Plotinus' epistemology and his reading of the *Theaetetus*

Sara Magrin

Department of Philosophy

McGill University, Montreal

July 2009

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfilment
of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Copyright Sara Magrin 2009

Abstract: Plotinus' epistemology and his reading of the *Theaetetus*

The thesis offers a reconstruction of Plotinus' reading of the *Theaetetus*, and it presents an account of his epistemology that rests on that reading. It aims to show that Plotinus reads the *Theaetetus* as containing two anti-sceptical arguments. The first argument is an answer to radical scepticism, namely, to the thesis that nothing is apprehensible and judgement must be suspended on all matters. The second argument is an answer to a more moderate form of scepticism, which does not endorse a universal suspension of judgement, but maintains nonetheless that scientific knowledge is unattainable.

The first chapter opens with a reconstruction of Plotinus' reading of *Theaet.*, 151e-184a, where Socrates examines the thesis that knowledge is sensation in light of Protagoras' epistemology. In this chapter it is argued that Plotinus makes a polemical use of the discussion of Protagoras' epistemology. Plotinus takes Plato to show that Protagoras' views imply radical scepticism; and he attack the Stoics' epistemological and ontological commitments by arguing that they imply Protagoras' views, and thus lead to radical scepticism, too.

The second chapter examines Plotinus' interpretation of the ontology of the *Timaeus*. In *Theaet*., 151e-184a Plato shows that Protagoras' epistemology leads to radical scepticism by arguing that it implies an allegedly Heracleitean conception of the sensible world. Plotinus maintains that in the *Timaeus* Plato offers an alternative to Protagoras' and Heracleitus' ontology. This alternative conception of the sensible world provides some of the premises on which Plotinus builds his interpretation of *Theaet.*, Part I, 184b-187a.

The third chapter reconstructs Plotinus' reading of *Theaet.*, 184b-187a. In this chapter it is argued that Plotinus takes the discussion of sensation at *Theaet*., 184b-186b 11 to remove the threat to knowledge that is presented by radical scepticism, while he reads *Theaet.*, 186b 11-187a as presenting an argument against the more moderate forms of scepticism described above. The third chapter also offers an overview of Plotinus' reading of the *Theaetetus* in its entirety and it suggests that this dialogue for Plotinus represents a Platonic exercise in Socratic dialectic that aims to prepare the student for the dialectic of the *Sophist*.

Résumé : L'épistémologie de Plotin et son interpretation du *Thééthète*

Cette thèse reconstruit la lecture plotinienne du *Thééthète*, et elle présente une analyse de l'épistémologie de Plotin qui s'appui sur cette lecture. Le but de ce travail et de montrer que Plotin identifie dans le *Thééthète* deux arguments contre le scepticisme. Le premier argument est une réponse à une forme de scepticisme radicale, c'est-à-dire à la thèse selon laquelle rien n'est connaissable et le jugement doit être suspendu sur toute chose. Le second argument est une réponse à une forme plus modérée de scepticisme, qui n'appui pas une suspension du jugement universelle, mais maintient quand même qu'on ne peut pas atteindre la connaissance.

Le premier chapitre reconstruit la lecture plotinienne de *Theaet.*, 151e-184a, où Socrate analyse la thèse que la connaissance est sensation à la lumière de l'épistémologie de Protagoras. Dans ce chapitre on observe que Plotin emploie à des fins polémiques la discussion de l'épistémologie de Protagoras. Plotin pense que pour Platon l'épistémologie de Protagoras implique un scepticisme radical, et il attaque l'épistémologie et l'ontologie des stoïciens en essayant de démontrer qu'elles impliquent la position de Protagoras, si bien qu'elles aussi amènent à une forme de scepticisme radical.

Le deuxième chapitre analyse la lecture plotinienne de l'ontologie du *Timée*. Dans *Theaet*., 151e-184a, Platon montre que l'épistémologie de Protagoras amène au scepticisme radical en soutenant qu'elle implique une conception du monde sensible de type héraclitéen. Plotin soutient que dans le *Timée* Platon présente une alternative à l'ontologie de Protagoras et d'Héraclite. Cette nouvelle conception du monde sensible fournit des prémisses sur lesquelles Plotin construit son interprétation de *Theaet.*, 184b-187a.

Le troisième chapitre reconstruit la lecture plotinienne de *Theaet.*, 184b-187a. Dans ce chapitre on suggère que Plotin voit dans *Theaet*., 184b-186b un argument qui vise à éliminer la menace d'un scepticisme radical, et qu'il voit dans *Theaet.*, 186b 11-187a un argument qui vise à réfuter une forme de scepticisme plus modérée, telle que celle décrite en haute. Le troisième chapitre présente aussi une vision d'ensemble de la lecture que Plotin fait du dialogue et il suggère que ce dialogue pour Plotin représente un exercice de dialectique socratique qui prépare le lecteur à la lecture du *Sophiste*.

Per Rosa, Brian e Caterina

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first debt of gratitude goes to my supervisor Prof. Stephen Menn, for the care and kindness with which he has directed my work in the past years. Every page of this thesis has benefitted from his suggestions, and from his unfailing attempts to steer me away from error.

I want to thank my co-supervisor Prof. Richard Bodéüs for his comments and his generous encouragement.

Special thanks go to Cristina D'Ancona, Eyólfur Emilsson, Paul Kalligas, Claude Panaccio, Steven Strange, and Brian van den Broek for their invaluable help with different parts of the dissertation.

Marwan Rashed and Philippe Hoffmann helped me greatly during a yearlong staying in Paris where I had access to the the wonderful library of the *École Normale Supérieure*. May they be warmly thanked here.

I am grateful to the faculty of the department of philosophy of McGill University for having accepted me in their Ph.D. program, and as a recipient of the Tomlinson doctoral fellowship I want to thank Doctor Richard Tomlinson and the faculty of graduate studies for their financial support over the years.

CONTENTS

Introduction 1

Chapter 1: Plotinus on *Theaetetus* Part I (151e-184a) 18

1.1. Readings of *Theaet*., 151e-184a 18

1.2. Plotinus and the Stoics on the real being of bodies 24

1.3. The Stoics' ontology and their theory of categories 26

1.4. III.6.[26]: Plotinus' criticism of the Stoics' first two categories 34

1.5. Conflicting appearances vs. cataleptic representations 48

1.6. VI.6.[34]: Plotinus' criticism of the Stoics' third category 59

1.7. The Stoics and the *Theaetetus* 66

1.8. The Stoics and the refutation of Protagoras 82

1.9. The antecedents of Plotinus' anti-Stoic strategy 86

Chapter 2: From Protagoras to Plato: the ontology of the *Timaeus* 91

2.1. Are sensible qualities illusions? 91

2.2. Abandoning atomism 102

2.3. The intelligible structure of bodies: II.6.[17] 115

2.4. Λόγοι as natures 133

2.5. Plotinus' account of necessity in the sensible world 144

2.6. Λόγοι and "forms in us" 148

2.7. Sensible qualities are indestructible: the Stoics and Aristotle 152

2.8. The inexhaustibility of generation: Aristotle 160

2.9. The inexhaustibility of generation: Plotinus 162

2.10. The identity of bodies through time 167

2.11. The issue of ἀντιτυπία 175

2.12. Matter 180

Chapter 3: Plotinus on *Theaetetus* Part I (184b-187a) 188

3.1. Plotinus and the *reductio ad Protagoram* 188

3.2. Readings of *Theaetetus* Part I: 184b-187a 192

3.3. The Wooden Horse psychology and Plotinus' conception of the soul 197

3.4. Sensation is a judgement of the soul 207
3.5. Sensation is a judgement of the soul: Aristotle 222
3.6. The Cyrenaics and Protagoras 229
3.7. *Theaet.*, 184b-d: the Wooden Horse psychology and the removal of *akatalēpsia* 232
3.8. *Theaet.*, 184d-186c 5: sensation as a judgement of the soul 241
3.9. *Theaet.*, 186c 6-187a 8: sensory representations and beliefs 250
3.10. A summary of Plotinus' reading of *Theaet.*, 184b-187a 256
3.11. The direct realist reading of sensory judgement 259
3.12. Criteria of truth 270
3.13. Plotinus' reading of *Theaetetus* Part II 275
3.14. Plotinus and the anonymous commentator on the *Theaetetus* 284

Conclusion 286
Bibliography 290

Introduction

In book III of the *Contra Academicos*, Augustine presents a short account of the history of the Academy.[1] Plato, he says, built a complete system of philosophy, and he maintained that there are two worlds: the intelligible world, in which truth and knowledge can be found, and the sensible world—an image of the true world—, where there is only truth-like opinion. But, not long after Plato's death, the Academy underwent a considerable change. Zeno, who was to be the founder of Stoicism, began to attend the school, and he started spreading inside and outside the Academy some un-Platonic views. He maintained that only the sensible world existed, and that the soul and God were bodies. Alarmed by these views, Plato's successors began to preserve the doctrine of the master as a "mystery" to be guarded from those men whose "impure" minds were not prepared to receive it. The first to adopt this policy was Arcesilaus, a fellow student of Zeno, who became the head of the so-called New or Second Academy. Arcesilaus thought that there was no point in trying to teach Plato to people whose minds were cluttered by mistaken beliefs, and he made it his priority to free from error those who had been wrongly taught. Afraid that Plato's teachings could have been distorted, he buried them, as "a golden treasure" to be uncovered by future generations, and he assumed a sceptical attitude, professing two things: that nothing could be apprehended, and that judgement had to be suspended on all matters. Arcesilaus was not really a sceptic, Augustine tells us, he only pretended to be one, because he wanted to show that what the Stoics called knowledge was no knowledge at all. The strength of Arcesilaus' sceptical arguments was about to triumph over Zeno, when Chrysippus came to the latter's rescue, bringing new life to views that were nearly fading away. Since the time to uncover Plato's teachings had not yet arrived, Carneades, the head of the so-called Third Academy, continued Arcesilaus' battle against the Stoics. He realized, however, that Arcesilaus' position had to be improved, because it was necessary to explain how a sceptic could perform the activities required to lead

[1] Aug. *Contra Academicos*, III 17, 37-20, 43. I draw from Peter King's translation, see Id. (ed.), *Augustine*. Against the Academicians *and* The Teacher, Indianapolis 1995.

an ordinary life. Thus, he argued that in their actions the Academics followed what is truth-like, that is, what as a matter of fact seemed to be true, but was not necessarily so. Augustine reports that the disputes between Academics and Stoics went on until Philo of Larissa, who became the head of the so-called Fourth Academy, judged that it was time "to open the gates", because the Stoics were almost defeated, and there was no point in keeping the Academy in a state of siege. Philo finally revealed that no Academic had ever been seriously committed to scepticism, and that those who held that nothing was apprehensible did so only in order to oppose the Stoics' conception of knowledge. He publicly claimed that there was only one Academy, and that all of its teachings could be traced back to the authority of Plato. But, Augustine says, right when the dark times seemed to be over, Antiochus, who was a student of Philo and of the Stoic Mnesarchus, infiltrated the Academy, and he started to spread again the teachings of the Stoics. It was Cicero's merit, he observes, if Antiochus' mistakes did not gain as much credibility as they could have: Cicero "buried all of Antiochus' remains".

Some aspects of this brief history of the Academy from Plato to Cicero, which is mainly based on Cicero's *Academica*, are peculiar and idiosyncratic. Thus, while a certain tendency to downplay Arcesilaus' and Carneades' scepticism was widespread among the Platonists of the Imperial era, Augustine's view that all Academics were secretly committed to Plato's dogma seems to find no support elsewhere.[2] But, in general, Augustine does provide a mostly accurate account of the phases through which Plato's school went, and he is correct in viewing them as corresponding to so many stages in an ongoing debate with the Stoics. From the third to the first century B.C., in fact, the history of the Academy was shaped by the attempts of its members to demolish the Stoic notion of "apprehension" (κατάληψις) as assent given to a cataleptic representation, that is, to a representation that is true and accurate, and that bears a special mark that makes it impossible to mistake it for a false one. Under Arcesilaus the Academy opposed the Stoics with a form of radical

[2] On the reception of Academic scepticism by the Platonists of the Imperial era see Jan Opsomer, *In Search of the Truth: Academic Tendencies in Middle Platonism*, Brussels 1998, to be compared with Charles Brittain, "Middle Platonists on Academic Scepticism", in Robert W. Sharples and Richard Sorabji (eds.), *Greek and Roman Philosophy 100BC-200AD*, London 2007, 2 Vols., Vol. II, pp. 297-316.

scepticism.[3] What I mean by "radical scepticism" is the position according to which no "apprehension" (κατάληψις) is possible—which I call the thesis of radical *akatalēpsia*—, and judgement is to be suspended on all matters—which I call the thesis of universal "suspension of judgement" (ἐποχή). Carneades' position is a little less clear. He was a sceptic, by which I mean that he was someone who maintained that nothing was apprehensible, but he might have been a moderate or "mitigated" sceptic rather than a radical one, insofar as, according to some sources, he did not suspend judgement on all matters, but conceded that it was possible to have some rationally warranted beliefs.[4]

Up to the time of Philo, then, (beginning of the first century B.C), the Academics were sceptics, and they were either all radical sceptics, like Arcesilaus, or more moderate ones, if one accepts the view that Carneades renounced universal suspension of judgement. Under Philo of Larissa, scepticism was replaced by a form of fallibilism. Instead of maintaining that nothing could be apprehended, Philo claimed that nothing could be apprehended according to the Stoic standards for apprehension, that is, according to cataleptic representations. Thus, in what came to be known as his "Roman Books", he argued that, even though nothing could be known on the basis of cataleptic representations, nonetheless many things could be apprehended on a different and more modest account of apprehension. We can assent to many things, he said, and we can indeed know them, without thereby claiming to have an infallible grasp of them; for it is possible to apprehend something, and yet remain open to the possibility of being mistaken about it. This fallibilist turn caused what is sometimes called "The *Sosus* Affair" (89-88 B.C.).[5] As Augustine reports, one of Philo's students, Antiochus of Ascalon, reacted quite strongly against the new conception of apprehension advocated by Philo (cf. Cic. *Acad.*, II 11). In fact, he went so far as to write a book against it and against Philo's views on the unity of the Academy: the *Sosus*.

[3] On the history of the sceptical Academy from Arcesilaus to Philo see Charles Brittain, *Philo of Larissa: The Last of the Academic Sceptics*, Oxford 2001.
[4] However, the thesis of universal suspension of judgement is ascribed to Carneades at Cic. *Acad.*, II 103-108. On "mitigated scepticism" see Brittain, "Middle Platonists on Academic Scepticism" op. cit.
[5] Thus John Glucker, *Antiochus and the Late Academy*, Göttingen 1978, p. 13.

Either there is no apprehension, Antiochus said, as the Academics before Philo held, or, if there is, it can only be of the kind described by the Stoics. However, Antiochus did not oppose Philo because he wanted to restore the scepticism of the Second and Third Academy, but because he thought that the teachings of Plato could be better interpreted in light of Stoicism. As Augustine puts it, Antiochus was responsible for bringing Stoicism inside the Academy, although, strictly speaking, by the first half of the first century B.C. there was no Academy. As an institution, the Academy did not survive the Mithridatic wars; Philo was active in Rome at the time of "The *Sosus* Affair", whereas Antiochus was in Alexandria. But, as a result of Philo's fallibilist turn, the lack of institutional continuity was followed by two main philosophical schisms: that of Antiochus, and that of Aenesidemus. The latter went on to become the founder of a new sceptical movement: Pyrrhonism, so called after Pyrrho, a late fourth century thinker under whose authority the new philosophical movement was placed. By the end of the first century B.C. the followers of Plato began to call themselves Platonists rather than Academics, and this shift probably signals both a lack of institutional affiliation, and the intent to take some distance from a sceptical reading of Plato associated with the "Academics". However, Favorinus revived Academic scepticism, and some Platonists, such as Plutarch, and Galen, remained sensitive to the sceptical tradition of the Academy. Neither Plutarch nor Galen were sceptics, but they had a fairly cautious approach to metaphysics, and Plutarch adopted a moderate form of scepticism in matters pertaining to the sensible domain.

Augustine, who depends on Cicero, has nothing to say about these Platonists. He seems to suggest that they kept fighting a battle against the Stoics and the Stoicizing reading of Plato introduced by Antiochus. He says that this situation continued until "Plato's visage, which is the most pure and bright in philosophy, shone forth once the clouds of error had been dispelled—and above all in Plotinus" (III 18, 41). His view in the *Contra Academicos* is that only with Plotinus does the dispute between Stoics and Platonists over the existence of the intelligible world and the possibility of knowledge finally come to an end. After Plotinus, Augustine says, the Stoics disappeared from

the philosophical scene, which came to be populated only by Platonists, Peripatetics, and a few Cynics (III 19, 42).

Thus, in Augustine's view, Plotinus is the one who finally brings back to light "the golden treasure" of Plato's teachings, which had been carefully hidden by Arcesilaus, so that it would not fall into the hands of untrained and "impure" minds: those of Zeno and his followers. With Plotinus, Augustine suggests, the battle against the Stoics is won, and scepticism no longer poses a threat to the possibility of knowledge. But what did Plotinus say that refuted the Stoics and answered the sceptical arguments against the possibility of knowledge? In the *Confessions*, Augustine recalls his youthful Manichean leanings, and he explains that, after he began to distance himself from the Manicheans—who, like the Stoics, believed that God and soul were bodies—, he started doubting that knowledge of anything could be attained (VII 1-8).[6] What led him out of this sceptical phase, he says, were certain books of the Platonists (VII 8). The authorship of these books is disputed, but they were probably either excerpts from Plotinus' *Enneads* or from Porphyry's works, so that in any case they contained Plotinus' teachings. These books are responsible for two things in Augustine's intellectual biography: for removing the obstacles to a correct understanding of God and the soul in non-corporeal terms, and for offering a method for searching for the truth, which consists in the soul's turning to itself and looking for God as its ultimate standard.[7] Plotinus' teachings, then, in the *Confessions*, offer Augustine a way out from scepticism by providing him with some positive views on the the nature of soul and God, and on the appropriate method for reaching true or scientific knowledge. But, if we look at the *Contra Academicos*, Augustine seems to suggest that Plotinus ended the sceptical tradition of the Academy and refuted the Stoics by: 1) engaging in the long dispute between the Academic sceptics and the Stoics; 2) proving the point that, in Augustine's view, Arcesilaus wanted to prove: that, on Stoic grounds, no apprehension is possible; 3) answering the challenge of both radical and moderate scepticism, which

[6] See Stephen Menn, *Descartes and Augustine*, Cambridge 1998, esp. pp. 130 ff.
[7] See Menn, *Descartes and Augustine* op. cit.

involved removing *akatalēpsia*, and showing how to reach true knowledge, that is, knowledge of forms.

That Plotinus engages to some extent with scepticism is well known. Plotinus presents his philosophical project in the form of an ascent to *Nous* and, ultimately, to a first principle that is beyond *Nous*, i.e. the One (V.9.[5]). *Nous*, which is generally rendered by "Intellect", is knowledge, that is, it is real, perfect knowledge, and human beings can ascend to it by means of their "reason" (διάνοια), and of their intellectual faculty, or *nous*. But *Nous* is not knowledge by being simply a disposition of a soul, as if it were a mind which *has* knowledge (V.9.[5]. 8).[8] Rather, it is a self-subsisting knowledge, and one of Plotinus' three metaphysical principles of reality, i.e. One, *Nous*, and Soul.[9] Plotinus' engagement with scepticism emerges precisely from the way in which he describes this self-subsisting knowledge. He claims that the contents of *Nous*' thought are the forms, but he insists that the forms are not external to *Nous*: *Nous* as a whole is all the forms together, he says, and each form in turn is *Nous* (V.5.[32]). These remarks are inspired by Aristotle's description of *Nous* as "thought of thought" (νόησις νοήσεως) in *Metaph.*, XII 9.[10] Plotinus accepts Aristotle's conception of *Nous*, but thinks that it needs to be defended from a sceptical challenge that is reported by Sextus Empiricus. At *Adv. math.*, VII 310, Sextus introduces an argument against the possibility of maintaining that *Nous* apprehends itself. There are only two ways in which *Nous* could possibly apprehend itself, he observes: by having a part of itself playing the role of the knowing subject and grasping another part as its object, or by grasping itself as a whole with the whole of itself. But it cannot know itself part by part, Sextus says, because the part that knows, when it grasps its object, becomes the same as that object, and another part needs to be invoked in the role of the knowing subject, with consequent threat of regress. Nor can *Nous* apprehend itself whole by whole, Sextus goes on, because it would not

[8] See Stephen Menn, *Plato on God as* Nous, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* Monograph Series, Carbondale 1995, pp. 14-18.
[9] The term "hypostasis" is never used in a technical sense in Plotinus, who prefers to refer to One, *Nous*, and Soul as "principles" (ἀρχαί). See, on this, Dominic O'Meara, "The hierarchical ordering of reality in Plotinus", in Lloyd P. Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, Cambridge 1996, pp. 66-81.
[10] On this see Eyólfur Emilsson, "Plotinus on the Objects of Thought", *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 77 (1995), pp. 21-41, esp. pp. 21-30.

have any object to apprehend, the whole object being the same as the whole knowing subject. That Plotinus' conception of *Nous* as a whole of parts (the forms), where each part is the same as the whole, is an attempt to answer this sceptical challenge against the possibility of *Nous*' self-knowledge was already noted by Bréhier, and it has been the object of more recent studies by R. T. Wallis and by Ian Crystal.[11]

Broadly speaking, then, that Plotinus engages with some sceptical challenges in order to defend some of his metaphysical commitments is a matter of general consensus. What is unclear is whether Plotinus engages with scepticism in a more systematic way. That he does so has been recently argued by Dominic O'Meara, who suggests that Plotinus arrives at his conception of knowledge in terms of self-knowledge through a strategy of argumentation that he shares to some extent with Augustine and Descartes. This strategy consists in using sceptical arguments against sensualist theories of knowledge, that is, theories according to which sensation is the basis for knowledge. The role of sceptical arguments here is that of clearing the way for a different theory of knowledge, that is, for an internalist theory that rests on the view that truth is to be found only inside the mind.[12] For O'Meara, Plotinus arrives at the view that real knowledge is a form of self-knowledge because he thinks that this is the only conception of knowledge that can resist any sceptical attack. Self-knowledge, O'Meara says, is self-authenticating, insofar as in it subject and object coincide, so that it is unassailable by refutation, whereas

[11] See Émile Bréhier's *Notices* to V.5.[32] and V.3.[49] in Id. (ed.), *Plotin.* Ennéades, Paris 1924-1938, 7 Vols.; R. T. Wallis, "Scepticism and Neoplatonism", *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II 36.2 (1987), pp. 911-954; Ian Crystal, "Plotinus on the Structure of Self-Intellection", *Phronesis*, 43 (1998), pp. 264-286.

[12] Dominic J. O'Meara, "Scepticism and Ineffability in Plotinus", *Phronesis*, 45 (2000), pp. 240-251. O'Meara mainly relies on his analysis of V.5.[32] and V.3.[49]. On pp. 243-244 he writes the following: "In attempting to show […] that transcendent Intellect possesses full knowledge and absolute truth, Plotinus holds this can only be the case if, in this Intellect, thought and its object are joined in such a way that no mediation or externality separates them. But why do the knowledge and truth that Intellect must possess require a unity, free of all mediation and externality, of thought and its object in Intellect? The conditions required for knowledge in Intellect (no mediation, no externality separating subject and object of knowledge) are simply *negations* of the conditions defining the acquisition of knowledge according to certain theories of knowledge which we could describe as sensualist or externalist, theories of knowledge which have recourse to sense-perception and/or suppose that the objects of intellect are external to it. To set aside these sensualist and externalist theories of knowledge, by process of elimination, Plotinus evokes arguments which had already been used by sceptics in a similar attack on dogmatic theories of knowledge of a sensualist or externalist type".

sensualist theories of knowledge, insofar as they presuppose that the cognizing subject apprehends an object that is external to it can be refuted by using sceptical arguments.[13] This interpretation of Plotinus' general philosophical strategy is close to that of Augustine, but we might ask how it is to be spelled out. For instance, is Plotinus interested in a particular sceptic tradition? Does he maintain that *Nous* is true knowledge, and nothing can be apprehended outside *Nous*? If he maintains that *Nous* is true knowledge, but there can be true beliefs, as he seems to, does he have an argument against the thesis of universal suspension of judgement? And if he admits rationally warranted beliefs, does he ascribe some cognitive power to sensation?

This dissertation is an attempt to show that Plotinus does engage with scepticism in a systematic way, as O'Meara has argued, and that he is deeply engaged with the history of the sceptical Academy, and with Arcesilaus in particular. I maintain that an important part of his philosophical project rests on three things: the refutation of the Stoics' conception of being and knowledge; the answer to radical scepticism; and the attempt to offer non-question-begging criteria of truth as a means of reaching real knowledge. I will try to argue, in other words, that Augustine's reading of Plotinus in the *Contra Academicos* is substantially correct, even though this does not mean that from him Plato's visage "shone forth" after centuries of obscurity. For, in contrast to what Augustine says, Plotinus reinterprets Plato, and, at times, it is difficult to square his views with Plato's own. There is no denying that Augustine's remarks do not immediately fit what we read in the *Enneads*. But this, I maintain, is because in order to see how Plotinus engages with scepticism we need to reconstruct the way in which he interprets the *Theaetetus*. That he engages to some extent with the *Theaetetus* is well known. From it he derives a theme that resurfaces time and again in the treatises: that of the assimilation to God (cf. *Theaet.*, 176b 1-3). Sometimes, it is his use of some peculiar metaphors that points to that text. For instance, he typically calls the

[13] O'Meara's views are not shared by Eyólfur Emilsson, "Plotinus on the Objects of Thought" op. cit., who does not think that Plotinus shows any systematic engagement with scepticism; Emilsson has reaffirmed and further developed this view in his *Plotinus on Intellect*, Oxford 2007, esp. pp. 130-141. See also Sara Rappe, "Self-knowledge and subjectivity in the *Enneads*", in Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* op. cit., pp. 250-274, who thinks that Plotinus' quest for *Nous* should not be viewed as a quest for certainty, but rather as a process of self-fulfillment or self-realization.

representations of sensible things in the soul "imprints" (τύποι) (cf. *Theaet.*, 192a 4), and twice he speaks of the soul's grasp of forms as a "having at hand" (πρόχειρον ἔχειν) (cf. *Theaet.*, 198d 7-8). But he never sets out to explain how he reads this dialogue, nor does he often directly engage with it. I think that Plotinus rarely engages directly with the *Theaetetus*, because he incorporates the *Theaetetus* in his own discourse in a deeper way; that dialogue, I suggest, forms the sub-text of some of the *Enneads*—most prominently III.6.[26], but also IV.3.[27], IV.4.[28], IV.5[29], I.1.[53]— just as the *Odyssey* is in the sub-text of the first six books of the *Aeneid*: it structures the discussion from the inside. Thus to reconstruct Plotinus' reading of the *Theaetetus* is to uncover the way in which that dialogue informs his discussion.

Unfortunately there are no ancient extant commentaries on the *Theaetetus*, aside from fragments of an anonymous commentary which may be dated between the middle of the first century B.C. and the middle of the second century A.D., and which breaks off at around 158a.[14] But we know that the Neoplatonists were interested both in scepticism and in the *Theaetetus*.[15]

[14] We know that Proclus wrote a commentary on the *Theaetetus* (cf. *In Tim.*, I 255, 25-26), and Asclepius refers to a commentary or lectures by Ammonius (*In Metaph.*, 70, 29-31). The Theaetetus, however, is included in the Neoplatonic curriculum (see *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy* chapter 26). The date of the Anonymous is controversial. Diels and Schubart, the first editors of the commentary, suggested the first half of the second century A.D. Harold Tarrant thinks that the date is to be moved back to the end of the first century B.C. (Id., *Scepticism or Platonism*, Cambridge 1985, pp. 66-79). Tarrant also suggests that the author could be Eudorus of Alexandria, but against this view see Jaap Mansfeld, "Two Attributions", *Classical Quarterly*, 41 (1991), pp. 541-544. Guido Bastianini and David Sedley, who re-edited the texts, suggest the middle of the first century B.C.; see Guido Bastianini and David Sedley (eds.), "Commentarium in Platonis *Theaetetum*", in *Corpus dei papiri filosofici greci e latini*, vol. III, Florence 1995, pp. 227-562, see, esp. pp. 246-260 for a full discussion of the issue. Recently, however, the consensus is shifting again towards a later date, in the second century A.D.; see, in particular, Brittain, *Philo of Larissa* op. cit., pp. 249-254, and Mauro Bonazzi, "Un dibattito tra academici e platonici sull'eredità di Platone. La testimonianza del commentario anonimo al *Teeteto*, in *Papiri Filosofici. Miscellanea di studi IV*, Firenze 2003, pp. 41-74.

[15] The discussion of scepticism was mostly contained in the so-called *Prolegomena philosophiae*, which were basic introductions to philosophy. The students had to attend to this general introductory material before approaching the introductions to Aristotle's and Plato's philosophy. The Neoplatonic *curriculum* required the student to start off his education by examining, in the *Prolegomena philosophiae*, how the radical sceptic committed to *acatalēpsia* was to be refuted. On the role of scepticism in Neoplatonism see Sara Rappe "Scepticism in the Sixth Century? Damascius' *Doubts and Solutions Concerning First Principles*", *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 36 (1998), pp. 337-363; Mauro Bonazzi, *Academici e Platonici. Il dibattito antico sullo scetticismo di Platone*, Milan 2003, esp. pp. 13 ff.

The Neoplatonic commentators are not very well acquainted with Hellenistic scepticism, but their lines of interpretation seem to be consistent: they view scepticism as an obstacle to be removed, rather than as a philosophical position to be seriously discussed; they mean by scepticism radical *akatalēpsia*; they discuss this form of scepticism in relation to Aristotle's remarks against Protagoras in *Metaph.*, IV 5; they consider Protagoras, who is one of the main characters of the *Theaetetus*, as a radical sceptic, and, since Plato refutes Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*, they take that dialogue to present an argument against *akatalēpsia*.[16] If my analysis is correct, Plotinus' interpretation of Protagoras and of scepticism in the *Theaetetus* is substantially the same as that sketched above, even though this does not mean that the Neoplatonists took from Plotinus the main lines of their reading of this dialogue.

Setting aside the introductory discussion, the *Theaetetus* can be divided into three main parts: in the first one Socrates discusses and rejects the thesis that knowledge is sensation; in the second he discusses and rejects the thesis that knowledge is true "belief" or true "judgement" (δόξα); in the third he again discusses and rejects the thesis that knowledge is true judgement with an "account" (λόγος). What I present here is largely a reconstruction of Plotinus' interpretation of Part I, although I will make some references to his account of Part II as well.

Most of Part I consists in an attempt to refute Protagoras' identification of knowledge and sensation. As I will show in chapter I, Plotinus thinks that Plato's refutation of Protagoras rests on the view that Protagoras' position leads to radical *akatalēpsia*. In an attempt to attack the Stoics, he tries to assimilate some aspects of their epistemology and ontology, in particular their notion of cataleptic representation, to some of Protagoras' views. Then, he uses Plato's arguments against Protagoras to show that the Stoics' epistemological and ontological commitments also lead to *akatalēpsia*. Plotinus' arguments against the Stoics are sometimes crude, but they should be read in light of a polemical use of the discussion of Protagoras in the

[16] On this see Bonazzi, *Academici e Platonici* op. cit., pp. 18, 40-48.

Theaetetus. Having shown the sceptical consequences of the Stoics' ontological and epistemological commitments, Plotinus examines how one is to overcome scepticism through his reading of the end of Part I (184b 5-187a). Even though Socrates has rejected the thesis that knowledge is sensation, at 184b 5 he begins to examine once again whether sensation could be knowledge. Unlike many readers, Plotinus, takes this discussion to aim at answering the challenge of radical scepticism introduced by the refutation of Protagoras. The goal of the end of Part I for him is to remove the obstacles that stand in the way of granting sensation cognitive power. When we perceive, Plotinus maintains, we do not grasp how things really are by themselves, but nonetheless we do know that we perceive something as pleasurable or as painful, and so on. Even though you do not grasp what these things are in themselves, he claims, in sensation you do genuinely apprehend the sensible qualities that these things manifest. Radical *akatalēpsia* is removed, in Plotinus' view, by the refutation of Protagoras' conceptions of soul and sensation. His argument takes as its starting point the so-called Wooden Horse psychology that is described by Socrates at *Theaet.*, 184d 1-5, and that Plotinus develops in connection with the epistemological views of the Stoics and the Cyrenaics, a Socratic school with sceptical leanings. Thus, for Plotinus, Plato in the *Theaetetus* maintains that sensation is a cognitive state, but rejects the identification of knowledge with sensation. Knowledge is always of what is true, and it is a grasp of what things are in themselves, Plotinus says, whereas sensations can be false, and they do not reveal to us the real essence of anything. Sensation, then, is not a sub-species of knowledge; rather it is merely something like knowledge, a very rudimentary form of apprehension that humans have in common with animals.

It is with this distinction between knowledge and sensation in mind that Plotinus reads the end of Part I. Now, it is possible to be a sceptic without adhering to radical *akatalēpsia*. One can concede that we know that something is sweet when it tastes so, and still think that there can be no real, scientific knowledge. Scientific knowledge, this sceptic could say, requires assent to things that are not evident to sensation, and for this kind of assent we need to have at our disposal non-question-begging criteria of truth. Since these criteria

of truth do not seem to exist, our sceptic could say, real scientific knowledge is impossible. This is a different sceptical challenge against the possibility of knowledge from that which rests on the claim of radical *acatalēpsia*. As I argue in chapter III, Plotinus addresses it in his discussion of *Theaet.* Part I, 186c-187a, and of Part II. At 186c-187e Socrates claims that sensation cannot be knowledge because knowledge requires grasping the truth, and this, in turn, requires having access to being, which is something that sensation lacks. Plotinus takes Socrates here to refer to the real being of intelligible entities, and from this passage he begins to build an interpretation of forms as criteria of truth that can be used to reach real, scientific knowledge, i.e. *Nous*. In virtue of his analysis of sensation in terms of a judgement of the soul, he maintains that sensations are mental states that can be objects of investigation and judgement in their own right, and he suggests that the forms, that our soul possess since birth, should be used as criteria to judge not sensible objects but the truth of our sensations. However, in Plotinus' view, the forms that can be used to judge whether our sensations are true or false are not the real forms that one finds in *Nous*. We do have those forms in our soul, but in judging our sensations we use representations of them that derive from *Nous*. Because they derive from *Nous*, these representations can lead us to true beliefs, but not yet to knowledge. Plotinus maintains that only *Nous* is real knowledge, and that its forms are the ultimate standard against which all our true beliefs need to be tested. The way in which this test is to be conducted, in his view, is described by Plato in *Theaet.* Part III. At this point Plotinus has to show why *Nous*' knowledge is the only real knowledge: the answer is that *Nous*' knowledge, in being self-knowledge, is self-authenticating, and it needs no higher standard to be judged against.

One salient feature of Plotinus' reading of the *Theaetetus* is that he thinks that the dialogue needs to be read side by side, so to say, with the *Timaeus*. The *Timaeus* either provides the answers to the problems raised in the *Theaetetus* or it makes an indispensable contribution to their solution. Concerning Part I, Plotinus argues that, having discarded Protagoras' ontology, the so-called Secret Doctrine, Plato presents his conception of the sensible world in the *Timaeus* as a response to it. It is this conception of the

world that I examine in chapter II. Analogous remarks can be made in the case of Protagoras' psychology that Plato, for Plotinus, replaces with the psychology of the *Timaeus*. As will emerge in chapter II, Plotinus tends to introduce what he takes to be Plato's conception of the sensible world and the soul by using observations from Aristotle, in particular from the *Physics*, the *De generatione et corruptione*, and the *De anima*. He considers Aristotle to be engaged in the same overall project as Plato's: that of building a correct account of the sensible world and the soul free from the misconceptions of the physicists, whose views are paradigmatically represented by Protagoras, and have been revived by the Stoics. In the end, however, he shows the inadequacy of Aristotle's position in respect to Plato's.

As I have said, one can find only scattered explicit references to the *Theaetetus* in the *Enneads*, and thus the reconstruction of Plotinus' reading that I propose involves a certain amount of speculation. In an attempt to help the reader navigate the complexities of someone thinking through what someone else thought of what a third party said, I will provide some kind of map. I will start the discussion of each portion of Plotinus' reading of the *Theaetetus* by laying down the relevant parts of what are still today the two most radically opposed interpretations of the dialogue: those of Burnyeat and Cornford.[17] This, I hope, will provide some boundary lines against which one will be able to test the plausibility of my remarks. Then, I will briefly sketch in advance the outline of Plotinus' own position. There will be aspects of Plotinus' reading, such as his attempt to assimilate the Stoics to Protagoras, say, that might seem odd and biased. Plotinus is hostile to the Stoics, whom he regards as his most serious adversaries, and he often has little patience for details, even when the details matter. The way in which he does history of philosophy, if at all, is a subject that I do not approach here. I assume that Plotinus presents paradoxical views deliberately. But if a view is paradoxical, it does not mean that it cannot contain some valuable insight. In fact, an author may make a very paradoxical claim, which he knows to be implausible, precisely in order to draw attention to the radical novelty of his position. This

[17] Myles Burnyeat, *The* Theaetetus *of Plato*, Indianapolis 1990; Francis McDonald Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge: The* Theaetetus *and the* Sophist *of Plato translated with a Commentary*, London 1935.

is what the Stoics do, for instance, when, in support of their theory of blending, they claim that if a drop of wine falls into the sea, it blends with the whole of it without losing its properties. Plotinus' way of reconstructing the views of his adversaries should not be taken at face value. His goal is not that of trivializing those views so as to turn his opponents into straw men for the convenience of his polemics. What looks like a trivialization is in fact a way of drawing attention to some core commitments of his adversaries. Plotinus does not merely want to show that, in some respects, Platonism fares better than Stoicism. He wants to replace a philosophical system that is based on the conviction that only bodies are real beings and knowledge is sense-based with another philosophical system that maintains exactly the opposite. This kind of enterprise calls for drastic measures, and it requires an attack that concentrates on the foundations of a system, and that dispenses with charity. In the end, what matters is not how fair-minded Plotinus is in his assessments of other people's views, but what he builds in response to them. To be sure, he cannot distort those views if he aims to respond to them, and, all considered, I do not think he distorts them. All I want to say is that the philosophical value of what Plotinus has to say cannot be measured against his success or failure at refuting his adversaries. Augustine's claim that after Plotinus Stoicism dies out may be historically accurate, but is an overenthusiastic assessment of the effectiveness of Plotinus' arguments against the Stoics, and also against the sceptics.[18] Plotinus does not have the final answer to Stoicism, nor to scepticism, but raises serious difficulties against the Stoics' core commitments, and he is able to do this without having to compromise in any way with scepticism. His polemics, in the end, lead him to build a new account of the sensible world, and a new conception of sensations as purely mental states that can be examined in their own right. This last point is what allows him to introduce, probably for the first time in Antiquity, the view that real truth is to be found in the analysis of our mental states rather than outside the mind.

[18] As far as I could see we have no knowledge of any Stoic active after Plotinus' time, although we do have some information about a few sceptics; For references see Bonazzi, *Academici e Platonici* op. cit. pp. 14-15.

Besides using Burnyeat's and Cornford's interpretations as some sort of boundary lines inside which the reader can locate and evaluate Plotinus' interpretation of the *Theaetetus*, I will try to corroborate my reconstruction of Plotinus' reading by pointing out its affinities with that of the anonymous commentator on the *Theaetetus*. David Sedley has argued that there are three main families of interpretation of this dialogue in Antiquity: one is that of the Academic sceptics, and it maintains that the dialogue should be read as Plato's disavowal of knowledge; another is that of Alcinous, the author of the *Didaskalikos*, who takes the *Theaetetus* to be about what knowledge is not of, i.e. the sensible world; the third is that of the anonymous commentator on the dialogue, according to whom the dialogue is an attempt at discovering the nature of knowledge.[19] Like Plotinus, the Anonymous takes Socrates' refutation of Protagoras to be an attack on the Stoics that aims to clear the way for a more adequate and non-sensualist account of knowledge. He holds that Socrates' attempt at defining knowledge is partially successful because, in his view, each successive definition that Socrates puts forward is a step closer to the true and complete definition of knowledge as true belief "tied down by an account of the cause" that is given at *Meno* 98a. Plotinus, I maintain, reads the dialogue in the same way, that is, as presenting more and more accurate definitions of knowledge that gradually approach the true account of what knowledge is, even though, unlike the Anonymous, he thinks that the final definition is not to be found in the *Meno*.[20] I do not want to suggest that Plotinus read the Anonymous' commentary; in fact, I do not think that the *Enneads* provide sufficient grounds for this conclusion. But it seems to me that Plotinus' reading and the Anonymous' belong to one and the same family, and that they shed light on each other.

I have organized the dissertation in three chapters. In chapter I, I examine Plotinus' criticism of Stoic epistemology and ontology in light of Socrates' refutation of Protagoras in *Theaet.* Part I. In chapter II, I reconstruct Plotinus' response to the Stoics' conception of the sensible world by

[19] David Sedley, "Three Platonist Interpretations of the *Theaetetus*", in Christopher Gill and Mary Margaret McCabe (eds.), *Form and Argument in Late Plato*, Oxford 1996, pp. 79-103.
[20] This does not exclude, however, that Plotinus might view his conception of knowledge in terms of self-knowledge as a development of the *Meno*'s definition. There are signs that point to this, but the issue requires further analysis.

presenting his interpretation of some aspects of Plato's *Timaeus*, in particular those concerning the nature of sensible qualities. The reconstruction of Plotinus' interpretation of the ontology of the *Timaeus* is necessary in order to understand his reading of the end of Part I, that is, of *Theaet.*, 184b 5-187a. Plotinus believes that Plato's arguments at the end of Part I presuppose the ontology and the psychology of the *Timaeus*. Thus, without an adequate reconstruction of how he reads the *Timaeus* it is not possible to go through his analysis of the *Theaetetus*. Particularly relevant here is Plotinus' account of sensible qualities, which is based on *Tim.*, 61c ff., for that account provides some of the grounds on which Plotinus rests the cognitive power of sensation. Finally, in chapter III, I reconstruct Plotinus' reading of the portion of *Theaet*. Part I that follows the refutation of Protagoras, i.e. 184b 5-187a. Here I present his response to the challenge of radical *akatalēpsia*, and I introduce his account of forms as criteria of truth. Unfortunately, I have not been able to reconstruct Plotinus' reading of the *Theaetetus* in its entirety. I merely sketch his reading of Part II, and I make a few suggestions concerning his reading of Part III. I plan to complete this project in future work.

Since English is not my mother tongue, I have drawn on already available translations of the Greek texts that I examine. For the *Enneads* I generally use Armstrong's translations, which are taken from A.H. Armstrong (ed.), *Plotinus. The Enneads*, Cambridge MA, 1966-1988, 7 Vols. In the case of III.6.[26] I use the translation by Fleet in Barrie Fleet (ed.), *Plotinus.* Ennead III.6. On the Impassivity of the Bodiless, Oxford 1995. I generally slightly revise these translations to make them more consistent with the terminology I use. Sometimes, however, the revisions are substantial, in which case I signal the divergence by saying that the translation has been "modified", rather than merely "slightly modified". Where not otherwise indicated, the translation is mine. The Greek text of the *Enneads* is that of the *editio minor* by Henry and Schwyzer: Paul Henry and Hans-Rudolf Schwyzer (eds.), *Plotini opera*, Oxford 1964-82, 3 Vols.[21]

[21] I could not take into consideration a new book on Plotinus and scepticism, because a copy of it became available to me only a few weeks before submission. The book is: Wilfried Kühn, *Quel savoir après le scepticisme. Plotin et ses prédécesseurs sur la connaissance de soi*, Paris

2009. Kühn's interests, however, are not the same as mine. He is mainly concerned with the analysis of self-knowledge, whereas what mostly interests me is how Plotinus explains that there can be knowledge.

Chapter I

Plotinus on Theaetetus *Part I (151e-184a)*

1.1 *Readings of* Theaet., 151e-184a

I think that the easiest way to approach Plotinus' interpretation of *Theaetetus* Part I is to begin by considering the two main contemporary readings of the dialogue that Myles Burnyeat singled out in 1990. This choice is not motivated by the belief that these two readings exhaust the range of possible interpretations of the dialogue proposed so far. In fact, several readings that have been recently proposed seem to fall in between the two that are identified by Burnyeat.[1] It just seems to me that "Burnyeat's dichotomy", as one might call it, provides a neat and clear framework against which one can grasp more readily the main lines of Plotinus' interpretation. Further readings of the dialogue will be examined in due course. Burnyeat calls the two readings of his dichotomy Reading A and Reading B. Reading A corresponds to Cornford's interpretation, while Reading B is Burnyeat's own interpretation as inspired by Bernard Williams. Reading A and Reading B read the *Theaetetus* in two radically different ways. On B the dialogue is a dialectical exercise that aims to lead the reader through an inquiry into the nature of knowledge and the problems that surround its definition. Plato has no positive views in sight; rather, his goal is to make the reader work out possible solutions by himself. On Reading A, in contrast, Plato has a positive agenda. Rather than being merely a dialectical exercise, for Cornford, the dialogue represents an inquiry into what knowledge is not of: the sensible world. The failures at finding a definition of knowledge are planned failures, which are designed to show that knowledge requires something that cannot be found in the sensible world: forms. The natural sequel of the *Theaetetus*, on A, is the *Sophist*, where Plato shows what knowledge is of. In this section, I will deal exclusively with the differences of these two readings in respect to *Theaet.* Part I 151e-184a.

[1] For a critical assessment of Burnyeat's procedure see Lesley Brown, "Understanding the *Theaetetus*", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 11 (1993), pp. 199-224.

Part I contains a discussion and a refutation of Theaetetus' first definition of knowledge, put forward at 151e 2-3, according to which knowledge is sensation. Socrates discusses the thesis that knowledge is sensation by appealing to two other theses: Protagoras' Measure Doctrine, and the so-called Secret Doctrine. The Measure Doctrine is supposed to be the thesis conveyed by Protagoras' dictum that "Man is the measure of all things; of the things which are, that they are, and of the things which are not, that they are not" (DK 80B 1).[2] Socrates introduces the Measure Doctrine by means of an example. The same wind, he says, may appear cold to someone and warm to someone else, and Protagoras concludes from this that the wind in itself is neither cold nor warm, but is cold for those to whom it appears cold, and warm for those to whom it appears warm. For Protagoras, he explains, "appearing" and "perceiving" are equivalent, so that one could also say that, on his view, the wind is cold for those who perceive it as cold, and is warm for those who perceive it as warm. At this introductory stage the point seems to hold for humans only, but, in the course of the discussion, it becomes clear that it holds for any perceiving subject. The equivalence between "appearing" and "perceiving" should not be taken to imply that the only things that may appear to a subject are sensible ones. Rather, the point is that even what we would call non-perceptual judgements such as "This is good" or "This is advantageous" are to be treated as perceptual ones such as "This is cold", and thus are to be viewed as some kind of sensations. The Measure Doctrine, then, rests on an argument from conflicting appearances, and it is to be spelled out as follows: how things appear to, or are perceived by, a subject is how they are for that subject, and, conversely, how things are for a subject is how they appear to, or are perceived by, that subject. This second clause is required so as to have man be the measure of *all* things, and not of those that appear to him only. The Measure Doctrine, Socrates says, makes all sensations infallibly true, and it maintains that there is nothing that sensation could fail to apprehend. Thus, he concludes, for Protagoras, as for Theaetetus, knowledge is sensation.

The second thesis that Socrates introduces is an ontological one, and it is presented as a Secret Doctrine that Protagoras would have taught

[2] The translation of all the passages quoted from the *Theaetetus* is M.J. Levett's translation in Burnyeat , *The Theaetetus of Plato*, op. cit.

exclusively to his closest pupils. It is difficult to say what the Secret Doctrine is without thereby imposing an interpretation upon it. But at least some things seem largely uncontroversial. According to the Secret Doctrine, nothing is anything in itself, that is, nothing is really either this or that determinate thing or of such and such a quality or type. In the ontology of the Secret Doctrine, like in Heracleitus' world, everything changes. But the point is not that all things are subject to change; rather, the point is that everything *is* change. In other words, in the Secret Doctrine being is reduced to change, and everything is said "to come to be" or "to become" (γίγνεται) this or that in relation to a perceiver, rather than "being" this or that. The notions of change and "becoming" that are at work here are in many respects elusive, and they can be spelled out in several ways. Socrates speaks of κίνησις, generally, which seems to suggest that the type of change he has in mind is motion and the physical, ordinary change that takes place when something passes from being *F* at t_1 to being non-*F* at t_2. But he also seems to suggests that things "become" (γίγνονται) insofar as they "appear to be" (φαίνονται) in a certain way to a certain subject, which would seem to indicate that the change he is interested in could be merely a matter of things appearing differently in different relations (what we may call "a mere Cambridge change"). For the time being, it is better to leave open the issue of the nature of the change that is presupposed by the Secret Doctrine. Let me just present the sort of example with which Socrates illustrates the so-called "becoming" of the Secret Doctrine. Socrates maintains that, on the Secret Doctrine, when I perceive something white, I am passively affected by "a power" of white. No white is intrinsically present in what I see or in my pupil, but the sensation comes about because of the encounter of a power in the world (which in itself has no colour whatsoever) with the power to see of my eyes. The power of sight and, say, the power of white, meet somewhere "in between" the eyes and what will appear to those eyes as a white thing, and, there, they give birth to a "twin offspring". The "twins" are "whiteness", and "a vision of white", and, as soon as they born, they travel back to wherever their respective powers came from; as a result, something in the world becomes white and a pair of eyes are "filled" with a vision of white.

The first difference between Reading A and Reading B lies in the way in which they link these three theses together (i.e. Theaetetus' thesis that knowledge is sensation, Protagoras' Measure Doctrine, and the "Heracleiten" Secret Doctrine). Reading B maintains that Theaetetus' thesis implies Protagoras' Measure Doctrine, and that, in turn, Protagoras' Measure Doctrine implies the Secret Doctrine. That is to say that: 1) Protagoras' thesis supplies the conditions that make Theaetetus' thesis true, because only if it were true to say that man is the measure of all things would there be identity between knowledge and sensation; and 2) the Secret Doctrine provides the conditions that make true Protagoras' thesis, insofar as it develops the only account of the world in which it would be true to say that man is the measure of all things. On Reading B Plato does not endorse any of these theses, but only examines them because, once Theaetetus' thesis is put forward, the other two necessarily follow. In the end, Plato rejects them all.

On Reading A, Plato presents the three theses, because he thinks that they will help him develop his own views on sensation and the constitution of the sensible world. Consider Protagoras' Measure Doctrine: A maintains that it is analyzed primarily because Plato wants to show what is sound in it. Plato, Cornford says, does not think that all things are such as they appear to be, but he does agree with Protagoras that sensible things are so. It is in order to isolate a narrower version of Protagoras' thesis, then, that, at 169d-179c, he suggests that judgements concerning justice and advantageousness, as opposed to sensory judgements, are sometimes false.[3] On Reading B, at169d-179c, Plato only engages with one of the problems embedded in the Measure Doctrine; but, on Reading A, Plato actually frees the Measure Doctrine of those aspects that he finds unacceptable in it. Cornford proceeds analogously in the case of the Secret Doctrine. He agrees with B that the Secret Doctrine provides the ontology that makes the Measure Doctrine true, but he maintains that that ontology actually reflects Plato's own conception of the sensible world as a world of "becoming". Plato introduces the Secret Doctrine, on A, in order to examine this "becoming", and to arrive at a coherent view about it.

[3] That is to say that Plato for Cornford adheres to what is generally called today "Narrow Protagoreanism", on which see Gail Fine, "Protagorean Relativisms", in John J. Cleary and William Wians (eds.), *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, 10 (1994), pp. 211-243.

Whether Plato endorses or not the conclusion of the argument that is presented at 169d-179c is subject to debate. But, in any case, by 179d Socrates has narrowed the scope of the Measure Doctrine, which now no longer holds for non-perceptual judgements. Socrates examines this narrower version of the Measure Doctrine by reconsidering the Secret Doctrine in light of the ontology of some Heracleiteans. If on the Secret Doctrine being is to be reduced to change, he says, there can be no room in the world for any kind of stability, as some Heracleiteans hold. But this means that "the twins" must change not only spatially, but also qualitatively after their birth, otherwise they would remain stable in some respect. If the "twins" both move and qualitatively change, Socrates observes, then both sensations and things perceived will change even at the very moment in which sensation takes place. Hence, things will appear to be both "thus" and "not thus", or rather, "not even thus". Each sensation will also be a non-sensation; knowledge will also be non-knowledge, and the thesis that knowledge is sensation will be no more true than false (182e-183c).

Reading B takes the discussion at 179d-183c to develop a view to which a supporter of the Secret Doctrine must be committed. Recall that on Reading B the Secret Doctrine provides the only ontology that makes Protagoras' Measure Doctrine true. On this Reading, at 179d, Socrates realizes that, if the Secret Doctrine is to fulfill its role, it must be further spelled out by saying that the "twins" undergo a qualitative change while they locally move back to the *loci* whence their "parents" (i.e. the powers) came. For, if Protagoras' ontology was to allow any room for stability, Burnyeat argues—even if this was just the minimal stability required in order for a momentary sensation to take place—there could still remain an objective fact of the matter (i.e. the way something is while we perceive it) about which sensations could be wrong. B maintains that, in light of his analysis of the implicit commitments of the Secret Doctrine, Socrates concludes that thesis leads to absurdities. In the world of the Secret Doctrine, Burnyeat says, words can have no meaning, so that we witness a "collapse of language" that makes life impossible. Thus, to summarize, Reading B interprets Part I 151e-184a in the following way: Theaetetus' thesis (*T*) implies Protagoras' Measure Doctrine (*P*); Protagoras' Measure Doctrine implies the "Hearacleitean" Secret Doctrine (*H*); the Secret Doctrine leads to absurdities; hence, since all these

theses must either stand or fall together, they all fall together by a *reductio ad absurdum*: *T→P→H→absurdum*.

According to Reading A, the ontology that Socrates presents starting from 179d is not the same as that of the Secret Doctrine, but is rather a radicalized version of it. Plato introduces this radical version of the Secret Doctrine to show that, even if he accepts the Secret Doctrine, this does not mean that he is committed to the view that sensible things always change in every respect. Sensible things change, Plato holds on A, but "moderately", for, at least in some respect, they remain stable. Since the ontology of the Heracleiteans is not the same as that of Secret Doctrine, Cornford maintains that the refutation of the former is not also a refutation of the latter. The refutation of the ontology of the Heracleiteans, he says, only shows that knowledge could not be sensation in a world where everything changes, always, and in every respect. But this is just the ontology of some extremists, and it helps bring forth the correct ontological requirements of the thesis that knowledge is sensation. Thus, to summarize, on Reading A, Plato in Part I 151e-184b frees both the Measure Doctrine and the Secret Doctrine of those aspects that he cannot accept, and then he endorses them both. He limits the field of application of the Measure Doctrine to strict perceptual appearances, and he refutes the view that the sensible world could be a world where everything changes in every respect. Only on the narrow construal is the thesis that knowledge is sensation false; but this is neither Protagoras' nor Plato's conception of the sensible world. Thus, the thesis that knowledge is sensation still stands by 184b.

We may come now to an overview of Plotinus' reading of *Theaet.*, 151e-184b, a more detailed analysis of which will be provided in this and in the next chapter. Plotinus agrees with Burnyeat's reconstruction of the argument in 151d-184a: *T→P→H→ absurdum*, but does not view the whole discussion as a mere dialectical exercise. Like Cornford, he believes that it is relevant for understanding Plato's own views on sensation and the sensible world, but he does not think that this is because Plato accepts a narrower version of the Measure Doctrine and the ontology of the Secret Doctrine. Plotinus is convinced that those two theses reflect views that Plato wants to replace by his own account of sensation and the sensible world, which he

presents in its most elaborate form in the *Timaeus*.[4] However, even if Plato wants to replace the Measure Doctrine and the Secret Doctrine, he does accept some of their presuppositions. Thus Plato is really of the view that sensations conflict, and that sensible things *qua* sensible appear the way they do only in relation to a perceiver. It is true, Plotinus holds, that there are powers in the sensible world that act on our sense organs in different ways, but it is just not true that they are indeterminate, as the Secret Doctrine would have us to believe. In the *Timaeus*, Plato shows that the powers that strike us in sensation, far from being indeterminate, are the hidden natures of the sensible qualities that we perceive, and of all natural bodies: they are what Timaeus calls "the copies of the forms". To be sure, we never perceive these "copies of the forms", because they are intelligible entities, Plotinus argues. But they provide bodies (which would otherwise just be agglomerates of ever-shifting qualities, cf. *Theaet.*, 157b) with an internal structure, and they ensure at least some regularity to our sensory appearances. Plotinus' reading of 151d-184a can be mainly reconstructed from III.6.[26] and VI.6.[34].

1.2. *Plotinus and the Stoics on the real being of bodies*

The key to understanding how Plotinus reads *Theaet.*, 151e-184a is to see that he uses this part of the dialogue to attack the Stoics. Against the Stoics, who maintain that the only real beings are bodies, Plotinus wants to show that bodies are not real beings, and that real being is intelligible rather than corporeal.[5] This polemical use of *Theaet.*, 151d-184a makes it more difficult to tease out Plotinus' interpretation, but is also the only possible starting point for it, or so it seems to me at least. If we do not reconstruct the part of Plotinus' criticism of the Stoics that is relevant for his interpretations of the *Theaetetus*, we cannot reconstruct his reading of *Theaet.*, 151e-184a; and, in turn, if we do not reconstruct this reading, we cannot get to the bottom of that criticism.

---

[4] A similar connection between the *Theaetetus* and the *Timaeus* has been suggested by Sedley, *The Midwife of Platonism* op. cit., pp. 72 and 172 ff.

[5] I will often speak of "Stoics" here and in the following chapters. This broad classification might seem dubious; but, in dealing with Plotinus, one is often forced to adopt it. Plotinus is of course very unsympathetic towards Stoicism, and thus he pays little or no attention to the difference of opinion among the members of the school.

Plotinus seems to suggest that there is one basic mistake at the root of Stoic epistemology and ontology, and he presents it thus in VI.1.[42].28:

> [...] They [i.e. the Stoics] give non-being (τὸ μὴ ὄν) the first rank as that which is most of all being and so rank the last first. The cause of this is that sensation became their guide and they trusted it for placing the principles and the rest (αἴτιον δὲ ἡ αἴσθησις αὐτοῖς ἡγεμὼν γενομένη καὶ πιστὴ εἰς ἀρχῶν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων θέσιν). For they believed that bodies were the real beings (τὰ γὰρ σώματα νομίσαντες εἶναι τὸ ὄν), and, since they were afraid of their transformation into each other, they thought that what persisted under them was reality, as if someone believed (νομίσειεν) that place rather than bodies was real being, believing (νομίσας) that place does not perish. Yet place also does persist for them, but they ought not to have believed (νομίσαι) that what persists in any kind of way was real being, but to have seen first what characteristics must belong to what is truly real, on the existence of which persistence forever depends. For if a shadow always persisted which accompanied a being in process of alteration, it would not exist more than that being. And the sense-world with that [persistent substrate] and many other things would by its multiplicity be more real, being the whole, than any one of the things in it; but if indeed the whole is not real, how could that [substrate] be its foundation? (*Enn.*, VI.1.[42].28, 3-18; Armstrong, slightly modified).

This passage is to be read in light of the characterization of "matter" (ὕλη) as "substance" (οὐσία) that the Stoics articulate on the basis of *Tim.*, 49a 6-50c 6.[6] Plotinus of course disagrees with their interpretation of that passage and with the conclusion that they derive from it. But the important point here is how he diagnoses the origin of their mistakes, by pointing to their faith in sensation. The Stoics, Plotinus says, "believe" (νομίζειν) that bodies rather than intelligible entities are real beings, and they are led to this belief by their trust in sensation. They think, that is, that sensation is a reliable means to find out what is the case, and, since what strikes us in sensation are bodies, they conclude that bodies must be real beings. Then, since what seems to persist throughout bodies' changes is matter, they conclude that matter must be the substance of bodies, that is, the ultimate cause of their existence. What

[6] See below for further details.

Plotinus means, then, by saying that the Stoics "believe" bodies to be real beings, is that they falsely or mistakenly believe that bodies are such. What we need to see next is why, in his view, bodies cannot be real beings.

1.3. *The Stoics' ontology and their theory of categories*

Let us begin by considering some basic elements of Stoic ontology that might help us understand Plotinus' criticism. The only real beings for the Stoics are bodies. Probably influenced by Plato's *Sophist* 247e, they hold that the mark of being is the capacity to act and be acted upon, and they think that such a capacity can belong exclusively to bodies (SVF II 300=LS 44B). However, since most bodies come to be and pass away, they infer that the primary cause of their being must be something stable, that actually persists through their changes. Inspired by *Tim*., 49a 6-50c, they identify this stable entity with prime matter, which is a quality-less body, one that is both universal and indestructible (SVF I 88=LS 44D).[7] A body, they maintain, exists insofar as it is material, that is, insofar as it has matter as its substrate. They think that there are two "first principles" of reality (ἀρχαί), one of which is passive while the other is active. The passive principle is matter, and the active principle is fire (this is Zeno's view), or "hot breath" (Chrysippus' view). This active principle contains the "seeds" or λόγοι σπερματικοί of all sensible things, and its function is that of moulding and shaping the all pliable, and quality-less prime matter so as to produce different bodies in different portions of it. The active principle moulds matter by mixing with it, so as to make it acquire or "have" (ἔχειν) a certain "quality" (ποιότης or ἕξις) (SVF II 391=LS 28M). This, however, does not mean that a portion of matter is simply disposed so as to have its parts organized in a certain way. It means, rather, that the active principle shapes matter by blending into it a quality that matter did not possess until then. This quality, which is itself a

[7] See on this Stephen Menn, "The Stoic Theory of Categories", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 17 (1999), pp. 215-247, esp. pp. 215-216 n. 2.

body, enters a certain portion of matter, and it becomes a part of the newly constituted body, which is a compound of matter and one or more qualities.

As one can gather from these brief remarks, the Stoics are corporealists. For they believe that the only substance is matter, which is a body, and they maintain that matter is the cause of existence for all the other bodies, which are insofar as they have a material component, and which are such as they are insofar as other bodies, i.e. qualities, are present in them. But the development of the Stoics' theory of categories seems to indicate that, in the course of time, they became aware of the limited explanatory power of this full-blown corporealism.[8] Now, there is very little that is not controversial concerning the Stoic theory of categories, and a topic that is subject to particular dispute is precisely its relation to Stoic ontology.[9] It seems safe to say, however, that the categories are concrete items for the Stoics, rather than some abstract properties, as is shown by the list of four categories that becomes standard with Chrysippus: ὑποκείμενον (object); ποιόν (qualified object); πως ἔχον (so disposed object); and πρός τί πως ἔχον (relatively so disposed object). Roughly speaking, each body for the Stoics is an ὑποκείμενον; but, though all composed bodies (i.e. bodies that are compounds of matter and quality) are ὑποκείμενα, matter, i.e. their substance, seems to be ὑποκείμενον in a primary way, because it is their universal "substrate".[10] All ὑποκείμενα that are composed of matter and a quality (and also qualities belong to this group insofar as they are bodies, matter being the only quality-less body in Stoic ontology) are ποιά. That is to say that they are bodies that are qualified through the presence in them of a

[8] In the following I draw from Menn's remarks in "The Stoic Theory of Categories" op. cit.
[9] A survey of the scholarly debate on this issue can be found in Jacques Brunschwig, "La Théorie Stoïcienne du Genre Suprême", in Jonathan Barnes and Mario Mignucci (eds.), *Matter and Metaphysics*, Naples 1988, pp. 19-128 n. 3. However, there are mainly two competing views; according to one group of interpreters the first and the second categories correspond to bodies, while the third and the fourth correspond to the incorporeals; according to another group, they represent different aspects under which each body can be considered. Here I follow this second line of interpretation, which seems to me to be closer to Plotinus' views.
[10] This suggests that οὐσία is one of the items that fall under the first category. The inclusion of οὐσία in the first category is disputed (see Menn, "The Stoic Theory of Categories" op. cit., p. 215 n. 1), but finds support in Plut. *Comm. not.*, 1083D, and in Plotinus, VI.1.[42].25, 12-14.

quality, where this quality is the cause of their being the kind of body they are, e.g. red, sweet or bitter, but also human or Socrates. The Stoics in fact draw a distinction between the κοινῶς ποιόν, or "commonly qualified", which is a body that is differentiated through a specific or generic quality, i.e. a κοινή ποιότης (e.g."humanity"), and the ἰδίως ποιόν, or "peculiarly qualified", which is a body that is differentiated through a quality that is peculiar to it and only to it, i.e. an ἰδία ποιότης (e.g."Socrateity"). Both kinds of qualities can be present in the same body together. Thus, for instance, we can say that Socrates is a man because he is a body that "has" the quality "humanity", and that he is the man he is, as distinct from any other man, because he "has" the peculiar quality "Socrateity". The view that bodies are differentiated through peculiar qualities grounds the Stoics' claim that there are no two bodies that are indiscernible from each other, even when they seem indiscernible, as in the case of twins (SVF II 398=LS 28G; LS 28J; SVF II 397=LS 28P). Each body, then, as long as the peculiar quality that makes it the body it is remains in it, can, in principle, be uniquely singled out from all other bodies (SVF II 395=LS 28I).

The distinction between the third and fourth category is meant to capture differentiations that cannot be traced back to the presence of a quality. The third category, i.e. the "so disposed" captures a differentiation that is due to an intrinsic disposition of an object's parts; whereas the fourth category, i.e. the "relatively so disposed", picks up extrinsic differentiations, that is, differentiations that belong to an object only in virtue of some relation that it happens to entertain with other objects. The distinction between third and fourth category is not attested before Chrysippus, and it is probably the result of a dispute on the ontological status of the virtues that was internal to the school. Conceived in order to handle a difficulty about the status of the virtues in the soul, the distinction between the third and fourth category is then put to a larger use. For it offers the Stoics the means to account for all those predicates (both accidental and non-accidental ones) that can be ascribed to a body as a subject, but cannot be easily accounted for in corporealist terms, that is, by appealing to the presence of a quality-body. A typical example of a predicate that falls under the third category is "fist", which, according to

Chrysippus, is "a hand so disposed", that is, a hand whose parts are disposed in such a way as to form a fist, without there being any other body besides (παρά) the hand to make it a fist. Typical examples of predicates that fall under the fourth category are "father" or "on the left".

Plotinus' criticism of Stoic ontology is structured as a systematic attack against the Stoic theory of categories. We can see how he builds this attack starting from VI.1.[42]. At the very beginning of VI.1.[42], Plotinus introduces the analysis of the Peripatetic and Stoic categories, which he takes to be "genera of being", as an inquiry περὶ τῶν ὄντων πόσα καὶ τίνα, that is, as an inquiry about the number and types of beings that there are. He first points out that there is a substantial difference between the Peripatetic categories and the Stoics ones. "For—he says at VI.1.[42].1, 13-14—some [i.e. the Peripatetics] make the *genera* principles of beings, others [i.e. the Stoics] [posit as principles] the beings themselves which are so many in genus" (οἱ μὲν γὰρ τὰ γένη ἀρχάς, οἱ δὲ αὐτὰ τὰ ὄντα τῷ γένει τοσαῦτα). The Stoic categories, in Plotinus' view, are types of beings, i.e. of bodies, considered as irreducibly prior things.[11] However, Plotinus points out that, even though they take them to be primary and irreducible, the Stoics give these four types of beings a hierarchical order, which is based on different levels of differentiation (VI.1.[42].25, 12-14). On Stoic grounds, he says, all beings, though different from matter, must ultimately come from matter through successive differentiations; thus matter has to be the first being. But the first differentiations of matter are due to qualities, which makes the "qualified" the second type of being, followed by the "so disposed", and, finally, the "relatively so disposed". The "relatively so disposed" has to be the

[11] This interpretation differs in some respects from that proposed by Mario Mignucci, "The Stoic Notion of Relatives", in Barnes and Mignucci (eds.), *Matter and Metaphysics* op. cit., pp. 129-222, esp. p. 177. Mignucci, in commenting on this passage, takes Plotinus to imply that "the categories were conceived by the Stoics not as classes of principles, or elements or components of things […], but as constituted by the things themselves considered from a certain point of view". It is true that Plotinus thinks that the categories are constituted by the things themselves considered from a certain point of view. But it seems to me that the emphasis in the passage above is on the fact that, in one way or another, the Stoic categories should correspond to four distinct types of things. This is shown by Plotinus' general line of attack in VI.1.[42]. 25-30, whose whole point, as I will try to argue, is to show that the categories collapse onto the fourth, with the consequence that the only being with which the Stoics are left is matter.

last type of being, because it does not account for intrinsic differentiations. Since each body must have intrinsic differentiations for the Stoics, a body can be "relatively so disposed" only if it has already some intrinsic differentiations. In other words, a "relatively so disposed" being is not reducible to other beings, but is "parasitic" upon them: it presupposes their existence.

