One enigmatic feature of the Platonizing Sethian tractate *Allogenes* (*NHC* XI,3) is the description of the ultimate moment of apprehension of the unknowable deity as a “primary revelation” (*oumntshorp nouônh ebol*) or a “first revelation” (*oushorp nouônh ebol*). The phrase “primary” or “first revelation” occurs five times throughout the treatise, most notably at the culmination of the final contemplative ascent through the triad of hypostases—Mentality (or Blessedness), Vitality, and Existence—constituting the three powers of the Triple Powered One that mediates between the Unknowable One and the fully-actualized Barbelo Aeon. The first mention occurs at 59.28, 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 of the Unknowable One, if you know him, be ignorant of him.” Another mention occurs in the next passage, at 60.39, during Allogenes’ own first-person account of the ultimate mystical vision: “I was filled with revelation by means of a primary revelation of the Unknowable One.” We find the expression yet again at 61.9: “by means of a primary revelation of the First One (who is) unknowable to them all, the God who is beyond perfection, I saw him and the Triple Powered One that exists in them all.” In each occurrence the phrase “primary revelation” appears to be a technical term. (See Appendix section A). In what follows I would like to present a hypothesis about the significance of this peculiar term which, I believe, will shed light not only on the implicit metaphysics and transcendental epistemology of Allogenes and related Sethian literature but will also have ramifications for our understanding of Plotinus’ mysticism, to which Sethian thought seems to be very closely related.

**Part 1. How should we interpret “Primary Revelation” in Allogenes?**

1.1. Let me begin by considering the prevailing scholarly opinion, namely, that as it occurs in Allogenes the phrase “primary revelation” (*oumntshorp nouônh ebol*) refers to a revelation primarily in the broad sense of *information*: information imparted by a deity either through discourse, vision, or

---

1 Unless otherwise noted, text and translations are generally from the CGL editions (with minor changes).
2 At 61.28-31 it is specifically distinguished from an unqualified revelation.
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, John Turner has suggested that the “primary revelation” bears a close relationship with the negative-theological predications of the Unknowable One. 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 64.37ff., where the supreme principle is described in terms of more positive attributes: a conjecture which appears 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. In more recent works, Turner, too, has tended to emphasize the experiential aspect of primary revelation; thus, for example, in the more recent (2004) BCNH edition of Allogenes he observes that at 63.14-15 the Unknowable One is itself said to be “primary revelation and knowledge of himself” (Appendix passage A4), and suggests that at the culmination of the ascent the aspirant’s reception of the primary revelation indicates he has been completely assimilated to the supreme principle’s own incognizant knowledge of himself.

1.2. Yet several perplexities remain. For one thing, although King seems to be right that this experience is closer to vision than to audition—for instance, at 61.9, Allogenes says that “by means of” (ebol hitn) a primary revelation, he “saw” (nau) the God beyond perfection—this particular distinction can hardly be the primary determining factor, since at 61.28 the Luminaries tell Allogenes to “hear” (sôtm) 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’ 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, the primary revelation 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 (ebol hitn) the vision of the deity occurs. The interpretations proffered thus far therefore leave as many questions as answers.

1.3. Here I would like to propose a slightly different interpretation of the phrase oumtnshorp nouônh ebol and its cognates, an interpretation that may allow us to solve some, but not all, of these difficulties. I will begin by considering the expression ouônh ebol from a purely philological perspective. It is true that the variants of the Coptic phrase ouônh ebol may be translated by the verb “to reveal” or the noun “revelation,” thus rendering the Greek anaggelein, apokaluptein, or phaneroun, or equivalent related terms that primarily connote the transmission of some kind of cognitive or visionary content. However, ouônh ebol may simultaneously be used to translate Greek verbs such as emphanein, epiphainein, phainesthai and other similar verbs that denote the intransitive act of manifestation or appearance itself; as a noun it can therefore render epiphaneia.\(^5\) Somewhat more indirectly, it seems that ouônh ebol may also have occasionally been used to render certain Greek verbs suggesting forward motion, emanation, projection, or spatial emergence, such as proballein or proerchesthai, if we are to judge by the numerous occurrences of each in the several manuscripts of the Apocryphon of John and the parallel fragments of Irenaeus of Lyon’s Adversus Haereses preserved by Theodoret of Cyrus.\(^6\) A brief perusal of the Nag Hammadi corpus— and especially of the Sethian and the more philosophical Valentinian tractates— similarly reveals that the intransitive verbal form of ouônh ebol and its cognates are frequently used to signify the emergence or procession of various hypostases from prior ontological strata.\(^7\) At this point one might also wonder what is meant by the qualification of the more exalted of these revelations as “first” (shorp) or “primary” (mntshorp). 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.\(^8\) If I am correct, then, the nominal phrase mntshorp or shorp nouônh ebol may therefore be translated as an

---

\(^5\) Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* 486b-787a; also, one may presume, emphaneia, redolent of the appearance of a God.


\(^7\) E.g. as a noun at *NHC* I,5 69.33; as a verb, II,5 99.1. Interestingly, the expression rshorp nouônh ebol is used throughout the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (*NHC* IV,2) to mean appearances and emanations on every level; thus 53.4, 54.22, 56.12, 63.5.

\(^8\) Rendering the Greek pro-, pró- and próto- but also próimos, en prótois, ek prótoû, ap’ archês, etc.; see Crum 586b-587b.
“initial manifestation” or “first emergence,” perhaps rendering a quasi-technical term such as, for example, prôtê ekphansis or prôtê epiphaneia or something of that sort in the original Greek text.⁹

1.4. Let us then adopt as a working hypothesis the interpretation of shorp ouônê ebol as something like “initial manifestation” and now 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 “primary revelation” or “first manifestation” is directly identified with the Unknowable One’s self-knowledge, which itself is also, in some way, identical to the deity.¹⁰ Now with this in mind, I would like to draw attention to a number of other references in the Sethian corpus to an extraordinary faculty or modality of knowledge that allows apprehension of the unknowable, a faculty that is therefore functionally parallel to “primary revelation,” although not described with this precise terminology (See Appendix section B). We find, for example, the mention of “first thought” (oushôrp nennoia) that allows apprehension of the deity at Allogenes 48.9-19: “Since it is impossible for them to comprehend the Universal One situated in the place that is higher than perfect, they apprehend by means of a First Thought.” A similar role is imputed to a “first thought” in the related Platonizing Sethian treatise Zostrianos, where at 24.10-13, the aspirant learns about the Invisible Spirit “by means of the thought which now exists in silence and within the First Thought (tishôrp nennoia).” To this one may also compare what is called at Allogenes 60.11 an “enlightened thought” (ouennoia ece nouoein), whose function seems identical to that of the “primary revelation” as a means of knowing the unknowable; thus the luminaries advise Allogenes, “if by means of an enlightened thought you should know him, be ignorant of him.”

1.5. We may therefore begin to suspect that the authors of these texts envisioned some kind of functional homology between the “primary revelation” or “initial manifestation,” the “first thought,” the “enlightened thought,” and, finally, the Unknowable One’s self-knowledge. We now may ask again: what precisely might be meant by this “initial manifestation”? By this point, we may see that a possible answer is emerging. For elsewhere in the Platonizing Sethian corpus and in related philosophico-religious literature, we already have a clear concept of an “initial manifestation” or “first

⁹ One might also suppose that it was 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.

