμφοτέρωθεν δὲ τὸ ἓν. καὶ γὰρ τὸ ἀφ’ οὗ καὶ τὸ εἰς δ· καὶ γὰρ ἄρχεται ἀπὸ τοῦ ἓν καὶ σπεύδει εἰς τὸ ἓν).

simultaneously with both mystical apperception *and* with the primordial genesis of Intellect. Moreover, these two activities are not entirely distinct; at lines 29–30, Plotinus insists upon their simultaneity: “it always has intellection while it also has not intellection, but looking at that god in another way” (τὸ δὲ ἔχει τὸ νοεῖν αἰεί, ἔχει δὲ καὶ τὸ μὴ νοεῖν, ἀλλὰ ἄλλως ἐκεῖνον βλέπειν). That this phrase refers directly to both prenoetic as well as hypernoetic vision is confirmed by lines 30–33, where he begins an account of the genesis of Intellect proper: “seeing the One, the [loving Intellect] has offspring” (καὶ γὰρ ὁρῶν ἐκεῖνον ἔσχε γεννήματα)—by which we must understand (by analogy with similar ontogenetic passages elsewhere) that the erotic Intellect’s fertile vision caused it to “conceive” the Forms—and “when he sees them [i.e., the offspring within himself] he is said to think, but [he sees] that (n.) by means of the power by which he was *going* to think” (καὶ ταῦτα μὲν ὁρῶν λέγεται νοεῖν, ἐκεῖνο δὲ ἢ δυνάμει ἔμελλε νοεῖν), which suggests a pre-cognitive phase of intellect, or rather, of the PNE, prior to—in a logical rather than temporal sense—its determination as Intellect proper. The account of mystical apprehension yet again blends seamlessly into a description of ontogenesis.

### 3.4 *Structural and Terminological Parallels in the Respective Activities of the PNE and the Mystical Subject*

Plotinus’s explicit statements alone make a strong case for the identification of pre- and hypernoetic selves and comprise a substantial burden of proof to those who would deny it. Yet perhaps the most vivid illustration of the proximity of the transcendental self and the prenoetic efflux are the numerous parallels between the sequence of the first eternal moments of ontogenesis and that of the last moments of mystical ascent. As we have seen, in Plotinus’s typical accounts of ontogenesis, the unbounded PNE reverts upon its source (or itself) and at the precise moment that it apprehends its source it is “filled” and defined by the vision of the One. The final stages of ascent towards MUO appear to recapitulate this process rather precisely: the mystical subject reverts upon him- or herself, at which point the subject is similarly “filled” by a sudden vision. This broad analogy is reinforced by a multitude of correspondences of both imagery and precise terminology. In what follows, I will provide an enumeration of these correspondences.

### 3.5 *Self-Reversion / Epistrophē*

We have seen that Plotinus describes the mystical self-reversion with the language of *epistrophē* or its correlates derived from the related verbs *strephēin* and *trepein*—terminology apparently that is only rarely used in pre-Plotinian

philosophy to denote self-reversion<sup>106</sup>—applied to the mystical subject at a critical phase of ascent towards ΜΥΟ (phase B): thus, at VI.9[9].7.17–18: “withdrawing from all external things, [the soul] must *revert* completely towards the within” (πάντων τῶν ἔξω ἀφεμένην δεῖ ἐπιστραφῆναι πρὸς τὸ εἶσω πάντη); at V.5[32].8.11, the autophanous subject awaits ΜΥΟ, “completely *turning* and surrendering himself there” (ἐκεῖ ἑαυτὸν πᾶς τρέπων καὶ διδούς); and at VI.7[38].31.6–7, “the soul which was able, *having reverted*, knew and saw” (ἐπιστραφεῖσα δὲ καὶ ψυχὴ ἡ δυνηθεῖσα, ὡς ἔγνω καὶ εἶδεν).<sup>107</sup> Turning ourselves now to ontogenetic passages, we find precisely the same language to describe the activity of the PNE as it reverts towards its source; thus at V.4[7].2.4–7, “Intellection, seeing the intelligible and *turning towards* that one and, as it were, being completed by that one, is itself, on the one hand, indefinite like sight, but is defined by the intelligible” (νόησις δὲ τὸ νοητὸν ὁρώσα καὶ πρὸς τοῦτο ἐπιστραφεῖσα καὶ ἀπ’ ἐκείνου οἷον ἀποτελουμένη καὶ τελειομένη ἀόριστος μὲν αὐτῇ ὥσπερ ὄψις, ὀριζομένη δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ νοητοῦ); at V.1[10].6.18–19, the second principle “has come to be while that one must be eternally *reverted* towards it(self)” (ἐπιστραφέντος αἰεὶ ἐκείνου πρὸς αὐτὸ ἀναγκαῖόν ἐστι γεγονέναι); at V.1[10].7.5–6, the PNE “sees” by means of its reversion (ἢ ὅτι τῇ ἐπιστροφῇ πρὸς αὐτὸ ἑώρα); at V.2[11].1.9–10, the PNE “*reverts towards* it” (εἰς αὐτὸ ἐπεστράφη) to be filled by the vision. At II.4[12].5.28–39, the PNE “is defined when it *reverts towards* it” (ὀρίζεται δέ, ὅταν πρὸς αὐτὸ ἐπιστραφῇ); while at V.5[32].5.17–19, primary Being emerged from the One, and then, “*having turned* towards its interior, stood and became the substance and hearth of all things” (μεταστραφέν δὲ εἰς τὸ εἶσω ἔστη, καὶ ἐγένετο οὐσία καὶ ἐστία ἀπάντων). At VI.7[38].16.15–16, the unbounded life emerging from the One “*reverted towards* it” (ἐπέστραπτο πρὸς αὐτό) prior to being filled; at VI.7[38].37.21, the PNE becomes Intellect proper by “*reverting* in contemplation” (ἐπιστραφέν ἐν τῇ θεᾷ).

Plotinus also uses the more robustly physical and spatial metaphors of interiority, self-contraction, and movement *eis to eisō* to describe the same process of mystical self-reversion; thus, at IV.8[6].1.1–2, “coming to be ... *within myself*” (γινόμενος ... ἐμαυτοῦ δὲ εἶσω); at VI.9[9].11.38–39, “running the opposite way, [the soul] will come not into another but *into herself*” (δραμοῦσα ἥξει οὐκ εἰς ἄλλο, ἀλλ’ εἰς αὐτήν); at V.8[31].11.10–11, “running *into the within*” (δραμὼν δὲ εἰς τὸ εἶσω), and at V.5[32].7.32, “contracting *into the interior*” (συναγαγὼν εἰς τὸ

106 See Aubin 1963; Hadot 1953.

107 Also *epistraphēsi* at I.6[1].7.5 and *eis to eisō epistrephein* at V.1[10].12.13–14. One should also take note of the many instances where the same kind of reversion is expressed without the exact terminology of *epistrophē*, e.g., at III.8[30].9.30, *eis toupisō anachōrein*.



εἶσω).<sup>108</sup> Similar spatial imagery describes the primordial reversion of the PNE at v.5[32].5.18, where, as we have just seen, the PNE, *qua* primary Being, reverts *eis* to *eisō*. It also describes the self-directed activity of the One, which, as we have similarly seen, cannot easily be distinguished from that of the PNE. Thus at v.6[24].5.1–3, Plotinus contrasts rhetorically the desire of “the multiple” to converge (*synneuein*) upon itself with the contrafactual convergence of the absolute One upon itself, but then (in lines 6–7) hints that the PNE undertakes precisely such a motion into the One: the second principle (Intellect) “is what has come into being while the Good subsisted and *moved what has come into being to itself*” (γενόμενον, ἐπειδὴ ὑπέστη τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ <τὸ> γενόμενον ἐκίνησε πρὸς αὐτό). At v.1.7[38].28.26–29, a selfward-directed motion is attributed to the supreme principle itself in terms that curiously echo the mystical ascent: “the nature of the Good ... *will have fled up* to the formless nature from which the first form comes” (ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ φύσις ... ἀναπεφευγυῖα ἂν εἴη εἰς τὴν ἀνείδεον φύσιν, ἀφ’ ἧς τὸ πρῶτον εἶδος).<sup>109</sup> Similarly, at v.1.8[39].16.12–13, the One “is, as it were, borne *into his own interior*” (ὁ δ’ εἰς τὸ εἶσω οἶον φέρεται αὐτοῦ); Plotinus redescribes this (at line 24) as “an *inclination of his own towards himself*” (νεύσις αὐτοῦ πρὸς αὐτόν).

### 3.6 Self-Apprehension / Autophany

We have seen extensively (in Chapter 2) that the mystical self-reversion (phase B) is typically followed by a sudden moment of self-apprehension (the autophany, phase C). Among many other examples one might consider I.6[1].9.15–16, “if you become this, and see it” (εἰ γέγονας τοῦτο καὶ εἶδες αὐτό), and again, at line 22, “if you see yourself having become this” (εἰ τοῦτο γενόμενον σαυτὸν ἴδεις); or v.1.9[9].9.55–56: “one can see both him and oneself” (ὁρᾶν δὴ ἔστιν ἐνταῦθα καὶ αὐτόν καὶ ἑαυτόν), and later, at 10.9, “seeing himself” (ἑαυτόν μὲν οὖν ἰδὼν), or (at lines 10–11) “he will perceive [*himself*] as such” (τοιούτων αἰσθήσεται); then, at 11.43–44, “if one should see oneself having become this” (εἰ τις οὖν τοῦτο αὐτὸν γενόμενον ἴδῃ). At v.8[31].11.3, the aspirant “looks at a beautified image of himself” (καὶ εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ καλλωπισθεῖσαν βλέπει), and at line 10 “perceives himself” (αἰσθάνεται αὐτοῦ); at v.5[32].8.11–13, the aspirant (as Intellect) “sees, first of all, himself” (εἶδε μὲν τὰ πρῶτα ... ἑαυτόν); and at v.1.7[38].34.12–13, the aspirant (as soul) “sees it suddenly appearing in herself” (ἰδοῦσα δὲ ἐν αὐτῇ [H-S<sup>1</sup>: αὐτῇ] ἐξαίφνης φανέντα); the list could, of course, continue. In accounts of ontogenesis, we find a similar description of the moment at which the PNE apprehends

108 In less mystical contexts, at v.1[10].11.15 and v.6[24].5.1–2, Plotinus uses *synneuein* to denote the cathartic activity of the aspirant.

109 Note the frequent use of *pheugein* in mystical contexts; thus I.6[1].8.8; v.3[49].17.22, etc.

the One, its former self. As in the accounts of autophany, it is not always possible to distinguish the object of the transformative vision: the vision of the self blends into the vision of the One. Since the One is in some sense at the center-point of the self, introversion, and self-contemplation is also reversion towards and contemplation of the One.<sup>110</sup> Significantly, this dual objectification of self and One is reflected in the proliferation of textual ambiguities involving the subject and object of the primordial [self-]reversion. Thus we return again to v.1[10].7.5–6: “by its reversion to it[self], it was seeing” (τῇ ἐπιστροφῇ πρὸς αὐτὸ ἑώρα); similarly, v.2[11].1.10–11, “looking towards it[self], it became this Intellect as well” (ἐγένετο πρὸς αὐτὸ βλέπον καὶ νοῦς οὗτος). At v.6[24].5.7–8, the PNE is moved by the One into itself, at which point “it was moved and saw” (τὸ δ’ ἐκινήθη τε καὶ εἶδε). At 111.8[30].11.1–8, Plotinus implies that the ontogenetic vision is a self-apprehension which has multiplied itself through self-objectification: “Since Intellect is a sight and a seeing sight, it will be a power having come into actuality.... Since also seeing in actuality has duality, it was indeed one before seeing. And so the one has become two and the two one. For the seeing, the filling and, as it were, perfecting, comes from the perceptible object, but for the sight of Intellect the Good is what fills it” (ἐπεὶ γὰρ ὁ νοῦς ἐστὶν ὄψις τις καὶ ὄψις ὁρώσα, δύναμις ἔσται εἰς ἐνέργειαν ἐλθοῦσα.... ἐπεὶ καὶ ἡ ὄρασις ἡ κατ’ ἐνέργειαν διττὸν ἔχει· πρὶν γοῦν ἰδεῖν ἦν ἓν. τὸ οὖν ἐν δύο γέγονε καὶ τὰ δύο ἓν. τῇ μὲν οὖν ὁράσει ἡ πλήρωσις παρὰ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ καὶ ἡ οἶον τελείωσις, τῇ δὲ τοῦ νοῦ ὄψει τὸ ἀγαθὸν τὸ πληροῦν). We find an almost identical notion at v.3[49].11.4–11: “it moved to it not as Intellect, but as vision not yet seeing, and came out having that which the vision multiplied. For again it has the impression of the thing seen, or else it would not have allowed it to come to be in itself. This became many out of one, and thus coming to know it saw it, and then became seeing sight” (ὥρμησε μὲν ἐπ’ αὐτὸ οὐχ ὡς νοῦς, ἀλλ’ ὡς ὄψις οὐπω ἰδοῦσα, ἐξῆλθε δὲ ἔχουσα ὅπερ αὐτὴ ἐπλήθυνεν· ὥστε ἄλλου μὲν ἐπεθύμησεν ἀορίστως ἔχουσα ἐπ’ αὐτῇ φάντασμά τι, ἐξῆλθε δὲ ἄλλο λαβοῦσα ἐν αὐτῇ αὐτὸ πολὺ ποιήσασα. Καὶ γὰρ αὖ ἔχει τύπον τοῦ ὁράματος· ἢ οὐ παρεδέξατο ἐν αὐτῇ [H-S<sup>1</sup>: αὐτῇ] γενέσθαι. οὗτος δὲ πολὺς ἐξ ἑνὸς ἐγένετο, καὶ οὕτως γνοῦς εἶδεν αὐτό, καὶ τότε ἐγένετο ἰδοῦσα ὄψις). This self-multiplying vision may be attributed equivalently to the PNE and to the One itself, who “(as it were) looks to himself and this (as it were) ‘Being’ for him is his looking to himself” (οἶον πρὸς αὐτὸν βλέπει καὶ τὸ οἶον εἶναι τοῦτο αὐτῷ τὸ πρὸς αὐτὸν βλέπειν: v1.8[39].16.19–21); the One is “the first activity manifesting itself as what it should be” (ὡς ἐνέργεια πρώτη τοῦτο ἑαυτὴν ἐκφῆνασα, ὅπερ ἔδει: v1.8[39].18.51–52).

110 Thus in the mystical context of autophany at v1.9[9].9.55–56, “one can see both him and oneself.”

### 3.7 *Filling / Impregnation (plērōsis)*

In several mystical passages, both the moment of autophany and that of the ultimate apprehension or union with the One (ΜΥΟ) is described in terms of “filling” and being “filled.” Thus at VI.9[9].7.15–16, the mystical apprehension is a “filling and illumination from the first nature” (πλήρωσιν καὶ ἔλλαμψιν αὐτῇ τῆς φύσεως τῆς πρώτης); later, at 9.20, the ΜΥΟ itself is described as being “filled with God” (πληρωθεῖσα θεοῦ). At 9.57, the autophanous, transcendental self is “full of noetic light” (φωτὸς πλήρη νοητοῦ). At V.5[32].8.12, the aspirant apprehends the transcendental self “as if filled with strength” (οἷον πληρωθεὶς μένους); at VI.7[38].31.32–33, the soul is “filled with the life of Being” (τῆς τοῦ ὄντος ζωῆς πληρωθεῖσα); at 35.19, the deity “filled the soul of the visionary” (τὴν ψυχὴν ἐμπλήσας τοῦ θεωμένου), and, during the ΜΥΟ at 36.19, “the vision fills his eyes with light” (ἡ θεὰ πλήσασα φωτὸς τὰ ὄμματα). So also in ontogenetic passages, one may similarly find an insistence on the language of *plērōsis*: the PNE is “filled” by its own source at the moment of vision following the primordial reversion. At V.2[11].1.8–11, the PNE is described as a “hyperplenitude” (ὑπερπλήρης) that “overflows” (ὑπερερρύη); the PNE then serves as the recipient for the effluence of the One that “fills” it.<sup>111</sup> At III.8[30].11.6–8, Plotinus describes the delimitation of the PNE by the vision of the One as “filling” (πλήρωσις ... πληροῦν). Finally, at VI.7[38].16, we find a repeated and almost overemphatic use of the verb *plēroun* and its cognates to describe the relationship between the One and the PNE during ontogenesis: the *kinēsis* of the PNE is “filled” by the One (πληρωθεῖσα: 16.16), the motion then “filled” (ἐπλήρωσεν: 16.17) Intellect and becomes “full” (πλήρης: 16.19), “having been filled” (πληρωθείς: 16.20). It came into existence by “being filled” (πληρούμενος: 16.31); once it was “filled” (πληρωθείς: 16.31–32) it was perfected (ἀπετελέσθη: 16.32); its *archē* is what it was prior to “being filled” (πληρωθῆναι: 16.33); another one “filled” (πληροῦσα: 16.34) it; it was thus imprinted by “being filled” (πληρούμενος: 16.34–35).

While the principal sense of *plēroun* and its cognates is “to fill,” it is certain that Plotinus also intends it to be taken simultaneously in another, more specifically reproductive, sense: that is “to impregnate,” or, in its passive form (*plērousthai*), “to be impregnated,” “to conceive.” Plotinus renders the otherwise subtextual double-entendre quite explicit in a number of mystical passages, in which the vision of the One or ΜΥΟ itself is understood as an impregnation by the One. Thus, at VI.9[9].9.20—now in frank sexual-reproductive language—the soul

111 There are several passages in which the language of “filling” is used to describe the relation of the One to its subsequents without necessarily implying the first moments of ontogenesis; thus at III.9[13].4.8 the One is said to fill all things, at III.8[30].11.43 to provide *plērōsis alēthinē* to Intellect.

“conceives” (κύει) virtues when “filled by God” (πληρωθεῖσα θεοῦ),<sup>112</sup> to which we may also compare Plotinus’s description of ΜΥΟ at VI.9[9].7.15–16 as “a *filling* [or *impregnation*] and illumination by the first nature” (πλήρωσιν καὶ ἔλλαμψιν αὐτῇ τῆς φύσεως τῆς πρώτης) followed by the description (lines 24–26) of the ambiguous tryst between Zeus and Minos, by which the latter is “filled with legislative status by the divine touch” (τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπαφῇ εἰς νόμων πληρούμενος θέσιν). Plotinus often evokes the ultimate apprehension of the One at the apex of the mystical ascent (as we have seen in Chapter 2) in erotic terms, but the erotic vision is also reproductive; thus at VI.7[38].35.30–32, the “loving Intellect” (*nous erōn*), “seeing that [One], had [*sc.* “conceived”] offspring and was conscious both of their being born and their being within him” (ὁρῶν ἐκεῖνον ἔσχε γεννήματα καὶ συνήσθετο καὶ τούτων γενομένων καὶ ἐνόντων). Finally, we may see a broad echo of this in his last mystical passage, that of V.3[49].17, where (in lines 15–19) he conflates erotic and reproductive language, playing on the double semantics of *ōdis*, meaning both the agony caused by labor and also by erotic longing: “the soul still has even greater birth-pangs. Perhaps at this point, she must give birth having eagerly glanced towards it and having been filled with birth-pangs” (ἦ ἔτι ἡ ψυχὴ ὠδίνει καὶ μάλλον. ἴσως οὖν χρὴ αὐτὴν ἡδὴ γεννήσαι ἀίξασαν πρὸς αὐτὸ πληρωθεῖσαν ὠδίνων. οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ πάλιν ἐπαστέον, εἴ ποθέν τινα πρὸς τὴν ὠδῖνα ἐπωδὴν εὔροιμεν). Similar biological-reproductive imagery pervades and structures his account of ontogenesis and procession more generally;<sup>113</sup> thus, for instance, the indefinite efflux from the One reverts so as to be “impregnated” by its vision of its source: “this is, as it were, the first birth/begetting” (πρώτη οἶον γέννησις αὐτῇ: V.2[11].1.7). Rendering the *plērōthēnai* of the ontogenetic passages as “impregnation” yields perfect sense: the PNE, “having come into being, reverts towards it and is impregnated” (V.2[11].1.9–10); “for the seeing, the impregnation and, as it were, perfecting, comes from the perceptible object, but for the sight of Intellect the Good is what impregnates it” (III.8[30].11.6–8); it “lived towards [the One] and depended upon it and turned towards it; indeed its very motion was impregnated by its being moved there” (VI.7[38].16.15–17).<sup>114</sup> The reproductive model of ontogenesis is also evoked by a similar attribution of “birth-pangs” (*ōdines*) to the PNE during the generation of Being (V.5[32].5.26: *ōdini*) and multiplicity (VI.6[34].9.27: *ōdinein*).

112 Which amusingly recalls the common mythological motif of the (often unfortunate) human impregnated by a god.

113 See Mazur 2009.

114 Successive impregnations by visions of higher principles occur in both classic Sethian and Valentinian literature.

### 3.8 *Strengthening/Perfecting*

In several accounts of mystical ascent, the vision is said to fill the mystical subject with “strength” (though the exact terminology varies). Thus at v.5[32].8.12 the transcendental self is “as if filled with strength” (οἷον πληρωθεῖς μένους) during the autophany; at vi.7[38].22.15, the autophanous soul “takes strength” (ῥώννυται) upon receiving a warm efflux from the One, and later (at 31.32) “takes on more *strength*” (ἐπερρώσθη πλέον).<sup>115</sup> In one instance Plotinus expresses this moment of strengthening with the Aristotelian (cognitive and embryological) terminology of “perfecting”; thus in a discussion of a contemplative approach to the One, Plotinus says that when the intellect “attains” (*tynchanōn*) the Good it is “*perfected* by the Good” (τελειοῦται παρὰ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ: III.8[30].11.17). Similarly, in accounts of ontogenesis, the PNE undergoes an identical strengthening and/or perfecting as a result of its recursive vision of the One. Thus at v.1[10].7.15–17, the *ousia* of Intellect, which comes from the One, “is both *strengthened* by that one and *perfected* into substance by that [One] and from that [One]” (καὶ ῥώννυται παρ’ ἐκείνου καὶ τελειοῦται εἰς οὐσίαν παρ’ ἐκείνου καὶ ἐξ ἐκείνου). At vi.7[38].16.32–33, at the moment of its “being filled” by the One, the epistrophic PNE “simultaneously was *perfected* and was seeing” (ὁμοῦ ἀπετέλεσθη καὶ ἑώρα). Finally, at vi.8[39].18.25, the prenoetic *dynamis* from the One (the PNE) generates Intellect “by means of some kind of *strength*” (ῥώμῃ τινί).

### 3.9 *Stasis*

Several accounts of mystical ascent refer to a moment of stasis or “standing towards” the self-contemplation during the vision. Thus at iv.8[6].1.7 the autophany is described as a “*stasis* in the divine” (ἐν τῷ θεῷ στάσιν), and we find similar terminology throughout the elaborate description of ascent used to describe the aspirant of the penultimate stage of MUO in the second half of vi.9[9]: “*stand* yourself upon these things” (στήσον σαυτὸν εἰς ταῦτα: 7.2); “*to stand* in this alone” (ἐν μόνῳ στήναι τούτῳ: 9.51); “completely *standing* and indeed having become a kind of *stasis*” (ἐστὼς πάντα καὶ οἷον στάσις γενόμενος: 11.15–16); finally, at 11.24, *stasis* itself is equated with MUO itself. So also at III.8[30].9.25–28, “*standing* anywhere” (στήσας ὅπουοῦν) and “*standing* to listen in the desert” (ἐν ὁπῶοῦν τοῦ ἐρήμου στήσας); similarly v.5[32].4.9, “*stand* perfectly still” (στήναι παντελῶς). In the full description of the autophany at v.5[32].8.9–13, we may note the repetition of the verb *stēnai*: “For Intellect *will stand itself* towards the contemplation, looking at nothing else but the Beautiful, completely turning and surrendering himself there, but *having stood*, and, as if having been filled with

115 This may also be brought into connection with I.6[1].9.27: the supreme principle can only be apprehended by one who is not “weak” (*asthēnes*).

strength, it sees, first of all, itself having become more beautiful and glistening, as he is close to him” (ἐστήξεται μὲν γὰρ ὁ νοῦς πρὸς τὴν θεάν εἰς οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἢ πρὸς τὸ καλὸν βλέπων, ἐκεῖ ἑαυτὸν πᾶς τρέπων καὶ διδούς, στάς δὲ καὶ οἶον πληρωθεὶς μένους εἶδε μὲν τὰ πρῶτα καλλίως γενόμενον ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἐπιστῖλβοντα, ὡς ἐγγὺς ὄντος αὐτοῦ). Interestingly, the One itself cannot truly be said even to stand, as *stasis*, along with *kinēsis*, transcends the primary Platonic genera of *Sophist* 254d; this suggests that the moments of mystical stasis are not unequivocally identical with the ultimate phase of *μυο* (we will return to this issue on p. 133, *supra*), but indicate a moment at one minimal remove. It is therefore significant that stasis similarly occurs at an infinitesimal distance from the first principle in the context of ontogenesis when the *PNE* reverts towards its source and stand facing towards the One. At v.2[11].1.11–13, the stasis is itself generative: “And its *stasis* towards that one makes Being, while its looking towards it is Intellect. So since it *stands* towards it so that it should see, it becomes simultaneously Intellect and Being” (καὶ ἡ μὲν πρὸς ἐκεῖνο στάσις αὐτοῦ τὸ ὄν ἐποίησεν, ἡ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸ θεὰ τὸν νοῦν. ἐπεὶ οὖν ἔστη πρὸς αὐτό, ἵνα ᾗδῃ, ὁμοῦ νοῦς γίγνεται καὶ ὄν). A similar stasis occurs during the account of the procession of “primary Being,” which, “having turned towards its interior, *stood*, and became the substance and hearth of all things” (μεταστραφὲν δὲ εἰς τὸ εἶσω ἔστη, καὶ ἐγένετο οὐσία καὶ ἐστία πάντων: v.5[32].5.17–19).

### 3.10 *Luminosity/Radiation of Light*

As we have seen in Chapter 2, the most common feature of the transcendental self at the moment of autophany is radiant luminosity.<sup>116</sup> The autophanous subject has become “only true light” (φῶς ἀληθινὸν μόνον: I.6[1].9.18); “having received the true light and having illuminated around the entire soul” (δεξάμενος φῶς ἀληθινὸν καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν ψυχὴν περιφωτίσας: VI.9[9].4.20–21), “gleaming” (ἡγλαϊσμένον: VI.9[9].9.57), “full of intelligible light—but rather itself pure light” (φωτὸς πλήρη νοητοῦ, μᾶλλον δὲ φῶς αὐτὸ καθαρὸν: VI.9[9].9.57–58); “inflamed” (ἀναφθέντα: VI.9[9].9.59); “a light, not another one in something else, but itself, alone by itself, pure, appearing suddenly by itself” (οὐκ ἄλλο ἐν ἄλλῳ φῶς, ἀλλ’ αὐτὸ καθ’ ἑαυτὸ μόνον καθαρὸν ἐφ’ αὐτοῦ ἐξαίφνης φανέν: v.5[32].7.32–34); “glistening” (ἐπιστῖλβοντα: v.5[32].8.13); and “suddenly taking light” (ἐξαίφνης φῶς λάβῃ: v.3[49].17.29). It is equally common to find Plotinus describing the *PNE* with similar imagery, as a radiation of light surrounding the One: “like a shining around from it ... like the brilliance of the sun shining around it as if running around it” (περίλαμψιν ἐξ αὐτοῦ μὲν, ἐξ αὐτοῦ δὲ μένοντος, οἶον ἡλίου τὸ περι

<sup>116</sup> Plotinus’s ubiquitous use of terminology connoting luminosity has recently been analyzed by Blandin 2003.

αὐτὸ λαμπρὸν ὥσπερ περιθέον: v.1[10].6.28–29). At v.1.7[38].17.21, the PNE is an unbounded life “shining out” (ἐκλαμπάσης) from the One. At v.1.8[39].18.32–35, the PNE—described as “something like what is in Intellect, in many ways greater, in that One” (οἷον γὰρ τὸ ἐν νῶ, πολλαχῇ μείζον ἢ τοιοῦτον τὸ ἐν ἐνὶ ἐκείνῳ) “is like light scattered from some one diaphanous thing to many places within itself” (ὥσπερ φωτὸς ἐπὶ πολὺ σκεδασθέντος ἐξ ἐνός τινος ἐν αὐτῷ ὄντος διαφανοῦς). At v.1.2[43].18.3, the beauty of the One “shines out upon” (ἀποστίλβον) the Forms (this echoes the transcendental self’s ἐπιστίλβοντα at v.5[32].8.13). One might also compare the description of the prenoetic radiance from the One at v.3[49].12.42–45 as an activity flowing from it like light from the sun (ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ οἷον ῥυεῖσαν ἐνέργειαν ὡς ἀπὸ ἡλίου φῶς), an “outshining” (τὸ ἐκφανέν) that “shines forth” from the One without being cut off from it (οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀποτέμνεται τὸ ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ); or later, at 15.6, a “shining around out from him as out of a light” (οἷον ἐκ φωτὸς τὴν ἐξ αὐτοῦ περιλαμπν).

### 3.11 *Vision / Faculty of Sight / Opsis*

In several passages, Plotinus compares the mystical capacity of the transcendental self to the faculty of vision itself. While the outshining of light we have seen previously might reflect the first effluent phase of vision in the Platonic extromission-theory,<sup>117</sup> in other cases the capacity for mystical vision is represented by the receptive faculty of vision or even the eye itself. Thus the auto-phanous self of 1.6[1] has “already [i.e., prior to MUO] become vision” (ὄψις ἤδη γενόμενος: 9.22–23); here Plotinus uses the technical term *atenizein* that typically denotes a vision of divinity;<sup>118</sup> thus, “gazing intently, observe!” (ἀτενίσας ἴδε: 9.24). At this point, one has become “alone the eye that beholds the great beauty” (οὗτος γὰρ μόνος ὁ ὀφθαλμὸς τὸ μέγα κάλλος βλέπει: 9.24–25). The MUO itself is described as an extraordinary manner of seeing; thus in the famous simile of the *adyton* at v.1.9[9].11.22–23, Plotinus says that what the aspirant experienced inside the temple was “not, perhaps, an object of vision, but another way to see” (τὸ δὲ ἴσως ἦν οὐ θέαμα, ἀλλὰ ἄλλος τρόπος τοῦ ἰδεῖν), a phrase reminiscent of Plotinus’s exhortation to change to “another sight” (ὄψιν ἄλλην) at 1.6[1].8.25–26 and also possibly echoed later at v.1.7[38].35.30–31: the *nous erōn* does not think but looks at the One “in another way” (τὸ μὴ νοεῖν, ἀλλὰ ἄλλως ἐκείνον βλέπειν). Similarly, in the account of autophany a few lines earlier, at v.1.7[38].35.14–15, the aspirant commingles his faculty of vision with the object of contemplation so that the former object of vision becomes the *faculty* of vision itself (τὴν ὄψιν αὐτοῦ συγκεράσαιο τῷ θεάματι, ὥστε ἐν αὐτῷ ἤδη τὸ

117 See Chapter 2, n. 75.

118 On the use of this term to describe a vision of divinity in particular, see Strelan 1999.

ὁρατὸν πρότερον ὥψιν γεγονέναι). So also, as we have already seen, in ontogenetic contexts the PNE is similarly equated with an indefinite or incomplete kind of vision, an incipient visual ray prior to the apprehension of its object. Thus at v.4[7].2.6–7 prenoetic “thinking” is “indefinite like seeing, but is defined by its object” (ἀόριστος μὲν αὐτὴ ὥσπερ ὄψις, ὀρίζομένη δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ νοητοῦ); at III.8[30].11.1–2, “since Intellect is a sight and a seeing sight, it [the PNE] will be a potentiality having come into actuality” (ἐπεὶ γὰρ ὁ νοῦς ἐστὶν ὄψις τις καὶ ὄψις ὁρώσα, δύνάμεις ἔσται εἰς ἐνέργειαν ἐλθοῦσα); at VI.7[38].17.33, “the *seeing* from there [i.e., the One] is the potentiality of all things” (ἡ δὲ ὄρασις ἡ ἐκεῖθεν δύνάμεις πάντων). At v.3[49].11.5, the PNE is “vision not yet seeing” (ὄψις οὐπω ἰδοῦσα) and finally, a few lines later, at 11.12, it is “unimprinted sight” (ἀτύπωτος ὄψις).

### 3.12 *Touching / Thrusting (thigein / epiballein)*

The act of transcendental apprehension shared by both mystical subject and PNE is occasionally redescribed with terms whose curiously physical sense lurks beneath the (more metaphorical) cognitive connotation. Mystical apprehension thus involves “touching,” “grasping” or—as I would usually prefer to render *epiballein*—“thrusting upon” its object (a common but excessively anodyne translation of *epibolē* is “intuition”). The aspirant must “as it were, *grasp* and *touch*” the One (οἶον ἐφάψασθαι καὶ θίγειν: VI.9[9].4.27); apprehension of the One occurs through an “inchoate *thrusting*” (ἐπιβολῇ ἀθρόα: III.8[30].9.21–22) and “*striking* towards it and coming to rest inside of it” (βαλὼν πρὸς αὐτὸ καὶ τυχὼν ἐντὸς αὐτοῦ ἀναπαυσάμενος: III.8[30].10.32–35); the *nous erōn* attains the One through a “*thrusting towards* and receiving [from]” it (ἐπιβολῇ τινι καὶ παραδοχῇ: VI.7[38].35.21–22). So also, in the case of ontogenesis, this terminology is used of the “multiple Intellect” (*ho nous ho polys*)—ambiguously the prenoetic or hypernoetic self—that “wanting to *thrust upon* [the One] as simple, emerged eternally grasping something else made multiple within itself” (ἐπιβάλλειν θέλων ὡς ἀπλῶ ἔξεισιν ἄλλο αἰεὶ λαμβάνων ἐν αὐτῷ πληθυνόμενον: v.3[49].11.2–4). The One’s own ineffable self-apprehension—equivalent to the initial activity of the PNE—is “some simple ‘*thrusting*’ by it towards itself” (ἀπλῇ τις ἐπιβολῇ αὐτῷ πρὸς αὐτόν: VI.7[38].39.1–2), “like a *touch*” (οἶον ἐπαφή: 39.19); “only a *touching* and, as it were, *grasping*” (θίξις καὶ οἶον ἐπαφή μόνον: v.3[49].10.42).

### 3.13 *Beauty*

Another frequently-mentioned and unsurprisingly positive characteristic of the transcendental self is that of overwhelming beauty. During the autophany, you must “see yourself [as] beautiful” (σαυτὸν ἰδῆς καλόν: 1.6[1].9.8); one sees an “an extraordinarily marvelous beauty” within oneself (θαυμαστὸν ἡλίκον



ὁρῶν κάλλος: IV.8[6].1.3); when the beauty has “penetrated the whole soul” (δι’ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς τοῦ κάλλους ἐλθόντος: V.8[31].10.33–34) one “looks at an image of oneself having become beautified” (εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ [H-S<sup>1</sup>: αὐτοῦ] καλλωπισθεῖσαν βλέπει: V.8[31].11.3); one “sees first of all oneself having become more beautiful” (εἶδε μὲν τὰ πρῶτα καλλίω γενόμενον ἑαυτόν: V.5[32].8.12–13); just prior to ΜΥΟ one has made oneself most beautiful (VI.7[38].34.10) and is “settled in beauty” (ἐν καλῷ ἰδρυθείς: VI.7[38].36.16). As I have already argued at length,<sup>119</sup> beauty occupies an uncertain ontological status in Plotinus’s thought; it is sometimes equated with the One or the Good itself, sometimes with the hypostatic Intellect, and sometimes occupies the liminal interhypostatic realm ‘between’ the two; Plotinus himself explicitly admits uncertainty on this issue. But throughout VI.7[38].32–33, Plotinus equates the beauty which flows from the One with the PNE. An excess of transcendent beauty overflows from the One to produce intelligible beauty: “The potentiality of all is the flower of beauty, the beauty-generating beauty. For it generates it and makes it more beautiful by means of the overabundance of beauty from it, so that it is the origin of beauty and limit of beauty” (δύναμις οὖν παντὸς καλοῦ ἄνθος ἐστί, κάλλος καλλοποιόν. καὶ γὰρ γεννᾷ αὐτὸ καὶ κάλλιον ποιεῖ τῇ παρ’ αὐτοῦ περισσίσῃ τοῦ κάλλους, ὥστε ἀρχὴ κάλλους καὶ πέρας κάλλους: 32.31–34).

### 3.14 *Image / Statue / Likeness / Mental Image (eikōn / agalma / phantasma etc.).*

In several mystical passages, Plotinus refers to the transcendental self as a kind of image of the first principle. This image may take the form of either a visual or mental representation, a cult-icon, or a statue. At I.6[1].9.13 he advises one to perfect, and then observe, one’s transcendental self as a statue (τὸ σὸν ἄγαλμα), thus adopting an image from Plato’s *Phaedrus*.<sup>120</sup> At VI.9[9].11.43–45, the hypernoetic mystical subject becomes a “likeness” (ὁμοίωμα) and “image” (εἰκὼν) of the One, immediately prior to the coalescence of image and archetype at “the end of journey.” At III.8[30].9.22–23 the “likeness within ourselves” of the One (τῷ ἐν ἡμῖν ὁμοίῳ) allows one to attain ΜΥΟ; at V.6[24].5.13–15, a perception of the first principle occurs by means of a “likeness” (ὁμοίωμα) and, “as it were, an imagination of the Good” (φαντασίαν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ). Now in several ontogenetic passages, the effluence from the One is similarly described as an

119 Chapter 2, pp. 45–47.

120 *Phaedrus* 252d. In its original Platonic context, however, the image of the statue is an analogy for the soul of the beloved, which one “works on” and improves presumably through pedagogical mentoring; Plato compares this to the ritual adornment of cult-icons (*agalmata*). In this Plotinian passage, however, the object to be transformed is one’s *own* soul, the apex of which now becomes the object of (auto-) erotic desire.

imaging process, with the resultant PNE as the first *eikōn* of the One. In the first instance, at V.1[10].6.28–38, Plotinus illustrates the emergence of the external *energeia* of the One as an image growing out of its archetype (εἰκόνα οὐσαν οἶον ἀρχετύπων ὧν ἐξέφυ: lines 33–34). One might also note his earlier exhortation (lines 14–15)—in a discussion of ontogenesis—“to contemplate the first-manifested cult-icon” (ἄγαλμα τὸ πρῶτον ἐκφανέν θεᾶσθαι) that stands outside the metaphorical temple in which the supreme principle ineffably resides.<sup>121</sup> That this might refer to the PNE rather than the fully-fledged Intellect is suggested by a much later treatise, VI.8[39].18.25–30, in which Plotinus refers to an “Intellect in One” that is a prenoetic “image” (*indalma*) of the One—thus mediating between the One and Intellect—that is multiplied so as to become Intellect.<sup>122</sup> Finally, at V.3[49].11.6–7, the PNE emerges as *opsis* while itself “having in itself some indefinite imagination” (ἀορίστως ἔχουσα ἐπ’ αὐτῇ φάντασμα τι) or “impression” (τύπον: 11.8) of the supreme principle: here, as at II.4[12].5, the dyadic PNE is both image of the One and the substrate onto which the image is impressed, just as the mystical subject is ultimately both the percipient of the image of the One within and also, at some more fundamental level, that very image itself.

### 3.15 *Waking (egersis)*

Plotinus occasionally describes the moment of autophany in terms of “waking” or “awakening.”<sup>123</sup> Thus he exhorts one to close one’s eyes and “awaken and change to another way of seeing” (ἀλλ’ οἶον μύσαντα ὄψιν ἄλλην ἀλλάξασθαι καὶ ἀνεγείραι: I.6[1].8.25–26), and describes his own experience of reversion and autophany as “awaking into myself” (ἐγειρόμενος εἰς ἑμαυτόν: IV.8[6].1.1). The soul, in its ultimate state of mystical receptivity, should be “awakened that it might receive what [Intellect] sees” (ἃ ὁρᾷ ἐκεῖνος ἐγρηγορυῖα δέχοιτο: VI.9[9].3.24); and the first apprehension of the Beautiful is an “awakening of love” (τοῦ ἔρωτος ἡ ἔγερσις) among “those who already, as it were, know and are awake” (ἤδη οἶον εἰδόσι καὶ ἐγρηγορόσιν: V.5[32].12.9–11). The language of waking

121 This might be taken to represent the fully-fledged Intellect, as it would seem from his other uses of the simile of the temple, but the logic of the chapter equivalently suggests this is in fact only the prefiguration of Intellect—i.e., the PNE—as Atkinson 1983, 134, also believes: “The first appearance is presumably the undefined emanation which after definition becomes Intellect.”

122 VI.8[39].18.25–30: οὕτω τοι κάκεινο, τῆς νοεράς περιθεούσης δυνάμεως, τὸ οἶον ἰνδάλματος αὐτοῦ ἀρχέτυπον, ἐν ἐνὶ νοῦν, πολλοῖς καὶ εἰς πολλὰ οἶον νενικημένου καὶ νοῦ διὰ ταῦτα γενομένου, ἐκεῖνου πρὸ νοῦ μείναντος <ἐκ> τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ νοῦν γεννήσαντος.

123 Occasionally Plotinus also uses the metaphor of awakening from the body to describe the philosophical ascent more generally, e.g., at III.6[26].6.71 and III.2[47].5.18.

also occurs repeatedly throughout VI.7[38].22: the soul is bathed in the warmth and light from the One and “*awakens*” (ἐγείρεται: lines 15 and 34); the first principle “*awakens*” the soul (ἐγείρει: line 36). Similar imagery of awakening occurs in accounts of ontogenesis. The first hint of this occurs in an account of the genesis of number at VI.6[34].10.1–2: Being became number “when it *awoke* as multiple” (ὅτε πολὺ μὲν ἡγήρετο). The same imagery is repeatedly used of the One’s own self-directed prenoetic activity in VI.8[39].16.31–35: the One’s *energeia* is “a kind of *waking* (the *awakener* not being another), a *waking* and an eternally-existing hypercognition: it is as this that he *awoke*. But the *awakening* is transcendent of substance and intellect and sage life, for these things are him” (οἷον ἐργήγορσις οὐκ ἄλλου ὄντος τοῦ ἐργηγορότος, ἐργήγορσις καὶ ὑπερρόνησις αἰεὶ οὖσα, ἔστιν οὕτως, ὥς ἐργηγόρησεν. ἡ δὲ ἐργήγορσις ἐστὶν ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας καὶ νοῦ καὶ ζωῆς ἔμφορος· ταῦτα δὲ αὐτός ἐστιν).

### 3.16 Wonder / Amazement (*thauma* / *thambos*)

Another striking concept occurring in close connection with the mystical subject at the moment of autophany is wonder or astonishment: thus the aspirant experiences “*amazement*” (θάμβος: I.6[1].4.16) and is “filled with *amazement*” (θάμβους πίμπλασθαι: I.6[1].7.16), he experiences a beauty that is “extraordinarily *wondrous*” (θαυμαστόν ἡλίκον: IV.8[6].1.3); similarly “*amazement*” (θάμβος: V.5[32].12.10) belongs to those who are mystically awakened. This attribute also appears to characterize the object of mystical apprehension; thus III.8[30].10.31–32: “if, taking away Being, you should grasp it, you will have a *wonder*” (εἰ δὲ ἀφελὼν τὸ εἶναι λαμβάνοις, θαῦμα ἔξεις); V.5[32].8.23: “it is a *wonder* how it is present not having come” (θαῦμα δὴ, πῶς οὐκ ἐλθὼν πάρεστι); and—with an evident echo of Plato’s own use of the term to describe the apex of the visionary ascent<sup>124</sup>—VI.7[38].40.26–27: the aspirant “will arrive ... beyond substance and Intellect, at *something wonderful*” (ἥξει ... ἐπέκεινα ἥξει οὐσίας καὶ νοήσεως ἐπὶ τι θαυμαστόν). One finds the same concept in ontogenetic contexts. Thus at VI.9[9].5.29–30 the term is applied ambiguously to the One or to the emergent Intellect (PNE): “[Intellect] somehow dared to stand away from the One, the pre-[Intellectual] *marvel* of the One which is nonbeing” (ἀποστήναι δὲ πῶς τοῦ ἐνὸς τολμήσας—τὸ δὴ πρὸ τούτου θαῦμα τοῦ ἑν, ὃ μὴ ὄν ἐστιν). Elsewhere it is used in close connection with the emergence of the PNE *qua* life: “It is indeed a *wonder* how the multiplicity of life came from what is not multiplicity” (ἡ καὶ θαῦμα, πῶς τὸ πλήθος τῆς ζωῆς ἐξ οὐ πλήθους ἦν:

124 Thus Plato, *Symposium* 210e: πρὸς τέλος ἡδὴ ἰὼν τῶν ἐρωτικῶν ἐξαίφνης κατόψεται τι θαυμαστόν τὴν φύσιν καλὸν (“coming to the completion of the erotic path, he will suddenly behold something wonderful, beautiful in nature”); see also *Epistulae* 340c3.

111.8[30].10.14–15). In these latter cases Plotinus's use of *thauma* appeals not only to the emotive sense of the word, with its venerable Platonic resonance (e.g., *thauma* as the origin of philosophy, *Theaetetus* 155d2–3) but also to its subtextual—yet equally Platonic—connotation, that of mechanical puppet or marionette,<sup>125</sup> which, like the PNE, constitutes the visible and apparently miraculous manifestation of the activity of an unseen agent.

### 3.17 *Unlimited / Indefinite / Formless / Unmeasurable*

Despite the diverse profusion of positive qualities thus far discussed, Plotinus also paradoxically describes the transcendental self in apophatic terms that may also be predicated of the One (in violation of only the strictest *negatio negationis*): it is unlimited, unbounded, indefinite, shapeless, formless, unmeasurable, and so on. As we have already seen,<sup>126</sup> in his very first description of autophany (phase C) at 1.6[1].9.19–22, Plotinus chooses to describe the transcendental subject as shapeless and unmeasurable and employs apophatic terms redolent of the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides* (139b–140d). We find the same notion repeated elsewhere; thus VI.9[9].7.12–16: “just as is said of matter that it needs to be without the qualities of all things if it is going to receive the impressions of all things, so also (and how much more so!) must the soul become *formless*, if there is not going to be embedded within her an impediment to a filling [or impregnation] and illumination from the first nature” (ὥσπερ περὶ τῆς ὕλης λέγεται, ὡς ἄρα ἄποιον εἶναι δεῖ πάντων, εἰ μέλλει δέχεσθαι τοὺς πάντων τύπους, οὕτω καὶ πολὺ μᾶλλον ἀνείδεν τὴν ψυχὴν γίνεσθαι, εἰ μέλλει μὴδὲν ἐμπόδιον ἐγκαθήμενον ἔσεσθαι πρὸς πλήρωσιν καὶ ἑλλαμψιν αὐτῇ τῆς φύσεως τῆς πρώτης). The requirement for the mystical subject to be an ‘unimprinted’ *tabula rasa* in order to apprehend the Absolute is also suggested with the negative concepts of (a) non-differentiation—thus VI.9[9].11.8–9: he had “*no distinction* in himself, either in relation to himself or in relation to others” (διαφορὰν ἐν αὐτῷ οὐδεμίαν πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ἔχων οὔτε κατὰ ἄλλα)—of (b) unlimitedness—VI.7[38].32.28: the [mystical] “love of this [One] would be *unlimited*” (ἄπειρος ἂν εἴη ὁ τοῦτου ἔρωσ) —and of (c) shapelessness: VI.7[38].33.1–4: “*one must flee all the more from such shape*” (φευκτέον μᾶλλον ἀπὸ μορφῆς τοιαύτης), or later, lines 27–28: “it is necessary to change into the *more shapeless*” (δεῖ μεταβαίνειν ἐπὶ τὸ ἀμορφότερον); and finally VI.7[38].34.2–4: “the soul, too, when it acquires an intense love of it, *sets aside all shape which she has, and even whatever shape of the intelligible might be in her*” (ἐπεὶ καὶ ψυχῇ,

125 *Thauma* is used by Plato to describe the puppet-like simulacra in the simile of the cave at *Republica* 514b5–6.

126 Chapter 2, pp. 32–34.

ὅταν αὐτοῦ ἔρωτα σύντονον λάβῃ, ἀποτίθεται πᾶσαν ἣν ἔχει μορφήν, καὶ ἥτις ἂν καὶ νοητοῦ ᾗ ἐν αὐτῇ). Now similar imagery is, of course, used to describe the first, indefinite phase of the PNE; it is, as we have seen, the “indefinite Dyad” (ἀόριστος δυάς),<sup>127</sup> “indefinite like sight” (ἀόριστος ... ὥσπερ ὄψις: V.4[7].2.6), and the indefinite *kinēsis* and *heterotēs* at the origin of intelligible matter: thus “the motion and otherness which are from the First are *indefinite*, and need that one so as to be defined. It is defined when it reverts towards it, but beforehand both matter and the other are *indefinite* and not yet good” (ἀόριστον δὲ καὶ ἡ κίνησις καὶ ἡ ἑτερότης ἡ ἀπὸ τοῦ πρώτου, κάκεινου πρὸς τὸ ὀρισθῆναι δεόμενα· ὀρίζεται δέ, ὅταν πρὸς αὐτὸ ἐπιστραφῇ· πρὶν δὲ ἀόριστον καὶ ἡ ὕλη καὶ τὸ ἕτερον καὶ οὐπω ἀγαθόν: II.4[12].5.31–35). One may also compare VI.7[38].17.14–18: “And so looking towards that one, it was *unlimited*, but having looked there, it was limited, that [One] having no limit” (πρὸς ἐκεῖνο μὲν οὖν βλέπουσα ἀόριστος ἦν, βλέψασα δ’ ἐκεῖ ὠρίζετο ἐκείνου ὅρον οὐκ ἔχοντος), “the form was in that which is shaped, but the shaper was shapeless” (καὶ τὸ εἶδος ἐν τῷ μορφωθέντι, τὸ δὲ μορφῶσαν ἄμορφον ἦν); or, a few lines later, “life that is multiple and *unbounded*” (τῆς ζωῆς ... πολλῆς καὶ ἀπείρου οὐσης: 17.20); also, at V.3[49].11.9–12, the pre-epistrophic PNE “is only desire and *unimprinted sight*” (ἔφεσις μόνον καὶ ἀτύπωτος ὄψις).

### 3.18 *Hylic Indefiniteness and the “Ancient Nature” (archaia physis)*

Besides Plotinus’s characterization of the transcendental self in terms that suggest the indefiniteness of the PNE, there is an additional hint of an association between the transcendental self and so-called “intelligible matter,” which is, as we have seen, another designation for the interhypostatic efflux of the One. Throughout VI.9[9].8, Plotinus elaborates his common geometrical metaphor of the coincidence of the center-points of circles to describe the relation of the One and the soul of the mystical aspirant, but at lines 13 to 16 specifies that the soul is not like a circle geometrically speaking, but only in the fact that “it has within it and around it the ancient nature” (ἐν αὐτῇ καὶ περὶ αὐτὴν ἡ ἀρχαία φύσις) and “because it is *from* such a thing” (ὅτι ἀπὸ τοιούτου)—i.e., that that soul has derived from its (presumably circular) “ancient nature.”<sup>128</sup> He then goes on to declare (at lines 19–20) that we attach ourselves at *our* center to the center

127 E.g., at V.4[7].2.4–8; V.1[10].5.7–9, 6.6; VI.7[38].8.23; V.5[32].4.20–27.

128 The notion of the *archē* of the soul also recalls the use of this term elsewhere in VI.9[9], such as in the simile of the *adyton*, and earlier in the treatise, at 3.21, to describe both the *origin* of the soul and the *principle* of transcendental apperception; significantly, the word *archē* also occurs at VI.7[38].16.32–34 to refer to the prenoetic efflux as the source of Intellect as distinct from the One: “the *archē* of Intellect was that which it was prior to being filled, but another *archē*, in some way from outside it, was what filled it” (ἀρχὴ δὲ αὐτοῦ ἐκεῖνο τὸ πρὶν πληρωθῆναι ἦν· ἑτέρα δὲ ἀρχὴ οἶονεῖ ἔξωθεν ἡ πληροῦσα ἦν).

of all things, thus bringing the *archaia physis* into connection with the center-point and circumference of the circles of his standard geometrical model of mystical union. In a later treatise, he also refers to the *archaia physis* as the impetus for self-reversion towards the first principle: it is “the longing for the Good, which is [the desire] of itself” (ἡ δ’ ἀρχαία φύσις καὶ ἡ ὀρεξις τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ὅπερ ἐστὶν αὐτοῦ [H-S<sup>1</sup>: αὐτοῦ]: VI.5[22].1.16–17). Now presumably the notion of the *archaia physis* of the soul originally derives from *Symposium* 192e, where it represents (in Aristophanes’s disquisition) the prelapsarian unity of the originally spherical human being whose vestigial memory serves as the impetus for sexual love (which would represent a reintegration of the sundered halves).<sup>129</sup> Yet in a much later treatise, at I.8[51].7.6–7, Plotinus hints at another sense of *archaia physis*, which he defines as the underlying substrate of matter prior to its being ordered by Form (τὴν ὕλην ... τὴν ὑποκειμένην οὕτω κοσμηθεῖσαν).<sup>130</sup> We have, then, an intimation that in our original passage, the *archaia physis* “within” and “around” the soul, whence the soul originally came—and also, significantly, whereby we return to the One—is in some way akin to the intelligible matter of II.4[12].5.15–39, which, as we have seen, is the indefinite, pre-epistrophic substance deriving from the PNE (here called *kinēsis* and *heterotēs*) which has just emerged from the One.<sup>131</sup> That this allusive series of associations linking the transcendental self and the PNE through intelligible matter is not too farfetched is confirmed by the (now familiar) mystical passage we have just seen VI.9[9].7.12–16 (cited *supra*, p. 114)—a passage that occurs, incidentally, in the chapter immediately preceding our original passage of VI.9[9].8 referring to the *archaia physis*—in which Plotinus similarly compares the soul at the final phase of mystical catharsis to the amorphous nature of matter prior to its

129 We have already seen (Chapter 2, p. 56) a subtextual allusion to Aristophanes’s circular lovers in an account of ΜΥΟ.

130 However, in this passage (I.8[51].7) he says that this matter is the source of evil, which presents some difficulty for its identification with the transcendental self. This may be explained by his first discussion of intelligible matter at II.4[12].5, where he describes pre-defined intelligible matter as both “divine” (*theia*: line 15) and still as “not yet good” (*oupō agathon*: line 35): thus clearly violating his own axiom of continuous hierarchy (on which see Mazur 2005), which may furthermore explain his own evident embarrassment at the discussion of intelligible matter at the end of Chapter 5.

131 One may also compare a peculiar ontogenetic passage at V.1[10].5.13–19, in which Plotinus is trying to explain the genesis of the Forms as a result of the prior begetting of numbers by means of the coupling of the One and the Indefinite Dyad: “the Dyad is indefinite while apprehending it by means of the (as it were) ‘substrate’” (ἀόριστος μὲν ἡ δυὰς τῷ οἷον ὑποκειμένῳ λαμβανομένη: lines 14–15). But what does this mean? The implication is that the mysterious *hypokeimenon* is a cognitive faculty of some sort that allows us to grasp or perhaps identify with the interhypostatic Dyad: that is, the PNE.

definition by form, and insists that the soul must be formless like matter so as to attain MUO. A similar hint of the origin of the soul in the indefinite prenoetic substrate occurs in the treatise on Love, III.5[50].7.1–8, where Plotinus states that Love is the progeny of the mating of Form and the “Indefiniteness that the soul had prior to attaining the Good, [when the soul] was divining there to be something [there], *according to an indefinite and unlimited object of imagination*” (ἐκεῖ γενομένης καὶ συμμιχθείσης ὡς ἐξ εἰδους καὶ ἀοριστίας, ἣν <ἦν> ἔχουσα ἢ ψυχὴ πρὶν τυχεῖν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, μαντευομένη δέ τι εἶναι κατὰ ἀόριστον καὶ ἄπειρον φάντασμα). This suggests that the allusive correspondence between the transcendental self and intelligible matter are noncoincidental, and that Plotinus deliberately associates the formlessness of the transcendental self with its origin (*archē*) in, and consubstantiality with, the PNE.

### 3.19 *Life*

In a number of mystical passages, Plotinus attributes an extraordinary kind of “life” to the transcendental self at the moment of autophany. Thus at IV.8[6].1.4 the mystical subject has “actualized the noblest *life*” (ζωὴν τε ἀρίστην ἐνεργήσας); at VI.9[9].9.47 “the soul has another *life*” (ἡ ψυχὴ ζωὴν ἄλλην ἴσχει τότε); and at VI.7[38].31.32–33 it is “filled with the *life* of Being” (τῆς τοῦ ὄντος ζωῆς πληρωθεῖσα). Most crucial, however, is the account of MUO at III.8[30].9.32–39: “If it wishes to ‘see’ that [n.], it must not be altogether intellect. For it [m.] *is itself the first life*, being an activity in the outgoing-through of all things; but outgoing-through not in its being [now] outgoing-through, but in that it has [previously] gone out-through. So if, then, it is life, and outgoing-through and has all things distinctly and not imprecisely—for thus it would have them imperfectly and inarticulately—it is from something else which is not still in the outgoing-through but is the *origin* of the outgoing-through, and the origin of life and the origin of intellect and of all things” (εἰ ἐθέλοι ἐκεῖνο ὁρᾶν, μὴ πάντα νοῦν εἶναι. ἔστι μὲν γὰρ αὐτὸς ζωὴ πρώτη, ἐνέργεια οὖσα ἐν διεξόδῳ τῶν πάντων· διεξόδῳ δὲ οὐ τῇ διεξιούσῃ, ἀλλὰ τῇ διεξελθούσῃ. εἴπερ οὖν καὶ ζωὴ ἐστὶ καὶ διεξόδος ἐστὶ καὶ πάντα ἀκριβῶς καὶ οὐχ ὀλοσχερῶς ἔχει—ἀτελῶς γὰρ ἂν καὶ ἀδιαρθρώτως ἔχοι—ἐκ τίνος ἄλλου αὐτὸν εἶναι, ὃ οὐκέτι ἐν διεξόδῳ, ἀλλὰ ἀρχὴ διεξόδου καὶ ἀρχὴ ζωῆς καὶ ἀρχὴ νοῦ καὶ τῶν πάντων). One should note that the masculine *autos* in line 32 refers neither to the supreme principle nor to the ordinary Intellect, but to the mystical faculty which must not be altogether intellect: this mystical faculty is called the “first life.” The “first life” is, then, an interhypostatic subject of transcendental apperception. Yet the remainder of the passage rather surprisingly emphasizes not the mystical apprehension itself but instead the effluent procession of this hypernoetic life, containing within itself the prefiguration of the intelligibles. But why does Plotinus abandon his account of

MUO precisely at the most crucial moment to then launch into discussion of the first moments of procession? By this point, we should not find this surprising. In the previous chapter, at III.8[30].8.26–38, Plotinus has defined the first life as the prenoetic identity of subject and object prior to the first division into multiplicity through a failure to contemplate the One in absolute unity;<sup>132</sup> and indeed “life,” as we have already seen (*supra*, 35, 61, esp. 84–85), is also a typical characteristic of the PNE during its procession forth from the One. Thus, for example, the (apparently interhypostatic) *noēton* of V.4[7].2, which similarly contains the prefiguration of reality, has “life in itself” (ζωὴ ἐν αὐτῷ), and among the ubiquitous references we have seen to the PNE as “life” in VI.7[38], we may take as exemplary the following: the PNE *qua* life “shines out” from (ἐκλαμψάσσης: 17.21) its source while the PNE itself “lives towards” (ἔζη ... πρὸς αὐτό: 16.15) the One; life is “some trace of that [One]” (ἥν ἡ ζωὴ ἵχνος τι ἐκείνου: 17.13–14)—or “an activity from the Good” (ἐκ τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἐνέργειαν: 21.5)—it “comes from that [One] into Intellect” (ἵκει δὲ εἰς νοῦν καὶ ζωὴ ἀπ’ ἐκείνου: 18.5), for “life, once delimited, is Intellect” (ὁρισθεῖσα γὰρ ζωὴ νοῦς: 17.25–26). Thus the life burgeoning from the One—or, as Plotinus sometimes implies, e.g., at VI.8[39].7.51 and V.3[49].16.40, the life inherent in the One itself—is indistinguishable from the mystical faculty by which the One is attained.

### 3.20 *Excursus: On Bussanich Contra Identificationism*

Before proceeding to the last (and perhaps most important) aspect shared by both the mystical subject and the PNE—namely, sexual love (*erōs*)—I should deal with the objection to identificationism that has been raised by John Bussanich in his brilliant but difficult commentary on passages that pertain to the relation between the One and Intellect in Plotinus. The essence of Bussanich’s objection (especially *contra* O’Daly, Hadot, and Trouillard) is that Plotinus refers not only to two distinct phases of Intellect—(i) the ordinary “thinking” Intellect and (ii) the hypernoetic “loving” Intellect that is also identical to the PNE—but actually *three*: (i) the ordinary Intellect; (ii) the hypernoetic “loving Intellect” (*nous erōn*) by which we attain mystical union; and (iii) the prenoetic effluence of the One (or so-called “inchoate” Intellect). According to Bussanich, these latter two extraordinary phases of Intellect—hypernoetic and prenoetic—must be distinguished, because Plotinus describes them differently: specifically (in Bussanich’ opinion) Plotinus applies *erōs*—with its connotation of the passionate frenzy of sexual love—only to the mystical subject, but never to the prenoetic or “inchoate” Intellect, whose

<sup>132</sup> Thus III.8[30].8.31–32 [Appendix B7].



condition Plotinus usually describes instead as one of *epheis*, a milder term for a more general desire.<sup>133</sup>

Although Bussanich's terminological evidence is, *prima facie*, unpersuasive [see Appendix B15],<sup>134</sup> my primary objection to his critique—assuming one could agree that a difference in the use of a single term could outweigh the cumulative evidence we have just seen—is that his judgment about Plotinus's differential uses of *erōs* and *epheis* itself depends upon an *a priori* commitment to the separation of internal and external activities of the One and consequently neglects an important body of evidence that would confute his claims. For example, as we will see, Plotinus makes various statements throughout VI.8[39] to the effect that the One has some kind of self-directed *erōs*: statements that Bussanich tendentiously dismisses as referring solely to processes internal to the One and therefore not identical to the incomplete or indefinite desire of the “inchoate Intellect” (the PNE) which flows out from the One.<sup>135</sup> Yet we have

133 Thus Bussanich 1988, 179: “Unlike the νοῦς ἐρῶν, the inchoate Intellect does not experience the intense longing for the Good or the pain which results from this longing. Moreover, it is precisely the purpose of the inchoate Intellect to be limited.... I conclude, therefore, that the ἔφεσις προνοοῦσα, far from being identical with the νοῦς ἐρῶν, is not even really similar to it—except that both states are modalities of desire and both are minimally differentiated.” Bussanich also thinks that Plotinus applies several terms indiscriminately—*epheis*, *erōs*, *pothos*, or *orexis*—to the actualized Intellect in its more general (i.e., not specifically mystical) desire for the One.

134 It is true that if we discount, as Bussanich does, the passages referring to the One's self-love in VI.8[39] as well as the ontogenetic role of the *nous erōn* of VI.7[38].35.24, then one can say that Plotinus never explicitly attributes *erōs* to something that is unquestionably the PNE. However, if Bussanich were correct that Plotinus specifically intended to maintain a substantial distinction between pre- and hypernoetic subjects, we would expect a broad semantic and conceptual distinction between the kind of desire proper to each of them: a distinction extending, most likely, beyond a single term. And yet, with the arguable exception of *erōs*, we find instead a considerable overlap among other terms of desire applied to the One, the PNE, and the hypernoetic subject. Thus *epheis* and its variants, as well as *agapan*, are shared by all three; *pothos* and *orexis* are unique to the hypernoetic subject, while *epithymēsai* is unique to the PNE. [See Table 3, Appendix B14]. (One other significant term with erotic connotations is the verb *syneinai*, which Plotinus applies also to all three). In addition to the underwhelming evidence that Plotinus intended to maintain such a distinction, one might also consider the erotic connotations of Plotinus's evocative description of the PNE even without the presence of the word *erōs*: thus VI.7[38].16.10–35 [complete passage in Appendix B10]: “It [the PNE] was not yet Intellect while it was looking at that, but looked unintellectually. Or we should say that it was not ever looking, but lived towards it and depended upon it and turned towards it; indeed its very motion was filled / impregnated by its being moved there, and it filled / impregnated it around that, and it was not still motion alone, but motion satiated and full.”

135 Elaborated in Bussanich 1987. To his credit, however, he grants (correctly, in my opinion) a close correspondence between the self-directed activity of the hypernoetic subject and the perfected and (in his view “internal”) self-directed activity of the One.

seen that it is very difficult to make any firm distinction, on either philological or philosophical grounds, between the self-directed activity of the One and the epistrophic activity of the PNE; facile attempts to crystallize the latter into a distinct principle invariably run into trouble. Indeed, the One's multifaceted *energeia* is always in flux; prior to its *epistrophē* it is never determinate, nor even entirely distinct from its source. And if this is the case, it seems more problematic to deny, as Bussanich does, that the One's self-directed *erōs* is also in some sense an incipient PNE.<sup>136</sup>

### 3.21 Love / Desire / "Being With" Sexually (*syneinai*)

Bussanich's objections notwithstanding, it is evident that Plotinus believed the common condition of both the hypernoetic subject and the supreme principle itself to be fundamentally erotic. As we have repeatedly seen throughout several of the most important mystical passages—e.g., I.6[1].5–9, VI.9[9].4 and 9; VI.7[38].22–23, 31, and 35—both the autophany and MUO proper are frequently described in terms of sexual love; and even where the explicit language of *erōs* is not used, the structure of the ascent is nevertheless based upon the

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136 Given the ambiguity of Plotinus's thought on the issue, one might wonder why so judicious an interpreter as Bussanich is so staunchly committed to this particular view. Although the pursuit of scholarly motivation, when not totally inappropriate, is usually pointless, it might be helpful to note that in an article appearing the year before the commentary, Bussanich 1987 undertook an analysis of those passages of *Enneads* that impute several putatively "illegal," self-directed activities to the One, and he demonstrated the wealth of remarkably cataphatic concepts that Plotinus had available to describe the first principle. The (quite admirable) intent of the article was primarily to serve as a much-needed corrective to the earlier tendency among scholars to discount some of Plotinus's statements about the One as indiscrete or unphilosophical violations of a higher principle of apophatic discourse and thereby to elevate Plotinus's One entirely beyond the reach of even mystical discourse. Bussanich rightly suggested that the experience of the mystical subject at the moment of union reflects that of the One itself, whose "rich inner life" had hitherto been underappreciated; but he nevertheless neglected any association between the One's own self-directed activities and those of the PNE in the first moments of ontogenesis, presumably because of his own understanding of the One—at least in non-mystical contexts—as a bounded domain, completely identified with its inward activities; see, for example, the discussion in Bussanich 1988, 77–78. The vaguely polemical concern of the article may have motivated him to emphasize the inclusivity and complexity of the One and to take as strictly internal to the First principle those activities that I would tend to see instead as belonging to the PNE, not yet fully distinct from the One, yet not purely internal to it either. In other words, Bussanich was able to expand the domain of the One only by contracting that of the PNE, and this position ultimately compelled him to emphasize the mystical subject's similarity with the One over its similarity with the PNE.

model of sexual desire and consummation. The specifically erotic aspect of the mystical self-reversion emerges throughout Plotinus's first treatise, 1.6[1]. At 5.5–9, he says that the “true lovers” of beauty will have an intense autoerotic experience at the moment of autophany: “What do you experience upon seeing your own beauty? And how will you be caught up in a Bacchic frenzy and moved upwards and long to ‘be together’ with yourselves, gathering yourselves together away from your bodies?” (καὶ ἑαυτοὺς δὲ ἰδόντες τὰ ἔνδον καλοὺς τί πάσχετε; καὶ πῶς ἀναβαλκχεύεσθε καὶ ἀνακινεῖσθε καὶ ἑαυτοῖς συνεῖναι ποθεῖτε συλλεξάμενοι αὐτοὺς ἀπὸ τῶν σωμαμάτων;). One should note that the verb *syneinai*, “to be together with,”—as it is thus often undertranslated—not only implies the moment of self-unification (phase C<sup>2</sup>) but also, when it occurs in mystical passages in the context of desire for beauty, is undoubtedly intended to be taken in its secondary, specifically erotic, sense, as “to have sexual intercourse with.” Thus the image of the transcendental self “being together with” itself occurs later at 1.6[1].9.15–19: “If you have become this, and see it, and, *you, pure, ‘come together’ with yourself*, having no impediment to thus coming towards one” (εἰ γέγονας τοῦτο καὶ εἶδες αὐτὸ καὶ σαυτῷ καθαρὸς συνεγένου οὐδὲν ἔχων ἐμπόδιον πρὸς τὸ εἰς οὕτω γενέσθαι). The same verb recurs during an analogous phase of self-unification at VI.9[9].10.10: the autophanous aspirant “will ‘*be together*’ with himself in such a manner” (αὐτῷ τοιοῦτῳ συνέσται). At VI.7[38].22.6–19, the vision of the One is said to fill the soul of the ascending aspirant with love and, at lines 8–10, to squirt a kind of erotic outflow into the soul; the line literally reads, “the soul, thence taking into herself an efflux, is moved and dances in a Bacchic frenzy and is struck with vehement desire and becomes love” (καὶ τοῖνυν ψυχὴ λαβοῦσα εἰς αὐτὴν τὴν ἐκεῖθεν ἀπορροὴν κινεῖται καὶ ἀναβαλκχεύεται καὶ οἷστρον πίμπλαται καὶ ἔρωσ γίνεται); then, at lines 18–19, the soul “naturally rises above, raised by the giver of love” (αἴρεται φύσει ἄνω αἰρομένη ὑπὸ τοῦ δόντος τὸν ἔρωτα). Later, at 34.1–4, this love is associated with the hypernoetic formlessness we have already seen to be a prerequisite for the ultimate apprehension of the One: “when [the soul] acquires an intense love of it, she sets aside all shape which she has, and even whatever shape of the intelligible might be in her” (ἐπεὶ καὶ ψυχὴ, ὅταν αὐτοῦ ἔρωτα σύντονον λάβῃ, ἀποτίθεται πᾶσαν ἣν ἔχει μορφήν, καὶ ἥτις ἂν καὶ νοητοῦ ᾖ ἐν αὐτῇ); finally, at 35.21–24, the aspirant is assimilated to the mystically-frenzied “loving Intellect” (νοῦς ἐρώων) that attains MUO by means of “some thrusting and receiving” (ἐπιβολῇ τινὶ καὶ παραδοχῇ). Moreover, as we have seen (*supra*, Chapter 2, pp. 54–56), Plotinus often expresses the ultimate coalescence with the One in explicitly sexual, if putatively metaphorical, terms; thus at the moment of union with the One, the love of the mystical subject for the One merges with and participates in the paradoxical love of the

One for itself.<sup>137</sup> Indeed, in several places throughout VI.8[39], Plotinus suggests that the One is primarily *erōs*; at 15.1, he proclaims that it is “beloved and love and love of himself” (καὶ ἐράσμιον καὶ ἔρωσ ὁ αὐτὸς καὶ αὐτοῦ ἔρωσ). This love is expressed with the same sexual double-entendre that was applied to the autophanous self earlier in I.6[1]: thus at VI.8[39].15.2–4, immediately following the equation of One and *erōs*: “[the One’s] ‘being together’ with himself could not be otherwise than if the one ‘being together’ and that with which it ‘is together’ were the same” (τὸ συνεῖναι ἑαυτῷ οὐκ ἂν ἄλλως ἔχοι, εἰ μὴ τὸ συνὸν καὶ τὸ ᾧ σύνεστιν ἓν καὶ ταῦτόν εἴη); the same image of the One ‘being together’ with itself (i.e., having sexual intercourse with itself) is repeated in the subsequent lines.<sup>138</sup> Significantly, Plotinus is explicit that the One’s erotic nature corresponds to its own ineffable self-reversion; thus 16.12–13: “[the One] is, as it were, borne into his own interior, as it were, loving himself” (ὁ δ’ εἰς τὸ εἶσω οἶον φέρεται αὐτοῦ οἶον ἑαυτὸν ἀγαπήσας). I would suggest, *contra* Bussanich, that this self-directed activity simultaneously belongs to the incipient PNE, from which the One’s love is not demarcated: for “the love here” Plotinus says later (at VI.7[38].32.26–28), “is not delimited, because neither is the beloved, but this love would be unlimited.” In the next few lines (32.31–34, cited above, Plotinus 140), Plotinus makes it clear that this unlimited love is not restricted to the “interior” of the One; rather, it is generative of beauty by means of its own “excess” (περιουσίᾳ). Although the term *erōs* itself is not explicitly applied, Plotinus’s descriptions of the relation of the PNE to the One are overwhelmingly evocative of erotic attraction, which is, undoubtedly, the motive for *epistrophē* (just as the One is “borne to its own interior” by self-love). An explicit instance of this occurs at V.1[10].6.50, where in the context of ontogenesis, Plotinus describes the relationship of the incipient Intellect and the One in essentially, if not literally erotic terms, but then says axiomatically that “everything longs for its parent and loves it” (ποθεῖ δὲ πᾶν τὸ γεννήσαν καὶ τοῦτο ἀγαπᾷ). It seems difficult to deny that this applies to the PNE. The term *agapein* / *agapē*, for Plotinus, is virtually synonymous with *eran* / *erōs*, and he uses both to describe the One’s self-love. Finally, the motif of sexual reproduction is also implicit in the relationship between One and PNE. As we have seen, the latter is “impregnated” by its fertile vision of the One and thus “conceives” the Forms within it: a biological model which recurs on subsequent ontological strata.<sup>139</sup>

137 Thus also Bussanich 1987.

138 At VI.9[9].6.49 Plotinus similarly says the One is “‘together with’ itself” (συνὸν αὐτῷ).

139 One might, however, still wonder why, if I am correct, Plotinus did not apply the term *erōs* explicitly to the PNE as distinct from the One’s self-directed activity. A plausible explanation is that the concept of *erōs* has extremely positive connotations for Plotinus, and is invariably connected with all stages of ascent. It is well known that depending on the

### 3.22 *Summary of Structural Homologies*

Thus far we have seen numerous striking parallels in the terminology Plotinus uses to describe the condition of both the hypernoetic and prenoetic subjects. At this point it will also be useful to summarize the structural homology between the phases of ascent and those of ontogenesis. Both mystical subject and PNE undergo a sequence of (i) self-reversion, (ii) stasis, and (iii) autophany or sudden self-apprehension and (iv) “filling” or “impregnation,” at which point (v) a sudden transformation or phase-shift occurs. In the case of ontogenesis, this marks the delimitation of the previously-unbounded PNE; in the case of mystical ascent, it marks instead the attainment of the transcendental self at the penultimate moment just prior to MUO. It is at this moment that both subjects breach the boundary between the realm of Intellect-Being and the hypernoetic and hyperontic “domain” of the One. The self-apprehension that fills and thus assimilates the mystical one into its own hypernoetic condition reiterates *precisely* the original self-apprehension that fills and thus delimits the ontogenetic subject.<sup>140</sup> There is, of course, one important difference: in the case of mystical ascent, the subject is in the process of converging upon and eventually coalescing with its object, while in the case of ontogenesis, the indefinite subject is at the cusp of the first distinction between subject and object and is moving towards greater separation and alterity; nevertheless, at the very moment of self-apprehension, according to a kind of commutative principle, the two subjects are essentially identical.

Yet one may discern additional structural correspondences as well. First, both the hypernoetic and prenoetic subjects extend between (i) a One-like unity and (ii) a peculiar duality of active and passive modalities. As we have seen, in the mystical ascent, the subject coalesces with his or her own transcendental self in a moment of self-unification just short of the final moment of annihilation and union (phases D and E). The two sub-phases of the autophanous state—one, the autophany itself (phase C), which entails the minimal duality of subject and object, and the other, the self-unification (phase C<sup>2</sup>), which transcends this duality—correspond to a very similar dyadic aspect of

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context his accounts of procession vary in tone from the highly positive to the frankly pessimistic. Since the intent of the ontogenetic passages is to explain the generation of inferior ontological strata without imputing intentionality to the One, while that of the mystical passages is to represent the positive aspect of reintegration with the source of love, one might expect the more positive, erotic aspect of the latter to be emphasized.

140 I therefore cannot agree with Bussanich that loving, hypernoetic and prenoetic states are “not even really similar.”

the PNE. Although the PNE may be said to emerge from the One as a unity,<sup>141</sup> in its epistrophic state a minimal duality may be distinguished: it is simultaneously the passive, indefinite, substrate, often described in negative terms (as matter or otherness), and also the active, luminous, efflux of the One that imprints and defines that very substrate. This duality maps directly onto the dual semantics of the term *dynamis*, with which he often characterizes the prenoetic effluence: in the case of the One, it is virtually synonymous with *energeia* and implies an active power, but when Plotinus applies it to the material substrate, it retains its Aristotelian sense of purely passive potentiality.<sup>142</sup> Thus the apparent paradox between Plotinus's alternate descriptions of the transcendental self in terms of both effulgent beauty and hylic indefiniteness<sup>143</sup> may be resolved if one understands this to reflect a similar duality inherent in the PNE.

Second, the next phase—the annihilation (phase D) in which even the transcendental self-identity must be surrendered—recapitulates, but now in reverse, the initial expansion and overflow of the emergent PNE from the One. We may recall that the first incipient overflow is at first paradoxically *both* identical to *and* different from its source; the pre-epistrophic PNE begins as identical with the One, but proceeds minimally outwards until it becomes “another.” This process is mirrored by the phase of annihilation, in which the transcendental self-identity attained in the self-coalescence (phase C<sup>2</sup>) immediately after the autophany must be surrendered. At the moment of self-identity, the subject both is and is not identical to the One. This subject is, of course, the hypernoetic “something of [the One] in us” (III.8[30].9.23; VI.7[38].31.8): the enigmatic *dynamis* or *archē* of the self that permits MUO; and it is only this principle's own hypernoetic selfhood that inhibits an unqualified identification with the One. This parallel is supported by the fact that Plotinus uses the image of the return of an image to its archetype at VI.9[9].11.43–45 (ἔχει ὁμοίωμα ἐκείνου αὐτόν, καὶ εἰ ἀφ' αὐτοῦ μεταβαίνοι ὡς εἰκὼν πρὸς ἀρχέτυπον) to describe the final progression from the stage of the self-unification of the transcendental self above Being (phase C<sup>2</sup>) to that of self-annihilation (phase D) and MUO proper (phase E); at V.1[10].6.33–34 he uses the same image, though in reverse order, to describe the first minimal emergence of the PNE from its source during ontogenesis, as “an image of the archetypes out from which it grew” (εἰκόνα οὖσαν οἶον ἀρχετύπων ὧν ἐξέφυ).

141 Thus III.8[30].8.32–33: “beginning as one it did not remain as it began” (ἀρξάμενος ὡς ἓν οὐχ ὡς ἥρξατο ἔμεινεν); although one should note that Plotinus also sometimes hints that it is the Dyad or a prefiguration of multiplicity.

142 Plotinus is explicitly aware of this ambiguity; thus VI.8[39].1.11–13 and V.3[49].15.33–35.

143 See *supra*, Chapter 2.

Finally, one might note—as Trouillard did long ago—that in dynamic terms, the ultimate moment of ascent is itself indistinguishable from the first moment of ontogenesis, the “extase germinale”: thus as we saw previously (in Chapter 2, pp. 60–61), the MUO itself coincides with a moment of desubjectification (phase E<sup>2</sup>) and an incipient outward shift of the formerly centripetal dynamic thrust. MUO is thus not equated—as it might be facetiously caricatured—with a moment of static beatitude, but rather with an overflow of overwhelmingly generative power: with “the ray that generates Intellect,” with “the first life,” with the outshining to be contemplated by another subject, with *nous erōn*’s fertilizing “reception” (*paradochē*) from the One that initiates procession, and so on. Like the foamy crest of a breaking wave, the apex of the ascent is also, simultaneously, the first moment of the procession (not coincidentally, P uses the metaphor of a wave to describe MUO).<sup>144</sup>

#### 4 The Convergence of Prenoeitic and Hypernoetic Ecstasy

##### 4.1 *The Conflation of Ontogenesis and MUO in the Simile of the Adyton at VI.9[9].11.22–25*

In order to demonstrate conclusively that Plotinus envisioned a convergence or even identity between the very last moment of mystical ascent and the very first moment of procession, I will now focus upon the semantic range of the terminology in just one of Plotinus’s more cataphatic (and textually problematic) descriptions of the final moment of MUO: the famous simile of the *adyton* at VI.9[9].11.22–25. This passage occurs in one of Plotinus’s first complete accounts of a robust mystical union with the One, but I deferred discussion of it in Chapter 2 because, I believe, it can only be fully understood in connection with the broader homology between mystical and hypernoetic subjects that we have examined in this chapter. The context of the passage is as follows. In chapter 11, lines 16 to 22, Plotinus compares the final stages of the approach to the One with the experience of a devotee who first contemplates statues or cult-icons standing outside a temple before penetrating into the inner sanctuary (*adyton*) to contemplate the god within. In the analogy the icons outside the temple correspond to the Forms within the hypostatic Intellect and the interior of the *adyton* itself to the realm of the One above Intellect.<sup>145</sup> In the next line, Plotinus corrects himself, since the supreme principle cannot,

144 VI.7[38].36.17: τοῦ νοῦ οἶον κύματι.

145 “The intercourse there with the [divine inside the temple]” (*tēn ekei synousian pros ... auto*) corresponds to contemplation of the One itself in the hyper-noetic realm. Hadot 1994,

properly speaking, be an *object* of contemplation. Instead, he says, the contemplation within the *adyton* is “perhaps not something seen, but another way to see” (τὸ δὲ ἴσως ἦν οὐ θέαμα, ἀλλὰ ἄλλος τρόπος τοῦ ἰδεῖν), and he illustrates this with six striking predicates, in what is perhaps the most explicit and cataphatic description of mystical apprehension of the One to be found anywhere in the *Enneads*. For the moment I will refrain from translating the phrase in question, but the text reads as follows: “τὸ δὲ ἴσως ἦν οὐ θέαμα, ἀλλὰ ἄλλος τρόπος τοῦ ἰδεῖν, ἔκστασις καὶ ἄπλωσις καὶ ἐπίδοσις αὐτοῦ [H-S<sup>1</sup>: αὐτοῦ] καὶ ἔφεσις πρὸς ἀφήν καὶ στάσις καὶ περινόησις πρὸς ἐφαρμογήν.”

This intriguing passage defies simple explanation and as a consequence has been the source of much scholarly perplexity. First, one might wonder whether this is merely a haphazard collection of terms that struggle to communicate an ineffable state—a bewildered stuttering—as many scholars have thought,<sup>146</sup> or whether instead, as I suspect, these terms were carefully selected to convey a precise meaning. One might also wonder whether these six attributes describe aspects of a single instant or instead several different, sequential phases of mystical apprehension. For if they are intended to describe the same temporal or logical moment, how can *stasis* be reconciled with *ekstasis* and with the directed motion implied by the other prepositional terms? Another, related, question is whether they all correspond to the ultimate stage of ascent—the mystical union itself (MUO proper, phase E)—or instead to what is still a penultimate stage (phase C<sup>2</sup>, the self-unification, or phase D, the annihilation), above the ordinary Intellect but just short of union with the One. At first glance this latter option would seem to be a possibility, since there are parallels for several of these terms in descriptions of the penultimate stage elsewhere,<sup>147</sup> and since some of Plotinus’s other descriptions of union would seem to imply a more absolute coalescence.<sup>148</sup> Moreover, it is hard to see how

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207–13, suggests that the entire temple-image may also be understood as a representation of the levels of the human soul.

146 The former option is typified, for example, by Arnou 1922, 236: “Plotin a donné lui-même à sa façon une définition de cette expérience du divin, dont il note en quelques traits rapides et sans ordre les différents moments, description génétique plutôt qu’analyse rigoureuse.”; also Meijer 1992, 280: “it suffices to underline that they are all aporetic terms, merely approximately correct, for ultimately it is impossible to describe the activities on the part of the soul.”

147 Thus, for example, we find the aspirant perceiving himself as *haploun* earlier in the treatise, at VI.9[9].10.11; or cognates of *histēnai* at e.g., IV.8[6].1.7, VI.9[9].9.51, and V.5[32].8.11; one might also compare the *stasis* and *epidosis hautou* to *stas* and *didous* at the penultimate phase of mystical union at V.5[32].8.11 (and also the apparently synonymous *heauton aphenta* at III.8[30].9.30).

148 E.g., VI.9[9].11.4–5; VI.7[38].34.13–14 etc.



one could “long” for something at the moment one attains it. And if in fact the *adyton* implies a hypernoetic stage, how can one have any kind of *noēsis* of the supreme principle, even *perinoēsis*, whatever this means?<sup>149</sup> And more generally, even if one only takes this to refer to a penultimate phase, how could there remain such complexity, such longing, and such an implicit separation of subject and object at the hypernoetic level of reality?

These apparent paradoxes have led scholars to proffer a number of differing and even contradictory interpretations.<sup>150</sup> I would therefore like to propose a new interpretation. Before I get to my analysis, however, I should explain how this passage has typically been understood. According to most commentators, the entire list is an attempt to redescribe the hypernoetic stage of ascent in terms of the abandonment of selfhood, and to do so without the subject-object duality ordinarily implied by the language of perception. The *ekstasis*, then, represents the self-annihilation (phase D) that one also finds elsewhere in Plotinus’s descriptions of the final stages of ascent, and all other features more or less follow from this. Thus *haplōsis* in this case means a “simplification” of the self, a reading that is rendered plausible by Plotinus’s equivalent application of the adjective *haploun* both to the mystical subject earlier in the treatise,<sup>151</sup> and elsewhere, to the One itself.<sup>152</sup> Likewise, the *epidosis hautou* implies a self-surrender; one must “give oneself up” entirely to the One through a progressive catharsis and the eventual abdication of one’s ordinary identity.<sup>153</sup>

149 Plotinus spends a great deal of energy elsewhere rejecting ordinary intellection *per se* as a means of attaining the One. Indeed, this peculiarity led W. Theiler to suggest an emendation to *perineusis* (a “sliding around,” “oscillation” or “inclining around”), a choice supported in the most recent translation and commentary by Hadot (1994). While absolving the mystic from (obviously inappropriate) intellection at the hypernoetic stage, *perineusis* nevertheless retains a disturbingly centrifugal connotation; elsewhere Plotinus’s use of *neusis* in the context of procession has a negative valence (see Sleeman-Pollet 1980, 676), the least negative instance being that of the One to itself at vi.8[39].16.24.

150 Thus, for example, for Meijer 1992, 282, all six terms refer only to the penultimate stage and represent a state of the soul of the aspirant alone, not the union itself; the apparent paradoxes are intentionally “aporetical.” Beierwaltes 1985, 140–41, takes *ekstasis* to indicate the union itself, and reconciles it with *stasis* by taking the latter word to apply only to cessation of thinking. For Hadot 1994, 207, only the first three terms describe the state of the self at the ultimate union, while the others indicate merely a desire or tendency. For Bussanich 1988, 171, the first three terms—*ekstasis*, *haplōsis*, and *epidosis hautou*—are all synonymous with the ultimate union and indicate the soul’s “self-transcendence.”

151 vi.9[9].10.11.

152 E.g., at i.6[1].7.9; compare also v.3[49].10.44, where Intellect unfolds because thinking “must not remain simple” (*dei ... mēde ... menein haploun*).

153 Perhaps yet another mystical-erotic innuendo, of a sort extremely common in Plotinus’s descriptions of MUO.

The *epheis pros haphēn* exemplifies the metaphorical imagery of erotic attraction and physical contact that Plotinus frequently employs to evoke the mystical approach to the One.<sup>154</sup> The *stasis* suggests the attainment of a motionlessness state during the union.<sup>155</sup> Finally, the *perinoēsis pros epharmogēn* suggests yet again a peripheral motion towards conformity with the One, using the (strictly speaking) inappropriate but still vaguely descriptive terminology of cognition.<sup>156</sup>

According to the general interpretations that have been suggested thus far, then, these six predicates are meant to emphasize the self-annihilation or the abdication of individual identity in a phase of the ascent (phase D) that is either an immediate prerequisite to, or coextensive with, the ultimate MUO (phase E). Yet not only does this reading ultimately leave the conceptual ambiguities of the passage unaddressed, it also tells only half the story. For taken as a whole, the ensemble of six predicates simultaneously admits another interpretation. The alternative reading arises from the semantic ambiguity of several of the terms, and it coexists happily with the more common interpretation but resolves the apparent tensions. Most importantly, as we shall see, this secondary reading is consistent with the identification of hypernoetic and prenoetic subjects that we have seen in the preceding section.

