Are the Plotinian Hyper–Noetic and Pre–Noetic Selves Identical?
Apprehension of the One at Enneads VI.9[9].11.16–26
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1. In a study published more than half a century ago, Jean Trouillard proposed that Plotinus envisioned a virtual identity between the soul of the mystical aspirant in its hyper–noetic state and the pre–noetic 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.1 This provocative thesis was later taken up by several scholars, most notably Pierre Hadot and Gerard O’Daly, writing in the 1960s and 70s respectively.2 However, the identification of pre– and hyper–noetic selves has been rejected by several subsequent scholars, notably Anthony Lloyd in 1987, John Bussanich in 1988, and most recently, Eyjólfur Emilsson in 2007, each for a slightly different reason.3 In previous research I have sided with O’Daly and the so–called “identificationist” point of view (to use Emilsson’s term) without taking the time to make a full defense of my position.4 However, in light of the critiques of identificationism I would like to make a slightly more detailed case for the identity of mystical and primordial selves. This paper will concentrate on the semantic range of the terminology in just one of Plotinus’ more cataphatic (and textually problematic) descriptions of the mystical apprehension of the supreme principle in the famous simile of the adyton of a temple at VI.9[9].11.22–25. This difficult passage provides, I think, one significant piece of evidence in support of identificationism.

2. First, some context. This passage occurs in one of Plotinus’ earliest accounts of a robust mystical union with the One, towards the end of his 9th treatise, VI.9. In chapter 11, lines 16 to 22, he

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2 Hadot (1968a, 1968b); O’Daly (1974), who compared the self–reflexive activity of both the soul of the mystic and the pre–Intelllect and concluded therefrom that procession and reversion are in fact identical: “…[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 origenerative vision of its principle—a vision that is permanent—is made conscious to itself as pre–intellectual, in an instant of unmediated contact.” (p. 164). Plotinus himself seems to suggest this very identity: at VI.9[9].4.29, for example, he says that the mystical apprehension of the One occurs when one is “as one was when one came from him” (hōs eichen, hote elthen ap’ autou), and similar statements may be found elsewhere throughout his works, e.g. VI.9[9].20 and VI.7[38].35.23.
3 This is not the place for a full critique of these arguments. Briefly, Lloyd (1987: 182 ff.) insisted that Plotinus’ account of procession (which he understood as following rationally from the double–energeia doctrine) had no significant relation to the mystical ascent; in Lloyd’s view, the latter has no genuine philosophical value but instead remains at the sub–philosophical level of myth. A more nuanced argument explicitly attacking the thesis of Trouillard and O’Daly occurs in John Bussanich’s 1988 study of the relation of the One and the Intellect. Bussanich argued that—despite certain similarities in Plotinus’ description—the pre–Intelllect of incipient procession should be sharply distinguished from the hyper–Intelllect of the mystical ascent, primarily because of supposed differences in the specific attributes of pre– and hyper–noetic selves. Most recently Bussanich’s criticism has been taken up (with many qualifications) by E. Emilsson in his study of the Plotinian Intellect published last year. Conceding some but not all of Bussanich’s points, Emilsson nevertheless rejects what he appropriately calls the “identificationist” position primarily because of the ostensible absurdity of the narrative such an view would entail: for if the mystical hyper– and proto– Intelleccts are identical, what would be the point of proceeding from the One only to be immediately reabsorbed into it?
4 In my previous work I have argued that Plotinus deliberately (if sometimes quite subtly) associates the self–reflexive activity of the mystical subject—an activity that culminates in a sudden “autophany” or manifestation of the transcendental self at the penultimate stage of ascent—with the eternal moment of self-reversion by which the emergent pre-noetic efflux of the One catches a glimpse of its source and thus acquires delimitation to become the actualized Intellect.
comparis the final stages of the approach to the One to 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 himself. In this analogy the icons outside the temple seem to correspond to the beautiful Forms within the hypostatic Intellect, while the adyton itself corresponds to the realm of the One above Intellect. In the next line Plotinus immediately corrects the analogy, since the supreme principle cannot, properly speaking, be an object of contemplation. Instead, he says, the contemplation within the adyton is “another way of seeing,” (allos tropos tou idein), 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 Henry and Schwyzer’s editio minor now has the text as follows: “ekstasis kai haplós kai epidosis hautou kai ephasis pros haphén kai stasis kai perinóesis pros epharmogén.”