¹⁰ Turner (2004: 100) has pointed out 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.
thought,” often described as luminous, that is similarly related to the transcendent deity’s own ineffable self-cognition. For we may recall the derivational scheme employed by several of these monistic systems. Typically, the supreme deity is a unique principle which subsists in absolute unity and which transcends not only intellection but even Being itself. In the first eternal moment of ontogenesis, this principle reverts upon itself, in an act—generally described with either cognitive or spatial imagery—that produces the first minimal duality through the deity’s own self-objectification. Once actualized, this self-cognition must be projected out of the absolute unity of the transcendent deity, and it thereby acquires independent subsistence. It is thus, in effect, the “image” of the first principle itself that comprises the second principle, usually described as an intellectual power, broadly speaking, or as the Barbelo aeon (or as some other triadic series of hypostases) and it is this latter principle from which the rest of metaphysical reality subsequently unfolds.\footnote{Similar examples of derivation through the self-reversion of the first principle in non-Sethian sources include, \textit{inter alia}, the systems of Simon Magus (\textit{apud} Hippolytus, \textit{Refutatio omnium haeresium} VI.18), Marcus (\textit{apud} Hippolytus, \textit{Haer.} VI.42), and Theodotus (\textit{apud} Clement of Alexandria, \textit{Excerpta ex Theodoto} 7.1); but see also \textit{Tripartite Tractate} (NHC I,5) 56.1-6, 56.16-57.3; \textit{Gospel of Truth} (NHC I,3) 38.6-39.28; among other Sethian examples, see the \textit{Untitled Text} from the Codex Bruce 21.5-21. This scheme was already discerned without recourse to the Nag Hammadi evidence by H.-J. Krämer (1964), and has been elegantly described by Turner in numerous works. To be absolutely precise, Turner has suggested that in the case of \textit{Allogenes} the reversion seems to be an activity of the Triple Powered One rather than the Unknowable One itself, from which the TPO is somewhat more independent than in other Platonizing Sethian treatises, thus better preserving its hypertranscendence; but of course, the highest modality of the TPO (\textit{Huparxis}) is indistinguishable from the UO and may be thought of as the first minimal activity of own its self-reversion.} The intent of this derivational scheme seems to be to preserve the hypertranscendence of the first principle, which remains self-directed, while accounting for the production of inferior ontological strata as virtually a by-product of the supreme principle’s own transcendence.

1.6. Among numerous other examples we may find a clear instance of ontogenesis through self-reversion in all versions of the \textit{Apocryphon of John}—presumably an important ancestor of the Platonizing Sethian corpus—where the Invisible Spirit contemplates his reflection in his own aqueous light (Appendix section C): “It is he who contemplates himself alone in his light which surrounds him, namely the spring of living water.... And in every direction he perceives his own image in the pure light-water which surrounds him. And his thought became actual and \textit{she came forth} and attended him.” We may note here that the shorter version uses the term \textit{ouônh ebol} to describe Barbelo’s actual emergence as the image of the Invisible Spirit,\footnote{\textit{NHC} III.1 7.13; \textit{BG} 27.5-6.} while the longer version tends to use instead the virtually synonymous expression \textit{gôlp ebol} to describe her act of emergence but then adds the epexegetic phrase “namely, she who had \textit{appeared} before him,” here again using \textit{ouônh ebol} to
describe her act of visible manifestation. In any case, all versions repeat the account of the emergence of Barbelo in the next few lines with the expression *ouôn ebol*. 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 “first thought” (*tehoueite nennnoia* or *phshorp m meeue*).

Similarly, one may compare the account of the first moment of procession in *Eugnostos* (and the parallel *Sophia of Jesus Christ*): “He sees himself within himself like a mirror, having appeared (*eafouôn ebol*) in his likeness as Self-Father, that is, Self-Begetter, and as Confronter, since he confronted Unbegotten First Existent.” Returning to the Sethian Platonizing treatises themselves, we find a number of suggestions of the same scheme in which the self-manifestation of the first principle, often expressed as *ouôn ebol*, constitutes the emergent second principle (see Appendix section D). At *Allogenes* 53.15-16, we find a description of the self-reversion of the Triple Powered One which mediates between the fully hyperontic Unknowable One and the determinate Being of the Barbelo Aeon: “And he entered into himself and he appeared (*afouôn ebol*), being all-encompassing.” An analogous process seems to be described from the perspective of the second principle, perhaps Barbelo, at *Allogenes* 45.17-30, as well as in a series of fragmentary passages in *Zostrianos*, running from page 80 to 83 and again at page 87. Indeed that the mechanism of primordial ontogenesis was itself a crucial issue for the Platonizing Sethians is implied at *Zostrianos* 3.11-13, when the eponymous visionary is nearly driven to suicide by his bewilderment over the metaphysical conundrum, “how has Existence which has no being appeared (asouôn ebol) in a power that has being?”

1.6. It therefore appears that the *shorp ouôn ebol* or “first manifestation”— the ineffable mode of apprehension by which Allogenes experiences the Unknowable One— is in some way analogous or even identical to the first eternal moment of procession in which the emergent self-perception of the transcendent first principle is a prefiguration of the second principle, which then is actualized as a fully independent hypostasis. As we can see clearly from the *Apocryphon of John*, this primordial self-manifestation may accurately be called a “first thought” or, equivalently, an “illuminated thought,”

---

13 *NHC* II,1 4.27; IV,1 7.3.
14 *NHC* III,1 75.3-9.
15 Among many other examples, we find the notion of “first thought” in *Zostrianos* 20.4-21 [Turner’s new translation]: “Now as for the Entirety, both the all-perfect kind and that which is higher than perfect and blessed: the self-generated Kalyptos is a pre-existent principle (**ευρκη πε ειρ ουητι ι οιοοτ**) of the Autogenes, a deity and forefather, a cause of Protophanes, a father of his own parts, a paternal deity, apprehended, but not comprehended (**ενοςτε ηεκωτ πε ευρκη πε ειρ ουητι ι οιοοτ αυν αειηκε ουητι εροα αυν αειηκε ουητι εροα αυν**) [cf. C. Barry’s trans., “un divin père connu d’avance, est inconnu,” or that of J. Sieber, “as a divine father, he is foreknown, but he is unknown.”] As he is a self-derived power, he is father of himself, therefore he is [fatherless]. The invisible Triple Powered One, the Forethought (**τρωητι ηεννοια**) [of them] all, the Invisible Spirit, is [source of them all] and [an insubstantial Existence] [prior to essence] and existence [and
since it is seen in the Invisible Spirit’s own aqueous light. In other words, if I am correct thus far, the authors of these texts postulated that the human aspirant could in some way re-live the first moment of ontogenesis by co-experiencing the first principle’s own primordial self-manifestation.