Let us begin, then, with a closer look at the first three terms, *ekstasis*,<sup>157</sup> *haplōsis*, and *epidosis hautou*. First, with respect to *ekstasis*, there should be no serious doubt that Plotinus envisioned union with the One as an “ecstasy”

154 E.g., at VI.9[9].4.27, Plotinus refers to “grasping” (*ephapsasthai*) or “touching” (*thigein*) the One.

155 One might compare the “rest” that comprises the apex of the mystical ascent in an immediately preceding passage, VI.9[9].11.15–16: “having come to a complete standstill and as it were having become a kind of *stasis*” (*hestōs pantē kai hoion stasis genomenos*). This *stasis* is probably not to be confused with *stasis* at the level of *Nous* that, along with *kinēsis*, Plotinus adopts from Plato’s *megista genē* (*Sophist* 254c–259d). While the One itself, of course, cannot *literally* be described as “at rest” (since it transcends the categories of *stasis* and *kinēsis* altogether), *stasis* is nevertheless an appropriate term to evoke the state of the mystical subject. This may also be understood as akin to the experience of “coming to rest” (*anapausamenou*) in the One, in a putatively metaphorical sexual embrace earlier in the treatise, at 4.19–20.

156 I.e., *-noēsis*; or equivalently, if one prefers Theiler’s emendation, the equally inappropriate spatial metaphor, *-neusis*. The word *epharmogē* may mean the coincidence of geometrical figures (see LSJ 741a)—reminiscent of Plotinus’s frequent geometric analogy for union—but it can also be as general as “accommodation” or “agreement,” so this phrase could simply imply an adjustment of one’s thinking *after* the experience.

157 Theiler (in Harder 1971) suggested reading this *stasis* and deleting the *stasis* in the next line; Meijer 1992, 280–81, n. 798, proposes *ektasis*, “extending.”

or as some kind of altered state of consciousness.<sup>158</sup> However, this is not the primary sense of the word elsewhere in the *Enneads*, where it typically denotes precisely an *ek-stasis*, a “standing *outside*,” a displacement or an extension: a concept that seems quite opposite to his usual emphasis on interiorization and self-unification during the mystical ascent. Indeed, every other occurrence of *ekstasis* in the *Enneads* signifies an undesirable exteriorization towards an inferior ontological stratum. At v.3[49].7.14, for instance, Plotinus applies it (with a negative evaluation) to Intellect;<sup>159</sup> at i.1[53].5.23, to the appetitive part of soul; and, at vi.3[44].2.20, to matter.<sup>160</sup> So while in this case it still could mean that one has been displaced from oneself by a mystical frenzy to “make room” for the One, it also connotes a decline towards the exterior or a decentralization.<sup>161</sup>

Next, we have a similar ambiguity in the case of the Plotinian hapax *haplōsis*. Besides the putative (but elsewhere-unattested) sense of “simplification” (on the basis of *haplous*), the verb *haploun* ordinarily means “to expand” or “unfold,” and this is in fact the only meaning of this word elsewhere in the *Enneads*. Thus at vi.7[38].1.55–56, Plotinus uses *haploumenon* and *ekteinomenon* conjointly to describe the unfolding of all things from the Intellect.<sup>162</sup> The verb *haplōtheis* is also used in an apparently mystical context at vi.7[38].35.26 to describe the *nous erōn*’s intoxication after having been “filled with nectar”;<sup>163</sup>

158 A doubt expressed, for example, by Armstrong 1988, 7.343, n. 1, and Beierwaltes 1985, 140 and n. 40, who finds a Platonic source for it at *Phaedrus* 249c8–9 (ἐξιστάμενος δὲ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων σπουδασμάτων καὶ πρὸς τῷ θεῷ γιγνόμενος), which is rather weak evidence for his argument, since Plato immediately goes on to say that such a person will be thought insane by those who do not recognize that he is divinely possessed. That *ekstasis* had the connotation of “ecstasy” in Plotinus’s time is evident—see, e.g., BDAG, s.v. “ἐκστασις”—and it is therefore unlikely that this sense did not somehow factor into Plotinus’s choice of this word.

159 Where he opposes it to the preferable *hēsychia*; see also, possibly, vi.7[38].17.40, if one rejects Theiler’s emendation to *ektasei*.

160 See Sleeman and Pollet 1980, 355.

161 Plotinus’s habitual use of *ekstasis* to denote ontological decline has been noted by several scholars, but they generally make an exception in this passage; thus Meijer 1992; see esp. Ferwerda 1965, 192: “Les mots *existasthai* et *ekstasis* ... désignent, à l’exception d’un seul passage (vi.9[9].11.23) le mouvement *descendant* des hypostases supérieure; il s’agit donc d’une sortie de soi qui les éloigne de plus en plus de l’unité primitive.”

162 vi.7[38].1.54–58: πάντα ἄρα ἡδὴ ἦν καὶ αἰὶ ἦν καὶ οὕτως ἦν, ὡς εἰπεῖν ὕστερον τότε μετὰ τότε· ἐκτεινόμενον μὲν γὰρ καὶ οἷον ἀπλούμενον ἔχει δεικνύναι τότε μετὰ τότε, ὁμοῦ δὲ ὅν πάν τὸδε· τοῦτο δὲ ἐστὶν ἔχον ἐν ἑαυτῷ καὶ τὴν αἰτίαν.

163 vi.7[38].35.19–26: καὶ τὸν νοῦν τοίνυν τὴν μὲν ἔχειν δύναμιν εἰς τὸ νοεῖν, ἣ τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ βλέπει, τὴν δὲ, ἣ τὰ ἐπέκεινα αὐτοῦ ἐπιβολὴν τινα καὶ παραδοχήν, καθ’ ἣν καὶ πρότερον ἑώρα μόνον καὶ ὁρῶν ὕστερον καὶ νοῦν ἔσχε καὶ ἔν ἐστι. καὶ ἔστιν ἐκείνη μὲν ἣ θεὰ νοῦ ἔμφρονος, αὕτη δὲ νοῦς ἐρῶν, ὅταν ἄφρων γένηται μεθυσθεὶς τοῦ νέκταρος· τότε ἐρῶν γίνεται ἀπλωθεὶς εἰς εὐπάθειαν τῷ κόρῳ.

thus the sense in the latter case is almost certainly “*expanded* into enjoyment by its satiety,” rather than Armstrong’s unlikely “*simplified* into happiness by having its fill” or Hadot’s somewhat preferable “*s’épanouissant dans la jouissance, à cause de l’état de satiété dans lequel il se trouve.*”<sup>164</sup> Furthermore, the interpretation of *haplōtheis* as “expanded” or “spread out” seems to be confirmed in a later treatise, at III.5[50].9.2, where the same term is applied to the Poros (“Plenty”) of Platonic myth (*Symp.* 203b). Here Plotinus says that Poros is a logos from Intellect that has fallen to the level of the soul, and, somewhat like the *nous erōn*, is intoxicated with nectar; thus Armstrong’s translation has Poros “more diffused (*kechymenos*) and, as it were, spread out (*haplōtheis*).”<sup>165</sup> Thus again with *haplōsis* we have a curious hint of what would typically represent, in Plotinus’s essentially centripetal hierarchy of value, a dissipation or dissolution towards the inferior.<sup>166</sup>

Now we come to *epidosis hautou*. It is perhaps not so surprising that there is also a vaguely expansive connotation lurking somewhere in the semantic unconscious of this word. At first glance, this suggests a self-surrender to the One. Yet on closer inspection this turns out not to be so certain. LSJ, for example, cites the occurrence of the phrase in this very passage as the sole example with the sense of “self-surrender.” Moreover, Plotinus’s only other uses of *epidosis* mean something quite different: specifically, an increase or augmentation. At I.5[36].1.1 and 6.19, he uses *epidosis* to mean “increase” as it applies to *eudaimonia*, and at I.9[16].18–19 he uses it in an indirect reference to an increase in virtue. Thus Plotinus’s use of the term in our passage contrasts again somewhat surprisingly with the more typical imagery of self-contraction in mystical contexts.

164 Here Hadot 1988, 174, n. 309, follows Ficino’s rendering *seipsam diffundens*.

165 III.5[50].9.1–3: ὁ οὖν Πόρος λόγος ὢν τῶν ἐν τῷ νοητῷ καὶ νῶ καὶ μᾶλλον κεχυμένος καὶ οἶον ἀπλωθεὶς περὶ ψυχὴν ἂν γένοιτο καὶ ἐν ψυχῇ.

166 An interesting but highly speculative comparison may be made to the controversial ontogenetic passage at V.3[49].11.1–4, in which the “multiple intellect” (*ho nous ... ho polys*) wishes to “flower upon” (*epithallein*, acc. to most mss.) or to “attain” (*epiballein* according to H-S<sup>2</sup>) the One “in its simplicity [?]” (*en haplōi*), but fails and instead divides it up into many. The strangeness of *en haplōi* is rarely noted in the literature, but one might conceivably associate it with the *haplōsis* of our passage, and if it applies to the subject, the *nous ho polys*, rather than the One, one might understand it as “in (its, i.e., the Nous’s) expansion” rather than “in (its, i.e., the One’s) simplicity.” This in turn strengthens the case for reading *epithallein*, because the implication would be that the Nous unfolds expansively from or “flowers upon” the One somewhat like a baobab tree on the surface of the Little Prince’s planet. Additionally, one may note similar terminology (*epanthoun*) occurs at VI.2[43].21.13, where it describes quality (*to poion*) blossoming from Intellect.

Thus far—according to this interpretation—the first triad of terms connotes a distinct centrifugal motion: a self-expansion or dissolution. Conversely, however, in the case of the next three terms—*epheſis pros haphēn*, *stasis*, and *perinoēsis pros epharmogēn*—the emphasis instead suggests a reversion towards or re-assimilation with the supreme principle. At this point, before continuing with this analysis, I should make absolutely clear what I am suggesting. While these six terms certainly are meant to describe the paradoxical hypernoetic apprehension of the One from the perspective of the mystical subject at the ultimate climax of MUO, here Plotinus has found an ingenious way to suggest—*simultaneously*—the first atemporal moments of procession in which, as we have seen, the One's PNE expands and then reverts imperfectly to its source—its former self—to become Intellect proper.<sup>167</sup>

This will become clearer when we examine the next three terms. I suggest that this second triad of terms also implicitly corresponds to Plotinus's descriptions of the *second* moment of ontogenesis in which the incipient PNE is attracted back to its source in a moment of primordial self-reversion. First, let us consider *epheſis pros haphēn*, “longing for contact.” Now elsewhere, of course, the mystical self-reversion as well as the final moments of ascent are described with erotic language.<sup>168</sup> However, it may be significant that on occasion, as we have seen, Plotinus describes the impetus for the *primordial* self-reversion in erotic terms, as the One's love of itself (at, for example, VI.8[39].15.1–2 and 16.12–16). More importantly, however, he repeatedly employs the specific term *epheſis* and its cognates to describe the nature of the PNE in ontogenetic contexts.<sup>169</sup> Thus, for example, at V.3[49].11.12, he calls the pre-epistrophic PNE “longing (*epheſis*) and unimprinted vision (*atypōtos opsis*).”<sup>170</sup> Similarly, at V.6[24].5.8–10, in the

167 Compare, for example, VI.8[39].18.20: “as it were poured out (*ekchythen*) and unfolded (*exelichthen*) and hanging out from (*exērtēmenon*)” the One.

168 As we have seen, for example, with the auto-erotic passage of I.6[1].9 and the *nous erōn* of VI.7[38].35.24.

169 In his attempt to discredit identificationism, Bussanich 1988, 235 struggles to contrast the *epheſis* and *kinēsis* of the emergent pre-Intellect with the supposed immobility of the subject at the final moment of mystical union: “The immobility of the unitive state contrasts sharply with the definition of the potential Intellect as *kinēsis* and *epheſis*.” He seems not to have taken sufficiently into account this passage and many others we have seen in Chapter 2. that indicate a surprising movement, even outward movement, at the moment of MUO.

170 V.3[49].11.1–16: Διὸ καὶ ὁ νοῦς οὗτος ὁ πολὺς, ὅταν τὸ ἐπέκεινα ἐθέλῃ νοεῖ, ἐν μὲν οὖν αὐτὸ ἐκεῖνο, ἀλλ’ ἐπιβάλλειν θέλων ὡς ἀπλῶ ἔξεισιν ἄλλο αἰεὶ λαμβάνων ἐν αὐτῷ πληθυνόμενον· ὥστε ὥρμησε μὲν ἐπ’ αὐτὸ οὐχ ὡς νοῦς, ἀλλ’ ὡς ὅψις οὐπω ἰδοῦσα, ἐξῆλθε δὲ ἔχουσα ὅπερ αὐτῇ ἐπλήθυνεν· ὥστε ἄλλου μὲν ἐπεθύμησεν ἀορίστως ἔχουσα ἐπ’ αὐτῇ φάντασμά τι, ἐξῆλθε δὲ ἄλλο λαβοῦσα ἐν αὐτῇ αὐτὸ πολὺ ποιήσασα. Καὶ γὰρ αὐτὴ ἔχει τύπον τοῦ ὁράματος· ἢ οὐ παρεδέξατο ἐν αὐτῇ [H-S<sup>1</sup> : αὐτῇ] γενέσθαι. Οὗτος δὲ πολὺς ἐξ ἐνὸς ἐγένετο, καὶ οὕτως γινὼς εἶδεν αὐτό, καὶ τότε ἐγένετο

course of a summary description of the genesis of Intellect, he says that thinking is “movement towards the Good, desiring that one (*ephiemenon ekeinou*); for desire (*ephesis*) generates thought and consubstantiates it with itself.”<sup>171</sup> With respect to *haphēn*, although Plotinus often uses the language of physical contact to describe *ΜΥΟ*,<sup>172</sup> he also uses non-cognitive, haptic imagery to suggest the presumably non-dualistic apprehension of the One by itself at the very first moment of procession; this precedes the fully-actualized but inferior form of vision that entails the first subject-object duality and the crystallization of the *ΠΝΕ* into Intellect. Thus, as we have seen, at V.3[49].10.42–44, the activity of what is either the One itself or the not-yet-differentiated *ΠΝΕ* is “only a touching (*thisis*) and as it were contact (*epaphē*) without speech and without thought, a pre-thinking (*pronoousa*), for Intellect has not yet come

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ἰδοῦσα ὄψις. Τοῦτο δὲ ἤδη νοῦς, ὅτε ἔχει, καὶ ὡς νοῦς ἔχει· πρὸ δὲ τούτου ἔφρεσις μόνον καὶ ἀτύπωτος ὄψις. Οὗτος οὖν ὁ νοῦς ἐπέβαλε μὲν ἐκείνῳ, λαβὼν δὲ ἐγένετο νοῦς, αἰὲ δὲ ἐνδεόμενος [H-S<sup>1</sup> : ἐνδιόμενος] καὶ γενόμενος καὶ νοῦς καὶ οὐσία καὶ νόησις, ὅτε ἐνόησε· πρὸ γὰρ τούτου οὐ νόησις ἦν τὸ νοητὸν οὐκ ἔχων οὐδὲ νοῦς οὕτω νόησας. This passage has been the subject of controversy. Although Plotinus begins with a description of what seems to be the already-determined “multiple Intellect” (*ho nous ... ho polys*) failing to grasp the absolute unity of the One, he seems to slide seamlessly into a description of the *pre-noetic* efflux; this is “sight not yet seeing” (*opsis oupō idousa*) and later “longing and unimprinted vision” (*ephesis kai atypōtos opsis*), which is in fact the incipient *ΠΝΕ* in the moments prior to its determination by its vision of the One. Many scholars (e.g., Bussanich 1988, 221; Emilsson 2007, 93, 99; etc.) correctly take this as a description of the genesis of Intellect itself, but Oosthout 1991, 149–51 treats the passage as if it pertains solely to an epistemological discussion of the actualized intellect’s (failed) apperception of absolute unity. Emilsson 2007, 80–101, tries to resolve this ambiguity by assuming Plotinus admitted some subject-object differentiation in the pre-Intellect; he consequently interprets the *nous ho polys* to mean the pre-Intellect, and—following Lloyd 1987—he differentiates between the One *itself* and the intranoetic *image* of the One that the emergent Intellect fails to grasp in a unified manner. I remain undecided; among other problems, it is unclear how any real pre-epistrophic, hyperontic multiplicity can exist (see Plotinus’s own admonitions, e.g., *inter alia*, V.6[24].6.8–11, along with Rist 1962). It may be that the first minimal duality is engendered by the *ΠΝΕ*’s self-objectification, at which point the subject becomes Intellect proper. The point is that here, as elsewhere (e.g., VI.7.[38].35), Plotinus seems to conflate descriptions of the genesis of Intellect with accounts of its attempts to attain absolute unity. Of course, it is precisely this ambiguity between mystical apprehension and ontogenesis that I am defending in this chapter.

171 V.6[24].5.5–10: τὸ γὰρ νοεῖν οὐ πρῶτον οὔτε τῷ εἶναι οὔτε τῷ τίμιον εἶναι, ἀλλὰ δεύτερον καὶ γενόμενον, ἐπειδὴ ὑπέστη τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ <τὸ> γενόμενον ἐκίνησε πρὸς αὐτό, τὸ δ’ ἐκινήθη τε καὶ εἶδε. καὶ τοῦτο ἐστὶ νοεῖν, κίνησις πρὸς ἀγαθὸν ἐφιέμενον ἐκείνου· ἡ γὰρ ἔφρεσις τὴν νόησιν ἐγέννησε καὶ συνυπέστησεν αὐτῇ [H-S<sup>1</sup>: αὐτῇ].

172 As we have seen in Chapter 2. However, as Meijer points out, this is the only place where *haphē* itself is thus employed; he explains this by noting Plotinus’s parallel uses of *happaxes* to describe the ultimate moment.

into being, and that which touches does not think.”<sup>173</sup> The term *epheſis pros haphēn*, therefore, is distinctly reminiscent of descriptions of the first impulse towards *epistrophē* in accounts of ontogenesis.

I have already mentioned that the next term, *stasis*, is puzzling because it occurs between two prepositional clauses that connote an activity directed towards the One from some minimal distance and that suggest the ultimate goal of complete coalescence has not yet been attained. Yet here we may recall that a moment of *stasis* similarly occurs in Plotinus’s accounts of procession. Indeed, the precise position of *stasis* in our passage corresponds exactly to Plotinus’s accounts of the primordial *epistrophē*, whose initial moment often precedes a subsequent mention of *stasis*. Thus, for example, at v.2[11].11–13, Plotinus describes the effluence of the One reverting towards its source to become Intellect and Being; only then, he says, “its *standing towards* that one (ἡ μὲν πρὸς ἐκεῖνο στάσις αὐτοῦ) makes Being, while its looking towards it is Intellect.” In the next line he repeats this notion of “standing towards”:<sup>174</sup> “Since it *stands towards* it (ἔσται πρὸς αὐτό) so that it should see, it becomes simultaneously Intellect and Being.” Similarly, at v.5[32].5.16–19, Plotinus describes the *stasis* of “primary Being” only after an initial moment of self-reversion: “proceeding, as it were, a little ways from there, did not wish to come forth any more, but having turned *towards its interior, stood*” (μεταστραφὲν δὲ εἰς τὸ εἶσω ἔσται).

Finally, we arrive at the curious phrase *perinoēsis pros epharmogēn*. By now, however, the intellection implied by *perinoēsis* will be somewhat less perplexing.<sup>175</sup> For we know that in Plotinus’s accounts of ontogenesis, the end result of the eternal process of self-reversion is the determinate Intellect, which now subsists as actualized thinking. Again, the preposition *pros* implies

<sup>173</sup> v.3[49].10.39–44: δεῖ τοῖνυν τὸ νοοῦν ἕτερον καὶ ἕτερον λαβεῖν καὶ τὸ νοοῦμενον κατανοοῦμενον ὃν ποικίλον εἶναι· ἢ οὐκ ἔσται νόησις αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ θίξις καὶ οἶον ἐπαφή μόνον ἄρρητος καὶ ἀνόητος, προνοοῦσα οὐπὶ νοῦ γεγονότος καὶ τοῦ θιγγάνοντος οὐ νοοῦντος. One might also compare the image of Intellect as the circle “growing” out from and “touching” its center-point at v1.8[39].18.4–9: *ephaptomenon ... ephaptetai ... ephaptoito*.

<sup>174</sup> Interestingly, Hadot 1994 emended *stasis* here to the accusative *stasin* so it could be taken along with *haphēn* as the indirect object of *epheſis*. Presumably this was an attempt to render its occurrence between the two *pros* constructions less peculiar, since according to this reading *stasin*, like *haphēn*, would be an intended result rather than a present state. But in light of the apparent parallels involving *stasis pros* at v.2[11].1 (and similar constructions elsewhere, such as *pros auton anapausaito* at v1.7[38].23.4, etc.), Hadot more easily might have left the ms. reading as it stands and taken *pros epharmōgen* to modify *stasis* along with *perinoēsis*.

<sup>175</sup> It makes little difference to my argument if we accept Theiler’s *perineusis*, since Plotinus similarly applies *neusis* to the emergent pre-Intellect’s reversion upon the One, at, e.g., v1.8[39]16.24.

some minimal separation from the One, and here the desired goal is no longer contact but the slightly weaker “adaptation” or “harmonization.”<sup>176</sup> That this final term in fact has a weaker sense than “contact” is suggested by the fact that Plotinus often uses one or another form of *epharmozein* to denote the ordinary emanative process occurring on several ontological strata, in which inferior principles conform to and participate in superior ones.<sup>177</sup> Whatever its precise meaning, then, *perinoēsis pros epharmogēn* describes an activity of apprehension directed towards or around the One from some minimal distance, a distance that creates a distinction between subject and object sufficient to be described more or less appropriately with the language of cognition that was so studiously avoided in the preceding five terms.

If I am correct, then, these six terms correspond to the germinal moment of procession from and reversion to the One that takes place in the interhypostatic domain between the One and Intellect. The first triad of terms connotes (1) the initial emergence of the One’s prenoetic superabundance, its (2) expansion, and its (3) growth, while the second triad suggests (4) the initial moment of erotic attraction of this efflux back towards its source, (5) the cessation of its outward motion and its ensuing stasis, and (6) the moment just prior to its delimitation as Intellect in conformity with its vision of the One. However, I would not deny that Plotinus intended this passage also, *simultaneously*, to suggest the ecstatic self-surrender of the aspirant (phase D) at the moment of MUO proper (phase E). In Chapter 2 we have already seen that a moment of incipient procession that I have described as a desubjectivization (phase E<sup>2</sup>) paradoxically coincides with the ultimate union itself. Indeed, the essentially untranslatable dual semantics at play here appears to be a deliberate and extremely subtle Plotinian device of a sort that has been noted elsewhere in his works: it is a means of evoking, in the necessarily delimited terms of language, both ambivalent relations of identity and difference, and simultaneous but opposing movements within a single, dynamic process.<sup>178</sup> Of course, if we accept the identification of hypernoetic and prenoetic subjects there is no paradox; we may conclude that (according to Plotinus) the mystical aspirant assumes the precise role or even identity of the emergent PNE, and for some brief

176 One might also compare Plotinus’s use of the prepositional prefix *peri-* in corresponding mystical and ontogenetic contexts, such as *periphōtisan* applied to the transcendental self of the ascending mystic at VI.9[9].4.20–21 and *perilampsin ... to peri auto lampron ... peritheon* applied to the luminous emanation of the One (or the Sun) at V.1[10].6.28–29.

177 E.g., VI.4[22].13.24; VI.6[34].11.30; VI.1[42].25.7; V.3[49].2.12, 6.27.

178 See especially on this Sells 1994, 19–31. This would appear to belie Porphyry’s claim that Plotinus was a somewhat careless writer. This analysis would imply that on the contrary, Plotinus chose at least certain terms with remarkable discernment.



moment participates experientially in the perpetual dynamic oscillation of simultaneous expansion and self-reversion whose origin and terminus is the One. In other words, the “other way to see” is in fact “seeing,” as it were, from the perspective of the One’s own prenoetic efflux (PNE) as it emerges from and converges upon its source.

This interpretation receives additional support from the fact that a similar double activity—an active, diastolic expansion and a passive, systolic, reception—lurks beneath other descriptions of MUO, and spermatically foreshadows the dynamic procession and reversion throughout all subsequent Plotinian reality.<sup>179</sup> Thus the *nous erōn* of VI.7[38].35 has both an active thrusting towards (*epibolē*) and a more passive reception from (*paradochē*) the One; similarly, in the next chapter, at 36.18–20, the MUO is described as a vision with both active and passive aspects: the subject first actively “looks into” (εἰσεῖδεν) the One, at which point the vision becomes active and “fills the eyes with light” (ἡ θέα πλήσασα φωτὸς τὰ ὄμματα). So also at III.8[30].10.31–35, in which MUO is described as “thrusting towards [the One] and striking it, coming to rest within it” (βαλὼν πρὸς αὐτὸ καὶ τυχὼν ἐντὸς αὐτοῦ ἀναπαυσάμενος) [See Appendix B15]. A curious ambivalence lurks within these passages, since the subject of the bi-directional activity may be equivalently taken to be either the PNE or the One, in accordance with desubjectification (phase E<sup>2</sup>). In the former case (with PNE as subject) the expansive motion suggests motion towards the One, while the contraction is the reception of the One’s effluence; in the latter case (in which the One is subject), the outward thrust represents the incipient procession while the phase of contraction reflects the ultimate reabsorption into the source. Of course, this distinction may be irrelevant, for inasmuch as MUO is a moment of absolute unity, the hypernoetic subject may also be understood to have identified completely with the One; but in this case the One itself must then be understood not as a discrete point, but as a dynamic process, the infinitesimal vibration at the root of all procession and return.

## 5 Conclusion

### 5.1 Summary

In this chapter, we have seen that (a) Plotinus envisioned the final stages of the ascent towards MUO—self-reversion, self-apprehension, self-coalescence, and

179 This fact was observed by Perczel 1997, who suggests that this active / passive duality in many mystical passages ultimately derives from a theory of sense-perception in Plato, *Theaetetus* 156a–157b.

self-dissolution—to reflect or even recapitulate the first moments of ontogenesis both during and prior to the first moment of *epistrophē*, and that (b) he believed this to be possible because of the close kinship or even identity between a hypernoetic faculty inherent within the human subject and the enigmatic prenoetic efflux (PNE) of the One. This resemblance was not coincidental nor merely the reflection of a subconscious tendency; the remarkable abundance of philological and conceptual parallels suggests that this identification was deliberate, if also, at times, extremely subtle. Yet the subtlety and bewildering complexity of this scheme—or its apparent lack of philosophical necessity—should not lead us to dismiss it as an eclectic or merely mythological addendum to Plotinus's otherwise more or less rational system. On the contrary: the correspondence between mystical ascent and ontogenesis is the very keystone of his thought, grounding both his mysticism and his metaphysics in a primal moment of reflexive self-apprehension.

## 5.2 *Remaining Problems*

Yet the philosophical peculiarity of this schema itself raises additional problems from an intellectual-historical perspective. The first and most obvious is how and why Plotinus arrived at this system. When purely 'rational' factors are not apparent (and even, in many cases, when they *are* apparent), a full explanation of a new development in the history of philosophy may be sought in a broader, extra-rational context. I will leave the full investigation into such a context for the next chapter. But one question must to be answered before I continue: namely, why, if I am correct, is Plotinus so evasive about such an important doctrine, alternately exposing it and veiling it under layers of contradictory proclamations and occasionally tortuous Greek? Part of the answer, of course, is quite simply that the doctrine itself concerns processes that elude precise expression in determinate language. But here I will briefly suggest another possible historical explanation for Plotinus's reticence that will also lead into a conjecture about the sources of his mystical schema. To begin with, we have seen that Plotinus is hampered by his own, occasionally quite strident dogmatism about the absence of intermediaries and the unity of Intellect (axiom [1]), a dogmatism that is in some tension with the more subtle equivocations and intimations perceptible in his mystical and ontogenetic passages. Indeed, the doctrine of the relations between and within the first and second hypostases seems to have been a subject of particular anxiety among Plotinus's circle. For instance, we know from a remarkable anecdote in Porphyry's *Vita Plotini* that Plotinus and Amelius politely but insistently coerced the young Porphyry to give a public recantation of his original "heresy"—a doctrine of extranoetic intelligibles presumably imparted by his

former teacher Longinus—that offended the official school “orthodoxy” concerning the unity of Intellect.<sup>180</sup> Yet why did Plotinus and his entourage insist on such a performance of unanimity over an issue about which Plotinus himself—and his senior pupil Amelius<sup>181</sup>—were often so equivocal? It may be significant that Plotinus’s most impassioned rejection of intermediaries occurs in the first two chapters of 11.9[33], his most explicitly anti-Gnostic treatise. From this we may begin to suspect that some sectarian concern underlies Plotinus’s apparent unease about this topic.<sup>182</sup> As we will explore further in Chapter 4, during Plotinus’s middle (Porphyrian) period, certain Platonizing Sethian Gnostics lurked on the periphery of his circle and were even ranked among his *philoi*,<sup>183</sup> while Sethian tractates were taken extremely seriously, and were read and refuted at great length by Plotinus’s innermost circle (especially by Amelius and Porphyry themselves).<sup>184</sup> From their extant writings we know that the Sethians engaged in a considerable amount of speculation about the relation between the first and second principle: the first, usually a transcendent, unknowable deity something like the Plotinian One; the second, typically a noetic principle akin to Plotinus’s second hypostasis. Unlike Plotinus, however, the Sethians explicitly postulated intermediary and often triadic entities between and within first and second principles. Moreover, the Sethian texts articulated this “interhypostatic” domain in great detail, and did so especially in the discussion of ritualized ascent towards the transcendent deity: ascents that—as we will soon see—also share many structural features with Plotinus’s ascent towards MUO. The implication, then, is that Plotinus’s dogmatic rejection of inter- and intra-hypostatic complexity was motivated by a sectarian desire to differentiate his own thought from that of the Gnostics,

180 Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 18.8–19.

181 While Plotinus has at least the excuse of his own obscurity on the matter, Amelius may be guilty of greater hypocrisy. If we trust Proclus (*In Platonis Timaeum commentaria* 1.306; 1.309; 3.103 Diehl), Amelius posited a discrete triad of intellects or indeed three independent intellects (based on the “three Kings” of Plato’s *Epistulae* 312e1–4)—“the one who is,” “the one who has,” and “the one who sees”—that mediate between the Intelligible itself and the demiurgic and psychic functions; on this, see Brisson 1987; Corrigan 1987.

182 That such an issue could become a source of intra-sectarian contention—and that it indeed did so among Gnostics—is made evident by Tertullian, *Adversus Valentianos* 4.2—quoted by Thomassen 2008, 264—who describes a schism within the Valentinian movement concerning the location of the aeons with respect to the supreme deity: “Ptolemy followed the same road (i.e., as Valentinus), distinguishing the aeons by names and numbers into personal substances *located outside god* [*sed extra deum determinatas*], whereas Valentinus *had included them in the totality of the deity himself* [*in ipsa summa diuinitatis ... includerat*] as thoughts, sentiments, and emotions.”

183 11.9[33].10.3.

184 Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 16.

while his reticence about those implicit interhypostases that he could not entirely extirpate from his derivational schema was driven by an acute, almost reflexive reaction to conceal any residual similarities between his own thought and certain Gnostic doctrines with which he was undoubtedly quite familiar and which, I suggest, he suspected to be embarrassingly close to his own. In the next chapter we will see that this unuttered suspicion would indeed have been accurate.

# “The Way of Ascent is the Way of Descent”: The Mechanism of Transcendental Apprehension in Platonizing Sethian Gnosticism

## 1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter we have seen that Plotinus envisioned the final stages of mystical ascent to the One to be homologous to the process by which the Intellect first emerges from it, and that he believed that the ultimate mystical union with the One (MUO) could be attained through the contemplative or visionary reiteration of the first reflexive moment of ontogenesis. Moreover, we have seen that he believed this experience to be possible because of the original kinship or consubstantiality of the center-point of the human subject with the prenoetic efflux (PNE): that is, with the ‘subject,’ as it were, of the primordial (self-) reflection of the transcendent principle. The point of this chapter is to demonstrate that this precise scheme is foreshadowed in certain prior or contemporaneous Gnostic systems, and that it is especially evident in those Platonizing Sethian tractates of which we have Coptic translations from Nag Hammadi—*Zostrianos* (NHC VIII,1) and *Allogenes* (NHC XI,3). These tractates describe the ascent of an eponymous visionary towards the utterly ineffable, unknowable deity, and the structure of the ascent—an inner ‘voyage,’ as it were, through the successive cosmic and hypercosmic strata of the complex metaphysical scaffolding by which the second, noetic, principle has unfurled from the first—shows many similarities to that of Plotinus. According to Porphyry’s *Vita Plotini* 16, the “apocalypses” (*apokalypseis*) of *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* were among those Gnostic tractates that were carefully read and critiqued at length in Plotinus’s circle, and it is therefore noncoincidental that the Nag Hammadi tractates with those titles closely resemble Plotinus’s thought.

To be specific, the argument of this chapter is that (a) the ultimate phase of the Sethian ascent entails precisely the same mechanism as in that of Plotinus: that is, the contemplative replication, within the mystical aspirant’s own consciousness, of the primordial self-reversion and / or self-reflection of the first principle by which the second principle is generated, and that (b) this visionary replication is possible, again as in Plotinus, because of an image or residue of the primordial self-reflection of the supreme principle that inheres within the elect human aspirant. Part 2 will present a brief outline of the common

structure behind the ascents of *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*. Part 3 will demonstrate that the Platonizing Sethian treatises (as well as their antecedents in the major second-century Gnostic systems) employ the related themes of mystical self-reversion and autophany that we have seen in Plotinus. Part 4 will provide a detailed analysis of the Sethian conception of the mechanism of transcendental apprehension and demonstrate that as in Plotinus it involves a recapitulation, within the aspirant's consciousness, of the transcendent principle's own primordial self-apprehension.

Before we approach the Sethian corpus itself, however, some words on its relation to Plotinus are in order. Besides the many important points of comparison between Plotinus's description of mystical ascent and that of the Platonizing Sethians,<sup>1</sup> there are also several crucial differences, the most significant for our immediate purposes being the following. First, while Plotinus's mystical passages are usually framed by a philosophical discussion and are tangentially adduced in support of a broad metaphysical argument (about the nature of beauty, for example, in I.6[1], or of contemplation, in III.8[30], or of Intellect, in V.5[32], or even of the One itself, in VI.9[9]), in the Platonizing Sethian treatises, by contrast, the praxis of ascent comprises the principal framework for the texts themselves. Central to these accounts is a revelatory discourse with explicit instructions on the stages of ritual ascent and the visionary epistemology necessary for the apprehension of transcendentia.<sup>2</sup> Sethian discourse thus emphasizes the practical and / or ritualized aspect of that which in Plotinus's writings for the most part remains—at least rhetorically, if not actually—theoretical, and which he usually (but not always) expresses in the language of academic Platonism. Second, while Plotinus (as we have seen) tends towards reticence about the interhypostatic domain and is therefore rather oblique in his descriptions of both ontogenetic and mystical processes mediating the first and second principles, the Platonizing Sethians, by contrast, not only provide explicit descriptions of a multitude of intermediary

1 The more general similarities and differences between Plotinus and the Gnostics have been the subject of a substantial body of literature (citations in the Introduction, Ch. 1); this topic extends far beyond the scope of this chapter, which is restricted to a discussion of the final stages of mystical ascent and the apprehension of the supreme principle.

2 The revelatory discourse is usually framed as initiatory instruction from one or another of the quasi-divine revealers that populate the Sethian universe, although there are exceptional cases in which the revelation-discourse is presented in terms of philosophical dialectic and / or scholastic pedagogy, further blurring the categorical distinction between Platonic and Sethian rhetorical mode; thus a passage of *Zostrianos* (22.2–23.20) even implies that one undergoes a series of metaphorical ablutions that seem to correspond to progressive mastery of ever more complex aspects of Aristotle's theory of categories, using the language of "universal" (*katholikos*), "partial" (*merikos*), "species" (*eidos*), and "genus" (*genos*).

principles, but in certain cases reify them into quasi-hypostases themselves, thus articulating otherwise unutterable, eternal processes in terms of a profusion of mythical-seeming personalities. Indeed, the Sethian tendency to subdivide, multiply, and hypostatize intermediary principles is diametrically opposite to—and in fact the likely target of—Plotinus’s dogmatic rejection of intermediaries (at, for example, *II.9*[33].1). Unconstrained by rigid axioms concerning the relation of the first and second principle, the Platonizing Sethians were able to articulate the complex transitional or interhypostatic phases of ontogenesis and mystical return in lavish detail. Thus, despite the seeming convolution of the texts, the extant Sethian evidence—with its greater emphasis on practical instruction and an (unabashedly mythopoetic) articulation of micro-phases—provides a lucid glimpse of a conception of ascent that these sectaries apparently shared with Plotinus.

### 1.1 *The Situation of the Platonizing Ascent Treatises in the Context of Sethian Gnosticism and Middle Platonism*

The Platonizing Sethian treatises *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*—along with the related tractates *Three Steles of Seth* (NHC VII,5) and *Marsanes* (NHC X,1)—comprise what John Turner has called the “ascent pattern” treatises, and they reflect a specific, and apparently later, moment in the development of Sethianism. During this period, the Sethians had apparently distanced themselves from their original Jewish-baptismal and / or superficially Christian forebears and were attempting to integrate themselves into Platonic philosophical circles.<sup>3</sup> In the earlier Sethian treatises of the “descent pattern,”<sup>4</sup> a divine revealer or savior who is usually some modality of Barbelo—the second principle—makes a successive series of descents in order to impart *gnōsis* and thus rescue humankind—or an elect “race” (*genos*) or subset of humans<sup>5</sup>—from their terrestrial or cosmic prison.<sup>6</sup> The ascent treatises, by contrast, purport to be first-person accounts by eponymous human aspirants who have themselves ascended through various celestial and metaphysical strata so as

3 Turner has hypothesized the complex vicissitudes of the Sethian movement; see Turner 1986; 2001, 747–59. On the tenuous relationship of the Sethian corpus with Christianity, see Schenke 1981; on the relationship to Judaism, see also, *inter alia*, Turner 1998; Pearson 1990, 124–35; Schenke 1981.

4 E.g., the *Ap. John* (NHC II,1, III,1, IV,1, and BG,2), *Three Forms* (NHC XIII,1\*), and *Gos. Eg. / Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* (NHC III,2 and IV,2).

5 Such as the Sethians, who apparently identified themselves as the spiritual lineage of the biblical Seth, son of Adam.

6 Turner suggests that the “descent pattern” derives from Hellenistic Jewish Wisdom literature; on the two patterns, see Turner 2001, 80–84, 93–125; 2002.

to apprehend and / or unite with the transcendental principle(s).<sup>7</sup> Broadly speaking, the language is typical of the apocalyptic genre,<sup>8</sup> but the Platonizing Sethian ascent treatises simultaneously echo Plato's conception of a metaphysical realm of eternal realities (the Forms), as well as the philosophical 'ascent' towards, and apprehension of, a transcendent principle akin to Plato's Good,<sup>9</sup> while simultaneously reflecting other philosophical influences; this includes a certain amount of Stoic and Aristotelian language as well as evidence of familiarity with the elaborate negative theological speculations that developed within the early Academy and flourished in Middle Platonism (as well as second-century Gnosticism).<sup>10</sup> Perhaps more importantly, these texts imply that such an ascent could be ritually replicated, either communally or individually, by the sectaries themselves; thus the Sethian treatises are replete with the technical and ritual terminology such as baptism, investiture, anointing, and sealing, as well as with hymnic invocations and the utterance of *voces magicae*. The presentation of the ascent as a *praxis* thus situates these Sethian treatises within the broad religio-historical context of late antiquity, in which a profusion of ritual techniques of ascent emerged concomitant

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- 7 Turner 2001, 297: "The earlier Sethian treatises such as the *Apocryphon of John* portray the advent of salvation as conveyed by a series of temporally successive descents into this world by the Mother Barbelo in the form of various modalities, culminating in her gift of the baptismal rite of the Five Seals. However, starting with *Zostrianos*, the Platonizing Sethian treatises exhibit a more vertical, non-temporal, supra-historical scheme in which salvation is achieved, not through visitations of the Mother, but through a graded series of visionary ascents initiated by the Gnostic himself."
- 8 In terms of genre they represent examples of Gnostic apocalyptic literature—thus Fallon 1979 and Krause 1989—, but this taxonomy groups them with other tractates with which they have very little conceptually in common. Moreover, even if *Zost.* and *Allogenes* do employ the rhetorical framework of the apocalyptic genre, they also differ categorically in that (a) they involve a deliberate ascent rather than involuntary rapture and (b) the paraenetic social / ethical content of the vision is demoted in favor of an emphasis on individual salvation, the attainment of philosophical *gnōsis*, and the transcendental apprehension of the supreme principle.
- 9 Visionary ascent evident, for example, in the *Respublica* VII 514c–519; X 614b–621b; *Phaedo* 109d–111c, *Phaedrus* 246a–247b, *Symposium* 210a–211c, and *Epistulae vii* 341c–d.
- 10 A substantial negative-theological passage in *Zostrianos* (64–75) seems to share a common source with Marius Victorinus's *Adversus Arium* (1.49.9–40, 50.5–16); Tardieu 1996 has shown this hypothetical source to be a commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*. Hypertranscendental theology in Gnostic theology certainly predates Plotinus; thus Basilides (*apud* Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresiorum* 7.20.3), for whom the supreme deity is "not even ineffable," suggesting a response to a prior tradition of negative theology. See, e.g., Jufresa 1981; Whittaker 1969a; Krämer 1964; Wolfson 1957.



with the progressive transcendentalization of the divine.<sup>11</sup> Yet the Platonizing Sethians' simultaneous emphasis upon introspective or contemplative vision and their frequent presentation of ritual acts in internalized or cognitive terms suggest that these tractates reflect an intermediate phase between the more patently ritual or exteriorized techniques of ascent and the purely interiorized Plotinian ascent.<sup>12</sup>

I should emphasize, however, that the argument of this chapter is not that Plotinus's conception of mystical ascent was strictly dependent upon the Platonizing Sethian ascent tractates *Zoostrianos* and *Allogenes* themselves (although I am of the opinion that the tractates by this name that circulated in Plotinus's circle were more or less the Greek *Vorlagen* of the Coptic versions from Nag Hammadi).<sup>13</sup> It appears that the influence of Gnostic thought on Plotinus's mysticism is much more profound and widespread in his thought than could be explained merely by his familiarity with these, or indeed any, particular texts. Moreover, Gnostic conceptions and technical terminology can be detected in Plotinian treatises chronologically prior to the appearance of the apocalypse-bearing Gnostics on the periphery of his circle in Rome. As we have seen in the preceding two chapters, Plotinus's complex mystical scheme is presupposed already in his first treatise (I.6); it is hinted at in his sixth (IV.8), and attains florescence as early as his ninth (VI.9). From Porphyry's *Vita Plotini* it appears that the contemporaneous *gnōstikoi* in Plotinus's milieu or even, as some have suggested, on the periphery of Plotinus's circle, were especially active during the period that Porphyry himself was studying with Plotinus in Rome, and that Plotinus's central anti-Gnostic treatise, II.9[33], as well as the remainder of the *Großschrift* (III.8[30], V.8[31], and V.5[32]), were composed specifically in response to the contemporaneous challenge posed by the

11 This type of ritualized ascent may be found in several pre-Plotinian sources aside from Nag Hammadi literature, such as, for example, the *Chaldaean Oracles*, the *Hermetica*, the Greek magical papyri (esp. the Mithras Liturgy, PGM IV.574ff.), the Mithraic mysteries themselves, early Gnostics such as the Ophites described by Origen (*Contra Celsum* 6.31) or the Peratae described by Hippolytus (*Refutatio omnium haeresiorum* 5.12), and, arguably, Hekhalot literature. On the theme of ascent, see Couliano 1983; Johnston 1997. The caution of Himmelfarb 1995—namely, that scholars have overgeneralized from minimal evidence, primarily the Mithras Liturgy, and exaggerated the prevalence of actual practices of ascent—is, I believe, excessive, considering that a widespread cultic phenomenon—that of the actual mysteries of Mithras—had ritualized ascent as its primary goal, on which see Beck 1988.

12 Visionary practices among the Gnostics have been the object of several studies; thus Casadio 1989; 1992; Quispel 1995; Filoramo 1999.

13 However, I agree with Turner 2000d; idem 2006 and Corrigan 2000a that one may detect responses to Sethian ideas in his later works.

appearance of these sectaries in the Rome of Plotinus's time. The structural resemblance between the Plotinian and Sethian visionary ascent is therefore more likely to be explained by the fact that they share a common origin in certain currents of Gnostic thought that had been percolating in late second- and early third-century Alexandria, the locale where Plotinus was educated,<sup>14</sup> and also where the Sethian tractates in question were likely to have been written. Indeed, even the Sethian tractates themselves are not entirely *sui generis*, but rather comprise the richest elaboration and most sophisticated synthesis of several complex schemata that were, in embryonic form at least, common to many different groups, including the earlier—so-called “classic”—Sethian and Valentinian systems with which Plotinus himself was also probably acquainted. My method of analysis in each of the following sections will be first to identify a particular theme in the Platonizing Sethian tractates and then, when possible, to demonstrate its presence in a wider variety of interrelated and presumably earlier Gnostic systems.

## 2 The Structure of Ascent in the Platonizing Sethian Ascent Treatises

### 2.1 *The Visionary Ascent through the Barbelo Aeon*

Before beginning the argument of the chapter, let us turn to a brief descriptive overview of the two Platonizing Sethian ascent treatises from Nag Hammadi—*Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*—that are mentioned by Porphyry.<sup>15</sup> Despite subtle differences, these two tractates also have much in common. Most generally, both tractates purport (pseudonymously) to be first-hand accounts of the ascent of an eponymous visionary through several metaphysical or aeonic strata, towards the transcendent deity, the Invisible Spirit or Unknowable One. In each case the trajectory of ascent requires an identification or assimilation with successive metaphysical or aeonic strata and thus retraces in reverse order the ontogenetic process by which these metaphysical strata first emanated forth; thus, the ascent ultimately leads back to the source in the first

14 Porphyry reports (at *Vit. Plot.* 3.3–10) that Plotinus was already going to grammar school by the age of eight, thus roughly by 213 CE; we may presume the locale was also Alexandria, where he later began studying with Ammonius Saccas in 233.

15 These may be grouped together with *Marsanes* (NHC X,1) and the *Three Steles of Seth* (NHC VII,5) on the basis of certain shared conceptions. The metaphysical hierarchy of *Marsanes* presupposes such an ascent but does not describe it, while *Steles Seth* appears to be a hymnic invocation to the transcendentalia intended for communal use during a ritual ascent. Here I concentrate principally on *Zost.* and *Allogenes*, whose descriptions of ascent are closest to Plotinus.

transcendent principle. Each visionary ascends through a noetic realm known as the Barbelo Aeon, which comprises a second, noetic principle or divine Intellect, very loosely parallel to the Plotinian *Nous*, but which (unlike the latter) is explicitly tripartitioned into a triad of subaeons—Kalyptos, Protophanes, and Autogenes—the last of which also shares certain characteristics with Plotinus’s notion of Soul.<sup>16</sup> Occasionally these aeons contain further subdivisions associated with particular personalities called luminaries (*phōsteres*) who instruct the eponymous visionary during the ascent and provide progressively more refined and esoteric revelations. An enigmatic savior-figure known as the Triple Male Child usually hovers between Autogenes and Protophanes

16 Kalyptos—the “hidden”—seems to represent the prefiguration of the divine Intellect—i.e., Barbelo prior to her manifestation—residing in occultation within the Invisible Spirit. Protophanes—the “first appearing”—is often called a *nous* and seems to refer to the first appearance of Barbelo as the prototypical universal Intellect (one might note the similarity of Plotinus’s description at v.1[10].6.14–15 of the pre-Intellect or PNE as “the first to appear” (τὸ πρῶτον ἐκφανέν). Autogenes—the “self-generated”—seems to be related to the individual intellects, perhaps conceived as having emerged through self-contemplation; on this see Whittaker 1980. However, Turner 2001 has suggested that the Autogenes Aeon be compared to the Plotinian hypostasis Soul. Of course, in Plotinus’s own thought, the distinction between the apex of the individual soul and Intellect itself is similarly ambiguous (thus, for example, Blumenthal 1974). If the Autogenes-Protophanes-Kalyptos triad is to be directly correlated with the Noetic Triad—as is suggested, for example, by Brisson 1999, 175 and Turner 2000d, 210—Kalyptos would represent the hiddenness of Existence, Protophanes would represent Intellect, and Autogenes, with its connotation of self-generated growth, would correspond to Life. This seems to be hinted at by a triadic sequence of baptisms described at *Zost. NHC VIII* 15.4–17: “It is the water of Life that gives Vitality in which you have been baptized in the Autogenes; it is the water of Blessedness that belongs to Knowledge in which you will be baptized in the Protophanes; it is the water of Existence (*huparxis*) which belongs to the Divinity that is Kalyptos. The water of Life exists according to (*kata*) a power, that belonging to Blessedness according to Essence (*ousia*); but that belonging to Divinity according to Existence.” This may be schematized as follows:

TABLE 1 Baptisms in *Zostrianos* p. 15

<i>line</i>	<i>baptism in water</i>	<i>that belongs</i>	<i>aeon</i>	<i>exists in</i>
	<i>of ...</i>	<i>to ...</i>		<i>relation to ...</i>
4–6, 13–14	Life	Vitality	Autogenes	Power
7–9, 14–15	Blessedness	Knowledge	Protophanes	Essence ( <i>ousia</i> )
10–12, 15–17	Existence	Divinity	Kalyptos	Existence ( <i>huparxis</i> )

but does not seem to have a fixed locus. The relation between the Invisible Spirit and the Barbelo Aeon is further mediated by various triadic principles loosely resembling the Noetic Triad of Being-Life-Intellect, a triad that was intimated in Plotinus but formalized in later, post-Plotinian Neoplatonism. In *Zostrianos*, the tripartite Barbelo Aeon unfolds more or less directly from the hypernoetic Invisible Spirit through the activity of the latter's three powers of Existence, Vitality, and Blessedness (or Mentality). In *Allogenes* the three powers of the supreme principle have crystallized into a quasi-independent triadic hypostasis, the "Triple Powered (One)" (ὁ τριπλοῦς ὁ ὅλος)—comprised by a triad of principles, here too called Blessedness, Vitality, and Existence—mediating between the Unknowable One and the Barbelo Aeon. Nevertheless, the function of the Triple Powered One of *Allogenes* appears to overlap considerably with those of both the "Triple Powered" Invisible Spirit and the triadic Barbelo in *Zostrianos*, suggesting that these are closely related elaborations of the same fundamental scheme.

## 2.2 *Narrative of Zostrianos's Ascent*

The text of *Zostrianos* begins with an autobiographical narrative of the eponymous protagonist's relentless metaphysical seeking and his eventual suicidal depression over his incomprehension of transcendental ontogenesis (1.10–4.20). At the moment when Zostrianos is about to offer himself up to be devoured by the wild animals of the desert, an "angel of the *gnōsis* of eternal light" appears, chastises him for his unnecessary despair, and invites him to begin the ascent. Leaving his body on the earth and donning instead a "light-cloud," Zostrianos ascends through the initial cosmic strata consisting of thirteen aeons (4.20–31), to a celestial "Airy Earth" where he is baptized and receives an "image of glories" (5.14–16). He then ascends through several successive hypercosmic strata that serve as a purgatory for disincarnate souls in various degrees of repentance and redemption—the seven Aeon Copies (*antitupoi*), the Exile (*paroikēsis*), and the Repentance (*metanoia*)—in which he undergoes a series of ablutions and baptisms (5.18–6.1). Next, Zostrianos ascends to the "Self-Generated Aeons," which are presumably situated within the Autogenes Aeon, the first (lowest) subaeon of Barbelo. Here Zostrianos undergoes a sequence of four baptisms "in the name of Autogenes" with corresponding angelic transformations; he becomes successively a "[God-] seeing angel" (ὁ ὑπερθεὸς ἰδὼν ἑαυτὸν: 6.18), an "angel of the male gender" (ὁ ὑπερθεὸς ἄρρενος ἄρρεος: 7.5–6), a "holy angel" (ὁ ὑπερθεὸς ἁγίος: 7.13), and finally a "perfect [angel]" ([ὁ ὑπερθεὸς] ὁ τέλειος: 7.19). After this point Zostrianos receives a series of revelations imparted successively by the divine revealers Authrounios, Ephesech (the Child of the Child), Youel, and the

Luminaries of Barbelo; these revelations comprise the greater part of the remaining text. The revelation of Authrounios concerns the cosmogony and the fate of various types of soul (8.7–13.6). Ephesech provides ritual instructions concerning baptism, explains the minutiae of the structure of the Barbelo Aeon (13.7–47.27), and then, most importantly, reveals the transcendental epistemology necessary for apprehending the Invisible Spirit (22.1–24.17), as well as the fall and restoration of the type of human who can attain salvation (44.1–46.31). Following Ephesech’s revelation, Zostrianos receives the fifth and final baptism in the name of Autogenes; he is thus divinized (literally, “became divine,”  $\lambda\iota\epsilon\psi[\omega]\pi\epsilon\ \bar{\eta}\nu\omicron\upsilon\gamma\eta\omicron\upsilon\tau\epsilon$ : 53.18–19). Now Youel appears and baptizes Zostrianos yet again (57.13–60.24); he thus receives power (61.8), form (61.10), and a holy spirit (61.13). She then brings him into the Aeon of the Triple Male Child, where he has a vision of “the invisible Child within an invisible light” (61.15–22), and she baptizes him for the last time. At this point, poised at the threshold of the Protophanes Aeon (the middle aeon of Barbelo), Zostrianos has become “per[fect for the] hearing of all [these matters]” (62.15–17), and stands “upon [his] *pneuma*, praying fervently, by means of a Thought, to the great Luminaries” for a final revelation (63.13–17). A badly damaged section of text that follows appears to contain a lengthy revelation from the Luminaries about the Invisible Spirit and the emergence of Barbelo as well as a detailed enumeration of the inhabitants of the upper reaches of the Barbelo Aeon (64.7–128.18). Finally, the Luminaries depart, and two hitherto unmentioned divine assistants, Apophantes and Aphropais, lead Zostrianos into the Protophanes Aeon for the ultimate vision and / or mystical union that culminates the ascent: “There I saw all of them as they exist in unity. I united with them all and blessed the Kalyptos Aeon, the virginal Barbelo, and the Invisible Spirit. I became all-perfect and received power. I was written in glory and sealed.”<sup>17</sup> Thus transformed, Zostrianos then redescends to the Autogenes Aeon and thence back down to the Airy Earth, where he inscribes wooden tablets to instruct future generations of the Elect during their ascent. Finally, returning to the terrestrial earth, he awakens the multitudes with his teachings.

17 Zost. NHC VIII 129.4–15 (text Barry, Funk, and Poirier, BCNH):  $\alpha\phi\eta\tau\text{'}\ \epsilon\zeta\omicron\upsilon\eta\ \epsilon\pi\iota\pi\rho\omega\tau\omicron\phi\alpha\eta\eta\varsigma\ \bar{\eta}\nu\omicron\varsigma\ \bar{\eta}\zeta\omicron\omicron\upsilon\gamma\tau\text{'}\ \bar{\eta}\tau\epsilon\lambda\iota\omicron\varsigma\ \bar{\eta}\nu\omicron\gamma\varsigma\ \alpha\gamma\omega\ \alpha\bar{\eta}\nu\alpha\gamma\ \epsilon\bar{\nu}\alpha\bar{\iota}\ \tau\eta\rho\omicron\gamma\ \epsilon\tau\bar{\eta}\mu\alpha\gamma\ \bar{\eta}\pi\rho\eta\tau\epsilon\ \epsilon\tau\omicron\gamma\omega\omicron\omicron\pi\text{'}\ \bar{\eta}\nu\omicron\varsigma\ \bar{\eta}\zeta\rho\alpha\bar{\iota}\ \xi\bar{\eta}\ \omicron\gamma\alpha\text{'}\ \alpha\gamma\omega\ \delta\epsilon\iota\zeta\omega\tau\bar{\iota}\ \bar{\eta}\mu\mu\alpha\gamma\ \tau\eta\rho\omicron\gamma\ \delta\epsilon\iota\varsigma\mu\omicron\gamma\ \epsilon\pi\epsilon\phi\eta\ \bar{\eta}\kappa\lambda\varsigma\ \bar{\eta}\bar{\eta}\ \text{'}\bar{\epsilon}\bar{\beta}\alpha\rho\beta\eta\lambda\omega\ \bar{\eta}\pi\alpha\rho\theta\epsilon\eta\omicron\varsigma\ \bar{\eta}\bar{\eta}\ \pi\alpha\zeta\omicron\rho\alpha\tau\omicron\eta\ \bar{\eta}\bar{\eta}\bar{\alpha}\text{'}\ \alpha\gamma\omega\ \delta\epsilon\iota\omega\omega\pi\epsilon\ \bar{\eta}\pi\alpha\tau\epsilon\lambda\iota\omicron\varsigma\ \delta\epsilon\iota\chi\iota\ \sigma\omicron\eta\ \alpha\gamma\varsigma\alpha\zeta\tau\text{'}\ \xi\bar{\eta}\ \pi\epsilon\omicron\omicron\gamma\ \alpha\gamma\bar{\rho}\varsigma\phi\rho\alpha\gamma\iota\zeta\epsilon\ \bar{\eta}\nu\omicron\epsilon\iota\text{'}$ .

### 2.3 *Narrative of Allogenes's Ascent*

Like *Zostrianos*, the tractate *Allogenes* presents itself as a first-hand report of a visionary ascent undertaken by a mythical seer.<sup>18</sup> Unlike *Zostrianos*, however, it focuses solely on the final phases of ascent and omits any discussion of the region below the Barbelo Aeon. Moreover, whereas *Zostrianos* describes a profusion of baptisms and other ritual acts performed by a welter of divine revealers, *Allogenes* neglects any mention of baptism and minimizes the number of ritual actions and of divine revealers; both the content and tone seem to be somewhat more ‘scholastic.’ More importantly, while the text of *Zostrianos* implies—arguably—that the eponymous visionary reaches only as far as the Protophanes Aeon (the middle aeon of Barbelo),<sup>19</sup> *Allogenes* ascends above the Barbelo Aeon altogether, assimilates himself in turn to each of the three activities of the Triple Powered One, and ultimately receives an enigmatic “primary revelation” (ἡ ἀρχαία τοῦ ἰσχυροῦς ἐκβολή) of the hypertranscendental “Unknowable (One)” (ἡ ἀγνοούμενη) it- (him-?) self.

The narrative structure is as follows. After an initial lacuna, the text of *Allogenes* opens amidst the first of five revelations of the (by now familiar)

18 Although in this case addressed to a particular recipient, *Allogenes's* son Messos.

19 This is Turner’s opinion. However, there remains some ambiguity in the passage in question (129.4–12, text Barry, Funk, and Poirier, BCNH). While *Zost.* explicitly mentions only his entrance into the second aeon of Barbelo, Protophanes, and not a further ascent beyond Protophanes “into” Kalyptos, the ambiguous objects of the vision / union—“I saw *all of them* as they exist in unity. I united *with them all* ...” (ἡ ὅλη τῆς τῆς)—might nevertheless *also* include the three transcendent principles—Kalyptos, Barbelo, and the Invisible Spirit—that he says he blesses (in the sentence that immediately follows). The principal argument for taking *Zostrianos's* mystical union (129.8–9: ἀειζωνῆν) to involve *only* the elements of the Protophanes Aeon (and not the superior principles) is that elsewhere (e.g., 127.9–11) Protophanes is said to be the *energeia* of “those that exist in a (single) place” (ἡ ἀ[ῖ] τῆς τοῦ ἐτ’ ὅσοι ἔῃ οὐκ ἔστι)—i.e., all together—suggesting that this is a formulaic description of Protophanes and thus that the union is restricted to one with the contents of Protophanes. However, some doubt is cast by the fact that earlier, at 121.6–7, the same phrase, “those that exist in a (single) place” (ἡ ἀ[ῖ] ἐν ὅσοι ἔῃ οὐκ ἔστι) is used to refer to the contents (presumably the luminaries) of Kalyptos, who moreover is referred to as “all-perfect” (*pantelios*) just like *Zostrianos* at the apex of his ascent. In *Allogenes* (55.14–16) the same epithet *pantelios* is similarly applied to “those who exist together” in the Triple Powered One *above* the Barbelo Aeon. Furthermore, *Zost.* NHC VIII 122.1–17 seems to imply that the ascending aspirant may become “a Barbelo” and / or one of the “Kalyptoi,” (among other transformations) suggesting such an assimilation is not out of reach for *Zostrianos* himself. Finally, the earlier revelation of Ephesech contains instructions on the apprehension of or assimilation to not only of all subaeons of Barbelo but also the Invisible Spirit itself (22.1–24.17). Given these ambiguities, it is not at all certain that the apex of the ascent in *Zost.* differs significantly from that of *Allogenes*; the difference may be one of emphasis and focus rather than fundamental structure.

Youel, who instructs Allogenes about the emergence of the Triple Powered One and the subaeons of Barbelo from the Triple Powered One all the way down to the level of Autogenes (45.9–46.11). Youel then provides a preliminary summary of the path of contemplative reascent from Autogenes back up through the Barbelo Aeon and the three powers of the Triple Powered One to the “Universal (One),” which is presumably a cognomen for the supreme Invisible Spirit (46.11–49.38). After Allogenes expresses trepidation (49.38–50.17), Youel reassures him (in a second revelation) that he has within him a “great power” granted by the supreme deity as well as inherent “images” of the Aeons of Barbelo which will assist him in the ascent (50.17–51.38). At this point Allogenes undertakes the first of a series of contemplative acts: he reverts to himself in contemplation, apprehends the luminous Good (*agathon*) that indwells him, and, in the first of several transformations, becomes “divine” (αἰεῖν νοῦν τε: 52.12–13). This contemplative act is followed by a ritual one: Youel anoints and “gives power to” Allogenes (52.13–15). Cautioning Allogenes that she will reveal a “great mystery” that he must guard from the uninitiated (52.15–28), she instructs him yet again (in a third revelation) about the emergence and ineffable nature of the Triple Powered One and the Barbelo Aeon (52.34–53.38). She then utters a hymnic invocation to the powers of the Triple Powered One and their associated luminaries or “glories” (54.6–55.11), and it appears that Allogenes repeats the invocation (although poor condition of the text makes certainty impossible). In a brief revelation (the fourth), Youel insists once more upon the hyperontic status of the Triple Powered One (55.17–30). Now Allogenes prays for further revelation (55.31–32), which Youel subsequently grants (the last of the five); apparently this revelation describes the nature of the Triple Male Child and provides instruction in a contemplative technique that requires one hundred years of meditation (55.33–57.23). Youel departs; Allogenes then meditates for one hundred years, after which period he receives illumination in the form of a vision of the Autogenes, the Triple Male Child, the Protophanes, Kalyptos, Barbelo, and the Triple Powered Invisible Spirit (58.12–26).<sup>20</sup> Although the vision described in this passage may

20 *Allogenes* ΝΗC XI 58.12–26 (text Funk and Scopello, BCNH): “I saw the Good divine Autogenes; and the Savior who is the perfect Triple Male Child and his goodness, the perfect Intellect Protophanes Harmedon; and the Blessedness of the Kalyptos; and the pre-principle of the Blessedness, the Barbelo Aeon full of divinity; and the pre-principle of the unoriginate one, the Triple Powered Invisible Spirit, the totality that is beyond perfection” (ἀἰνάει ἐπαγαθὸς ἡγατογενὴς ἡνοῦν τε ἡν πικωτ[ηρ] ἐτεπαῖ πε πικωμῆντ’ ῥο[ογ]τ’ ἡτελειος ἡναλλογ’ ἡν ἡμῆντ’ ἀγαθὸς ἡτε παῖ πικρωτοφανὴς ἡζαρμηλῶν ἡτελειος ἡνογς ἡν ἡμῆντ’ ἡκαριος ἡτε πικαλῆπιτος ἡν ἡωροῖ ἡαρχη ἡτε ἡμῆντ’ ἡκαριος).

be intended to be propaedeutic to the ascent itself;<sup>21</sup> it is equally likely that this intends to be understood as a brief, prospective summary of the actual ascent mentioned in the next sentence and described in great detail throughout the remainder of the treatise.<sup>22</sup> In either case, in the lines that follow, Allogenes is carried out of his body by an “eternal light”—reminiscent of the luminous cloud that serves as Zostrianos’s vehicle—to a “holy place whose likeness cannot be revealed in the world”; here, by means of a “great blessedness” Allogenes receives a direct vision of those principles about which he has previously been taught. “Standing” upon his own knowledge,<sup>23</sup> and simultaneously “turning” towards the knowledge of Barbelo, he receives from the Luminaries of Barbelo the final instructions for the ultimate ascent beyond the Barbelo Aeon to the Unknowable One. These final stages of ascent entail a successive assimilation to the three powers—Blessedness (or Mentality), Vitality, and Existence—that comprise the Triple Powered One, and the process is described in terms of a series of contemplative “withdrawals” (*anachōrēseis*). Allogenes immediately does as he is instructed, recounting at 60.12–61.22 the experience post factum in language nearly identical to the instructions he received at 59.9–60.12 [see complete passages in Appendix C6–7]. Having reached Existence (*huparxis*), the highest activity of the Triple Powered One, Allogenes must still apprehend the utterly ineffable first principle, the Unknowable One. Paradoxically, the Unknowable One can only be apprehended through an apophatic “unknowing,” which is attained by means of (or correlated with) an enigmatic “primary revelation” or “first manifestation,” (ϣορπὶ ὄγῳνῆ εἶβολ: an important technical concept to which we will return). At the apex of the ascent, Allogenes (i) is

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πιστων ἡβάρηκλῳ ἐφμερ εἶβολ ἔν οὐμνῖ νογτε μῆν †ϣορπὶ ἡδρην ἡτε πιστάρην·  
πισμνῖ· ὅση ἡδρῶρατον ἡπῆα· πιστῆρῳ ἐτῆσε ἐτελιος).

21 The relative first-perfect ἐταγτορπῖ<τ>, which apparently functions temporally—thus “when I was taken ...”—suggests that this refers to a previously mentioned event and introduces an epexegetis of the vision summarized in the passage quoted above.

22 In a single sentence, *Allogenes* thus dispenses with the entire ascent through the Barbelo Aeon that comprises the major portion of *Zost.* However, this passage is perhaps indicative of a greater similarity to *Zost.* than is sometimes assumed. Allogenes’s initial vision does not explicitly mention the Triple Powered One, but only (in sequence) Autogenes, the Triple Male Child, Protophanes, Kalyptos, the Barbelo Aeon, and the Triple Powered Invisible Spirit. This suggests that the Triple Powered One—described independently from the Invisible Spirit *elsewhere* in *Allogenes* and not explicitly mentioned in *Zost.*—represents less a truly independent hypostasis than it does an *activity* of the Invisible Spirit (akin to the Spirit’s triad of powers in *Zost.*) and / or a *process* of reascent. It may be that the greater focus in *Allogenes* on the highest phases of the ascent required a more detailed elaboration of micro-phases, which gives the impression of a more independent or free-floating principle.

23 Cf. *Enn.* VI.9[9].7.1–3.



“filled” with a “primary revelation,” (ii) “unknowns” the transcendent principle, (iii) receives strength / power, (iv) knows that which exists “within himself,” and (v) knows the manifestation of that principle’s “unlimitedness” or “unbound- edness.” The account is then repeated in slightly different terms: “And by means of a First Manifestation of the First, unknowable to them all—the god who is beyond perfection—I saw him and the Triple-Powered One who exists within them all.”<sup>24</sup> Although *Allogenes* has at this point attained the absolute apex of the ascent and has apprehended the hypertranscendental deity, it is ironic that in the subsequent lines, the Luminaries of Barbelo debrief *Allogenes* with a lengthy (and somewhat anticlimactic) negative-theological disquisition on the Unknowable One that he has just experienced first-hand (61.22–67.38). Finally, the Luminaries instruct him to record his experiences for posterity and to leave the ensuing book on a mountain with an adjuration to a demonic guardian; he does so, and the tractate ends with *Allogenes*’s joyful address to his son Messos, to whom the tractate is purportedly addressed (62.16–69.19).

#### 2.4 *Parallels between the Ascent in Platonizing Sethian Ascent Tractates and that in Plotinus*

On the surface, the seemingly inchoate profusion of ritual and mythic elements in the ascent narratives of *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* would appear to distance them from the comparatively austere and subtle Plotinian ascent; yet upon closer examination these accounts reveal a deeper, more coherent structure that bears noncoincidental, and even extremely striking, similarities to Plotinus’s schema. As we have seen in the preceding chapters, the Plotinian ascent involves the following essential characteristics. First, there is a contemplative self-reversion (phase B) that culminates in a sudden vision of one’s transcendental self (the autophany, phase C), and a subsequent assimilation to or coalescence with this indwelling principle (phase C<sup>2</sup>). Second, (b) the structure of self-reversion and autophany replicates the primordial self-reversion of the One’s prenoetic efflux (PNE) and the moment of self-apprehension that establishes ontogenesis. And finally, (c) the transcendental self within the human subject is itself consubstantial with, or even identical to, the PNE that emerges from the One and reverts to it(self) in the first moments of ontogenesis; this inherent principle is itself the faculty by which the aspirant can attain

24 *Allogenes* NHC XI 61.8–14 (text Funk and Scopello, BCNH): ἀ[γῶ] εἰς ὅλ γῆν οὐκ ἔστιν ὁρῶντι  
 ἡ[οῦ] ἀντὶ εἰς ὅλ ἡ τε πῶρτι ἡ ἀτ[τ] [c]οὐκ ἔστιν ἡ ἀτ[τ] τῆροῦ πῶρτε ἐτ[τ] ὅσοι ἐτελειοῦ  
 ἀἰναῖ ἐροῦ ἡ πῶρτι ὅσοι ἐτ[τ] ὅσοι ἡ τῆροῦ τῆροῦ. As will be discussed later, there  
 is an intended parallelism and thus contrast between the “the One who exists in me” at  
 61.5–6 and “[First God who is unknowable to them] all and the Triple Powered One who  
 exists in them all” at 61.12–14.

the ultimate apprehension or union with the One (ΜΥΟ, phase E), and it has somehow been 'left over' within us from that primordial moment. The first and most evident correspondence between this schema and that of the Platonizing Sethians is that (a) the latter portrayed crucial, transformational phases of the ascent as an act of self-seeking and / or contemplative introversion expressed either in terms of reflexive cognition or of the spatial metaphor of interiorization; and, moreover, this act of introversion often culminates in a momentary, luminous vision of a higher principle or an aspect of the transcendent deity within oneself. Second, (b) they understood the contemplative self-reversion and self-apprehension to be structurally parallel to the first moments of ontogenesis, during which the second, noetic principle—either an aspect of the Barbelo Aeon or else the truly interhypostatic Triple Powered One—emerges as a result of the transcendent deity's own self-reflexive activity. Finally, (c) they envisioned not only a structural parallel between the first moments of ontogenesis and the last moments of mystical ascent, but also a functional kinship, consubstantiality, or even identity between (i) the mystical faculty of transcendental apperception within the individual aspirant and (ii) the eternal ontogenetic self-reflection and / or self-manifestation of the supreme principle; and moreover, they believed this homology or identity derived from the fact that the former was, in essence, a residue of the latter, a residue that remains concealed within the human subject. In what follows, we will examine in detail each of these points of correspondence as they occur in Platonizing Sethian tractates and some related Gnostic literature.

### 3 Mystical Self-Reversion and Autophany in Gnostic Visionary Ascent

#### 3.1 *Mystical Self-Reversion and Autophany in the Platonizing Sethian Ascent Tractates*

The Platonizing Sethian ascent treatises transpose the conventional spatial trajectory of apocalyptic ascent onto the aeonic or metaphysical strata 'above' the cosmos: a metaphysical trajectory which is simultaneously envisioned, as in Plotinus, as a centripetal progression or withdrawal into oneself. Yet the parallel with Plotinus may also be formulated more precisely: these treatises frequently describe a discrete moment—or a successive series of discrete moments—in which the visionary reverts reflexively upon himself, or penetrates into his own interior.<sup>25</sup> The result of this act of self-seeking is the ap-

25 The language varies; it is often forms of the Greek verb *anachōrein*, but one also finds forms of *κᾰτᾰεῖν*, "to turn," which translates a variety of Greek antecedents cognate with *epistrephein*. Aubin 1963, 93–112 surveys the use of *epistrophē* and its cognates in (pre-Nag

prehension of some luminous or divine principle within oneself, in a manner similar to the Plotinian autophany (phase C). These visionary moments are associated with important phases of self-transformation or even divinization—akin to Plotinus's imagery of coalescence with the transcendental self (phase C<sup>2</sup>)—in which one assimilates oneself to that very power of which one experiences the interior vision.

### 3.2 *Mystical Self-Reversion and Autophany in Zostrianos*

Despite the extensive damage to the manuscript, the themes of contemplative self-reversion, transformative self-apprehension, and the spatial metaphor of interiorization are unquestionably evident throughout *Zostrianos*. The initial phases of Zostrianos's ascent through the first few aeonic strata are correlated with a series of autophanous visions of a luminous principle—an inherent “power” (δυναμις, possibly rendering *dunamis*)—that abides within the self. After his initial ascent in the light-cloud, he declares, “I knew the power existing *within me*, that it was placed over the darkness because it contained the entire light.”<sup>26</sup> Explaining the method of ascent through the level of the Aeonic Copies, Authrounious informs Zostrianos (at 11.9–14) that there are moments in which the aspirant can be illuminated from within by a *tupos*—i.e., the “type,” “model” or, more likely, “impression”—that comes into being within oneself when one attains a state of contemplative *apatheia*: “[S]ouls are enlightened by the light within them(selves) and (by) the *tupos* which often comes into being within them (when they are) in a (state of) impassibility.”<sup>27</sup> Although the remainder of the passage is marred by a lacuna, the implication is that the luminous impression appearing within the soul assists in the ascent, an interpretation which will be confirmed later.<sup>28</sup> The autophanous vision of

Hammadi) Gnostic literature, where it is usually used to describe the action of a divine rather than human figure.

26 *Zost.* NHC VIII 5.11–13 (text Barry, Funk, and Poirier, BCSN): [τ]οτε λείκωνν †σὸν  
ἐτωο[ο]π ἡζήτ †ε νεσκη ῥίλῃν πικακε [ε]γῆντας ἡμαγ ἡπογοεῖν τηρῷ.

27 Zost. NHC VIII 11.9–14 (text Barry, Funk, and Poirier, BCSN): εἰσάγει ΔΕ ΕΥΔΑ ΧΙ ΟΥΘΕΙΝ  
 ΝΙΣ[1] ΝΙΨΥΧΗ ΕΒΟΛ ΖΗΤΗΝ ΠΟΥΘΕ[1]Ν ΕΤΩΟΟΠ ΝΗΗΤΟΥ ΜΗ ΠΤΥΠ[ΟC] ΕΤΕΩΔΥΩΠΕ  
 ΝΗΗΤΟΥ Ν[ΟΥ]ΜΗΗΩΕ ΝΙΟΠ` ΖΗ ΟΥΗΗΤ[Δ]ΤΧ[1] ΜΚ[Δ]Ζ. Here I depart slightly from  
 the interpretation of Turner 2000a, 515, who takes ΝΗΗΤΟΥ to refer to the Aeon Copies  
 and translates ΖΗ ΟΥΗΗΤ[Δ]ΤΧ[1] ΜΚ[Δ]Ζ as “effortlessly.” According to Crum 1939, 164a,  
 ΔΤ-(ΧΙ)-ΜΚΔΖ can translate ἀπαθής. This makes considerably better sense in light of several  
 parallel NHC passages linking *apatheia* directly with salvation (e.g., *Ap. John* in Waldstein  
 and Wisse 1995, 68.20–69.15), and also by analogy with *Corpus Hermeticum* 13.7–13, in  
 which a vision of the self is immediately preceded by a progressive stilling of the psychic  
 passions and the attainment of perfect *apatheia*. If we take ΝΗΗΤΟΥ to refer to the souls,  
 then the light comes into being within themselves when they are in a state of *apatheia*.

28 The badly damaged passage at the bottom of p. 11 and top of p. 12 appears to be saying something to the effect that the luminous models that come into being within each soul

the indwelling *tupos* is attained through self-seeking; thus, at 44.1–5, while the eponymous visionary is in mid-ascent (apparently at the level of Autogenes), the revealer Ephesech informs him, “The person that can be saved is the one that *seeks himself and his intellect (nous)* and finds each of them. And how much power this one has!”<sup>29</sup> Ephesech then explains (at 44.17–22) that one who is saved can assimilate oneself to, and then transcend, each (presumably aeonic) stratum, and also that one can become divine through self-reversion. As in Plotinus’s concentric topology of the mystical subject, this self-reversion is explicitly equated to a return to the divine principle in oneself: “Whenever one [wishes], one again separates from all these and *withdraws (anachōrein) into oneself*; for one becomes divine, having withdrawn to God.”<sup>30</sup> The motif of self-reversion similarly recurs in the subsequent discussion of the incarnation of the soul; here Ephesech implies—in language again reminiscent of Plotinus—that those in need of salvation only “come down to birth” because of a deficiency resulting from the repeated failure of the (presumably pre-incarnate) soul to withdraw (*anachōrein*) perfectly to itself and thus to apprehend its inherent transcendentalia in absolute unity.<sup>31</sup> Conversely, however,

assist in the soul’s progressive ascent through the aeons, as souls are transferred from the various copies (*antitupoi*) of aeons with which the *tupoi* are associated (in the stratum of Aeon copies?), to the actually-existing aeons themselves; thus 12.9–15: “They are transferred individually from the copy of the Exile to the actually-existing Exile, from the copy of the Repentance to the actually-existing Repentance,” and so on. This interpretation is confirmed later, at 46.6–30. Cf. *Enn.* VI.9[9].11.44–45, εἰ ἀφ’ αὐτοῦ μεταβαίνοι ὡς εἰκῶν πρὸς ἀρχέτυπον, τῆλος ἂν ἔχοι τῆς πορείας.

29 *Zost.* NHC VIII 44.1–5 (text Barry, Funk, and Poirier, BCNH): ΠΙΡΩΜΕ ΔΕ ΕΤΕΩΔΥΝΑΖΜΕΥ ΠΕ ΠΗ ΕΤ’ ΚΩΤΕ ΝΩΩΥ ΕΨΗ ΠΕΦΗΟΥΣ ΔΥΩ ΝΩΩΙΝΕ ΉΠΟ[Υ]Δ ΠΟΥΔ ΜΗΟΟΥ ΔΥΩ ΔΕ ΟΥΨΤ[Δ]Υ Ή[ΜΑΥ Ή]ΟΥΗΡ ΝΩΟΗ.

30 *Zost.* NHC VIII 44.17–22 (text Barry, Funk, and Poirier, BCNH). ΕΩΩΠ’ ΕΩΩΔ[ΝΟΥ]ΩΩ ΠΑΛΙΝ ΟΗ Ε[Ω]ΔΥΠΩΡ[Χ Ή]C[Δ]ΒΟΛ ΉΝΑΪ ΤΗΡΟΥ ΔΥΩ Ή[ΤΟΥ] ΜΩΡΑΝΑΧΩΡ[Η Ν Ε]ΡΟΥ ΜΑΥΔ[ΔΥ] ΠΑΪ ΓΑΡ ΩΔ[ΩΥ]ΩΠΕ [Ή]ΝΟΥ[ΤΕ] ΕΔΥΡΑΝΑΧΩ[ΡΙ]Η ΕΠΙΟΥΤΕ.

31 *Zost.* NHC VIII 45.9–46.6 [text Barry, Funk, and Poirier, BCNH; complete passage in Appendix C4], to which compare *Enn.* V.3[49].12.35–38: “It is necessary, then, so that anything else can exist, that that one abide quietly by itself, or it will move prior to moving and will think prior to thinking, <or else> its first activity will be incomplete, *being only an impulse*” (δεῖ οὖν, ἵνα τι ἄλλο ὑποστῇ, ἡσυχίαν ἄγειν ἐφ’ ἑαυτοῦ πανταχοῦ ἐκεῖνο· εἰ δὲ μή, ἢ πρὸ τοῦ κινήθηναι κινήσεται, καὶ πρὸ τοῦ νοῆσαι νοήσει, <ἢ> ἢ πρώτη ἐνέργεια αὐτοῦ ἀτελής ἔσται ὁρμὴ μόνον οὐσα); also III.8[30].8.31–38: “Since also when it contemplates the One [or: even when the One contemplates] it is not as one; if not, it would not become Intellect. But beginning as one, it did not remain as it began, but unaware of itself, became multiple, as it were, weighted down, and unravelled itself wanting to have everything—as it was better for it not to have wanted this, [for] it became the second—like a circle unravelling itself it became shape and surface and circumference and center-point and lines, both those above and those below” (ἐπεὶ καὶ ὅταν τὸ ἐν θεωρῇ, οὐχ ὡς ἓν· εἰ δὲ μή, οὐ γίνεται νοῦς. ἀλλὰ ἀρξάμενος ὡς ἓν οὐχ ὡς ἡρξάτο ἔμεινεν, ἀλλ’ ἔλαθεν ἑαυτὸν πολλὺς γενόμενος, ὅσον βεβαρημένος, καὶ ἐξείλιξεν αὐτὸν πάντα ἔχειν θέλων—ὡς βέλτιον ἦν αὐτῷ μὴ ἐθελῆσαι τοῦτο, δεύτερον γάρ

(Ephesech continues) one can be saved if one “takes light” (χαίρειν: 46.1) and ascends with the assistance of certain mysterious “glories” ([ν]ιόου) that accompany one while still in the cosmos. The sense is recondite; initially it might seem that the glories are independent entities, and would therefore duplicate the function of the autophanous *tupoi* within the self, but the remainder of the passage suggests that the salvific “glories” and the powers or *tupoi* within the soul are in fact to be identified with each other. The “glories” are redescribed as “perfect thoughts” (ἐννοηματα νη ντελ[1]οc) within “powers” (νδου), and they are explicitly equated with “*tupoi* of salvation” (ρεντυπος [ν]η ντε ογοχ[α]).<sup>32</sup> These salvific *tupoi* are, one may presume, identical to the luminous *tupoi* that (as we have seen earlier, at 11.9 ff.) appear autophanically within the aspirant when he or she is able to attain a perfect state of contemplative *apatheia*; this is perhaps what is meant by the soul “taking light.”<sup>33</sup> The aspirant is thereby “empowered” and thus is able to exit the cosmos and ascend through the aeons by means of successive visions of these luminous indwelling powers: “One takes a *tupos*, receives strength from each of them, and with the glory as a helper (*boēthos*), one will thus pass out from the cosmos and all the aeons.”<sup>34</sup> Finally, another extensive passage (pp. 22–24) confirms that the *tupoi* correspond to fragments of the hypercosmic aeons within the aspirant; thus in response to Zostrianos’s inquiry—“How then can one acquire an eternal *tupos*?” (22.2–4)—Ephesech describes the process of ascent as a series of successive ablutions representing various modes of knowledge of, and

ἐγένετο—οἷον γὰρ κύκλος ἐξελίξας αὐτὸν γέγονε καὶ σχῆμα καὶ ἐπίπεδον καὶ περιφέρεια καὶ κέντρον καὶ γραμμαὶ καὶ τὰ μὲν ἄνω, τὰ δὲ κάτω).

- 32 *Zost. NHC VIII 46.15–27* (text Barry, Funk, and Poirier, BCNH): “This is why (powers) are appointed for their salvation, and each of the powers resides in this world. Within the self-begotten ones corresponding to each of the [aeons] stand glories so that one who is in the [world] might be saved beside them. The glories are perfect thoughts (νόημα τέλειος) appearing in powers. They are imperishable because [they are] *tupoi* of salvation which each saved one receives” (εἰς τὴν π[αί] σῆτην ἐρραῖ ἐκ τῆς μοιχᾶς ἡ[τ]ε) ναῖ· ἀγὼ ναῖσθον ναῖ σῶσι[σθ] ᾗ τῇ π[αί]· ἀγὼ ἡρραῖ ᾗ τῇ ν[α]γ[τ]ο[γ]ενῆς κατὰ ποῦα ποῦα ἥτε ν[ε]ων σεαρερα[τ]ο[γ] ἡ β[ε] γενοοῦ γῆνα .δε ἐφενό[γ]τῃ ἡ κα σπ[ρ] να[τ]ι ἡ β[ε] π[η] ἐτῆπ[ι]να· ν[ε] ἡσοῦ .δε ἐ[π]η[ν]ονηνα νε ἡτελ[ι]ος ἐφονῆ ἐπ[ι]ν[ε] σθον ἡσετακο .δε γενηγπος [νε] ἡτε ογοχᾶι· ἐτεεωαρ[ε]π[ι]ο[γ]α ποῦα χ[ι]τοῦ ἐφενόγτῃ ἐρ[α]ῖ ἐρσοῦ). [See complete passage in Appendix C5]. Cf. *Enn.* v.8[31].11.18–19: οἷος ἐκείθεν ἦκει ἐλάμποντα τοῖς νοήμασι.
- 33 Compare, for example, *Great Pow.* NHC VI 47.9–24, trans. Wisse, CGL: “Then the souls will appear, who are holy through the light of the Power, who is exalted above all powers, the immeasurable, the universal one, I and all those who will know me.... and they all have become as reflections (*eikōn*) in his light. They have all shone, and they have found rest in his rest.”
- 34 *Zost.* 46.27–31 (text Barry, Funk, and Poirier, BCNH): ἀγὼ ἐφ[ε]χι τυπος· ἐφ[ε]χι σθον ἐβολ γῆτῃ παῖ παῖ· ἀγ[ω] ἐγῆταγ ἡπεροῦ ἡογβονθο[ς] ἡπ[ρ]ῃ[τ]ε θαρ[ε]χ[ι]νε ἡπκοσμος ἀγ[ω] ἡε[ων] [ν]ῃ.

assimilation to, the “waters” corresponding to each aeonic stratum up through that of Barbelo,<sup>35</sup> and explains that this process is enabled by the consubstantiality of one’s inherent *tupos* and its corresponding aeonic archetype; thus, “according to each place one has a portion of the eternal ones [and] ascends [to them].”<sup>36</sup> Precisely as in Plotinus, the “ascent” requires a progressive assimilation to ever more interior aspects of the subject’s own self, each of which appear as a luminous manifestation at the culmination of an act of self-reversion.

### 3.3 *Mystical Self-Reversion and Autophany in Allogenes*

As in *Zostrianos*, the conjoined themes of mystical self-reversion and autophany similarly pervade *Allogenes*; unlike *Zostrianos*, however, the motif of self-reversion underlies the entire structure of the ascent and persists throughout the final stages, even up to and including the ultimate apprehension of the Unknowable One. The clearest textual example of an autophany in the Platonizing Sethian corpus—one with distinct Plotinian echoes<sup>37</sup>—occurs at *Allogenes* 52.6–13, during the preparatory phase of ascent: “[My soul became] weak and I escaped (from it); I hastened greatly, and [I] turned to myself alone; I saw the light that [surrounded] me and the Good that was in me. I became

35 Turner 1988 has pointed out that in the Sethian corpus baptism and immersion are very closely related with visionary experience, and points to the origin of the Sethian ritual in Jewish baptismal rites.

36 *Zost.* NHC VIII 23.17–21 (text Turner, 2000a, 532): κατὰ ποῦα ποῦα [ἡ] τοποῦ οὐ γῆταρ ἡμαρ ἡο[υ]μερικον ἦτε ἡιδᾶ ἐμε[ρ] ἀγ[ω]ν παρῶν ἐλ[ρα]ί εροογ]. Plotinus similarly attributes *tupoi* to individual Forms in the intelligible at VI.7[38].16.4–6: “Each is thus a form, each is also as it were its unique *tupos*, but being in the form of the Good, all have in common that which runs over them all” (ἐκαστον μὲν οὖν εἶδος, ἕκαστον καὶ ἴδιος οἶον τύπος· ἀγαθοειδὲς δὲ ὃν κοινὸν τὸ ἐπιθέον ἐπὶ πάσι πάντα ἔχει).