3. Now 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, as many scholars have thought, 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 different sequential phases of mystical apprehension. For if they are intended to describe the same temporal or logical moment, then 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—or instead to what is still a penultimate stage, above the ordinary Intellect but just short of union with the One. At first glance this latter option would seem to be more likely, since there are parallels for several of these terms in descriptions of the penultimate stage elsewhere, and since Plotinus’ other descriptions of union tend to imply a more absolute coalescence. Moreover, it is hard to see how one could “long” for something at the moment one attains it. And if in fact the adyton implies a hyper-noetic stage, how can one have any kind of noësis of the supreme principle, even perinoësis, whatever this means? And more generally, even if one

5 “The intercourse there with the [divine inside the temple]” (tén ekei sunousian pros...auto) corresponds to contemplation of the One itself in the hyper-noetic realm. Hadot (1994: 207-213) suggests that the entire temple–image may also be understood as a representation of the levels of the human soul.
6 VI.9[9].11.16–25: Οὐδὲ τῶν καλῶν, ἀλλά καὶ τὸ καλὸν ἡδὴ ύπερθέων, ύπερβάς ἡδή καὶ τὸν τῶν ἀρετῶν χορόν, ὡσπερ τις εἰς τὸ εἰσίν του ἀδύτου εἰδός εἰς τοῦποσ καταλιπων τὰ ἐν τῷ νεόν ἀγάλματα, ἃ ἔξελθοντι τοῦ ἀδύτου τάλιων γίνεται πρώτα μετὰ τὸ ἐνδον θέαμα καὶ τὴν ῥεῖν συνούσια πρὸς οὐκ ἀγάλμα τοῦ εἰκόνα, ἀλλά αὐτό· ἃ δὲ γίγνεται δεύτερα θέαμα. Τὸ δὲ ἰσώς ἢν οὐ θέαμα, ἀλλά ἀλλός τρόπος τοῦ ἰδεῖν, ἱκασίας καὶ ἀπλώσιας καὶ ἐπίδοσις αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔφεσις πρὸς ἀρήν καὶ στάσις καὶ περινόσις πρὸς ἔφαρμογήν, εἶπερ τις τῷ ἐν τῷ ἀδύτῳ θέασεται. (One should note that for reasons unmentioned in the apparatus, H–S² has switched to an aspirated reflexive hautou in epidosis hautou; H–S¹ originally had autou. Since it does not appear to affect the sense, I transliterate it consistently as autou).
7 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 aporetical terms, merely approximately correct, for ultimately it is impossible to describe the activities on the part of the soul.”
8 Thus, for example, we find the aspirant perceiving himself as haploun earlier in the treatise, at VI.9[9].10.10; or cognates of histénai at e.g. IV.8[6].1.8, VI.9[9].9.51, and V.5[32].8.12; one might also compare the stasis and epidosis autou to stas and didous at the penultimate phase of mystical union at V.5[32].8.12 (and also the apparently synonymous heautou aphanhata III.8[30].9.30).
9 E.g. VI.9[9].11.4–5, VI.7[38].34.18, etc.
10 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 (1971: 174) suggest an emendation to perinøsis (a “sliding around” or “oscillation” or “inclining around”), a choice supported in the most recent translation and commentary by Hadot (1994). But this doesn’t
simply imply an adjustment of one’s thinking

The word evoke the state of the mystical subject “at rest” (since it transcends the categories of Plotinus adopts from Plato’s stasis genomenos VI.9[9].11.16: “mêde…menein haploun”.

And while the others only indicate a desire or tendency. For Bussanich (1988: 171), the first three terms of the ascent, and all other features more or less follow from this. Thus haplôsis in this case means a “simplification” of the self, a reading that is rendered plausible by Plotinus’ equivalent application of the adjective haploun both to the mystical subject earlier in the treatise, and elsewhere, to the One itself. Likewise, the epidosis autou 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. The ephesis pros haphên exemplifies the metaphorical imagery of erotic attraction and physical contact that Plotinus frequently employs to evoke the mystical approach to the One. The stasis suggests the attainment of a motionlessness state during the union. And finally, the perinoêsis pros epharmogên suggests yet again an oblique motion towards conformity with the One, using the (strictly speaking) inappropriate but still vaguely allusive terminology of cognition.