1.7. Yet if this is in fact how we should understand mntshorp ouônēh ebol one may still wonder how the authors of these texts thought that the ineffable self-reflection of the deity could be accessible to the human subject. I would suggest in response that there are certain intimations of a doctrine according to which some extraordinary faculty that permits apprehension of the unknowable transcendent principle— in other words, the faculty that experiences the “first manifestation”— is found within the depths of the human subject and is accessible through an act of contemplative self-reversion. (Appendix section E). One may first consider the progressive series of “withdrawals” (anachôreseis) by which Allogenes ascends through the triad of powers to attain his primary revelation,16 or, equivalently, his report at 52.7-12: “I turned to myself and saw the light that surrounded me and the Good that was in me and I became divine”; or Youel’s revelation at 56.15-21: “If you [seek with a perfect] seeking, [then] you shall know [the Good that is] in you; then [you will know yourself] as well, (as) one who [derives from] the God [who truly pre-exists].” A similar image occurs in Zostrianos, at 43.17: “If one [wishes], then he again parts from them all and withdraws (anachôrein) into himself [alone], for he can become divine by having withdrawn to God.”17

1.8. At this point we may try to identify this interior faculty somewhat more precisely. There are a number of subtle indications that this indwelling principle is, in effect, a residual “image” (eikôn) or “impression” (tupos) that has somehow been left over from the first primordial moment of ontogenesis— specifically from the “first manifestation.”18 During the final ascent towards the “first manifestation,” at 59.37-60.2, the Luminaries advise Allogenes that “in accordance with the impression (tupos) that indwells you, know likewise that it is this way in all such matters, after this very pattern (smot).” 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

---

16 One may also compare a remarkably similar sequence in the Valentinian Tripartite Tractate (NHC I,5) 123.27-124.25, in which ascent towards a silent realm of illumination is attained by those who reflexively name and conceive of themselves.

17 Self-withdrawal also seems to lead to knowledge of transcendentalia in Marsanes.NHC X,1 9.21-27. There are also a number of comparable passages in the Platonizing Sethian tractates in which a similar act of self-reversion or self-cognition leads to an apprehension of the transcendent, but in which the subject is ambiguously the human aspirant or a subsidiary deity; thus, inter alia, Mars. 8.19-9.20; Zost. 45.9-46.2; 76.21-25; 81.1-21; 87.10-23;

18 Zostrianos and Allogenes employ the language of tupos, antitupos and eikôn throughout, e.g. Zost. 10.9-14; 12.1-21; Allog. 51.14-16; cf. also the (related?) “great power” (ounoq nqom) for salvation bestowed on the aspirant earlier, at 50.25.
inactivity in you (piatenergia et-hrai nhêtk) 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. Subsequently, in Allogenes’ first-hand account of the final stages of ascent, at 60.30-37, he says that he finds the power of Existence “standing and at rest like an image (eikôn) and likeness (eîne)” of that — and here the sense is ambiguous— “which is bestowed (or invested) upon me” (ettoe hiôôt), and a few words later, after the mention of the “primary revelation”: “I knew the One who exists within (me) and the Triple Powered One and the revelation of his uncontainableness” (piouônh ebol nte piatshôp). Clearly we have a concept of an aspect or modality of the transcendent deity within the self. Perhaps more speculatively, if we interpret the nominal phrase piouônh ebol here as “manifestation” or “appearance,” akin to that of the “first manifestation,” and take the “uncontainableness” to be the first unbounded effluence that emanates forth from the transcendent principle prior to its determination as the Barbelo Aeon, it suggests some remnant of this primordial act of manifestation remains within the aspirant and functions in return as the mechanism for the ultimate act of apprehension. This would seem to be further supported by a later passage, at 64.30-36 (Appendix section B), where the aspirant is said to be “blind apart from the eye of revelation (pibal...nte piouônh ebol) which is at rest, (the eye) that has been activated, (the eye) from the first thought (tishorp nennoia) of the Invisible Spirit.” In this case the human faculty of transcendental perception— the “eye of revelation”— is explicitly said to have derived from the “first thought,” which we have already seen to be identical with the “primary revelation” or “first manifestation.”

1.9. If I am correct thus far, it would appear that the Platonizing Sethian authors conceived the mystical ascent as a process of reversion towards some residual aspect of the transcendent divinity’s initial self-manifestation that is immanent within the self. Yet it also seems that the human aspirant’s mystical self-reversion is itself non-coincidentally parallel to the primordial self-reversion undertaken by the first, transcendent principle, when this principle reverts to and apprehends itself to produce the first incipient duality whence emerges the rest of reality. Indeed, it appears that these sectaries envisioned the mystical and the ontogenetic experiences of self-perception— in each case a “primary manifestation”— to be identical, according to a kind of commutative principle, even if the end result in each case was thought to be quite different. One may therefore suppose the Sethian authors imagined that it was possible to reiterate the transcendent principle’s own primordial self-apprehension.

19 Perhaps another name for the “Boundlessness” (mnt-atnarêjs) traversed by the Triple Powered One at 49.9.
20 One may also compare Marsanes (NHC X,1). At 9.29-10.7, the ontogenesis seems to occur through a spatial withdrawal, when the Invisible Spirit “runs up to his place” (afpôt ahrêtì apeftopos); this is echoed by the human aspirant in the mystical

2.1. At this point I would like to briefly situate this conception of mystical apprehension in the slightly broader intellectual context of the Platonism of the first few centuries CE, and eventually to point out certain intriguing parallels with Plotinus, in whose circle Greek versions of the treatises Allogenes and Zostrianos were carefully read and critiqued. First, however, I should explain how this theme originally caught my attention, and why I think it might be of particular concern for the history of later Platonism. In the course of research for my dissertation on Plotinian mysticism I was repeatedly struck by the close parallels between, on the one hand, Plotinus’ accounts of the final stages of the ascent towards the ultimate union with the One and, on the other hand, his descriptions of the first moments of ontogenesis whereby the hypostatic Being–Intelect unfolds from the One. Yet I was not the first to notice this; already in 1955, Jean Trouillard had pointed out the correspondence between what he called the “extase germinale” of the emergent pre-Intellect and the ecstasy of the human mystic in union with the One. In subsequent decades this thesis was eloquently developed by Pierre Hadot and Gerard O’Daly. However, there remains a considerable debate among Plotinian scholars about whether Plotinus actually intended to make a robust identification between the final moments of the mystical return and the first moments of procession, and the identificationist thesis has even come under direct attack from eminent Plotinus specialists such as Anthony Lloyd and John Bussanich. My own opinion on the matter, derived from a close observation of Plotinus’ mystical texts and the parallels in the related Sethian material, is that he did indeed envision these processes as virtually homologous if not identical. Indeed, we have good reason to suspect that in the philosophico-religious milieux of the 2nd and 3rd centuries there circulated rather sophisticated speculations on methods of transcendental apprehension. A similar tradition of mystical speculation seems to have informed both Plotinus and the Sethians, who were themselves in close intercommunication.

ascent at 10.19-23: “the Invisible Spirit runs up above. And you yourselves run with him up above, since you have the great crown...”

21 Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 16.

22 Indeed, there are a few Plotinian passages, such as V.3[49].11.1-16, about which scholars have not reached a consensus as to whether they describe the first moments of ontogenesis or the last moments of mystical ascent.