Plotinus' main goal is to show that the Stoics are incapable of getting off the ground, so to say, the differentiations that bring about their four types of beings. More precisely, he aims to reduce their four supposedly irreducible categories to the fourth one, so as to show that, in a Stoic world, all bodies are in fact only relative and apparent dispositions of matter. The general outline of this reductionist strategy is to be found in VI.1:

> 1) Ποιά for them must be something other (ἕτερα) than the ὑποκείμενα, and this is what they mean; otherwise they would not have counted them second. If then they are something else, they must also be simple; if this is so, not composite; and if this is so, they must not have matter, insofar as they are ποιά; and if this is so they must be bodiless and active […] . 2) But if they are composite, first of all the division is absurd which sets simples and composites over against one another, and that under one genus, and then puts the other one in each of the species, as if someone dividing knowledge said that one kind was grammar, and another grammar plus something else. 3) But if they were to say that ποιά are qualified matter (ὕλη ποιά), first of all their λόγοι will be immanent in matter (ἔνυλοι); they will not make something composite when they have come to be in matter, but before the composite which they make they will be composed of matter and form; they will not, then, themselves be forms or λόγοι. 4) But if they were to say that the λόγοι are nothing but matter πως ἔχουσα, they obviously will be saying that ποιά are πως ἔχοντα, and they ought to be classed in the third genus. But if this is a different kind of σχέσις, what is the difference?[12] Now clearly in this case τό πως ἔχειν is more of an existence (ὑπόστασις μᾶλλον). But if it is not an existence there too [i.e. in the case of the σχέσις as fourth genus], why do they count it as one genus? […]. But what is

[12] That is to say, what is the difference between this σχέσις and the σχέσις that corresponds to the fourth category, σχέσις being a common way to refer to the πρός τί πως ἔχον, and, sometimes, to the third category as well.

> this πως ἔχον imposed on matter? It is either existent or non-existent; and if it is existent, it is an empty name and there is only matter, and the ποιόν is nothing. But neither is τό πως ἔχον anything: for it is still more non-existent. And the fourth class mentioned is even more non-existent. So then only matter is existent. (*Enn.*, VI.1.[42].29, 1-25; Armstrong, slightly modified).

The four parts in which I have divided the passage correspond to four arguments leading to one single conclusion: all there is in the Stoics' world is matter. The remarks in the first part of the passage are quite tendentious and, I think, not worthy of much thought. Plotinus begins by saying that ποιά must be something other (ἕτερα) than ὑποκείμενα for the Stoics. Then, he claims that the ποιά can be something other than the ὑποκείμενα only by being simple. This is to say that they cannot just be ὑποκείμενα plus something else. Since no simple thing is a body (cf. V.4.[7].1, 17-18), he infers that the ποιά must be incorporeal. A number of implicit assumptions must lie behind these observations, but, as I have said, I do not think it is worth trying to spell them out here. The fact is that the Stoics think of the ποιά as bodily compounds, rather than as simple, incorporeal things as Plotinus demands them to do; thus, if Plotinus wants to address the problems with their schema of categories, he has to address them on the Stoics' own terms. This is what he does in part 2, where in fact he discusses the ποιά starting from the more accurate assumption that they are composite things. A ποιόν, he assumes now, is properly speaking an ὑποκείμενον, viewed as a piece of bare, quality-less matter, that has come to acquire a certain quality.[13] This means that the ποιόν differs from the ὑποκείμενον by being an

[13] The fact that Plotinus speaks of ὑποκείμενα in the plural might suggest that what he has in mind are "objects" in general. But in part 2, immediately after having conceded that ποιά are composite things, he says that it is absurd on the Stoics' part to set "simples and composites over against one another". Since the simples in question cannot be the ποιά (for we are assuming that they are composite here), and since so far Plotinus has spoken only of ποιά and ὑποκείμενα, I take it that the simples he mentions in part 2 are the ὑποκείμενα. It also seems to me that to describe them as simple, Plotinus must view them as bare, quality-less portions of matter, matter being the only quality-less, and thus non-composite body. The idea here seems to be that the ὑποκείμενα are "objects" viewed *qua* pieces of matter, cf. Mignucci, "The Stoic Notion of Relatives" op. cit., p. 177.

ὑποκείμενον plus a quality. But, he argues, to divide beings in this way is absurd. It is as if someone set out to divide knowledge by positing as its species grammar and grammar plus something else, where grammar stands for the ὑποκείμενον and grammar plus something else for the ποιόν.[14] I take the point to be that, properly speaking, grammar plus something else should be a sub-species of grammar, and thus it could not be something other (ἕτερα) than grammar, as, to be "other", it should belong to a different genus. Conclusion: since the ποιά cannot be something other than the ὑποκείμενα, they cannot be a different kind of thing from the ὑποκείμενα, and thus they are mere portions of quality-less matter or simply matter. In part 3, Plotinus tries to undermine the distinction between the first two categories by raising what I take to be a threat of regress. He considers the Stoic characterization of the ποιά in terms of qualified matter, i.e. matter (the first ὑποκείμενον) plus a quality. Then, he observes, rightly, that the qualities that are supposed to qualify matter, what he calls λόγοι here, are themselves ποιά. On these grounds, he claims that, if these qualities too are ποιά, i.e. compounds of matter and qualities, then they cannot be responsible for moulding matter into this or that body, because they are themselves in need of some other quality that qualifies their own portion of matter. The regress is not explicitly worked out, but we can guess that, on Stoic grounds, these further qualities would have to be themselves composite, so as to require some other, additional qualities in order to come about, and so on *ad infinitum*. In part 4, Plotinus considers what he takes to be an alternative strategy that the Stoics could adopt to show that there are bodies other than matter. When the appeal to a quality added to matter from the outside is no longer available, the Stoics, he says, could resort to the third category. That is to say, they could bite the bullet, and concede that there is no body that enters matter so as to differentiate it. But they could suggest (hypothetically) that matter can still undergo a differentiation from the inside, so to say, by which Plotinus means through "qualities" conceived of as ways in which matter itself is so and so disposed. This amounts to turning qualities into πως ἔχοντα, and it is probably not a

[14] See Mignucci, "The Stoic Notion of Relatives" op. cit., pp. 174-175.

move that any Stoic actually ever made.[15] Rather, Plotinus here forces the Stoics to this conclusion; that is, he pushes them to shift all the burden of accounting for matter's differentiations onto πως ἔχοντα. He wants to lead his adversaries to say that either there are only matter and πως ἔχοντα in their world, so that everything that is not matter is a way in which the latter is disposed, or there is only matter; and he assumes that, forced to choose between these two alternatives, they would obviously opt for the first one. But not even this attempt to account for how there are bodies other than matter gets off the ground. First, Plotinus says, it is difficult to grasp how the πως ἔχοντα are supposed to be distinguishable from the πρός τί πως ἔχοντα. Now, he goes on, the πρός τί πως ἔχοντα are mere extrinsic differentiations, which in the end amount only to "an empty name", because they do not correspond to anything in the object that they are supposed to differentiate. Hence, he concludes, so long as no distinction can be found between πως ἔχοντα and πρός τί πως ἔχοντα, the πως ἔχοντα, too, will have to be considered as mere relative and extrinsic differentiations, and this no matter how much the Stoics insist that the πως ἔχοντα are "more of an existence", because they are intrinsic, rather than extrinsic differentiations. Plotinus points out that a πως ἔχον could provide matter with some differentiation only if it were something existing over and above matter, that is, only if it were a being on its own, acting on matter so as to impose on it a differentiation that it previously lacked. But, since a πως ἔχον is precisely not something over and above (παρά) the thing so disposed, he says, it will be unable to differentiate matter, and everything in the world will be just matter relatively so disposed and nothing else.

This criticism trades on an ambiguity, for Plotinus treats πως ἔχοντα and πρός τί πως ἔχοντα as if they were "differentiations", rather than considering them for what they are, i.e. objects that are differentiated in certain ways.[16] But the main issue throughout the discussion of the Stoic categories in

[15] See Menn, "The Stoic Theory of Categories" op. cit., p. 246.
[16] See Menn, "The Stoic Theory of Categories" op. cit., pp. 245-247, who points out that Plotinus' polemic here rests on the rather unfair treatment in terms of separate "existents" of

VI.1.[42].25-30 is always the same: how can the Stoics account for the existence of something other than matter in the world by assuming that bodies are the only real beings.[17] Yet, VI.1.[42] only provides us with an outline of the polemical strategy that Plotinus adopts. His arguments there are compressed, and they are often tendentious. We need to look elsewhere to reconstruct his point, in particular, at III.6.[26] and VI.6.[34]. In III.6.[26] Plotinus attacks the idea that there could be any intrinsic differentiation of matter; in VI.6.[34] he attacks more specifically the possibility of accounting for this kind of differentiation through πως ἔχοντα.

1.4. III.6.[26]*: Plotinus' criticism of the Stoics' first two categories*

Let me summarize what we have seen so far of Plotinus' anti-Stoic strategy. Plotinus holds that at the origin of the Stoic view that bodies are the only real beings there is an epistemological mistake: the conviction that sensations are a reliable means to find out what is the case. Since they take sensations to be reliable, and since sensations seem to indicate that bodies are real beings, the Stoics, he suggests, conclude that bodies are in fact real beings. But, he goes on, one can show that bodies cannot be real beings by attacking the Stoic theory of categories. According to the Stoics, he says, there are four primary and irreducible types of bodies, and each of them corresponds to a genus of being or category of being. One has to show that these four types of being in fact collapse into one, that is, into the fourth type or "relatively so disposed". Since the items that fall into the fourth category lack intrinsic differentiation, Plotinus reasons, if one can show that in the Stoics' world there are only bodies in this category, it follows that on their ontology everything turns out to be merely a relative, extrinsic, and temporary state in which the substrate, i.e. matter, happens to find itself.

Naturally, Plotinus knows that this conclusion would be devastating for the Stoics, for their ontology is consciously built as an alternative to the view that sensible things are what they are simply in a relative and extrinsic way.

---

what the Stoics take to be dispositions of this or that object. See also Andreas Graeser, *Plotinus and the Stoics. A preliminary Study*, Leiden 1972, p. 100.

[17] More precisely, the same reductionist strategy can be found, I think, at VI.1.[42].27 and 30.

Let me explain by going back to the philosophical context in which Stoicism emerged. Before Zeno and Epicurus began elaborating their philosophical systems, some of the most prominent figures on the philosophical scene were Pyrrho, his mentor Anaxarchus of Abdera, and Metrodorus of Chios. The sources report that both Anaxarchus and Metrodorus were followers of Democritus (Cic. *De nat. deor.*, III 82; 70 A1 DK), but a Democritean influence can be detected also in Pyrrho, who is said to have held Democritus in high esteem (Diog. Laert. IX 67). Pyrrho, and most of all Anaxarchus and Metrodorus spread a sceptical interpretation of Democritus. Thus, for instance, Sextus claims that

> A good many people […] have said that Metrodorus, Anaxarchus and Monimus abolished the criterion [of truth]—Metrodorus because he said "we know nothing, nor do we even know just this, that we know nothing"; and Anaxarchus and Monimus, because they compared existing things to stage-painting (σκηνογραφίᾳ ἀπείκασαν τὰ ὄντα) and took them to be like experiences that occur in sleep or insanity. (Sext. Emp. *Adv. math.*, VII 87-88=LS 1D).

According to Sextus, Anaxarchus, Metrodorus and Monimus the Cynic were all sceptics, and Anaxarchus, in particular, held that not only knowledge was unattainable, but the things themselves lacked any intrinsic nature or differentiation by which they could have been known, being rather like illusory images in a stage-painting. Much the same can perhaps be said about Pyrrho who is famously on record (see Aristocl. *ap*. Eus. *Praep. Ev.*, XIV 18, 1-5) for having maintained that "things" (τὰ πράγματα) are "equally without difference, without balance, without decision" (ἐπ᾽ ἴσης ἀδιάφορα καὶ ἀστάθμητα καὶ ἀνεπίκριτα). To be sure, the interpretation of this claim has raised a great deal of controversy, and it is unclear whether Pyrrho here means to refer to the indeterminate nature of things or to point out the inadequacy of our cognitive abilities.[18] But in either case the upshot of his

[18] There are three competing interpretations of Pyrrho's words. There is a "metaphysical" interpretation, which has been most recently defended by Richard Bett, *Pyrrho, his Antecedents, and his Legacy*, Oxford 2000, pp. 18-28 (see also Fernanda Decleva Caizzi, *Pirrone. Testimonianze*, Napoli 1981, pp. 223-227; A. A. Long and David Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, Cambridge 1987, 2 Vols, Vol. I p. 16). According to this interpretation, Pyrrho would be making a statement concerning the way things are, rather than about the way in which we know them. There is an "epistemological" interpretation, according

claim is that things cannot be grasped as being intrinsically such or such. One of Epicurus' goals was precisely to oppose the sceptical interpretations of Democritus that were widespread at the time, and to do so he tried to show that atomism did not commit one to the idea that sensible qualities are merely extrinsic and fleeting differentiations of things. Analogous remarks can be made in the case of the Stoics. The Stoics were not interested in salvaging an atomistic account of the world from the sceptical results it led to, but they wanted to maintain that knowledge was possible, and they thought that for knowledge to be possible things had to have intrinsic differentiations, that is, qualities and natures of their own. There is no evidence, as far as I know, that indicates that the Stoics directly opposed the strand of Democritean scepticism of the late fourth century, but we do have plenty of evidence of their disputes with the Academic sceptic Arcesilaus. Now, apparently, Aristo (Diog. Laert. IV 32-33=LS 68E) used to say of Arcesilaus "Plato in front, Pyrrho behind, and Diodorus in the middle". Aristo is not an orthodox Stoic, this is true, but "Pyrrho behind" does not seem to be a compliment, and it shows that the Stoics viewed Arcesilaus as some kind of follower of Pyrrho. Thus, in opposing him they probably meant to oppose also Pyrrho's views. In fact, the whole passage in Diog. Laert. IV 32-33, where Aristo's saying is to be found, seems to suggest a certain affinity, more or less justified, but at least perceived, between Arcesilaus' and Pyrrho's views.

Thus, the ultimate goal of Plotinus' anti-Stoic strategy is to reduce the Stoics' position to the very sceptical views they argued against, and to do this he begins by questioning their trust in the epistemic power of sensation, and then he systematically attacks each of their categories. The attack against the second category, i.e. the ποιόν, is to be found in III.6.[26]. As in VI.1.[42],

---

to which the claim is about our human abilities to grasp things, rather than about the intrinsic nature of these things, and this interpretation is defended especially by M. R. Stopper, "Schizzi Pirroniani", *Phronesis*, 28 (1983), pp. 265-297. Finally there is an "ethical" interpretation, according to which the claim would be about the appropriate ethical attitude towards things, on this see H. W. Ausland, "On the moral origin of the Pyrrhonian philosophy", *Elenchos*, 10 (1989), pp. 359-434. I am inclined to follow the remarks of Jacques Brunschwig, "Once again on Eusebius on Aristocles on Timon on Pyrrho", in Id., *Papers in Hellenistic Philosophy*, Cambridge 1994, pp. 190-211. Brunschwig points out that all it takes to solve the dispute is to assume that "things" include sensations and beliefs, and I share this view. I do not follow Brunschwig, however, when he ascribes this inclusion to Timon (whose work Aristocles is paraphrasing) and suggests that Pyrrho had little or no epistemological concerns in mind.

Plotinus begins by referring to the Stoics' commitment to the epistemic power of sensation, but now his point is made in more precise terms. Thus, at III.6.[26].6, Plotinus first asserts that bodies are not real beings (ll. 9-11), and then he observes the following:

> How can the nature of bodies be non-being? Or matter, on which bodies are based […] all things that offer resistance (ἀντίτυπα) and by their impact force what they strike to acknowledge their being (ταῖς πλαγαῖς βιαζόμενα τὰ πληττόμενα ὁμολογεῖν αὐτῶν τὴν οὐσίαν)? (*Enn.*, III.6.[26].6, 33-36; Fleet).

Even if bodies are not real beings, Plotinus says here, one has to concede that they seem to be so, because it is evident that they strike our senses. There is no explicit mention of the Stoics; but a passage from Sextus makes it clear that Plotinus must have them in mind. At *Adv. math.*, VII 257, Sextus explains that the Stoics identify the criterion of truth with the cataleptic representation, and he claims that, in their view, when this representation is "evident and striking" (ἐναργὴς […] καὶ πληκτική) it forces one to assent. I am not suggesting that Plotinus read Sextus; but he must have known the Stoic view which Sextus reports, as is shown by the reference in the passage above to bodies "forcing what they strike to acknowledge their being". Sextus' passage allows us to see that, when Plotinus attacks the Stoic trust in sensation, he is concerned in particular with the Stoic notion of cataleptic representation (καταληπτικὴ φαντασία). Sensation, on Stoic grounds, is the assent to a cataleptic representation (SVF II 72), and a cataleptic representation is one that is true, accurate, and that has a special, distinctive mark. There can be both sensory and non-sensory cataleptic representations for the Stoics, but Plotinus is only interested in sensory ones, because of their foundational role.[19] Knowledge, for the Stoics is a coherent system of cataleptic representations, and it is to be built starting from sensory cataleptic representations. In the passage above, Plotinus concedes to the Stoics that the evidence of some of our sensory representations, which they

[19] Whether there are also non-sensory cataleptic representations is in fact a disputed issue, but on this see Michael Frede, "Stoics and Skeptics on Clear and Distinct Impressions", in Id. *Essays in Ancient Philosophy*, Minneapolis 1987, pp. 151-176.

view as cataleptic, seems to force us to believe that bodies are real beings. But let us see how his argument unfolds.

The remarks on sensation above are used by Plotinus to introduce a long discussion of matter's impassibility, which is inspired by Plato's description of the receptacle in the *Timaeus*. Plotinus is among those Platonists who have a non-literal interpretation of the *Timaeus*. Plato, Plotinus holds, does not really believe that the world was created by a benevolent god, but rather thinks that it is eternal, and in the *Timaeus* he describes the cosmos as it is and as it has always been.[20] For Plotinus, then, it is only for clarity's sake that Plato frames his account of the world in the form of a creation myth, and in III.6.[26] he is determined to spell out part of the philosophical content of that myth. As I have said, what most interests Plotinus in III.6.[26] is the description of the receptacle.

After having distinguished three orders of reality (the intelligible paradigm, its visible copy, and the receptacle), at *Tim.*, 53b 2 ff., Plato describes the state of the receptacle before the constitution of the cosmos. At this stage, the four elemental bodies—earth, water, air, and fire—have not yet come into being, but the receptacle already contains some "traces" (ἴχνη) of them by which it is irregularly "inflamed", "moistened", and so on. It is by giving order and proportion to these "traces" that the demiurge produces the elemental bodies and the world; and he gives order to the "traces" by applying to them some "forms" and "numbers", that is, some shapes (53b 5). Plotinus understands Plato's receptacle in terms of matter; he views the "traces" as sensible qualities (cf., e.g., II.6.[17].3, 14-20);[21] and he calls λόγοι the "forms" and "numbers" that the demiurge imposes on the "traces" (II.4.[12].8, 28-30).[22] Then, he begins to reflect on the nature of the receptacle itself. He

[20] There are certainly problems with maintaining a non-literal interpretation of the *Timaeus* (for which see David Sedley, *Creationism and Its Critics in Antiquity*, Berkeley 2007, pp. 100-107), but with it Plotinus avoids falling into one major perplexity caused by any interpretation of the "traces" in terms of "protoelements", namely the necessity to explain why and how they could come about before the demiurge's creative intervention. Plotinus avoids the problem because, on his reading, the "traces" are the effect of the demiurge's activity, and the activity in question is not temporal. On this see Matthias Baltes, *Dies Weltentstehung des Platonischen Timaios nach den Antiken Interpreten*, Leiden 1976-78, 2 Vols.

[21] See A.C. Lloyd, *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism*, Oxford 1990, p. 93.

[22] See Luc Brisson, "*Logos* et *logoi* chez Plotin. Leur nature et leur rôle", *Cahiers Philosophiques de Strasbourg*, 8 (1999), pp. 87-108. For a comprehensive analysis of the

observes that Plato presents the receptacle as the universal substrate of all the things that come to be (*Tim*., 50b 5); but, Plotinus reasons, the receptacle has to be impassible if it is to fulfill this role, and this means, in contrast to the way in which the Stoics read the passage, that it cannot possess as its own affections any of the traits that the things that come to be in it display. The Stoics are right in holding that matter must be eternal and, thus, incorruptible, he concedes; but matter could not be incorruptible if it was affected by sensible qualities, that is, if it was literally changed by the qualities that "enter it", because the affections, in the course of time, would cause its perishing (cf. III.6.[26].8). Furthermore, he goes on, contraries are the only things that suffer affections from each other, but matter has no contraries, because contraries must have a genus in common, whereas matter is completely "other" and "alien" in respect to the qualities that are supposed to "shape it", so that it cannot be affected by them (cf. III.6.[26].9, 34-44).[23] Finally, Plotinus claims that matter must be available for the reception of any quality, but points out that, if this reception were to bring about an affection, any further reception would be obstructed (cf. III.6.[26].10, 1-10). Thus, Plotinus concludes, matter must be impassible, and one cannot maintain that the qualities that come to be present in it affect it in any way. This conclusion is presented in III.6.[26] as the "correct" interpretation of Plato's remarks on the receptacle and its "traces". Plotinus has no doubt that Plato, in the *Timaeus*, is committed to the thesis that matter is impassible (*Tim*., 50b 8-c 2). But, nonetheless, he is aware that to show that his interpretation is correct, he needs to engage in the exegesis of some difficult passages which, if taken at face value, seem to contradict the position that he maintains. The most problematic passage is 52d 5-6, where Plato suggests that whatever comes to be in the receptacle, does so in virtue of the "affections" (πάθη) caused by some "forms" (μορφαί). The

---

notion of λόγος in Plotinus, see also Pauliina Remes, *Plotinus on Self. The Philosophy of the "We"*, Cambridge 2007, pp. 68-72, to be compared with Paul Kalligas, "*Logos* and the Sensible Object in Plotinus", *Ancient Philosophy*, 17 (1997), pp. 397-410. The differences between Remes' and Kalligas' position mainly pertain to the nature of the λόγοι of complex entities (e.g., the λόγος of "human being" versus that of "white"). Here, however, I will try to focus on sensible qualities and their λόγοι, and I will only tangentially deal with the issue of bodies' λόγοι.

[23] These observations show the influence of Aristotle's conception of contrariety. In fact, Plotinus' arguments against the Stoics here are in part also an attack against Aristotle's physics. I will come back to this in chapter II.

affections in question are the receptacle's "traces", and they are characterized as ways in which the receptacle "is moistened" (ὑγραινομένη) and "inflamed" (πυρουμένη). On the other hand, the forms that cause these affections are the "copies (μιμήματα) of the forms" (*Tim*., 50c 2-5), which, Plato claims, "enter and exit" the receptacle "shaping it through" (διασχηματίζεσθαι). But how could anything be "moistened", "inflamed", etc. without being really affected? And how are some "forms" supposed to enter and exit the receptacle, thus "shaping it through", unless by affecting it?

Plotinus deals with these difficulties in III.6.[26].12. I will begin with the first difficulty. For, though this inverts the order in which they are examined in the text, the first is more tractable. When Plato claims that the receptacle "is inflamed", Plotinus says, he does not mean to say that it is "set on fire", i.e. πυροῦσθαι. If this was the case, he observes, the receptacle would indeed suffer some affections, i.e. some physical changes. Plato, he goes on, wants to maintain that the receptacle "becomes" (γίνεσθαι) fire, and this is *not* a way of being affected. Plotinus arrives at the conclusion that "becoming" fire is not a way of being affected by noticing how Plato describes the genesis of the "traces": the receptacle, Plato says, is inflamed, moistened, and so on "receiving the forms of air, and water" (καὶ τὰς ἀέρος καὶ ὕδατος μορφὰς δεχομένην) (12.33-34=*Tim*., 52d 5-6). The fact that the receptacle is inflamed etc. "receiving the forms" shows somehow, in Plotinus' view, that we are dealing with "affections" here. This is a peculiar observation, but it allows us to infer that, for Plotinus, the reason why the "traces" are not affections of the receptacle depends upon the kind of relation that the copies of the forms entertain with it, and upon the special kind of "shaping" they cause. Let us examine, then, the second difficulty, i.e. how Plato can maintain that some forms "enter" matter without affecting it. This is the way in which the issue is addressed at the beginning of III.6.[26].12:

> He [i.e. Plato] wants to show […] how matter itself would remain unaffected when receiving the forms [i.e. the copies of the forms], seeking an example (παράδειγμα) of unaffected participation. It would not be easy in any other way to explain what things exactly, when they are present, allow the substrate to remain the same. He raised many aporiai in his eagerness to

> achieve his aim [i.e. showing matter's impassibility] and, furthermore, in his desire to show the deficiency of substantial being in the objects of perception, and that the space of semblances is vast (τὴν χώραν τοῦ εἰκότος οὖσαν πολλήν). He therefore framed a hypothesis (ὑποθέμενος) that it is by shapes that matter produces affections in soulless things, although matter itself has none of those affections; in this way he indicates its permanence and allows us to draw the conclusion that matter does not even undergo affection and alteration from the shapes (τὴν οὖν ὕλην σχήμασιν ὑποθέμενος τὰ πάθη ποιεῖν τοῖς ἀψύχοις σώμασιν οὐδὲν αὐτὴν ἔχουσαν τούτων τῶν παθημάτων τὸ μένον ταύτης ταύτην ἐνδείκνυται διδοὺς συλλογίζεσθαι, ὡς οὐδὲ παρὰ τῶν σχημάτων ἔχει τὸ πάσχειν αὐτὴ καὶ ἀλλοιοῦσθαι). For one might say that alteration takes place in those bodies when they receive one shape in succession to another—using the term "alteration" homonymously to mean a change of shape.[24] But since matter has no shape, nor even size, how could one even homonymously say that the presence of shape in any degree was an alteration? (III.6.12, 1-21; Fleet, slightly modified).

Here Plotinus reconstructs from his own perspective the way in which Plato explains the unaffected participation of the receptacle in the copies of the forms, that is, the kind of participation that brings about the "traces". Plato, Plotinus suggests, proceeds as a geometer. He has a problem to solve: to show that the receptacle participates in the copies of the forms without being affected by them. In order to solve this problem, he sets out an hypothesis, namely that it is by shapes that matter produces the affections in soulless things; then, he reasons that, if he can show that the affections in soulless things are caused through shapes, he can conclude that matter remains unaffected when receiving the copies of the forms.[25] The observation that

[24] Cf. Arisot. *Phys.*, VII 3, 245b 3-9, where we read that change of shape is not a type of alteration.

[25] The claim that "matter produces the affections in soulless things" should not be taken to mean that matter is actually the proper cause of those affections. Matter seems to be a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for these affections. Matter's ποιεῖν is an echo of Plat. *Rep*., X 596c-e (cf. also *Soph.*, 232a-234b and 239d 7-9), where Plato speaks of mirrors "producing" things. Plotinus, who claims in III.6.[26] that matter is like some sort of invisible mirror, ascribes to it this same quasi-causality (cf. III.6.[26].13, 34-55). We should refrain, however, from taking the mirror analogy at face value. For Plotinus' rejection of a straightforward application of the analogy see VI.5.[23].8.

Plato proceeds by hypotheses in the *Timaeus* has solid textual grounds.[26] But probably Plotinus has also in mind the *Meno*, where the use of hypotheses is presented as a method of discovery that is supposed to illustrate how recollection works (*Men.*, 82b-87b).[27] In any case, for Plotinus Plato's reasoning rests on the implicit identification of the copies of the forms with some "shapes" (σχήματα), and, as Paul Kalligas has remarked, the passage of the *Timaeus* that he has in mind here is 61c 3-64a 1.[28]

After having explained the nature of the four primary elements in terms of shapes and having introduced the inanimate bodies that derive from their transformations, Plato inquires into the causes through which "the affections" (παθήματα) of these bodies come to be (61c 3-5), i.e. the causes of their sensible qualities.[29] He claims that the παθήματα of soulless bodies cannot be explained independently of the nature of our own bodies, sensation and mortal soul; and he also claims that, conversely, we cannot grasp the latter

---

[26] Concerning the use of hypotheses in the *Timaeus* see Plat. *Tim*., 53c-54a, and for Aristotle's recognition and criticism of this method see Marwan Rashed (ed.), Aristote, *De la Génération et de la Corruption*, Paris 2005, pp. xxi-xxx.

[27] The precise nature of the geometrical method that Plato describes in the *Meno* is controversial, but see Stephen Menn, "Plato and the Method of Analysis", *Phronesis*, 47 (2002), pp. 193-223, who argues that it is the method of analysis. An interesting account of the use of geometry in the *Timaeus* can be found in Plut. *Quaest. Conv.*, VIII 2, where the question is: "What Plato meant by saying that God is always doing geometry". Plutarch shows that geometry could be understood both as a means to train the mind in the grasp of the intelligible and as a divine method for imposing order upon matter and bringing about the world, with no contrast between the two. Here Plotinus seems to allude to geometry as a means to improving our understanding of the world; but, in presenting Plato's hypothesis as a way to "recollect" the nature of the receptacle and of its participation in the copies of the forms, he implies that the "geometer-style" hypotheses of the *Timaeus* are not arbitrary, but rather are meant to lead us to the true order of things. However, Plotinus reinterprets the notion of "recollection", see chapter III and Richard King, *Aristotle and Plotinus on memory*, Berlin 2006.

[28] See Paul Kalligas (ed.), ΠΛΩΤΙΝΟΥ ΕΝΝΕΑΣ ΤΡΙΤΗ, ΑΘΗΝΑΙ 2004, p. 498.

[29] A few words are in order here. I fully agree with Denis O'Brien, when he claims, against Taylor (cf. A.E. Taylor, *A Commentary on Plato's* Timaeus, Oxford 1928, pp. 429-430), that in this passage of the *Timaeus*, the παθήματα are not "characters of the bodies themselves"; and when he says that "*pathemata* occupy a position midway between the features which are inherent in an object and which give rise to sensation and the actual sensible awareness which is registered in a human or an animal percipient" (cf. Id., *Theories of Weight in the Ancient World*, Vol. II, Leiden 1984, p. 138; but see also Luc Brisson, "Plato's Theory of Sense Perception in the *Timaeus*: How it Works and What it Means", *Proceedings of The Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, 13 (1997), pp. 147-176, esp. p. 153). Thus, in translating παθήματα by "sensible qualities" I do not mean to suggest that they are "characters of the bodies themselves". But "hot", "cold", and so on (that is the παθήματα Plato will refer to) are "sensible qualities" for Plotinus, and I see no harm in translating the word in this way, insofar as there is no need to assume that by "sensible quality" one means "a sensible quality that is intrinsic to the object".

without an account of the παθήματα. Since it is impossible to give at once an account of body, sensation, and mortal soul, and, on the other hand, of sensible qualities, he decides to take the nature of sensation, body, and mortal soul as given, and he proceeds to an explanation of the genesis of sensible qualities (61c 8-d 5). It is at this point that the shapes Plotinus refers to are introduced. For Plato seems to suggest that it is primarily in virtue of the shapes of which they are constituted that soulless bodies come to possess certain sensible qualities. Thus, for instance, he maintains that, when we say that fire is hot, we assign it a quality that in fact consists in "the sharp experience" produced in the encounter of our flesh with its pyramids. But, in general, besides the shapes themselves, Plato mentions other causal factors when dealing with the genesis of sensible qualities in soulless bodies (e.g. the swiftness of the particles' motion in relation to heat; their quantity and position in relation to heavy and light). One might legitimately ask, then, why Plotinus ignores this further complexity in Plato's reasoning. The reason is that he wants to simplify the *Timaeus*' account of the παθήματα, because he believes that even the shapes, despite the primary causal role that Plato seems to assign them, are "an example" used for the sake of clarification. For Plotinus, Plato, in the *Timaeus*, is not really committed to the idea that the παθήματα come about through shapes, but introduces these shapes to make his notion of an unaffected participation easier to grasp.[30] But why should shapes make things easier? Consider the way in which Plotinus goes on:

> Thus in this instance it would not be out of place to use the term 'colour by convention' and "the other things by convention", because the underlying nature is no way disposed as it is usually believed to be (εἴ τις οὖν ἐνταῦθα τὸ νόμῳ

[30] Cf. VI.6.[34].17, 22-32: "And indeed [we must also ask] where and how about plane and solid and all the shapes: for it is certainly not we who merely think (ἐπινοεῖν) the shapes. The shape of the universe, which was before us, is evidence of this, and the other natural shapes in the things which exist by nature, which must exist before the bodies as shapes without a shape there in the intelligible (ἃ δὴ ἀνάγκη πρὸ τῶν σωμάτων εἶναι ἀσχημάτιστα ἐκεῖ), and primary shapes. For they are not shapes in something else, but since they are themselves belonging to themselves there was no need for them to be extended: the extended shapes belong to other things. Shape, then, is always one in real being, but it has distinctions in it […]. But I mean 'has distinctions' not in the sense that it has acquired size, but because it has been divided, each part of it in correspondence to each being, and given to the bodies there in the intelligible, as to fire there, if you like, to the pyramid there". (Armstrong, slightly modified).

> χροιὴ καὶ τὰ ἄλλα νόμῳ λέγοι τῷ τὴν φύσιν τὴν ὑποκειμένην μηδὲν οὕτως ἔχειν, ὡς νομίζεται, οὐκ ἂν ἄτοπος εἴη τοῦ λόγου). But in what way does matter "have" the forms, if we are not even satisfied with the suggestion that it has them as shapes? Well, Plato's hypothesis (ὑπόθεσις) at least gives us such indication as can be given of the impassibility of matter and of the apparent presence of a kind of image which is not really present (ἔχει ἔνδειξιν ἡ ὑπόθεσις ὡς οἷόν τε τῆς ἀπαθείας καὶ τῆς οἷον εἰδώλων οὐ παρόντων δοκούσης παρουσίας). (*Enn.*, III.6.12, 22-27; Fleet, slightly modified).

The first lines of this passage suggest that Plotinus detects a Democritean influence at *Tim*., 61c ff. In fact, when he says that, all things considered, it would not be out of place to suggest that for Plato colour and "the other things" are "by convention", he is pointing to Democritus' fr. B9/125 DK: "For he says: 'By convention sweet, by convention bitter, by convention hot, by convention cold, by convention colour; but in reality atoms and void'" ("νόμῳ" γάρ φησι "γλυκὺ καὶ νόμῳ πικρόν, νόμῳ θερμόν, νόμῳ ψυχρόν, νόμῳ χροιή· ἐτεῇ δὲ ἄτομα καὶ κενόν"). This allusion to Democritus allows us to see why Plotinus interprets the identification of the copies of the forms with some geometrical shapes as a move that Plato makes for clarity's sake. It is because the shapes are meant to remind the readers of the *Timeaus* of a notion they are already familiar with, i.e. the Democritean notion of the atomic shapes.

Plotinus reasons in the following way: Plato believes that the receptacle, i.e. matter, is impassible, and that it cannot be affected by the copies of the forms. But, if it is not affected by the copies of the forms, Plato must explain in what other way it comes to acquire its "traces", that is, the sensible qualities that it displays. To do this he appeals to Democritus. He identifies the copies of the forms with some shapes that are meant to recall the atomic shapes in Democritus, and, like Democritus, he claims that sensible qualities come to be in the encounter of these shapes with our body (flesh, and the sense-organs, which are animated by the soul). In reality, Plotinus continues, Plato does not believe in shapes (nor in void and atoms), but uses a familiar notion to convey in simpler terms his own theory of the unaffected

participation of the receptacle in the copies of the forms, which is a theory that is too remote from our ordinary way of thinking to be grasped directly, because it does not rely on shapes or other familiar notions, but on some special, intelligible entities, i.e. the λόγοι. It is in terms of λόγοι, Plotinus maintains, that the copies of the forms must be understood. But the λόγοι are fairly obscure entities, and their modes of operation are bound to be obscure as well. It is better to think of them in terms of shapes, and to find in the shapes' behaviour as close an approximation as possible of the λόγοι's operations.

Briefly, if we want to know what sensible qualities are for Plato, and how they come to be displayed in matter, Plotinus recommends that we look to Democritus' account of them.[31] This suggestion is of course problematic; for what Democritus might have meant in fr. B9/125 is still a matter of dispute. But for our purpose we do not need to sort out what Democritus thought; we only need to figure out what Plotinus took him to have thought. From the passage above (III.6.[26].12, 22-27) we can see that, in Plotinus' view, to say that colour and "the other things" (i.e., probably, the other sensible qualities) are "by convention" is the same as to maintain that "the underlying nature", i.e. the receptacle, "is in no way disposed as it is usually believed to be (νομίζεται)".[32] From this it follows that, according to Plotinus, in B9/125 Democritus must have said that colour, sweet or bitter, are "by convention" in the sense that we "believe" matter to possess these qualities, whereas in fact it has none of them.

---

[31] Plotinus' use of Democritean material has not been the object of much attention so far. Thomas Gelzer, "Plotins Interesse an den Vorsokratikern", *Museum Helveticum*, 39 (1982), pp. 101-131, does not examine Plotinus' treatment of this thinker, though he points to Plotinus' references to Epicurus. The only study I am aware of that considers the use Plotinus makes of Democritean material is Giannis Stamatellos, *Plotinus and the Presocratics*, Albany 2007, pp. 154-155 for B9/125. However, Stamatellos thinks that Plotinus read at least some of Democritus' works, whereas I can find no evidence for this conclusion. Rather, I think that Plotinus read reports on Democritus; on this see below, section 1.5.

[32] What Plotinus means here by "the other things" is unclear. He could refer to sensible qualities, but also to sensible qualities and bodies in general. However, since he is interpreting Democritus, and since Democritus does not seem to have held that bodies are "by convention", it is perhaps more prudent to suggest that Plotinus means "other sensible qualities" here. For this interpretation of Democritus see Mi-Kyoung Lee, *Epistemology After Protagoras*, Oxford 2005, p. 224-225. We know that Democritus might not have believed that all sensible qualities are "by convention" either (the status he ascribes to weight is especially controversial), but this falls outside our interest, for Plotinus analyzes every quality in the same way.

The general upshot of this analysis of the receptacle's impassibility is that sensible qualities never enter matter, and never mix with it so as to form a bodily compound, but rather are merely believed to be in matter. They are subjective appearances due to the impact of some intelligible powers on the sense-organs of a perceiver. We believe matter to be sweet, red, and so on, but, in fact, matter never has any intrinsic quality; it only appears to have it. Now this does not mean at all that, for Plotinus, Plato's lesson in the *Timaeus* is that the sensible world is merely a world of dream-like appearances. This conclusion would follow only if we were to ascribe to Plotinus the view that the sensible world rests exclusively on the combination of matter with some sensible qualities. But this is precisely what Plotinus denies when he makes the λόγοι responsible for the formation of sensible qualities. This description of the sensible world as a world of illusory appearances is built as an attack against those who deny the dependence of what is sensible upon intelligible principles, and, in particular, it is meant as an attack against Stoic ontology. For it is the Stoics who, on the basis of the *Timaeus*, conclude that the world comes about through a mixture of qualities with matter, and it is the Stoics who deny causal power to intelligible entities, and thus it is they who, in Plotinus' view, reduce all bodies to mere fleeting appearances on matter.

To be sure the polemic with the Stoics is far from explicit, but there are several hints of it in the text. Recall that in III.6.[26].12 (ll. 36-38), Plotinus excludes the possibility of interpreting Plato's claim that matter is inflamed at *Tim.*, 52d 5 as meaning that matter is "set on fire". He argues that this cannot be what Plato wants to suggest, because, otherwise, Plato would be committed to the view that matter is turned by fire into some fiery stuff, which corresponds to the sensible fire that we ordinarily experience. This idea that matter would turn into fire by being being made fiery by some other fire, Plotinus holds, is absurd, for it is like saying that a statue comes to be when the statue itself "takes a walk" through some bronze (ll. 40-43). This remark, I take it, is Plotinus' version of an anti-Stoic criticism that is voiced most famously by Plutarch at *De comm. not.*, 1083A-1084A (=LS 28A). Plutarch observes that, on Stoic doctrine, every natural body is both matter, since matter is the substance of all bodies, and "qualified", and he polemically

concludes from this that the Stoics turn each thing into two objects that mysteriously share the same place, and the same properties. The observation is crude, because for the Stoics matter is a component of a "qualified object" rather than a distinct body sharing the same space with it; but Plotinus seems happy to echo the criticism none the less. Furthermore, consider the way in which Plotinus introduces Democritus' fragment. It is not out of place to say that colour is "by convention", he explains (III.6.[26].12, 22-23), because in fact matter "is in no way disposed as it is believed to be". The Greek runs: μηδὲν οὕτως ἔχειν, ὡς νομίζεται. At first the use of ἔχειν here seems innocent (part of a very common locution); but then notice what Plotinus asks next: "In what sense does matter 'have' (ἔχει) the forms?" (ll. 24-25). This suggests that Plotinus is interested in determining whether or not matter "has" or not the sensible qualities that it displays, and the suggestion is confirmed by the insistence with which Plotinus keeps using the verb ἔχειν throughout III.6.[26] whenever he discusses matter's participation (e.g., III.6.[26].13, 46, 54-55; 14, 12; 16, 24-25). This insistence reveals that Plotinus is engaging with the Stoics, because it is they who claim that qualities are ἕξεις, i.e. ways in which matter is intrinsically disposed by "having" in it a certain type of body. Finally, recall Plotinus' way of introducing his criticism of the Stoics in VI.1.[42].28. The Stoics, he says there, "believe" that bodies are real beings, and they "believe" that matter is their substance; in all cases the Greek is νομίζειν. Now, at III.6.[26].6, 9, right before alluding to the Stoics' commitment to cataleptic representations as their grounds for concluding that bodies are real beings, Plotinus explains that being

> is not as most people believe (ὡς οἱ πολλοὶ νομίζουσιν) [i.e. sensible]. For being, that which may also be called 'truly being', is 'the real being' (ἔστι γὰρ τὸ ὄν, ὃ καὶ κατ᾽ ἀλήθειαν ἄν τις εἴποι ὄν, ὄντως ὄν). (*Enn.*, III.6.[26].6, 9-11).

This passage occurs before the mention of fr. B9/125, but there are two reasons to think that its context is meant to echo that fragment. First, because we read that real being is not "as most people believe" (ὡς οἱ πολλοὶ νομίζουσιν), namely sensible, but "truly" is intelligible, and this opposition

between what people "believe" and what truly is is often used in the sources to gloss Democritus' fragment.[33] Second, because it introduces the discussion of matter's impassibility, which is the discussion that B9/125 should enable us to better understand. If Plotinus is indeed working with B9/125 in mind at III.6.[26].6, as I think, then we can say that he reads that fragment as presenting a contrast between what is merely a matter of belief, and what "truly is", and that he uses this contrast to convey his own opposition between what is sensible and what is intelligible, i.e., as the context makes clear, the "real being" of forms and *Nous*.[34] But in light of the discussion of Democritus that follows III.6.[26], we can also conclude that Plotinus' point there is that the Stoics are like "the many", and they confuse what is truly being, i.e. the intelligible forms, with what is only a matter of belief, if bodies are taken to be matter-quality compounds. In other words, the conclusion that Plotinus' wants us to draw from the discussion of the impassibility of matter in III.6.[26] is polemical, and it is meant as an attack against the Stoic conception of matter as capable of mixing with qualities, and against the Stoic conception of bodies as material entities that are intrinsically differentiated by the presence of corporeal qualities, i.e. as ποιά. Against Anaxarchus, Metrodorus and Pyrrho who, on the grounds of their interpretation of Democritus, reduced the sensible world to a stage-painting, the Stoics tried to save the reality of sensible qualities and bodies; but, Plotinus maintains, their strategy does not succeed. In contrast, when properly examined, their understanding of bodies in terms of compounds of matter and corporeal qualities leads straight back to that kind of "Democritean" view of the sensible world that their ontology was meant to replace.

1.5. *Conflicting appearances* vs. *cataleptic representations*

A great deal still has to be spelled out in Plotinus' reasoning. What we have so far is the following: 1) the Stoics are committed to a conception of sensation in terms of assent to cataleptic representations, 2) because they have confidence in these representations they are led to believe that bodies are real

[33] See below section 1.5.
[34] Matter, in this context, seems to fulfill a role that is analogous, but only analogous, to that of void in Democritus, cf. III.6.[26].8, 32-33.

beings, and 3) they conceive of bodies as qualified objects that are compounds of matter and corporeal qualities. However, since matter cannot really enter into any compound, nor can it be in any way affected, bodies cannot be matter-quality compounds, and, unless one posits some intelligible principle, they can only be ways in which matter appears to be disposed in relation to a perceiver. This means that the Stoic second category is in fact to be reduced to the fourth; for the fourth category is the category of things that are merely extrinsically differentiated, and what is such and such only in relation to a perceiver is extrinsically differentiated. But this also means that for Plotinus the Stoics are wrong in putting their trust in cataleptic representations. These representations lead them to believe that bodies are real beings, but, viewed as matter-quality compounds, bodies, Plotinus says, are not real beings, but are only agglomerates of sensible qualities that are "believed" to be in matter. Behind Plotinus' criticism of the ποιόν, then, lurks an attack against the cognitive power of cataleptic representations. It is because these representations do not reveal what is the case in the world, but are taken to reveal it, Plotinus suggests, that the Stoics go astray and ascribe real being to bodies. To be sure, so far nothing that Plotinus has said explicitly points to this conclusion, but that this is his position can be seen by reconstructing his reasoning in III.6.[26] a little further. The key step here is to see why Plato, in Plotinus' view, builds the hypothesis that sensible qualities are caused by λόγοι. He must assume that Plato had some grounds for formulating this hypothesis, but what are they? Since Plotinus thinks that Plato's λόγοι have the same function as Democritus' shapes, if we can see why Democritus posited his shapes, we should also have an indication of why, in his view, Plato arrived at positing the λόγοι.

I think that Plotinus' interpretation of fr. B9/125 reveals that he probably never read Democritus' works, but only used reports to reconstruct his thought. This is suggested by the way in which he reads that fragment, that is, as presenting a contrast between what truly is and what is a matter of belief. For this is the way in which at least Sextus and Aëtius gloss fr. B9/125.[35] This

[35] I base this claim on Lee, *Epistemology After Protagoras* op. cit., pp. 220-229. Lee has drawn a map, so to say, of the Ancient families of interpretation of fr. B9/125. Quotations

does not mean that Plotinus read Sextus or Aëtius. He probably had at his disposal texts that are lost for us, and we cannot trace back with any precision the sources through which he interpreted Democritus.[36] However, we know from Porphyry that Plotinus read Aristotle, and Aristotle does present a rough summary of Democritus' epistemology in *Metaph.*, IV 5.[37] Thus, it is reasonable to suggest that Plotinus took Aristotle's account as his starting point, and developed it in light of other sources with views akin to those of Sextus and Aëtius. This suggestion is plausible because, in fact, both Aristotle and Sextus seem to agree on at least one thing, which is precisely the point that would have interested Plotinus the most: they both maintain that Democritus arrived at positing the shapes starting from an argument from conflicting appearances (Aristot. *Metaph.*, IV, 5, 1009b 7-12; Sext. Emp. *Pyrr. hyp.*, I 210-214).[38] Since the fullest argument is given in Sextus, let us reconstruct it from him, keeping in mind, however, that I am not implying that Plotinus' reconstruction directly depends on Sextus.[39]

Sextus says that Democritus arrived at the conclusion that sensible qualities are "by convention" and ultimately depend on shapes starting from the experience of conflicting appearances, which Sextus describes as the experience for which "contraries appear to hold of the same thing" (τἀναντία περὶ τὸ αὐτὸ φαίνεσθαι) (notice that the same expression is

---

and/or paraphrases of fr. B9/125 can be found in Diogenes Laërtius IX 72, IX 44, IX 87, IX 61; in Galen *On Medical Experience* 15.7, *On the Elements according to Hippocrates*, I 2; in Plutarch *Adv. Col.*, VIII 1110E-F; in Aëtius IV 9.8; in Sextus *Pyrr. hyp.*, I 213-214, *Adv. math.*, VII 135. Lee remarks that Sextus and Aëtius have very similar interpretations that differ substantially from those of Galen and Plutarch in particular.

[36] On Posidonius as a possible sources of Sextus at *Adv. math.*, VII 135-140 see David Sedley, "Sextus Empiricus and the Atomists' Criteria of Truth", *Elenchos*, 13 (1992), pp. 19-56, esp. pp. 27-34. Antiochus is suggested as a source by Harold Tarrant, *Scepticism or Platonism? The Philosophy of the Fourth Academy*, Cambridge 1985, p. 105, but Jonathan Barnes has raised doubts on this suggestion, see Id., "Antiochus of Ascalon" , in Miriam Griffin and Jonathan Barnes (eds.), *Philosophia Togata*, Oxford 1989, pp. 51-96, esp., pp. 64-65.

[37] See Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*, 14.

[38] One can also reasonably suggest that Plotinus developed Aristotle's remarks through Alexander, since Porphyry tells us that Plotinus did read Alexander. However, it is unlikely that Alexander could have been his only source, because, when he comments on *Metaph.*, IV 5 at *In metaph.*, 304, 10-30; 309, 1-311, 25 he says nothing more on Democritus than what Aristotle had already said.

[39] Notice that Lee, *Epistemology After Protagoras* op. cit., esp. p. 228, observes that Sextus is the source that more clearly presents Democritus' discussion of sensible qualities and their relation to shapes in the context in which it was probably developed by Democritus himself, i.e. as part of an inquiry about the limits of the cognitive power of the senses.

used by Aristotle to convey the same point at 1009b 7-8).[40] This experience, Sextus claims, is common to all human beings alike, but has led different thinkers to draw different conclusions about the nature of sensible things. Thus, in light of it, the Sceptics refrain from saying anything on this subject; while the Heracliteans conclude that "contraries actually do hold (ὑπάρχειν) of the same thing". Democritus, for his part, infers that things are "no more" sweet than bitter, and so on, in the sense that they are neither sweet nor bitter, but only seem to be so. The argument is compressed, but, by filling in the gaps, we can conclude that, in Sextus' view, Democritus posits his atomic shapes in order to solve an epistemological problem: that of determining if we can know anything of the nature of sensible things, and if so what, given the conflicting ways in which they appear to us.[41] Since the appearances of one and the same thing conflict, and since one and the same thing cannot really have contrary qualities at the same time, Democritus concludes that sensible things in themselves have none of the qualities that we perceive, and that their nature consists in some shapes that cause different and even opposite effects on differently disposed perceivers.

Now we can go back to the *Timaeus*, and see whether Plotinus could have found there any grounds for thinking that Plato posited the shapes starting from the premise of conflicting appearances. Let us begin by asking if there is anything in the way in which the παθήματα are introduced at 61c ff. that might lead one to infer that Plato works from this implicit premise. Plato claims that we cannot explain the nature of the παθήματα independently of our sensations, body, and mortal soul. But then he goes on to describe them by taking our knowledge of these three things for granted. This poses a problem: since the assumption is that we do not know these three things yet, how are we

[40] Cf. Sext. Emp. *Pyrr. hyp.*, I 210: "But Aenesidemus and his followers used to say that the Sceptical persuasion is a path to the philosophy of Heraclitus, because the idea that contraries appear to hold of the same thing leads to the idea that contraries actually do hold of the same thing (διότι προηγεῖται τοῦ τἀναντία περὶ τὸ αὐτὸ ὑπάρχειν τὸ τἀναντία περὶ τὸ αὐτὸ φαίνεσθαι); and while the Sceptics say that contraries appear to hold of the same thing, the Heracliteans go on from there to the idea that they actually do hold. Against this we say that the idea that contraries appear to hold of the same thing is not a belief of the Sceptics but a fact which makes an impression not only on Sceptics but on other philosophers too—and indeed on everyone". Translation from Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (eds.), *Sextus Empiricus. Outlines of Scepticism*, Cambridge 1994.
[41] Cf. Sext. Emp. *Adv. math.*, VII 135-140.

to make any sense of the account of the παθήματα? Plato, one could say, must rely on at least some previous clues about the nature of sensation, body, and mortal soul that he has already offered. At this point, one could also notice that, in fact, he has already sketched the mechanism of sensation, and its relation to soul and body, at *Tim*., 43b-44c. There sensations are identified with some kind of violent and contrary motions that enter the soul through the body and end up disrupting the circles of the rational, immortal soul. These violent motions, which at 43b 7 Plato seems to call παθήματα, are produced by the encounter of our body with external fire, earth, water, and air (43c); and, when they reach the rational soul, they cause its circles to move in twisted and opposite ways. As a consequence, we begin to see things as the opposite of what they are: what is on our left suddenly appears on our right, and *vice versa*; and the soul, confused, says that this is "the same as that" or that this is "different from that", when, in fact, the matter is the other way round.

At 43b-44c, Plato is particularly interested in the contrast that arises between the motions of the irrational soul and those of the rational one. But he does seem to suggest that some conflict has to be present also among the motions of the irrational soul itself, insofar as he describes these motions as contributing to the "tumult" which dominates in that soul (43b 6-7). Plotinus, I suggest, seizes upon this point, and he reads *Tim*., 43b-44c as Plato's avowal of the conflicting nature of our sensory appearances which he identifies with the violent movements that cause the rational soul to see things as the opposite of what they are. Having done so, he concludes that Plato posits the shapes in light of the same reasoning from conflicting appearances that led Democritus to posit his shapes according to Sextus.

We can show this in two steps. First by noticing Plotinus' interest in the epistemological debate that Sextus engages in when he compares the Sceptics, the Heracliteans, and Democritus; and, second, through some observations pertaining to the structure of the argument for the impassibility of matter in III.6.[26]. If we look back at III.6.[26].7, 16-23, we can notice that Plotinus employs almost the same formula used by Sextus and Aristotle to describe the phenomenon of conflicting appearances. Sextus and Aristotle express the idea that appearances conflict by saying that "contraries appear to

hold of the same thing" (τὰ ἐναντία περὶ τὸ αὐτὸ φαίνεσθαι); Plotinus says of matter that it "always displays contrary images on it" (τὰ ἐναντία ἀεὶ ἐφ᾽ ἑαυτοῦ φανταζόμενον). Since τὰ ἐναντία περὶ τὸ αὐτὸ φαίνεσθαι is at least from Aristotle's time a standard formula in the kind of epistemological debate in which Sextus is engaged, its presence in III.6.[26] does show Plotinus' interest in, and intention to contribute to, that debate.

But let us see what use Plotinus makes of the idea of a conflict of appearances by taking a broader look at the structure of the argument for the impassibility of matter in III.6.[26]. Before exploring matter's impassibility, in what is generally considered the second part of III.6.[26], Plotinus, in III.6.[26].1-5, examines another sort of impassibility: that of soul. In this first part of the treatise he shows that there are no alterations in the soul nor motions, but only activities (ἐνέργειαι). Naturally, he is fully aware that his position might be taken to conflict with Plato's own, since Plato does often speak of "motions of the soul", and the "violent motions" through which he characterizes sensations in the *Timaeus* are a case in point.[42] Plotinus, thus, needs to reinterpret Plato's language and to show that what Plato means by "motions of the soul" are not physical or quasi-physical changes, but activities.[43]

At III.6.[26].5, 2-3, Plotinus suggests, by echoing Plato, that what "enters" the soul in sensation is a φάντασμα. A φάντασμα, I take it, is simply the content of the αἰσθητικὴ φαντασία that he mentions a few lines before, in III.6.[26].4, 45, which, in turn, can only be identified with the "undecidable" (ἀνεπίκριτος) φαντασία, and the "obscure quasi-belief" (ἀμυδρὰ οἷον δόξα) he also mentions in III.6.[26].4, at line 21.[44]

Now Plotinus is not innovating when he claims that our sensory φαντασίαι are "obscure quasi-beliefs", but has most likely in mind a passage

---

[42] Cf. Plat. *Tim*., 36d 8-e 5, 37a 5-b 8, 43b 5-44c 1; *Phileb*., 33d 2-34a 5, and Stephen Menn, "Aristotle's Definition of Soul and the Programme of the *De anima*", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 22 (2002), pp. 83-139, esp., p. 85.

[43] The idea of a quasi-physical change is meant to capture the difficulty of explaining how Plato, and some Platonists after him, such a Plutarch, for instance, might have conceived of "motions" in the soul, though admitting that the soul is not a body. On this see Menn, "Aristotle's Definition of Soul and the Programme of the *De anima*" op. cit.

[44] For an analysis of this point see chapter III.

from Alexander's *De anima* (p. 71) where we find a classification of sensory representations that is at least in part of Stoic origin.[45] Alexander claims that sensory "representations" (φαντασίαι) are primarily of two kinds: "obscure" (ἀμυδραί) and "intense" (σφοδραί). The most important and unifying characteristic of our "obscure representations", he says, is that they are never cataleptic, because they always represent their object in a confused and indistinct manner. As other sources inform us, the Stoics defined an "obscure representation" by opposition to a "clear" one.[46] If clear representations are such as to report all the characteristics of a sensible object or, at least, all of those characteristics that are most relevant for claiming that that object is the type of thing it is, an obscure representation is, in contrast, one that does not report all or the most relevant traits of its object, so that it ends up representing it in a confused way. A typical obscure representation for the Stoics is one that is caused by a distant object, when we cannot figure out what it is that we are looking at.

But Plotinus is far from innovating even when he describes our sensory representations as "undecidable". We have already encountered the adjective ἀνεπίκριτος in Aristocles' report on Pyrrho (cf. section 4 above). There is no reason to assume, however, that Plotinus took this adjective from Aristocles. In fact ἀνεπίκριτος is a very common adjective in the Hellenistic and Imperial epistemological debate, where it is always associated with a sceptical position. We can find it in Galen, but most of all in Sextus, who often uses it as some kind of technical term. Sextus generally uses ἀνεπίκριτος to describe the "disagreement" (διαφωνία) that dogmatic opinions fall into. However, he also employs it to characterise representations (cf. *Pyrr. hyp.*, I 117). A disagreement of opinions is "undecidable" for Sextus

[45] Cf. Michael Frede, "Stoics and Skeptics on Clear and Distinct Impressions", in Id. *Essays in Ancient Philosophy*, Minneapolis 1987, pp. 151-176, esp. p. 161. I say that Alexander's classification is "at least in part" Stoic because it starts with a distinction between "intense" (σφοδραί) and "obscure" (ἀμυδραί) representations, and, while the Stoics did consider some representations as "obscure", it is not clear to me that they ever labeled some of them as "intense". It is in fact Carneades who, influenced by Stoic vocabulary, divides what he calls the "apparently true representation" (ἡ φαινομένη ἀληθὴς φαντασία) into two types: the "obscure" one (ἀμυδρά), and the "intense" one (σφοδρά); cf. Sext. Emp. *Adv. math.*, VII171.

[46] On this see Frede, "Stoics and Skeptics on Clear and Distinct Impressions" op. cit., p. 161.

when we cannot arrive at a judgement (κρίσις) to sort it out, that is, when we cannot evaluate which opinions are true and which are false. The case of an "undecidable representation" is analogous. A representation is "undecidable" when we cannot arrive at a judgement (κρίσις) to sort out whether it is true or false, because it conflicts with other representations of the same object.[47] In general, Sextus uses the adjective "undecidable" when he engages in anti-Stoic polemics, and he wants to claim that the representations the Stoics think of as cataleptic are in fact just "undecidable".

It is certainly true that the *Timaeus* is not the only Platonic text that Plotinus has in mind in the first part of III.6.[26]. But, since it is the chief text with which he engages in the second part of the treatise, it seems reasonable to suggest that the "undecidable quasi-beliefs" that Plotinus introduces in III.6.[26].4 are the violent and contrary motions that Plato describes at *Tim.*, 43b-44c. These motions are "violent and contrary" for Plotinus because they are obscure and conflicting beliefs; and they are "undecidable" because they confuse the rational soul so as to make it see things in twisted and opposite ways.

I therefore suggest that Plotinus, in III.6.[26], reconstructs Plato's discussion of sensation and sensible qualities in the *Timaeus*. In his view, at 61c Plato introduces the shapes of the elements as an hypothesis to show matter's impassibility, after having explained that sensory appearances conflict at 43b-44c. Plotinus does the same: he explains why matter is impassible in the second part of III.6.[26], after having analyzed our sensory φαντασίαι in terms of conflicting appearances in the first part of the treatise. In so doing, he makes explicit the reason why, in his view, Plato frames the hypothesis that the παθήματα of soulless bodies are produced through shapes: it is on the grounds of an inference to the best explanation that aims to account for the nature of things starting from the phenomenon of conflicting appearances.

[47] On this disagreement as a form of undecidable conflict that depends on contradiction see Gisela Striker, "The Ten Tropes of Aenesidemus", in Ead., *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics*, Cambridge 1996, pp. 116-134, esp. p. 122-123.

In light of the background on which Plotinus works when he says that sensory representations are "undecidable" and "obscure", it seems safe to conclude that, by characterizing them in that way, he wants to make a polemical point against the Stoic notion of cataleptic representation. His point, I take it, is that the Stoic distinction between cataleptic and non-cataleptic sensory representations cannot hold; for all our sensory representations are obscure, and thus non-cataleptic. Since there are no cataleptic representations, Plotinus holds, neither can there be any assent to them. In fact, he goes on, besides being "obscure", sensory representations are also conflicting and "undecidable", so that none of them should be confidently taken as true. This does not mean, as it does not mean for a Pyrrhonist, for instance, that, when asked what colour an apple is, one cannot answer the question. It just means that, on the grounds of a sensory representation, one cannot say that the apple *really* is red, that is, that it is red "by nature". Interestingly, *Tim.*, 43b-44c, i.e. the text which Plotinus reads as presenting an account of the "obscure" and conflicting nature of sensory representations, is a text where Plato examines children's sensations. Now, the Stoics maintain that cataleptic representations are available only to adult human beings as opposed to children and animals.[48] In referring to that passage, Plotinus polemically suggests that in fact any sensory representation is something that we adult humans share with children and, possibly, with animals too.

It seems, then, that for Plotinus the Stoics are led to conceive of bodies as real beings which are qualified objects because they are misled by their belief that some sensory representations are cataleptic, when, in fact, no representation is ever such. He does not explain on what grounds he concludes that there are no cataleptic representations. But this is probably because he thinks he is not making a new charge against the Stoics, but rather is rehearsing what he takes to be the conclusion of a long debate between Academic sceptics, Pyrrhonists and Stoics that begins with Arcesilaus, the

[48] Cf. Sen. *De ira*, I 3, 8, where animal φαντασίαι are said to be *turbidae* and *confusae*. For the confusion that appearances cause in the soul see also Epictetus' *Discourses*, II 18. The only place in the the *Enneads* where Plotinus addresses explicitly the issue of animal's sensations, as far as I know, is IV.3.[27].28. On this see below, chapter III.

head of the Second Academy.[49] Zeno, the founder of the Stoic school, holds that human beings can reach knowledge by assenting to cataleptic representations, which they can use as criteria of truth. The assent to a cataleptic representation is an "apprehension" (κατάληψις) of what a thing really is. Against Zeno, Arcesilaus argues that no apprehension is possible, and that one should suspend judgement on all matters (cf. Cic. *Acad.*, II 77-78=LS 40D). Zeno at first defines a cataleptic representation as one that is 1) stamped (in the soul) by something that is, i.e. true; and 2) capable of reproducing with artistic precision all the features of its object, i.e. accurate.[50] But, against him, Arcesilaus points out that one can never tell which representations are true and which are false because they are indistinguishable. To meet this objection, Zeno introduces a third clause in the definition (cf. Sext. Emp. *Adv. math.*, VII 447-252=LS 40E). Cataleptic representations, he says, are also 3) such that they could not be caused by an object that is not their own, because they have a special mark, determined by their causal history that singles them out, and makes them such that one is forced to assent to them.[51] This is a strong thesis, but Zeno can find support for it in his ontology, and more precisely in the notion of the "peculiarly qualified". If each body is peculiarly qualified so as to be uniquely differentiated, it will always be discernible, and it will cause a unique representation through which it can be at least in principle infallibly grasped.[52] However, Arcesilaus launches a new attack by putting forward the so-called "Indiscernibility thesis" or ἀπαραλλαξία, that is, the thesis that there are indiscernible sensible objects. He invokes examples such as that of two eggs that are presented successively to someone's attention, and that are exchanged without the person noticing, or the case of two twins that cannot be distinguished by anybody. In the course of time the Stoics add more and more levels of

[49] The main lines of this debate are reconstructed by R. J. Hankinson, "Natural Criteria and the Transparency of Judgement. Antiochus, Philo and Galen on Epistemological Justification", in Brad Inwood and Jaap Mansfeld (eds.), *Assent and Argument*, Leiden 1997, pp. 161-216, esp. pp.161-183.
[50] The meaning of the first clause is disputed, for it is unclear whether Zeno meant to say that the representation has to be from something that is in the sense that it exists, or from something that is in the sense that it is such as represented. I think the second reading is the correct one.
[51] See Frede, "Stoics and Skeptics on Clear and Distinct Impressions" op. cit., p. 169.
[52] See David Sedley, "The Stoic Criterion of Identity", *Phronesis*, 27 (1982), pp. 255-275.

complexity to their theory of sensation, so as to block the attacks of the Academic sceptics (see, for instance, Sphaerus' story in Diog. Laert. VII 177=LS 40F), who insist that, no matter whether in principle each object is discernible, as a matter of fact it is not, because in point of evidence true and false representations are indistinguishable. The Academics, then, point to the hallucinations of madmen and drunks, and other such cases. The Stoics reply by saying that these examples are only representative of exceptional or non-standard situations, where some obstacle interferes with what would otherwise be a "normal" case of sensation, and they add a new precision: that cataleptic representations can be criteria of truth only when there is no "obstacle" (ἔνστημα) to them, such as a bad condition of the sense-organs (Sext. Emp. *Adv. math.*, VII 253). Academic sceptics and Pyrrhonists alike rebut that there is no non-question-begging criterion for establishing which perceptual conditions are to be privileged on the Stoics' account, so that their view that cataleptic representations are criteria of truth under "normal" perceptual conditions is bound to be arbitrary or to lead to a regress (see, esp., Sext. Emp. *Pyrr. hyp.*, I 164-177).

Not every Academic sceptic is committed to Arcesilaus' thesis of radical *akatalēpsia*, whereas every sceptic of any stripe contests the existence of cataleptic representations. In fact Arcesilaus is the only Academic sceptic that all our sources describe as being committed to radical *akatalēpsia*. It is unclear at this point (but see below section 1.8) whether Plotinus has any precise sceptical position in mind when he maintains that there are no cataleptic representations. But, be this as it may, when in III.6.[26] he says that all sensory representations are "obscure" and "undecidable", he suggests that, despite all the counter-moves made by the Stoics, the problems raised by Arcesilaus against the notion of cataleptic representation have never been solved. There are no cataleptic representations, Plotinus maintains, because there are no uniquely qualified objects that could give those representations their unique content; and there are no uniquely qualified objects because, at least on the Stoic account of what being qualified means, there are no intrinsically qualified objects at all.

1.6. VI.6.[34]*: Plotinus' criticism of the Stoics' third category*

In III.6.[26] Plotinus uses his analysis of the impassibility of matter to show that there are no matter-quality compounds in the sensible world, and to reduce the second Stoic category, i.e. the "qualified" to the fourth, i.e. "the relatively so disposed". If the sensible world contains only items in the fourth category, he reasons, then it is merely a stage-painting, that is, a *tableau* made of subjective and perceiver-dependent appearances with nothing out there that corresponds to them, beside a shapeless matter. But recall the outline of Plotinus' criticism of the Stoic theory of categories in VI.1.[42].29 (section 1.3 above). There Plotinus does not try to reduce the second to the fourth category directly, but rather proceeds by degrees. He assumes that the Stoics would answer his criticism of the second category by appealing to the third one. If the Stoics, hypothetically, were to concede that there are no corporeal qualities mixing with matter, he suggests, they would try to argue for the presence of intrinsic traits in matter by saying that these traits depend upon matter being "so disposed". In other words, the Stoics, to defend themselves, would shift the responsibility of accounting for the intrinsic differentiations of bodies, and they would ascribe the role of "qualifying" matter to some intrinsic dispositions or σχέσεις. Only if this move were in turn to fail, Plotinus observes, would they go on shifting the burden of such a "qualification" on other kinds of dispositions or σχέσεις, i.e. the extrinsic and relative dispositions that account for objects in the fourth category. Plotinus' claim, in III.6.[26], that matter is impassible already excludes that for him matter could be differentiated by any intrinsic disposition of its parts. But he seems to devote no special treatment to the Stoics' third category in III.6.[26], and he does not explain how that category in particular could be reduced to the fourth. However, he takes up this task in VI.6.[34]. The relevant passages are inspired by Plato's treatment of the material causes of being and coming to be at *Phaedo* 96a 5 ff. Plotinus uses Plato's discussion of material causes in the *Phaedo* in order to argue against the plausibility of differentiating bodies on the basis of supposedly intrinsic dispositions of their material parts.

At *Phaed.*, 96a, Socrates begins to recall his youthful enthusiasm for the inquiries of the philosophers of nature. When he was young, he says, he thought that he could discover in their works why each thing is and comes to be. He explains that he lost this hope when he saw the inadequacy of their causes. To make his point, he picks some examples of what his predecessors called causes of being and coming to be. They would have said, for instance, that a man is and becomes taller by things like "a head"; or they would have explained something's being and becoming two by "a coming together". Socrates observes that men can also be shorter "by a head", and something can become two also when it is split. Why should "a head", then, explain why someone becomes taller rather than shorter? He asks; and why should a "coming together" be the cause why something is two rather than one? He concludes that the philosophers of nature failed to hit upon the genuine causes of being and coming to be, which is why, he says, he began a new inquiry into these causes on the basis of a method of his own invention (99e 4). This method, he explains, rests on the use of hypotheses: he first formulates an hypothesis, and then he tests it, to see if the consequences that follow from it are consistent or in general compatible with each other. If they are compatible, he maintains the hypothesis, and he proceeds with the inquiry; if they are not, he discards it. The first hypothesis that he formulates to find out the real causes of being and coming to be, is what he calls "the safe answer". According to "the safe answer" things are and become beautiful, say, by "Beauty itself", and they are and become one by "One itself". "Beauty itself" and "One itself" are intelligible forms, and they are by themselves what bodies are and come to be by their presence, e.g. beautiful, hot, and so on.