37 The simultaneous vision of the first principle—the Good (to *agathon*) of Plato’s *Respublica* (now interiorized within the mystical subject), and also of light from within oneself that also surrounds one (πογγειν ἐτκωτε)—to which one may also compare Plotinus’s use of the verb *periphōtizein* to describe the autophany at VI.9[9].4.20—is reminiscent of the autophany of VI.9[9].9.55–56: “Here, at this point, *one can see both him and oneself*.” Compare also the vision of the indwelling, *agathoeidēs* light at VI.8[39].15.14–21. Here, however, the author of *Allogenes* appears to have calqued language typical of Middle Platonism onto an (apparently original) mystical *epistrophē*; cf. for example, Alcinous, *Didaskalikos* 10.6.1–7 (text Whittaker 1990): θεωρῶν γὰρ τις ... ὃ αὐτὸ τὸ ἀγαθὸν νοεῖ καὶ τὸ πρῶτον ἐραστὸν καὶ ἐφετὸν ὥσπερ φῶς φανέν καὶ οἶον ἐκλάμπαν τῇ οὕτως ἀνιούσῃ ψυχῇ· τοῦτω δὲ καὶ θεὸν συνεπινοεῖ διὰ τὴν ἐν τῷ τιμίῳ ὑπεροχὴν.

divine.”<sup>38</sup> Here—to paraphrase—the eponymous visionary (i) exits his soul,<sup>39</sup> (ii) “turns” or reverts to his true, solitary, self,<sup>40</sup> (iii) sees both a light surrounding himself and the Good (*agathon*) within himself, and finally (iv) is divinized (we may recall the general statement we have just seen at *Zostrianos* 44.17–22 that divinization follows from self-reversion). In this case, however, the initial self-reversion and its ensuing divinization are not the ultimate goal, but instead—as is often the case in Plotinus’s descriptions of autophany—serve as a prerequisite for the final moments of ascent.<sup>41</sup> Immediately after this passage, at *Allogenes* 52.15–18, Youel informs Allogenes that since he has come to know the Good within him, he is now ready for an even greater revelation; later, at 56.14–21, just prior to the eponymous visionary’s century-long period of meditation, she reiterates the need for further self-seeking, and explicitly connects it with knowledge of one’s kinship with the hyperontic (“pre-existent”) deity: “If you [seek with a perfect] seeking, [then] you shall know the [Good that is] within you; then [you will know yourself] as well, the one who is [from] the God who truly [pre-exists].”<sup>42</sup>

The act of self-reversion is repeated yet again during the ultimate phase of the visionary ascent through the Triple Powered One. This is portrayed as a tripartite introversion towards increasingly interiorized aspects of Allogenes's own self. Allogenes attains each of the three powers—Blessedness, Vitality, and Existence—by means of an act of contemplative “withdrawal,” each of which culminates in the sudden apprehension of a higher principle within himself. As in both *Zostrianos* and Plotinus, the verb *anachōrein* (=ἀναχωρεῖν) is a technical term connoting contemplative self-reversion;<sup>43</sup> it also occurs elsewhere with the same sense in the Platonizing Sethian corpus and throughout Gnostic literature, where it also indicates the heavenly return of a divine figure.<sup>44</sup> The

38 *Allogenes* NHC XI 52.6–13 (text Funk and Scopello, BCSN): ἀ[ϰῖ Ϯ] ἀβ ἡτ[τ· ἡ] ἵεῖ τὰϣ[ϣ]  
 ἡ· δῶ [α]εῖρ ἐβ[ολ αειωτ]ορῑρ ἐματε· δῶ[ω αε]ῖκοτῑρ· εροι οὔα[ατ· α]εῖναδ  
 εἰσοροεῖν εἴτ[τ· κω]τε εροι ἡν παγαθον εἴῑρητ· αεῖρ νοῦτε.

39 The implication may be that the mystical subject needs to “escape” from the soul—or from some aspect of it—because it is an inferior, demiurgic creation, the dwelling of the reviled passions, and therefore must be transcended during the ascent.

40 This “turning,” rendered here with the Coptic verb κωτε, parallels Plotinus’s use of *epistrophē* to describe mystical self-reversion.

41 Cf. *Enn.* VI.8[39].15.14–21.

42 *Allogenes* ΝΗC XI 56.14–21 (text Funk and Scopello, BSHN): [ε]ϰωπε εκϰα[νωμινε ᾗ  
ογ]μινε εϰζη[κ εβολ· τότε] εκέειμε επι[αγαθον εἴ]νητῖ· τότε ε[κ]έειμε εροκ]  
ῥωκ· πη ετ’ [ωροπ εβολ ᾗ] πνογτε εἴρ [ωροῖ ἡωροπ] οητωc.

43 E.g., in Philo, *De specialibus legibus* I, 298; *De vita contemplativa* 89;

44 E.g., in *Bk. Thom.* NHC II 139.30–31; *Orig. World* NHC II 127.4; *Great Pow.* NHC VI 46.6; *Paraph. Shem* NHC VII 43.30.

related (but badly damaged) Platonizing Sethian tractate *Marsanes* similarly uses the terminology of *anachōrēsis* explicitly to describe contemplative self-reversion leading to the knowledge of the transcendent Triple Powered One.<sup>45</sup> That Allogenes's *anachōrēsis* specifically involves a reflexive or selfward motion is confirmed by the Luminaries' final instructions, in which they exhort him to "withdraw" to the Vitality by "turning to" or "seeking yourself" (ἐκκώτε ἑαυτὸν).<sup>46</sup> In Allogenes's post-factum report of the ascent (60.12–61.22), he describes the three phases in detail [see the complete passage in Appendix C7]. (i) First, an initial "stillness of silence" abides within himself, and yet—paradoxically—he "hears" the Blessedness; by means of this Blessedness he "knows (his) proper self."<sup>47</sup> This phase is apparently to be equated with the attainment of the Intellect proper, associated with discursive thought (represented by the audition)<sup>48</sup> and perfect self-knowledge.<sup>49</sup> (ii) In the next phase,

45 *Marsanes* 9.21–28 (text Funk and Poirier, BCNH): "We have all withdrawn to ourselves. We have become silent, and when we came to know him, that is, the Three-Powered, [we] bowed down; we [...] [we] blessed him [...] upon us" (ἀναῖν τῆρῃ ἀν[ῖ]ρα·ἡαχωρι ἡεν· ἀρῆ[ι]ω)πε ἐνκαρὰε[ι]τ ἀγω ἡ[ι]ταρῆσογω[ι]ῃ[ι] ῥωων χε[ι] πατ[ρ]ωα[ι]τε ἡῶα πε ἀρῆ[ι] παρ[τ]ῆ ἀρ[ι]τ[ρ] εαγ ἀρῆ[ι]σογ ἀρ[α]γ [...] ἀχων ἡ[ι]...). Cf. *Enn.* 111.8[30].9.29–31: δεῖ τὸν νοῦν οἶον εἰς τοῦπίσω ἀναχωρεῖν καὶ οἶον ἑαυτὸν ἀφέντα τοῖς εἰς ὅπισθεν αὐτοῦ. The verb ἀναχωρεῖν occurs, interestingly, in the context of another classic Platonic "apocalypse," that of Timarchus in Plutarch, in a passage reminiscent also of Zostrianos's ascent in a light-cloud, *De gen. soc.* 590b (text de Lacy and Einarson, 1953, LCL): "While withdrawing back up (*anachōrousa*), [out of his skull through his cranial sutures, Timarchus's soul] mixed with air that was radiant and pure ..." (ὥς δ' ἀναχωροῦσα κατεμίγνυτο πρὸς ἀέρα διαυγῇ καὶ καθαρὸν ἀσμένῃ).

46 *Allogenes* NHC XI 59.9–16 (text Funk and Scopello, BCNH): "O Allogenes! Behold your Blessedness, how it exists in a silence by which you know your proper self. And withdraw upon the Vitality—that which you will see moving—by turning to yourself" (παλλο[γ] ἐνῆς ἐναγ ἐτῆντ·ἡακαριος ἐτῆντακ ἡῶε ἐτῶοοπ ῥῆ ογσιγῆ· τῆ ἐτεκεῖνε ἐροκ ἡρῆτς κατ[ρ]οκ· ἀγω ἀριαῖαχωρι ἐχῆ τῆτῆτ·ὠνῆ ἐκκώτε ἡῶα· τῆ ἐτεκῆααγ ἐροκ ἐκκῆ). According to Crum (1939, 125a), the verb κώτε with the prepositional object marker ἡμο usually indicates the reflexive "to turn oneself," or "return," (e.g., *epistrephesthai*), while with the preposition ἡῶ it primarily means "to seek." This latter option would be a possibility here on the basis of ὠνῆ in a similar context at *Allogenes* 56.16 (cf. Turner 2004, 94); however, it appears likely that the spatial connotation is indicated by the immediate context of the metaphor of "withdrawal"; thus also Scopello's translation in BCNH: "en se tournant vers toi-même."

47 If we accept the emendation at 60.18 of κατ[ρ]οκ to κατ[ρ]οκ<ι>; this is proposed by King (1995, 148) and Turner (2004, 184) (and accepted by Scopello in her translation in the BCNH edition, but not reproduced in the BCNH text) on the basis of the nearly identical instruction at 59.13.

48 Plotinus similarly uses audition as a metaphor for the initial phases of mystical apprehension, at, e.g., 111.8[30].9.26; a mention of mystical audition similarly occurs at *Corp. Herm.* 10.17.

49 Elsewhere in the text (49.26–37) we find "Intelligence" (τῆνοητης) occupying the position of Blessedness in the noetic triad.



Allogenes “withdraws upon” (ἀναχωρεῖ εἰς) the second power, Vitality, by “turning towards it”—or, possibly, “towards <myself>”:<sup>50</sup> “And I withdrew upon the Vitality as I turned towards (myself), and I accompanied it to enter within (together) with it, and I stood, not firmly but still. And I saw an eternal, intellectual motion that pertains to all the formless powers, which is unlimited by limitation.”<sup>51</sup> In the Sethian ontogenetic schema, as in Plotinus, vitality, and motion appear to characterize the first efflux of the supreme principle; above this one finds the transcendent stability of Existence, correlated with the supreme principle itself. The motion of Vitality is said to be unlimited by Form (*eidē*) that is present in the Intelligible; and although it is in motion, it is indivisible and unlimited.<sup>52</sup> At this stage, then, the vision supersedes even perfect self-knowledge, as Allogenes has apparently transcended Form and thus intellection altogether. The peculiar phrase ἀεὶ ὄνῃς ἑσθλὸς ἐξοῦν ἐρος ἡμῶς—“I accompanied (lit. ‘befriended’) it (i.e., the Vitality) to enter into it (together) with it”—is puzzling, but the spatial sense of interiorization is clear; the notion of entrance “into” the power together with the power itself hints at the image of a priest or mystagogue leading the initiate into the successive enclosures of a cult-sanctuary (Plotinus also frequently uses the image of entering a sanctuary, yet for him, the emphasis is instead upon solitude within the temple). More importantly, however, one may recall Plotinus’s unmistakable echo of this passage at 111.8[30].9.32–39—tellingly, in the opening treatise of the *Großschrift*—in which he describes the penultimate stage of ascent as a mystical *anachōrēsis* in which the Intellect surrenders itself to a hypernoetic, eternally burgeoning principle of Life, a vital principle that also serves in some manner as the faculty of hypernoetic apprehension.<sup>53</sup> We also encounter here

50 If one accepts the possible emendation of ms. ἑσθλὸς to ἑσθλ<ῖ>. at 60.20. Though it is hardly necessary for my argument, the rationale is that if indeed one accepts the emendation at 60.18 on the basis of the parallel at 59.13 (see n. 47 *supra*), then similar evidence (i.e., 59.15: ἐκκῶτε ἑσθλὸς) supports a similar emendation here. It is easy to imagine how a scribe, having already made an error at 60.20—thus having forgotten the unfamiliar reflexive formula he or she correctly transcribed on the previous page—would simply repeat the same error a few lines later. One argument against this reading, however, is the fact that the next line has an ambiguous third-person indirect object (possibly the Vitality itself?) which is possibly what is referred to here.

51 *Allogenes* NHC XI 60.19–28 (text Funk and Scopello, BCNH): ἀγὼ ἀεὶ ἀναχωρεῖ εἰς τὴν ὄνῃς ἐκκῶτε ἑσθλὸς ἀγὼ ἀεὶ ὄνῃς ἑσθλὸς ἐξοῦν ἐρος ἡμῶς ἀγὼ ἀειδρατὶ ἡρπᾷ ἔν ὀγτάχρο ἀν’ ἀλλὰ ἔν ὀγτροκ ἀγὼ ἀἰναγ ἐγκιν ἡδᾶ ἐνεγ ἡνοερον ἡατιπῶρξ· ἐπαμῖσθον τηρογ πε ἡνατ’ εἰδος ἡνατ’ τ’ τοῦ ἐρογ ἔν ὀγτ’ τοῦ.

52 We have seen that Plotinus too describes the *pne* in terms of “life” and “motion.”

53 *Enn.* 111.8[30].9.32–34: “if it wishes to see that one, it must not be altogether intellect. For it is itself the first life, being an activity in the going-through-and-out of all things” (εἰ ἐθέλοι ἐκεῖνο ὁρᾶν, μὴ πάντα νοῦν εἶναι. Ἔστι μὲν γὰρ αὐτὸς ζωὴ πρώτη, ἐνέργεια οὖσα ἐν διεξόδῳ τῶν πάντων).

the common Sethian motif of “standing” in contemplation, a motif which, as we have seen, similarly occurs in Plotinus’s accounts of autophany.<sup>54</sup> (iii) Finally, in the third phase, Allogenes’s self-withdrawal is repeated yet again; he “withdraws upon” the Existence and finds it “standing and at rest *according to an ‘image and likeness’ of that which is invested upon me* by a revelation of the Indivisible and that which is at rest.”<sup>55</sup> The passage is ambiguous and offers two possible interpretations. On the one hand, it may be that (a) Allogenes’s apprehension—his “finding” (ϢΝΤ)—is what is enabled by means of (ΕΒΟΛ ΖΗΤΗ) the revelation or manifestation (ΟΥΩΝΕ ΕΒΟΛ) of the Indivisible One itself; support for this interpretation may be found in the fact that the motif of investiture with a heavenly garment at the moment of angelification or other forms of transformation occurs in other Sethian tractates and is also ubiquitous in the apocalyptic literature upon which *Allogenes* is modeled. Or, on the other hand, it might be that (b) “that which is conferred or invested upon” him is the result of the revelation; in this latter case we may perhaps connect the “image” and “likeness” process with the luminous *tupoi* that we have seen earlier. In either case, however, it is certain that the object of Allogenes’s apprehension resembles or reflects himself as an *eikōn*: a term with which Plotinus also describes both the PNE and the transcendental self. In other words, at this third phase of self-reversion, having attained perfect stasis and rest, Allogenes apprehends the final power of the Triple Powered One—namely, Existence—as *his own image*. This autophany enables him to advance to the ultimate phase and attain the Unknowable One.<sup>56</sup>

Thus having attained the third and final power, Existence (*huparxis*), Allogenes is finally on the verge of apprehending the supreme transcendent

54 On the theme of stasis and stability as essential to Sethian identity and praxis, see Williams 1985.

55 *Allogenes* NHC XI 60.30–37 (text Funk and Scopello, BCNH): ΔΕΙΡΑΝΑΧΩΡΙ ΕΞΗ ΤΖΥΠΑΡΙΣ ΤΗ ΕΤΑΕΙΘΗΤΕ ΕΣΑΡΕΡΑΤΕ· ΔΥΩ ΕΣΩΡΚ ΗΜΟΣ ΚΑΤΑ ΟΥΖΙΚΩΝ ΗΝ ΟΥΕΙΝΕ ΝΤΕ ΠΗ ΕΤ· ΤΟΕ ΖΙΩΔΤ· ΕΒΟΛ ΖΗΤΗ ΟΥΩΝΕ ΕΒΟΛ ΝΤΕ ΠΑΤ· ΠΩΩ ΗΝ ΠΗ ΕΤΣΩΡΚ ΗΜΟΦ. It is interesting to note here that each stage of the threefold self-withdrawal involves a slightly different cognitive modality. The first apprehension, that of Blessedness, is purely intellectual and occurs by means of audition, suggestive of discursive thought. Allogenes then “sees” the motion of Vitality. The apprehension of Existence, the supreme power of the Triple Powered One, is presented in the implicitly visual terms of image and likeness, but perhaps deliberately, neither hearing nor sight is specified, suggesting some more ineffable form of perception.

56 One may of course connect Allogenes’s sequential passage through the Triple Powered One with Plotinus’s veiled references to the noetic triad in accounts of mystical ascent; see Excursus on *the enigmatic Sethian tupoi and their possible reflection in Plotinus*, pp. 162–164 *infra*.

principle by means of an ineffable “unknowing” and an enigmatic “primary revelation” (to which we will return in §4.4.1). At this point in the text, however, we encounter a peculiarity. The climactic description of the transcendental apprehension that follows the description of ascent through the Triple Powered One seems to repeat itself; indeed, the two sentences (at 60.37–61.14) are so similar that at first glance one might suspect dittography. On closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that the duplication is deliberate; the two descriptions of “primary revelation” differ slightly and thus mean to subdivide the experience of transcendental apprehension into two sequential moments. First, the penultimate moment: [1] “I was filled with a revelation, by a primary revelation of the Unknowable, as though ‘unknowing’ him, I knew him and received power from him, and having received an eternal strength, *I knew that which exists within me* and the Triple-Powered and the manifestation of that of his which is uncontainable.”<sup>57</sup> Next, the ultimate moment: [2] “And by means of a primary revelation of the First one unknowable *to them all*—the god who is beyond perfection—I saw him and the Triple-Powered One *who exists in them all*.”<sup>58</sup> The differences between [1] and [2] are subtle but significant. In phase [1] Allogenes is (i) “filled” with the revelation and thus (ii) “permanently strengthened” (as we have seen, both “filling” and “strengthening” are specific technical concepts that occur repeatedly in Plotinus’s accounts of autophany).<sup>59</sup> Allogenes then apprehends (i) the Unknowable One, (ii) the principle that abides within *himself* (ἐν ὡσόν ἑαυτῷ), (iii) the Triple Powered One, and finally, (iv) the manifestation of the Triple Powered One’s “uncontainableness” or “unboundedness” (ἄμεινον ὄν); yet again, this foreshadows Plotinus’s description of the hylic-seeming indefiniteness and / or unboundedness of the transcendental self *qua* PNE. In moment [2], Allogenes again apprehends (i) the First One and (ii) the Triple Powered One; yet in this case, unlike [1], both are described in universal, not individual, terms: the First One as *universally* unknowable ἄτα[ς] οὐκ ὄντι πανταχόθεν, the Triple Powered One as *universally* immanent (ἐν παντί ὄντι πανταχόθεν). In support of this interpretation is

57 *Allogenes* ΝΗC XI 61.4–8 (text Funk and Scopello, BCNH): εαλειx̄ ἰοϣ̄x̄p̄o ἡ̄ν̄ητ̄ [ἡ̄]ϣ̄a  
 ε̄νε̄ε̄ δ̄εῑcoϣ̄oṽn π̄η ε̄[τ̄]ϣ̄]oο̄π̄ ἡ̄ν̄ητ̄ ἡ̄ν̄ π̄oϣ̄ητ̄·c̄o[ḡ] ἡ̄ν̄ π̄oϣ̄oṽ̄ε̄ ε̄[bo]λ̄ ἡ̄τε  
 π̄[ι]λ̄τ̄·ϣ̄oṽ̄π̄ ε̄p̄oϣ̄ ε̄[ḡ]ḡ̄τ̄aϣ̄. Given the ambiguity of the preposition ἡ̄ν̄- it is possible  
 that the inherent principle and the Triple Powered One are meant to be identical and / or  
 both to abide “within” the mystical subject.

58 *Allogenes* ΝΗC XI 61.8–14 (text Funk and Scopello, BCNH): α[Υω] εβολ ρίπν ογνντ' ωροπι  
 ν[ΟΥ]πῶξ εβολ ἡτε πιωροπι ἡατ' [C]ογωμῆq ναγ τηρογ' πινογτε ετ' ἄοσε ετελιος  
 ἀῖναq εροq μῆν πιωντ' ὅση ετ' ωροπι ἡρητογ τηρογ.

59 Cf., for example, v.5[32].8.12, where the transcendental self is “as if *filled with strength*” (οἷον πληρωθεὶς μένους); see discussion in Ch. 3, *Strengthening / perfecting*, p. 107 and *infra*.

the enigmatic statement by the luminaries during the previous instructional phase that *Allogenes* has within himself an inherent *tupos* that corresponds to “all these” (ΝΑΪ ΤΗΡΟΥ, if we accept the reconstruction) or perhaps “these universal ones,” “everything”: “According to the impression (*tupos*) that is within you, know that it is the same with all these ones, according to the same pattern (σμοτ).”<sup>60</sup> This may in turn be brought into connection with the inherent *tupoi* in *Zostrianos* that we have seen to model the higher principles within the aspirant’s own subjectivity. We may, therefore, conclude that the first primary revelation—the penultimate phase [1]—entails the initial apprehension (or autophany) of the hypertranscendental powers as they inhere within *Allogenes*’s own individual constitution as an *eikōn* or *tupos*, as it were, of the ultimate mystical union, while the ultimate phase [2] describes the visionary’s experience of the attainment of the Unknowable One in some more objective, universal, actuality. Here we have an apparent precursor of Plotinus’s extremely subtle and easily overlooked distinction between, on the one hand (i) the penultimate moment at which the mystical subject, having already experienced the autophany (phase C), attains a perfect self-coalescence (phase C<sup>2</sup>)—i.e., the moment at which it converges with the subject’s own transcendent center-point or transcendental self, which is virtually indistinguishable from the One—and, on the other hand (ii) the ultimate moment of ΜΥΟ in which the subject is reabsorbed, as *eikōn* towards its *archetupos*, into the unbounded radiance of the first principle itself (phases D and E). We may also detect an echo of this Sethian construction—“in me” versus “in them all” or “in everything”—in Plotinus’s very last words: “Try to lead the god *in us* back to the divine *in the all*.”<sup>61</sup>

### 3.4 *Excursus: The Enigmatic Sethian Tupoi and their Possible Reflection in Plotinus*

We have seen that both *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* refer to enigmatic luminous *tupoi*—“types,” “models,” or “impressions”—that appear within the soul of the autophanous aspirant. In *Zostrianos* the *tupoi* are equated with “helpers” (*boēthoi*) that assist the aspirant during the ascent, while in *Allogenes* the visionary is said to have an indwelling *tupos* that corresponds to “all these” (realities) or, possibly, the “universals.” What is meant by this? One might note that the language of *eikōn* and *tupos* pervades the Sethian corpus and also can be found in Valentinian texts. The term *tupos* itself—which can mean

60 *Allogenes* ΝΗC XI 59.38–60.2 (text Funk and Scopello, ΒCΣΗ): ΚΑΤΑ ΠΙΤΥΠΟΣ ΕΤ΄ΩΟΟΠ ΝΖΗΤΚ· ΕΙΜΕ ΟΝ ΝΤΖΕ [60] [Σ]Ε ΕΦΩΟΟΠ ΝΤΖΕ ΖΝ Ν[ΑΙ ΤΗΡΟ]Υ ΚΑΤΑ ΠΕΙCΜΟΤ΄.

61 Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 2.26–27: πειρᾶσθε τὸν ἐν ἡμῖν θεὸν ἀνάγειν πρὸς τὸ ἐν τῷ παντὶ θεῖον.

ambiguously either the impression or the model from which the impression is made—was important in Stoic epistemology,<sup>62</sup> but it was also already employed by Philo of Alexandria in a theological sense, to describe the innate impression of the divine in the human mind.<sup>63</sup> Something of this sort undoubtedly underlies the Sethian conception. Yet another connotation of the word *tupos* is a “carved figure” or a “statue,”<sup>64</sup> and it is therefore possible that the Platonizing Sethians envisioned these, interior *tupoi*, to be something like statues or imprinted figures of the transcendentia that inhere within the soul. As we have seen, Plotinus frequently makes use of the image of intrapsychic statues or images. We may recall that at I.6[1].9.14 he uses the elaborate simile of the transcendental self as a “statue” or “cult-image” (*agalma*), and later in the chapter, he equates the statue with the faculty that sees or unites with the One. He then insists that this faculty—now called the indwelling “eye that sees the great Beauty”—specifically obviates the need for a “guide” or “demonstrator” (*deiknus*).<sup>65</sup> Plotinus thus makes a close association between (on the one hand) the intrapsychic image of the divinized self described as a cult-icon, and (on the other hand) the function that it replaces, i.e., that of the mystagogue who guides the aspirant on the mystical ascent. We have seen that *Zostrianos* mentions enigmatic *tupoi* within the soul that assist as “helpers” (*boēthoi*) in the ascent. Might this Plotinian passage be a deliberate response to the Platonizing Sethian image of the indwelling statue as a mystagogue? That the image of the transcendental self as a cult-icon had a particular importance for Plotinus is indicated by the fact that he repeatedly returns to it in various guises, and with a variety of terms, throughout his works.<sup>66</sup> For example, in the very next treatise he wrote after our original passage of I.6[1].9—i.e., his second, IV.7[2]—he describes the virtues of the soul as inherent “cult-images” (*agalmata*) within oneself that one sees when the soul abides “itself by itself in comprehension of itself” (αὐτὴ παρ’ αὐτῇ [H-S<sup>1</sup>: αὐτῇ] ἐν τῇ κατανοήσει ἑαυτῆς: 10.44–45) and “[sees] itself having become isolated” (αὐτόν... ὁρῶν μεμονωμένον: 49–50). Likewise, as we have seen, Plotinus uses the terminology of *eikōn* and *archetupos* to describe the ultimate surrender of the transcendental self (phase D) at VI.9[9].11.44–45. This may be understood in connection with his imagery of “imprinting” the soul as *tabula rasa* in the final stage of MUO, but Plotinus also implies that it is to be understood as an inherent *pre-existing* imprint

62 E.g., Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus mathematicos* 7.373.3.

63 Philo, *Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesin* 2.62.6.

64 Thus LSJ 1835a, citing, among other instances, LXX Amos 5:26.

65 *Enn.* I.6[1].9.23–24: “at that point, having already ascended, you have no need for a demonstrator” (ἐνταῦθα ἥδη ἀναβεβηκώς μηκέτι τοῦ δεικνύντος δεηθεῖς).

66 See Chapter 3 *supra*, *Image / statue / likeness / mental image*, pp. 111–112.

within the soul that enables *ΜΟΥ*. Much later, at v.8[32].11.3–4—thus mid-*Großschrift*—he says that the autophanous aspirant “presents himself to himself and looks at a beautified *eikōn* of himself”;<sup>67</sup> he then proceeds to use more blatantly Sethian terminology, advising one to “remain within some kind of *tupos* of him while seeking to discern into what sort of thing one is entering.”<sup>68</sup> Now the ultimate source of image of the statue within the soul is Platonic, and derives not only from the key passage of the *Phaedrus* about working on the statue of one’s beloved, but also from *Symposium* 215a ff., where Alcibiades compares Socrates to a statue of a repulsive, satyresque Silenus that can be split open to reveal cult-images (*agalmata*) of the (presumably more august) gods within.<sup>69</sup> While the Platonic sources probably lie in the distant—or not so distant<sup>70</sup>—background of both the Plotinian and Platonizing Sethian notion of intrapsychic images, one more proximate source may possibly be found in earlier (second century) Gnostic thought, in which speculation about both ontogenesis and salvation through *tupoi* and *antitupoi* was already current,<sup>71</sup> and where it possibly was related to the ritual use of seals and *sumbola*.<sup>72</sup>

67 v.8[32].11.3: ἐαυτὸν προφέρει καὶ εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ καλλωπισθεῖσαν βλέπει.

68 v.8[32].11.14–15: ἐν τινὶ τύπῳ αὐτοῦ μένοντα μετὰ τοῦ ζητεῖν γνωματεύειν αὐτόν, εἰς οἷον δὲ εἴσεισιν.

69 Plato, *Symposium* 215a5–b3: “I say that he [Socrates] is most like the [statues] of Silenus seated in the herm-carver’s [workshops], the ones which the craftsmen carve holding *syringes* or flutes, the ones which, when their two halves are separated, are shown to have cult-icons of the gods within” (φημί γὰρ δὴ ὁμοιότατον αὐτὸν εἶναι τοῖς σιληνοῖς τούτοις τοῖς ἐν τοῖς ἐρμολυφείοις καθημένοις, οὓστινας ἐργάζονται οἱ δημιουργοὶ σύριγγας ἢ αὐλοὺς ἔχοντας, οἱ διχάδε διοιχθέντες φαίνονται ἐνδοθεν ἀγάλματα ἔχοντες θεῶν).

70 In a series of recent (unpublished) colloquium presentations, Turner and Corrigan have proposed that the *Symposium* underlies a great deal of the structure of *Allogenes*, with the five sequential revelations of Youel corresponding to the five principal disquisitions on Love—see esp. Turner 2000b, 214–16 [and Corrigan 2013—ed.]. Youel herself might also be compared to Diotima. On the use of the *Symposium* by pre-Plotinian Gnostics, see also Czachesz 2006.

71 E.g., Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 1.1.1, 1.1.13, 1.1.16, 1.1.17, 1.10.1 (*tupos*); *ibid.*, 1.1.10 (*antitupos*); *Tri. Trac.* NHC I 123.11–23 (*tupos*). The widespread concept of *tupoi* in Gnosticism remains to be studied in detail.

72 Thus, for example, according to Origen (*Contra Celsum* 6.31.29), the ascending Ophite Gnostic declares to the archon of the fifth realm, “I am watched over by the impression of an image” (εἰκόνι τύπου τετηρημένον); also, note the 13 seals (*sphragides*) that play some role in the ritual ascension of *Marsanes*. On inner *sunthēmata* see also Shaw 1999 and Mazur 2004.

### 3.5 *Excursus: Echoes of the Sethian Noetic Triad in Plotinus’s Mystical Passages*

While *Allogenes* makes extensive use of the triadic (Mentality / Blessedness-Vitality-Existence) structure of the Triple Powered One to organize the sequential self-reversions that enable the ascent between the Barbelo Aeon and the Unknowable One, Plotinus explicitly admits no such formalized structure to order the phases of ascent “between” Intellect and the One, although as we have seen, his scheme nevertheless tacitly presupposes a considerable interhypostatic complexity. It is therefore intriguing that in a number of mystical passages, at the point at which the aspirant is ascending towards the One from Intellect, Plotinus makes peculiar, even awkward, allusions to the noetic (Being-Life-Mind) triad which appears to echo the three powers of the Sethian Triple Powered One. Unlike *Allogenes*, however, in Plotinus’s allusions, the elements of the triad occur in no particular order, and do not seem to represent a hierarchical series; in certain cases, one or another element is omitted, and the terminology is not fixed. Consider the following passages: [a] 1.[6].1.7.4–12: “[T]he attainment of it is for those ascending towards the above and is for those who have been converted and who shed what we put on while descending—just as with those going up to the [inner] sanctuaries of the temples, the purifications and taking off of the clothing beforehand, and the going up naked—until, in the ascent leaving everything behind inasmuch as it is foreign to god, one should see, by oneself alone, *it* alone, absolute, simple, pure, from which everything depends and looks to it, and *is*, and *lives*, and *thinks*; for it is cause of *life and mind and being*.”<sup>73</sup> [b] VI.9[9].9.1–2: “In this round dance one sees the *spring of life, the spring of Intellect, the principle of being*, the root of the soul.”<sup>74</sup> [c] VI.7[38].31.31–34: “In that very moment, she sees all things are beautiful and true, and she takes on more strength, *filled with the life of being; and having really also become Being herself, and having true consciousness*, she perceives she is close to what she has long been seeking.”<sup>75</sup> [d] VI.7[38].35.42–44: “Therefore the soul does not move, then, since that does

73 [a] 1.[6].1.7.4–12: τεύξις δὲ αὐτοῦ ἀναβαίνουσι πρὸς τὸ ἄνω καὶ ἐπιστραφεῖσι καὶ ἀποδυομένοις ἃ καταβαίνοντες ἡμίψισμεθα· οἷον ἐπὶ τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἱερῶν τοῖς ἀνιούσι καθάρσεις τε καὶ ἱματίων ἀποθέσεις τῶν πρὶν καὶ τὸ γυμνοῖς ἀνιέναι· ἕως ἄν τις παρελθὼν ἐν τῇ ἀναβάσει πᾶν ὅσον ἀλλότριον τοῦ θεοῦ αὐτῷ μόνῳ αὐτὸ μόνον ἴδῃ εἰλικρινές, ἀπλοῦν, καθαρὸν, ἀφ’ οὗ πάντα ἐξήρτηται καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸ βλέπει καὶ ἔστι καὶ ζῆ καὶ νοεῖ· ζωῆς γὰρ αἴτιος καὶ νοῦ καὶ τοῦ εἶναι.

74 [b] VI.9[9].9.1–2: Ἐν δὲ ταύτῃ τῇ χορείᾳ καθορᾷ πηγὴν μὲν ζωῆς, πηγὴν δὲ νοῦ, ἀρχὴν ὄντος, ἀγαθοῦ αἰτίας, ῥίζαν ψυχῆς.

75 [c] VI.7[38].31.31–34: Ἐνθα δὲ εἶδε μὲν καλὰ πάντα καὶ ἀληθῆ ὄντα, καὶ ἐπερρώσθη πλέον τῆς τοῦ ὄντος ζωῆς πληρωθεῖσα, καὶ ὄντως ὄν καὶ αὐτὴ γενομένη καὶ σύνεσιν ὄντως λαβοῦσα ἐγγὺς οὕσα αἰσθάνεται οὐ πάλλαι ζητεῖ.

not either. Nor, therefore, is it soul, because that does not *live*, but is above *life*. Nor is it *intellect*, because it does not *think* either; for it is necessary to become similar.”<sup>76</sup> [e] VI.7[38].36.10–15: “Whoever has become simultaneously the contemplator and himself the object of his contemplation of himself and all other things, and having become *substance and intellect and the “all-perfect living being,”* should no longer behold it from without, but having become this, is nearby, and that one is next in order, and it is already close by, gleaming upon all the intelligible.”<sup>77</sup> These veiled allusions suggest Plotinus’s tacit acknowledgment of the Sethian Mentality (Blessedness)-Vitality-Existence triad in the final stages of mystical ascent.

### 3.6 *Autophany in Other Gnostic and Hermetic Visionary Accounts*

We have thus seen that both *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* evoke a repeated sequence of contemplative self-reversions with corresponding visions of ever more elevated divine powers or self-manifestations within the aspirant’s own consciousness. At this point, we may note that this curious motif—that of a sudden, transformative moment of either self-apprehension or of the apprehension of a divine power “within” the human subject—may be found in a broad array of earlier Sethian, Valentinian, and Hermetic sources, as well as in certain eddies of the vast and amorphous current of late antique mysteriosophic literature of uncertain but roughly contemporaneous date; this includes, for example, extra-canonical apocrypha and apocalyptic literature, Hekhalot literature, Manichaeism, and Greco-Egyptian magical and alchemical texts.<sup>78</sup> It is beyond the scope of this book to discuss this material in-depth or to examine the complex historical relationship between these other bodies of literature and the Platonizing Sethian corpus; my focus is primarily on the relationship of the latter with Plotinus, whose thought is usually closer to theirs than it is to other Gnostic systems. Yet it will be important to determine the broader intellectual-historical context of the Platonizing Sethian autophany and—despite the persistent chronological questions that overshadow many of the sources—to locate its *Sitz im Leben* firmly within the philosophically-minded cultic milieu of pre-Plotinian late antiquity.

76 [d] VI.7[38].35.42–44: Διὸ οὐδὲ κινεῖται ἡ ψυχὴ τότε, ὅτι μὴδὲ ἐκεῖνο. Οὐδὲ ψυχὴ τοίνυν, ὅτι μὴδὲ ζῇ ἐκεῖνο, ἀλλὰ ὑπὲρ τὸ ζῆν. Οὐδὲ νοῦς, ὅτι μὴδὲ νοεῖ· ὁμοιοῦσθαι γὰρ δεῖ.

77 [e] VI.7[38].36.10–15: “Ὅστις γένηται ὁμοῦ θεατῆς τε καὶ θέαμα αὐτὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων καὶ γενόμενος οὐσία καὶ νοῦς καὶ ζῶν παντελὲς μὴκέτι ἔξωθεν αὐτὸ βλέπει—τοῦτο δὲ γενόμενος ἐγγὺς ἐστί, καὶ τὸ ἐφεξῆς ἐκεῖνο, καὶ πλησίον αὐτὸ ἦδη ἐπὶ παντὶ τῷ νοητῷ ἐπιστῖλβον.

78 Somewhat surprisingly, given its prevalence, this imagery has not received the scholarly attention that it deserves.



### 3.7 *Manifestation of Deity within*

Let us turn first to the theme of the luminous manifestation of the deity “within” the human subject. This occurs most notably in the earlier Sethian descent-pattern treatises in relatively close historical proximity to the Platonizing Sethian treatises. Thus, for example, in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* / *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* (NHC III,2 and IV,2)—a superficially Christianized Sethian text that may be an immediate precursor of *Zostrianos* and thus a forerunner of the entire Platonizing Sethian corpus—we find the following hymnic liturgical invocation to an indwelling deity:<sup>79</sup> “O indivisible self-begotten one, *who are not outside of me. I see you*, you who are invisible before everyone ... Now that I have recognized you, I have mixed myself with the immutable; I have armed myself with an armor of light; I have been made light.... I was given shape (*morphē*) in the circle of the wealth of the light that is in my bosom ...”<sup>80</sup> In this case, the appearance of the deity is an interior vision; the deity is described as “not outside of me,” or, elsewhere, as “in the heart.”<sup>81</sup> The vision of the deity corresponds to a vision of the devotee’s own self, now transformed into the shape of a luminous circle.<sup>82</sup> One may relate this passage in turn to a number of eschatological passages in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (NHC XIII,1\*) in which the eponymous revealer declares that she has concealed herself within the Elect and has manifested herself within them; here also, she has transformed their shape (*morphē*).<sup>83</sup> These passages reflect the more common Gnostic anthropological notion that the deity inheres within, or comprises, the depths of the human being, expressions of which may be found throughout

79 Possibly Yesseus Mazareus Yessedekus, a common Sethian figure, apparently associated here with Jesus.

80 *Gos. Eg.* NHC III 66.22–67.10 (text and trans. Böhlig and Wisse, CGL, slightly modified): πεινὰς ἥραν ἐτήτακ ῥιχῶει πατῶωωτ’ ἡαυτοῖν πᾶι ἐτήπαβολ ἀν εἰνὰγ ἐροκ πατ’ ἀαγ ἐρογ ἡναρῖν οὐον <N>ιη νιη...τενοῦ δε δεισοῶωκ δειμοῦχτ’ ἡμοει ἐπετεμεσῶβε δειροπλize ἡμοει ῥῖν οὐροπλον ἡοοειν δειρ οοοειν...δαιχι μορφῇ ῥῖν πκγκλος ἡτηῖντῖνῖνῖνῖν ἡποοοειν ἐμῶν κοοογντ’.

81 *Gos. Eg.* NHC III 66.20–21: ῥῖν φητ. The expression also occurs on two occasions in the Platonizing Sethian *Steles Seth* 122.18 and 123.2. The formula καὶ ἔχω σε ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ μου also occurs in an address to a deity at PGM XIII.931.

82 For the pure soul as spherical, see also *Marsanes* NHC X 25.21–26.1.

83 *Three Forms* NHC XIII 45\*.16–27 (trans. Turner, CGL): “You will accept robes from those who give robes and the Baptists will baptize you and you will become gloriously glorious, the way you first were when you were Light. And I hid myself in everyone and manifested myself within them, and every mind seeking me longed for me, for it is I who gave an image (*eikōn*) to the All when it had no shape (*morphē*). And I transformed their shapes into other shapes until the time when a shape will be given to the All.” See also *ibid.*, 35.19–20, 36.15–16, 22–27, 40.31–34, 47.14–19, 49.20–23; cf. *Zost.* NHC VIII 61.10; *Marsanes* NHC X 25.24ff.



Yet the theme of self-vision also occurs in less scholastic form, at, for instance, *Gospel of Philip* 58.3–5, where the vision of the self is assimilated to a vision of Jesus: "Some indeed saw (Jesus), thinking that they were *seeing themselves*...."; or, later, at 69.8–13, where baptism is equated with the vision of a reflection of oneself: "No one will be able to *see himself* either in water or in a mirror without light. Nor again will you be able to *see (yourself)* in light without water or a mirror. Therefore it is fitting to baptize in the two, in the light and the water." Along with these examples, we may consider passages from other apocryphal Christian or Gnostic sources which reflect similar ideas, such as, for example, the *Apocryphon of James*, NHC I 12.15–17: "Blessed is *he who has seen himself* as a fourth one in heaven"; the *Gospel of Thomas*, NHC II 47.24–29 [logion 84]: "Jesus said, "When you see your likeness (εἰκὼν) you rejoice; but when you see your images (eikōn) which come into being before you and which neither die nor become manifest, how much you will have to bear!" or, finally, the apocryphal *Acts of John*, which probably dates from the last third of the third century; here, in the role of mystic *koruphaïos*, Jesus states, "I am a mirror to those who know me," and exhorts the one following him to "*see yourself in me* who is speaking."<sup>88</sup> The vision of the self reflected in the deity—or the recognition of one's own identity in that of the deity—is also reminiscent of Mani's account of his encounter with his heavenly *syzygos* in the Cologne Mani Codex: "I recognized him, and I perceived that I am that one from whom I had been separated; I bore witness that I myself am he, being entirely the same";<sup>89</sup> or, similarly, the (apparently related) passage from the Hymn of the Pearl in the *Acts of Thomas*: "On a sudden, as I faced it, the garment seemed to me like a mirror of myself. I saw it all in my whole self. Moreover, I faced my whole self

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and the known are other than each other and opposed to each other as things that are related; but when they are actualized, by becoming one, the opposition ceases. For (then) it is not possible to fit them into the logic of a relationship. Thus the active intellect, itself having become the object of intellection, is rightly said to know itself" (πρὸ μὲν οὖν τοῦ κατ' ἐνέργειαν τὸν νοῦν νοεῖν πρὸς ἄλληλά ἐστι τὸ νοοῦν τε καὶ τὸ νοούμενον καὶ ἀντικείμενα ἀλλήλοις ὡς τὰ πρὸς τι, ὅταν δὲ ἐνεργῶσιν, ἐν γινόμενα παύεται τῆς ἀντιθέσεως. οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐφαρμόζειν αὐτοῖς οἷόν τέ ἐστι τὸν τοῦ πρὸς τι λόγον. διὸ ὁ κατ' ἐνέργειαν νοῦς ὁ αὐτὸς γινόμενος τῷ νοητῷ εὐλόγως αὐτὸν λέγεται νοεῖν); the argument's theological conclusions are on pp. 88–89. This of course closely forshadowes Plotinus's doctrine of the identity of intellect with its objects, e.g., v.9[5].5–7.

88 95.12 (text Bonnet 1972): "Ἐσοπτρόν εἰμί σοι τῷ νοοῦντί με; 96.1–3: ὑπακούου δέ μου τῇ χορείᾳ ἴδε σεαυτὸν ἐν ἐμοὶ λαλοῦντι, καὶ ἰδὼν ὁ πράσσω τὰ μυστήριά μου σίγα. The image of Jesus's round dance in the *Acts of John* may of course be brought into connection with Plotinus's frequent analogy of a round dance in which the One corresponds to the *koruphaïos*.

89 *Cologne Mani Codex* (text Koenen and Römer 1998) 24.10–15: ἐπέγνων μὲν αὐτὸν καὶ συνήκα ὅτι ἐκεῖνος ἐγὼ εἰμι ἐξ οὗ διεκρίθην. ἐπεμαρτύρησα δὲ ὅτι ἐγὼ ἐκεῖνος αὐτός εἰμι ἴσος [δλως] ὑπάρχων.

in facing it, for we were two in distinction and yet again one in one likeness.”<sup>90</sup> As in Plotinus, in this schema one must first apprehend one’s higher self as ‘another,’—that is, as one’s heavenly *suzugos* or “companion-image,”—or, to use the language of the *Gospel of Thomas*, “the One must become Two prior to the reintegration with that transcendental self so that the Two might eventually become One.”<sup>91</sup>

Significantly, there are a few texts in which the reflexive self-apprehension is described as a momentary, experiential event that marks a decisive phase of a ritualized ascent. Besides a few tantalizing (but chronologically quite uncertain) passages in apocalyptic literature and related Hekhalot texts that mention a reflexive vision of the narrator’s own radiant self while approaching the ultimate face to face encounter with God—e.g., 2 (*Slavonic*) *Enoch*<sup>92</sup> and the *Ma’aseh Merkabah*<sup>93</sup>—the clearest examples derive from the Hermetica.<sup>94</sup> In the *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* (NHC VI,6), Hermes Trismegistus guides his son (presumably Tat) into the hypercosmic region towards a coalescence with the divine Intellect. The ascent is accomplished by means of a series of “stages” (*bathmos*) involving lessons from books, prayers, incantations of *voces magicae*, and finally a series of increasingly rigorous contemplations

90 Lines 76–78, trans. Bevan 1897, 25, 27.

91 This may be schematized as follows:

TABLE 2 Parallel Plotinian and Gnostic distinction between the apprehension of and reintegration with the transcendental self

	Plotinus	Gnostics
“1 becomes 2”	Autophany (phase C)	Apprehension of one’s transcendental self ( <i>eikōn</i> , <i>suzugos</i> or <i>sunousia</i> ) as an ‘other’
“2 become 1”	Self-unification (Phase C <sup>2</sup> )	Coalescence or reintegration with one’s transcendental self

92 2 (*Slavonic*) *Enoch* 22.9–10 (trans. Andresen, in Charlesworth 1983): “And I looked at myself (ms. A: ‘and I gazed at all of myself’) and I had become like one of his glorious ones, and there was no observable difference.”

93 *Ma’aseh Merkabah* 23, lines 722–732, in Janowitz 1989, 51–52: “R. Ishmael said: As soon as I heard from R. Nehunya ben Hakana, my teacher, this announcement ... I heard, I got up and asked him all the names of the princes of wisdom and from the question that I asked I saw a light in my heart like the days of heaven. R. Ishmael said: As soon as I stood up and saw my face shining from my wisdom and I began to detail off each and every angel in each and every palace....” On the relation between apocalyptic and mysticism, see esp. Gruenwald 1980.

94 For a brief discussion of the Hermetic “encounter with one’s Self” (despite the suspiciously Jungian aura), see van den Broek 2000, esp. 91–95.

(*theōria*).<sup>95</sup> At 57.28–58.17, poised at the threshold of the supernal eighth sphere, the teacher (Trismegistus) himself experiences the climactic vision; he declares that he has received power (*dunamis*) and has become Nous. At 58.8, he exclaims: “*I see myself*” (†ΝΑΥ ΕΡΟΕΙ).<sup>96</sup> A few lines later, the pupil shares in the vision as well; at 59.26–28, Tat himself says, “We have received this light. And I myself see this same vision (*theōria*) in you” (ΑΝΧΕΙ ΜΠΕΕΙΟΥΘΕΙΝ· ΔΥΩ ΔΝΟΚ †ΝΑΥ ΕΤΕΕΙΘΕΩΡΙΑ ΝΟΥΩΤ· ΝΖΡΑΪ ΝΖΗΤΚ); and later, at 60.32–61.2, coupled with a mention of empowerment: “*I see myself! I have received power* from you, for your love reaches us [or, perhaps, ‘causes us to stand’]” (†ΝΑΥ ΕΡΟΕΙ ΔΕΙΧΙ ΒΟΗ ΝΤΟΟΤΚ ΔΠΕΚΜΑΕΙΕ ΓΑΡ Τ[Ε]ΖΔΝ).<sup>97</sup> A moment of self-apprehension appears at a similar point in the ascent described in *Corpus Hermeticum* XIII, which presents itself as an esoteric discourse (*logos apokruphos*) on initiatory “rebirth” (*paliggenesia*). At 3.5–15, Trismegistus describes his own experience of rebirth as an ineffable, incorporeal vision; bewildered, Tat protests that he has been brought to the point of madness with longing for the vision, but that he does not yet see himself.<sup>98</sup> Later, however, after having received the teaching and having successively expelled the various psychic passions correlated with the celestial spheres, Tat experiences the vision himself, exclaiming, “Father, I see the All and *I see myself* in Nous!” (πάτερ, τὸ πᾶν ὁρῶ καὶ ἐμαυτὸν ἐν τῷ νοῖ).<sup>99</sup> The Hermetic vision thus represents the assimilation of the aspirant to the noetic cosmos—a theme that also occurs in Plotinus<sup>100</sup>—yet this visionary experience also recurs in more patently ritualized contexts. In a recondite treatise ostensibly on the fabrication of electrum, Zosimos of Panopolis—who,

95 Mahé 1982.

96 The entire passage (*Disc.* 8–9 NHC VI 57.28–58.17, trans. Dirkse, Brashler, and Parrott, CGL) reads: “Rejoice over this! For already, from them, the power (*dunamis*), which is light, is coming to us. For I see! I see inutterable depths! How will I tell you, O my son? [...] How [will I describe] the All? I am [Nous and] I see another Nous, that which [moves] the soul. I see that which moves me from pure forgetfulness. You give me power! *I see myself!* I wish to speak; fear restrains me. I myself have found the origin (*archē*) of the power (*dunamis*) that is above all powers (*dunamis*), the one without origin (*archē*). I see a spring bubbling with life. I have said, O my son, that I am Nous. I have seen! Discourse is not able to reveal this.”

97 Besides the autophany, empowerment, and stasis, all of which are also Plotinian, see also VI.7[38].22.18–19: (the autophanous soul) “is raised up above naturally by the giver of love” (αἴρεται φύσει ἄνω αἰρομένη ὑπὸ τοῦ δόντος τὸν ἔρωτα).

98 *Corp. Herm.* 13.4.1–2 (text Nock and Festugière 1945): Εἰς μανίαν με οὐκ ὀλίγην καὶ οἰστροῖσιν φρενῶν ἐνέσεισας, ὦ πάτερ· ἐμαυτὸν γὰρ νῦν οὐχ ὁρῶ.

99 *Corp. Herm.* 13.13.1 (text Nock and Festugière 1945).

100 Thus at V.8[31].9–11 and V.3[49].4.4–14. In several visualization exercises (e.g., at V.1[10].2 and VI.7[38].15.24–32) Plotinus advises one to envision the entire cosmos within one’s own mind, on which see Rappe 2000, 109–12.

although writing at some point around 300 CE, thus well after Plotinus's death, was himself well-versed in earlier Gnostic and Hermetic lore—recounts a story about a mirror made of electrum that had the property that “when a man looks at himself in it, it suggests to him the idea of examining himself and purifying himself from his head to the tips of his toenails.” This mirror, he says, was placed in a temple called the “Seven Gates,” above certain gates corresponding to the celestial spheres. As in *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*, the moment of self-apprehension occurs “above” the seven heavens, but just “below” the supreme stratum; at this point, “When a man *looks at himself and sees himself* in [this mirror], he turns his face away from everything that is called gods and demons, and attaching himself to the Holy Spirit, he becomes a perfect man; *he sees God who is in him*, by the mediator of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>101</sup> As with other aspects of Zosimus's writings, it is impossible to be certain whether the account is factual or merely symbolic, but lest there be any doubt that a vision of oneself could be a potential goal of a Graeco-Egyptian ritual practitioner, we might consider a spell in the Greek magical papyri, PGM VII.335–340, a “self-observation” (*autoptikē*) whose stated goal is to obtain a vision of oneself; the spell begins, “If you wish *to see yourself* (ἐὰν βούλῃ σὲ αὐτὸν [ι]δεῖν)...” [then perform such-and-such a procedure],<sup>102</sup> or similarly, at PGM VII.505–528, a spell to obtain an “encounter” or “conjunction (*sustasis*) with your own *daimōn*.” This praxis in turn—to complete the cycle—may be brought into connection with Porphyry's anecdote about the theurgical evocation (*klēsis*) of Plotinus's own personal *daimōn* in the Iseum of Rome: an indwelling *daimōn* who, according to Plotinus's own demonological theory, represents the apex of the individual, and, moreover, one who turned out to be, according to Porphyry, “a god (*theos*) and not of the genus of *daimones*.”<sup>103</sup>

101 Zosimus of Panopolis, Syriac Fragments, *Peri aretēs* Book XII, “On Electrum.” Trans. from the French in Berthelot 1893, 262–63. The passage continues, “This mirror is placed above the Seven gates, to the West, so that whoever should look at it sees the East, where shines the intelligible light, which is above the veil. For this reason it is also situated to the south, above all the doors that answer to the seven heavens, above the visible world, above the twelve houses [i.e., the zodiac] and the Pleiades, which are the world of the thirteen. Above these exists the Eye of the invisible senses, this Eye of the spirit, which is present there and everywhere.”

102 PGM VII.335–340 (text Preisendanz 1973–1974): Αὐτοπτική· ἐὰν βούλῃ σὲ αὐτὸν [ι]δεῖν, λαβὼν μυῖαν καὶ στίμιν K[ο]πτικὸν τρίψον, ἐνχρίε τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς σου. καὶ λαβὼν πτερὸν ἱβέως δακτύλων ἰδ', χρίσας ῥοδίνῳ μύρῳ ἢ κρινίνῳ, περιελίξας ὀθονίῳ βυσσίνῳ, ὡς βιβλίον ἔχε μετὰ χεῖρας. λέγε δέ, τῷ ἀριστερῷ ὀφθαλμῷ παρεμβλέπων, οὕτως. λόγος.

103 Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 10.23–25; cf. *Enn.* 111.4[15].3.18–27. This connection was made by Betz 1981. This type of ritual might also be brought into connection with the occurrence of the term *autopsia* in Proclus, *In Alcibiadem* 87 (in connection with *Oracula Chaldaica*

### 3.9 *The Distant Delphic Roots of the Gnostic Autophany*

We may thus infer that certain late antique ritual practitioners sought, or claimed to seek, a discrete visionary experience or manifestation of the true or “inner” self and / or the divine principle inherent within the human being. Although it is conceivable that they exist, I have been unable to find any examples of autophany as discrete visionary praxis in Hellenistic religious thought prior to the early second-century date when the earliest extant Gnostic and Hermetic works were most likely produced.<sup>104</sup> Yet one may note that the impetus for this praxis—the search for the divine within oneself—has venerable philosophical roots in the Delphic exhortation to “know yourself.” Long a commonplace topos of philosophical ethics, by late antiquity the Delphic maxim apparently had come to mean “recognize the divinity within yourself” and/or “remember your divine origin,” on the basis of the belief that the innermost essence of the human being—soul, intellect, or *pneuma*—comprised a fragment, image, or reflection of the divine: a notion which itself most likely represents a confluence of several interrelated Platonic,<sup>105</sup> Aristotelian,<sup>106</sup> and Stoic<sup>107</sup> ideas.

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- fr. 190) to describe a theurgical visionary ascent, although it should be noted that *autopsia* is also used more commonly in the PGM to describe a broad range of vision-seeking spells.
- 104 One possible predecessor, however, might include catoptromancy, which is apparently very ancient. In this regard, it is interesting that Turner 1998 has speculated that the Sethian association between vision and baptism derives from earlier Jewish priestly lustration practices and the close connection between vision and water in Jewish apocalyptic, which itself seems to have originated in hydromancy.
- 105 Courcelle 1971 has shown that one principal source text for this notion in Neoplatonism is Plato, 1 *Alcibiades* 133c1–6 (trans. Hutchinson in Cooper 1997, 592–594): “*Socrates*: Can we say there is anything about the soul which is more divine than that where knowing and understanding take place? *Alcibiades*: No, we can’t. *Socrates*: Then that region in it resembles the divine, and someone who looked at that and grasped everything divine—vision and understanding—would have the best grasp of himself as well” (“Ἐχομεν οὖν εἰπεῖν ὅτι ἐστὶ τῆς ψυχῆς θειότερον ἢ τοῦτο, περὶ ὃ τὸ ἰδέναί τε καὶ φρονεῖν ἐστίν; - Οὐκ ἔχομεν. - οὕτω καὶ ἑαυτὸν ἂν γνοίῃ μάλιστα”). Also the possibly spurious 133c8–17: “*Socrates*: Just as mirrors are cleaner, purer, and brighter than the reflecting surface of the eye, isn’t God both purer and brighter than the best part of our soul? *Alcibiades*: I would certainly think so, *Socrates*. *Socrates*: So the way that we can best see and know ourselves is to use the finest mirror available and look at God and, on the human level, at the virtue of the soul.”
- 106 The source is the notion of a self-thinking *Nous*, understood by later commentators to be the divine mind; thus Aristotle, *Metaphysica* 12.9–10 1074b15–1075b6.
- 107 The notion of the consubstantiality of the human mind with the divine and / or the immanence of the deity (or *daimōn*) is widespread in Stoicism; e.g., Marcus Aurelius, *Meditationes* 2.13; 3.5–6, 12; 5.10, 27; 12.26; Epictetus, *Diabtribai* 2.8.11; Seneca, *Epistulae* 120.14; Cicero, *Respublica* VI.26; also more extensive references in Betz 1970.

This interpretation attained particular prominence in the Hermetic corpus;<sup>108</sup> but more importantly, as Pierre Courcelle (1974) has eloquently shown—even without recourse to Nag Hammadi evidence—the Delphic maxim also lies at the core of Gnostic thought, where the salvific *gnōsis* consists in recognizing oneself as divine, remembering one's pleromatic origin, and returning whence one has fallen. I will not repeat the impressive list of passages that Courcelle adduces, but I would confirm his observations by adding that an emphasis on self-knowledge, self-reversion, and self-seeking in close connection with salvation may be found throughout the Nag Hammadi corpus, including, but not limited to, the Platonizing Sethian tractates.<sup>109</sup> Indeed, so pervasive is the theme of self-knowledge in the Nag Hammadi corpus and other Gnostic sources one might begin to suspect that despite its venerable philosophical paternity, this notion is Gnostic *par excellence*.<sup>110</sup> An allusion to the Delphic maxim may even be detected in the first few words of the much-cited definition of salvific Gnosis itself according to the Valentinian scholar Theodotus: "Gnosis is: *who we are; what we have become*...."<sup>111</sup>

### 3.10 *The Transformation of Ethical Theory into Visionary Praxis*

One may still wonder about the way in which the Delphic maxim was able to transform from a rather vague and pedantic ethical precept into a discrete

108 In a pair of excellent articles, Betz 1970; 1981 has demonstrated that this particular interpretation of the Delphic maxim played a significant role in both the Hermetica and the Greek magical papyri. Indeed, Zosimus makes the connection between the mirror and the Delphic maxim explicit; see Berthelot 1893, 263): "Que dit en effet la parole philosophique? Connais-toi toi-même. Elle indique par là le miroir spirituel et intellectuel." The Hermetic redeployment of the Delphic maxim (with influence from the *Alcibiades*) is also evident, for example, at *Corp. Herm.* 1.21, the Armenian *Definitions* IX.5 Mahé, and in Zosimus of Panopolis, *On the Letter Omega* 7.4–11. See also Filoramo 1999.

109 For references to self-knowledge in the NHC apart from the Platonizing Sethian tractates, see, *inter alia*, *Gos. Truth* NHC I 21.5–14 (trans. Attridge and MacRae, CGL): "It is about themselves that they receive instruction, receiving it from the Father, turning again to him.... Then, if one has knowledge, he receives what are his own and draws them to himself." See also *Gos. Truth* NHC I 18.24–40; *Tri. Trac.* NHC I 61.34–62.5; *Gos. Thom.* NHC II 32.26–33.5 [3]; *Gos. Phil.* NHC II 76.17–22; *Bk. Thom.* NHC II 138.8–18; *Dial. Sav.* NHC III 132.15–19; *Teach. Silv.* NHC VII 117.3–9; *Testim. Truth* NHC IX 35.22–36.28, 41.4–17, 45.1–6. For self-reversion or self-seeking, see *Exeg. Soul.* NHC II,6 131.19–21; *Gos. Phil.* NHC II 68.8–17 [Matt 6:6]; *Testim. Truth* NHC IX 41 11–15; *Gos. Truth.* NHC I 25.10–19.

110 This is suggested by Quispel 1992.

111 The whole passage, from Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpta Theodoto* 78.2 (text Sagnard 1948): "*Gnōsis* is: who we are, what we have become, where we are, whither we have been cast down, whence we are hastening, whence we are ransomed, what is birth, what is rebirth" (ἡ γνώσις, τίνες ἡμεν, τί γεγόναμεν· ποῦ ἡμεν, [ῆ] ποῦ ἐνεβλήθημεν· ποῦ σπεύδομεν, πόθεν λυτρούμεθα· τί γέννησις, τί ἀναγέννησις).



visionary praxis or a momentary event in the context of ritualized ascent. I would suggest that it most likely occurred first within earlier Gnostic and Hermetic traditions: traditions which placed a significant emphasis both upon visionary experience and soteriological ascent and which also tended to reify the ideal abstractions and/or metaphorical constructs of philosophy—such as, for example, the Stoic passions, Plato’s philosophical ascent, the notion of stability, the concept of divine providence, and so on—into discrete hypostases or concrete ritual actions. One early example of the convergence of the motif of self-knowledge with that of a discrete moment of self-apprehension in the context of visionary ascent occurs in the apocryphal *Acts of Andrew*, a Christian text with Gnosticizing features whose absolute *terminus ante quem* is mid-third century, but which probably dates from more than a century earlier.<sup>112</sup> After a lengthy exhortation to recognize oneself as intelligible, luminous, and divine, we encounter the statement that one who has “seen your own face in your essence (*ousia*)” will escape the bonds of the body and of the malevolent celestial authorities and subsequently experience a vision of the “ungenerated” (*ou genomenon*) deity.<sup>113</sup> As in the more extensive passage of *Zostrianos* 45–46, self-reversion and self-recognition are co-implicated and then immediately linked with heavenly ascent and transcendental apprehension.<sup>114</sup> We may recall that Allogenes similarly “comes to know his true self” at the level of Blessedness, immediately prior to his respective visionary experiences of Vitality and

112 A dating close to 150 CE has been suggested by J.-M. Prieur in his introduction to the *Acts of Andrew* in Hennecke/Schneemelcher 2003, 2:114–15; see also Prieur 1989; Quispel 1956.

113 *Acta Andreae* 38.14–18 (text Prieur 1989): “*And having seen your own face in your substance and having broken through every bond—I don’t mean (only) those having to do with generation but also those above generation, of whom we have established for you the immensely great appellations—(you should) desire to see that one which has been seen by you, who has not come into being, the one whom presently you alone will courageously recognize*” (*Καὶ ἰδὼν τὸ σὸν πρόσωπον ἐν τῇ οὐσίᾳ σου, τὰ πάντα διαρρήξας δεσμά, οὐ λέγω τὰ περὶ γενέσεως ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ ὑπὲρ γένεσιν, ὧν σοι προσηγορίας ἐθέμεθα ὑπερμεγέθεις οὐσας, πόθησον ἐκεῖνον ἰδεῖν ὁφθέντα σοι, οὐ γενόμενον, ὃν τάχα εἰς μόνος γνωρίσις θαρρῶν*). The philosophical origin of this notion is suggested by the occurrence of the expression βλέψῃ πρὸς τὴν ἑαυτῆς οὐσίαν to describe the exercise of ordinary reason in a fragment of Plutarch, *Parsne an facultas animi sit vita passiva* 2.31 (LCL 429:62).

114 Cf. also *Zost.* NHC VIII 17.15, 22.8, 43.15–16, 44.1–4, 76.21–25. Interestingly, a similar association of self-vision with heavenly ascent occurs in a clearly apocalyptic / visionary context in Athanasius’s *Life of Anthony* 65.2 (text Bartelink 2004), probably written in the following century: “At one point, intending to eat, having risen to pray at about the ninth hour, he perceived himself to be snatched away by thought. *And, paradoxically, he saw himself standing as if having come to be outside of himself* and (as if) having been led into the air by certain ones” (Μέλλων γὰρ ἐσθίειν ποτέ, καὶ ἀναστὰς εὐξασθαι περὶ τὴν ἐνάτην ὥραν, ἦσθετο ἑαυτὸν ἀρπαγέντα τῇ διανοίᾳ. Καί, τὸ παράδοξον, ἐστῶς ἐβλεπεν ἑαυτὸν ὥσπερ ἔξωθεν ἑαυτοῦ γινόμενον καὶ ὥς εἰς τὸν ἀέρα ὁδηγούμενον ὑπὸ τινων).

Existence and thence to the ultimate pair of primary revelations. Moreover, even when not explicitly connected with vision, specific acts of self-knowing occur in accounts of an ascent towards the transcendent deity; one may compare a passage of the *Tripartite Tractate* (NHC I,5) in which the salvific ascent through the Pleroma towards the hypernoetic, “pre-existent” (ϣαρπ̄ ἡϣοοπ̄) realm of light—wherein abides the ineffable Father—is accomplished insofar as one has both “named” and “known oneself.”<sup>115</sup> Irenaeus describes a particular subset of Valentinians who instruct the initiate in a technique of postmortem ascent during which one must ritually declare to the archontic powers and the Demiurge: “*I know myself and I recognize where I am from.*”<sup>116</sup> Furthermore, the theme of the sudden, epiphanic self-apprehension in Valentinian ritual ascent also corresponds to the classic Gnostic myth, where it is the mythical prototype of the human race rather than the mystical aspirant who experiences a momentary event of salvific self-apprehension. In the *Apocryphon of John*, at the very moment the mental reflection (Epinoia) of the transcendent light that has hidden herself within the fallen Adam reveals herself to him, he “immediately recognizes his (own) essence” (ΝΤΕΥΝΟΥ ΝΤΑΡΕ`Ϛ`ϚΟΥΩΝ ΤΕΦΟΥCΙΑ: BG 60.3–4) or “his image” (ΤΕΦΕΙΝΕ: NHC II 23.9), and he is awakened.<sup>117</sup> Likewise for the inhabitants of the aeonic realms; thus, referring to the pleromatic Aeons, the *Untitled Treatise* of the Codex Bruce says, “Their looking

115 *Tri. Trac.* NHC I 124.13–25 (text and trans. Attridge and Pagels, CGL): “The redemption is an ascent [to] the degrees which are in the Pleroma and to those who have named themselves and who *intelligize themselves* according to the ‘power’ of each of the aeons, and it is an entrance into what is silent, where there is no need for voice nor for knowing nor for intelligizing nor for illumination, but (where) all things are light, while they do not need to be illuminated” (ΟΥΝΗΤΡ̄ CΑ ΝΕΡΗΙ ΔΝ ΠΕ ΠΙCΩΤΕ Δ{ΥΩ}ΝΙΒΔΑΘΟC ΕΤΩΟΠΙ ΞΗ ΠΠΛΗΡΩΜΑ· ΔΥΩ {Η}ΝΙΝΕΝΤΑΥΤ̄ ΡΕΝ ΑΡΑΥ ΤΗΡΟΥ ΔΥΩ ΕΥΡ̄ΝΟῙ ΗΜΔΥ ΚΑΤΑ ΤCΘΗ ΗΠΟΥΕΙ ΠΟΥΕῙ ΗΝΔΙΩΝ· ΔΥΩ ΟΥΝΗΤΩΕ ΔΥΟΥΗ ΨΑ ΠΕΤΚΑΡΑΕΙΤ̄ ΠΝΑ ΕΤΕΝΗ ΧΡΕΙΑ ΝCΗΗ ΗΜΕΥ ΟΥΔΕ ΔΤΤΡΟΥΗΗ· ΟΥΔΕ ΔΤΤΡΟΥΡ̄ΝΟῙ ΟΥΔΕ ΔΤΤΡΟΥΡ̄ ΟΥΟ̄ ΕΙΝ ΑΡΑΟΥ ΑΛΛΑ ΞΗΡΒΗΥΕ· ΤΗΡΟΥ ΝΕ ΟΥΟ̄ ΝΟΥΟΕΙΝ· ΕΝCΕΡ̄ ΧΡΙΑ ΕΝ ΝΤΡΟΥΡ̄ ΟΥΟΕΙΝ ΑΡΑΥ).

116 Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 1.21.5 (text Rousseau and Doutreleau 1967): “I have come to see all things, both those that are alien and those that are mine ... I derive from the genus of the Pre-existent, and I proceed back to the those that are mine, whence I was released ... Though your mother is ignorant of her own root, *I know myself and I recognize where I am from* ...” (Εγὼ υἱὸς ἀπὸ πατρὸς, πατρὸς προόντος, υἱὸς δὲ ἐν τῷ παρόντι. Ἦλθον πάντα ἰδεῖν τὰ ἀλλότρια, καὶ τὰ ἴδια.... κατὰγω [l. κατὰγει] δὲ τὸ γένος ἐκ τοῦ προόντος, καὶ πορεύομαι πάλιν εἰς τὰ ἴδια, ὅθεν ἐλήλυθα.... Εἰ ἡ μητὴρ ὑμῶν ἀγνοεῖ τὴν ἐαυτῆς ρίζαν, ἐγὼ οἶδα ἐμαυτὸν, καὶ γινώσκω ὅθεν εἰμι).

117 A similar notion is implied at *Gos. Phil.* NHC II 68.22–26 (trans. Isenberg, CGL): “When Eve was still in Adam death did not exist ... If he enters again and attains his former self, death will be no more.” Cf. a similar statement attributed to Mani, cited by Theodore bar Konai in Quispel 1992; also *Bk. Thom.* NHC II 139.29–30 (trans. Turner, CGL): “The light will withdraw (*anachōrein*) up to its own essence (*ousia*).”



epistemology by which the supreme principle may nevertheless be apprehended. These shared concepts are expressed with a number of technical terms and concepts whose significance has hitherto remained obscure. In what follows, we will examine the constellation of Sethian terms that describe the ultimate moment of ascent, and we will see that they reveal a considerable amount about the underlying mechanism of mystical apprehension.

#### 4.2 “Primary Revelation” in *Allogenes*

One central yet still enigmatic feature of the final stages of ascent in *Allogenes* is the description of the ultimate apprehension of the Unknowable One—the final moment of mystical vision at the culmination of the ascent through the three powers of the Triple Powered One—as a “primary revelation” (ΟΥΜΝΤΨΟΡΠΙ ΝΟΥΩΝΞ ΕΒΟΛ) or a “first revelation” (ΟΥΨΟΡΠΙ ΝΟΥΩΝΞ ΕΒΟΛ). It appears that this is a technical term, as the phrase “primary” or “first revelation” occurs at least five times throughout the treatise. The first mention occurs at NHC XI 59.26–32, during the propaedeutic instruction for ascent that the eponymous aspirant receives from the luminaries of Barbelo: “And when you receive a revelation of him by means of a *first revelation* (ΝΟΥΨΟΡΠΙ ΝΟΥΩΝΞ ΕΒΟΛ) of the Unknowable, the one whom if you know him, ‘unknow’ him!” It occurs again at 60.37–61.1 during Allogenes’s first-person account of the ultimate vision: “I was filled with revelation by means of a *primary revelation* (ΟΥΜΝΤΨΟΡΠΙ ΝΟΥΩΝΞ ΕΒΟΛ) of the Unknowable.” Yet again at 61.9–14: “by means of a *primary revelation* (ΟΥΜΝΤΨΟΡΠΙ Ν[ΟΥ]ΩΝΞ ΕΒΟΛ) of the First one (who is) unknowable to them all, the God who is beyond perfection, I saw him and the Triple-Powered that exists in them all.” [See the complete passage in Appendix C7]. At 63.14–16, the “primary revelation” or “initial manifestation” is described in terms of the Unknowable One’s own self-knowledge: “There is a *primary revelation* (ΕΥΨΟΡΠΙ ΝΟΥΩΝΞ ΕΒΟΛ) and knowledge of him; it is he alone who knows himself.”<sup>121</sup> In each occurrence, the phrase “primary revelation” appears to be a technical term of particular significance, one that denotes the paradoxical apprehension, or mystical “unknowing,” of the completely unknowable first principle.<sup>122</sup>

Let us approach this first by considering the prevailing scholarly opinion: namely, that as it occurs in *Allogenes*, the phrase “primary revelation” (ΜΝΤΨΟΡΠΙ ΝΟΥΩΝΞ ΕΒΟΛ) refers to a “revelation” primarily in the broad sense of a transmission of *information*: information imparted by a deity either

121 *Allogenes* NHC XI 63.14–16 (text Funk and Scopello, BCNH): ΕΥΨΟΡΠΙ ΝΟΥΩΝΞ ΕΒΟΛ ΠΕ ΜΗ ΟΥΓΝΩΣΙC ΝΤΑΥ ΕΝΤΟΥ ΟΥΔΑΥ ΕΤ΄ΕΙΝΕ ΕΡΟΥ.

122 At *Allogenes* NHC XI 61.28–31 it is specifically distinguished from an unqualified revelation.

through discourse, vision, or perhaps even through some more ineffable kind of experience. The primary revelation would thus convey a paradoxically non-noetic, intuitive knowledge of the unknowable deity. Indeed, over the course of numerous publications, Turner has suggested that the “primary revelation” bears a close relationship with the negative-theological predications of the Unknowable One.<sup>123</sup> Initially, in his annotations to the 1990 CGL edition, he suggested that the phrase may in fact describe the Luminaries’ apophatic disquisition on the Unknowable One at 61.32–64.37, in contrast with the “ordinary” revelation at 64.37–65.21, where the supreme principle is described with positive attributes: a conjecture which seems to be supported by the fact that at 61.28–31 the Luminaries introduce their extensive theological discourse, both negative and positive, by exhorting Allogenes to “hear about [the Unknowable One] insofar as it is possible by means of a primary revelation *and* a revelation.” However, in her 1995 commentary on *Allogenes*, Karen King rejected the interpretation of primary revelation as a kind of *discourse*, and proposed that the difference between primary and simple revelation instead pertains to that between auditory and visionary apprehension, vision being the superior of the two;<sup>124</sup> and in more recent works, Turner, too, has tended to emphasize the experiential aspect of primary revelation.<sup>125</sup> Yet several perplexities remain. For one thing, although King seems to be correct that this experience is closer to vision than to audition—for instance, at 61.9–13, Allogenes says that “by means of” (ἐβολὰ ᾗτῆν) a primary revelation, he “saw” (ὤναι) the God beyond perfection—this particular distinction can hardly be the primary determining factor, since at 61.28 the Luminaries tell Allogenes to “hear” (ἀκοῦσαι) both the primary *and* the unqualified revelation. And conversely, while Turner is undoubtedly correct that the revelation has something to do with apophasis and “learned ignorance,” it is puzzling that Allogenes would describe a *vision* of the god as occurring through a discursive series of negative predications. Indeed, it seems peculiar that the climax of Allogenes’s courageous ascent through the intricate armature of the transcendent realm would merely entail the reception of additional *information*, however ineffable such information might be. Furthermore, despite the apparent equation at 63.9–16, the primary revelation

123 E.g., Turner 1990, 261; idem 1992, 448–49; idem 2000c, 131; idem 2000d, 120; idem 2001, 119; idem 2004, 96.

124 K. L. King 1995, 149–50.

125 Thus, for example, in the more recent (2004) BCNH edition of *Allogenes*, Turner observes that at 63.14–16 the Unknowable One is itself said to be “primary revelation and knowledge of himself,” and suggests that at the culmination of the ascent the aspirant’s reception of the primary revelation indicates that he has been completely assimilated to the supreme principle’s own incognizant knowledge of himself.

through which the deity is perceived cannot be—or cannot *simply* be—either the deity itself or a synonym for the vision of the deity, since it is said to be rather the mechanism *by means of* which (ΕΒΟΛ ΖΗΤῆ) the apprehension or attainment of the deity occurs. The interpretations proffered thus far therefore leave more questions than answers.

Here, I would like suggest a slightly different interpretation of the phrase ΜΗΤΩΡΠΙ ΝΟΥΩΝΕ ΕΒΟΛ and its cognates, an interpretation that may allow us to solve many of these difficulties. Let us begin by considering the Coptic expression ΟΥΩΝΕ ΕΒΟΛ from a purely philological perspective. It is true that the variants of the phrase ΟΥΩΝΕ ΕΒΟΛ may be translated by the verb “to reveal” or the noun “revelation,” thus rendering the Greek ἀναγγέλλειν, ἀποκαλύπτειν, or φανεροῦν, or corresponding nominal terms that primarily connote the transmission of some kind of cognitive or visionary *content*. However, ΟΥΩΝΕ ΕΒΟΛ may simultaneously be used to translate Greek terms such as ἐμφανίζειν, ἐπιφαίνειν, φαίνεσθαι or other similar verbs that denote the intransitive act of manifestation or appearance itself;<sup>126</sup> as a noun; therefore, it can render ἐπιφάνεια, or also, one may presume, ἐμφάνεια, redolent of the appearance of a deity.<sup>127</sup> Somewhat more indirectly, ΟΥΩΝΕ ΕΒΟΛ may also have occasionally been used to render certain Greek verbs suggesting forward motion, emanation, projection, or spatial emergence, such as προβάλλειν or προέρχεσθαι—parallel to the English “appear” in the sense of “come into being” or “emerge”—if we are to judge, for instance, by the occurrence of ΟΥΩΝΕ ΕΒΟΛ to describe the emergence of “Foreknowledge” (*prognōsis*) in both manuscripts of the shorter version of the *Apocryphon of John* in a position corresponding to προελθούσης in the parallel Greek fragment of Irenaeus of Lyon’s *Adversus haereses* preserved by Theodoret of Cyrus.<sup>128</sup> A brief perusal of the Nag Hammadi corpus, and especially the protologies found in the Sethian and the more philosophical Valentinian tractates, similarly reveals that the intransitive verbal form of

126 This equivalence is supported, for example, by the Oxyrynchus fragment of the original Greek version of *Wis. Jes. Chr.* (P.Oxy. 1081.33–34; text Parrott, CGL): [τ]ῇ φαινόμενῃ τοῦ ἀγ[εννῆ]του πρς; compare to *Eugnostos* NHC III 74.19: Ζῆ ΠΕΤΟΥΑΝΕ ΕΒΟΛ; *Wis. Jes. Chr.* NHC III 98.19 and BG 90.11–12: Ζῆ ΝΕΤΟΥΟΝΕ ΕΒΟΛ.

127 Crum 1939, 486b–87a.

128 E.g., Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 1.29.1 *prodiiset* = Theodoret, *Haereticarum fabularum compendium* προελθούσης (text in Waldstein and Wisse 1995, 188.13) = *Ap. John* NHC III 8.9: ΟΥΩΝ[ε ΕΒΟΛ]; BG 28.8–9: ΟΥΩΝΕ ΕΒΟΛ. In the longer version, this is translated with the virtually synonymous expression ὁλωπ ΕΒΟΛ; thus NHC II 5.15: ΔΕῶΛΠ ΕΒΟΛ; NHC IV 8.2–3: [ΔΕῶΛ]Π ΕΒΟΛ. Thus also in the next line, describing the emergence of Indestructibility *et. al.*, Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* *prodiit* = Theodoret, *Haereticarum fabularum compendium* προελήλυθεν (text in Waldstein and Wisse 1995, 188.14) cf. NHC III 8.16: ΟΥΩΝΕ ΕΒΟΛ; BG 28.17: ΔΟΥΩΝΕ ΕΒΟΛ; NHC II 5.22: [ΔΕῶΛ]Π ΕΒΟΛ; and so on.

ΟΥΩΝ̄ ΕΒΟΛ and its cognates, meaning to “manifest (oneself)” or “appear,” are most frequently used to signify the emergence or procession of various hypostases from prior ontological strata and / or the self-manifestation of a deity,<sup>129</sup> while the sense of “revelation” as in the revelation of information is considerably less common. [See synopsis in Appendix C11] Significantly, the expression ⲡ̄ ΟΥΟΡῙ ΝΟΥΩΝ̄ ΕΒΟΛ is used repeatedly throughout the proto-Platonizing Sethian *Gospel of the Egyptians* to mean appearances and emanations on every level of reality.<sup>130</sup> At this point, one might also wonder what is meant by the qualification of the more exalted of these revelations as “first” (ΟΥΟΡῙ) or “primary” (ΜΝΤΟΥΟΡῙ). It has generally been taken to mean “primary” as in the sense of “pre-eminent,” and this sense, at least, is certainly required by the context. But the Coptic term apparently extends into another related semantic domain, that of temporal or sequential priority, as in “early,” “initial,” “prior,” “precedent,” or “beginning.”<sup>131</sup> This being the case, the nominal phrase ΜΝΤΟΥΟΡῙ- or ΟΥΟΡῙ ΝΟΥΩΝ̄ ΕΒΟΛ may therefore be translated as an “initial manifestation,” “first emergence,” or “primordial appearance” perhaps rendering a quasi-technical term such as, for example, πρώτη ἔκφανσις, πρώτη ἐπιφάνεια, πρωτοφάνεια, or προφάνεια (which actually does occur, moreover, in an ontogenetic context at *Gospel of the Egyptians*, NHC III 51.17), or something of this sort in the Greek *Vorlage*.<sup>132</sup>

Let us then adopt as a working hypothesis the interpretation of ΜΝΤΟΥΟΡῙ ΝΟΥΩΝ̄ ΕΒΟΛ as something like “primordial *manifestation*” or “initial *appearance*” and return to the immediate context of *Allogenes* itself, which may provide some additional clues about the significance of the term. Most importantly, as we have already seen, in the fifth and final occurrence of the phrase at 63.9–16, the “primordial manifestation” is directly identified with the Unknowable One’s self-knowledge, which itself is also, in some way, identical

129 E.g., as a noun at NHC I 69.33; as a verb, II,5 99.1; see table 7, Appendix C11.

130 Thus, for example, NHC IV 53.4, 54.22, 56.12, 63.5.

131 Rendering the Greek *pro-*, *prō-* and *prōto-* but also *prōimos*, *en prōtois*, *ek prōtou*, *ap’ archēs*, etc.; see Crum 1939, 586b–587b.

132 One might also suppose that the term ΟΥΟΡῙ ΝΟΥΩΝ̄ ΕΒΟΛ was usually not left in its original Greek form—as seems to have been the case with other proper names and technical terms—in order to avoid confusion with the middle power of the Barbelo Aeon, Protophanes, who abides on a somewhat lower ontological level. The peculiar use of both “revelation” and “primary revelation” in the same breath could also be explained as the somewhat clumsy attempt of the *Allogenes* translator to render two different Greek verbs with a single Coptic expression; however, the punctuation of Turner’s new (2004) translation of 60.35–61.4 (“By means of a revelation ...; By means of a primary revelation....”, also adopted by M. Scopello) suggests a deliberate parallelism that would have required the same word in the original. I therefore remain undecided on this issue.

to the deity.<sup>133</sup> Now with this in mind, one may consider a number of other references to an extraordinary epistemic faculty that allows apprehension of the unknowable first principle, a faculty that is therefore functionally parallel to “primary revelation,” although not necessarily described with this precise terminology. Beginning with *Allogenes* itself, at 48.9–19, we find, for example, a mention of a “first thought” (ΝΟΥΘΟΡΨΙ ΝΕΝΝ[Ο]ΙΔΑ) that allows apprehension of the deity: “Since it is impossible for them to comprehend the Universal One situated in the place that is beyond perfect, they typically apprehend by means of a *First Thought*.”<sup>134</sup> As with the “Primordial Manifestation,” the “First Thought” is similarly associated with the manifestation (ΟΥΩΝΞ ΕΒΟΛ) of the transcendent principle’s own, ineffable self-cognition; thus at 53.23–29, the first principle is said to be apprehended through the “third silence of Mentality and the second undivided activity which *manifested in the First Thought*, which is the Aeon of Barbelo.”<sup>135</sup> To this one may also compare what is called at *Allogenes* 60.10–11 an “enlightened thought” (ΟΥΕΝΝΟΙΑ ΕΞΕ ΝΟΥΘΕΙΝ), whose function seems identical to that of the “primary revelation”; thus the luminaries advise Allogenes, “But knowing him through a *luminous thought*, ‘unknow’ him!”<sup>136</sup> A similar role is imputed to a “first thought” in *Zostrianos* in the context of a passage (24.1–17) describing the various faculties by which one may apprehend increasingly elevated ontological levels, including the subaeons of Barbelo and ultimately the Invisible Spirit itself. One “sees” the contents of the Autogenes aeon with a “perfect soul,” those of the Protophanes with a “pure spirit,” and those of the Triple Male with the Intellect; one “hears” about Kalyptos through the powers which emerge in a “vastly superior manifestation”

133 Turner 2004, 100 notes that the knowledge here is “of” the Unknowable One in both the objective and subjective genitive sense: the human aspirant’s knowledge of the Unknowable One is also that One’s own *self*-knowledge.

134 *Allogenes* ΝΗC XI 48.9–13 (text Funk and Scopello, BCNH): ΕΠΙΔΗ [ΟΥΜΝ]Τ’ΑΤ’ΕΔΗ ΤΕ ΝΤΕ ΝΙΚ[ΑΤΑ Ο]ΥΑ ΕΤΑΞΕ ΠΤΗΡΨ ΕΤ’Κ[Η Ψ]Η [Π]ΗΔ ΕΤ’ΧΟΞΕ ΕΤΕΛΙΟΣ’ ΕΩΔΥΧΙ ΔΕ ΕΒΟΛ ΞΨΤΟΨΤΣ ΝΟΥΘΟΡΨΙ ΝΕΝΝ[Ο]ΙΔΑ.

135 *Allogenes* ΝΗC XI 53.23–29 (text Funk and Scopello, BCNH): ΠΙΝΕΞΟΥΨΤ’ ΝΚΑΡΩΨ ΝΤΕ ΨΗΨΤ’ ΕΙΜΕ ΜΗ ΨΗΕΞΝΤΕ ΝΕΝΕΡΓΙΑ ΝΑΤ’ ΠΩΡΞ ΕΤΑΔΟΥΩΝΞ ΕΒΟΛ ΞΨ ΨΟΥΨΙ ΝΕΝΝΟΙΑ ΕΤΕΠΕΩΝ ΠΕ ΝΒΑΡΒΗΛΩ. One might also compare *Allogenes* 46.16–37, a slightly damaged passage that seems to indicate that the vision of Kalyptos is obtained either through or of ΨΟΡΨΙ ΝΞΨΗ, a “first procession.”

136 *Allogenes* ΝΗC XI 60.10–12 (text Funk and Scopello, BCNH): ΔΛΛΑ ΕΒΟΛ ΞΨΤΩ ΟΥΕΝΝΟΙΑ ΕΞΕ ΝΟΥΘΕΙΝ ΕΚΙΝ[Ε] ΕΡΟΨ’ ΔΡΙ ΑΤ’ΕΙΜΕ ΕΡΟΨ. We have seen in Chapter 2 that Plotinus uses precisely the same exhortation at VI.9[9].7.18–21: ἀγνοήσαντα τὰ πάντα καὶ πρὸ τοῦ μὲν τῇ διαθέσει, τότε δὲ καὶ τοῖς εἰδέσιν, ἀγνοήσαντα δὲ καὶ αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ θεᾷ ἐκείνου γενέσθαι (“[U]n-knowing’ all things (both as he had at first, in the sensible realm, then also, in that of the forms) and even ‘un-knowing’ himself, [the soul must] come to be in the vision of that ...”).