23 Hadot (1968); O’Daly (1973, 1974).


25 In support of my hypothesis, I should mention that it has long been noted that one roughly contemporaneous (and arguably pre-Plotinian) current of Platonism postulated a special faculty permitting the apprehension of the unknowable that was called “first thought” or “prethinking” (prôtê ennoia or proennoia) that also seems to have been an aspect of the deity’s own primordial self-conception. The anonymous Turin commentary on Plato’s *Parmenides* advises an apperception of the hypernoetic One in a “non-comprehending comprehension” (akatalêptôi katalêpsei) that is also described as “an ineffable preconception” (arrêton proennoia) that represents [the One] through silence,” *Anon. Comm. Pl. Parm.* II.16-17,
2.2. This is not the place for a full enumeration of the many striking parallels between Plotinus’ mystical ascent and that of the Platonizing Sethian treatises, but I will summarize Plotinus’ complex view extremely briefly, as follows. He apparently believed that the approach to the completely hyperontic and hypernoetic One could be achieved by means of an extraordinary and sometimes even paradoxically non-noetic faculty of the intellect— or an aspect or trace of the One itself “in us”— that abides at the essential core of the self. He sometimes implies this faculty derives from the original ontogenesis, and at one point suggests that it is an “image” (eikôn) whose archetype (archetupos) is the One. Sometimes this principle within the self appears to occupy an intermediary role between the fully transcendental One and the Intellect itself, in a liminal domain about which Plotinus tends to be somewhat reticent; it thus resembles the primordial formlessness or even the first unbounded effluence from the One itself. This transcendental aspect of the self is accessible through a contemplative self-reversion that ensues in a sudden self-manifestation at a penultimate moment just prior to the absolute

20 Hadot, (if we accept P. Hadot’s emendation; the ms. has prosennoia, preserved by Bechtle (1999)). Hadot (1968: 1.117-118) noted possible Hermetic sources (e.g. CH. vol. 4, p. 111, fr. 12a Nock-Festugière), similarities with Porphyry’s Sententiae 26, and echoes in Plotinus himself, e.g. at V.3[49].10.42-44, where he describes apprehension of the One as not a thought but “only a touching (thixis) and as it were contact (epaphe) without speech and without thought, a prethinking (pronoousa), for Intellect has not yet come into being and the that which touches does not think.” Hadot suggests this initially derived from the Stoic notion of innate intuition or prolepêsí. The precise chronological relationship between Plotinus, the Anonymous Commentary, and the Sethian Platonizing treatises is a controversial issue with which I will not get embroiled here, but the roots of this doctrine are almost certainly pre-Plotinian and Neopythagorean; thus, e.g., Nicomachus of Gerasa (Theologoumena Arithmeticae 21.22. de Falco), “the primary conception of otherness is in the Dyad” (heterotétos gar próstitê ennoia en duadi). Moreover, as M. Tardieu has pointed out (1996: 79), the ACP passag closely resembles Zostrianos 24.6-17, which refers to the apprehension of the Invisible Spirit through a thought “in silence” and a “first thought” (tishorp nennoia). I would further suggest that it reflects a similar type of primordial self-manifestation of the transcendent principle by means of an “image” (eikôn) of the primordial moment of self-manifestation. For as the anonymous commentator subsequently insists, the preconception is “only an image”— (an eikôn)— “of the ineffable, [but also] ineffably is the ineffable” (monon eikona arretou to arrêton arrêtôs ouusan). The implication is that the proennoia is the self-image of the transcendent principle, still, in some sense identical to its archetype, and is simultaneously the faculty by which the human aspirant is able to grasp it.

26 Thus generally following the views of Corrigan (2000) and Turner (multiple works, but esp. 2000a, 2000c, 2001).

27 Some references to the indwelling aspect of the One: inter alia, VI.9[9].3.26-27: the “primary [part] of intellect” (tou nou toti prótôi); III.8.[30]11.22 (cf. also VI.7[38].33.30 and VI.6[34].18.49): a “trace” (ichnos) of the Good in us; VI.7[38].31.8: “something of him [the One]...within [the soul]”; VI.8[39].15.14-21: we sometimes “see within” (enidóimen) ourselves a light in the form of the Good (agthoeidous) that is “greater than that according to Intellect, having that above Intellect within], not imported [from without]”; V.3[49].14.15: the “inner intellect” (endon nous).

28 E.g. VI.9[9].4.27-28, 8.10-22.

29 VI.9[9].11.44-45, to which compare Zost.12.4-18. There is another interesting but quite speculative connection which might merit future research. W. Beierwaltes (1965: 372) notes that Proclus calls the “One in us” (in William of Moerbeke’s Latin translation, In Parmenidem 54.23 ff) the provole and expressio of the One itself, which Beierwaltes then retranslates as probolē and ekphanis: i.e., precisely the kind of Greek terms which I suspect might have been rendered as ouzhē ebol. Could this reflect a pre-Plotinian tradition of Parmenides interpretation that similarly involved a doctrine of a “One in us”? One might note Plotinus’ 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).

30 At times— e.g. V.1[10].6.1-8— Plotinus describes it in terms of the Neopythagorean Indefinite Dyad, on which, see Perczel (1997).
coalescence with the One.\textsuperscript{31} Now Plotinus’ mystical schema, like that of the Sethians, very closely mirrors his account of ontogenesis. (See Appendix section G). In both mystical and ontogenetic contexts we find a general motif of the subject “turning,” “withdrawing,” or reverting to itself; then a moment of stasis or standing in contemplation,\textsuperscript{32} and finally, at the penultimate moment—prior to either mystical union or determination as Intellect—a sudden, climactic self-apprehension, which “fills,” enforms, or delimits the contemplator.\textsuperscript{33} In the case of the mystical ascent the subject is the human aspirant who has already been assimilated to the hypostatic Intellect and is seeking to transcend Intellect in a further union with the One; in the case of ontogenesis, the subject begins as the unbounded, pre-noetic effluence of the One itself, still in some sense identical to its source, that reverts upon itself to acquire delimitation as Intellect. All this, in its broad outline, is similar to both the ontogenesis and the corresponding mystical ascent described in the Sethian treatises.

2.3. To demonstrate the parallel as clearly as possible I have selected one mystical passage from Plotinus, V.5[32].8.9-13, to which we may compare our original passage describing Allogenes’ “primary revelation.”\textsuperscript{34} The Plotinian passage describes the penultimate moment of ascent by the human aspirant who has been assimilated to the Intellect just prior to the ultimate vision or coalescence with the One. (See Appendix H): “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.” The ultimate vision or union with the One is subsequently implied in the next few lines. By this point it should also be evident that the parallels with our original Allogenes passage are unlikely to be coincidental. Here we find references to (a) standing; (b) self-reversion or withdrawal; (c) a filling with strength or empowerment; (d) self-apprehension; (e) a reference to the unboundedness or uncontainableness of the transcendent principle; and finally, (f) 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 a precise echo in V.5[32].8.9-13


\textsuperscript{32} On this theme in Plotinus, Sethianism and the general late antique milieu, see especially Williams (1985).

\textsuperscript{33} In both mystical and ontogenetic contexts one also may find references to strengthening and / or actualization. Strengthening during self-apprehension in mystical contexts: V.5[32].8.13: hoion plêrôtheis menous; VI.7[38].22.15: rhônmutai; 31.32: eperrôsthê; cf. I.6[1].9.26: asthenês; strengthening in an ontogenetic context: V.1[10].7.14-16: kai hoti hoion meros hen ti tôn ekeinou kai ex ekeinou he ousia, kai rhônnutai par ekeinou kai teleioutai eis ousian par ekeinou kai ex ekeinou; actualization: V.4[7].2.