The most common way of reading Socrates' criticism of his predecessors today rests on the idea that Socrates takes the material causes of the physicists as vacuous.[53] On this reading, Socrates would maintain that those causes are explanatory vacuous because sometimes the same cause can be invoked to explain opposite effects, and sometimes opposite ones can be invoked to explain the same effect. Thus, for instance, things like "heads"

[53] See Julia Annas, "Aristotle on Inefficient Causes", *Philosophical Quarterly*, 32 (1982), pp. 311-326; Steven Strange, "The Double Explanation in the *Timaeus*", in Gail Fine (ed.), *Plato*, Oxford 2000, pp. 399-417, esp. pp. 400-401.

seem to be causes of opposite effects, and things like "coming together" and "splitting" seem to be opposite causes of one and the same effect. Socrates would point out, then, that these causes cannot be genuine, because where one effect can be explained by opposite causes, and one cause can explain opposite effects, anything, in the end, can be used to explain anything else. This is why Socrates would introduce some new causes, which are capable of producing only one and the same effect: the forms.[54]

Plotinus attacks the Stoics' third category by assimilating it to the material causes that Socrates examines in the *Phaedo*, but diagnoses the problems that those causes raise in a way that is considerably different from today's standard interpretation. The relevant passages are in VI.6.[34].14, where Plotinus begins his argument thus:

> But if someone were to say that the one also, without being affected in any way, when something else comes to it (προσελθόντος ἄλλου) will no longer be one but two, he will not be speaking correctly. For it was not the one which became two, neither the one which was added nor the one it was added to (οὐ γὰρ τὸ ἓν ἐγένετο δύο, οὔτε ᾧ προσετέθη οὔτε τὸ προστεθέν), but each of them remains one, as it was; but the "two" is predicated of both, and the "one" separately of each, which remains what it is (χωρὶς δὲ τὸ ἓν καθ᾽ ἑκατέρου μένοντος). The two and the dyad is not therefore by nature in a disposition (φύσει ἐν σχέσει). But if two was by coming together, and coming together was the same thing as making two, perhaps the two and the dyad would be a disposition of this kind (ἀλλ᾽ εἰ μὲν κατὰ τὴν σύνοδον καὶ τὸ συνόδῳ εἶναι ταὐτὸν τῷ δύο ποιεῖν τάχ᾽ ἂν ἦν ἡ τοιαύτη σχέσις τὰ δύο καὶ ἡ δυάς). (*Enn.*, VI.6.[34].14, 13-21; Armstrong, slightly modified).

This passage picks up *Phaed.*, 96e 6-97a 6, where Socrates examines how his predecessors explained being and becoming two. First, Plotinus discards the possibility of explaining becoming two by saying that, given *x* and *y*, either *x* becomes two when it is added to *y*, or *y* becomes two when it is added to *x*. Both *x* and *y*, he says, remain what they are after the addition, and neither of them becomes two. Then, a more promising explanation is put forward.

[54] On the actual causal power of the forms, as opposed to a mere explanatory power, see David Sedley, "Platonic Causes", *Phronesis*, 43 (1998), pp. 114-132. Plotinus' reading of the forms' causal power is in line with Sedley's interpretation.

Perhaps, Plotinus goes on, becoming two is caused by a "coming together" (σύνοδος) of *x* and *y*. The reasoning so far follows step by step Socrates' remarks in the *Phaedo*. But Plotinus' focus throughout the passage is on a notion that is not explicitly mentioned in that dialogue, i.e. the notion of "disposition" (σχέσις). Thus, he says that "coming together" is a way in which *x* and *y* might happen to be disposed, and we are told that, if this "coming together" is the cause of being and becoming two, it follows that two is caused by, and it is by its very essence, this specific disposition, the essence of two being also the cause why it comes about. Since the term σχέσις is a technical term which is generally used in the sources to indicate the third or the fourth Stoic category, it seems that Plotinus uses this term to point out the affinity between those categories and the material causes of the *Phaedo*, things like "coming together", that Plato ascribes to the philosophers of nature.[55] However, since a "coming together" seems to indicate that the disposition is not merely extrinsic to the object that is put together, but rather rests on a redistribution of its parts, I suggest that here by σχέσις Plotinus means the second category in particular. It is the Stoics' third category, then, that in his view is to be assimilated to a material cause. But let us see why, for Plotinus, a "coming together" cannot be a genuine cause of something being and becoming two:

> But as it is the dyad is also observed on the other hand in the opposite way of being affected; for when some one thing is cut, it becomes two (σχισθέντος γὰρ ἑνός τινος γίνεται δύο); so that the two is neither a coming together nor a cutting, so as to be a disposition (οὔτε σύνοδος οὔτε σχίσις τὰ δύο, ἵν' ἂν ἦν σχέσις). And the same argument applies to every number. For, when it is a disposition which produces something, it is impossible for the opposite disposition to produce the same thing so that this thing can be the disposition (ὅταν γὰρ σχέσις ᾖ ἡ γεννωσά τι, ἀδύνατον τὴν ἐναντίαν τὸ αὐτὸ γεννᾶν, ὡς τοῦτο εἶναι τὸ πρᾶγμα τὴν σχέσιν). What then is the proper cause (τὸ κύριον αἴτιον) of number? (*Enn.*, VI.6.[34].14, 21-27; Armstrong).

[55] That Plotinus argues against the Stoics, among others, in IV.6.[34] is shown by his remarks in chapter 12.

Plotinus has still the *Phaedo* in mind (cf. 97a 6-b 7), and, like Socrates there, he remarks that a splitting, i.e. some kind of "cutting" or "coming apart" (σχίσις), can be the cause of becoming and being two as much as a "coming together". But, once again, Plotinus interprets this "coming apart" as a disposition, i.e. I take it, as a reference to the Stoics' third category. Thus, while Socrates describes "coming apart" as "the opposite cause" of two (ἐναντία αἰτία 97a 8), meaning by this that it is opposite to the cause that he has previously mentioned, i.e. the "coming together", Plotinus speaks of "coming apart" as a cause of two which consists in "the opposite disposition" (ἐναντία σχέσις), that is, in a disposition that is the opposite of a "coming together". At first it might seem that there is no real contrast between speaking of "opposite causes" and "opposite dispositions". One might say, for instance, that the causes of which Socrates speaks are opposite because they are opposite dispositions of an object's parts. This, I think, is indeed how Plotinus reads the Socratic reference to "opposite causes"; but the shift of focus from causes to dispositions reveals his peculiar diagnosis of the problem with the material causes.

If your focus is on opposite causes you are most likely to diagnose the problem Socrates deals with in the standard way, that is, by saying that it is vacuous to account for opposite effects through one cause or to explain one effect by two opposite causes. But if your focus is primarily on dispositions, as is Plotinus', the analysis unfolds in a different direction. Consider the grounds on which Plotinus discards "coming together" and "coming apart" as causes of two in the passage quoted above: "When it is a disposition which produces something—he says—, it is impossible for the opposite disposition to produce the same thing so that this thing can be the disposition" (ὅταν γὰρ σχέσις ᾖ ἡ γεννωσά τι, ἀδύνατον τὴν ἐναντίαν τὸ αὐτὸ γεννᾶν, ὡς τοῦτο εἶναι τὸ πρᾶγμα τὴν σχέσιν). The argument, I think, runs like this. Assume that a disposition, such as "coming together" is the cause of being and becoming two. On this assumption, you must maintain two things: that "coming together" brings about two, as it is the cause of its coming to be; and that this "coming together" is all there is in being two, as it is also the cause of being two. Then, notice that "coming apart" can bring about two as well. From

this new observation you will have to conclude that this second disposition, i.e. "coming apart", is a cause of being and coming to be two, i.e. it causes two to come about, and it is all there is in being two. But "coming together" and "coming apart" are opposite dispositions, and, if they both are what it is to be two, it follows that "twoness" is opposite things at the same time. Now you have to concede that nothing can be opposite things by its very nature; hence, you must conclude that "coming together" and "coming apart" cannot be the real causes of being and becoming two; and since "coming together" and "coming apart" are dispositions, you can generalize and say that dispositions cannot be real causes of being and becoming. In other words, Plotinus rejects the material causes of the physicists because he thinks that, on their grounds, one would be led to the absurd conclusion that one and the same thing is by its very nature *F* and non-*F*. These causes for him do not explain anything, but rather are bound to lead to absurd results.

This, then, is how Plotinus concludes his argument against the material causes viewed as dispositions of an object's parts:

> A thing is one by the presence of the one and two by the presence of the dyad, just as it is white by the presence of the white and beautiful by that of the beautiful and just by that of the just. Otherwise, one would not be able to maintain that these exist either, but would have to make dispositions responsible for these two (ἢ οὐδὲ ταῦτα θετέον εἶναι, ἀλλὰ σχέσεις καὶ ἐν τούτοις αἰτιατέον), as if the just was so because of this particular disposition in respect to these particular things, and the beautiful because we are so disposed, with nothing existing in the object itself of a kind to dispose us, and nothing coming from outside to what appears beautiful (οὐδενὸς ὄντος ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ ὑποκειμένῳ οἵου διαθεῖναι ἡμᾶς οὐδ' ἥκοντος ἐπακτοῦ τῷ καλῷ φαινομένῳ). (*Enn.*, VI.6.[34].14, 27-33; Armstrong, slightly modified).

Plotinus here generalizes the consequences of Plato's reflections on the material causes of one and two. If you maintain that things are and come to be one or two by being differentiated through the dispositions of their parts, then you have to concede that everything is what it is through such dispositions: white things, and sensible things in general, and even things like justice; they all become a matter of dispositions. The point about justice is particularly

significant; for it seems that Chrysippus introduced the third category precisely in order to avoid reducing virtues to merely extrinsic dispositions of the soul. Plotinus here seems to suggest that Chrysippus' efforts were in vain, because to say that something is what it is (e.g. that a soul is just) only in virtue of a disposition of its parts is not different, in the end, from saying that the differentiations of an object are not "in that object", but merely appear to be in it. Since an object whose differentiation is not "in it" falls into the fourth category, what Plotinus says here is that there is no difference between third and fourth category, for in both cases the objects that fall under them are not what they are intrinsically or by themselves. This conflation of the third with the fourth category is of course polemical, and it is probably made in light of some Platonic passages such as *Symp.*, 211a, where Plato suggests that sensible things are whatever they are only in a relational way, and this is the reason why they always appear to be both *F* and non-*F*. But, no matter how crude and unfair the conflation may be, it rests on an argument that can be found in Sextus' Modes of suspension of judgement. Sextus, like the Stoics and Plotinus, presupposes that for something to be really *F*, or *F* by nature, it must be *F* in a non-relational way; that is to say, it must be *F* by itself and in all circumstances. But according to the Seventh Mode of suspension of judgement (*Pyrr. hyp.*, I 129-134, see also the Fifth Mode, 118-123), if something is what it is in virtue of the disposition of its parts, it cannot be *F* by itself. The Seventh Mode is the Mode that leads to suspension of judgement concerning what is or is not really the case on the basis of the quantities and "constitutions" (σκευασίαι) of things, where by "constitution" what is meant is the manner of "composition" (σύνθεσις). Take a few pebbles: when they are scattered apart they appear to be rough, but when combined in a heap they seem soft, and, Sextus says, in this situation you cannot conclude that the pebbles are either rough or soft in themselves, but you must suspend judgement, and concede that the pebbles only appear to be soft or rough. Plotinus, I think, reasons in an analogous way in VI.6.[34], when he infers that if something is such and such only because of the dispositions of its parts, then it is so only in an extrinsic and relational way, insofar as it merely appears to be so. Some things, he suggests, when bound together, seem two; but they also

seem two when split; and this means that they are not two by themselves, but are so in a merely extrinsic way, so that they only appear to be so. In assimilating the Stoics' dispositions to things like a "coming together" or a "splitting", he implicitly suggests that those dispositions are something like what Sextus calls "the composition" of a thing, which accounts for the thing appearing in different ways, rather than for its being in this or that way. Hence, Plotinus concludes that, when the Stoics account for the differentiations of objects by means of the third category, in fact they simply slip into accounting for those differentiations through the fourth category. Since, by the Stoics' own admission, the fourth category accounts only for relational and extrinsic differentiations, Plotinus infers that the third category leads to a conception of the sensible world in terms of mere relative appearances. It is the use of a sceptical argument, then, that allows Plotinus to reduce the third category to the fourth, and a sceptical influence might also be at the origin of his reading of those passages of the *Phaedo* that examine the nature of numbers (cf. Sext. Emp., *Adv. math.*, XI 297-330, where Sextus discards the possibility of explaining how numbers come to be by appealing to the addition and subtraction of bodies). Once again, I am not suggesting here that Plotinus read Sextus; the suggestion, rather, is that he is familiar with the kind of argumentative strategies that are used by Sextus, and that, to some extent, are shared by all the Ancient sceptics.

1.7. *The Stoics and the* Theaetetus

We can now attempt a complete, albeit speculative, reconstruction of the way in which Plotinus develops the anti-Stoic strategy that he outlines in VI.1.[42].29 (section 1.3 above). Plotinus observes that the Stoics are committed to the view that in standard conditions, a normal, adult human, as opposed to a child or an animal, can have cataleptic representations. Cataleptic representations, the Stoics maintain, are a criterion of truth, and, in virtue of a causal mark, they force one to assent to them. Sensation is the assent to a cataleptic sensory representation, and it is an apprehension of what a thing really is by itself. It is this trust in the cognitive power of sensation, based on the notion of cataleptic representation, Plotinus argues, that leads the Stoics to

conceive of bodies as real beings that are differentiated through the presence of an intrinsic quality or through an intrinsic disposition or through some relative and extrinsic disposition. But, he remarks, the Stoics tie the epistemic power of sensation to their ontology, and, in fact, they ground that power on their ontology. For it is because objects, in their view, are intrinsically and peculiarly qualified in certain ways that they can maintain that, at least in principle, every adult human can have cataleptic representations.[56] Yet, he points out, this match between epistemology and ontology is not as sound as it seems to be. He starts by considering the notion of cataleptic representation in light of the criticisms raised against it by Academics and Pyrrhonists, and he concludes that in fact there are no sensory representations that are clear, distinct, and distinguishably true. In contrast, he says, all sensory representations, as the sceptics point out, are "obscure" and conflicting, and this suggests that there are no uniquely qualified objects in the world. Thus, on the basis of an argument from conflicting appearances, which he uses to argue for the thesis of the impassibility of matter, Plotinus shows that, in a world conceived of according to the principles of Stoic ontology, there can be no peculiarly qualified objects, nor can there be any qualified objects at all. Then, by using sceptical strategies, he proceeds to reject the view that there could be at least objects that are intrinsically differentiated through a disposition of their material parts. His general conclusion is that, when appropriately analyzed, Stoic ontology leaves room only for a shapeless matter that is merely extrinsically and relationally disposed so as to appear such and such in a sensory representation, without really being what it appears to be. From this he infers that the only thing that a sensory representation can reveal is what appears to be the case to a perceiver.

I suggest that, by following this train of thought, Plotinus brings about a reduction of the second and third category to the fourth one. Now recall his final goal: he wants to show that the Stoics are wrong in thinking that bodies are real beings (section 1.2). But bodies, in Stoic ontology, "are" because of

[56] Notice that I am not suggesting here that the introduction of the notion of "peculiarly qualified" is an *ad hoc* move on the Stoics' part that was made in order to find further support for cataleptic representations. However, I think that Plotinus might indeed view it that way or nearly so. See on this Frede, "Stoics and Skeptics on Clear and Distinct Impressions" op. cit., p. 163.

matter, in the sense that they exist insofar as they are material. If the world were just matter "relatively so disposed", the bodies we encounter in our daily life would only be images on a stage-painting, that is, mere relative appearances; but their substrate, i.e. matter, would still be something, and it would still be a body. Let us look more closely at the Stoic account of matter, then.

For the Stoics matter is a passive, quality-less substrate. But several sources inform us that they thought of it as a "flowing substance" (οὐσία ῥευστή), that is, as a substance that is always subject to change in every respect (Aët. I 8, 2; SVF II 305).[57] We can perhaps better grasp this notion by viewing it against the background of a Platonist conception of matter with which it has several aspects in common. By the time of Plotinus, there was a long-standing Platonist tradition that interpreted the *Timaeus*' receptacle in terms of a "flowing matter" (ὕλη ῥευστή), conceived of as a metaphysical principle of transformation and change. In this tradition, the receptacle was generally interpreted in light of Pythagorean doctrines on the nature of matter, and it was often identified with the Indefinite Dyad of Plato's unwritten doctrines. As Fernanda Decleva Caizzi has pointed out, the oldest evidence for a tendency to view matter as a metaphysical principle of transformation is a passage in Damascius, where we read that Aristotle, in his books *On Archytas*, said that Pythagoras called matter "other" (ἄλλο), because matter is ῥευστή, and it becomes always "other" (*De princ.*, II 172, 16-22). Probably Damascius does not report Aristotle's own words, for the adjective ῥευστή never appears elsewhere in the Aristotelian *corpus*, and, thus, it seems suspicious. But, in any case, the passage reflects views about the Pythagorean conception of matter that gained currency in the Academy. Thus, for instance, we know that Xenocrates identified the receptacle with matter and the Dyad, and that he used to describe it as "everflowing" (ἀέναον), which is an adjective that appears in the Pythagorean Oath (frs. 101 and 102 Isnardi Parente; and cf. Sext. Emp. *Adv. math.*, VII 94 for the text of the Oath). From the Academy this notion of "flowing matter" was passed on to the Middle Platonists. We

[57] See Fernanda Decleva Caizzi, "La 'materia scorrevole'. Sulle trace di un dibattito perduto", in Barnes and Mignucci (eds.), *Matter and Metaphysics* op. cit., pp. 425-470.

find it, with some variations, in Eudorus of Alexandria, Philo, Numenius, and Plutarch.[58] All these authors viewed matter as ῥευστή because they thought of it as an all pliable substrate that was capable of undergoing any kind of change. This is why they also used to described it as "passible" (παθητή). Now an analogous line of interpretation of the receptacle was pursued by the Stoics, and some Ancient sources witness a cross-contamination between the Platonist, the Pythagorean, and the Stoic conception of matter (see, esp., Aët. I 8, 2, where the same notion of matter as ὕλη ῥευστή and παθητή is ascribed to Thales, Pythagoras, and the Stoics; cf. I 24, 3). The Stoics, of course, did not identify the receptacle with the Dyad, but their notion of matter as οὐσία ῥευστή stems from an interpretation of the receptacle as metaphysical principle of change that is analogous to the Platonist interpretation that I have just presented.

We have already seen that Plotinus argues against the Stoics—and, in general, against the line of interpretation of the receptacle that they follow—that matter cannot be subject to change, and, thus, it cannot be παθητή. But, most importantly, Plotinus wants to show, against the Stoics, that matter is not οὐσία, but is non-being. He does not mean to suggest that matter is nothing at all, however; rather he wants to say that it is non-being in a special sense. Consider this passage from III.6.[26].7, where we read that matter is

> Truly non being (ἀληθινῶς μὴ ὄν), an image and a phantasma (φάντασμα) of mass, a yearning for substantial existence; […] it always displays contrary images on itself (τὰ ἐναντία ἀεὶ ἐφ᾽ ἑαυτοῦ φανταζόμενον), small and great, less and more, deficiency and excess, […]. Therefore all its declarations are false (πᾶν ὃ ἂν ἐπαγέλληται ψεύδεται); if it appears great, it is small; if it appears more, it is less (κἂν μέγα φανταση̃, μικρόν ἐστι, κἂν μᾶλλον, ἧττόν ἐστι), and its being in a semblance is no being at all, but like some elusive illusion. (*Enn*., III.6.[26].7, 12-23; Fleet, slightly modified).

By saying that matter is small and great, less and more, Plotinus reveals that he identifies matter with the the Indefinite Dyad (cf. Aristot. *Metaph.*, I 6,

[58] For this see John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, Ithaca 1996.

987b 20; XIV 1, 1087b 7-8). But, when he says that matter is "truly non-being", he suggests that the notion of matter as Dyad needs to be spelled out in light of Plato's discussion of non-being at *Soph.*, 254d ff.[59] Since Plato there describes non-being as "other", the suggestion here is that matter is non-being as what is constantly "other" in respect to any sensible quality. An analogous remark is made at II.4.[12].16, 1-3, where, in echoing *Soph.*, 257c 5-258e 5, Plotinus says that matter is "other" in the sense of being that "part of otherness" which is opposed to each real being or form.[60] This means that for Plotinus matter "is" only in the sense that, for any predicate, it is not that predicate (cf. II.4.[17].13, 28); which is why he claims, in the passage quoted above, that all matter's declarations are false, for "if it appears great, it is small; if it appears more, it is less". But the problem now is this: why should these observations about matter's non-being work against the Stoics? There is no reason why a Stoic should accept this description of matter based on the notion of "other", and, thus, there is no reason why Plotinus' commitment to matter's non-being should count against their conception of matter as οὐσία ῥευστή. There has to be more to matter's non-being than the "otherness" of the *Sophist*.

Let me begin by considering a second line of interpretation of the receptacle that seems to have been in place by Plotinus' time. This tradition of intepretation indentified the receptacle with matter, but did not view matter as a metaphysical principle, but as corresponding to the entirety of the sensible world, conceived of as a world of "becoming". Even though matter is not mentioned in the *Theaetetus*, this tradition paid special attention to the φερομένη οὐσία introduced at 179d, where Plato begins to examine the Secret Doctrine in light of the ontology of the Heracleiteans, by claiming: "We shall have to consider and test this moving Being (σκεπτέον τὴν φερομένην ταύτην οὐσίαν), and find whether it rings true or sounds as if it had some flow in it" (179d 2-4; Levett). The "moving Being" here is the "being" of the Secret Doctrine, and this means that, when he speaks of

[59] That which is "truly non-being" here corresponds to the ὄντως μὴ ὄν of *Soph.*, 254d 2. See Fleet, *Plotinus.* Ennead III op. cit., p. 170.
[60] See on this Denis O'Brien, "Plotinus on Matter and Evil", in Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* op. cit., pp. 171-195, esp. p. 173.

φερομένη οὐσία, Plato means to refer to a world where everything is change. But, by the middle of the second century AD at the latest, the φερομένη οὐσία was interpreted by some Platonists as matter. The main witness of this kind of reading is the anonymous commentator of the *Theaetetus*, who was probably active at the latest around the middle of the second century AD. For the Anonymous, Plato has in mind the Secret Doctrine, when he mentions the φερομένη οὐσία; but, in his view, this οὐσία is not a being that has been reduced to change, but is matter, conceived of as all there is. This world of matter for the Anonymous, which is the world of the Secret Doctrine, is changing because everything in it is subject to a constant replacement of its components (col. LXX 27-col. LXXI 46). There are some kinds of effluences leaving every sensible thing, he suggests, and what is lost by a body is constantly replaced by new material. On the basis of *Theaet.*, 152e 2-4, the Anonymous ascribes this conception of the world to all the philosophers of nature, and he claims that it was voiced, in particular, by the comic poet Epicharmus, whom Plato mentions, in fact, at 152e 5. The Anonymous, that is, interprets the notion of being that Plato develops in the Secret Doctrine as corresponding to a general Presocratic conception of the world as material, and he summarizes this view by saying that it is the view according to which all things are in "flux" (ῥύσις), where what is meant by "flux" is the constant replacement of particles through effluences and additions of material components (cf. LXXI 26).

However, there are other sources that suggest that the φερομένη οὐσία was identified at some point with matter, conceived of as the totality of what exists. For consider Sextus' remarks on Protagoras in *Pyrr. hyp*, I:

> He [i.e. Protagoras] says that matter is in a state of flux (φησὶν οὖν ὁ ἀνὴρ τὴν ὕλην ῥευστὴν εἶναι), and that as it flows additions continually replace the effluxes; and that our sense are rearranged (μετακοσμεῖσθαι) and altered depending on age and on other constitutions of the body. (Sext. Emp. *Pyrr. hyp.*, I 217; Annas and Barnes).

Sextus might not be thinking of the Protagoras of the Secret Doctrine, and we do not know what sources he relies on. But it is reasonable to suggest that, if

his attribution of a notion of "flowing matter" to Protagoras did not originate from a reading of the *Theaetetus*, it was at least not entirely independent from it.[61] For there are remarkable similarities between this passage from Sextus and the Anonymous. Recall that the Anonymous suggests that matter is "flowing" in the sense that there are material effluences that continuously shift from place to place. Now Protagoras, in Sextus, seems to have the very same conception of matter's flux. But, most importantly, Sextus seems to suggest that Protagoras identified his matter with the totality of the sensible world, which is the same kind of view that the Anonymous sees at work in the Secret Doctrine. This can be gathered from a passage in *Pyrr. hyp.*, III which is parallel to that quoted above from book I:[62]

> Next, some have also puzzled about rest in nature, saying that what moves does not rest but all bodies move continuously according to the supposition of the Dogmatists who say that being is in flux (ῥευστὴν εἶναι λεγόντων τὴν οὐσίαν) and is always producing effuxions and additions—so that Plato says that bodies are not even beings but rather calls them coming into being and Heraclitus compares the mobility of our matter (τὴν εὐκινησίαν τῆς ἡμετέρας ὕλης) to the swift flowing (ῥύσις) of a river. (Sext. Emp. *Pyrr. hyp.*, III 115; Annas and Barnes, slightly modified).

Even though there is no mention of Protagoras here, the conception of matter under discussion is the same as that ascribed to him in I 217, as shown by the reference to the effluences. What we learn from III 115 is that the "flowing matter" in which Protagoras is interested is "our matter", i.e. the matter of which our body and any other body in the world is made; and this means that matter here is not viewed as a metaphysical principle.

However, *Pyrr. hyp.*, III 115 (cf. also *Adv. math.*, VIII 7) also seems to witness a tendency to associate Protagoras', Plato's, and Heracleitus' conception of the sensible world. This association of Plato to Protagoras and Heracleitus *via* the notion of ὕλη or οὐσία ῥευστή seems to rest on Plato's

[61] Caizzi, "La material scorrevole" op. cit. p. 461, argues that the conception of matter that Sextus presents might go back to Asclepiades of Bythinia, but points out that Diogenes Laertius at IX 51 says that for Alscepiades soul is nothing but sensations "*as Plato says in the* Theaetetus". Thus, even if Sextus were to ascribe to Protagoras a theory of matter that is influenced by Asclepiades' views, nonetheless this theory could still be linked to the Secret Doctrine.

[62] The passage is presented as parallel to I 217 by Caizzi, "La material scorrevole" op. cit., p. 459.

claim that sensible things always "become" and never are. But this claim is made both in the context of the Secret Doctrine (*Theaet.*, 152e 1), and in the *Timaeus* (27c). Thus it seems that at least some of those who interpreted the Secret Doctrine as involving a "flowing matter" that corresponds to the totality of the world also saw the same conception of matter at work in the *Timaeus*. Support for this suggestion can be found in Diogenes Laertius, who reports, in III 9, the views of a certain Alcimus, an otherwise unknown thinker. Alcimus is hostile to Plato, for he accuses Plato of having plagiarized Epicharmus. But what matters for us are the grounds on which this accusation of plagiarism is raised. Alcimus says that:

> It is evident that Plato often employs the words of Epicharmus. Just consider. Plato asserts that the object of sense is that which never abides either in quality or in quantity, but is ever in flux and change (αἰσθητὸν μὲν εἶναι τὸ μηδέποτε ἐν τῷ ποιῷ μηδὲ ποσῷ διαμένον ἀλλ᾽ ἀεὶ ῥέον καὶ μεταβάλλον). The assumption is that the things from which you take away number are no longer equal nor determinate, nor have they quantity or quality. These are the things to which becoming always, and being never, belongs (ἀεὶ γένεσις, οὐσία δὲ μηδέποτε πέφυκε). But the object of thought is something constant from which nothing is subtracted, to which nothing is added (νοητὸν δὲ ἐξ οὗ μηθὲν ἀπογίνεται μηδὲ προσγίνεται). (Diog. Laert. III 9; Hicks).[63]

There is some controversy about the authenticity of this alleged quotation from Alcimus; but, in any case, the passage begins with a discussion of flux which is analogous to the one we have found in the anonymous commentator of the *Theaetetus*, as is shown by the reference to Epicharmus and to the idea that change depends on additions and subtractions of material parts. Alcimus applies this notion of flux, which the Anonymous uses to spell out the Secret Doctrine, to the "becoming" introduced by Plato at *Tim.*, 27d. That Alcimus has in mind the *Timaeus* is suggested by the distinction he draws between sensible and intelligible things. For this distinction (which is not mentioned in the *Theaetetus*) picks up *Tim.*, 27c-d, and it is developed on the basis of *Tim.*, 52a 1-6. Alcimus, in fact, says that the intelligible is that from which nothing

[63] R.D. Hicks (ed.), *Diogenes Laertius. Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Cambridge MA 1925, 2 Vols.

is subtracted and to which nothing is added; and, at *Tim.*, 52a 1-6, Plato claims that, in contrast to what is sensible and "constantly in motion" (πεφορημένον), the intelligible "neither receives into itself anything else […], nor itself enters into anything else anywhere" (οὔτε εἰς ἑαυτὸ εἰσδεχόμενον ἄλλο […] οὔτε αὐτὸ εἰς ἄλλο ποι ἰόν) (*Tim.*, 52a 1-2; Zeyl).

Briefly, then, Diogenes is the witness of a tendency among Plato's detractors to link the conception of the world of the Secret Doctrine to that of the *Timaeus via* the notion of "becoming" that Plato presents at *Theaet.*, 152d 7-e 1 and *Tim.*, 27c-d. The resemblance between the two passages, in fact, as many commentators have pointed out, is remarkable. After having observed that according to the Secret Doctrine nothing is anything by itself, Socrates says, in the *Theaetetus* that:

> What is really true is this: the things of which we naturally say that they "are", are in process of coming to be, as the result of movement and change and blending with one another. We are wrong when we say they "are", since nothing ever is, but everything is always coming to be (ἀεὶ δὲ γίγνεται) (*Theaet.*, 152d 7-e 1; Levett, slightly modified).

Similarly, right at the beginning of his cosmological account, Timaeus claims that:

> As I see it, then, we must begin by making the following distinction: what is *that which always is* and has no becoming, and what is *that which always becomes*, but never is? (τί τὸ ὂν ἀεί, γένεσιν δὲ οὐκ ἔχον, καὶ τί τὸ γιγνόμενον μὲν ἀεί, ὂν δὲ οὐδέποτε;) The former is grasped by understanding, which involves a reasoned account (νοήσει μετὰ λόγου). It is unchanging. The latter is grasped by opinion, which involves unreasoning sense-perception (δόξῃ μετ᾽ αἰσθήσεως ἀλόγου). (*Tim.*, 27c 5-28a 2; Zeyl modified).

Now let me go back to Plotinus. Plotinus does not think that matter could be identified with the whole of the sensible world, because "down here" for him, beside matter, there are the intelligible λόγοι. But he is interested in this second line of interpretation of the receptacle for polemical purposes.

Consider III.6.[26].6-7. III.6.[26].6-7 contains a brief exposition of Plotinus' ontology. Plotinus explains that there are three distinct and hierarchically organized orders of reality. The first from the top is real being, which is eternal, unchangeable, able to contain "all things together" (ὁμοῦ πάντα), and receptive of nothing (for if it were to receive something, this would have to be non-being).[64] This real being is identified with *Nous* and the forms, and it is described as the most complete life. The second rank is held by bodies, which are said to "come to be" and to be subject to "flux" (ῥοή). In contrast to *Nous* and the forms, rather than properly being, they are said to "seem to be". Finally, at the lowest level of the hierarchy, there is matter which is where bodies come or appear to be. It is shapeless and unlimited; and it is what Plato refers to when he speaks of what is "truly non-being" (ἀληθινῶς μὴ ὄν). As Barrie Fleet has remarked, this threefold ontology clearly reflects Plato's distinction, at *Tim.* 48e 2 ff., between the intelligible paradigm, its copy, and the receptacle;[65] however, it is also built on the grounds of Plato's remarks at *Tim.*, 52a-b. Plotinus refers to 52a 1-3 when he claims that real being is "eternal, unchanging, receptive of nothing" (III.6.[26].6, 19-20); he refers to 52a 6-7 when he remarks that bodies "come to be" and are subject to flux (III.6.[26].6, 76-77); finally, he points at *Tim.*, 52b 1 when he describes matter as the universal substrate of becoming (III.6.[26].7, 1). The reason why 52a-b is so important for Plotinus is that there Plato refers back to 27d, where the basic ontological distinction that frames the inquiry of the *Timaeus* is introduced; I mean the distinction between "that which always is" (the intelligible) and "that which always becomes" (the sensible world). *Tim*., 52a-b summarizes 27c-28a, but adds a third kind of reality to the two that are mentioned there, i.e. the receptacle. Thus, *Tim*., 52a-b maps the ontology of 27c-28a into the schema of paradigm/copy/receptacle, which is introduced at 48e.

The question is this: what is "that which always becomes" for Plotinus? Plato seems to explain the nature of "that which always becomes" at *Tim.*, 49a

[64] Cf., Plat. *Soph.*, 248e. The view that real being contains "all things together" is inspired by Anaxagoras fr. B1.
[65] Cf. Fleet (ed.), *Plotinus.* Ennead III op. cit., pp. 146-147.

6-50c 6, where he describes the so-called primary bodies that come to be in the receptacle. These bodies, he says, are not real bodies, but only "traces" (ἴχνη) of the elements that make the receptacle appear now "inflamed", now "moistened", and so on. Plotinus seems to follow Plato, and in III.6.[26].12, in commenting upon *Tim.*, 49a 6-50c 6, he introduces the idea that "that which always become" is matter. But now notice how Plotinus describes the way in which matter "becomes" in III.6.[26].7:

> Truly non being (ἀληθινῶς μὴ ὄν), an image and a phantasma (φάντασμα) of mass, a yearning for substantial existence; […] it always displays contrary images on itself (τὰ ἐναντία ἀεὶ ἐφ᾽ ἑαυτοῦ φανταζόμενον), small and great, less and more, deficiency and excess, […]. Therefore all its declarations are false (πᾶν ὃ ἂν ἐπαγέλληται ψεύδεται); if it appears great, it is small; if it appears more, it is less (κἂν μέγα φανταση̃, μικρόν ἐστι, κἂν μᾶλλον, ἧττόν ἐστι), and its being in a semblance is no being at all, but like some elusive illusion. (*Enn*., III.6.[26].7, 12-23; Fleet, slightly modified).

Compare these remarks to *Theaet.*, 152d, where Socrates introduces Protagoras' Secret Doctrine for the first time:

> I'll tell you; and this, now, is certainly no ordinary theory—I mean the theory that there is nothing which in itself is just one thing: nothing which you could rightly call anything or any kind of thing. If you call a thing large, it will appear as small (ἐὰν ὡς μέγα προσαγορεύῃς, καὶ σμικρὸν φανεῖται), and if you call it heavy, it is liable to appear as light, and so on with everything, because nothing is anything or any kind of thing. (Plat. *Theaet*., 152d 2-6; Levett).

Plotinus, it seems, describes matter in a way that is meant to remind the reader of Plato's description of the world of the Secret Doctrine.[66] Matter, Plotinus suggests, is always the opposite of what it is, and you cannot call it great or small or, more generally, "this" or "such" or "one thing", because it is nothing by itself (cf. 152d 7-e 1); it "always becomes" (ἀεὶ γίγνεται) such and such in a relational way. Then consider this other passage from III.6.[26].8, where

[66] However, see also the Hypothesis VII of Plato's *Parmenides*.

Plotinus explains how qualities (ποιότητες), that he has just said are caused by δυνάμεις or λόγοι, are present in matter:

> […] what suffers the affection is also what suffers destruction. But matter cannot be destroyed—for what would its destruction result in, and how could it take place? Yet since matter receives in it countless myriads of qualities, such as various instances of heat and cold (λαβοῦσα ἐν αὐτῇ θερμότητας, ψυχρότητας, μυρίας καὶ ἀπείρους ὅλως ποιότητας), and is differentiated by them and contains them *as if* they were natural to it (συμφύτους) and *as if* they were all blended together (συγκεκραμένας ἀλλήλαις)—for the qualities cannot exist apart, nor can matter itself remain isolated in the midst of them while they are affected in the blending of each other by each other (πασχουσῶν τῶν ποιοτήτων ἐν τῇ πρὸς ἀλλήλαις ὑπ᾽ ἀλλήλων μίξει) — , since this is the case, does not matter too join in being affected? (*Enn.*, III.6.[26].8, 10-19; Fleet).

The answer Plotinus gives to this question is of course negative: matter does not join in qualities' affections. But this is not what interests us here. We must compare this description of the qualities in matter with Plato's account of the Secret Doctrine:

> What is really true, is this: the things of which we naturally say that they "are", are in process of coming to be, as the result of movement and change and blending with one another (ἐκ […] φορᾶς τε καὶ κινήσεως καὶ κράσεως πρὸς ἄλληλα). (Plat. *Theaet.*, 152d 7-e 1; Levett).

And again:

> Motion has two forms, each infinite in multitude (πλήθει μὲν ἄπειρον), but distinguished by their powers, the one being active and the other passive (τὸ μὲν ποιεῖν ἔχον, τὸ δὲ πάσχειν). And through the intercourse and mutual friction of these two there comes to be an offspring infinite in multitude but always twin births (ἐκ δὲ τῆς τούτων ὁμιλίας τε καὶ τρίψεως πρὸς ἄλληλα γίγνεται ἔγκονα πλήθει μὲν ἄπειρα, δίδυμα δέ), on the one hand what is perceived, on the other, the sensation of it […]. For the sensations we have such names as sight, hearing, smelling, feeling cold and feeling hot […]. And on the other side there is the race of things perceived, for each of these sensations perceived things born of the same parentage, for all kinds of visions all kinds of colours, for all kinds of hearings all kinds of sounds; and so on, for the

> other sensations the other things perceived, that come to be in kinship (συγγενῆ) with them. (Plat. *Theaet.*, 156a 5-c 3; Levett, slightly modified).

The idea that sensible qualities mix with each other and are infinite in number and variety, it seems to me, must come from the *Theaetetus*, as is also suggested by Plotinus' peculiar use of the abstract forms θερμότητες and ψυχρότητες (cf. *Theaet*., 156e; 182a 8). In III.6.[26].8 Plotinus has not explained yet that sensible qualities, when the λόγοι are bracketed, are just perceiver-relative appearances; but, in that chapter, he gives us the context in which he expects us to read his analysis of sensible qualities and the receptacle; this context, I suggest, is the Secret Doctrine.[67]

The reason why Plotinus is interested in the interpretative tradition of the receptacle that takes it to be matter and identifies it with the world of "becoming" of the Secret Doctrine is that he wants to use this tradition against the Stoics. The Stoics, I have said, view matter as a metaphysical principle which is a οὐσία ῥευστή, and Plotinus is well aware that they never meant to identify it with the whole of the sensible world. But since he thinks that in their world there cannot be anything else but matter "relatively so disposed", he concludes that the Stoics are not entitled to conceive of matter as a principle of being, but must concede that, on their account, matter is the whole world, and it is analogous to the φερομένη οὐσία of the Secret Doctrine. In other words, Plotinus collapses the Stoic interpretation of the receptacle onto the line of interpretation that links the receptacle to the φερομένη οὐσία of the *Theaetetus*, and identifies matter with the whole world as a world of "flux" or "becoming".

However, Plotinus also introduces some important changes in this last line of interpretation. For he excludes the idea that matter could be subject to any real change or motion. The "flux" that Plato mentions in connection with the Secret Doctrine, and that is associated with the nature of "that which always becomes" in the *Timaeus*, is not a question of effluences or motions for Plotinus. Rather, for Plotinus that "flux" is about appearances, i.e. ways in

[67] Notice, also, that at II.4.[12].11, 42 Plotinus claims that matter is unstable and always φερομένη.

which matter appears both in relation to some perceiver and in relation to this or that form. Plotinus is very sensitive to the fact that, in the world of the Secret Doctrine, everything is relative. But for him the Secret Doctrine is not about an ontology in which everything literally changes in relation to everything else, and where there are continuous additions and losses of material particles. Rather, for him the Secret Doctrine is about a world where all there is is ever-shifting relativities.[68] Nonetheless, like the Anonymous, Plotinus seems to read the Secret Doctrine as reflecting a general Presocratic view of the sensible world. This is shown by his reading of the material causes of the philosophers of nature in the *Phaedo*, which he uses against the Stoics' third category. For, in Plotinus' view, those causes—which rest on "additions" and "subtractions" of material components—reveal the same conception of the world as a "web" of relative appearances which is at work in the Secret Doctrine. Thus, the Stoic world, for Plotinus, is in the end the Presocratic world as revived by Anaxarchus, Metrodorus, Monimus, and Pyrrho.

It is in light of the *Theaetetus*, I suggest, that we can finally see how Plotinus uses the notion of non-being as "other" so as to argue, against the Stoics, that everything, even matter, in their world, is a mere illusion. Let me examine the notion of matter's non-being a little further. Consider the following passage from III.6.[26].17; Plotinus is still dealing with the nature of matter:

> What is nothing in itself can become, by means of something else, the opposite; but when it has become the opposite, it is not the opposite—for if so it would come to a standstill (ὃ δὲ μή ἐστί τι παρ᾽ αὐτοῦ, δύναται γενέσθαι καὶ ἐναντίον δι᾽ ἄλλο καὶ γενόμενον τὸ ἐναντίον οὐδὲ ἐκεῖνό ἐστι· ἔστη γὰρ ἄν). (*Enn.*, III.6.[26].17, 35-37; Fleet).

Here Plotinus links the idea of matter's "becoming" or "coming to be", that we have seen at work in III.6.[26].12, to that of unrest or continuous motion; and this confirms that matter in his view is in fact "that which always becomes", in the sense that it is "in flux", even though the "flux" is a flux of relativities. But what does Plotinus mean exactly by saying of matter that "when it has become

[68] I borrow the term "relativities" from David Sedley, *The Midwife of Platonism*, Oxford 2004, p. 47 and *passim*.

the opposite, it is not the opposite". The point, I think, is to be explained by examining a passage from III.6.[26].18. There, Plotinus describes the relation between matter and "copies of the forms" or, in his view, the λόγοι, and he explains, in particular, what the λόγος of size does to matter. Thus, he says that this λόγος

> has caused both that [i.e. matter] which is not large nor thus [i.e. not non-large] and the large visible in the mass to seem large (πεποίηκε μέγα τε ἐκεῖνο τὸ μὴ μέγα μηδ᾽ οὕτω δόξαι καὶ τὸ ὁρώμενον ἐν ὄγκῳ μέγα). (*Enn.*, III.6[26].18, 17-19; Fleet, modified).

The point about the large "visible in the mass" does not concern us here. We should focus on the large that appears in matter as a consequence of the action of the λόγος. The translation of this passage has caused interpreters a fair amount of trouble. What is disputed is how one should construe the sentence πεποίηκε μέγα τε ἐκεῖνο τὸ μὴ μέγα μηδ᾽ οὕτω δόξαι καὶ τὸ ὁρώμενον ἐν ὄγκῳ μέγα. One option (which most interpreters follow) is to take τὸ μὴ μέγα μηδ᾽ οὕτω δόξαι as a unit. Another one is to take δόξαι as governed by πεποίηκε (as I have done).[69] The first construal is appealing because it gives a plausible sense to μηδ᾽ οὕτω, which, if it is detached from δόξαι, is admittedly rather odd, not to say nonsensical. Thus construed, the phrase means that the λόγος has made large that which is not large (i.e. matter) nor does it even seem thus [i.e. large].[70] This makes sense, but raises a problem. As we have seen, Plotinus has already said that matter appears to be or seems to be a great deal of things, including large, and it would be surprising if now, all of a sudden, he was to suggest that actually matter does not seem to be large. Moreover, as Barrie Fleet points out in the commentary to his edition of III.6.[26] (*ad loc*.), the whole point of chapter 18 is to show

[69] See Fleet (ed.), *Plotinus.* Ennead III.6 op. cit. *ad loc.*, where the reader may also find a review of the different translations.

[70] There is another possible rendering. Bréhier (cf. Émile Bréhier (ed.), *Plotin: Enneades*, Paris 1924-1938, 7 Vols, *ad loc.*) understands the phrase has meaning that the λόγος has made large that which is not large, so that it may cease to appear non-large (*si bien que la matière cesse de paraître sans grandeur*). This seems less likely to me, even if it shows that Bréhier saw the problem that I am about to point out.

that matter does appear large. Thus, it is better to take δόξαι as governed by πεποίηκε, and to take as a unit only τὸ μὴ μέγα μηδ᾽ οὕτω. The problem now is to make sense of μηδ᾽ οὕτω. Fleet translates "what is not large—not even in the way of the Sensible World". Yet it seems to me that, perhaps, the awkwardness of the expression should be stressed rather than minimized. Literally τὸ μὴ μέγα μηδ᾽ οὕτω means "that which is not large and not even thus", and the point it means to convey is precisely the same as that made in III.6.[26].7.17, 37: matter, "when it has become the opposite, it is not the opposite", because "it flows", so to say, or rather it appears to flow, and it cannot rest, so that nothing determinate can be said about it. Since it lacks any kind of stability, every time it is said to be *F* it is and it is not *F*, and, in not being *F*, it is not even non-*F*. The awkward location μηδ᾽ οὕτω is there on purpose to point to the strange manner in which matter participates in the forms, that is, by not being *F*, nor non-*F*, nor not non-*F*. But why does Plotinus employ this peculiar expression: μηδ᾽ οὕτω? I suggest that it is because he wants to evoke the οὐδ᾽ οὕτως or οὐδ᾽ ὅπως, ἄπειρον λεγόμενον of *Theaet.*, 183b 4.[71] Plotinus, through his description of matter, wants to point to the absurdities that Plato imputes to the Heracleiteans at *Theaet*., 181b-183c.

I suggest that the reason why Plotinus appeals to *Theaet.*, 181b-183c is that, after having reduced the Stoic world to matter "relatively so disposed", he wants to show that, if the world is only matter "relatively so disposed", it leads to the absurdities that Plato discusses there. Since Plotinus tries to reject the Stoic conception of matter by appealing to non-being, this means that for him matter's non-being, in the end, is to be grasped by looking at the absurdities of the Heracleiteans at *Theaet.*, 181b-183c. In other words, *Theaet.*, 181b-183c is the place where Plotinus finds the grounds for his final argument against Stoic ontology.

[71] There is a textual problem at *Theaet.*, 183b 4: all manuscripts, except for one (W), have οὐδ᾽ ὅπως; but both Burnet and the editors of the new OCT edition follow W and print οὐδ᾽ οὕτως because οὐδ᾽ ὅπως seems to make the point excessively obscure.

1.8. *The Stoics and the refutation of Protagoras*

Let me try to reconstruct how Plotinus uses Socrates' refutation of the Heracleiteans at 181b-183d. At 181b-183d Socrates shows that, if being is change, as the Secret Doctrine holds, then also our sensations and their contents must change during the process in which they come about. He argues in the following way. Sensations and their contents, he says, come to be through the encounter—which takes place outside the sense organ—between a sensory power, sight, say, and the power of a sensible quality in the world. This encounter brings about a "twin offspring": white and the vision of white, say. Each twin, as soon as it comes to be, begins to move in opposite directions: vision travels back to the eyes, and there it becomes the eyes' "vision of white", whereas white travels back to wherever it came from, and it makes something become white. This is the way in which a vision of a white thing takes place. But, then, Socrates points out that this account leaves the "twins" stable in one respect, because, while subject to local change, they seem to be exempt from qualitative change. If everything is to change in every respect, he notices, the "twins" must become other than what they are while they head back to the sense-organs and to the "things" in the world that they are going to make such and such. From this he concludes that, if being is change, sensations and their contents, must change at the very moment in which one experiences them (182d), so that: a) we cannot call anything perceiving rather than non-perceiving (182e 3-5); b) assuming that sensation is knowledge, as Protagoras maintains, we cannot call anything knowledge rather than non-knowledge (182e 7-11); c) any answer to any question is equally correct, because we can say of anything that "It is thus", and also that "It is not thus"; except that, in this complete lack of stability, we should not say "Thus" or "Not thus", but should say, at most, "Not even thus" (183a 2-b 5).

Points a, b, and c are connected, but it is not clear under what heading one is to sum up the problem that they raise. Burnyeat argues that this problem amounts to a "collapse of language". In a world where everything always changes in every respect, a word, he says, can mean everything and the opposite of everything, so that, in the end, it has no meaning at all. Since a world where words have no meaning is an absurdity, Plato, Burnyeat concludes, refutes the Heracleiteans through a *reductio ad absurdum*. A

different reading has been suggested by David Sedley, who argues that the problem is rather to be spelled out as a "collapse of dialectic".[72] The world of the Heracleiteans, Sedley says, is absurd; but what is absurd in it is not the fact that one has no language to express what one perceives or thinks; rather, the absurdity is that in this world there can be no meaningful discourse, that is, no discourse that tries to distinguish truth from falsity. You can speak in a Heracleitean world, Sedley maintains, but you cannot speak truly, and, thus, you cannot pursue a dialectical research into the definitions of things.

Plotinus' interpretation of the problem raised by Plato against the Heracleiteans falls midway between the "collapse of language" and the "collapse of dialectic". As we have seen, he thinks that the Heracleitean view of the world can be summarized by the idea that matter is non-being, and he holds that matter is non-being because "all its declarations are false". A world in which everything is matter "relatively so disposed" is a world of "lies" for him. Now, lies require a language, so that the problem with the Heracleiteans, for Plotinus, is not that, in their world, words have no meaning at all, and language collapses. However, recall how Plotinus spells out matter's "lies": matter "lies", he says, because it is nothing by itself, and thus when it appears to be *F*, it is non-*F*, and then not even non-*F*. This does not only mean that nothing true can be said of matter; it also means that nothing false can be said of it. Matter is "truly non-being", then, because it tells "true lies", and a "true lie" is when you say something that is not even false. Matter, Plotinus says, is like a mirror (III.6.[26].7), and, like reflections in a mirror, sensible qualities seem to be present in it, but are not there. But, unlike an ordinary mirror, matter is nothing by itself, which explains why, when you say that it is non-*F*, it is not even non-*F*.

These remarks suggest that, for Plotinus, the problem with the Heracleiteans is not exactly a "collapse of dialectic", but rather is a "collapse of assertion and denial". An Heracleitean world for him is a world in which nothing can be asserted, and nothing can be denied either truly *or falsely*. To put the point otherwise, you cannot say that *x* is *F*, nor that x is non-*F*, nor that *x* is not non-*F*, because everything is just a stream of subjective appearances,

[72] See Sedley, *The Midwife of Platonism* op. cit., p. 98.

and nothing is anything by itself. If these observations are correct, it follows that Plotinus identifies the world of the Heracleiteans with that of Pyrrho, who in fact maintained that we should say "about each single thing that it no more is than is not or both is and is not or neither is nor is not" (Aristocl. *ap.* Eus. *Praep. Ev.*, XIV 18, 1-5=Fr 4.3 Chiesara).[73] But Plotinus' reading of the Heracleiteans, it seems, is also influenced by Metrodorus. What I mean to say is that the world of the Heracleiteans for Plotinus is Metrodorus' insofar as it is one of complete ἀκαταληψία, where you do not even know that you do not know anything; it is a stage-painting world, where even the stage is an illusion. It is in order to convey this sense of illusion that Plotinus so often in III.6.[26] refers to dreams. It is not because he thinks that the sensible world is a world of illusions, but is because he maintains, polemically, that a world where there are no intelligible principles, and where all there is is matter "relatively so disposed", is analogous to that of Anaxarchus, Metrodorus, and Pyrrho. But now recall that in III.6.[26] Plotinus also seems to have in mind the Academic sceptics and the Pyrrhonists, and that he builds his attack against the Stoics starting from their criticisms of Stoic epistemology. This indicates that, in reading the refutation of the Heracleiteans, Plotinus probably has in mind also Arcesilaus with his commitment to radical *akatalēpsia*, and that he thinks of the Pyrrhonists that Galen describes at *Diff puls*. VII 711K as "rustic" because they think that nothing can be either asserted or denied. Briefly, Plotinus thinks that Plato, in the *Theaetetus*, refutes the Heracleiteans by reducing their position to a form of radical scepticism that maintains that nothing can be either asserted or denied and that there is no apprehension. The Stoics, he suggests, are to be refuted by showing that their epistemology and their ontology lead exactly to this form of scepticism.

Let me try to reconstruct how this refutation works starting from Plotinus' reading of *Theaet.* Part I. Plotinus describes the world of matter "relatively so disposed", to which he has reduced the Stoics' ontology, by appealing to the ontology of the Secret Doctrine. Then, he examines what is

[73] On Pyrrho's position here see Bett, *Pyrrho, his Antecedents, and his Legacy* op. cit., pp. 22-39, and the analysis of *aphasia* that Bett offers there, see also pp. 132-140, where Bett explores the connection between Pyrrho and the Heracleiteans of the *Theaetetus*, and where he examines the direct or indirect influence on Pyrrho of the Secret Doctrine.

wrong with this world by referring to the Heracleitean position examined at *Theaet.*, 181b 8-183d. This procedure shows that he takes Plato's discussion of the Heracleiteans at 181b 8-183d to be a natural development of the Secret Doctrine.[74] From this it follows that for him the Secret Doctrine and Heracleiteanism must either stand or fall together, and that he reads 181b-183d as the passage where Plato actually makes them fall together. In contrast to what Cornford suggests, for Plotinus, Plato does not endorse the Secret Doctrine and refute the Heracleiteans, but rather refutes the Secret Doctrine by refuting the Heracleiteans. Since Plotinus takes the ontology of the Heracleiteans to be a natural development of the Secret Doctrine, and since he also takes the refutation of the Heracleiteans to be a refutation of Protagoras, I suggest that he reads Plato's argument against Protagoras in *Theaet.* Part I as Burnyeat does: *T→P→H→absurdum*, where the absurdity, however, is radical scepticism.

However, when Plotinus discusses *H* he is not interested in Heracleitus, he is interested in the Stoics. For his refutation of the Stoics to work he needs to show that Stoic ontology can be reduced to *H*; but *H* depends on *P* and *P* follows from *T*. Presumably, then, to refute the Stoics by using *H*, he needs to show that they are committed to *T* and *P*. Let me try to reconstruct in a speculative way how Plotinus might have reasoned. Consider the way in which he begins his argument against the Stoic view that bodies are real beings: the Stoics, he says, maintain that there are sensory cataleptic representations which reveal what really is the case, namely, the cataleptic representations; since they trust these representations, they conclude that bodies (i.e. their objects) are real beings. Then he notices that the Stoics rest the cognitive power of these representations on an ontology according to which bodies are intrinsically qualified. At this point, he appeals to sceptical, anti-Stoic arguments, and he points out that sensory representations conflict. From this observation, I submit, he infers that sensory representations can reveal how things are, as the Stoics maintain, only if sensible things are not

[74] Thus, Plotinus differs not only from Cornford but also from Lee, who, in contrast to Cornford, does maintain that the refutation of Heracleitean flux is a refutation of the Secret Doctrine, but who also thinks that the Heracleitean position is not implied by the Secret Doctrine, but is an extreme development of it; see *Epistemology After Protagoras* op. cit., pp. 88; 115-117.

intrinsically qualified bodies, but "are" in the sense that they are ways in which matter appears to be to a perceiver (otherwise each thing would have to be qualified in opposite ways at the same time). It is at this point that he reduces the Stoics' ontology to the Secret Doctrine and develops it on the grounds of Plato's remarks on the Heracleiteans. I suggest that Plotinus feels entitled to reduce Stoic ontology to *H* because he thinks that *H* is the type of ontology that is implied by the thesis that sensory representations reveal how things truly are. Plotinus takes the Stoic claim that sensation is an apprehension that rests on cataleptic sensory representations to amount to the thesis that knowledge is sensation, and he thinks that, when the conflicting nature of sensory representations is taken into consideration, the Stoic account of sensation implies *P*, i.e. Protagoras' Measure Doctrine. Now Plotinus is aware that the Stoics do not maintain that knowledge is sensation, but he is also aware that they hold that sensation is a form of κατάληψις, that is, of apprehension, and he knows that apprehension, for them, is the basis for knowledge, and its content can be viewed as a "piece of knowledge".[75] Thus, Plotinus reads Plato's argument against Protagoras as an argument against the Stoics that runs like this: *CR* (for cataleptic representations)→*T*→*P*→*H*→*absurdum*/radical scepticism.

1.9. *The antecedents of Plotinus' anti-Stoic strategy*

Plotinus is not the first Platonist to make an anti-Stoic use of the discussion of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*. This kind of strategy is at work in the Anonymous' commentary on the *Theaetetus*, and it might go back to Arcesilaus.[76] Only fragments of the Anonymous' commentary have survived; but the extant text leaves little doubt about the polemical intentions of the author. Towards the beginning of his commentary the Anonymous explains

[75] I think, in particular, of the Stoic conception of reason as some kind of basic knowledge, that is constituted of concepts and natural notions acquired through sensation, and that provides the starting point for inferences. On this see Michael Frede, "The Stoic Conception of Reason", in K. J. Boudouris (ed.), *Hellenistic Philosophy*, Athens 1994, Vol. II, pp. 50-63. See also the discussion of the Platonist notion of "simple knowledge" in Harold Tarrant, *Plato's First Intepreters*, Ithaca 2000, pp. 146-147.

[76] For an anti-Stoic use of the *Theaetetus* in Arcesilaus see Anna-Maria Ioppolo, "Presentation and Assent: a physical and a cognitive problem in early Stoicism", *Classical Quarterly*, 40 (1990), pp. 433-449, esp. p. 438.

that Theaetetus was familiar with Protagoras' treatise *On Truth*, where Protagoras presents his views on knowledge (col. II 5-8). These, the Anonymous goes on, are the views from which Theaetetus had "to be preliminary cleansed" (προαναθήρασθαι) in order to properly examine the question of what knowledge is (col. II 10-11). The remark suggests that, according to the Anonymous, Plato rejects the Measure Doctrine *in toto* rather than accepting some kind of narrower version of it, as Cornford holds. The point seems to find confirmation at col. LXII 1-17, where we read that Socrates knew all along that, by saying that knowledge is sensation, Theaetetus did not mean the same thing as did Protagoras. The text is badly damaged; but perhaps we can infer that the author thinks of 184b, where Theaetetus' claim that knowledge is sensation is introduced and examined again. The Anonymous seems to suggest that, since Plato refutes Protagoras and a "Protagorean construal" of Theaetetus' claim that knowledge is sensation by 183c, at 184b he puts forward a new thesis.[77] Such a complete rejection of Protagoreanism is analogous to what is found in Plotinus.

After having remarked that Theaetetus needed to be "purified" from Protagoras' views, the Anonymous says the following:

> Since those who overestimated sensations, led by the capacity they have to strike our senses (τι πληκτικόν), ascribed them also accuracy (ἀκρίβεια), first of all he [i.e. Plato] proceeds to test this belief. (col. III 7-15).

Here the Anonymous describes the general aim of the first part of the dialogue. He suggests that Plato examines the thesis that knowledge is sensation in order to refute not only Protagoras but all those who overestimated the cognitive power of the senses. As Bastianini and Sedley remark in their commentary (*ad loc.*), he has almost certainly the Stoics in

[77] Cf. Bastianini and Sedley (eds.), "Commentarium in Platonis *Theaetetum*" op. cit., p. 548, who claim that the Anonymous might view *Theaet.*, 151d-183c as "a partial" refutation of Theaetetus' thesis. This seems a little ambiguous to me. In fact, the Anonymous stresses that Socrates, at 152a 1-2, i.e. immediately after Theaetetus claims that knowledge is sensation, says that Protagoras spoke τρόπον δέ τινα ἄλλον in respect to Theaetetus (cf. col. LXII 16). This means, I take it, that, in the Anonymous' view, Theaetetus' claim could express in fact a different thesis in respect to Protagoras'. It is this different thesis that is introduced at 184b ff. Thus, there is no reason to believe that the thesis put forward at 184b has already been partially refuted, as Bastianini and Sedley suggest. Rather, I think that the Anonymous takes Socrates at 184b to examine a new thesis, and to start a second refutation of the claim that knowledge is sensation.

mind, for, as we have seen, the idea that sensations depend upon representations that are πληκτικαί is Stoic (cf. Sext. Emp. *Adv. math.*, VII 257). Thus the Anonymous believes that part I of the *Theaetetus* can be used against Stoic epistemology, because Stoic epistemology is based on the idea that sensations are accurate. This stress on accuracy suggests that the target here is probably the Stoic notion of cataleptic representation, since a cataleptic representation is supposed to cause an accurate and secure apprehension (κατάληψις) of its object. Both Plotinus and the Anonymous must know that for the Stoics not all sensory φαντασίαι are cataleptic, in contrast to what they perversely suggest by assimilating the Stoics' trust in sensation to Protagoras' views. But both of them argue that the Stoic notion of cataleptic φαντασία implies a Protagorean epistemology because they want to reject the view that sensation could have the cognitive power that the Stoics assign it.

Right at the beginning of the extant text, the Anonymous tells us what the *Theaetetus* is about, and he sets his interpretation against that of some other Platonists (such as Alcinous, as Sedley has shown).[78] The Anonymous says that, in these Platonists' view, in the *Theaetetus* Plato shows what knowledge is *not* of, while in the *Sophist* he explains what it *is* of (col. II 32-51), i.e. forms. The Anonymous does not condemn this reading as utterly wrong, but points out that Plato in the *Theaetetus* is not concerned with what knowledge is not of. Rather, he claims, Plato deals with the essence of knowledge. As Sedley has remarked, the interpretation of those other Platonists (what Sedley calls "the object-interpretation") is very similar to that of Cornford.[79] Now this is a little speculative, but it seems to me that, if a Platonist believes that the *Theaetetus* deals with what knowledge is not of, he is likely to think that the dialogue deals with sensible objects, since for a Platonist what knowledge is not of is the sensible world. But if this is the case, then such a Platonist will also probably read the Secret Doctrine as conveying Plato's own views about sensible objects, precisely as Cornford does. In

[78] For the ascription to Alcinous of one of the interpretations that the Anonymous opposes see David Sedley, "Three Platonist Interpretations of the *Theaetetus*", in Christopher Gill and Mary Margaret McCabe (eds.), *Form and Argument in Late Plato*, Oxford 1996, pp. 79-103.
[79] Sedley, "Three Platonist Interpretations of the *Theaetetus*" op. cit., p. 90.

rejecting the "object-interpretation", then, the Anonymous, I think, also rejects the idea that Plato adheres to the Secret Doctrine; and this is in line, once again, with Plotinus' interpretation.[80]

Finally, the Anonymous makes ample and explicit use of Pyrrhonist ideas in his discussion of Part I. He does not favour a sceptical interpretation of the dialogue; in fact he openly opposes it.[81] But shortly after having introduced the Measure Doctrine, he starts discussing material that seems to derive from Aenesidemus' Modes (col. LXIII 1-45). Unfortunately the immediate context of his analysis of the Modes is lost, and the text is too badly damaged for us to conclude anything with certainty about the train of thought that leads the author form Protagoras to the Pyrrhonists. Things are made even worse by the fact that the lines in which the Anonymous presents the Measure Doctrine contain traces of Democritean material, so that it is not clear whether the Pyrrhonists are invoked in order to develop Protagoras' position, Democritus' or both. But, in any case, what we can say is that the author is interested in the Pyrrhonists' use of an argument from conflicting appearances, and in the conclusion they draw from it: that all things are relative, and nothing is anything by itself or has any "intrinsic peculiarity", i.e. ἰδιότης.[82] The Anonymous uses the Pyrrhonist notion of relativity to develop the argument of *Theaet*. Part I in an anti-Stoic direction, that is, in order to oppose the Stoic view that things have their own sensible ἰδιότης (by being peculiarly qualified). This procedure is illuminating for us, I think, for it constitutes an antecedent of Plotinus' own use of Pyrrhonist material against the Stoics. Like the Anonymous, Plotinus appeals to Pyrrhonist views to develop the discussion of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*, so as to use that discussion to attack the Stoics. Neither Plotinus nor the Anonymous think that

[80] See also Tarrant, *Plato's First Interpreters* op. cit., pp. 171-172. Tarrant too suggests that the Anonymous rejects the idea that the Secret Doctrine is endorsed by Plato, but argues the point on other grounds, by starting from Sedley's reconstruction of fragment D in David Sedley, "A New Reading in the Anonymous 'Theaetetus' Commentary (PBerol. 9782 Fragment D)" in *Papiri filosofici: Miscellanea di studi*, vol. I, Florence 1997, pp. 139-144.
[81] Col. LXI 1-46, where Academic and Pyrrhonist views are mentioned as is remarked by Bastianini and Sedley in their commentary p. 545.
[82] The author illustrates relativity by means of examples taken from the Ten Modes. That the Modes can be all subsumed under relativity as their genus is probably an idea of Aenesidemus that we find in Sextus, cf. *Pyrr. hyp.*, I 39 and the analysis of this point in Striker, "The Ten Modes of Aenesidemus" op. cit.

sensible things have no intrinsic nature at all, for, although the text is corrupted, it is clear that the Anonymous tries to distance Plato's position from that of the Pyrrhonists. They only think that the Stoics lack the metaphysical tools to show that things are intrinsically differentiated.

There is one last point of similarity between the Anonymous and Plotinus which I have already mentioned in section 6, where I have said that the Anonymous reads the φερομένη οὐσία as matter in commenting upon 152e 2-4. There Plato singles out Parmenides as the only thinker who denies change, and the Anonymous says that the reason why Parmenides did not conclude that "all things are in motion" (φέρεσθαι πάντα) is that he looked only at the nature of form thereby neglecting matter (col. LXX 27-40).

To summarize, I am not suggesting that Plotinus read the Anonymous' commentary and borrowed from it the main lines of his interpretation of *Theaet.* Part I. We have no clear evidence of Plotinus' dependence on that text. But I do want to suggest that Plotinus' interpretation of the *Theaetetus* belongs to the same family as that of the Anonymous. As Sedley has argued, there are three families of interpretations of the *Theaetetus* in Antiquity. The first is that of the Academic Sceptics; the second is the "object-interpretation" of Alcinous; the third is that of the Anonymous himself. Unlike the "object-interpretation", the Anonymous' is based on the idea that the *Theaetetus* is about knowledge, rather than about what knowledge is not of, and, unlike the sceptical interpretation, it maintains that knowledge is possible for Plato, and that Plato expresses positive views about it in the dialogue. At least as far as Part I is concerned, Plotinus, I think, agrees with the Anonymous.

Chapter II

From Protagoras to Plato: the ontology of the Timaeus

2.1. *Are sensible qualities illusions?*

In the previous chapter, we have seen that for Plotinus sensible qualities are never in matter, and thus do not join with it to form a material compound. Rather, they are subjective appearances that are caused by the impact of some λόγοι on our sense-organs, and they are only believed to be in matter. Matter has no intrinsic qualities for Plotinus, but only appears to have them, and when we say that it is white, sweet, and so on it is because of a conventional belief we happen to have about it. As we have also seen, however, Plotinus does not think that Plato's lesson in the *Timaeus* is that the sensible world is a world of dream-like appearances. The world is a series of appearances only if we assume that all there is in it are matter and the qualities that matter seems to display. But this assumption is foreign to Plotinus, who believes that, besides matter and sensible qualities, there are real entities in the world, i.e. the λόγοι. In this chapter I will deal with two issues. First, I will consider in more detail Plotinus' analysis of Democritus, by examining why for Plotinus atoms cannot be causes of sensible qualities. Then, I will try to explain how Plotinus uses the λόγοι in order to build his own conception of the sensible world. Plotinus' conception of the sensible world, I think, is built through a dialogue with the Stoics and Aristotle. In fact it is the result of a reaction to Stoic and Aristotelian physics. This will cause me to go sometimes back and forth between Plotinus' position, the Stoics', and Aristotle's.

In III.6.[26], Plotinus seems to present Democritus as some kind of sceptic for whom, in the end, the sensible world is only a series of illusory appearances.[1] This reading of Democritus reflects the development of Democritean views in some sceptical circles of the late fourth century BC, although it probably depends most of all on Aristotle's remarks in *Metaph.*, IV 5. But Plotinus' approach to Democritus is twofold; for, on the one hand, he

[1] Cf. Sextus' claim that Democritus rejected the senses and all sensible things at *Adv. math.*, VIII 56 (see also VIII 6). Sextus, however, says the same about Plato.

seems to view him as a sceptic who reduced the world to an illusion, and, on the other hand, he thinks that his atomic shapes are an important step in the direction of a correct, Platonic understanding of the sensible world. Thus we need to spell out how, for Plotinus, Democritus can be at the same time some kind of sceptic and a thinker who anticipated some key aspects of Plato's conception of the sensible world. The issue, as with the Stoics, turns on the ontological status of qualities.