According to the general interpretations that have been suggested thus far, these six predicates are meant to emphasize the self–annihilation or the abdication of individual identity in a phase of the ascent that is either an immediate prerequisite to, or coextensive with, the ultimate union with the One. 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 really help. While absolving the mystic from (obviously inappropriate) intellection at the hypernoetic stage, perineusis nevertheless retains a disturbingly centrifugal connotation; elsewhere Plotinus’ use of neusis in the context of procession has a negative valence (see Sleeman–Pollet, Lexicon Plotinianum 676), the least negative instance being that of the One to itself at VI.8[39].16.24.

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: 140–141) takes ekstasis to indicate the union itself, and reconciles it with stasis by taking the later 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 only indicate a desire or tendency. For Bussanich (1988: 171), the first three terms— ekstasis, haplôsis, and epidosis autou—are all synonymous with the ultimate union and indicate the souls’ “self–transcendence.”

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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 strong identificationism.

6. Let us begin, then, with a closer look at the first three terms: ekstasis, haplósis, and epidosis autou. First, with respect to ekstasis, there should be no serious doubt that Plotinus envisioned union with the One as an “ecstasy” or as some kind of altered state of consciousness. However, this is not the primary sense of the word elsewhere in Plotinus, 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 negatively to Intellect; at I.1[53].5.23, to the appetitive part of soul; and, at VI.3[44].2.20, to matter. 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.

7. Next, we have a similar ambiguity in the case of the Plotinian hapax haplósis. 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].1.56, Plotinus uses haploumenon and ekteinomenon conjointly to describe the unfolding of all things from the Intellect. The verb haplótheis is also used in an apparently mystical context at VI.7[38].35.26 to describe the nous erón’s intoxication after having been filled with nectar, 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.” Furthermore, the interpretation of haplótheis 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 ff.). Here Plotinus says that Poros is a logos from Intellect

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18 Theiler suggested reading this stasis and deleting the stasis in the next line; Meijer (1992: 280–281, n. 798) proposes ekstasis, “extending.”
19 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 in existamenos de tôn anthropinôn spoudasmatôn kai pros tôi theití gignomenos... (Phaedr. 249c8: a rather weak case for his argument, since Plato immediately goes on to say that such a person will be thought insane by those who don’t recognize he is divinely possessed). That ekstasis had the connotation of “ecstasy” in Plotinus’ time is evident—see e.g., W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1952) 244— and it is extremely doubtful that this did sense not somehow factor into Plotinus’ choice of this word.
20 Where he opposes it to the preferable hêsuchia; see also VI.7[38].17.40, if one rejects Theiler’s emendation to ektaei.
22 Plotinus’ habitual use of ekstasis to denote ontological decline has been noted by several scholars, but they generally make an exception for 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 sorte de soi qui les éloigne de plus en plus de l’unité primitive.”
23 VI.7[38].1.54–57: Πάντα ἄρα ἢδη ἢν καὶ άεὶ ἢν καὶ οὔτως ἢν, ὡς εἶπεν ὑστερον τόδε μετά τόδε ἐκτεινόμενον μὲν γὰρ καὶ οὖν ἀπλούμενον ἐχεῖ δεικνύων τόδε μετά τόδε, ομοί δὲ ὑν πάν τούτο τούτῳ δε ἐστιν ἑξον ἐν οὖσε ταύτῃ καὶ την αἰτίαν.
24 VI.7[38].35.19–26: Καὶ τὸν νοῦν τοίνυν τήν μὲν ἑχεῖν δύναμιν εἰς τὸ νοεῖν, ἢ τὰ ἐν αὐτῶ βλέπει, τῆν δὲ, ἢ τὰ ἐπέκεινα αὐτοῦ ἐπίστολη τιν καὶ παρασκοτή, καθ' ἢν καὶ πρότερον ἔστα τούτων μόνον καὶ ὑπὸν ὑστερον καὶ νοῦν ἑχει καὶ ἐν ἐστι. Καὶ ἐστιν ἑκείνη μὲν ήθα νοῦς ὑμερφος, αὐτὴ δὲ νοος ἑρων, ὅταν ἀρφων γεννηται μεθοιδεῖς τοῦ νέκταρος τότε ἑρων γίνεσαι ἀπλούμενος εἰς εὔπαθειαν τῶν κόρων.
that has fallen to the level of the soul, and, somewhat like the nous erôn, is intoxicated with nectar; thus Armstrong’s translation has Poros “more diffused (kechumenos) and, as it were, spread out (haplôtheis).” Thus again with haplôsis we have a curious subtextual hint of what would typically represent, in Plotinus’ essentially centripetal hierarchy of value, a dissipation or dissolution towards the inferior.