\textsuperscript{34} I will, however, pass over a discussion of several more complex Plotinian passages with extremely striking verbal parallels with the Allogenes passage, such as that of III.8[30].9.19-32 and V.8[31].11.1-19.
is the reference to primary revelation or “initial emergence” or “manifestation.” Yet I would suggest that it actually does have a tacit parallel in the Plotinian account, since the entire experience of self-vision in the Plotinian mystical passage corresponds precisely to the “primary revelation”; as we may see from Plotinus’ accounts of ontogenesis, the homology between mystical self-apprehension and the primordial self-manifestation of the One is evident even when he is not entirely explicit about their identity.

2.4. In conclusion, one may begin to suspect that Plotinus developed this specific doctrine of mystical apprehension of the One in close but uneasy dialogue with Platonizing Sethians and others of this sort. There are certainly differences both in rhetorical mode and in their exact metaphysics; for instance, as Turner has shown over the past several decades, the Sethians developed an extremely sophisticated articulation of overlapping proto-ontological strata between the first and second principles that seems to have been based on some systematization of the noetic triad (Being–Life–Intellect) that became so important in later Platonism, while Plotinus, on the other hand, is vaguely aware of such a triadic scheme, but discusses it only reluctantly and unsystematically, since in general he tends to be quite phlegmatic about any intermediate domain between the One and the Intellect, even when he is not being fiercely dogmatic— as he so often is— about the absence of intermediaries. But if my hypothesis about oumûnt ouônh ebol is correct, it suggests that the Platonizing Sethians explicitly and deliberately employed a precise identification of mystical apperception and ontogenesis, an identification which may have influenced a central aspect of Plotinus’ own mysticism about which he himself remains tantalizingly, and sometimes infuriatingly, elusive. Indeed, his awareness of the

35 Though one might note that the continuation of III.8[30].9.19-32, lines 33ff., launches immediately into a discussion not of mystical union itself but rather of the “first life” (zôê prôtê) that emerges from the One, suggestive of course of a shorp ouônh ebol.

36 Moreover, there are even a few passages where Plotinus does appear to be explicit that the faculty of mystical apprehension derives from the primordial moment of pre-noetic self-perception. Among several other possible examples, one might note the much-discussed passage in VI.7[38].35 in which Plotinus describes two powers of Intellect: one is the ordinary, sober Intellect, that which thinks, and the other, the “loving Intellect” (nous erhon), is the mystical faculty which apprehends the hypernoetic One; it is this latter Intellect that grasps “what transcends it, by means of some touch and reception, by which also, earlier, it saw only, and later, by seeing, also acquired intellect and is one”; and few lines later, “for seeing that [One], he had [that is, “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 [One], by means of the power by which he was going to think.” (ekêino de hei dunamei emelle noei). In this case it seems that Plotinus is referring to the pre-noetic power of the emergent pre-Intellect during the first moments of ontogenesis. In a presentation (“Are Plotinian Hyper-Noetic and Pre-Noetic Selves Identical?”) at the ISNS conference in New Orleans this past June (now available on my home page, http://home.uchicago.edu/~ajmazur), I argued that in Plotinus’ most elaborate account of the moment of mystical union (the simile of the vision in the adyton of a temple at VI.9[9].11.22-25), he describes the ultimate moment of mystical union in terms that subtly evoke the emergence of the pre-noetic efflux, and also juxtaposes paradoxical attributes of the mystical subject-cum-transcendent One, such as ekstasis and stasis, in the same breath; one might now also compare the intriguing parallel in the description of the Unknowable One at Allogenes 66.34: “Rather, he contains all of these in himself, being at rest and standing out of (statas and ek-stasis?) the one who stands continually (efhork mnof eftheratf nouoeish nim), since there appeared (eafouônh ebol) an Eternal Life, the Invisible and Triple Powered Spirit.”
sectarian origin of some of these ideas might also explain his apparent reticence on the topic. Whatever the precise relation between them may be, it should be evident by now that even Plotinus’ mysticism—which had long been taken to be the most intimate, inaccessible, and private aspect of his life and thought—was developed in close connection with contemporaneous currents of philosophically-informed sectarian revelation, and any serious study of Plotinian mysticism in the future will have to take this complex heritage into account.

Self-Manifestation and “Primary Revelation” in the Platonizing Sethian Ascent Treatises and Plotinian Mysticism

[Text and translation unless otherwise noted from The Coptic Gnostic Library]

A. References to Primary Revelation in Allogenes:

[A1] Allogenes 59.26-60.12: And when you receive a revelation of him by means of a first revelation of the Unknowable One ( Erotntwop trwynwv trwv ntwtp oynwv – the One whom if you should know him, be ignorant of him—and you become afraid in that place, withdraw to the rear because of the activities. And when you become perfect in that place, still yourself. And in accordance with the pattern that indwells you, know likewise that it is this way in [all such (matters)] after this very pattern. And [do not] further dissipate, [so that] you may be able to stand, and do not desire to [be active] lest you [fall in any way] from the inactivity in [you] of the Unknowable One. Do not know him, for it is impossible, but if by means of an enlightened thought (OYENNOIA ECE ΝΟΥΟΕΙΝ) you should know him, be ignorant of him.

[A2] Allogenes 60.28-61.14: And when I wanted to stand firmly, I withdrew to the Existence, which I found standing and at rest like an image and likeness of what is conferred upon me by a revelation of the Indivisible One and the One who is at rest. I was filled with revelation by means of a primary revelation of the Unknowable One. [As though] I were ignorant of him, I [knew] him and I received power [by] him. Having been permanently strengthened, I knew the One who exists in me and the Triple Powered One and the revelation of his uncontainableness (PIOYWNV ΕΒΟΛΑ ΝΤΕ ΠΙΛΑ ΑΤΜΩΨΙ ΕΡΟΨ Ε[ΓΙΝΗΣΑ]). [And] by means of a primary revelation of the First One (who is) unknowable to them all (EOΒΑ ΖΙΓΝ ΩΝΤΜΝΩΡΠΕ ΝΟΥΨΙ ΝΤΕ ΠΙΛΨΙ ΝΑΤ[COΨΙ ΝΑΓ ΤΗΡΟΥ]), the God who is beyond perfection, I saw him and the Triple Powered One that exists in them all.

[A3] Allogenes 61.25-39: “Cease hindering the inactivity that exists in you by seeking incomprehensible matters; rather hear about him insofar as it is possible by means of a primary revelation and a revelation (CWUM ETCBHΤΨ ΚΑΤΑ ΘΕ ΕΤΕ ΟΥНΟΜ ΕΒΟΛ ΖΙΓΝ ΩΝΤΜΝΩΡΠΕ ΝΟΥΨΙ ΕΒΟΛ ΝΜ ΟΥΨΙ ΝΣΕΙΕΣ ΏΝ ΕΝΤΟΨ ΟΥΛΑΨ ΕΤΕΙΜΕ ΕΡΟΨ). Now he is something insofar as he exists that he either exists and will become, or acts or knows, although he lives without Mind or Life or Existence or Non-Existence, incomprehensibly.