Plotinus presents the shortcomings of Democritus' conception of sensible qualities in IV.4.[28].29. This is a dense chapter that deals with several problems in a far from explicit manner, and we will have to come back to it to try to further unpack its content in the next sections. For now, however, let us see what it tells us concerning the problems with Democritus' understanding of sensible qualities. In IV.4.[28].29, Plotinus examines what happens to the life of a living body when the body, at death, is abandoned by the immortal rational soul. He wants to find out whether the life of the body perishes or "goes away" following the rational soul.[2] But rather than dealing with this issue directly, he first inquires about what happens to colours and sensible qualities in general, when the body in which they are perceived to inhere is destroyed: are the qualities destroyed or do they "go away"?

He formulates two hypotheses, both of which are meant to suggest that sensible qualities survive the corruption of bodies. Before introducing the first hypothesis he makes the following remarks:

> That in the case of corrupted bodies, when the bodies from which the light (which we call colour) comes have changed, the light does not exist is something into which nobody enquires, for instance where the colour of a burnt-out fire is, just as no one enquires where its shape is. But still, shape is a disposition (σχέσις), like clenching and opening the hand, but colour is not like this, but like sweetness. (*Enn.*, IV.4.[28].29, 19-25; Armstrong, slightly modified).

The contrast underlined by Plotinus between the status of some qualities, such as shape, and other qualities, such as sweetness, sets the context for the first

[2] This is, of course, a metaphorical way of speaking. On this see Matthias Baltes and Cristina D'Ancona, "Plotino, *L'Immortalità dell'anima*. IV 7 [2],8[4]", in Riccardo Chiaradonna (ed.), *Studi Sull'Anima in Plotino*, Napoli 2005, pp. 19-58, esp. pp. 55-56. D'Ancona remarks that the individual souls do not literally "go" anywhere, but simply remain there where they have always been, i.e. in the intelligible world.

hypothesis (which is introduced immediately after in the text), and it seems to suggest that, in that hypothesis, Plotinus will deal with the Stoic understanding of the career of a sensible quality. For it is the Stoics who maintain that shape is a σχέσις, and who use the clenching of a hand as a typical example of an item that, because it is differentiated through a σχέσις, falls under the third category; while sweetness is a typical example of a Stoic "quality" (ποιότης). As we have seen (section 1.3), a quality for the Stoics is a body that, by entering into a mixture with another body, i.e. matter, gives rise to a ποιόν, that is, to an item that falls into the second category. Since items in the third category, like shapes, are not what they are in virtue of an intrinsic quality, i.e. a ποιότης, Plotinus, who is interested in the career of ποιότητες, sets them aside and disregards them. After these preliminary remarks the first hypothesis is put forward:

> What then prevents sweetness and sweet scent from not being destroyed (μὴ ἀπολωλέναι) with the destruction of the sweet or sweet-scented body, but coming to be into another body (ἐν ἄλλῳ δὲ σώματι γίνεσθαι), but not being perceptible because the bodies which have received something of them are not of such a kind that the qualities in them make an impact (ἀντερείδειν) on sensation? So then the light of bodies which have perished would remain, but the impact, which is the result of all the qualities, would not remain (τὴν δὲ ἀντιτυπίαν τὸ ἐκ πάντων οὖσαν μὴ μένειν). (*Enn.*, IV.4.[28].29, 19-31; Armstrong, slightly modified).

The content of this first hypothesis confirms the engagement with the Stoics, and it reflects, in particular, their theory of blending. The Stoics maintain, in fact, that qualities, besides mixing with matter, also mix "through and through" with bodies in general. In this mixture, they hold, qualities do not lose their nature, but preserve it intact, so that, when the mixture is dissolved, they can pass, unchanged, into other mixtures with other bodies, be their presence in those bodies detectable by the senses or not. Plotinus, I take it, has in mind a passage such as Alexander's *De mixt.*, 4, 217, 26-32:

> Since all this is so, they [i.e. the Stoics] say there is nothing remarkable in the fact that certain bodies, when assisted by another, are so mutually unified through and through (ἑνοῦσθαι δι᾽ ὅλων) that while being preserved together

> with their own qualities (ὡς αὐτὰ σωζόμενα μετὰ τῶν οἰκείων ποιοτήτων) they are mutually coextended as wholes through and through (δι᾽ ὅλων ὅλα), even if some of them are small in bulk and incapable by themselves of spreading so far and preserving their own qualities. In this way too a measure of wine is blended with a large amount of water and assisted by it to attain an extension of that size. (Alex. *De mixt.*, 4, 217, 26-32=LS 48C 9).

Alexander here wants to point out the paradoxical nature of the Stoics' theory of blending; but the Stoics themselves do not shy from stressing the surprising consequences of their theory. The example of the measure of wine in a large amount of water, and other similar ones (see the case of the drop of wine blending with the sea in Plut., *Comm. not.*, 1078E=LS 48 B) are designed to show that certain qualities are present throughout bodies even if sensation does not detect them, and even if the point seems counterintuitive.[3]

Plotinus' general conclusion concerning the first hypothesis, is that, on its basis, one can maintain that qualities "are not destroyed" (μὴ ἀπολωλέναι) when the body in which they are perceived to inhere perishes, because they can come to be in another body, by shifting to it. We will see later why this conclusion is significant, and in what respects Plotinus' treatment of the Stoics' qualities here is problematic. (section 2.7 below).

Then, a second and last hypothesis is put forward:

> Unless somebody were to say that seeing is by convention (νόμῳ ὁρᾶν), and that the so-called qualities are not in the objects (τὰς λεγομένας ποιότητας μὴ ἐν τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις εἶναι). But if this is the case, then we will make qualities indestructible and not coming to be in the constitution of bodies (ἀφθάρτους ποιήσομεν καὶ οὐ γινομένας ἐν ταῖς τῶν σωμάτων συστάσεσι τὰς ποιότητας), and we will maintain that it is not the λόγοι in the seeds which make the colours, in the case of many-coloured birds, for instance, but they [i.e. the λόγοι] bring existing colours together, or produce them but make use in doing so also of the colours in the air which is full of things of this kind; for in the air they [i.e. the colours] are not as they appear in bodies when they come to be in them (καὶ γὰρ καὶ εἶναι ἐν τῷ

[3] On this see Inna Kupreeva, "Alexander of Aphrodisias on Mixture and Growth", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 27 (2004), pp. 297-329, esp. p. 300.

> ἀέρι οὐ τοιαῦτα, οἷα, ὅταν γένηται, ἐν τοῖς σώμασι φαίνεται). (*Enn.*, IV.4.[28].29, 30-40; Armstrong, slightly modified).

This second hypothesis clearly picks up once again Democritus' fr. B9/125, and Plotinus here offers an account of sensible qualities that rests on an analogy between Democritus' shapes and the λόγοι.[4] Now Plotinus refers to fr. B9/125 in order to suggest that, if sensible qualities are "by convention", as Democritus thinks, then we can claim that they are indestructible. The reason why they are indestructible, I take it, is that, if qualities are "by convention", they never ordinarily come to be or pass away, but rather appear to us whenever a certain shape or a certain λόγος (which is eternal, as are Democritus' atoms) has an impact on our sense-organs. We just call that effect "red" or "sweet", but there is no "redness" nor "sweetness" that properly speaking comes to be.

But here Plotinus raises some possible objections against the view that sensible qualities are "by convention". The main problem with it, he says, is that it seems to imply that qualities "are not in the objects", i.e. that they do not belong to—or are not in—the bodies in which they are perceived to inhere. If qualities "are not in the objects", then someone could say that they are nothing more than dream-like appearances with nothing that corresponds to them in the world. It is clear, however, that despite this difficulty, Plotinus does not abandon the hypothesis and the conception of sensible qualities that goes with it. Rather, he tries to suggest that there is a way in which sensible qualities can be "in the objects" even if they are "by convention".

Let me look more closely at the last passage quoted above. There are two difficulties, Plotinus suggests, with the view that qualities are "by convention". 1) If qualities are "by convention", they "are not in the objects",

[4] He probably relies on Aristotle's and Theophrastus' reports, according to which Democritus associated particular qualities with particular atomic shapes. See esp. Aristot. *De gen. et corr.*, I 2 and Theoph. *De sens*. 67-78. I will come back to these passages in the next section. One should be aware that the attempt to associate qualities with atomic shapes simplifies Democritus' account of sensible qualities, which also depends upon the order and position of the atoms in the compound, and the disposition of the perceiving subject. Theophrastus, however, does mention these further factors, even though, like Aristotle, he seems to give more prominence to the shapes. See Pierre-Marie Morel, *Démocrite et la recherche des causes*, Paris 1996, pp. 211-213.

Plotinus reasons, but only happen to find themselves together in this or that body because some random, eternal λόγοι have caused them to appear there. But this means that they cannot be the qualities of anything in particular, because they do not belong to the constitution of the body in which they are perceived. That is to say, if qualities are produced by random λόγοι, they are not "born" with the body in which they are perceived, because they are not really part of the nature of that body; they are the effect of such and such a λόγος, period, no matter the body in which they appear to be. But, he remarks, if this is the case, we cannot account for the fact that, in our experience, some colours tend to appear regularly in some bodies, e.g. in some species of birds. 2) Furthermore, he observes, "convention" does not explain the fact that the same colours appear different not just in relation to different perceivers, but also in relation to different environments (as it happens when a colour is seen "in the air", and then it appears differently in a bird). This second difficulty is a little obscure, but presumably the problem is to account for things like the same colour looking one way in the dark and another way in full light or, more generally, a bird, say, looking brown in the dark and then yellow in the light. The first difficulty—which is the failure to account for the natural or constitutive qualities of a body— is to be understood on the basis of two things: Plotinus' analogy between λόγοι and atomic shapes, and some of the criticisms raised against atomism by Aristotle and Alexander. Consider this passage from Aristotle's *De Caelo*:

> What the followers of Empedocles and Democritus do, though without observing it themselves, is to reduce the generation of elements out of one another to an illusion. They make it a process of excretion from a body of what was in it all the time—as though generation required a vessel rather than a material—so that it involves no change of anything. (Aristot., *De Cael.*, III 7, 305b 1-5; Stocks).

Aristotle here does not speak of qualities and change of quality, but attacks more generally the idea that in a Democritean world bodies could genuinely come to be and have their own specific nature and characteristics. The atomists, he assumes, explain generation and corruption by means of association and dissociation of atomic aggregates (cf. *De gen. et corr.*, I 2).

But, he goes on, from this it follows that, on their account, a body comes to be only through the local change of already existing atoms, which detach themselves from the aggregate they originally belonged to. From this he concludes that a body is just a heap of independently existing atoms for Democritus, and that the "generation" of such a body is only an illusion, because a new body only seems to come to be, when in fact no real change other than a local shift of atoms has occurred. The same kind of criticism resurfaces in Alexander, who, in the *De mixtione*, tends to view the atomic association on which generation depends for the atomists as a form of juxtaposition (esp. *De mixt.*, 2, 214, 16-28). Juxtaposition (σύνθεσις), he explains (developing on *De gen et corr.*, I 10), differs from blending (κρᾶσις) insofar as its components never form a unitary substance. Thus, he suggests, if atomic association is a form of juxtaposition, it follows that it cannot account for the coming to be of a body, a body being a unitary substance.[5] Plotinus does not explicitly point to the difficulty of accounting for the unity of a body on the basis of atoms. But the hypothesis that bodies could come to be such and such merely in virtue of pre-existing qualities points to a conception of bodies in terms of heaps of atoms. As heaps of atoms bodies lack any stable internal structure, and they just appear to become such and such through their atomic shapes, while in fact they are not undergoing any real change.

Plotinus provides no definitive answer to the difficulties he raises against the Democritean conception of qualities in IV.4.[28], nor is it clear whether he does so elsewhere.[6] Nonetheless, he clearly keeps the second hypothesis, and he begins to make some adjustments to it, so as to render it less counterintuitive. In place of postulating λόγοι of colours freely floating in the world, he says, we should assume that the λόγοι causing the qualities that we perceive as inhering in a body are included in the particular seed from which that body comes to be. This would explain why some colours seem to

[5] On Aristotle's and Alexander's opposition to the atomists' account of generation see Morel, *Démocrite et la recherche des causes* op. cit., pp. 85-87.
[6] IV.5.[29].7 is a possible candidate, but the content of this chapter is quite obscure. See M.-N. Bouillet (ed.), *Les* Ennéades *de Plotin*, Paris 1857-61, 3 Vols., Vol. II, *ad loc.*; Rudolf Beutler, Richard Harder, and Willy Theiler (eds.), *Plotins Schriften*, Hamburg 1956-71, 6 Vols., Vol. IIb, *ad loc*.

belong to a particular species of, say, birds. Then, he tries to explain the differences in colour due to the environment. He suggests that the effects produced by some λόγοι might interact with those produced by other, "nearby", λόγοι (as when, say, a certain light causes a variation in the colour of an object), so that such and such particular interaction would be responsible for the appearance of such and such particular quality. As I have said, these suggestions are not presented as definitive answers. But it is not difficult to see that they express Plotinus' considered views on these issues, because they appeal to a fundamental tenet of his ontology: the idea that bodies have a rational structure due to a special kind of λόγος, which is like "the seed" of a body, and that "contains", in an organized way, the λόγοι of the sensible qualities that belong by nature to that body.

I will come back to Plotinus' analysis of the rational structure of bodies. I ask the reader to grant me this point for the time being, because I want to focus on the status of sensible qualities. If the second hypothesis represents Plotinus' own way of explaining the career of sensible qualities, how are his adjustments to this hypothesis supposed to ensure that sensible qualities will not be merely appearances? Plotinus' answer, I think, runs like this.

When sensible qualities are conceived of in relation to matter, they are just subjective appearances, to which nothing corresponds in the world. Since matter is impassible, it simply cannot have any quality present in it. But things are different in the case of bodies. *Qua* sensible, that is, from the perspective of someone who brackets or denies the existence of its intelligible λόγοι, a body is merely a bundle of sensible qualities and matter (cf. VI.3.[44].8, 19-20). Since sensible qualities in relation to matter are just dream-like appearances, Plotinus thinks, also bodies, when they are conceived of as bundles of these appearances, can only be illusions. This is, crudely put, the way in which the Stoics must end up conceiving of the ordinary bodies in our daily experience in Plotinus' view.[7] However, he claims that from the

[7] This is "crudely put" because the Stoics maintain that bodies do have a rational organization, insofar as the qualities that contribute to their constitution together with matter are rational λόγοι operating according to an overall good plan. But, since Plotinus maintains that the

perspective of someone who can consider a body otherwise than as exclusively sensible, the world can be more than a "stage-painting". One must admit that the sensible qualities that we perceive depend upon some λόγοι of qualities (e.g. the λόγος of white, and so on), that are organized according to a pattern imposed on them by a further, higher λόγος, i.e. the λόγος of a natural kind, such as that of a human being. This λόγος is like a seed, and from it a body of a certain type comes to be. From this perspective, Plotinus goes on, there are real bodies in the world, because there are real entities that are organized in a coherent and unified way. i.e. the intelligible λόγοι. Since both the λόγοι of natural kinds and those of qualities are real, external causes of the sensible qualities and the bodies that we perceive, neither those qualities nor those bodies can be illusory.

Let me frame the point in another way. Plotinus maintains that sensible qualities, even if they are a matter of "convention" and, thus, are relative, subjective appearances, nonetheless are "in the objects", because their λόγοι, i.e. the intelligible powers that cause them, are "in" the intelligible structure of those objects.[8] Thus, suppose that a body looks white to me. Plotinus says that this happens because of the interaction of a λόγος "in" that body, i.e. the λόγος of white, with my eyes. That λόγος is a real, external cause of the fact that that body looks white to me; and, since it is "in" that body, it is also what makes it possible for that body to have and to really display the quality of whiteness. It makes that body "manifest" whiteness, so to say. To be sure, a λόγος can interact with the other λόγοι in the environment where the body is, and this will have some effect on the colour it causes. Thus, if the white body I am looking at does not have the λόγος of white in it, it will not be intrinsically white, but nonetheless, that whiteness will be "real" insofar as it is caused by another λόγος nearby or by the interaction of some λόγοι. The

---

Stoics lack the metaphysical tools to argue that bodies are more than matter relatively so disposed, he takes away from them the possibility of defending the thesis that bodies are rationally organized, as that thesis rests on the assumption that there are qualities intrinsic to bodies. For more details see section 1.7 below.

[8] For the presence of λόγοι "in" bodies see Cristina D'Ancona, "Le rapport modèle-image dans la pensée de Plotin", in Daniel De Smet, Meryem Sebti, and Godefroid De Callataÿ (eds.), *Miroir et Savoir*, Leuven 2008, pp. 1-47, esp. pp. 28-42.

point is that the λόγοι cause a body not only to appear white to me, but to appear white to me because it manifests whiteness, and this whether this whiteness is intrinsic to the body or not. This is something that matter cannot do, since there are no λόγοι "in" matter, as we have seen, so that any time that one refers to matter alone as showing this or that quality he might as well be speaking of a dream he had, because there is nothing in the world that corresponds to his experience. Matter only seems to be white, but never really displays such a quality, in contrast to bodies which, when they seem white, also are white.

Plotinus arrives at the view that bodies both seem and are such and such, that is, that they both appear to have a certain quality and really display that quality, by working through the *Timaeus*, and more precisely, through Plato's account of the παθήματα of soulless bodies at 61c ff. Recall that Plotinus builds his account of sensible qualities in III.6.[26] on that passage (see section 1.4), and on the basis of his analysis of the "traces". Then, recall Plotinus' account of the "traces" in III.6.[26].12 (section 1.4). Plotinus says that matter, rather than being "affected" by the "traces", "becomes" (γίνεται) the "traces", so that it "becomes fiery" for instance. This "becoming" is developed by Plotinus in terms of "appearing to be" as we have seen. Matter appears to be fiery for Plotinus, but never is so. Now, I think that when Plotinus speaks of "becoming" in terms of "appearing to be" in III.6.[26] he has in mind a precise meaning of γίγνομαι. In ordinary philosophical language, γίγνομαι means "become" or "coming to be", but the verb has also a different meaning: "appearing to be", "looking like" or "manifesting such and such a property", and already Plato might have used it this sense.[9] It is because he uses γίγνομαι in the sense of "appearing to be" that Plotinus in III.6.[26] feels no need to justify why matter's "becoming" should be spelled out as an appearing to be. However, an Ancient Greek speaker can use γίγνομαι in the sense of appearing to be in two different ways; that is, he may either say that a thing "looks" (γίνεται) *F* so as to imply that it is not *F*

[9] Michael Frede, "Being and Becoming in Plato", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, Suppl. Vol. (1988), pp. 37-52.

or he can say that it looks *F* and avoid taking a stand on the issue of whether it is *F* or not. When Plotinus uses γίγνομαι to explain how a λόγος makes matter "become" such and such, he uses it to indicate that matter only looks *F*, but is not so. However, when he considers the way in which a λόγος makes a body "become" such and such, he uses the verb to indicate that the body looks *F* and it may well be intrinsically so.

It is only because Plotinus does not think that its being relative to a perceiver makes a quality any less inherent in its object that sometimes he speaks as if qualities just were inherent in their objects with no further precision (see, esp., IV.5.[29].6, 11-13; IV.2.[4].1, 41-50; VI.6.[34].14, 26-33). But this practice has often been otherwise explained. I am thinking, in particular, of Eyjólfur Emilsson's interpretation of the status of sensible qualities in Plotinus, which today is shared by a large number of scholars. For Emilsson Plotinus is a "common sense direct realist", who believes that in sensation we "read off" of a sensible object its sensible qualities.[10] Starting from the analysis of Plotinus' theory of sensation, Emilsson argues that sensible qualities for Plotinus are "objective" features of things, and what he means by saying that qualities are "objective" is 1) that they are in sensible objects just as we perceive them, and 2) that they are in the objects in which they are perceived independently of any perceiving subject.[11] I will examine in more detail Emilsson's interpretation of sensation in Plotinus in the next chapter. But it seems to me that his reading of sensible qualities in Plotinus does not fit the remarks in III.6.[26]. This seems to have escaped notice, but III.6.[26], I think, is the treatise where Plotinus more accurately examines the nature of sensible qualities; what they are, and how they come about.[12] Now this treatise shows that sensible qualities for Plotinus cannot be "objective"

---

[10] Eyjólfur Emilsson, *Plotinus on Sense-Perception*, Cambridge 1988, pp. 67-73, and pp. 82-83. Emilsson has maintained these views more recently in Id., *Plotinus on Intellect*, Oxford 2007, pp. 130-141, and "Plotinus on Sense Perception", in Simo Knuuttila and Pekka Kärkkäinen (eds.), *Theories of Perception in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy*, Dordrecht 2008, pp. 22-33.

[11] Emilsson, *Plotinus on Sense-Perception* op. cit., p. 52.

[12] To be sure, II.6.[17], which Porphyry titled *On Quality*, is important for determining what sensible qualities are in Plotinus. But this treatise examines sensible qualities in the interest of solving a metaphysical problem about the causality of forms raised by Aristotle in *Metaphysics* I 9. It does not focus on the nature of qualities in an attempt to understand what they are, and how they relate to our perception of the world. See below section 2.3.

features of the world in the sense of "objective" suggested by Emilsson. Plotinus models his account of sensible qualities on the παθήματα of *Tim.*, 61c-69a, and, it seems to me, he roughly presents the way in which we become aware of them through Plato's account of sensation at *Tim.*, 43b-44c. From his analysis of *Tim.*, 61c-69a he concludes that sensible qualities are the effects of some intelligible entities—i.e. what he calls λόγοι—on our sense-organs. On the grounds of *Tim.*, 43b-44c, he infers that we become aware of them through some "obscure quasi-beliefs" or "undecidable" (ἀνεπίκριτοι) φαντασίαι, rather than by "reading them off" of an object. One appealing aspect of Emilsson's interpretation is that it makes it abundantly clear that for Plotinus the sensible world cannot be reduced to a web of dream-like appearances. If things just are the way they appear, then certainly it cannot be the case that all sensations are mere illusions. As I have tried to point out, Plotinus is indeed interested in saving the reality of qualities, but wants and needs to maintain that they are relative. This is revealed most of all by his refutation of the Stoics. For that refutation rests on the view that sensible qualities are to some extent perceiver-dependent. If Plotinus had given up the idea that qualities are perceiver-dependent, he would have considerably weakened his criticism of the Stoics. The problem for him is to show that, though perceiver-dependent, qualities can be real, in the sense that they can be more than mere subjective appearances to which nothing corresponds out there in the world.

2.2. *Abandoning atomism*

Plotinus, then, rejects Democritus' account of sensible qualities by pointing out that, were atoms and their shapes the real nature of things, sensible qualities would not be "in the objects". But now recall Plotinus' attack against the Stoic notion of "so disposed" on the grounds of "the safe answer" of the *Phaedo* in VI.6.[34].14 (section 1.6). Things, he said, cannot be differentiated by being "so disposed", because this would mean that the differentiations are not "in the objects". This was one of the remarks on which he rested his reduction of the Stoics' ontology to Protagoras' Secret Doctrine.

Now the fact that this very same point is raised against Democritus is no coincidence, I think, but shows that Plotinus maintains that Democritus' conception of sensible qualities can be reduced to Protagoras' too. This might be an unfair treatment of Democritus; but it depends, I suggest, on what was probably one of the main sources for Plotinus' analysis of Democritus: Aristotle's remarks in *Metaph.*, IV 5. For, there, Aristotle argues precisely that, even though there are some differences between Protagoras and Democritus, in the end the latter was some kind of Protagorean. The idea that Democritus' and Protagoras' projects shared some common ground is an old one, as witnessed by a passage from Clemens of Alexandria (70 A1 DK) where Democritus is actually said to be Protagoras' teacher. We think that this information is not reliable, because we believe that Democritus was younger than Protagoras by about 25 years. In fact some sources view Democritus as reacting to Protagoras, rather than as his teacher.[13] But Aristotle, in *Metaph.*, IV 5, does not seem interested in comparing Democritus' views to those of the historical Protagoras; he rather has in mind the Protagoras of the *Theaetetus*, which is why his remarks are all the more relevant for Plotinus.

When, in III.6.[26], Plotinus argues against the existence of quality-matter compounds in the world, he means to attack the Stoics, as I have said. But some of his criticisms are also addressed to Aristotle' conception of bodies as compounds of matter and form; for form, for Aristotle, is intrinsic to matter, and Plotinus wants to deny that matter could have any intrinsic traits. But his anti-Stoic polemics should not be conflated with his criticism of Aristotle. As we have seen, Plotinus' attacks against Stoic ontology start from an epistemological point. It is because the Stoics believe in cataleptic representations, he maintains, that they reach "wrong" ontological conclusions. But in Aristotle there is no equivalent of what the Stoics call cataleptic representations. Even if he does think that our senses are for the most part reliable, and that the grasp of the special sensibles is almost always infallible, Aristotle insists that sensation can never be "knowledge" (ἐπιστήμη). To be sure, neither are the Stoics committed to such a strong

[13] See Lee, *Epistemology After Protagoras* op. cit., p. 182 for a review of the literature; and cf. Sext. Emp. *Adv. math.*, VII 389-390; Plut. *Adv. Col.*, 4, 1108F for the view that Democritus reacted to Protagoras; that Democritus reacts to Protagoras is argued by Victor Brochard, "Protagore et Démocrite", in Id., *Études de philosophie ancienne*, Paris 1912, pp. 23-33.

claim. But their cataleptic representations are infallible means to acquire knowledge, and they lead to an infallible apprehension, whereas for Aristotle sensation is the starting point on the road to knowledge, but provides no infallible grasp of the truth. Thus, for instance, at *Top*., II 8, 114a 21-22, we read that "an object of sensation is an object of knowledge (ἐπιστητόν), whereas sensation is not knowledge (αἴσθησις οὐκ ἐπιστήμη)".

In any case, Plotinus seems to use some of Aristotle's remarks in his anti-Stoic polemic. Recall the passage from III.6.[26].6, where he says that bodies are not real beings, despite their resistance and their capacity to strike our senses (III.6.[26].6, 33-38) (section 1.4). There Plotinus also claims that those bodies that strike our senses the most, such as earth, are beings in the least degree; whereas those that almost "escape" the nature of bodies, such as fire, are closer to real beings, and, thus, to forms (III.6.[26].6, 38-64):

> And in fact how in the case of bodies is the more mobile and less heavy than stationary earth more truly being? And how is the element above this more real than this? And how is this true of fire too, which almost escapes the nature of body? Καὶ δὴ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν σωμάτων μᾶλλον γῆς ἑστώτης τὸ μᾶλλον κινούμενον καὶ ἐμβριθὲς ἧττον, καὶ τούτου τὸ ἄνω; καὶ δὴ καὶ τὸ πῦρ φεῦγον ἤδη τὴν σώματος φύσιν; (*Enn.*, III.6.[26].6, 38-41; Fleet).

When Plotinus here describes fire as the element that almost "escapes" the nature of body, he has in mind Aristot., *De gen et corr.*, I 8, 318b 18 ff.[14] But, when he claims that the elements "above" earth, i.e. water and air, which are more mobile than earth, are more truly being than earth itself, he thinks of *De gen. et corr.*, I 3. There Aristotle discusses the difference between generation and corruption, and he observes the following:

> The opinion, however, which most people (οἱ πολλοί) are inclined to prefer, is that the distinction depends upon the difference between that which is sensible (τὸ αἰσθητόν) and that which is not sensible. Thus, when there is a change into sensible material, people say there is coming-to-be; but when there is a change into invisible material, they call it passing-away. For they distinguish what is and what is not by their perceiving and not perceiving, just as what is knowable is and

[14] Cf. Fleet, *Plotinus.* Ennead III.6 op. cit, p. 159.

> what is unknowable is not—sensation on their view having the force of knowledge (τὸ γὰρ ὂν μὴ ὂν τῷ αἰσθάνεσθαι καὶ τῷ μὴ αἰσθάνεσθαι διορίζουσιν, ὥσπερ τὸ μὲν ἐπιστητὸν ὄν, τὸ δ᾽ ἄγνωστον μὴ ὄν· ἡ γὰρ αἴσθησις ἐπιστήμης ἔχει δύναμιν). Hence, just as they believe (νομίζουσιν) themselves to live and to be in virtue of their perceiving or their capacity to perceive, so too they believe the things to be *qua* perceived or sensible —and in this they are in a sense on the track of the truth, though what they actually say is not true. In fact, unqualified coming to be and passing away turn out to be different according to belief (κατὰ δόξαν) from what they truly are (κατ᾽ ἀλήθειαν). For wind and air are less real [than earth] to sensation (κατὰ μὲν τὴν αἴσθησιν ἧττόν ἐστιν) […]. But in truth they are more "this" or a "form" than earth (κατὰ δ᾽ ἀλήθειαν μᾶλλον τόδε τι καὶ εἶδος ταῦτα τῆς γῆς) (Aristot. *De gen. et corr.*, I 3, 318b 18-32; Joachim, slightly modified).

The last lines of this passage are what inspires Plotinus to say, in III.6.[26].6, that water and air are more truly being than earth. But when we put this passage side by side with the excerpts from VI.1.[42].28 and III.6.[26].6 quoted in chapter I sections 2 and 4—i.e. the passages where Plotinus attacks the Stoics by saying that they "believe" (νομίζουσιν) that bodies are real beings, led only by their faith in sensation—, it seems that Plotinus' anti-Stoic strategy echoes Aristotle's remarks against those who take sensation to be knowledge. Both Aristotle and Plotinus think that being is identified with that which is sensible by those who believe that sensation has the force of knowledge. Both of them ascribe this view to οἱ πολλοί; both look upon the issue by using the distinction between νομίζειν and proceeding κατὰ δόξαν *versus* κατ᾽ ἀλήθειαν; both take their distance from the view that that which is and that which is sensible are equivalent. I am not suggesting that there is specifically a Democritean background in this passage of the *De gen. et corr.*; for Plotinus certainly develops Aristotle's remarks in his own way, by linking them to Democritus, but there seems to be in what Plotinus says in III.6.[26].6 an Aristotelian inspiration.

Now in *Metaph.*, IV 5 Aristotle says of Democritus the same thing that he says of "the many" in *De gen. et corr.*, I 3: that he identifies what is with what is sensible. In *Metaph.*, IV 5 Aristotle works through the difficulties

posed in his view by two theses that, he says, imply each other: the thesis that contradictions can be true together, and the thesis that all appearances are true.[15] These two theses, he claims, stand or fall together, and they both stem from one and the same mistake (1009a 15-16): that of thinking that "that which is" (τὰ ὄντα) is equivalent to "that which is sensible" (τὰ αἰσθητά) (1010a 1-3).[16] The main goal of Aristotle is to show that the two theses in fact fall together, and that the main problem with them is that they lead to scepticism. But it is worth reconstructing his argument in some detail, because it sheds light on why Plotinus thinks that Democritus is a Protagorean and a sceptic.

Aristotle explains why the theses that contradictories are true together and that all appearances are true imply each other right at the beginning of *Metaph.*, IV 5:

> For on the one hand, if all opinions and appearances are true, all of them must be at the same time true and false (εἴτε γὰρ τὰ δοκοῦντα πάντα ἐστὶν ἀληθῆ καὶ τὰ φαινόμενα, ἀνάγκη εἶναι πάντα ἅμα ἀληθῆ καὶ ψευδῆ). For many men hold beliefs in which they conflict with one another, and all think those mistaken who have not the same opinions as themselves; so that the same thing must be and not be (ὥστ' ἀνάγκη τὸ αὐτὸ εἶναί τε καὶ μὴ εἶναι). And on the other hand, if this is so [i.e. if the same thing is and is not], all opinions must be true; for those who are mistaken and those who are right are opposed to one another in their opinions; if, then, reality is such as the view in question supposes, all will be right in their beliefs. (Aristot. *Metaph.*, IV 5, 1009a 6-15; Ross, slightly modified).

Aristotle's reasoning here relies on three things: 1) Protagoras' conception of appearances in the broad sense of sensations and beliefs; 2) the self-refutation of Protagoras at *Theaet.*, 171a-c.; 3) the core message of the Measure Doctrine: that things are as they appear to a subject, and that as they are so they appear to a subject. The reasoning, as I see it, is as follows: if all

[15] These two theses are distinguished in Lee, *Epistemology After Protagoras* op. cit., pp. 118-119.
[16] See Lee, *Epistemology After Protagoras* op. cit., p. 121. I mainly reconstruct Aristotle's argument on the basis of Lee's remarks; however, I develop the relation between the thesis that all appearances are true and the thesis that contradictories are true together in a slightly different way.

appearances are true, then, since people have conflicting beliefs and think of the beliefs that conflict with their own as false, it follows that all appearances are both true and false at the same time, i.e. that contradictories are true together; from which, in turn, it follows that the world is such that each thing in it is both *F* and non-*F* at the same time. The line of implications here proceeds from an epistemological commitment (that all appearances are true) towards an ontological one. In the rest of the text (i.e. from "And on the other hand, if this is so") the implications go the other way, that is, from ontology to epistemology: if each thing is both *F* and non-*F* at the same time, then all appearances are true, even those of people that one might think of as mistaken.

After this compressed introduction, Aristotle spells out the link that the theses that contradictories are true together and that all appearances are true have with the view that what is is identical with what is sensible, i.e. the view that is at the origin of both of them. He assumes that "what is sensible", i.e. τὰ αἰσθητά, can be taken to mean two things: 1) the totality of sensible things, viewed as constituting a domain where everything is subject to change; or 2) the way in which sensible things appear to us, that is, the contents of our sensations. If τὰ αἰσθητά is taken in the first meaning, the thesis that what is is equivalent to what is sensible expresses the view that everything there is belongs to the order of what is subject to change. If τὰ αἰσθητά is taken in the second meaning, the idea is that being coincides entirely with what seems to be the case to a perceiver; that is, that something is only insofar as it is perceived, and that it is just as it is perceived by someone. Then, with this remark in mind, Aristotle shows that the view that contradictories are true together follows in particular from the first, ontological, reading of the claim that what is is equivalent to what is sensible, whereas the view that all appearances are true follows form the second, epistemological, reading. He develops first the ontological reading (1009a 22-38). But let me begin with the epistemological one:

> Some have inferred ἐκ τῶν αἰσθητῶν the truth of appearances. For they think that the truth should not be determined by the large or small number of those who hold a belief, and that the same thing is thought sweet by some who taste it, and bitter by others, so that if all were ill or all were

> mad, and only two or three were well or sane, these would be thought ill and mad, and not the others. And again, many of the other animals receive impressions contrary to ours; and even to the sense of each individual, things do not always seem (δοκεῖν) the same. Which, then, of these impressions are true and which are false is not obvious (ἄδηλον); for the one set is no more (οὐθὲν μᾶλλον) true than the other, but both are alike. And this is why Democritus, at any rate, says that either there is no truth or to us at least it is not evident. And in general it is because these thinkers suppose understanding to be sensation (διὰ τὸ ὑπολαμβάνειν φρόνησιν μὲν τὴν αἴσθησιν), and this to be a physical alteration (ταύτην δ' εἶναι ἀλλοίωσιν), that they say that what appears to our senses must be true; for it is for these reasons that Empedocles and Democritus and, one may almost say, all the others have fallen victims to opinions of this sort. (*Metaph.*, IV 5, 1009b 1-16; Ross, slightly modified).

As the examples used in this passage show, Aristotle here has in mind the discussion of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*, and the way he frames it seems to anticipate some of the Modes for the suspension of judgement of the later Pyrrhonists.[17] Protagoras, he suggests, and all those who like him think that all appearances are true reached this conclusion because they thought: 1) that sensible things strike us in conflicting ways; 2) that such a conflict of appearances, for lack of an appropriate criterion, could not be resolved other than by saying that things just are as they appear to each perceiver.

Democritus, thus, appears both among those who held that all appearances are true, and among those who thought that contradictories are true together; and this is not surprising, since, for Aristotle, the two theses, as we have seen, imply each other, so that when somebody is committed to one, he is also committed to the other. But what is striking in the last passage is that, in light of 1 and 2, Aristotle says that Democritus concluded that "either there is no truth or to us at least it is not evident". The reason why this is striking, of course, is that this thesis seems to be the opposite of the one under consideration, i.e. the thesis that all appearances are true. To attenuate the problem, we may reasonably suggest that, when Aristotle claims that for Democritus "either there is no truth or to us at least it is not evident", he sides

[17] See A.A. Long "Aristotle and the History of Greek Scepticism", in Dominic O'Meara (ed.), *Studies in Aristotle*, Whashington, DC, 1981, pp. 79-106.

in fact with this last interpretation. In other words, one may suggest that, for Aristotle, Democritus concludes that we do not know which appearances are true and which are false, rather than concluding that they are all false; and this might in fact be a more accurate interpretation of Democritus' position in light of other reports on his epistemology.[18] However, this suggestion does not yet solve the difficulty, which, as most commentators point out, seems to find a solution only by the end of the passage, where Aristotle claims that Democritus, like Empedocles and "all the others", was committed to the view that all appearances are true because he identified understanding and sensation. These last lines seem to introduce a different argument from that at work in the first lines in support of the conclusion that all appearances are true. This new argument starts from the premise, once again ascribed to both Protagoras and Democritus, that understanding or thinking is like perceiving.[19] In other words, Aristotle seems to present two distinct arguments in this passage to the effect that all appearances are true. The first argument, which is an argument from conflicting appearances, is ascribed to both Protagoras and Democritus; but we are told that, whereas Protagoras concluded from it that all appearances are true, Democritus concluded that none is true more than any other. The second argument starts from the premise that thinking is perceiving, and it is presented as the argument that led Democritus, too, to conclude that all appearances are true. It is reasonable to think that for Aristotle there has to be a link between these two arguments, but the nature of such a link is obscure. I take it that Aristotle is not saying that Democritus explicitly maintained the thesis that all appearances are true, but wants to show that, even if Democritus tried to argue against Protagoras that no appearance is true more than any other, he failed to prove his point, because his psychology committed him to Protagoras' views.

One can say that for Protagoras thinking and perceiving are the same thing because in his view they both rest on bodily affections.[20] When he

---

[18] Thus C. C. W. Taylor (ed.), *The Atomists: Leucippus and Democritus. Fragments*, Toronto 1999, p. 221.

[19] That Aristotle here takes φρονεῖν to be synonymous with νοεῖν is shown by the parallel discussion in *De anima*, III 3, on which see below. For a detailed analysis see Lee, *Epistemology After Protagoras* op. cit., pp. 137-138.

[20] Lee, *Epistemology After Protagoras* op. cit., p. 139 says that they are similar "in significant ways", and she uses this expression in order to distinguish Protagoras' and, in general, the

introduces Protagoras' Measure Doctrine, Socrates stresses that, in its context, appearing and perceiving are the same thing (152b 12-c 2), and he goes on speaking of φαντασίαι and/or δόξαι as if the two terms were interchangeable. It is because Protagoras conceives of thinking and perceiving along the same lines, that is, as affections, that he can maintain that all appearances are true. The point is not spelled out in the *Theaetetus*, but the idea seems to be that, if perceiving and thinking are ways in which something appears to a subject, and the modality of this appearing is an affection, the content of the appearance (be this a sensation or a belief) is entirely determined by the object that causes the affection, with no margin for error. Now Aristotle claims that this very same conception of thinking and perceiving as appearances that consist of physical affections is to be found in Democritus and in all Presocratic thinkers. From this he concludes that all of them are committed to the view that all appearances are true, no matter how much they claim to be opposed to it.[21] In *Metaph.*, IV 5, he offers a brief account of the Presocratic/Protagorean way of conceiving thinking and perceiving; but he develops the point at length in *De anima* III 3:

> Thinking and understanding (τὸ νοεῖν καὶ τὸ φρονεῖν) are regarded as akin to a form of perceiving; for in the one as well as the other the soul discriminates and is cognizant of something which is (ἐν ἀμφοτέροις γὰρ τούτοις κρίνει τι ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ γρωρίζει τῶν ὄντων). Indeed the ancients go so far as to identify thinking and perceiving; […]. They all look upon thinking as a bodily process like perceiving, and hold that like is understood as well as perceived by like […]. Yet they ought at the same time to have accounted for error also. (Aristot. *De an.*, III 3, 427a 19-b 1; Smith).

Here Democritus is not explicitly mentioned, but that he is to be included among "the ancients" can be gathered from *De an.*, I 2, 404a 27-31. There, Aristotle observes that Democritus takes what appears to be equivalent to what is true, and that this shows that he identifies the soul with *nous*. Both claims make sense if we interpret them in light of the remarks about the similarity

---

Presocratic conception of thinking from the "primitivist" interpretation offered by Bruno Snell, who argued that the Presocratics actually lacked any notion of non-perceptual thinking. I do not imply any "primitivist" reading either.

[21] See on this Victor Caston, "Why Aristotle needs Imagination", *Phronesis*, 41 (1996), pp. 20-55.

between thinking and perceiving in III 3. Also, in *De an.*, I 2, Aristotle claims that Democritus praises Homer for the phrase "Hector lay thinking other thoughts (ἀλλοφρονέων)" (404a 30).[22] The same phrase is used in *Metaph.*, IV 5—though there it is introduced by a generic "they say" (cf. *Metaph*, IV 5, 1009b 28)—, and its point is that Hector, who is injured and out of his senses, is still capable of having thoughts, just other thoughts than those he had before the injury. Aristotle condemns the idea that one could have "other thoughts", when one is out of his senses, but suggests that it follows from the identification of thinking with a form of bodily state, in light of which, when one is in a certain bodily state, one also has to have the kind of thoughts corresponding to that state.

Now, if these are the reasons why Aristotle feels entitled to assign Democritus the view that all appearances are true in *Metaph.*, IV 5, it follows, I think, that he takes the word "true" to mean two different things when he deals with Democritus there. When Aristotle claims that for Democritus all appearances are true, he means to say that, on the latter's account of thinking and perceiving, it turns out that the mind always thinks something that is, since the contents of its thoughts are entirely determined by an external cause. But when he says that, on the basis of an argument from conflicting appearances, Democritus holds that no appearance is true more than any other, the truth at stake is of a different order, so to say, for it is a scientific truth that is conceived of as lying beyond the domain of the appearances. Aristotle, then, seems to say that Democritus, unlike Protagoras, is aware that there is another truth beyond the appearances, but fails to arrive at it, because of the psychological model he works with. This view seems to fit some of Aristotle's remarks on Democritus and Leucippus in *De gen. et corr.*, I 2:

> Since they thought that the truth lay in the appearance (τἀληθὲς ἐν τῷ φαίνεσθαι), and the appearances are conflicting and infinitely many (ἐναντία δὲ καὶ ἄπειρα τὰ φαινόμενα), they made the shapes (τὰ σχήματα) infinite in number. Hence—owing to the changes of the aggregate—*the same* thing seems (δοκεῖν) different to different people: it is

[22] This is not actually a quotation from Homer, however, but, most likely an application to Hector of something that Homer says about Euryalus in *Il.*, XXIII 698, where Euryalus is said to ἀλλοφρονεῖν as a result of a boxing match.

> transposed (μετακινεῖσθαι) by a small additional ingredient, and appears utterly other by the transposition of a single constituent. For both tragedy and "trugedy" (τρυγῳδία) come to be out of the same letters. (*De gen. et corr.*, I 2, 315b 9-15; Joachim, modified).

When Aristotle says that for Democritus "the truth lay in the appearance", he does not mean to say that for him, like for Protagoras, all appearances are true. As in *Metaph.*, IV 5, the point is that, on the basis of an argument from conflicting appearances, Democritus infers something about the true nature of things beyond the appearances; that is, he infers that sensible things rest on the atoms and their shapes. Thus, what Aristotle means by "the truth lies in appearance" is that for Democritus appearances give us a glimpse of the truth, in being the starting point for inferring the shapes of their atoms, which constitute their real nature.[23]

Let me now examine Aristotle's ontological interpretation of the thesis that what is is equivalent with what is sensible:

> Those who really feel the difficulties have been led to this opinion ἐκ τῶν αἰσθητῶν. They think that contradictions or contraries are true at the same time, because they see contraries coming to be out of the same thing. If, then, that which is not cannot come to be, the thing must have existed before as both contraries alike, as Anaxagoras says all is mixed in all, and Democritus too; for he says the void and the full exist alike in every part, and yet one of these is being, and the other non being. (*Metaph.*, IV 5, 1009a 22-30; Ross, slightly modified).

The view expressed here is that both Anaxagoras and Democritus offer analogous solutions to the old Parmenidean problem of explaining how something comes to be without having to say that it comes to be out of nothing. Anaxagoras for Aristotle solves the problem by saying that there are bits of everything mixed in everything, so that something comes to be *F* when in a mixture of *F* and non-*F* bits, the former become preponderant.[24]

---

[23] Aristotle' interpretation of Democritus in *De gen et corr.*, I 2 squares, in fact, with what we know from Sext. Emp., *Adv. math.*, VII 140, who reports that Democritus praised Anaxagoras for having said that "Appearances are a glimpse of things hidden" (ὄψις γὰρ τῶν ἀδήλων τὰ φαινόμενα).

[24] I deliberately speak of bits to avoid positing the problem of how Anaxagoras conceived of the ingredients of his mixtures, that is, whether he took them to be "stuffs" or qualities.

Democritus solves it by positing the full and the void, which he conceives of as being and non-being respectively. The full represents the atoms, which are indestructible precisely because they contain no void; the void is what is in between the atoms, and it is what allows aggregates to dissolve, recombine, and rearrange, which is what for Democritus explains generation and corruption (cf. Aristot. *De gen. et corr.*). An aggregate, then, is made of both atoms and void or being and non-being, and the presence of non-being in it is what allows it to come to be something else. Aristotle concludes that Democritus' position leads to the view that contradictories are true together, because any aggregate, which we perceive as being *F*, in fact is also non-*F* insofar as it contains some void or non-being. But Anaxagoras and Democritus are mistaken, Aristotle maintains, because they do not see that there is another kind of being beside that which is subject to change, and this, I take it, is the being of forms. It is true, he says, that when something comes to be from something else in a sense it must have already been present in that from which it comes to be, but this is to be explained by saying that it was present there in potentiality rather than in actuality.

Altogether, then, Aristotle seems to suggest that Democritus' project, whatever exactly that was, fails on two counts: because of an ontological assumption, which he shares with Anaxagoras, and that commits him to the view that things are both *F* and non-*F* at the same time, and because of an epistemological/psychological assumption, which leads him to identify thinking and perceiving. Plotinus, I suggest, is sensitive to Aristotle's arguments in *Metaph.*, IV 5, and he picks up both the critique of Democritus' and the Presocratics' psychology, and the critique of Democritus' ontology. I will deal with the first point in the next chapter; here I would like to focus on the criticism of Democritus' ontology, because it seems to be more relevant for understanding why Plotinus replaces Democritus' atomic shapes with λόγοι. Plotinus reasons that, if things are constituted by atoms, they must be both *F* and non-*F* at the same time, as Aristotle says in *Metaph.*, IV 5. But, as his discussion of the material causes of the *Phaedo* in VI.6.[34].14 reveals (section 1.6), he holds that things cannot be in their very nature both *F* and

---

Aristotle, in any case, takes him to speak of "stuffs" such as blood, bones, and so on. On this see now David Sedley, *Creationism and Its Critics in Antiquity* op. cit., pp. 14-20.

non-*F*, but may only appear to be so in a relative and extrinsic way. Like Aristotle, Plotinus thinks that the way out from the impasse to which Democritus' ontology leads rests on the recognition that there is some being that is not subject to change and coming to be. However, unlike Aristotle, he does not identify this being with a form that is immanent in matter, but with an intelligible principle that never enters matter, i.e. a λόγος. The λόγοι solve the problem with atomism in a way that is similar to the potentiality/actuality distinction that Aristotle invokes for the same purpose, but is not the same, for the λόγοι for Plotinus are *active powers* (see III.6.[26].8 in section 1.7, and II.5.[25].2). Thus Plotinus endorses Aristotle's remarks, but says that something comes to be from something else when its "power" is present in it, rather than when it is present in it "in potentiality".[25]

Following Aristotle, Plotinus interprets Democritus as someone who holds that Protagoras is right in thinking that sensible things appear to us in conflicting ways, but is wrong in believing that all appearances must be true. For Plotinus, Democritus, in contrast to Protagoras, infers from the phenomenon of conflicting appearances that sensible things cannot just be what they appear to be, but must have a nature that lies beyond their appearances, this nature being the atoms. The atoms, Plotinus thinks, have in Democritus' ontology a function that is analogous to that of the mysterious powers at play in the Secret Doctrine, but are not those powers. Protagoras introduced those powers in order to ensure the truth of his Measure Doctrine. Man is the measure of all things, he believed, and this means 1) that things are for each perceiver such as they appear to him; and 2) that in whatever way things are, thus they also appear. But both 1 and 2 can hold only in a world in which nothing is anything by itself. Thus, in Protagoras' view, even the powers that give rise to sensory appearances must be indeterminate by themselves. Now, for those indeterminate powers, Plotinus says, which are nothing by themselves, Democritus substitutes his atoms, which are something by themselves, because they have a particular shape that, insofar as it is the shape it is, can cause a determinate effect on a sense-organ so and so disposed. But, in the end, Democritus' project fails. Plato, Plotinus concludes, applauded

[25] Cf. Plotinus' remarks on actuality and potentiality in.

the idea that there are natures hidden behind the appearances of things; he picked up Democritus' project, and he brought it to success, by substituting for the corporeal atoms the intelligible and active λόγοι.

2.3. *The intelligible structure of bodies:* II.6.[17]

Now that we have seen what goes wrong with Democritus' project, and why Plotinus thinks that the atomic shapes need to be replaced by λόγοι, I would like to examine what kind of causal function the λόγοι have, and what sort of sensible world they are responsible for.

In section 1, I have said that Plotinus conceives of two kinds of λόγοι: those of qualities and those of bodies or, more precisely, of natural kinds. The relation between these two kinds of λόγοι is not very clear, but in II.4.[12] it is described thus:

> So when the form (εἶδος) comes to the matter it brings everything with it; the form has everything, the size and all that goes with (μετά) and is caused by (ὑπό) the λόγος. Therefore, in every natural kind the dimensions are determined along with (μετά) the form; the dimensions of a man are different from those of a bird, and those of different kinds of birds from one another. Is there anything more surprising in the bringing of quantity to matter as something different from itself than in the addition to it of quality? It is not the case that quality is a λόγος and quantity is not, since quantity is form (εἶδος) and measure (μέτρον) and number (ἀριθμός). (II.4.[12].8, 24-30; Armstrong).

The λόγος of a species of animals, Plotinus says here, e.g. a species of birds, brings with it all the λόγοι of the qualities that are regularly found in the individuals that belong to that species. But, since these individuals are also characterized by a particular size-range, we must assume that the λόγος of their species also brings with it the λόγος of their size. The λόγος of the species, Plotinus goes on, has some kind of causal priority over the other λόγοι; for it is the power on which ultimately the coming to be of the individual depends (notice the use of ὑπό in connection with it), while the other λόγοι (i.e. those of

qualities and quantities) contribute to its work, but are incapable of bringing about a body by themselves (notice the use of μετά). An analogous point is made in III.6.[26].16, where Plotinus explains how bodies come to be even if matter does not enter in their constitution:

> A λόγος approached and made it [i.e. matter] large, leading it on to the size desired (ἤθελεν) by the λόγος itself […]. The size (μέγεθος) was "the large" (τὸ μέγα) imposed on top of it. So if one were to remove this form, the subject is no longer something large, nor does it even appear to be. But if the thing of size that came to be was a man or a horse, and it was "the large" of the horse that entered matter with the horse (μετὰ τοῦ ἵππου τὸ μέγα τοῦ ἵππου ἐπελθόν), then when the horse leaves (ἀπελθόντος τοῦ ἵππου), "the large" in it leaves also (καὶ τὸ μέγα αὐτοῦ ἀπέρχεται). But if anyone were to say that the horse is based on bulk of a certain size and that "the large" remains (μένει τὸ μέγα), our reply will be that it is not the size of the horse that remains there, but that of the bulk. (III.6.[26].16, 1-11, Fleet, slightly modified).

This passage explains, I think, that there is no such thing as "a size" that is not the size of something in the world, as there is no "sweetness" or "whiteness" that is not the sweet or white of this or that thing. This is because it is the λόγος of a natural kind that is ultimately responsible for all the qualities and quantities that we might perceive. Since matter lacks any quality, and it is incapable of acquiring them, all that enters into a body's constitution must come from the intelligible λόγος which is in the seed of that body (or from the interactions it might have with "nearby" λόγοι).[26] There are two ways in which the λόγος of a natural kind can be analyzed in Plotinus. One way is to view it as the answer to a "What is it?" question. In this sense it is a whole that has a structure analogous to that of an Aristotelian definition, and whose parts correspond to differentiae.[27] Another way is to view it as the DNA of a living organism.[28] I will try to argue that these two characterizations are in fact compatible, but that only the second one gives a proper account of the role of

[26] See section 2.1 above.
[27] See Kalligas, "*Logos* and Sensible Object in Plotinus" op. cit., pp. 400-401; Remes, *Plotinus on Self* op. cit., pp. 70-75.
[28] See Kalligas, "*Logos* and the Sensible Object in Plotinus" op. cit., p. 409.

the λόγοι in the sensible world. However, let me begin by examining the first one, which Plotinus develops especially in II.6.[17].[29]

At first, II.6.[17] seems to deal exclusively with a logical problem that was widely debated among philosophers of the Imperial age: that of finding a rationale for distinguishing qualities, i.e. accidental attributes of substances, from differentiae, i.e. essential attributes. The origin of this problem is to be found in the efforts of systematization of Aristotle's conception of the differentia. Aristotle claims that a differentia is a quality (Aristot. *Metaph*., V 14 and *Top*., IV 2, 122b 16), but also maintains that it has to be an essential attribute of the substance to which it belongs (what will be later called an attribute that is "completive of the substance", συμπληρωτικὸς τῆς οὐσίας). One way to spell out the difficulty that later Peripatetics were confronted with is to refer to the *Categories*.[30] According to the doctrine of the *Categories*, as an essential attribute, a differentia has to be synonymously predicated (*Cat*., 5, 2a 14-29), while as a quality it must be "in the subject" of which it is predicated. But what is "in a subject", Aristotle says, cannot be synonymously predicated of the subject it is in. Hence, if one is to build a systematic account of the differentia, one has to explain how a differentia can

[29] II.6.[17] is sometimes read as "an earlier treatise", in which Plotinus puts forward views that he abandons in his "mature" years. The view that he would abandon is that there are essential qualities of bodies, that is, so-called "completive qualities" of bodies. This reading stems from Plotinus' remark in VI.2.[43].14, 14-22 that there are no "completive" qualities of bodies, and the scholars that endorse it do so because they take "completive quality" to mean the same as "essential quality". Plotinus endorses the view that there are essential qualities in II.6.[17], this reading maintains, and he rejects completive qualities in VI.2.[43]; since completive and essential qualities are the same thing, Plotinus in VI.2.[43] rejects the view that there are essential qualities, and thus revises his "early" II.6.[17]. I do not think that by excluding the existence of "completive qualities" Plotinus wants to say that there are no essential qualities in bodies. Rather, I think that his point in VI.2.[43] is that the essential qualities of bodies are not "completive", because they belong to the substance of the body, i.e. to its λόγος, since its very origin, and they are not added to the substance later so as to "complete" it. In other words, the point made in VI.2.[43] is that the relation between differentiae and *genera* should not be explained as Aristotle does, i.e. by saying that the differentiae come from "outside" the genus. The differentiae for Plotinus are pre-contained in the genus and so are the essential qualities that they pick up. I therefore read VI.2.[43].14, 14-22 as Lloyd, *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism* op. cit., pp. 90-94. However, for a complete review of the literature see Chiaradonna, *Sostanza, movimento, analogia* op. cit., pp. 140-142, n. 167.

[30] Thus A.C. Lloyd, "Neoplatonic logic and Aristotelian logic-I", *Phronesis*, 1 (1955-1956), pp. 58-72, esp. p. 65-66. Lloyd actually argues that the difficulty came about by a conflation between the doctrine of the *Categories* and that of the predicables in the *Topics*. The idea that the later attempts at systematization rest on some confusion on the Aristotelian notion of quality finds more support in light of Donald Morrison's remarks in Id., "The Taxonomical Interpretation of Aristotle's *Categories*", in Anthony Preus and John P. Anton, *Essays in Ancient greek Philosophy V: Aristotle's Ontology*, Albany 1992, pp. 19-46.

be both an essential attribute and a quality. Now even if it is true that Plotinus struggles with this kind of logical issue in II.6.[17], his interest lies elsewhere, and the reason why he examines it is that he wants to answer one of Aristotle's challenges to Plato' forms. Consider the way in which II.6.[17] begins. Plotinus makes some remarks about substance "there", i.e. in *Nous* (II.6.[17].1, 1-7). Substance "there", he claims, is a whole out of different parts, where these parts are being, difference, sameness, motion and rest, i.e. the *summa genera* of the *Sophist*. But, he says, there are different ways in which this claim could be spelled out. One way is to say that substance "there" is being plus the other genera, meaning by this that being is the underlying subject that remains after all the other genera have being stripped away, and that substance is the underlying subject of being. In this scenario, he observes, the other genera would be only accidents of being, and being would be only an accident of substance. The point is actually obscure unless it is read in light of *Anal. Post.*, I 4. Aristotle there distinguishes substances from accidents by saying that substance, in contrast to accidents, is what is predicated *per se* rather than accidentally, where predicated accidentally means of a subject "as of something else". Something is said to be artistic, for instance, insofar as it is something else, a man, say, and then artistic; but line is not predicated of triangle in this way, but as part of what it is to be a triangle, that is, as part of the definition of triangle (i.e. "figure bounded by three lines"). Now, Plotinus reasons, if being is the underlying subject that remains when the other genera have been stripped away, these other genera, being other than it, must be predicated of it "as of something else"; in other words, they must be its accidents, and the same must hold for being in relation to substance. However, he points out, this way of understanding the relation between substance, being, and the other genera cannot be correct (1, 7-8). For it implies that being and the other genera are not substances, while, in contrast, everything "there" must be substance. Plotinus begins to address the problem by rethinking the relation between substance and the *summa genera*. Substance is a whole of which the *summa genera* are parts, he says, but is a whole in the way a seed is. A seed "here", i.e. in the sensible world, contains its parts all in one, even if each of them has its own specific function (as each of them is appointed to the constitution of a different part of a leaving organism). In the same way,

substance "there" is a whole that contains all of its parts, i.e. the *genera*, "all together" as one single thing, and the parts are not something other than the whole. In this scenario, he goes on, the whole is substance, but also the parts are substances, because they are no longer attributes said of substance as of something else, but are what makes substance the substance it is.

At this point we would expect Plotinus to develop an analysis of the relations between the forms in the intelligible world. Instead he abruptly claims that, since there cannot be accidents "there" (i.e. things said of substance as of something else), qualities must be "there" as differentiae of substances, which are not accidentally predicated of substance, but are responsible for making each substance "there" the kind of substance it is. This, I take it, is a way of saying that the *summa genera* are what they are in virtue of their differentia, which is a "completive" attribute of their substance, and which makes each of them a different substance. Having said that accidents or qualities are "there" as differentiae, Plotinus, again abruptly, introduces the following problem, that will occupy him for the rest of the treatise: if everything "there" is substance and differentia, why "down here", i.e. in the sensible world, are there things other than substances and differentiae? That is to say, why are there proper qualities (or accidents) too "down here"? (1, 8). The worry, then, is that if there are no proper qualities "there", but there are qualities "here", we need to explain how these qualities "here" could ever come to be from the substances "there". This picks up a difficulty that Aristotle raises against Plato's forms in *Metaph.*, I 9. In *Metaph.*, I 9, 990b 27-991a 8, Aristotle puts forward a compressed argument against the forms, which has been interpreted in quite different ways.[31] He says that, on the one hand, the Platonists seem committed to the thesis that there are forms of both substances (e.g. man) and qualities (e.g. beauty, large, justice), whereas, on the

[31] See G. E. L. Owen, "Dialectic and Eristic in the Treatment of the Forms", in Id. (ed.), *Aristotle on Dialectic*, Oxford 1968, pp. 103-125, esp. pp. 108-123; Gregory Vlastos, "The 'Two-Level Paradoxes' in Aristotle", in Id., *Platonic Studies*, Princeton 1981 (first edition 1973), pp. 323-334; Julia Annas, "Aristotle on Substance, Accident, and Plato's Forms", *Phronesis*, 22 (1977), pp. 146-160. Annas takes the argument to rest on a distinction between *per se* or essential predication, and accidental predication. I agree with most of Annas' remarks. However, my reading differs from Annas' at one key point: unlike Annas, I do not think that Aristotle assumes that a Platonist, from the fact that a particular participates in the form of the double, and this is eternal, would infer that there must be a form of eternity (the strength of Aristotle's criticism, in my view, rests precisely on the fact that no Platonist would draw this inference).

other hand, they also seem to maintain that there are forms only of substances. Since these two theses are incompatible, he concludes that they should abandon at least one of them. The first thesis that Aristotle ascribes to the Platonists seems unproblematic, since there is evidence in Plato's dialogues for forms of substances and qualities alike. It is the second thesis that does not seem to square with what we read in Plato, since Plato often refers to the forms of justice, beauty, largeness, which are all forms of qualities. Thus, Aristotle, it seems, cannot be suggesting that the Platonists actually claim that there are forms only of substances; rather, he must be saying that this conclusion follows from some of their views. Aristotle shows how this conclusion follows from their views in the following passage:

> But according to the necessities of the case and the opinions held about the forms, if they can be participated in there must be forms of substances only. For they are not participated in accidentally, but a thing must participate in its form as in something not predicated of a subject (e.g. if a thing participates in double itself, it participates also in eternal, but accidentally; for eternal happens to be predicable of the double). Therefore the forms will be substance. (Aristot. *Metaph.*, I 9, 990b 28-34; Ross, slightly modified).

The argument, as I understand it, runs as follows: if *x*, i.e. a sensible thing or a mathematical, participates in the form of the double, it cannot do so accidentally, because the forms are essences of their participants, so that they should be predicated of them essentially or *per se*. However, the form of the double can have various predicates that are said of it accidentally, e.g. eternal. As eternal is said of double, but does not belong to its definition, the *x* that participates in the double will also participate in eternal, but only accidentally, and there will be no form of eternity required to explain why some *x* (a mathematical, say) happens to be eternal, why some other *x* (a couple of sensible particulars) does not. The analysis can be generalized from eternal to all qualities: say you participate in the form of human being, of which white is accidentally predicated; by participating in human being, you might participate also in white, but will do so accidentally, and there will be no form of white alongside that of human being. What follows from the generalisation is that there cannot be forms of qualities but only forms of substances, and this is why all forms are substances.

What is the problem, then, with maintaining that there are only forms of substances? Aristotle presents it thus:

> Therefore the forms will be substance; and the same terms indicate substance in this and in the ideal world (or what will be the meaning of saying that there is something apart from the particulars—the one over many?). And if the forms and the particulars that participate in them have the same form, there will be something common to these; for why should 2 be one and the same in the perishable 2's or in those which are many but eternal, and not the same in the 2 itself as in the particular 2? But if they have not the same form, they must be homonymous, and it is as if one were to call both Callias and a wooden image a man, without observing any community between them. (Aristot. *Metaph.*, I 9, 990 b 34-991a 8; Ross, slightly modified).

The term "substance", Aristotle says, must have the same meaning "here" and "there", that is, when applied to sensible things and when applied to forms, otherwise the grounds on which the Platonists argue for forms become senseless, and the forms become mere duplicates of the things that participate in them, as the portrait of Callias is of Callias. But if substance has the same meaning "here" and "there", and if all forms are substance, then all sensible particulars must be substances too.

In II.6.[17], Plotinus, like Aristotle, maintains that all forms are substances, but, by suggesting that qualities are "there" as differentiae, he wants to say that the fact that forms are substances does not prevent forms of qualities from being "there". The forms of qualities, in contrast, are "there" as differentiae, for the differentiae are qualities, but are also participated in *per se*. Since qualities are "there" as differentiae, Plotinus infers that there can also be qualities "down here", though these qualities too can only be differentiae. But this raises a problem, because "here" the same thing seems to be sometimes a differentia (white in white-lead, say) and sometimes a mere quality (e.g. white in a swan). In other words, the idea that qualities are "there" as differentiae is only a partial answer to Aristotle; but to give a complete answer to Aristotle, Plotinus has to show either that all qualities "here" are in fact differentiae, or that there is a way to explain how there can be qualities "here" that are mere accidents, even though there are only differentiae "there".

Plotinus begins by exploring the first option, and he looks into the nature of quality "here" to see whether in the end qualities and differentiae are the same thing "here" or if there is a rationale for distinguishing them. Let us pick up his argument from here:

> But we must enquire what in itself a quality (ποιότης) is: for perhaps the knowledge of what it is will more effectively put an end to our difficulties. First of all then, we must enquire into the question already raised, whether we are to assume that the same thing is at one time only qualitative, and at another completive of the substance, and we must not be uneasy about what is qualitative being completive of substance, but regard it as a completive element of a substance of a certain quality (οὐ δυσχεράναντας ποιὸν συμπληρωτικὸν οὐσίας εἶναι, ἀλλὰ ποιᾶς μᾶλλον οὐσίας). (*Enn.*, II.6.[17].2, 1-5; Armstrong, modified).

We need to find out what a quality is "here", Plotinus says, and we should start by putting forward a working hypothesis. Let us say that perhaps qualities and differentiae are the same thing "down here", as they seem to be the same thing "there", and that they can be distinguished only by context. To be sure, if all differentiae were qualities, then we should conclude that all sensible substances are what they are in virtue of qualities. This might be problematic for some people (i.e. the Peripatetics, cf. e.g. Aristot. *Phys.*, I 6, 189a 33 ff.), Plotinus goes on, but is not a serious problem for someone who holds that the only substance in the sensible world *qua* sensible is a "qualified substance" (ποιὰ οὐσία). I take this to refer to Plotinus' own position, and to be an anticipation of what is said at VI.3.[44].8, 15-20, where Plotinus claims that, in his view, a body, *qua* sensible, is "a qualified substance", as it is a bundle of qualities and matter. Let me leave this notion of bundle aside for the moment.

Should one conclude, then, that qualities and differentiae "here" are the same thing, on the grounds that all sensible things are just qualified substances? To answer this question Plotinus needs to explain what he means by qualified substance first;

> Now in a qualified substance the substance, the "what it is", must be there before it is qualified. What then, in the case of fire, is the substance which is there before the qualified

> substance? Is it the body? Then the genus "body" will be the substance, and fire will be a hot body, and the whole of it will not be substance but the hot will be in it in the same way as the quality of snubnosedness is in you. So if the heat and the brightness and the lightness—these appear to be qualitative—and resistance are taken away, the three-dimensionality is left and the matter is the substance. But we do not think it is: the form (εἶδος), rather, is substance. But the form is quality. No, the form is not quality but λόγος. (*Enn.*, II.6.2, 6-15; Armstrong, slightly modified).

Here Plotinus puts his working hypothesis to the test, and by the end of the passage he rejects it. What he says is a version of the point that he has made and rejected concerning the constitution of the intelligible world at the beginning of the treatise. If you assume that qualities and differentiae are the same thing "here", he claims, you are bound to interpret the notion of qualified substance as picking up an underlying subject (the substance) plus a quality or, more generally, an accident. But this notion would lead you to the absurdity of making matter the only real substance in the sensible world. Take the qualified substance "fire", for instance; its differentia will be heat. Now, if you treat this differentia as an accident (i.e. as something said of something as of something else), you have to say that heat can be taken away from fire, and that what remains, i.e. a resistant body, is the the substance of fire. But this body can be further analysed as three-dimensional matter plus resistance. Thus, probably with the Stoics in mind, Plotinus concludes that, on this account of the differentia, the only real substance in the world ends up being matter.

This is the reason why qualities and differentiae cannot be the same thing "here": this view leads to the unacceptable conclusion that only matter is substance. Against this conflation of the notion of quality and differentia, and against the notion of matter as substance that it entails, Plotinus points out that only form can be substance, and form "down here" is not quality but λόγος. A λόγος is a substance insofar as it is the answer to a "What is it?" question asked of some sensible thing. For Plotinus, then, a λόγος is properly speaking what each thing is "down here", and its differentiations cannot be qualities, or at least not strictly speaking. Take a bright, hot thing, that is, and ask what it is; the answer should not be "a hot, bright thing" but "fire", which is the

λόγος of a body that contains heat as its intelligible differentia. The differentiae "down here", then, are what makes a λόγος the type of λόγος it is, in the same way in which "there" they are what makes a form the type of form it is.

To sum up, then, at II.6.[17].2, 1-5, i.e. the last passage quoted above, Plotinus' main goal is to show that differentiae and qualities "down here" must be different things, even if we do say that a swan is white and that white-lead is white, as if they were the same thing. Differentiae "here", Plotinus says, are λόγοι, and, as he goes on to explain in II.6.[17].2, 17-18, all λόγοι are activities (ἐνέργειαι) or active, intelligible powers. Thus, for instance, the λόγος of white is the activity or the active power of "whitening", that of heat is the activity of "warming", and so on. None of these activities, he claims, should be confused with a quality (3, 1-3). Insofar as they are activities and insofar as each of them is just what it is, the λόγοι are exactly like the intelligible forms. But they are not forms; they are those essential traits into which the complex nature of forms can be spelled out by the application of conceptual distinctions (3, 11-14). This does not mean that the λόγοι are just thoughts in our minds, however; rather, they are real powers into which the activity of the forms is developed and articulated "down here". There is no explicit reference to the model of the seed in the text, but it is the model that seems to be in place.

