

John F. Finamore

Robert M. Berchman

(Eds.)

METAPHYSICAL PATTERNS

IN PLATONISM

Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance,

And Modern Times

University Press

Of The South

2007

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| THE PLATONIC TRIPARTITE SOUL AND THE PLATONISM OF GALEN'S <i>ON THE DOCTRINES OF HIPPOCRATES AND PLATO</i> John F. Finamore, University of Iowa..... | 1 |
| WHO THOUGHT THE STARS ARE CAUSES? THE ASTROLOGICAL DOCTRINE CRITICIZED BY PLOTINUS Marilynn Lawrence, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania..... | 17 |
| THE TRANSCENDENCE OF <i>SOPHIA</i> IN PLOTINUS' TREATISE <i>ON INTELLIGIBLE BEAUTY</i> V.8 (31) Daniele Bertini, University of Parma..... | 33 |
| THE GOOD'S BEAUTY IS ABOVE BEAUTY: PLOTINUS' ARGUMENT IN <i>ENNEAD</i> VI.7[38] 32-33. Martin Achard, Université Laval..... | 45 |
| PLOTINUS ON THE BEING OF THE ONE John Bussanich, University of New Mexico..... | 57 |
| CONSULTING THE ORACLE: THE MANTIC ART AND ITS CAUSATION IN IAMBlichUS' <i>DE MYSTERIIS</i> Crystal Addey, University of Bristol..... | 73 |
| ASTROLOGY AS DIVINATION: IAMBlicheAN THEORY AND ITS CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE Gregory Shaw, Stonehill College..... | 89 |
| THE ROLES OF APOLLO AND DIONYSUS IN NETZSCHE'S BIRTH OF TRAGEDY AND IN THE EMPEROR JULIAN'S THEOLOGY. Jay Bregman, University of Maine..... | 115 |

VII

| | |
|--|-----|
| AUGUSTINE, PROUST AND THE RHETORIC OF TIME AND CREATION Burcht Pranger, Universiteit van Amsterdam..... | 121 |
| MONOPHYSITISM AND THE EVOLUTION OF THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE IN CHRISTIAN NEOPLATONISM Edward Moore, St. Elias School of Orthodox Theology..... | 133 |
| ERIUGENA, EMERSON AND THE POETICS OF UNIVERSAL NATURE Willemien Otten, Utrecht University..... | 147 |
| MARSILIO FICINO'S PLATONISM ON HUMAN-DIVINE KINSHIP AND ASSIMILATION Mary Lenzi, University of Wisconsin at Platteville..... | 165 |
| THE PLACE OF THE UNIVERSE: SCIENCE AND PLATONISM IN COPERNICUS' <i>DE REVOLUTIONIBUS</i> Gina Zavota, Kent State University..... | 181 |
| MAPPING KNOWLEDGE AND CONSCIOUSNESS OF BEING: CATEGORIES AS TRANSCENDENTALS IN PLOTINUS AND HEGEL Robert M. Berchman, Dowling College and Bard College..... | 193 |
| CRITIQUE AND RESCUE: ON ADORNO'S DIAGNOSIS OF ARISTOTLE'S <i>METAPHYSICS</i> Russell Ford, Elmhurst College..... | 209 |
| WINCENY LUTOSŁAWSKI PLATONIC STUDIES: PLATO AS AN INSPIRATION FOR POLISH MESSIANISM Tomasz Mróz, University of Zielona Góra..... | 225 |
| NEOPLATONISM IN SCIENCE PAST AND FUTURE Bruce MacLennan, University of Tennessee..... | 241 |

THE PRIMORDIAL TRADITION OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS
AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF NEOPLATONIC
METAPHYSICS

Atsushi Sumi, Hanazono University.....261

**THE TRANSCENDENCE OF *SOPHIA*
IN PLOTINUS' TREATISE
ON INTELLIGIBLE BEAUTY,
V.8 (31)**

Daniele Bertini

I will consider an argument by Plotinus to show how the notion of transcendence is used in explaining the nature of knowledge. The argument is set forth in the section 4-6 of the treatise V.8 (31)¹. In my opinion this argument provides a good example of the philosophical frame of Platonism. I sum up this frame in the following theses: a) for a thing being is being real and true; so that for a thing being real and being true is equivalent; but b) for a thing being real and true means being intelligible; that is to say: a thing could be understood because that thing is a being; thus c) for a thing being is the identity of its ontological and epistemological nature².