8. Now we come to epidosis autou. It is by now 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’ only other uses of epidosis mean something quite different: namely, 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 he uses it in an indirect reference to an increase in virtue. Most significantly, however, a rapid search of the TLG database shows that the reflexive phrase epidosis autou occurs at least twice in the philosophical literature more or less contemporaneous with Plotinus: once before, in Galen’s commentary on Hippocrates’ De natura hominis, and once just afterwards, in Porphyry’s treatise Against the Christians; in both cases it appears to mean “advance” or “increase,” rather than “surrender oneself.” Thus Plotinus’ use of the term in our passage contrasts again somewhat surprisingly with the usual imagery of self–contraction in mystical contexts.

9. 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 haphên, stasis, and perinoêsis pros epharmogên—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 quite different: namely, an increase or augmentation. The strangeness of this analysis, I believe that here Plotinus has found an ingenious way to suggest—simultaneously—the first atemporal moments of procession, the process whereby the One’s own pre–noetic efflux expands and then reverts imperfectly to its source—its former self—to become Intellect proper.

10. This will become clearer when we turn to the next three terms. I would suggest that this second triad of terms also implicitly corresponds to Plotinus’ descriptions of the second moment of

26 III.5[50].9.1–3: Ὅ οὖν Πόρος λόγος ὃν τῶν ἐν τῷ νοητῷ καὶ νόη καὶ μᾶλλον κεχυμένος καὶ οἷον ἀπλωθεῖς περὶ ψυχήν ἃν γένοιτο καὶ ἐν ψυχῆ. 

27 An interesting but highly speculative comparison may be made to the controversial ontogenetic passage at V.3[49].11.1–4 (see text infra, n. 33) in which the “multiple intellect” (ho nous...ho polus) wishes to “flower upon” (epithallein, acc. to most mss.) or to “attain” (epiballein acc. to H–S”) the One “in its simplicity” (en haplōi), but fails and instead divides it up into many. The strongens of en haplōi is rarely noted in the literature, but one might conceivably associate it with the haplôsis of our passage, and if it applies to the subject, the nous ho polus, rather than the One, one might understand it as “in (its, i.e. the Nous’) 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 from or “flowers upon” the One somewhat like a baobab tree on the surface of the Little Prince’s planet.

28 Galen 15.196.7 Kühn: “καὶ ἢ σκληροκοίτια δὲ λυπεῖ καὶ συνέχει καὶ σκληρύνει καὶ σφίγγει τὸ σῶμα καὶ διὰ τούτο τὴν εἰς πάν μέρος ἐπίδοσιν αὐτοῦ κωλύει.”