With this account of the λόγοι in mind, Plotinus finally explains what is a sensible quality "down here", how precisely it is to be distinguished from a differentia, and how the final answer to Aristotle's challenge in *Metaph.*, I 9 is to be built.

> There is nothing to prevent heat, by the fact that it is connatural to fire, from being a form and an activity of fire and not its quality, and again being a quality in a different way, when it is taken alone in something else and is no longer a shape of substance, but only a trace, a shadow, an image that has abandoned its substance, of which it is the activity, to be a quality (οὐδὲν κωλύει καὶ τὴν θερμότητα τῷ σύμφυτον εἶναι τῷ πυρὶ εἶδός τι εἶναι τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ ἐνέργειαν καὶ οὐ ποιότητα αὐτοῦ, καὶ αὖ ἄλλως ποιότητα, μόνην δὲ ἐν ἄλλῳ ληφθεῖσαν οὐκέτι

> μορφὴν οὐσίας οὖσαν, ἀλλὰ ἴχνος μόνον καὶ σκιὰν καὶ εἰκόνα ἀπολιποῦσαν αὐτῆς τὴν οὐσίαν, ἧς ἡ ἐνέργεια, ποιότητα εἶναι) (*Enn.*, II.6.[17].3, 14-20; Armstrong, slightly modified).

Plotinus here seems to say that heat, that is, the differentia of fire, can be both a quality and an essential attribute; that is, he seems to claim that heat can be a differentia in fire, and also be a quality in something that is not essentially hot. But we have seen that he excludes the possibility that the same thing could be now a differentia and now a quality. What he means, then, must be something different. As I understand it, this passage says that heat *qua* differentia can never be a quality, in the same way in which heat *qua* quality can never be a differentia, and this independently of the context in which the heat is to be found. In other words, Plotinus holds that, when we speak of heat as quality and as differentia, in fact we are always speaking of two things rather than one.[32] Plotinus' words here, I think, should be understood in light of a theory that he has introduced in an earlier treatise, V.4.[7]; I mean the so-called "double activity theory", which he regularly uses to explain how, starting from the One, an inferior ontological level comes to be from the superior one:

> In each and every thing there is an activity which belongs to substance and one which is from substance; and that which belongs to substance is the activity which is each particular thing, and the other activity derives from the first one, and must in everything be a consequence of it, different from the thing itself: as in fire there is a heat which completes its substance, and another which comes into being from that primary heat when fire exercises the activity that is connatural to its substance in abiding unchanged as fire.
> ἐνέργεια ἡ μέν ἐστι τῆς οὐσίας, ἡ δ' ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας ἑκάστου· καὶ ἡ μὲν τῆς οὐσίας αὐτό ἐστιν ἐνέργεια ἕκαστον, ἡ δὲ ἀπ' ἐκείνης, ἣν δεῖ παντὶ ἕπεσθαι ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἑτέραν οὖσαν αὐτοῦ· οἷον καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ πυρὸς ἡ μέν τίς ἐστι συμπληροῦσα τὴν οὐσίαν θερμότης, ἡ δὲ ἀπ' ἐκείνης ἤδη γινομένη ἐνεργοῦντος ἐκείνου τὴν σύμφυτον τῇ οὐσίᾳ ἐν τῷ μένειν πῦρ. (V.4.[7].2, 27-33; Armstrong, slightly modified).

[32] Cf. Michael F. Wagner, "Plotinus on the nature of physical reality", in Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* op. cit., pp. 130-170, esp. pp. 161-163.

Everything has a double activity, Plotinus maintains. One of these is an internal activity, i.e. an activity of the substance of a thing. The other is an external activity, i.e. an activity from the substance of a thing "in something else". And they are never the same thing. Take fire for instance, the heat that belongs to it *qua* fire is its internal activity, and it is the essential disposition of fire to heat, whereas the heat that fire communicates to the air or to some other subject, in the exercise of its disposition, is its external activity. The latter is only "an image" of the internal one, but, as Plotinus always insists, it is an activity that is never "cut off" (ἀποτετμημένη) from the internal one (V.4.[7].2, 25-26). As it has been remarked some time ago by Rutten, Plotinus' distinction between internal and external activity stems in part from Aristotle's analysis of motion in *Phys.*, III 3.[33] Aristotle argues there that, when *x* moves *y*, the motion of the agent is never "cut off" (ἀποτετμημένη) from that of the patient, and in fact it is the same as the motion that takes place in the patient, in the sense that it is the motion of the agent in the patient. Plotinus applies this account of motion to his notion of activity, and thus he suggests that the activity that is in the patient is never "cut off" from that of the agent. But he also seems to combine Aristotle's remarks in *Phys.*, III 3 with *Phys.*, VIII 4, 255a 30-b 13, where Aristotle discusses the natural motion of the elements by appealing to the distinction between having a science and exercising it in an act of contemplation or θεωρία.[34] The passage is in many respects very obscure, especially because Aristotle wants to argue that, although analogous in some respects to the exercise of a science, the natural motion of the elements differs from contemplation in an important way. For, whereas the man of science can start contemplating at will, the elements cannot move by themselves of their natural motion, but need to be moved by something else. Plotinus takes the view that a natural body moves by

[33] See Christian Rutten, "La doctrine de deux actes dans la philosophie de Plotin", *Revue Philosophique*, 81 (1956), pp. 100-106.

[34] Plotinus has also in mind, and perhaps more importantly, *De an.*, II 5, 417b 5-16, but on this see below. That the theory of the double activity depends both upon *Phys.*, III 3 and *De an.*, II 5 has been argued by A. C. Lloyd in "Plotinus on the Genesis of Thought and Existence", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 5 (1987), pp. 155-186, esp. pp. 167-168. Lloyd rightly observes, however, that Plotinus distances himself from Aristotle by saying that the effect (i.e. the external activity or activity in the patient) is "an image" of the cause, and thus it is inferior to the cause, because for Aristotle the exercise of a science is a higher kind of act than the mere possession of the science which is the disposition to actualize the science.

exercising an internal disposition in a way analogous to that in which a science is exercised, and this is why he presents the substance of fire as a stable disposition to act in a certain way. But he also seems to suggest, in contrast to Aristotle, that fire, to some extent, exercises its disposition by itself, even though I say "to some extent", because in Plotinus' broad metaphysical scheme it is clear that fire, and any other λόγος, acquires its disposition to act from a higher level of being, and, ultimately, from the One. Thus, even if fire exercises its essential disposition by itself, insofar as it has it in virtue of some higher principle, it also exercises it in virtue of something else, as if it were "moved", so to say, by the entity that precedes it in the hierarchy of being.

If we read the last passage above from II.6.[17].3 in light of the double activity theory, we can see that Plotinus uses the distinction between internal and external activities to draw that between differentiae and qualities. "The heat that is connatural to fire" in II.6.[17].3, i.e. the differentia of fire, can now be viewed as the internal activity of fire; while "the image of heat in something else", i.e. the heat as sensible quality, can be viewed as the external activity of fire. Since internal activities are never the same thing as the external ones, differentiae "down here" will never be the same thing as qualities, but, nonetheless, qualities will always be strictly dependent on them (i.e. never "cut off" from them) as an image in a mirror is linked to the original that produces it (cf. IV.5.[29].6). Naturally, the internal activities or differentiae cannot be anything else but those activities, such as whitening, warming, and so on, that Plotinus calls λόγοι, and these will be the internal constituents of the λόγος of a natural kind. But in the case of simple bodies like fire, the internal differentia and the actual λόγος of the kind will be hardly distinguishable, if at all. Since the λόγοι are intelligible things, it follows that all the differentiae "down here", that is all the differentiae of bodies, will be intelligible entities, while their qualities will always be the sensible effects produced by those intelligible entities.[35]

[35] On this see Eyjólfur Emilsson, "Cognition and Its Object", in Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* op. cit., pp. 217-249, esp. pp. 222-223; see also Id., *Plotinus on Intellect*, Oxford 2007, pp. 132-133.

Now let me try to present how Plotinus develops his final answer to Aristotle. He has said that in *Nous* there are qualities as differentiae, and that in the sensible world there are only qualities, that are caused by differentiae which are part of the intelligible nature of bodies. This means that, in contrast to what Aristotle argues, even though everything "there" is substance, in the sensible world not only not everything is substance, but nothing is substance. This point does not emerge clearly from II.6.[17], but it is made in VI.3.[44].15, where Plotinus probably relies on II.6.[17]:

> It was said about the "such" (ποιόν) that, mixed together with others, matter and the "how much" (ποσόν), it effects the completion of sensible substance, and that this so-called substance is this compound of many, and is not a "something" (τι) but a "such" (ποιόν); and the λόγος, of fire for instance, indicates rather the "something", but the shape (μορφή) it produces is rather a "such" (ποιόν). And the λόγος of human being is the being a "something", but its product in the nature of body, being an image of the λόγος, is rather a sort of "such". It is as if, the visible Socrates being a man, his painted picture were called Socrates, even though it is merely colours and painter's stuff; in the same way, therefore, since there is a λόγος according to which Socrates is, the sensible Socrates should not rightly be said to be Socrates, but colours and shapes which are imitations (μιμήματα) of those in the λόγος; and this λόγος [i.e. Socrates'] in relation to the truest λόγος of man is to be predicated in the same way. And so much for that. (*Enn.*, VI.3.[44].15, 24-38; Armstrong, slightly modified).

Here Plotinus describes sensible things as bundles of qualities and quantities, and he says that these bundles are called whatever they are called, e.g. "Socrates" or "fire", in virtue of the λόγος which brings them about (cf. VI.3.[44].8, 15-20). This means that, when you say of something bright and hot that it is fire, in fact you refer (or you should refer) to the λόγος of fire and to its differentia, because fire is strictly speaking this λόγος, whereas the bundle that you perceive can only be called fire homonymously. Sensible fire is only an "image" of fire, because, as a bundle of qualities, it does not have what makes fire the thing it is, i.e. an internal disposition to act in a certain way. This does not mean that sensible fire is only a "degraded" and

"imperfect" fire.[36] As a portrait of Socrates can be a perfect imitation of Socrates, but cannot be Socrates because it cannot act and behave like Socrates; in the same way a bundle of heat and light can be a perfect "portrait" of what fire is, but cannot be fire, because it cannot produce heat and light: it displays those traits, but does so only in virtue of a λόγος of which it is a manifestation. Plotinus, thus, embraces the view that sensible things are imitations of the forms merely as a portrait is an imitation of Callias, and he sees nothing threatening in this.

One could object that Plotinus' answer to Aristotle is a little too confident, so to say. For, if forms and particulars are only homonymous in respect to each other, what link is there between the sensible and the intelligible, and how can we grasp any intelligible substance starting from our experience of the sensible things around us?[37] Take fire, if sensible fire has only the name in common with its form, will we ever be able to know what fire is, given that the true essence of fire in the end must be a form? Plotinus, I think, is fully aware of this difficulty, and, as far as I can see, he uses the double activity theory to solve it. Keep in mind that this theory is of paramount importance for his metaphysics. For it is through it that he explains how the One produces *Nous*, and *Nous* produces Soul. This theory provides him with the way out from the impasse, because, in virtue of it, he can maintain that not everything sensible has only the name in common with its form. Take again the case of fire: sensible fire is fire only homonymously, but is not "hot" only homonymously, because its sensible heat is an "image" of the intelligible, internal heat of fire's substance in a very special way: rather than being "a portrait" of it (assuming for a moment that there could be such a thing for heat), it directly depends on that intelligible heat, because it is its immediate effect, like a reflection, which can be in a mirror only so long as the the cause that produces it is there. To be sure, the intelligible heat that is in the substance of fire is "purer", and sensible fire is hot only in a derivative way;

[36] See Richard Patterson, *Image and Reality in Plato's Metaphysics*, Indianapolis 1985.
[37] This problem is developed in detail by Riccardo Chiaradonna, *Sostanza, Movimento, Analogia. Plotino critico di Aristotele*, Napoli 2002, who claims, however, that Plotinus copes with it by suggesting that sensible objects are only occasions for recollecting the forms. I agree with D'Ancona, "Le rapport modèle-image dans la pensée de Plotin", in Daniel De Smet, Meryem Sebti, and Godefroid De Callataÿ (eds.), *Miroir et Savoir* op. cit., who says that for Plotinus what leads us from the sensible world to *Nous* is the *via eminentiae*.

but, as the red of a flower reflected in a mirror is not only homonymously the red of the flower (whereas the flower is, since it cannot do the things flowers do, as growing, say), neither is the heat of the fire that you can feel in your hand homonymously heat. In fact, Plotinus alludes to how the relation between a quality and the intelligible differentia it derives from should be understood by pointing to Aristotle's account of "paronymy". This, at least, is what seems to emerge from the following passage in II.6.[17].2:

> We ought not to call what are said to be essential completions of substance (ὅσαι λέγονται συμπληροῦν οὐσίας) qualities, seeing that those of them which come from the λόγοι and substantive powers are activities (ἐνέργειαι); we should call qualities only what are outside (ἔξωθεν) all substance and do not appear in one place as qualities but in other things as not qualities; they contain that which is extra and comes after substance, for instance, virtues and vices, and uglinesses and beauties, and states of health, and being of this and that shape (οὕτως ἐσχηματίσθαι). Triangle and square in themselves are not qualitative (τρίγωνον μὲν καὶ τετράγωνον καθ' αὑτὸ οὐ ποιόν), but being made triangular insofar as it is being given a shape must be called qualitative (τὸ δὲ τετριγωνίσθαι ᾗ μεμόρφωται ποιὸν λεκτέον), not the triangularity, that is, but the shaping (καὶ οὐ τὴν τριγωνότητα, ἀλλὰ τὴν μόρφωσιν). Arts and aptitudes should also be called qualities. So quality, we say, is a condition that comes about on substances which already exist, either brought about from outside or accompanying them from the beginning (διάθεσίν τινα ἐπὶ ταῖς οὐσίαις ἤδη οὔσαις εἴτ' ἐπακτὴν εἴτ' ἐξ ἀρχῆς συνοῦσαν): [even in this latter case], if it was not there the substance would have nothing less. (*Enn.*, II.6.[17].2, 20-32; Armstrong, slightly modified).

When Plotinus says that we should call quality only what is "outside all substance", what he means to say, as in II.6.[17].3 cited above, is not that we should call quality the white in swans, but should not call quality the white in white-lead; his point, rather, is that all sensible white should be called "quality", because nothing sensible is ever together with substance, substance being the intelligible λόγος of a natural kind. A quality is only a διάθεσις, that is, a more or less transitory disposition, that can either depend upon an actual differentia—in which case it accompanies the substance out of which it

comes to be (as in the case of the heat of fire)—or come to be from the interaction between the λόγοι of different things in the environment. But what matters in this passage are the examples of qualities that Plotinus uses: shapes, virtuous dispositions, arts. These examples show that Plotinus here elaborates on Aristotle's *Cat.*, 8, 10a 11-b 11, the chapter on quality.[38] Something is said to be ποιόν, i.e. "such", Aristotle says there, according to different things; when this thing is a shape, e.g. a triangle, it is called triangular; when it is an art, e.g. grammar, it is called grammatical, and so on. Even if there are exceptions, he goes on, in all these cases the thing is called what it is called "paronymously" from the shape, the art, or virtue. Plotinus uses these examples from the *Categories* to suggest that each time we say of sensible fire that it is hot, we call it hot "paronymously", rather than homonymously, from the intelligible differentia of heat. He is not interested in Aristotle's notion of paronymy *per se*, however, but uses that notion to convey something about the metaphysical structure of things. This emerges from the way in which he develops the paronymy between triangle and what is given a triangular shape. Rather than saying that something is called triangular from triangle, as one would have expected, he speaks of "being triangularized" (τετριγωνίσθαι), as if "being triangularized" meant the same thing as "triangular". The peculiar expression "being triangularized" shows that his concern is with Plato's description of the receptacle as something that "is inflamed", "moistened", and so on, by the presence of the "traces" of the elements. The suggestion is that the "traces" are in some sense paronymous rather than homonymous in respect to the differentiae of the intelligible elements that cause them. In other words, Plotinus uses the notion of paronymy to express the special ontological dependence of the essential quality of a thing, the heat of fire, say, upon the differentia that belongs to its intelligible substance, and he suggests that the passive verbal forms used by Plato to describe the "traces" should in fact be understood in some sense as paronymous forms of predication. I say in some sense because paronymy strictly speaking is only a linguistic category. At *Cat.*, 1, 1a 12-13, Aristotle claims that things are called paronymous, when they derive their name from something with a difference of ending. But

[38] See Henry-Schwyzer, *Index fontium ad loc.*

Plotinus is not interested in words, but rather wants to use the notion of paronymy to express the view that some things are what they are derivatively from something else. Thus, when we say that fire is hot for Plotinus we actually refer to a property that sensible fire *has in common* with its real substance, and that is such that the substance has it in an eminent way, whereas the sensible fire has it in a derivative way. It is because we can recognize certain special qualities in sensible things, which ultimately are the differentiae in the definition of a thing, that we can pass from the grasp of what is fire only homonymously, to the grasp of what fire really is.

Now, if it is true that sensible composites have only the name in common with their λόγοι, and, ultimately, with the forms from which those λόγοι derive, it follows that, for Plotinus, none of the sensible composites we are acquainted with can be in *Nous* in any proper sense. On the other hand, since these composites actually share in the quality which, *qua* differentia, makes their λόγος, and, ultimately, their form the form it is, it follows that all the qualities that are essential to one species or another must be in *Nous* in an eminent way. Plotinus is notoriously obscure when he speaks of the contents of *Nous*, and when he tries to explain what the forms are; hence, what I am about to suggest is speculative. However, if we develop the train of thought followed so far, we can say that perhaps what Plotinus means by saying that the differentiae "there" make each substance the substance it is is not that there is the form of fire "there" which is a body that comes to be marked off by a differentia, but rather that fire "there" is the quality of heat. Plotinus is committed to the view that there is "eminent" heat in *Nous*; what I am suggesting is that he takes this "eminent" heat to be what it is to be fire there, that is, to be "the form" of fire "there". He seems of the view that there is "eminent" moist "there"; and this could be what it is to be water there; "eminent" light could be what it is to be colour, and so on. Since not all the differentiae are sensible qualities, like rationality in humans, say, or life in animals, in *Nous* there will be eminently also some non-sensible qualities, e.g. rationality and life, and these will be what human being and animal are "there". In other words, I am suggesting that perhaps Plotinus thinks that all things are "there" in the form of their distinctive characteristics, and that they

are ultimately organized into the five *summa genera*, which are not the subjects from which everything else can be derived by division, but are the characteristics on which ultimately each thing depends for being a distinct kind of thing. [39]

2.4. Λόγοι *as natures*

In the previous section I have explained in what sense the λόγος of a natural kind can be viewed as the definition of a thing. Now I would like to explore the role of this λόγος in the creation of the world, and see what kind of entity it is in the end. Plotinus takes the *Timaeus* as the main point of departure for his physics. There, Plato describes the creation of the world as a work of art that is brought about by a good demiurge and by the soul. Probably in light of Aristotle' criticisms, Plotinus eliminates from the *Timaeus*' story any mathematical aspect (hence, his substituting the λόγοι for the shapes), and he tries to demythologize it.[40] The demiurge in Plotinus becomes *Nous* (II.3.[52].18, 15; II.9.[33].6, 21-22; V.8.[31].8); the role of the "the young gods", whom the demiurge puts in charge of fashioning the sublunary bodies, is ascribed to the World-Soul and the souls of the stars.[41] The World-Soul fashions the sublunary bodies indirectly, by producing their lower or irrational souls, but is not responsible for the higher or rational soul that may inhabit those bodies. For the rational soul, like the World-Soul itself and the souls of the stars, comes directly from *Nous*. In Plotinus the World-Soul is the first manifestation of the so-called hypostasis Soul. Soul, Plotinus says, interprets the contents of *Nous*, i.e. the forms, which become present in it and in the World-Soul as λόγοι. The Soul and the World-Soul are themselves λόγοι, and they contain the λόγοι of all things. With these λόγοι the World-Soul

[39] For a different view see, esp., Remes, in Ead. *Plotinus on Self* op. cit., pp. 63-85. But Remes' remarks should be compared with those of Kalligas, "*Logos* and Sensible Object in Plotinus" op. cit. Kalligas actually suggests that for Plotinus there is no such thing as the form of fire, say, because fire is only a certain pattern of sensible qualities. I think he is right in pointing out that fire cannot be in *Nous* as a species of body that is contained in the genus body, which in turn is contain in another genus, and so forth, but I maintain that there is an alternative, i.e. that fire could be there as its essential quality.

[40] On this effort to demythologize and demathematize see Luc Brisson, "*Logos* et *logoi* chez Plotin. Leur nature et leur rôle" op. cit.

[41] See on this James Wilberding, *Plotinus' Cosmology: A Study of* Ennead II.1.(40), Oxford 2006, p. 58.

creates the world. But let me try to explain what these λόγοι are. I start with what Plotinus says about the role of the World-Soul in a passage from VI.7.[38], where he describes how the soul produces bodies in the sublunary world:

> And if the soul has the opportunity, it makes what is finer, but if not, what it can; it is foreordained to make in any case: is like the craftsmen who know how to make many forms and then make just this one, for which they had the order or which their material required by being apt for it. For what is there to prevent the power of the World-Soul from drawing a preliminary outline (προϋπογράφειν), since it is the universal λόγος, even before the soul-powers come from it (πρὶν καὶ παρ᾽ αὐτῆς ἥκειν τὰς ψυχικὰς δυνάμεις), and this preliminary outline being like illuminations running on before into matter (καὶ τὴν προϋγραφὴν οἷον προδρόμους ἐλλάμψεις εἰς τὴν ὕλην εἶναι), and [what prevents] the soul which carries out the work by following traces of this kind from making by articulating the traces part by part, each individual soul becoming this to which it came by figuring itself (ἤδη δὲ τοῖς τοιούτοις ἴχνεσιν ἐπακολουθοῦσαν τὴν ἐξεργαζομένην ψυχὴν κατὰ μέρη τὰ ἴχνη διαρθροῦσαν ποιῆσαι καὶ γενέσθαι ἑκάστην τοῦτο, ὧ προσῆλθε σχηματίσασα ἑαυτὴν), as the dancer does to the dramatic part given him? (*Enn.*, VI.7.[38].7, 5-16; Armstrong, modified).

The World-Soul, which is a "universal λόγος" because it contains all the λόγοι that are required to bring about the sensible world, draws an outline of this world by sending some "illuminations" on matter, and these "illuminations" are "traces" (ἴχνη). Then, the World-Soul also sends "down" towards matter some soul-powers, which are like craftsmen. These souls follow the blueprint traced by the World-Soul. They act like artisans who carry on the plan of an architect, and, by shaping and organizing "the traces", they build bodies, which begin to exercise the dispositions that belong to them.[42] This is *grosso modo* what Plotinus maintains in this passage; but we should

[42] Plotinus here is inspired by *Phaedr.*, 246b 6-7, where Plato says that all soul looks after that which lacks a soul, and it "takes different shapes at different times" (ἄλλοτ᾽ ἐν ἄλλοις εἴδεσιν γιγνομένη). This, I think, is what leads Plotinus to say that each nature "figures itself" in its demiurgic activity. The account of the relation between World-Soul and soul-powers in inspired by Aristot. *Metaph*., I, 1. Plotinus, strictly speaking, thinks of the soul-powers as arts, rather than as craftsmen or artisans, but on this see below.

see what this means. It seems to me that Plotinus here works with Plato's description of the pre-cosmic state of the receptacle, and that "the traces" are to be identified with the receptacle's "traces", that is, its qualitative states. The idea is that the World-Soul, which can contemplate the paradigm of the "Living Being", provides the first constituents of the world by distributing on matter the essential qualities of the elements (i.e. the qualities that correspond to their differentiae). These qualities, I take it, are the "copies of the forms", which the World-Soul takes directly from *Nous* and directly hands down to the soul-powers, so as to provide the latter with some primary building blocks. What organizes these qualities into bodies are some "soul-powers" (ψυχικαὶ δυνάμεις), and these too are sent by the World-Soul. Since the World-Soul is a soul, it is not surprising to see that it contributes to the world's creation by providing soul-powers, whatever these may be. The soul-powers are said to behave like craftsmen, who can make all sorts of things, but execute the orders of the World-Soul/architect; they build the primary bodies, and all the other natural bodies that can be built from them. A passage from III.8.[30].2 explains what these "soul-powers" are:

> In fact, of course, nature must be a form, and not composed of matter and form; for why should it need hot or cold matter? For matter which underlies it and is worked on by it (δημιουργουμένη) comes to it bringing this [heat or cold] or rather becomes of this quality (γίνεται τοιαύτη) (though it has no quality of itself) by being given form by a λόγος. For it is not fire which has to come to matter in order that it may become fire, but a λόγος; and this is a strong indication that in animals and plants the λόγοι are the makers and nature is a λόγος (τοὺς λόγους εἶναι τοὺς ποιοῦντας καὶ τὴν φύσιν εἶναι λόγον), which makes another λόγος, its own product, which gives something to the substrate, but stays unmoved itself. This λόγος, then, which operates in the visible shape (κατὰ τὴν μορφὴν τὴν ὁρωμένην) is the last, and is dead and no longer able to make another, but that which has life is the brother of that which makes the shape, and has the same power itself, and makes in that which comes into being. (*Enn.*, III.8[30].2, 22-34; Armstrong).

The craftsman that works on matter here is identified with "nature". Nature is a λόγος, but is not a λόγος in the sense in which heat or cold are λόγοι.

Heat and cold, and all the other λόγοι that make matter appear of this or that quality are "dead" ones; but nature is a living λόγος, and it is the soul-power that comes from the World-Soul. Nature, I suggest, is the λόγος of a natural kind, and after having built a certain type of body, it remains in that body, and it makes it play its part in the overall "dance" of the universe. There is one discrepancy between the account of the creation of bodies in III.8.[30].2 and in VI.7.[38].7. In VI.7.[38] Plotinus says that it is the World-Soul that provides the building blocks of the universe, i.e. the λόγοι that correspond to the differentiae in the definitions of the four elements, whereas in III.8.[30] he says that it is nature that produces these λόγοι. I do not think, however, that this discrepancy is at all important. In fact, it is to be explained away by saying that in VI.7.[38] Plotinus remains closer to Plato' chronological account than he does in III.8.[30]. Since Plotinus does not believe that the *Timaeus*' myth should be interpreted literally, we should infer that, strictly speaking, the essential qualities of the elements cannot be on matter before nature begins its work, because they are qualities of this or that body; from which it follows that the account of III.8.[30] is more accurate. In VI.7.[38], I suggest, Plotinus wants to make clear that nature is provided with the qualities that are needed as building blocks of the universe by the World-Soul, which takes them directly from *Nous*. With these qualities at hand, nature builds the natural bodies, starting from the elements, by following the plan fixed by the World-Soul. The reason why nature needs this plan is given in III.8.[30].3, 10-15, where Plotinus explains that nature lacks "reason" (λόγος).

The analysis of VI.7.[38].7 and III.8.[30].2 shows that even if Plotinus often speaks of nature as if he meant to refer to some kind of "Nature" conceived of as a universal principle of all natural bodies, strictly speaking, he is not committed to such an entity.[43] Plotinus, in my view, believes that there is only a multitude of "natures" in the world, and he identifies them with the λόγοι of natural kinds.[44] Thus, for him the λόγος of a natural kind acts in the

[43] The only thing that could be called "Nature", I think, is the World-Soul.
[44] As I have said, "Nature" is, I think, the World-Soul whose relation with the individual natures may be in part inspired by Aristortle' account of the relation between cosmic nature and individual nature as interpreted by Margaret Scharle, "Elemental Teleology in Aristotle's *Physics* 2.8", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 34 (2008), pp. 147-183, see esp. n. 60.

world as the DNA in a living organism; it is the genetic code that contains the recipe for the development of a body; it determines the species to which the body will belong, and how it will look. As a "nature", i.e. a φύσις, each λόγος is a soul-power, which means that it is a power that originates from the World-Soul, even though not all natures are necessarily souls. Only the λόγοι of animals and plants are souls. To be sure, Plotinus says that the elements are alive in some sense. Thus, at III.6.[26].6, 49-50 he claims that: "Movement too is a kind of life amongst bodies, and presents a copy of the life in the soul" (Fleet). But this passage is inspired by Aristot. *Phys.*, VIII 1, 250b 10-15, where Aristotle says that movement is some kind of life. Like Aristotle, then, Plotinus maintains that all natural bodies have life in some sense, but is not committed to the idea that the elements have souls: their life is their power to move (cf. III.2.[47].36-38). There is, I think, only one passage in which Plotinus might be taken to suggest that the elements have souls:

> The growth, then, and shaping of stones and the inner pattering of mountains as they grow one must most certainly suppose take place because an ensouled λόγος is working within them and giving them form (λόγου ἐμψύχου δημιουργοῦντος ἔνδοθεν καὶ εἰδοποιοῦντος); and this is the active form of the earth, like what is called the growth-nature in trees (ὥσπερ ἐν τοῖς δένδροις τὴν λεγομένην φύσιν), and what we call earth corresponds to the wood of the tree […]. Now surely when we have discovered the working nature seated in earth as a life in a λόγος (τὴν <δὴ> δημιουργοῦσαν ἐγκαθημένην τῇ γῇ φύσιν ζωὴν ἐν λόγῳ) we shall easily be confident about what comes next, that the earth there in the intelligible is much more primarily alive […]. But if fire also is a λόγος in matter […], and fire is not spontaneously generated—for where could it come from? Not from friction, as one might think: for friction occurs when fire is already in the All and the bodies being rubbed together have it; also matter is not able to be fire in such a way that fire can come from it—if then what makes must do so according to a λόγος, by shaping, what could make fire except a soul with the power for it (τί ἂν εἴη ἢ ψυχὴ ποιεῖν πῦρ δυναμένη)? But this is a life and a λόγος, both one and the same (τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶ ζωὴ καί λόγος, ἓν καὶ ταὐτὸ ἄμφω). This is why Plato says that there is a soul in each of these elements, in no other way as making this sensible fire. (*Enn.*, VI.7.[38].11, 24-45; Armstrong, slightly modified).

When Plotinus says: "This is why Plato says that there is a soul in each of these elements", he probably refers to *Epinomis* 981b-c and 984b-c, which Plotinus seems to consider authentic.[45] However, the reason why he devotes time to these passages is not that he wants to show that even the elements have a soul. On the contrary, he engages with them because they are a source of embarrassment. That is to say, he wants to find an interpretation of these passages that, presumably in contrast with other interpretations known to him, could dispel the idea that Plato actually assigned the elements a soul. To do this, Plotinus tries to argue that Plato there does not speak of the elements, but rather of things like the earth and its mountains.[46]

Plotinus develops his notion of nature by bringing together different suggestions in Plato and elsewhere. The last passage quoted above, for instance, reveals that his conception of nature is part of an anti-Stoic polemic, for it is the Stoics who speak of "the growth-nature (φύσις) in trees". On the Stoics' account of the creation of the world, the active principle, or "pneuma", first brings about the non-living bodies by shaping matter through ἕξεις, which are tensional states of the "pneuma" itself. These ἕξεις are qualities, as we have seen, and, more precisely, they are the defining qualities of non-living bodies, like the hardness of stones, for instance. In being defining tensional states, they make each type of body the body it is, and they keep it together. By changing its disposition and becoming less dense, "pneuma" brings about "nature" (φύσις), which is another tensional state: that which characterizes plants. Finally, by changing again its disposition and becoming still less dense, "pneuma" brings about "soul" (ψυχή), which is the tensional state of animals. Against this account that makes soul come to be out of nature, nature out lifeless qualitative states, and these out of a primary body, i.e. "pneuma", Plotinus argues that soul (in the form of the World-Soul) has to be first, that

[45] See Henry-Schwyzer, *Index fontium ad loc.*

[46] Notice that Plotinus says: "What could make fire except a soul with the power for it (τί ἂν εἴη ἢ ψυχὴ ποιεῖν πῦρ δυναμένη)? But this (τοῦτο) is a life and a λόγος, both one and the same". "This" (τοῦτο) cannot refer to the soul; it refers to fire. Thus, the line says that soul makes fire, but fire is not a soul, but is a λόγος and a life. The soul that makes fire could well be the World-Soul.

nature must come to be out of soul, and that the qualities of soulless things must depend on nature, insofar as they are qualities of bodies that are fashioned by it. This sequence is inspired by Plato's remarks at *Leg.*, X 892a ff. Plotinus, I think, probably takes as his starting point for developing his notion of nature *Tim.*, 69c 7-8— where we read that the young gods "build beside" the immortal soul that they received from the demiurge another soul, around which the living bodies are fashioned—, but elaborates on this passage by using *Leg.*, X.

Another important source of inspiration for Plotinus is Aristotle, for Plotinus describes nature as the disposition of a body to behave in a characteristic way, which is how Aristotle defines nature in *Physics* II. Consider the following passage from III.3.[48].1, where Plotinus says that "down here" everything

> acts according to its own nature, […], for instance fire burns, a horse does the things which belong to a horse, and individual men do their own things in the way in which they have been disposed by nature, and different men different things (*Enn.*, III.3.[48].1, 22-25, Armstrong).

This passage reveals, I think, that Plotinus models his conception of nature on *Phys.*, II 1, 192b 8-22, where Aristotle says that nature is a principle of motion for the thing in which it resides or a disposition to behave in a characteristic way. Further proof comes from III.1.[3].1:

> If all things have a cause for their happening it is easy to apprehend the proximate (προσεχεῖς) causes of each happening and to trace it back to them: for instance, the cause of going to the market place is that one thinks one ought to see someone or to collect a debt […]. And there are some things whose causes should be assigned to the arts; the cause of getting well is the medical art and the doctor […]. And the cause of the child is the father, and perhaps some external things coming from various sources which co-operate towards the production of a child, for instance, a particular kind of diet, or, slightly remoter, seed, which flows easily for begetting, or a wife well adapted to bearing children; and in general one traces the cause of the child back to nature (φύσις). (*Enn.*, III.1.[3].1, 24-35; Armstrong, slightly modified).

The distinction between different levels of proximity in the causes, and the mention of the father as cause of a child are inspired by *Phys.*, II 3. The example of someone going to the market place is taken from *Phys.*, II 5.

Finally, and most importantly, a strong Aristotelian influence is to be detected also in Plotinus' description of nature's activity. The passage that is most pertinent here comes from III.6.[26].4:

> […] no form can contain upset or any affection (εἴδει δὲ οὐδενὶ δεῖ παρεῖναι ταραχὴν ἢ ὅλως πάθος); each form must remain the same (ἑστηκέναι μὲν αὐτό), while it is its matter that is affected on each occasion when the case arises, and it is the form that sets it in motion by its presence (ἐκείνου τῇ παρουσίᾳ κινοῦντος). For the vegetative faculty (τὸ φυτικόν) does not itself grow when it causes growth, nor itself increase when it causes increase, nor in general does it itself change with the change that it causes (οὐδ' ὅλως, ὅταν κινῇ, κινεῖται ἐκείνην τὴν κίνησιν ἣν κινεῖ); either it is not changed at all, or the manner of its change or activity is different in character (ἢ ἄλλος τρόπος κινήσεως ἢ ἐνεργείας). (*Enn.*, III.6.[26].4, 38-41; Fleet).

There are complexities in what Plotinus means when he speaks of τὸ φυτικόν. But, generally, like here, by τὸ φυτικόν Plotinus means the vegetative power of the soul—which includes the powers of nutrition, growth, reproduction and sensation (as far as the affection of the sense-organs is concerned)—, and he takes this power of the soul to be the same thing as what he calls "nature" (cf. III.4.[15].1).[47] Τὸ φυτικόν, more precisely, is nature in living beings, by which I mean plants and animals. When Plotinus says, in the passage above, that τὸ φυτικόν does not cause the growth of the body it is in by itself growing, because, like any other form in matter, it causes a change without being itself subject to change, he thinks, I believe, of *De gen. et corr.*, I 5, 422a 33, where Aristotle claims that in growth and diminution "the form remains the same" (τὸ εἶδος μένει).[48] But consider how he phrases the point: he says that τὸ φυτικόν is not changed "with the change that it

[47] See Henry J. Blumenthal, *Plotinus' Psychology*, The Hague 1971, pp. 26-27.
[48] Rashed, in his edition of the *De gen. et corr.*, transposes the phrase "the form remains" from l. 33 to l. 28, but nothing hangs on this here.

causes"; and then he says that "either it is not changed at all, or the manner of its change or activity is different in character (ἢ ἄλλος τρόπος κινήσεως ἢ ἐνεργείας)". As Dominic O'Meara has pointed out, Plotinus here is reporting almost *verbatim De an.*, II 5, 417b 5-7. There, Aristotle says that when a knower actualizes his disposition, that is when it exercises its science, either he is not altered, or "the alteration" (ἀλλοίωσις) is of a different sort, that is, it is not the same type of alteration that bodies are subject to. Plotinus "quotes" this passage because he wants to make clear that the vegetative power of the soul in living beings and, in general, nature, has to be an unchanging activity akin to the exercise of a science.[49] In other words, nature is a disposition, like an art, and it acts by exercising this disposition. Plotinus' "quotation", however, is not faithful to the text of the *De anima*. Where Aristotle speaks of "alteration", Plotinus speaks of "motion" (κίνησις), and the reason why he speaks of κίνησις is that souls for Plato are self-moving movers and motion is one of the *summa genera*. Plotinus wants to reinterpret the sense of Plato's views on motion in light of Aristotle's notion of "activity". He wants to say that there is some kind of "motion" that the soul has, but is not to be confused with bodies' motion. As far as bodies' motion is concerned, soul is completely unmoved. The point finds confirmation in III.8.[30], where the workings of nature are described as follows:

> Well, then, it is clear, I suppose, to everyone that there are no hands here or feet, and no instrument either acquired or of natural growth, but there is need of matter on which nature can work and which it forms (ἐνειδοποιεῖ). But we must also exclude levering from the operation of nature. For what kind of thrusting or levering can produce this rich variety of colours and shapes of every kind? For even the wax-modellers (κηροπλάσται)—people have actually looked at them and thought that nature's workmanship was like theirs—cannot make colours unless they bring colours from elsewhere to the things they make. But those who make this comparison ought to have considered also that even with those who practice crafts of this kind there must be something in themselves, something which stays unmoved, according to which they will make their works with their hands (δεῖ τι ἐν αὐτοῖς μένειν, καθ' ὃ

[49] Dominic O'Meara, "Plotinus On How Soul Acts On Body", in Id. (ed.), *Platonic Investigations*, Washington, D.C., 1985, vol. 13, pp. 247-262, esp. p. 255.

> μένον διὰ χειρῶν ποιήσουσιν ἃ αὐτῶν ἔργα); they should have brought their minds back to the same kind of thing in nature, and understood that here, too, the power, all of it, which makes without hands, must stay unmoved (ἐπὶ τὸ τοιοῦτον ἀνελθεῖν τῆς φύσεως καὶ αὐτοὺς καὶ συνεῖναι, ὡς μένειν δεῖ καὶ ἐνταῦθα τὴν δύναμιν τὴν οὐ διὰ χειρῶν ποιοῦσαν καὶ πᾶσαν μένειν). (*Enn.*, III.8.[30].2, 1-15; Armstrong).

Here Plotinus seems to echo an Epicurean criticism of the *Timaeus*, which is voiced by Cicero (*De nat. deor.*, I 18-23=LS 13G). But what he really wants to address is a criticism raised by Aristotle against Plato in *De an.*, I 3, 407b 1-5, of which one is reminded by some of the things said by the Epicureans. In *De an.*, I Aristotle accuses Plato of having turned the activity of the soul into a violent and unnatural business by putting it in charge of moving bodies. The point is made especially against Plato's description of the World-Soul, but in the passage above Plotinus answers by referring to his notion of nature. He suggests that nature does not move bodies by moving in a violent way, because, precisely as Aristotle maintains, nature is an unmoved mover as far as the motion of bodies is concerned, and it makes bodies move just by its presence. It is true that nature is some kind of artisan, Plotinus goes on, but this is strictly speaking an improper description, for nature is more of an art or art-like activity. As the art in the artisan remains unmoved during the production of the artefact, thus nature remains unmoved while it fashions bodies.[50]

However, there is a genuine, and important difference between Plotinus' conception of nature as the λόγος of a natural kind that makes each body the body it is, and Aristotle's own conception of what an individual nature is: for Plotinus the natures are eternal, whereas for Aristotle they die

[50] See Christian Wildberg ("A World of Thoughts: Plotinus on Nature and Contemplation", in Riccardo Chiaradonna and Franco Trabattoni (eds.), *Physics and Philosophy of Nature in Greek Neoplatonism*, Leiden 2009, pp. 121-143, esp. p. 143 n. 33), who argues that nature does not emerge in III.8.[30] as an unmoved mover, because Plotinus describes the workings of nature as a form of contemplation, and, he says: "Nature's contemplation is moved and motivated by the higher intelligible reality of the Soul".

with the bodies they are in.[51] Thus, consider the following passage from V.9.[5].4:

> But certainly if soul is a thing subject to affections, but there must be something impassible—otherwise everything will be destroyed by time—there must be something before soul. And if soul is in the universe, but there must be something outside the universe, in this way too there must be something before soul. For if what is in the universe is what is in body and matter, nothing will remain the same: so that man and *all* the other λόγοι will not be eternal or the same (εἰ γὰρ τὸ ἐν κόσμῳ τὸ ἐν σώματι καὶ ὕλῃ, οὐδὲν ταὐτὸν μενεῖ· ὥστε ἄνθρωπος καὶ πάντες λόγοι οὐκ ἀίδιοι οὐδὲ οἱ αὐτοί) . One can see then from these and many other arguments that there must be an intellect before soul. (*Enn.*, V.9.[5].4, 15-20; Armstrong, slightly modified and italicized).

Here Plotinus claims that the λόγοι of natural kinds, and *all* the λόγοι in general must be eternal for the world as we know it to continue to exist, and these λόγοι, as I have tried to argue, are natures. Thus, for him the natures must be eternal. Eternal natures, in Plotinus' view, are necessary for ensuring the eternity of the world as we know it. Aristotle, too, wants to maintain that the world as we know it is eternal. But Plotinus argues against him that unless he concedes that the nature in each body is eternal, he cannot defend his thesis.

Just to give a more concrete example, let me briefly sketch how human reproduction comes about for Aristotle. I will not enter in the details of Aristotle's biology, but a general outline can be grasped from *Metaph.*, VII. At *Metaph*., VII 8, 1033b 20 ff., Aristotle says that when a child is generated, a "this", i.e. the father, generates "a such", that becomes a "this such" only after it has been generated. This means that, in generation, the growth principle in the seed of the father transmits to the καταμήνια some motions, which are responsible for a qualitative change in the καταμήνια. These motions direct the change until a "this", i.e. a child, is formed, at which point the growth principle in charge of the operation is completely dissolved. Plotinus, I suggest, rejects this kind of account as inadequate, and he insists that the

[51] This, of course, is also a significant divergence from the account of the irrational soul built by the young gods in the *Timaeus*, for Plato says that that soul is mortal. But Plotinus here probably reinterprets the *Timaeus* in light of *Leg.*, X, where soul and nature are said to be immortal.

parents must transmit to the child an eternal principle of their kind. Only an eternal "genetic code", that is, will prevent the species from degenerating and, eventually, disappearing.[52]

To summarize, then, Plotinus' natures, like Aristotle's, are principles of motion, in the sense of being dispositions to behave in a characteristic way, and they are all eternal, "unmoved" movers. They are the intelligible and eternal principles that make each body the body it is. Generally speaking they are λόγοι, but in living organisms they are actually vegetative souls that supervise the most basic functions of life, such as growth, nourishment, reproduction. In animals, they allow the sense-organs, *qua* body parts, to be affected in this or that way. Speaking of nature in humans, Plotinus says sometimes that this type soul is not "ours" or not completely "ours". What this means, I take it, is that it operates in ways that are not under our control, and that it carries on a job of its own, of which we are often completely unaware.

2.5. *Plotinus' account of necessity in the sensible world*.

The World-Soul and nature considerably complicate the picture of the λόγοι in II.6.[17], where the λόγοι are described as creative powers that merely unfold the forms in *Nous*. But, if we consider the matter bottom-up, we can say that for Plotinus the world comes to be through some λόγοι of qualities which come from *Nous* and manifest their power on matter. The first qualities that are displayed on matter are the essential qualities of the elements, which are used by some natures to fashion the bodies of the elements. The elements, in turn, are used by some more complex natures, i.e. the vegetative souls, to build the bodies of plants and animals. The whole process is supervised by the World-Soul, which directs it according to a good plan that it finds in *Nous*.

But, in the *Timaeus*, Plato claims that there are two causes of the world, one is soul, and the other is necessity, and it is unclear where necessity is to be located in Plotinus' account. Let me start with the *Timaeus*. At 48a 1-

[52] I radically simplify here Plotinus' views on reproduction. For a detailed analysis of these issues see James Wilberding, "Plotinus and Porphyry on the Seed", *Phronesis*, 53 (2008), pp. 406-432. I speak of a transmission of genetic material from the parents to the child because Plotinus actually assigns what seems to be an important role to the mother.

2, Plato says: "This ordered world is of mixed birth: it is the offspring of a union of Necessity and *Nous*" (μεμειγμένη γὰρ οὖν ἡ τοῦδε τοῦ κόσμου γένεσις ἐξ ἀνάγκης τε καὶ νοῦ; Zeyl, slightly modified). *Nous* is what overrules necessity and persuades it to contribute to its works; but what does necessity stand for? Plato calls it a "wandering cause" (48a 6-7), but the sense of this expression is to be gathered from the following passage:

> Now all of the above are among the auxiliary causes (συναίτια) employed in the service of the god as he does his utmost to bring to completion the character of what is most excellent. But because they make things cold or hot, solidify or disperse them, and produce all sorts of similar effects, most people regard them not as auxiliary causes but as the actual causes (αἴτια) of all things. Things like these, however, are totally incapable of possessing any reason (λόγος) or intellect (νοῦς) about anything. We must pronounce the soul to be the only thing there is that properly possesses intellect. The soul is an invisible thing, whereas fire, water, earth and air have all come to be as visible bodies. So anyone who is a lover of intellect and knowledge must of necessity pursue as primary causes those that belong to intelligent nature, and as secondary all those belonging to things that are moved by others and that set still others in motion by necessity. We too, surely, must do likewise: we must describe both types of causes, distinguishing those which possess intellect and thus fashion what is beautiful and good, from those which, when deserted by intelligence (φρόνησις), produce only haphazard and disorderly effects every time. (*Tim.*, 46c 7-e 2; Zeyl, slightly modified).

This passage suggests that by speaking of "necessity" Plato intends to refer to some "secondary causes" that are deprived of reason. Causes deprived of reason are those that make things hot or cold or solid by being set in motion and by setting something else in motion in their turn. When the activity of these causes is directed by a higher cause, namely the soul, they are to be called "auxiliary causes" rather than "wandering" ones, because they help the soul, that has reason, to fashion the world in an ordered and good manner.

Now, it is fairly common to associate the idea of necessity in the *Timaeus* with that of matter and material compounds. Matter, it is generally held, is what Plato means by necessity because it is what presents a certain resistance to the works of the soul, just by being what it is: something hard to bring to order, and yet indispensable for building the world. But there is

another way to look at necessity. As Glenn Morrow has pointed out, the secondary causes are not described by Plato as something that offers resistance to the soul, but rather are introduced as powers (of heating, cooling, and so on) that act reliably but at random or "blindly".[53] That is to say, a secondary cause seems to be a cause that acts in a necessary manner—by which I mean always in the same way, but without direction—, and it is because it acts always in the same way that the soul can reliably use it to build the world. Analogous remarks have been made more recently by Thomas Johansen.[54] Johansen, however, goes further than Morrow, and he actually identifies the secondary causes with the shapes. He points out that Plato seems to describe the shapes as secondary causes at *Tim.*, 68e, and he argues that the shapes' causality fits the interpretation of necessity offered by Morrow.

Plotinus, I think, interprets necessity in the *Timaeus* in a way that is very similar to that of Johansen. Consider the following passage, which seems to be inspired directly by *Tim.*, 46c 7-e 2. Plotinus is arguing for the incorporeality of the soul, and he says:

> Besides, it is equally obvious for the following reasons that it is impossible for soul to be any kind of body. For [if it is], it is hot or cold, hard or soft, fluid or solid, black or white, and [one could mention] all the other qualities of bodies which are different in different ones. And if it is only hot, it heats; if it is only cold, it will cool; and the light (τὸ κοῦφον) when it is added and present will make things light, and the heavy makes them heavy; and the black will blacken, and the white will make things white. For it does not belong to fire to cool things, nor to the cold to make them hot. But the soul does different things in different living beings, and even opposite things in the same one: solidifying some and liquefying others, and making some things dense, and others rarefied, making things black and white, light and heavy. But, [if it was a body] it ought to produce one effect according to its body's quality, for instance, colour (καίτοι ἓν δεῖ ποιεῖν κατὰ τὴν τοῦ σώματος ποιότητά τε τὴν ἄλλην καὶ δὴ καὶ χρώαν); but as it is it produces many effects. (*Enn.*, IV.7.[2].4, 21-34; Armstrong, slightly modified).

[53] Glenn Morrow, "Necessity and Persuasion in Plato's Metaphysics", in R. E. Allen (ed.), *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, London-New York 1965, pp. 421-437, esp. p. 428.
[54] See Thomas K. Johansen, *Plato's Natural Philosophy*, Cambridge 2004, p. 98.

First of all, let us get rid of the impression that Plotinus might be contrasting the causal power of bodies with the causal power of soul. It is true that he speaks of bodies "making" this or that thing, but he does so only in order to bring home the point that soul is not a body. Bodies have whatever causal power they possess only in virtue of their λόγοι (IV.7.[2].8[1]), and it is therefore with the λόγοι that the efficient power of the soul is contrasted. The λόγοι that Plotinus mentions (those of heat, cold, and so on) are those that he identifies with the shapes in III.6.[26].12. The general point of the passage is that, while the λόγοι responsible for heating, cooling, and so on, are causes of one effect, soul is able to bring about different and even opposite effects. But soul, it seems, is capable of opposite effects in the sense that it chooses which effect to cause among those produced by the λόγοι. For Plotinus says that soul can heat and cool, solidify etc.; in other words he assigns soul the role of distributing the effects of the λόγοι. Soul does not rob the λόγοι of their powers (it cannot cool, for instance), but seems to establish how and when to apply those powers: it can cause something to be hot and something else to be cold, or it can turn some hot thing into something cold, whereas the λόγοι act always in the same way, but act "blindly".[55]

Plotinus' distinction between soulless powers and powers of the soul, I think, is meant to remind us of the Aristotelian distinction between rational and irrational powers in *Metaph.*, IX 5. There (1048a 5-8), Aristotle says that the irrational powers, which can be present both in animate and inanimate things, are capable of producing only one effect and produce it necessarily each time they encounter a substrate on which they can act (fire, e.g., necessarily warms). In contrast, he observes (1048a 8-13) that the rational powers, which only animate things can have, consist in the capacity to choose to bring about one of two opposite effects. Plotinus' λόγοι, I think, act as Aristotle's irrational powers, whereas his soul is described as a rational one.

[55] However, the World-Soul for Plotinus establishes how to use the λόγοι by looking at *Nous*. It does not need to deliberate in order to bring about the world, see IV.4.[28].11. This does not mean that it does not "choose" in some sense; it means that it behaves like an art that has a coherent set of rules, rather than like an artisan, who needs to make calculations. Analogous remarks hold for nature.

I suggest, then, that Plotinus uses *Metaph.*, IX 5 to develop Plato's distinction between the "primary" causality of soul and the secondary causes. By assimilating the λόγοι to the irrational powers of *Metaph*., IX 5, he maintains that the secondary causes are such in the sense that they always and necessarily produce the same effect upon the encounter with a substrate (e.g. heat necessarily heats, cold chills), whereas soul chooses how to use them so as to carry on a good plan (cf. IV.4.[28].11). However, when he distinguishes the λόγοι of qualities from those of the natural kinds, i.e. natures, Plotinus introduces some changes in the *Timaeus*' account of causality. Natures must be auxiliary and secondary causes, because they help the World-Soul; but, even if they are incapable of having a plan, and thus are "blind" like the λόγοι of qualities, nonetheless they can at least follow a plan. It is only the λόγοι of qualities, then, that represent necessity in a robust way for Plotinus, because they cannot follow any plan, but can only be used either for good or for worse. They are merely the building blocks out of which souls fashion the world.

2.6. Λόγοι *and "forms in us"*

It is often thought that the *Timaeus* should be read as fulfilling a plan that remains incomplete in the *Phaedo*. For, although in the *Phaedo* Socrates presents forms as candidates for the role of causes of being and coming to be, nonetheless, he seems to introduce them as a second best cause. The forms solve the problems hampering the theories of causality of Socrates' predecessors, but are not what Socrates views as the most proper cause of being, because they are not final causes. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates says that he would be ready to become the pupil of whomever could teach him what fulfils the role of a final cause, and, in the *Timaeus*, he seems to find his ideal teacher in Timaeus, who offers him a teleological account of the world, according to which the universe and everything in it comes to be because of a benevolent mind aiming at the good. Plotinus, too, thinks that the non-teleological causes of the *Phaedo* should be incorporated in the teleological scheme of the *Timaeus*. We have seen that the λόγοι of qualities for him are "copies of the

forms" of the *Timaeus*. But, I suggest, he also identifies these λόγοι and those of the natural kinds with "the forms in us" of the *Phaedo*. The evidence for this is to be found in a passage from III.6.[26] that I have already quoted above, reproduced here again for ease of reference:

> A λόγος approached and made it [i.e. matter] large, leading it on to the size desired (ἤθελεν) by the λόγος itself […]. The size (μέγεθος) was "the large" (τὸ μέγα) imposed on top of it. So if one were to remove this form, the subject is no longer something large, nor does it even appear to be. But if the thing of size that came to be was a man or a horse, and it was "the large" of the the horse that entered matter with the horse (μετὰ τοῦ ἵππου τὸ μέγα τοῦ ἵππου ἐπελθόν), then when the horse leaves (ἀπελθόντος τοῦ ἵππου), "the large" in it leaves also (καὶ τὸ μέγα αὐτοῦ ἀπέρχεται). But if anyone were to say that the horse is based on bulk of a certain size and
> that "the large" remains (μένει τὸ μέγα), our reply will be that it is not the size of the horse that remains there, but that of the bulk. (III.6.[26].16, 1-11, Fleet, slightly modified).[56]

After having introduced the forms as true causes of being and coming to be, Socrates, in the *Phaedo*, seems to distinguish between proper forms and the so-called "forms in us". This is how he presents the latter in the context of what is generally called "the battlefield of the opposites":

> It seems to me that not only tallness itself (αὐτὸ τὸ μέγεθος) [i.e. the form] is never willing (ἐθέλειν) to be tall (μέγα) and short at the same time, but also the tallness in us will never admit the short or be overcome, but one of two things happens: either it flees and retreats whenever its opposite, the short, approaches, or it is destroyed by its approach. It is not willing to endure and admit shortness and be other than it was, whereas I admit and endure (δεξάμενος καὶ ὑπομείνας) shortness and still remain the same person and am this short man. But tallness, being tall, cannot venture to be small. […] nor does any other of the opposites become or be its opposite […]; either it goes away or is destroyed (ἀπέρχεται ἢ ἀπόλλυται). (*Phaed.*, 102d 5-103a 1, Grube).

[56] When Plotinus speaks of "horse", and of its "large", he seems to refer both to the intelligible λόγοι and to the sensible effects that they produce. That he thinks of the intelligible λόγοι, and not only of their sensible effects, is shown by his claim that "the large" enters matter "with (μετά) the horse". This phrasing, I think, is meant to remind of the relation between λόγοι of natural kinds and of qualities as described in II.4.[12].8, 24-30; I have quoted this passage above in section 2.3.

The similarity between the passage quoted above from III.6.[26].16 and this passage from the *Phaedo* is too close to be a coincidence, and it suggests that Plotinus has "the forms in us" in mind when he speaks of the λόγοι of sensible qualities and of natural kinds, since it is with both of them that he deals in III.6.[26].16. But Plotinus, unlike Socrates, does not wonder whether "the forms in us" "go away" or are destroyed by their opposites, but confidently claims that they "go away". However, it is unclear how he can identify the λόγοι of natural kinds with the "forms in us". To unfold his reasoning we need to examine the *Phaedo* a little further.

Shortly before the passage quoted above, Socrates points out that, on the basis of "the safe answer" one should say that, if Simmias is taller than Socrates, this is because of the "size" (μέγεθος) he happens to have, rather than in virtue of his own nature (*Phaed.*, 102c 1-2: οὐ γάρ που πεφυκέναι Σιμμίαν ὑπερέχειν τούτῳ). Then, shortly after the passage above, he introduces a more complex account of the causes of being and coming to be: the so-called "cleverer answer". One should conceive of the proper causes of being and becoming, Socrates says, on the model of things like snow, or fire, which are not forms of opposites (as, e.g., tallness and smallness; heat and cold), but things (be these forms or not, the issue is disputed)[57] that always or "by nature" bring with themselves one of a couple of opposites and cannot tolerate the other (cf. 104a 1-2, where three is said to be by nature such as to be inseparable from the odd). On this new model of causes, Socrates reaches the conclusion that, as fire cannot but bring with itself heat, thus soul cannot but be by nature alive and bring life with itself, because life is inseparable from it.

[57] The issue is examined in Ian Mueller, "Platonism and the Study of Nature" (*Phaedo* 95e ff.)", in Jyl Gentzler, *Method in Ancient Philosophy*, Oxford 1998, pp. 67-89, esp., p. 81. For the interpretation of the entities of "the cleverer answer" in terms of ordinary objects rather than forms see David Gallop (ed.), *Plato. Phaedo*, Oxford 1975, p. 198; and Alexander Nehamas, "Predications and Forms of Opposites in the *Phaedo*", *Review of Metaphysics*, 26 (1972-3), pp. 482-90.

Plotinus starts by interpreting Socrates' "forms in us" in terms of λόγοι of sensible qualities.[58] Then he assumes that, in speaking of things like snow and fire, Socrates must refer to forms, and he infers (probably on the basis of 105c) that also these forms have corresponding "forms in us". He takes these further "forms in us" to be λόγοι of natural kinds that "contain" somehow those of qualities and quantities, and, consequently, he reads "the cleverer answer" not as replacing "the safe one", but as improving on it.[59] He observes that Socrates says that fire brings about heat by nature, that snow brings about cold by nature, and that it is in the nature of three to be odd. He takes this to mean that the new "forms in us" introduced by Socrates in "the cleverer answer" are strictly speaking natures conceived of, in Aristotle's way, as tendencies to behave in a certain way (e.g. to heat, in the case of fire; to chill in that of snow, and so on).[60]

Plotinus' identification of the λόγοι with "the forms in us", however, raises an obvious problem. Plotinus' λόγοι are eternal, whereas "the forms in us" are corruptible. In fact, Plato seems to suggest that heat and cold, and things like snow and fire, *unlike* the soul, are *not* eternal. Soul and life, Plato says (105d-106a), "go away" when death approaches, because soul is always accompanied by life, and life cannot admit death; hence he concludes, since

---

[58] There is a difficulty here. Plato, in the *Phaedo*, does not seem to have in mind specifically sensible qualities when he speaks of forms and "forms in us". It is true that some of his examples are heat and cold; but he also speaks of one and two, and it is not clear that these could be sensible qualities. Plotinus, I think, takes the discussion to be about sensible qualities because he assumes that also qualities such being one or being two can have sensible manifestations. Thus, for instance, if you see one house as one house it is because that house has unity or oneness in it. Things are more difficult with other examples, such as odd and even. But here Plotinus might have thought that these are in fact just examples, used for clarity's sake.

[59] The logical structure of the relation between the λόγοι of natural kinds and those of qualities can be conceived of on the basis of the remarks on the "the cleverer answer" in Gregory Vlastos, "Reasons and Causes in the *Phaedo*", in Id., *Platonic Studies*, Princeton 1981, pp. 76-110. However, in contrast to Vlastos and others (most prominently Michael Frede, "The Original Notion of Cause", in Id., *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* op. cit., pp. 125-150, esp., pp. 129 ff), Plotinus does not think that the causes of the *Phaedo* are only reasons as opposed to real entities with causal power, and thus he is in agreement with Mueller, "Platonism and the Study of Nature" op. cit., pp. 74-82, and David Sedley, "Platonic Causes" op. cit.

[60] Plotinus, it seems, reads "the cleverer answer" along the lines of those who see in it an essence/accident distinction. See F.C. White, "Particulars in *Phaedo*, 95e-107a", *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* Suppl. Vol. 2 (1976), pp. 129-147; and Alan Code, "Aristotle: Essence and Accident" in Richard Grandy and Richard Warner (eds.), *Philosophical Grounds of Rationality*, Oxford 1986, pp. 411-439, esp. p. 427.

soul is always together with life, and life cannot die, the soul cannot die either. But heat and cold, Plato observes, are not like life, for they can be destroyed, and, since they can be destroyed, fire and snow can be destroyed too (106b-c).

Since he identifies fire and snow with his natures, Plotinus cannot concede that they perish. Natures, he holds, must be eternal, if the world as we know it is to be so. Thus, he decides that the account of the *Phaedo* has to be "amended", and he "amends" it by looking at the *Timaeus*. He notices that, if he can ensure the incorruptibility of heat and cold, and, in general, of the λόγοι of the sensible qualities that belong essentially to a natural kind, it will follow that also the λόγοι of the natural kinds that contain them will be indestructible (cf. *Phaed.*, 106b 7-c 7). This, after all, is the procedure that Plato follows to prove the indestructibility of the soul: he shows that soul essentially contains life, and that life does not admit death. Then, Plotinus makes the λόγοι of qualities indestructible by identifying them with "the copies of the forms" of the *Timaeus*, which Plato seems to think of as eternal, given that he says that they are present in the receptacle even before the creation of the world.

2.7. *Sensible qualities are indestructible: the Stoics and Aristotle*

Thus, Plotinus thinks that, in "the battlefield of the opposites", given the choice between making the λόγοι of qualities be destroyed or "go away", one should say that they "go away". This does not mean that they actually change location, for they are intelligible entities; it only means that they cease to be active where they were, and they become part again of the World-Soul. Let me now go back to IV.4.[28].29, and to Plotinus' remarks there on the career of qualities (cf. section 2.1). Recall that, in IV.4.[28].29, Plotinus says that he wants to examine what happens to the life of a living body when the body perishes. He wants to find out whether the life of the body perishes with the body or "goes away" following the rational soul. But rather than confronting this issue directly, he decides to explore first what happens to qualities when the bodies they are perceived in perish: do they perish with the body in which they are perceived to inhere, or do they "go away"? Nobody, he

says, looks into this issue. The background against which Plotinus operates is clearly "the battlefield of the opposites" in the *Phaedo*;[61] and this observation enables us to better understand the obscure remarks he makes on the career of qualities.

As I have said in section 2.1, Plotinus formulates two hypotheses on this subject. The first hypothesis supports the conclusion that qualities "are not destroyed" (μὴ ἀπολωλέναι), when the body perishes; the second one is meant to show that qualities are "indestructible" (ἄφθαρτοι). The two conclusions may be taken to amount to the same, but they do not, even though both hypotheses suggest that sensible qualities do not perish with bodies. I have tried to show that Plotinus sides with the second hypothesis, that is, that he opts for the indestructibility of sensible qualities. The first hypothesis, I have suggested, represents the Stoics' account of the career of qualities. Let me examine this account then. Plotinus' remarks on the Stoic conception of qualities in IV.4.[28].29 are odd; for no Stoic, as far as I know, ever maintained a position that was even similar to the one that Plotinus presents. But Plotinus knows this, and he points it out himself, when, in introducing his "Stoic" account of qualities, he says explicitly that no one has inquired about the issues he deals with. This means, I take it, that it is not his intention to report some Stoic views on qualities in IV.4.[28].29, but rather to fill what he takes to be a gap in the Stoic account of the sensible world. In other words, Plotinus thinks that the Stoics should have said something about the career of qualities, but did not; and he offers to build for them a speculative account that takes as its starting point premises that they would share. Thus, Plotinus' remarks about the Stoic conception of the career of qualities are, properly speaking, only "Stoic-like" ones.

He starts from "the battlefield of the opposites", and he says that, given the choice between making qualities "go away" or be destroyed, the Stoics would say that they are not destroyed. At first, it seems that to say that qualities are "not destroyed" should simply amount to saying that they "go away". But this is not the case. Plotinus seems to maintain that to say that

[61] Compare IV.4.[28].29, 12-13: συναπέρχεται, ἢ φθείρεται; with Plat. *Phaed.*, 103a 1-2: ἀπέρχεται ἢ ἀπόλλυται. Compare, also, IV.4.[28].29, 26: μὴ ἀπολωλέναι with *Phaed.*, 102e 1-2: ἢ προσελθόντος ἐκείνου ἀπολωλέναι.

qualities "go away" is the same as saying that they are indestructible and eternal, and he suggests that this is something else than holding that they are "not destroyed". That qualities are "not destroyed", then, has to be a *tertium quid* between the two extremes corresponding to "going away" and being destroyed; as we are about to see, by "not-being-destroyed" Plotinus means "being long-lasting" rather than eternal. Long-lastingness, that is, is the *tertium quid* between the qualities' eternity and their perishing together with the body in which they are perceived. That long-lastingness is what Plotinus has in mind when he says that qualities are "not destroyed" emerges from the analysis of the background against which he builds his Stoic-like account of qualities: Cebes' remarks on the nature of the soul at *Phaed.*, 87a ff. The context, in the *Phaedo*, is that of the so-called "affinity argument". Socrates has just tried to defend the thesis of the immortality of the soul by pointing to the special nature, i.e. invisible, intelligible, and non-dissolvable, that the soul has, and that distinguishes it from bodies, which are visible, earthly, and dissolvable. Cebes concedes (87a-c) to Socrates that he has shown that the soul survives the death of some of the bodies it comes to live in, as a cloak can survive the death of its owner and be passed on to another. But he objects that the argument does not prove that the soul is indestructible, but only that it is long-lasting. Now, compare IV.4.[28].29, 25-27, which is the remark that introduces the Stoic-like account of the career of qualities: τί γὰρ κωλύει φθαρέντος τοῦ σώματος τοῦ γλυκέος τὴν γλυκύτητα μὴ ἀπολωλέναι καὶ τοῦ εὐώδους τὴν εὐωδίαν, ἐν ἄλλῳ δὲ σώματι γίνεσθαι with *Phaed.*, 88a 4-6: μηδὲν κωλύειν καὶ ἐπειδὰν ἀποθάνωμεν ἐνίων ἔτι εἶναι καὶ ἔσεσθαι καὶ πολλάκις γενήσεσθαι καὶ ἀποθανεῖσθαι αὖθις. The textual similarities, I think, show that Plotinus frames the Stoic-like views on the career of qualities through the cloak-soul analogy put forward by Cebes in the *Phaedo*. The reason why he does so, as usual, is polemical. His point is that, even if one were to concede, after all, that the Stoics can build a non-illusory world out of their matter and qualities, still, their qualities would be inadequate for the task, and they would have to be replaced by intelligible entities. For the Stoics, in his view, can at best maintain that qualities are long-lasting, and this is a

problem, because with their destruction also the world as we know it would perish.

There are several reasons why this is a fairly crude criticism of the Stoics' views on the qualities and the cosmos. The most obvious one is that Plotinus seems to accuse the Stoics of being unable to ensure the eternity of the world as we know it, whereas the Stoics maintain that the world is not eternal, but goes through cycles of conflagration and reconstitution. I will deal with this point shortly. First let me consider another reason why Plotinus' criticism might be deemed to be unfair: he presents his account as a Stoic-like one, but the Stoics would have never agreed to say that qualities, in general, are long-lasting. Take the peculiar quality that characterizes one and only one individual in their view; at least that quality should perish when the body it is in perishes. On which Stoic premises, then, does Plotinus build his speculative and Stoic-like account of the career of qualities? To arrive at the bottom of that account we need to see that Plotinus places himself in the context of an already existing debate about the Stoics' qualities that involved Platonists and Peripatetics alike.[62]

Among the "qualified objects" (ποιά), the Stoics distinguish the "peculiarly qualified" from the "commonly qualified" (see section 1.3). But it seems that, among those objects, they also distinguish those that are primarily qualified from those that are derivatively qualified. At least this is the picture that we gather from Cicero's report of Antiochus' physics, which is mostly Stoic, in book II of the *De natura deorum*. Cicero speaks of "qualities", i.e. *qualitates*, but seems to use this word to cover both ποιότης and ποιόν. It is to the latter that he must think of when he says that some *qualitates* are "primary" (*principes*), whereas others are derived from them (*ex his ortae*) (II 7, 26). The first kind of *qualitates*, he says, are "homogeneous and simple" (*sunt unius modi et simplices)*, and they are the elements; the second kind are "varied and, so to say, multiform" (*variae … et quasi multiformes*), and they are all the living beings in the world, which come to be out of the elements. Through this distinction between primary and derivative *qualitates*, Cicero

[62] The corporeal nature of Stoic qualities is discussed in Alexander's school treatise *De an. mant*., 122, 37-126, 23; Alc. *Didask.*, 11; Plut. *De comm.. not.*, 50, 1085E-1086B; and Ps.-Gal. *De qual. incorp.*, on which see below.

actually provides an account of the first phases of Stoic cosmology. As I have said in section 1.3, the Stoics think that the world comes to be from two principles, i.e. matter and the active fire or "pneuma". Fire or "pneuma" passes through matter and mixes with it, passing through different states. In the first phase, it brings about all non-living bodies, starting from the elements, as Cicero says, and afterwards, by becoming of finer texture, it brings about all the living but soulless things, i.e. the plants. Ultimately, by becoming of still finer texture, it brings about the animals. If plants and animals are strictly speaking qualified objects for the Stoics, rather than qualities, in the case of the elements it does not seem out of place to say that they are qualities. For, the Stoics assign each element only one quality, and they tend to identify the element with the quality that characteristically belongs to it: fire with heat, air with coldness, earth with dryness, and water with moistness. Unlike Aristotle, they do not view their elements as permanent building blocks of the universe. Rather than a cosmology, the Stoics have what is generally called a "cosmobiology".[63] That is, they think of the world as a living organism, and they explain its structure and its coming to be in biological rather than in cosmological terms. However, they are committed to the view that the elements have to last for an entire cycle of the world, that is, they make them last from the beginning of a world until its end in the conflagration (Diog. Laert. VII 134; and cf. Cic. *Acad.*, I 7, 29). Thus, it is safe to say, I think, that at least one type of qualities for the Stoics are indeed long-lasting, i.e. the elements.[64]

Plotinus, I suggest, having taken up the task of building for the Stoics an account of the career of qualities generalizes the long-lastingness of the elements to all or, at least, most qualities. He thinks perhaps that, since the elements are dispositions of "pneuma" like all the defining qualities of bodies, there is no reason why, if they are long-lasting, the other qualities should not be long-lasting as well. As I have previously noted (section 2.1), Plotinus seems to use the theory of blending in his Stoic-like account of the career of qualities. He makes this choice for several reasons, I think. First of all, the

[63] See David E. Hahm, *The Origins of Stoic Cosmology*, Ohio 1977, pp. 94-101.
[64] This does not mean, however, that the elements remain intact as long as a world cycle lasts: they are subject to transmutation.