[A4] Allogenes 63.9-16: [...] Nor is he something that exists, that one can know. But he is something else of himself that is superior, which one cannot know. He is first revelation and knowledge of himself, as it is he alone who knows himself (ΕΥΨΙΡΠΕ ΝΟΥΨΙ ΕΒΟΛ ΝΜ ΟΥΨΙ ΝΣΕΙΕΣ ΏΝ ΕΝΤΟΨ ΟΥΛΑΨ ΕΤΕΙΜΕ ΕΡΟΨ).
B. Mechanism of Transcendental Apprehension in *Allogenes* and *Zostrianos*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allogenes (48.9-16)</th>
<th>Allogenes (59.26-35)</th>
<th>Allogenes (60.8-12)</th>
<th>Allogenes (60.37-61.4)</th>
<th>Allogenes (64.30-36)</th>
<th>Zostrianos (24.6-17)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Since it is impossible for the [individuals] to comprehend the Universal One [situated in the] place that is higher than perfect, they apprehend by means of a first [thought] (ἔγνωκα) the One—[it is not as] Being (alone), [but] it is along with the latency of Existence that he confers Being.</td>
<td>And when you receive a revelation of him by means of a first revelation of the Unknowable One (ἐγνώκας οὐκ έποιήκαν εὐθεία γινόμενος εἶσαι εἰς τὸ ξύλον τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ διαμέσου τοῦ φωτός), namely, the spring of [living] water, [the light full] of purity, the spring of the spirit poured forth from the living water of the light. And he provided all aeons and worlds.</td>
<td>Do not [know] him, for it is impossible, but if by means of an enlightened thought (οὖν οὐσίαν εἰς ἐνώτητα γίνομεν) you should know him, be ignorant of him.</td>
<td>I was filled with revelation by means of a primary revelation of the Unknowable One (ἀκούσας εἰς τὸ θείον εὐθεία γινόμενος εἰς τὸ κατάκόρον τοῦ διαμέσου τοῦ φωτός). [As though] I were ignorant of him, I [knew] him and I received power [by] him.</td>
<td>[The aspirant] was blind apart from the eye of revelation that is at rest (πτέρνα εἰς τὸ ἐνώτημα τοῦ διαμέσου τοῦ φωτός εἰς τὸ κατάκόρον τοῦ διαμέσου τοῦ φωτός), the (eye) that is activated, the (eye) from the Triple Power of the First Thought of the Invisible Spirit.</td>
<td>And by means of the thought which now exists in silence and within the First Thought (θείον ἐν ἡ τῆς ἀκούσας εἰς τὸ κατάκόρον τοῦ διαμέσου τοῦ φωτός) (he hears) about the Triple Powered Invisible Spirit; it is, moreover, an audition and a silent power purified with life-giving Spirit, the perfect, [first] perfect, and all-perfect one. [Turner’s new trans.]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C. Ontogenesis through Self-Manifestation in Early Sethian Texts

*Apocryphon of John*

[C1] [NHC III,1.5] 7.2-23: It is he who contemplates [himself alone in his light] which surrounds him (ἐν τοίς οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ κύριος τῆς ἀκούσας εἰς τὸ κατάκόρον τοῦ διαμέσου τοῦ φωτός) (hearing) about the power of (the light) that is higher than the all, the Providence [of the] All, who shines in the light of the Invisible One, the perfect power, Barbelon, the perfect aeon, the glory glorifying him, since she had come forth (ἀκούσας εἰς τὸ κατάκόρον τοῦ διαμέσου τοῦ φωτός) because of him. She is the first thought, [his] image (τελεία εἰς τούτην οὐσίαν ἀκούσας εἰς τὸ κατάκόρον τοῦ διαμέσου τοῦ φωτός). And his thought became actual and she came forth (ἀκούσας εἰς τὸ κατάκόρον τοῦ διαμέσου τοῦ φωτός) and attended him in the brilliance of the light. She is the...
power who is before the All, who came forth (ὮΝΤΑΚΟΥΥΝΣ ΕΒΩΛ). She is the perfect Providence of the All, the light, the likeness of the light, the image of the invisible One (ὮΗΚΟΝ ΜΙΤΡΑΤΝΥ ΕΡΩῪ), the perfect power, Barbelo, the perfect aeon of glory, glorifies him, since she had come forth because of him (ἌΚΟΥΥΝΣ ΕΒΩΛ ΝΗΡΤΠ). And she knows him. She is the first thought, his image (ὮΤΟϹ ΤΕ ΤΕΡΩΥΕΙΤΕ ΝΙΜΝΝΩΝ ΤΕΡΩΚΙΚΩΝ).

[C3] [NHC II,1] 4.19-5.6: For it is he who contemplates himself in his light which surrounds [him] ([ὮΗΤΟΠ ΥΡΑ ΕΤΜΟΥΤ ΕΙΡΩ ΟΥΑΛΑΤΡ ΧΡΑΙ ΖΗ ΠΕΡΗΠΟΙΟΕΙΝ ΕΤΙΚΤΗΤΥ ΕΙΡΩΠΙ], namely the spring of living water. And it is he who provides [all the [aeons]]. And in every direction he perceives his image (ὮΑΥΡ ΖΗΝ ΣΗΙΩΤ ΝΙΜ ΕΓΧΩΓΩΜ ΝΘΛ ΤΕΡΩΚΙΚΩΝ) by seeing it in the spring of the [Spirit]. It is he who put his desire in his [water]-light [which is in the] spring of the [pure light]-water [which surrounds him. And [his thought became] actual and she came forth (ἌΚΟΥΥΝΣ ΕΒΩΛ), [namely] she who had [appeared] before him in [the shine of] his light. This is the first [power (ὙΠΟΡΗ ΖΗΩΜ)], which was before the All, and [which came] forth from his mind (ὮΝΤΑΚΟΥΥΝΣ ΕΒΩΛ ΖΗ ΠΕΡΗΠΟΙΕΙΕΥ). She is [the Providence of the All]—her light [shines like his] light—the [perfect] power who is [the] image of the invisible, virginal Spirit who is perfect. [The first power], the glory of Barbelo, the perfect glory in the aeons, the glory of the revelation, she glorified the virginal Spirit and it was she who praised him, for because of him she had come forth (ὩΕ ΕΤΒΗΤΠῪ ጊΟΥΥΝΣ ΕΒΩΛ). This is the first thought, his image (ΠΑΙ ΤΕ ΠΥΟΡΙΤΗ ΜΗΕΕΥΕ ΣΠΡΩΚΙΚΩΝ); she became the womb of everything, for it is she who is prior to them all....

Eugnostos and Sophia of Jesus Christ

[C4] [NHC V,1] 4.16-22: Now he always understands himself as in a semblance that appears and resembles himself (ὮΝΟΥΕΙΚ ΑΕ ΝΙΜ ΕΓΧΩΓΕΙΕ ΕΡΩ ΠΗΡΗΤΠΙ ΝΘΕ ΝΟΥΕΙΑ ΕΓΧΩΓΟΥΜΝΤΕ ΕΒΩΛ ΕΓΧΩΓΕΙΕ ΜΗΟΠ). And it is [his resemblance that] was called “Self-[Begotten Father,] He [Who is Before his Presence,]” since in [his resemblance he appeared before] Unbegotten.