30 Compare, for example, VI.8[39].18.20: “as it were poured out (ekchuthen) and unfolded (exelichthen) and hanging out from (exêrtêmenon)” the One.
ontogenesis in which the initial pre-noetic efflux of the One is attracted back to its own source in a moment of primordial self-reversion. First, let us consider ἐφήσις πρὸς ἅφην, “longing for contact.” Now elsewhere, of course, the mystical self-reversion too is often described with erotic language.31 However, it may be significant that on occasion Plotinus describes the impetus for the primordial self-reversion in erotic terms, often as the One’s love of itself (at, for example, VI.8[39].15.1–2 and 16.12–16). More importantly, he employs the specific term ἐφήσις to describe the nature of the pre-noetic efflux in ontogenetic contexts.32 Thus, for example, at V.3[49].11.13, Plotinus says that this overflow, prior to its determination by the One, is “longing (ἐφήσις) and unimprinted vision (ἄτυπος ὁπησι).”33 Similarly, at V.6[24].5.8–10, in the course of a summary description of the genesis of Intellect, he says that thinking is “movement towards the Good, desiring that one (ἐπιμενον ἐκεῖνον); for the desire (ἐφήσις) generates thought and consubstantiates it with itself.”34 With respect to ἅφην, although Plotinus often uses the language of physical contact to describe the mystical approach to the One,35 he also uses similarly non-cognitive, haptic imagery to suggest the “successful” non-dualistic apprehension of the One by the pre-noetic efflux at the first moments of procession; this precedes the fully-actualized but inferior form of vision which entails the first subject-object duality. Thus at V.3[49].10.43–45, the activity of pre-Intellect is “only a touching (θίξις) and as it were contact (ἐπαφή) without speech and without thought, a pre-thinking (προνοούσα), for Intellect has not yet come into being and that which touches does not think.”36 The term ἐφήσις πρὸς ἅφην, therefore, is

31 As we have seen, for example, with the nous erón of VI.7[38].35.24.

32 It is ironic that in his attempt to discredit identificationism, Bussanich (1988: 235) struggles to contrast the ἐφήσις and κίνησις of the emergent pre-Intellect with the supposed immobility of the subject in mystical union: “The immobility of the unitive state contrasts sharply with the definition of the potential Intellect as κίνησις and ἐφήσις.” He seems not to have taken our passage sufficiently into account.

33 V.3[49].11.1–16: Διό καὶ ὁ νοῦς ὁ πρῶτος ὁ πολύς, ὅταν τὸ ἐπέκεινα ἑθελὶ νοεῖ, ἐν μὲν οὗ ἀυτὸ ἀκίνητο, ἀλλὰ ἐπιβάλλειν θέλων ὡς ἀπλῶς ἔξειν ἀλλὰ διὶ λαμβάνων ἐν αὐτῷ πληθυνόμενον· ὡς ὁρίσμεν μὲν ἐπ᾿ αὐτὸ ὑπὲρ νοῦς, ἀλλ᾿ ὡς ὑπέρ ἄποιτο ἱδοῦσα, ἐξῆλθεν δὲ ἔξουσα ὑπὲρ αὐτή ἡπλὴν· ὡς ἄλλου μὲν ἐπιθέσθην ἀπόριστως ἔξουσα ἐπ᾿ αὐτὴν φαντασμάτι τι, ἐξῆλθε δὲ ἀλλο λαμβάνειν εἰς αὐτὴν ἀυτὸ πολὺ ποιήσασα. Καὶ γὰρ αὐτῷ ἔχει τόπου τοῦ ὀράματος ἢ ὡς παρεδέχοντο ἐν αὐτῇ γενόσθαι. Οὕτως δὲ πολὺς ἐξοῦσα ἐγένετο, καὶ ὡς ὑπὲρ νοῦς εἶνα αὐτῷ, καὶ τότε ἔγενετο ἱδοῦσα ὑπό καὶ ὡς ὑπῆρ έχει πρὸ τοῦ τούτου ἔξουσις μόνον καὶ ἀτυπώτως ὑπό. Οὗτος ὁ νοῦς ὁ πρῶτος ἐπήβαλε μὲν κινήτου, λαμβάνω δὲ ἐγένετο νοῦς, διὶ ἐν ἐνείδιαμενος καὶ γενόμενος καὶ νοούς καὶ εὐσία καὶ νόησις, ὡς ἐνεῖσπερ πρὸ τοῦ τούτου οὐ νόησις ἢ τὸ τοίον ὄν ἔχων οὔτε νοῦς οὔτε νόησις. This passage has been the subject of controversy (see supra, n. 27). Although Plotinus begins with a description of what seems to be the already-determined “multiple Intellect” (ho nous... ho polus) 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” (ὁπησι ὁπδιασωσ) and later “longing and unimprinted vision” (ἐφήσις καὶ ἄτυποτο ὁπησι), which is in fact the incipient Intellect 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: 149–151) treats the passage as if it pertains solely to an epistemological discussion of the actualized intellection’s (failed) apprehension of absolute unity. Emilsson (2007: 80–101) tries to resolve this ambiguity by assuming Plotinus already admitted some subject-object differentiation in the pre-Intellect; he consequently interprets the nous ho polus to mean the pre-Intellect, and— following Lloyd (1987)— 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 unconvinced; among other problems, it is unclear how any real multiplicity can exist at the pre-noetic stratum (see Plotinus’ own admonitions, e.g., inter alia, V.6[24].6.8–11); I think rather that the first minimal duality is engendered by the pre-noetic efflux’ progressive self-objectification (Corrigan’s phrase “the traveling subject in the logic of generation” is apposite), at which point the self becomes Intellect proper. The point is that here, as elsewhere, Plotinus seems to conflate descriptions of the genesis of Intellect with accounts of the actualized Intellect’s attempts to attain absolute unity. Of course, it is precisely this ambiguity between mystical apprehension and ontogenesis that I am defending in this paper.