( $\bar{\epsilon}\bar{\nu}$  οὐρανῷ ἐβολ ἐκκοτῆι νῆσοις) of the Invisible Spirit. Finally, “by means of the *thought that now exists in Silence and within the First Thought* [one learns] about the Triple Powered Invisible Spirit.”<sup>137</sup>

We may, therefore, begin to suspect that the Platonizing Sethians envisioned some kind of functional homology between what they call the “primary” or “initial manifestation,” the “first thought” and the “luminous thought,” all of which allow some kind of extraordinary apperception of the supreme principle. We now may ask again: what, precisely, is meant by this “first manifestation” or “first thought” that allows apprehension of the unknowable? By this point, the answer is emerging. For elsewhere in the Platonizing Sethian corpus, and also in related Gnostic literature, we already have a clear concept of a “primordial manifestation” or a “first thought,” often described as luminous, that is similarly related to the first moment of ontogenesis. To be precise, these phrases recall the exact language that is used in several monistic Gnostic systems, including prototypical Sethianism, to describe the primordial self-apprehension of the first principle—quite literally the “first manifestation” or “first thought”—that establishes ontogenesis itself. That the doctrine of primordial ontogenesis was itself a crucial, even defining, issue for the Platonizing Sethians is suggested at *Zostrianos* 3.11–13, when the eponymous visionary is nearly driven to suicide by his bewilderment over the metaphysical conundrum: “How did Existence (*huparxis*) which does not exist *appear* (οὐρανῷ ἐβολ) in an existing power?”<sup>138</sup>

#### 4.3 *Primordial Self-Reversion and the Reflexive Self-Manifestation of the Transcendent First Principle in Gnostic Ontogenetic Schemata*

To understand in detail what is meant by “primordial manifestation” or “first thought”—and thus to appreciate the depth of the parallel between ontogenetic and mystical self-apprehension in Platonizing Sethian thought—let us first pull back somewhat for a broader perspective. In several Gnostic systems, including not only that of the Platonizing Sethian tractates but also in (presumably earlier) examples of Sethian, Valentinian, and Thomasine Gnostic thought, we find variants of a single ontogenetic schema in which the supreme deity is absolutely unique and, like the Plotinian One, surpassingly transcendent, ineffable, and unknowable; often it is said to be beyond Being itself. In the first eternal moment of ontogenesis, this principle reverts upon and

137 *Zost. NHC VIII* 24.10–13 (text Barry, Funk, and Poirier, BCNH):  $\epsilon\bar{\rho}\alpha\bar{\iota}$   $\Delta\epsilon$   $\bar{\epsilon}\bar{\nu}$   $\bar{\iota}\epsilon\bar{\nu}\bar{\nu}\bar{o}\bar{\iota}\alpha$   $\tau\alpha\bar{\iota}$   $\epsilon\tau\omega\sigma\sigma\bar{\iota}$   $\bar{\iota}$   $\bar{\nu}\bar{o}\bar{\gamma}$   $\bar{\epsilon}\bar{\nu}$   $\bar{o}\bar{\gamma}\bar{\iota}\bar{\gamma}\bar{\eta}$   $\bar{\eta}\bar{\epsilon}\bar{\rho}\alpha\bar{\iota}$   $\Delta\epsilon$   $\bar{\epsilon}\bar{\nu}$   $\bar{\iota}\omega\sigma\bar{\rho}\bar{\iota}$   $\bar{\eta}\bar{\epsilon}\bar{\nu}\bar{\nu}\bar{o}\bar{\iota}\alpha$   $\epsilon\tau\bar{\iota}\bar{\nu}\epsilon$   $\bar{\mu}\omega\bar{\mu}\bar{\tau}\bar{\epsilon}\bar{o}\bar{\mu}$   $\bar{\eta}\alpha\bar{\rho}\bar{o}\bar{\rho}\bar{\alpha}\bar{\tau}\bar{o}\bar{\nu}$   $\bar{\eta}\bar{\iota}\bar{\nu}\bar{\eta}\bar{\alpha}$ .

138 *Zost. NHC VIII* 3.11–13 (text Barry, Funk, and Poirier, BCNH):  $\eta$   $\bar{\eta}\alpha\omega$   $\bar{\eta}\bar{\rho}\bar{\eta}\bar{\tau}\bar{\epsilon}$   $\bar{\iota}\bar{\gamma}\bar{\iota}$   $\bar{\mu}\bar{\alpha}\bar{\rho}\bar{\chi}\bar{\iota}\bar{\varsigma}$   $\epsilon\tau\bar{\epsilon}\bar{\nu}\bar{\epsilon}\bar{\omega}\sigma\bar{\sigma}\bar{\iota}$   $\Delta\bar{\eta}$   $\Delta\bar{\varsigma}\bar{o}\bar{\gamma}\bar{\omega}\bar{\nu}\bar{\eta}$   $\bar{\epsilon}\bar{\nu}\bar{o}\bar{\lambda}$   $\bar{\epsilon}\bar{\nu}$   $\bar{o}\bar{\gamma}\bar{o}\bar{\mu}$   $\epsilon\bar{\varsigma}\bar{\omega}\sigma\bar{\sigma}\bar{\iota}$ .

apprehends itself (or some aspect or attribute of itself), in a reflexive act of *epistrophē* that is generally described with either (i) the cognitive imagery of self-intellection or self-vision, or, instead, with (ii) the physico-spatial imagery of selfward-directed or recursive motion, self-withdrawal, self-contraction, or even self-impregnation; henceforth I will call the general schema “primordial self-reversion,” or PSR for short. This act of self-apprehension produces the first minimal duality through the deity’s own self-objectification. Once actualized, the self-apprehension is extruded from the absolute unity of the transcendent deity and thereby acquires independent subsistence, having crystallized into a fully-determinate second principle.<sup>139</sup> This emergent principle is, in effect, the “image” of the first principle itself—the object of its own self-apprehension—and it is usually described as an intellect or an aeon (in “Barbeloite” or proto-Sethian thought, either Barbelo or, occasionally, some other triadic series of hypostases) from which all subsequent levels of reality unfold. This principle is also uniquely able to know the first, in contradistinction with the principles on the subsequent ontological strata, whose failure to comprehend the unknowable first principle (or, in certain cases, failure to generate offspring in imitation of the latter’s perfect productivity) introduces into the system the first germ of error or failure. This primordial cognitive failure initiates a progressive ontological decline that eventually culminates in the creation of the psychic sphere as well as the profoundly mediocre material cosmos with all of its inherent evils.<sup>140</sup> The intent of this derivational scheme seems to be to preserve the independence of the first principle, which remains utterly self-directed and aloof while accounting for the production of the ontologically-inferior

139 I am not the first to have noticed this. The existence of this motif in Gnostic sources was already pointed out prior to the full publication of the Nag Hammadi corpus by Krämer 1964. On the basis of Patristic accounts alone (primarily those of Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresiorum* and Clement), Krämer identified the theme of self-objectification in Gnostic derivational schemata; thus Krämer 1964, 254: “Die Selbstentfaltung der Ur-Einheit zur Mannigfaltigkeit ist als *Reflexionsvorgang* gedeutet, durch den der Seinsgrund sich sowohl ‘für sich selbst’ wie ‘für andere’ darstellt und auseinanderlegend zum Bewußtsein bringt. Der Grund an sich selbst ist dabei je schon verstanden als latente Subjektivität, gleichsam als Ur-Subjekt, das potentiell und noch undifferenziert die Duplizität von Subjekt und Objekt und die Vielfalt der Wesenheiten in sich enthält.” At the 1978 Yale conference on Gnosticism, Whittaker (published 1980) noted the related theme of the self-generation of the second principle in Gnostic thought. Dillon 1999 described the reflexive ontogenesis in the *Apocryphon of John*, while more recently, Turner 2000d; idem 2001 and Bechtle 2000 have analyzed this type of derivational motif in the Platonizing Sethian treatises.

140 See Mazur 2005. To be precise, the failure is limited to those principles that are not able to successfully revert to—and know, imitate, or reproduce—their superiors.

strata as a natural by-product of the vast ontological differential entailed by the first principle’s overwhelming transcendence.<sup>141</sup>

#### 4.4 *Examples of Ontogenesis through Primordial Self-Reversion in Classic Gnostic Systems*

The similarity of the PSR scheme to that of Plotinus is, by this point, unmistakable. Yet this scheme originated neither with Plotinus nor with the Platonizing Sethians themselves. Rather, several variants of PSR had already been developed in a wide range of Gnostic systems, including ‘classic’ (second century CE) Gnostic thought. Some examples are as follows [see also passages in Appendix C8–10]:

#### 4.5 *The Apocryphon of John*

A clear instance of ontogenesis through self-reversion occurs in both versions of the *Apocryphon of John*, a distant ancestor of the Platonizing Sethian corpus. Here the first principle, the Invisible Spirit, apprehends his reflection in his own effulgent, aqueous light, and this self-image becomes the second principle: “*It is he who intelligizes (noein) himself in the light that surrounds him, which is the spring of living water, which is full of purity, and the spring of the spirit which poured forth living water from within it. He was providing all the aeons*

141 This scheme seems not to have been current in contemporaneous orthodox Christianity (at least not until Marius Victorinus in the fourth century, possibly influenced by Gnostic sources, and certainly by Plotinus and Porphyry). The evidence points towards a Gnostic innovation. It is most likely that the PSR mechanism would have been developed by those (a) for whom the philosophically-sophisticated elaboration of the hypertranscendence of the first principle was paramount; (b) who nevertheless believed in a ‘personal’ deity capable of self-apprehension; and (c) who were more deeply committed to the strict philosophical exigencies of transcendental monism than to a more literal or earnest interpretation of the traditional accounts of creation, such as the book of Genesis or Plato’s *Timaeus*. The Gnostics meet all three criteria. The issue of transcendental hyperontology—and with it the concomitant preoccupation with the problem of ontogenesis—seems to have been extremely central among second century Gnostics, perhaps even more so than among contemporaneous (pre-Plotinian) academic Platonists. The various tributaries to this Gnostic doctrine, however, are difficult to determine, and probably include some kind of creative synthesis of, *inter alia*, (a) Neopythagorean and early Academic derivational schemata involving the extension of the Monad into the Unlimited Dyad and / or Middle Platonic models of self-contraction such as that of Moderatus of Gades, on which see Turner 2000d, idem 2006, and Bechtle 2000; (b) various Stoic conceptions of *tonikē kinēsis* (the simultaneous bi-directional expansion and contraction of *pneuma* by which physical objects and living organisms constitute themselves, on which see Hadot 1960; and (c) contemporaneous embryology in which conception entails both the self-contraction of the seed and the imprinting or imaging of the forms inherent in the seed on the underlying material substrate.

and their worlds, and *in every likeness, he sees his own image (eikōn) in the pure light-water that surrounds him; and his thought became an actuality; she appeared; she stood before him in the brilliance of his light.*"<sup>142</sup> We may note that the shorter version of the *Apocryphon of John* uses the term ΟΥΩΝΖ ΕΒΟΛ to describe Barbelo's actual emergence as the image of the Invisible Spirit,<sup>143</sup> while the longer version tends to use instead the virtually synonymous expression ΣΩΛΠ ΕΒΟΛ to describe her act of emergence but then adds the exegesis, "namely, she who had appeared before him," here again using ΟΥΩΝΖ ΕΒΟΛ to describe her act of visible manifestation.<sup>144</sup> To complete the cycle of associations, the versions of Nag Hammadi codices II and III as well as the Berlin codex refer to the newly-actualized Barbelo immediately thereafter as the "primordial" or "first thought" (ΤΕΞΟΥΕΙΤΕ or ΠΩΟΡΙ ΜΗΕΥΕ).

#### 4.6 *Eugnostos and Wisdom of Jesus Christ*

The first moment of procession in the proto-Sethian *Eugnostos* (and the Christianized parallel *Wisdom of Jesus Christ*) is compared to a reflection in a mirror: "*He sees himself within himself like a mirror, having appeared (ΕΑΦΟΥΩΝΖ ΕΒΟΛ) in his likeness as Self-Father, that is, Self-Begetter, and as Confronter, since he confronted Unbegotten First Existent.*"<sup>145</sup> This may be compared to an earlier passage in which the first principle "looks to every side and sees its own self by means of itself."<sup>146</sup> The second principle is, paradoxically, the object of the first principle's reflexive (self-)vision.

<sup>142</sup> *Ap. John* NHC III 7.2–15 (text and trans. Waldstein and Wisse 1995, 10.5–11.1): [ΝΤΟΥ ΕΤ]ΝΟΕΙ ΉΜΟΥ Ή[ΜΙΝ ΜΗΟΥ ΖΗ ΠΟΥΟΕΙ]Ν ΕΤΚΩΤΕ Ε[ΡΟΥ ΕΤΕ ΝΤΟΥ ΠΕ ΤΠΗ]ΓΗ ΉΜΟΥ Ή[ΩΝΖ ΠΟΥΟΕΙΝ ΕΤΗΝΖ] ΝΡΙΕΙΚΡΙΝΕΣ [ΜΗ Τ]ΠΗΓΗ Ή[ΤΕ ΠΕΠΗ]Δ ΕΣΞΡ ΜΟΥ [ΕΦΟΝ]Ζ ΕΒΟΛ [ΝΖΗΤΣ] ΝΕΦΕΠΧΟΡΗ[ΓΕΙ Ν]ΝΔΙΩ[Ν ΤΗ]ΡΟΥ ΜΗ ΝΕΥΚΟΣ[ΜΟΣ] ΔΥΩ ΖΉ [ΣΜΟ]Τ' ΝΗ ΤΕΥΖΙΚΩΝ [ΜΗ]Ν ΉΜΟΥ ΕΦΝΔΥ ΕΡΟΣ ΖΉ ΠΜΟ[ΟΥ ΝΟ]ΥΟΕΙΝ ΉΚΑΘΑΡΟΝ ΕΤΚΩΤΕ Ε[ΡΟΥ] ΔΥΩ ΤΕΦΕΝΝΟΙΑ ΔΣΡ ΟΥΖΩΒ' [ΔΣΟΥ]ΩΝΖ ΕΒΟΛ' ΔΣΑΖΕ ΕΡΑΤΣ ΉΠΕΦ[ΜΤΟ] ΕΒΟΛ' ΖΉ ΠΕΦΛΑΜΠΗΔΟΝΟΣ Ή[ΟΥΟΕΙ]Ν. See also parallels in BG 26.15–27.8 and NHC II 4.19–29.

<sup>143</sup> *Eugnostos* NHC III 7.13; BG 27.5–6.

<sup>144</sup> *Ap. John* NHC II 4.27; IV 7.3. In any case, all versions repeat the account of the emergence of Barbelo in the next few lines with the expression *ouōnh ebol*.

<sup>145</sup> *Eugnostos* NHC III 75.3–6 (text and trans. Parrott, CGL, slightly modified): ΕΦΝΔΥ ΕΡΟΥ ΉΜΙΝ ΉΜΟΥ ΉΡΡΑΪ ΉΖΗΤΪ' ΝΘΕ ΝΟΥΕΙΑΛ' ΕΑΦΟΥΩΝΖ ΕΒΟΛ ΖΉ ΠΕΦΕΙΝΕ ΝΑΥΤΟΠΑΤΩΡ; see also parallels: *Eugnostos* NHC V 2.22–27 and *Wis. Jes. Chr.* NHC III 94.24–95.6; BG 84.17–85.9.

<sup>146</sup> NHC III 72.11–13 and parallels: ΕΦΝΔΥ ΖΙ Σ'Α' ΝΗ ΕΣΕΪΩΡΖ ΉΜΟΣ ΟΥΔΑΣ' ΖΤΟΟΤΣ ΜΗΝ ΉΜΟΣ. In the Platonizing *Steles Seth*, the first principle, a "Non-Being Existence," is praised as one who knows himself, since "the one who belongs to thee is on every side"; here the second principle seems to be the self-perception in the reflective medium of the first principle's own emanation. We may detect an intimation of the same schema in the *Three Forms* where the second principle, the hypostatized "first thought" (Protennoia) of the

#### 4.7 *Simon Magus*

In Hippolytus's description of the *Apophasis Megalē* attributed to Simon Magus—the ostensible “first” Gnostic—the “pre-existent” principle generates the second—also described, in Simon's system, as an intellectual principle, *Epinoia* (“mental reflection”)—through an act of self-manifestation: “Having manifested [himself] to himself from himself, he became the second” (φανείς γὰρ αὐτῷ ἀπὸ ἑαυτοῦ ἐγένετο δεύτερος).<sup>147</sup> Plotinus echoes the wording of the latter part of this phrase in the ostensibly anti-Gnostic context of the *Großschrift*, at III.8[30].8.32–36, when he describes the unfolding of Intellect from the One through self-manifestation in uncharacteristically pessimistic terms: “But beginning as one, it did not remain as it began, but unaware of itself, became multiple, as it were, weighed down, and unraveled itself wanting to have everything—as it was better for it not to have wanted this, for it became the second (δεύτερον γὰρ ἐγένετο).” In any case, we may compare this with an earlier passage in which Hippolytus attributes to Simon the doctrine that the first principle engages in a series of self-directed actions and relationships that apparently produce a division within the godhead: “[it] is one power divided above (and) below, generating itself, making itself grow, seeking itself, finding itself, being mother of itself, father of itself, sister of itself, spouse of itself, daughter of itself, son of itself, mother, father, being one, a root of the whole.”<sup>148</sup>

#### 4.8 *The Naasenes*

In Hippolytus's account of the teachings of an unnamed Naasene heresiarch, we encounter a curious ontogenetic system in which a non-existent and infinitesimal spermatoc deity, described in vaguely Pythagoreanizing terms as a mathematical point, expands into an incomprehensibly vast cosmic principle through an act of self-intellection: “For this one, being nothing (he [the Naasene heresiarch] says) and consisting of nothing, being an indivisible point, will become, *through a mental reflection (epinoia) of itself*, some incomprehensible magnitude.”<sup>149</sup>

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Father, declares that she is illuminated by the latter's own luminosity, and describes the Father himself as an “eye” of that light: that is, as a self-perceptive principle.

147 Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresiorum* 6.18.5.3–4.

148 Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresiorum* 6.17.3.14 (text Marcovich 1986): αὕτη, φησίν, ἐστὶ <ν> ἡ <δύναμις μία, διηρημένη <δ> ἄνω κάτω, αὐτὴν γεννώσα, αὐτὴν αὖξουσα, αὐτὴν ζητοῦσα, αὐτὴν εὐρίσκουσα, αὐτῆς μήτηρ οὖσα, αὐτῆς πατήρ, αὐτῆς ἀδελφή, αὐτῆς σύζυγος, αὐτῆς θυγάτηρ, αὐτῆς υἱός, [μήτηρ, πατήρ,] ἐν οὖσα· ῥίζα τῶν ὅλων.

149 Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresiorum* 5.9.5.8–12 (text Marcovich 1986): ἡ <γάρ> <μηδὲν οὖσα, φησί, καὶ ἐκ μηδενὸς συνεστῶσα [στιγμὴ ἀμέριστος οὖσα], γενήσεται ἑαυτῇ <ς> ἐπινοίᾳ μέγεθός τι ἀκατάληπτον.

#### 4.9 *The Valentinian School*

We find a variant of this theme in a number of accounts of Valentinian thought. While the typical Valentinian account of ontogenesis describes the very first moment in terms of sexual reproduction rather than a primordial self-reversion *per se*—although even this reproductive act often suggests a recursive self-impregnation—there are also a number of instances in which an entity at a subsequent phase of generation—usually called the “Son”—emerges as a result of the first principle’s self-cognition. In Clement’s paraphrase of the occidental Valentinian heresiarch Theodotus, the unknowable Father produces the Son through an act of self-intellection: “The Father, being unknown, wished to make himself known to the Aions; and through his own thought—a *pneuma* of knowledge within knowledge—inasmuch as he knows himself, he emits the *Only-Begotten*”<sup>150</sup> This schema reappears in the *Tripartite Tractate*, in which the (self-) thought of the Father itself comprises the Son; here we may note the remarkable sophistication and paradoxical elegance of the use of indeterminate Coptic pronominal referents of several of the passages in question, which undoubtedly reflects more or less accurately a similar ambiguity in the Greek *Vorlagen*: “The Father, in the way we mentioned earlier, in an unbegotten way, is the one in whom he [the Son? The Father?] knows himself, who begot him [the Son? / the Father?] having a thought, which is the thought of him [the Father / Son?], that is, the perception of him [the Son / the Father?]....”<sup>151</sup> A related schema occurs in the *Gospel of Truth*; here, however, the generative recursion involves self-naming rather than self-knowing: “Now the name of the Father is the Son. It is he [The Father? The Son?] who first gave a name to the one [the Son] who came forth from him [the Father], who was himself [the Father?], and he begot him as a son. He gave him his [the Father’s? / the Son’s?] name which belonged to him; he is the one to whom belongs all that exists around him, the Father.”<sup>152</sup> In these equations, the respective identities of subject and

150 Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpta Theodoto* 7.1 (text Sagnard 1948): “Ἀγνωστος οὖν ὁ Πατήρ ὢν, ἠθέλησεν γνωσθῆναι τοῖς Αἰώσι· καὶ διὰ τῆς Ἐνθυμήσεως τῆς ἑαυτοῦ, ὡς ἂν ἑαυτὸν ἐγνωκώς, Πνεῦμα γνώσεως οὐσης ἐν γνώσει, προέβαλε τὸν Μονογενῆ.”

151 *Tripartite Tractate* NHC I 56.32–57.1 (text and trans. Attridge and Pagels, CGL): πῶτ ἡὲ ἐντανῶρπ ἡχῶοc ρῆν οὔνῆτᾱτχπᾱc πετῆcαγνε ἡμαc ἡμαc ἡμιν ἡμαc εταcχπο ἡμαc εcωοοπ εγῆτεc ἡμεc· ἡνογῆεγε· ετεπεεῖμεγε ἡτεc πε ετετεεῖ τε τᾱc[57] ὅnc. One might also consider 67.17–19 (trans. Attridge and Pagels, CGL, slightly modified): “Seeing himself in himself completely and having a son and a shape.”

152 *Gospel of Truth* NHC I 38.6–14 (text and trans. Attridge and MacRae, CGL): πρεν δε ἡπῶτ· πε πῶρπ· ἡταc· ἡῶρπ πενταcτῆ ρεν απενταρεῖ αβαλ ἡμαc ενταc ρῶ πε· αγω αcμεcτῆ ἡνογῶρπ· αcτῆ πεcρεν αραc ετενεογῆτεc ἡταc πε ετεογῆτεc ἡκεεῖ νημ εcωοοπ ραcτηc· ἡcῖ πῶτ. Cf. also *Val. Exp.* NHC XI 24.36–39 (text and trans. Turner, CGL, slightly modified): “It is he who manifests himself in the Monogenes, and in

object are ambiguous and possibly interchangeable: if the self-cognition of X is Y, which is the subject, and which the object, of self-cognition? As with the Simonian first principle—who by apprehending himself “became the second” (ἐγένετο δεύτερος)—the fluid identity of the reflexive subject engenders the first minimal alterity and, paradoxically, bridges the gulf between the absolutely ineffable first principle and the more easily predicable second principle. As we have seen in Chapter 3, Plotinus exploits precisely this kind of pronominal ambiguity in his accounts of ontogenesis, and there can be little doubt that he derived this ingenious technique from Gnostic sources.

#### 4.10 *Marcus the Magician*

In Hippolytus’s account of the doctrine of Marcus the Magician, we may perceive a more distant variation of PSR in which the second principle is produced by a voluntary act of the first, and yet, as in the more typical scheme, the second principle reflects the first back upon himself: “When the First Father—the one who is inconceivable and insubstantial, who is neither male nor female—wanted the unutterable to be uttered and the invisible to be given shape, he opened his mouth and sent forth a Logos similar to himself, which, standing beside him, showed him what he was, himself the manifested shape of the invisible.”<sup>153</sup> In this case, Marcus seems to be interpreting the famous words of the Johannine prologue in terms of PSR, reading the preposition in the phrase *pros ton theon* spatially so as to signify the reversion of the primordial deity’s first utterance to its source.<sup>154</sup>

3.2.2.7. [g] *The Docetae*. According to Hippolytus, the Docetae held that the aeons are aspects of the first transcendent deity that have separated themselves off hierarchically according to their ability to apprehend the transcendent deity. The deity is, in effect, their former ‘self,’ and the apprehension is described as reflexive: “For that one that attained a position nearest to the First God, that one like a seed, having the greatest power to beget, *measured*

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him [?] he [?] manifested the Ineffable ...” (περὶ ἡτὰρ πεῖταρ ὁ γὰρ ἀβὰλ οὐρανοῦ ἔμῃ πρῶτον αὐτὸν ἡτὰρ ἡτὰρ ἀφ’ οὗ αὐτὸν ἀβὰλ ἡπατοῦσε).

153 Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresiorum* 6.42.4.1–5.1 (text Marcovich 1986): ὅτε τὸ πρῶτον ὁ Πατήρ, <οὐ πατήρ οὐδεις ἦν,> [αὐτοῦ] ὁ ἀνεν<ν>όητος καὶ ἀνούσιος, ὁ μήτε ἄρρεν μήτε θῆλυ, ἡθέλησεν αὐτοῦ τὸ ἄρρητον ῥητὸν γενέσθαι (καὶ) αὐτὸ ἀόρατον μορφωθῆναι, ἡνοίξε τὸ στόμα καὶ προήκατο Λόγον ὁμοιον αὐτῷ· ὅς παραστάς ἐπέδειξεν αὐτῷ ὃ ἦν, αὐτὸς τοῦ ἀοράτου μορφὴ φανείς.

154 Hints of a similar interpretation of John 1:1 by the Valentinians occur in Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpta Theodoto* 6–7. In the Nag Hammadi *Teachings of Silvanus* NHC VII 113.4–12 (trans. Peel, CGL), there is a parallel emergence of the Logos as the *tupos* and the “spotless mirror of the *energeia* of God” or—even closer to Plotinus—“the seeing (*hōrasis*) that observes the Invisible Father.”

himself—the unmeasurable—tenfold. But that one who came to be in the second position with respect to the First (God), himself the ungraspable, grasped himself sixfold. But that one who attained the third position came to be in an infinite separation through the expansion of his brothers; having thrice intelligized himself—the unintelligible—it was as if he bound himself with an eternal bond of union.”<sup>155</sup> As in Plotinus, ontological status correlates with an aptitude for self-knowledge.

#### 4.11 *The Untitled Treatise of the Codex Bruce*

In the *Untitled Treatise of Codex Brucianus*, the unknowable Father emanates in his “first concept” (τεταωρηπ νεννοια) what appears to be the second stratum of divinities—described as the Fathers’ own “members” (*melos*) who also collectively comprise the Son—in order that they should know him in return, which implies that the “first conception” that establishes ontogenesis is equivalent to a mutually-interwoven self-apprehension of both the deity and its immediate progeny.<sup>156</sup>

#### 4.12 *Ontogenesis through Primordial Self-Reversion in the Platonizing Sethian Tractates*

Given the wide diffusion of the PSR schema in many varieties of Gnostic thought (some likely much earlier), it is not surprising that the same pattern may also be detected in the Platonizing Sethian tractates themselves. Indeed, as with many other aspects of their thought, the Platonizing Sethians were broadly dependent upon a more Gnostic scheme—both that of ‘classic’ Sethianism as exemplified by the *Apocryphon of John* and that of other, non-Sethian Gnosticism—for their conception of ontogenesis. Although the poor condition of the texts complicates interpretation, the ontogenetic scheme of the Platonizing Sethian tractates involves the progressive emergence of the second ontological stratum from the transcendent principle—the Invisible or Unknowable Spirit—through various (usually triadic) processes of self-contemplation and self-determination. As in the *Anonymous Commentary on*

155 Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresiorum* 8.8.8 (text Marcovich 1986): ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἔγγιστα τῷ πρώτῳ θεῷ, τῷ οἰοίει σπέρματι, <τῇ> θέσει τυχῶν, τῶν ἄλλων γονιμωτέραν ἔσχε δύναμιν, δεκάκις [αὐτὸς] αὐτὸν μεγέθει μετρήσας ὁ ἀμέτρητος· ὁ δὲ τῇ θέσει τοῦ πρώτου γενόμενος δεύτερος, ἑξάκις αὐτὸν κατέλαβεν ὁ ἀκατάληπτος· ὁ δὲ ἤδη τρίτος τῇ θέσει <τυχῶν>, εἰς ἄπειρον διάστημα διὰ τὴν αὐξήσιν τῶν ἀδελφῶν γενόμενος, τρίς <αὐτὸν> νοήσας <ὁ ἀνεκνόητος>, ἑαυτὸν οἰοίει δεσμὸν τινα τῆς ἐνότητος αὐτῶν ἔδωκεν αἰῶνιον.

156 Cod. Bruc. *Untitled* 265.11–18, text Schmidt and MacDermot 1978: ριτη νεφμελος μμιν μμοϋ αϗααϗ ντοπος μνεφμελος. ετρεγοϗωρ ηρητϗ αϗω πεσοϗωνηϗ ϗε ντοϗ πε πεϗειωτ αϗω ϗε ντοϗ πενταϗπροβαλε μμοϗ εβολ ρη τεϗωο[ρ]ηπ νεννοια.



*Plato's 'Parmenides'* the process is often said to consist of a triad of Existence (*Huparxis*), Vitality, and Blessedness; these are occasionally hypostatized into the Triple Powered One (ΠΤΩΜΕΤΕΟΝ). The result of this process is the actualization of the Barbelo Aeon—more or less equivalent to the determinate realm of Being or the Platonic Forms, itself divided into the subaeons Kalypsos, Protophanes, and Autogenes—which had hitherto remained in indeterminate prefiguration within the Invisible Spirit. Since the Barbelo Aeon comprises the triad of subaeons, the process of self-reflection is sometimes described in terms of a single act of which Barbelo herself is the subject, while at other times the sequential unfolding of her subaeons is described with greater precision; however, these accounts are not necessarily contradictory, since one might conceive of the activities of each aeonic stratum as co-implicated or overlapping with the activities of the inferior strata which it contains. This apparent ambiguity is, of course, reflected in Plotinus's own ontogenetic schema.

#### 4.13 *Primordial Self-Reversion in Zostrianos*<sup>157</sup>

There are a few relatively intact passages in *Zostrianos* that indicate, more or less explicitly, that a self-cognition of the first hyperontic principle produces the first minimal duality and leads to the production of subsequent ontological strata.

*Zostrianos* 74.3–16: “It is because of all these that this is the one who pre-exists; and he is pure, he is a simple unity, a single Spirit who is unnamable. And he is the (a) existence (*huparxis*), the idea (*idea*), the word, of him(self), both according to the activity which is his (b) life and according to the perfection which is (c) an intellectual power, there being a light; and the triad stands together (while) moving together.”<sup>158</sup> Here the first principle (the Invisible Spirit) is described in terms of its own self-directed attributes, which include a variant of the noetic triad (a, b, and c) that emerges out of that principles' own unity. Although this triad is “standing,” it is also paradoxically in motion, and this

157 Throughout the badly damaged manuscript of *Zost.* there are a number of lacunose passages whose visible remnants are tantalizingly suggestive of the technical terminology of PSR but whose interpretation remains too uncertain to merit a detailed analysis here; thus, for example, 17.11–15: “the Invisible Spirit is a spring of them all (or: “of the Universals), while the rest (come) from knowledge as likenesses of him; but the one who knows him(self) [...]”; or, similarly, 80.8–18, esp. lines 8–12, where Barbelo is described as “an *eikōn* in a turning (οὐκῶτε = *epistrophē*)... having seen the ... (pre-existent one).”

158 *Zost.* NHC VIII 74.3–16 (text Barry, Funk, and Poirier, BCNH): ΕΤΒΕ [ΝΑΙ Τ]ΗΡΟΥ ΝΑΙ [Π]ΕΤΡΩ [Π]ΤΙ ΝΩ]ΟΟΠ` ΑΥΩ ΕΦΤ[ΟΥΒΗΟ]Υ ΕΟΥΑ ΠΕ ΝΕΑΠ[ΛΟΥΝ ΟΥ]ΠΠΑ ΟΥΩΤ` Ε[ΦΕ ΝΑΤ`Τ] Ρ[ΑΝ] ΕΡΟΥ ΠΕ` ΑΥΩ [ΝΗ ΤΕΥ]ΠΑΡΞΙΣ ΤΕΙΔΕΑ [ΠΩΑΔΕ Π]Ε ΝΤΑΥ` ΑΥΩ ΚΑ[ΤΑ ΤΕΝ]ΕΡΓΙΑ ΕΤΕΠΩΝΕ [ΝΤΑΥ] ΠΕ` ΑΥΩ ΚΑΤΑ ΤΗΝ[Τ]ΤΕ]ΛΙΟΣ ΕΤΕΤΕΟΜ Τ[Ε] ΝΝΟ]ΕΡΟΝ ΕΥΟΥΟΕΙΝ Τ[Ε] ΑΥΩ] ΠΩΟΗΤ` ΕΦΑΞΕΡΑΤ[Υ ΕΥ]ΟΠ` ΕΦΚΙΝ ΕΙ ΟΥΕ[ΟΠ].

incipient motion is presumably responsible for the emergence of subsequent ontological strata. As we have seen in Chapter 3, Plotinus similarly describes the PNE in terms of effulgent life and light as well as the paradoxical combination of *kinēsis* and *stasis*.

*Zostrianos* 76.21–25: “His (the Invisible Spirit’s) knowledge (*gnōsis*) exists outside of him, with the one who examines himself as he exists within himself, a reflection and an image (*eikōn*)....”<sup>159</sup> The first principle’s own self-knowledge—which is, as an “image” or “reflection” of that very principle, equivalent to knowledge of it—is extruded from that principle itself, which remains an absolutely simple unity. Significantly, although this self-knowledge is, strictly speaking, exterior to the first principle, it nevertheless inheres *within* the subjectivity of subsequent principles—even, one may presume, within that of certain human beings—who are capable of perfect self-knowledge. This passage thus appears to identify the self-knowledge of the transcendent deity with that of the human aspirant. The emphasis on exteriorization—“existing *outside* of him”—is also significant. This may be compared with an ontogenetic passage of *Marsanes* 9.1–5: “For this reason the Virgin [Barbelo] became male, since she *separated off from* the male. The knowledge *stood outside of him* as it belongs to him.”<sup>160</sup> It is also reminiscent of a description of the Unknowable first principle itself in terms of its own paradoxical self-exteriorization at *Allogenes* 66.29–32 as “*resting and standing out* of that which stands all the time,”<sup>161</sup> a phrase which has an echo in Plotinus’s own paradoxical description of simultaneous ontogenesis and mystical apprehension as both *stasis* and *ek-stasis* at VI.9[9].11.22–25.

*Zostrianos* 77.7–15: “Therefore she came to be outside of the Pleroma [...] which she desired, not for herself. This (aspect) of hers she placed outside the perfection. She separated off from the total perfection, for she is a perfection existing (merely) as a (kind of) cogitation.”<sup>162</sup> The second principle is expelled and separated from the absolute perfection of the first principle’s plenitude;

159 *Zost.* NHC VIII 76.21–25 (text Barry, Funk, and Poirier, BCNH): ΟΥΓΝΩΣΙΣ ἤταυ ἐ[ϥ] ὄροσι· ἡσάβολ ἡμοϥ· ἡῖ πῖ ἐτ· μοϥοῦτ· ἡῖ[ο]ϥ ἐϥὄροσι· ἡρῆτϥ· ὀ[ϥ]εἰλαδων ἡῖ οὔρῃ[κων].

160 *Marsanes* NHC X 9.1–5 (text Funk and Poirier, BCNH): ΕΤΒΕ ΠΕΕΙ ΑΣΩΩΠΕ ἡζαϥτ· ἡβι τπαρθενος· δε ασπωρξ αφαϥτ ασωρερετ·ε̣ ἡπεφβαλ ἡβι τεῖρνωσις· εως εσῃπαραϥ.

161 *Allogenes* NHC XI 66.29–32 (text Funk and Scopello, BCNH): ἐϥρορ̣κ ἡμοϥ ἐϥαζερεατ̣ εβολ ε̣ῖ πῖ ἐταζερεατ̣ ἡοϥοειϥ ἡῖ. Cf. *Steles Seth* NHC VII 121.9–11.

162 *Zost.* NHC VIII 77.7–15 (text Barry, Funk, and Poirier, BCNH): [ετβ]ε παῖ ασωϥ[π]ε [ἡσάβολ]λ ἡπιπληρωμα [± 3]ε̣ ετασοϥαϥϥ εϥ[ω]ς ἡ[α]ς αν· παῖ ἡτας [ακκ]ααϥ ἡσάβολ ἡτῖῃτ̣·[τελι]ος· ασπωρξ, εβολ [τῖῃτ̣]·παντελιος γαρ τε [ἡτ]ε οὔῃτ̣·τελιος εσωοσι· ἡοϥοϥοῦτ̣.

presumably this is a result of the reflexive self-cognition described in the previous passage (76.21–25). This establishes Barbelo as a lesser form of perfection, here identified with  $\mu\omicron\gamma\omega\tau$ , which probably renders a Greek noun such as  $\lambda\omicron\gamma\iota\sigma\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$  that denotes a less valued and more laborious form of intellection: “(rational) consideration,” “calculation,” or, possibly, “cogitation.” The Plotinian PNE is similarly characterized by “desire” (*ephēsis*) for its source, while its exile is also due to an act of cognition.

*Zostrianos* 78.6–79.9: “It is he [*m. = the Barbelo Aeon?*] who knows and who foreknows himself, truly existing as an aeon, in actuality and potentiality and existence (*huparxis*). She [*f. = Barbelo?*] did not originate in time, but rather manifested (herself) in eternity, having stood before him in eternity. And she was obscured through the power of his [...]. She stood, looking at him and rejoicing, filled with his goodness.”<sup>163</sup> One may assume that the subject of both the first and second sentence of this passage are the same, since the initial masculine pronoun implicitly refers to the “aeon” of Barbelo, a masculine noun in both Greek and Coptic, while the subsequent use of the feminine corresponds to Barbelo herself. Yet at the same time the shift in gender hints at a subtle transformation of the subject, between (i) one whose self-directed intellectual act is purely reflexive and (ii) one which has sufficiently objectified its former self so as to confront it as ‘another.’<sup>164</sup> We have seen that Plotinus envisions an identical process in which the self-apprehension of the PNE as a “traveling” subject gradually establishes its independence from the One. We have also seen that Plotinus describes the PNE as simultaneously both *energeia* and *dunamis*. Moreover, we have seen that the PNE (a) “stands,” (b) “looks” towards its source, and (c) “is filled” by the first principle’s effluence, just as does the emergent Barbelo.

*Zostrianos* 81.6–21: “She was ... the cause of the decline. So that she would not come forth anymore and come to be apart from perfection, *she knew herself and that one*. And she made herself stand; she expanded because of that one, and since she was from the truly existent, she was from the truly existent with the universals, to *know her(self) and to know the one that pre-exists*.”<sup>165</sup>

163 *Zost. NHC VIII* 78.6–22 (text Turner 2000a, 610):  $\pi[\text{H}] \epsilon[\text{TEW}]\alpha\text{q}\epsilon[\text{I}]\mu[\epsilon \text{ p}]\epsilon \text{ n}\bar{\text{H}} \text{ p}\bar{\text{H}} \epsilon[\text{T}\bar{\text{P}} \text{ wop}\bar{\text{T}}] \bar{\text{n}}[\epsilon]\text{I}\mu\epsilon \epsilon\text{POY} \epsilon\text{q}\text{w}\text{O}\text{O}[\text{P} \bar{\text{n}} \text{ ON}]\text{T}\text{W}\text{C} \epsilon\gamma\epsilon\text{WN} \text{p}\epsilon \text{ n}\bar{\text{q}}[\pm \text{ q}] \bar{\text{E}}\text{H} \text{OY}\epsilon\text{NEP}\text{ΓIA} \Delta\epsilon [\text{H}\bar{\text{H}} \text{ OY}]\text{C}\text{OM} \Delta\gamma\text{W} \text{OY}\bar{\text{Z}}\text{Y}\text{H}[\Delta\text{P}\bar{\text{Z}}\text{IC}] \bar{\text{H}}\text{N}\Delta\text{C}\bar{\text{P}}\Delta\text{P}\bar{\text{X}}\text{I} \epsilon\text{N} \bar{\text{H}}[\text{HOY}]\text{XPO}\text{NOC} \Delta\text{LLA} \Delta\text{C}[\text{OY}\text{W}]\text{H}\bar{\text{Z}} \epsilon\text{BOL} \bar{\text{E}}\text{H} \text{OY}\text{H}\bar{\text{H}}\text{T} \text{W}\Delta [\epsilon]\text{N}\epsilon\bar{\text{Z}} \epsilon\Delta\text{C}\Delta\text{Z}\epsilon\text{P}\Delta\text{T}\bar{\text{C}} \bar{\text{H}}\text{N}[\Delta]\bar{\text{Z}}\text{P}\Delta\text{q} \bar{\text{E}}\text{H} \text{OY}\text{H}\bar{\text{H}}\text{T} \text{W}\Delta \epsilon\text{N}[\epsilon\bar{\text{Z}}] \Delta\gamma\text{W} \Delta\text{C}\bar{\text{P}}\epsilon\text{BN} \epsilon\text{BOL} \bar{\text{E}}\text{H}\text{T}\bar{\text{H}} \text{H}\bar{\text{H}}\text{T}\text{H}\text{NOC} \bar{\text{H}}\text{T}\epsilon \text{H}\bar{\text{H}}\text{T} \text{X}\bar{\text{P}}\bar{\text{C}}] \bar{\text{H}}\text{T}\Delta\text{q} \Delta\text{C}\Delta\text{Z}\epsilon\text{P}\Delta\text{T}\bar{\text{C}} \epsilon[\text{C}]\text{H}\Delta\gamma \epsilon\text{POY} \Delta\gamma\text{W} \epsilon\text{CT}[\epsilon]\text{H}[\lambda]\bar{\text{H}} \bar{\text{H}}\text{MOC} \epsilon\text{C}\text{M}\epsilon\bar{\text{Z}} \epsilon\text{BOL} \bar{\text{E}}\text{H} \text{OY} \text{H}\bar{\text{H}}\text{T} \text{XPHCTOC}.$

164 Cf. *Marsanes NHC X* 9.1–13.

165 *Zost. NHC VIII* 81.6–21 (text Barry, Funk, and Poirier, BCNH):  $[\text{H}\bar{\text{E}}]\text{C}\text{W}\text{O}[\text{O}\text{P} \bar{\text{n}}] \text{p}]\epsilon \text{ K}\Delta[\text{T}\Delta \text{OY}\Delta \bar{\text{H}}]\text{XO}\epsilon\text{I}\bar{\text{X}}\bar{\text{E}} \bar{\text{H}}\text{T}\epsilon \text{P}[\text{P}]\text{IK}\epsilon \bar{\text{E}}\text{H}[\text{H}]\Delta \Delta\epsilon \bar{\text{H}}\text{NEC}\bar{\text{E}} \epsilon\text{BOL} \bar{\text{H}}\bar{\text{Z}}\text{OY}\text{O} [\Delta]\gamma\text{W} \bar{\text{H}}\text{C}\text{W}\text{H}\text{P}\epsilon \bar{\text{E}}\text{H} \text{POY}\epsilon$

Again we find that the emergent Barbelo simultaneously knows herself and her source, her former self, the first principle; the Plotinian PNE is said to know both itself and its source. As in Plotinus, the *epistrophē* is concomitant with stasis, and the recursive cognition halts the process of externalization and decline by imparting definition to the epistrophic subject. The notion of Barbelo “expanding” upon apprehending the supreme principle has a precise parallel in Plotinus’s use of the verb *haplotheis* at VI.7[38].35.26 to describe the erotic “expansion” of the PNE at the moment of its ontogenetic “impregnation” with the effluence of the One.

*Zostrianos* 82.6–13: “[The one] who preconceives it is an eternal space, since he had become the second of his knowledge(s), again the knowledge of his knowledge, which is the unbegotten Kalyptos.” “Preconception”—akin to “first thought”—is a technical term for the self-knowledge of the transcendent first principle (as we will see in the next section). The notion of an “eternal space” reflects the hypertranscendence of the Invisible Spirit (one may compare the Valentinian pre-principle *Bythos*, the Deep), an unutterably vast abyss—perhaps loosely modeled on the receptacle in Plato’s *Timaeus* 52d ff.—within which, so to speak, the subsequent ontogenetic processes unfold. The self-knowledge of the Invisible Spirit reduplicates itself as the “knowledge of his knowledge,” which becomes the supreme aeon of Barbelo, Kalyptos; this latter represents the absolutely hyper-noetic reality that remains in a state of occultation prior to its first (pre-) intelligible manifestation as Protophanes. At II.9[33].1, Plotinus undoubtedly has this or a related passage (such as *Allogenes* 45.29–30 or *Zostrianos* 117.5) in mind when he denounces the Gnostic division of Intellect into one part that knows and another that knows that it knows.<sup>166</sup>

ἤτε ἡμῖν·τελιος· ἀρῖμε ερος ἡν πη εἰμῆαγ· ἀγω ἀσαρεατῆς [ρω]ως ἀσογωῶς  
εβολ [ετ]βε πη εἰμῆαγ· ἀγω [ε]πλῆη νεσσοοπ· εβολ [εἰ] πη εἰμῆαγ· ὄντω  
{νεσσοοπ· εβολ εἰ πη εἰμῆαγ· ὄντω} ἡν μη [τ]ηρογ εσογωῶς ἀγω [ε]σογῶ πη  
ετῶ ὄρῃ· ἡωο[ο]π.

- 166 *Enn.* II.9[33].1.34–40: “Do not on this account make the intellect multiple, if one thinks and the other thinks that it thinks. For even if—in this realm—“to think” is one thing and “to think that one thinks” is another, nevertheless there is but one (mental) contact that is not unobservant of its own activities. For it is ludicrous to suppose this of the true Intellect, but the one that thought will be the same as the one that thinks that it thinks” (Οὐ μὴν οὐδὲ διὰ τοῦτο πλείους νοῦς ποιεῖν, εἰ ὁ μὲν νοεῖ, ὁ δὲ νοεῖ ὅτι νοεῖ. Καὶ γὰρ εἰ ἄλλο τὸ ἐν τούτοις νοεῖν, ἄλλο δὲ τὸ νοεῖν ὅτι νοεῖ, ἀλλ’ οὖν μία προσβολὴ οὐκ ἀναίσθητος τῶν ἐνεργημάτων ἑαυτῆς· γελοῖον γὰρ [Armstrong, LCL: δὲ] ἐπὶ τοῦ ἀληθινοῦ νοῦ τοῦτο ὑπολαμβάνειν, ἀλλὰ πάντως γε ὁ αὐτὸς ἔσται ὅσπερ ἐνόει ὁ νοῶν ὅτι νοεῖ). The proximity to the thought of Amelius, who posited a tripartition of intellect (or possibly three separate intellects) is also intriguing.



independent than in *Zostrianos*, thus better preserving the first principle's hypertranscendence. Yet the difference is not absolute; the highest modality of the Triple Powered One, *Huparxis*, is barely distinguishable from the first principle itself, and may be thought of as the first minimal activity of that principle's own self-reversion.

*Allogenes* 45.22–33 (badly damaged, relying on Turner's reconstruction):<sup>169</sup> “When it was contracted, it [expanded] and spread forth; it became perfect. And it received power through all of them, *knowing itself* [and] the perfect Invisible Spirit, and he became an Aeon. *Knowing herself, she knew that one*, and she became Kalyptos, because she acts in those whom she knows.”<sup>170</sup> As with several passages in Plotinus, the PSR is described in spatial terms; the first stage consists of a self-directed contraction; the second, an expansion and “perfection” (the notion ultimately derives from Aristotelian embryology, and also has a Plotinian reflection at, for example, III.8[30].11.1–7). In Plotinus as well, the epistrophic PNE is “empowered” or “strengthened” by its source.<sup>171</sup> The initial subject of the contraction is probably the Triple Powered One, since its self-knowledge is distinguished from knowledge of the Invisible Spirit, but as at *Zostrianos* 78.6–79.9, the pronominal prefixes switch to the feminine gender to indicate the emergence of distinct alterity at the moment of self-objectification (this despite the fact that Kalyptos is masculine). Here again, Barbelo's successful self-knowledge is equated with knowledge of the transcendent first principle.

*Allogenes* 48.14–19: “It is not as Being, but he provides Being (παῶν) with that which is the occultation of Existence (*huparxis*). He provides for everything since *it is he who will come to be when he intelligizes himself*.”<sup>172</sup> This passage is explicit that the primordial moment of self-cognition generates Being, just as in Plotinus at, for instance, VI.8[39].16.20–21: “this (as it were)

169 Turner's reconstruction of εφεῖμ[ε ερω] at line 26 and εσεῖμ[ε δε ερος...] at lines 29–30 are accepted by the BCNH team but not by K. L. King 1995, 82 who prefers εφεῖμ[ε ερω] and εσεῖμ[ε ερω] on the basis of comparison with νη εἶς[κο]οῦν ἡμοῦ at 45.32–33.

170 *Allogenes* ΝΗC XI 45.22–33 (text Funk and Scopello, BCNH): *ἄε εταγρο[τῆ] αφοῦ* *ως εβολ[α] ἄφ[ε] [εαφπορ]ῶν ἄφ[ε] τε[λ]ῶς [α]φ[ε] αφ[ε] [ε]ον εβολ[α] [ἡ]ντοῦ τ[ῆ]ροῦ* *εφεῖμ[ε] ερω...πα[ρ]ορ[α]τον ἡπῶν ἡτελιος[ε]* *αφ[ε] αφ[ε]ῶν ἡνοῦ[ε]ων εσεῖμ[ε] δε ερος α[ρ]εῖνε επη ε[τῆ]μα[ρ] [α]φ[ε] αςῶν πε ἡκαλλ[ε]π[ε]τος [δε ε]ρεπερη[ε] ἔν νη εἶς[κο]οῦν ἡμοῦ.*

171 See *supra* Chapter 3, *Strengthening / perfecting*, p. 107. The fact that Barbelo is said to receive power from “within them all” is curious but might be explained by the possibility that [ἡ]ντοῦ τ[ῆ]ροῦ is used here in place of νῆτηρ[ε], the “Universals” (= οἱ καθόλου?) sometimes used to refer to the transcendentia rather than the intelligible realities.

172 *Allogenes* ΝΗC XI 48.14–19 (text Funk and Scopello, BCNH): [ἡ]θε ἡπῶν πε αν[ε] αλ[λα] *εφ[ε] ἡ[π]ῶν πε ἡν [π]ῆ [ετ]ῆ]ρηπ ἡτ[ε] ὁπαρ[ε]ς[ε] εφ[ε] [α]ρ[ε]νε ἡσῶ[ρ] [ἡ] ῥων νη[ε] δε πη ἡτοῦ ε[τ]ε[λ]εῶν πε εφ[ε]μαρ[ε]νοεῖ ἡμοῦ.*

‘Being,’ for him, is his looking to himself” (τὸ οἶον εἶναι τοῦτο αὐτῷ τὸ πρὸς αὐτὸν βλέπειν). The distinction between superior and inferior forms of “Being”—i.e., *huparxis* versus *πωγωνε* (= *to on* or *hē ousia*?)—occurs in the ACP ( *huparxis* and *to einai* versus *to on*), and is also echoed by Plotinus in the *Großschrift* at v.5[32].5.16–19, where he contrasts *to prōton on* with *ousia*.

*Allogenes* 49.5–21: “He [the Triple Powered one?] has Blessedness and Goodness, since when he is intelligized as the ‘Traverser’ (m.=T) of the Unboundedness (f.=U) of the Invisible Spirit (m.=IS) which abides within him[self] (m.=T/IS?), she (f.=U) turns him (m.=T) towards {him / herself}, in order that she (f.=U) should know what it is that is within him (m.=IS/T?) and the manner in which he exists, and so that he would become a salvation for everyone, being a cause of those that truly exist. For through this his (m.=IS/T?) knowledge remained observant, since he (m.= T/IS?) is the one who knows what he (m.=IS/T?) is.”<sup>173</sup> The initial subject of this convoluted passage is most likely the Triple Powered One, one of whose three modalities is Blessedness. It appears that the function of the Triple Powered One *qua* Traverser is to mediate and/or traverse the unbounded effluence that flows forth from the Invisible Spirit, and thus to allow some communication over the limitless and otherwise unbridgeable gulf between the transcendent first principle and the intelligible—i.e., the Barbelo Aeon—and thence to the realm of human beings. Yet curiously, the Triple Powered One itself constitutes the unbounded effluence of the first principle. Indeed, the distinction between these four principles—the Invisible Spirit, the Unboundedness, the Triple Powered One, and the Traverser—is far from clear, and one may suspect that their functions substantially overlap. We have already seen that during the final stages of ascent through the Triple Powered One (later in the text, at 16.19–28), the unbounded and formless powers create a disturbing and similarly fluid instability at the intermediary power of Vitality. One literal sense of the term “traverser” (περχειοορ) is “ferryman,” and one might imagine that the author had in mind the image of a rapidly flowing river that must be negotiated in order to reach its source; paradoxically, however, different aspects of the Triple Powered One comprise both river and ferry.<sup>174</sup> This passage may also be compared to an ap-

173 *Allogenes* ΝΗC XI 49.5–21 (text Funk and Scopello, BCNH): [...O]ΥΝΤ[αφ ἡ] ΟΥΝΤ[μακ[αριος] ΜΗ ΟΥΝ[ιτ']ΑΓΑΘΟΣ· ΧΕ [εω]ΠΕ ΕΥ[αη]ΡΝΟΕΙ ΜΗΟΥ Η[ΟΥΡΕ] QXIOOP ΝΤΗΜΤ'ΑΤΗΑΡ[ΗΧC] ΗΤΕ ΠΑΡΟΡΑΤΟΝ ΜΠΝ[α] ΕΤ'Κ]Η ΝΖΡΑ[Ι] ΝΖΗΤ[Υ] ΕCΚΩΤΕ ΜΗΟΥ ΕΡ[OC] Ε[Ι]ΝΑ ΧΕ ΕCΕΙΜΕ ΧΕ ΟΥ ΠΕ [ΠΗ Ε]Τ[Η]ΡΑΙ ΝΖΗΤ[Υ] ΑΥΩ ΧΕ [Ε]Υ[Υ]ΟΟΠ ΝΑΥ ΝΖΕ· ΑΥΩ Η[Τ]Ε ΠΑΙ ΩΠΠΕ ΝΟΥΡΧΑΙ Ν[Ο]ΥΟΝ ΜΗ· ΕΥΩΟΟΠ ΝΟΥΛΑΕΙCΕ ΝΗΟΝΤΩC ΕΤ'ΩΟΟΠ· ΕΒΟΛ ΓΑΡ ΕΙΤΗ ΠΑΙ ΑCΩΩΩΤ' ΕΒΟΛ ΝΒΙ ΤΕΥΓΝΩCΙC· ΧΕ ΝΤΟΥ ΕΤ'CΟΟΥΗ ΧΕ ΟΥ ΠΕ.

174 This interpretation is reinforced by the mention of a “pilot” (πετ[ῖρ] εἰμε) in an analogous role at *Allogenes* ΝΗC XI 53.11–12 (text Funk and Scopello, BCNH).

parently ontogenetic but damaged passage at *Zostrianos* 16.5–13 which seems to refer to the generation of the Barbelo Aeon in terms of the powers of the Invisible Spirit having “traversed” (εαγχιῶορ) and established limit over the unboundedness. Yet we have of course also seen an analogous conception in Plotinus, who describes the unboundedness of the PNE as well as the path of ascent to MUO in terms of the One’s own effluvia; these include motion and life “going through and out” (ἐν διεξόδῳ: III.8[30].9.33).<sup>175</sup> More importantly, however, this passage describes a primordial *epistrophē* whose subject and object are ambiguous. The difficulty in identifying the referents of the pronominal prefixes—some of which are lost among the lacunae, others perhaps deliberately obscure—has led to conflicting interpretations. What seems to be certain is that the (feminine) “Unboundedness” that gushes forth from the Invisible Spirit either (i) transitively “turns him” (presumably the Traverser or Triple Powered One)—or possibly, (ii) reflexively turns “herself,”<sup>176</sup>—either (i) “to him[self],” i.e. to the Traverser; (ii) “to him,” i.e., to the Invisible Spirit; or (iii) “to herself” (ἐκωτῆ ἡμοῦ ἐρ[οϛ], according to Turner, or ἐρ[οϛ] according to the BCNH edition), so that the Unboundedness might apprehend the contents of either the Invisible Spirit or the Triple Powered One *qua* Traverser. As in the case of Plotinus’s ontogenetic passages, some of this ambiguity is very likely deliberate and is used to indicate the fluid identity of both subject and object of the primordial *epistrophē*. Whichever reading one chooses, however, it is most likely to mean that it is the unbounded effluence that acquires delimitation through its reversion to its source. Yet that the Unboundedness is not completely distinct from its source is suggested by the next sentence that re-describes the entire process in terms of the perfect self-knowledge of a masculine subject, thus either the Invisible Spirit or the Triple Powered One.<sup>177</sup>

*Allogenes* 53.10–18: “He moved motionlessly—namely, that one there within the one that guides—lest he should sink into the unbounded by means of another activity of Mentality. *And he entered into himself alone and he ‘appeared,’* (οὐωνῆ εἶβολ), (thus) establishing every limit, the Universal that is beyond

175 This is pointed out by Turner 1990, 251–52.

176 Only K. L. King 1995, 100 emends the MS ἡμοῦ to ἡμο<C>, which would also accord with the present interpretation.

177 The verb ὤωνῆ εἶβολ, which apparently has a large semantic range, has puzzled translators. Turner along with the BCNH team opted for the sense of “remain”; King renders this “looked out.” I prefer the latter—or something like “remained observant” or “watched” that preserves both aspects—because the context is clearly that of the self-knowledge of the first principle which becomes in turn the second, akin to the knowledge of knowledge at, e.g., *Zost. NHC VIII* 82.6–13.



perfection.”<sup>178</sup> First, with respect to the second sentence (“And he entered ...”), the subject is again the Triple Powered One; the primordial self-reversion is described yet again in physico-spatial terms, as occasionally in Plotinus, for whom the One is, for example, “as it were, borne into his own interior” (εἰς τὸ εἶσω ὅσον φέρεται αὐτοῦ: VI.8[39].16.12–13). By now it is not surprising that the self-reversion is immediately associated with the technical notion of “manifestation” (οὐρανῶν ἐβολ); behind this lies the presupposition that the goal of the primordial self-reversion is self-apprehension or self-manifestation. Similarly, as in Plotinus, the first self-apprehension of the PNE—i.e., the “primordial manifestation”—is concomitant with the acquisition of limit, boundary, and form: thus it “establish[es] every limit.” Returning to the first sentence (“He moved motionlessly ...”), we may perhaps compare the motionless motion with the “undivided motion” that Allogenes encounters at the level of Vitality. It is unclear whether “another activity of Mentality” refers to one *below* the Triple Powered One’s own lowest power (also called Mentality) or whether this refers to that power itself, just subjacent to the Vitality. Whichever the case may be, the danger is that the delicate metaphysical structure of the Triple Powered One itself will be flushed away by its own unbounded effluence. For this reason, it must remain self-directed. Finally, πετρ ἔμμε “the one that guides,” might also render κυβερνήτης (“steersman,” “pilot”), which might be another allusion to the nautical metaphor of the “ferryman” or “traverser” at 49.8, who represents the specifically mediatory aspect of the Triple Powered One. If the “ferryman” is to be equated with the “steersman” in this passage, the question then arises what it is that is “within” (ἐραῖ ἔμ) the latter: is it the Triple Powered One active within its mediatory aspect, or the Invisible Spirit within the Triple Powered One?

*Allogenes* 63.14–16: “There is a first manifestation and knowledge of him: it is he alone who knows himself.”<sup>179</sup> In the context of the luminaries’ extensive negative-theological disquisition, we find that the utterly unknowable first principle is characterized by a self-cognition that is explicitly equated with the “first manifestation” (αὐτοῦ ἡ πρώτη ἐβολ). In other words, the first principle’s reflexive intellection initiates ontogenesis.

In this section (§4.4.14), we have seen that the Platonizing Sethians believed that ontogenesis occurred through a process of self-reversion and reflexive

178 *Allogenes* NHC XI 53.9–18 (text Funk and Scopello, BCSN): [ἀγῶ] ἀγκυμ ἔμ οὐμ[ῆ]τ’ ἀτ’ κμ [ῆ]σι πη ἐτῆμαγ ἐραῖ ἔμ πετ[ρ] ἔμμε ἔμνα δε νεφωμεε εἰογν ἐπατῆαρηχῶ ἐβολ ἔττοοτς ἡκενεργια ἡτε ἡμῆτ’ εἰμε ἀγῶ ἀφωκ εἰογν ἐρογ οὔααγ ἀφωμῆ ἐβολ ἐφε ἡτ τογ νμ πτηρῶ ἐτ’ ὅσε ἐτελιος.

179 *Allogenes* NHC XI 63.14–16 (text Funk and Scopello, BCSN): ἐγῶρπ ἡογῶμῆ ἐβολ πε ἡμ οὔγνωσις ἡταγ ἐντογ οὔααγ ἐτ’ εἰμε ἐρογ.

self-manifestation. The primordial self-objectification of the deity creates an image that is paradoxically both identical to and distinct from its invisible archetype. For self-knowing, however self-directed, always entails alterity and exteriorization as the subject of knowledge emerges from its object. Successive replications of this image produce realities that are correspondingly removed from their source, although each ontological level retains an inherent impression of its superiors. This process culminates with the creation of the human being, enmired in corporeal matter. Yet certain humans can obtain salvation and return to the source through visionary introspection; one's status in the spiritual hierarchy corresponds directly to the degree that one is able to "recognize," or to apprehend, one's essential self. At this point, by comparing this schema with that of the visionary ascent we saw previously (in Part 2), it becomes apparent that the Platonizing Sethians envisioned a homology or even identity between mystical and ontogenetic activities. This homology has two fundamental aspects. First, (i) the aspirant's mystical self-reversion corresponds to or even replicates the primordial self-reversion of the transcendent deity. Second, (ii) the autophany—the vision of a higher principle, *tupos*, or power within the aspirant's own self—corresponds to the first moment of ontogenesis in which the deity apprehends and thus objectifies itself. That this structural parallel is noncoincidental is indicated by the Platonizing Sethian use of the term "primordial manifestation" (ἡνῆτωροῦ οὐκ ὄντος ἐβολα = \**prophaneia*?), or various synonyms, to describe *both* the faculty of transcendental apprehension employed at the climax of visionary ascent *and* the primordial self-apprehension at the first moment of ontogenesis.<sup>180</sup> Indeed, this homonymy is undoubtedly deliberate, for they considered these transformative

180 However, as in Plotinus, the terminological parallel underlying the Platonizing Sethian ascent is not restricted to specific technical terms such as "primordial manifestation," but may also be discerned in other terminological parallels between the ontogenetic activity of the first principle and of the aspirant during a visionary ascent. Thus, for instance, we may understand an apparent parallel in *Marsanes* between (i) the ontogenetic self-withdrawal of the Invisible Spirit, who originally "ran up to his place" (9.29–10.4) to cause the universe to spread forth, and (ii) the eschatological or ritual "running up" of the Elect, who are now explicitly said to be in the company of the Invisible Spirit (10.16–23): "For you will become [elect] with the elect ones [in the last] times, [as] *the Invisible Spirit [runs] up above. And you [yourselves] run with him [up above], since you have the great crown....*" *Marsanes* 9.29–10.4 (text Funk and Poirier, ВСНН): [...πεῖνδ] ἡδωρατον ἀφωτ ἀρρηῖ ἀπεφτοπος· ἀπμα τηρῷ σωλῖ δβαλ· ἀπμα τηρῷ βοφ[λ] δβαλ; 10.16–24: χε κναωπι[ε] ε[κκα]τῖ ἡτε νετσατῖ [ἀνη]ἀφευ ἡνεογαειω[·] [εφπ]ητ ἀπσαρρε ἡσι πεῖνδ ἡδωρατον· ἀγω ἡτωτῖ [ρωτ]τῖνε πατ ἡμμεφ [ἀπσαρρ]ε· εὔνητητῖ ἡ[μεγ ἡπ]ἡδσ ἡκλαμ ετ[πῖρωογ·] We have seen that Plotinus too uses the imagery of "running up" (*anadramōn*) in both ontogenetic and mystical contexts.

moments to be one and the same: *the luminous, reflexive object of vision within the mystical subject is the very same reflection that the deity sees of itself in the first eternal moment*. Furthermore, although the Platonizing Sethians may have developed the most elaborate formulation of this schema, its seeds were buried deeply in the fertile soil of classic Gnostic thought, and they had undoubtedly germinated prior to the extremely sophisticated elaborations of contemplative ritual ascent that we find in *Allogenes* and *Zostrianos*.<sup>181</sup> Now we may also begin to grasp the extent of the similarity with Plotinus, who shared a more or less identical conception of the homology or identity between the respectively mystical and ontogenetic moments of self-apprehension. Some additional observations will confirm this resemblance beyond any doubt.

#### 4.15 “First Thought” or “Pre-Intellection” as both Faculty of Transcendental Apprehension and Primordial Self-Cognition of the Deity

We have briefly seen that the term “first thought” occurs in close connection with the “primordial manifestation,” and, like the latter, is a technical term that has both a mystical and an ontogenetic significance, a semantic ambivalence that is in fact deliberate. This, I suggest, has a clear echo in Plotinus’s transcendental epistemology, and specifically in his use of the term *pronoein*, “pre-intellection,” and the cluster of concepts to which this term is related. In the section that follows—an extended detour—I would like to demonstrate that the concept of pre-intellection has a substantial pre-Plotinian history in Gnostic protological, soteriological, and mystical speculation.

#### 4.16 Pre-intellection in Plotinus

For the moment, then, let us leave the Gnostics and return briefly to Plotinus. Throughout his works, Plotinus repeatedly denies that the One can be an object of intellection, even of reflexive self-thought, on the grounds that the resulting logical duality between subject and object, however minimal, would compromise the supreme principle’s absolute unity. In various places, however, he grants that there can nevertheless be *some* kind of transcendental apprehension of the One. As we have seen, he usually describes the ultimate phase of mystical ascent in terms of the transcendence or abdication of intellection, but occasionally he suggests that an apprehension of the One may be attained

181 There are also examples of a similar use of  $\text{OYON}\bar{\eta}\text{ EBOL}$  as a technical term for mystical apprehension in other, non-Platonizing Sethian Gnostic tractates; thus *Val. Exp.* NHC XI 23.31–38, 24.19–39; *Tri. Trac.* NHC I 127.8–24; *Gos. Thom* NHC II 41.20–7[50]; 47.19–24[83]; *Disc. Seth* NHC VII 66.12–21.

by means of an extraordinary faculty of Intellect itself. At v.3[49].10.41–44, Plotinus uses the peculiar verb *pronoëin* to describe this faculty of transcendental apprehension: “There will not be thinking of it, but touching, and, as it were, only an unutterable and unthinkable contact—‘pre-thinking’ (*pronoousa*)—Intellect not yet having come into being, and what is touching is not thinking.”<sup>182</sup> Although this is Plotinus’s only use of *pronoëin* in this sense, elsewhere he employs a number of similar images which imply an extraordinary faculty of mystical apperception that is not merely superior to intellect in terms of value, but that is also—to use a temporal metaphor—*anterior* to intellection itself. In the remarkable description of the mystical-erotic attainment of the One at vi.7[38].35.19–38, Plotinus equates the faculty by which we apprehend the One—the *nous erōn* or “loving Intellect”—not with the ordinary epistemic activity of *nous*, but rather with “the power by which it was *going* to think.”<sup>183</sup> The use of the verb *mellein*, which indicates an intended or future action, suggests that the moment of transcendental apperception—the mystical union with the One—*precedes* intellection, and somehow recapitulates the primordial moment of ontogenesis just prior to the constitution of Intellect proper. Thus, for instance, in a description of ontogenesis earlier in the same treatise, at vi.7[38].16.13, Plotinus refers to the prenoetic efflux of the One prior to its reversion upon its source as “*not yet* Intellect while looking at that” (ἀλλ’ οὐπω νοῦς ἦν ἐκεῖνο βλέπων), and later, at v.3[49].11.1–16, to “sight not yet seeing” (ὄψις οὐπω ἰδοῦσα); “*before this*, it is only desire an unimprinted sight” (πρὸ δὲ τούτου ἔφεσις μόνον καὶ ἀτύπωτος ὄψις); “*before this*, it was not a thinking” (πρὸ γὰρ τούτου οὐ νόησις ἦν). In other words, the *pronoousa* of v.3[49].10.43 would appear to refer to an atemporal moment at which the unbounded, prenoetic *dunamis* emerging from the One has *not yet* reverted upon and apprehended its source, and thus still abides in an ineffable, pre-epistrophic contact with the supreme principle itself. The mystical faculty is therefore also a *pre*-figuration of Intellect—or “pre-thinking”—through which the human aspirant replicates or co-experiences the One’s own, ineffable self-apprehension.

Whence, then, Plotinus’s curious concept of mystical “pre-intellection,” *pronoëin*? We may start with the most obvious parallel, which happens to be post-Plotinian. The related verb *proennoëin* occurs in a similar context in Porphyry’s *Sententiae* 26, where it describes a (presumably mystical) apprehension of the hyperontic first principle. By “holding fast to being,”—or so Porphyry

182 v.3[49].10.41–44: ἡ οὐκ ἔσται νόησις αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ θίξις καὶ οἶον ἐπαφή μόνον ἄρρητος καὶ ἀνόητος, προνοοῦσα οὐπω νοῦ γεγονότος καὶ τοῦ θιγγάνοντος οὐ νοούντος.

183 vi.7[38].35.30–33: Καὶ γὰρ ὁρῶν ἐκεῖνον ἔσχε γεννήματα καὶ συνήσθετο καὶ τούτων γενομένων καὶ ἐνόντων· καὶ αὐτὰ μὲν ὁρῶν λέγεται νοεῖν, ἐκεῖνο δὲ ἦ δυνάμει ἔμελλε νοεῖν.

implies—“we *preconceive* (*proennooumen*) the nonbeing above being.”<sup>184</sup> In his 1968 *Porphyre et Victorinus*, Pierre Hadot noted that a similar term occurs in the Anonymous *Commentary on Plato’s ‘Parmenides’* (ACPP), where—if we accept Hadot’s emendation—the commentator insists that one can apprehend the transcendent First One by “standing upon an ineffable *preconception* of him” (*stēnai epi tēn autou arrhēton proennoia*).<sup>185</sup> Hadot further compared this to Victorinus’s use of the term *praeintellegentia*, where this is used among other similar constructions to describe not mystical apprehension but rather the self-intellection of God the Father.<sup>186</sup> In any case, according to Hadot—who considered the ACPP to be post-Plotinian, and for this and other reasons attributed it to Porphyry—the latter’s use of *proennein* in these two passages would be largely, if not entirely, dependent upon the Plotinian parallel in

184 Porphyry, *Sententiae* 26.1–5 (text Lambez 1975): “‘Nonbeing’: one (kind) we generate while separated from being, another we *preconceive* while holding fast to being. If indeed we are separated from being, we do not *preconceive* the nonbeing above being, but we generate the false experience ‘nonbeing,’ which is found around the one standing out of himself” (μη δὲν τὸ μὲν γεννῶμεν χωρισθέντες τοῦ ὄντος, τὸ δὲ προεννοούμεν ἐχόμενοι τοῦ ὄντος· ὡς εἴ γε χωρισθείμεν τοῦ ὄντος, οὐ προεννοούμεν τὸ ὑπὲρ τὸ δὲν μὴ ὄν, ἀλλὰ γεννῶμεν ψευδὲς πάθος τὸ μὴ ὄν, συμβεβηκὸς περὶ τὸν ἐκστάντα ἑαυτοῦ).

185 ACPP 2.14–27 (text Hadot 1968): “And thus it will be possible neither to fall off into a void nor to dare to attach anything to it, but to remain in non-apprehensive apprehension and in nonconceptual thought; from this exercise, it will at some point happen to you, while also standing away from those things substantiated through him, to stand upon an unutterable *preconception* of him, which creates an image of him through silence, without recognizing that it is silent nor is conscious that it is creating an image of him nor knowing absolutely anything at all, but being only an image of the unutterable, unutterably being the unutterable, but not as if cognizant, if you can follow me imaginatively insofar as I am able to explain” (καὶ οὕτως οὕτε ἐκπίπτειν εἰς κένωμα ἐνέσται οὕτε τολμᾶν τι ἐκείνῳ προσάπτειν, μένειν δ’ ἐν ἀκαταλήπτῳ καταλήψει καὶ μηδὲν ἐννοοῦση νοήσει· ἀφ’ ἧς μελέτης συμβήσεται σοὶ ποτε καὶ ἀποστάντι τῶν δι’ αὐτὸν ὑπο<σταν>των τῆς νοήσεως στήναι ἐπὶ τὴν αὐτοῦ ἄρρητον προέννοιαν τὴν ἐνεικονιζομένην αὐτὸν διὰ σιγῆς οὐδὲ ὅτι σιγῇ γινώσκουσιν οὐδὲ ὅτι ἐνεικονίζεται αὐτὸν παρακολουθοῦσαν οὐδέ τι καθάπαξ εἰδυῖαν, ἀλλ’ οὖσαν μόνον εἰκόνα ἀρρήτου τὸ ἀρρητὸν ἀρρήτως οὖσαν, ἀλλ’ οὐχ ὡς γινώσκουσιν, εἴ μοι ὡς χωρὶ λέγειν δύναίω καὶ φανταστικῶς παρακολουθῆσαι). The MS reads *προσέννοιαν* (as a noun, this is a hapax); Hadot conjectures *προέννοιαν*, which is followed by Linguisti 1995; Bechtle 1999, however, preserves *προσέννοιαν*. But could this instead have been *προτέννοιαν*—unattested in Greek, but preserved in the Coptic ΠΡΩΤΕΝΝΟΙΑ, in NHC XIII,1\*?

186 Marius Victorinus, *Adversus Arium*, 1.49.26–29 (text Henry and Hadot 1960): “... it is the first cause of all things that are, of both wholes and parts, the pre-principle of every principle, the *pre-knowledge* of all knowledge ...” (et universalium et partium omnium quae sunt prima causa, omnium principiorum praepincipium, omnium intellegendiarum *praeintellegentia*) and 50.1–3: “this is God, this Father, preexisting *preintelligence* and pre-existence, preserving himself and his own happiness in an immobile movement ...” (hic est deus, hic pater, *praeintellegentia* praexistens et praexistentia beatitudinem suam et immobili motione semet ipsum custodiens).

v.3[49].10, and would suggest a correspondence between, on the one hand, the preternatural intellection by which we grasp the divine and, on the other hand, the *self*-intellection of the deity itself.<sup>187</sup>

The question remains, however, how it is that Plotinus himself arrived at this conception. Following a suggestion in Walter Scott's edition of the *Hermetica*, Hadot conjectured that this concept originated in the Stoic notion of *prolēpsis* or "preconception." Now apparently the Stoics used the originally Epicurean term *prolēpsis* in a technical sense to mean a universal faculty of pre-empirical knowledge that allows one to recognize the presentations of sense-data and / or to intuit what cannot be perceived either with the senses or with reason.<sup>188</sup> Among the Roman Stoics, the term seems also to have been closely related to the so-called *koinai ennoiai* or "common conceptions": that is, the innate intuitions supposedly shared by all humans, such as, for example, a belief in the gods. Hadot suggested that this overarching conception, if not precise terminology, was later transformed by the Neoplatonists into a mystical faculty for apprehending the supreme principle: a principle which itself can neither be perceived by the senses nor conceived, strictly speaking, with the intellect.

While I happen to disagree with Hadot's post-Plotinian dating of the ACPP, I nevertheless concur that the Stoic conception of *prolēpsis* and / or *koinai ennoiai* lurks (at least somewhere) in the background of the conception of "pre-thinking" as faculty of transcendental apprehension: a conception that seems to have been shared by Plotinus and Porphyry, and, also—if indeed, as I suspect, it was *not* Porphyry—by the anonymous commentator him- or herself. And yet I would suggest that Plotinus and his immediate successors did not adopt this notion directly from the Stoics, but instead did so through only the mediation

187 Hadot 1968, 1:117: "Cette idée de "prénotion", de προέννοια, n'est pas si singulière qu'on pourrait le croire. On la retrouve d'abord dans les *Sententiae* de Porphyre qui nous disent que nous avons une prénotion (προνοούμεν ou προεννοούμεν) du Non-Étant au dessus de l'Étant, c'est-à-dire de l'Un. Plotin y fait allusion lorsqu'il imagine, au-delà de la dualité de la pensée, la simplicité absolue d'un toucher sans intellection qui anticipe la pensée (προνοούσα)... Le premier Dieu est "préconçu" (aussi bien par les autres que par lui-même) parce qu'il ne peut être atteint que par un mode de connaissance antérieure à la connaissance et qui correspond précisément au fait qu'il est "préexistant"... [n. 6:] La pensée antérieure à la pensée correspond à la fois au mode d'intellection par lequel nous saisissons Dieu et au mode d'intellection propre à Dieu."

188 Diogenes Laertius 7.54-5-9 text and trans. Hicks, LCL, slightly modified: "Chrysippus, contradicting himself, says in the first book *On Reason* that the criteria are sense-perception and preconception (*prolēpsis*); *preconception is the natural conception of universals*" (ὁ δὲ Χρύσιππος διαφερόμενος πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ Περὶ λόγου κριτήριά φησιν εἶναι αἰσθησιν καὶ πρόληψιν· ἔστι δ' ἡ πρόληψις ἐννοια φυσικὴ τῶν καθόλου). Cf. *Zost.* NHC VIII 20.16-17 (text Barry, Funk, and Poirier, BCNH): †αφορῇ ἡἐννοια ἡ[τε καὶ] τηρο[γ]; cf. also 22.5.

of roughly contemporaneous Gnostics, possibly including, but certainly not limited to, the Platonizing Sethians on the immediate periphery of Plotinus's Roman circle. As seems so often to be the case with the peculiar technical terms that permeate the ACP—indeed, even those terms which *also* occur in undisputedly Porphyrian works—the term *proennoia*, as well as the constellation of conceptions to which this term is related, have much closer parallels in indubitably pre-Plotinian sources, including, and *especially*, Gnostic texts. I would like to suggest that the Gnostics—whose literature, moreover, is suffused with Stoic ideas—had previously re-appropriated this aspect of Stoic psychology and had already reconfigured it into a well-developed schema that combined soteriology and transcendental epistemology, and that this schema thus comprised the intellectual-historical background of Plotinus's doctrine of pre-intellection.

To investigate the pre-Plotinian roots of this concept, then, let us begin with Hadot's citations. Interestingly, although Hadot appeals to the Stoic origins of this idea, the only (arguably) pre-Plotinian sources that he cites are all exiguous Hermetic fragments in which the phrase *ho proennoumenos theos* appears to be a conventional Hermetic cognomen for the supreme deity who is beyond the ordinary capability of human intellection.<sup>189</sup> Although these passages tell us very little about how this term was intended, they do appear to have something to do with the Stoic use of “preconception” to mean an intuition of the divine. Cicero uses the term *praenotionem deorum* (“the preconception of the gods”) in this sense,<sup>190</sup> and in a passage from Plutarch's critique of the Stoic doctrine of *koinai ennoiai*, the verb *proennein* denotes the prior intuition of the Good upon which all value judgments rely.<sup>191</sup>

189 *Corp. Herm. frag. 12A.3* (text Nock and Festugière 1972): ἔστιν γάρ τις, ὃ τέκνον, ἀπόρρητος λόγος σοφίας θεοῦς τε περὶ τοῦ μόνου κυρίου πάντων καὶ προεννοούμενου θεοῦ, ὃν εἰπεῖν ὑπὲρ ἀνθρώπων ἔστιν. (There is, O child, an unutterable doctrine and a holy wisdom about the sole lord of all things and the *preconceived* god, the declaration of whom is beyond human (capability)). Also Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* 10.7 [= *Corp. Herm. frag. 17.1*, text Nock and Festugière 1972]; Αὐτὸ δὲ τάχαθὸν τὸ μὲν θεῖον ἡγούνται τὸν προεννοούμενον θεόν, τὸ δὲ ἀνθρώπινον τὴν πρὸς αὐτὸν ἔνωσιν.... (“The Good itself [the Egyptians] consider to be, in the divine sense, the *preconceived* god, but in the human sense, the union with him ...”).

190 Cicero, *De natura deorum* 1.3 (text Rackham 1979): “... the anticipation ... or ‘preconception’ of the gods, which Epicurus himself called *prolēpsis* ...” (anticipationem ... sive *praenotionem deorum* ... ut Epicurus ipse πρόληψιν appellavit).

191 Plutarch, *Against the Stoics on Common Conceptions* (*Peri tōn koinōn ennoion*) 1072a5–b1 (text Westman 1959): “For if apart from the good it is not possible to conceive of indifference to that which is *not* good, still more prudence about those things that are good does not provide a notion of itself to those who did not *preconceive* the good; but just as a conception of technique with regard to health and sickness does not occur to those who have not previously (conceived of) them, so also it is not possible to get a thought

However, one might also note that language tantalizingly reminiscent of *pronoein* with a more metaphysical implication also occurs in other, related contexts. We may augment Hadot’s list of Hermetic citations with another ostensibly Egyptian doctrine preserved by Iamblichus at *De mysteriis* 8.3, which is perhaps somewhat closer to Plotinus’s understanding of pre-intellection as a property of the transcendent first principle prior to the constitution of Intellect. Here, among a profusion of different Hermetic theologies, Iamblichus describes one schema in which an apparently dyadic principle called “Eiktōn” is intercalated between the utterly transcendent, “indivisible One” and the self-intelligizing Nous proper. This intermediary principle contains both “the first thinker and the first intelligible,” and, he says, it “is worshipped through silence alone.”<sup>192</sup> Interestingly, we may recall a similar association between silence and pre-intellection in the ACPD passage cited *supra*, p. 203. To this we may also compare a passage of the *Theologoumena arithmeticae* attributed to the Neopythagorean Nicomachus of Gerasa: “the *primal thought of otherness* is in the Dyad.” (ἐτερότητας γὰρ πρωτίστη ἔννοια ἐν δυάδι).<sup>193</sup> These two pas-

of knowledge of good and bad things without having *preconceived* both good things and bad things” (εἰ γὰρ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ χωρὶς οὐκ ἔστι νοῆσαι τὴν πρὸς τὸ μὴ ἀγαθὸν ἀδιαφορίαν, ἔτι μᾶλλον ἢ τῶν ἀγαθῶν φρόνησις ἐπίνοιαν αὐτῆς οὐ δίδωσι τοῖς ἀγαθὸν μὴ προενοήσασιν. ἀλλ’ ὥσπερ ὑγιεινῶν καὶ νοσερῶν τέχνης οὐ γίνεται νόησις, οἷς μὴ πρότερον αὐτῶν ἐκείνων γέγονεν, οὕτως ἀγαθῶν καὶ κακῶν ἐπιστήμης οὐκ ἔστιν ἔννοιαν λαβεῖν μὴ τάγαθὰ καὶ τὰ κακὰ προενοήσαντας). On πρόληψις cf. also Diogenes Laërtius 7.54 (Chrysippus) and 10.33 (Epicurus).

192 Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* 8.3 (text des Places 1966): “According to another ordering, [Hermes] ranks first the god [K]mēph, the leader of the celestial gods, whom he says to be an intellect thinking himself and turning his thoughts towards himself; but he promotes above this one the Indivisible One, and what he calls the ‘first delivery by a midwife,’ which he also names Eiktōn, in which in fact there is the *first thinker and the first intelligible*, which is indeed worshipped through silence alone” (Κατ’ ἄλλην δὲ τάξιν προτάττει θεὸν τὸν Ἡμῆφ τῶν ἐπουρανίων θεῶν ἡγούμενον, ὃν φησι νοῦν εἶναι αὐτὸν ἑαυτὸν νοοῦντα καὶ τὰς νοήσεις εἰς ἑαυτὸν ἐπιστρέφοντα· τούτου δὲ τὸ ἐν ἀμερὲς καὶ ὃ φησι πρῶτον μαίευμα προτάττει, ὃν καὶ Εἰκτῶν ἐπονομάζει· ἐν ᾧ δὴ τὸ πρῶτόν ἐστι νοοῦν καὶ τὸ πρῶτον νοητόν, ὃ δὴ καὶ διὰ σιγῆς μόνῃς θεραπεύεται). The hierarchy of this passage may be schematized:

TABLE 3      Analysis of variant Hermetic theological schema in Iamblichus, <i>De mysteriis</i> 8.3	
1. Indivisible One	Supreme transcendent deity
2. Eiktōn = “First Delivery by a midwife”	first thinker and first intelligible, worshipped in silence (= dyad?)
3. [K]mēph	Intellect thinking itself (= Nous)

193 Nicomachus of Gerasa, *Theologoumena arithmeticae* 21.19–21 (text de Falco 1922): “for the Monad is some quantity also contemplated in its own right, and is the most unique



sages, taken together, suggest that something associated with preconception or pre-intellection was thought to abide immediately subjacent to the first principle beyond Intellect, but somewhere “above” the Intellect itself: in the precise interhypostatic locus of the Platonic-Pythagorean Indefinite Dyad to which Plotinus himself furtively refers, for instance, at v.4[7].2.4–8. The certainty of the pre-Plotinian dating of this doctrine is, of course, partially compromised by the fact that both of these mysterious fragments are preserved by Iamblichus; nevertheless, this provides some grounds to suspect that the notion of pre-intellection occurred in the context not only of Stoic psychology but also of Platonic metaphysics in pre-Plotinian religio-philosophical circles.

Now as we have just seen, the closest, arguably pre-Plotinian elaboration of a transcendental epistemology involving the notion of “pre-intellection” and/or “primary” or “first conception” may be found in the Platonizing Sethian Gnostic tractates that circulated among Plotinus’s entourage: a fact that Hadot apparently did not notice in 1968, but one that Michel Tardieu noted briefly in his 1996 reply to Hadot’s earlier work.<sup>194</sup> Indeed, the Platonizing Sethians had already formulated (a) a conception of ontogenesis through the hyper-transcendental, unknowable deity’s pre-intellectual self-apprehension and (b) a model of mystical apprehension involving the contemplative replication, within the consciousness of the human aspirant, of the first principle’s own ineffable self-apprehension.

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delimiter and true definer; for if a thing would at some point be together with another, it would not be alone, but would be ranked under the Dyad; for the *primal thought* of otherness is in the Dyad” (ἔστι γὰρ ποσόν τι ἢ μονάς καὶ καθ’ ἑαυτό γε θεωρούμενον καὶ μονώτατον περαίνον καὶ ἀληθῶς ὀρίζον· σὺν γὰρ ἑτέρῳ μόνον οὐκ ἂν ποτε εἴη τι, κατὰ δὲ τὴν δυάδα· ἑτερό-τητος γὰρ πρωτίστη ἔννοια ἐν δυάδι).

- 194 Tardieu 1996, 79: “Qu’en est-il maintenant de la préintelligence, ἡ προέννοια, copte *tisorp nennoia*? Dans les textes gnostiques, elle désigne toujours le mode suréminent par lequel les véritablement existants, appelés aussi “membres”, “éons”, “touts”, peuvent accéder à la connaissance d’eux-mêmes dans l’Être premier qui est νόησις νόησεως....”) See also the earlier observations of Krämer 1964, 254–55: “Der aktuelle Denkprozeß kommt aber erst dann in Gang, wenn der Ursprung durch Emanation ein Anderes aus sich heraussetzt, das ihn—in vermittelnder Spiegelung—objectivierend vor sich selbst bringt, das ihm aber zugleich erkennend gegenübertritt und dem er sich darum gegenständlich manifestieren kann. In der so statuierten γνώσις θεοῦ ist demnach Gott Subjekt und Objekt in einem: Indem er sich auslegt, vermittelt er sich selbst *und* andere, erkennt sich selbst *und* wird erkannt.” Also, Turner 2000b, 129: “The reality associated with the Invisible Spirit is apprehended neither by sight nor audible revelation, but only by a “silent power” or faculty of *thought*, a form of audition beyond hearing, which is identical with the “pure silent power” that exists in Barbelo, namely the silent Forethought (προτέννοια) of the Invisible Spirit which emanates as the Aeon of Barbelo.”

#### 4.17 *Pre-Intellection in the Platonizing Sethian Tractates*

Returning to the Platonizing Sethian tractates themselves, let us examine first the evidence from *Zostrianos*, where it is evident that pre-intellection occurs in three interrelated contexts: first, in the self-apprehension of the supreme deity, the Invisible Spirit; second, in the ontogenetic emergence of the second, noetic principle (that is, the Barbelo Aeon and its subaeons); and third, in the mystical epistemology which permits the human aspirant to apprehend the transcendent first principle. On page 20, lines 11–14, we find an indication that the hypertranscendent first deity is not accessible to knowledge but is, nevertheless, “pre-knowable”: “He is a divine father as *he is pre-known* (εὐρ ὧρπ̄ῑ ν̄ειμε εροϋ), and he is *not known*; for he is a power and a father from himself.”<sup>195</sup> The remainder of the passage, lines 15–18, seems to equate the tripartite power of the first principle, the Invisible Spirit, with a “first thought,” (†ϣορπ̄ῑ ν̄ειννοια), a phrase which recurs later at 24.12 and 60.13,<sup>196</sup> and which is, one may presume, more or less equivalent with the first principle’s “pre-knowing” (ϣρπ̄ῑ ν̄ειμε). Earlier, at 58.16–20, we find: “the Invisible Spirit is a psychic and an intellectual power, a knower and a *pre-knower* ([ρεϥ]ρ̄ ϣορπ̄ῑ ν̄ειμε).”<sup>197</sup> This pre-intellectual self-apprehension is also the original act that establishes ontogenesis, as the Barbelo Aeon and its contents emerge from the Invisible Spirit through an act of reflexive pre-intellection. At 82.23, the fully-determinate Barbelo is described as the “comprehension (*katanoēsis*)” of the pre-existent god, a peculiar term which Plotinus later echoes in an early, pre-*Großschrift* treatise, v.4[7].2.16–17, to describe the mysterious *noēton* apparently located

195 *Zost. NHC VIII* 20.11–18 (text Barry, Funk, and Poirier, BCNH): “He is a divine father as *he is pre-known*, and he is not known; for he is a power and a father from himself. This is why he is [fatherless], the invisible Triple-Powered, the *First Thought* of them all, the Invisible Spirit ...” (εὐνοϥτε ν̄ειωτ πε εὐρ ὧρπ̄ῑ ν̄ειμε εροϥ· αὐω νεϥειμε εροϥ ἀν· οὐβον γαρ εβολ ἥμοϥ πε ἡν οϥε[ι]ωτ εβολ ἥ[μο]ϥ μαγλαϥ· ετβε παῖ οϥατε[ιω]τ πε· πατρηαϥ δε εροϥ ἥ[ϣ]ἡτβον· †ϣορπ̄ῑ ν̄ειννοια ἥ[τε ναῖ] τηρο[ϥ] πι[αρο]ρατον ἥπ̄ν̄α).