I.

Plato's texts provide many passages to prove this conceptual notion of Platonism. I will briefly consider the best known, *Republic* 508d and following. Socrates invites his interlocutor to call the idea of Good (τὴν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ιδέαν) that being (τοῦτο) giving: a) to things knowable their truth (τὴν ἀλήθειαν παρέχον τοῖς γινωσκομένοις); and b) to the knowing subject the possibility to know (τῷ γινώσκοντι τὴν δύναμιν). The assumption of the argument is plainly that the sourceal being accounts simultaneously for objective truth and subjective cognition. Indeed this source is said to be the causal reason (αἰτίαν οὐσαν) both of knowledge and truth (ἐπιστήμης καὶ ἀληθείας).

¹ Porphyry entitled the treatise ΠΕΡΙ ΤΟΥ ΝΟΗΤΟΥ ΚΑΛΛΟΥΣ. The actual body of the text was part of a major work against gnosticism divided by Porphyry into four treatise. The sequence would have been the following: III.8; V.8; V.5; II.9. See Harder (1936); Cilento (1971).

² On the double features of a thing in Plotinus, see Emilsson (1996).

Anyway, at this stage, it is not very clear what Plato really means; since he simply asserts a kind of transcendental condition of *epistémé* and *aletheia*, without arguing in relation to the ontological status of this condition. Moreover, what does he think when he says knowledge? And truth? Are we sure truth is objective and knowledge subjective? Can truth be understood as a logical concept? Or does it have an ontological value too? It seems clear that the notion of *truth* assumed in the text is the main philosophical problem of the argument³.

³ Notoriously an influential reading of the myth of cave by M.Heidegger attributes to Plato a germinal theory of truth as representation (See Heidegger [1976]). Now, although we have good reasons to refute the Heideggerian interpretation from a purely exegetical standpoint (See, J.Barnes [1990]), I think that a philosophical consideration of the text shows undoubtedly how Heidegger could not achieve the inner essence of Plato's thought. Heidegger's thread is grounded in the distinction between the condition of man. in and out of the cave. In the cave the being of man is determined by falsity; while out of the cave by truth (See M.Heidegger [1976], p. 214). But, for Heidegger, this assertion is just a superficial comprehension of the myth. (See M.Heidegger [1976], p. 215). The crucial point of the reading is the observation that in the Greek text preceding Plato's philosophizing this truth is not understood as a quality of the epistemological process of the human acquisition of knowledge, but as the evidence of every particular being, of *ta onta*. (See M.Heidegger [1976], p. 223). Heidegger translates *aletheia* with the German neologism *Un-Verborgenheit*; truth is everything that is not-hidden, because truth is everything positively appearing in the horizon of being. (See M.Heidegger [1976], p. 238). Now, the man delivering himself from the chains imprisoning human kind in the cave attains a right view of truth out of the cave, since he moves from the ontological space of falsity to that of truth. In this way he draws out things from their *Verborgenheit*, hiddenness, making them public for his comrades. Heidegger thinks then that for Plato the truth acquires an instrumental value for the laying of life: in the cave, where we spend most of our human condition, we need to regard the true beings subsisting outside of the cave; since these are the epistemological criteria to judge correctly of the nature of things. Things in the cave represent in fact the ideas out of the cave, and truth consists in the right understanding of our conceptions as images of certain true archetypal causes. Thus Heidegger reduces the journey of man through the degrees of reality, described by Plato, to an epistemological process. But this is the real source of his unsatisfying comprehension of Platonism. Had he read the passage in the *Republic* immediately preceding the myth of cave, with the same accuracy he dedicates to that containing the myth, he could have maybe seen how the idea of Good has for Plato simultaneously an epistemological and an ontological causal activity; so that it would be deceiving to distinguish, with a modern attitude, between epistemology and ontology, subjectivity and objectivity, in Plato's

Now, the subsequent passage of the text, treating the causal action of the first principle, the idea of Good, gives to the reader some helpful suggestions for understanding the presumed nature of *aletheia*.