34 V.6[24].5.8–10: Τὸ γὰρ νοεῖν ὡς πρῶτον ὥστε τῷ ἑδοτῷ ἑδοτὲ τῷ τίμιῳ εἶναι, ἀλλὰ δεύτερον καὶ γενόμενον, ἐπειδὴ ὑπέστη τὸ ἀγαθόν καὶ <τὸ> γενόμενον ἐκίνησε πρὸς αὐτό, τὸ δ` ἐκίνησθε ταύτα ὑπονοεῖ. Καὶ τοῦτο ἐστὶ νοεῖν, κύνησις πρὸς ἀγαθόν ἐφεύγειν ἐκεῖνον· ἦ γὰρ ἔρεις τῷ νόησιν ἐγένεσθαι καὶ συνυπέστησιν αὐτὴ ἔρεις γὰρ ὑπὸς ὑπερηφάνειας. Although as Meijer points out, this is the only place where ἅφην itself is thus employed.

35 V.3[49].10.39–43: Δεῖ τούτῳ τὸ νοῦν ἔτερον καὶ ἔτερον λαβεῖν καὶ τὸ νοοῦμενον κατανοοῦμενον ἢ ποικίλον εἶναι· οὐκ ἄποικος αὐτῷ, ἀλλὰ δελεί καὶ ἄποικὴ μοῦν ἄρρητος καὶ ἀνόητος, προνουσά.”
distinctly reminiscent of descriptions of the first impulse towards self–reversion in accounts of procession.

11. I have already mentioned that the next term, \textit{stasis}, is puzzling because it occurs between two prepositional terms that suggest the ultimate goal has not yet been attained. Yet here we may recall that a moment of rest similarly occurs in Plotinus’ accounts of procession. Indeed the position of \textit{stasis} in our passage corresponds precisely to Plotinus’ accounts of primordial self–reversion, whose initial moment often precedes a subsequent mention of \textit{stasis}. Thus, for example, at V.2[11].1.7–13 Plotinus describes the overflow of the One turning back towards its source to become Intellect and Being; only then does he say that “its standing towards that one (\textit{hê pros ekeino stasis}) makes Being, while its looking towards it is Intellect.” And in the very next line he repeats this notion of “standing towards”.37 “Since it stands towards it (\textit{estê pros auto}) so that it should see, it becomes simultaneously Intellect and Being.”38 Similarly, in a later treatise, at V.5[32].5.16–19, Plotinus describes the \textit{stasis} of the incipient Intellect only after an initial moment of self–reversion: “This that is said to be primary Being, proceeding, as it were, a little ways from there, did not wish to come forth any more, but having turned towards its interior, stood (\textit{metastraphên de eis to eisò estê}) and became the substance and hearth of all things.”39