196 *Zost. NHC VIII* 60.10–23 (text Barry, Funk, and Poirier, BCNH): “[...][hear] him [...] and [...] in a [thought] and [in] a *First Thought* [...] since [...] with power [...] she is perfect [...] you must be preached to concerning everything, and [...] those to whom you will listen, *by means of a thought of those beyond perfection*, and those which you will know in the souls of the perfect ones” ([...c]ωτ̄ῃ [ερ]οϥ ϣ[± 5 | ± 3]α αὐω [.]·ϥ[± 6] ἡρπαῖ ϣ̄ν οϥεννο[ια ἡν] οϥϣορπ̄ῑ ν̄ειννο[ια ± 3] επιαη ϣ̄ν οὐβον αϥ[± 3] νοϥτελιος τε· α[λλα] ὧϥε εροϥ εταω[ε οειω] ετβε ϣωβ νημ· αὐω [ἡν] νη ετ̄κνααωτ̄ῃ ε[ροοϥ] εβολ ϣ̄τ̄ῃ οϥεννο[οια] ἡτε νη ετ·χοσε ετ[ελι]οϥ αὐω ἡν νετ̄κν[α]σοϥ ωνοϥ ϣ̄ν οϥτ̄χχῃ [ἡτε] νητελιος).

197 *Zost. NHC VIII* 58.16–20 (text Barry, Funk, and Poirier, BCNH): αὐω πια[ρορα]τον ἡπ̄ν̄α οὐβον [ἡϥϥ]χικον αὐω ἡνοερ[ον πε] οϥρεϥειμε αὐω ν[ρεϥ]ρ̄ ϣορπ̄ῑ ν̄ειμε.

somewhere ‘between’ Intellect and the One.<sup>198</sup> At *Zostrianos* 82.6–13, the subject of self-intellection is the prefiguration of intellect still in occultation: namely, Kalyptos, the supreme subaeon of Barbelo; this principle first minimally distinguishes itself from the Invisible Spirit through reflexive pre-cognition: “[the one] who *preconceives it* (ὡρῶν ἑμῆς) is an eternal space (*chōrēma*), since he had become a second one of his knowledge, again the knowledge of his knowledge, which is the unbegotten Kalyptos.”<sup>199</sup> Finally, in the clearest elaboration of mystical epistemology in *Zostrianos*, at 24.1–17, we find a description of the various faculties by which one can apprehend successive ontological strata. The passage is worth quoting in full: “On the one hand, one sees in a perfect soul those of Autogenes; on the other hand, in intellect, those of the Triple Male, in a pure spirit, those of the Protophanes. One hears about Kalyptos through the powers of the Spirit which emerged in a vastly superior manifestation of the Invisible Spirit. *Through the thought that now exists in Silence and through the First Thought [one learns] about the Triple Powered Invisible Spirit*; it is a hearing and a power of silence which is purified in a vivifying spirit: perfect, first-perfect, and all-perfect.”<sup>200</sup> Something called a “first thought” (ὡρῶν ἑννοία)—which we may reasonably connect with pre-intellection (ῥῶ ὡρῶν ἑμῆς)—corresponds to the ultimate apprehension of the first principle, the Invisible Spirit, in (or through) the First Thought (ἑν ἰωρῶν ἑννοία). [See Appendix C1–2.] Here we have an explicit statement that the faculty by which the first principle is known is called a “first thought.”

198 Thus *Zost. NHC VIII* 82.23–83.1 (text Barry, Funk, and Poirier, BCNH): ἡ κατανόησις [εἰς τὴν] ἐν τῇ πνοῇ [τῆς] ἐν τῷ ὡρῶν ἑμῆς [ὡρῶν] (She is the comprehension (*katanoēsis*) of the god who pre-exists”); cf. *Enn.* v.4[7].2.17–19: “[the Intelligible] is its own self-comprehension (*katanoēsis*), and exists as if by consciousness (*sunaisthēsei*) in everlasting stasis, and in (a kind of) thinking different from the thinking according to Intellect” (ἡ κατανόησις αὐτοῦ αὐτὸ οἶονε συναίσθησει οὐσα ἐν στάσει αἰδίῳ καὶ νοήσει ἐτέρως ἢ κατὰ τὴν νοῦ νόησιν).

199 *Zost. NHC VIII* 82.6–13 (text Barry, Funk, and Poirier, BCNH): “[the one] who *preconceives it* is an eternal space, since he had become a second one of his knowledge(s), again the knowledge of his knowledge, which is the unbegotten Kalyptos” ([π]ῆ ἐν τῷ ὡρῶν ἑμῆς ἐροῦ ἐχχωρημα πε ἡῶα ἐνεῖ· ἐαφωπε νογῆ[ε] ἑντε ἑντε τεφρνωσις παλιν ον ἰγνωσις ἡτ[ε] τεφρνωσις ἐτεπκλ[ε] πε ἡνατῆσε). This apparently recursive “knowledge of knowledge” is specifically criticized by Plotinus at *Π.9*[33].1.34–40 despite its evident proximity to his own scheme.

200 *Zost. NHC VIII* 24.1–17 (text Barry, Funk, and Poirier, BCNH): ὡαφν[αγ] μ[ε]ν ἑν ογ[γ]χῃ Δε ἡτελιος ἐν[ε]νιαγτογενῆς· ἑν ογνογς Δ[ε] ἐν[ε]νιαφῶν[η]τ[ε]ροογτ· ἑν ογῆνα Δε ἐφογααβ ναμπρωτοφανῆς· ὡαφωτῆ Δε ἐτβεπκλς ἐβολ ἑτῆν ἡβον ἡτε πῆπα ἐταγῆ ἐβολ ἡνογ ἑν ογῶνῆ ἐβολ ἐφωτῆ ἡρογο ἡτε παζροατον ἡπῆα· ῥραῖ Δε ἑν ἑννοία ταῖ ἐτῶοπ ἑνογ ἑν ογσιγῆ· ἡρραῖ Δε ἑν ἰωρῶν ἑννοία· ἐτβε πῶμῆτ[ε]ρον ἡαζροατον ἡπῆα ἐφωτῆ σε πε ἡν ογβον ἡτε ογσιγῆ ἐστογβῶογτ ἑν ογ[π]ῆα ἐφταηρο ἰτελιος ἀγῶ ἡω[ο]ρ[π]ῆ ἡτελιος ἀγῶ ἡπαντε[λ]ιο[ς].

In *Allogenes*, the term  $\omega\rho\pi\iota \bar{\nu}\epsilon\bar{\nu}\nu\omega\iota\alpha$ —“first thought”—appears to have crystallized into a technical term for pre-intellection, and is, as we have already seen, virtually synonymous with “primordial manifestation.” This denotes both the reflexive self-manifestation of the first principle that initially establishes ontogenesis, and also, simultaneously, the mechanism by which the human aspirant apprehends that transcendent principle. The term “first thought” itself occurs unambiguously at least three times in the tractate. The first instance, at 48.13, clearly occurs in the context of mystical epistemology: “Since it is impossible for the individuals to comprehend the Universal one that abides in the place that is beyond perfection, they apprehend through a *first thought* ( $\omega\rho\pi\iota \bar{\nu}\epsilon\bar{\nu}\nu\omega\iota\alpha$ ).”<sup>201</sup> The second instance, at 53.10–13, refers to a first thought in the simultaneous sense of both mystical epistemology and of primordial ontogenesis: “Since perfect comprehension is impossible ... it is (known) in this manner: because of the third silence of Mentality and the second undivided activity which manifested in the *First Thought* ( $\tau\omega\rho\pi\iota \bar{\nu}\epsilon\bar{\nu}\nu\omega\iota\alpha$ ), which is the Aeon of Barbelo.”<sup>202</sup> Finally, at 64.35–36, the term appears to refer to a faculty of transcendental apprehension that is somehow imparted by the initial precognition at the moment of universal ontogenesis: “He was blind apart from the eye [or ‘spring’] of revelation that is at rest, that which is activated from the triple power of the *First Thought* ( $\tau\omega\rho\pi\iota \bar{\nu}\epsilon\bar{\nu}\nu\omega\iota\alpha$ ) of the Invisible Spirit.”<sup>203</sup>

We may see, then, that the conception of pre-intellection and / or “first thought” as the simultaneous mechanism of both ontogenesis and mystical apperception occurs throughout the Platonizing Sethian literature closest to Plotinus. However, lest anyone harbor any residual suspicion that the vector of influence moved from Plotinus to the Gnostics, rather than, as I suggest, the other way around—that is, from the Gnostics to Plotinus—we may observe that variants of the same notion are extremely widespread in other Gnostic sources

201 *Allogenes* NHC XI 48.9–13 (text Funk and Scopello, BCNH):  $\epsilon\pi\iota\delta\eta [\omicron\gamma\bar{\mu}\bar{\nu}] \tau\acute{\alpha}\tau\prime \gamma\alpha\bar{\nu} \tau\epsilon \bar{\nu}\tau\epsilon\bar{\nu}\iota\kappa[\alpha\tau\alpha \omicron]\gamma\alpha \epsilon\tau\alpha\tau\epsilon \pi\tau\eta\rho\bar{\upsilon} \epsilon\tau\prime \kappa[\eta \xi]\eta [\pi]\mu\alpha \epsilon\tau\prime \chi\omicron\sigma\epsilon \epsilon\tau\epsilon\lambda\iota\omicron\varsigma\prime \epsilon\omega\alpha\chi\chi\iota \Delta\epsilon \epsilon\upsilon\omicron\lambda \xi\iota\tau\omicron\sigma\tau\epsilon \bar{\nu}\omicron\gamma\omega\rho\pi\iota \bar{\nu}\epsilon\bar{\nu}\nu[\omicron]\iota\alpha$ .

202 *Allogenes* NHC XI 53.18–29 (text Funk and Scopello, BCNH): “The entirety beyond perfection precedes knowledge, (in such a way that it is not known by means of knowledge). Since perfect comprehension is impossible to be known, is (known) in this manner: because of the third silence of Mentality and the second undivided activity which manifested in the *First Thought* which is the Aeon of Barbelo” ( $\pi\iota\tau\eta\rho\bar{\upsilon} \epsilon\tau\prime \chi\omicron\sigma\epsilon \epsilon\tau\epsilon\lambda\iota\omicron\varsigma\prime \epsilon\psi\epsilon \bar{\nu}\omega\rho\pi\iota \mu\epsilon\bar{\nu} \epsilon\tau\gamma\iota\nu\omega\varsigma\iota\varsigma \bar{\nu}\tau\epsilon \epsilon\upsilon\omicron\lambda \xi\iota\tau\omicron\sigma\tau\prime \alpha\bar{\nu} \epsilon\pi\iota\delta\eta \bar{\mu}\bar{\nu}\bar{\nu} \varsigma\omicron\mu \epsilon\pi\iota\tau\epsilon\tau\omicron \bar{\nu}\tau\epsilon\lambda\iota\omicron\varsigma \epsilon\gamma\epsilon\iota\mu\epsilon \epsilon\rho\omega\bar{\nu} \bar{\nu}\tau\epsilon \Delta\epsilon \pi\alpha\iota\prime \epsilon\tau\upsilon\epsilon \pi\mu\epsilon\tau\omega\mu\bar{\nu}\tau\prime \bar{\nu}\kappa\alpha\rho\omega\bar{\nu} \bar{\nu}\tau\epsilon \tau\bar{\mu}\bar{\nu}\bar{\nu}\tau\prime \epsilon\iota\mu\epsilon\prime \bar{\mu}\bar{\nu} \tau\bar{\mu}\epsilon\tau\epsilon\varsigma\bar{\nu}\tau\epsilon \bar{\nu}\epsilon\bar{\nu}\epsilon\rho\gamma\iota\alpha \bar{\nu}\alpha\tau\prime \pi\omega\rho\bar{\chi}, \epsilon\tau\alpha\varsigma\omega\gamma\omega\bar{\nu}\bar{\xi} \epsilon\upsilon\omicron\lambda \xi\bar{\nu} \tau\omega\rho\pi\iota \bar{\nu}\epsilon\bar{\nu}\nu\omega\iota\alpha \epsilon\tau\epsilon\pi\epsilon\omega\bar{\nu} \pi\epsilon \bar{\nu}\beta\alpha\rho\beta\eta\lambda\omega\prime$ ).

203 *Allogenes* NHC XI 64.30–36 (text Funk and Scopello, BCNH):  $\alpha\bar{\nu}\rho \bar{\nu}\lambda\lambda\epsilon \bar{\nu}\varsigma\alpha \bar{\nu}\epsilon\omicron\lambda \bar{\mu}\pi\iota\beta\alpha\lambda \epsilon\tau\prime \chi\omicron\rho\bar{\kappa} \bar{\mu}\bar{\nu}\omega\bar{\nu} \bar{\nu}\tau\epsilon \pi\omega\gamma\omega\bar{\nu}\bar{\xi} \epsilon\upsilon\omicron\lambda\prime \pi\eta \epsilon\tau\epsilon\gamma\bar{\rho}\epsilon\bar{\nu}\epsilon\rho\gamma\iota \epsilon\rho\omega\bar{\nu} \pi\iota \epsilon\upsilon\omicron\lambda \xi\bar{\nu} \pi\omega\gamma\bar{\mu}\bar{\nu}\bar{\nu}\tau\prime \varsigma\omicron\mu \bar{\nu}\tau\epsilon \tau\omega\rho\pi\iota \bar{\nu}\epsilon\bar{\nu}\nu\omega\iota\alpha \bar{\nu}\tau\epsilon \pi\alpha\tau\omicron\rho\alpha\tau\omicron\bar{\nu} \bar{\mu}\bar{\mu}\bar{\nu}\bar{\nu}$ .

at a greater remove from Plotinus's circle; moreover, they appear not to exist outside the Gnostic context. Beginning with other Sethian texts, in the *Untitled Treatise* of the Bruce Codex, for instance, we find a clear statement that the aeons are established by the “first thought” of the transcendent Father, which also appears to grant the aeons knowledge of the Father in return: “Through his members, he has of himself provided a place for his members so that they would be situated within him and so that they know that he is the Father and that it is he who projected them in his *first thought* (τεφωορι νεννοια).”<sup>204</sup> While the *Untitled Treatise* is considered (by Turner among others) to postdate *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, this term also occurs in the classic Sethian literature that most likely predates the Platonizing tractates, as is suggested by the namesake of the Sethian *Trimorphic Protennoia*—the “*first-thought* in three forms”—who is both the primordial first thought of the Father and, simultaneously, the indwelling salvific principle within human beings that permits them to reascend to their pleromatic source.<sup>205</sup> Moreover, this notion is not restricted to Sethian literature, but may also be found in the Valentinian *Tripartite Tractate*, though with subtle terminological differences. Thus at 61.1–2, the initial emanation of the aeons by the transcendent Father occurs by means of pre-intellection: “The one who *preconceived* them ...” (ῥ ὡαρῖ ἡμεγ[ε]),<sup>206</sup> or, with a slight variation of terminology, at 62.15–16, “the one who conceived it from the beginning ...” (πετεαφμεγε αρας χν ἡωαρῖ);<sup>207</sup> at 82.22, the aeons emerge from “the thought that *preconceived* them.”<sup>208</sup> A similar construction

204 Cod. Bruc. *Untitled* 265.11–18: ριτν νεφμελος μμιν ημοφ αφααφ ντοπος ννεφμελος. ετρεγοφωρ νρητφ αφω νδεσοφωμφ χε ντοφ πε πεγειωτ αφω χε ντοφ πενταφπροβαλε ημοοφ εβολ ρν τεφωορι νεννοια.

205 *Three Forms* ΝΗC XIII 35\*.1–2 (text Turner, CGL): [ανок] τε τпρω[тенноια пη]εεγε ετω[οο]п· ρῖ [погоειν]....; 36\*.17: анок пе пмеεγε ἡпφωт.

206 *Tri. Trac.* ΝΗC I 61.1–9 (text and trans. Attridge and Pagels, CGL, slightly modified): “The one (the Father) who *preconceived* them [i.e., the Aeons]—not only that they should exist for him, but also that they should exist for themselves as well, that they should then exist in his thought as the substance of thought, that they might also be (substance of thought) for themselves as well—he sowed a thought as a spermatric seed” (πενταφ ὡαρῖ ἡμεγ[ε] αραοφ πωт оу моноп атроφωппе неφ αλλα атроφωппе неφ ρωοφ αν· атроφωппе σε· ρῖ п[εφ]μεге· ρωс оуcia ἡμεγ[ε] атроφωппе δε неφ ρωοφ· α[φ]cite ἡноуμеег[ε] ρωс оуcпe[р]ма· пе· ἡпῖтсп[ерма]).

207 *Tri. Trac.* ΝΗC I 62.15–20 (text and trans. Attridge and Pagels, CGL): “The one who *conceived it from the beginning* possessed it from the beginning; he saw it; he *concealed* (?) it from those who first came forth from him” (πετεαφμεγε αρας χн ἡωαρῖ· ἡтаφ ἡμεп оуптеφс ημεг χн ἡωαρῖ афнег арас· афρωтῖ δε ἡмос апаеи· ептаρῖ φорῖ ἡеи аβαλ ημαφ).

208 *Tri. Trac.* ΝΗC I 82.22–24 (text and trans. Attridge and Pagels, CGL, slightly modified): ηеи ἡде [п]таг ρηпаβαλ не ρῖ п[п]еге ептаφῖ ὡαρῖ ἡсоφω[п]оу.

is explicitly used to describe the mystical apprehension of the Godhead. Thus at 127.8–25 we find a list of technical terms for the mystical apprehension of the pre-existent deity, one of which is explicitly described as a manifestation of the ontogenetic first thought: “He who gave them knowledge of him was one of his powers for enabling them to grasp the knowledge in preeminence; it is called ...”—among other terms—“*the manifestation of those things that were preconceived*” (ΠΟΥΩΝῆ Δ΄ ΒΑΛ΄ ἸΝΝΕΝΤΑΥΚΟΥΩΝΟΥ ἸΩΟΡῆ).<sup>209</sup>

Moreover, the notion of preconception also occurs in descriptions of primordial ontogenesis in the very earliest phase of Gnostic thought. In the Valentinian ontogenetic schema thought itself emerges, somewhat counter-intuitively, prior to the genesis of Intellect. In Irenaeus’s account of the system of Ptolemy, the supreme deity *Buthos* (Deep) is accompanied by two consorts, Thought and Will; “for it was *first conceived* (πρῶτον γὰρ ἐννοήθη) to project something ... and then it was willed.”<sup>210</sup> The apparent tmesis dividing the word *proennoein* somewhat obscures the parallel, but in an account of the ostensible “first” Gnostic, Simon Magus, the terminological connection is clear. According to Justin Martyr, Simon Magus’s companion Helen, an ex-prostitute, was considered by Simon’s disciples to be the “first thought” (*ennoian prōtēn*) generated by the supreme deity;<sup>211</sup> interestingly, elsewhere Justin disapprovingly quotes

209 *Tri. Trac.* NHC I 127.8–25 (text and trans. Attridge and Pagels, CGL, slightly modified): “He who gave them knowledge of him was one of his powers for enabling them to grasp the knowledge in supremity; (it) is called “the knowledge of all that are conceived” and “the treasure” and (it) is “the addition for the increase of knowledge” (and) the “*manifestation of those things which were preconceived*” and “the path towards harmony and toward the one who pre-exists,” which is the increase of those who have abandoned the greatness which was theirs in the organization of the will, so that the end might be like the beginning” (παει εταρῆ νεγ ἱπισαγνε· ἵτεq νεγoycoμ· ἵτεq πε· ατρογτερασ xε πicaγνε μεν ρῆν ογμῆτxαιc· cεμoyτε apaq xε πicaγνε· ἵνετογnameεγε `αραγ` τηρογ αγω παρo· αγω πoy{ρ}ωρ ἵτε ατοστογ ap ρoye cαγνε· πε πoyωνῆ Δ΄ βαλ· ἵνενταυκογωνογ ἵωορῆ αγω πmαειτ· αρoγn απιῆ μετε αγω αρoγn απετῆ ωορῆ ἵωοοπ ετεπεει πε πxin ἵῆmαειn· ἵΔε nαι ενταρ`κω ἵcωoγ ἵτογmαειn ετετωγ τε· ἵρῆnῆ ἵτοικονομia ἵτε πoyωωε· xεκαce ερετpαν· nαωωπε· ἱπρητε· εταρεταpχn οἱ ἵnαq).

210 Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresiorum* 6.38.5.4–6 [= Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 1.6.1–10]: “Those around Ptolemy say that [*Buthos*] has two consorts, which they also call ‘dispositions,’ namely Thought and Will; for it was *first conceived* to project something, as they say, and next it was willed” (οἱ δὲ περὶ τὸν Πτολεμαῖον δύο συζύγους αὐτὸν ἔχειν λέγουσιν, ἃς καὶ διαθέσεις καλοῦσιν, Ἐννοίαν καὶ Θέλησιν· πρῶτον γὰρ ἐννοήθη τι προβαλεῖν, ὥς φασιν, ἔπειτα ἡθέλησε).

211 Justin Martyr, *Apologia i* 26.3.1–6 (text Minns and Parvis 2009): “And almost all the Samaritans, and a few also among the other nations, agree to and revere [Simon Magus] as the first god; and some Helen—who wandered about with him during that time, who

certain pagans, possibly Stoics, who describe the birth of Athena from Zeus's head as his “first thought” (*prōtēn ennoian*).<sup>212</sup> And—most importantly—in the description of ontogenesis in the *Apocryphon of John*, at the moment Barbelo emerges from the self-apprehension of the Invisible Spirit as his reflection in his own aqueous light, she is described as ΤΕΞΟΥΕΤΕ ΝΕΝΝΟΙΑ, the “primordial thought.”<sup>213</sup> This confirms that the notion of the self-reflection of the supreme principle described as “pre-intellection” or “first thought” already existed in embryonic form in the classic Gnostic systems, and that this principle was thought to occupy an intermediary position immediately subjacent to the supreme principle but in some sense superior to the fully-determinate Barbelo Aeon.

#### 4.18 *Pronoein and Pronoia*

At this point, we may wonder how this first thought becomes associated with soteriology and visionary ascent. I cannot claim to answer this here with any certainty, but I would suggest that it has something to do with the notion of divine providence. Significantly, in the same ontogenetic passage of the *Apocryphon of John*, another related term is employed to describe the first emergent self-cognition: “His thought became an actuality; she appeared; she stood before him in the brilliance of his light. She is the *dunamis* that is prior to everything, the *Pronoia* of the all (ΤΕΠΡΟΝΟΙΑ [ΜΗΤΤ]ΗΡΨ).”<sup>214</sup> Here the term

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had previously prostituted (herself) in a brothel—she they claim (to be) the *first thought* generated by him” (καὶ σχεδὸν πάντες μὲν Σαμαρεῖς, ὀλίγοι δὲ καὶ ἐν ἄλλοις ἔθνεσιν, ὡς τὸν πρῶτον θεὸν ἐκείνον ὁμολογοῦντες ἐκείνον καὶ προσκυνοῦσι· καὶ Ἑλένην τινά, τὴν περινοστήσαν αὐτῷ κατ’ ἐκεῖνο τοῦ καιροῦ, πρότερον ἐπὶ τέγους σταθείσαν, τὴν ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ ἐννοίαν πρῶτην γενομένην λέγουσι). Cf. also Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 1.23.2.

212 Justin Martyr, *Apologia* i 64.5 (text Minns and Parvis 2009): “Also—behaving in a similarly malicious manner—they [sc. the Pagans] declare Athena to be the daughter of Zeus, not through sexual reproduction but rather, since they knew that God had the notion to create the world through the Logos, they spoke of Athena as the *first thought*, which we consider to be the silliest thing, to put forth the female form as an image of thought” (καὶ τὴν Ἀθηνᾶν δὲ ὁμοίως πονηρευόμενοι θυγατέρα τοῦ Διὸς ἔφασαν, οὐκ ἀπὸ μίξεως, ἀλλ’, ἐπειδὴ ἐννοηθέντα τὸν θεὸν διὰ λόγου τὸν κόσμον ποιῆσαι ἔγνωσαν, ὡς τὴν πρῶτην ἐννοίαν ἔφασαν τὴν Ἀθηνᾶν· ὅπερ γελοῖότατον ἡγοῦμεθα εἶναι, τῆς ἐννοίας εἰκόνα παραφέρειν θηλειῶν μορφὴν).

213 *Ap. John* (Waldstein and Wisse 1995, 9–11 [see complete passage of NHC III 6.24–7.23 in Appendix C8]).

214 *Ap. John* NHC III 7.12–17 (and parallels in Waldstein and Wisse 1995, 10.18–11.4): ΤΕΞΕΝΝΟΙΑ ΑΣΨ ΟΥΓΩΒ· [ΑΣΟΥ]ΩΝΕΣ ΕΒΟΛ· ΑΣΑΞΕ ΕΡΑΤΣ ΗΠΕΨ[ΗΤΟ] ΕΒΟΛ· ΕΨ ΠΕΦΛΑΜΠΗΛΟΝΟΣ Η[ΟΥΟΕΙ]Η ΕΤΕ ΗΤΟΣ ΠΕ Τ·ΔΥΝΑΜΙΣ Ε[ΤΩΟ]ΟΠ· ΖΑΘΗ ΗΨΚΑ ΝΙΜ· ΤΕΠΡΟΝΟΙΑ [ΜΗΤΤ]ΗΡΨ. Williams 1992b, 485–88 observed that the activity of Providence in *Ap. John* is tripartite (as in the Middle Platonic doctrine of pseudo-Plutarch, *De Fato* 572f–573a and Apuleius,

*pronoia* is used to describe the emergent Barbelo, and in this passage, it is often simply translated as “providence,” which is certainly at least one of its meanings. But *pronoia* here might be better rendered as “forethought” or even “pre-thought,” and we may begin to suspect that it is related both conceptually and etymologically to the other designation of the incipient Barbelo, *τερογερτε νεννοια*, “primordial thought,” that occurs later in the same passage.<sup>215</sup> That *pronoia* is more or less synonymous with *prōtē ennoia* elsewhere in Sethian thought is further supported by the occurrence of this term in precisely the same context—and, moreover, in close connection with silence—in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, which is a more proximate ancestor of the Platonizing Sethian tractates; thus, in Codex IV, page 50, lines 5–9, we find the hymnic phrase, “the light of the perfection, the eternal light of the eternities, the light in silence, in the *Pronoia* and silence of the Father.”<sup>216</sup>

Yet the mythical figure of Pronoia in the *Apocryphon of John*—like the eponymous savior of the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the First Thought in the Platonizing Sethian tractates—is not only the incipient reflexive apprehension of the supreme principle, but is also, as is well known, the salvific mechanism by which one returns to the transcendent realm. In the long version, Pronoia herself is important enough to be accorded a lengthy aretology of her own (the so-called Pronoia monologue); thus, in Codex II, page 31, lines 11–14, she declares, “I am the *Pronoia of the pure Light*; I am the thought of the Virginal Spirit, who raises you up to the honored place,” and the same salvific role is attributed to the personified Pronoia and / or her secondary emanation, Epinoia, “mental reflection,” throughout both long and short versions of the tractate.<sup>217</sup>

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*De Plat.* 1.12), and in its higher aspect comprises both the reflection of the deity and the principle of salvation.

215 At NHC II 14.20–21, Pronoia is called the *eikōn* of the Invisible.

216 *Gos. Eg.* NHC IV 50.5–9 [cf. also 75.11 and NHC III 63.22] (text and trans. Böhlig and Wisse, CGL): πογο[ει]ν ν̄τε [π]̄χωκ̄ πογοειν ωα ενεε̄ ν̄τε μινεε̄ πογο[ει]ν̄ ḡν ογσιγν̄ ḡν ογπρνοιᾱ μ̄ν ογσιγν̄ ν̄τε πωτ̄.

217 *Ap. John* NHC II 31.11–14: ἀνοκ̄ τ̄ε τπρνοιᾱ ἡπογοειν̄ ετ̄β̄β̄ν̄χ̄ ἀνοκ̄ πε πινεε̄γε ἡππαρ̄θ̄ενικον̄ ἡγ̄ν̄ᾱ πετσορε̄ ἡνοκ̄ ε̄ρρᾱῑ επτοπος̄ ετ̄ταειν̄χ̄. See also NHC II 23.26–31 (in Waldstein and Wisse 1995, 62.12–17): “I appeared in the likeness of an eagle upon the Tree of Knowledge, which is the mental reflection (*Epinoia*) from the *Pronoia of pure Light*, so that I might teach them and awaken them out of the depth of sleep” (ἀιογ̄ωνε̄ ἀνοκ̄ ε̄βολ̄ ἡπ̄σματ̄ ἡογ̄αετος̄ ρ̄ιχ̄ν̄ π̄ωην̄ ἡπ̄σοογν̄ ε̄τετᾱῑ τε̄ τεπ̄νοιᾱ ε̄βολ̄ ḡν̄ τεπ̄ρνοιᾱ ἡογοειν̄ ετ̄τ̄β̄β̄ν̄χ̄ χ̄εκαδ̄ς̄ ε̄ῑνατ̄σεβᾱχ̄ δ̄γ̄ω̄ ἡ̄τατογ̄ν̄οσογ̄ ε̄βολ̄ ḡν̄ π̄ωικ̄ ἡ̄π̄ρ̄ῑν̄η̄β̄). Cf. also NHC II 30.24 etc: ἀνοκ̄ πε π̄ρ̄ πινεε̄γε̄ ἡ̄τπρνοιᾱ (“I am the remembrance of the Pronoia”). NHC III 27.2–4 (in Waldstein and Wisse 1995, 56.9–10): “the *Thought of the pre-existing light*, being within him, awakened his thought” ([τε]̄ννοιᾱ σε̄ ἡ̄π̄ε̄π̄ροον̄τος̄ ἡ̄ογ̄[οει]ν̄ ἡ̄σ̄ᾱω̄πε̄ ἡ̄ρ̄ρᾱῑ ἡ̄ρ̄η̄τ̄ῑ ε̄ς̄[τ̄ωογ̄]ν̄ ἡ̄π̄ε̄ρ̄η̄σογ̄ε̄ ε̄ρ̄ρᾱῑ).



Hints of a similar association between *pronoia* and both salvation and visionary ascent may also be found in the earliest strata of Valentinian thought. One might consider a fragment of Valentinus himself, preserved by Clement of Alexandria: “Until the heart encounters *pronoia*, it is impure, being the domicile of many demons; but when the Father who alone is good inspects [the heart], he sanctifies it and *causes it to shine forth with light*, and therefore one having such a heart is blessed, because *he will see God*.”<sup>218</sup> This quotation from Valentinus is later echoed at *Zostrianos* 46.6–31, a passage discussed earlier in this chapter, where the soul, having fallen into generation, is similarly imprisoned by evil spirits, but is subsequently saved, here not quite by *pronoia*, but instead by “perfect living thoughts” (ἐ[ὲν]νοήμα νε ἡτέλ[ι]ος εὐονῆ) that are equated with luminous “impressions” (*tupoi*) within the soul; these assist in the ascent out of the cosmos.<sup>219</sup> In both passages, one may perceive a conflation of the soteriological or providential role of the innate remnant within the human soul of the primordial first moment of divine intellection (on the one hand) with (on the other hand) the visionary possibilities inherent in introspective contemplation.

218 Valentinus *apud* Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 2.114.3–6 (text Stählin 1960): “And it seems to me that the heart experiences something like an inn; for that is riddled with holes and dug up and often filled with excrement, as people stay there licentiously, having no *forethought* for the place since it has been established by another. In this way too, until the heart encounters *forethought*, it is impure, being the domicile of many demons. But when the Father who alone is good inspects (the heart), he sanctifies it and causes it to shine forth with light, and thus one having such a heart is blessed, because he will see God” (καὶ μοι δοκεῖ ὁμοῖόν τι πάσχειν τῷ πανδοχείῳ ἡ καρδία· καὶ γὰρ ἐκεῖνο κατατιτράται τε καὶ ὀρύττεται καὶ πολλάκις κόπρου πύμπλαται ἀνθρώπων ἀσελγῶς ἐμμενόντων καὶ μηδεμίαν πρόνοιαν ποιομένων τοῦ χωρίου, καθάπερ ἀλλοτρίου καθεστῶτος· τὸν τρόπον τοῦτον καὶ ἡ καρδία, μέχρι μὴ προνοίας τυγχάνει, ἀκάθαρτος [οὐσα], πολλῶν οὐσα δαιμόνων οἰκητήριον· ἐπειδὴν δὲ ἐπισκέψηται αὐτὴν ὁ μόνος ἀγαθὸς πατήρ, ἡγίασται καὶ φωτὶ διαλάμπει, καὶ οὕτω μακαρίζεται ὁ ἔχων τὴν τοιαύτην καρδίαν, ὅτι ὁψεται τὸν θεόν).

219 *Zost.* NHC VIII 46.22–23 [text Barry, Funk, and Poirier, BCNH; see complete passage (45.12–46.31) in Appendix C5]; cf. also *noëma* at *Marsanes* 8.25. An additional curiosity is that this extended passage is apparently paraphrased in Porphyry, *Sententiae* 40–41 (cf. also *Enn.* VI.9[9].11.35–45). One may also compare Porphyry’s curious statement at *Vit. Plot.* 23.8–9 that Plotinus attained *μυο* “by means of thoughts” (ταῖς ἐννοίαις). Hadot 1968, 2:85 n. 2 conjectured—correctly, in my opinion—that the “thoughts” in this passage refer to the innate notions of the divine. Yet we have seen that the whole constellation of ideas about *ennoiai* and *pronoia* that enable the mystical-visionary ascent is widespread in pre-Plotinian Gnostic literature, and that the likelihood is that Plotinus has appropriated it from some Gnostic source(s). We may suspect that Porphyry, who is aware of his teacher’s appropriation of the Gnostic *ennoiai*, is anxiously attempting to reaffirm its emphatically Platonic heritage by immediately and somewhat awkwardly associating it with the *Symposium* in the same breath.

There are a number of more ambiguous hints that *Pronoia* played some unusual role in Gnostic thought; one might consider Origen's description of the Ophite diagram, in which one figure's caption apparently read "the *pronoia* of Sophia";<sup>220</sup> or Plotinus's own diatribe against the Gnostics, where he enigmatically takes them to task for claiming themselves to be the unique beneficiaries of *pronoia*.<sup>221</sup> Here the sense is obscure.

Now it is well known that the concept of *Pronoia*, understood as providence or forethought, occupied a significant role in Stoicism, and it is possible, of course, that the Stoics themselves envisioned some connection between *pronoia* and the *prolēpsis* and / or *koinē ennoia* that permits apprehension of the divine; and yet other than a few intimations here and there, I have been unable to find a clear indication of this association in Stoic sources. Whether or not this association was made by the Stoics, however, it appears that *pronoia* was deliberately employed in a dual sense by the Gnostics, who exploited the ambiguity between both its traditional meaning, that of the divine Providence necessary for salvation—which they understood specifically in the sense of an ascent out of the cosmos—and also its newer, more esoteric significance, that of the salvific, visionary, or mystical-epistemological faculty of transcendental "pre-intellection" that was also understood as the primordial self-apprehension of the transcendent deity itself. Undoubtedly aware of the Gnostic origin of this association, Plotinus makes no connection between *pronoia* and mystical *pronoēsis* in his long treatise *On Providence* that Porphyry separated into III.2 and III.3 (chronologically numbers 47 and 48). But such a connection was made explicit by later Neoplatonists, who, unlike Plotinus, did not feel that their Platonic or Hellenic identity was threatened by Gnosticism and therefore had far less compunction about tacitly redeploying certain recognizably Gnostic ideas that earlier had so embarrassed Plotinus and his Roman circle. Alluding to the Stoic conception of *koinai ennoiai*, Iamblichus insists that an "innate knowledge" (*emphutos gnōsis*) about the gods derives from the gods themselves and is also associated with the soul's desire for the

220 Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.38.16–19 (text Borret 1969): "On the second circle [in the Ophite diagram], intertwined with and encompassing two other circles, was inscribed another rhomboidal figure, (entitled) "the *Pronoia of Wisdom (Sophia)*" (τῷ δὲ δευτέρῳ κύκλῳ ἐνεγέγραπτο, περιπεπλεγμένῳ καὶ ἐμπεριειληφότι ἄλλους δύο κύκλους καὶ ἄλλο σχῆμα ῥομβοειδές, « σοφίας πρόνοια »).

221 *Enn.* II.9[33].16.14–17: "Also, how is it pious [sc. to claim, as the Gnostics do] that *Providence (pronoia)* does not penetrate [this world down] here, or into everyone? *For they say it 'provides' for them alone*" (Ἐπεὶ καὶ τὸ πρόνοιαν μὴ διικνεῖσθαι εἰς τὰ τῆδε ἢ εἰς ὅτιοῦν, πῶς εὐσεβές; Πῶς δὲ σύμφωνον ἑαυτοῖς; Λέγουσι γὰρ αὐτῶν προνοεῖν αὐτόνων).

Good.<sup>222</sup> More remarkably, in a discussion of providence, Proclus later makes the Gnostic *jeu de mots* explicit: “Among the gods, then, providence is primary; for where, then, is the activity prior to intellect, if not in the hyper-essential things? *Providence (pronoia)—as the name indicates—is an activity prior to intellect (pro nou).*”<sup>223</sup> Proclus was writing in the fifth century, but we may be certain that this equation—that of (i) the salvific faculty of transcendental apprehension that was granted providentially to humans with (ii) an element of the transcendent deity’s own, primordial pre-intellection—was already current in demonstrably pre-Plotinian strata of Gnostic thought, perhaps even as early as the second third of the second century when the *Apocryphon of John* was presumably compiled. It was undoubtedly from his profound familiarity with these Gnostic ideas that Plotinus derived his notion of mystical pre-intellection: a notion whose true source he reveals with but a single use of *pronoousa* at V.3[49].10.43, a treatise written late in his career once the immediate Gnostic ‘threat’ to his circle had largely abated.

#### 4.19 *Excursus: Mystical Unknowing in Allogenes, Plotinus, and pre-Plotinian Sources*

In this section (§4) we have seen that *Allogenes* describes the extraordinary faculty by which the human aspirant can apprehend the unknowable deity in terms of both mystical precognition and also “primordial manifestation” (and their cognates), both of which describe not only a mechanism of transcendental apprehension but also, simultaneously, the transcendent deity’s own *self*-apprehension. Yet *Allogenes* simultaneously describes the ultimate apprehension quite differently, in terms of what has been called ‘learned ignorance’: i.e., the mystical apperception of the Unknowable through a

222 Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* 1.3 (text des Places 1966): “For an *innate knowledge* about the gods abides together with our very substance, and is superior to all discernment and decision-making, reason and demonstration. It is united from the beginning with its own cause, and coexists with the essential desire of the soul towards the Good” (Συνυπάρχει γὰρ ἡμῶν αὐτῇ τῇ οὐσίᾳ ἡ περὶ θεῶν ἐμφυτος γνώσις, κρίσεώς τε πάσης ἐστὶ κρείττων καὶ προαιρέσεως, λόγου τε καὶ ἀποδείξεως προϋπάρχει· συνήνωται τε ἐξ ἀρχῆς πρὸς τὴν οἰκείαν αἰτίαν, καὶ τῇ πρὸς τὰ γὰθὸν οὐσιώδει τῆς ψυχῆς ἐφέσει συνυφέστηκεν).

223 Proclus, *Elements of Theology* §120.10–14 (text Dodds 1977): “Among the gods, then, providence is primary. For where, then, is the activity prior to intellect, if not in the hyper-essential things? *Providence (pronoia)—as the name indicates—is an activity prior to intellect (pro nou).* By their being, then, and by their being goodnesses, the gods fill all things with a goodness prior to intellect” (ἐν θεοῖς οὖν ἡ πρόνοια πρῶτως. καὶ ποῦ γὰρ ἡ πρὸ νοῦ ἐνέργεια ἢ ἐν τοῖς ὑπερουσίοις; ἢ δὲ πρόνοια, ὡς τοῦνομα ἐμφαίνει, ἐνέργειά ἐστι πρὸ νοῦ. τῷ εἶναι ἄρα θεοὶ καὶ τῷ ἀγαθότητες εἶναι πάντων προνοοῦσι, πάντα τῆς πρὸ νοῦ πληροῦντες ἀγαθότητος).



and it should be added to our growing collection of Platonizing Sethian terms for the faculty of transcendental apprehension.<sup>228</sup>

It is therefore significant that on one occasion in an early-period mystical passage, Plotinus also uses precisely the same term to describe the final *aphairēsis* or annihilation of the transcendental self (phase D) that accompanies MUO; thus VI.9[9].7.17–21: “[W]ithdrawing from all external things, she [the soul] must turn completely to the within, and not be inclined to any of the external things, but ‘un-knowing’ all things (ἀγνοήσαντα τὰ πάντα)—both as he had at first, in the sensible realm, then also, in that of the forms—and even ‘un-knowing’ himself (ἀγνοήσαντα δὲ καὶ αὐτόν), come to be in the contemplation (ἐν τῇ θεᾷ) of that [One].”<sup>229</sup> The terminology of this Plotinian passage echoes the twofold primordial manifestation of the *Allogenes* passage discussed earlier in which the initial apprehension of the inherent transcendentalia within the aspirant’s own self is followed by the ultimate apprehension of those “within them all,” (although here, of course, the order in which “self” and “all” occur is reversed). To this, we may also compare a mystical passage from the *Großschrift* in which, as Corrigan (2000b [“Positive and Negative Matter”]: 50) has suggested, we find subtle echoes of the Sethian Kalyptos-Protophanes-Autogenes triad; here, paradoxically, the negation of *looking* results in a sudden vision, just as in the *Allogenes* passage the negation of knowing paradoxically results in an extraordinary kind of “knowing” which entails an immediate apprehension of the transcendent: “Thus also Intellect, veiling (καλύψας [i.e., Kalyptos]) itself from other things and contracting into its interior, *not looking at anything, will see* (μηδὲν ὁρῶν θεάσεται) a light, not another one in something else (ἐν ἄλλῳ), but itself, alone by itself (αὐτὸ καθ’ ἑαυτοῦ [i.e., Autogenes]), pure, appearing suddenly (ἐξαίφνης φανέν [i.e., Protophanes]) by itself, so as to be puzzled whence it appeared, from without or within....”<sup>230</sup> One may reasonably suspect, then, that Plotinus adopted the concept of mystical un-knowing

228 One might call attention to the similarity between this apparent equivocation on the question of the first principle’s self-knowledge and Plotinus’s vacillation regarding the One’s self-knowledge that we have seen throughout Chapter 3.

229 Similar ideas, if not identical terminology, occur elsewhere; thus, *inter alia*, VI.9[9].6, esp. 6.50–52: “One must not attach the ‘being together’ [to it], so as to preserve the One, but [one must] remove both the ‘to intelligize’ and the ‘to be together,’ and [also remove] the intelligizing of oneself and of the others” (Ἐπεὶ οὐδὲ τὸ συνείναι δεῖ προσάπτειν, ἵνα τηρῆς τὸ ἓν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ νοεῖν καὶ τὸ συνιέναι ἀφαιρεῖν καὶ ἑαυτοῦ νόησιν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων). See also VI.7[38].39; V.3[49].12.48–53. Cf. Corrigan 2000a, 159 n. 65, who suggests that Plotinus attempts to distance himself from “intelligible ignorance” due to its Gnostic connotations.

230 V.5[32].7.31–35: Οὕτω δὴ καὶ νοῦς αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τῶν ἄλλων καλύψας καὶ συναγαγὼν εἰς τὸ εἶσω μηδὲν ὁρῶν θεάσεται οὐκ ἄλλο ἐν ἄλλῳ φῶς, ἀλλ’ αὐτὸ καθ’ ἑαυτοῦ μόνον καθαρόν ἐφ’ αὐτοῦ ἐξαίφνης φανέν, ὥστε ἀπορεῖν ὅθεν ἐφάνη, ἔξωθεν ἢ ἔνδον.

from the immediate antecedents of the Platonizing Sethians, as he did with the essential structure (if not usually the terminology) of first thought and primordial manifestation.

Still, we may ask: whence *Allogenes*' own curious concept of mystical "un-knowing"? It has been noted that a similar kind of 'learned ignorance' occurs in the apophatic description of the ultimate apprehension of the First One in the Anonymous *Commentary on Plato's 'Parmenides'* (=ACPP).<sup>231</sup> We have already seen the passage (2.14–27) which exerts one to "stand upon an unutterable preconception of him, which creates an image of him through silence, *without recognizing* (οὐδὲ...γινώσκουσιν) that it is silent nor is conscious that it is creating an image of him *nor knowing absolutely anything at all*, (οὐδὲ τι καθάπαξ εἰδυῖν) but being only an image of the unutterable, unutterably being the unutterable, but *not as if cognizant*" (οὐχ ὡς γινώσκουσιν).<sup>232</sup> A similar notion occurs in Porphyry's *Sententiae* 25, where we encounter the claim that hypernoetic realities should be contemplated by "non-intellection" (*anoēsia*) rather than intellection (*noēsis*),<sup>233</sup> and the *Tübingen Theosophy* also imputes to Porphyry the notion that "knowledge of [the first cause] is un-knowing."<sup>234</sup> Here a word about chronology is in order. According to those who follow Hadot in attributing the ACPP to Porphyry or later and who maintain—untenably, in my opinion—the redaction hypothesis (i.e., that there is Porphyrian or post-Porphyrian influence in our version of *Allogenes*, whose *Vorlage* would then be dated to sometime *after* the mid 260s, and would reflect discussions in Plotinus's circle, rather than *vice versa*), this particular iteration of 'learned ignorance' would have been *originally* Plotinian and would thus have been adopted by Porphyry who in turn could have transmitted it to the Platonizing Sethians. However, as I have mentioned, I believe there to be several persuasive—indeed, conclusive—arguments against [a] a post-Plotinian date for either *Allogenes* or *Zostrianos* and concomittantly against [b] the Porphyrian authorship of the ACPP. These arguments are too complex to be elaborated in the present work, which in any case does *not* argue for a unique dependence of Plotinus upon *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* themselves. For the moment it will suffice to demonstrate that there is an unquestionably

231 Thus Turner 2004; K. L. King 1995, 150–52.

232 Cf. ACPP 9.20–26: "We therefore lack the power for the apprehension (*epibolē*) of God, even if those who represent him in images in whatsoever manner explain it to us through discourse, inasmuch as it is possible to hear about him, since he remains above all reasoned discourse and all intellection in our ignorance (*agnōsia*) of him."

233 Porphyry, *Sententiae* 25.1–2 (text Lamberz 1975): Περὶ τοῦ ἐπέκεινα τοῦ νοῦ κατὰ μὲν νόησιν πολλὰ λέγεται, θεωρεῖται δὲ ἀνοησίᾳ κρείττονι νοήσεως.

234 ἔστιν αὐτοῦ γνώσις ἢ ἀγνώσις (text Erbse 1995, §65).

pre-Plotinian source—one *also* certainly known to Porphyry—in which one finds a similar conception of transcendental ‘unknowing’; and it is this pre-Plotinian source, not Porphyry, that is most likely reflected in the *Allogenes* passage. In fragment 1 of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, the first principle is called a *noēton* (as in Plotinus’s unorthodox v.4[7]), yet nevertheless it cannot be known in ordinary terms: “For there is some Intelligible (*noēton*), which you must intelligize by means of the flower of intellect. For if you incline your intellect also to that and *intelligize it as if intelligizing some thing, you will not intelligize it*. For it is the everywhere-appearing power of strength....”<sup>235</sup> Compare *Allogenes*: “As though ‘unknowing’ it, I knew it and received power from it, and having received an eternal strength....” Besides the obvious verbal similarity, both passages immediately associate a variety of extraordinary knowing (or not-knowing) with power or strength; we may also recall that both strength and power are characteristic of the Plotinian transcendental self *qua* PNE. However, as in the passage from the ACPP cited *supra*, p. 203, the *Oracles* fragment does not actually advocate ‘unknowing’ as a positive technique; the intention is to intelligize the *noēton*, but not as “some thing” (*ti*). It, therefore, seems probable that the author of *Allogenes* is either unconsciously echoing the verbal pattern of the *Oracles* passage, or, what is more likely, deliberately alluding to it and adroitly inverting its logic, reappropriating the term “unknowing” as a positive method rather than an undesirable outcome.<sup>236</sup> Closer to *Allogenes*, however, is *Zostrianos* 20.11–14; here the ‘unknowing’ is not the activity of the mystic but of the transcendent deity itself; and, to complete the cycle, it is immediately associated with preconception. “He is a divine father as *he is pre-known* (εὔρ ὤρτι ἤειμε εἶροϋ) and he is *not known* (νεγείμε εἶροϋ ἀν); for *he is a power* (οὐδωμ)

235 *Oracula Chaldaica* frag. 1.1–4 (text des Places 1971): “Ἔστιν γάρ τι νοητόν, ὃ χρὴ σε νοεῖν νόου ἀνθεῖ· ἦν γάρ ἐπεγκλίνης σὸν νοῦν κάκεινο νοήσης / ὥς τι νοῶν, οὐ κείνο νοήσεις· ἔστι γάρ ἀλκῆς / ἀμφιφαοὺς δύναμις. Later in the passage (lines 10–12), one is exhorted to apprehend this principle by “extend[ing] an empty mind.”

236 This is not to suggest that the metaphysical schema of the *Oracles* as a whole is identical to that of *Allogenes*; yet there are important similarities (besides very general tendencies, such as their common emphasis on triadization). For instance, we may compare the prenoetic faculty of the Gnostics with the Chaldaean “flower of intellect” (*anthos nou: Oracula Chaldaica* fr. 1.1.) by which we can apprehend the Intelligible (*noēton*): a faculty, incidentally, which is analogous to Plotinus’s transcendental self / PNE. In any event, whatever the precise relation of the *Oracles* with the Platonizing Sethian material, one might speculate that they contained primitive elements of a mystical schema that was eventually to be crystallized in the elaborate mystical epistemology shared by Platonizing Sethians and Plotinus. In fact, as anyone well versed in this material will be aware, it is somewhat surprising that the *Chaldaean Oracles* does *not* occupy a more prominent position in the development of the conception of transcendental apprehension common to the Gnostics and to Plotinus that I have attempted to elaborate in this section.

and a father from himself.”<sup>237</sup> Here the faculty of transcendental apprehension (in this case pre-knowing) is again equated with the transcendent deity’s incognizance, and, moreover, as in the *Chaldaean Oracles* fragment, we find an immediate reference to power. This establishes a clear route, via the *Oracles* and *Zostrianos*, to Allogenes’s own mystical ‘unknowing.’ One final example proves that we do not need Porphyry to explain either *Allogenes*’ or *Zostrianos*’ references to unknowing knowledge. Rather, this theme evidently reflects the theological preoccupations of the earliest phases of proto-Sethian Gnosticism, for in *Eugnostos the Blessed* we find a parallel phrase: “He is unintelligizable, while (nevertheless) he intelligizes himself.”<sup>238</sup> As with the other Gnostic mechanisms of transcendental apprehension, Allogenes’s mystical unknowing is simply an attempt to replicate the activity of the supreme principle itself.

#### 4.20 *The Faculty of Transcendental Apprehension as Inherent “Imprint,” “Reflection,” or ‘Residue’ of the First Moment of Ontogenesis*

Thus far we have seen that the Platonizing Sethians envisioned a close correspondence or identity between the first moment of ontogenesis and the apex of the visionary ascent. We have also seen that both Platonizing Sethians and earlier Gnostics believed an inherent aspect or impression of the transcendent deity to reside within the human subject and in some way to enable the visionary ascent. In earlier chapters (Chapters 2 and 3) we have seen that Plotinus bridged the seemingly enormous abyss between human experience and that of the transcendent Absolute by positing a hypernoetic or transcendental self at the center-point of the human being that serves as the means of apprehending the One. According to Plotinus, the transcendental self is a remnant of the prenoetic efflux (PNE) that is somehow leftover from, or a “trace” (ἵχνος) of, the first eternal moment of ontogenesis. We may find indications of an analogous idea in Platonizing Sethian thought, although admittedly the texts are not as clear on this point as one might ideally wish. There are indications that they believed that the inherent “impression” (*tupos*) or “image” (*eikōn*) within the human subject—the faculty of transcendental apprehension—was a residual “impression” or “image” of the reflexive “first thought” or “first manifestation” of the first principle and that it survives in the depths of human beings (or of certain individuals). The clearest indication of this theme occurs at

237 Might this juxtaposition of positive and negative knowledge at the moment of mystical apprehension be brought into connection with the paradoxical description of the ultimate apprehension at *Zost.* NHC VIII 24.13–14 as an apparently paradoxical “audition and power of silence”?

238 *Eugnostos* NHC III 72.19–21 (text Parrott, CGL): ΟΥΔΤΙΝΟΕΙ ΞΗΝΟΙ ΠΕ ΕΥΔΑΦΝΟΕΙ ΞΗΝΟΙ ΞΗΝΗ ΞΗΝΟΙ; also parallels (*Wis. Jes. Chr.* III 95.12–14 and BG 85.17–19); on the prototypical nature of *Eugnostos*, Tardieu 1984, 48.



*Allogenes* 64.30–36 (discussed previously) in reference to the ability of a hypothetical human aspirant to know the Unknowable One: “He was blind apart from the eye [or ‘spring’] of revelation/manifestation (οὐρανὸν εὐολ) that is at rest, that which is activated from the triple power of the First Thought (τὸ πρῶτον νοῦν) of the Invisible Spirit.”<sup>239</sup> The “eye of revelation/manifestation” appears to describe the innate faculty within the prototypical human subject without which one cannot apprehend the unknowable first principle; interestingly, we have seen that Plotinus too describes the transcendental self as an “eye.”<sup>240</sup> Significantly, the “eye” is said to be “activated (*energein*) by the triple power of the first thought of the Invisible Spirit,” which suggests that it derives from the primordial self-cognition of the first principle at the first moment of ontogenesis.<sup>241</sup> A possible connection between the “eye” and the prototypical human being is suggested also by the intriguing observation that elsewhere in Sethian literature the prototypical human being, Adam, as well as his more exalted archetype, Pigeradama, are often inexplicably associated with an “eye.”<sup>242</sup>

There are also a few other indications of the same theme elsewhere. At *Allogenes* 60.31–37, immediately prior to the eponymous visionary’s ultimate apprehension of the Unknowable One, he withdraws to the Existence (*huparxis*) which he finds “standing and at rest like an image (*eikōn*) and likeness

239 *Allogenes* NHC XI 64.30–36 (text Funk and Scopello, BCNH): ἀφ’ ὅλλε ἡσὰ ἡβολ ἡπιδάλ ἐτ’ ὁρῶν ἡμοῦ ἡτε πιοῦντ’ εὐολ· πη ἐτεγρενεργί ερωῖ πη εὐολ ῥῆ πωμῆντ’ ὅση ἡτε τὸ πρῶτον νοῦν ἡτε πιαζορατον ἡπῆα.

240 At 1.6[1].9, Plotinus describes the indwelling transcendental self in terms “the eye that sees the great Beauty.” At *Allogenes* 65.18 (text Funk and Scopello, BCNH), we find the tantalizing word “beauty” (ἡπῆαε) following a lacuna in the next few lines after the mention of the “eye of revelation.” Cf. also Plotinus’s description at IV.3[27]18.19–23 of the soul in the intelligible realm as like an eye.

241 This interpretation finds further support in an earlier passage, NHC XI 59.37–60.2 (text Funk and Scopello, BCNH), where in the moments prior to the final ascent to the Unknowable One, the Luminaries tell *Allogenes*, “And according to the impression (*typos*) that is within you, know that it is the same with all these things, according to the same pattern (ἡμοῦ).” There is a further hint that some remnant of the transcendental principle inheres in the human subject at 60.7–8, when the Luminaries warn *Allogenes* not to fall away from “the inactivity in you (ἡπῆαε) ἐτῆρα ἡζητῆς) of the Unknowable One,” which suggests that some aspect of the supreme deity’s transcendental stability abides within the human being even prior to the ultimate vision. This may also be connected with the “great power” (οὐρανὸν ἡσὰ) for the discernment of transcendentalia that Youel says is placed by the Father upon *Allogenes* at 50.24–33; we are reminded of the *dunamis* connatural with that which comes from the One that serves the same purpose at *Enn.* VI.9[9].4.28–29.

242 Cf. *Zost.* NHC VIII 13.4–6: “... the perfect [Child] who is beyond divine and his eye, Pigeradama” and 30.4–6: “Adam, the perfect man, is an ‘eye’ of Autogenes.” At *Three Forms* NHC XIII 38\*.5, the Son is describes as “the Eye” of the Father’s light that surrounds him; thus also *Wis. Jes. Chr.* and *Eugnostos* (NHC III).

(εἶναι) of *what is invested upon me by a manifestation* (οὐρανῷ ἐβολ) of the Indivisible and the one who is at rest.”<sup>243</sup> Although the precise meaning is ambiguous, this would appear to imply that some aspect of the transcendent principle—perhaps its own perfect rest or *stasis*—has been invested or imprinted upon the human aspirant by the initial manifestation (οὐρανῷ ἐβολ), and that this imprint is in some sense superior to even the highest power of the Triple Powered One, Existence, which is merely an image and likeness of that which has been invested upon Allogenes himself. The language here appears to echo the creation of Adam at Genesis 1:26, and thus to suggest the Platonic conception of the ontological superiority of archetype to image; yet again, as with the “eye,” there is a subtextual allusion to the prototypical human being. Moreover, although the evidence from *Allogenes* is clearest, a similar notion may be detected elsewhere in Platonizing Sethian literature. For example, we have already seen that according to *Zostrianos* 76.21–25—“His (the Invisible Spirit’s) knowledge (*gnōsis*) exists outside of him, with the one who examines himself as he exists within himself, a reflection and an image (*eikōn*)....”—the *gnōsis* that is implicitly the Invisible Spirit’s own ontogenetic self-cognition is said to inhere as an *eikōn* within the human aspirant. Somewhat more impressionistically, several passages in the *Three Steles of Seth* hymn the transcendentalia by praising the latter’s ontogenetic manifestation and / or self-division and then go on to mention in the same breath that these powers or attributes are distributed among humans or that they inhere “in the heart.”<sup>244</sup> Finally, at *Marsanes* 7.20–28, the eponymous revealer describes the ontogenetic manifestation of the Triple Powered One from the utterly unknowable Silent One and immediately describes these powers as “perfected within me.”<sup>245</sup>

While the consubstantiality of the innermost essence of the human being with the transcendent deity was certainly a widespread topos of Gnostic

243 Note the possible parallel at *Zost.* NHC VIII 2.28–30: “three unborn images with an origin better than existence.”

244 *Steles Seth* NHC VII 120.15–22, 30–35; 122.8–18; 123.1–6.

245 There is another interesting but quite speculative connection which might merit future research. W. Beierwaltes 1965, 372 notes that in his *Parmenides* commentary, Proclus calls the “One in us” (in William of Moerbeke’s Latin translation, *In Parmenidem* 54.23 ff.) the *provolē* and *expressio* of the One itself, which Beierwaltes then retranslates as *probolē* and *ekphansis*: i.e., precisely the kind of Greek terms which I suspect might have been rendered as οὐρανῷ ἐβολ. Could this reflect a pre-Plotinian tradition of *Parmenides* interpretation that similarly involved a doctrine of an inherent impression of the incipient self-manifestation of the first principle? One might note the terminological resonance with Plotinus’s statement at v.1[10].6.14–15 that the One is like a god within a temple and in order to venerate it we must contemplate the statues outside the temple or rather “the (one) first-appearing cult-icon” (*agalma to prōton ekphanen*).

thought,<sup>246</sup> one may still wonder about the origin of the Platonizing Sethian notion—shared by Plotinus—that the true self is a residue of the deity’s primordial self-reflection. Here too, as is the case with many ideas common to both Plotinus and the Platonizing Sethians, there are suggestions that this first found expression not in academic philosophy but rather in classic Sethian soteriological myth. In the *Apocryphon of John*, Adam—the prototypical human—is imprisoned in a material body by the malevolent archons, but a luminous entity called Epinoia (“mental reflection”) is hidden within him and eventually emerges from his rib somewhat like Eve in Genesis. Yet unlike the Biblical Eve, the role of Epinoia is clearly salvific; it is she whom Adam beholds when he reverts to himself and apprehends his true *ousia*; it is also she who imparts the saving *gnōsis* to him and teaches him the “way of ascent.” Significantly, Epinoia was closely related to the primordial self-reflection of the Invisible Spirit: she is frequently referred to as the “Epinoia of the Light,” and in one case she is called the *ennoia* of the light, reminiscent both of the Invisible Spirit’s aqueous light in which he is reflected back to himself, and also of his “first thought”; moreover, she is explicitly said to be an emissary or aspect of Pronoia, who, as we have seen, is explicitly equated with the first deity’s self-apprehension. Most importantly, however, as we have seen earlier, the Naasenes, who were closely related with the Sethians,<sup>247</sup> used the term *epinoia* to describe the primordial self-manifestation itself: thus the infinitesimal deity becomes—“*through an epinoia of itself*”—a great magnitude; a similar use of *epinoia* may be found in the doctrine imputed to the putative “first” of the Gnostics, Simon Magus. We may tentatively conclude that some prototypical Sethian anthropology of the sort found in early Gnostic literature such as the *Apocryphon of John* provided the conceptual background for the more elaborate and sophisticated Platonizing Sethian identification of the indwelling faculty of transcendental apprehension with the primordial self-apprehension of the deity.

#### 4.21 *Structural Comparison*

At this point let us reflect on the general structure of the Platonizing Sethian visionary ascent. We may make the following synoptic observations: [1] The ascent involves a progressive self-reversion that culminates in an autophany: a discrete vision or apprehension of a luminous image or impression of the transcendent principle within oneself. [2] The ultimate apprehension of, or coalescence with, the transcendent deity that follows the autophany is accomplished by means of an extraordinary epistemic faculty within the human

246 And, as demonstrated by Narbonne 2008, one that probably influenced Plotinus.

247 Thus Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresiorum* 5.6.4. Rasimus 2005 has argued for a close connections between the Sethians and the Naaseni.

subject, a faculty whose structural attributes and nomenclature suggest it is to be identified with the self-apprehension of the supreme principle during the first moments of ontogenesis. [3] The faculty of transcendental apprehension may therefore be identified with the inherent aspect of the transcendent deity that is first apprehended in the autophany. [4] This inherent aspect of the deity within the human subject is itself identical to (or a consubstantial residue or imprint of) the transcendent principle's own reflexive apprehension during the first moment of ontogenesis. [5] Not only is there a functional identity between the inherent faculty of transcendental apprehension and the reflexive activity of the transcendent deity, but there is also a curious structural parallel between the mystical and ontogenetic activities of self-reversion and self-apprehension, suggesting that the ultimate attainment of the deity is accomplished by means of a ritual replication or contemplative reiteration—or visualization—of the primordial self-manifestation in the first eternal moments of ontogenesis. In a radical reinterpretation of the Platonic goal of *homoiōsis theōi*, the Platonizing Sethians appear to have believed it to be in some way possible to identify with, and thus co-experience, the utterly transcendent and unknowable principle's own non-cognitive self-apprehension. Finally, as will by now have become abundantly clear, [6] the entire structure of the Platonizing Sethian schema is virtually identical to the Plotinian schema discussed in Chapter 3.

#### 4.22 *A Brief Textual Comparison*

The comparison between Platonizing Sethian thought and that of Plotinus could potentially continue far beyond the scope of this book. For instance, one could undertake a more detailed discussion of the similarities between the Sethian interhypostatic realm and the Plotinian prenoetic efflux, or instead into innumerable minutiae, such as, for instance, the precise terminological correspondences that can be conjectured on the basis of the likely Greek philosophical antecedents of Coptic words in the Sethian tractates.<sup>248</sup> But these investigations can wait; I believe that by this point the case for a close correspondence of their respective doctrines of visionary ascent has been more than adequately made. Before concluding this chapter, however, I would like to call attention to one additional detailed textual comparison whose full significance will be evident only now that we have understood the broader Sethian schema in some detail. To demonstrate the remarkable parallel as clearly as possible I would like to compare the crucial passage of *Allogenes* describing the attainment of the Unknowable One by means of a primary revelation to three essential Plotinian mystical passages [See complete Plotinus texts

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<sup>248</sup> Including many neglected by Zandee 1961.

and translations in Appendix A, nos. 6, 10, and 12, and *Allogenes* in C7]. First, *Allogenes* 60.19–61.8: “And I withdrew upon the Vitality as I turned towards it [or: to myself], and I became a companion with it to enter within together with it, and I stood, not firmly but still. And I saw an eternal, intellectual motion that pertains to all the formless powers, which is unlimited by limitation. And when I wanted to stand firmly, I withdrew upon the Existence, which I found standing and at rest like an image and likeness of what is conferred upon me by a manifestation of the Indivisible and the one who is at rest; I was filled with a manifestation by means of a Primary Manifestation of the Unknowable, as though ‘unknowing’ him, I knew him and received power from him, and having received an eternal strength, I knew that which exists within me and the Triple-Powered and the manifestation of his unlimitedness.”<sup>249</sup> Now, compare Plotinus v.5[32].8.9–13, which describes a self-reversion (phase B) and autophany (phase C) at the penultimate moment of ascent (the subject here is the human aspirant who has already been assimilated to the Intellect): “For Intellect will make itself stand towards the contemplation, looking at nothing else but the Beautiful, completely turning and surrendering himself there; but having stood, and, as if having been filled with strength, it sees, first of all, itself having become more beautiful and glistening, as he is close to him.”<sup>250</sup> Also III.8[30].9.29–34, which describes self-annihilation (phase D), mystical union proper (phase E), and what I have called ‘desubjectification’ (phase E<sup>2</sup>): “[T]he intellect, being “double-mouthed,” must (so to speak) withdraw backward, and, as it were, surrender itself to what lies behind it; and there, if it wishes to see that one (n.), it must not be altogether intellect. For it (m.) is itself the first life, being an activity in the going-through-and-out of all things....”<sup>251</sup> Finally, VI.9[9].7.17–21, which again describes both self-reversion (phase B)

249 *Allogenes* ΝΗC XI 60.19–61.8 (text Funk and Scopello, BCNH): ἀγῶ ἀειρᾶναχωρι ἐχῆν ἡνῆστ’ ὠνῆρ εἰκῶτε ἡς ὥς· ἀγῶ ἀειρ ὧβηρ ἡβῶκ ἐροῦν ἐρος ἡνῆμας· ἀγῶ ἀειᾶρερατ’ ἡρεᾶι ῥῆ οὔταχρο ἀν’ ἀλλὰ ῥῆ οὔρροκ· ἀγῶ ἀίναγ ἐγκιμ ἡῶα ἐνεῖ ἡνοερον ἡαττωρῶ· ἐπανιῶσιμ τηροῦ πε ἡνατ’ εἰδος ἡνατ’ ἡ τοῦ ἐροῦ ῥῆ οὔτ τοῦ· ἀγῶ ἐταειοῶα ἐδρερατ’ ῥῆ οὔταχρο· ἀειρᾶναχωρι ἐχῆν ἡγῆπαρξίς τῆ ἐταειῶντς ἐσαρερατς· ἀγῶ ἐσρορῆ ἡμος κατὰ οὔγικων ἡν οὔεινε ἡτε πῆ ἐτ’ τοῦ ῥῆ ὧῶτ’· ἐβολ ῥῆτῆ οὔωνῆ ἐβολ ἡτε πιατ’ πῶα ἡν πῆ ἐτσορῆ ἡμοῦ· ἀειμοῦρ ἐβολ ῥῆ οὔωνῆ ἐβολ· ἐβολ ῥῆτῆ οὔνῆτ’ ὧρῆ ἡῶωνῆ [61] ἐβολ ἡπιατ’ σοῦωνῆ· ῥ[ῶς] εἰε ἡνατ’ εἰνε ἐροῦ· ἀίει[με] ἐροῦ ἀγῶ ἀειχί σοι ῥραῖ ἡ[ῥ]ῆτῆ· ἐαειχί ἡῶχρο ἡρητ’ [ἡ]ῶα ἐνεῖ· ἀεισοῶα πῆ ἐ[τ’ ὧ]οοπ ἡρητ’ ἡν πιαῶντ’ ὄρ[η] ἡν πιοῶωνῆ ἐ[βο]λ ἡτε π[ῆ]ατ’ ὧωπ ἐροῦ ἐ[τῆ]τᾶα.

250 v.5[32].8.9–13: ἐσθήζεται μὲν γὰρ ὁ νοῦς πρὸς τὴν θέαν εἰς οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἢ πρὸς τὸ καλὸν βλέπων, ἐκεῖ ἑαυτὸν πᾶς τρέπων καὶ διδοὺς, στάς δὲ καὶ οἶον πληρωθεὶς μένους εἶδε μὲν τὰ πρῶτα καλλίω γενόμενον ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἐπιστῆλβοντα, ὡς ἐγγὺς ὄντος αὐτοῦ.

251 III.8[30].9.29–34: “Ἡ δεῖ τὸν νοῦν οἶον εἰς τοῦπίσω ἀναχωρεῖν καὶ οἶον ἑαυτὸν ἀφέντα τοῖς εἰς ὀπισθεν αὐτοῦ ἀμφοῖστομον ὄντα, κάκεῖνα, εἰ ἐθέλοι ἐκείνο ὄραν, μὴ πάντα νοῦν εἶναι. Ἔστι μὲν γὰρ αὐτὸς ζωὴ πρῶτη, ἐνέργεια οὐσα ἐν διεξόδῳ τῶν πάντων.

and self-annihilation (D): “[W]ithdrawing from all external things, she must turn completely to the within, and not be inclined to any of the external things, but ‘un-knowing’ all things (both as he had at first, in the sensible realm, then also, in that of the forms) and even ‘un-knowing’ himself, come to be in the contemplation of that....”<sup>252</sup> By this point, it should also be evident that the parallels between the original *Allogenes* passage and the three Plotinian examples are unlikely to be coincidental. In both *Allogenes* and in one or more of the Plotinian passages we find shared references to (a) stasis; (b) self-reversion or self-withdrawal; (c) a “filling” with “strength” or an empowerment from the luminous efflux of the first principle; (d) self-apprehension; (e) mystical “un-knowing”; (f) a reference to the unboundedness or uncontainableness of the transcendent principle; (g) an assimilation to burgeoning vitality or life; and finally, (h) an apprehension of that principle itself through some special, non-noetic faculty of intellect. The only feature of the *Allogenes* passage that does not have an explicit echo in these Plotinian passages is the technical term for transcendental vision: “primordial manifestation.” And yet—as we have seen in great detail in Chapter 3—in Plotinus’s texts, the homology or identity between mystical and primordial self-manifestation obtains even when his embarrassment about the source of this remarkable conception leads him to be less than completely explicit about it.

## 5 Conclusion

### 5.1 *Summary of Similarities between Platonizing Sethian and Plotinian Mystical Schemata*

In Chapters 3 and 4 we have seen that both Plotinus and the Platonizing Sethian treatises share a common mystical schema with the following features. First (i) the “ascent” towards the supreme principle entails an initial contemplative reversion towards an extraordinary, hypernoetic faculty within the mystical aspirant’s own self. Second, in both cases, (ii) this transcendental faculty of the self—that which permits apprehension of, or union with, the transcendent principle—has somehow derived from the very first eternal moment of ontogenesis, in which the indefinite or unbounded efflux of the transcendent first principle (the One or the Invisible Spirit) reverts upon its own source—its

<sup>252</sup> VI.9[9].7.17–21: πάντων τῶν ἔξω ἀφεμένην δεῖ ἐπιστραφῆναι πρὸς τὸ εἶσω πάντη, μὴ πρὸς τι τῶν ἔξω κεκλίσθαι, ἀλλὰ ἀγνοήσαντα τὰ πάντα καὶ πρὸ τοῦ μὲν τῇ αἰσθήσει [H-S<sup>1</sup>: διαθέσει], τότε δὲ καὶ τοῖς εἶδεσιν, ἀγνοήσαντα δὲ καὶ αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ θεᾷ ἐκείνου γενέσθαι. The twofold “unknowings,” first (i) “all things,” then (ii) “even yourself,” is an echo of a similar twofold “unknowings,” parallel to the twofold primary revelation / primordial manifestation. In both instructions and post-factum account, the “unknowing” is repeated.

former self—to engender the first duality of subject and object, which then acquires definition and subsistence to emerge as the second, fully independent, noetic principle. The transcendental faculty within the human subject is sometimes described as itself the first manifestation, thought, or *eikōn* of the transcendent principle, while at other times it is described in terms of a residue or imprint of the first unbounded efflux prior to its delimitation. Finally, in both Plotinus and the Sethian treatises, (iii) the aspirant's mystical act of self-reversion deliberately reiterates—or is virtually identical with—the supreme principle's own primordial, ontogenetic, act of self-reflection: an analogy which establishes a very close connection between metaphysics and soteriological or mystical praxis.

## 5.2 *Historical Questions*

The conceptual parallels between Plotinus and the Platonizing Sethian treatises with respect to this extremely subtle doctrine are too robust to be coincidental. The evidence adduced here points instead towards a much closer and more substantial relationship between Plotinus and the Platonizing Sethians than has hitherto been supposed. Yet what, precisely, *was* this relationship? We know that Plotinus had Gnostic *philoi*; that his circle was reading Greek *apokalypseis* attributed to Zostrianos and Allogenes, and that he himself makes numerous overt as well as tacit references to concepts that we may find in the extant Coptic translations of those tractates. We may be certain, then, that Platonizing Sethian tractates were available to him during his tenure in Rome, and that familiarity with them may have influenced him consciously or unconsciously. But this demands some qualification. It must not be assumed that he became acquainted with Gnostic thought only during the appearance of the presumably Platonizing Sethian sectaries on the periphery of his Roman circle during his middle (Porphyrian) period.<sup>253</sup> A passing acquaintance with the Sethian tractates during this time—a period in which the Gnostics, moreover, had become (to use Plotinus Athanassiadi's apt expression) a *bête noire* for him and his immediate entourage—can not explain the degree of correspondence between the Platonizing Sethian schema and his own mystical thought, which, as we have seen, is already evident in his earliest treatises and runs extremely deep throughout. Rather, we may suspect instead that many aspects of Plotinus's mysticism were dependent not upon the Platonizing Sethians who attended his lectures in Rome but rather upon some prior background that he must have shared with them. This suggests that Plotinus's encounter with

253 This assumption is made by Puech 1960, 181, although it is possible that certain issues attain greater prominence in and after the *Großschrift* specifically in response to challenges from his Gnostic auditors.

Gnostic doctrines of ascent occurred very early in his educational trajectory, perhaps during his studies under Ammonius Saccas in Alexandria from roughly 233 to 244 CE (prior to his arrival in Rome in 245) or possibly earlier, during the two 'dark' decades of Plotinus's life—from his eighth to his 28th year—about which Porphyry, and Plotinus himself, are conspicuously silent. Yet the degree of similarity between Plotinus and the Platonizing Sethians suggests that far from being straightforwardly opposed to these sectaries, Plotinus must have developed his mysticism in extremely close dialogue with them. This means that the most personal, even intimate, aspect of his spiritual life and thought is somehow profoundly intertwined with precisely those of his interlocutors against whom his invective is the most caustic. How is this possible?

We cannot know for sure, but I would offer the following hypothetical conjecture. It is plausible that even well before he arrived in Rome, Plotinus was well-versed not only in the theory but also—crucially—in the *practice* of some Gnostic tradition akin to that of the Platonizing Sethians. His early contact with or even immersion in the Gnostic worldview may have taken place in an Alexandrian religio-philosophical milieu in which academic Platonism and Gnosticism were not yet fully distinct. We may suppose that even much later, in Rome, once he had self-consciously broken with his past and consequently rejected his former allegiances in favor of a purely Platonic identity, his own thought continued to be tacitly fertilized—as well as challenged—by an ongoing dialogue with Platonizing Sethians on the periphery of his circle. Indeed, a youthful immersion in a religious praxis or contemplative discipline would have left profound marks on his consciousness, habits of mind, and behavior which would have persisted even once sectarian rivalries and competing strategies of legitimation obliged him to part ways, intellectually speaking, with his Gnostic associates (some of whom, to his obvious embarrassment, nevertheless remained among his personal *philoi*). Therefore, while his expressed metaphysical doctrines would have diverged from the Gnostics in important ways, these deeper, more intractable patterns of thought and vision certainly persisted, and they may be discerned lurking within—and indeed vivifying—his mystical schema. Whatever the case may have been, this surprising proximity between Plotinus and the Gnostics challenges a common assumption about the boundary between the philosophical and ritual spheres of late antiquity. In the concluding chapter (Ch. 5) that follows, we will reexamine the biographical, social, and religio-historical aspects of this boundary in greater detail.



## Conclusion: Dissolving Boundaries

### 1 Introduction

Among the many unnamed interlocutors and philosophical opponents that tacitly populate the *Enneads*, Plotinus seems to have singled out the Gnostics for particular criticism, devoting at least one entire treatise—11.9[33], and possibly the entire *Großschrift*<sup>1</sup>—to a severe and even sometimes indignant dissection of their doctrines.<sup>2</sup> The importance of this particular debate for Plotinus is underscored by the fact that it is the sole example of a sustained polemic against a philosophical rival anywhere in his writings. The impetus for this was apparently provided by the presence of Gnostic sectaries somewhere on the periphery of Plotinus's circle, who proffered copies of various apocalypses, including those of “Zoroaster and Zostrianos and Nikotheus and Allogenes and Messos and others of the kind,” as Porphyry writes in chapter 16 of his *Life of Plotinus*. [See Appendix D1]. Moreover, (as Porphyry recounts), Plotinus assigned to his senior pupils the task of refuting particular Gnostic tractates, a task which Amelius seems to have taken particularly seriously, writing 40 books against *Zostrianos* alone.<sup>3</sup> Yet that Plotinus's circle made such a concerted effort to refute the Gnostics suggests that they felt threatened not by their absolute otherness but rather by their uncomfortable proximity. Indeed, despite Plotinus's self-proclaimed opposition to these sectaries, we have already seen that his account of contemplative ascent towards and union with the One—the central goal of his spiritual life and thought—corresponds far too closely to that found in Platonizing Sethian tractates to have developed independently, and that the essential features of his mystical doctrine are

1 Or even an entire “*Großzyklus*,” which, according to Narbonne 2008, would extend well beyond the treatises of the *Großschrift* and cover all periods of Plotinus's literary production.

2 Many suggestions of the identity of the precise Gnostic sect he has in mind; discussions include Puech 1960; Elsas 1975; Robinson 1977; Pearson 1978; Igal 1981; Abramowski 1983a; Alt 1990; Tardieu 1992; Corrigan 2000b.

3 If this number (40) is not an idiom for “many,” it is significant. The long-winded Amelius seems to have written one hundred books compiled from the minutes of Plotinus's classes (Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 3.46–47). Does this mean he devoted two-fifths of his literary output to *Zostrianos*, and only one-fifth more than that to Plotinus? For his part, Porphyry—who seems to have been obsessed with text-criticism and especially with problems of forgery (e.g., Eusebius, *Preparatio evangelica* 10.3)—set his sights on proving the (lost) Gnostic apocalypse of Zoroaster was a late fabrication.

foreshadowed in a wide variety of Gnostic thought. We are therefore ineluctably drawn towards the conclusion that Plotinus developed his mystical schema in extremely close dialogue with Gnostics of some sort, perhaps the immediate antecedents of the apocalypse-bearing Platonizing Sethians on the periphery of his circle.

The depth of the correspondence between Plotinus and the Gnostics has not generally been recognized. Although it has long been noted that they hold certain doctrines in common, the opposition evident in 11.9[33] has often been taken to be a paradigmatic or defining feature of this relationship. It is generally believed that Plotinus emerged—under the tutelage of Ammonius Saccas—as a staunch Platonist, in sharp contrast with the Christians and Gnostics in his milieu. According to this narrative, having settled in Rome in about 245, Plotinus taught relatively unopposed until about the mid-260s, at which point the appearance of Gnostics among his peripheral auditors brought the previously latent conflict to the surface and obliged Plotinus to write the *Großschrift*, presumably to protect his inner circle of students from the risk of ‘infection’ from these noxious, but possibly nevertheless tempting, doctrines: doctrines which impugned both the Demiurge and the cosmos he created but also—what is worse—Plato himself, for not having “attained to the depth of intelligible substance.”<sup>4</sup> This conventional narrative assumes that the interaction between Plotinus and the Gnostics was one of brief and often antagonistic encounters between discrete entities whose categorical distinction, supposedly so self-evident in historical retrospect, would have similarly been self-evident in their own time. Yet by now, we have seen this to be untenable; the reality of this relationship must have been far more complex. Whatever the exact historical circumstances—and these we may never determine with any certainty—I would suggest that our understanding of the nature of Plotinus’s mysticism has been impeded by the common assumption of two discrete categorical boundaries: specifically, (a) that between Platonists and Gnostics in Plotinus’s milieu, and, more generally, (b) that between philosophical contemplation and ritual praxis.

## 2 Platonists and Gnostics in Alexandria and Rome: Biographical and Socio-historical Reflections

In this section, I would like to present the hypothesis that Plotinus’s worldview, at least in his youth, was very close to—or indeed, indistinguishable

4 For this translation of *pelēsantes* and *ousia*, Tardieu 1992, 522 n. 44 who takes this as a quote from *Tri. Trac.* NHC I 60.16ff.

from—the unbounded category of religio-philosophical systems called “Gnosticism.” Moreover, I would suggest that the evidence for Plotinus’s own engagement with Gnostic ideas points not towards an accidental encounter between discrete entities, but rather towards an initial unity followed by emergence, self-definition, and separation: a pattern that precisely resembles—amusingly—the mechanism by which both Plotinus and the Platonizing Sethians believed the unbounded efflux of the transcendent principle to distinguish itself from its source. What we can discern of Plotinus’s own development suggests that at one point in time he underwent a discrete break with a shadowy past, a past he had probably shared with the Alexandrian predecessors of his Gnostic adversaries in Rome. In other words—to continue the unfortunate nosological metaphor—I would suggest that Plotinus’s subliminal Gnostic affinities were ‘congenital’ rather than ‘acquired.’

### 2.1 *Plotinus’s Alexandrian Education*

The most plausible explanation for Plotinus’s apparent familiarity with Gnostic visionary ascent is that he had some exposure to Gnostic thought during his youth and education in Alexandria. Yet at this point, we confront the paucity of information—or rather, a deliberate shroud of obscurity—about Plotinus’ past. The principal source is chapter 3 of Porphyry’s *Life of Plotinus*. [See Appendix D2]. This biography is, by all accounts, a fascinating but deeply problematic document, closer to the genre of late antique hagiography than what we normally think of as biography, every sentence of which rewards careful scrutiny and yields many layers of meaning, often as much about its author as its putative subject.<sup>5</sup> Now according to Porphyry, Plotinus revealed nothing about his parentage, his native country, or—with one crucial exception—his early years.<sup>6</sup> Porphyry’s account of his teacher’s education only begins when Plotinus decided to study philosophy in his 28th year (in about 233 CE) and obtained a formal introduction to the teachers with the best reputation in Alexandria. According to Porphyry, Plotinus was disappointed by his experience among the Alexandrian intelligentsia (no reason is provided) and he consequently fell into a deep depression.<sup>7</sup> In any case, at this point, a friend of Plotinus “recognized the wish of his soul” and recommended him to the largely enigmatic figure of Ammonius Saccas. Immediately upon hearing Ammonius

5 On Porphyry’s hagiographic style, Blumenthal 1971. On all aspects of this text, Brisson *et al.* 1992.

6 According to Eunapius (*Lives of the Philosophers* 455 Boissonade), he was born in Lyco[polis], presumably in Upper Egypt. The date was probably 205 CE.

7 This anecdote is possibly a *topos* of late antique spiritual seeking; we are reminded, curiously, of both Porphyry’s and Zostrianos’s near-suicidal crises of melancholy. On the common theme of dissatisfaction with Alexandrian teachers, see Whittaker 1997, 162–3.

lecture, Plotinus declared: “This is the one I was seeking!”, and thereafter remained with Ammonius continuously for eleven years. Despite Plotinus’s evidently momentous conversion-experience, Porphyry says nothing at all about Plotinus’s activities during this period, nor about Ammonius himself, nor, strangely enough, about the content of the latter’s teaching. One may presume this is because Plotinus himself told his pupils nothing about this. Porphyry mentions only that at the conclusion of his studies under Ammonius, Plotinus “had acquired such ingrained training (*hexis*) in philosophy as also to be eager to try to acquire that which was practiced by the Persians and that which was proper among the Indians.” For this reason, in his 39th year, Plotinus joined a military expedition against Persia under the Emperor Gordian, intending to travel eastward to research Persian and Indian thought. The mission failed; Gordian was killed, and Plotinus barely escaped via Antioch. In his 40th year, in about 245 CE, Plotinus arrived in Rome and began to teach.

## 2.2 *A Plausible Hypothesis*

This exiguous account of Plotinus’s early life leaves two windows of possibility for a substantial encounter with Gnostic ideas and practices. Such an encounter could have occurred either (i) prior to his decision to study philosophy and/or his first meeting with Ammonius; or instead (ii) once he was already under the tutelage of Ammonius. The possibility that Plotinus was only exposed to Gnostic ideas during his initial period in Rome prior to writing anything must be rejected because one would not expect a substantial Gnostic influence on such an important aspect of Plotinus’s thought at the height of his intellectual maturity and once he was already teaching; moreover the Platonizing Sethian tractates read in his circle during the 260s could not have had an influence on his earlier writings. The period of the abortive expedition to the Orient (and thence via Antioch to Rome) lasted less than a year and would not have allowed sufficient time for any serious scholarly or spiritual pursuits. Likewise, the final possibility—that Plotinus had been exposed to Gnostic ideas during his disappointing circuit of the Alexandrian intelligentsia—is also exceedingly unlikely because this period of seeking lasted under one year and the time spent under any one teacher would have been insufficient to have left such a mark on the development of his thought. Since we know nothing about Plotinus’s first 28 years—save one crucial anecdote, to which we will return—it remains a plausible (yet unverifiable) possibility that his acculturation into Gnostic ideas occurred during this period, during his earlier education, or through his parents. But could Ammonius himself, or his entourage, have been Plotinus’s Gnostic source?

At first glance, this would seem unlikely. The common interpretation is that Ammonius—who is explicitly called a Platonist<sup>8</sup>—was responsible for Plotinus's philosophical 'conversion' to Platonism; moreover, that Plotinus's discovery of and studies with Ammonius—his true spiritual guide—were the most important influence on his life; and, finally, that it was upon the substantial foundation provided by this mysterious yet undoubtedly eminent thinker that Plotinus's creative brilliance initially flourished and continued to be informed.<sup>9</sup> This narrative of continuity accords well with the Neoplatonic myth of an unbroken golden chain of transmission leading back to Plato and Pythagoras. However, just beneath the surface of Porphyry's apparently glowing portrayal of Ammonius—an attitude which has been uncritically adopted by modern interpreters—, there lurks a somewhat darker counter-narrative that runs diametrically quite opposite to that which Porphyry intends to convey. Specifically, Porphyry's text yields several hints (possibly unrecognized by Porphyry himself) to the effect that the long period Plotinus spent with Ammonius was fraught with anxiety; that in leaving both Ammonius and Alexandria, Plotinus was making a deliberate break with a past about which he had some degree of remorse, shame, or embarrassment; and that once he had arrived in Rome, he attempted to conceal or deny a past whose influence nevertheless tacitly persisted. This unexplained rupture with Ammonius and his Alexandrian past is consistent with the possibility that Ammonius was the source for the tacit Gnostic conceptual structures that we have seen to be so deeply interwoven with Plotinus's own thought.

To explore this hypothesis, let us imagine the following scenario: first, that [1] Ammonius's own thought stood in a far closer relation to that of the Gnostics than has previously been supposed, and that Plotinus shared an education in some sort of Gnostic thought; that [2] for some indeterminate reason, Plotinus eventually came to be ashamed of these doctrines and thus renounced some or all of them, and, along with some fellow pupils, decided to make a clean break with his past; and finally, that [3] once he had established himself in Rome, Plotinus adopted a purely Platonic identity over and against the Gnostics, and came to lecture against them with a fervor only an apostate could summon, while [4] nevertheless retaining—either deliberately or unconsciously—other aspects of their teachings, and in particular their model of visionary ascent and union with the transcendent principle. This scenario is

8 Longinus, *apud* Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 20.36–37.

9 Thus, according to Porphyry (*Vit. Plot.* 14.15–16), Plotinus "brought the intellect of Ammonius to the inquiries at hand."

far more consistent with the available evidence than the somewhat rosier picture that is portrayed on the surface of Porphyry's account. One should keep in mind, however, that it is not my intention to prove this biographical conjecture, but simply to offer it as one plausible hypothesis—largely *ex silentio*—of how Plotinus might have come to hold ideas about mystical ascent that, as we have seen, are so profoundly suffused with Gnostic thought, while paradoxically repudiating the Gnostics themselves.