Plato explains the epistemological and ontological role peculiar to the source by comparing how the principle acts with the activity of the epistemological and ontological principle of the visible world (see *Respublica*, 509b). This second principle is the sun. The sun gives to the visible things the possibility to be viewed (τοῦ ὁρᾶσθαι δύναμιν), but it is also the cause of their actual being: of their birth, growth, and nourishment (τὴν γένεσιν καὶ αὔξησιν καὶ τροφήν). The sun plays in this way a twofold function: while enlightening the sensible world, it makes the object able to be seen; but in this enlightenment the sun provides the ontological condition for the existence of things too. In a similar way the idea of Good, a kind of sun of the intelligible world, gives to the knowable things not only the possibility of being known, but also their existence (τὸ εἶναί) and essence (τὴν οὐσίαν).

If we collect all these assertions, it will appear evident how, for Plato, things are true in the same sense in which they simply subsist. Being is being real and being true; since reality and truth are caused with the same act by a single principle, the idea of Good. In their ontological subsistence, depending on their actual relation to the source, true things are possible objects of knowledge because of their being, enlightened by the intelligible sun. Consequently the same conditions of the existence of a thing accounts for our knowledge of it too: in being real things are true.

Naturally Plato just asserts all these theses, without giving a philosophical justification of the reasons why the principle should and could act in this way. Indeed, he paradoxically says that the principle gives existence and essence to things, being itself beyond being (οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ἀλλ' ἔτι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας). How is it possible? How can a principle act without having a kind of subsistence? And what does it mean, that the principle is beyond being? What is it then? Or where is it? Now, since Plato's argument is the place where the notion of

philosophy. (On the philosophical understanding of the relation between Plato and Heidegger see H.G.Gadamer [1976]).

transcendence appears in the horizon of western philosophy, in my opinion, it would be difficult to overestimate its importance. The history of Platonism find here its spring: Plato's assumption of a principle transcending the wholeness of beings grounded, constitutes the permanent *leit-motiv* of every neoPlatonic philosophy.

Consequently Plotinus too finds in this passage of the *Republic* a source for his understanding of the relation among *hypostasis*. In his book on the Plotinian doctrine of *Nous*, T.Szlezák has proved the sourceal importance of the textual source offered by Plato's argument⁴. The notion of transcendence seems in this way the centre around which gravitates the Platonic conflagration of reality, truth and being.

II.

Many Plotinian treatises concern transcendence among the *hypostasis*⁵. But, instead of taking a general survey of these, I prefer analyse the use of the notion in an argument where Plotinus does not focus it: so that the notion implicitly assumed could be particularly clear from its use.

I begin then the consideration of Plotinus' text. The first passage (V.8.4, lines 1-7) treats the ontological determinations of the *Nous*. Plotinus speaks in this place a mythical language. While elsewhere he defines rationally the structure of the Intellect, here he prefers adopting an allusive proceeding concerning the kind of life peculiar to the superior gods⁶. In conformity with the Homeric verse, these gods *live at ease* in the Intellect (καὶ γὰρ τὸ ρεῖα ζῶειν ἐκεῖ),

⁴ See T.A.Szlezák (1979), *passim*.

⁵ See V.4 (7); V.1 (10); V.2 (11); V.6 (24); V.5 (32); VI.7 (38); VI. (39); V.3 (49).