Stoics think that indeed at least one body that blends is long lasting, and this is the soul, which is said to mixed "through and through" with the body. At death, they maintain, the soul leaves the body, and it persists for some time by itself (until conflagration in the case of the sage's soul) (LS 53 W). Plotinus, I think, extends the observations about the long-lastingness of the soul to qualities, probably relying on the fact that the Stoics treat the case of the blending of soul and body like a standard type of blending involving qualities. Soul and qualities, in the end, come from the same principle for the Stoics, i.e. "pneuma" (LS 47 M and R), and this is why they maintain that there is nothing special about the blending of soul with body: as fire mixes with iron, they claim, (fire mixed with iron being a typical example of blending), thus soul mixes with the body (cf. Hierocl. *Elem. eth.*, 4, 3-10).[65] If soul mixes with the body as the heat of fire with iron, and if soul is long-lasting, Plotinus reasons, then also heat and the other qualities which are dispositions of "pneuma" should be long-lasting.[66] To be sure, he goes on, the Stoics do not say that the qualities that blend are long-lasting, but they do maintain that they are recoverable from the bodies with which they mix, and that after having been recovered they are numerically the same quality. Thus, he concludes, let us say that this capacity to remain numerically the same through the mixture is indicative of their long-lastingness.

To summarize, Plotinus pastes together his Stoic-like account of the career of qualities from different and scattered claims, but takes as his starting points the view that the elements are qualities and must be long-lasting, and the view that, though qualities blend with bodies, they are actually are recoverable from those bodies. Now we need to see why he thinks that this account of the career of qualities is to be rejected. To be sure, Plotinus wants to maintain that the world, and all the natural kinds in it, are eternal, and he maintains that for this to be the case the essential qualities of the natural kinds must be eternal. But there seems to be nothing incoherent in holding that qualities are only long-lasting for someone who thinks that the world is not

[65] See Inna Kupreeva, "Qualities and Bodies": Alexander against the Stoics", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 25 (2003), pp. 297-344, esp. pp. 315 ff.
[66] There is an important discrepancy between the long-lastingness of soul and that of qualities, however. Soul does not reincarnate, whereas the qualities, on Plotinus' Stoic-like account pass from body to body.

eternal, and the Stoics just think that the world is not eternal. Now, the Stoics were not all in agreement about the issue of the conflagration. For some of them (Boethos of Sidon and Panaetius, in particular) questioned or outright rejected the view that the world could be subject to conflagration, and they maintained that it had to be eternal (LS 46 P). But, no matter their views on conflagration, all of them held that at least one quality, i.e. the heat of fire or of "pneuma", was eternal. Those committed to the theory of conflagration, maintained that the world, having dissolved into fire, would have been brought about again by fire; whereas, those who were not committed to the theory of conflagration, maintained that the world was eternal precisely because it could never lose that quality, even if the other qualities were destroyed.[67] To be sure, there is no incoherence in holding that one quality is eternal while the others are not. But, I submit, Plotinus thinks that, unless the Stoics make all the ἕξεις (that is the defining qualities of bodies) eternal, they will not be able to explain how the bodies that are not fire, can come to be from fire. This polemical point is not explicitly made in the text, but can be guessed on the basis of analogous criticisms against the Stoic conception of qualities.

One such criticism that seems to me particularly relevant here is that of the Pseudo-Galen of the *De qualitatibus incorporeis*.[68] As usual, I am not suggesting that Plotinus depends on the Pseudo-Galen, but I think that his observations become clearer if they are read with the latter's in mind. One of the main problems that the Ps.-Galen raises against the Stoic conception of qualities has to do precisely with their eternity or lack of it. At first, the author seems to ascribe to the Stoics—albeit with some uncertainty—the view that all

[67] This, at least, is one of the reasons presented by Boethos to disprove the theory of the conflagration in Philo's *De aeternitate mundi* 76-84.

[68] This short treatise was already considered spurious by Manuzio, who published it in 1525. That it is spurious was argued by Joannes Westenberger in Id., *Galeni qui fertur de qualitatibus incorporeis libellus*, Diss., Marpurgi Cattorum 1906. Its authorship is still disputed. E. Orth, "Les œuvres d'Albinos le Platonicien", *L'Antiquité Classique*, 16 (1947), pp. 113-114, has argued that the author is Albinus; Robert B. Todd, "The Author of the *de qualitatibus incorporeis*: If Not Albinos, Who?", *L'Antiquité Classique*, 46 (1977), pp. 198-204, suggests that the author is an Epicurean. On this see Paul Moraux, *Der Aristotelismus bei den Griechen*, Berlin 1973-2001, 3 Vols, Vol II pp. 470-472; Moraux stresses the presence of Peripatetic elements in the treatise, and he thinks that the author should be a Peripatetic. For a review see Tryggve Göransson, *Albinus, Alcinous, Arius Didymus*, Göteborg 1995, pp. 52-53. I use the most recent edition of the work: Michelangelo Giusta (ed.), *L'opuscolo pseudogalenico* ὅτι αἱ ποιότητες ἀσώματοι, Memorie dell'Accademia delle Scienze di Torino, Classe di Scienze Morali, Storiche e Filologiche, ser. 4a, n. 34, Turin 1976.

qualities are "eternal" (ἀίδια) (475, 219-476, 228 Kühn). But it soon becomes clear that he is aware of the fact that for the Stoics qualities are not eternal, and that his point is polemical. For, he remarks that, on Stoic grounds, neither of the two first principles of the world contains eternal qualities in itself. But, he asks, if qualities are not eternally present either in matter or in the divine fire that shapes it, how can the elements, which are bodies and qualities for the Stoics, come to be? (477, 249-478, 265 Kühn). To explain his point he uses two examples. Imagine a potter, who wants to produce a vase, he says, if the potter has at his disposal only clay, he will make a vase of clay, and he will not be able to put around this vase a golden coat; in the same way, if the divine fire shapes a quality-less matter, it will not be able to produce bodies that have qualities other than heat, such as the elements, for it will not have at its disposal the necessary qualities. To circumvent the problem, he says, we might suggest that the divine fire proceeds like a doctor rather than like a potter. If it proceeds like a doctor, then in fact it can itself produce the qualities it needs by mixing some more basic ingredients (the heat and cold of "pneuma", say), as a doctor does with drugs. But, he observes, the Stoics maintain that the divine fire does not produce the cosmos in this way, but by passing through matter, from which it follows that, on their account, both matter and the qualities that inform it should be eternal (478, 265-275 Kühn).

Like the Ps.-Galen, Plotinus presupposes that the Stoics could account for the origin and nature of the cosmos only if they allowed qualities (at least the defining qualities of bodies) to be eternal, and then he criticizes them for not having made them so. At best, he says, qualities could be long-lasting on Stoic grounds. But if qualities are only long-lasting, then, once they are gone, nothing will bring them back, not even fire; the world will be destroyed forever, and it will not come back after the conflagration. The point, then, is that Plotinus, rightly, believes that the Stoics are committed to the thesis of the inexhaustibility of generation, and he maintains that they lack the metaphysical tools to support it. Now the criticism of the Ps.-Galen works only if one overlooks that for the Stoics bodies are formed by the divine fire or by "pneuma" in the way an organism is formed, that is, not starting from eternal building blocks, but starting from "seeds"; and the same can be said

against Plotinus' remarks in IV.4.[28].29, if, as I maintain, they are analogous to those of the Ps.-Galen. Both the Ps.-Galen and Plotinus, that is, try to impose on the Stoics a cosmological model that is not theirs, because both of them think, evidently, that it is the only cosmological model that works. But it seems to me that, in the case of Plotinus, even if he had taken into account the fact that the Stoics have a "cosmobiology", he would have arrived at the same conclusions. As we have seen, Plotinus objects to Aristotle that there must be eternal building blocks, so to say, even in the case of the formation of living bodies, because a vegetative soul must be eternal for him, and there is no reason to think that he would not have made the same point against the Stoic "cosmobiology".

2.8. *The inexhaustibility of generation: Aristotle*

We have seen that for Plotinus, Aristotle fails to account for the eternity of the world because he takes nature to be a corruptible principle. But it is not clear why Plotinus thinks that Aristotle cannot account for the eternity of the world otherwise. As is well known, Aristotle describes the cycle of the elements by taking as his starting point "the battlefield of the opposites" of *Phaedo* 102a 10 ff (*De gen. et corr.*, II 4), and he says that the elements do not "go away", but are destroyed. But he rests the thesis of the eternity of the world on his account of the inexhaustibility of generation. Generation is inexhaustible for two reasons in Aristotle's view: because matter provides an infinite "reservoir", and because the eternal and regular motion of the heavens brings about a succession of cycles, of day and night, of seasons, and so on that ensures the continuity of the species (cf. *De gen. et corr.*, II 10). Now one of the reasons why Plotinus attacks the idea that matter could be affected in III.6.[26] is that he thinks that, if it was affected, it would be perishable (cf. III.6.[26].8). Since Aristotle does think that matter is subject to affections, because he conceives of it as a passive "potentiality" (δύναμις), it follows that for Plotinus Aristotle's matter could not be an appropriate "reservoir". The role played by the motion of the heavens in Aristotle's account is less clear. But no matter how the details are to be filled in, that motion, and

especially that of the sun, is supposed to ensure that the individuals belonging to a species will regularly grow and reproduce, thus perpetuating their species by passing on their traits to their offspring. Plotinus is certainly convinced that the motion of the heavens plays some role in maintaining the continuity of the species (III.1.[3].6, 1-5), but he claims, against Aristotle, that the heavens are not capable by themselves of ensuring the eternity of the world as we know. Thus, in III.1.[3].2, immediately after having endorsed Aristotle's account of nature, and having said that the most proximate cause of the child is the father, he adds: "But to come to a halt when one has reached these causes and not to want to go higher is characteristic, perhaps, of one who is easy-going" (III.1.[3].2, 1-2; Armstrong, slightly modified). As the context shows, the criticism is directed to Aristotle and the Peripatetics in general: they identify the correct causes of generation, but fail to see that these causes depend upon higher principles (i.e. the forms), and that they cannot fulfil the role ascribed to them but for those higher principles, which ensure their eternity. This charge, in the end, stems from a long debate on the role of providence in the sublunary world that seems to have engaged the Peripatetics for centuries. Theophrastus was the first to point out that Aristotle's account of the relation between the celestial world and the sublunary world seemed to leave unexplained how the former could have any influence on the latter.[69] The issue was raised again by the Platonists of the Imperial era, who framed it in terms of "providence" (πρόνοια). They maintained that the Peripatetics were only able to account for the presence of providence in the heavens, but were unable to explain how it could benefit the sublunary world.[70] Alexander tried to offer a response to these attacks in several places, by piecing together a Peripatetic account of providence.[71] But Plotinus probably thinks that his efforts were unsuccessful, because Alexander, like Aristotle, denied the eternity of the natures. In III.3.[48].6, 10-11, he insists that providence orders "all things, even those that come to be" (πάντα καὶ τὰ γινόμενα), and a few lines

[69] Theophr. *Metaph.*, 4a 9-11, 5b 10-13
[70] Cf., in particular, Atticus fr. 8 (Des Places). Apparently, at some point the Peripatetics are even assimilated to the Epicureans in order to stress their inability to find a place for providence in the world, cf. Procl. *In Tim.*, p. 262, 3-7.
[71] See Charles Genequand, *Alexander of Aphrodisias On the Cosmos*, Leiden 2001, and Silvia Fazzo (ed.), *Alessandro di Afrodisia*. La Provvidenza. Questioni sulla Provvidenza, Bari 1999.

later he goes on to remark that the eternity of the world is not only due to the heavens, but requires a contribution from the things here below, which means, I take it, from the natures of the natural kinds.[72]

2.9. *The inexhaustibility of generation: Plotinus*

To summarize: Plotinus argues that a λόγος makes an object "come to be" such and such, in the sense that it makes the body it is "in" be and look such and such to a perceiver. When, for whatever reason, the λόγος of an opposite quality becomes present "in the environment", the λόγος that was there before "goes away". But, since it is eternal, that λόγος remains ready to "come back", as soon as the circumstances allow it, and it brings back with it the sensible quality that it causes, so that nothing goes wasted. Thus, for instance, assume some white-lead were to be burnt. The white that characterizes it would not get destroyed, but would simply cease to be apparent where it was. It is tempting to say that it goes back into the hands of the World-Soul that uses it for something else.[73] But a more natural story may perhaps be found. However, Plotinus as far as I can see does not provide it. In any case, this account of the indestructibility of qualities does not work for all sensible qualities, but only for those that are directly caused by a λόγος. These are the essential qualities of the natural kinds; the accidental qualities that we perceive in bodies are not indestructible. Since they depend on contingencies, when they cease to appear, they might or might not reappear again.

---

[72] III.3.[48].6, 22-24: "For these things here below are carried along with those in heaven, and those in heaven with these below, and both together contribute to the existence and the eternity of the cosmos" (συμφέρεται γὰρ καὶ ταῦτα ἐκείνοις κἀκεῖνα τούτοις συντελοῦντα ἅμα πρὸς σύστασιν καὶ ἀιδιότητα κόσμου). The context makes it unambiguous that Plotinus refers to celestial and sublunary things. That κἀκεῖνα refers to sublunary things is indicated by the fact that they are supposed to make only "a contribution" to the eternity of the world. The heavens and their soul, I take it, cannot simply "contribute" to the eternity of the world, but must be directly responsible for it.

[73] "For, just as when some things are destroyed the λόγος of the All uses them for the generation of others—for nothing anywhere escapes its grip—so, when a body is damaged, and a soul enfeebled by suffering something of this kind, what has been seized upon by sickness and vice is subject to another chain of causation and another ordering" (*Enn.*, III.2.[47].5, 9-15; Armstrong, slightly modified).

Even if the way in which sensible qualities appear to us when we perceive them depends on the impact that a λόγος has on our sense organs, this does not mean that the existence of the sensible world for Plotinus depends upon humans and other sentient beings. For the λόγοι manifest their effects on any subject, and not only on sense-organs. Recall the basic message of the double activity theory. Each thing has two activities (ἐνέργειαι). One is the activity *of* the λόγος of a natural kind, which is the essence of a thing, the other is the activity *from* it. Thus, fire, for instance, has an internal heat that cannot be perceived, and an external one, that is, the heat that fire manifests and communicates to other things (see section 2.3 *ad finem*). In virtue of this theory, Plotinus can maintain that fire is hot "down here" even if no one is there to perceive its heat; and he can say that fire produces heat because it is in its nature to do so. The point is, however, that, since heat is a *sensible* quality, it is to be conceived of in respect to the effect that fire exercises on a sentient being. If in the world there were only stones and fire, fire would still produce heat but heat would not be sensible in any meaningful way. What we humans call heat is what strikes our sense-organs in a certain way, or, otherwise put, it is the way in which the intelligible principle of heat in the λόγος of fire manifests itself to us. The dependence of the sensible heat on the intelligible principle of heat in fire makes of it a special quality that can lead us to grasp the nature of fire. But, no matter how special this quality may be, it is still relative to us, and it is only "obscurely" related to fire from our point of view. It is because even the essential qualities of bodies are relative in the end, in that they may appear different according to the environment and the condition of the perceiving subject, that the essence of sensible things is so difficult to figure out.

Plotinus, then, thinks that the world is eternal, and that for the world to be eternal the essential qualities of all bodies must be eternal too. But for the world to be eternal it is also required that generation be inexhaustible. Let me explain how the discussion of the indestructibility of qualities fits into Plotinus' account of the inexhaustibility of generation. Recall the way in which he introduces the *Timaeus*' "traces" in III.6.[26].12. He says that when matter "is inflamed" in fact it is not "set on fire", but rather "becomes" or

"comes to be" (γίνεται) fire. Matter's "becoming" fire here is a way to say that it displays the qualitative traits of fire. As I have said (section 1.4), Plotinus wants to deny that matter is "set on fire" in order to distance himself from the Stoics. But when he stresses that matter "becomes" such and such rather than being affected, he also has another target in mind: Aristotle. In *De gen. et corr.*, II 1 Aristotle claims that Plato at *Tim.*, 49a 6-52d 6 reduces generation to alteration:

> And what Plato has written in the *Timaeus* is not based on any precisely-articulated conception. For he has not stated clearly whether this "Omnirecipient" (τὸ πανδεχές) exists in separation from the elements; nor does he make any use of it. He says, indeed, that it is a kind of *substratum* (ὑποκείμενόν τι) prior to the so-called elements—underlying them, as gold underlies the things that are fashioned of gold. (And yet this comparison, if thus expressed, is itself open to criticism. Things which come-to-be and pass-away cannot be called by the name of the material out of which they have come to be: it is only the results of alteration (ἀλλοίωσις) which retain the name. However, he actually says that far the truest account is to affirm that each of them is gold). Nevertheless he carries his analysis of the elements—solids though they are—back to planes; but it is impossible for "the Nurse" (i.e. the primary matter) to be the planes (Aristot. *De gen. et corr.*, II 1, 329a 13-24; Joachim, slightly modified).

Here we find two important observations about Plato's treatment of the receptacle. Aristotle claims that: 1) Plato does not explain whether the receptacle is or is not separate from the elements; 2) it is unclear what the receptacle is for. Plotinus has answers to both points (see III.6.[26].15, 1-9; III.6.[26].14, 31-35, and the section on matter below). First, he says, the receptacle is separate from the elements, even though it is so only in thought. Then, he goes on, the receptacle has a very specific function: it is the cause *sine qua non* of the sensible universe. Aristotle's main point, however, concerns generation. In the passage above, Aristotle refers to Plato's claim, at *Tim.*, 49a 6-50b, that fire, earth, and the other "traces" of the elements are, properly speaking, receptacle, and that they are receptacle in the same way in which a golden triangle is gold.[74] He observes that Plato maintains that "the

[74] Plato, in fact, claims that, since the traces are unstable, they cannot be said to be "this". Only the receptacle, he maintains, can be "this"; thus, when you see a "trace" you can only say

traces" "come to be" in the receptacle (*Tim.*, 49c 7), while the analogy between receptacle and gold reveals that they can only be alterations of the receptacle, rather than things that come to be in it. For, as a golden triangle is said to be "golden" not because it is gold, but because it is produced from gold, by making the gold undergo such and such an alteration of shape, thus also the elements must be receptacle because they are ways in which the receptacle is altered.[75]

Plotinus has to deny Aristotle's point, because in his view matter cannot undergo any alteration. But he also knows that Aristotle is not merely pointing out some incoherence in Plato's account of generation. In the *De generatione et corruptione* Aristotle aims to show that his predecessors, and in particular Democritus and Plato, attempted to explain generation, but failed to do so. Plotinus wants to show, in contrast, that Plato did not fail, and he begins by arguing that that "the traces" are ways in which the receptacle itself γίγεται, in the sense that it "appears to be" or it "looks like".[76] Then, he turns the "coming to be" of the receptacle into the last manifestation of a generative power that ultimately comes from the One:

> If the First [i.e. the One] is perfect (τέλεον), the most perfect of all, and the primal power, it must be the most powerful of all beings and the other powers must imitate it as far as they can. Now when anything else comes to perfection (τῶν ἄλλων εἰς τελείωσιν ἴῃ) we see that it generates (γεννῶν), and does not endure to remain by itself, but makes something else. This is true not only of things which have choice (προαίρεσις), but of things which grow without choice, and even lifeless things, which communicate as much as they can of themselves to others (μεταδίδοντα ἑαυτῶν καθόσον δύναται): as fire warms, snow cools, and drugs that produce on something else something that is such as themselves (εἰς ἄλλο ἐργάζεται οἷον αὐτά)—all imitating the First Principle as far as they can by tending to eternity and goodness. (*Enn.*, V.4.[7].1, 23-34; Armstrong modified).

---

that it is "this" by pointing at the receptacle. Aristotle takes this to mean that the receptacle is their substance (since it is "this"), and that the "traces" are different, transitory states of it.

[75] For Aristotle's analysis of "golden" and analogous adjectives that indicate out of which something is made see *Metaph.*, VII 1, 1033a 1-23.

[76] The idea that the receptacle "becomes the traces" is Plotinus' own, however, and it finds no parallel in Plato's text. For Plato it is the elements or rather their "traces" that come to be or become.

Plotinus here maintains that all things "imitate" the first principle, i.e. the One, because, like it, they continuously "generate". However he stresses that they only "generate" in virtue of the inexhaustible power that they receive from the One.[77] The passage is inspired by Aristotle's *De anima*, II 4, 415a 26-b 7. But, whereas Aristotle says that only living beings (plants and animals) generate in an attempt to imitate the divine and reach immortality, Plotinus extends the idea to all things, no matter whether they are alive or not. He is drawn to extend Aristotle's remarks in this way by Plato's *Symposium* 207d-208b. There, Plato says that mortal nature seeks immortality and obtains it only by reproduction. Incapable of remaining the same forever, a mortal being reaches immortality by leaving behind a child who is like it. Then he adds:

> Even while each living thing is said to be alive and to be the same—as a person is said to be the same from childhood till he turns into an old man—even then he never consists of the same things, though he is called the same (ὁ αὐτὸς καλεῖται), but he is always being renewed (νέος ἀεὶ γιγνόμενος) and in other respects passing away, in his hair and flesh and bones and blood and his entire body. (*Symp*., 207d 4-e 1; Nehamas and Woodruff).

This passage suggests that Plato understands reproduction and the renewal of body parts in a living organism as being both some kind of "replacement". In reproduction one living being (the father) is "replaced" by another akin to him (the child). In a living body, parts are replaced continuously by other parts, and both "replacements" are described as ways of "coming to be" or "becoming". There is no reference to qualities here, such as the cold of snow or the heat of fire; but Plotinus probably notices that, at *Symp.*, 208b 3-4, Plato says: "What is mortal shares in immortality, whether it is a body or anything else (καὶ σῶμα καὶ τἆλλα πάντα)" (Nehamas and Woodruff). Since to share in immortality is to be able to always "reproduce" or "regenerate", Plotinus infers that "generation" is a universal phenomenon.

[77] Cf. III.2.[47].13, 25-27: "all this [i.e. the sensible world] has not been made once and come to an end but is always being made as the powers above move in different ways over this world" (Armstrong).

However, as the passage above from V.4.[7] makes it clear, Plotinus is not of the view that everything "generates" in the same way. Plants and animals imitate the One by reproducing, whereas soulless things like fire and snow only transmit their powers to other objects. Plotinus describes this transmission of power as the capacity that the natural disposition of a thing (of heating in the case of fire, e.g.) has of assimilating something else to itself. This disposition is the λόγος of the natural kind to which a body belongs, and, as we have seen, it is responsible for making things "become" such and such (e.g. hot or cold) through the λόγος of its defining quality. To be sure, Plotinus does not mention the λόγοι of qualities in IV.4.[7], but this is probably because he thinks that they are "dead", and thus would not fit into the type of generative chain that he is describing. The λόγοι of qualities, then, are implicitly described as the last effect in a generative chain that begins from the One. These powers contribute to the generative chain only to the extent that they make things "come to be" in the sense of manifesting such and such a quality, and the ultimate subject that they can make display qualities is matter. Making things "come to be" (γίγνεται), then, is not a form of generation, but nonetheless it is a way of expressing the inexhaustible generative power of the intelligible principles (cf. III.6.[26].19, 38-41).[78]

2.10. *The identity of bodies through time*

You might think that since sensible things *qua* sensible "come to be" only by displaying such and such a quality, and since Plotinus often speaks of bodies as being "in flux" (e.g. III.6.[26].6, 76; II.1.[40].1, 24-25; II.1.[40].2, 5-6), despite all his efforts he has to fall back into the Secret Doctrine. But this is not the case. I think that Plotinus' notion of γίγνομαι does pick up some core aspects of "the becoming" of the Secret Doctrine, which Plato endorses, in his view, at *Tim.*, 27c-d. But Plotinus picks up these core aspects of "the becoming" of the Secret Doctrine without thereby embracing its ontology. Let

[78] Plotinus, I think, interprets Plato's conception of the sensible world, *qua s*ensible, in the way suggested by Frede, "Being and Becoming in Plato" op. cit., and Wolfgang-Rainer Mann, *The Discovery of Things*, Princeton 2000, esp. pp. 157-172, although Mann thinks that the Secret Doctrine is reproduced in the ontology of the *Timaeus*. See below.

me explain. He isolates the notion of "becoming" from the Secret Doctrine, by cutting its link with Protagoras' mysterious and indeterminate "powers", and by incorporating it in the metaphysics of the λόγοι. This emerges, in particular, from a passage in III.6.[26].8 that we have already examined, but needs to be considered from a different perspective now.

> […] what suffers the affection is also what suffers destruction. But matter cannot be destroyed—for what would its destruction result in, and how could it take place? Yet since matter receives in it countless myriads of qualities, such as various instances of heat and cold (λαβοῦσα ἐν αὐτῇ θερμότητας, ψυχρότητας, μυρίας καὶ ἀπείρους ὅλως ποιότητας), and is differentiated by them and contains them *as if* they were natural to it (συμφύτους) and *as if* they were all blended together (συγκεκραμένας ἀλλήλαις)—for the qualities cannot exist apart, nor can matter itself remain isolated in the midst of them while they are affected in the blending of each other by each other (πασχουσῶν τῶν ποιοτήτων ἐν τῇ πρὸς ἀλλήλαις ὑπ᾽ ἀλλήλων μίξει) — , since this is the case, does not matter too join in being affected? (III.6.[26].8, 10-19; Fleet).

I have previously said (section 1.7) that this description of the interactions of qualities is inspired by the Secret Doctrine. But now it is time to observe that the passage, although inspired by the Secret Doctrine, gives an indication of how to go beyond that Doctrine, in order to offer an appropriate account of the sensible world. What "saves" the sensible world from becoming only a series of ever-shifting appearances, on the model of the Secret Doctrine, is the presence "down here" of the λόγοι. Unlike the powers of the *Theaetetus*, the λόγοι have their own specific nature, they are determinate and they are whatever they are by themselves. Now notice that, even though Plotinus speaks of myriads of fleeting qualities in the passage above (this is in line with what we read in the context of the Secret Doctrine), he cannot mean to suggest that there are myriads of λόγοι of qualities in the world. As we have seen, there are just as many λόγοι of qualities as there are qualities that belong by nature to natural kinds. Thus one assumes, by saying that there are myriads of qualities here, Plotinus must refer to all sensible qualities, including those that have no specific λόγος, but are to be traced back to the interactions of the

λόγοι of some other qualities. But notice also that he explicitly mentions only two qualities, i.e. heat and cold. This is remarkable, because it is unexpected. If the passage is inspired by the Secret Doctrine, one wonders, why does Plotinus mention heat and cold as examples of qualities, since heat and cold are not prominent examples of qualities in the *Theaetetus*, or, at least, not as prominent as others, e.g. white?

Plotinus picks heat and cold, I suggest, because they have been singled out by Aristotle as the two most basic active qualities of the sublunary world (*De gen et corr.*, II 1). Plotinus, thus, endorses the primacy of heat and cold in the constitution of the sensible world. The context in which Plotinus works is that of *De gen. et corr.*, II 2, 329b 6-13:

> Since, then, we are looking for principles of sensible body; and since sensible is equivalent to tangible, and tangible is that of which the sensation is touch, it is clear that not all the contrarieties constitute forms and principles of body, but only those which correspond to touch. For it is in accordance with a contrariety—a contrariety, moreover, of *tangible* qualities—that the primary bodies are differentiated. That is why neither whiteness and blackness, nor sweetness and bitterness, nor similarly any of the other sensible contrarieties either, constitutes an element. (*De gen. et corr.*, II 2, 329b 6-13; Joachim, slightly modified).

Aristotle here is particularly concerned with what we might call a general Presocratic way of doing physics by appealing to some qualities such as sweetness, whiteness, and so on. He points out that these qualities are useless for those who want to grasp how bodies are primarily constituted. If you want to understand how bodies are constituted, Aristotle claims, you must focus only on tangible qualities. Shortly after this passage, he goes on to list cold, heat, dry, and moist, as the most basic, i.e. irreducible, tangible qualities, and he describes how they are to be coupled in the elements. Now this general Presocratic way of making sensible things out of non-tangible qualities is reflected in the Secret Doctrine, where, in fact, the role of sweetness and whiteness is prominent.

I am not suggesting that Aristotle here must necessarily have the Secret Doctrine in mind; but I think that Plotinus reads *De gen. et corr.*, II 2, 329b 6-13 as a criticism of the Secret Doctrine, insofar as that Doctrine reflects the

general Presocratic views that Aristotle considers. Plotinus believes that Aristotle's remarks are correct; and it is for this reason that, when he decides to replace the Secret Doctrine with a proper account of the sensible world, he keeps the idea that the primary bodies come from a mixture of qualities, but claims that these qualities are those singled out by Aristotle: heat and cold, moist and dry. However, he does not "borrow" Aristotle's primary qualities, but rather notices that heat, cold, dry, and moist are the qualities that can be more easily identified with "the traces" of the *Timaeus*' receptacle. Thus he incorporates Aristotle's views on primary qualities in his physics, because he takes those views to be a development of Plato's.[79] However, unlike Aristotle, he does not seem to suggest that each element is out of two qualities, but out of one quality; for fire, for instance, in Plotinus' view, is characterized exclusively by heat.

"The system of λόγοι" allows Plotinus to maintain that things have stable identities, and that they tend to manifest at least some qualities for a relatively long time and in a relatively stable pattern. However, Plotinus argues that the stability of each sensible thing depends upon the kind of λόγος that causes it. As we have seen, the λόγοι of natural kinds differ: some of them are only natures, whereas others are vegetative souls. Vegetative souls for Plotinus provide the things they are in with a higher degree of stability. To see the point we need to address Plotinus' discussion of alteration (ἀλλοίωσις). You might think, at this point, that nothing really comes to be or passes away in Plotinus' world, since he claims that the only things that generate are intelligible, and since he maintains that even qualities are indestructible. But his views are less counterintuitive than it seems. To be sure, the power to generate rests on intelligible principles, and qualities are only displayed or not displayed. But there is something that comes to be in the ordinary sense of the word, and that is subject to alteration and corruption: bodies. Let me begin Plotinus' account of alteration starting from its background, i.e. *De gen. et corr.*, I 4, where Aristotle claims that:

[79] Plotinus' handling of Aristotle's views in relation to Plato's is similar to the reading of Numenius' assessment of the ancient tradition in light of Plato suggested by Michael Frede, "Numenius", *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II 36.2 (1987), 1034-1075.

> There is alteration when the subject remains, being something sensible, but changes in respect to its affections, whether these are contraries or intermediaries (ἀλλοίωσις μέν ἐστιν, ὅταν ὑπομένοντος τοῦ ὑποκειμένου, αἰσθητοῦ ὄντος, μεταβάλλῃ ἐν τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ πάθεσιν, ἢ ἐναντίοις οὖσιν ἢ μεταξύ). (Aristot. *De gen et corr.*, I 4, 319b 10-12).

For Aristotle the ordinary subjects of alteration are bodies. But bodies can be subject to alteration, in his view, because they have a material component that provides them with the potentiality for change. Since Plotinus thinks that matter cannot change, he has to find another way to explain how bodies can be subject to alteration. He maintains, like Aristotle, that alteration depends upon opposites, but argues that bodies are not altered because they are material, but because their qualities form "a couplement":

> Affection happens to opposite at the hands of their opposites (τοῖς ἐναντίοις ὑπὸ τῶν ἐναντίων ἡ πεῖσις); anything else remains unaffected by anything else. And things that have no differentiation inherent in them could not be affected by any single opposite quality. Thus if something is to be affected, it cannot be matter, but must be some couplement (τι συναμφότερον)—or in general many things together. (*Enn.*, III.6.[26].9, 32-37; Feet).

Plotinus says that, since alteration requires an interaction among opposites, it can neither belong to what is entirely undifferentiated, like matter, nor to what is entirely simple, but requires "some couplement", that is, a compound or bundle of several qualities, so that when one quality is altered, the others can persist. That this "couplement" is in fact a body is shown by the following remarks:

> As a general rule anything that is to be affected (τὸ πάσχον) must be such that it is in the possession of the powers or qualities opposite to the ones that come in on top and cause affection. For when hot is present, alteration (ἀλλοίωσις) for it is by what chills; and when moist is present, alteration for it is from what dries; and we say that the subject is altered when it becomes cold from being hot or moist from being dry (ἠλλοιῶσθαι λέγομεν τὸ ὑποκείμενον, ὅταν ἐκ θερμοῦ ψυχρὸν ἢ ἐκ ξηροῦ ὑγρὸν γίγνηται). And further evidence is provided also by the so-called destruction (φθορά) of fire, when a change to another element takes place. For we say that it is the fire, not the matter, which has been

> destroyed. Thus the affections are to do with the same thing as the destruction; for the reception of an affection is the route to destruction, and what suffers the affection is also what suffers destruction. (*Enn.*, III.6.[26].8, 1-11; Fleet).

Here Plotinus explicitly claims that alteration takes place when a subject (ὑποκείμενον) passes from one quality to another (cf. III.6.[26].9, 21-22). But by "subject" he cannot mean a material substrate, because there is no such thing for him. The ὑποκείμενον for Plotinus is not a bare particular that becomes the bearer of some properties, but is a body conceived of as "a couplement", that is, as a bundle of qualities (cf. VI.3.[44].8, 15-20).[80] Plotinus can maintain that this bundle is subject to alteration, and not merely to destruction, because he distinguishes the essential properties in it from the accidental ones, and thus he can say that the bundle persists through change so long as its essential qualities remain in it.[81] In the passage above, Plotinus examines a simple body, that is, the body of an element: fire. He speaks of "the so-called destruction of fire", I take it, to signal that the nature of fire, i.e. its λόγος, is never destroyed. However, he points out that sensible fire is indeed destroyed, because it is subject to alteration; its flame, say, can progressively loose strength.

But not all bodies are subject to alteration in the same degree: lifeless bodies suffer it more than those that are alive. In III.6.[26].6 Plotinus expresses this view by saying that lifeless bodies "are liable to fall and unable to pick themselves up" (III.6.[26].6, 44). Take earth, for instance. If you divide a particle of earth, it remains separate, and it is unable to bring itself back to a unity (III.6.[26].6., 60-61). But living things, he suggests, have "more power" (6, 61). What this "power" is is explained in this passage:

> Things then that enter matter as into "a mother" do it neither harm no good. Not even their blows land on her, but on each other, since their powers conflict with their opposites, not with their substrates—unless one considers them combined with what enters (ὅτι αἱ δυνάμεις πρὸς τὰ ἐναντία, οὐ πρὸς τὰ ὑποκείμενα, εἰ μή τις συνειλημμένα θεωρεῖ τοῖς ἐπεισιοῦσι); heat puts a stop to cold, black to white, or else these opposites mixed and produced some other quality out of

[80] See Lloyd P. Gerson, *Plotinus*, London 1994, p. 96.
[81] One could say that Plotinus rejects an "unrestricted" bundle theory of sensible particulars.

> themselves. So it is the things that are overcome that are affected (τὰ παθόντα οὖν τὰ κρατηθέντα); for them being affected means ceasing to be what they were (τὸ μὴ εἶναι ὅπερ ἦσαν). But in living creatures, in fact, the affections are to do with the body; alteration takes place according to the qualities and powers that are in them; (καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἐμψύχοις δὲ αἱ μὲν πείσεις περὶ τὰ σώματα κατὰ τὰς ποιότητας καὶ τὰς δυνάμεις τὰς ἐνυπαρχούσας τῆς ἀλλοιώσεως γινομένης); their combinations are separated, or join together, or are realigned contrary to their natural constitution, and the affections occur in the body (τὰ μὲν πάθη ἐν τοῖς σώμασι) while the soul is aware only of the more severe affections through its association with the body—otherwise there is no sensation. (*Enn*., III.6.[26].19, 1-14; Fleet, slightly modified).

In the first part of this passage Plotinus seems to speak of qualities being altered by their opposites, but this cannot be taken literally, because he has already explained in previous chapters of III.6.[26] that alteration only belongs to bodies. What Plotinus must have in mind is a basic "couplement" of qualities in a soulless body (e.g. an element), where one quality is dominant. The reason why he puts side by side the case of this alteration and that which occurs in living bodies is that he wants to explain how they differ from each other. In a soulless body an alteration eliminates the dominant or essential quality in the bundle, and the body, as a consequence, ceases to be what it was: it is destroyed. But an ensouled body can have its qualities "realigned", "recombined", and even disposed against its nature, and still remain the body it is. Plotinus is not explicit, but recall that soulless bodies are more subject to alteration because they cannot bring themselves back together when they have been divided. This suggests that the reason why an ensouled body can persist, even when it is acted on against its own nature, is that its soul has the power to re-establish the proper order of its constituents, and to reinstate the natural balance of its qualities. Plotinus' understanding of the "re-constituting" capacity of the vegetative soul is inspired by Aristotle. At *De gen. et corr.*, I 5, Aristotle provides what seems to be the first articulated account of why a body remains numerically the same through time. He examines the case of growth, and he explains that the growth of a body is unlike a mixture because a mixture, of water and wine, say, is said to be water or wine only in virtue of

the dominant component, whereas, in growing, a body assimilates the food, and its nature is not changed by it (321a 29-b 10). The body persists, Aristotle explains, because its vegetative soul, which does not change, transforms the food into the same form as that of the body. In the passage quoted above from III.6.[26], the contrast between the alteration of a basic, soulless bundle, and that of a living body reflects Aristotle's distinction between mixtures and living bodies.

These remarks on the identity of body through time, however, only pertain to the sublunary bodies. For the celestial bodies, in Plotinus' view, actually enjoy individual everlastingness. Plotinus shortens the distance, so to say, between supra and sublunary world by maintaining, against Aristotle, that the heavens are not made of a special fifth element, i.e. the aether, which alone is incorruptible, but are made of fire, and he maintains that, although the fire of the heavens is purer than the fire of the sublunary world, it is still essentially the same element as the fire down here.[82] Plotinus says that the heavenly bodies, unlike the sublunary ones, are individually everlasting because they are made of a purer fire, and they have a better soul. He puts in charge of the heavens as a whole the World-Soul, and he assigns each heavenly body a soul that, like the World-Soul, derives directly from *Nous*. Since these souls and the World-Soul derive from *Nous*, they are more powerful than the natures of the sublunary bodies, and thus they can prevent the bodies they care for from perishing.

Let us go back to "the becoming" of the Secret Doctrine", then. Echoing the Secret Doctrine, Plotinus often says that bodies are in "flux", but what he means by "flux", when he speaks of bodies' "flux", is not the ever-shifting relativities that he sees in place in the Secret Doctrine. In the context of bodies, Plotinus refers to a more ordinary type of "flux": the moderate replacement of parts that bodies undergo in the course of their career. He maintains that lifeless bodies have little means to cope with this flux, and that, in the case of the elements the replacement of one quality may be enough to bring about destruction, when this quality is the essential quality in the bundle. But, following Aristotle, he thinks that living bodies have no problems in

[82] On the nature of the heaven and the heavenly bodies see Wilberding, *Plotinus' Cosmology* op. cit., pp. 57 ff.

copying with flux, because their vegetative souls ensure their numerical identity through time. Concerning the celestial bodies, finally, he denies that they are subject to flux.

2.11. *The issue of* ἀντιτυπία

In section 2.1, I have argued that Plotinus does not view the sensible world as a world of illusions, because the λόγοι allow him to maintain that sensible qualities, quantities, and bodies are real, in the sense that they are not just subjective appearances on par with dreams. However, one may object that if the λόγοι are intelligible entities and they cause sensible qualities through the impact they have on the sense-organs of a perceiving subject, it is not clear how bodies could be "resistant" (ἀντίτυποι), that is, capable of resisting when pressed against. This problem is what I call here "the issue of ἀντιτυπία". This notion is used by both atomists and Stoics to characterize bodies. The atoms, in fact, even though they lack most of the ordinary qualities of bodies, differ from the void precisely because they are "resistant". Being "resistant" is part of the definition of body for the atomists, whereas it is less clear whether this is so for the Stoics. To be sure, also for them the ordinary bodies of our daily experience are "resistant", and one source, the Ps.-Galen of the *De qualitatibus incorporeis*, suggests that they include resistance in their definition of body, together with three-dimensionality (SVF II 381). But the point is disputed, and, in any case, the view that bodies are resistant by definition might not represent the opinion of all the members of the school.[83] The problem with assigning the Stoics the view that bodies are resistant by definition is that they think that prime matter is a body, but prime matter is by definition all pliable and capable of being turned into any kind of body. Thus, one would think, it should be a non-resistant body, and resistance should not be part of the definition of body. Plotinus, in fact, never ascribes to the Stoics the view that body is by definition "resistant". Rather, he says (II.4.[12].1, 13-14) that "they give it [i.e. matter] a body saying that it is

[83] See Richard Sorabji, *Matter, Space, & Motion*, Ithaca 1988, p. 99.

quality-less body and size" (διδόασι δὲ καὶ σῶμα αὐτῇ ἄποιον αὐτὸ σῶμα λέγοντες καὶ μέγεθος δέ).[84]

But let us look at Plotinus' own position. ἀντιτυπία for Plotinus is a quality (VI.1.[42].26, 20-25), that is, it is something that must depend on λόγοι; matter, in lacking any quality, lacks also resistance (III.6.[26].7,30-31). Likewise, he claims, any intelligible thing lacks resistance, i.e. both the forms and "the copy of the forms" (III.6.[26].6, 37-38). But what kind of quality is resistance? The most useful point starting point is the treatise *On the Universe*, II.1.[40]. In II.1.[40].7, Plotinus observes the following:

> He [Plato] says: in the cosmos as a whole there must be this kind of solidity (στερεόν), i.e. resistance (τὸ ἀντίτυπον ὄν), in order that the earth, being seated at the center, may be a solid foundation (ἐπιβάθρα) for the things that stand upon her, and that the living things upon her necessarily possess this kind of solidity (τὸ τοιοῦτον στερεόν). (*Enn.*, II.1.[40].7, 1-6; Wilberding).

Plato never makes these remarks in the *Timaeus*, although he does locate the earth at the center of the universe. But Plotinus thinks that these observations are necessary in order to understand what we read at *Tim.*, 31b 5-6, i.e. that the body of the universe could not be visible without fire, and that it could not be tangible (ἁπτόν) without solidity, nor solid without earth. I will come back to this passage of the *Timaeus* in a moment. Let us first examine Plotinus' point in the quotation above. As James Wilberding has remarked, Plotinus seems inspired by Aristot. *De mot. an.*, 4, 699b 30-700a 20.[85] Resistance, Plotinus says, must be present in the cosmos for two reasons: 1) so that the earth might be a base on which all the other sublunary things can rest, and, presumably, move; and 2) so that living beings upon it might themselves be resistant, and actually rest or move by pressing against the earth. Being resistant, Plotinus remarks here, is one way of being solid (στερεόν), but, as we are about to see, resistance is not coextensive with solidity.

[84] The same may be gathered from VI.1.[42].26, 20-25, where Plotinus explains that "resistance" is a quality to be added to the three-dimensionality of matter to form natural bodies; but it is not clear what kind of position is ascribed to the Stoics here.
[85] Wilberding, *Plotinus' Cosmology* op. cit., p. 209.

The passage of the *Timaeus* that leads Plotinus' inquiry on this issue seems to be, as have said, 31b 5-6. Plotinus engages with it at II.1.[40].6, 1-4 (slightly before the passage quoted above); but there we find out that *Tim.*, 31b 5-6 for him does not report Plato's views, but rather Timaeus' own.[86] This is what we read:

> It seems to follow from Timaeus' first having made the body of the universe out of earth and fire so that it will be visible due to the fire and solid due to the earth, that he also makes the stars not completely but mostly of fire, since the stars obviously possess solidity (τὸ στερεόν). And Timaeus might, perhaps, be right, since Plato also judges this opinion to be likely. For perception, both by sight and by the apprehension that belongs to touch, makes it evident that most or all of the heavens is made of fire; and to those who consider the heaven through reason, if there could be no solidity without earth, the heaven should be made of earth, too. (*Enn.*, II.1.[40].6, 2-12; Wilberding, slightly modified).

According to what we read at *Tim.*, 31b 5-6, Plotinus says, it must be the case that, for something to be "solid", it has to contain earth. But this is Timaeus' opinion rather than Plato's. It is not Plato's considered view because it involves two main problems. First problem: the heavens, Plotinus observes, must be "solid"; but on Timaeus' view, they can be so only by containing some earth. Yet, if the stars are to move with the swiftest motion, they can hardly be made of earth, for earth would hinder their motion. Fire is the swiftest element, and, if the stars are to be the swiftest bodies, as they must be, they must be made of fire only (recall that Plotinus does not admit aether). Furthermore, the stars are the most luminous bodies; but, again, earth would hinder their luminosity (II.1.[40].6, 57-59). Second problem: if earth is not visible without fire, nor is any other element solid without earth, no element would be either visible or solid by itself (II.1.[40].6, 25-29). But, Plotinus insists, each of them must be visible and solid by itself, and not in virtue of fire and earth respectively, otherwise you would have to admit that even snow contains fire, just because it is visible, and actually luminous (II.1.[40].6, 42-43). Thus he observes:

[86] For Plotinus' analysis of this passage see Wilberding, *Plotinus' Cosmology* op. cit., *ad loc.*

> And what about fire? Does it require earth as if it were neither *per se* continuous nor extended in three directions (τὸ συνεχὲς παρ᾽ αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔχοντι οὐδὲ τὸ διαστατὸν τριχῇ)? And why wouldn't solidity (στερεότης)—not in terms of extension in three directions (διάστασις ἡ τριχῇ)—rather, clearly in terms of resistance (ἡ ἀντέρεισις)—belong to it simply *qua* natural body (φυσικὸν σῶμα)? It is rather hardness (σκληρότης) that belongs to earth alone. For even the density of gold, being water, is increased—not by adding earth—but by density or freezing. (*Enn.*, II.1.[40].6, 46-52; Wilberding).

Here Plotinus explicitly says that being resistant is only one way of being solid, and he explains why. It is because "solidity" (στερεότης) can be two things: it can be a three-dimensional extension; or it can be resistance (II.1.[40].6, 48-49). Every body, i.e. both a geometrical body and a natural one (cf. *Tim*., 53c 5-6), is "solid" in the sense of being three-dimensionally extended. The relation between three-dimensional extension and "size" (μέγεθος) is sometimes a little obscure; but we read in III.6.[26].16, 30-31 that size "is part of the definition of body (ἐν σώματος λόγῳ)" or "of the λόγος of body"; which leads us to conclude that size and three-dimensional extension are the same thing (since all bodies are three-dimensional). Size varies, and, when it is determined (i.e. when it is not viewed as size in general or pure three-dimensionality), it is this or that shape (σχῆμα). But only natural bodies, besides being three-dimensional, are also resistant. This is because three-dimensionality is something to which resistance is added to form a natural body (II.6.[17].2, 11-13). Natural bodies are resistant *per se*, that is, not in virtue of containing earth, but *qua* natural bodies; and resistance is not a quality that depends on some particular λόγος, but is brought about in various ways either by the λόγος of a certain quality, like hardness for instance, or by the interactions of some of the λόγοι, e.g. when something is frozen. As Wilberding has remarked, resistance comes in degrees for Plotinus, and the element which is resistant to the highest degree is earth, which is

actually hard.[87] This is why, in Plotinus' view, Plato located the earth at the center of the universe: because, in being not just resistant but actually hard, it is capable of supporting all the other sublunary bodies.

The reason why resistance belongs to all natural bodies *per se* is to be explained in light of the *De gen. et corr*. Recall that at *De gen. et corr.*, II 2 Aristotle maintains the following:

> Since, then, we are looking for principles of sensible body; and since sensible is equivalent to tangible, and tangible is that of which the sensation is touch, it is clear that not all the contrarieties constitute forms and principles of body, but only those which correspond to touch. For it is in accordance with a contrariety—a contrariety, moreover, of *tangible* qualities—that the primary bodies are differentiated. That is why neither whiteness and blackness, nor sweetness and bitterness, nor similarly any of the other sensible contrarieties either, constitutes an element. (Aristot. *De gen. et corr.*, II 2, 329b 6-13; Joachim, slightly modified).

When Plotinus develops the notion of resistance on the basis of *Tim.*, 31b 5-6, he summarizes that passage by saying that Timaeus maintains there that each body gains "solidity" through earth. But actually, in that passage of the *Timaeus* we read that bodies are made "tangible" through earth. It seems to me that Plotinus reaches the conclusion that all natural bodies are resistant, because, understandably, he takes tangibility to be the same thing as resistance, and he reads the passage quoted above from Aristotle as expressing Plato's considered views in the *Timaeus*. Since Plotinus holds, like Aristotle, that all natural bodies must be made from elements, and the elements must be characterized by tangible qualities, it follows that resistance for him is built in the structure of all natural bodies.

There are problems concerning Aristotle's grounds for claiming that what is sensible is equivalent to what is tangible. At *De an.*, II 11, 423b 27, he claims that the distinctive characteristics of body *qua* body are tangible, and he seems to suggest that this is to be inferred from the fact that touch is the only type of sensation that belongs to all animals.[88] However, I am inclined to agree

[87] Wilberding, *Plotinus' Cosmology* op. cit., p. 211.
[88] See C. J. F. Williams (ed.), *Aristotle's De Generatione et Corruptione*, Oxford 1982, p. 157. Notice that at *De an.*, II 11, 423b 27-28 Aristotle refers to *De gen. et corr.*, II 2 as belonging to his work *On the Elements*.

with Marwan Rashed, when he says that, probably, Aristotle thinks that sensible bodies *qua* sensible are tangible because all sublunary bodies are in fact tangible, even though they might lack other qualities.[89] Thus, for instance, air has neither odour nor colour, but is tangible. But Plotinus, it seems to me, could hardly have found a more appealing reason for concluding that sensible bodies must be tangible than that of the *De anima*. Since all sensible qualities for him are the result of the activity of some λόγοι on the sense-organs of a perceiving subject, he has no choice but to say that what is sensible, as sensible, must be what looks such to all those beings that are capable of sensation. Since the only common sensation across animal species is touch, it follows that being tangible, or, as he says, resistant, must be the same thing as being sensible in his view. It is probably this consideration that leads him to conclude that the elements must be made by the λόγοι of tangible qualities. To be sure, sensible qualities are only a matter of "convention", but, apparently, Plotinus takes the universal agreement among the sensory reports across animal species as a sufficient indication that something should be in its real nature the way it appears to be.

2.12. *Matter*

Matter for Plotinus is impassible. It must be impassible for several reasons: because it has to be incorruptible, whereas what is subject to affections is subject to perishing as well (cf. III.6.[26].8); because only contraries can interact, but matter has no contrary, since it is not in the same genus as anything else (cf. III.6.[26].9, 34-44); finally, because it must be receptive of any quality—like the kind of neutral base that one uses to make perfumes—, but if it was to possess some qualities by itself, these would obstruct the reception of the others by altering them (cf. III.6.[26].10, 1-10). But matter, as I have said, is also the cause *sine qua non* of the sensible world. In this section I would like to explore how something impassible, quality-less, and quantity-less like matter is supposed to be a necessary cause of the sensible world, for one might easily think that, if matter contributes nothing to

[89] See Rashed, *Aristote. De la génération et corruption* op. cit., p. 155.

the constitution of bodies, not even magnitude, there is no reason why its existence should not be dispensed with. Plotinus is aware that one could charge him with turning matter into "an empty name" (II.4.[12].11, 13), but insists that matter is necessary for the sensible world. The reason why matter is necessary is tied to its function as receptacle. Matter's specific role does not depend on its being capable to receive the λόγοι, nor on its impassibility; for it shares both of these features in common with soul (II.4.[12].11, 15-16; III.6.[26].1-5). Matter is required for the constitution of the world because, unlike soul, it is capable of receiving all things "in extension" (ἐν διαστήματι) (II.4.[12].11, 18). Thus, if there was no matter, all bodies' natures would still exist as intelligible principles in the World-Soul, but there would be no bodies.

This does not mean that matter is extended or that it is extension. For Plotinus says that if matter was itself extended, it could not adapt to all shapes and dimensions, as it must, but rather would hinder the creative activity of the λόγοι, by imposing its own size to bodies and to the sensible universe in general (III.6.[26].18, 36-40). Thus, matter must be non-extended and apt to receive extension. Plotinus, in fact, says that matter is precisely that which has an "aptitude" (ἐπιτηδειότης) for extension (II.4.[12].11, 18-19). But can we try to figure out what is matter in itself? Or is Plotinus of the view that matter, in the end, is an "I know not what"?

It is fair to say, I think, that matter is, in Plotinus, an "I know not what". But nonetheless, he tries to gives us both a representation of it that suits our imagination, and some kind of more precise characterization of what it must be in itself. If one was to try to imagine matter, Plotinus says, he should imagine it as "an appearance of mass" (φάντασμα ὄγκου) or as "an empty mass" (κενὸν ὄγκον, II.4.[12].11, 28). In other words, take a mass, he says, and then imagine it "empty"; the result to which this thought experiment should lead you is a "vision" of what is completely indeterminate. The problem, however, is to figure out first what a "mass" is. Following Luc Brisson, we might notice that mass for Plotinus has to be an indeterminate size

or extension.[90] What an indeterminate size is, however, is to be "imagined" on the basis of the Hypothesis VII of the *Parmenides*; for it is from there, I think, that Plotinus takes his notion of mass. The Hypothesis VII examines the consequences for "the others", i.e. for what is not One, if we assume that there is no One. In other words, it examines what would be of things if they entirely lacked unity.

> Well then, won't there be many masses (ὄγκοι), each appearing (φαινόμενος), but not being, one, if in fact one is not to be? […] And there will seem to be a number of them, if in fact each seems to be one, although being many. […] And among them some appear even and some odd, although not really being so, if in fact one is not to be […]. Furthermore, a smallest too, we say, will seem to be among them; but this appears many and large in relation to each of its many, because they are small. […] and each mass will be conceived to be equal to its many small bits. […] and this would be an appearance (φάντασμα) of equality […]. Whenever you grasp any bit of them in thought as being a beginning, middle, or end, before the beginning another beginning always appears, and after the end a different end is left behind, and in the middle others more in the middle than the middle but smaller, because you can't grasp each of them as one, since the one is not […]. So every being that you grasp in thought must, I take it, be chopped up and dispersed, because surely, without oneness, it would always be grasped as a mass (θρύπτεσθαι δὴ οἶμαι κερματιζόμενον ἀνάγκη πᾶν τὸ ὄν, ὃ ἄν τις λάβῃ τῇ διανοίᾳ· ὄγκος γάρ που ἄνευ ἑνὸς ἀεὶ λαμβάνοιτ' ἄν). (*Parm.*, 164d 6-165b 6; Gill and Ryan).

It is in light of this passage that Plotinus conceives of matter as "a φάντασμα of mass". Mass seems to be an indeterminate and infinitely divisible extension here. Matter, or "the great and small", is something like that, Plotinus says, only it is not extension.[91] But let us see how Plotinus

---

[90] Luc Brisson, "Entre physique et métaphysique. Le terme ὄγκος chez Plotin, dans ses rapports avec la matière (ὕλη) et le corps (σῶμα)", in Michel Fattal (ed.), *Études sur Plotin*, Paris 2000, pp. 87-111, esp. p. 99.

[91] Cf. II.4.[12].13, esp. l. 31, where Plotinus seems to model his description of matter on the seventh Hypothesis and calls matter "others". Shortly after the passage quoted above, Plato claims that the effect produced by the masses is something like a σκιαγραφία. We know that a σκιαγραφία was a painting technique. The details are obscure, but, apparently, it aimed at producing, probably by using some shadow-effects (the word comes from σκιά, "shadow"), the appearance of a three-dimensional object in front of a spectator looking at the painting from the appropriate perspective. Plato uses σκιαγραφία as a metaphor for the

speaks of mass, and why matter should be viewed as an appearance of mass, rather than of any other thing.

Plotinus is of the view that we should not conceive of the creation of the world as taking place in time. He interprets the myth of the *Timaeus* in a non-literal way, and he also thinks that it would be wrong to imagine that the sensible world came to be as if by the addition of successive layers of forms set upon matter. Inspired by the idea of "the animal itself" as form and paradigm of the whole universe (cf. *Tim.*, 31a-b 3 and 39e 1), he thinks that there is literally no first form that appears on matter, but says that "the form of the whole universe" is reflected upon matter all at once, bringing with itself all its differentiations, i.e. the forms of all bodies (III.6.[26].18, 42-45). But, despite his own cautionary remarks, he does often speak as if matter was to receive quantities and qualities in layers, so to say, that is, one set after another; and he gives size priority over quality. Plotinus chooses this manner of speech, I think, in the interest of clarity. If matter is necessary because only in it can the effects of the λόγοι become extended, extension must have at least a logical priority over the other forms. Thus he claims that "size" (μέγεθος) is the first λόγος that matter receives (II.4.[12].12, 1-6). When it has been made to appear extended by the λόγος of size, matter is "modeled" by the λόγοι of sensible qualities. It is to characterize matter in this intermediate stage, i.e. at the stage where it has size *tout court* with no other determination (not even that which comes with a specific shape), that Plotinus uses the term ὄγκος. Matter with size, then, is a pure mass, and, in being extended, it must be some kind of proto-body.[92] Mass, as in Hypothesis VII of the *Parmenides*, is regularly associated, in Plotinus, with "plurality" (πλῆθος) and infinite divisibility.[93]

---

lack of real being of the sensible world, and, used in this way, the word is meant to evoke the same sort of illusory reality that is conveyed by σκηνογραφία, "stage-painting", which we have already encountered in relation to the sceptical "Democriteans" Metrodorus and Anaxarchus (cf. section 1.4). On this see Eva C. Keuls, *Plato and Greek Painting*, Leiden 1978.

[92] See Brisson, "Entre physique et métaphysique " op. cit., p. 101, who points out that the term "mass" comes from the latin *massa*, which, in turn, is a translation of the Greek μᾶζα that means "paste", as in the paste used to prepare bread.

[93] See, e.g., III.6.[26].18, 27-28; II.4.[12].11, 41-43.

From Plotinus' accounts of matter, however, we always come to know only what matter is not, and, even when we try to imagine it, we can only do so by thinking of it in the negative terms of "an empty mass". In fact, we cannot grasp in a precise way what matter is, because it lacks everything. Matter, Plotinus says, is "privation" (στέρησις) (II.4.[12].16, 3-6, to be read as a sequel of II.4.[12].14).[94] The only positive description that he provides of matter consists in saying that it is one, simple, and continuous (II.4.[12].8, 1 and 13), and this seems to suggest that perhaps the best way to translate χώρα in the *Enneads* is "space", even though "space" is generally associated with three-dimensionality. This notion of matter as "space" can perhaps be developed a little further by comparing some of Plotinus' remarks with Aristotle's criticism of Plato's χώρα in *Phys.*, IV 2.

In *Phys.*, IV 2 Aristotle discusses a series of aporiai about "place" or "location" (τόπος). One way to think of place, he says, is to view it as that which primarily contains a body. On this account, he observes, place turns out to be limit and form. Another way to think of place is to view it as "the extension of a size" (τὸ διάστημα τοῦ μεγέθους). On this account, place turns out to be matter (*Phys.*, IV 2, 209a 30-b 7). The idea that place is "the extension of the size", he goes on, is Plato's. Let us see what it means to be "the extension of the size". Aristotle takes Plato to maintain that extension is something different from size, because it is that which is defined "by the form", which, I take it, means that extension is that which is defined or bounded by size. Thus, I assume, Aristotle thinks of extension in Plato as an unbounded or indeterminate size, and he views size as determinate and limiting, i.e. as being a definite size. This distinction between extension and size recalls that between an indeterminate and a determinate "size" (μέγεθος) in Plotinus. Plotinus identifies what Aristotle calls extension here with mass,

[94] The claim is directed against Aristot. *Phys.*, I 9. Aristotle there distinguishes matter from privation, and he accuses Plato of not having drawn such a necessary distinction. The distinction is necessary, Aristotle claims, because, since privation by itself is nothing, by identifying matter with privation, one ends up claiming that matter is non-being, which is what Plato does. We have seen (section 1.7) how Plotinus answers the challenge, by specifying in which sense matter is non-being. Matter is not nothing at all, he says, but is what is "truly non-being", i.e. what is not this nor that nor their negations. That is to say that matter is non-being in the sense that it is the limit beyond which nothing can be *conceived*. It is the utmost nonsense our mind can bear.

and he says that mass is indeterminate, while a definite size is a shape. The difference between Plotinus' and Aristotle's interpretation of Plato lies in the fact that, for Plotinus, mass or extension is not matter, whereas for Aristotle Plato identified extension with matter.

But why does Aristotle claim that Plato identifies extension with matter? He reaches this conclusion on the basis of the *Timaeus*. The χώρα, he observes, is described by Plato as that which is left when "limit" (πέρας) and "affections" (or "qualities", πάθη) are stripped away (*Tim*., 49b-50b); and this cannot be anything else but matter, which is in fact indeterminate. But, being determined by a limit, Aristotle seems to suggest, is the same as being determined by a shape, and, in fact, the χώρα is "that which participates" (τὸ μεταληπτικόν) in shapes. It is extension, i.e. three-dimensional space, he reasons, that is primarily determined by shapes. Thus, he concludes, if only three-dimensional space can be bound by shapes, and what is bound by shapes is matter, extension and matter must be the same thing in Plato, as his description of matter in terms of "great and small" seems to suggests. This, it seem, is a fair, and, in some sense, generous interpretation of Plato's χώρα, because it treats the χώρα as something specific, rather than as an "I know not what".[95] In fact, Aristotle praises Plato, because he thinks that he was the first who tried to say what place is in some precise manner. Plato is better than his predecessors, Aristotle claims, because he gives content to the notion of place, and, consequently, of matter. Nonetheless, Aristotle thinks that Plato

[95] If my analysis is correct, this treatment of the χώρα on Aristotle's part may raise some difficulties for the interpretation of *Metaph.*, VII 3, where Aristotle speaks of matter as what remains when all differentiations, both qualitative and quantitative ones, have been taken away. For, it is sometimes suggested that Aristotle, in *Metaph.*, VII 3, has precisely the χώρα in mind (see, e.g., Mary Louise Gill, *Aristotle on Substance. The Paradox of Unity*, Princeton 1989, pp. 26-27). Now, in *Metaph.*, VII 3, Aristotle claims that matter is completely indeterminate, while in *Phys*., IV 2 he claims that the χώρα is extension. However, he does point out also in *Phys.*, IV 2 that matter, although it is extension, is indeterminate, because extension needs size (i.e. a determinate shape) to be bounded and limited by. Moreover, Aristotle does say, at *Metaph.*, VII 3, 1029a 18, that there is nothing left if length, width, and depth are taken away "unless there is something that is determined by them". He just might have in mind three-dimensionality as something bounded by determinate shapes. Cf. Sorabji, *Matter, Space, & Motion* op. cit., pp. 6 ff. Both Simplicius and Philoponus interpret Aristotle's prime matter as indefinite extension, although Philoponus seems to have arrived at this view by degrees. Cf. Simp. *In Phys.*, 229, 6; 230, 19-27; 232, 21-24; 537, 13; 623, 18-19; Philop. *Contra Proclum*, XI 1-8 (pp. 405-445).

has an inadequate notion of place. For, in Aristotle's view, place can neither be form nor matter, because both form and matter are inseparable from bodies, whereas place must be separable from them. Place, he claims, is something like a "vessel" (ἀγγεῖον), and it contains bodies, but is not part of them.

Now clearly Plotinus has a ready answer to this. He can say that he agrees that form cannot be place, and he can maintain that Aristotle is wrong in thinking that for Plato matter is part of bodies. Matter, in contrast, does not enter into the constitution of bodies, and thus there is no obstacle against it being place; in fact matter is precisely some kind of vessel (III.6.[26].14, 31-35). This does not mean, however, that matter is really separate from bodies or "outside" them. It is "outside" (ἔξω) them only in the sense in which a mirror can be said to be "outside" the images that appear on it at the spot where they appear: we distinguish it from those images in thought, because we know that the mirror is something else than the image; but we cannot say that the image and the mirror are two separate and independent things (if the mirror was not there, the image would not be there either) (III.6.[26].15, 1-9).[96] Yet, Plotinus insists that matter is neither extension nor place, and Aristotle, *malgré lui*, might have helped him reach this conclusion. In fact, at 209b 33-210a 2, Aristotle observes, critically, that Plato never says that "the forms and numbers", i.e. the shapes of the *Timaeus*, are "in place". Plotinus, I think, seizes upon this remark, and he concludes from it that Plato never said that the shapes are "in place" just because he never thought that the χώρα could be place.[97]

What remains to be determined is if Plotinus' notion of matter really constitutes an improvement on Aristotle's interpretation of the χώρα. It

[96] See Fleet, *Plotinus. Ennead III 6* op. cit., p. 245 for the non-spatial connotation of "outside" here.

[97] Concerning place: although Plotinus does use (once I think) the word τόπος to designate matter, at III.6.[26].18, 48, his conception of place seems substantially the same as that of Aristotle. One thing invites this conclusion: the fact that he says in II.4.[12].12, 11-13 that "place is posterior to matter and bodies, so that bodies would need matter before they need place" (Armstrong). This claim, I think, makes sense if we assume that Plotinus accepts Aristotle's definition of place as "the limit of a body". If there are no bodies, there are no limits of bodies, and thus no place. See also III.6.[26].15. Even though at III.6.[26].18, 48 Plotinus says that matter is the place of all things, it seems to me that he does not have in mind a spatial notion here, but rather thinks of "the place of the forms" of Aristot. *De an.*, III 4, 429a 27-29. On this see chapter III.

seems to me that Plotinus might have good reasons not to make matter subject to affections. This allows him to maintain that matter can support generations of bodies after generations without running the risk of being "consumed" in the process. But he could have made matter impassible while maintaining that it is three-dimensional. As far as I can see, the only reason he offers in support of his claim that matter is not three-dimensional extension is that, if matter had size, it could hinder the creative power of the λόγοι. But, as Aristotle says, and Plotinus seems to concede, size is one thing and extension another. Matter could be three-dimensional without having any specific size; that is, it could be "pure three-dimensional extension", and I cannot see how this "pure three-dimensional extension" by itself could hinder anything. Plotinus, I think, speaks of a possible hindrance only to hide the fact that his monism does not allow any room for something that is even minimally determined by itself, rather than by a power that depends upon the first principle. In other words, if matter were to be three-dimensional, it would have such a minimal determination independently of the One and of *Nous*, and Plotinus wants to deny that anything could exist and be what it is independently of the One and of *Nous*. I think that there is an unresolved tension in his position. On the one hand, he wants to maintain that matter is something, and, since he holds that it is a cause *sine qua non* of coming to be, he cannot say that it is just the relations that bodies have among themselves. On the other hand, he should maintain that matter is three-dimensional space, and yet he cannot do so, because this would open the door to a form of dualism. This is why he gives up that one thing that Aristotle praised in Plato's conception of matter, that is, the idea that matter is some specific thing, i.e. extension. Plotinus' matter, as a "space" without extension, is, I am afraid, just an "I know not what".