12. Finally we arrive at the curious phrase \textit{perinoêsis pros epharmogên}. By now, however, the intellection implied by \textit{perinoêsis} seems somewhat less perplexing.40 For we know that in Plotinus’ accounts of ontogenesis, the end result of the eternal process of self–reversion is the actualized Intellect, which has acquired delimitation from its recursive vision of the One (its former self). Again, the preposition \textit{pros} implies some minimal separation from the One, and here the desired goal is no longer contact but the slightly weaker “adaptation” or “harmonization.”41 That \textit{epharmogê} in fact has a weaker sense than “contact” is suggested by the fact that Plotinus often uses one or another form of \textit{epharmozein} to denote the ordinary emanative process occurring on several ontological strata, in which inferior principles conform to and participate in superior ones.42 Whatever its precise meaning, then, \textit{perinoêsis pros epharmogên} describes an activity of apprehension directed towards or around the One from some minimal distance, a distance that creates a differentiation between subject and object sufficient to be described, more or less appropriately, with verbs of intellection.

13. If I am correct, then, these six terms correspond to the eternal procession and reversion in the indeterminate hyper-noetic domain between the One and the hypostatic Intellect. The first triad of

\begin{quote}
oùπω νοῦ γεγονότος καὶ τοῦ βιγγάνωτος οὐ νοοῦντος. One might compare also the image of Intellect as the circle “growing” out from and “touching” its center–point at VI.8[39].18.4–9: \textit{ephaptomenon...ephaptetai...ephaptoito}.\footnote{37 Interestingly, Hadot (1994) emended \textit{stasis} here to the accusative \textit{stasin} so it could be taken along with \textit{haphên} as the indirect object of \textit{ephesis}. This presumably was an attempt to render its occurrence between the two \textit{pros} constructions less peculiar, since according to this reading, \textit{stasin}, like \textit{haphên}, would be an intended result rather than a present state. But in light of the apparent parallels involving \textit{stasis pros...} at V.2[11].1 (and similar constructions elsewhere, such as the \textit{pros auton anapanasaito} at VI.7[38].23.4, etc.), Hadot more easily might have left the ms. reading as it stands and taken \textit{pros epharmogê} to modify \textit{stasis} along with \textit{perinoêsis}.}
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39 V.5[32].5.16–19: ὥ γὰρ τοις λεγομένοις διὸ τοῦτο πρῶτον ἐκείθεν οἶδα πρὸς τὸ πρῶτον ἑθέλησεν ὁλόγον προβεβηκὸς οὐκ ἠθέλησεν ἐτί πρῶτον ἐλθεῖν, ἐπετράραγε δὲ εἰς τὸ εἰςω ἐστίν, καὶ ἐγένετο ὁμίλος καὶ ἐστίν θεάν ἀπάντητον.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
40 It makes little difference to my argument if we accept Theler’s \textit{perineusis}, since Plotinus similarly applies \textit{neusis} to the emergent pre–Intellect’s reversion upon the One, e.g. at VI.8[39]16.24.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
41 One might also compare Plotinus’ use of the prepositional prefix \textit{peri}– in corresponding mystical and ontogenetic contexts, such as \textit{periphôsisan} applied to the transcendental self of the ascending mystic at VI.9[9].4.20 and \textit{perlampsin}... to \textit{peri autou lampron}... \textit{periletheon} applied to the luminous emanation of the One (or the Sun) at V.1[10].29–30.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
42 E.g. VI.4[22].13.24; VI.6[34].11.30; VI.1[42].25.7; V.3[49].2.12, 6.27.
\end{quote}
terms connotes (1) the initial emergence of the One’s pre-noetic 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 of its delimitation as Intellect proper, 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 at the moment of mystical union. 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 dynamic process and fluid identity in the necessarily delimited terms of language. Of course, if we accept a strong identificationism there is no paradox; we may conclude that the mystical aspirant (according to Plotinus) assumes the precise role or even identity of the emergent pre-Intellect, and for some brief moment participates experientially in the perpetual dynamic oscillation of expansion and self-reversion. In other words, the “other way to see” is in fact “seeing,” as it were, from the perspective of the One’s own pre-noetic efflux. This passage is not absolute proof of identificationism, but it does, I think, present some rather forceful evidence in its favor. It appears that for Plotinus the mystical ascent and the unfolding of reality are in fact merely different directions along the same continuous route. One’s position along this continuum is a matter of different modalities of apprehension, or, one might say, of different “ways of seeing.”