[C5] [NHC III,3] 75.3-9: He sees himself within himself, like a mirror, having appeared in his likeness as Self-Father (ὋΕΝΑΥ ΕΡΩΠ ΜΗΙΝ ΜΗΟΠ ΝΟΥΕΙΑ ΕΓΧΩΓΟΥΜΝΣ ΕΒΩΛ ΖΗ ΠΕΡΗΠΟΙΕΙΕ ΝΛΤΟΠΑΤΡΝΤ), that is, Self-Begetter, and as Confronter, since he confronted Unbegotten First Existent.

[C6] [NHC III,4] 99.2: Seeing himself within himself in a mirror, he appeared resembling himself, but his likeness appeared as Divine Self-Father (ὋΕΝΑΥ ΕΡΩΠ ΜΗΙΝ ΜΗΟΠ ΝΟΥΕΙΑ ΕΓΧΩΓΟΥΜΝΣ ΕΒΩΛ ΕΓΧΩΓΕΙΕ ΜΗΟΠ ΝΟΥΕΙΑ ΕΓΧΩΓΟΥΜΝΣ ΕΒΩΛ ΖΗ ΠΕΡΗΠΟΙΕΙΕ ΝΛΤΟΠ ΑΕ ΠΕΡΗΠΟΙΕ ΠΡΟΥΟΥΝΣ ΕΒΩΛ ΝΗΡΠΤΗ ΝΙΕΙΤ), as Divine Father, and as Confronter, since he is in the presence of him who is from the First, Unbegotten Father.

[C7] [BG 8502,3] 91.3-13: Seeing himself within himself in a mirror, he appears resembling himself, but his likeness appeared as Forefather (ὍΕΝΑΥ ΕΡΩΠ ΜΗΙΝ ΜΗΟΠ ΝΟΥΕΙΑ ΕΓΧΩΓΟΥΜΝΣ ΕΒΩΛ ΖΗ ΠΕΡΗΠΟΙΕΙΕ ΝΛΤΟΠ ΑΕ ΠΕΡΗΠΟΙΕ ΠΡΟΥΟΥΝΣ ΕΒΩΛ ΝΗΡΠΤΗ ΝΙΕΙΤ), as Divine Father, and as Confronter, since he is in the presence of him who is from the First, Unbegotten Father.

D. Ontogenesis through Self-Manifestation in Platonizing Sethian Tractates

[D1] Allogenes 53.10-31: That One moved motionlessly in that which governs, lest he sink into the boundless by means of another activity of Mentality. And he entered into himself and he appeared (ὮΑΥΡ ΑΓΒΧΚΕ ΕΖΟΥΝ ΕΡΩΠ ΟΥΑΛΑΤΡ ΠΡΟΥΟΥΝΣ ΕΒΩΛ), being all-encompassing, and the Universal One that is higher than perfect. Indeed it is not through me that he is to such a degree anterior to knowledge. Whereas there is no possibility for complete comprehension, he is (nevertheless) known. And this is so because of the third silence of Mentality and the second undivided activity which appeared (ἘΤΑΚΟΥΥΝΣ ΕΒΩΛ) in the First Thought, that is, the Aeon of Barbelo, together with the Indivisible One of the divisible likenesses and the Triple Powered One and the nonsubstantial Existence.

[D2] Zostrianos 2.24-3.13: Now for Existence: How can beings—since they are from the aeon of those who derive from an invisible and undivided self-generated Spirit as triform unengendered images—both have an origin superior to Existence and pre-exist all [these] and yet have come to be in the [world]? How do those in its presence with all these [originate from the] Good [that is above]? What sort [of power] and [cause, and] what is [the] place of that [one]? What is its principle? How does its product belong both to it and all these? How, [being a] simple [unity], does it differ [from] itself, given that it exists as Existence, Form, and Blessedness, and, being vitally alive, grants power? How has Existence which has no being appeared (ἌΚΟΥΥΝΣ ΕΒΩΛ) in a power that has being?
[D3] Zostrianos: 76.21-25: “It is outside of himself that his knowledge dwells; it dwells with the one who examines himself, a reflection and a […]”

[D4] Zostrianos 80.18-81.23 [Turner]: The Invisible Spirit has never [been] incognizant: [he (merely) did not] make an act of knowing, but was instead [abiding in] perfection [and] Blessedness. [Now] when [she] became incognizant [ ... ] and she [ ... ] body after [ ... in] another way [ ... ] [en]lighten [ ... ] she [was] existing [individually as cause] of [the declination]. Lest she come forth anymore or get further away from perfection, she knew herself and him, and she stood at rest and spread forth on his [behalf]— since she was [from] true existence, she was from what truly exists in common with all things— to know herself and the one that pre-exists.

[D5] Zostrianos 87.10-23: [the virgin Bar]belo through the simplicity of the blessedness of the three-powered Invisible Spirit. She who has known it has known herself. And that one, being one everywhere, being undivided, having [...] has [...] and she has known [herself as] his activity [and he has known [...] knowledge [...] within [...].

E. Mystical Self-Reversion in Platonizing Sethian Tracts

[E1] Zostrianos 44.1-22: Now the (type of) person that can be saved is the one that seeks itself and its intellect and finds each of them. And how much power this (type) has! The person that has been saved is one who has not known about these things [merely] as they (formally) exist, but one who is personally involved with [the] rational faculty as it exists [in him]. He has grasped their [image that changes] in every situation as though they had become simple and one. For then this (type) is saved who can pass through [them] all; [he becomes] them all. Whenever it [wishes], it again parts from all these matters and withdraws into itself, for it becomes divine, having withdrawn into god (Ντοπ Νηρ Αναξωπίν Εἴροπ Μαγαίικαίεις Γάρ Οὐδέις Εἰς [N] Νοὐ[Τ]ς).

[E2] Allogenes 52.7-12: [My soul went slack] and I fled [and was] very disturbed. And [I] turned to myself [and] saw the light that [surrounded] me and the Good that was in me and I became divine ([...ekwv] ὡς ἔτος ἐκκόττε ἐροει ὡς ἕνατε ἐπιοὐοειν ἐ[τκω[Τ]ς ἐροει ὡς Μαγα[ ] ἐτνής ἐκπνο[Τ]τε).”

[E3] Allogenes 56.15-21: If you [seek with a perfect] seeking, [then] you shall know [the Good that is] in you; then [you will know yourself] as well, (as) one who [derives from] the God [who truly pre-exists].

[E4] Marsanes 9.9-27: She withdrew from them, from these two powers, since she exists outside of the Great One, as she [...] who is above [...] who is silent, who has this commandment to be silent. His knowledge and his hypostasis and his activity are those things of which the power of the Three-Powered spoke, <saying>, “We all have withdrawn to ourselves. We have become silent, and we wanted to know him, that is, the Three-Powered, we bowed down; we […] we blessed him […] upon us.” […]

F. Example of Mystical Self-Reversion in Plotinus

V.5[32].8.9-23: 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 not as not 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 which it is not Intellect.