Chapter III

Plotinus on Theaetetus *Part I (184b-187a)*

3.1. *Plotinus and the "reductio ad Protagoram"*

The most basic and essential tenet of Platonism is that real being is intelligible. It is this tenet that Plotinus sets out to defend first of all in the *Enneads*. Plotinus does not deny the intrinsic implausibility of the view that he wants to defend. On the contrary, he admits that it is completely counter-intuitive. "The many", he says, think that bodies are real beings, and their view seems sound, since no one can deny that bodies strike us as something real, and, in fact, as the most real of all things (III.6.[26].6). But, he goes on, we need to examine if there are any philosophical arguments that may be invoked in support of the view of "the many". As Aristotle points out in *De gen. et corr.*, I 3, the view of "the many" rests on the conviction that sensation is knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). This conviction, Plotinus holds, is embedded in an epistemological tenet that is at work in Stoicism. Now Plotinus is often quite crude in his treatment of the Stoics, and if he really were to ascribe to them the view that sensation is knowledge, in the sense of scientific knowledge or ἐπιστήμη, his position would not deserve much attention, for the Stoics never claimed that sensation is knowledge in this sense. But they did claim that sensation is an apprehension of how things really are, and that it leads to scientific knowledge. Plotinus, I maintain, thinks that they are committed to the view that sensation is knowledge in the sense that they identify sensation with a sub-species of knowledge, that is, with the assent to a cataleptic representation, where the assent is an apprehension. He thinks that if one wants to show that real being is not corporeal one has to refute the Stoic view that sensation is apprehension. He never presents his argument against Stoic epistemology and ontology in a systematic way, but he lays down its outline in VI.1.[42].28-29. If we take the remarks that he makes in those two chapters as our guide-lines, we can reconstruct his argument in the following way.

He begins by attacking the foundation on which the claim that sensation is an apprehension rests, namely the notion of cataleptic

representation. The Stoics say that cataleptic representations differ from non-cataleptic ones through a causal mark, and they link their notion of cataleptic representation to a very specific ontological doctrine: that of the "peculiarly qualified (ἰδίως ποιόν). Cataleptic representations can have a distinctive causal mark, because each body in the world is uniquely qualified, and thus, at least in principle, it is discernible from any other. These Stoic views are attacked by Arcesilaus. Arcesilaus argues that there are no indiscernible objects in the world, and that there are no cataleptic representations. In fact, Arcesilaus goes so far as to maintain that no apprehension is possible. Like Arcesilaus, Carneades, and the Pyrrhonists before him, Plotinus, too, maintains that there are no cataleptic representations, and that, in contrast, all our representations are "obscure" and "undecidable". He thinks that Arcesilaus is right in maintaining that no apprehension is possible, but suggests that radical *akatalēpsia* is only a consequence of the Stoics' views on sensation and the constitution of sensible things.

Plotinus begins his criticism of the Stoics from their theory of categories, where he thinks that the Stoics have laid down what they take to be their primary types of objects. In III.6.[26] he argues that there cannot be matter-quality compounds in the world, from which it follows that there cannot be any object that is intrinsically qualified through a quality present in it as one of its components. This amounts to saying that the second category is empty. In VI.6.[34].14 he argues that sensible objects cannot be intrinsically differentiated in virtue of the disposition of their parts. This amounts to saying that the third category is empty. In both III.6.[26] and VI.6.[34].14 he concludes that, when the Stoic conception of bodies is "properly" examined, in a Stoic world, bodies can only belong to the fourth category. But the fourth category does not cover bodies that are intrinsically differentiated; it only covers bodies that are what they are in virtue of the extrinsic relation they have with other bodies. As Plotinus puts it (VI.6.[34].14), in this scenario no differentiation is "in the objects", and a sensory representation can only report the way in which things seem to be in relation to a perceiver. Far from being cataleptic, then, all sensory representations are merely subjective, and their content does not correspond to anything in the world.

At this point Plotinus has paved the way for arguing that Stoic epistemology and ontology lead to the radical *akatalēpsia* held by Arcesilaus. To show this point, he assimilates the Stoics' epistemology and ontology to those of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*. He thinks that Plato refutes Protagoras by showing that the thesis that knowledge is sensation implies the Measure Doctrine, which implies the ontology of the Secret Doctrine, which implies an absurdity, namely, radical *akatalēpsia*. He assimilates the Stoics to Protagoras by arguing that, when "properly" examined, their conception of sensation is the same as Protagoras and so is their conception of sensible qualities and bodies. Having assimilated the Stoics to Protagoras, he can conclude that, like Protagoras', their views lead to radical *akatalēpsia*.

For Plotinus, then, Plato's discussion of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus* (Part I, 151e- 184b) contains an *ante litteram* argument against the Stoics. But, as I have tried to show in section 2.10, he also believes that Plato there rejects a general Presocratic view of the sensible world (152e 2-4). The Stoics, Plotinus suggests, have revived this general Presocratic view of the world.

At this point, however, Plotinus has still some way to go in order to show that real being is intelligible. Thus, after having used scepticism as a polemical tool against his adversaries, he decides to employ it in a more constructive way, by following what he takes to be Democritus' example. Granting that, as the Sceptics point out, our sensory representations conflict, Plotinus reasons that one can take one of the following two approaches: maintain that sensory representations give us knowledge of their objects by going down the road of Protagoras, as the Stoics (allegedly) do, or say that sensory representations do not give us knowledge, because they do not reveal how things really are. The latter, he holds, is the road taken by Democritus. By means of an argument from conflicting appearances, Democritus argues that the real nature of things must lie beyond the way in which they look to us. To grasp what things really are, Democritus claims, we need to grasp the hidden causes of the phenomena, and these causes are the atoms. Plotinus endorses this approach, but does not endorse Democritus' conclusion: that the causes of the phenomena are atoms, that is, imperceptible bodies. By relying on Aristotle's reading of Democritus in *Metaph.*, IV 5, and on a traditional sceptical reading of the latter's views, he argues that Democritus, too, in the

end, is to be assimilated to Protagoras. For also on Democritus' ontology, he maintains, no quality and no differentiation can said to be "in the objects", so that all we can grasp of sensible objects is merely a series of appearances.

There is no doubt that Plotinus proceeds hastily. But his main point, in general, seems to be the following: if you can ascribe to a thinker the view that "qualities are not in the objects", you can then reduce his epistemological position to that of Protagoras', and refute him by showing that he is committed to *akatalēpsia*. That is, Plotinus uses *Theaet.* Part I to implement a strategy of argumentation that I will call a *reductio ad Protagoram*. It is a strategy that consists in refuting an opponent by arguing that his views lead to those of Protagoras, and that the latter are absurd. It was not uncommon among Platonists (cf. Plut. *Quaest. conv.*, III 5, 652B), and it is based on a methodological point laid down by Aristotle in *Top.*, VIII 4, where Heracleitus' view that contraries are present in things at the same time seems to be the absurdity towards which a questioner might want to lead the answerer in a dialectical debate (*Top.*, VIII 6).

Plotinus first rejects the Stoic view that sensible bodies are the only real beings, because that view leads to a form of Protagoreanism; then he rejects Democritus' view that the atoms, i.e. some invisible bodies, are the real beings, because that view, too, leads to a form of Protagoreanism. The problem with Protagoras is that one can show that in the end he is committed to a world where bodies are merely a series of ever-shifting appearances, and where no apprehension is possible.

The *pars contruens* of Plato's thought, in Plotinus' view, begins where Democritus' projects fails, and it is developed in the *Timaeus* (see chapter II), where Plato presents his own conception of the sensible world. Plotinus thinks that Plato endorses in the *Timaeus* Democritus' philosophical project of looking for the hidden causes of sensory appearances. But, unlike Democritus', Plato's project succeeds, because Plato replaces the atoms with the only kind of entities that can actually function as natures and causes of sensible things in a coherent way: intelligible entities that Plotinus calls λόγοι. This is not the most obvious reading of the relation between Plato and

Democritus, but for Plotinus Plato develops Democritus' intuitions about the constitution of the sensible world.

By relying on the physics of the *Timaeus*, then, Plotinus shows how, from purely intelligible causes, one can build a world that is not a series of appearances. In this world, sensible things appear to be such and such in relation to each other and to the subjects that perceive them, and this is why Plato says that they "become" (γίγνεται) rather than have "being". But now beyond their appearances there are real and determinate natures that make bodies relatively stable through time and allow them to display a relatively stable pattern of qualities. The point is not merely that the "flux" of the Secret Doctrine—understood, as Plotinus does, in terms of ever-shifting relativities—now becomes "more moderate". The point is that finally bodies get to have intrinsic differentiations, because their essential qualities become the manifestation of their intelligible natures. This does not mean that suddenly sensible things no longer cause "obscure" and conflicting representations. They still cause them, and they still confuse us. But now there is hope of finding a path towards the truth, because there is some truth to seek: an essence beyond the phenomena.

With these remarks in mind let us approach Plotinus' reading of *Theaet.*, 184b-186e, i.e. the very end of Part I.

3.2. *Readings of* Theaetetus *Part I: 184b-187a*

Following the method I have used so far, I will begin by considering Burnyeat's and Cornford's readings of the text, and I will place Plotinus' own reading against that background. At 184b Socrates re-examines the claim that knowledge is sensation afresh. He points out that the correct way to develop it consists in saying that we perceive something with the soul, through or *via* (διά+ gen.) the sense-organs. It is important to maintain that we perceive with the soul, Socrates claims, rather than with the sense-organs, because to say that we perceive with the sense-organs amounts to turning the sense-organs into the ultimate subjects of sensation. This would imply that each of us is similar to a wooden horse that contains within itself many warriors, each of which has

its own sensations. This Wooden Horse psychology, he claims, does not account for our ability to connect the contents of our sensations. Then, Socrates seems to examine the scope of sensation. There are some features that sensible objects have in common (the so-called κοινά), such as their being similar or dissimilar, one or many, beautiful or ugly, that seem to be beyond the domain of sensation. In sensation we have access to those traits of bodies to which our sense-organs are appointed—colours, in the case of sight, flavours in that of taste, and so on—but we seem unable to judge whether something is the same as something else or is different from it, or whether something is beautiful, and so on. In particular, in sensation we are unable to judge what all things seem to have in common: being. But if sensation cannot judge being, it follows that it cannot judge the truth, for judging whether something is true presupposes the ability to judge whether it is so and so. Furthermore, it seems that one cannot have knowledge unless one grasps truth, because one cannot know anything but the truth. From these remarks Socrates concludes that knowledge is not sensation, but perhaps can still be identified with true "belief" (δόξα). As sensation cannot be a valid candidate for knowledge, he introduces in its stead true belief.

Now Cornford maintains that the claim that knowledge is sensation put forward at 184b picks up the same thesis that Theaetetus and Socrates have been discussing all along. He explains that by 184b Plato has "purified" the Measure Doctrine from all those elements that he found unpalatable in it, and he has freed the ontology of the Secret Doctrine from any possible extremist interpretation. This is why, at 184b, the thesis that knowledge is sensation can be finally tested with the right premises at hand. By 186e, Cornford claims, Socrates refutes the thesis that knowledge is sensation, and he does so in two steps. First step, Socrates shows that sensation, conceived of as an interaction between some powers in the world and the powers of a sense organ, cannot be the whole of knowledge (184b-185e). That is, even if one were to grant that sensation is knowledge, one would have to say that strictly speaking it is knowledge only in the sense that it is a part of knowledge, rather than in the sense of being identical with knowledge. For Cornford, in fact, the point of the discussion of the Wooden Horse psychology is to show that knowledge

requires something over and above sensation, namely, a central mind capable of processing the reports of the sense-organs. The mind processes these reports by formulating judgements in which it makes use of "common terms" (i.e. κοινά such as "same", different", "beautiful", and so on), the meaning of which rests on the intelligible forms. Second step, Socrates shows that knowledge and sensation are not only non-identical, but sensation is not even a part of knowledge (184b-186e) because sensation has no access to the real being of forms that is disclosed in the "common terms", and knowledge rests on the grasp of this being. To be sure, Cornford admits that there is no explicit mention of forms throughout the dialogue, but holds that this is part of Plato's deliberate strategy: Plato wants us to see the problems an empiricist theory of knowledge leads to before solving them. This solution is to be found in the the *Sophist*, where Plato gives an account of truth that rests on the appeal to the forms.

Reading B handles differently Socrates' examination of Theaetetus' thesis at 184b. It maintains that the claim that knowledge is sensation that is put forward at 184b introduces a new thesis, which, this time, is built from premises that Plato accepts as true. Socrates now implicitly assumes that both sense-organs and sensible objects are stable things, and he shows, by direct proof rather than by *reductio ad absurdum*, that knowledge cannot be sensation. He rejects the Wooden Horse psychology as a Protagorean remnant, and he replaces it by introducing a unitary subject of consciousness. There is no allusion to the forms on Reading B. When Socrates says that sensation has no access to being, all he means is that sensation cannot form even the most simple judgements (x if *F*). In being unable to determine whether something is or is not the case, sensation is cut off from the truth. Thus, since knowledge presupposes the ability to grasp what is true, Socrates concludes that knowledge cannot be sensation.

Both Reading A and Reading B, then, maintain that Socrates discusses the thesis that knowledge is sensation at 184b starting from premises that Plato accepts as true. But they identify different premises. Cornford argues that the premises are Protagorean. For Cornford, Plato endorses Protagoras' view that the sensible world is a world where things are changing, and are nothing in

themselves, and he also endorses a form of narrow Protagoreanism by maintaining that sensation, when it is restricted to the grasp of the special sensibles, is a passive affection of the sense-organs, and is infallible. In contrast, Reading B maintains that the premises have nothing to do with Protagoras, who has been thoroughly refuted by 184b. On B, Plato assumes that the sensible world is made of stable entities and that sensation requires some activity on the part of the mind, insofar as the mind is responsible for an intentional use of the sense-organs. For Cornford Plato goes through the discussion of Protagoras' views to present his own views on the sensible world and sensation, and, then, from 184b until the end of Part I, he shows that knowledge cannot be sensation and that there is no knowledge of the sensible world. In Part I, Cornford says, Plato wants to show us what knowledge is not of so as to make us understand that to reach knowledge we need to reach for the forms. Knowledge is not sense-based, and sensible things cannot be its objects: this is the lesson we have to learn in order to approach the *Sophist*, where, finally, Plato tells us what knowledge is of. In contrast, Burnyeat steers away from these metaphysical presuppositions. For him, *Theaet.* Part I—and the dialogue in its entirety—is a dialectical exercise that aims to engage the reader in an open-ended and multi-faceted epistemological inquiry, and no final lesson is to be found in it.

Plotinus' reading of 184b-186c is as follows. Plotinus agrees with Reading B that the claim that knowledge is sensation at 184b introduces a new thesis rather than a narrower version of the Protagorean thesis that was the focus of discussion up to that point. For him, too, Plato has refuted Protagoras, and now he builds a new thesis from premises that he accepts as true. But these new premises are not merely laid down for the benefit of leading the reader through a dialectical inquiry. They are taken from the *Timaeus*, and they express Plato's considered views on the nature of sensible objects, and the soul. Like Cornford, then, Plotinus maintains that we should read the *Theaetetus* with Plato's metaphysical commitments very much in mind. The assumptions on which Plato works for Plotinus are 1) the existence of relatively stable objects that have some intrinsic traits (the sensible manifestations of which, however, are relative and "obscure"); and 2) the conception of the soul as a special substance that is made of divisible and

indivisible being which is found at *Tim.*, 35a. Plato uses these two assumptions, Plotinus argues, first to remove the *akatalēpsia* to which Protagoras' views led, and then to introduce the forms as criteria of truth through which real knowledge can be reached. By the end of Part I, in Plotinus' view, Plato shows that sensation is indeed a form of apprehension, but is neither to be identified with knowledge nor to be viewed as a part or sub-species of knowledge. Sensation in Plato, Plotinus says, is something like knowledge, namely, an apprehension of the qualities that sensible things display. Plotinus believes that Plato removes *akatalēpsia* by rejecting the Wooden Horse psychology and introducing the view that sensation is a judgement of the soul rather than a passive affection, as Protagoras thought. The Wooden Horse psychology, Plotinus thinks, is a remnant of Protagoreanism, and Plato rejects it, because it cannot account for how we *perceive* things. We seem able *in sensation* to connect the information coming from different senses, and this can be accounted for only by assuming that the soul is a special substance which shares both in divisible and indivisible being. Plato grounds a new understanding of sensation on this conception of the soul. Up to 184d sensation is conceived of in terms of a passive affection, because this is the way in which Protagoras thought of it. But the new conception of the soul that Plato introduces leads to a different view. It leads to the view that sensation must be a judgement of the soul and some kind of belief. The soul is not merely active in sensation insofar as it makes an intentional use of the sense-organs; the soul actually judges in sensation, and it forms some kind of beliefs of the form "This is red" or "This is red, large, and so on". I do not think that the text can be interpreted in this way, but Plotinus has an agenda. He wants to show that Plato is capable of removing the conditions that led to radical scepticism, and then he also removes the obstacles that stand in the way of reaching real, scientific knowledge, i.e. knowledge of the forms. Starting at 186c Plato, Plotinus says, begins to explain how knowledge of forms can be reached, and he explains that the first step towards it consists in forming true beliefs. True beliefs are not knowledge, but they help us sort out the conflict of our sensations, and they lead us towards knowledge by judging sensory reports against some a priori standards the soul contains within itself.

Plotinus' reading of 184b-186c can be mainly reconstructed, in my view, from IV.2.[4].2; IV.3.[27].19; III.6.[26]; IV.4.[28].23.

3.3. *The Wooden Horse Psychology and Plotinus' conception of the soul*

You might think that, since Plotinus assimilates the Stoics' epistemology to that of Protagoras, and since he holds that Protagoras has been refuted by 184b, he has no longer any reason to engage with the Stoics. But this is not the case. In his view, the refutation of Protagoras makes it clear that there cannot be any cataleptic representations, but there are other Stoic commitments that Plotinus considers unsound. One of these is their conception of the subject of sensation; another is their notion of representations as affections of the soul. Let me start with the first of these two points. Plotinus interprets the discussion of the Wooden Horse psychology as a discussion that aims to show that sensation presupposes a unitary subject, and that the only adequate subject is the soul conceived of as a special kind of intelligible entity. The Wooden Horse psychology—by which I mean the view that the soul is not a unitary subject of sensation, and that there is no unitary subject of sensation—is a remnant of Protagoreanism for him, and, in his view, Plato rejects it. Plotinus uses his reading of the discussion of the Wooden Horse psychology to argue against the Stoics' conception of the subject of sensation. He wants to show that, even if the Stoics want to maintain that their psychology can explain how there can be a unitary subject of sensation, their account of this subject is incoherent, so that, in the end, they slip into a form of Wooden Horse psychology.[1]

The move is polemical, of course. The Stoics have an account of the the subject of sensation that is an attempt to avoid the Wooden Horse psychology criticized by Plato at *Theaet.*, 184b ff. The clearest version of that account is probably due to Chrysippus. Chrysippus' conception of the soul seems to be driven by the attempt to explain the presence of different faculties in the soul without compromising its unity. He thinks that the soul is a body, i.e. hot breath (πνεῦμα); and he explains its different faculties, or "parts", in

[1] My account of Plotinus' reading of the Wooden Horse psychology is indebted to Eyjólfur Emilsson, "Plotinus and soul-body dualism", in Stephen Everson (ed.), *Companions to Ancient Thought 2: Psychology*, Cambridge 1991, pp. 148-165, however it diverges from Emilsson's in two important (I think) respects. I will signal the divergences in due course.

terms of different qualities that this breath can intrinsically have (LS 53K). The ruling principle (ἡγεμονικόν), which is located in the heart, is the seat of sensation, and, more generally, of consciousness. From it proceed, like the tentacles of an octopus, the powers of the five senses, the nutritive power, and the power responsible for utterances (LS 53H). The five senses act as messengers (LS 53G): they receive sensory inputs, and they "send" them to the ruling principle by "transmission" (διάδοσις), that is, by passing them on from one part the soul to the next. The ruling principle processes all the sensory reports, and it formulates judgements.

Plotinus attacks the Stoic views on the unity of the subject of sensation in several places, but I will mainly limit myself to the remarks he makes in IV.2.[4], which seem most pertinent for our purposes. In IV.2.[4].1 Plotinus explains that bodies are that which is primarily divisible, because they lack intrinsic unity. Their parts, he says, differ from each other and from the whole to which they belong, and this is why when one part is affected the others cannot share in its affection. Then this observation is applied to the analysis of the soul:

> If it [i.e. the soul] was like bodies (εἶτε γὰρ οὕτως ἦν, ὡς τὰ σώματα), having parts different from each other, then when one part was affected the other would not arrive at any sensation of the affected part, but it would be that particular soul, the one in the region of the finger, for instance, which would perceive the affection as a soul distinct from the other and on its own (ὡς ἑτέρα καὶ ἐφ' ἑαυτῆς οὖσα ᾔσθετο τοῦ παθήματος): so, speaking generally, there would be many souls directing each one of us. (*Enn.*, IV.2.[4].2, 4-10; Armstrong, slightly modified).

Plotinus argues that if the soul was *like a body* it would lack intrinsic unity, and it would be divisible throughout the body in the way bodies are divisible. But imagine what would happen in sensation. The soul being divided throughout the body, its parts, Plotinus maintains, would be unable to share in each other's affections, and, as a consequence, each of them would have its own sensations. The soul in the finger would perceive what happens to the finger, and the soul in the foot what happens to the foot, and they would be like the warriors in the Wooden Horse.

But Plotinus is aware that the Stoics have an answer to his objection; for they maintain that the sense-organs do not perceive the sensory inputs, but only transmit them to the ruling principle where sensation takes place. Thus he attacks their transmission theory. If the sensory inputs are transmitted to the ruling principle, he asks, how can the ruling principle correctly locate their origin (IV.2.[4].2, 20-21)? We are able to distinguish whether the pain we feel, say, is in a hand or in a foot; but if all sensory inputs reach the ruling principle by going through the soul part by part, the ruling principle should perceive them as coming merely from the parts of the soul that are adjacent to it, rather than as coming from a foot, say.

But, once again, the Stoics have an answer. They can say that the sense-organs are linked to the ruling principle in a way that is more complex than that sketched by Plotinus, and, that because of this they convey from the periphery a message that remains one and the same throughout the soul. Thus Plotinus begins to attack the Stoic conception of the ruling principle:

> And if the input comes into contact with the ruling principle itself, it will either come into contact with a part of it, and this will perceive, but the other parts will not any more: there would be no point in their doing so; but one will say "I was affected first" and another, "I perceived another's affection (πάθημα)"; but they will every one of them except the first be ignorant of where the affection occurred. (*Enn.*, IV.2.[4].2, 23-29; Armstrong, slightly modified).

Grant that sensory inputs reach the ruling principle bringing their message with the correct location of the input, and so on, you still have a problem, Plotinus says. For if this principle is to be conceived of in terms analogous to those of bodies, it will also be divisible the way bodies are divisible. But if the ruling principle is divisible like bodies, then each input will reach just one part of it, rather than the whole of it, and each part will become the subject of its own sensation. This means that the Wooden Horse is back, and, this time, it is back to stay, unless one is ready to bring in a further ruling principle. The Stoics, then, fall into a regress, according to Plotinus. The idea is that the ruling principle, which was introduced in order to account for the unity of the subject of sensation, is now incapable of accounting for it, and a new principle needs to be invoked to account for the unity of sensation in that very entity that was supposed to guarantee it in the first place. In Plotinus' view, the

Stoics thought that they could escape the Wooden Horse by denying the sense-organs the ability to perceive. Rather than as autonomous subjects of sensation, they viewed the sense-organs as channels through which a single ruling principle could gather information. But they failed to see that this move was insufficient to reach the goal they wanted. For by conceiving of the ruling principle in corporeal terms, they inadvertently re-instated at its level the very Wooden Horse psychology that they were trying to avoid, with consequent threat of regress.

How, then, is one to escape the Wooden Horse, that is, the idea that there is no unitary subject of sensation? Plotinus answers by quoting *Tim.*, 35a 1-4, where Plato describes the soul as sharing in both divisible and indivisible being (IV.2.[4].2, 49-52). *Tim.*, 35a 1-4 is certainly an obscure passage, but let me explain what Plotinus makes of it.[2] The most illuminating passage is in IV.7.[2]:

> If anything is going to perceive anything it must itself be one and perceive everything by one and the same means, both if a number of incoming things (τὰ εἰσιόντα) are received through many sense-organs (διὰ πολλῶν αἰσθητηρίων), or many qualities are perceived in one thing, or if through one sense-organ a complex thing, for example a face, is perceived. For there is not one sensation of the nose and another of the eyes, but one and the same sensation of all together. And if one sensation comes through (διά) the eyes and another through (διά) hearing, there must be one thing to which both come. Or how could one say that these sensory inputs (αἰσθήματα) are different, if they did not all come together to one and the same thing? This then must be like a center (κέντρον), and the sensations from every quarter, lines coming together from the circumference of the circle, must reach it, and that which apprehends them (τὸ ἀντιλαμβανόμενον) must be of this kind, really one. (*Enn.*, IV.7.[2].6, 3-15; Armstrong, slightly modified).

We should not be puzzled by Plotinus' claim that the subject of sensation needs to be "really one". Plotinus is not contradicting himself; for he maintains that, by being both divisible and indivisible, the soul manifests a unity that is

[2] The analysis of *Tim.*, 35a 1-4 is not in Emilsson. Emilsson points to the Aristotelian background of Plotinus' conception of the subject of sensation, as I will, but the reason why Plotinus is interested in Aristotle' remarks on the unity of sensation is that he can use them to develop *Tim.*, 35a.

superior to that of bodies (IV.2.[4].1). An account of the subject of sensation, Plotinus says, must explain three things: 1) our ability to judge the difference between sensory inputs coming from different sense-organs (between white and sweet say); 2) our ability to perceive different qualities as belonging to one thing; and 3) our ability to perceive as a whole a complex sensible object, e.g. a face, to which we have access through one single organ. A soul that, like a body, is merely divisible through the body cannot account for these things; to account for them you need a soul that is both divisible through the body and indivisible: this is the kind of soul that Plato introduces at *Tim.*, 35a. It has to be divisible throughout the body so as to receive the sensory inputs coming from the different parts of the body. But it must be also indivisible, and thus present as a whole throughout the body and in each part of it, because only in this way can it perceive a complex object as being this or that type of thing, and judge that white, say, is different from sweet.

Plotinus, then, reads the discussion of the Wooden Horse psychology in the following way. In the *Theaetetus*, he maintains, Plato claims that we perceive "with" the soul rather than "with" the sense-organs, because he wants to point out that sensation requires a unitary subject. But he does not spell out what he means by "soul" nor does he explain how the soul functions in sensation. To fill in the gaps, Plotinus goes on, we must look at the *Timaeus*, where Plato says that the soul is an entity that shares in both divisible and indivisible being. What this means, Plotinus explains, is that the soul can be divided throughout a body in such a way as to be present as a whole everywhere and in each of the body's parts. This is a special characteristic that only the soul has among all beings, for bodies are only divisible, and *Nous* and its forms are always undivided (IV.2.[4].1). It is because the soul can be both divided and indivisible, Plotinus concludes, that it can be the unitary subject that sensation presupposes.

Plotinus' point, I think, is not that sensation can take place only if we assume that the soul is an intelligible entity rather than a body; for *Nous* is a purely intelligible entity, and yet, in being undivided, it cannot perceive.[3]

[3] *Pace* Emilsson, "Plotinus and soul-body dualism" op. cit. Although it is true that in VI.7.[2].6 Plotinus reasons from the hypothesis that the soul is a body, rather than from the hypothesis that it may be like a body.

Plotinus' point is that sensation cannot be accounted for if we think that the soul functions in the way a body does, and has properties analogous to those of a body. Interestingly, I think, he makes this point precisely by appealing to the dialogue where Plato does describe the soul in body-like terms: the *Timaeus*. This is because he wants to oppose the view that the soul for Plato could be a body-like entity, and the *Timaeus* is the text one has to engage with to carry on this kind of plan.

But now you may wonder what are Plotinus' grounds for suggesting that one should read *Theaet*., 184b ff. with *Tim.*, 35a in mind. The text of the *Theaetetus* does not seem to point to the *Timaeus*, and it is unclear how Plotinus arrives at the *Tim*., 35a from it. The answer, I think, lies in IV.7.[2].6, i.e. the last passage quoted above. There Plotinus says that the subject of sensation is like the center of a circle of which the sensations coming from the sense-organs are the radii. The analogy is taken from Alexander's *De anima* (p. 63, 11-12).[4] Plotinus' use of the analogy is an indication that he may have Aristotle's and Alexander's reflections on sensation in mind when he develops his views on the subject of sensation. In fact, I suggest that it is precisely in light of Aristotle's and Alexander's reflections that Plotinus reaches the conclusion that the refutation of the Wooden Horse psychology at *Theaet.*, 184b ff. appeals to the conception of the soul introduced at *Tim.*, 35b. Let me explain.

Alexander employs the analogy of the circle and its radii to explain the relation between the common sense, or central faculty of sensation, and the special senses. Now although Alexander's remarks on this subject are not always perspicuous, we can say that for him each sense-organ is the recipient of a motion that originates from the sensible object, and it transmits this motion to the central faculty of sensation, i.e. the common sense. He suggests that the motions coming from the sense-organs are analogous to the radii of a

[4] Both Alexander and Plotinus develop their account of the subject of sensation in opposition to the Stoics, and Plotinus sometimes relies on Alexander's polemics. It is in Alexander's *De anima*, in fact, that he finds the regress argument he uses against the Stoic thesis that the ruling principle is the seat of sensation (i.e. the argument built from the observation that, if the ruling principle is like a body, it must be divisible into parts that are subject to distinct and separate sensations (cf. Paul Henry, "Une comparaison chez Aristote, Alexandre et Plotin", in *Les sources de Plotin. Entretiens Hardt V*, Geneva 1960, pp. 429-444). Plotinus also finds in Alexander's *De anima* the view that the subject of sensation has to be something capable of being present as whole throughout a body and in each of a body's parts.

circle, whereas the central faculty corresponds to a circle's center. What matters here, however, is that the analogy of the circle is designed to convey Alexander's systematization of Aristotle's remarks on the subject of sensation in *De an.*, III 2, 426b 17-427a 16. Aristotle, like the Stoics after him, builds his account of the subject of sensation against the background of the *Theaetetus*. But, in contrast to what Plato seems to suggest there, he argues that sensation is a critical faculty; that is, he maintains that sensation is able to judge whether something is or is not the case and whether two sensory inputs are the same or not. On most readings, Plato in the *Theaetetus* maintains that only reason (the central mind) can carry on this kind of critical task, but Aristotle argues against him that sensation is perfectly capable of judging and can do so without the help of reason. In *De an.*, III 2, Aristotle remarks that, in sensation, we seem able to judge not only that this is sweet or that that is bitter, but also that sweet is other than bitter and that sweet is other than white. This capacity, he says, presupposes that the judging subject (τὸ κρῖνον) be one. For if the judging subject were more than one, it would be as if you judged that something is white, and I judged that something is sweet. In other words, if the subject were more than one the subjects of sensation inside us would be like the warriors of the Wooden Horse. Then Aristotle draws attention to a problem. When we perceive, he says, we do not only judge that this is sweet and that is white, but we also judge that this is sweet and that is white *now*. But, then, consider what happens when we perceive white and black, he says, that is, when we perceive two contrary qualities. The judging subject must be capable of judging that they are different now, and, to do this, it must have a simultaneous experience of both. But this presupposes that one and the same subject is *moved* in contrary ways at the same time, i.e. "blackwise" and "whitewise", whereas nothing can be moved by contrary motions at the same time. To solve this problem, Aristotle claims that one must view the judging subject as one and indivisible in number, but divisible "in being", as if it were a boundary-point, he says, that can be "used twice".

Aristotle never explains what he means by the judging subject in the *De anima*, and he never mentions there a common sense. But he does introduce a common sense in the *Parva Naturalia* (cf., esp., *De sens.*, 7).

Alexander reads the remarks on τὸ κρῖνον in the *De anima* in light of this notion, and he identifies τὸ κρῖνον with the central faculty of sensation of the *Parva Naturalia*, which, he explains, is for Aristotle the *locus* where all the inputs from the special senses converge. With this picture in mind he interprets the obscure observation about a point being "used twice". Alexander takes Aristotle to mean that a point can be "used twice" because it is the limit of two or more lines which converge on it. He interprets the boundary-point as the center of a circle which is the limit of all the radii; and he takes this center to represent the central faculty of sensation. Unfortunately, it is not at all clear how he solves the problem of the contrary inputs. Sometimes he seems to suggest that this problem can be solved only by conceiving both common sense and special senses as an incorporeal power. But since he keeps treating sensory inputs as motions that have to do with bodily parts it is unclear whether this is his considered answer to the problem or is simply a possible explanation that he submits to the reader.

Plotinus, for reasons that I will explain in the next section, is convinced that sensation has to be a judgement (κρίσις) of the soul. Thus, he thinks that Aristotle's conception of sensation in terms of a critical faculty is right. Only he wants to show that, in contrast to what Aristotle thinks, this was also Plato's opinion. He notices that Aristotle says that the subject of sensation, to be a judging subject, must be both one and many, divisible and indivisible, and he maintains that this view can be found in *Tim*., 35b. Hence, he suggests that *Tim.*, 35b is implicitly invoked by the discussion of sensation in *Theaet.*, 184b ff. This does not mean, however, that *Tim.*, 35b presents the same views as those of Aristotle. Rather, for Plotinus, Plato is able to account for the unity of the subject of sensation better than Aristotle or Alexander, for Plato's conception of this subject solves the difficulties embedded in Aristotle's and Alexander's views. Consider this passage from IV.7.[2].6. These lines immediately follow the passage I have quoted above, namely IV.7.[2].6, 3-15, where Plotinus introduces and endorses Alexander's analogy between the subject of sensation and the center of a circle:

> But if this [i.e. the center of the circle] were extended (εἰ δὲ διεστὼς τοῦτο), and the sensations arrived at something like

> the same boundary point of two lines (οἷον γραμμῆς ἐπ᾽ ἄμφω τὰ πέρατα αἱ αἰσθήσεις προσβάλλοιεν), either they will run together again at one and the same point, like the middle, or the two boundary points will each have a sensation of something different (as if I perceived one thing and you another). (*Enn.*, IV.7.[2].6, 15-19; Armstrong, modified).

This passage develops a possible interpretation of the circle analogy: one that Plotinus wants to oppose. This wrong interpretation is identified by Plotinus with that of Aristotle and Alexander; for it is they who maintain that the center at which the sensations of, say, sweet and bitter arrive should be conceived of as the boundary point of two lines that is "used twice". One has to examine the nature of this point, Plotinus says. If the point is extended, one of these two things will occur: either each sensation will have its own end point in it, in which case the Wooden Horse is back, or there will be a middle of the point where the sensations meet, with consequent threat of regress, since, if this middle is extended, they will have to meet at the middle of the middle, and so on. What Plotinus means to say here, I take it, is that Aristotle and Alexander think of the subject of sensation *as if* it was an extended thing, so that their account falls into problems analogous to those of the Stoics'. In other words, even if Aristotle does not think that the soul is a body, for Plotinus, he still keeps conceiving of it in body-like terms, and this emerges from his analysis of the subject of sensation.

At first Plotinus' criticism of *De an.*, III 2 may seem unfair, insofar as it rests on the view that a point is extended, whereas for Aristotle points are not extended. But Plotinus knows that for Aristotle points are not extended, and this is precisely why he thinks that Aristotle's account of the subject of sensation is incoherent. Aristotle invokes the image of the point in *De an.*, III 2 to explain how we can perceive at the same time contrary qualities such as sweet and bitter. Plotinus reasons that a point for Aristotle is not extended, and from this he infers that what Aristotle means to say is that the subject of sensation is not to be conceived of in body-like terms, because it is not to be conceived of as extended. But then Plotinus points out that the very reason why Aristotle finds it difficult to explain how we can simultaneously perceive contraries is that he speaks of sensations as motions. Motions, Plotinus goes

on, are things that only bodies are subject to. Thus, on the one hand, Aristotle conceives of the subject of sensation in body-like terms, as he suggests that it is moved, and on the other hand, he tries to argue that it is not like a body, as it is not extended. From this Plotinus concludes that Aristotle has to choose: if he wants to maintain that the subject of sensation is analogous to a body and it is moved, then he either renounces the view that it is also analogous to a point, or he invokes the point, but makes it extended. The problem in making the point extended, however, is that it no longer provides a solution to the problem for which it was invoked.

More generally, however, Plotinus thinks that Aristotle and Alexander misplace their worries. That is, they fail to realize that the problem of contrary sensations is only a symptom of a more general difficulty that their account of the subject of sensation falls into. Never mind contrary sensations, Plotinus says, if you keep thinking of the soul in body-like terms, you cannot account for how we arrive at simultaneous sensations of any sort, as the analysis of the Stoic account shows. Plato, Plotinus goes on, saw the problems with a body-like conception of the soul *qua* subject of sensation, and this is why he said in *Tim.*, 35a that the soul must share in both divisible and indivisible being, which is something that no body nor body-like thing can do. If the soul shares in divisible and indivisible being it can be divided and still be a whole in each of its "parts", and this is what allows it to process many sensory inputs at the same time, be these contrary or not. Now, Plotinus has read *De an.*, I; he knows that Aristotle there criticizes Plato precisely for having given an account of the soul in body-like terms in the *Timaeus*; he also knows that Aristotle wants to provide an account of the soul that does not rest on a body-like conception of it. His point is not that Aristotle is blind to the problems involved in a conception of the soul in body-like terms. Rather, Plotinus wants to show that Plato already saw these problems, and he solved them, whereas Aristotle remains caught in the very same conceptual mistakes for which he reproaches his predecessors.

Plotinus' conception of the soul as both divisible and indivisible makes the introduction of a special central faculty of sensation, over and above the

power of the senses, superfluous.[5] Probably inspired by Galen's attempt to reconcile the discovery of the nerves with the anatomy of the *Timaeus*, he does maintain that the brain is the center of the nervous system (IV.3.[27].23). But he claims that, although an organ is the starting point of a certain activity of the soul (because it is the type of body part that is fit for the exercise of that activity), the soul does not have intrinsically differentiated powers. This means, I take it, that whereas the physical inputs coming from sense-organs literally converge on the brain, the information that is carried by them does not literally converge anywhere, but is received by the soul at once. To perceive, for Plotinus, one needs a brain and a properly functioning nervous system. But this system is not mirrored, so to say, by an analogous system of powers in the soul, as it seems to be in Alexander. It is not the case that the animated sense-organ picks up a piece of information and sends it to the central faculty of sensation, where this information is processed. In contrast, the same powers are all present throughout the soul, because the soul is one and the same substance in all of its "parts"; the soul simply activates them where the appropriate bodily implementation is available. You can only see by means of eyes, for instance; but this is not because the eyes, as animated organs, have a special incorporeal power that other parts of the body lack. It is only because they are the type of body part that is structured so as to allow the soul to exercise its power of vision there. In this scenario, the notion of a central faculty, as I have said, is superfluous.

3.4. *Sensation is a judgement of the soul*

Plotinus maintains that sensation is an "apprehension" (ἀντίληψις); but, since he uses the term ἀντίληψις for any kind of mental apprehension, he explains that perceiving is more precisely: "The soul's apprehension of sensible things by making use of the body" (τὸ σώματι προσχρωμένην τὴν ψυχὴν ἀντιλαμβάνεσθαι τῶν αἰσθητῶν. IV.7.[2].8, 2-4; Armstrong). The view that soul uses the body as an instrument is in line with

[5] He speaks of a κοινὴ αἴσθησις in I.1.[53].9, but, as Emilsson remarks, this has nothing to do with a common sense; rather it is the sensation of what Plotinus calls κοινόν, i.e. the soul-body compound.

Plato's suggestion in the *Theaetetus* that we perceive "with" the soul "through" (διά + gen.) the sense-organs, but is not to be directly linked to the discussion of sensation there. It is a general Platonic view, which is particularly prominent in the *Alcibiades*, and it is also an Aristotelian view.[6] But on the grounds of the previous observations on the unity of the senses, it seems that Plotinus develops his account of sensation starting from *Theaet.*, 184b ff. Thus the claim that sensation is an apprehension of the soul "through" the sense-organs should be read against the background of that text, even if it does not stem exclusively from that text.

We would like to know, then, what a sensory apprehension is exactly. Plotinus claims that sensation is an apprehension that consists in a judgement (κρίσις) of the soul.[7] The claim is not surprising, if we consider the Peripatetic background on which Plotinus develops his theory of the subject of sensation. As I have said, for Aristotle sensation is a critical faculty, and he calls the subject of sensation τὸ κρῖνον in *De anima*, III 2. But how does this understanding of sensation in terms of a judgement fit Plato's description of sensation at *Theaet.*, 184b-186e? According to most interpreters, Plato does not suggest that sensation is capable of judgement in *Theaet.* 184 ff., but maintains that sensation is a passive affection to be sharply distinguished from any critical activity of the soul, such as belief (δόξα).[8] These interpreters point out that Protagoras' claim that all appearances are true is based on an assimilation of belief to sensation that was common among the Presocratics (see section 2.2). Protagoras assimilates belief to sensation, because for him both of them are passive ways of "being appeared to", where "being appeared

[6] Aristot., *Phys.*, VII 2, 244b 11-12; *De somn.*, 454a 8-10, see Menn, "Aristotle's Definition of Soul and the Programme of the *De anima*" op. cit., p. 87.
[7] *Enn*., III.6.[26].1, 1-8; V.5.[32].1, 9-19; I.1.[53].7, 9-16.
[8] The point is made most sharply by Michael Frede, "Observations on Perception in Plato's Later Dialogues", in Id., *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* op. cit., pp. 3-10. See also Dorothea Frede, "The Soul's Silent Dialogue: A Non-Aporetic Reading of the *Theaetetus*", *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, 35 (1989), pp. 20-49; Sedley, *The Midwife of Platonism* op. cit., p. 106. For a different view see John Cooper, "Plato on Sense-Perception and Knowledge", *Phronesis*, 15 (1970), pp. 123-146. Cooper thinks that in sensation the mind is active, like Burnyeat, but, unlike Burnyeat, he also thinks that this activity consists in labeling sensible qualities, rather than merely in an intentional use of the sense-organs. For Cooper, however, Plato does not view sensation as a judgment in which the mind claims that this is sweet and so on. For an interpretation of sensation in terms of rudimentary judgments, such as "This is sweet", see Deborah Modrak, "Perception and Judgment in the *Theaetetus*", *Phronesis*, 26 (1981), pp. 35-54.

to" is explained in terms of "being affected by". Believing that something is the case, for Protagoras, is having the mind "impinged" by a certain state of affairs, in a way analogous to that in which one has the eyes "impinged" by whiteness when looking at something white. It is precisely this assimilation of belief to sensation, on this reading, that Plato would question in *Theaet.*, 184b ff., so as to refute the view that all appearances are true, and reject the thesis that knowledge is sensation. Plato would argue that, unlike sensation, which is merely a passive affection, belief is a critical activity of the mind, in which the mind judges whether something is or is not the case. As it is an activity and not an affection, a belief would not have its content entirely determined by its object, and thus it would be open to error.

Plotinus must view things very differently. He, too, thinks that at *Theaet.* 184b Plato distances himself from Protagoras; but he does not take Plato to argue that belief is something different from a passive affection, and, thus, from sensation. Rather, he thinks that Plato accepts the idea that belief and sensation are similar, but switches the order of the terms, so to say. What I mean is that, whereas Protagoras and the Presocratics in general, think that belief is to be conceived of as being similar to sensation, Plato, in Plotinus' view, thinks that it is sensation that should be conceived as being some kind of belief, and he holds that 1) since belief is not a passive affection, neither is sensation, and 2) since belief is not infallible, neither is sensation. Before engaging directly with Plato's text, however, let me reconstruct the argument on which Plotinus' conception of sensation as a judgement of the soul rests. The passage to start from is III.6.[26].1, where Plotinus explains precisely why sensation must be a judgement of the soul rather than a passive affection.

> We stated that sensations were not affections (πάθη), but activities and judgements to do with affections (ἐνεργείας δὲ περὶ παθήματα καὶ κρίσεις); affections (πάθη) are to do with something other than the soul—let us say body of such and such a kind (τὸ σῶμα φέρε τὸ τοιόνδε)—while the judgement is to do with the soul; it is not an affection (πάθος), for if it were, we would need another judgement, and we would be involved in an infinite regress. Nevertheless we were faced with a problem here too—whether the judgement *qua* judgement "has" (ἔχει) nothing of what was judged (ἡ κρίσις ᾗ κρίσις οὐδὲν ἔχει τοῦ κρινομένου). True; if it were to

> "have" some imprint (τύπον ἔχοι), then it would be affected—although one could say even of the so-called imprints (τυπώσεις) that they are made in a way quite different from what has been supposed, such as is found in thoughts (νοήσεις), which are also activities (ἐνεργείαι) able to cognize (γινώσκειν) without being affected in any way. (*Enn.*, III.6.[26].1, 1-11; Fleet, slightly modified).

The passage is dense, thus let me first present an overview of what Plotinus says here. Plotinus claims that sensation is not an affection (πάθος), but is a judgement (κρίσις) of the soul that has to do with affections (παθήματα); not any affections, mind you, but the affections of "such and such a body" or "qualified body". The expression "qualified body" is taken from Aristotle's *De anima* II 1, 412a 16-17, and by it Plotinus means a body that is alive, and alive not in the general sense of having a principle of motion in itself, but alive in the more ordinary sense of the word, i.e. in the sense in which one says that plants and animals are alive.[9] This body has a vegetative soul, but has neither a rational soul nor what Plotinus calls "the trace of soul in body", which stands for the functions of the soul that are higher than the nutritive and lower than the rational ones. Then, a "qualified body" is the type of body that animals and plants have in common; it is made of flesh and bones, organs, and blood, but also of leafs and roots; it is a body that is constituted of all those things that are needed for something to live and to possibly engage in higher, rational activities. Let us proceed. Sensation, Plotinus claims, has to be a judgement of the soul, rather than an affection. What is grasped in this judgement is a thought (νόησις). That is to say that in sensation one apprehends something sensible by having a thought about it. I will call the judgement of the soul in sensation "sensory judgement"; a "sensory judgement", then, is the activity of the soul in which we apprehend something sensible, and it is what sensation amounts to.

The context in which Plotinus' notion of sensory judgement is developed in III.6.[26].1 is both exegetical and polemical. When Plotinus says that the judgement cannot grasp an "imprint" (τύπωσις) of the sensible

[9] Cf. also Aristot. *Metaph.*, VII 10, 1035b 14-16. On the notion of "qualified body" in Plotinus see Blumenthal, *Plotinus' Psychology* op. cit., p. 61.

object, but must grasp a thought, he intends to reject the Stoic conception of sensation as assent to a cataleptic representation; for τύπωσις is the technical term used by Zeno to describe representations (Diog. Laert. VII 45). Representations, Zeno says, are τυπώσεις in the soul, that is, something like the stamp that a signet-ring impresses on wax. In receiving these imprints, the soul, which is a type of body, is literally affected in some way. But consider the way in which Plotinus introduces his idea that what is apprehended in a sensory judgement is a thought as opposed to an imprint. First he claims that sensation is a judgement. Then, he seems to introduce a possible objection; he observes that, if what is grasped in sensation is a τύπος, one should say that sensation is an affection rather than a judgement. Finally, he explains that by τύπος one can mean two different things: one can mean a τύπωσις, i.e. a physical imprint, like the Stoics, or one can mean a thought, in which something is apprehended without any affection occurring in the cognizing subject. At this point he concludes that τύπος should be conceived of in terms of a thought. The key question is: why should sensations grasp τύποι in the first place? Where does this idea come from? Things become clearer if we recognize that what is at stake here is the interpretation of the τύποι to which Plato assimilates sensations in Part II of the *Theaetetus*, where he introduces the so-called Wax-Block model of the soul (191d). In III.6.[26].1 Plotinus compares his own interpretation of the account of sensation in the *Theaetetus* to that of the Stoics. Plotinus reads Plato as saying that sensation is a judgement of the soul as opposed to a physical affection; but he is ready to concede that the description of sensations as some kind of τύποι in Part II seems to suggest that sensations must depend upon an affection of the soul, as the Stoics think. The Stoics think that sensation is an assent, and thus a judgement, but they also believe that it is the assent to a representation, which is an affection of the soul. To steer away from their interpretation, Plotinus suggests that τύπος in the *Theaetetus* is just a metaphor for thought. Both the Stoics and Plotinus work with some version of the Wax-Block model of the soul when they deal with sensation; but Plotinus holds that the Stoics take it too literally. We will come back to this model of the soul. What I want to

focus on in this section is the following: why does Plotinus say that sensation is an activity, and a judgement of the soul rather than an affection?

While Plotinus never says this explicitly, I think that in III.6.[26].1 he justifies his conception of sensation by discussing three ways in which one could explain sensation otherwise than he does. I will first present the way in which I read the passage, and then I will put forward the evidence that supports my reading. Sensation cannot consist simply of any sort of bodily affection. When we say that this is salty it is because one way or another we are capable of grasping with the mind the affection that something causes on our tongue. After all, rocks too can be heated and cooled, and yet rocks are incapable of perceiving. But Plotinus maintains that from this simple observation one could arrive at four different accounts of sensation. One could say, as he does, that sensation is a judgement of the soul that has nothing to do with affections, or one could say that sensation is 1) an affection, or 2) a special affection that is a judgement, or 3) a judgement that requires a preliminary affection. The first account is the simplest. 1) Say that your hand gets hot when it is close to the fire. You could say that the sensation of heat is not something over and above the affection of your hand. That is, you could maintain that sensation is somehow "bundled together" with that affection or "contained" in that affection. A hand, you could say, is not a rock, and a hand, because it is made of flesh, and skin, and blood, and nerves can have an affection that results in your soul perceiving heat. I will call this type of affection "sensory experience". This experience can be viewed as an affection of a special kind of body, i.e. a living one, in which the soul shares. The second account seems to be a variation on the first. 2) You could be opposed to the view that sensation is merely an experience in which the soul shares in the affection of the body, and maintain that sensation has to be a judgement. But even if you think that sensation has to be a judgement, you could still hold that this judgement is an affection, i.e. a special type of affection: a critical affection, so to say. The last account is more complex. 3) According to this account, sensation is a judgement of the soul in the sense that it is an activity of the soul, rather than any sort of special, critical affection. But on this account sensation is still preceded by an affection of the soul that brings the sensible object to the mind's attention. On this view, your soul, first, comes to

have an impression of the fire by being affected by it *via* your hand; and, then, it actively formulates a judgement. In so doing, i.e. in judging, the soul passes from having merely an impression that there is some heat over there to having a proper sensation, in which it judges that fire is hot.

Against 1, Plotinus says that "affections are to do with something other than the soul", and that no bodily affection, not even that of a living body, should be confused with a sensation. He maintains that sensation consists of an act of judgement, and thus it cannot be a sensory experience, consisting of a bodily affection in which the soul shares. Against 2, he claims that the view that sensation is a judgement, where the judgement is an affection, is subject to regress. If you hold that perceiving cannot be an affection of the body in which the soul shares, but has to be a judgement, and then you say that this judgement is itself an affection, one wonders why you rejected the view that sensation is an affection in the first place. Since you have rejected that view, however, one can argue that, on your own grounds, the judgement, insofar as it is an affection, cannot be a sensation. Hence, you will need to introduce another judgement to have a sensation, with consequent threat of regress, if also the new judgement is an affection. Against 3, Plotinus repeats what he has said against 1, namely that "affections are to do with something other than the soul". That is, he maintains that the affections, in sensation, belong exclusively to the qualified body, and nothing can be brought to the mind's attention by an affection of the soul. This means that there can be no passive "impinging" of the mind that precedes a sensory judgement. Things come to the mind's attention when the mind judges them, and this judgement is sensation.

These, then, are three misconceptions, in Plotinus' view, of what happens in the soul in sensation. The first is the view that the soul suffers something together with the body, in the sense that it shares in the affection of the body. The second one is the view that a sensory judgement is some kind of affection, a critical affection. The third one is the view that sensation is an act of judgement, and therefore neither an affection nor a special "critical" affection, but is a judgement that requires a preliminary passive affection. 1, in Plotinus' view, represents the position of the Cyrenaics; 2 that of Aristotle; 3 that of the Stoics. Against all of them, Plotinus holds that sensation comes about thus: first, a part of a living body, say your hand, is affected, with no

experience whatsoever attached to it; and, then, the soul directly apprehends this affection by formulating a judgement that is not an affection of the soul, but is an activity of the soul.

Let me try to present some evidence for my reading of III.6.[26].1, starting with the Stoic conception of sensation that I take Plotinus to address. Recall the observations with which I have opened the discussion of III.6.[26].1. From those observations it emerges that Plotinus thinks of the Stoics because he suggests that the Stoic τυπώσεις could fulfill the role of what is grasped in a sensory judgement. The Stoics define sensation as the assent to a cataleptic representation (SVF II 72), and what they mean by "assent" is a judgement of the ruling principle.[10] In sensation, they maintain, your soul first receives an "imprint", which is a passive affection and a representation of the characteristics of a sensible thing; in virtue of this "imprint" a sensible object becomes "present" to the mind. Then, if the representation is cataleptic, they say, it forces your soul to assent to it. Assent is an activity of the soul, in which the soul apprehends a sensible thing, and forms a belief. As I have said, Plotinus thinks that there are no cataleptic representations. But this is not the point here. The point is that, no matter whether cataleptic representations exist or not, for Plotinus the Stoics are wrong in distinguishing between the sub-sensory, passive "imprinting" of the soul in which the representation consists, and sensory judgement. Plotinus applauds the idea that sensation has to be a judgement rather than any sort of experience or affection of the soul; but he sees no point in the Stoic distinction between affection and judgement. What need is there for the preliminary affection? he wonders. Now the Stoics, of course, have an answer to this question. They hold that one has to explain how an object becomes "present" to the mind by invoking an affection because affections, in contrast to judgements, have their content determined by the objects that cause them. This kind of causal dependence is what makes representations capable of reporting the traits of their objects in a reliable and, sometimes, infallible way. Plotinus knows that this is the reason why the the Stoics hold that representations must

[10] More precisely the assent is to the proposition (a type of λεκτόν) that is "bundled up together" with the physical imprint, on this see Tad Brennan, *The Stoic Life*, Oxford 2005, pp.51-61.

be affections and must precede sensory judgements, but disapproves of it. The Stoics, he observes, want to say that representations are affections so as to guarantee the possibility of having cataleptic representations; but cataleptic representations are a red herring anyway, and "on proper analysis" they lead to Protagoras' views. If one abandons the view that there are cataleptic representations, Plotinus concludes, there is no longer any need to distinguish between sensory judgement and sensory representation. But there is also a deeper problem with the Stoics, in his view, one that they have in common with the supporters of 1. For Plotinus maintains that to assume that there is an affection of the soul in sensation is not merely superfluous, but is actually wrong.

Let me examine, then, the position of the supporters of 1. Plotinus does not reveal the identity of these people in III.6.[26], but does make clear who they are in IV.4.[28].19, a chapter that repeats the main lines of the analysis of sensation in III.6.[26].1: they are the Cyrenaics.

In IV.4.[28].19 Plotinus provides us with an elaborate discussion of pain. He considers pain and pleasure to be two kinds of sensations (IV.4.[28].19, 25). Thus nothing special hangs on the example of pain here: what he says, that is, should be taken to work for any sensation. This is what Plotinus says about pain:

> The affection (πάθος) is there, in the body, but the cognition (γνῶσις) belongs to the sensitive soul (ἡ αἰσθητικὴ ψυχή) […]. And it was the body which "was pained" (ἠλγύνθη); and by "was pained" I mean "it was affected" (λέγω δὲ τὸ "ἠλγύνθη" τὸ "πέπονθεν ἐκεῖνο"); as in a surgical operation when the body is cut the division is in its material mass, but the inflammation (ἀγανάκτησις) is in the mass, because it is not only a mass, but a mass of such and such a kind; it is there too that the boiling (φλεγμονή) occurs. But the soul perceives it, taking it over because it is, so to speak, situated next to it. (*Enn.*, IV.4.[28].19, 4-12; Armstrong, slightly modified).

Plotinus here distinguishes between "a cut" that a body may suffer, and another type of bodily affection: "inflammation" or "boiling". The difference between the two types of affection is explained on the basis of a reference to a special type of "mass", namely, "a mass of such and such a kind". "A mass of

such and such a kind" here is simply a qualified body, that is, a living body, as opposed to some fabric, say. A "cut" is an affection that any body can suffer, and it does not matter whether it is alive or not. I can cut a piece of fabric as much as I can cut a piece of flesh. Things are different with "inflammation" and "boiling". If I cut a piece of fabric, I just obtain two pieces of fabric. But, if I cut a piece of flesh in a living body, that flesh will be affected by suffering an inflammation in addition to undergoing the cut. Now Plotinus wants to distinguishe the affection of the living body from the apprehension or cognition (I use the two terms interchangeably) of this affection, just as he has done in III.6.[26].1, where he has set aside sensory judgement from the affection of the "qualified" or "living" body. But, here, in IV.4.[28].19, he makes the distinction more intuitive by referring to things like "inflammations" and "boiling". Last time you were in pain, he maintains, your body "was pained" (ἠλγύνθη), but your soul had a sensation of that pain, that is, it knew that your body "was pained". Imagine the scenario of a surgery room in a modern hospital. You need surgery on a finger.[11] The doctors give you a dose of anaesthesia, and they proceed to cut your finger. The finger reacts to the cut, it swells, and so on, but you do not know it, because you are under the effect of the anaesthesia. Alternatively, think of plants: plants can have something analogous to an "inflammation" or a "boiling" too, when they wither, for instance; pieces of fabric do not wither when you cut them, but plants do, and yet, they do not know it. Now to perceive pain, Plotinus points out, is to know that you are in pain. Thus since the bodily affection can occur independently of your knowing it, there has to be something more to a sensation than the affection suffered by a living body. In other words, sensation is more than your body's "being pained".[12]

[11] Cf. Plat. *Rep.*, V 462d, which is one of the passages on which Plotinus works in IV.4.[28].19.

[12] My analysis of this passage is very different from that offered by Remes, *Plotinus on Self* op. cit., p. 97. Remes claims that the "being pained" in IV.4.[28].19 is a pure non-conceptualized feeling. I cannot see the grounds for this conclusion. As the example of the surgery room reveals, I think, there might be no feeling attached to an "inflammation", and if Plotinus had in mind "feelings" he could not oppose the Cyrenaics, which is what he does, I maintain. Remes follows here some of Emilsson's views concerning the presence of non-conceptualized experiences in Plotinus' theory of sensation. I examine these views below, see section 3.11.

That Plotinus' target here are the Cyrenaics is suggested by his reference to the affection of the living body by means of the expression "was pained". ἠλγύνθη, i.e. the verbal form that Plotinus uses for "was pained", is rare. That it is not ordinary Greek is made clear by the fact that Plotinus feels the need to gloss it by saying that what he means by it is that the body "was affected". ἠλγύνθη is the 3rd person singular of the passive aorist of an uncommon verb: ἀλγύνω. ἀλγύνω means "causing pain", and, thus, ἠλγύνθη means, literally, "was caused to be in pain". Plotinus uses this unusual verbal form in order to remind the reader of the verbal forms used by the Cyrenaics as some kind of technical formulae to convey their main epistemological position: that only the affections, i.e. πάθη, are "apprehensible" (κατάληπτα); these are formulae such as "I am whitened" or "I am sweetened". The Cyrenaics think that we cannot know anything about the objects that strike our senses, so that we cannot say that they are white or sweet, for instance; all we can say and know is that "we are sweetened" or "whitened", and so on. That is to say, we know our own affections; but we do not know how the object that caused them is. I have not being able to find among the many and peculiar formulae ascribed by the sources to the Cyrenaics the verbal form ἠλγύνθη. But we know that the Cyrenaics considered pain and pleasure as the two most important πάθη, because they took pleasure to be the "goal" (τέλος) of life, and they considered pain as evil, that is, as something to be avoided in order to find happiness (Sext. Emp., *Pyrr. hyp.*, I 215). Thus, no matter if ἠλγύνθη is a genuine Cyrenaic formula or not, we have sufficient grounds to conclude that Plotinus has the Cyrenaics in mind, or so I think at least. Furthermore, our ancient sources often seem to supply their own formulae to describe the Cyrenaics' position.[13]

Now the Cyrenaics think that pleasure and pain, like any other πάθος, are a type of "motion" (κίνησις) (Sext. Emp. *Pyrr. hyp.*, I 215 and Diog. Laert. II 85), and they think that this πάθος is grasped by "internal touch" (Cic. *Luc.*, 20). They do not explain, however, whether this "touch" belongs to

[13] See Plut. *Adv. Col.*, 1121A.

the soul or to the body; and probably the ambiguity is not an oversight, but reflects an understanding of sensation as a phenomenon that is both physical and mental in an inextricable way.[14] When you grasp your affection by "internal touch", they maintain, you know it; so that even though you cannot know how a sensible object is in itself, you do know for sure what sort of affection it causes in you. The sources generally use καταλαμβάνω to describe this cognitive grasp of the πάθη, for the Cyrenaic position is generally described as the position of those who hold that "only the affections are κατάληπτα". But the use of καταλαμβάνω is likely to depend on the widespread influence of Stoic vocabulary in the Hellenistic epistemological debates, and at least the earliest Cyrenaics seem to have used γνωρίζειν in its stead.[15] When Plotinus speaks of a γνῶσις of affections in IV.4.[28].19 he might have this early Cyrenaic usage in mind. But, be this as it may, what he reproaches the Cyrenaics for is their understanding of sensation in terms of a mere "experience" in which a bodily motion is "bundled together" with the grasp that the mind has of it. Against them Plotinus wants to maintain that the apprehension of the affection must be an activity of the mind, over and above the affection of the body.

Yet we still do not know why this has to be the case. If we consider the passage I have quoted above, all Plotinus has shown in it is that your body can suffer an affection without you knowing it. But this could simply mean that there are some bodily affections that are perceived and others that are not perceived; nothing has been said about the fact that sensation, as an apprehension, *cannot be* an affection, which is the point that Plotinus wants to make. On the one hand, the Cyrenaics could insist that there is no more to sensation than the special affection of a living body. Never mind that this affection is not always experienced, they could say, sometimes, or rather often, it is experienced, and this can still be explained by saying that the soul shares in the affection of the body, because, for instance, the affection is strong enough, or it has some other feature that makes the soul share in it, whatever

[14] This is one of Voula Tsouna's main conclusions in her *The Epistemology of the Cyrenaic School*, Cambridge 1998.
[15] Tsouna, *The Epistemology of the Cyrenaic School* op. cit., p. 32.

this may be. But the real problem for Plotinus is that this possible Cyrenaic move actually has a strong Platonic basis. In several passages Plato does describe sensation as some kind of "spilling over" into the soul of a bodily motion.[16] When the affection of the body is strong enough, Plato says, it is communicated to the soul, and this is how sensation takes place. Plotinus wants to show that Plato's words should not be taken at face value, and he does it, once again by using *Tim.*, 35b.

Plotinus knows that he has not shown yet that sensation cannot be a bodily affection in which the soul somehow shares. So far he has only tried to make the idea that sensation is distinct from a bodily affection more intuitive. Thus he finally gives an argument to show his point:

> If it [i.e. the soul] was affected (παθοῦσα), being wholly present in every part of the body, it would not have said or indicated that the affection was there [in that particular place] but would all have been affected by the pain, and in pain as a whole, and would not have said or made clear (ἐδήλωσεν) that the pain was there [in that particular place] but would have said that it was there where the soul is; but the soul is everywhere. But as it is the finger has a pain […]. But, then, the sensation itself is not to be called pain, but cognition of pain (γνῶσις ὀδύνης); but since it is cognition it is unaffected (γνῶσιν δὲ οὖσαν ἀπαθῆ εἶναι), so that it can cognize and give a sound report (ἵνα γνῷ καὶ ὑγιῶς ἀπαγγείλῃ). For a messenger who is affected, if he gives himself over to the affection, either does not deliver his message (οὐκ ἀπαγγέλλει) or is not a sound and reliable messenger (οὐχ ὑγιὴς ἄγγελος). (*Enn.*, IV.4.[28].19, 15-30; Armstrong).

Plotinus here relies on the analysis of the soul as a unitary subject of sensation that he has developed on the basis of *Tim.*, 35a. This is shown by his reference to the soul's being present everywhere in the body as a whole. He uses that analysis against the Cyrenaics. Granted the the soul is present as a whole throughout the body and in each of its parts, he says, it follows that sensation cannot be a πάθος. Imagine having pain in one of your fingers, for instance, the soul, in being present as a whole in that finger and throughout the body, would be throughout affected, and, thus, throughout in pain. In being in pain as a whole, it would cause you to experience the pain as being all over your

[16] Cf. esp. *Tim.*, 36d 8-e 5, 37a 5-b 8, 43b 5-44c 1; *Phil.*, 33d 2-34a 5.

body. But this, of course, is not what happens when you have pain in the finger. Rather you are able to know that the pain is in the finger. The point is not merely about awareness. That is to say, Plotinus is not arguing here that you could not be aware of pain if sensation was an affection of the soul. If this was all he had in mind, the example that he uses would be inadequate. If you hurt your finger, but you experience the pain as being all over your body, you must be aware of something. And yet Plotinus denies that, in that condition, you would perceive the pain. This means that the reason why Plotinus denies that sensation could be an affection is not that, in that case, it could not be a state of awareness, but is that *it could not be an apprehension* of pain, or anything else. In other words, it could not be a proper grasp of pain *as* pain and as located in a specific part of the body. Sensation, Plotinus says, is like a messenger: it reports some information to you. But a messenger that is affected by something (that is in pain, for instance) either reports badly or does not report at all. Thus, he concludes, if sensation was a passive experience suffered by the soul, it would either do a poor job of reporting information to you, or it would not report any information at all.

The messenger analogy is crucial, I think, to get at the heart of Plotinus' criticism of the Cyrenaics. Let us see what it means for sensation to report badly or not to report at all. Plotinus, I think, has in mind the kind of objections against the Cyrenaics that we can find also in Aristocles (fr. 5 Chiesara).[17] Aristocles is one of our most important sources for the epistemology of the Cyrenaics. He tells us that sensation, for them, consists in the encounter between something that acts (ποιοῦν) and something that is "acted upon" (πάσχον), and he raises many difficulties against their idea that only πάθη are apprehensible. One of these problems seems to me particularly relevant here. If one knows only his own affections, as the Cyrenaics maintain, then, he asks

> How will he be able to say that this is pleasure and that pain? Or that he had an affection by tasting, by seeing, or by hearing? And by tasting with his tongue (τῇ μὲν γλώσσῃ), seeing with

[17] As usual, I am not suggesting that Plotinus read Aristocles. But it is noteworthy that Aristocles was read by Asclepius and by Philoponus, see Bonazzi, *Academici e Platonici* op. cit., p. 54 n. 123.

> his eyes, and hearing with his ears? (Aristocles, F 5.5 Chiesara).

The problem of knowing that you taste with the tongue (rather than with some other part of your body) is analogous to that raised by Plotinus in IV.4.[28].19: you might know that you are in pain, on the Cyrenaics' account; but you could not know with what part of your body you are registering this pain. This, I take it, is a case in which sensation reports badly. But, as Aristocles shows, there are other instances of possible bad reports. If all you know is your affection, he asks, how do you know that that affection is pleasure, i.e. how can you distinguish it from an affection of pain? The point, I take it, is the following: it is one thing to know that you have an affection (i.e. to be aware of something), and another to know what the affection is, that is, to recognize it as this or that type of affection, e.g. as pain, and the Cyrenaics confuse the two. Now, of course, if sensation tells you that you have pleasure while you are in pain that counts as a bad report. But one can also say that it counts as no report at all. That is, when the report is so bad that it can be taken to say the opposite of what it says, it makes no sense to keep calling it a report, and this, I suggest, is what Plotinus means when he says that the Cyrenaics' affection is like a messenger that delivers no report. Here rests his key argument against the idea that sensation could be the soul's sharing in a bodily affection. Plotinus generalizes the claim that some sensory reports, on this view, could be so bad as to be no report at all. He maintains that if some of them can be no report at all, since we have no way to discriminate among them, we have to conclude that all of them could be so. From this he infers that sensation is indeed the apprehension of a bodily affection, as the Cyrenaics maintain, but to be such an apprehension it must be an activity as opposed to a passive affection. Grasping an affection, i.e. knowing what your body is suffering, requires an active engagement of the mind because it requires you to grasp something *as* being this or that, and to do this you need to apply concepts and to formulate a judgement. To know that you are in pain is not having your body being in pain. It is to think that this is pain and that you have it. Your body cannot think that this is pain and that you have it, nor can your soul do this if it is affected. You can have this thought only if your soul remains unaffected and judges that

this is the case, and this amounts to saying that sensation is a purely mental phenomenon that consists in having a thought or belief that something is the case. In Plotinus' view, the Stoics, unlike the Cyrenaics, understood that sensation had to be an act of judgement; but they did not understand that something has to become present to the mind without affecting it. To be sure, Plotinus is aware that the Stoics' conception of sensation is more sophisticated than that of the Cyrenaics, and he knows that the Stoics' representations are far more complex entities than the Cyrenaics' πάθη. Much work had been done by the Stoics to show the complexity involved in a psychic affection. Chrysippus even abandoned the term τύπωσις used by Zeno to refer to a representation, and he adopted "alteration", ἑτεροίωσις, precisely to indicate that a representation had to be an affection of some special, complex kind; something more than an "imprint" (cf. SVF II 56). But Plotinus wants to point out that the Stoics, in his view, laboured on the wrong path, and that, in the end, they remained caught in the same problems as the Cyrenaics. For if an affection of the soul cannot report, the soul will have no grounds for judging, and there will be no sensation. Plotinus' treatment of Stoic psychology might be harsh, crude, and unfair; but the point he wants to make is a significant one. What he claims is that to apprehend something with the senses an activity of the soul is required, and there can be no preliminary affection, because an affection would make that activity pointless.