⁶ In V.8.3, lines 27 and following, Plotinus distinguishes among two kinds of gods. Those of them "ἐν οὐρανῷ ὄντες... θεῶνται ἀεὶ, οἷον δὲ πόρρωθεν, τὰ ἐν ἐκείνῳ", that is to say the objects in the Intellect. In some sense they are spatially under the intellect, so that their nature could be determined as inferior, because of the distance qualifying their imperfect contemplation. Others gods, "οἱ... ἐν ἐκείνῳ ὄντες", stay in the Intellect, "ἐπ' αὐτῶν ἐν αὐτῷ, ἐν παντὶ οἰκοῦντες τῷ ἐκεῖ οὐρανῷ". These could be said superior, since they live the same life of the Intellect, directly touching it.

since the truth is the cause of their birth, provides to them nourishment, and constitutes their substantiality (ἀλήθεια αὐτοῖς καὶ γενέτειρα καὶ τροφὸς καὶ οὐσία καὶ τροφή). They stay there contemplating all things (ὀρῶσι τὰ πάντα) in clearness; because in the Intellect every being is shining (διαφανῆ). An intelligible light is the efficient cause of this clearness: every being shows itself in its depth core completely (ἀλλὰ πᾶς παντὶ φανερός εἰς τὸ εἶσω καὶ πάντα· φῶς γὰρ φωτὶ).

Evidently in this passage Plotinus refers to Plato's argument concerning the idea of Good⁷. Some elements prove this impression: the role of light is a direct quotation of the epistemological activity of the sun; the Platonic pattern of thought asserting a twofold causation, both epistemological and ontological, is applied to the explanation of the life of the gods; the relationship between knowledge and vision is explicitly set forth with a metaphorical language, the language of myth, stated by the quotation by Homer. Plotinus, in this way, introduces the reader into a Platonic world, inhabited by intelligible beings, whose subsistence is to be self evident to some superior understandings, those of the gods. Obviously, the reader could ask: why does Plotinus speak mythically? Has he rethorical reasons as in other treatises? Or do philosophical motives incline him to this choice? In my opinion the reference to the mythical horizon has a rigorous epistemological source (V.8.3, lines 11 and following): to inquire the nature of the *Nous* (τίνα εἰκόνα τις αὐτοῦ) a philosopher needs to apprehend his object directly from the inside. If he looks for an image of that, he could find just something inferior, derivative. Indeed, he really attains the Intellect, only purifying the *nous* in him. Just because we are in the *Nous*, we can understand the *Nous*⁸. But this purified understanding is similar to the life of gods: so Plotinus wants the reader to have a comprehension of the Intellect by a kind of phenomenology of the understanding peculiar to the divine part of our soul; that is to say that part of our soul similar to soul of the gods⁹. The use of myth in this passage is

⁷ I. Crystal states persuasively that Plotinus used the light analogy since influenced by *Respublica* passage quoted above. See Crystal (1998).

⁸ Plotinus states clearly this epistemological principle in III.7.7, lines 1-5.

⁹ V.8.3, lines 17-18.

therefore justified by the necessity to involve the reader in the search, referring to a world familiar to him, the commonly granted context of the Greco-Roman religious culture.

Because of this proceeding Plotinus describes the *Nous* as it appears to the gods (V.8.4, lines 7-9). There every thing is everything else, and the gods see every thing in every otherness (ἔκει πᾶς πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ, καὶ αὐὸ ὁρᾷ ἐν ἄλλῳ πάντα). There are no determinations in the extension, since all things are everywhere. Every being is in relationship with all the others, and the evidence of the every being is infinite (ἄπειρος). The structure of the Intellect is then a whole wherein all beings subsist; and such subsistence consists in being a part referred to the whole: a part who mirrors in itself every otherness (... ἐν ἐκάστῳ ἄλλο, ἐμφαίνει... πάντα). Now, the same gods are to be understood, not as subject of the process of intellection, but as part of this intelligible world. Their mythical connotation is gradually lost, while their true nature becomes clear: they are simply a kind of beings subsisting in the Intellect; and when they contemplate the *Nous* they just contemplate everything in themselves; since they actually contemplate themselves, the otherness and the relationships between themselves, the otherness, and among other othernesses. Plotinus states in this way the general ontology of the second hypostasis. Every being in the Intellect is intelligible because its being is to be an understanding, and the Intellect is its substance (τὸ ὑποκείμενον νοῦς καὶ αὐτὸς νοῦς). In the activity of the *Nous* subject and object are then the same, since what thinks is thought too; and every part is sustained by its relationship to the wholeness.