### 2.3 *The Enigma of Ammonius Saccas*

Let us begin with Ammonius. Virtually everything about Ammonius Saccas remains mysterious. Despite many attempts to reconstruct his doctrines, nothing may be concluded with any certainty.<sup>10</sup> That he had Gnostic proclivities therefore cannot be ruled out. Longinus identifies him as a Platonist, but this does not exclude Gnostic tendencies; Valentinus himself, for example, was also considered a Platonist.<sup>11</sup> It is also significant that neither Plotinus nor Porphyry mentions anything about the content of his doctrines nor about his own philosophical or spiritual lineage.<sup>12</sup> Porphyry's silence on this matter is probably due to the fact that Plotinus himself did not specify what precisely he learned from Ammonius. It is tempting to compare Ammonius to the ancient agraphic sage, on the model of Socrates or Pythagoras, who supposedly committed nothing to writing, but about whom a great deal was written. However, this comparison should probably be resisted, for unlike the other examples, Ammonius not only did not write, he is also veiled in an awkward historical silence.<sup>13</sup> Why is this?

### 2.4 *The Pact of Secrecy*

One possible reason for the silence concerning at least Ammonius's philosophical thought is that it was deliberately kept secret. We learn from Porphyry

10 These attempts have been analyzed in Schroeder 1987. Tidbits supposedly preserved in doxographers include Middle Platonic commonplaces (even these are rejected by Schroeder): [a] from Hierocles, *Peri Pronoias* (a suggestively-titled—see Ch. 4, *Pronoein and Pronoia*, pp. 213–217. *supra*—but lost work, *apud* Photius, *Bibl.* 172a3; 461a31; 173a20), that he taught the concord of Plato and Aristotle (not unlikely given Porphyry's observation that the *Metaphysics* are condensed into the *Enneads*); [b] from Nemesius of Emesa (*De natura hominis* 2.129.9–11 Matthaëi) the immortality of the soul. In the absence of positive evidence, Dillon 1977, 383 is led to conclude that Ammonius is “little more than a charismatic purveyor of Numenian Neopythagoreanism.”

11 E.g., Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresiorum* 6.29.1.6.

12 By contrast, Porphyry tells us that Plotinus's teacher was Ammonius, Amelius came from the school of Lysimachus, and Olympius studied with Ammonius.

13 Precisely these sentiments are reflected at 11.9[33].10.3–5 in his mention of his Gnostic *philoï*.

that Plotinus made a pact of secrecy with two fellow students—Erennius and Origen—not to reveal Ammonius's doctrines. However, Porphyry's account of the pact of secrecy is far from straightforward, and leaves it unclear what precisely would constitute a violation of the agreement: specifically, whether the pact referred only to writing or even to oral transmission, and whether it concerned all of Ammonius's teachings or only specific doctrines. Porphyry claims that all three pupils eventually violated the pact, but that Plotinus was the last to do so, and that he lectured for ten years without revealing Ammonian doctrines.<sup>14</sup> One might reasonably wonder just how important Ammonian doctrines could have been for Plotinus's education if Plotinus could teach for a decade without revealing any of his teacher's thoughts. This suggests that the pact involved only specific doctrines and not the entirety of Ammonius's teaching, and Porphyry's phraseology would also seem to tip the balance slightly in favor of the opinion that the pact involved the interdiction of oral as well as written transmission. Now the pact of secrecy has generally been taken as an indication of the esoteric nature of Ammonius's teachings, and possibly also to reflect some Pythagorean tendency towards esotericism, with venerable precedent in the accounts of secrecy among the early Pythagoreans and of course Plato's notorious "unwritten doctrines."<sup>15</sup> The three co-disciples—Plotinus, Erennius, and Origen—would, therefore, have constituted Ammonius's innermost circle, privy to esoteric teachings not revealed in public lectures or to a larger and less exclusive circle of auditors. This is also consistent with a Gnostic hypothesis; among contemporaneous Valentinians, for instance, esoteric doctrines reserved for the Elect were concealed from novices and revealed only progressively.<sup>16</sup> But there are other possibilities: for example, the secrecy might have concerned not doctrines as such but practices, such as, perhaps, the contemplative ascent to the One, or conceivably the kind of ritual praxis of the sort that is hinted at by Plotinus's utterance that perplexes Porphyry and his fellow students when the teacher declined Amelius's invitation to sacrifice at the New Moon: "[The gods] must come to me, not I to them."<sup>17</sup> Yet it seems there may

14 O'Brien 1993 suggests that Porphyry deliberately obfuscates in his attempt to exonerate Plotinus.

15 The notion of esoteric teachings reserved for a small inner circle of students and more general lectures given to a wider audience has Pythagorean precedent; thus Watts 2006, 157.

16 Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.9.12; Tertullian, *Adversus Valentinianos* 1.16–18; cf. also Dunderberg 2008, 191–5, who compares Valentinian secrecy to that of Ammonius.

17 Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 10.35–36.

have been other motives for secrecy as well.<sup>18</sup> For it was not Ammonius himself who had demanded his doctrines be kept secret; instead, Porphyry says that it was a voluntary decision on the part of the three pupils. It is therefore also possible, but by no means exclusive of the first possibility, that the three co-disciples may have come to feel embarrassment at some of their master's doctrines and therefore sought to keep them secret. One might even imagine that some simultaneous combination of all these factors played a role in the pact.

### 2.5 *Ammonius's Secret Doctrines*

What might such doctrines have been? Attempts have been made to deduce Ammonius's doctrines by triangulation from the thought of Plotinus and that of Ammonius's other known students.<sup>19</sup> These others include Erennius, (about whom nothing is known), Origen, and Longinus, under whom Porphyry seems to have studied prior to his arrival in Plotinus's school.<sup>20</sup>

### 2.6 *Longinus*

Longinus claims to have attended the schools of both Ammonius and of Origen for a long time, but one may reasonably doubt he was a member of Ammonius's inner circle,<sup>21</sup> both because he is not party to the pact of secrecy, but more importantly, because he comes across, at least at first glance, as a conventional-minded Middle Platonist who initially objected to Plotinus's ideas.<sup>22</sup> He seems to have been the one responsible for teaching the young Porphyry the 'heretical' doctrine of extranoetic intelligibles (i.e., precisely those positions of which Plotinus and Amelius felt obliged to disabuse Porphyry upon his arrival in Rome, possibly because of their Gnostic connotations, but of which they themselves might have been guilty of holding in one form or another).<sup>23</sup> Even after Porphyry changed his mind and attempted to persuade his former teacher just as he himself had been persuaded, Longinus persisted in holding

18 Moreover, one wonders what would be the point of an extensive philosophical training that could not be transmitted to others at all; even Plato's putative unwritten doctrines were still communicated orally to an inner circle of disciples.

19 Prior scholarship is surveyed in Schroeder 1987.

20 Eunapius, *Lives of the Philosophers* 455–56 Boissonade.

21 Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 20.37–38. As Watts 2006, 154 n. 74 points out, the verb he uses, *prosephoitēsamen*, implies only a casual apprenticeship and indicates he was not in Ammonius's innermost circle of disciples.

22 E.g., Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 19–20. On Longinus's adherence to the typical Middle Platonic separation of the Forms and the divine Intellect, Dillon 1977, 255–56. The current weight of opinion would tip the balance slightly in favor of distinguishing him from Dionysius Longinus, author of *On the Sublime*, who seems to have been somewhat earlier.

23 Cf. Corrigan 1987, 981–84.



this doctrine of extranoetic intelligibles.<sup>24</sup> There is no certain connection with Gnostic thought, but it is nevertheless intriguing that the Platonizing Sethians posited a derivational scheme whereby inferior strata emerge from the self-thinking of superior ones, leading to a multiplication of intellects, and it seems to be this doctrine that Plotinus attacks in the first chapter of his anti-Gnostic treatise (11.9[33].1).

## 2.7 *Origen*

The current consensus appears to be that the Origen who studied alongside Plotinus in Ammonius's inner circle should not be identified with the homonymous Christian Father whose extensive works are well known,<sup>25</sup> even though the Christian Origen may also have attended a few of Ammonius's lectures.<sup>26</sup> We are left with only two pieces of evidence concerning the Pagan Origen. The first is a passage of Proclus, who expresses surprise that Origen, who had the same education as Plotinus, did *not* similarly arrive at the idea of a One beyond Being and Intellect.<sup>27</sup> Proclus's implication, then, is that Plotinus *had* in fact derived the doctrine of the transcendent One from Ammonius.<sup>28</sup> This is consistent with the hypothesis of Ammonius's Gnostic affinity, since many Gnostic systems posited a hypertranscendent first principle, and we have seen that Plotinus's conception of the ascent to and apprehension of that principle parallels that of the Gnostics.

The second piece of evidence concerning the Pagan Origen consists of the titles of two of his (lost) books, *On the Daimones* and *That The King is the Only Creator*, whose publication violated the pact of secrecy. If these books constituted a violation of the pact, the obvious implication is that they contained Ammonian doctrines. What can we determine from the titles alone? On the one hand, a treatise on demonology is not by itself an indication of any affinity with Gnosticism, since Plotinus himself as well as many other non-Gnostic Platonists wrote on demons.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, the title *That the King is the Only Creator* itself suggests at first impression, not a Gnostic tractate but quite the opposite, a *refutation* of the typical Gnostic distinction between the transcendent first deity and the inferior creator-deity (or the Demiurge

24 The account of the exchange between Porphyry and his former teacher, in the form of a letter from Longinus to Porphyry, occurs at *Vit. Plot.* 20.86–21.23.

25 For a detailed survey of the scholarship on the question, see Schroeder 1987, 494–509.

26 Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 6.19.1–12, 6.19.6.

27 Proclus, *Theologica Platonica* 2.4.

28 This is the one positive assertion about Ammonius admitted by Schroeder 1987.

29 It is interesting (but entirely inconclusive) that in his anti-Gnostic treatise (11.9[33]) Plotinus criticizes the Gnostics precisely for their view of demons.

of the *Timaeus*).<sup>30</sup> In this case, one may presume the essence of the argument is that a single demiurgic creative principle is the ultimate source of both intelligible and sensible realms.<sup>31</sup> If, on the one hand, we suppose that this treatise was in fact a repudiation of Gnostic doctrine, we may wonder in what manner it revealed Ammonius's secret teachings. It is, of course, possible that Ammonius was himself opposed to the Gnostic demotion of Plato's Demiurge, and that Origen violates the pact simply by reporting Ammonius's anti-Gnostic position. Yet it seems unlikely that a notion so mundane could be treated as esoteric doctrine. So if, on the other hand, we suppose that Ammonius himself distinguished the Demiurge from the first deity in the Gnostic manner, Origen's treatise might have violated the pact by revealing Ammonius's doctrines not by propounding them but instead by refuting them.<sup>32</sup> And if we accept this, then it is also possible to understand Plotinus's many attacks on Gnostic ideas throughout his works—including but not limited to the *Großschrift*—to constitute his own parallel violation of the pact: i.e., through the refutation of Ammonius's doctrine; although here we may still be uncertain whether Porphyry was aware of what precise doctrines comprised the violation. In other words, according to this interpretation, the three apostate students would have agreed not to reveal certain aspects of their former master's thought that they had conjointly rejected.

Conversely—and more speculatively—it is also possible that *That the King is the Only Creator* does not attack Gnostic positions, but rather puts forwards more positive arguments for a certain type of Gnostic protology. Gnostic theologians committed to transcendental monism would have been keenly aware of the problem posed by the apparently pre-existent material substrate mentioned in traditional Biblical and Platonic accounts of ontogenesis.<sup>33</sup> Complex derivational schemata—including the primordial self-reversion (PSR) schema we have seen—were devised in order to exculpate the first principle from complicity in the deliberate production of these inferior ontological strata,<sup>34</sup>

30 The "King" (*basileus*) is taken from Plato's *Epistulae* ii, 312d–e.

31 On this basis Dillon 1977, 382–83 concludes that Ammonius did not posit a transcendent One.

32 The close association between exposing and refuting doctrine has some precedent in the works of the Patristic heresiologists, whose detailed elaborations of heretical doctrine may have served at least as much to expose as to refute them; the mere fact that esoteric teachings were widely known would make them less attractive to potential converts.

33 E.g., the enigmatic "waters" of Gen. 1:1–10 and / or the wet-nurse and "receptacle" (*hupodoche*) of becoming in Plato, *Timaeus* 49a6.

34 This schema was itself probably a response to Middle Platonic and Neopythagorean derivational schemata like that of Eudorus of Alexandria which attributed the generation of

and to obviate the need for a second principle co-eternal with the first.<sup>35</sup> Both Plotinus and the Platonizing Sethians solved this problem by positing an indefinite prenoetic power that gushes forth ‘naturally’ from the “only creator”—i.e., from the first principle conceived as the ultimate source of everything—before reverting upon its source; this unbounded principle, which is both identical and different from the first, is then responsible for the generation of lower strata, including matter itself. An argument *That the King is the Only Creator* might, therefore, defend precisely this kind of system,<sup>36</sup> while rejecting those dualistic systems which posit separate principles respectively responsible for the generation of intelligible and sensible reality.<sup>37</sup> And if this is correct, although this would be at variance with Proclus’s evidence for the non-transcendental nature of Origen’s first principle, it would provide some indication that Ammonius was the source of a doctrine of a hypertranscendent One: a doctrine, interestingly enough, that requires a rich conception of the interhypostatic domain and processes mediating between the first and second principles. The hypothesis that some doctrine concerning the prenoetic or interhypostatic domain was one element of Ammonius’s secret doctrines—kept secret also perhaps because of its Platonizing Sethian connotation<sup>38</sup>—would go some way towards explaining both Plotinus’s development of, and reticence about, the interhypostatic PNE (as we have seen repeatedly throughout Chapter 3), and also, perhaps, his evident embarrassment at having revealed too much about intelligible matter at II.4[12].5.37–39.

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matter directly to the supreme One; thus Simplicius, *In Aristotelis physicorum libros octo commentaria*. 181.10ff. Diels, on which see Dillon 1977, 126–29.

35 As in Manichaeism and in certain varieties of classic proto-Sethianism, e.g., *Orig. World* NHC II 97.24–99.22; *Paraph. Shem* (NHC VII,1); Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresiorum* 5.19–22.

36 It could even be in accord with systems which, like those of Plotinus and the Platonizing Sethians, distinguished the first transcendent principle (the One, the Invisible Spirit) from the inferior principles directly responsible for the cosmos (the Soul or Demiurge). Earlier Sethian, Valentinian, and Platonizing Sethian systems all typically distinguish between the creator-deity and the pleromatic transcendentalia, but explain the derivation of the former from the latter.

37 An example of a system against which Origen’s treatise might be reacting would be that of the Middle Platonists Plutarch and Atticus, who posited (according to Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria* 1.381.26) a Maleficent Soul (*katergetis psuchē*) that subsisted independently from the Demiurge and was responsible for the generation of matter. Note also that in Numenius’s system the second and third gods might also be thought to derive from the first (the Father), but this is not emphasized in the extant fragments.

38 Corrigan 2000b suggests that Plotinus’s theory of matter was developed in dialogue with the Platonizing Sethians.

### 2.8 *Excursus on Intelligible Matter in Ammonius's School*

Could, then, intelligible matter too have been a secret doctrine of Ammonius?<sup>39</sup> Three additional pieces of (admittedly tenuous) evidence also connect a doctrine of intelligible matter both with the Gnostics in Plotinus's immediate vicinity and with Ammonius. We have seen that [a] Porphyry names an Aculinus as one of the teachers of the apocalypse-bearing Gnostic sectaries in Plotinus's milieu. [b] A passage of Joannes Lydus's *De mensibus* attributes to an Aculinus an elaborate allegory in which Hermes's mother Maia corresponds to the procession of intelligible matter.<sup>40</sup> [c] In Eunapius's garbled account of Plotinus's school, an Aculinus is placed alongside Origen and Porphyry as one of Plotinus's—not Ammonius's—students. While it is possible that the Pagan Origen visited one of Plotinus's classes, in no reasonable sense could he be called Plotinus's student. M. J. Edwards (1993) therefore has suggested that Eunapius has confused Plotinus's classmates under Ammonius with his own pupils, and conjectures that the Gnostic Aculinus instead may have been a fellow disciple of Ammonius, along with Origen and Plotinus himself.<sup>41</sup> If correct, this would provide some additional grounds for suspicion, but certainly not proof, that intelligible matter was a secret doctrine of Ammonius, and it would also suggest an Ammonian source for the complex theories of interhypostatic processes that we have seen to be common to Plotinus and the Platonizing Sethians.

### 2.9 *Ammonius and Christianity*

Porphyry implies that Plotinus is recommended to Ammonius only *after* making the rounds of the well-respected (εὐδοκίμοισι) teachers of Alexandria. Ammonius was therefore not among them. Was he, as John Dillon has suggested, perhaps on the outer fringes of the Alexandrian philosophical establishment?<sup>42</sup> If so, one might speculate that it was because he had some

39 This opinion is, I believe, intimated cryptically by D. O'Brien 1992 and discussed in O'Brien 1994. The doctrine of intelligible matter also might be one of the implicit targets of the accusations levelled against Plotinus by the official Platonic 'Vatican' in Athens, namely that "the foundations of his system are the basest of all things."

40 It is interesting that in Aculinus' allegory, *Maia* corresponds to the prenoetic efflux, while we have seen that in Iamblichus's account of a peculiar Hermetic doctrine at *De mysteriis* 8.3 [262.10–263.5], the interhypostatic, prenoetic principle that we have seen (in Ch. 4) to be related to the Gnostic concept of *pronoëin* (τὸ πρῶτον ἐστὶ νοοῦν καὶ τὸ πρῶτον νοητὸν), is also known as the first *maieuma*, or "product of a midwife," which may possibly be related etymologically to the *Maia* (Hermes's mother) in Aculinus' allegory.

41 Note that there are also reasons to suspect that Eunapius's account is entirely dependent on an utter misreading of Porphyry. Further, the identification of the three Aculini has not been universally accepted, and is rejected by e.g., Tardieu 1992, 519.

42 Dillon 1977, 381, followed by Watts 2006, 156.

unfashionably close relationship with Christianity.<sup>43</sup> According to Eusebius, Porphyry claims that Ammonius was born a Christian but converted to Paganism; Eusebius counters that in fact he was born and remained a Christian until his death.<sup>44</sup> Both the Christian Origen and Heraclas, an Alexandrian bishop, may have attended his classes.<sup>45</sup> Ammonius's ambiguous but omnipresent association with Christianity is consistent with a Gnostic classification; we have seen that Porphyry describes the contemporaneous Gnostics as an elective subset (*hairetikoi*) of Christians who simultaneously "derived from" or possibly "deviated from" (*anegmēnoi*) the ancient philosophical schools.<sup>46</sup> The ambiguity surrounding Ammonius's Christianity, or apostasy therefrom, is thus analogous to the ambiguity of the complex logical relationship between the interlocking categories of Christianity, heresy, and philosophy in Porphyry's passage.<sup>47</sup> We may imagine overlapping categories of intellectual and spiritual identity—something like a complex Venn diagram—in which an individual could simultaneously belong to several superimposed sets at one point but could just as easily shift between sets over the course of a lifetime as older and less crystallized identities were replaced with newer, firmer ones.

#### 2.10 *Plotinus's Enigmatic Past*

Let us now turn to Plotinus himself. Plotinus says nothing about his parents or his native country and next to nothing about his youth. Porphyry does relate one anecdote about the eight-year-old Plotinus (I will return to this below), but for the two decades between Plotinus's eighth and his 28th year, when he encounters Ammonius, we are left completely in the dark. Porphyry suspects Plotinus's refusal to talk about his past is because of his teacher's shame at being in a body.<sup>48</sup> More recently it has been taken to imply that Plotinus experienced nothing comparable to the overwhelming significance of his meeting with

43 This has long been suspected. Langerbeck 1957, for instance, who conflated the two Origenes, concludes that Ammonius was a "secularized Christian philosopher." Eusebius (*Historia ecclesiastica* 6.19.10) says that he wrote a treatise on *The Harmony of Moses and Jesus*, disputed by Schroeder 1987.

44 Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 6.19.6–10, again disputed by Schroeder 1987.

45 Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 6.19.12–14.

46 According to Tardieu's analysis (1992, 509–17), the passage in Porphyry depends upon Christian heresiological categories.

47 Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 16.1–2: Γεγόνασι...τῶν Χριστιανῶν πολλοὶ μὲν καὶ ἄλλοι, αἰρετικοὶ δὲ ἐκ τῆς παλαιᾶς φιλοσοφίας ἀνηγγμένοι. The *men..de* construction refers to two subsets among the Christians, as Igal 1981 noted.

48 Importantly, this is not Plotinus's own opinion, but only Porphyry's interpretation; he says (*Vit. Plot.* 1.1) that Plotinus seemed (*eōkei*) to Porphyry to be ashamed of being in the body, not that Plotinus thus *described* himself.

Ammonius, which would simply have eclipsed his youth.<sup>49</sup> Could this silence not be more easily explained as Plotinus's attempt to conceal some shameful aspect of his familial background or his activities during his most formative years? After all, whether or not he referred to his past, his body would undoubtedly persist for all to see.

### 2.11 *Conflict with the School of Ammonius*

Although Porphyry says nothing directly about Ammonius's school, his discussion of Plotinus's contemporaries actually implies that a great deal of tension surrounded Plotinus's relations with his fellow students. [a] Olympius, who studied under Ammonius for a short time, became jealous and attempted to harm Plotinus with malicious astral magic. [b] When Origen appeared at one of Plotinus's classes in Rome, Plotinus became embarrassed and refused to continue, declaring that it is impossible to lecture if one's audience already knows what one will say. [c] Plotinus disparaged Longinus, who also studied under Ammonius, as a *philologos* but not a *philosophos*. Thus, Plotinus is clearly not at ease in the company of his former Ammonian co-disciples. Porphyry also reveals a substantial amount of tension between Plotinus's own Roman circle and other philosophical schools,<sup>50</sup> and also, more strikingly, within Plotinus's circle itself.<sup>51</sup> The evident anxiety surrounding Plotinus's scholastic

49 Thus Fowden and Fowden 2008, 94.

50 For some reason Plotinus seems to have run afoul of the official Platonic successors (*diadochoi*) in Athens, Theodotus and Eubulus, who repeatedly accuse Plotinus of plagiarism from Numenius, of being full of nonsense, or of positing the basest of fundamental principles. It is unclear why they were harrasing Plotinus, but it is evident that he was marginalized by the official Platonist establishment. In this light, the pact of secrecy also seems somewhat more ominous.

51 Porphyry relates several other anecdotes, too many to deal with in depth here, that suggest an inordinate amount of negativity, anxiety, and open conflict within and around Plotinus's circle. Briefly, some examples I have not previously mentioned include, *inter alia*, Plotinus's appalling disease and abandonment by his friends at the end of his life (2.1–20); the “nonsense” (*phluaria*) that plagued his classes (3.37); the anxiety surrounding publication (4.14–16); the torture of a slave who stole a necklace (11.1–8); the scuttling of Plotinus's plans to found Platonopolis by jealous courtiers (12.9–12); Thaumasias's annoyance with Porphyry's own obsessive questioning (13.12–17); the negative reaction of the school to Porphyry's scandalous mystical-erotic poem (15.1–6); Plotinus's self-righteous outrage at Diophanes' interpretation of the *Symposium* (15.6–12); and the otherwise harmless Longinus's loathing of Plotinus (20.4–5) and his scathing indictment of Amelius's pompous and un-Plotinian style (20.76–80); Porphyry's negative interpretation of the otherwise flattering hexametric oracle about Plotinus (22.35–39, 23.18–21); Porphyry's own near-suicidal depression and the master's gentle suggestion that he go ‘on vacation’ to Sicily, i.e., away from the school. And so on, and so on. No doubt there are many other examples. That the biography is far from anodyne hagiography and is rather

relationships is consistent with the hypothesis of an antagonistic rupture with his former life.

### 2.12 *Plotinus's Gnostic Friends*

Despite his vehement opposition to the Gnostics, Plotinus himself avows that he has certain Gnostic *philoï* for whom he has an abiding respect (or shame: *aidōs*). At one point in the course of his anti-Gnostic polemic, at 11.9[33].10.1–5, he restrains himself for the sake of these friends: “For I have some kind of reverence (*aidōs*) towards some of my friends, who encountered this [Gnostic] discourse prior to becoming my friends, though I don’t know how they keep to it.”<sup>52</sup> It is surely of profound significance that this passage is the unique instance of a reference to a specific personal relationship anywhere in Plotinus’s writings;<sup>53</sup> at no point does he make even a passing reference to his own students, to his teacher, or indeed to *any* other contemporary interlocutors.<sup>54</sup> The present tense of the verbs implies that these sectaries still remain his friends. We may wonder: why, if these unnamed *philoï* were *already* Gnostics when he met them, would he ever have befriended them in the first place?<sup>55</sup> The implication is that he was originally in agreement with these Gnostic sectaries when

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a narrative “plein de conflit et de misère” was first called to my attention by Jean-Marc Narbonne (in person) in 2009.

52 11.9[33].10.3–5: Αἰδῶς γὰρ τις ἡμᾶς ἔχει πρὸς τινὰς τῶν φίλων, οἱ τούτῳ τῷ λόγῳ ἐντυχόντες πρότερον ἢ ἡμῖν φίλοι γενέσθαι οὐκ οἶδ’ ὅπως ἐπ’ αὐτοῦ μένουσι.

53 Thus it is not Porphyry but Plotinus himself, interestingly, who supplies our single most important (and most secure) biographical datum. It is also intriguing that Plotinus himself never calls them *gnōstikoi*; this is Porphyry’s word.

54 By this I mean not only that there is no other mention of the proper *name* of one of his contemporaries, but that there is not even a *pronominal* reference to any specific contemporary individual. He does, of course, occasionally mention both generic philosophical rivals and eminent philosophical figures from the past by name. Note, however, that Plotinus occasionally uses the second person (probably addressing his inner circle of students) and in at least one important mystical passage (1v.8[6].1) refers to his own experience of ascent in the first person.

55 Attempts to argue that by using the term *philos*—a term with Pythagorean resonance—Plotinus actually means “disciple,” are entirely unsatisfactory; nowhere else does he use the term to mean anything other than friend; on this, see Sleeman-Pollet *Lexicon Plotinianum* 1083 and esp. 111.6[26].19.16. The same seems to be the case with Porphyry, who divides Plotinus’s students into the inner circle (*zēlotai*) and the casual hearers (*akroatai*)—on which see esp. Watts 2006, 160 n. 99—but does not refer to his students as *philoï*. Porphyry refers to Carterius, the painter friend (but clearly not a disciple) of Amelius as the latter’s *philos*; Amelius’s letter refers to Plotinus as a *hetairos*; Zethus the Arab, one of Plotinus’s oldest friends, is his *hetairos*; the Egyptian priest who performs the ritual evocation of Plotinus’s guardian *daimōn* is introduced to Plotinus by one of his *philoï*; etc.

he befriended them and that it was *he* who had apostatized from, and turned against, their shared doctrines. This is also circumstantially suggested by the context of the comment amidst what is nearly a late antique literary genre: the polemic of an apostate against a former system of belief.<sup>56</sup>

Yet there is more to be said on the identity of Plotinus's Gnostic *philoï*. They have usually been taken to be auditors on the periphery of Plotinus' circle in Rome, and are sometimes identified with the Adelphius and Aculinus mentioned by Porphyry.<sup>57</sup> In fact Porphyry's description in *Vita Plotini* 16 [Appendix D<sub>1</sub>] is too vague to merit the conventional certainty that any of these sectaries were themselves actually present at Plotinus's school.<sup>58</sup> Porphyry's passage implies that Aculinus and Adelphius are teachers, rather than students, and that it is their apocalypse-bearing disciples who are contemporaneous (*kat' auton*) with Plotinus.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, granting that it is the followers of Aculinus and Adelphius who are Plotinus's contemporaries and not necessarily these heresiarchs themselves, it is still unclear whether they were physically present at the school, since the *kat' auton* refers not only to the *hairetikoi*, but to *all* of the Christians, the *polloi men kai alloi*, who were certainly not all present at Plotinus's lectures.<sup>60</sup> So it is *possible* that Gnostic followers of Aculinus and Adelphius also attended Plotinus's classes (or even that these named individuals did),<sup>61</sup> and we might accept the notion that Gnostic treatises became available to Plotinus's school sometime in the 260s, more or less coincident

56 Examples include, *inter alia*, Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone* 2–6; Bardaisan of Edessa's lost anti-Valentinian writings (apud Theodoret of Cyrus, *Haereticarum fabularum compendium* 1.22; Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 4.30.3); the Emperor Julian, *Against the Galilaeans*; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 26.17.4–9; Augustine, *Contra epistolam Manichaei* 3.

57 E.g., by A. Smith 1987.

58 Assumed without comment for instance in A. Smith 1987, 762.

59 Porphyry uses the familiar construction *hoi peri* so-and-so that can refer both to the contemporaneous entourage and also to the more geographically and temporally distant followers of a given teacher or founder of a school or sect (οἱ περὶ Ἀδελφίου καὶ Ἀκυλίνου).

60 One question is whether we should trust a passage of Eunapius (*Lives of the Philosophers*, 457 Boissonade), who (mis)quotes Porphyry to the effect that Aculinus is a student of Plotinus along with Porphyry himself, "Amerius" [sic], and Origen. Given that this passage is, by Eunapius's own admission, a paraphrase of Porphyry himself, and also that it has the more obvious inaccuracy of making Origen Plotinus's student, this probably should be rejected as a garbled misreading of Porphyry's own account without any independent source. "Amerius" (from *amereia*, "indivisibility") is Plotinus's nickname for Amelius; Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 7.3–5. That this is based on Porphyry is further supported by the fact that Eunapius proudly points out the one fact about Plotinus that he knows but that Porphyry does not mention: namely, Plotinus's place of birth (*Lives of the Philosophers*, 455 Boissonade).

61 If they did so, we may wonder why. According to the hypotheses of Turner 2001 and now Rasimus 2010, the Sethians gradually moved into the orbit of Academic Platonism after



with the arrival of Porphyry, and obligated Plotinus to refute them in the *Großschrift*; but quite plainly Porphyry does not say, as is often claimed, that Gnostic sectaries ever attended Plotinus's classes. Indeed, the prevalence of the erroneous interpretation has encouraged the implausible (if not utterly preposterous) notion that the *Vorlagen* of the extant Coptic translations of Platonizing Sethian tractates were not those read in Plotinus's circle but were newer versions that had been revised by Plotinus's putative Gnostic auditors to take Plotinus's (and Porphyry's) critiques into account. In any event, whether or not these Gnostics were ever physically present, one thing of which we can be certain is that their treatises circulated readily among Plotinus's entourage.<sup>62</sup>

But there is also another, stronger possibility: could these unnamed *philoi*, for whom Plotinus still has some reverence, in fact refer to certain Gnostic associates from Plotinus's Alexandrian past, or even to Ammonius himself and / or members of his entourage? That Plotinus's anti-Gnostic writings are not directed at the Gnostics themselves is indicated by his occasional addresses to his readers in 11.9[33] with the second person, while the Gnostics are always referred to in the third person, and with a kind of rhetorical vitriol that one would not expect him to use if the target—his friends—were in his immediate presence. In fact he is explicit that this discourse is not for the Gnostics but for his immediate pupils; thus immediately after mentioning his Gnostic *philoi*, he insists: "We have spoken to [our] intimate pupils (*gnōrimous*), not to them [i.e., the Gnostics]."<sup>63</sup> This possibility that he is referring to Ammonius's circle becomes more intriguing if we note that one of the few other places where Plotinus evokes this kind of hesitation and self-restraint is at the conclusion of his furtive discussion of intelligible matter—also, as we have seen, conceivably an Ammonian doctrine—at 11.4[12].5-37-39: "And by this, *more than is appropriate has been revealed* about intelligible matter."<sup>64</sup> Both passages—the

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a gradual estrangement from Christian circles. The real question, however, if indeed they did attend Plotinus's seminar, why would they choose him in particular?

62 It is possible these treatises were deliberately circulated by these sectaries to proselytize their own views or to lure away Plotinus's students. That such writings were easily accessible to the students is evident not only from Porphyry *Vit. Plot.* 16 but also from Plotinus's casual suggestion, at the conclusion of an exasperated diatribe about Gnostic demonology in 11.9[33].14, that his students investigate the remainder of their doctrines for themselves.

63 11.9[33].10.8: ἀλλ' ἡμεῖς πρὸς τοὺς γνωρίμους, οὐ πρὸς αὐτοὺς λέγοντες.

64 One other possible instance occurs in the short treatise *On Dialectic* (apparently one of his rare concessions to this Platonic commonplace), where he refers to two stages of the ascent, one consisting of the ascent to the intelligible, the other, to the ultimate phase of ascent (which, as at VI.9[9].11.45, he calls "the end of the journey"); discussion of this final stage, he says, "should be made to wait."

only of the kind in the *Enneads*—may be subtle allusions to the pact of secrecy surrounding Ammonius's (Gnostic) doctrines.

### 2.13 *Problems Surrounding Porphyry's Relation to Gnosticism*

A word here must be said about Porphyry. It has been suggested that the arrival of Porphyry—supposedly an anti-Christian *par excellence*—was the factor that precipitated the Gnostic 'crisis' of the mid-260s: i.e., that it was Porphyry's insistence that had motivated Plotinus to write the *Großschrift* and to encourage his senior pupils to do likewise.<sup>65</sup> Yet not only is this hypothesis *a priori* unlikely—we know, of course, that it was the young Porphyry who had to be set straight by Plotinus and Amelius, not the other way around—but it is also unnecessary, since if I am correct, long before Porphyry's arrival, Plotinus had already attempted, however incompletely, to purge his thought and writing of any explicitly Gnostic terminology and to veil it with an opaque veneer of language drawn from Plato and other purely Hellenic authorities. That is to say, an engagement with, and argument against, Gnostic thought is already present in his early period, and this cannot be explained by Porphyrian influence. But still, why the sudden crisis in the 260s? One might rather suppose—if my suspicions about Porphyry are correct—that it was the arrival in Plotinus's circle of a young man saturated with Christian and especially Gnostic thought—that is, Porphyry himself—which had precipitated the crisis. That is to say, one might easily imagine Plotinus's exasperation at the appearance in his inner circle of a pupil infatuated with the very same kind of ideas of which he himself had earlier struggled so intensely to rid himself in his youth. And one might further imagine that the mature Porphyry, having been entirely re-educated into the newly-purified Plotinian Platonism, would have been ashamed of his youthful Gnostic tendencies and therefore neglected to mention them in the *Vita Plotini*, emphasizing instead the relatively minor issue of extranoetic intelligibles, while nevertheless failing to conceal entirely the Gnostic associations of this very same idea.

### 2.14 *Plotinus's Decisive Break with His Past*

Porphyry strains to portray Plotinus's decision to leave Ammonius—and thus to undertake the (eventually abortive) expedition to Persia and India—in a positive light, insisting that his desire for the acquisition of Oriental wisdom was a result of his having acquired such an ingrained training (*hexis*) in philosophy under Ammonius.<sup>66</sup> No mention is made of Ammonius's death, which

65 Thus Rasimus 2010.

66 Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 3.14–15: τοσαύτην ἔξιν ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ κτήσασθαι.

suggests the possibility that Plotinus's departure preceded it.<sup>67</sup> Porphyry may have felt obligated to provide an explanation to counteract the suspicion that Plotinus's departure may have been for some other, less positive reason, such as a change of heart or dissatisfaction with his master's teachings (as Porphyry himself would possibly have experienced in the case of his own former teacher, Longinus, prior to his arrival in Rome to study with Plotinus). Moreover, if we conjecture that Plotinus did have a change of spirit and at some point came to reject Ammonius's Gnosticizing views, it is reasonable to suppose that some sense of shame, as well as residual respect, would have obliged him not to discuss his teacher's failings to his pupils.<sup>68</sup> But there is no reason that Plotinus might not also have had genuine interest in an Asian expedition in its own right. Travel to the Orient in search of wisdom was a venerable *topos* of Platonic-Pythagorean lore;<sup>69</sup> and, more importantly, it would offer the most radical break available to someone intent on starting anew.

Yet if this hypothesis is correct, we might still wonder what might have initially precipitated Plotinus's sudden 'conversion,' as it were, away from the Gnostic Platonism of Ammonius towards the new, 'purified' Platonism he came to profess in Rome. Although there is insufficient evidence to determine this with any real probability, let alone certainty, it is interesting to note that Plotinus's departure from Alexandria nearly coincided with (or preceded by only a few years) the initial anti-Christian pogroms in that city, in a paroxysm of intercommunal violence which foreshadowed the more massive (and state-sanctioned) Decian persecution of 250 CE.<sup>70</sup> One might imagine that the growing anti-Christian sentiment among Plotinus's elite Alexandrian milieu would have encouraged him to try to purify his own thought of any influence from a current of thought that was inextricably associated with Christianity (as we

67 Thus O'Brien 1994.

68 This is suggested by Whittaker 1997, 174 with respect to Plotinus's disappointing pre-Ammonian Alexandrian teachers: "It is also possible that the identity of his teachers was a subject upon which Plotinus did not himself care to expand or to respond to questions from his acquaintances, if they dared ask. For there were matters upon which Plotinus's students did not venture to question him." Whittaker provides the example of Porphyry's statement that he did not dare ask his teacher what was meant by the utterance "[the gods] should come to me, not I to them."

69 E.g., for Plato's similarly thwarted attempt to travel to Persia, Diogenes Laertius 3.7.3; for Pythagoras's encounter with Zoroaster, Aristoxenus *apud* Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresiorum* 1.2.12; for Apollonius of Tyana in India, Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 2.6ff. Of the account of Plotinus's expedition, Whittaker 1997, 167 writes: "We are here clearly in the realm where real life and literary tradition intermingle, each feeding upon the other in a pattern of mutual imitation."

70 Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 6.39.

have seen Gnosticism to have been at least in the eyes of Plotinus and his pupils), and, more importantly, it might have led him to dissociate himself from its teachers, to seek out a new environment less hostile to his former ideas (as Rome certainly was), and to re-invent himself intellectually and spiritually—as an ostensibly ‘pure’ Platonist—in the relative anonymity of a new geographical locale in which he could more easily conceal his former sectarian identity and his true intellectual and spiritual genealogy.

### 2.15 *Alexandria and Rome*

Indeed, Plotinus's flight from Alexandria did not terminate in the Orient as intended. Rather, precisely like that of Valentinus in the previous century, his circuitous trajectory ended in Rome, where, also like Valentinus, he began to teach within an elite milieu.<sup>71</sup> By the middle of the third century, he would have shared this milieu with some Valentinian Christians. Other Gnostics, possibly including Platonizing Sethians, would have been nearby, while an exponentially increasing number of ordinary Christians would have been scattered throughout all strata of society. The vast portion of what we know about Plotinus's life is from this period, and we might suppose that it was at this time that Plotinus assumed the strictly Platonic identity—and the consequent attitude vis-à-vis his Gnostic contemporaries—by which Porphyry knew him and for which he is still remembered. Yet the radical break with his Alexandrian past would have been tempered somewhat by (as we have seen) the persistence of Gnostic conceptions in central aspects of his thought, such as the relation between the intelligible and transcendent realms, and, more importantly, the contemplative or visionary techniques required to apprehend the One.

Consistent with Plotinus's apparently conflicting crypto- and anti-Gnostic tendencies, we may also notice the peculiar fact that even in Rome, he cannot seem to shake off his ties with Ammonius's Alexandrian entourage that he had at some point deliberately tried to abandon. We have seen the anecdotes about Origen, whose arrival in one of Plotinus's classes causes him great embarrassment, and about the magical attack by the jealous magician Olympius of Alexandria.<sup>72</sup> The suggestion is that some often uncomfortable intercommunication still remained between Ammonius's Alexandrian circle and that of Plotinus. Yet there are also more positive examples. For example,

<sup>71</sup> On the social status of the Valentinians in second-century Rome, see Lampe 2003, 298. Unlike Valentinus, however, Plotinus found himself close to the center of Imperial power (Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 12).

<sup>72</sup> Though it is unclear if the latter was physically present in Rome; one assumes that supernatural assault could happen at a distance.

several of Plotinus's closest friends in Rome—Porphyry's claim to such status notwithstanding—are themselves Alexandrian or have close ties with Ammonius. Plotinus was perhaps closest to Zethus the Arab, at whose country estate he would take his retreats. According to Porphyry, Zethus married the daughter of Theodosius, one of Ammonius's companions. Another Alexandrian doctor, Eustochius, is the only one of Plotinus's entourage present during his sickness and death; it is to Eustochius that Plotinus utters his cryptic last words that possibly reflect the primary revelation in *Allogenes*. One might also speculate that the priest who performed the evocation of Plotinus's guardian *daimōn* in the Iseum in Rome had some association with Ammonius's sphere, since he was a friend of a friend of Plotinus who had recently arrived from Egypt.<sup>73</sup>

### 2.16 *Ammonius and Plotinus's Wet-Nurse*

Finally, let us return to the single piece of evidence that Plotinus reveals about his childhood, which, as we will see, actually reveals rather more about his adulthood, and would appear to support the hypothesis of a radical break with Ammonius. Porphyry says that Plotinus was extremely reluctant to discuss his upbringing, save one single anecdote. Thus *Vita Plotini* 3.1–6: “Nevertheless, many times during the meetings he voluntarily conveyed the following. Until he was eight years old, he kept going back to his wet-nurse, and—even though he was already going to a grammar teacher—he wanted to suckle and bared her breasts. Once he heard that he was a mischievous little brat, he was ashamed and desisted.”<sup>74</sup> For all of its prurient allure—and its potential symbolic import for those interested in psychoanalytic theories of mysticism—this anecdote has received surprisingly little attention. It is often dismissed as a mere curiosity, and when it has been addressed, it is usually—wrongly—taken to be yet another example of Plotinus's putative shame about being in a body.<sup>75</sup> That this

73 Porphyry reports that the priest makes Plotinus's acquaintance through some unnamed friend (*dia tinos philou*). If correct, this would in turn suggest some common ritual background linked Plotinus's activity in Rome with his past under Ammonius.

74 Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 3.1–6 (text Armstrong, LCL): “Ἀ μέντοι ἡμῖν αὐτὸς ἀφ’ ἑαυτοῦ ἐν ταῖς ὁμιλίαις πολλάκις διηγείτο, ἣν τοιαῦτα. Προσφοιτᾶν μὲν γὰρ τῇ τροφῇ καίπερ εἰς γραμματοδιδασκάλου ἀπιόντα ἄχρις ὀγδόου ἔτους ἀπὸ γενέσεως ὄντα καὶ τοὺς μαζοὺς γυμνοῦντα θηλάζειν προθυμείσθαι· ἀκούσαντα δὲ ποτε ὅτι ἀτηρόν ἐστι παιδίον, ἀποσχέσθαι αἰδεσθέντα.

75 Note that neither the anecdote itself, nor the very fact of its being told, suggests shame about embodiment itself, but rather the opposite: it indicates the ease with which Plotinus reveals potentially embarrassing details about his own experience of embodiment in order to communicate a further point. Brisson 1992, 3, 26–27 takes it as an allusion to the Stoic notion of innate or common notions of morality and of seven years as the age of reason. This is obviously incorrect; the text is clear that it is not an innate recognition that causes the young Plotinus to desist, but that he only does so when he

anecdote had some particular salience for Plotinus is indicated not only by the fact that it is the only thing he ever revealed about the first 28 years of his life, but also—significantly—by the fact that he volunteered this same anecdote to his students on many occasions (*pollakis*). This suggests that it had some particular allegorical significance that he wanted to convey. This is not to say that it could not also have had some core of truth, but rather that the truth's value is irrelevant; the important question is why Plotinus told this and only this anecdote to his students on several occasions, and what he intended it to communicate. Now the allegorical significance of the anecdote undoubtedly rests upon its anomalous elements. Neither the fact of breast-feeding itself nor the scolding of a mischievous eight-year-old are particularly noteworthy. The most anomalous element is the fact that Plotinus wanted to suckle long after it was appropriate to do so. Thus we might imagine that by repeating this anecdote Plotinus is trying to make a symbolic connection between his very late weaning (in his eighth year) and his relatively late discovery of philosophy under the tutelage of Ammonius (in his 28th year). According to this interpretation, the point would be that just as he was an indulgent (or even lascivious) child until he was made to feel shame, so also, in his young adulthood, he was indolent until he discovered philosophy. This would be a reasonable assumption were it not the case that in the literature of Plotinus's time breastfeeding already had a commonly accepted and quite specific metaphorical significance, just as it does today: that of teaching and learning itself.<sup>76</sup> In this light, it remains puzzling why he would use the conventional symbol of pedagogy to represent the period *before* he began to study with Ammonius. We may instead suspect that although twenty years separate the anecdote about nursing from that of his discovery of Ammonius, the two events are inseparably linked, as they are the only two facts that Plotinus revealed about the first three decades of his life, and Porphyry's passage implies that he often told them together in a single breath. A different interpretation now presents itself: that Plotinus intended the nursing anecdote to parallel the period he spent studying with Ammonius. We have already seen that Plotinus spent eleven whole years with Ammonius but abruptly abandoned his teacher in his 39th year, and we have also seen hints that there was something about it of which he was ashamed. At this point we may begin to perceive the sense of the allegory as the pieces of the puzzle

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hears (*akousanta*) an admonition from someone else; moreover, this occurs in his eighth, not seventh, year.

76 Already in the century prior to Plotinus, Philo (at *De migratione Abraham*, 140.7–8) used the metaphor of suckling for pedagogy. The pedagogical subtext of this anecdote is in fact made explicit by the seemingly gratuitous insertion that he was at the time going to study with a teacher of grammar (*grammatodidaskalos*).

fall into place: just as Plotinus persisted in his childish habits far longer than appropriate, suckling from his wet-nurse until he was shamed out of it, so also he ‘suckled at the teat of Ammonius,’ so to speak, for far longer than he should have, and only later came to his senses once he had experienced a similar sense of shame. Why he experienced shame, we are not told; but it was at this point that he left his teacher, departed for Asia, and eventually settled in Rome. I would suggest that it was through the use of this elegantly veiled but endearing parable that Plotinus attempted to intimate to his pupils—at least to those able to ‘hear’—the troubled story of his own belated coming-of-age, and to do so without explicitly slandering the teacher from whom he had deliberately ‘weaned’ himself but for whom he still had an unwavering shameful reverence (*aidōs*: 11.9[33].10.3).

To summarize: the dense texture of correspondences between Plotinus’s mysticism and Gnostic visionary ascent, as well as Plotinus’s simultaneous and apparently paradoxical rejection of any explicit identification with Gnostic thought, can be accounted for if we suppose that Plotinus was educated in Platonizing Gnosticism in the school of Ammonius; that his move to Rome more or less corresponded with his rejection of all other affiliations in favor of a strictly Platonic identity; and finally, that having dissociated himself from his past training he nevertheless still retained certain deeply-ingrained structures of thought that he had acquired in his youth. Though this scenario cannot be proved, it is consistent with the available evidence, and it has many parallels in better-attested cases of other historical figures. It may never be possible to determine the precise cause of the rupture with his past, or why his attacks on the positions of the Gnostics reached a climax only in the 260s. It is possibly a response to some discrete stimulus, such as the arrival of Platonizing Sethian sectaries—possibly the spiritual heirs of those from whom he had earlier tried to distance himself—on the periphery of his circle, or the circulation of their treatises among his students, but we cannot know for certain. However, we may suspect that the appearance of these Gnostics particularly irked Plotinus—whose response is especially evident in his mid- to late treatises<sup>77</sup>—because their texts would have reminded him of those doctrines that he had long before tried to reject, and, more importantly, they would have appeared to him to be making a mockery of a conception of visionary ascent to the transcendent principle: a conception which he continued to hold well into his later years,<sup>78</sup>

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77 See Corrigan 2000b, 42.

78 E.g., v.3[49].17.15–38.

and which remained the center-point of his spiritual and philosophical life even up until the very moment of his death.<sup>79</sup>

### 2.17 *Overlapping Spheres of Religio-Philosophical Identity in Late Antique Alexandria*

The hypothesis that Plotinus shared a common origin with the Gnostics brings us to the following theoretical problem. It has generally been assumed that despite certain more or less accidental interactions, academic Platonism and Gnosticism represent clearly bounded categories, subject to various mutual ‘influences,’ but themselves inherently distinct. This assumption has tended to conceal from view the depth of the correspondence between the thought of Plotinus and that of the Gnostics. I do not wish to dispute that there may be significant differences of doctrine, temperament, and rhetoric between Plotinus and his Gnostic interlocutors as they are generally understood. What I would like to call into question, however, is the notion of an ahistorical, categorical boundary between late antique Gnosticism and Platonism. In particular, I question whether we really can make a clear analytic distinction between those phenomena called “Platonism” and those called “Gnosticism” in the time before Plotinus and his circle defined the Gnostics over against their own position. It is now widely recognized that the category of “Gnosticism” is itself a fuzzy or unbounded one. One recent and pervasive scholarly tendency has been to reject the term “Gnosticism” itself as an overly essentialist designation adopted by scholars from ancient Christian heresiologists who sought to define themselves over and against the ‘other.’<sup>80</sup> There may be no need to push this critique to the point of abandoning the term altogether, but if we accept its premises—which, I believe, are valid—it becomes difficult to maintain any abstract analytic distinction between the categories of “Gnosticism” and the equally artificial construct “Platonism,” whatever terms we choose to use.<sup>81</sup> This type of distinction, I believe, has been too often uncritically adopted from the ancient heresiological and doxographical discourse and reified in the modern history of philosophy. To borrow the anthropological cliché, we should not unthinkingly map the ‘emic’ designations of sectarian or scholastic identity isomorphically onto our own ‘etic’ categories of intellectual-historical analysis. If we reject the view of Platonism and Gnosticism as bounded categories, we

79 I.e., his *Allogenesque* last words, Porphyry *Vita Plot.* 2.26–27.

80 Following Williams 1996 and King 2003; but earlier see also Bauer 1971. Perhaps the category of “Gnosticism” should not be dispensed with altogether, if only for its broad utility in pointing out a general sphere of ancient thought and practice. For a judicious defense of some aspects of this category, see Pearson 2004, 201–23.

81 Though I have tried to describe certain discrete philosophical differences in Mazur 2005.



may reconceptualize them as broad tendencies, each composed of relatively free-floating independent elements or conceptual substructures—whether these elements involve doctrine, mythologoumena, ritual acts, or rhetorical mode—that can be freely borrowed, mutually exchanged, and transformed. Superimposed upon that, one may imagine sectarian or scholastic identity as a more visible marker or flag—itsself based upon a named school of thought, individual teacher, spiritual leader, or traditional ethnically or geographically-defined cult—that was often dialectically associated with one or another set of conceptual structures but in actuality not restricted to an absolutely fixed set of elements.

This model is largely borne out by what is known about late antique philosophical education. First, with respect to institutions: despite the conventional division of classical pagan philosophical schools—which in 176 CE was formalized by Marcus Aurelius' endowment of official Platonist, Aristotelian, Stoic, and Epicurean chairs at Athens—the degree of doctrinal interpenetration between these schools by the third century suggests that the traditional boundaries were somewhat imprecise and certainly far more permeable than is generally admitted by ancient authors.<sup>82</sup> With respect to individuals, one can detect a similar pattern. The extant accounts of personal educational histories suggest that both pagans and Christians tended to seek philosophical training from a wide variety of schools of thought and a multiplicity of teachers before settling on a systematic position.<sup>83</sup> Although the profusion of competing philosophical schools and *haireses* offered a multiplicity of elective intellectual paths, these paths were not necessarily always entirely coextensive with an individual's philosophical or confessional identity, and could be combined in any number of complex ways. As contemporary psychologists are aware, the totality of an individual's worldview emerges out of a broad and not necessarily coherent juxtaposition of disparate elements and multiple superimposed self-conscious identities and affiliations. Philosophically speaking, this is not

82 This issue has led to an entire volume—Dillon and Long 1988—devoted to the rejection of the category of “eclecticism” in late antique philosophy. The appropriation of Aristotle into Middle Platonism has long been noticed. On this see Dillon 1977. This is exemplified by Plotinus himself; Porphyry admits that Stoic and Aristotelian ideas are concealed within Plotinus's works; *Vit. Plot.* 14.4–7; on Stoic influence in Plotinus, see also, *inter alia*, Theiler 1960.

83 On this see Whittaker 1997. Examples include Clement's insistence (*Stromateis* 1.13) that all varieties of pagan philosophy contain some truth; Galen's well-rounded education, described by *ibid.*; Justin Martyr's peregrinations prior to his conversion to Christianity in *Dialogus cum Tryphone* 2–8. With the intention of “seeing God,” he goes first to a Stoic, then to a Peripatetic, then to a Pythagorean (who rejects him), and then finally to a Platonist, with whom he stays (until eventually, of course, converting to Christianity).

necessarily a negative; indeed, as is borne out in the case of both Plotinus and the Gnostics, it is from the tension inherent in such an assemblage that real intellectual creativity emerges. Finally, the historical evidence points towards a considerable overlap between philosophical schools and Gnostic *haireses* of the second century. Valentinus himself was known as a “Platonist.” The Carpocratians apparently venerated icons of Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle alongside that of Jesus. As W. Löhr (2010) has recently suggested, Christian and Gnostic teachers in the second century self-consciously situated themselves within the tradition of philosophical schools. It is therefore possible to imagine that Plotinus was first educated in a milieu in which a traditional philosophical education—whether Platonic, Stoic, or Aristotelian—coexisted harmoniously with instruction in Gnostic soteriology and ritual praxis.

With these theoretical issues in mind, we may turn to the historical question of the debate between Plotinus’s school and the Gnostics. Despite some genuine philosophical disagreements,<sup>84</sup> I would suggest Plotinus’s opposition was not, as is commonly believed, primarily an issue of doctrinal differences *per se*, but rather one of conflicting identities and competing strategies for the legitimation of spiritual and intellectual authority. To begin with, we may note that this conceptual opposition was itself hardly a given, but had a distinct history of its own. Despite the fact that nearly a century earlier, the Platonist Celsus had mocked Christianity by conflating it with Gnostic practices, it appears that the distinct, self-conscious opposition between academic Platonism and Gnosticism *per se* appears first in Plotinus’s milieu. One need only consider the fact that the writings of pre-Plotinian Platonists such as Philo, Plutarch, and Numenius, for example, and pseudepigraphical literature such as the Chaldaean Oracles and the Hermetica, display many doctrinal proximities to Gnosticism without being ‘Gnostic’ themselves. Even the conflict between Platonists and Christianity more generally had not always been as crystalline as it was to become. Indeed, I would suggest that “Platonists” and “Gnostics” would not have considered their views to be mutually exclusive communities prior to the moment at which Plotinus and his immediate disciples self-consciously constructed a firm distinction between them. Therefore, rather than retrojecting anachronistic Porphyrian categories onto pre-Plotinian philosophico-religious institutions, we should probably envision

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84 In Mazur 2005 I have discussed other aspects of Plotinus’s thought that coincide with that of the Gnostics, and, despite real philosophical differences, I suggest that his opposition had more the character of a sectarian or scholastic squabble, an attempt at self-definition, rather than a deeply substantive ideological disagreement. The many correspondences between Plotinus and Gnostic thought have long been noted; thus, *inter alia*, Jonas 1954; Puech 1960, 184.

a socially and intellectually mobile domain in which individual teachers of complex backgrounds would attract potentially overlapping and rather porous circles of disciples. Firm boundaries between competing schools of thought would only have been constructed in moments of particular conflict. It is, interestingly, Porphyry, not Plotinus, who calls the apocalypse-bearing heretics *Gnōstikoi*, and even then the word occurs only in the title he and Amelius gave to 11.9[33], but not in *Vita Plotini* 16, where he simply refers to them as *hairetikoi* among the *christianoī*. Plotinus himself never uses either *gnōstikoi* or *christianoī*. Rather, for Plotinus, these unnamed opponents are simply “they”—or his “friends.” Porphyry, by naming them—i.e., by calling them collectively *Gnōstikoi*—would have reified the differences between Plotinus’s circle and these sectaries, thereby hardening a discourse of orthodoxy and heresy in academic Platonism parallel to that which had been gradually emerging within contemporaneous Christianity,<sup>85</sup> and which persists even today in the history of philosophy. Yet despite this discourse of opposition, it has long been recognized that many aspects of Plotinus’s system resemble that of the sectaries he critiques in 11.9[33], and that the very doctrines he attacks often closely resemble his own.<sup>86</sup> One might wonder, then, why Plotinus and his disciples were so insistent on differentiating themselves from this particular group of heretics. What was this debate really about?

At first glance, the identity-issue at stake appears to be a competition for the legitimate succession of Plato. Plotinus complains that the Gnostics derive, or rather plagiarize, their doctrines from Plato, but that they insult him in several ways. [a] They invent nontraditional jargon and use excessively pompous, unphilosophical language (11.9[33].6.1–10); [b] they contaminate Platonic thought with the addition of certain extraneous, non-Hellenic elements (6.10–12); [c] they demote, and thus insult, the Demiurge of the *Timaeus* (6.14–24); [d] they claim to have understood the nature of the intelligible realm better than Plato and other ancient (Hellenic) philosophers (6.24–28);<sup>87</sup> and finally [e] they ridicule their Hellenic opponents in a manner unbecoming a philosopher (6.43–52). Yet even Plotinus’s defense of Plato against insult from the supposedly un-Hellenic Gnostics, and the reaffirmation of his own school’s sacred lineage, while possibly a rallying-point for his immediate circle, fails

85 The Christian heresiological background of Porphyry *Vit. Plot.* 16 has been pointed out by Tardieu 1992. Athanassiadi 2002; 2006 has described the formation of Neoplatonic orthodoxy in and after Plotinus, which she attributes to the interpretation of certain passages of Numenius that describe an unbroken “golden” chain of transmission.

86 Yet Plotinus himself is on occasion equally pessimistic; on this see Mazur 2005.

87 We may perceive an echo of the Gnostics’ accusation that Plato himself did not attain to the “depth of intelligible substance” (Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 16.8–9).

to explain the essence of his opposition. For why would Plotinus—who, in his youth, was so fascinated by Oriental wisdom—have turned against these particular sectaries on the putative grounds of insufficient Hellenicity? And why would he attack their claims to Platonic heritage more vehemently than other rival Platonists (or for that matter, than any other philosophical school)? Furthermore, why would Porphyry, whom we know to have been utterly obsessed with Chaldaean, Egyptian, and even Persian lore, attempt so vigorously to debunk these particular Gnostics for their claim to reproduce the wisdom of the ancient Zoroaster, while elsewhere citing with approval a similar claim made by initiates of the Mithraic mysteries?<sup>88</sup> Clearly, the issue of identity is not restricted merely to Hellenic versus non-Hellenic or Platonic versus supposedly Oriental wisdom.

Here, I believe, we may finally converge on the explanation for Plotinus's initial rejection of Gnostic teachings and also for the concerted polemic campaign on which he eventually led his students. I would suggest that it was not merely the content of their doctrines *per se*, but the fact that these sectaries were considered to be a subset of *Christians* (thus Porphyry: "among the Christians, there were on the one hand the multitudes, and on the other, the heretics ...") and further that they obscured the newly-emerging (or rather newly-constructed) boundary between Platonism and Christianity. This is, of course, independent of whether or not Plotinus's Gnostic opponents actually *were* in any sense Christians, or whether the existent Platonizing Sethian corpus can be said to display any properly Christian elements.<sup>89</sup> What is important is that Plotinus and his students *believed* the Gnostics to be a subset of Christians, which was all the more galling because of their ostensible (mis-)appropriation of Plato. Quite independently of Porphyry, then, it may have been the association of the Gnostics with the newly-threatening mass movement of Christianity—with, *inter alia*, [a] its forceful rejection of venerable pagan traditions, [b] its derivation of authority not from Greek but from Jewish scripture, [c] its insistence upon the importance of historical and genealogical particularity rather than eternal truths, and [d] its most un-Hellenic

88 Porphyry himself approvingly refers to Zoroaster as founder of mysteries in *De antro nympharum* 6.

89 We know that the Sethian corpus as a whole represents a broad movement with Biblical—both Jewish and Christian—elements; the ambiguous relationship to Christianity is, like Ammonius's own Christian affiliations, reflected in Porphyry's statement. Conversely, the Platonizing Sethian corpus displays no overt Christianity (although the distant Jewish ancestry is, of course, implicit).

requirement of absolute exclusivity—that had initially obliged Plotinus to reject his former path.<sup>90</sup>

Yet what would have made the dichotomy between Platonism and Christianity so particularly salient at this particular point in Plotinus's career? Here some more general historical context is helpful. Christianity and Platonism may have co-existed more or less happily in Plotinus's Alexandrian milieu of the early third century, while Christianity was still a marginal sect (they may even have co-existed within the same individual: witness Clement and Origen), and the specter of Christianity even lurks in the background of Plotinus's own environment, at least in its early days; we have already seen that Ammonius had Christian roots and some Christian pupils.<sup>91</sup> Yet whatever Plotinus's early relationship to Gnosticism or to Christianity more generally, the moment at which, I suggest, any tolerance or accommodation came to an abrupt end coincided with a significant demographic shift. The date of Plotinus's arrival in Rome in about 245 CE falls in the middle of a decade in which there occurred a sudden explosive growth of the Christian population,<sup>92</sup> to which Porphyry's passage ("in his time there were many Christians ...") probably alludes. No longer marginal, during this period Christian culture began to present a serious challenge to the pagan intellectual and spiritual life of the Empire and to the venerable Hellenic tradition with which Plotinus came so strongly to identify. Indeed, an awareness of a new and more pressing antagonism between venerable pagan tradition and the burgeoning new sect may have produced the crisis of spiritual identity that resulted in Plotinus's deliberate choice to identify quite consciously as a "Platonist" (in the manner of Numenius), to reject any explicit allegiance to authorities tainted with Christianity (i.e., the Gnostics), to purify (however incompletely) his writing of Gnostic technical terms in favor of a vocabulary drawn conspicuously from Plato. And Plotinus's choice to identify as a strict Platonist rather than a Gnostic was subsequently adopted

90 The attitudes towards Christianity of earlier Platonists such as Celsus are discussed in Frede 1997; on Porphyry, see also Barnes 1994.

91 Some of this may be discerned in the curious silences; thus it is interesting, for example, that Plotinus restricts his critique in 11.9[33] to Gnostic doctrines that have no incontrovertibly Christian elements (this may, of course, simply reflect a similar absence of clear Christian elements in Platonizing Sethian sources such as *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*). But we know that Plotinus's senior pupil Amelius seems to have been very familiar with Christian scripture and apparently even wrote approvingly of the conception of the *logos* in the prologue of the Gospel of John (Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 11.19.1); while even Porphyry, who was to become the archenemy of Christianity *par excellence*, seems to have been closely acquainted with the Hebrew bible.

92 Frend 1984, 310.

and reified by his pupils and more distant heritors into a rigid antagonism that even now continues to distort the historical gaze.<sup>93</sup>

### 2.18 *A New Platonism Purified of Gnosticism*

According to this hypothesis, Plotinus emerged from a milieu imbued with Gnostic thought and praxis but underwent a conversion of sorts in his 39th year, coming to disavow Gnosticism outwardly while retaining many of its essential conceptual structures. But while Plotinus's anti-Gnostic vehemence may rightly be thought to resemble a sectarian squabble more than an absolute antithesis, Plotinus has not simply replaced a few Gnostic technical terms here and there with Platonic language; he has also reworked the Gnostic system considerably. While a complete analysis of Plotinus's relationship to Gnostic thought must await a future project, the following points may be noted.

## 3 Philosophical Contemplation and Ritual Praxis

In Chapters 2 and 3, we have examined the complex structure of Plotinus's ascent towards mystical union with the One (ΜΟΟ). In Chapter 4, we have seen the parallels between the Plotinian model and the structure of ascent to the unknowable deity and the various mechanisms of transcendental apprehension in Platonizing Sethian and other Gnostic sources. At this point, I would like to address the question of Plotinus's praxis. As I mentioned in the Introduction (Ch. 1), philosophy and ritual praxis are usually thought to be clearly distinct categories of activity, and it has therefore commonly been

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93 This may also explain the sudden surge of interest in the *Chaldaean Oracles* among Plotinus's immediate successors, beginning already with Porphyry. Plotinus probably knew the Oracles, but he was completely unconcerned with them. If one disregards its historical inclusion in the canon of Neoplatonic scripture, the content of this text, permeated with Numenian Middle Platonism and Stoicism—situates it in close proximity to 'Gnosticism'—at least as close and it displays many thematic elements that fall into the Neoplatonic critique of Gnosticism. So why the fascination among the post-Plotinian Neoplatonists? It may be that the supposedly "Chaldaean" *logoi* were thought to provide the genuinely 'Hellenic'—i.e., non-Christian—counterpart to Gnostic revelation: untainted with Judaism or Christianity, they had been recorded by the Platonizing father-son team (the Juliani, whose roots were no more "Chaldaean" than those of the Hellenized-*par excellence* Porphyry of Tyre himself); they were attributed to a Classical goddess (Hekate), and they were presented in pseudo-Homeric hexameter. The *Oracles* became salient only in the generation of Plotinus's students once the dichotomy between 'Hellene' and Judeo-Christian / Gnostic had been firmly established. On Porphyry's anti-Christianity behind his emphasis on the *Oracles* and on Hellenic identity, see Busine 2009.

assumed that a strict categorical difference separates the ritualized ascent practices of the Platonizing Sethians from the ostensibly ‘rational’ mysticism of Plotinus. Yet we have seen this distinction challenged by the unmistakable structural isomorphism between Plotinus’s contemplative ascent to the One and the more ritualized Platonizing Sethian ascent to the unknowable god. In this brief concluding section, I would like to suggest that both Plotinian contemplation and the Sethian visionary ascent represent a common mode of contemplative praxis that blurs the distinction between philosophy and ritual, and that the differences between Plotinian and Platonizing Sethian ascent may be largely rhetorical.

### 3.1 *Plotinian Praxis*

We have seen two distinct bodies of evidence that Plotinus’s ascent to the one consisted of a specific praxis. First—from an objective perspective—Porphyry affirms that “by means of ‘thoughts’ and according to the path laid out by Plato in the *Symposium*” Plotinus attained union with the One “in unutterable actuality and not in potency only” on four discrete occasions while the two men were together. Second, Plotinus’s writings imply, but do not explicitly state, a mystical praxis, not merely a metaphysical system. Indeed, his own mystical passages leave no doubt that he did undergo at least some kind of extraordinary experience, and the nearly complete absence of an explicit statement in the *Enneads* describing the ascent as a specific praxis is not evidence against such a praxis, but is to be expected, since his writing is primarily theoretical rather than biographical and practical, and reticence on the precise praxis of ascent has a venerable Platonic precedent.<sup>94</sup> As we have seen in Chapter 2, the structure underlying his mystical passages suggests a template for praxis, and the exceptional instances where he *does* provide detailed practical instructions to his readers (e.g., the visualization exercise in v.8[32].9.1–28) are consistent with the use of such practices to ascend to the One. Moreover, throughout the *Enneads* we may find general theoretical discussions of topics that we know from anecdotes in Porphyry’s biography to correspond tacitly to specific practices and events.<sup>95</sup> In other words, it is not surprising we do not find clearer and more specific *practical* instructions for the technique of MUO in Plotinus’s written work, while we do find more *theoretical* descriptions there as well as

94 See Plato, *Epistula vii*.

95 Thus, for example, compare *Enneads* III.4[15] (on the personal *daimōn*) with Porphyry’s description (*Vit. Plot.* 10) of the ritual evocation of Plotinus’s guardian daimon in the Iseum of Rome; also Plotinus’s exculpation of the astral bodies from complicity in star-magic in IV.4[28].38 (and elsewhere) with Porphyry’s anecdote (*loc. cit.*) about the jealous rival philosopher Olympius casting a malicious astral spell on Plotinus.

anecdotal evidence in Porphyry's biography. Plotinus may have reserved practical instruction for his oral (unwritten) teaching, and revealed it only to the members of his inner circle, such as Porphyry himself, who claims to have been able to attain MUO on one occasion, or to others with whom Plotinus seems to have been more intimate than he was with Porphyry and with whom he apparently took his retreats outside of the regular seminar.<sup>96</sup>

Yet we may now ask ourselves again: what was Plotinus actually doing, *in practice*, during these moments? In the previous section, I presented a hypothesis that Plotinus and the Platonizing Sethians shared a common educational and religious background in an Alexandrian Gnostic milieu. Here I will suggest that the Platonizing Sethian context may itself provide a clue as to the nature of Plotinus's own mystical praxis. Let us begin by broadly identifying the nature of the praxis implied by extant Gnostic literature, and especially the Platonizing Sethian ascent pattern tractates such as *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, the *Three Steles of Seth*, and *Marsanes*. Three essential points are as follows.

First, it is important to recognize that [a] the Platonizing Sethian tractates are *ritual* texts. These texts are meant to function as the prototypical templates, if not explicit manuals, for an ascent that could be enacted by the sectaries themselves. While they are framed as 'historical' accounts of ascents undertaken by archaic mythical visionaries, these tractates describe what is in fact a prescribed ritual with discrete stages and a program of successive actions and / or utterances. In the case of *Zostrianos*, these ritual acts include baptism, anointing, and invocation or prayer; in *Marsanes* the framework of the ascent consists of 13 enigmatic "seals," leading up to the domain of the Unknown Silent One. The ritual aspect is perhaps less immediately evident in the case of *Allogenes*, but that the ascent was understood in terms of a prescribed series of ritual acts is confirmed by the fact that at 59.9–60.12 the eponymous visionary is instructed on the precise phases of the ascent through the three powers of the Triple Powered One and the acts he must perform at each stage; in a

96 This is indicated by two passages of Porphyry's *Vit. Plot.* 5.2–5: "I, Porphyry, had been in Rome a little before the tenth year [of Gallienus], while Plotinus met his intimates during the summer vacation, *associating with them in another way during the[se] meetings*" (ὁλίγον γὰρ ἔτι πρότερον τῆς δεκαετίας ἐγεγόνειν ὁ Πορφύριος ἐν τῇ Ῥώμῃ, τοῦ Πλωτίνου τὰς θερινὰς μὲν ἄγοντος ἀργούς, συνόντος δὲ ἄλλως ἐν ταῖς ὁμιλίαις). 7.22–23: "[Plotinus] was on such intimate terms with [Zethus the Arab] that he would even *withdraw* to his [Zethus's] country place that lay six miles from Minturnae" (Ἐχρήτο δὲ αὐτῷ οἰκείως, ὥς καὶ εἰς τοὺς ἀγροὺς πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀναχωρεῖν πρὸ ἑξ σημείων Μητουρνῶν ὑπάρχοντας). The use of the term *anachōrein* is interesting given its importance as a *terminus technicus* in Platonizing Sethian ascent.



subsequent passage, at 60.14–61.22, Allogenes himself recounts his ascent as having happened precisely as it was previously instructed.<sup>97</sup>

Second, [b] inasmuch as the Platonizing Sethian ascent specifically involves a ritual, it is primarily an ‘interiorized’ ritual. That is to say, the spatial orientation of the extra-cosmic ascent has been transmuted into an ‘inner’ voyage in which the aspirant identifies with the successive ontological strata by means of increasingly demanding (inward) acts of contemplation.<sup>98</sup> This is self-evident in *Allogenes*, but even in *Zostrianos* the traditional ritual procedures such as baptism and lustration have been reconfigured in terms of specific acts of cognition. Thus, for example, *Zostrianos* 22.7–10: “When one *knows* (ἐῖμε) [Autogenes] and all these, one becomes the first-manifesting water,” or 23.15–17: “when one *knows* ([εἰ]με) these things, one has been baptized in the baptism of Kalyptos,” and so on. In the case of *Marsanes*, each phase of ascent appears to involve an act of intellection, culminating,<sup>99</sup> as in *Allogenes*, with the aspirant’s reception of an incognizant thought (*noēma*) reminiscent of a ritualized investiture: “Be silent so that *you do not know* ... but *intelligize* that this one was silent, and receive a *thought*.”<sup>100</sup> That this might be performed “inwardly,” however, does not mean that it is not a kind of ritual, if the latter is understood as a prescribed series of acts performed over a discrete period of time.

Finally, [c] the principal activity of this interiorized ritual praxis consists of *visualization*. Throughout *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* we find innumerable

97 *Marsanes* is structured around a ritual ‘ascent’ through 13 “seals”; *Steles Seth* appears to reflect a communal hymnic invocation that is immediately followed by ascent (127.14–21).

98 See discussion in Turner 2000c, 128–37. The theological interpretation of the Aristotelian epistemological model in which knowing occurs through the assimilation of subject and object of knowledge is probably due to Alexander of Aphrodisias, whose ideas seem to be reflected in other Gnostic texts outside of the Sethian corpus, including the Valentinian *Gospel of Philip* discussed in Ch. 4, §3.8 *supra*.

99 Thus 5.18–24.

100 *Marsanes* ΝΗC X 8.21–25 (text Funk and Poirier, BCNH): καρωκ· οἶνα δε νεκῆμε ... ἀλλὰ ἐρίνοει ἵπεει δε νεψκα[ραε]ῖτ· ἡκχι ἵπνοηνα. N.b, however, that elsewhere (NH C X 25–27) there is a lengthy exposition of mystical phonemes corresponding to angels; this may indicate a ritual vocalization in the course of a theurgical ascent, perhaps representing the kind of *voces magicæ* criticized by Plotinus in 11.9[33].14. Even in *Steles Seth*—which consists of a hymnic liturgy to the Triple Powered deity that is used both by the (Sethian) community and also individually—there is a brief reference to the ascent ritual itself that *follows* the performance of the liturgy; this is said to be conducted in silence (127.11–21). Similar, silent ritual ascent is attested elsewhere in earlier Gnostic praxis; thus Hippolytus (*Refutatio omnium haeresiorum* 4.51; 5.7) intimates that the Peratae “shut the eyes” to perform a silent contemplative ascent ritual structured on the subtle physiology of the human body.

references to vision and light as well as the apparition of luminous interior principles or intrapsychic *tupoi* following the stilling of the passions. This is not, however, mere metaphor, but seems to suggest some kind of actual photic experience.<sup>101</sup> We may recall Zostrianos's declamation at 11.9–14: "I knew the power existing within me, that it was placed over the darkness because *it contained the entire light*," or, at 11.9–14: "[S]ouls are enlightened by the *light within them(selves)* and (by) the *tupos* which often comes into being within them (when they are) in a (state of) impassibility." Language of perception and cognition occurs even at the ultimate moment of transcendental apprehension, despite the author's attempt to avoid terms that connote cognitive processes. Although in *Zostrianos* the ultimate apprehension is described progressively in terms of vision, audition, and "the thought which now exists in silence and within the First Thought,"<sup>102</sup> in *Allogenes*, the ultimate apprehension of the Unknowable occurs by means of a "first *manifestation*," a "*luminous thought*," or by means of the "*eye of manifestation*."<sup>103</sup> As we have already seen, these extraordinary forms of mystical apperception are simultaneously identified with the ontogenetic self-apprehension of the transcendent deity; but that they are so often phrased in visionary and photic terms suggests that in practice they were ritually re-enacted, in however exceptional a manner, in what we might call the aspirant's faculty of visual imagination.<sup>104</sup>

101 As already evident in Plato—e.g., the vision of the Good in the *Republica* (508b–516e), and of the Forms in the *Phaedrus* (250b–c)—visual experience is a nearly unavoidable metaphor for transcendental apperception.

102 *Zost.* NHC VIII 24.10–12.

103 We have also seen parallels in the descent-pattern Sethian corpus, e.g., *Gos. Eg.* NHC III 67.

104 In one passage of Plotinus's anti-Gnostic treatise, Plotinus himself confirms that he is aware of some extraordinary Gnostic praxis of visionary contemplation (*theōria*) that permits them to ascend out of the cosmos. The sense of the passage is, in essence, a complaint: while "we" (i.e., Platonists) must undergo lengthy periods of exercises in meditation so as barely to attain the supernal tranquility of the stars, the Gnostics, by contrast, boast of being in unique possession of a special kind of *theōria* that is superior to that of the stars; thus 11.9[33].18.30–38: "Having come close to an undisturbed condition, we might imitate the condition of the soul of the entirety and that of the stars; having come into proximity by similarity, we could hasten towards the same thing [as the stars] and [attain] the same things through vision, and we would be beautifully prepared even for those [elevated things] by nature and by exercises; but [contemplation] belongs to them [the stars] 'from the beginning' *Even if [the Gnostics] declare themselves the only ones able to contemplate*, there would not be more for them to contemplate, nor would there be if they declare themselves to be able to exit [the cosmos] when they die, while others [the celestial bodies] are not, as they eternally decorate the sky" (Ἐγγύς δὲ γινόμενοι τοῦ

This interpretation is supported by evidence for the use of visionary practices in a wide variety of Gnostic milieux.<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, we may also be able to identify this kind of visionary praxis more precisely by comparison with other texts whose ritual background is better known. In the ancient Mediterranean world, there was, of course, a long tradition of both mantic vision and dream divination.<sup>106</sup> Yet one might distinguish between divinatory vision for the sake of obtaining information, on the one hand, and, on the other, the deliberate use of contemplative visualization in the context of ritual praxis. Indeed, in late antiquity, one finds a proliferation of techniques of visionary ascent whose purpose was not divinatory *per se*, but rather was intended to manifest and reaffirm one's connection with the source of divine power.<sup>107</sup> These texts often take the form, "perform action X, and you will see Y." In these cases, the content of the vision is quite specifically predetermined. One can find examples of this in the *Chaldaean Oracles*,<sup>108</sup> Hekhalot literature,<sup>109</sup> the so-called

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ἀπλήκτου μιμοίμεθ' ἂν τὴν τοῦ σύμπαντος ψυχὴν καὶ τὴν τῶν ἄστρον, εἰς ἐγγύτητα δὲ ὁμοίότητος ἐλθόντες σπεύδοιμεν ἂν πρὸς τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ τὰ αὐτὰ ἂν ἐν θέᾳ καὶ ἡμῖν εἴη ἅτε καλῶς καὶ αὐτοῖς παρεσκευασμένοις φύσεσι καὶ ἐπιμελείαις· τοῖς δὲ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ὑπάρχει. Οὐ δὴ, εἰ μόνοι λέγοιεν θεωρεῖν δύνασθαι, πλεόν ἂν θεωρεῖν αὐτοῖς γίνοιτο, οὐδ' ὅτι αὐτοῖς φασιν εἶναι ἐξελεῖν ἀποθανούσι, τοῖς δὲ μή, αἰεὶ τὸν οὐρανὸν κοσμοῦσιν).

- 105 On the origins of Platonizing Sethian visionary praxis in earlier Jewish ritual, see Turner 1998. The theme of vision is of course widespread in Gnostic literature outside of Sethianism; see, *inter alia*, Casadio 1989, 1992; Quispel 1995; Filoramo 1989, 1999; on theurgic visionary ascent, Johnston 1997, 2004.
- 106 There is also a literary genre of apocalyptic that involves involuntary raptures and visionary ascent; this, of course, is the literary template for the Sethian revelations. The philosophical tradition is itself one source for this theme; one need only think of the myth of Er in Plato's *Respublica* 10 614b–621b, or its various echoes in Cicero (*Respublica* 10.9–26) and Plutarch (*De sera numinis vindicta* 563d–568a).
- 107 Which is not to say that there is no interesting overlap between visualization practices and divinatory vision; many spells in the PGM advise what seems to be a visionary or visualization technique as preparation for an oracular inquiry of the manifestation. Another such example may be found in Zosimus of Panopolis's series of deliberately-sought symbolic dreams or trance-visions; the visions informed his alchemical procedures, but were also structured upon these processes themselves.
- 108 E.g., *Oracula Chaldaica* fr. 146 (text and trans. Majercik 1989): "... after this invocation, (it says) you will either see a fire, similar to a child, extended by bounds over the billow of air, or you will see a formless fire, from which a voice is sent forth, or you will see a sumptuous light, rushing like a spiral around the field ..." (... ταῦτ' ἐπιφωνήσας ἢ παιδί κατόψῃ / πῦρ ἵκελον σκιρτηδὸν ἐπ' ἡέρος οἶδμα τιταίνον· / ἢ καὶ πῦρ ἀτύπωτον, ὅθεν φωνὴν προθέουσιν· / ἢ φῶς πλούσιον ἀμφὶ γύρην ροιζαῖον ἐλιχθέν).
- 109 Described, for example, in Gruenwald 1980.

Mithras Liturgy,<sup>110</sup> and occasionally, elsewhere in the Greek magical papyri.<sup>111</sup> Iamblichus hints at what appear to be similar techniques of theurgical visualization in the *De Mystериis*.<sup>112</sup> It is, of course, impossible to know precisely how these were supposed to work, but these apparently efficacious procedures might in practice actually have involved the deliberate techniques of ritualized visualization of a sort we find more clearly expressed, for example, in Kabbalah<sup>113</sup> and in medieval Sufism,<sup>114</sup> where certain descriptions of what is clearly visualization praxis have unmistakable echoes of Plotinus.<sup>115</sup> [See Appendix E].

It is against this background of visionary ritual praxis, I suggest, that we may begin to understand Plotinus's mysticism.<sup>116</sup> This is perhaps most difficult to

110 The language is remarkably similar to that of Plotinus; see PGM IV.539–40 (text Preisendanz 1973–1974): “Draw up pneuma from the rays, sucking up three times what you are able, and *you will see yourself raised up* and going up above into the height, so that you appear to be in the middle of the air” (ἔλκε ἀπὸ τῶν ἀκτίνων πνεῦμα γ’ ἀνασπῶν, ὃ δύναι[σ]ται, καὶ ὄψῃ σεαυτὸν ἀνακουφίζόμενον [κ]αὶ ὑπερβαίνοντα εἰς ὕψος, ὥστε σε δοκεῖ[ν μ] ἔσον τοῦ ἀέρος εἶναι).

111 E.g., at PGM I.74ff. There is a curiously down-to-earth example at PGM I.42–195 (text Preisendanz 1973–1974), where the practitioner is instructed to summon a daimonic assistant (*paredros*) who will provide all kinds of goods, including sumptuous meals, but the text reveals an awareness (lines 106–110) that the material benefits the *daimōn* provides are really produced through deliberate acts of visualization described, interestingly, as contemplation: “*Visualizing* any appropriate room, order [the assistant] to prepare it quickly and without delay. Immediately he will place gilt-ceilinged halls all around, you will see their walls enmarbled—and *you will consider some of these things real, and others only illusionary*” (πᾶν χώρημα εὐπρεπὲς θεωρήσας [κ]έλευε τούτῳ στρώσαι ταχέως καὶ συντόμως· εὐθὺς [περι]θῇσει χρυσόροφα δώματα, τοίχους τούτοις μαρμαρωθεῖ [ν]τας ὄψῃ—καὶ ταῦτα ἡγεῖ τὰ μὲν ἀληθῆ, τὰ δὲ βλέπεσθαι μόνο[ν]).

112 Besides Iamblichus's discussion of various visionary and divinatory states, ranging from the completely cataleptic to the more or less fully conscious (*De mysteriis* 3.27 [102.11–115.11], 3.14 [132.3–134.15]), at 6.4 [255.13–256.2], he also refers to *eikones* of the gods in the soul—i.e., intrapsychic images—through which one can attain union (text des Places 1966): “And still we preserve in our soul, undivided, the mystical and unutterable images of the gods, and we raise the soul up through them towards the gods, and having been raised according to our ability, we attach it to the gods” (Καὶ ἔτι ἀθρόαν τὴν μυστικὴν καὶ ἀπόρητον εἰκόνα τῶν θεῶν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ διαφυλάττομεν, καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν δι’ αὐτῶν ἀνάγομεν ἐπὶ τοὺς θεοὺς, καὶ ἀναχθεῖσαν κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν τοῖς θεοῖς συνάπτομεν).

113 On which, for example, Idel 1988a, esp. 103–11, “Visualization of colors and Kabbalistic prayer”; also idem 1988b, 405–38, “*Hitbodedut* as concentration in ecstatic Kabbalah.”

114 Theorized extensively by Corbin 1958, 167.

115 And not just of the text of the Arabic Plotinus (the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*), which is primarily from IV.8[6]).

116 Of course, Plotinus's notion of ascent towards mystical union differs from that of the Sethians in terms of both specific details and rhetorical mode; but the fundamental structure of these accounts of mystical ascent have much in common. This kind of deliberate

imagine in part because this is so distant from what is normally considered philosophical practice today, but also because most of us have no access to any type of visionary experience ourselves, while the history of philosophy has typically misunderstood Plotinus's own activities. We have seen that when Plotinus's mystical passages are read without consideration of their original context, it might appear—as it has too many interpreters—as if he were a 'congenital' mystic, naturally endowed with some unique psycho-spiritual propensity. And yet, however exceptional an individual Plotinus may have been, his mysticism is far from congenital. Indeed, if we are incapable of replicating Plotinus's experiences ourselves, it is not, I think, because we lack some putatively innate capacity, but rather because we have not understood the nature of this particular tradition of praxis—a sophisticated technique of contemplative visualization—which could only be transmitted directly by a teacher to a pupil, preserved as an esoteric oral instruction for replicating experientially the trajectory of a mythical visionary described in the source-texts.<sup>117</sup> Yet the hermeneutic key of this Plotinian visionary praxis, along with its living tradition—one that he inherited from the Gnostics, who had themselves adopted it from earlier Jewish mystical traditions—has been almost entirely lost in the vicissitudes of intellectual history. To some extent, of course, such a hermeneutic key may have survived in the theurgical practices of Plotinus's successors Iamblichus and Proclus, but a final rupture may well have resulted from the demise of the pagan philosophical tradition and more specifically from the closing of the pagan philosophical schools, including the last phase of the Athenian Neoplatonic academy, by decree of the emperor Justinian in 529 CE.<sup>118</sup> It was at this point, we could say, that academic philosophy finally divested itself of the living tradition of visionary praxis, although traces of similar practices may possibly have survived among the less academic, and now supposedly 'monotheistic,' heritors of late Neoplatonism, such as Pseudo-Dionysius and the Cappadocian Fathers (whence these traditions

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visualization is certainly not foreign to Plotinus; one may recall the numerous moments in his mystical passages where he vacillates between descriptive and prescriptive language. In several places—at, for example, V.1[10].2.1–23, V.8[31].9.1–18, and VI.7[38].15.24–32—Plotinus does advise a complex guided visualization of the noetic sphere of the cosmos, and then instructs one to somehow assimilate oneself to the visualized sphere. Although these particular passages do not occur in the immediate context of the ultimate union, I would suggest that we understand the final stages of ascent towards union with the One as this type of ritualized visualization. In this I am in agreement with Dillon 1986 who has discussed these exercises in relation to Plotinus's notion of various kinds of *phantasia*.

117 By analogy with *Allogenes* NHC XI 59.5–61.22.

118 There were, however, some interesting rediscoveries and / or recrudescences of this praxis among the Renaissance Hermetists.

reached Byzantine Hesychasm), medieval Jewish kabbalists, and possibly also early Sufis. Yet the extant academic tradition has preserved only the discursive aspect of ancient philosophical praxis, which, though certainly important, gives but a partial idea of what Plotinus and his contemporaries were actually doing.

Now at this point, I should anticipate a certain amount of resistance from those who fear that a suggestion of a ritual substrate might contaminate Plotinus's ostensible philosophical purity or the authenticity of his religious sentiment. Such resistance is, I believe, founded on an excessively narrow definition of philosophy as well as certain implicit assumptions about the oft-discussed but relatively underexamined category of ritual, which is typically contrasted with more 'genuine' forms of religious or philosophical mysticism.<sup>119</sup> I am not alone in suggesting that the category needs to be expanded. One of the late Pierre Hadot's innumerable contributions to the field has been to broaden the conception of late antique philosophical practice by positing a category of "spiritual exercises," whose goal was not merely the investigation of objective reality but practical techniques of self-transformation.<sup>120</sup> Yet I would go further. According to Hadot's definition, spiritual exercises included practices that would occur over an extended period of time if not over the course of a lifetime. We should probably find a more specific model to understand both Plotinian and Platonizing Sethian contemplative ascent, as we would seem to be dealing with a ritual praxis that consists of a series of discrete experiential events and takes place over the course of a specifically demarcated period of time. But the gulf between what I am suggesting and more conventional philosophical praxis is in fact not as profound as it might first appear. Elsewhere I have tried to propose a category of interiorized ritual, one that cannot be entirely subsumed into discursive philosophy and that has much in common with better-attested, and better-understood, techniques of visualization in, for example, certain varieties of Buddhism and Tantric yoga.<sup>121</sup> While typical definitions of ritual require a performance of observable actions, there exist certain rituals which internalize one or another pattern of formerly external action, so that they are iterated in the subjective awareness alone; examples include the repetitive, unvocalized prayer in Hesychasm, Kabbalah, and Sufism, or, in the case of Tantric and yogic meditation, the construction of complex

119 A recent example of such resistance may be found in Beierwaltes's recent (2006) critique of my *Unio Magica* I and II (Mazur 2003 and 2004), on which see Mazur 2008.