ΠΕΡΙ ΤΑΓΑΘΟΥ Η ΤΟΥ ΕΝΟΣ  VI. 9

αὐτῷ, οὐ θυμόσ, οὐκ ἐπιθυμία ἄλλου παρῆν αὐτῷ ἀνα- 10
βεβηκότι—ἀλλ' οὐδὲ λόγος οὐδὲ τις νόησις οὐδ' ὅλως
αὐτός, εἰ δεὶ καὶ τούτο λέγειν. ἀλλ' ὥσπερ ἄρπασθεὶς ἡ
ἐνθουσιάσας ἡνυχῆ ἐν ἐρήμῳ καὶ καταστάσει γεγένηται
ἀτρεμεί, τῇ αὐτοῦ οὐσίᾳ οὐδαμῇ ἀποκλίνων οὐδὲ περὶ
αὐτῶν στρεφόμενος, ἔστως πάντη καὶ οἷον στάσις γενό-
μενος. οὐδὲ τῶν καλῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ καλὸν ἦδη ὑπερθέων,
ὑπερβας ἦδη καὶ τὸν τῶν ἀρετῶν χορὸν, ὥσπερ τις εἰς τὸ
εἰς τοῦ ἀδύτου εἰσόδου εἰς τοῦπισω καταστοφὼν τὰ ἐν τῷ
νεῷ ἀγάλματα, ἀ εἰξελθόντι τοῦ ἀδύτου πάλιν γίνεται
πρῶτα μετὰ τὸ ἐνδον θέαμα καὶ τὴν ἐκεί οὐνομασίαν πρὸς 20
οὐκ ἀγάλμα μιὸδ το ἐικόνα, ἀλλ' αὐτός· ἀ δὴ γίγνεται δεύτερα
θεάματα. τὸ δὲ ἐις τὴν θέαμα, ἀλλὰ ἄλλος τρόπος
τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ, ἐκσκοιεί καὶ ἀπλωσις καὶ ἐπιδοσις αὐτοῦ καὶ
ἐφεσίς πρὸς ἀφήν καὶ στάσις καὶ περισότης πρὸς
ἐφαρμογήν, εἰπτερ τὸ ἐν τῷ ἀδύτῳ θεάςεται. εἰ δ' 25
ἀλλως βλέπωι, οὐδέν αὐτῷ πάρεστι. ταῦτα μὲν οὖν
μιμήματα· καὶ τοῖς οὗν σοφοῖς τῶν προφητῶν αἰνίττεται,
ὅπως θεὸς ἐκείνος ὁράται· σοφὸς δὲ ἰέρευς τὸ αἰνίγμα
συνεἰς ἀληθινῆν ἂν ποιοῖτο ἐκεῖ γενόμενον τοῦ ἀδύτου
τὴν θέαν. καὶ μὴ γενόμενος δὲ τὸ ἀδύτου τοῦτο ἀόρατον 30
τῇ χρήμα νομίζας καὶ πηγὴν καὶ ἀρχήν, εἰδῆσει ὡς ἀρχῇ
ἀρχὴν ὁρᾷ καὶ συγγίνεται [καὶ] τῷ ὁμοίῳ τὸ ὁμοίον. <καὶ>
οὐδὲν παραλίπων τῶν θείων ὁσα δύναται ψυχῇ ἐχειν καὶ

II. 22 Post θέαμα desinit E

Plat. Phaedr. 245 c 9 32 cf. Philolaus Fr. A 29; Empedocles Fr. B 109;
Democritus Fr. B 164

II. 13 ἐνθουσιάσας ἡνυχῆ οἰκυμορον 14 οὐδαμοῦ w 16 τῶν
καλῶν scil. 11 λόγοι 19 εἰκαθύντα RJQ 23 ἀπλωσις simplificatio
27 ad aïnitétei (medium) subiectum ταύτα 29 τοῦ ἀδύτου regitur ab
ἐκει 31 ἀρχῆ BRJUC: ἀρχῆ A: ἀρχῆ Q 32 καὶ* transposuimus
32 τῷ ὁμοίῳ: τῶν ὁμοίων JU 33 οὐδέν (οὖν) Dodds

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