ἔστησεται μὲν γὰρ ὁ νοῦς πρὸς τὴν θέαν εἰς οὐδὲν ἀλλὰ ἑν πρὸς τὸ καλὸν βλέπον, ἐκεί ἕατον πᾶς τρέπτων καὶ διδόντων, στὰς δὲ καὶ οἷον πληρωθεὶς μένους εἶδε μὲν τὰ πρῶτα καλλίως γενομένους ἑαυτοῦ καὶ ἐπιστῆσαν, ὡς ἐγγὺς ὑποτε νεῖτοὺ. ὃς δὲ οὐκ ἦν, ὡς τις προσέδοκα, ἄλλα ἤλθεν ὡς οὐκ ἐλθὼν ὡς ὅπως ἐλθὼν, ἀλλὰ πρὸς ἀπαντᾶν παρών, πρὶν καὶ τὸν νοῦν ἐλθέων. Εἰναι δὲ τὸν νοῦν τὸν ἐλθόντα καὶ τούτῳ εἶναι καὶ τὸν ἀπόντα, ὅτι μή οἶδε ποῦ δεῖ μένειν καὶ ποῦ ἐκείνος μένει, ὅτι ὅτι οὐδέν. Καὶ εἰ οἴον τε ἦν καὶ ἄυτῳ τῷ νῷ μένειν μιμοῦνο—οἷς ὅτι ἐν τῶς ὡς ἐροεῖ τὸν ἐλθόντα ἐν τῶς ἐλθέων, ἀλλὰ ὅλως μιμοῦ— ἦν ὁ δὲ ἐκείνον βλέπον καὶ τοῖς οὐδὲ βλέπον, ἄλλῳ ἐν ἐκείνῳ ὥν καὶ οὐ δύο. Νῦν δὲ, ὅτι ἐστὶ νοῦς, οὕτω βλέπει, ὅτε βλέπει, τῷ ἑαυτοῦ μὴ νῷ.
G. Examples of Ontogenesis through Self-Reversion in Plotinus

[G1] V.1[10]7.2-6: πρῶτων μὲν, ὅτι δεὶ πως εἶναι ἐκεῖνο τὸ γενόμενον καὶ ἀποσώζειν πολλὰ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἶναι ὑμιμοῦτα πρὸς αὐτό, ὥσπερ καὶ τὸ φῶς τοῦ ἡλίου. Ἀλλ’ οὖν νοῦς ἐκεῖνο. Πῶς οὖν νοῦς γεννᾶ; Ἡ ὅτι τῇ ἐπιστροφῇ πρὸς αὐτὸ ἔφρα · ἢ δὲ ὤρας αὐτῆς νοσ.

First, it is necessary for what has come to be, to somehow be that one, and to preserve much of it, and to be a likeness with respect to it just as is light of the sun. But intellect is not that one. And so how does it generate Intellect? Because with its reversion to itself, it sees, and this seeing is itself Intellect.


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) overlays, and its overlay has made another. This, having come into being, turns back towards it and is filled and by looking towards it, this becomes Intellect as well. And its rest with respect to 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.


This 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, and became the substance and hearth of all things.


Did it, when it was looking towards the Good, think that one as many, and he himself being one, 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 unintelleclually. 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 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 the light beside the provider and receiving this. Because of this it is not only said to be the cause of substance but of its being seen.

[G5] VI.7[38].17.12-26: Ἔξεχεν οὖν ζωήν καὶ οὐκ ἐδείκτο ποικίλον τοῦ διδότος, καὶ ἡ ζωή ἱκανος τοῦ ἐκεῖνου, καὶ οὐκ ἐκεῖνο ζωής, Πρὸς ἐκεῖνο μὲν οὖν βλέπουσα ἀορίστους ἤ, βλέπασθαι δ’ εἰκε εἰκετε ἐκεῖνου ὅρον οὐκ ἤξυντος. Εὐθὺς γὰρ πρὸς ἐν τὶ οὐδ’ ὁμολογεῖται τοῦτο τί καὶ ἤξίζεν ἐν ἐκεῖ ὅρον καὶ πέρας καὶ εἰδός: καὶ τὸ εἶδός ἐν τῷ μορφωθεῖται, τὸ δὲ μορφωθεῖσά ἐν ὑμνήμων ὥσ’ ὁ δὲ ἐρωτεία οὕτως ὥσ’ ὁ δὲ πάσης ἐκεῖσθ’ ὅρος ὁρός πολλῆς καὶ ἀπέραντος, ζωή ἡ τῇ οὐκ ὑπεστέρει οὑσία ἐκκαθάρισον. Ζωή τῇ ἡ ὅ τι οὐκ ἐπάθει ὅριστα γὰρ ἦν ὡς ἔφρος ἑκατοντοῦ ἦν ἐκεῖσθ’ πόρως πολλοῦ— ὅριστα δ’ καὶ ἐκαθετον τῶν πολλῶν— διὰ μὲν τὸ πολὺ τῆς ζωῆς πολλά ὁρισθείσα, διὰ δὲ αὐ τοῦ ὅρον ἐν. Ἡ οὖν τὸ ἐκ ὁρίσθη· Νος’ ὁρισθείσα γάρ ζωή νοσ.

It therefore had life and had no need of a multiformer giver, and its life was some trace of that and not his life. And so looking towards that one, life was unbounded, but having looked there, it was bounded, 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 of 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.
H. Comparison of Mystical Apprehension in *Allogenes* 60.28ff. and Plotinus V.5[32].9-19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>theme</th>
<th><em>Allogenes</em> 60.28-61.14</th>
<th>Plotinus V.5[32].9-9-13</th>
<th>Plotinus III.8[30].9.18-32</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[a] Standing</td>
<td>And when I wanted to <strong>stand firmly.</strong></td>
<td>For Intellect will make itself <strong>stand</strong> towards the contemplation, looking at nothing else but the Beautiful,</td>
<td>...by standing to listen at any point in the deserted place, 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?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[b] Self-reversion / withdrawal</td>
<td>I <strong>withdrew</strong> to the Existence, which I found standing and at rest like an image and likeness of what is conferred upon me by a revelation of the Indivisible One and the One who is at rest.</td>
<td>completely turning and surrendering <strong>himself</strong> there, but having stood, and,</td>
<td>Rather the intellect, being “double-mouthed,” must (so to speak) withdraw backwards (eis toupió anachôrein), and, as it were, surrender itself to what lies behind it (heauton aphabetia tois opisten autou)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[c] Filling with strength</td>
<td>I was filled with revelation by means of a <strong>primary revelation</strong> of the Unknowable One. [As though] I were ignorant of him, I [knew] him and I received power [by] him. Having been permanently strengthened,</td>
<td>as if having been filled with <strong>strength</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[d] Self-apprehension</td>
<td>I knew the One who exists in me and the Triple Powered One</td>
<td><strong>it sees first of all itself</strong> having become more beautiful and glistening, as he is close to him.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[e] Uncontainableness or unboundedness of the supreme principle</td>
<td>and the revelation of his <strong>uncontainableness.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[f] Apprehension of transcendent principle through special non-noetic faculty</td>
<td>[And] by means of a <strong>primary revelation</strong> of the First One (who is) unknowable to them all the God who is beyond perfection, I saw him and the Triple Powered One that exists in them all.</td>
<td><strong>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.</strong></td>
<td>and there, if it wishes to see that one, it must not be altogether intellect.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>