120 See Hadot 1987a.

121 Mazur 2004, 42–44.

mental images based on external ritual acts.<sup>122</sup> Something of this sort, I believe, lies behind both the Sethian ascent treatises and Plotinus's accounts of the final stages of the union. This kind of interiorized ritual found a natural home in the broader socio-religious context of late antiquity, in which the progressive deracination of individual identity from its prior socio-geographical context contributed not only to a widening competition among philosophical schools and sects, but also, simultaneously, to the privatization and miniaturization of formerly public ritual praxis,<sup>123</sup> and to the proliferation of freelance techniques for the mediation of divine power.<sup>124</sup>

Lest one object that Plotinus was either too "rational" or too "spiritual" to have derived the deepest and ostensibly most personal aspect of his philosophical praxis from rituals of this sort, I would like to conclude with one additional piece of positive, though anecdotal, evidence. In a much-discussed episode of Porphyry's biography of his teacher, Plotinus "readily" (*hetoimōs*) attends an evocation (*klēsis*) of his companion *daimōn* in the Iseum of Rome conducted by a priest recently arrived from Egypt.<sup>125</sup> To the astonishment of the participants, Plotinus's *daimōn* appears as a god (*theos*) and is not merely among the genus of *daimones*.<sup>126</sup> Now it is intriguing that in his 15th treatise, III.4[15],<sup>127</sup> Plotinus describes the *daimōn* in terms of one's higher self, which presides inactively on the ontological plane immediately superjacent to that on which one is generally active. Thus, he says, if one is ordinarily active at the level of sense-perception, one's *daimōn* abides, inactively, at the level of reason;<sup>128</sup>

122 On internalized ritual in Tantrism, see Sanderson 1995.

123 The privatization and miniaturization of ritual during this period is explored by J. Z. Smith 1978, 2001. In a brilliant essay—"Myth and Mysticism; a Study of Objectification and Interiorization in Religious Thought"—Jonas 1969 noted the tendency in late antique religiosity towards the transmutation of objective mythology into subjective mysticism: in this way the heavenly ascents of the mystery-cults were gradually internalized and experienced as a journey through successive levels of the microcosmic self.

124 This has been pointed out by Brown 1978, 12–14.; see also, *inter alia*, Athanassiadi 1992, 1993.

125 *Vit. Plot.* 10.15–30.

126 There are several spells in the PGM that seem to describe an evocation of a companion *daimōn*. A ritual for evoking a "conjunction with one's own *daimōn*" (*sustasis idiou daimonos*) occurs at PGM VII.505–528; the similarities between this ritual and that of *Vit. Plot.* 10 are discussed by Betz 1981.

127 The treatise (*On Our Allotted Daimōn*) intends to explicate the *daimōn* in Plato, *Republica* 10.617e–620e.

128 III.4[15].3.4–8: τοῦτο γὰρ ἐφέστηκεν ἀργούν, ἐνεργεῖ δὲ τὸ μετ' αὐτόν. Καὶ εἰ μὲν τὸ ἐνεργούν ἢ αἰσθητικοί, καὶ ὁ δαίμων τὸ λογικόν· εἰ δὲ κατὰ τὸ λογικὸν ζῶμεν, ὁ δαίμων τὸ ὑπὲρ τοῦτο ἐφεστώς ἀργὸς συγχωρῶν τῷ ἐργαζομένῳ.

but for one who already lives at the level of *Nous*—remarkably—“*that above Intellect is his daimōn*.”<sup>129</sup> A mystical ascent, therefore, can also be thought of as an assimilation to one’s *daimōn*,<sup>130</sup> an entity which, it seems, Plotinus thought to be potentially coextensive with the brilliantly luminous, transcendental self that is apprehended “within” oneself during the mystical autophany immediately prior to union with One.<sup>131</sup> It would not have surprised Plotinus that his own *daimōn*, as it manifested itself in the Iseum, was exceptionally exalted: for he understood it to be identical with his transcendental self above Being and Intellect. Although this incident does not occur in the context of mystical union with the One *per se*,<sup>132</sup> there is a noncoincidental correspondence between the external, public manifestation of Plotinus’s transcendental self in the context of this ritual, and his own subjective experience of its self-manifestation at the penultimate moment of mystical ascent. This theurgical *klēsis* is, in effect, a mystical autophany writ large; or conversely, perhaps, we might think of a mystical autophany as in some sense a “privatized” interiorization of such a ritual evocation. Significantly, that experience gleaned from such ritual praxis could be at the foundation of Plotinus’s theoretical philosophy is suggested by Porphyry’s claim that this episode led to his writing treatise III.4[15] itself.<sup>133</sup> One may plausibly suppose, therefore, that a similar familiarity with the practice of visionary ascent in the manner of the Platonizing

129 III.4[15].6.3–5: Νοὺς γὰρ ἐνεργεῖ ἐν τούτῳ. Ἡ οὖν δαίμων αὐτὸς ἢ κατὰ δαίμονα καὶ δαίμων τούτῳ θεός. Ἀρ’ οὖν καὶ ὑπὲρ νοῦν; Εἰ τὸ ὑπὲρ νοῦν δαίμων αὐτῷ, διὰ τί οὖν οὐκ ἐξ ἀρχῆς;

130 III.4[15].3.18–20: “If one is able to follow the *daimōn* above him, he comes to be living that one above, and places the better part of himself, towards which he is led, in the lead; and after that one, another, up to the above” (Εἰ δὲ ἐπείσθαι δύναίτο τῷ δαίμονι τῷ ἄνω αὐτοῦ, ἄνω γίνεται ἐκείνον ζῶν καὶ ἐφ’ ὃ ἄγεται κρείττον μέρος αὐτοῦ ἐν προστασίᾳ θέμενος καὶ μετ’ ἐκείνον ἄλλον ἕως ἄνω).

131 This interpretation is incidentally supported by a variant interpretation of the enigmatic opening words of Porphyry’s description of Plotinus’s mystical union at *Vit. Plot.* 23.8, τούτῳ τῷ δαιμονίῳ φωτὶ, generally thought to refer to Plotinus himself (thus Armstrong: “So to this god-like man above all ...”; Brisson *et al.* 1992: “Ainsi, c’est tout particulièrement à cet homme démonique, à cet homme qui ...”) but which one could equally render (with, *inter alia*, Ficino) as “to / with this daimonic light” [to one who entered into himself, that god appeared, etc.]: i.e., by means of the self-luminosity of the autophanous, transcendental subject (equivalent to the *daimōn*), the One appears.

132 Although this anecdote has no obvious connection to Sethian Gnosticism, what is interesting in this regard is that the officiant is an Egyptian priest who has recently come to Rome and made Plotinus’s acquaintance through some friend (*dia tinos philou*: 10.16). This suggests a relatively active connection between Plotinus’s Roman entourage and Egypt, long after Plotinus’s migration from Alexandria to Rome.

133 Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 10.30–33: “Ἐστὶ γοῦν αὐτῷ ἀπὸ τῆς τοιαύτης αἰτίας καὶ βιβλίον γραφὴν « Περὶ τοῦ εἰληχότος ἡμᾶς δαίμονος », ὅπου πειράται αἰτίας φέρειν περὶ τῆς διαφορᾶς τῶν συνόντων. /



Sethians lurks behind Plotinus's accounts of the final union with the One. That ritual praxis lurks *behind* Plotinus's text, rather than, as in the case of the Sethians, on its surface, may be explained by the fact that both his rhetorical style—that of a fully-identified academic Platonist—and his practical intention in committing his thought to writing—philosophical investigation—were quite different from those of the Sethians. This should not lead us to neglect the numerous indications of the origin and structure of his ideas.

We may, therefore, perceive a curious convergence among Plotinus's mysticism, his metaphysical system, and ritual praxis, a convergence which can be summarized with the following four observations: [a] Plotinus's technique of union with the One was patterned in part upon certain types of internalized ritual ascent praxis that also informed the Platonizing Sethian Gnostics; [b] this kind of ritual praxis and what might be called 'mystical experience' are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, these rituals involved deliberate techniques of visualization which undoubtedly had an intensely experiential or 'mystical' content;<sup>134</sup> [c] the structure and content of this visualization praxis was itself modeled upon the objective metaphysics of a complex ontogenetic scheme; and finally, [d] this metaphysical scheme itself did not arise in a vacuum, and was at least in part the result of certain profound subjective experiences. Here I would appeal to Hans Jonas's conception of late antique mysticism as the result of a "feedback loop" between metaphysics and subjective experience: on the one hand, an objective metaphysical system provides the conceptual framework for the subjective experience, while, in turn, the subjective experience itself confirms and invigorates that objective metaphysical system.<sup>135</sup> Indeed, we may conclude that it is only because of the richness and intensity of their common metaphysical thought-world—perhaps forged in the furnace, so to speak, of some shared Alexandrian ritual praxis—that Plotinus and his Sethian contemporaries were actually able to "bring forth the contemplation into an act of seeing"<sup>136</sup> and "make [themselves] the contemplation,"<sup>137</sup> in a way that would be very difficult for us to repeat today.

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"Indeed, it is from this motive that he wrote the book *On our Allotted Companion Daimon*, where he tries to get at the reason for the distinction between indwelling companions."

134 It is of course interesting that the notion of visionary ascent itself has Platonic roots.

135 Jonas in an interview with Couliano 1985, 143; also Jonas 1954.

136 v.8[31].11.2: εἰς τὸ ἰδεῖν προφέρει τὸ θέαμα.

137 v1.7[38].15.31–32: δεῖ δὲ ἑαυτὸν ἐκεῖνο γινόμενον τὴν θέαν [ἑαυτὸν] ποιήσασθαι.

#### 4 Conclusion

Although I cannot claim to have done more than a preliminary exploration of the topic in the present study, I believe we can conclude with more or less certainty that Plotinus's mysticism must now be understood to be inextricably embedded in the context of contemporaneous Gnostic thought and ritual praxis. This comprised the intellectual, spiritual, and *practical* ground from which Plotinus's mysticism originally germinated, and with which he remained in continuous dialogue throughout his life. The exact historical relation between Plotinus and his Gnostic contemporaries may prove impossible to determine. Nevertheless, the recognition of the true intellectual- and religio-historical context of Plotinian mysticism—and in particular, its close interrelation with both Gnostic derivational schemata and visionary praxis—allows us to understand elements that had previously remained bewilderingly obscure, and that had often been relegated to the inscrutable domain of 'mystical experience.' Ironically, however, it is its close relation with Gnostic thought that allows us to recuperate Plotinian mysticism for the domain of the history of philosophy.

More importantly, this broad conclusion has three principal ramifications for future research. First, [a] with respect to Plotinus's mysticism, we may see that Plotinian mysticism can no longer be understood as a *sui generis* phenomenon or as a matter of a unique constitution. Rather, it must be recontextualized within the broader context of the philosophico-religious praxis of the early third century, and especially that of Platonizing Sethian Gnosticism. This is not to say that Plotinus himself was not a brilliant and creative thinker. On the contrary, it is precisely a sensitivity to this background that will reveal the otherwise impenetrable depths of Plotinian mysticism and allow us to recognize the subtlety of his contribution. But just as Plotinus's thought on matter, for instance, must be studied in the context of contemporaneous currents of Platonic, Aristotelian, and Stoic thought, so also must his notion of mystical ascent to the One be investigated with reference to the broader philosophico-religious context—and especially the context of *praxis*—in which it is so firmly embedded. Indeed, any future research into Plotinian mysticism must take into account its relationship with Platonizing Sethian Gnosticism, as distasteful as this may seem to those working strictly within the conventionally-bounded field of ancient philosophy.

Second, [b] with respect to the study of Gnosticism itself, the present study suggests a reconsideration of the position of the Gnostics in the course of intellectual history. As I have mentioned in the introduction, the most common assumption is that the Gnostics were generally derivative. What we have seen here, however, suggests quite the reverse, that the Platonizing Sethians and

other Gnostics were extremely innovative interpreters of ancient philosophical tradition, and that they had a far greater degree of intellectual agency with respect to contemporaneous academic philosophy than is usually supposed. We have seen that Plotinus's mysticism itself relied upon several Gnostic innovations that had emerged from speculation on the nature of the hypertranscendental deity. According to the broad scenario I have suggested, the Gnostics are a necessary phase in the development of Plotinian mysticism. Three tendencies specific to the Gnostics are at play: first, the emphasis on subjective visionary experience; second, the tendency to reify and hypostatize psychological states and metaphysical abstractions into discrete objective entities; and third, a tradition of sophisticated speculation on the mechanism of transcendental apprehension in the practical service of salvation. Without these Gnostic developments, I submit, we would not have Plotinus's mysticism.

The final point I would like to make concerns the categorical delimitations of ancient philosophy itself. I believe that this study has demonstrated that Plotinus's mysticism lies in the liminal domain between discursive philosophy and ritual praxis. Indeed, we cannot assume the conceptual boundaries of the contemporary categories of either "philosophy" or "ritual" are valid for other historical periods. Precisely what these categories involve and their semantic contours vary over time and between cultures. Therefore, I would suggest that—by contrast with the conventional history of philosophy and the study of religion—we dissolve these boundaries, and not limit our definition of philosophical praxis to discursive reason alone, but expand it to encompass non-discursive ritual praxis as well, while also, simultaneously, broadening the category of ritual so as to include purely contemplative acts. This richer conception—which is, after all, merely a robust interpretation of Hadot's *exercices spirituels*—will allow us to reconceptualize both Plotinus's mysticism and Platonizing Sethian ritual as part of a common enterprise. In so doing, we will come to a better appreciation of the seemingly esoteric thought-world of those late antique sectaries who sought salvation through ritual techniques, while simultaneously enriching our conception of ancient philosophy itself.

## Appendices

### *Appendix A.<sup>1</sup> Passages Pertaining to Plotinus's Ascent and / or Mystical Union with the One (MUO)*

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[A1] Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 23.7–18 (text Armstrong, LCL)

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Οὕτως δὲ μάλιστα τούτῳ τῷ δαιμονίῳ  
 φωτὶ πολλάκις ἐνάγοντι ἑαυτὸν  
 εἰς τὸν πρῶτον καὶ ἐπέκεινα θεὸν  
 ταῖς ἐννοίαις καὶ κατὰ τὰς ἐν τῷ  
 « Συμποσίῳ » ὑφηγημένας ὁδοὺς τῷ  
 Πλάτῳ ἐφάνη ἐκεῖνος ὁ θεὸς ὁ μήτε  
 μορφὴν μήτε τινὰ ἰδέαν ἔχων, ὑπὲρ  
 δὲ νοῦν καὶ πᾶν τὸ νοητὸν ἰδρυμένος.  
 Ὅτι δὴ καὶ ἐγὼ Πορφύριος ἅπαξ λέγω  
 πλησιάσαι καὶ ἐνωθῆναι ἔτος ἄγων  
 ἐξηκοστὸν τε καὶ ὄγδοον. Ἐφάνη γοῦν  
 τῷ Πλωτίνῳ σκοπὸς ἐγγύθι ναίων.  
 Τέλος γὰρ αὐτῷ καὶ σκοπὸς ἦν τὸ  
 ἐνωθῆναι καὶ πελάσαι τῷ ἐπὶ πᾶσι  
 θεῷ. Ἐτυχε δὲ τετράκις που, ὅτε αὐτῷ  
 συνήμην, τοῦ σκοποῦ τούτου ἐνεργεῖα  
 ἀρρήτῳ καὶ οὐ δυνάμει

Thus especially to this daimonic luminary—  
 the one who frequently entered himself into  
 the first and transcendent god (a) by means of  
 thoughts and (b) according to the path laid out  
 by Plato in the *Symposium*—there appeared  
 the god having neither shape nor form, settled  
 above Intellect and all the intelligible. To [this  
 god] I, Porphyry, also affirm myself to have  
 once approached and to have been united,  
 having attained my sixty—eighth year. Indeed  
 to Plotinus the goal appeared close at hand.  
 For the end and goal was to be united and to  
 approach the god who is above all things. He  
 attained this goal four times while I was with  
 him, in an unutterable actuality and not in  
 [mere] potentiality.

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1 On the texts and translations presented here, see “Note on References and Abbreviations” at the beginning of this book.

[A2] 1.6[1].7.1–19 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

Ἀναβατέον οὖν πάλιν ἐπὶ τὸ ἀγαθόν,  
οὗ ὀρέγεται πᾶσα ψυχή. Εἴ τις οὖν  
εἶδεν αὐτό, οἶδεν δὲ λέγω, ὅπως  
καλόν. Ἐφετὸν μὲν γὰρ ὡς ἀγαθὸν  
καὶ ἡ ἔφεσις πρὸς τοῦτο, τεύξις δὲ  
αὐτοῦ ἀναβαίνουσι πρὸς τὸ ἄνω καὶ  
ἐπιστραφεῖσι καὶ ἀποδυμένοις ἃ  
καταβαίνοντες ἡμφίεσμεθα· οἶον  
ἐπὶ τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἱερῶν τοῖς ἀνιούσι  
καθάρσεις τε καὶ ἱματίων ἀποθέσεις  
τῶν πρὶν καὶ τὸ γυμνοῖς ἀνιέναι· ἕως  
ἂν τις παρελθὼν ἐν τῇ ἀναβάσει πᾶν  
ὅσον ἀλλότριον τοῦ θεοῦ αὐτῷ μόνῳ  
αὐτὸ μόνον ἴδῃ εἰλικρινές, ἀπλοῦν,  
καθαρόν, ἃφ' οὗ πάντα ἐξήρτηται  
καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸ βλέπει καὶ ἔστι καὶ ζῇ  
καὶ νοεῖ· ζωῆς γὰρ αἴτιος καὶ νοῦ καὶ  
τοῦ εἶναι. Τοῦτο οὖν εἴ τις ἴδῃ, ποίους  
ἂν ἴσχοι ἔρωτας, ποίους δὲ πόθους,  
βουλόμενος αὐτῷ συγκερασθῆναι,  
πῶς δ' ἂν ἐκπλαγείη μεθ' ἡδονῆς;  
Ἔστι γὰρ τῷ μὲν μήπω ἰδόντι  
ὀρέγεσθαι ὡς ἀγαθοῦ· τῷ δὲ ἰδόντι  
ὑπάρχει ἐπὶ καλῷ ἀγασθᾶί τε καὶ  
θάμβους πίμπλασθαι μεθ' ἡδονῆς  
καὶ ἐκπλήττεσθαι ἀβλαβῶς καὶ ἐρᾶν  
ἀληθῆ ἔρωτα καὶ δριμύεις πόθους καὶ  
τῶν ἄλλων ἐρώτων καταγελάειν καὶ  
τῶν πρόσθεν νομιζομένων καλῶν  
καταφρονεῖν.

And so one must reascend to the Good, for  
which every soul longs. If someone has seen  
it, he knows what I am saying, [and] the  
manner in which it is beautiful. It is desired  
as good, and the desire is towards this, yet  
the attainment of it is for those ascending  
towards the above and is for those who have  
been converted and who shed what we put  
on while descending—just as with those  
going up to the [inner] sanctuaries of the  
temples, the purifications and taking off of  
the clothing beforehand, and the going up  
naked—until, in the ascent leaving everything  
behind inasmuch as it is foreign to god, one  
should see, by oneself alone, *it* alone, absolute,  
simple, pure, from which everything depends  
and looks to it {and *is*, and *lives*, and *thinks*;  
for it is cause of *life* and *mind* and *being*}.  
If someone should see it, what a love he  
would have, what a longing, wishing to be  
commingled with it; how it would strike one  
with pleasure! For the one not yet seeing it, it  
is to be desired as good, but for the one seeing  
it, he is to be really delighted in its beauty  
and to be filled with amazement along with  
pleasure, and to be stricken harmlessly and to  
love with true love and a piercing longing, and  
to mock other loves and to despise what he  
previously considered beautiful.

[A3] 1.6[1].9.7–25 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

Ἄναγε ἐπὶ σαυτὸν καὶ ἴδε· κἂν μήπω  
 σαυτὸν ἴδῃς καλόν, οἷα ποιητὴς  
 ἀγάλματος, ὃ δεῖ καλὸν γενέσθαι, τὸ  
 μὲν ἀφαιρεῖ, τὸ δὲ ἀπέξεσε, τὸ δὲ λείον,  
 τὸ δὲ καθαρὸν ἐποίησεν, ἕως ἔδειξε  
 καλὸν ἐπὶ τῷ ἀγάλματι πρόσωπον,  
 οὕτω καὶ σὺ ἀφαιρεῖ ὅσα περιττὰ καὶ  
 ἀπεύθυνε ὅσα σκολιά, ὅσα σκοτεινὰ  
 καθαίρων ἐργάζου εἶναι λαμπρὰ καὶ μὴ  
 παύσῃ τεκταίνων τὸ σὸν ἄγαλμα, ἕως  
 ἂν ἐκλάμψει σοι τῆς ἀρετῆς ἡ θεοειδῆς  
 ἀγλαία, ἕως ἂν ἴδῃς σωφροσύνην ἐν  
 ἀγνῶ βεβώσαν βάθρῳ. Εἰ γέγονας τοῦτο  
 καὶ εἶδες αὐτὸ καὶ σαυτῷ καθαρὸς  
 συνεγένου οὐδὲν ἔχων ἐμπόδιον πρὸς  
 τὸ εἶς οὕτω γενέσθαι οὐδὲ σὺν αὐτῷ  
 ἄλλο τι ἐντὸς μεμιγμένον ἔχων, ἀλλ’  
 ὅλος αὐτὸς φῶς ἀληθινὸν μόνον, οὐ  
 μεγέθει μεμετρημένον οὐδὲ σχήματι  
 εἰς ἐλάττωσιν περιγραφέν οὐδ’ αὖ εἰς  
 μέγεθος δι’ ἀπειρίας αὐξηθέν, ἀλλ’  
 ἀμέτρητον πανταχοῦ, ὥς ἂν μείζον  
 παντὸς μέτρου καὶ παντὸς κρείσσον  
 ποσοῦ· εἰ τοῦτο γενόμενον σαυτὸν ἴδοις,  
 ὁψις ἤδη γενόμενος θαρσύνσας περὶ  
 σαυτῷ καὶ ἐνταῦθα ἤδη ἀναβεβηκῶς  
 μηκέτι τοῦ δεικνύντος δεηθεὶς ἀτενίσας  
 ἴδε· οὗτος γὰρ μόνος ὁ ὀφθαλμὸς τὸ  
 μέγα κάλλος βλέπει.

Go back into yourself and look; and if you  
 still do not see yourself beautiful, just as  
 the maker of a statue which needs to be  
 beautiful cuts some parts away and polishes  
 others and makes some parts smooth  
 and others pure until he has revealed the  
 beautiful face in the statue, so also you cut  
 away whatever is excessive, and straighten  
 whatever is crooked, and remove whatever  
 is dark and make it shiny, and not stop  
 “crafting your statue” until you should see  
 “temperance mounted upon a holy pedestal.”  
 If you have become this, and see it, and, you,  
 pure, “come together” with yourself, having  
 no impediment to thus coming towards one,  
 nor having with it anything else mixed inside,  
 but wholly yourself, only true light, not  
 measured by magnitude nor circumscribed  
 into diminution by shape nor, conversely,  
 expanded into magnitude by unboundedness,  
 but everywhere unmeasurable because  
 greater than all measure and better than all  
 quantity; if you see yourself having become  
 this, at this point, having become vision, you  
 have confidence with respect to yourself,  
 and in this very moment, having ascended,  
 you have no need of a demonstrator; look  
 intently; for this alone is the eye that sees the  
 great beauty.

[A4] IV.8[6].1.1–11 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

Πολλάκις ἐγειρόμενος εἰς ἑμαυτὸν ἐκ τοῦ σώματος καὶ γινόμενος τῶν μὲν ἄλλων ἔξω, ἑμαυτοῦ δὲ εἴσω, θαυμαστὸν ἡλίκον ὁρῶν κάλλος, καὶ τῆς κρείττονος μοίρας πιστεύσας τότε μάλιστα εἶναι, ζώην τε ἀρίστην ἐνεργήσας καὶ τῷ θεῷ εἰς ταῦτὸν γεγενημένος καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ ἰδρυθεὶς εἰς ἐνέργειαν ἔλθων ἐκείνην ὑπὲρ πάντων τὸ ἄλλο νοητὸν ἑμαυτὸν ἰδρύσας, μετὰ ταύτην τὴν ἐν τῷ θεῷ στάσιν εἰς λογισμόν ἐκ νοῦ καταβάς ἀπορώ, πῶς ποτε καὶ νῦν καταβαίνω, καὶ ὅπως ποτέ μοι ἔνδον ἡ ψυχὴ γεγένηται τοῦ σώματος τοῦτο οὕσα, οἷον ἐφάνη καθ' ἑαυτήν, καίπερ οὕσα ἐν σώματι.

Frequently—awakening into myself out of my body, and coming to be outside of other things but within myself, seeing an extraordinarily marvelous beauty, and coming to believe then I was of the better part, having actualized the noblest life, and having come to identify with the divine and having been settled within it, coming into that actuality, settling myself above every other intelligible object—after this stasis in the divine, having descended into rationality from Intellect, I am puzzled, however, even now, how I descend, and how for me the soul *ever* came to be inside of the body, being what it appears to be on its own even while it is in the body.

[A5] VI.9[9].4.1–30 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>, modified)

Εἰ δὲ μὴ ἦλθέ τις ἐπὶ τὸ θέαμα, μηδὲ σύνεσιν ἔσχεν ἡ ψυχὴ τῆς ἐκεῖ ἀγλαΐας μηδὲ ἔπαθε μηδὲ ἔσχεν ἐν ἑαυτῷ οἷον ἐρωτικὸν πάθημα ἐκ τοῦ ἰδεῖν ἐραστοῦ ἐν ᾧ ἔρᾳ ἀναπαυσαμένου, δεξάμενος φῶς ἀληθινὸν καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν ψυχὴν περιφωτίσαν [H-S<sup>1</sup>: περιφωτίσας] διὰ τὸ ἐγγυτέρω γεγονέναι, ἀναβεβηκέναι δὲ ἔτι ὀπισθοβαρῆς ὑπάρχων, ἃ ἐμπόδια ἦν τῇ θεᾷ, καὶ οὐ μόνος ἀναβεβηκώς, ἀλλ' ἔχων τὸ διείργον ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, ἢ μήπω εἰς ἐν συναρθεῖς—οὐ γὰρ δὴ ἄπεστιν οὐδενὸς ἐκεῖνο καὶ πάντων δέ, ὥστε παρῶν μὴ παρεῖναι ἀλλ'

If someone has not come to the contemplation, and the soul has not had an awareness of, or experienced, the glories there, nor had in itself (as it were) the erotic experience—from the vision—of a (male) lover resting in the (male) beloved, having received the true light and having illuminated around the entire soul through having become closer; but [instead] has ascended while still being burdened from behind, which was an impediment to the contemplation, and not having ascended alone, but having something that separates one from it, or not yet being brought together into one—for that one is certainly not absent from any, and yet is absent from everything, so that being present, it is not present except to those able

(cont.)

[A5] v1.9[9].4.1–30 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>, modified)

ἢ τοῖς δέχεσθαι δυναμένοις καὶ  
 παρεσκευασμένοις, ὥστε ἐναρμόσαι  
 καὶ οἷον ἐφάψασθαι καὶ θίγειν  
 ὁμοιότητι καὶ τῇ ἐν αὐτῷ [H-S<sup>1</sup>:  
 αὐτῷ] δυνάμει συγγενεῖ τῷ ἀπ'  
 αὐτοῦ· ὅταν οὕτως ἔχῃ, ὡς εἶχεν, ὅτε  
 ἦλθεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, ἥδη δύναιται ἰδεῖν  
 ὡς πέφυκεν ἐκεῖνος θεατὸς εἶναι.

to receive it and those who are prepared so as  
 to adapt to it and as it were lay hold of it and to  
 touch it by means of likeness; and by means of a  
*dynamis* in oneself that is *connatural* with that  
 which comes from it, when one keeps oneself as  
 one kept oneself when one came from him, one  
 is immediately able to see, as it is natural for  
 that one to be contemplated.

[A6] v1.9[9].7.1–26 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>, modified)

Εἰ δ' ὅτι μηδὲν τούτων ἐστίν,  
 ἀορίστεῖς τῇ γνώμῃ, στήσον σαυτὸν  
 εἰς ταῦτα, καὶ ἀπὸ τούτων θεῶ· θεῶ  
 δὲ μὴ ἔξω ρίπτων τὴν διάνοιαν. Οὐ  
 γὰρ κεῖται που ἐρημώσαν αὐτοῦ τὰ  
 ἄλλα, ἀλλ' ἔστι τῷ δυναμένῳ θίγειν  
 ἐκεῖ παρόν, τῷ δ' ἀδυνατοῦντι οὐ  
 πάρεστιν. "Ὡςπερ δὲ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων  
 οὐκ ἔστι τι νοεῖν ἄλλο νοοῦντα καὶ  
 πρὸς ἄλλω ὄντα, ἀλλὰ δεῖ μηδὲν  
 προσάπτειν τῷ νοουμένῳ, ἵν' ἡ αὐτὸ  
 τὸ νοούμενον, οὕτω δεῖ καὶ ἐνταῦθα  
 εἰδέναι, ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλου ἔχοντα  
 ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ τύπον ἐκεῖνο νοῆσαι  
 ἐνεργούντος τοῦ τύπου, οὐδ' αὖ  
 ἄλλοις κατελιγμμένην τὴν ψυχὴν  
 καὶ κατεχομένην τυπωθῆναι τῷ τοῦ  
 ἐναντίου τύπῳ, ἀλλ' ὥςπερ περὶ  
 τῆς ὕλης λέγεται, ὡς ἄρα ἄποιον  
 εἶναι δεῖ πάντων, εἰ μέλλει δέχεσθαι  
 τοὺς πάντων τύπους, οὕτω καὶ πολὺ  
 μᾶλλον ἀνείδεον τὴν ψυχὴν γίνεσθαι,  
 εἰ μέλλει μηδὲν

But if because it is none of these, you are  
 indeterminate in thought, stand yourself in  
 these these things and contemplate out from  
 them; but contemplate without throwing your  
 thought outward. For it does not lie 'somewhere'  
 having left the other things bereft of it, but it  
 is present 'there' to the one able to touch, but  
 is not present to the one unable to. But just as  
 with other things, it is not possible to think  
 something while thinking something else and  
 being oriented towards another, but one must  
 attach nothing to the object of thought, in order  
 that it be indeed the object of thought itself;  
 so also, here too, one should know that it is not  
 possible to think that [One] while having the  
 impression of another in one's soul, while the  
 impression is active, nor, moreover, when the  
 soul is taken over and possessed by other things  
 can she be imprinted with the impression of  
 the opposite, but just as is said of matter that it  
 needs to be without the qualities of all things  
 if it is going to receive the impressions of all  
 things, so also (and how much more so!) must



(cont.)

[A6] v1.9[9].7.1–26 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>, modified)

ἐμπόδιον ἐγκαθήμενον ἔσεσθαι πρὸς  
πλήρωσιν καὶ ἔλλαμψιν αὐτῇ τῆς  
φύσεως τῆς πρώτης. Εἰ δὲ τοῦτο,  
πάντων τῶν ἔξω ἀφεμένην δεῖ  
ἐπιστραφῆναι πρὸς τὸ εἶσω πάντη,  
μὴ πρὸς τι τῶν ἔξω κεκλίσθαι, ἀλλὰ  
ἀγνοήσαντα τὰ πάντα καὶ πρὸ τοῦ  
μὲν τῇ αἰσθήσει [H-S<sup>1</sup>: διαθέσει],  
τότε δὲ καὶ τοῖς εἶδεσιν, ἀγνοήσαντα  
δὲ καὶ αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ θέᾳ ἐκείνου  
γενέσθαι, κάκεινῳ συγγενόμενον  
καὶ ἱκανῶς οἶον ὁμιλήσαντα ἦκιν  
ἀγγέλλοντα, εἰ δύναιτο, καὶ ἄλλῳ  
τὴν ἐκεῖ συνουσίαν· οἶαν ἴσως καὶ  
Μίνως ποιούμενος ὀαριστῆς τοῦ  
Διὸς ἐφημίσθη εἶναι, ἥς μεμνημένος  
εἶδωλα αὐτῆς τοὺς νόμους ἐτίθει  
τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπαφῇ εἰς νόμων  
πληροῦμενος θέσιν.

the soul become formless, if there is not going  
to be embedded within her an impediment to  
an impregnation and illumination from the  
first nature. If this is so, withdrawing from  
all external things, she [the soul] must turn  
completely to the within, and not be inclined to  
any of the external things, but ‘un—knowing’  
all things (both as he had at first, in the sensible  
realm, then also, in that of the forms) and  
even ‘un—knowing’ himself, come to be in  
the contemplation of that, and having ‘come  
together’ and having had sufficient intercourse,  
so to speak, with that, come announce the  
communion there, if possible, also to another.  
Perhaps it is because of doing such a thing that  
Minos too was said to be the “familiar friend”  
of Zeus; remembering this [communion] he  
instituted laws as an image of it, having been  
filled with legislative status by the divine touch.

[A7] v1.9[9].9.46–10.21 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

“Ὅστις δὲ εἶδεν, οἶδεν ὃ λέγω, ὥς  
ἡ ψυχὴ ζωὴν ἄλλην ἴσχει τότε καὶ  
προσιούσα καὶ ἤδη προσελθοῦσα  
καὶ μετασχούσα αὐτοῦ, ὥστε γινώναι  
διατεθεῖσαν, ὅτι πάρεστιν ὁ χορηγὸς  
ἀληθινῆς ζωῆς, καὶ δεῖ οὐδενὸς ἔτι.  
Τοῦναντίον δὲ ἀποθέσθαι τὰ ἄλλα  
δεῖ, καὶ ἐν μόνῳ στήναι τούτῳ, καὶ  
τοῦτο γενέσθαι μόνον περικόψαντα τὰ  
λοιπὰ ὅσα περιεκείμεθα· ὥστε ἐξελεῖν  
σπεύδειν ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἀγανακτεῖν ἐπὶ  
θάτερα δεδεμένους, ἵνα τῷ ὅλῳ

“Whoever has seen, knows what I mean”: that  
then the soul has another life, both while  
approaching and having already “come forward”  
and participated in him, so that she is disposed  
to recognize that the provider of true life is  
present and she needs nothing further. But on  
the contrary, it is necessary to put the other  
things away and stand in this *alone*, and become  
that alone, having cut away the remaining  
things with which were are encompassed, so as  
to hasten to go out from here, and to be irritated  
at being bound to the other things, in order that

(cont.)

[A7] v1.9[9].9.46–10.21 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

αὐτῶν περιπτυσώμεθα καὶ μὴδὲν  
μέρος ἔχοιμεν, ᾧ μὴ ἐφαπτόμεθα θεοῦ.  
Ὅρᾶν δὴ ἔστιν ἐνταῦθα κάκεινον καὶ  
ἑαυτὸν ὡς ὁρᾶν θέμις· ἑαυτὸν μὲν  
ἡγλαΐσμενον, φωτὸς πλήρη νοητοῦ,  
μᾶλλον δὲ φῶς αὐτὸ καθαρὸν, ἀβαρὴ,  
κοῦφον, θεὸν γενόμενον, μᾶλλον δὲ  
ὄντα, ἀναφθέντα μὲν τότε, εἰ δὲ πάλιν  
βαρύνοιτο, ὥσπερ μαραινόμενον.

[9 lines omitted]

... Ἐαυτὸν μὲν οὖν ἰδὼν τότε, ὅτε  
ὁρᾷ, τοιοῦτον ὄψεται, μᾶλλον δὲ  
αὐτῷ τοιοῦτῳ συνέσται καὶ τοιοῦτον  
αἰσθήσεται ἀπλοῦν γενόμενον. Τάχα  
δὲ οὐδὲ « ὄψεται » λεκτέον, « τὸ δὲ  
ὀφθέν », εἶπερ δεῖ δύο ταῦτα λέγειν,  
τό τε ὁρᾶν καὶ ὁρώμενον, ἀλλὰ μὴ ἐν  
ἁμφω· τολμηρὸς μὲν ὁ λόγος. Τότε μὲν  
οὖν οὔτε ὁρᾷ οὐδὲ διακρίνει ὁ ὁρῶν  
οὐδὲ φαντάζεται δύο, ἀλλ' οἷον ἄλλος  
γενόμενος καὶ οὐκ οὐδὲ φαντάζεται  
δύο, ἀλλ' οἷον ἄλλος γενόμενος καὶ  
οὐκ αὐτὸς οὐδ' αὐτοῦ συντελεῖ ἐκεῖ,  
κάκεινου γενόμενος ἐν ἑστίν ὥσπερ  
κέντρῳ κέντρον συνάψας. Καὶ γὰρ  
ἐνταῦθα συνελθόντα ἐν ἑστί, τό τε  
δύο, ὅταν χωρὶς. Οὕτω καὶ ἡμεῖς νῦν  
λέγομεν ἕτερον. Διὸ καὶ δύσφραστον  
τὸ θέαμα· πῶς γὰρ ἂν ἀπαγγείλειέ τις  
ὡς ἕτερον οὐκ ἰδὼν ἐκεῖ ὅτε ἐθεᾶτο  
ἕτερον, ἀλλὰ ἐν πρὸς ἑαυτόν;

we may embrace with the whole of ourselves,  
and have no part with which we do not touch  
god. Here, at this point, one can see both him  
and oneself as it is right to see: the self glorified,  
full of intelligible light—but rather itself pure  
light, weightless, floating, having become—but  
rather, being—a god; inflamed, then, but if  
one should be weighed down again, it is as if  
withering.

[9 lines omitted]

[...] And so seeing himself, then, when he sees,  
he will see himself as such, or, rather, he will  
“be together with” himself in such a manner  
and will perceive [himself] as such, having  
become simple. But perhaps one should not  
say, “will see,” but “was seen,” if indeed it is  
even necessary to speak of two, the seer and  
the seen, but not both as one (the statement  
is audacious!). And so, then, the seer neither  
sees nor distinguishes nor imagines two, but  
as if having become another and not himself  
nor belonging to himself there, having come  
to belong to that [one], he is one, as if having  
attached center to center. For down here, too,  
having “come together” they [sc. “lovers”] are  
one, but two when separate. Thus, now, we also  
say “another.” Therefore the contemplation  
is indeed difficult to express: for how could  
someone report as another, not seeing as  
another there when he contemplated, but as  
one in relation to himself?

[A8] VI.9[9].11.4–25 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>, modified)

Ἐπεὶ τοίνυν δύο οὐκ ἦν, ἀλλ' ἐν ἡν αὐτὸς ὁ ἰδὼν πρὸς τὸ ἑωραμένον, ὡς ἂν μὴ ἑωραμένον, ἀλλ' ἡνωμένον, ὃς ἐγένετο ὅτε ἐκείνῳ ἐμίγνυτο εἰ μεμνῶτο, ἔχοι ἂν παρ' ἑαυτῷ ἐκείνου εἰκόνα· Ἦν δὲ ἐν καὶ αὐτὸς διαφορὰν ἐν αὐτῷ οὐδεμίαν πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ἔχων οὔτε κατὰ ἄλλα—οὐ γάρ τι ἐκινεῖτο παρ' αὐτῷ, οὐ θυμός, οὐκ ἐπιθυμία ἄλλου παρῆν αὐτῷ ἀναβεβηκότι—ἀλλ' οὐδὲ λόγος οὐδὲ τις νόησις οὐδ' ὅλως αὐτός, εἰ δεῖ καὶ τοῦτο λέγειν. Ἀλλ' ὥσπερ ἀρπασθεὶς ἢ ἐνθουσιάσας ἡσυχῇ ἐν ἐρήμῳ καὶ καταστάσει γεγένηται ἀτρεμεῖ, τῇ αὐτοῦ οὐσίᾳ οὐδαμῇ ἀποκλίνων οὐδὲ περὶ αὐτὸν στρεφόμενος, ἐστὼς πάντῃ καὶ οἷον στάσις γενόμενος. Οὐδὲ τῶν καλῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ καλὸν ἤδη ὑπερθέων, ὑπερβάς ἤδη καὶ τὸν τῶν ἀρετῶν χορόν, ὥσπερ τις εἰς τὸ εἶσω τοῦ ἀδύτου εἰσδὺς εἰς τοῦπίσω καταλιπὼν τὰ ἐν τῷ νεῷ ἀγάλματα, ἃ ἐξεληθόντι τοῦ ἀδύτου πάλιν γίνεται πρῶτα μετὰ τὸ ἐνδον θεάμα καὶ τὴν ἐκεῖ συνουσίαν πρὸς οὐκ ἀγαλμα οὐδὲ εἰκόνα, ἀλλὰ αὐτό· ἃ δὴ γίνεταί δεύτερα θεάματα. Τὸ δὲ ἴσως ἦν οὐ θεάμα, ἀλλὰ ἄλλος τρόπος τοῦ ἰδεῖν, ἔκστασις καὶ ἁπλωσις καὶ ἐπίδοσις αὐτοῦ [H-S1: αὐτοῦ] καὶ ἔφεσις πρὸς ἀφῆν καὶ στάσις καὶ περινόησις πρὸς ἐφαρμογὴν, εἴπερ τις τὸ ἐν τῷ ἀδύτῳ θεάσεται.

Since, then, there were not two, but the seer himself was one in relation to the seen (for it was not really seen, but unified), if he remembers who he became when he was mingled with that [one], he will have an image of that [one] with himself. But he himself, too, was one, with no distinction in himself either in relation to himself or in relation to others; for nothing moved with him, and he had no wish, no desire for another when he had ascended—but there was not even any reason or thought, nor even a self at all, if one must say even this; but he was as if snatched away or divinely possessed, in quiet solitude and stillness, having become motionless, not turning aside anywhere in his substance, nor turning about himself, having come to a complete standstill and indeed having become a kind of stasis. He was not among the beauties, having already ascended beyond even the chorus of virtues, just like someone enters into the interior of the *adyton* having left behind in the *naos* the cult—statues which, upon his emergence back out of the *adyton*, become the first things [encountered] after the object of contemplation inside, and the intercourse there not with cult—statues or icons, but with the thing itself; for these [statues] become secondary objects of contemplation. But the former was perhaps not an object of contemplation, but rather another way to see: an 'ecstatic standing outside' and a 'simplifying expansion' and a 'surrendering growth of oneself' and a 'longing towards contact' and a stasis and a 'thinking around towards accomodation,' if someone is going to contemplate what is in the *adyton*.

[A9] vi.9[9].11.36–46 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

Οὐ γὰρ δὴ εἰς τὸ πάντη μὴ ὄν ἤξει ἡ ψυχῆς φύσις, ἀλλὰ κάτω μὲν βάσα εἰς κακὸν ἤξει, καὶ οὕτως εἰς μὴ ὄν, οὐκ εἰς τὸ παντελὲς μὴ ὄν. Τὴν ἐναντίαν δὲ δραμοῦσα ἤξει οὐκ εἰς ἄλλο, ἀλλ' εἰς αὐτήν, καὶ οὕτως οὐκ ἐν ἄλλῳ οὐσα <οὐκ> ἐν οὐδενί ἐστιν, ἀλλ' ἐν αὐτῇ· τὸ δὲ ἐν αὐτῇ μόνῃ καὶ οὐκ ἐν τῷ ὄντι ἐν ἐκείνῳ· γίνεται γὰρ καὶ αὐτὸς τις οὐκ οὐσία, ἀλλ' ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας ταύτης, ἣ προσομιλεῖ. Εἴ τις οὖν τοῦτο αὐτὸν γενόμενον ἴδοι, ἔχει ὁμοίωμα ἐκείνου αὐτόν, καὶ εἰ ἀφ' αὐτοῦ μεταβαίνοι ὡς εἰκὼν πρὸς ἀρχέτυπον, τέλος ἂν ἔχοι τῆς πορείας.

For indeed the nature of the soul will not come to complete non—existence, but going (on the one hand) “down,” it will come into evil, and thus into non—being (i.e., not to utter non—existence). Conversely, running the opposite way, it will come not into another but into itself, and thus not being in another, it is in no one but itself; yet while in itself, and not in Being, it is in that, for one becomes also oneself and not in substance, but “beyond substance” by means of this intercourse. And so if one should see oneself having become this, one has oneself as a likeness of that, and if one goes on from oneself as an image to an archetype one reaches the “end of the journey.”

[A10] III.8[30].9.19–32 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

Καὶ γὰρ αὖ τῆς γνώσεως διὰ νοῦ τῶν ἄλλων γινομένης καὶ τῷ νῷ νοῦν γινώσκειν δυναμένων ὑπερβεβηκὸς τοῦτο τὴν νοῦ φύσιν τίνοι ἂν ἀλίσκοιτο ἐπιβολῇ ἀθρόα; Πρὸς δὲ δεῖ σημῆναι, ὅπως οἶόν τε, τῷ ἐν ἡμῖν ὁμοίῳ φήσομεν. Ἔστι γὰρ τι καὶ παρ' ἡμῖν αὐτοῦ· ἢ οὐκ ἔστιν, ὅπου μὴ ἔστιν, οἷς ἐστὶ μετέχειν αὐτοῦ. Τὸ γὰρ πανταχοῦ παρὸν στήσας ὅπου οὐκ ἐστὶν τὸ δυνάμενον ἔχειν ἔχεις ἐκείθεν· ὥσπερ εἰ φωνῆς κατεχούσης ἐρημίαν ἢ καὶ μετὰ τῆς ἐρημίας καὶ ἀνθρώπους ἐν ὁπωσὺν τοῦ ἐρήμου στήσας οὗς τὴν φωνὴν κομιεῖ πᾶσαν καὶ αὐτὸ οὐ πᾶσαν. Τί οὖν ἐστὶν ὁ

For, again, since knowledge of other thing occurs through intellect, and we are able to know intellect by intellect, by what sudden grasping could we seize that which supersedes the nature of intellect?—in response to which one should note how it is possible: we will say, it is by means of the likeness within us. For there is something of it with us too; there is not somewhere it is not, for those able to participate in it. For standing anywhere, you have from there that which is able to have that which is present everywhere; just as if there was a voice diffused over a desert, or also in the midst of the desert, people too, and by standing to listen at any place in the desert, you will receive all the voice, and yet not all. What is it, then, which we shall receive when we set our intellect to it? Rather the intellect,

(cont.)

[A10] III.8[30].9.19–32 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

κοιμούμεθα νοῦν παραστησάμενοι;  
 "Ἡ δει τὸν νοῦν οἶον εἰς τοῦπίσω  
 ἀναχωρεῖν καὶ οἶον ἑαυτὸν ἀφέντα  
 τοῖς εἰς ὅπισθεν αὐτοῦ ἀμφίστομον  
 ὄντα, κάκεῖνα, εἰ ἐθέλοι ἐκεῖνο ὁρᾶν,  
 μὴ πάντα νοῦν εἶναι. "Ἔστι μὲν γὰρ  
 αὐτὸς ζωὴ πρώτη, ἐνέργεια οὖσα ἐν  
 διεξόδῳ τῶν πάντων· διεξόδῳ δὲ οὐ  
 τῇ διεξιούσῃ, ἀλλὰ τῇ διεξελθούσῃ.  
 Εἴπερ οὖν καὶ ζωὴ ἐστὶ καὶ διεξόδος  
 ἐστὶ καὶ πάντα ἀκριβῶς καὶ οὐχ  
 ὁλοσχερῶς ἔχει—ἀτελῶς γὰρ ἂν  
 καὶ ἀδιαθρότως ἔχοι—ἔκ τινος  
 ἄλλου αὐτὸν εἶναι, ὃ οὐκέτι ἐν  
 διεξόδῳ, ἀλλὰ ἀρχὴ διεξόδου καὶ  
 ἀρχὴ ζωῆς καὶ ἀρχὴ νοῦ καὶ τῶν  
 πάντων.

being "double—mouthed," must (so to speak)  
 withdraw backwards, and, as it were, surrender  
 itself to what lies behind it; and there, if it wishes  
 to see that one (n.), it must not be altogether  
 intellect. For it (m.) is itself the first life, being  
 an activity in the going—through—and—out of  
 all things; but going—through—and—out not  
 in its being [now] going—through—and—out,  
 but in that it has [previously] gone—through—  
 and—out. So if, then, it is life, and going—  
 through—and—out, and has all things distinctly  
 and not imprecisely—for thus it would have  
 them imperfectly and inarticulately—it is from  
 something else which is not still in the going—  
 through—and—out but is the origin of the  
 going—through—and—out and the origin of  
 life and the origin of intellect and of all things.

[A11] V.8[31].11.1–19 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>, modified)

Εἰ [Armstrong, LCL: "Ετι] δέ τις  
 ἡμῶν ἀδυνατῶν ἑαυτὸν ὁρᾶν, ὅπ'  
 ἐκείνου τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπὶ ἀν καταληφθεὶς  
 εἰς τὸ ἰδεῖν προφέρει τὸ θέαμα,  
 ἑαυτὸν προφέρει καὶ εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ  
 καλλωπισθεῖσαν βλέπει, ἀφείς δὲ  
 τὴν εἰκόνα καίπερ καλὴν οὖσαν εἰς  
 ἐν αὐτῷ ἐλθὼν καὶ μηκέτι σχίσας  
 ἐν ὁμοῦ πάντα ἐστὶ μετ' ἐκείνου τοῦ  
 θεοῦ ἀψοφητὶ παρόντος, καὶ ἔστι  
 μετ' αὐτοῦ ὅσον δύναται καὶ θέλει,  
 εἰ δ' ἐπιστραφεῖ εἰς δύο, καθαρὸς  
 μένων ἐφεξῆς ἐστὶν αὐτῷ, ὥστε αὐτῷ  
 παρεῖναι ἐκείνως πάλιν, εἰ πάλιν ἐπ'

If one of us is unable to see himself, then, when  
 he is possessed by that god, if he should bring  
 forth the contemplation into an act of seeing,  
 he presents himself to himself and looks at a  
 beautified image of himself, but dismisses the  
 image though it is beautiful, coming into one  
 with himself, and, being no longer separate, is  
 simultaneously one and all things with that god  
 noiselessly present, and is with him as much  
 as he is able and wishes to be; but if he should  
 revert into duality, while remaining pure, he  
 is immediately subjacent to him, so as to be  
 present to him thusly again, if he should again  
 turn towards him. In this reversion he has this

(cont.)

[A11] v.8[31].11.1–19 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>, modified)

αὐτὸν στρέφοι, ἐν δὲ τῇ ἐπιστροφῇ  
κέρδος τοῦτ' ἔχει· ἀρχόμενος  
αἰσθάνεται αὐτοῦ, ἕως ἑτερός ἐστι·  
δραμῶν δὲ εἰς τὸ εἶσω ἔχει πᾶν, καὶ  
ἀφείς τὴν αἴσθησιν εἰς τοῦπίσω τοῦ  
ἑτερος εἶναι φόβῳ εἰς ἐστὶν ἐκεῖ· καὶ  
ἐπιθυμήσῃ ὡς ἑτερον ὃν ἰδεῖν, ἔξω  
αὐτὸν ποιεῖ. Δεῖ δὲ καταμανθάνοντα  
μὲν ἔν τινι τύπῳ αὐτοῦ μένοντα μετὰ  
τοῦ ζητεῖν γνωματεύειν αὐτόν, εἰς  
οἶον δὲ εἴσειςιν, οὕτω μαθόντα κατὰ  
πίστιν, ὡς ἐπὶ χρῆμα μακαριστὸν  
εἴσειςιν, ἥδη αὐτὸν δοῦνα εἰς τὸ εἶσω  
καὶ γενέσθαι ἀντὶ ὁρώντος ἥδη θέαμα  
ἐτέρου θεωμένου, οἷος ἐκεῖθεν ἥκει  
ἐκλάμποντα τοῖς νοήμασι.

advantage: from the beginning, he perceives  
himself, so long as he is different; but running  
into the within, he has everything, and leaving  
perception behind in fear of being different,  
he is one there. And if he should desire to  
see while being different, he makes himself  
external. But one must, on the one hand, learn  
about him, and, other the other hand, maintain  
some impression of him while seeking to  
discern into what sort of thing one is entering,  
thus, learning with certainty that it is into the  
most blessed thing, immediately one must  
surrender oneself to the within and become,  
instead of a seer, the object of contemplation  
of another contemplator, shining out with the  
kind of thoughts that come from there.

[A12] v.5[32].7.31–8.23 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

Οὕτω δὴ καὶ νοῦς αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τῶν  
ἄλλων καλύψας καὶ συναγαγὼν εἰς τὸ  
εἶσω μηδὲν ὁρῶν θεάσεται οὐκ ἄλλο  
ἐν ἄλλῳ φῶς, ἀλλ' αὐτὸ καθ' ἑαυτὸ  
μόνον καθαρὸν ἐφ' αὐτοῦ ἐξαίφνης  
φανέν, ὥστε ἀπορεῖν ὅθεν ἐφάνη,  
ἔξωθεν ἢ ἔνδον, καὶ ἀπελθόντος εἰπεῖν  
« ἔνδον ἄρα ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔνδον αὖ ». "Ἡ  
οὐ δεῖ ζητεῖν πόθεν· οὐ γάρ ἐστι τὸ  
πόθεν· οὕτε γὰρ ἔρχεται οὕτε ἀπεισιν  
οὐδαμοῦ, ἀλλὰ φαίνεται τε καὶ οὐ  
φαίνεται· διὸ οὐ χρὴ διώκειν, ἀλλ'  
ἡσυχῇ μένειν, ἕως ἂν φανῇ,

Thus also Intellect, veiling itself from other  
things and contracting into its interior, not  
looking at anything, will see a light, not  
another one in something else, but itself, alone  
by itself, pure, appearing suddenly by itself,  
so as to be puzzled whence it appeared, from  
without or within, and, once it has departed,  
to say, "it was within, and yet was not within."  
But one need not seek whence, for there is  
no "whence." For it does not come nor go  
anywhere, but appears or does not appear.  
Therefore, it is not necessary to pursue it, but  
to remain quiet until it should appear,

(cont.)

[A12] v.5[32].7.31–8.23 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

παρασκευάσαντα ἑαυτὸν θεατὴν εἶναι, ὥσπερ ὀφθαλμὸς ἀνατολὰς ἡλίου περιμένει· ὁ δὲ ὑπερφανεὶς τοῦ ὀρίζοντος—ἐξ ὠκεανοῦ φασιν οἱ ποιηταί—ἔδωκεν ἑαυτὸν θεάσασθαι τοῖς ὁμμασιν. Οὐτοσί δέ, ὃν μιμεῖται ὁ ἥλιος, ὑπερσχήσει πόθεν; Καὶ τί ὑπερβάλων φανήσεται; Ἡ αὐτὸν ὑπερσχῶν τὸν νοῦν τὸν θεώμενον· ἐστήξεται μὲν γὰρ ὁ νοῦς πρὸς τὴν θέαν εἰς οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἢ πρὸς τὸ καλὸν βλέπων, ἐκεῖ ἑαυτὸν πᾶς τρέπων καὶ διδούς, στὰς δὲ καὶ οἷον πληρωθεὶς μένους εἶδε μὲν τὰ πρῶτα καλλιῶ γενόμενον ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἐπιστίλβοντα, ὥς ἐγγὺς ὄντος αὐτοῦ. Ὁ δὲ οὐκ ἦει, ὥς τις προσεδόκα, ἀλλ' ἦλθεν ὥς οὐκ ἐλθῶν· ὥφθη γὰρ ὥς οὐκ ἐλθῶν, ἀλλὰ πρὸ πάντων παρῶν, πρὶν καὶ τὸν νοῦν ἐλθεῖν. Εἶναι δὲ τὸν νοῦν τὸν ἐλθόντα καὶ τοῦτον εἶναι καὶ τὸν ἀπιόντα, ὅτι μὴ οἶδε ποῦ δεῖ μένειν καὶ ποῦ ἐκείνος μένει, ὅτι ἐν οὐδενί. Καὶ εἰ οἷόν τε ἦν καὶ αὐτῷ τῷ νῷ μένειν μηδαμοῦ—οὐχ ὅτι ἐν τόπῳ· οὐδὲ γὰρ οὐδ' αὐτὸς ἐν τόπῳ, ἀλλ' ὅλως μηδαμοῦ—ἦν ἂν αἰεὶ ἐκείνον βλέπων· καίτοι οὐδὲ βλέπων, ἀλλ' ἐν ἐκείνῳ ὣν καὶ οὐ δύο. Νῦν δέ, ὅτι ἐστὶ νοῦς, οὕτω βλέπει, ὅτε βλέπει, τῷ ἑαυτοῦ μὴ νῷ.

preparing oneself to be a contemplator, just like the eye awaits the rising of the sun; and its appearance above the horizon (“from Ocean,” the poets say) offers itself to the eyes to be contemplated. But he whom the sun imitates, whence will he arise? And surmounting what will he appear? Indeed, he will surmount the contemplating Intellect itself. For Intellect will make itself stand towards the contemplation, looking at nothing else but the Beautiful, completely turning and surrendering himself there, but having stood, and, as if having been filled with strength, it sees first of all itself having become more beautiful and glistening, as he is close to him. But he did not come as someone expected, but came as not having come; for he was seen not as having come, but as being present before all things, before even Intellect came. There is the Intellect that comes, and there is also the Intellect that goes away, because it does not know where to stay and where that one stays, as it is in nothing. And if it were possible also for Intellect itself to remain nowhere—not because it is in place, for neither is he in place, but rather, *absolutely* nowhere—it would have been gazing at that one eternally; or rather, not gazing, but being one with that and not two. But now, because it is Intellect, it looks, when it looks, with that of itself which is not Intellect.

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[A13] VI.7[38].31.5–35 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>, modified)

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Ἦρθη μὲν οὖν ἐκεῖ καὶ ἔμεινε  
ἀγαπήσας τὸ περὶ ἐκεῖνον εἶναι·  
ἐπιστραφεῖσα δὲ καὶ ψυχὴ ἡ  
δυσνηθεῖσα, ὡς ἔγνω καὶ εἶδεν, ἤσθη  
τε τῇ θεᾷ καὶ ὅσον οἶα τε ἦν ἰδεῖν  
ἐξεπλάγη. Εἶδε δὲ οἶον πληγεῖσα καὶ  
ἐν αὐτῇ [H-S<sup>1</sup>: αὐτῇ] ἔχουσά  
τι αὐτοῦ συνήσθετο καὶ διατεθεῖσα  
ἐγένετο ἐν πόθῳ, ὥσπερ οἱ ἐν τῷ  
εἰδῶλῳ τοῦ ἐρασμοῦ κινούμενοι εἰς  
τὸ αὐτὸ ἰδεῖν ἐθέλουν τὸ ἐρώμενον....

[19 lines omitted]

... Εἴτ' ἐκεῖ φέρεται δεινὴ ἀνευρεῖν  
οὐπερ ἐρᾷ οὐσα, καὶ οὐκ ἂν πρὶν  
ἐλεῖν ἀποστᾶσα, εἰ μὴ πού τις αὐτῆς  
καὶ τὸν ἔρωτα ἐξέλοι. Ἐνθα δὲ εἶδε  
μὲν καλὰ πάντα καὶ ἀληθῆ ὄντα,  
καὶ ἐπερρώσθη πλέον τῆς τοῦ ὄντος  
ζωῆς πληρωθεῖσα, καὶ ὄντως ὄν καὶ  
αὐτῇ γενομένη καὶ σύνεσιν ὄντως  
λαβοῦσα ἐγγὺς οὐσα αἰσθάνεται οὐ  
πάσαι ζητεῖ.

And so [Intellect] was raised up there, and  
he remained content to be around him; but  
the soul which was able, having reverted,  
when she knew and saw, also delighted in the  
contemplation, and, inasmuch as she was able  
to see, was smitten. She saw, stricken, as it were,  
and she was conscious of having something of  
it in herself, and thus disposed, she came into a  
state of longing, just like those who are moved  
by the image of a lovely person to want to see  
the beloved one itself....

[19 lines omitted]

... Then she is carried off there, being marvelous  
at discovering whatever she loves, and not  
desisting until she seizes it (unless someone,  
somewhere, were to steal even this love of hers  
away). In that very moment, she sees all things  
are beautiful and true, and she takes on more  
strength, filled with the life of Being; and having  
really also become Being herself, and having  
true consciousness, she perceives she is close to  
what she has long been seeking.

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[A14] VI.7[38].34.1–25 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>, modified)

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Καὶ οὐκέτι θαυμάσομεν τὸ τοὺς  
δεινοὺς πόθους παρέχον εἰ πάντῃ  
ἀπήλλακται καὶ μορφῆς νοητῆς· ἐπεὶ  
καὶ ψυχὴ, ὅταν αὐτοῦ ἔρωτα σύντονον  
λάβῃ, ἀποτίθεται πᾶσαν ἣν ἔχει  
μορφήν, καὶ ἥτις ἂν καὶ νοητοῦ ᾖ ἐν  
αὐτῇ. Οὐ γάρ ἐστιν ἔχοντά τι ἄλλο καὶ  
ἐνεργοῦντα περὶ αὐτὸ οὔτε ἰδεῖν οὔτε  
ἐναρμολογεῖσθαι. Ἀλλὰ δεῖ μήτε κακὸν  
μήτ' αὐτὸ ἀγαθὸν μηδὲν ἄλλο

And we will no longer be amazed if that which  
provokes the tremendous longing is entirely  
free from even intelligible shape; since the  
soul, too, when it acquires an intense love of  
it, sets aside all shape which she has, and even  
whatever shape of the intelligible might be in  
her. For there is neither seeing nor adaptation  
while holding anything else and being active  
around it. But it is necessary to have no evil  
nor even another good at hand, so that she



(cont.)

[A14] VI.7[38].34.1–25 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>, modified)

πρόχειρον ἔχειν, ἵνα δέξῃται μόνῃ μόνον. Ὅταν δὲ τούτου εὐτυχῆσῃ ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ ἦκῃ πρὸς αὐτήν, μᾶλλον δὲ παρὸν φανῇ, ὅταν ἐκείνη ἐκνεύσῃ τῶν παρόντων καὶ παρασκευάσασα αὐτήν ὡς ὅτι μάλιστα καλὴν καὶ εἰς ὁμοιότητα ἐλθοῦσα—ἡ δὲ παρασκευὴ καὶ ἡ κόσμησις δῆλι που τοῖς παρασκευαζομένοις—ἰδοῦσα δὲ ἐν αὐτῇ [H-S<sup>1</sup>: αὐτῇ] ἐξαίφνης φανέντα—μεταξὺ γὰρ οὐδὲν οὐδ' ἔτι δύο, ἀλλ' ἐν ἁμφω· οὐ γὰρ ἂν διακρίναις ἔτι, ἕως πάρεστι· μίμησις δὲ τούτου καὶ οἱ ἐνταῦθα ἐρασταὶ καὶ ἐρώμενοι συγκρίναι θέλοντες—καὶ οὔτε σώματος ἔτι αἰσθάνεται, ὅτι ἐστὶν ἐν αὐτῷ, οὔτε ἑαυτήν ἄλλο τι λέγει, οὐκ ἄνθρωπον, οὐ ζῶον, οὐκ ὄν, οὐδὲ πᾶν—ἀνώμαλος γὰρ ἡ τούτων πως θέα—καὶ οὐδὲ σχολὴν ἄγει πρὸς αὐτὰ οὔτε θέλει, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸ ζητήσασα ἐκείνῳ παρόντι ἀπαντᾷ· κακείνῳ ἂν αὐτῆς βλέπει· τίς δὲ οὐσα βλέπει, οὐδὲ τοῦτο σχολάζει ὁρᾶν. Ἐνθα δὲ οὐδὲν πάντων ἀντὶ τούτου ἀλλάξαιτο, οὐδ' εἴ τις αὐτῇ πάντα τὸν οὐρανὸν ἐπιτρέποι, ὡς οὐκ ὄντος ἄλλου ἔτι ἀμείνωνος οὐδὲ μᾶλλον ἀγαθοῦ· οὔτε γὰρ ἀνωτέρω τρέχει τὰ τε ἄλλα πάντα κατιούσης, καὶ ἢ ἥνω.

alone may receive it alone. When the soul should attain it and it comes to her (but rather, [already] being present, it appears)—when that soul slips away from the things present and has prepared herself so that she is most beautiful and has come into likeness (the preparation and the adornment are evident, perhaps, to those who are preparing), seeing it appearing suddenly in herself (for there is nothing between nor are there still two, but both are one; nor could you still make a distinction while it is present; an imitation of this is also lovers and beloveds down here, wishing to be blended) nor does she still perceive the body, that she is in it, and she does not call herself anything else: not a human being, nor a living thing, nor a being, nor all (for somehow the contemplation of these would be irregular), and she has neither leisure nor wishes with regard to these things, but having sought it, she encounters that, it being present, and looks at that instead of herself, not even at leisure to see who it is that looks—then, at that very moment, she would not exchange this for anything, not even if someone bequeathed to her all the heavens, there being nothing still greater nor a greater good; nor could she run up higher, all other things being on the descent, even if they might be “above.”

[A15] VI.7[38].35 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

Οὕτω δὲ διάκειται τότε, ὥς καὶ τοῦ νοεῖν καταφρονεῖν, ὃ τὸν ἄλλον χρόνον ἡσπάζετο, ὅτι τὸ νοεῖν κίνησις τις ἦν, αὕτη δὲ οὐ κινεῖσθαι θέλει. Καὶ γὰρ οὐδ' ἐκεῖνόν φησιν, ὃν ὁρᾷ, καίτοι νοῦς γενόμενος αὕτη θεωρεῖ οἷον νοωθεῖσα καὶ ἐν τῷ τόπῳ τῷ νοητῷ γενομένη· ἀλλὰ γενομένη μὲν ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ περὶ αὐτὸν ἔχουσα τὸ νοητὸν νοεῖ, ἐπὶ δ' ἐκεῖνον ἴδῃ τὸν θεόν, πάντα ἤδη ἀφίησιν, οἷον εἴ τις εἰσελθὼν εἰς οἶκον ποικιλὸν καὶ οὕτω καλὸν θεωροῖ ἔνδον ἕκαστα τῶν ποικιλιμάτων καὶ θαυμάζοι, πρὶν ἰδεῖν τὸν τοῦ οἴκου δεσπότην, ἰδὼν δ' ἐκεῖνον καὶ ἀγασθεὶς οὐ κατὰ τὴν τῶν ἀγαλμάτων φύσιν ὄντα, ἀλλ' ἄξιον τῆς ὄντως θέας, ἀφείκε ἐκεῖνα τοῦτον μόνον τοῦ λοιποῦ βλέπει, εἴτα βλέπων καὶ μὴ ἀφαιρῶν τὸ ὅμμα μηκέτι ὄραμα βλέπει τῷ συνεχεῖ τῆς θέας, ἀλλὰ τὴν ὅψιν αὐτοῦ συγκεράσαιο τῷ θεάματι, ὥστε ἐν αὐτῷ ἤδη τὸ ὁρατὸν πρότερον ὅψιν γεγονέναι, τῶν δ' ἄλλων πάντων ἐπιλάθοιτο θεαμάτων. Καὶ τάχα ἂν σῶζοι τὸ ἀνάλογον ἢ εἰκὼν, εἰ μὴ ἄνθρωπος εἴη ὁ ἐπιστάς τῳ τὰ τοῦ οἴκου θεωμένῳ, ἀλλὰ τις θεός, καὶ οὗτος οὐ κατ' ὅψιν φανείς, ἀλλὰ τὴν ψυχὴν ἐμπλήσας τοῦ θεωμένου. Καὶ τὸν νοῦν τοῖνον τὴν μὲν ἔχειν δύναμιν εἰς τὸ νοεῖν, ἣ τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ βλέπει, τὴν δέ, ἣ τὰ ἐπέκεινα αὐτοῦ ἐπιβολῇ τι καὶ παραδοχῇ, καθ' ἣν καὶ πρότερον ἑώρα μόνον καὶ ὁρῶν ὕστερον καὶ νοῦν ἔσχε καὶ ἐν ἐστὶ. Καὶ ἔστιν

Then [the soul] is thus disposed, so as even to disdain intellection, which at another time she welcomed, because intellection is a motion, but she does not want to move. For she says that indeed neither does he whom she sees [move], yet having become intellect, she contemplates, having become intellect, as it were, having come into the intelligible place. Yet having come to be in it, possessing the intelligible, she thinks, but when she sees that one—that is, God—she immediately lets go of everything, just as if someone, coming into an ornate (and thus beautiful) house, were to contemplate each of the decorations within, and were to be amazed [even] before seeing the master of the house, but seeing and admiring that one (as he is not of the nature of cult—statues, but worthy of real contemplation), dismissing those [other] things, were thereafter to (a) look at that one alone; then, looking and not averting his eyes in the continuity of contemplation, he were to no longer to look at a sight, but would (b) commingle his vision with the object of contemplation, so that what was previously seen were to become vision in him; he would forget all other objects of contemplation. And perhaps the image would preserve the analogy if it were not a man who encountered the one contemplating the things of the house, but rather some god, and one who did not appear to sight but rather who filled the soul of the contemplator. Intellect, too, therefore, has one power for intellection, by which it looks at the things in itself, and another for what transcends it, by means of some touching and reception by which also, earlier, it saw only, and later, by seeing, also acquired intellect and is one. And that [former] contemplation is *of*

(cont.)

[A15] vi.7[38].35 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

ἐκείνη μὲν ἢ θεὰ νοῦ ἔμφορος, αὐτὴ  
 δὲ νοῦς ἐρώων, ὅταν ἄφρων γένηται  
 μεθυσθεὶς τοῦ νέκταρος· τότε ἐρώων  
 γίνεται ἀπλωθεὶς εἰς εὐπάθειαν  
 τῷ κόρῳ· καὶ ἔστιν αὐτῷ μεθύειν  
 βέλτιον ἢ σεμνοτέρῳ εἶναι τοιαύτης  
 μέθης. Παρὰ μέρος δὲ ὁ νοῦς  
 ἐκεῖνος ἄλλα, τὰ δὲ ἄλλοτε ἄλλα  
 ὁρᾷ; Ἡ οὐ· ὁ δὲ λόγος διδάσκων  
 γινόμενα ποιεῖ, τὸ δὲ ἔχει τὸ νοεῖν  
 αἰεὶ, ἔχει δὲ καὶ τὸ μὴ νοεῖν, ἀλλὰ  
 ἄλλως ἐκεῖνον βλέπειν. Καὶ γὰρ  
 ὁρῶν ἐκεῖνον ἔσχε γεννήματα καὶ  
 συνήσθετο καὶ τούτων γενομένων  
 καὶ ἐνόντων· καὶ ταῦτα μὲν ὁρῶν  
 λέγεται νοεῖν, ἐκεῖνο δὲ ἢ δυνάμει  
 ἔμελλε νοεῖν. Ἡ δὲ ψυχὴ οἶον  
 συγχέασα καὶ ἀφανίσασα μένοντα  
 τὸν ἐν αὐτῇ νοῦν, μάλλον δὲ ὁ νοῦς  
 αὐτῆς ὁρᾷ πρῶτος, ἔρχεται δὲ ἢ θεὰ  
 καὶ εἰς αὐτὴν καὶ τὰ δύο ἐν γίνεται.  
 Ἐκταθέν δὲ τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἐπ' αὐτοῖς  
 καὶ συναρμολογῶν τῇ ἀμφοτέρων  
 συστάσει ἐπιδραμὸν καὶ ἐνώσαν τὰ  
 δύο ἔπεστιν αὐτοῖς μακαρίαν διδοὺς  
 αἰσθησιν καὶ θεάν, τοσοῦτον ἄρας,  
 ὥστε μήτε ἐν τόπῳ εἶναι, μήτε ἐν  
 τῷ ἄλλῳ, ἐν οἷς πέφυκεν ἄλλο ἐν  
 ἄλλῳ εἶναι· οὐδὲ γὰρ αὐτός που· ὁ δὲ  
 νοητὸς τόπος ἐν αὐτῷ, αὐτὸς δὲ οὐκ  
 ἐν ἄλλῳ. Διὸ οὐδὲ κινεῖται ἢ ψυχὴ  
 τότε, ὅτι μὴδὲ ἐκεῖνο. Οὐδὲ ψυχὴ  
 τοίνυν, ὅτι μὴδὲ ζῇ ἐκεῖνο, ἀλλὰ  
 ὑπὲρ τὸ ζῆν. Οὐδὲ νοῦς, ὅτι μὴδὲ  
 νοεῖ· ὁμοιοῦσθαι γὰρ δεῖ. Νοεῖ δὲ  
 οὐδ' ἐκεῖνο, ὅτι οὐδὲ νοεῖ.

the sober intellect, but the [latter is] *itself* the  
 loving intellect, when it has become insane,  
 “drunk from the nectar”; then in love, having  
 been expanded into enjoyment in satiety; and  
 it is better for it to be drunk with this kind  
 of inebriation than more respectably sober.  
 But does that intellect see in part, sometimes  
 some things and sometimes others? No; the  
 instructional discourse makes them “come  
 to be,” but it always has intellection while it  
 also has not intellection, but looking at that  
 in another way. For seeing that (m.), he had  
 [sc. “conceived”] offspring and was conscious  
 both of their being born and their being within  
 him; and when he sees them he is said to think,  
 but [he sees] that (n.) by means of the power  
 by which he was *going* to think. But the soul,  
 as if confusing and annihilating the intellect  
 remaining within her—or rather, her intellect  
 sees first, and the contemplation comes also  
 into her and the two become one. But the  
 Good is extended over them and adapted to the  
 constitution of both of them, running over them  
 and uniting the two, it is upon them, giving  
 them blessed perception and contemplation,  
 having raised them so much as to not be in  
 place, nor in another thing in which something  
 is by nature in another. For he is not anywhere  
 either, but the intelligible place is in him, but  
 he is not in another. Therefore the soul does  
 not move, then, since that does not either. Nor,  
 therefore, is it soul, because that does not live,  
 but is above life. Nor is it intellect, because  
 it does not think either; for it is necessary to  
 become similar. Nor does it think that, because  
 it does not think.

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[A16] vi.7[38].36.10–26 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

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“Ὅστις γένηται ὁμοῦ θεατῆς τε καὶ  
 θέαμα αὐτὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων  
 καὶ γενόμενος οὐσία καὶ νοῦς καὶ  
 ζῶον παντελὲς μηκέτι ἔξωθεν  
 αὐτὸ βλέπει—τοῦτο δὲ γενόμενος  
 ἐγγύς ἐστι, καὶ τὸ ἐφεξῆς ἐκεῖνο,  
 καὶ πλησίον αὐτὸ ἤδη ἐπὶ παντὶ  
 τῷ νοητῷ ἐπιστιλβόν. ”Ενθα δὴ  
 ἐάσας τις πᾶν μάθημα, καὶ μέχρι  
 του παιδαγωγηθεὶς καὶ ἐν καλῷ  
 ἰδρυθεὶς, ἐν ᾧ μὲν ἐστι, μέχρι τούτου  
 νοεῖ, ἐξενεχθεὶς δὲ τῷ αὐτοῦ τοῦ νοῦ  
 οἶον κύματι καὶ ὑψοῦ ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ οἶον  
 οἰδήσαντος ἀρθεὶς εἰσεῖδεν ἐξαίφνης  
 οὐκ ἰδὼν ὅπως, ἀλλ’ ἡ θέα πλήσασα  
 φωτὸς τὰ ὄμματα οὐ δι’ αὐτοῦ  
 πεποίηκεν ἄλλο ὄραν, ἀλλ’ αὐτὸ  
 τὸ φῶς τὸ ὄραμα ἦν. Οὐ γὰρ ἦν ἐν  
 ἐκείνῳ τὸ μὲν ὁρώμενον, τὸ δὲ φῶς  
 αὐτοῦ, οὐδὲ νοῦς καὶ νοούμενον, ἀλλ’  
 αὐγὴ γεννώσα ταῦτα εἰς ὕστερον  
 καὶ ἀφείσα εἶναι παρ’ αὐτῷ. αὐτὸς  
 δὲ αὐγὴ μόνον γεννώσα νοῦν, οὐτι  
 σβέσασα αὐτῆς ἐν τῷ γεννῆσαι,  
 ἀλλὰ μέινασα μὲν αὐτῇ, γενομένου  
 δ’ ἐκείνου τῷ τοῦτο εἶναι.

Whoever has become simultaneously the  
 contemplator and himself the object of his  
 contemplation of himself and all other things,  
 and having become substance and intellect and  
 the “all-perfect living being,” should no longer  
 behold it from without, but having become  
 this, is nearby, and that one is next in order,  
 and it is already close by, gleaming upon all  
 the intelligible. At that moment one dismisses  
 all learning, and thus far one has been led by  
 instruction and settled in the beauty in which  
 one is —up until this point one thinks—but  
 then, being hoisted up out of it by (as it were) the  
 wave of intellect itself, raised to the heights above  
 it as if being engorged, he suddenly beholds,  
 not seeing how, but the vision fills his eyes with  
 light, not having made him see something else  
 by means of it, but the light itself was the thing  
 seen. For in that there was not the object of  
 vision and its light, nor intellect and the object  
 of intellect, but a ray having generated these  
 things later and left them to be beside it; but he  
 is the ray which has only generated Intellect,  
 in no way having extinguished itself in the  
 generating, but itself remains, that one having  
 come to be by this one’s Being.

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[A17] VI.8[39].15.14–23 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>, modified)

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εἴ ποτε καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν αὐτοῖς [H-S<sup>1</sup>: αὐτοῖς] ἐνίδοιμέν τινα φύσιν τοιαύτην οὐδὲν ἔχουσαν τῶν ἄλλων, ὅσα συνήρτηται ἡμῖν, καθὰ πάσχειν ὃ τί περ ἂν συμβῇ [καὶ] κατὰ τύχην ὑπάρχει—πάντα γὰρ τὰ ἄλλα, ὅσα ἡμῶν, δοῦλα καὶ ἐκκεῖμενα τύχαις καὶ οἷον κατὰ τύχην προσελθόντα, τούτῳ δὲ μόνῳ τὸ κύριον αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ αὐτεξούσιον φωτὸς ἀγαθοειδοῦς καὶ ἀγαθοῦ ἐνεργεία καὶ μείζονος ἢ κατὰ νοῦν, οὐκ ἐπακτὸν τὸ ὑπὲρ τὸ νοεῖν ἐχούσης· εἰς ὃ δὴ ἀναβάντες καὶ γενόμενοι τοῦτο μόνον, τὰ δ' ἄλλα ἀφέντες, τί ἂν εἴποιμεν αὐτὸ ἢ ὅτι πλεόν ἢ ἐλεύθεροι, καὶ πλεόν ἢ αὐτεξούσιοι;

If ever we too, ourselves, should see within ourselves some nature of a kind that has nothing of the other things which are attached to us, [i.e., those things] by which we have to experience whatever should occur by chance—for all the other things which are ours are enslaved and exposed to chances, and, as it were, come forth according to chance, but by this alone [we have] the self—mastery and autonomy of a light in the form of good, and of good in actuality and [of a good] greater than that according to Intellect, having that above Intellect [within], not imported [from without]; indeed, ascending into this and becoming this alone, but dismissing the other things, what could we call it except *more* than free and *more* than autonomous?

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[A18] VI.8[39].19.1–6 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

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Λαμβανέτω τις οὖν ἐκ τῶν εἰρημένων ἀνακινήθεις πρὸς ἐκεῖνο ἐκεῖνο αὐτό, καὶ θεάσεται καὶ αὐτὸς οὐχ ὅσον θέλει εἰπεῖν δυνάμενος. Ἰδὼν δὲ ἐκεῖνο ἐν αὐτῷ πάντα λόγον ἀφείς θήσεται παρ' αὐτοῦ ἐκεῖνο τοῦτο ὄν, ὥς, εἴπερ εἶχεν οὐσίαν, δοῦλην ἂν αὐτοῦ τὴν οὐσίαν εἶναι καὶ οἷον παρ' αὐτοῦ εἶναι.

And so, having been impelled upwards towards that from what has been said, one should take hold of that itself, and one will also see himself, not being able to say as much as he would like. But seeing that in himself, taking away all rationality, he will set that by itself, being such that if it had substance, the substance would be his slave and, as it were, issuing from him.

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[A19] v.3[49].17.15–38 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

Ἄρκει οὖν ταῦτα λέγοντας  
ἀπαλλαχθῆναι; Ἡ ἔτι ἡ ψυχὴ ὠδίνει  
καὶ μάλλον. Ἴσως οὖν χρὴ αὐτὴν  
ἤδη γεννησάι ἀίξασαν πρὸς αὐτὸ  
πληρωθεῖσαν ὠδίνων. Οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ  
πάλιν ἐπαστέον, εἴ ποθέν τινα πρὸς  
τὴν ὠδίναν ἐπωδὴν εὖρομεν. Τάχα  
δὲ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἤδη λεχθέντων, εἰ  
πολλάκις τις ἐπάδοι, γένοιτο. Τίς οὖν  
ὥσπερ καινὴ ἐπωδὴ ἄλλη; Ἐπιθέουσα  
γάρ πάσι τοῖς ἀληθέσι καὶ ὦν  
μετέχομεν ἀληθῶν ὅμως ἐκφεύγει, εἴ  
τις βούλοιο εἰπεῖν καὶ διανοηθῆναι,  
ἐπεὶ περ δεῖ τὴν διάνοιαν, ἵνα τι  
εἴπῃ, ἄλλο καὶ ἄλλο λαβεῖν. οὕτω  
γάρ καὶ διέξοδος· ἐν δὲ πάντῃ ἀπλῶ  
διέξοδος τίς ἐστιν; Ἄλλ' ἄρκει κἂν  
νοερῶς ἐφάψασθαι· ἐφαψάμενον δέ,  
ὅτε ἐφάπτεται, πάντῃ μηδὲν μήτε  
δύνασθαι μήτε σχολῇν ἄγειν λέγειν,  
ὑστερον δὲ περὶ αὐτοῦ συλλογίζεσθαι.  
Τότε δὲ χρὴ ἐωρακέναι πιστεῦειν,  
ὅταν ἡ ψυχὴ ἐξαίφνης φῶς λάβῃ·  
τοῦτο γάρ—[τοῦτο τὸ φῶς]—παρ'  
αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτός· καὶ τότε χρὴ  
νομίζειν παρῆναι, ὅταν ὥσπερ θεὸς  
ἄλλος [ὅταν] εἰς οἶκον καλοῦντός  
τινος ἐλθῶν φωτίσῃ· ἢ μὴδ' ἐλθῶν  
οὐκ ἐφώτισεν. Οὕτω τοι καὶ ψυχὴ  
ἀφώτιστος ἄθεος ἐκείνου· φωτισθεῖσα  
δὲ ἔχει, ὃ ἐζήτει, καὶ τοῦτο τὸ τέλος  
τάλθηνδον ψυχῇ, ἐφάψασθαι φωτὸς  
ἐκείνου καὶ αὐτῷ αὐτὸ θεάσασθαι,  
οὐκ ἄλλου φωτί, ἀλλ' αὐτό, δι' οὗ  
καὶ ὁρᾷ. Δι' οὗ γὰρ ἐφωτίσθη, τοῦτό  
ἐστιν, ὃ δεῖ θεάσασθαι· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἥλιον  
διὰ φωτὸς ἄλλου. Πῶς ἂν οὖν τοῦτο  
γένοιτο; Ἀφελε πάντα.

And so is it sufficient to leave off having said these things? No, the soul still has even greater birth—pangs. Perhaps at this point, she must give birth, having eagerly glanced towards it and having been filled with birth—pangs. But still we must chant another spell, if somewhere we can find some spell against birth pangs; perhaps it might emerge from what has already been said if someone were to incant it repeatedly. And so what other spell is as if new? For she has run over all truths, and, simultaneously, flees from the truths in which we participate, if someone wishes to speak and reason [about them], since reason must, if it wishes to express something, take one thing after another (for such is also an exposition); but what “exposition” is there in the entirely simple? But it suffices if one makes contact intelligibly; but having made contact (when one does make contact), one is completely unable (nor has leisure) to speak, but one reasons about it [only] afterward. Then, one must believe one has seen, when the soul suddenly takes light; for this—this light—is from him, and he is it. And then one must consider him to be present, when, just like another god called by someone into a house, he comes and illuminates; indeed, if he did not come he would not have illuminated. So then too the unenlightened soul is without that god, but once enlightened, it has what it sought, and this is the true goal for the soul, to touch that light and to see it by itself, not through the light of another, but [to see the light] itself, through which it sees. For that by which it has been enlightened is that which must be seen; for neither does one see the sun through another light. And so how should this occur? Take away everything.

*Appendix B.<sup>1</sup> Plotinian Passages concerning Ontogenesis*

[B1] v.4[7].2.1–26 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

Εἰ μὲν οὖν αὐτὸ νοῦς ἦν τὸ γεννῶν,  
νοῦ ἐδεέστερον, προσεχέστερον  
δὲ νῶ καὶ ὅμοιον δεῖ εἶναι· ἐπεὶ  
δὲ ἐπέκεινα νοῦ τὸ γεννῶν, νοῦν  
εἶναι ἀνάγκη. Διὰ τί δὲ οὐ νοῦς, οὐ  
ἐνέργειά ἐστι νόησις; Νόησις δὲ  
τὸ νοητὸν ὁρώσα καὶ πρὸς τοῦτο  
ἐπιστραφεῖσα καὶ ἀπ’ ἐκείνου οἶον  
ἀποτελουμένη καὶ τελειουμένη  
ἀόριστος μὲν αὐτῇ ὥσπερ ὅψις,  
ὀριζομένη δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ νοητοῦ. Διὸ  
καὶ εἴρηται· ἐκ τῆς ἀορίστου δυάδος  
καὶ τοῦ ἐνὸς τὰ εἶδη καὶ οἱ ἀριθμοί·  
τοῦτο γὰρ ὁ νοῦς. Διὸ οὐχ ἀπλούς,  
ἀλλὰ πολλὰ, σύνθεσίν τε ἐμφαίνων,  
νοητὴν μέντοι, καὶ πολλὰ ὁρῶν ἥδη.  
"Ἐστὶ μὲν οὖν καὶ αὐτὸς νοητὸν,  
ἀλλὰ καὶ νοῶν· διὸ δύο ἦδη. "Ἐστὶ  
δὲ καὶ ἄλλο τῷ μετ’ αὐτὸ νοητὸν.  
Ἀλλὰ πῶς ἀπὸ τοῦ νοητοῦ ὁ νοῦς  
οὗτος; Τὸ νοητὸν ἐφ’ ἑαυτοῦ μένον  
καὶ οὐκ ὄν ἐνδεές, ὥσπερ τὸ ὁρῶν  
καὶ τὸ νοοῦν—ἐνδεές δὲ λέγω τὸ  
νοοῦν ὡς πρὸς ἐκεῖνο—οὐκ ἔστιν  
οἶον ἀναίσθητον, ἀλλ’ ἔστιν αὐτοῦ  
πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ σὺν αὐτῷ, πάντῃ  
διακριτικὸν ἑαυτοῦ, ζωὴ ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ  
πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ, καὶ ἡ κατανόησις  
αὐτοῦ αὐτὸ οἶονεῖ συναισθῆσαι οὐσα  
ἐν στάσει αἰδίῳ καὶ νοήσει ἐτέρως ἢ  
κατὰ τὴν νοῦ νόησιν. [...(4 lines)]  
Ἐπεὶ οὖν ἐκεῖνο μένει νοητὸν, τὸ

And so if the generator was Intellect, it would  
be more deficient than Intellect but would  
need to be more attentive to Intellect and be  
similar to it; but since the generator is beyond  
Intellect, it is necessarily Intellect. But why is  
it not Intellect, whose activity is intellection?  
Intellection, seeing the intelligible and  
turning towards that one and, as it were, being  
completed and perfected by that one, is itself, on  
the one hand, indefinite like sight, but is defined  
by the intelligible. For this reason, also it is said  
that from the Indefinite Dyad and the One come  
the Forms and numbers: for this is Intellect.  
Therefore it is not simple, but multiple, and  
manifests composition, indeed an intelligible  
one, and one immediately seeing many things.  
And so it is also itself an intelligible, but is also  
intelligizing; therefore it is already two. It is also  
another intelligible by being after it. But how  
does this Intellect derive from the Intelligible?  
The Intelligible remains by itself and is not  
deficient like that which sees and intelligizes—  
I deem that which intelligizes deficient with  
respect to that one—it is not without sensation,  
but all things belong to it and are in it and with  
it; it is entirely able to discern itself; life is in it  
and all things are in it and it *is* its own self—  
consideration, and exists as if by consciousness  
in everlasting rest, and intelligizes in a manner  
different from the intellection according to  
Intellect.... Since, therefore that one remains  
intelligible, that which comes into being

1 On the texts and translations presented here, see "Note on References and Abbreviations" at the beginning of this book.