After having laid down this ontological structure, Plotinus goes on comparing this whole with the sensible order appearing to us (V.8.4, lines 22 and following). While in the sensible world everything springs from other (ἄλλο ἄλλου), and to be a singular thing means to be a part (μόνον ἕκαστον μέρος), in the intelligible world every part has in itself all other beings (φαντάζεται μὲν γὰρ μέρος, ἐνορᾶται δὲ τῷ ὅξει τὴν ὄψιν ὅλον). The text assumes then a difference in predicating the term *part* (μέρος) of an object of the *Nous* and of a sensible object. The second is an actual part, because sensible beings are composition of

many different elements. The first is a part just because it inheres in a substance; but this substance, the Intellect, is not a composition of its object: every object is every other object too.

The third step of the argument is the most controversial, and the most important (V.8.4, lines 35 and following). Here Plotinus characterizes the ontological structure of the *Nous* by the comprehension of the kind of life proper to this hypostasis. In this way he stops enumerating the intelligible objects and their relationships and begins considering the dynamical subsistence of the whole of those objects. This subsistence is that life whose living is a particular kind of knowledge ('Η δὲ ζωὴ σοφία): the first knowledge, the absolute knowledge, the knowledge in itself (ἀλλ' ἔστιν ἡ πρώτη καὶ οὐκ ἀπ' ἄλλης). The very being of this knowledge is to be nothing else than knowledge: differently from any human science, inferred by reasonings and occasioned by a lack, the life of *Nous* is always complete and never faulty (... ἀεὶ ἦν πᾶσα καὶ ἐλλείπουσα οὐδενί), a kind of absolute contemplation of objects, self-evident in their appearance (Πάντα γὰρ τὰ τοιαῦτα ἐκεῖ οἷον ἀγάλματα παρ' αὐτῶν ἐνορώμενα). Now, this knowledge is the very source of every thing (πεποίηκε τὰ ὄντα), since it is itself every thing (ἔστιν αὐτὴ τὰ ὄντα); so that the *prote sophia* and being in general are the same (ἡ οὐσία ἡ ἐκεῖ σοφία).

It seems then to me clear enough how Plotinus is here plainly stating the Platonic identity between being, reality and truth. The life of the *Nous*, the first knowledge, is the very spring of the real things: the whole of these inheres indeed in it. But this inherence can not be understood simply by the relationship between a part and the whole: every thing in the Intellect is every other thing, since the whole appears in every part. In this sense the *Nous* is the same with its parts; every part is a part related to the whole, because this relationship is a sort of mirroring, wherein the otherness appears completely. But if every part shows itself inhering in the whole and subsisting as an expression of the whole, since the life of the whole, the *Nous*, is a kind of knowledge, the first and absolute knowledge, whose being is to be knowledge, so that the all is truth, then in being real every part shows its truth, appearing as the same truth.

III.

The main problem of this passage, about which controversies arose, concerns the issue of non-discursive thought. Recent scholarship has paid particular attention to Plotinus' theory that the knowledge peculiar to the upper *Nous* would be non-propositional¹⁰. In the argument on which I'm commenting there are some ideas referring to the theory: a) the first knowledge is not acquired by reasoning (σοφία δὲ οὐ πορισθεῖσα λογισμοῖς); b) at the last lines of V.8.4 Plotinus says that we cannot understand the nature of the *prote sophia* because we are used to think sciences composed by theorems (θεωρήματα), while the first knowledge has not this kind of composition; c) at line 20 of the subsequent section (V.8.5, 20 and following), the text states that gods and people contemplating the truth do not know axioms (Οὐ τοίνυν δεῖ νομίζειν ἐκεῖ ἀξιώματα ὁρᾶν τοὺς θεοὺς οὐδὲ τοὺς ἐκεῖ ὑπερευδαίμονας), but the real appearance of the things (... ἀγάλματα δὲ οὐ γεγραμμένα, ἀλλὰ ὄντα); d) at the beginning of section six (V.8.6, lines 1 and following), Plotinus says that the old Egyptian system of notation, the hieroglyphical scripture, was grounded on the understanding of the non-propositional nature of knowledge (... οἱ Αἰγυπτίων σοφοί, ... ἐβούλοντο διὰ σοφίας δεικνύναι, μὴ τύποις γραμμάτων διεξοδεύουσι λόγους καὶ προτάσεις, ... ἀγάλματα δὲ γράψαντες).