(cont.)

[B1] v.4[7].2.1–26 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

γινόμενον γίνεται νόησις· νόησις δὲ οὐσα καὶ νοοῦσα ἀφ’ οὗ ἐγένετο— ἄλλο γὰρ οὐκ ἔχει—νοῦς γίγνεται, ἄλλο οἶον νοητὸν καὶ οἶον ἐκεῖνο καὶ μίμημα καὶ εἶδωλον ἐκείνου.

becomes intellection, as it is intellection and is intelligizing that from which it came to be—for it has nothing else—it becomes Intellect, [that is,] another (as it were) “Intelligible,” and like that one and an imitation and image of it.

[B2] v.1[10].6.15–19 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

παντὶ τῷ κινουμένῳ δεῖ τι εἶναι, πρὸς ὃ κινεῖται· μὴ ὄντος δὲ ἐκείνῳ μηδενὸς μὴ τιθώμεθα αὐτὸ κινεῖσθαι, ἀλλ’ εἴ τι μετ’ αὐτὸ γίνεται, ἐπιστραφέντος αἰεὶ ἐκείνου πρὸς αὐτὸ ἀναγκαζόν ἐστι γεγενῆναι.

For everything that is moved, there must be something *towards which* it is moved. Since there is no such thing for that one, let us not posit that it is moved, but if anything comes to be after it, it must come to be while that one is eternally reverted towards it(self).

[B3] v.1[10].7.1–6 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

Εἰκόνα δὲ ἐκείνου λέγομεν εἶναι τὸν νοῦν· δεῖ γὰρ σαφέστερον λέγειν· πρῶτον μὲν, ὅτι δεῖ πως εἶναι ἐκεῖνο τὸ γενόμενον καὶ ἀποσώζειν πολλὰ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἶναι ὁμοιότητα πρὸς αὐτό, ὥσπερ καὶ τὸ φῶς τοῦ ἡλίου. Ἀλλ’ οὐ νοῦς ἐκεῖνο. Πῶς οὖν νοῦν γεννᾷ; Ἡ ὅτι τῇ ἐπιστροφῇ πρὸς αὐτὸ ἐώρα· ἡ δὲ ὄρασις αὕτη νοῦς.

We say that the Intellect is an image of that one, for it is necessary to speak more clearly. First, it is necessary for what has come to be, to somehow *be* that one, and to preserve much of it, and to be most closely similar to it just as is light of the sun. But that is not Intellect. And so how does it generate Intellect? Because with its reversion to it(self), it was seeing, and this seeing is itself Intellect.



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[B4] V.2[11].1.7–13 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

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καὶ πρώτη οἷον γέννησις αὕτη· ὃν γὰρ τέλειον τῷ μηδὲν ζητεῖν μηδὲ ἔχειν μηδὲ δεῖσθαι οἷον ὑπερερρῦη καὶ τὸ ὑπερπλήρης αὐτοῦ πεποίηκεν ἄλλο· τὸ δὲ γινόμενον εἰς αὐτὸ ἐπεστράφη καὶ ἐπληρώθη καὶ ἐγένετο πρὸς αὐτὸ βλέπον καὶ νοῦς οὗτος. Καὶ ἡ μὲν πρὸς ἐκεῖνο στάσις αὐτοῦ τὸ ὃν ἐποίησεν, ἡ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸ θέα τὸν νοῦν. Ἐπεὶ οὖν ἔστη πρὸς αὐτό, ἵνα ἴδῃ, ὁμοῦ νοῦς γίγνεται καὶ ὃν.

And this is, as it were, the first birth: for being perfect (as it seeks nothing, has nothing, and needs nothing), it (as it were) overflows, and its overflow has made another. This, having come into being, reverts towards it and is filled; and by looking towards it, this becomes Intellect as well. And its standing towards that one makes Being, while its looking towards it is Intellect. So since it stands towards it so that it should see, it becomes simultaneously Intellect and Being.

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[B5] II.4[12].5.28–39 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

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Καὶ γὰρ ἡ ἑτερότης ἡ ἐκεῖ αἰεὶ, ἡ τὴν ὕλην ποιεῖ· ἀρχὴ γὰρ ὕλης αὕτη, καὶ ἡ κίνησις ἡ πρώτη· διὸ καὶ αὕτη ἑτερότης ἐλέγετο, ὅτι ὁμοῦ ἐξέφυσαν κίνησις καὶ ἑτερότης· ἀόριστον δὲ καὶ ἡ κίνησις καὶ ἡ ἑτερότης ἡ ἀπὸ τοῦ πρώτου, ἀακείνου πρὸς τὸ ὀρισθῆναι δεόμενα· ὀρίζεται δέ, ὅταν πρὸς αὐτὸ ἐπιστραφῇ· πρὶν δὲ ἀόριστον καὶ ἡ ὕλη καὶ τὸ ἕτερον καὶ οὐπω ἀγαθόν, ἀλλ' ἀφώτιστον ἐκείνου. Εἰ γὰρ παρ' ἐκείνου τὸ φῶς, τὸ δεχόμενον τὸ φῶς, πρὶν δέξασθαι, φῶς οὐκ ἔχει αἰεὶ, ἀλλὰ ἄλλο ὃν ἔχει, εἴπερ τὸ φῶς παρ' ἄλλου.

For indeed the otherness there always exists, i.e., that [otherness] which makes matter; for this is the principle of matter, and the first motion. Thus also it [i.e., motion] is called otherness, because motion and otherness sprouted forth simultaneously. The motion and otherness which are from the First are indefinite, and need that one so as to be defined. It is defined when it reverts towards it, but beforehand both matter and the other are indefinite and not yet good, but are unilluminated by that one. For if light is from that one, the one receiving the light, prior to the receiving, always does not have light, but has it as another, since the light is from another.

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[B6] v.6[24].5.5–10 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>, modified)

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Τὸ γὰρ νοεῖν οὐ πρῶτον οὔτε τῷ εἶναι  
οὔτε τῷ τίμιον εἶναι, ἀλλὰ δεύτερον καὶ  
γενόμενον, ἐπειδὴ ὑπέστη τὸ ἀγαθὸν  
καὶ <τὸ> γενόμενον ἐκίνησε πρὸς αὐτό,  
τὸ δ' ἐκινήθη τε καὶ εἶδε. Καὶ τοῦτό ἐστι  
νοεῖν, κίνησις πρὸς ἀγαθὸν ἐφιέμενον  
ἐκείνου· ἡ γὰρ ἔφεις τὴν νόησιν  
ἐγέννησε καὶ συνυπέστησεν αὐτῇ [H-S<sup>1</sup>:  
αὐτῇ]· ἔφεις γὰρ ὁψεως ὄρασις.

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For thinking is first neither with respect  
to being nor to honor, but is second and  
what has come into being while the Good  
subsisted and moved what has come into  
being to itself: it was moved and saw. And  
this is thinking: a movement towards good,  
desiring that one, for desire generates  
intellection and consubstantiates it with  
itself; for desire of sight is seeing.

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[B7] 111.8[30].8.31–38 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

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Ἐπεὶ καὶ ὅταν τὸ ἐν θεωρῇ, οὐχ ὡς  
ἐν· εἰ δὲ μὴ, οὐ γίνεται νοῦς. Ἀλλὰ  
ἀρξάμενος ὡς ἐν οὐχ ὡς ἤρξατο  
ἔμεινεν, ἀλλ' ἔλαθεν ἑαυτὸν πολὺς  
γενόμενος, οἷον βεβαρημένος, καὶ  
ἐξείλιξεν αὐτὸν πάντα ἔχειν θέλων—  
ὡς βέλτιον ἦν αὐτῷ μὴ ἐθελῆσαι  
τοῦτο, δεύτερον γὰρ ἐγένετο—οἷον  
γὰρ κύκλος ἐξελίξας αὐτὸν γέγονε καὶ  
σχῆμα καὶ ἐπίπεδον καὶ περιφέρεια  
καὶ κέντρον καὶ γραμμαι καὶ τὰ μὲν  
ἄνω, τὰ δὲ κάτω.

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Since also when it contemplates the One [or:  
when the One contemplates] it is not as one;  
if not, it would not become Intellect. But  
beginning as one, it did not remain as it began,  
but unaware of itself, became multiple, as it  
were, weighted down, and unravelled itself  
wanting to have everything—as it was better  
for it not to have wanted this, [for] it became  
the second—like a circle unravelling itself it  
became shape and surface and circumference  
and center—point and lines, both those above  
and those below.

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[B8] 111.8[30].11.1-7 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

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ἐπεὶ γὰρ ὁ νοῦς ἐστὶν ὄψις τις καὶ  
ὄψις ὁρώσα, δύνάμεις ἔσται εἰς  
ἐνέργειαν ἐλθοῦσα. Ἔσται τοίνυν  
τὸ μὲν ὕλη, τὸ δὲ εἶδος αὐτοῦ [οἶον  
καὶ ἡ κατ' ἐνέργειαν ὄρασις], ὕλη  
δὲ ἐν νοητοῖς· ἐπεὶ καὶ ἡ ὄρασις ἡ  
κατ' ἐνέργειαν διττὸν ἔχει· πρὶν γοῦν  
ἰδεῖν ἦν ἓν. Τὸ οὖν ἐν δύο γέγονε  
καὶ τὰ δύο ἓν. Τῇ μὲν οὖν ὁράσει ἡ  
πλήρωσις παρὰ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ καὶ ἡ  
οἶον τελείωσις, τῇ δὲ τοῦ νοῦ ὄψει τὸ  
ἀγαθὸν τὸ πληροῦν.

Since Intellect is a sight and a seeing sight, it  
will be a power having come into actuality.  
Therefore there will be on the one hand its  
matter, and on the other, its form (but the  
matter is [also] in the intelligible). Since also  
seeing in actuality has duality, it was indeed  
one before seeing. And so the one has become  
two and the two one. For the seeing, the filling  
[or impregnation] and, as it were, perfecting,  
comes from the perceptible object, but for  
the sight of Intellect the Good is what fills [or  
impregnates] it.

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[B9] V.5[32].5.16-19 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

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ὁ γὰρ τοι λεγόμενον ὄν τοῦτο πρῶτον  
ἐκεῖθεν οἶον ὀλίγον προβεβηκὸς  
οὐκ ἠθέλησεν ἔτι πρόσω ἐλθεῖν,  
μεταστραφὲν δὲ εἰς τὸ εἶσω ἕστη, καὶ  
ἐγένετο οὐσία καὶ ἐστία πάντων·

This that is said to be primary Being,  
proceeding, as it were, a little ways from there,  
did not wish to come forth anymore, but  
having turned towards its interior, stood, and  
became the substance and hearth of all things.

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[B10] vi.7[38].16.10–35 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

Ἄρα, ὅτε ἑώρα πρὸς τὸ ἀγαθόν, ἐνόει ὡς πολλὰ τὸ ἐν ἐκείνῳ καὶ ἐν ὃν αὐτὸς ἐνόει αὐτὸν πολλὰ, μερίζων αὐτὸν παρ' αὐτῷ τῷ νοεῖν μὴ ὅλον ὁμοῦ δύνασθαι; Ἄλλ' οὕτω νοῦς ἦν ἐκείνῳ βλέπων, ἀλλ' ἐβλεπεν ἀνοήτως. Ἡ φατέον ὡς οὐδὲ ἑώρα πώποτε, ἀλλ' ἔζη μὲν πρὸς αὐτὸ καὶ ἀνήρητο αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐπέστραπτο πρὸς αὐτό, ἡ δὴ κίνησις αὕτη πληρωθεῖσα τῷ ἐκεῖ κινεῖσθαι καὶ περὶ ἐκεῖνο ἐπλήρωσεν αὐτὸ καὶ οὐκέτι κίνησις ἦν μόνον, ἀλλὰ κίνησις διακορῆς καὶ πλήρης· ἐξῆς δὲ πάντα ἐγένετο καὶ ἔγνω τοῦτο ἐν συναισθήσει αὐτοῦ καὶ νοῦς ἤδη ἦν, πληρωθεὶς μὲν, ἔν' ἔχῃ, ὃ ὄψεται, βλέπων δὲ αὐτὰ μετὰ φωτὸς παρὰ τοῦ δόντος ἐκεῖνα καὶ τοῦτο κομιζόμενος. Διὰ τοῦτο οὐ μόνον λέγεται τῆς οὐσίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦ ὁρᾶσθαι αὐτὴν αἴτιος ἐκεῖνος εἶναι. Ὡσπερ δὲ ὁ ἥλιος τοῦ ὁρᾶσθαι τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς καὶ τοῦ γίνεσθαι αἰτίος ὢν αἰτιὸς πως καὶ τῆς ὀψεῶς ἐστίν—οὐκ οὐτε ὄψις οὐτε τὰ γινόμενα—οὕτως καὶ ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ φύσις αἰτία οὐσίας καὶ νοῦ οὔσα καὶ φῶς κατὰ τὸ ἀνάλογον τοῖς ἐκεῖ ὁρατοῖς καὶ τῷ ὁρῶντι οὕτε τὰ ὄντα οὕτε νοῦς ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ αἴτιος τούτων καὶ νοεῖσθαι φωτὶ τῷ ἑαυτοῦ εἰς τὰ ὄντα καὶ εἰς τὸν νοῦν παρέχων. Πληρούμενος μὲν οὖν ἐγένετο, πληρωθεὶς δὲ ἦν, καὶ ὁμοῦ ἀπετελέσθη καὶ ἑώρα. Ἀρχὴ δὲ αὐτοῦ ἐκείνο τὸ πρὶν πληρωθῆναι ἦν· ἑτέρα δὲ ἀρχὴ οἶονεῖ ἐξωθεν ἡ πληρούσα ἦν, ἀφ' ἧς οἶον ἐτυποῦτο πληρούμενος.

Did it, when it was looking towards the Good, think that one as many, and he himself “One—Being,” think him as many, dividing him in himself by not being able to think the whole at once? But it was not yet Intellect while it was looking at that, but looked unintellectually. Or we should say that it was not ever looking, but lived towards it and depended upon it and turned towards it; indeed its very motion was filled by its being moved there, and it filled it around that, and it was not still motion alone, but motion satiated and full; and thereafter it became all things and knew this in its consciousness of itself and was already Intellect, having been filled so that it should have what it sees, but looking at these things with light from the provider and receiving this. Because of this it is not only said to be the cause of substance but of its being seen. And just as the sun, which is cause for sense—objects both of their being seen and their coming into being, is also in some way cause of sight—and therefore is neither sight nor the things which have come to be—in this way also the nature of the Good, which is the cause of substance and intellect and light, according to our analogy, to the things seen there and the seer, is neither the real beings nor intellect but cause of these, giving by its own light thinking and being thought to the real beings and to intellect. So then it came to be by being filled, and when it was filled it was, and simultaneously it was perfected and was seeing. Its principle was that which it was before being filled, but another principle, in a way external to it, was the one that filled it, from which it, as it were, was ‘imprinted’ as it was being filled.

[B11] VI.7[38].17.12–26 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>, modified)

Εἶχεν οὖν ζῶην καὶ οὐκ ἐδεῖτο  
ποικίλου τοῦ διδόντος, καὶ ἦν ἡ  
ζωὴ ἵχνος τι ἐκείνου, οὐκ ἐκείνου  
ζωή. Πρὸς ἐκεῖνο μὲν οὖν βλέπουσα  
ἀόριστος ἦν, βλέψασα δ' ἐκεῖ  
ὠρίζετο ἐκείνου ὅρον οὐκ ἔχοντος.  
Εὐθύς γὰρ πρὸς ἓν τι ἰδοῦσα ὀρίζεται  
τούτῳ καὶ ἴσχει ἐν αὐτῇ [H-S<sup>1</sup>:  
αὐτῇ] ὅρον καὶ πέρασ καὶ εἶδος·  
καὶ τὸ εἶδος ἐν τῷ μορφωθέντι,  
τὸ δὲ μορφώσαν ἄμορφον ἦν. Ὁ  
δὲ ὅρος οὐκ ἔξωθεν, οἷον μεγέθει  
περιτεθείς, ἀλλ' ἦν πάσης ἐκείνης  
τῆς ζωῆς ὅρος πολλῆς καὶ ἀπείρου  
οὐσης, ὡς ἂν παρὰ τοιαύτης φύσεως  
ἐκλαμπάσσης. Ζωὴ τε ἦν οὐ τοῦδε·  
ὠριστο γὰρ ἂν ὡς ἀτόμου ἦδη· ἀλλ'  
ὠριστο μέντοι· ἦν ἄρα ὀρισθείσα  
ὡς ἑνὸς τινος πολλοῦ—ὠριστο δὴ  
καὶ ἕκαστον τῶν πολλῶν—διὰ μὲν  
τὸ πολὺ τῆς ζωῆς πολλὰ ὀρισθείσα,  
διὰ δὲ αὐτὸν ὅρον ἓν. Τί οὖν τὸ « ἐν  
ὠρίσθῃ »; Νοῦς· ὀρισθείσα γὰρ ζωὴ  
νοῦς.

It, therefore, had life and had no need of a  
multifarious giver, and its life was some trace  
of that and not its life. And so looking towards  
that one, it was unlimited, but having looked  
there, it was limited, that one having no limit.  
For immediately by looking towards some  
“one,” the life is bounded by it, and has in itself  
boundary and limit and form; and the form  
was in that which was shaped, but the shaper  
was amorphous. But the boundary is not  
from outside, as if surrounded by magnitude,  
but it was the boundary of all that life which  
is manifold and unlimited, as one would be  
shining out from such a nature. And it was not  
the life of a particular thing; for it would already  
be limited to that of an individual; nevertheless,  
it was defined; it was therefore defined as the  
life of some “One—Many”—and each of the  
many was at that point defined—and it was  
defined, on the one hand, as “Many” through the  
multiplicity of the life, yet again, on the other  
hand, as “One,” through the boundary. So what  
is “defined as one”? Intellect. For life defined is  
Intellect.

[B12] VI.8[39].16.12–30 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

ὁ δ' εἰς τὸ εἶσω οἷον φέρεται αὐτοῦ οἷον  
ἑαυτὸν ἀγαπήσας, αὐγὴν καθαρὰν,  
αὐτὸς ὢν τοῦτο, ὅπερ ἡγάπησε· τοῦτο  
δ' ἐστὶν ὑποστήσας αὐτόν, εἶπερ  
ἐνέργεια μένουσα καὶ τὸ ἀγαπητότατον  
οἷον νοῦς. Νοῦς δὲ ἐνέργημα· ὥστε  
ἐνέργημα αὐτός. Ἀλλὰ ἄλλου μὲν  
οὐδενός· ἑαυτοῦ ἄρα ἐνέργημα αὐτός.  
Οὐκ ἄρα ὡς συμβέβηκέν ἐστιν, ἀλλ'

He is, as it were, borne into his own interior,  
as it were, loving himself, the “pure ray,”  
being himself that which he loves; that is, he  
substantiates himself, since he is an abiding  
activity and the most loveable thing like  
Intellect. Intellect is an actualization; thus he  
is an actualization. But not of anything else;  
he is, perhaps, an actualization of himself.  
Not, as it seems, as he is accidentally, but as

(cont.)

[B12] VI.8[39].16.12–30 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

ὥς ἐνεργεῖ αὐτός. Ἔτι τοίνυν, εἰ ἔστι  
 μάλιστα, ὅτι πρὸς αὐτὸν οἶον στηρίζει  
 καὶ οἶον πρὸς αὐτὸν βλέπει καὶ τὸ  
 οἶον εἶναι τοῦτο αὐτῷ τὸ πρὸς αὐτὸν  
 βλέπειν, οἶον ποιοῖ ἂν αὐτόν, οὐχ ὥς  
 ἔτυχεν ἄρα ἐστίν, ἀλλ' ὥς αὐτὸς θέλει,  
 καὶ οὐδ' ἡ θέλησις εἰκῇ οὐδ' οὕτω  
 συνέβη· τοῦ γὰρ ἀρίστου ἡ θέλησις  
 οὕσα οὐκ ἔστιν εἰκῇ. Ὅτι δ' ἡ τοιαύτη  
 νεύσις αὐτοῦ πρὸς αὐτὸν οἶον ἐνέργεια  
 οὕσα αὐτοῦ καὶ μονῇ ἐν αὐτῷ τὸ  
 εἶναι ὃ ἐστι ποιεῖ, μαρτυρεῖ ὑποτεθέν  
 τούναντιον· ὅτι, εἰ πρὸς τὸ ἔξω νεύσειεν  
 αὐτοῦ, ἀπολεῖ τὸ εἶναι ὅπερ ἐστὶ· τὸ  
 ἄρα εἶναι ὅπερ ἐστίν ἡ ἐνέργεια ἢ πρὸς  
 αὐτόν· τοῦτο δὲ ἐν καὶ αὐτός. Αὐτὸς  
 ἄρα ὑπέστησεν αὐτὸν συνεξενεχθείσης  
 τῆς ἐνεργείας μετ' αὐτοῦ.

he acts. Still, furthermore, if he *is* most of all,  
 because he (as it were) establishes himself  
 and, as it were, looks to himself, and this (as it  
 were) “Being” for him is his looking to himself,  
 he would as it were make himself not as he  
 happened to be but as he himself wishes, and  
 the willing is not random nor accidental, for  
 being the willing of the best, it is not random.  
 That such an inclination of his towards  
 himself—being, as it were, his activity and  
 remaining in itself—makes him be what he  
 is, is evinced by hypothetically postulating  
 the opposite: that if he inclined towards his  
 exterior, it would destroy his being what he  
 is; therefore, to be what he is, is an activity  
 towards himself; this is one and himself. He  
 then substantiated himself, his activity having  
 been brought out together after him.

[B13] VI.8[39].18.18–30 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

οὕτω τοι καὶ τὸν νοῦν καὶ τὸ δὴ χρῆ  
 λαμβάνειν, γενόμενον ἐξ ἐκείνου  
 καὶ οἶον ἐκχυθὲν καὶ ἐξελιχθὲν καὶ  
 ἐξηρημένον ἐκ τῆς αὐτοῦ νοεράς  
 φύσεως, μαρτυρεῖν τὸν οἶον ἐν ἐνὶ  
 νοῦν οὐ νοῦν ὄντα· ἐν γάρ. Ὡσπερ  
 οὐδ' ἐκεῖ γραμμὰς οὐδὲ κύκλον τὸ  
 κέντρον, κύκλου δὲ καὶ γραμμῶν  
 πατέρα, ἔχῃ αὐτοῦ δόντα καὶ δυνάμει  
 μενούσῃ γραμμὰς καὶ κύκλον οὐ  
 πάντῃ ἀπηρητημένα αὐτοῦ ῥώμῃ τινι  
 γεγεννηκότα· οὕτω τοι καὶ αὐτῷ, τῆς

Thus one must grasp both Intellect and Being:  
 coming to be from that one, as it were, poured  
 out and unraveled and hanging out, it attests  
 from its intellectual nature the (as it were)  
 ‘Intellect’ in the One that is not Intellect; for  
 it is one. Just as there [in the geometrical  
 analogy], neither the radii nor the circle are  
 the center, but the [the center] is the father of  
 the circle, giving traces of itself and by means  
 of abiding power having generated the radii  
 and the circle by means of some strength, not  
 at all divided off from him; thus also that too,

(cont.)

[B13] vi.8[39].18.18–30 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

νοεράς περιθεούσης δυνάμεως, τὸ  
οἷον ἰνδάλματος αὐτοῦ ἀρχέτυπον,  
ἐν ἐνὶ νοῦν, πολλοῖς καὶ εἰς πολλὰ  
οἷον νενικημένου καὶ νοῦ διὰ ταῦτα  
γενομένου, ἐκείνου πρὸ νοῦ μέιναντος  
<ἐκ> τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ νοῦν  
γεννήσαντος

while an intellectual power is running around  
it, is, as it were, an archetype of his image,  
the Intellect in One, as it were defeated by  
and into many, and by means of these things  
becoming Intellect, as he remains before  
Intellect, generating Intellect <from> its  
power.

[B14] v.3[49].11.1–16 (text H-S<sup>1</sup>, modified)

Διὸ καὶ ὁ νοῦς οὗτος ὁ πολὺς, ὅταν τὸ  
ἐπέκεινα ἐθέλῃ νοεῖ, ἐν μὲν οὖν αὐτὸ  
ἐκεῖνο, ἀλλ' ἐπιβάλλειν θέλων ὡς ἀπλῶ  
ἔξεισιν ἄλλο αἰεὶ λαμβάνων ἐν αὐτῷ  
πληθυνόμενον· ὥστε ὥρμησε μὲν ἐπ' αὐτὸ  
οὐχ ὡς νοῦς, ἀλλ' ὡς ὄψις οὕτω ἰδοῦσα,  
ἐξῆλθε δὲ ἔχουσα ὅπερ αὕτῃ ἐπλήθυνεν·  
ὥστε ἄλλου μὲν ἐπεθύμησεν ἀορίστως  
ἔχουσα ἐπ' αὕτῃ φάντασμά τι, ἐξῆλθε  
δὲ ἄλλο λαβοῦσα ἐν αὕτῃ αὐτὸ πολὺ  
ποιήσασα. Καὶ γὰρ αὐτὸ ἔχει τύπον τοῦ  
ὁράματος· ἢ οὐ παρεδέξατο ἐν αὕτῃ [H-S<sup>1</sup>:  
αὕτῃ] γενέσθαι. Οὗτος δὲ πολὺς ἐξ ἐνὸς  
ἐγένετο, καὶ οὕτως γινούς εἶδεν αὐτό, καὶ  
τότε ἐγένετο ἰδοῦσα ὄψις. Τοῦτο δὲ ἤδη  
νοῦς, ὅτε ἔχει, καὶ ὡς νοῦς ἔχει· πρὸ δὲ  
τούτου ἔφεσις μόνον καὶ ἀτύπτως ὄψις.  
Οὗτος οὖν ὁ νοῦς ἐπέβαλε μὲν ἐκεῖνῳ,  
λαβὼν δὲ ἐγένετο νοῦς, αἰεὶ δὲ ἐνδεόμενος  
[HS<sup>1</sup>: ἐνδιόμενος] καὶ γενόμενος καὶ νοῦς  
καὶ οὐσία καὶ νόησις, ὅτε ἐνόησε· πρὸ γὰρ  
τούτου οὐ νόησις ἦν τὸ νοητὸν οὐκ ἔχων  
οὐδὲ νοῦς οὕτω νοήσας.

Thus this multiple Intellect, when it wishes  
to think the Transcendent (that one itself  
[being] one), but wishing to blossom as  
if simple, it comes out eternally grasping  
another, multiplied in itself; so that it  
moved to it not as Intellect, but as vision  
not yet seeing, and came out having that  
which the vision multiplied. For again  
it has the impression of the thing seen,  
or else it would not have allowed it to  
come to be in itself. This became many  
out of one, and thus coming to know it  
saw it, and then became seeing sight. It  
is already Intellect when it has this, and  
has it as Intellect; but before this, it is  
only desire and unimprinted sight. And  
so this Intellect apprehended that one,  
but grasping it became Intellect, eternally  
in need and having become Intellect,  
substance, and thought, when it thought;  
for before this it was not thinking, not  
having the intelligible nor Intellect, not  
having yet thought.

[B14] TABLE 4 Comparison of terms for desire predicated of the One, PNE, and mystical subject

	<i>erōs / eran</i>	<i>agapē / agapan</i>	<i>epheis</i>	<i>orexis / oregein</i>	<i>epithumēsai</i>	<i>pothos / pothein</i>
One	VI.8[39].15.1	VI.8[39].16.15	VI.8[39].15.6–8			
PNE	?	V.1[10].6.51	V.6[24].5.9–11 V.3[49].11.13		V.3[49].11.7	
Mystical subject	I.6[1].7.13 VI.7[38].22.6–8 VI.7[38].35.24	VI.7[38].31.5	VI.9[9].11.23 VI.7[38].22.6–8	VI.5[23]. 1.16 VI.7[38]. 33.28		I.6[1]. 7.13 VI.7[38]. 31.9 VI.7[38]. 34.1

[B15] TABLE 5 Examples of MUO described in terms of simultaneous active and passive modalities (text H-S<sup>1</sup>)

	Phase i: active	Phase ii: passive
IV.8[6].1.5–7	...εις ἐνέργειαν ἐλθὼν ἐκείνην ὑπὲρ πᾶν τὸ ἄλλο νοητὸν ἐμαυτὸν ἰδρύσας	ἐν αὐτῷ ἰδρυθεὶς...
VI.9[9].11.23–25	ἐκστασις καὶ ἀπλωσις καὶ ἐπίδοσις αὐτοῦ	καὶ ἔφεις πρὸς ἀφήν καὶ στάσις καὶ περινόησις πρὸς ἐφαρμογήν
III.8[30].9.29–31	ἢ δεῖ τὸν νοῦν οἶον εἰς τοῦπίσω ἀναχωρεῖν	καὶ οἶον ἑαυτὸν ἀφέντα
III.8[30].10.32–35	βαλὼν πρὸς αὐτὸ καὶ τυχὼν ἐντὸς αὐτοῦ	ἀναπαυσάμενος
VI.7[38].35.21–22	ἐπιβολῇ	παραδοχῇ
VI.7[38].36.17–19	εἰσείδεν ἐξαίφνης οὐκ ἰδὼν ὅπως,	ἀλλ' ἢ θέα πλῆσασα φωτὸς τὰ ὄμματα
Porphryry, <i>Vita Plotini</i> 23.12.14	ἄπαξ λέγω πλησιάσαι	καὶ ἐνωθῆναι



Appendix C. Passages Pertaining to Visionary Ascent in Gnostic Sources

[C1] *Zostrianos*, NHC VIII 24.1–17 (text Barry, Funk, and Poirier, BCNH)

ϥαϥη[αϣ μ]εν ῒν οϣϣϣη δε ἡτελιϩ[ε  
εν]ανιαϣτογενηε· ῒν οϣνοϣε Δ[ε ε]να  
πῶμῃτϣοοϣ· ῒν οϣπῃα δε εϣοϣααβ  
να ηἰπρωτοφανηε· ϥαϣωτῃ δε  
ετβε πικλς εβολ ῒτῃ ηἰβωμ ἡτε  
πῖπῃα εταϣει εβολ ἡμοϣ ῒν οϣωῃ  
εβολ εϣωτῃ ἡϣοϣο ἡτε παϣορατον  
ἡπῃα· ῒραῖ δε ῒν ῑεννοια ταῖ ετωοοἰ  
ῑνοϣ ῒν οϣϣῃ· ἡῒραῖ δε ῒν ῑωρῑ  
ἡεννοια· ετβε πῶμῃτβωμ ἡαϣορατον  
ἡπῃα εϣωτῃ σε πε ἡἡ οϣβωμ ἡτε  
οϣϣῃ εστοϣβωοϣ· ῒν οϣ[πῃα  
εϣτανϣο ῑτελιος αϣω ἡω[ο]ῑ[πῃ]  
ἡτελιος αϣω ἡπαντε[λιο]ε·

On the one hand, he sees in a perfect soul  
those of Autogenes; on the other hand,  
in intellect, those of the Triple Male, in a  
pure spirit, those of the Protophanes. He  
hears about Kalyptos through the powers  
of the Spirit which emerged in a vastly  
superior manifestation of the Invisible  
Spirit. By means of the thought that now  
exists in Silence and in the First Thought  
(one learns) about the Triple Powered  
Invisible Spirit; it is an audition and a  
power of silence which is purified in a  
vivifying spirit, perfect, first-perfect, and  
all-perfect.

[C2] TABLE 6 Analysis of the various faculties of mystical apprehension in *Zostrianos*,  
NHC VIII 24.1–13

Line no.	Object	Faculty by which object is apprehended
1–3	those of the Autogenes	perfect soul
3–4	those of the Triple Male	intellect
4–5	those of the Protophanes	pure spirit
6–10	Kalyptos	the powers of the Spirit which emerged in a vastly superior manifestation of the Invisible Spirit
10–13	Triple-Powered Invisible Spirit	the thought that now exists in Silence and through the First Thought



(cont.)

[C4] *Zostrianos*, NHC VIII 45.9–46.6 (text Barry, Funk, and Poirier, BCNH)

ϩε νοϣμνηωε ἡμορ[φ]η[·] αϣω  
 εϣωανρικε ωαϣ[ω]ωπε εϣωινε ἡσα  
 νη ετε[ἡ]σεωοον' αν' αϣω εϣωανρε  
 ερραῖ εναῖ εἴν οἰνοημα αϣω εἴν σ[ο]μ  
 ἡϣεῖμε εροοϣ ἡκε[ρ]ἡτε' ε[ἡ]ἡτι [46]  
 ἡϣχι ἡποϣοειν ωαϣωωπε ἡοϣϣεῖς  
 αϣω ἡπεῖρητε ωαϣεῖ ερραῖ εϣχο  
 ετβηητῷ αϣω ωαϣρ ατ' ωαξε ετβε  
 ἡ[ι] ἡκοοε' ἡν ἡἡν[τ'] ατῆ[α]ρη[α]ς  
 ἡτε ἡεϣλη'

When one inclines (\*νεύειν?), one comes into being seeking those things that do not exist. When one descends to them in thought, one cannot understand them in any other way unless one is enlightened, and it becomes a physical entity. Thus this type of person accordingly descends into generation, and becomes irrational (\*ἄλογός) because of the passions and indefiniteness of matter.

[C5] *Zostrianos*, NHC VIII 46.6–31 (text Barry, Funk, and Poirier, BCNH)

εϣ[ἡ]τ[α]ϣ [ἡ]οϣομ ἡωα ενεε ἡ[μα]ϣ  
 ἡατ' μοϣ ωαϣονεῶ ἡε[ραῖ] εἴν  
 μεῖε[ιβ] ἡτε πωμα' ωα[ϣ]ῑ[τ]ῷ εβωλ  
 αϣω ωαϣονεῶ[ι] ἡοϣοει]ω ἡμ ἡεραῖ  
 εἴν εεεεαϣε εϣναωτ' εϣωωξε <sup>vac</sup>  
 ἡμοϣ εβωλ εἴ[τῆ]ν ἡεε ἡμ ετσοοϣ'  
 ωαντῷα[ι]ῷ ὡν αϣω ἡῑραρχι ὡν  
 εωωπε εραῖ ἡεητῷ' ετβε π[αῖ] σεηω  
 ερραῖ εἴν μοϣαῖ ἡ[τε] ναῖ' αϣω  
 ναῖομ ναῖ σεωο[ον] εἴν πμα' αϣω  
 ἡεραῖ εἴν ἡαϣ[το]εεηε κατα ποϣα  
 ποϣα ἡτε ἡ[ε]ων σεαερα[το]ϣ ἡοῖ  
 εεεοοϣ εἴνα ξε εεεο[ϣ]εἴν ἡσα  
 σπρ να[ῖ] ἡοῖ πη εἴπ[ἡ]μα' ἡ[ε]οοϣ  
 δε ε[ε]ν[ο]ημα νε ἡτελ[ι]οϣ εϣοῖε  
 εἴ[ἡ]ν] ομ ἡεεακο ξε εεετϣοϣ  
 [νε] ἡτε οϣοϣαῖ' ετε εωαρ[ε]π[οϣα]  
 ποϣα χῑτοϣ εεεοϣεἴν εεραῖ ε[ρ]οοϣ'  
 αϣω εϣχι τϣοϣ' εϣ[ε]χι ομ εβωλ  
 εἴτῆ παῖ παῖ' αϣ[ω] εἴηταϣ ἡπεοοϣ  
 ἡοϣονεο[ς] ἡπρ[ἡ]τε ωαϣε[ι]ἡ  
 ἡπκοεμοϣ αϣ[ω] ἡε]ων <sup>vac</sup> [ἡ]μ'

Although it possesses an eternal and immortal power, (this type) is bound within the [movement] of the body. It is [made] alive and is bound [always] within cruel, cutting bonds by every evil spirit, until it [acts] again and begins again to come to its senses. This is why (powers) are appointed for their salvation, and each of the powers resides in this world. Within the self—begotten ones corresponding to each of the [aeons] stand glories so that one who is in the [world] might be saved beside them. The glories are perfect thoughts (\*τελεία νοήματα?) appearing in powers. They are imperishable because [they are] impressions of salvation which each saved one receives. One receives an impression; one takes strength from each of them, and with the glory, as a helper one will thus pass out from the world and all of the aeons.

[C6] *Allogenes*, ΝΗC XI 59.9–60.12 (text Funk and Scopello, BCNH)

παλλο[γ]ενης εναυ εἰ-ἡντ' μακαριος  
 εἰ-ἡντακ ἡθε εἰ-ἡοοπ ἡν οὐσιγῆ· τῆ  
 ετεκειμε εροκ ἡρητς καταροκ· αὖω  
 αριαναχωρι εἰ-ἡν ἡ-ἡντ' ὡνῆ εκκωτε  
 ἡσωκ· τῆ ετεκναναυ ερος εκκιν· αὖω  
 εἰ-ἡν ὁαμ ἡτ' ἀρεπατκ· ἡπρρ ῥοτε λααυ·  
 αλλα εωωπε εκωανοωω εαρεπατκ·  
 αριαναχωρι εἰ-ἡν ἡ-ἡπαρζις· αὖω  
 εκερε ερος εσαρεπατς αὖω εςρορκ  
 ἡμος κατα πινε ἡπῆ εἰ-ἡρορκ ἡμοq  
 οντωс· αὖω εφанаζετῆ ἡναἱ τῆρογ  
 ἡν ογκαρωq ἡν ογἡ-ἡντ' ἀτεнерγια·  
 αὖω εκωανχι ἡογὡνῆ εβολ ἡτε παἱ·  
 εβολ ἡἱτοοτq ἡογὡορῆ ἡογὡνῆ εβολ  
 ἡτε πατ' соγὡνῆ· πῆ ετεεωωπε  
 εκωανειμε εροq· ἀρατ' εἰμε εροq·  
 αὖω εκωανῆ ῥοτε ἡπῆνα εἰ-ἡμαγ  
 αριαναχωρι επαρογ εἰβε ἡεнерγια·  
 αὖω εκωανῆ τελιος ἡπιτοπος  
 εἰ-ἡμαγ ῥροκ ἡмок· αὖω κατα  
 πῆγῆπος εἰ-ἡοοп ἡρητк· εἰμε οἷ ἡ-ἡρε  
 [60] [x]ε εqωοоп ἡ-ἡρε ἡн н[αἱ τῆρο]γ  
 κατα πῆсμοτ'· αὖ[ω ἡπ]ῆ ῥωωρε  
 εβολ ἡρογο [ἡἡna x]ε εκεὅ-ἡsom  
 ἡαρεπατк· ο]γτε ἡπρωωω εἰ-ἡen[εpгi  
 ἡἡ]na xε некpe εβολ πανт[ωс ἡἡ]  
 πατεнерγια εἰ-ἡραἱ ἡρη[ηтк] ἡτε  
 πῆ[ατ'с]ογὡνῆ ἡπρ[ε]ἡ[и]ε εροq[·] παἱ  
 гар ογἡ-ἡнτ' ατ' som те· αλλα εβολ ἡἱ-ἡн  
 ογἡ-ἡnoia εce ἡογοein εκκ[ε] εροq·  
 ἀρι ατ' εἰμε εροq·

O Allogenes, behold your Blessedness,  
 how silently it abides, by which you  
 know your self according to yourself. And  
 withdraw upon the Vitality by turning  
 to yourself, (i.e., to) the one that you  
 will see moving. And if you are unable  
 to stand, fear nothing. But if you wish  
 to stand, withdraw upon the Existence,  
 and you will find it standing and at rest,  
 according to the likeness of the one who  
 is truly at rest and who possesses all of  
 them in silence and inactivity. And if  
 you receive a manifestation of this one  
 by means of a First Manifestation of the  
 Unknowable One—the one whom you  
 will come to know—you must ‘unknow’  
 him. And if you become afraid in that  
 place, withdraw to the rear, on account  
 of the activities. And if you are made  
 perfect in that place, remain at rest.  
 And according to the impression (*typos*)  
 that is within you, know that it is the  
 same with all these things, according to  
 the same pattern. And do not dissipate  
 further, so that you will be able to stand,  
 and do not desire to be active, lest you  
 fall in any way from the inactivity within  
 you of the Unknowable. Do not know  
 him, for it is impossible; but if by means  
 of a luminous thought you know him,  
 ‘unknow’ him.

[C7] *Allogenes*, NHC XI 60.12–61.22 (text Funk and Scopello, BCNH)

नाई ΔΕ ΝΕΪΩΤΗ ΕΡΟΟΥ ΕΥΧΩ ΉΜΟΥ  
 ΝΟΙ ΝΗ ΕΤΗΜΑΥ· ΝΕΥΩΟΟΠ ΝΟΙ ΟΥΖΡΟΚ  
 ΖΡΑΪ ΝΖΗΤ ΝΤΕ ΟΥΣΙΓΗ· ΔΕΙΩΩΤΗ  
 ΕΤΗΜΝΤ· ΜΑΚΑΡΙΟΣ ΤΗ ΕΤΑΕΙΜΕ ΕΡΟΙ ΕΒΟΛ  
 ΖΗΤΟΟΤΣ ΚΑΤΑΡΟΣ ΔΥΩ ΔΕΙΡΑΝΑΧΩΡΙ  
 ΕΞΗ ΤΗΜΝΤ· ΩΝΕ ΕΙΚΩΤΕ ΝΩΩ· ΔΥΩ  
 ΔΕΙΡ ΩΒΗΡ ΝΒΩΚ ΕΖΟΥΝ ΕΡΟΣ ΝΗΜΑ·  
 ΔΥΩ ΔΕΙΑΖΕΡΑΤ· ΝΖΡΑΪ ΖΗ ΟΥΤΑΧΡΟ  
 ΑΝ· ΑΛΛΑ ΖΗ ΟΥΖΡΟΚ· ΔΥΩ ΑΙΝΑΥ  
 ΕΥΚΗΜ ΝΩΑ ΕΝΕΖ ΉΜΟΕΡΟΝ ΝΑΤΠΩΡΧ·  
 ΕΠΑΝΙΘΟΜ ΤΗΡΟΥ ΠΕ ΝΝΑΤ· ΕΙΔΟΣ  
 ΝΝΑΤ· Τ ΤΟΩ ΕΡΟQ ΖΗ ΟΥΤ ΤΟΩ· ΔΥΩ  
 ΕΤΑΕΙΟΥΩΩ ΕΔΖΕΡΑΤ· ΖΗ ΟΥΤΑΧΡΟ·  
 ΔΕΙΡΑΝΑΧΩΡΙ ΕΞΗ ΤΖΥΠΑΡΞΙC ΤΗ  
 ΕΤΑΕΙΘΗΤΣ ΕΣΑΖΕΡΑΤΣ· ΔΥΩ ΕΣΖΟΡΚ  
 ΉΜΟΣ ΚΑΤΑ ΟΥΖΙΚΩΝ ΜΗ ΟΥΕΙΝΕ ΝΤΕ ΠΗ  
 ΕΤ· ΤΟΕ ΖΙΩΩΤ· ΕΒΟΛ ΖΗΤΗΝ ΟΥΩΝΕ ΕΒΟΛ  
 ΝΤΕ ΠΑΤ· ΠΩΩ ΜΗ ΠΗ ΕΤΖΟΡΚ ΉΜΟQ·  
 ΔΕΙΜΟΥΖ ΕΒΟΛ ΖΗ ΟΥΩΝΕ ΕΒΟΛ· ΕΒΟΛ  
 ΖΗΤΗΝ ΟΥΗΜΤ· ΩΡΠΗ ΝΟΥΩΝΕ [61] ΕΒΟΛ  
 ΜΠΑΤ· ΣΟΥΩΝQ· Ζ[ΩC] ΕΙΕ ΝΝΑΤ· ΕΙΜΕ  
 ΕΡΟQ· ΔΙΕΙ[ΜΕ] ΕΡΟQ ΔΥΩ ΔΕΙΧΙ ΘΟΜ  
 ΖΡΑΪ Ν[Ζ]ΗΤQ· ΕΔΕΙΧΙ ΝΟΥΧΡΟ ΝΖΗΤ·  
 [Ν]ΩΑ ΕΝΕΖ· ΔΕΙCΟΥΩΝ ΠΗ Ε[Τ· Ω]ΟΟΠ  
 ΝΖΗΤ· ΜΗ ΠΩΩΜΤ· ΘQ[Μ] ΜΗ ΠΟΥΩΝΕ  
 Ε[ΒO]Λ ΝΤΕ Π[Ι]ΔΤ· ΩΩΠ ΕΡΟQ Ε[ΤΗ]Ν  
 ΤΑQ· Α[ΥΩ] ΕΒΟΛ ΖΗΤΗΝ ΟΥΗΜΤ· ΩΡΠΗ  
 Ν[ΟΥ]ΩΝΕ ΕΒΟΛ ΝΤΕ ΠΩΩΡΠΗ ΝΔΤ· [C]  
 ΟΥΩΝQ ΝΔΥ ΤΗΡΟΥ· ΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΕΤ· ΧΟCΕ  
 ΕΤΕΛΙΟΣ ΑΙΝΑΥ ΕΡΟQ ΜΗ ΠΩΩΜΤ· ΘΟΜ  
 ΕΤ· ΩΟΟΠ ΝΖΗΤΟΥ ΤΗΡΟΥ· ΝΕΙΚΩΤΕ  
 ΝCΑ ΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΝΝΑΤ· ΩΑΧΕ ΉΜΟQ  
 ΜΗ ΠΑΤ· ΣΟΥΩΝQ· ΠΑΙ ΕΤΕΕΩΠΠΕ  
 ΕΡΩΑΝΟΥΑ ΕΙΜΕ ΕΡΟQ ΠΑΝΤΩC  
 ΩΑQΡ ΔΤ· ΕΙΜΕ ΕΡΟQ· ΠΗΕCΙΤΗC ΝΤΕ  
 ΠΩΩΜΝΤ· ΘΟΜ ΠΗ ΕΤ· ΚΗ ΖΗ ΟΥΖΡΟΚ ΜΗ  
 ΟΥΚΑΡΩQ· ΔΥΩ ΕQΕ ΝΝΑΤ· ΣΟΥΩΝQ·

While I was listening to that which those  
 there said, there was within me a stillness  
 of silence, and I heard the Blessedness  
 by which I knew my self according to  
 myself. And I withdrew upon the Vitality  
 as I turned towards it [or: to myself],  
 and I became a companion with it to  
 enter within (together) with it, and I  
 stood, not firmly but still. And I saw an  
 eternal, intellectual motion that pertains  
 to all the formless powers, which is  
 unlimited by limitation. And when I  
 wanted to stand firmly, I withdrew upon  
 the Existence, which I found standing  
 and at rest according to an image and  
 likeness of what is conferred upon me  
 by a manifestation of the Indivisible and  
 the one who is at rest; I was filled with  
 a manifestation by means of a Primary  
 Manifestation of the Unknowable, as  
 though ‘unknowing’ him, I knew him and  
 received power from him, and having  
 received an eternal strength, I knew that  
 which exists within me and the Triple-  
 Powered and the manifestation of that  
 of his which is uncontainable. And by  
 means of a Primary Manifestation of the  
 First who is unknowable to them all—  
 the god who is beyond perfection—I  
 saw him and the Triple-Powered who  
 exists within them all. I was seeking the  
 ineffable and unknowable god—whom  
 if one should know him, one would  
 absolutely ‘unknow’ him—the mediator  
 of the Triple-Powered, the one who  
 abides in stillness and silence and is  
 unknowable.

[C8] *Apocryphon of John*, NHC III 7.2–7.23 [text and trans. Waldstein and Wisse 1995, 10.2–11.18, slightly modified, with parallels = BG 26.15–27.19 and NHC II 4.19–5.5]

ΝΤΟQ ΕΤ]ΝΘΕΙ ΝΜΟQ Μ[ΜΙΝ ΜΜΟQ ΖΗ  
ΠΟΥΘΕΙ]Ν ΕΤΚΩΤΕ Ε[ΡΟQ ΕΤΕΝΤΟQ  
ΠΕ ΤΠΗ]ΓΗ ΜΜΟΥ Ν[ΩΝΖ ΠΟΥΘΕΙΝ  
ΕΤΜΗΖ] ΝΡΙΛΕΙΚΡΙΝΕC [ΜΝ Τ]ΠΗΓΗ  
Ν[ΤΕ ΠΕΠΗ]Δ ΕCΕΡ ΜΟΟΥ [ΕΦΟΗ]Ζ ΕΒΟΛ  
[ΝΖΗΤC] ΝΕΦΕΠΧΟΡΗ[ΓΕΙ Ν]ΝΑΙΩ[Ν  
ΤΗ]ΡΟΥ ΜΝ ΝΕΥΚΟC[ΜΟC] ΔΥΩ ΖΝ [CΜΟ]Τ'  
ΝΙΝ ΤΕΦΖΙΚΩΝ [ΜΜ]Ν ΜΜΟQ ΕΦΝΑΥ  
ΕΡΟC ΖΜ ΠΜΟΟΥ ΝΟ]ΥΘΕΙΝ ΝΚΑΘΑΡΟΝ  
ΕΤΚΩΤΕ Ε[ΡΟQ] ΑΥΩ ΤΕΦΕΝΝΟΙΑ ΑCΡ  
ΟΥΖΩΒ' [ΑCΟΥ]ΩΝΖ ΕΒΟΛ' ΑCΑΖΕ ΕΡΑΤC  
ΜΠΕQ[ΜΤΟ] ΕΒΟΛ' ΖΜ ΠΕΦΛΑΜΠΗΛΟΝΟC  
Ν[ΟΥΘΕΙ]Ν ΕΤΕ ΝΤΟC ΠΕ Τ' ΔΥΝΑΜΙC  
Ε[ΤΩΟ]ΡΠ' ΖΑΘΗ ΝΝΚΑ ΝΙΜ' ΤΕΠΡΟΝΟΙΑ  
[ΜΠΤ]ΗΡQ ΕΤΡ ΟΥΘΕΙΝ ΖΗ ΠΟΥΘΕΙΝ  
Ν[ΘΙΚΩ]Ν ΜΠΑΖΟΡΑΤΟC' Τ' ΤΕΛΙΑ  
ΝΔΥ[ΝΑ]ΜΙC ΤΒΑΡΒΗΛΟΝ ΠΑΙΩΝ ΕΤΧΗΚ  
[ΕΒΟ]Λ' ΠΕΘΟΥ' ΕΦΤ ΕΘΟΥ ΝΑQ' ΔΕ ΕΒΟΛ  
ΖΙ[ΤΟΟΤ]Q ΑCΟΥΩΝΖ ΕΒΟΛ ΑΥΩ ΑCΤ' ΕΘΟΥ  
[ΝΑQ]· ΤΕΕΙ ΤΕ ΤΕΖΟΥΕΙΤΕ ΝΕΝΝΟΙΑ [ΤΕQ]  
ΖΙΚΩΝ

*It is he who intelligizes himself in the light that surrounds him, which is the spring of living water, which is full of purity, and the spring of the spirit which poured forth living water from within it. He was providing all the aeons and their worlds, and in every likeness he sees his own image (eikôn) in the pure light-water that surrounds him; and his thought became an actuality; she appeared; she stood before him in the brilliance of his light. She is the power (dunamis) that is before everything, the Pronoia of the All, who shines in the light of the invisible image (eikôn), the perfect power (dunamis), Barbelon, the aeon that is perfected, the glory giving glory to him, since she appeared by means of him. And she gave glory to him, she who is the Primordial Thought, his image (eikôn).*

[C9] *Eugnostos the Blessed*, NHC III 72.6–13 [see also parallels: *Eugnostos* NHC V 2.22–27 and *Wis. Jes. Chr.* NHC III 94.24–95.6; BG 84.17–85.9] (text and trans. Parrott, CGL, slightly modified)

ΟΥΝΤΑQ ΝΝΟΥΖΙΔΕΑ ΜΜΙΝ ΜΜΟQ ΝΘΕ ΑΝ  
ΝΤΖΙΔΕΑ ΝΤΑΝΔΙΓC' Η ΝΤΑΝΝΑΥ ΕΡΟC  
ΑΛΛΑ ΟΥΖΙΔΕΑ ΝΩΝΜΩ ΤΕ ΕCΟΥΔΤΒ  
ΝΖΟΥΟ ΕΝΚΑ ΝΙΜ' ΕCΑΤΠ' ΕΝΙΠΤΗΡQ'  
ΕCΝΑΥ ΖΙ C' Α' ΝΙΜ' ΕCΕΙΩΡΖ ΜΜΟC ΟΥΑΔC  
ΖΙΤΟΟΤC ΜΜΙΝ ΜΜΟC

He has a form (*idea*) of his own, not like the form we have received or seen, but a strange form that greatly surpasses all other things and transcends the Universals. *It looks to every side and sees its own self by means of itself.*

[C10] *Eugnostos the Blessed*, NHC III 74.20–75.9 [see also parallels: *Eugnostos* NHC V 4.8–23 and *Wis. Jes. Chr.* NHC III 98.22–99.10; BG 90.15–91.14; P.Oxy. 1081, 36–49] (text and trans. Parrott, CGL, slightly modified)

πχοεις̅ ἡπτηρϣ̅ κατα̅ ταλνηθεια̅ μη̅[εϣ̅]χοος̅ εροϣ̅ χε̅ ειωτ̅` αλλα̅ πρ̅[ο]πατωρ̅ πειωτ̅` γαρ̅ ταρχη̅ ἡ̅[75]πετοϣ̅αν̅ [εβολ̅] π̅ε̅ πετ̅ῃ̅μαϣ̅ γ̅αρ̅ π̅ι̅[α̅]ἡ̅[αρ̅]χος̅ ἡ̅προπατωρ̅ εϣ̅η̅αϣ̅ εροϣ̅ ἡ̅μ̅ιν̅ ἡ̅μοϣ̅ ἡ̅ζ̅ρα̅ι̅ ἡ̅ζ̅η̅τ̅ῃ̅` ἡ̅θε̅ ἡ̅οϣ̅ει̅αλ̅· ε̅α̅φ̅οϣ̅ων̅ ε̅βο̅λ̅ ε̅ῃ̅ πεϣ̅ει̅νε̅ ἡ̅α̅υ̅το̅πα̅τω̅ρ̅ ε̅τε̅πα̅ι̅ πε̅ πα̅υ̅το̅γε̅ν̅τω̅ρ̅ α̅υ̅ω̅ να̅ν̅το̅πο̅ς̅ ἐπ̅ι̅ α̅ν̅το̅πι̅τω̅ ἡ̅προ̅ον̅το̅ς̅ ἡ̅α̅γε̅ν̅νη̅το̅ς̅·	The Lord of the All according to the truth is not called ‘Father’ but ‘Forefather.’ For the Father is the origin of that which is manifest. For that one is the in-originate Forefather. <i>He sees himself within himself, as in a mirror, having appeared in his likeness as Self— Father, which is the Self—Generator, and as Confronter, since he confronted Unbegotten Pre-Existent one.</i>
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[C11] TABLE 7 Forms of οϣ̅ων̅ ε̅βο̅λ̅ (and cognates) in the NHC and BG that refer to the “appearance” or “manifestation” of a deity (rather than the revelation of information)

	v. intr.: “to manifest oneself”; “to appear”; “to emerge”	n.m., “appearance”; “manifestation”
<i>Ap. Jas.</i> NHC I,2	2.17; 16.11	
<i>Gos. Truth</i> NHC I,3	18.5; 28.5, 8; 37.14; 38.4; 20.6, 23	30.24
<i>Treat. Res.</i> NHC I,4	48.8	
<i>Tri. Trac.</i> NHC I,5	69.22, 23; 89.15; 97.12; 114.34; 116.36; 118.33; 119.1; 131.12; 133.16	69.33; 77.5; 89.1; 90.2; 91.27; 95.30; 114.11; 116.4 (n.f.); 117.16; 126.3; 131.10
<i>Apoc. John</i> NHC III,1	2.18; 7.13, 21; 8.9, 16, 23; 9.16, 21; 10.8, 12, 18; 13.3; 14.13; 37.20	9.2; 30.15
<i>Apoc. John</i> BG,2	21.3; 26.5; 27.9, 16; 28.8, 17; 29.3; 30.5, 12; 31.7, 13; 33.2; 35.4; 36.20;	29.7; 60.8

[C11] TABLE 7 Forms of ΟΥΩΝ̄Ξ ΕΒΟΛ (and cognates) in the NHC (*cont.*)

	v. intr.: “to manifest oneself”; “to appear”; “to emerge”	n.m., “appearance”; “manifestation”
<i>Apoc. John</i> NHC II,1	4.17, 28, 31; 5.3; 6.16, 21; 7.21; 8.32; 9.28; 10.3; 14.29; 20.28; 22.36; 23.26; 24.10	5.1
<i>Apoc. John</i> NHC IV,1	6.18; 7.3?, 7; 9.20, 27; 11.17; 15.3; 23.8; 32.1; 35.18; 36.19; 37.20	
<i>Gos. Thom.</i> NHC II,2	33.13, 21; 38.22; 42.1; 43.6; 47.28	
<i>Gos. Phil.</i> NHC II,3	53.7; 57.29, 30, 32, 33; 34; 35; 58.5; 67.38; 82.15	
<i>Nature of the Rulers</i> NHC II,4	87.13, 16, 32; 88.8; 93.25	
<i>Orig. World.</i> NHC II,5	98.17, 28; 99.1, 31; 100.5; 101.1; 108.1, 12, 30; 109.2, 10, 18; 110.8; 111.4, 6, 29; 113.28; 116.14; 117.29; 124.19, 22, 26, 27, 28; 125.24; 127.6	
<i>Bk. Thom.</i> NHC II,7	139.19; 142.14	
<i>Gos. Eg.</i> NHC III,2	50.25; 51.10; 56.26; 64.9	
<i>Gos. Eg.</i> NHC IV,	*53.4; *54.22; 55.25; *56.12, *21; 58.8; 60.13, 18; 62.25; *63.5, *27; 71.31	(*=ϠΟΡ̄Π̄ ΟΥΩΝ̄Ξ ΕΒΟΛ)
<i>Eugnostos</i> NHC V,1	4.18, 22, 29; 5.24; 6.15, 21; 7.3; 8.1, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 16, 32; 10.6, 15; 11.8, 23, 30; 12.2, 16, 22, 27; 13.6, 20, 21, 25; 14.13, 18; 15.4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14	
<i>Eugnostos / Wis. Jes.</i> <i>Chr.</i> NHC III,3	75.1, 5, 12; 76.23; 77.11, 15; 81.23; 82.9; 83.13, 16; 84.7, 12, 21; 85.2, 8, 20, 22; 86.1, 5, 18; 87.1, 13, 18, 20, 22; 96.17; 98.25; 99.3, 6, 13; 100.19; 101.20; 103.11, 13, 14; 104.11; 106.17; 111.3; 114.20, 118.8	113.20



[C11] TABLE 7 Forms of  $\sigma\gamma\omega\tilde{\nu}\tilde{\epsilon}$  εβολ (and cognates) in the NHC (*cont.*)

	v. intr.: “to manifest oneself”; “to appear”; “to emerge”	n.m., “appearance”; “manifestation”
<i>Wis. Jes. Chr.</i> BG,3	87.11; 88.13; 91.1, 6, 8, 18; 92.8; 93.14; 94.8; 95.6; 97.12, 16; 98.1; 99.3; 102.18; 105.5; 107.11; 108.7; 109.2, 5, 15; 110.14, 15; 111.8; 112.6, 11, 14, 16; 113.1, 5, 7; 119.18	116.12
<i>Dial. Sav.</i> NHC III,5	136.12; 143.10	
<i>1 Apoc. Jas.</i> NHC V,3	29.15; 39.19; 41.14	
<i>Thunder</i> NHC VI,2	15.34; 16.33, 35; 20.1	
<i>Authoritative</i>	22.8, 10, 11; 25.31; 26.4, 13	
<i>Discourse</i> NHC VI,3		
<i>Great Pow.</i> NHC VI,4	36.10; 42.18, 20; 44.3, 27; 47.9	
<i>Asclepius</i> NHC VI,8	71.27	
<i>Paraph. Shem</i> NHC VII,1	1.25; 2.36; 3.28, 35; 4.1, 4, 12; 5.14; 6.7; 8.7, 22, 23; 9.22; 10.3, 9, 10; 12.12, 25, 37; 14.4, 8; 15.29; 16.6, 13, 36; 17.9, 16; 19.34; 22.21; 24.3, 14; 28.22, 34, 35; 29.7, 32; 30.2, 5, 9, 12, 13, 22, 28; 31.17; 33.7; 34.2; 35.21; 39.15, 24; 41.2; 43.15; 47.33	4.7; 12.7; 30.7
<i>Disc. Seth</i> NHC VII,2	66.13; 69.7	
<i>Revelation of Peter</i>	70.23; 71.9; 79.6, 8; 82.16; 84.2;	
NHC VII,3		
<i>Teach. Silv.</i> NHC VII,4	111.15, 21; 112.8, 15, 24;	
<i>Steles Seth</i> NHC VII,5	119.10, 19, 20, 23, 24, 26; 123.10	
<i>Zost.</i> NHC VIII,1	3.12; 14.4, 9, 11; 23.8; 30.26; 78.13; 81.24; 82.3, 5; 120.9; 127.13	10.6; 24.8
<i>Ep. Pet. Phil.</i> NHC VIII,2	134.10, 12; 135.12; 138.6; 140.16	137.19
<i>Testim. Truth</i> NHC IX,3	72.26	
<i>Marsanes</i> NHC X,1	4.4; 6.21; 7.27	
<i>Interpretation of</i>	12.18	
<i>Knowledge</i> NHC XI,1		

	v. intr.: “to manifest oneself”; “to appear”; “to emerge”	n.m., “appearance”; “manifestation”
<i>Val. Exp.</i> NHC XI,2	24.19, 27, 34, 37	23.33
<i>Allogenes</i> NHC XI,3	45.17; 53.16, 26, 32; 65.21; 66.32 * = $\omega\omicron\rho\pi\bar{\iota}$ $\bar{\nu}\omicron\gamma\omega\bar{\nu}\bar{\eta}$ $\epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda$ <b>bold</b> = $\bar{\mu}\bar{\nu}\bar{\tau}\omega\omicron\rho\pi\bar{\iota}$ $\bar{\nu}\omicron\gamma\omega\bar{\nu}\bar{\eta}$ $\epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda$	59.27, *28; 60.35, 38, 39; 61.7, 9, 30; *63.14; 64.32
<i>Gos. Truth</i> NHC XII,2	53.23	
<i>Three Forms</i> NHC XIII,1*	35.29; 36.22; 37.14; 38.17, 19; 39.8, 18, 21; 10.18; 42.4, 24; 43.5; 44.2; 45.21; 47.14, 16, 23; 49.16, 21; 50.6	

[C12] TABLE 8 Synopsis of Platonizing Sethian terms for faculty of transcendental apprehension (*Allogenes* text Funk and Scopello, BCNH; *Zostrianos* text Barry, Funk, and Poirier, BCNH)

<i>Allogenes</i> , NHC XI 48.9–13	$\epsilon\pi\lambda\eta$ [ $\omicron\gamma\bar{\mu}\bar{\nu}$ ]τ`ατ`σάμ τε ἤτε $\eta\kappa[\alpha\tau\alpha\ \omicron]\gamma\alpha\ \epsilon\tau\alpha\rho\epsilon$ πτηρῶ $\epsilon\tau\ ` \kappa[\eta\ \eta]\bar{\mu}$ [ $\pi$ ]μα ετ` $\chi\omicron\sigma\epsilon$ $\epsilon\tau\epsilon\lambda\iota\omicron\varsigma$ · $\epsilon\omega\delta\alpha\chi\iota$ δε $\epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda$ $\xi\bar{\iota}\tau\omicron\omicron\tau\bar{\iota}$ $\bar{\nu}\omicron\gamma\omega\omicron\rho\pi\bar{\iota}$ $\bar{\nu}\epsilon\bar{\nu}\bar{\nu}[\omicron]\bar{\iota}\bar{\alpha}$ ·	Since it is impossible for the individuals to comprehend the Universal one that abides in the place that is beyond perfection, they apprehend through a <i>first thought</i> .
<i>Allogenes</i> , NHC XI 48.32–38	$\alpha\lambda[\lambda]\bar{\alpha}$ [ $\epsilon$ ]ωωπε $\epsilon\gamma\omega\delta\alpha\chi\iota$ $\epsilon\omega\delta\alpha\chi\iota$ $\epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda$ $\xi\bar{\nu}$ τωορῖ $\bar{\mu}\bar{\nu}\bar{\tau}$ · $\omega\bar{\nu}\bar{\eta}$ · $\bar{\mu}\bar{\nu}\omicron\gamma\epsilon\bar{\nu}\epsilon\rho\gamma\iota\alpha$ ἡδτ`πωρῆ· $\omicron\gamma\eta\gamma\omicron\sigma\tau\alpha\varsigma\iota\varsigma$ ἤτε τωορῖ ἤτε πογα $\epsilon\tau\ ` \omega\omicron\omicron\pi$ οντωσ·	[But] whenever they [ <i>sc.</i> the individuals (from line 10)] apprehend, they participate in the <i>First Vitality and an indivisible activity</i> , a hypostasis of the First (one) of the One that truly exists.
<i>Allogenes</i> , NHC XI 59.26–32	$\alpha\gamma\omega$ $\epsilon\kappa\omega\delta\alpha\chi\iota$ $\bar{\nu}\omicron\gamma\omega\bar{\nu}\bar{\eta}$ $\epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda$ ἤτε παῖ· $\epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda$ $\xi\bar{\iota}\tau\omicron\omicron\tau\bar{\iota}$ $\bar{\nu}\omicron\gamma\omega\omicron\rho\pi\bar{\iota}$ $\bar{\nu}\omicron\gamma\omega\bar{\nu}\bar{\eta}$ $\epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda$ ἤτε πατ` $\varsigma\omicron\gamma\omega\bar{\nu}\bar{\eta}$ · $\pi\eta$ $\epsilon\tau\epsilon\epsilon\omega\omega\pi\epsilon$ $\epsilon\kappa\omega\delta\alpha\bar{\nu}\epsilon\iota\mu\epsilon$ $\epsilon\rho\omicron\upsilon$ · $\delta\rho$ $\alpha\tau\ ` \epsilon\iota\mu\epsilon$ $\epsilon\rho\omicron\upsilon$ ·	And when you receive a revelation of him by means of a <i>primary revelation</i> of the Unknowable—the one whom if you should know him, ‘ <i>unknow</i> ’ him!

[C12] TABLE 8 Synopsis of Platonizing Sethian terms (*cont.*)

<i>Allogenes</i> , NHC XI 60.10–12	ἀλλα ἐβोल ἔϊτῆν οὐγεννοία εἰσε ἡογοειν ἐκίμ[ε] ἐροϋ· ἀρι ἀτ·εἰμε ἐροϋ·	But knowing him through a <i>luminous thought</i> , ‘ <i>unknow</i> ’ him!
<i>Allogenes</i> , NHC XI 60.37–61.1	ἀειμοϋζ ἐβोल ἔῆν οὐγωνῆ ἐβολ· ἐβोल ἔϊτῆν οὐμῆντ· ὡροῖ ἡογωνῆ [61] ἐβολ ἡπατ· σογωνῆ·	I was filled with a revelation by means of a <i>primary revelation</i> of the Unknowable.
<i>Allogenes</i> , NHC XI 61.9–14	ἐβोल ἔϊτῆν οὐμῆντ· ὡροῖ ἡ[οϋ]ωνῆ ἐβολ ἡτε παῶροῖ ἡδτ· [c]ογωνῆ νὰϋ τηροϋ· πνοϋτε ἐτ· ἄοσε ἐτελιος ἀῖναϋ ἐροϋ μῆν παῶμτ· ὅσμ ἐτ· ὡροπ ἡζητοϋ τηροϋ·	By means of a <i>primary</i> <i>revelation</i> of the First, the one Unknowable to them all, the god who is beyond perfection, I saw him and the Triple-Powered that exists within them all.
<i>Allogenes</i> , NHC XI 61.28–32	ἀλλα σῶτῆν ἐτβηητῆ κατὰ ὅε ἐτεοϋῆ ὅσμ ἐβोल ἔϊτῆν οὐμῆντ· ὡροῖ ἡογωνῆ ἐβολ μῆν οὐγωνῆ ἐβολ·	Hear about him according to the way it is possible by means of a <i>primary revelation</i> and a <i>revelation</i> .
<i>Allogenes</i> , NHC XI 63.14–16	ἐϋῶροῖ ἡογωνῆ ἐβολ πε ἡῆν οὐγνῶσις ἡταϋ ἐντοϋ οὐααϋ ἐτ·εἰμε ἐροϋ·	He is <i>primary revelation</i> and knowledge of himself as it is he alone who knows himself.
<i>Allogenes</i> , NHC XI 64.8–14	ἀϋῶ ἐβोल ἔϊτοῖτοϋ τηροϋ ἐϋζραῖ ἡζητοϋ τηροϋ ἡτῆγνῶσις οὐαας ἀν ἡνατσογωνῆ[ς] τῆ ἐτ· ὡροπ καταροϋ· ἀϋ[ω] ἐϋζοῖτῆ ἐβोल ἔϊτοῖτς ἡτῆμ[ῆτ·] ἀτ· σογωνῆ ἐτναϋ ἐροϋ·	And through them all it is within them all; the <i>unknowable</i> <i>knowledge</i> that is proper to [the Unknowable] is not unique; it [the Unknowable] is <i>also</i> <i>conjoined by means of the</i> <i>unknowingness that sees it</i> .
<i>Allogenes</i> , NHC XI 64.30–36	ἀϋῖ βῆλλε ἡσα νβολ ἡπιβαλ ἐτ· ζοῖκ ἡμοϋ ἡτε πογωνῆ ἐβολ· πῆ ἐτεϋῖνεργι ἐροϋ πῆ ἐβोल ἔῆν παῶμῆτ· ὅσμ ἡτε τῶροπ ἡεννοία ἡτε παζορατον ἡπῆα	He was blind apart from <i>the eye</i> [or ‘ <i>spring</i> ’] of <i>revelation that is</i> <i>at rest</i> , that which is activated from the triple power of <i>the First</i> <i>Thought</i> of the Invisible Spirit.
<i>Zostrianos</i> , NHC VIII 20.11–14	ἐϋνοϋτε ἡεῖωτ πε ἐϋῖ ὡῖπῆ ἡεἰμε ἐροϋ· ἀϋῶ νεϋεἰμε ἐροϋ ἀν· οὐῖομ γαρ ἐβोल ἡμοϋ πε ἡῆν οὐε[ι]ῶτ ἐβोल ἡ[μο]ϋ ἡαγὰαϋ·	He is a divine father as <i>he is pre-</i> <i>known</i> , and he is not known; for he is a power and a father from himself.

[C12] TABLE 8 Synopsis of Platonizing Sethian terms (*cont.*)

Zostrianos NHC VIII 24.10–13	<p> <math>\epsilon\rho\alpha\dot{\iota}\ \Delta\epsilon\ \xi\bar{\eta}\ \tau\epsilon\nu\nu\omicron\iota\alpha\ \tau\alpha\dot{\iota}</math>  <math>\epsilon\tau\omega\omicron\omicron\pi\ \tau\eta\nu\omicron\gamma\ \xi\bar{\eta}\ \omicron\gamma\iota\gamma\eta\ \bar{\eta}\epsilon\rho\alpha\dot{\iota}</math>  <math>\Delta\epsilon\ \xi\bar{\eta}\ \tau\omega\rho\tau\bar{\iota}\ \bar{\eta}\epsilon\nu\nu\omicron\iota\alpha\ \epsilon\tau\beta\epsilon</math>  <math>\pi\bar{\omega}\mu\tau\omicron\mu\ \bar{\eta}\alpha\zeta\omicron\rho\alpha\tau\omicron\nu\ \bar{\eta}\pi\bar{\eta}\alpha</math> </p>	<p> And by means of <i>the thought</i>  <i>which now exists in silence</i>  and within <i>the First Thought</i>  [one learns] about the Triple  Powered Invisible Spirit </p>
Zostrianos NHC VIII 58.16–20	<p> <math>\alpha\gamma\omega\ \pi\alpha[\zeta\omicron\rho\alpha]\tau\omicron\nu\ \bar{\eta}\pi\bar{\eta}\alpha</math>  <math>\omicron\gamma\omicron\mu\ [\bar{\eta}\psi\gamma]\chi\iota\kappa\omicron\nu\ \alpha\gamma\omega</math>  <math>\bar{\eta}\nu\omicron\epsilon\rho[\omicron\nu\ \pi\epsilon]\ \omicron\gamma\rho\epsilon\psi\epsilon\iota\mu\epsilon\ \alpha\gamma\omega</math>  <math>\eta[\rho\epsilon\psi]\bar{\rho}\ \omega\rho\tau\bar{\iota}\ \bar{\eta}\epsilon\iota\mu\epsilon</math> </p>	<p> And the Invisible Spirit is a  psychic and an intellectual  power, a knower and a  <i>pre-knower</i>. </p>
Zostrianos NHC VIII 60.10–23 [fragmentary]	<p> <math>[..c]\omega\tau\bar{\eta}\ [\epsilon\rho]\omicron\psi\ \xi[\pm\ 5\  \ \pm\ 3]\alpha\ \alpha\gamma\omega\ [..]\gamma[\pm\ 6]\ \bar{\eta}\epsilon\rho\alpha\dot{\iota}\ \xi\bar{\eta}</math>  <math>\omicron\gamma\epsilon\nu\nu\omicron[\iota\alpha\ \bar{\eta}\bar{\eta}]\ \omicron\gamma\omega\rho\tau\bar{\iota}\ \bar{\eta}</math>  <math>\bar{\eta}\epsilon\nu\nu\omicron[\alpha\ \pm\ 3]\ \epsilon\pi\iota\lambda\eta\ \xi\bar{\eta}\ \omicron\gamma\omicron\mu</math>  <math>\alpha\gamma[\pm\ 3]\ \nu\omicron\gamma\tau\epsilon\lambda\iota\omicron\varsigma\ \tau\epsilon\ \alpha[\lambda\lambda\alpha]</math>  <math>\bar{\omega}\psi\epsilon\ \epsilon\rho\omicron\kappa\ \epsilon\tau\alpha\psi[\epsilon\ \omicron\epsilon\iota\omega]</math>  <math>\epsilon\tau\beta\epsilon\ \zeta\omega\beta\ \nu\iota\mu\ \alpha\gamma\omega\ [\bar{\eta}\bar{\eta}]\ \eta\eta</math>  <math>\epsilon\tau\kappa\eta\alpha\varsigma\omega\tau\bar{\eta}\ \epsilon[\rho\omicron\omicron\gamma]\ \epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda</math>  <math>\xi\bar{\iota}\tau\bar{\eta}\ \omicron\gamma\epsilon\mu\bar{\eta}[\omicron\iota\alpha]\ \bar{\eta}\tau\epsilon\ \eta\eta</math>  <math>\epsilon\tau\ \chi\omicron\omicron\epsilon\ \epsilon\tau[\epsilon\lambda\iota]\omicron\varsigma\ \alpha\gamma\omega\ \bar{\eta}\bar{\eta}</math>  <math>\eta\epsilon\tau\kappa\eta[\alpha\varsigma\omicron\gamma]\omega\nu\omicron\gamma\ \xi\bar{\eta}\ \omicron\gamma\gamma\chi\eta</math>  <math>[\bar{\eta}\tau\epsilon]\ \eta\iota\tau\epsilon\lambda\iota\omicron\varsigma</math> </p>	<p> ...[hear] him [...] and [...] in  a [thought] and [in] a <i>First Thought</i> [...] since [...] with  power [...] she is perfect [...] you  must be preached to concerning  everything, and [...] those to  whom you will listen, by means  of a <i>thought of those beyond perfect</i>, and those which you  will know in the souls of the  perfect ones. </p>
Zostrianos NHC VIII 76.21–25	<p> <math>\omicron\gamma\gamma\nu\omicron\varsigma\ \bar{\eta}\tau\alpha\psi</math>  <math>\epsilon[\psi]\omega\omicron\omicron\pi\ \bar{\eta}\varsigma\alpha\beta\omicron\lambda\ \bar{\eta}\mu\omicron\psi</math>  <math>\bar{\eta}\eta\ \pi\eta\ \epsilon\tau\ \mu\omicron\gamma\omega\tau\ \bar{\eta}\bar{\eta}[\omicron]\psi</math>  <math>\epsilon\psi\omega\omicron\omicron\pi\ \bar{\eta}\epsilon\eta\tau\bar{\psi}\ \psi[\gamma]\epsilon\iota\lambda\omega\lambda\omicron\nu</math>  <math>\bar{\eta}\bar{\eta}\ \omicron\gamma\epsilon\bar{\iota}[\kappa\omega\nu]</math> </p>	<p> His knowledge exists outside  of him, with the one who  examines himself as he is within  himself, a <i>reflection</i> and an  <i>image</i>.... </p>
Zostrianos NHC VIII 82.23–83.1	<p> <math>\tau\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\nu\omicron\eta\varsigma[\varsigma\ \tau]\epsilon\ \bar{\eta}\tau\epsilon</math>  <math>\pi\eta\omicron\gamma[83][\tau]\epsilon\ \epsilon\tau\bar{\rho}\omega\bar{\rho}\bar{\iota}</math>  <math>\bar{\eta}\omega[\omicron\omicron\pi]</math> </p>	<p> She is <i>the comprehension</i>  (<i>katanoêsis</i>) of the god that  pre-exists </p>

**Appendix D.<sup>1</sup> Passages from Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* concerning  
Plotinus's Education and His Interaction with the Gnostics**

[D1] Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 16.1–18 (text Armstrong, LCL)

Γεγόνασι δὲ κατ' αὐτὸν τῶν Χριστιανῶν πολλοὶ μὲν καὶ ἄλλοι, αἱρετικοὶ δὲ ἐκ τῆς παλαιᾶς φιλοσοφίας ἀνηγγμένοι οἱ περὶ Ἀδέλφιον καὶ Ἀκυλῖνον οἱ τὰ Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ Λίβυος καὶ Φιλοκώμου καὶ Δημοστράτου καὶ Λυδοῦ συγγράμματα πλείστα κεκτημένοι ἀποκαλύψεις τε προφέροντες Ζωροάστρου καὶ Ζωστριανοῦ καὶ Νικοθέου καὶ Ἀλλογενοῦς καὶ Μέσσου καὶ ἄλλων τοιούτων πολλοὺς ἐξηπάτων καὶ αὐτοὶ ἡπατημένοι, ὥς δὴ τοῦ Πλάτωνος εἰς τὸ βάθος τῆς νοητῆς οὐσίας οὐ πελάσαντος. Ὅθεν αὐτὸς μὲν πολλοὺς ἐλέγχους ποιούμενος ἐν ταῖς συνουσίαις, γράψας δὲ καὶ βιβλίον ὅπερ « Πρὸς τοὺς Γνωστικούς » ἐπεγράψαμεν, ἡμῖν τὰ λοιπὰ κρίνειν καταλέλοιπεν. Ἀμέλιος δὲ ἄχρι τεσσαράκοντα βιβλίων προκεχώρηκε πρὸς τὸ Ζωστριανοῦ βιβλίον ἀντιγράφων. Πορφύριος δὲ ἐγὼ πρὸς τὸ Ζωροάστρου συχνοὺς πεποιήμαι ἐλέγχους, ὅλως νόθον τε καὶ νέον τὸ βιβλίον παραδεικνύς πεπλασμένον τε ὑπὸ τῶν τὴν αἵρεσιν συστησάμενων εἰς δόξαν τοῦ εἶναι τοῦ παλαιοῦ Ζωροάστρου τὰ δόγματα, ἃ αὐτοὶ εἶλοντο πρεσβεύειν.

In his time, among the Christians, there were on the one hand the multitudes, and on the other hand, heretics (*hairetikoi*) who departed from the ancient philosophy, those around Adelphius and Aculinus, who had acquired many treatises of Alexander the Libyan and Philocomus and Demostratus and Lydus, and who proffered apocalypses of Zoroaster and Zostrianos and Nikotheus and Allogenes and Messos and others of the kind, misleading many, and themselves misled, that Plato had not attained to the depth of intelligible substance. On this account [Plotinus] made several refutations in the meetings, and he wrote the book which we inscribed *Against the Gnostics*; he left it up to us to critique the rest. Amelius went up to forty books writing against the book of Zostrianos. I, Porphyry, wrote many refutations against that of Zoroaster, proving the book to be entirely spurious and recent, fabricated by constituents of the sect to make it seem that the doctrines which they had elected to venerate were those of the ancient Zoroaster.

1 On the texts and translations presented here, see “Note on References and Abbreviations” at the beginning of this book.

[D2] Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 3.1–35 (text Armstrong, LCL)

Ἄ μέντοι ἡμῖν αὐτὸς ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ ἐν ταῖς  
ὁμιλίαις πολλάκις διηγείτο, ἦν τοιαῦτα.  
Προσφοιτᾷ μὲν γὰρ τῇ τροφῇ καίπερ  
εἰς γραμματοδιδασκάλου ἀπίοντα  
ἄχρις ὀγδοῦ ἔτους ἀπὸ γενέσεως ὄντα  
καὶ τοὺς μαζοὺς γυμνοῦντα θηλάζειν  
προθυμείσθαι· ἀκούσαντα δὲ ποτε  
ὅτι ἀτηρόν ἐστι παιδίον, ἀποσχέσθαι  
αἰδεσθέντα. Εἰκοστὸν δὲ καὶ ὄγδοον ἔτος  
αὐτὸν ἄγοντα ὁρμήσαι ἐπὶ φιλοσοφίαν  
καὶ τοῖς τότε κατὰ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρειαν  
εὐδοκιμοῦσι συσταθέντα κατιέναι ἐκ  
τῆς ἀκροάσεως αὐτῶν κατηφῇ καὶ  
λύπῃ πλήρῃ, ὥς καὶ τινι τῶν φίλων  
διηγείσθαι ἃ πάσχοι· τὸν δὲ συνέντα  
αὐτοῦ τῆς ψυχῆς τὸ βούλημα ἀπενέγκαι  
πρὸς Ἀμμώνιον, οὗ μὴδέπω πεπείρατο.  
Τὸν δὲ εἰσελθόντα καὶ ἀκούσαντα φάναι  
πρὸς τὸν ἑταῖρον· τοῦτον ἐζήτουν. Καὶ  
ἀπ' ἐκείνης τῆς ἡμέρας συνεχῶς τῷ  
Ἀμμωνίῳ παραμένοντα τοσαύτην ἔξιν  
ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ κτήσασθαι, ὥς καὶ τῆς  
παρὰ τοῖς Πέρσαις ἐπιτηδευομένης  
πεῖραν λαβεῖν σπεύσαι καὶ τῆς παρ'  
Ἰνδοῖς κατορθουμένης. Γορδιανοῦ  
δὲ τοῦ βασιλέως ἐπὶ τοὺς Πέρσας  
παριέναι μέλλοντος δοὺς ἑαυτὸν  
τῷ στρατοπέδῳ συνεισῆγει ἔτος ἡδὴ  
τριακοστὸν ἄγων καὶ ἔννατον. Ἐνδεκα  
γὰρ ὅλων ἐτῶν παραμένων τῷ Ἀμμωνίῳ  
συνεσχόλασε. Τοῦ δὲ Γορδιανοῦ περὶ  
τὴν Μεσοποταμίαν ἀναιρεθέντος  
μόλις φεύγων εἰς τὴν Ἀντιόχειαν  
διεσώθη. Καὶ Φιλίππου τὴν βασιλείαν  
κρατήσαντος τεσσαράκοντα γεγονώς

Nevertheless, many times during the  
meetings he voluntarily conveyed the  
following. Until he was eight years old,  
he kept going back to his wet—nurse,  
and—even though he was already going to  
a grammar teacher—he wanted to suckle  
and bared her breasts. Once he heard  
that he was a mischievous little brat, he  
was ashamed and desisted. In his twenty-  
eighth year, he experienced an impulse  
towards philosophy, and he obtained a  
formal introduction to those who at that  
time had the best reputation throughout  
Alexandria. He came away from their  
lectures so dejected and full of grief as  
even to tell one of his friends what he had  
experienced. The latter, comprehending  
the wish of [Plotinus's] soul, sent him to  
Ammonius, whom he had not yet tried.  
Having gone to him and heard him lecture,  
Plotinus said to his friend, “*This* is what I  
was seeking.” And staying continuously with  
Ammonius from that day on, he acquired  
such a training in philosophy as also to  
be eager to try to acquire that which was  
practiced by the Persians and that which was  
proper among the Indians. As the Emperor  
Gordian was intending to march against  
the Persians, Plotinus volunteered himself  
and accompanied the army while already in  
his thirty-ninth year; for he had remained  
studying with Ammonius for eleven whole  
years. When Gordian was killed near  
Mesopotamia, Plotinus barely escaped and  
evacuated in safety to Antioch. And when

[D2] Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 3.1–35 (text Armstrong, LCL)

ἔτη εἰς τὴν Ῥώμην ἄνεισιν. Ἐρεννίῳ δὲ καὶ Ὀριγένει καὶ Πλωτίνῳ συνθηκῶν γεγονυῖων μηδὲν ἐκαλύπτειν τῶν Ἀμμωνίου δογμάτων ἃ δὴ ἐν ταῖς ἀκροάσεσιν αὐτοῖς ἀνεκεκάρτατο, ἔμενε καὶ ὁ Πλωτίνος συνῶν μὲν τισι τῶν προσιόντων, τηρῶν δὲ ἀνέκπυστα τὰ παρὰ τοῦ Ἀμμωνίου δόγματα. Ἐρεννίου δὲ πρώτου τὰς συνθήκας παραβάντος, Ὀριγένης μὲν ἠκολούθει τῷ φθάσαντι Ἐρεννίῳ. Ἐγραψε δὲ οὐδὲν πλὴν τὸ « Περὶ τῶν δαιμόνων » σύγγραμμα καὶ ἐπὶ Γαλιήνου « Ὅτι μόνος ποιητῆς ὁ βασιλεὺς ». Πλωτίνος δὲ ἄχρι μὲν πολλοῦ γράφων οὐδὲν διετέλεσεν, ἐκ δὲ τῆς Ἀμμωνίου συνουσίας ποιούμενος τὰς διατριβάς· καὶ οὕτως ὅλων ἐτῶν δέκα διετέλεσε, συνῶν μὲν τισι, γράφων δὲ οὐδέν.

Philip assumed power, having turned forty, Plotinus came to Rome. Errennius, Origen, and Plotinus had made an agreement not to disclose any of the doctrines of Ammonius which he had elucidated for them in the lectures. Plotinus, too, stood firm; although meeting with those who came to him, he preserved the incommunicability of the doctrines of Ammonius. Errennius was the first to violate the agreement, while Origen followed Errennius's precedent; but he wrote nothing except *On the Daimones* and, during the reign of Gallienus, *That the King is the Only Creator*. For a long time, Plotinus persisted in writing nothing, but his class lectures were created from his intercourse with Ammonius, and thus he continued for ten whole years, meeting with some people, but writing nothing.

*Appendix E. Echoes of autophany of Enn. 1.6[1].9.15–25 in Najm al-din al-Kubra*

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Najm al-din al-Kubra (1145–1220 CE), *Fawa'il al-jamal wa-fawatih al-jalal* (*The Blossoms of Beauty and the Perfumes of Majesty*) §66, from H. Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, N. Pearson trans. (New Lebanon, NY: Omega, 1994), 85 [cf. Appendix A3 *supra*]

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[When the circle of the face has become pure] it effuses lights as a spring pours forth its water so that the mystic has a sensory perception that these lights are gushing forth to irradiate his face. This outpouring takes place between the two eyes and between the eyebrows. Finally, it spreads to cover the whole face. At that moment, before you, before your face, there is another Face also of light, irradiating lights; while behind its diaphanous veil a sun becomes visible, seemingly animated by a movement to and fro. In reality, this Face is your own face and this sun is the sun of the Spirit that goes to and from in your body. Next, the whole of your person is immersed in purity, and suddenly you are gazing at a person of light who is also irradiating lights. The mystic has the sensory perception of this irradiation of lights proceeding from the whole of his person. Often the veil falls and total reality of the person is revealed, and with the whole of your body you perceive the whole. The opening of the inner sight begins in the eyes, then in the face, then in the chest, then in the entire body. This person of light before you is called in Sufi terminology the suprasensory Guide. It is also called the suprasensory personal Master, or again the suprasensory spiritual Scales.

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