In my opinion all these elements should incline the reader to think that Plotinus does maintain a non-propositional theory of absolute knowledge. Not only he is arguing about the possibility of knowing something without using a written or a spoken discourse: he is really thinking about a kind of knowledge other than a propositional one¹¹. Naturally that knowledge could be, in some intelligible sense, non-propositional is really puzzling. In our philosophical culture we are used to believe a sourceal dogma: every knowledge has a propositional nature; that is to say, only those theses which could be set forth by a language could be thought. Anyway, differently from the contemporary linguistic

¹⁰ See A.C.Lloyd (1970); R.Sorabji (1982); A.C.Lloyd (1986); M.Alfino (1989).

¹¹ Plotinus treats the argument many other times. See in particular V.5.

pattern, Plotinus adopts a visual approach to knowledge: while our ordinary knowing experience is of a propositional kind, the knowledge peculiar to the *Nous* is something like a vision. Indeed the *prote sophia* is an apprehension of self evident objects. The semantic context of the argument is constituted by terms related to the phenomenon of vision. Things are shining in clearness (*διαφανῆ*). The light is mentioned at V.8.4, line 7. In a quotation of the myth of Lynceus (V.8.4, lines 25 and following) Plotinus makes the reader think the right understanding is a kind of deep view. And the key-word of the passage is the term *agalma*, recurring twice as a predication of the intelligible objects at V.8.4, line 43 and V.8.5, lines 22-24, and once in the sense of the identity of sign and meaning proper to the elements of the absolute scripture used by the old Egyptian wise men, at V.8.6, line 6. Now, *agalma* means *statue, ornament, image*¹². Plotinus says then that absolute knowledge is a kind of vision of images, both real and true; vision wherein the viewer and the viewed are not ontologically separated.

If this is the case, we will not really understand Plotinus' doctrine if we do not take off our glasses: our prejudices about the linguistic nature of knowledge. Before asking about the possible consistency of a so unusual system, we should then try to apprehend its visual pattern. Actually, this is the first reason of dissatisfaction with the recent scholarly literature about the theory. For example: Lloyd, Sorabji, and Alfino all inquire into Plotinus' doctrine of the absolute knowledge from the standpoint of the linguistic conception. While Sorabji seems troubled to save Plotinus from the presumed absurdities of a non-propositional theory of knowledge, Lloyd and Alfino provide textual evidence that he did hold the theory; but all the three commentators read the text assuming that knowledge has something to do with language: that the issue of the non-discursive thought of the *Nous* should be approached by the relationship between knowledge, language, intellection or meaning¹³.

¹² Faggin (1992) translates the three occurrences of the term with *statue, immagini, and figure*; S.McKenna (1991) translates with *visible images, noble image, and pictures*.

¹³ Lloyd defines the Plotinian issue of non-discursiveness an *enigma*; wherein Plotinus could be read as asserting a doctrine regressive comparing with

Obviously we should ask the reason why Plotinus states that the *first knowledge* is a kind of vision. Some difficulties indeed seem arise from Plotinus' statement. E. K. Emilsson speaks, for example, of a basic problem: every vision presumes a distinction between subject and object--exactly what Plotinus intends to deny for *Nous*' knowledge--so that the *light analogy* would be unable to prove the consistency of a visual epistemology¹⁴. Anyway, I think that here Emilsson is completely missing the point. Firstly, Plotinus cannot understand subject-object opposition in knowledge as we are used to do, that is as a skeptical topic; since the epistemological problems of Platonism are not dealing with this kind of opposition. Moreover, vision is the very *paradeigma* of this attitude, since it is understood as a kind of immediate assimilation between the soul and the object in a *medium*; so that vision, for Plotinus, proves the identity of subject and object. Secondly, Plotinus does not introduce a visual pattern to refute epistemological dualism, but simply because it is an example of a non-propositional way to know; a way in which the simple being of a thing, its being viewed, is the source of its being real and truth. In my opinion all this is proved by his use of the doctrine set forth in the Platonic similitude of the sun. Plotinus' topic is here to assert the identity of epistemology and ontology, and not that of explain how the soul knows an object. Thus, it would be wrong to treat Plotinus' visual knowledge as a kind of theory of perception: it is an ontological model of the second hypostasis. To understand this model we should then change our epistemological approach.

Now, we could go along a different path. In asserting the Platonic identity between being, reality and truth, Plotinus refers also to the other notion peculiar to Platonism: transcendence. In my opinion, we could achieve better results examining the text from the point of view of the role transcendence plays in the explanation of the nature of the *prote sophia*.

Aristotle and the middle platonists (Lloyd, 1970). The author focuses his reading around the notion of intellection; aiming at showing how Plotinus tries to escape from the fallibilism proper to the aristotelic concept of first mover. Alfino reads Plotinus theory directed by a model of consciousness escluding discursiveness, in relation to the issue of meaning (see Alfino, 1989).

¹⁴ See Emilsson (1996).

IV.

At the beginning of section five (V.8.5, lines 1 and following) Plotinus asserts that all sensible beings (Πάντα τὰ γινόμενα, εἴτε τεχνητὰ εἴτε φυσικὰ εἶν) are occasioned by a certain knowledge (σοφία τις ποιεῖ). This knowledge is in conformity to the kind of beings occasioned, since it accomplishes the process of producing. The artisans, in framing the objects of their arts, refer to the knowledge of nature: this is in fact the cause of the same arts (καθ' ἕν γεγένηται). Nature too, in framing sensible beings, acts by some rational principles, proceeded from other, from the *Nous*. This last knowledge, being not derived by other, can be said first.

The argument assumes therefore that every determined knowledge cannot be founded in itself, since it needs to refer to something other. This reference is made necessary because no knowledge has in itself the principles of its truth, except the first knowledge, whose being is to be truth. Plotinus then defines a scale of knowledge where the upper degree accounts for the inferior, because the true principles of the inferior are ontologically subsisting in the superior: the human knowledge is so grounded in the upper level, the natural knowledge; the natural knowledge is grounded in the first knowledge; and, lastly, the first knowledge is self-grounded. The transcendence is the relative ontological situation of a degree in respect to the others, so that the first knowledge is that knowledge that is not transcended by other knowledge: this knowledge in fact does not refer to anything other than itself.

Now, the argument seems however problematic. Why does every knowledge refer to something other? And why must this reference be thought as an ascensional dialectics of transcendent degree? And why is the first knowledge self-grounded when the *Nous* proceeds from the One?

The answer to these questions involves in some sense a sympathetic reading of Plotinus' visual model of knowledge. The first knowledge transcends all the other because is the source of the Platonic identity between being, reality and truth. This knowledge is a self-intellection of the *Nous*¹⁵. The One is beyond being: it is

¹⁵ See Crystal (1998).

not ontologically real, neither true, nor knowable. Obviously this does not mean that the One has a privative nature; but that its transcendence is more sourceal than that degree wherein reality, truth, and the absolute knowledge acquire an ontological subsistence; since the One is the source, while being is the substantiality of the true reality. The first knowledge is this very ontological determination of the power of the One to give being in reality and in truth. The first knowledge is the same wholeness of being ('Η... ἀληθινὴ σοφία οὐσία, καὶ ἡ ἀληθινὴ οὐσία σοφία). Now, this knowledge could not be discursive, since it is not propositional; indeed it is not rational¹⁶. In being real and true all objects just show their self evidence to the *Nous*, contemplating them; that is to say, touching intellectually with a clear vision in the identity in which things come into being as real and true. In being known, indeed, things come into being as something that is viewed: without distinction with the viewer, and without mediation; simply as beings. This identity between *Nous* and the being real and true of the objects is the absolute appearance of the ontological degree in the procession from the One: and for this reason it transcends all the derivative lower degrees, being in this way the source of their necessity to refer to it. In some sense every object has an ontological meaning, preceding the linguistic one: because the truth and reality proper to every sensible is not self evident in the sensible order, but in the intelligible order where the object really and truly appears.

¹⁶ See C.Guidelli, (1991).