3.5. *Sensation is a judgement of the soul: Aristotle*

As I have said, Plotinus in III.6.[26].1 considers three "wrong" accounts of sensation. I have examined two of them, 1 and 3: that of the Stoics and that of the Cyrenaics, which, in the end, for Plotinus amount to the same, since he argues that the Stoics' conception of sensation, insofar as it presupposes a preliminary affection of the soul can be reduced to that of the Cyrenaics. The analysis of the Stoics' and the Cyrenaics' conception of sensation leads Plotinus to the conclusion that sensation must be an activity of the soul rather than a passive affection, and it has to be an activity that is not preceded by an affection of the soul. This activity, he maintains, is a judgement. I want to examine now account 2, that I have identified with

Aristotle's position. That Plotinus has in mind Aristotle is not at all clear at first. But let me consider the matter more closely. Recall what the supporters of 2 hold: they hold that sensation is a judgement, but deny that this judgement is an activity of the soul; instead they maintain that this judgement is an affection. Their view, according to Plotinus, leads to a regress, for, in being an affection, this judgement cannot accomplish the task that it is supposed to accomplish, i.e. that of establishing what is and what is not the case, and another judgement has to be invoked, with threat of regress. This is not to say that position 2 collapses into the Cyrenaics' conception of sensation. For the supporters of 2 want to maintain, unlike the Cyrenaics, that sensation is a judgement, and, unlike the Stoics, they do not hold that this judgement has to be preceded by an affection that is not a judgement. The problem with them, for Plotinus, is that they have a "wrong" conception of what a sensory judgement is, because they think that a judgement can be an affection. Plotinus discusses 2 in order to clarify what a sensory judgement has to be, and he concludes that it has to be the active grasp of a thought.

Aristotle's theory of sensation is of course a very controversial subject, and even those who would agree with Plotinus that a sensory judgement for Aristotle has to be some kind of affection, would still find his claim too crude.[18] I cannot assess here the merits and faults of Plotinus' interpretation; I can only try to explain how he might have arrived at it. There are two reasons for thinking that 2 represents Aristotle's conception of sensation for Plotinus: a) Aristotle develops his conception of sensation against the background of the Wax-Block model of the soul in *De an.*, II 12, 424a 16-21, and this model of the soul is at the center of Plotinus' interest in III.6.[26].1; and b) Plotinus actually follows *Phys.*, VII 3 in developing his discussion of the soul in III.6.[26].1-5, and there Aristotle does suggest that sensation is an affection. Let me start with this last point.

In *Phys.*, VII 3 Aristotle argues that "states" (ἕξεις), whether of the body or of the soul, are not alterations or affections. At 427a 1 ff., he examines

[18] For a detailed analysis of the ways in which Aristotle's theory of sensation can be interpreted see Victor Caston, "The Spirit and the Letter: Aristotle on Perception", in Ricardo Salles (ed.), *Metaphysics, Soul, and Ethics in Ancient Thought*, Oxford 2005, pp. 245-320. Plotinus, it seems to me, sides with the "spiritualist" interpretation, but I will not try to reconstruct how he reads Aristotle's theory of sensation in any detail.

the states of the soul, that is, virtues, vices, and intellectual states. He observes that virtues and vices are not alterations, but are certain dispositions that a subject may have in relation to something. Virtues, he says, are a state of "perfection" (τελείωσις) or fulfillment in relation to one's own nature, whereas vices are a departure from it. Virtues and vices, Aristotle argues, concern pleasures and pains. Pleasures and pains are all alterations caused by sensible things in the sensitive part of the soul, but virtues and vices are not alterations; rather, they come about as a consequence of some alteration occurring in the sensitive soul. Then Aristotle explains why the states of the intellectual part of the soul, i.e. *nous*, are not alterations. They are not alterations, he says, because these states, too, are dispositions that *nous* has in relation to something. When someone has the capacity to know, he becomes a knower in act in virtue of the presence of an appropriate object rather than by being moved or changed. But, in the end, Aristotle adds the following: knowing is not an alteration, unless one wants to say that the exercise of knowledge is something like vision. The remark implies that, unlike knowing, seeing is an alteration for Aristotle.

Plotinus is interested in Aristotle's analysis of the states of the soul in *Phys.*, VII 3 because in III.6.[26].1-5 he wants to show that the soul is completely impassible, i.e. subject to no affection or alteration.[19] He begins by claiming that soul is an incorporeal and incorruptible substance (1, 25-30), and that it is for these reasons that it must be impassible. But, then, in chapter 2, he deals with the first counter-example to his thesis, namely the case of virtues and vices, which, Plato says, are things that can be actually "implanted" or "extracted" from the soul.[20] This language suggests that virtues and vices are some kind of affections, and Plotinus wants to reinterpret it so as to show that Plato never thought that there could be affections in the soul. At first, he adopts the strategy of counter-balancing Platonic expressions that might suggest that virtue and vice are affections. Thus he says that virtue is not an affection, but some sort of attunement.[21] But since there can be no attunement, unless each thing participating in it plays its part, Plotinus explains how each

[19] Fleet, *Plotinus.* Ennead III.6 op. cit., p. 77.
[20] Plat., *Phaedr.*, 256b 2-3; *Soph.*, 247a 5.
[21] Plat. *Rep.*, IV 430e-432a, and Fleet, *Plotinus*. Ennead III op. cit. p. 89.

part of the soul contributes to the attunement of the whole without suffering affections. The explanation he gives is based on the notion of "activity" (ἐνέργεια). Each part of the soul is virtuous, Plotinus says, whenever it acts according to its own substance, and it does so whenever it looks at a "higher" part, as when the irrational part of the soul looks at the rational one, and the rational one looks at *nous*. Then he introduces the following analogy: as sight can be spoken of in two ways, he says, because there is sight as a capacity to see and actual sight or vision, and as the passage from the capacity to see to actual vision is not an alteration, thus each part of the soul, when it looks at the one that precedes it, is somehow disposed in relation to it, rather than being altered. This is how virtue is acquired, he concludes, and virtue is the activation of a power of the soul, which is a fulfilment of the soul's nature. Having characterized virtue as an activity, Plotinus explains that even remembering consists in the activation of a power, rather than in an alteration (III.6.[26].3, 27-35).[22] This precision introduces the more general topic of pleasure, pain, and emotions in general (III.6.[26].4), which in turn leads to a discussion of sensation (4, 43).

Plotinus' discussion, then, reflects the order followed by Aristotle, and it takes from him the view that virtues and intellectual states are ways in which the soul is disposed in relation to certain objects, and are some kind of fulfillment or "completion".[23] But, in contrast to Aristotle, Plotinus actually claims that these states of the soul are *like* vision. In other words, while Aristotle says that a state of the soul is not an alteration, because it *is not like* vision, which is an alteration, Plotinus says that they are not alterations or affections, and they *are like* vision, which, therefore, in his view is not an alteration or affection. It is because there is no alteration either in vision or in *Nous* that there are no imprints in the soul, such as those caused by a seal-ring in a piece of wax (2, 38-40). This remark leads us to a second Aristotelian text that is in the background of Plotinus' discussion in III.6.[26].1-5: *De an.*, II 5.

In III.6.[26].1 Plotinus tries to make sense of Plato's characterization of sensations as "imprints" (τύποι) in the soul, which is introduced in the

[22] Cf. *Enn.*, III 6 [26], 3, 27-35.
[23] Aristot. *Phys.*, VII 3, 246a 12-b 20.

context of the Wax-Block model of the soul in *Theaet.* Part II. He discards the Stoic interpretation of the "imprints" in terms of affections, but the Stoics are not the only ones who worked out their theory of sensation by reflecting on *Theaet.* Part II. Aristotle, too, starts from there in order to develop his own conception of sensation. This emerges, in particular from *De an.*, II 12, 424a 16-21, where he describes sensation as "the reception of the form without matter". Sensation, he says, "is that which receives (τὸ δεκτικόν) the sensible forms of things (τῶν αἰσθητῶν εἰδῶν) without matter, as wax receives receives the imprint of the ring without the iron or the gold" (424a 18-20). Plotinus' interest in this passage in III.6.[26] is revealed by his claim, at the end of the treatise (III.6.[26].18., 24-28), that in sensation the soul "receives" (δέχεσθαι) "the forms of sensible things" (τῶν αἰσθητῶν εἴδη) without "the mass". This suggests that Plotinus endorses Aristotle's view that in sensation the soul receives sensible forms. But it is one thing to say that soul in sensation receives some forms, and it is another thing to say that it receives them as a piece of wax may receive an imprint. In light of *Phys.*, VII 3 Plotinus concludes that what Aristotle means by "imprint" in *De an.*, II 12 is an alteration or affection. But, as his discussion of the subject of sensation reveals (section 3.3. above), Plotinus also knows that for Aristotle sensation is a judgement. Thus he infers that the reception of forms of which Aristotle speaks must be a special kind of affection, one that somehow has a critical power.

Since in *Phys.*, VII 3 Aristotle compares the actualization of knowledge to vision, Plotinus tries to understand what sort of alteration sensation is for Aristotle by looking at *De an.*, II 5, where Aristotle says that sensation is a dispositional state, like an art with which we are born, and explains how this state is actualized starting from the case of the actualization of knowledge. There are two different ways of understanding what "being affected" (πάσχειν) means, Aristotle says: it can mean the type of ordinary alteration to which bodies are subject to, or it can mean another kind of "alteration", where there is no destruction, but rather conservation and completion, of a pre-existing state:

> For what has knowledge becomes an actual knower, and this transition is either not for it a way of being altered—in being a progress towards itself and towards actuality—or is another kind of alteration [θεωροῦν γὰρ γίνεται τὸ ἔχον τὴν ἐπιστήμην, ὅπερ ἢ οὐκ ἔστι ἀλλοιοῦσθαι (εἰς αὐτὸ γὰρ ἡ ἐπίδοσις καὶ εἰς ἐντελέχειαν) ἢ ἕτερον γένος ἀλλοιώσεως]. (Aristot. *De an.*, II 5, 417b 5-7).

This passage recalls the discussion of the states of the soul in terms of fulfillments that we have found in the *Physics*, but it actually says that the actualization of knowledge could be viewed, perhaps, as some kind of alteration. The point is notoriously obscure, but Aristotle uses it to illustrate how sensation comes about. At 417b 20-21, he claims that, in contrast to what happens when knowledge is actualized, in sensation, the actualization of the dispositional state is brought about "from the outside", that is, it is caused by the action of the sensible object on the sense-organ. This may be taken to mean that, no matter whether the actualization of knowledge is or is not a special kind of alteration, sensation has to be some kind of alteration or affection; although the idea seems to be that it is a special type of affection, different from that of bodies.

Plotinus, I think, reads *De an.*, II 5 as Aristotle's attempt to explain how an affection can be a judgment, and he finds the explanation unsatisfactory. There is no difference, he maintains, between the actualization of sensation and that of knowledge, for they come about in the same way, that is when "lower" parts of the soul look "above", and neither of them is an affection. Even if the term is Aristotelian, of course, Plotinus claims that a sensory judgement has to be an ἐνέργεια in III.6.[26].1 not to signal his agreement with Aristotle, but to signal his disagreement. For, in saying that sensation is an ἐνέργεια, Plotinus wants to say that it is an activity rather than an affection. Against Aristotle, he argues that if a sensory judgement is an affection there is a threat of regress. Now we can spell out this regress a little more clearly, I think. Aristotle wants to say that sensation has the power to judge sensible qualities accurately, but then, on Plotinus' interpretation, he also says that this judgement is an affection. The reason why Aristotle wants to maintain that sensation has a critical power is that he thinks that it has to be cognitive. Were

sensation not cognitive, Aristotle seems to think, it would be difficult to explain how animals, which do not have reason, can do all the things they do by means of it, such as locate prey, for instance, or recognize their food. Plotinus agrees that sensation has to be cognitive, but thinks that as long as it is assimilated to an affection it cannot be so, for affections cannot have any critical power, no matter how minimal this is. Thus Plotinus says that if Aristotle wants to account for the cognitive power of sensation, he needs to invoke another κρίσις, one that this time will be used to judge what the affection of the sense-organ should have judged in the first place, with consequent threat of regress. Plotinus, then, turns the tables against Aristotle, so to say. Aristotle deliberately develops his conception of sensation as a critical faculty in opposition to Plato, who, in his view, claims in the *Theaetetus* that only reason is capable of judging, whereas sensation is merely a passive affection with no ability to judge anything. Now Aristotle's interpretation of the *Theaetetus* has strong grounds. But Plotinus wants to say that Plato actually never said what Aristotle takes him to say. For Plotinus, Plato in the *Theaetetus* holds that sensation is a judgement, and he has a more coherent view than Aristotle about the nature of this judgement, for he takes this judgement to be an activity that brings about a thought. This reference to thought, too, I think, is meant as an attack against Aristotle's understanding of a sensory judgement. For in *De an.*, III 3 Aristotle says that both in perceiving and in "thinking" (νοεῖν) the soul judges, but denies that perceiving and thinking could be the same thing (427b 6-7). To be sure, what Aristotle has mostly in mind in *De an.*, III 3 is the Presocratic view that thought is to be explained in a way analogous to sensation, that is, as a passive affection, and Plotinus agrees with him that this view is wrong. But Aristotle denies not only that thinking is like perceiving, but also that perceiving could be a form of "thought" (νόησις) or "belief" (δόξα). It is this Aristotelian view, I suggest, that Plotinus wants to attack by saying that, when Plato claims that sensation is an imprint, by "imprint" he means a thought: Aristotle thinks that sensation is some kind of imprint, but he explicitly denies that this "imprint" could be a thought.

3.6. *The Cyrenaics and Protagoras*

Let me begin to address Plotinus' reading of the end of *Theaet.* Part I with some observations about his interpretation of the Cyrenaics. Plotinus is interested in the Cyrenaics, I think, because he takes them to be Protagoreans. Recall the main lines of his argument against them: they maintain that only πάθη are apprehensible, and Plotinus argues that if a sensation, the sensation of pain, say, were a πάθος, you could perceive pain, while in fact what you really perceive is pleasure, which, in the end, amounts to having no sensation at all. This is the same as saying that you perceive and do not perceive, and, as sensations on this view are apprehensions, it is also the same as saying that you know and you do not know, which is analogous to the point that Plato makes against Protagoras at *Theaet.*, 182d-183a. While Plotinus never says this explicitly, I think that he views the Cyrenaics' claim that only πάθη are apprehensible as a variety of Protagoreanism. As usual, this might not be a fair assessment of their views, but is not completely farfetched either. The issue is controversial, but on some interpretations, at least, the Cyrenaics' claim that only πάθη are apprehensible is considered to amount to the claim that we only know how things "appear" (φαίνεται) to us, as opposed to how they really are by nature.[24] On this reading, then, their πάθη, are taken to be equivalent to "appearances-reports", which could be easily assimilated to Protagoras' conception of sensation. But this is not perhaps the most widespread interpretation of their position today. Especially in light of Voula Tsouna's study on the Cyrenaics' epistemology, scholars today seem more inclined to think that the πάθη are our own "subjective" states conceived of as inextricably mental and physical at the same time.[25] The Cyrenaics'

[24] See Frede, "The Skeptics' Beliefs", in Id., *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* op. cit., pp. 196-197; Jonathan Barnes, "The Beliefs of a Pyrrhonist", in Myles Burnyeat and Michael Frede (eds.), *The Original Sceptics: A Controversy*, Indianapolis 1997, pp. 58-91, esp. p. 66.

[25] Admittedly, subjectivity is a slippery notion. For Tsouna the πάθη are subjective in the sense that they are private experiences undergone by a perceiver in a context innocent of the mind-body distinction (Tsouna, *The Epistemology of the Cyrenaic School* op. cit. p. 22). Gail Fine ("Subjectivity, Ancient and Modern. The Cyrenaics, Sextus, and Descartes", in Jon Miller and Brad Inwood (eds.), *Hellenistic and Early Modern Philosophy*, Cambridge 2003, pp. 192-231, esp. p. 193) thinks that the πάθη are subjective in the sense that they are states

position, that is, would be that we only know "our own, private experiences" rather than how something either seems to be or really is. On this view, when the Cyrenaics say "I am whitened", they do not mean to say "Something appears white to me", but rather mean "I am disposed whitely", with no reference to an external object. On this reading the πάθη are not "appearance-reports", but "experience-reports", so to say, and thus they cannot be assimilated to what Protagoras meant by "sensation". I do not intend to take a side in this debate here; but it is worth noticing that the evidence we have can go in both directions, and the sources do not make it clear whether the πάθη are "experience-reports", or "appearance-reports", i.e. reports about what things seem to be to a perceiver. Two of our Ancient sources on the Cyrenaics' epistemology, i.e. Sextus and Plutarch, consider such Cyrenaic formulae as "I am warmed" (θερμαίνομαι) to be equivalent to "something appears warm to me" (Sext. Emp. *Adv. math.*, VII 190-200; Plut. *Adv. Col.*, 1120D).[26] Moreover, if we trust the anonymous commentator on the *Theaetetus*, the Cyrenaics argue for the conclusion that only πάθη are apprehensible through an argument from conflicting appearances (col. LXV). That is, they observe that the same thing seems *F* to some and non-*F* to others, and from this they infer that we only know our own πάθη. The most intuitive way to interpret this conclusion is to say that it is equivalent to the claim that we only know how things appear to us, rather than how they are. Finally, Plutarch considers and rejects what we may call a "besieged" interpretation of

---

that have a phenomenological feel. Since I am not interested here in the Cyrenaics themselves, but rather in Plotinus' reading of them, to keep things simple, I will simply take the view that the πάθη are "subjective" to amount to the claim that they are private experiences, inextricably mental and physical, as opposed to appearances-reports, i.e. states that report what things look like to a perceiver. My interest is in this distinction between experiences and appearances-reports.

[26] One could say that perhaps Sextus and Plutarch are not reliable because they are hostile sources; but I am not sure that this would be correct. It is true that Sextus wants to distance himself from the Cyrenaics, but is also true that he makes his own their formulae, and this seems to reveal that his qualms with their epistemology do not concern their claim that only πάθη are apprehensible; cf. Fine "Subjectivity, Ancient and Modern. The Cyrenaics, Sextus, and Descartes" op. cit., p. 207-208. However, Fine thinks that Sextus' endorsement of the Cyrenaics' formulae reveals that he is committed to the idea that we know only our subjective feelings, whereas I think that the endorsement can be read the other way round as well, that is, as showing that the Cyrenaics, like Sextus, are committed to appearances-reports. Concerning Plutarch, it is not at all clear that he has strong views against the Cyrenaics; in contrast, he seems sympathetic towards them; cf. Opsomer, *In search of the Truth* op. cit., p. 99.

the Cyrenaics' formulae, by which I mean an interpretation that tends to assimilate the condition of the perceiving subject to that of a city under siege, where the doors are barred, and there is no communication to and from the outside world. Plutarch observes that the Cyrenaics' formulae could suggest that our affections for the Cyrenaics trap us inside ourselves, like the barred doors of a city under siege. If I cannot say, upon feeling warm, that something is warm, but can only say that I am warmed, he remarks, it may follow that I should also say that "I am walled", when I see a wall, or that "I am horsed", and so on. If, when I see a wall, all I can say is that "I am being walled", and so on, my affections actually cut me off from the world, because they prevent me from reaching out to the walls and horses out there (Plut. *Adv. Col.*, 1120C-1121E). Now Plutarch says that this "besieged" interpretation may be a legitimate way to develop the Cyrenaics' claim that only πάθη are apprehensible, but also insists that it is *not* based on what the Cyrenaics say, and thus it is not a correct interpretation of their position. The Cyreanics, Plutarch says, only hold that one is warmed or chilled, and so on, but do not claim that one is "horsed" or "walled". It seems to me that the most intuitive reason that accounts for why they did not say this is that they viewed their πάθη as appearance-reports of the form "This wall seems hot to me". If they had viewed their πάθη as subjective "experiences" that cannot even enable one to say what seems to be the case, the "besieged" scenario, I think, would have represented the very essence of their position, rather than a mere speculative consequence to be drawn from it.

In any case, I think that Plotinus assimilates the Cyrenaics to Protagoras because he reads their claim that only πάθη are apprehensible as an appearance-report, and because he thinks that, read in that way, it is not far from Protagoras' conception of sensation. He probably also observes that the Cyrenaics are committed to the view that the πάθη are "motions", and that this seems to fit well Protagoras' ontology. Like some 19th century scholars, Plotinus identifies the Cyrenaics with the κομψότεροι followers of

Protagoras that Plato mentions at *Theaet.*, 156a.[27] Tsouna has built what I take to be a strong case against the possibility of identifying the Cyrenaics with those "refined philosophers", and I cannot do justice to her arguments here. But since many aspects of the Cyrenaics' epistemology do resemble the epistemology of Protagoras, and since Plotinus is ready to view as Protagoreans of sorts even thinkers who could not be further from Portagoras, such as the Stoics, I think that, correctly or not, he believes that Protagoras and the Cyrenaics share the same views. As we have seen in section 1, Plotinus thinks that, if you are of the view that qualities "are not in the objects", you are thereby committed to a form of Protagoreanism, and the Cyrencaics can certainly be said to hold some version of that view. The suggestion becomes even more plausible if we notice that the idea that the Cyrenaics were Protagoreans had already some currency among Platonists, as is witnessed by the anonymous commentator on the *Theaetetus*. The Anonymous does not exactly say that the Cyrenaics share all of Protagoras' views; but he does say, in commenting upon 152b 5-6, that, like Protagoras, they think that objects have no distinctive characteristics, and he says that, again like Protagoras, they reach this conclusion on the basis of an argument form conflicting appearances (col. LXV). In fact, the Anonymous discusses their position immediately *before* introducing that of Protagoras. This is speculative, but he might have thought that discussing them first could have helped the reader of his time to understand what Protagoras meant to say; much in the same spirit in which we discuss today the position of a contemporary philosopher as a way to make the views of some ancient thinker clearer. Plotinus' assimilation of the Cyrenaics to Protagoras, then, is in my view another instance of the *reductio ad Protagoram* that he inflicts on his adversaries.

3.7. Theaet., 184b-d*: the Wooden Horse psychology and the removal of akatalēpsia*

[27] For the identification of the Cyrenaics with the κομψότεροι see Paul Natorp, "Aristipp in Platons Theätet", *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 3 (1890), pp. 347-362, who argues, however, that the evidence is not conclusive.

Many scholars today read Plato as maintaining that sensation is not cognitive; but Plotinus, I think, is under pressure to prove exactly the opposite, and to prove it by means of the *Theaetetus*. As witnessed by the anonymous commentator on the *Theaetetus*, the Academic sceptics thought that in that dialogue they could find Plato's avowal of scepticism. In contrast, Plotinus, like the Anonymous, thinks that Plato was no sceptic, and he is probably of the view that to prove his point he has to show that the Academic reading of the *Theaetetus* is wrong. It is true that there are no Academic sceptics around in Plotinus' time; but their reading of Plato left an important mark on the Platonists of the Imperial era, and on Plutarch and Galen in particular.[28]

Plutarch and Galen have complex epistemologies of their own. But both of them seem to inherit from the Academic sceptics a cautious attitude towards any metaphysical commitment. As far as sensation is concerned, they grant it some cognitive power, but they maintain that this power is limited. Galen explains the cognitive power of sensation by arguing in favour of the reliability of our natural faculties.[29] Plutarch's argument is less clear. Plutarch believes in the so-called thesis of "The Unity of the Academy". He thinks, that is, that from Plato on there is a single, unitary Academic tradition. To accommodate the Academic sceptics inside this tradition he tries to downplay their scepticism.[30] All these Academics meant to show, he argues, is that sensible things cannot be objects of scientific knowledge, but they never accepted a universal suspension of judgement; in contrast, they were committed to some positive views, as all Platonists are. This accommodating attitude leads Plutarch to what Charles Brittain has called a form of "mitigated scepticism" in respect of sense-based forms of cognition.[31] A "mitigated sceptic" is someone who admits the possibility of having rationally warranted beliefs, but denies that anything can be known. In admitting the possibility of

[28] For the influence of the Academic skeptics on Plutarch see Opsomer, *In Search of the Truth* op. cit.
[29] Cf. Hankinson, "Natural Criteria and the Transparency of Judgement. Antiochus, Philo and Galen on Epistemological Justification" op. cit.
[30] On this see esp. Charles Brittain, "Middle Platonists on Academic Scepticism" op. cit., on which my discussion here is based.
[31] Brittain, "Middle Platonists on Academic Scepticism" op. cit., p. 298 for whom "mitigated skepticism" is the view "ascribed by Philo [of Larissa] and Metrodorus to Carneades, but not to Arcesilaus, which accepted the possibility of attaining rationally warranted beliefs, but prominently included among those beliefs the thesis that nothing could be known".

having rationally warranted beliefs, a "mitigated" sceptic differs from a "radical sceptic", who maintains that not only nothing can be known, but there cannot be any rationally warranted beliefs at all, because judgement has to be suspended on all matters. Plutarch, as I have said, grants sensation some cognitive power, but holds that sensation can lead at best to true opinion, and it cannot lead to scientific knowledge. He never explicitly explains the basis of his claim that sensation is cognitive, but he seems to have in mind an argument from "inactivity" or *apraxia*. To engage in the ordinary activities of life, you need to have some beliefs, including beliefs about sensible things. Since you seem able to engage in these activities, it has to be the case that you have beliefs, and that at least some of them rest on sensation.

In contrast to Plutarch, Plotinus does not want to downplay the scepticism of the Academy. For as we have seen in chapter I, he actually wants to use Arcesilaus' radical scepticism to refute the Stoics. Thus he cannot merely base the cognitive value of sensation on the claim that beliefs are presupposed by our ability to lead an ordinary life. Since he accepts that it is possible to be in a state of radical *akatalēpsia* and of complete suspension of judgement, he has to show how one can remove *akatalēpsia*. But neither does he want to say, like Galen, that sensation is cognitive merely because it is a natural faculty, and natural faculties are reliable. Plotinus wants to maintain that strong metaphysical commitments are possible, and he wants to argue that they are even necessary in order to conclude that sensation is cognitive.

With the remarks above in mind we can look back at Plotinus' discussion of sensory judgement in connection with Aristotle, the Cyrenaics, and the Stoics to see whether it can give us some indications about his reading of the *Theaetetus*. The first thing to notice is that the entire discussion is driven by the need to show that sensation is a form of apprehension. Plotinus argues that sensation can be a form of apprehension because it is a judgement rather than a passive affection. He discards the view that sensation could be an affection by using the conception of the soul as divisible and indivisible from *Tim.*, 35a. But recall how he has reached that conception of the soul: he has reached it by reasoning through the difficulties of the Wooden Horse psychology at *Theaet.*, 184b. The conception of the soul of *Tim.*, 35a is for him Plato's answer to the Wooden Horse psychology. This means, I take it,

that for Plotinus the Wooden Horse psychology has to be a remnant of Protagoreanism. Plato, in his view, discusses it so as to refute an aspect of Protagoras' thought that he has not addressed before: his psychology and his view that sensation is a passive affection. Plato, Plotinus reasons, after having shown that Protagoras' epistemological and ontological commitments lead to *akatalēpsia*, wants to show that at the origin of this *akatalēpsia* there is also a wrong psychology and a wrong understanding of how sensation comes about in the soul. Plato replaces Protagoras' psychology, Plotinus goes on, with a new one, i.e. the psychology of *Tim.*, 35a. By replacing Protagoras' Wooden Horse psychology with that of *Tim.*, 35a, Plato removes all the obstacles that stand in the way of sensation being a form of apprehension. For when you see that the soul as subject of sensation is divisible and indivisible, you must conclude that sensation is not a passive affection, as Protagoras thought, but is an activity of the soul that is a judgement. As judgement sensation is a form of apprehension. Thus by 184d Plato stops dealing with Protagoras, in Plotinus' view, and begins to show what a sensory judgement is: not only is Protagoras refuted by that point, but all the obstacles that stand in the way of the cognitive power of sensation have been removed.

Now, you may wonder what kind of cognitive power Plotinus is ready to concede to sensation. Since he thinks that all our sensory representations are "obscure" he can hardly suggest that sensation knows how things really are in their nature. Here, I think, his interpretation of sensible qualities in the *Timaeus* may help. Since Plotinus takes Plato to introduce his own psychology at 184b ff., he probably also thinks that Plato, at that point in the dialogue, presupposes his own ontology. In fact, if Plotinus reads 184b-d as an argument that removes *akatalēpsia* so as to make sensory apprehension possible, he has to think that there is something to be apprehended in the sensible world. Now, in Protagoras' world for Plotinus nothing can be apprehended, because everything is merely a stream of relativities. This is why Plotinus thinks that, when Plato replaces Protagoras' psychology at 184b-d by using the *Timaeus*, he also replaces Protagoras' ontology by using the same dialogue.

Now recall Plotinus' analysis of sensible qualities (section 2.1., cf. 1.4). He has argued that sensible qualities are παθήματα of soulless bodies

as well as ways in which those bodies really look to a perceiver. That is, he has maintained that a sensible quality is the manifestation of the power of a λόγος in a body, but also the effect produced by that λόγος on a perceiver's sense-organ. For Plotinus, then, there is something more to white, say, than the impression you might have that something seems white to you. For him, white is really displayed by the object you are looking at, but that object is nonetheless white for you as a consequence of the impact that its λόγος has on you, which, in turn, means that white is as much a πάθημα of that object as it is of your eyes. Since for him there is nothing more to sensible things *qua* sensible than the qualities that they display—as he holds that sensible things are bundles of qualities—, Plotinus can say that what sensation apprehends is not simply what things *seem to be* in a non-committal way, but how they *are*. In other words, Plotinus maintains that a sensory apprehension is an apprehension of the sensible traits that things display: in sensation you do know that something is sweet or bitter, even though you do not know its true nature.

This is a form of realism, but is not the same kind of realism as that of a contemporary direct realist who maintains that the sense-organs have some role in determining how sensible qualities are perceived. Even if he grants that things look different to different perceivers because of the sense-organs that these perceivers have, a direct realist holds that sensible qualities are "out there" in the sense that they are intrinsic to the objects. But for Plotinus the only qualities that are intrinsic to the objects are their essential qualities (see section 2.1). An object, white-lead, say, can really display some brown, because it has been in contact with some brown thing. But since brown does not belong to the nature of white-lead, it is not really "in" the white-lead. Moreover, Plotinus cannot be assimilated to a contemporary direct realist, I think, because he thinks that even those qualities that are essential to an object, and thus are intrinsic to it, are properly speaking not in the sensible object but in the intelligible λόγος. It is the λόγος that, in his view, is the real *locus* of the intrinsic qualities of an object: the heat of fire, properly speaking, is intelligible, and it is "in" sensible fire because it is "in" the intelligible nature of fire.

We can better grasp how Plotinus thinks of the constitution of sensible qualities and of how the soul apprehends them by looking at the use he makes of the notion of "sympathy". Plotinus speaks of sympathy in different contexts, but here I am only interested in the use he makes of it in sensation. It is a commonplace to say that Plotinus relies on the Stoics when he speaks of sympathy. The Stoics invoke sympathy, in their theory of sensation, to explain the transmission of a certain psychic state through a living being. Take Chrysippus' account of the soul. He holds that soul and body are reciprocally affected, and that whenever the body is affected by something in the environment, this affection causes a motion that is transmitted throughout the soul, so that the soul as a whole takes part in a common affection with the body. However, Emilsson has argued, persuasively in my view, that even though Plotinus is in part inspired by the Stoics, his theory of sympathy rests on the *Timaeus*, and it lacks all the physicalist aspects of the Stoics' account.[32] I would actually go farther than Emilsson, and say that, Plotinus' account of sympathy is not in fact inspired by the Stoics at all. Plotinus' notion of sympathy, I think, is "Stoic" in the same way in which his λόγοι are: in name only. Both Plotinus and the Stoics speak of sympathy and λόγοι, but speak of different—and, in Plotinus' view, competing—things. As Plotinus' wants to substitute his λόγοι for the Stoics', thus, I maintain, he wants to substitute his sympathy for theirs.

Plotinus begins to develop his account of sympathy starting from two passages of the *Timaeus*: 38a ff. and 45c-d. At 38a Plato says that, since the soul is made of same, different, and being, and it is bound together by proportion, it is stirred throughout its whole self when it encounters either a "scattered being", i.e. a body, or any stable and intelligible being. In being so stirred, it says what the thing that it encounters is the same as or different from. At 45c-d Plato gives an account of vision. He says that, in vision, the eyes emanate a stream of fire, which, by coming into contact with daylight, forms a uniform body of light through which some motions are transmitted from a sensible object to the soul, where vision takes place. Plato explicitly maintains that this body of light transmits motions by being "commonly

[32] Emilsson, *Plotinus on Sense-Perception* op. cit., pp. 47 ff.

affected" (ὁμοιοπαθές) (45c 7). Plotinus, Emilsson suggests, uses the notion of sympathy that he finds in Stoicism to explain these two Platonic passages, and to build out of them a theory of sensation that eliminates the need for a medium to account for the transmission of information from the sensible object to the organs and the soul. As I have said, I mostly agree with Emilsson, but I think that Plotinus does not develop the *Timaeus* by using a Stoic notion, but by using an important aspect of Aristotle's theory of sensation: the view that the activity of what is sensible is the same as the activity of the sense (*De an.*, III 2, 425b 26-27). Aristotle rests this view on his analysis of motion in *Phys.*, III 3, and on his remarks on acting and being acted upon in *De gen. et corr.*, I 7. Starting from those remarks, he argues that, when a sound is heard, for instance, the activity of the thing causing the sound (the "sonorous thing") and that of hearing are the same, because hearing is the activity of the thing that causes the sound in the sense-organs, i.e. in the ears. Plotinus engages with Aristotle' account of sensation in terms of the activity of what is sensible in the sense in IV.5.[29], where we find his most sustained treatment of the notion of sympathy. The argument of this treatise is, unfortunately, particularly convoluted. However, the topic of sympathy is introduced right at the beginning of the treatise, which suggests that the treatise should be read as an attempt to explain this notion:

> Now we have said that seeing, and in general sensation, must take place by means of some body; for without body the soul is wholly in the intelligible world. Since sensation is an apprehension, not of intelligible objects, but of sensible objects alone, the soul must somehow be connected with sensible things (δεῖ πως τὴν ψυχὴν συναφῆ γενομένην τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς) through things which are very much like them and establish a sort of communion of cognition or affection with them (κοινωνίαν τινὰ πρὸς αὐτὰ γνώσεως ἢ παθήματος ποιεῖσθαι). This is why this cognition comes through bodily organs (δι᾽ ὀργάνων σωματικῶν); for through these, which are in a way naturally united to or continuous with sensible things, the soul must somehow in some way come to a unity with the sensible things themselves, and so a sort of common affection with them [i.e. sensible things] must arise (διὰ γὰρ τούτων οἷον συμφυῶν ἢ συνεχῶν ὄντων οἷον εἰς ἕν πως πρὸς αὐτὰ τὰ αἰαθητὰ ἰέναι, ὁμοπαθείας τινὸς οὕτω πρὸς αὐτὰ

γινομένης). (*Enn.*, IV.5.[29].1, 3-13; Armstrong, slightly modified).

Plotinus here says that the sense-organs are indispensable in sensation, for otherwise the soul could not grasp anything sensible (cf. IV.4.[28].23, 32-36). The idea seems to be that sensation requires the soul to come into contact with sensible things, but contact with sensible things implies an affection. Since the soul cannot be affected, but body parts can, sensation requires sense-organs. But notice how Plotinus describes the communion of the soul with the sense-organs and the sensible things: it is a communion "of cognition or affection" he says. This remark, I think, should be read in light of what has been said in IV.4.[28].19 in connection with the Cyrenaics. There Plotinus has tried to argue against the Cyrenaics that there is no "affection" (πάθημα or πάθος) of the soul in sensation. But, as I have said, in order to hold this view he has to explain away the numerous passages in the Platonic dialogues where sensation is indeed described as a πάθημα that enters the soul through the body. In the passage above we finally come to know how he explains them away. He suggests that what Plato really means by πάθημα is a γνῶσις, that is, a form of apprehension or cognition. From this it follows that every time Plato says that sensation is a πάθημα that enters the soul what he means, for Plotinus, is that the sense-organ is affected, and, through this affection, it enables the soul to apprehend the sensible traits of an object. There is one continuous process that accounts for the transmission of information from the object to the soul, but is not a uniform process throughout, for, unlike the organs, the soul is not passively affected by the sensible qualities of the object; rather, it actively grasps them.

Plotinus characterizes the communion between sensible things, organs and soul as "a common affection" (ὁμοπάθεια) in which the soul "comes to a unity" with the sensible thing. This "unity", he adds a few lines later, is to be explained by means of "the so-called sympathies" (IV.5.[29].1, 35). The rest of the treatise is an attempt to explain what these "sympathies" really are. Plotinus first of all embarks on a refutation of some competing theories of vision and light; mainly extromissive theories (cf., esp., IV.5.[29].4, 39-46),

and theories that presuppose the appeal to a medium (cf., esp., IV.5.[29].4, 1-38). In opposing the former, he attacks the Stoic account of vision, and in opposing the latter he rejects Aristotle's, and, especially, Aristotle's view that light is the "activity" (ἐνέργεια) of the transparent, which is the medium that allows a colour to act on the pupil. But Plotinus does not reject *in toto* Aristotle's account of vision, but accepts one of its most important features: the view that what is transmitted to the eyes is an "activity" (ἐνέργεια) of the sensible thing. Precisely because light is an activity, Plotinus claims, it needs no medium to travel through, but can be present at once at its source and on any object it shines upon, including the eye (cf. IV.5.[29].6). To be sure, Plotinus' discussion of light is not as clear as one would hope, especially because, rather than dealing only with the relation between light and eyes, he engages also with the issue of colour formation. But we should keep in mind why that discussion came about: the need to explain sympathy or the "common affection" between the soul and the sensible objects. If we keep this in mind, it follows that Plotinus' account of light in terms of activity is meant to explain what sympathy is really about: it is about an activity that, like light, is caused by a sensible thing (e.g. the sun) and is capable of reaching the organs and the soul.

Plotinus' most significant departure from Aristotle, I think, is not that he abandons the medium; it is his view that the activity of what is sensible is present at once *in both* the sensible object and the soul of the perceiving subject. For Aristotle, the activity of what is sensible is in the perceiving subject, but for Plotinus it is somehow in between the subject and the object, much like Plato's "body of light" of *Tim.*, 45c-d. The reason why Plotinus holds this view is that he thinks it follows from Plato's account of the παθήματα at 61c ff., which he takes to be Plato's considered account of sensible qualities. Those παθήματα are as much affections of bodies, in Plato's account, as they are "affections" of the soul, and sympathy, for Plotinus, is what explains why this has to be the case. It is because the soul, through the sense-organs, forms a unity with the sensible object, by sharing in one activity with the latter's qualities, so that there is continuity between the quality possessed by a body and the grasp of it in the soul. The notion of

sympathy allows Plotinus to bridge the gap between sensible qualities, sensory affections in the perceiver's organs, and actual sensation in the soul, which is why sometimes he speaks of παθήματα of the compound, i.e. of both soul and body, when he deals with sensation (esp. I.1.[53].9, 26; IV.5.[29].1 above; and cf. IV.4.[28].33, 38).[33]

In addition to providing Plotinus with an "appropriate" account of sympathy, however, Aristotle's view that the activity of what is sensible is the same as that of the sense allows him to account for an important aspect of his epistemology. In order for us to "rise" from the apprehension of sensible things to the knowledge of their forms, there has to be some path that leads us from sensible qualities to forms. Now our soul is stimulated by activities coming from different λόγοι in different sensible things; these activities "mingle" in some sense, and sensation is not able to discriminate which activity exactly belongs to which object. But each body, for Plotinus, has an intrinsic activity that is responsible for its essential qualities. As the activity that stems from the essence of the body is the same as that which is present in the perceiving subject, the perceiving subject does actually grasp something of the nature of the object. To be sure, the sensible heat of fire, say, is merely an "image" of its essential heat, but it derives from that essential heat, and it has more than just the name in common with it. Since the activity of the heat from fire is the same as that of the soul of the perceiving subject, this soul can find in it a privileged access into the nature of the fire.

3.8. Theaet., 184d-186c 5*: sensation as a judgement of the soul*

So far, then, all we can say is that Plotinus reads Plato at *Theaet.*, 184a-d as presenting his view of the subject of sensation and as removing, at the same time, *akatalēpsia*, thus showing that sensation can be an apprehension, no matter how minimal. But sensation, as an apprehension, is a judgement of the soul for Plotinus. What I would like to do now is to examine how he can

[33] That Plotinus is concerned about bridging the gap between soul and body in sensation emerges from I.1.[53].3, where he tries to enrich his previous account of the soul-body relation in terms of an artisan-tool relation in IV.4.[28].23. On this see Cristina D'Ancona, "Plotino. *Che cos'è l'essere vivente e che cos'è l'uomo?*", in Carlo Marzolo (ed.), *Plotino.* Che cos'è l'essere vivente e che cos'è l'uomo?I 1[53], Pisa 2006, pp. 35-62.

make this conception of sensation square with what Plato says at *Theaet.*, 184b-186e. First of all, we need to see that, when Plotinus defines sensation as a judgement of the soul, in fact, he makes two distinct claims. Let me isolate them. He says that: 1) sensation is an activity, rather than a passive affection of the soul; 2) the soul's exercise of this activity is a judgement, as a result of which the soul comes to have a thought. 1 and 2 are distinct claims, because to say that sensation is an activity rather than a passive affection is not thereby to commit oneself to the view that it is a judgment, and that this judgement brings about a thought. Sensation could well be an activity in the sense of requiring an intentional use of the sense-organs on the part of the soul, for instance, or in the sense of a "labelling" or "noticing" this or that sensible quality.[34] If sensation were an activity in either of these senses, it would have nothing to do with judgements and thoughts. Plotinus, however, is committed to both 1 and 2, and he is committed to 1 in the sense that he believes that sensation requires an intentional use of the organs, and in the sense that he takes sensation to be a labelling of sensible qualities. That in sensation we label qualities for Plotinus will emerge from the discussion that I am about to begin. That in sensation the soul makes an intentional use of the sense-organs in his view is shown by IV.4.[28].25, 1-3, where Plotinus says that: "The existence of 'that through which' (δι᾽ οὗ) is not a sufficient cause of vision and, in general, of sensation, but the soul must be so disposed as to attend (νεύειν) to sensible things". No matter how "that through which" is to be spelled out here (it could be either an appropriate environment, or the organ), the point is that soul needs to be actively engaged in order to perceive, in the sense that it needs to pay attention to its "surroundings"; and this invites the conclusion that for Plotinus sensation requires an intentional use of the sense-organs.

Let me try to examine on what textual grounds Plotinus might have relied in his reading of the *Theaetetus* starting from the more modest claim that sensation is an activity of the soul because it requires an intentional use of the sense-organs. The strongest evidence comes from 185b 10 and 185e 7. In

[34] For the soul's intentional use of the sense-organs see Myles Burnyeat, "Plato on the Grammar of Perceiving", *Classical Quarterly*, 26 (1976), pp. 29-51; for the soul's labelling see Cooper, "Plato on Sense-Perception and Knowledge", op. cit.

the first passage Plato claims that the soul "investigates" (σκέψασθαι) whether two things are salty or not. In the second one, he says that the soul "examines" (ἐπισκοπεῖν) through bodily powers, i.e. the sense-organs. In both cases we seem to be dealing with activities rather than affections. But it is often remarked that, despite 185b and 185e, at 186c 2, Plato seems to identify sensations with passive affections.[35] What does Plotinus make of this passage? At 186c we read the following:

> And thus there are some things which all creatures, men and animals alike, are naturally able to perceive (πάρεστι φύσει αἰσθάνεσθαι) as soon as they are born; I mean, the affections which reach the soul through the body (ὅσα διὰ τοῦ σώματος παθήματα ἐπὶ τὴν ψυχὴν τείνει). (*Theaet.*, 186b 10-c 2; Levett, slightly modified).

In order to read this passage as maintaining that sensations are παθήματα, i.e. passive affections, one has to maintain that perceiving and having a πάθημα entering the soul are the same thing, and this is probably what Plato meant in my view. But we have seen in the previous section how Plotinus interprets the claim that Plato makes here and elsewhere that sensations are παθήματα entering the soul through the body: he says that by πάθημα, in these contexts, Plato means γνῶσις. There is no affection that enters the soul, what happens in sensation is that the affection of the living body becomes an apprehension or cognition in the soul.[36]

Altogether, then, Plotinus can at least defend the view that, after having refuted the Wooden Horse psychology, and having introduced the psychology of *Tim.*, 35a, Plato in the *Theaetetus* suggests that sensation is an activity because it requires an intentional use of the sense-organs. However, Plotinus wants to say that the activity of the soul in sensation is actually a judgement,

---

[35] Frede, "Observations on Perception in Plato's Later Dialogues" op. cit., p. 7.

[36] "The affections (παθήματα) differ according to the organs, but the judgement (κρίσις) comes from one and the same principle, which is like a judge [i.e. the soul]". (*Enn.*, IV.3.[27].3, 22-24; Armstrong, slightly modified).
"We could say at once that its [i.e. of the soul] perceptive part is perceptive only of what is external; for even if there is a concomitant sensation of what goes on inside the body, yet even here the apprehension (ἀντίληψις) is of something outside the perceptive part; for it perceives the affections in the body by its own agency (γὰρ ἐν τῷ σώματι παθημάτων ὑφ᾽ ἑαυτοῦ αἰσθάνεται)". (*Enn.*, V.3.[49].2, 2-6; Armstrong, slightly modified).

and this claim is problematic, because there is little or no evidence for it in the text. There is one passage where Plato could be interpreted as saying that sensation is a judgement, and this is 185b 10, but it is a strong counterfactual, and I think that it would weaken rather than strengthening Plotinus' case.[37] Let me reconstruct what Plato says, after having dealt with the Wooden Horse psychology.

He observes that (185a) each sense-organ has its own special object, e.g. sight has colour; hearing has sound, but we are able "to think" (διανοεῖσθαι) about both a colour and a sound. Since there are no sense-organs through which the soul could perceive both of them, he concludes that when it thinks of them it must do this through itself. Then, he explains what exactly the soul does when it operates through itself: it considers the most common features of sensible things (the κοινά). Take the usual sound and colour, Plato says, when you think that they are (i.e. when you form a judgement to the effect that there is a sound in the air, or that the sound is such and such); when you think that they are the same or different (i.e. that each of them is the same as itself and different from the other); when you think that they are two or one (i.e. that each is one and both are two); when you think that they are beautiful or useful; in all these cases, you do not use a sense-organ; rather your soul operates through itself (185c 4-d 4). This activity of the soul through itself, then, for Plato is a critical activity in which the soul formulates simple judgements about sensible things by using some very general, "common" concepts.

If you recall Plotinus' account of the soul as subject of sensation, however (section 3.3), you can notice that the kind of critical activity that I have just described is precisely the activity that Plotinus ascribes to the soul in sensation. For Plotinus the soul as subject of sensation judges whether sweet is different from black, whether something is sweet or is a face, and so on. Plato, at least in my view, does not identify nor assimilate what the soul does through itself with what comes about in the soul through the sense-organs, but Plotinus does assimilate the two. That is, he maintains that even though the soul does more through itself than just perceive, it also perceives through itself in

[37] See Sedley, *The Midwife of Platonism* op. cit., p. 106 n. 29.

addition to perceiving through the sense-organs. Plotinus can actually invoke two passages in support of his interpretation: 185c 8 and 184d 4. In the first passage, Plato calls the soul that examines the κοινά through itself "that which perceives in us" (τὸ αἰσθανόμενον); in the second one, he says that "we perceive" (αἰσθανόμεθα) the κοινά "with" the soul.[38] The text here may be read as suggesting that what the soul does when it uses the κοινά is in fact perceiving, and one may conclude that, since in using the κοινά the soul actually formulates judgements, sensation has to be a judgement of the soul. Thus sensation on this reading consists of simple judgements of the type "This is blue", "This blue thing is different from that black thing", but also "This is a face". Things are more intricate with a predicate such as "beautiful", but a case can be made for taking beauty as some kind of sensible trait, e.g. as the effect of a combination of colours.

The problem, then, is to explain how the soul in Plotinus' view comes to possess those common concepts that it applies in sensation. Recall the new psychology that according to him Plato introduces to account for the subject of sensation after the rejection of the Wooden Horse psychology; I mean the conception of the soul of *Tim.*, 35a. Then notice that the soul in the *Timaeus* is not made only of divisible and indivisible being; it is also made of divisible and indivisible sameness and difference. This can be taken to mean that the soul is made of the κοινά.[39] Plato also explains in the *Timaeus* that by "divisible" and "indivisible" he means to refer to the being, sameness, and difference of bodies and forms respectively (35a). Plotinus, I take it, infers from this that all perceiving subjects, that is, both humans and animals, are born with the κοινά in their soul, and this is why they are able to have

[38] It is true that at 184a 4 Plato describes the activity that the soul carries on through itself as a form of διανοεῖσθαι, and this seems to suggest that it is an activity that involves reasoning and inference. But Plotinus, who does not think that sensation is inferential (see below), insists in I.1.[53].9, 21 that there is διάνοια and διάνοια, and that only the "true" διάνοια is responsible for reasoning. I take this insistence to be due to the embarrassment caused precisely by 184 a 4.

[39] For this suggestion see Dorothea Frede, "The Philosophical Economy of Plato's Psychology: Rationality and Common Concepts in the *Timaeus*", in Michael Frede and Gisela Striker (eds.), *Rationality in Greek Thought*, Oxford 1996, pp. 29-58, and Ead., "The Soul's Silent Dialogue: A Non-Aporetic Reading of the *Theaetetus*", *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, 35 (1989), pp. 20-49.

sensations that are actually judgements about sensible things.[40] This does not mean that we are born with the concept "red", say, for the κοινά are very general concepts. It means that we have the ability to sort sensible qualities into types, by judging, for instance, that the colour of that flower is the same as the colour of this book, and it is different from the colour of this chair. When we have sorted out the type we assign it a conventional name: "red", and we judge that "The flower is red". To be sure we will not be able to sort out all the possible shades of colours into types. But Plotinus can reply to this that where there is no type, there is no judgement, and thus there is no sensation. The reader should be aware, however, that I do not mean to say that for Plotinus the κοινά are merely the concepts that we use in sensation. For Plotinus, the κοινά are both concepts that we use in sensation and forms. I only call the concepts we use in sensation κοινά to assign them a name.

While Plotinus never explicitly says that some intelligible concepts are involved in sensation, he does say that some of them reach the irrational soul through the faculty of representation. Consider this passage from IV.3.[27].30:

> The thought of *Nous* (νόημα) is without parts and has not, so to speak, come out into the open, but remains unobserved within, but the λόγος unfolds its content and brings it out of the thought into the faculty of representation (εἰς τὸ φανταστικόν), and so shows the thought as if in a mirror […]. Therefore, even though the soul is always moved to intelligent activity, it is when it comes to be in the faculty of representation that we apprehend it. (*Enn.*, IV.3.[27].30, 7-13; Armstrong, modified).

What Plotinus means by "the unfolding" of the content of a thought is unclear, but this passage shows that our soul receives from *Nous* the content of some of its cognitive acts, only this content is not present in the soul in the same way as it is present in *Nous*: it is "unfolded", whereas in *Nous* it has a greater unity. Since Plotinus says that what comes from *Nous* becomes present in the faculty of representation, it seems that what "unfolds" from *Nous* are representations of the forms, rather than real forms. I will call these representations "rational

[40] For an analysis of animal sensation that may illuminate Plotinus' account see Charles Brittain, "Non-Rational Perception in the Stoics and Augustine", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 22 (2002), pp. 253-308.

copies of the forms". There are two faculties of representation in the soul for Plotinus, one is in the rational soul, and it is the faculty where the contents of *Nous* unfold. I will call it "rational faculty of representation". The other is in the irrational soul, or rather in "the trace" of the soul in the body. Let me call it "irrational faculty of representation". The important point is that, immediately after the passage above, Plotinus goes on to say that these two faculties of representation communicate on a regular basis. As a consequence, I take it, the intellectual contents present in the rational faculty of representation become available to the irrational soul where sensation takes place. I suggest that the intellectual contents that become available to sensation are the κοινά of the *Theaetetus* that Plotinus interprets as representation of the forms. They are the last level at which the forms "unfold", and I will call them "copies of the forms" so as to distinguish them from "the rational copies of the forms" which are not used in sensation and belong to the rational faculty of representation. It is unclear in what sense these "copies of the forms" can be said to be representations of the forms. Concerning being, one could say that the being that we use to form judgements about sensible things is not exactly the same as that used to form judgements about forms. When you say that Beauty itself "is", you mean to say that it is eternally; whereas when you say of a flower that "it is", you know that it "is" only temporarily, because it is now, but it will die in time. Thus, at a minimum, the "is" we use to form judgements about sensible things has a temporal aspect that the "is" we use to speak of forms lacks. The two "is" are related, but the "is" in use for forms is of a "higher" kind, so to say. Analogous remarks can be made about beauty, or advantageousness or sameness.[41] The form of the good is advantageous always and in all respects, whereas a drug is advantageous only sometimes, and in

[41] See Frede, "The Philosophical Economy of Plato's Psychology: Rationality and Common Concepts in the *Timaeus*", op. cit. The point, in Plotinus, can be viewed as a version of Aristotle's πρὸς ἕν predication interpreted in terms of "focal meaning", and it is analogous to the remarks that Plotinus makes about the relation between the sensible heat of fire and its intelligible λόγος. Essential qualities, Plotinus suggests, have more than the name in common with their archetypes, and they are what they are derivatively from their archetypes, (see section 2.3.). The dependence of the essential qualities upon the λόγος of their object helps us find the nature of the object; the "copies of the forms", since they ultimately depend upon the being, sameness, and difference in *Nous* help us identify the essential qualities.

some respects. Again the two senses of "advantageous" are related, but the advantageousness expressed by the latter is of a "lower" kind.

When examined against the background of the *Theaetetus*, Plotinus' view that sensations are thoughts is to be spelled out by saying that sensations are "beliefs" (δόξαι) of some sort, and that Plotinus indeed wants to maintain that sensations are beliefs of some kind is confirmed by his characterization of them in terms of "obscure quasi-beliefs" in III.6.[26].4 (see section 1.5). Now this conception of sensations as beliefs presupposes some continuity between the activities of the rational and the irrational soul. Both of them can be said to have thoughts. This continuity is suggested by *Tim.*, 37b 3-c 5, and can find some support in the *Theaetetus* at 185e 6-7, where Plato says that: "while the soul examines some things through the bodily powers, there are others which it examines alone and through itself" (τὰ μὲν αὐτὴ δι᾽ αὑτῆς ἡ ψυχὴ ἐπισκοπεῖν, τὰ δὲ διὰ τῶν τοῦ σώματος δυνάμεων; Levett; slightly modified). Notice that there is one verb, i.e. ἐπισκοπεῖν, which is used for what the soul does by itself, and for what it does through the sense-organs. There is one and the same activity here; one that can be exercised "through" two different things: the soul or the sense-organs. Even if one does not concede that sensation can formulate judgements, Plato here seems to suggest that the examining that the soul carries on through the sense-organs is at least analogous to the kind of activity that the soul exercises through itself, and this activity is a form of thought.

There is another problematic passage, however, that does not seem amenable to the kind of reading of sensation that Plotinus wants to suggest. It is *Theaet.*, 186b 10-c 5:

> And thus there are some things which all creatures, men and animals alike, are naturally able to perceive (πάρεστι φύσει αἰσθάνεσθαι) as soon as they are born; I mean, the affections which reach the soul through the body (ὅσα διὰ τοῦ σώματος παθήματα ἐπὶ τὴν ψυχὴν τείνει). But the calculations that have to do with these (περὶ τούτων) and regard their being and their advantageousness (πρός τε οὐσίαν καὶ ὠφέλειαν) come, when they do, only as the result of a long and arduous development, involving a good deal of trouble and education (διὰ πολλῶν πραγμάτων

καὶ παιδείας). (*Theaet.*, 186b 10-c 5; Levett, slightly modified).

On most readings, the "calculations" to which Plato refers here are the judgements of the soul that have been described up to that point, and they are supposed to bring about what Plato later on will call δόξαι, i.e. beliefs. If sensation is a judgement, and a belief, as Plotinus says, how can Plato maintain now that it requires a long study and "calculations"? Furthermore, in the passage above, Plato seems to say that being and advantageousness, which are two κοινά, become available only through reasoning and calculation. How then can the κοινά be both available in sensation and require calculation? One way out of the problem would be to say that sensation is a form of calculation, because it depends upon reason and it requires inferences. But this is not the path that Plotinus takes. For Plotinus denies that sensation could depend directly on the rational soul and involve inference. Thus, in VI.3.[44].18, he examines the basis of our ability to distinguish sensible qualities, and this is his conclusion:

> But the truth is that it is either sensation or *nous* which says that they are different, and they will not give a reason (οὐ δώσουσι λόγον), sensation because reason (λόγος) does not belong to it, but only give different indications (μηνύσεις), but *nous* everywhere uses its own simple "focusings", not reasons (ὁ δὲ νοῦς ἐν ταῖς αὑτοῦ ἐπιβολαῖς ἁπλαῖς καὶ οὐ λόγοις χρῆται), so that it says of each thing "this is this and that is that". (*Enn.*, VI.3.[44].18, 8-13; Armstrong, slightly modified).

Certainly Plotinus here does not mean to suggest that our intellectual faculty is directly involved in sensation. What the passage is intended to convey is the view that sensation does not need to reason in order to identify a sensible quality.

I think that Plotinus explains away *Theaet.*, 186b 10-c 5 by arguing that Plato here opposes sensation to a higher activity of the soul which uses not "copies of the forms" but "rational copies of the forms" of which "the copies of the forms" used in sensation are only a pale imitation. If I am correct, the κοινά that we use in sensation are the lowest level at which the λόγος in the

soul "unfolds" the real forms of *Nous*. But it is typical of an "unfolding" to be gradual, and to proceed by steps. In other words, for Plotinus, I think, the "being" and "advantageousness" mentioned at 186b 10-c 5 are not the concepts that we use in sensation, they are the concepts from which the latter derive. Notice that, later in the text, i.e. at 187a 5-6, Plato seems to explain the nature of the calculations that he has introduced at 186b 10 by saying that they are those activities of the soul that have to do "with beings", that is, that are περὶ τὰ ὄντα. Since Plotinus in III.6.[26].1 has said that sensation is a judgement of the soul that "has to do with affections", i.e. that is περὶ παθήματα, he has to maintain that any sort of judgement περὶ τὰ ὄντα has to be different from sensation. He probably takes these newly introduced judgements to be the province of dialectic.

3.9. Theaet. 186c 6-187a 8*: sensory representations and beliefs*

Let me pick up from *Theaet.*, 186b 10-c 5. Plato says that the παθήματα that enter the soul through the body, i.e. sensations, are common to children and animals, whereas the calculations that "have to do with" (περί) them and regard their being and advantageousness require a long training. The context seems to reveal that what Plato means by these "calculations" are reasonings that bring about beliefs (δόξαι). These beliefs, he seems to suggest at 187 a 5-7, are περὶ τὰ ὄντα. Since in 186b 10-c 5 beliefs are said to be περὶ sensations, Plotinus, I think, infers that beliefs, that is, proper beliefs, and not just the "quasi-beliefs" or "undecidable" representations in which sensations consist, are περὶ τὰ ὄντα insofar as they are περί sensations, and sensations are ὄντα. The reason why sensations are ὄντα is that, insofar as they are thoughts, they are intelligible things. That this is Plotinus' reading can be inferred from the following passage:

> And soul's power of sensation need not be sensation of sensible things, but rather it must be apprehensive of the τύποι

> produced by sensation on the living being; these are already intelligible entities (νοητά). So external sensation (τὴν αἴσθησιν τὴν ἔξω) is the image of this sensation, which is in its essence truer and is a contemplation of forms alone without being affected (εἰδῶν μόνων ἀπαθῶς εἶναι θεωρίαν). From these forms, from which the soul alone (μόνη) receives its lordship over the living being, come reasonings, and beliefs and thoughts (διάνοιαι δὴ καὶ δόξαι καὶ νοήσεις); and this precisely is where "we" are. (*Enn.*, I.1.[9].7, 9-17; Armstrong, slightly modified).

Plotinus here distinguishes two kinds of sensation: one is an apprehension of intelligible things, the other is our ordinary sensation of sensible things. The first of these two is "sensation" only in an improper sense; as Plotinus says at the end of the passage, properly speaking it is the power of the soul by which we reason and form beliefs. The power to form beliefs is distinct from sensation for two reasons: it belongs to the soul alone (cf. *Theaet.*, 187a 5), rather than to "the living being" (i.e. the soul-body compound); and, in place of having sensible things as its objects, it has the τύποι produced by sensation as objects. Recall the previous discussion of III.6.[26].1: the τύποι are the thoughts that sensory judgements bring about in the soul, and they stand for the τύποι that Plato mentions in *Theaet.*, part II. What this means is that for Plotinus the objects of belief are sensory representations which are themselves beliefs, only "obscure" ones.[42] Insofar as they are "obscure" beliefs, sensory representations are intelligible items, in the sense that they are mental states that can be considered and examined in their own right. Plotinus, I submit, reads *Theaet.*, 186b 10-c 5 as saying that, in contrast to children and animals, which can only have sensory representations, all or most adults are capable of forming true beliefs about their sensory representations by using reason. The activity that consists in examining sensory representations and forming true beliefs, as it has to do with intelligible things (i.e. ὄντα=τύποι=the thoughts

[42] In referring to sensory representations from now on I will never speak of "belief", but of "obscure belief". I will use "belief" only for δόξα. When I speak of "true belief" I mean true belief, I *do not* mean to refer to a special type of belief that differs from the "obscure belief" that sensation brings about.

brought about by sensory judgements=sensory representations) rather than with sensible things, is a higher cognitive activity than sensation.[43]

The type of analysis that reason operates on sensory representations can be gathered from V.3.[49].3:

> Well, then, sensation sees a human being and gives its "imprint" to the reasoning faculty (ἔδωκε τὸν τύπον τῇ διανοίᾳ). What does reason say? It will not say anything yet, but only takes notice, and stops at that; unless perhaps it asks itself (πρὸς ἑαυτὴν διαλογίζοιτο) "Who is this?" if it has met the person before, and says, using memory to help it, that it is Socrates. And if it unfolds the details of his form (ἐξελίττοι τὴν μορφήν), it divides (μερίζει) what the φαντασία gave it; and if it says whether he is good, its remark originates in what it knows through sensation (ἐξ ὧν μὲν ἔγνω διὰ τῆς αἰσθήσεως), but what it says about this it has already from itself, since it has a κανών of the good in itself. How does it have the good in itself? Because it is like the good, and it is strengthened for the sensation of this kind of thing by *Nous* illuminating it: for this is the pure part of the soul and receives the traces (ἴχνη) of *Nous* coming down upon it [i.e. the copies of the forms]. (*Enn.*, V.3.[49].3, 1-12; Armstrong, modified).

This passage presents reason's examination of sensory representations as a silent dialogue of the soul with itself, and it is clearly inspired by the account of false judgement through the Wax-Block model of the soul that Plato presents in *Theaet.* Part II. The first lines should not be taken to mean that we need reason in order to perceive. As I have said, sensation does not require inference for Plotinus, and what we read in this passage is that reason deals with τύποι, i.e. with sensory representations; this means that reason comes into play after sensation has already taken place. The scenario that is described here is that of someone having an "obscure" belief about a person with a snub nose whom he cannot identify. Sensations, as we have seen, grasp their objects as if these objects were always at a distance (section 1.5). Say, then, that you have a sensation of someone with a snub nose; reason takes notice of the sensory representation and tries to figure out the identity of the person that you

[43] It is worth noticing that, even though for Plotinus sensation has to be a judgement about external objects rather than about our representations of these objects (IV.6.[41].2), because otherwise it would be unable to grasp anything, in contrast, in the case of belief, the evaluation and grasp of the sensory *representation* is a higher form of cognition than that which accompanies the grasp of external objects. See below.

are seeing. Reason finds out whom you are seeing by matching the sensory representation with a memory of that person, if you have one, and says that your sensory representation is a representation of Socrates. This is in line with what we read in *Theaet.* Part II. But, then, consider what reason does when it tries to figure out in more detail Socrates' sensible traits, e.g. whether he is pale, and so on: it does not take a look at Socrates "out there", but examines the sensory representation itself. Reason, then, operates exclusively on representations; it never judges external objects, but rather judges their representations in the soul. I will come back to the method used by reason to examine sensory representations. First I would like to give an overview of the passage. Sensory representations seem to provide reason with all it needs for some judgements, e.g. for judging whether Socrates is pale. But there are some other judgements for which reason needs to appeal to "standards" (κανόνες) that are not drawn from sensation, but from *Nous*; these standards, then, are a priori. One of these standards is the standard of the good. Goodness is one of the κοινά, but here Plotinus has in mind a higher concept of goodness than that which is used in sensation when, in tasting a cake, one perceives it as good. It would be tempting to say that this new standard is the form of the good in our intellectual faculty, but Plotinus says that it is "a trace" of *Nous*, and "traces" are always copies or imitations in Plotinus' language. Thus we should conclude that the a priori standards used by reason to form beliefs are not forms, but are what I have called "the rational copies of the forms", i.e. concepts that are at a higher level than those used in sensation, but are at a lower level than the real forms in *Nous*. For Plotinus, the intellectual faculty of the soul contains latent within itself the real forms that constitute *Nous*; it is a potential *Nous* (cf. V.9.[5].13); but reason does not use these forms in formulating beliefs.[44]

As I have said, I will come back later to the method used by reason in examining sensory representations. Let me consider again what sort of examination reason's examination is starting from the following passage,

[44] For soul's possession of forms in Plotinus see Stephen Menn, "Plotinus on the Identity of Knowledge with its Object", *Apeiron*, 34 (2001), pp. 233-246.

where Plotinus introduces the material that is developed in the passage I have just quoted above:

> We could say at once that its [i.e. the soul's] sensitive part is perceptive only of what is external […]; for it perceives the παθήματα in the body by itself, but the reasoning faculty in it makes its evaluation starting from the sensory representations present to it by combining and dividing them (τὸ δ' ἐν αὐτῇ λογιζόμενον παρὰ τῶν ἐκ τῆς αἰσθήσεως φαντασμάτων παρακειμένων τὴν ἐπίκρισιν ποιούμενον καὶ συνάγον καὶ διαιροῦν). (*Enn.*, V.3.[49].2, 2-9; Armstrong, slightly modified).

Here we read that the judgement that "the reasoning faculty" or "reason" (τὸ λογιζόμενον or διάνοια) formulates starting from sensory representations is "an evaluation" (ἐπίκρισις). In light of V.3.[49].3, I take this to mean that reason forms a true belief by evaluating sensory representations. This reference to an "evaluation" is significant because Plotinus has described sensory representations in III.6.[26].4 as "obscure quasi-beliefs", but also as "undecidable" (ἀνεπίκριτοι) representations (see section 1.5.). In the context of the sceptical debates from which Plotinus takes the notion conveyed by the adjective ἀνεπίκριτος, a belief is ἀνεπίκριτος precisely because no ἐπίκρισις, i.e. "evaluation", of its truth is possible. The sceptics appeal to a variety of arguments in order to justify their view that reason seems unable to evaluate the truth of a belief. But the following points are particularly relevant here. If you form the belief that this apple is sweet, the sceptics say, reason cannot evaluate whether it is true or false because it conflicts with other beliefs (e.g. someone else could believe that the apple is not sweet) and there is no non-question-begging criterion to sort out the "disagreement" (διαφωνία). Perhaps reason could sort out the disagreement if it could "reach out" to the apple itself and grasp its nature, but it cannot do this, because it can only rely on sensory reports to find out what is "out there" in the world, and sensory reports are "notoriously" unreliable (Sext. Emp. *Pyrr. hyp.*, II 72). If we read what Plotinus says in V.3.[49].2 against the background of these sceptical observations, it emerges that Plotinus there intends to present an answer to the sceptics. Plotinus, I think, maintains that sensory representations are

"undecidable" only to the extent that we cannot know which of them are true and which are false without a priori standards. But he holds that they are merely "unevaluated" when these a priori standards are taken into account.[45] "Undecidable" in themselves, these φαντασίαι can be evaluated when the soul gains access to the rational copies of the forms. The rational copies of the forms function like standards of truth, against which reason can judge sensory representations so as to form a true belief. The a priori standards used by reason can solve the disagreement of our sensory representations precisely because they are a priori, and thus are not themselves party to the disagreement. At this point, however, someone like Sextus would reply that all that reason can judge and evaluate on this account are sensory reports, from which it follows that reason cannot find out what is the case so as to form a true belief. Sensory reports, Sextus would say, are unreliable, and reason cannot reach beyond them to the object itself. Here, I think, lies the originality of Plotinus' answer to these sceptical observations. Plotinus agrees that sensory reports are unreliable, and that reason cannot "reach out" to sensible things so as to find out what they are, but he nevertheless has a solution. He claims that: 1) there is no point in trying to "reach out" to sensible things because there is no truth to be found in sensible things, since their being is their appearing so and so to someone, 2) truth is to be found in the sensory representations themselves, because these are intelligible things. Sensory reports are unreliable, he maintains, but, if one abandons the view that truth rests on what is the case in the sensible world, those unreliable sensory reports can be tested against a priori standards. Through these standards one can find out whether a sensory report is true or not. Thus reason, for Plotinus, plays the role of a judge in a law-court; the judge cannot know whether the man on trial has committed the burglary or not, he can only judge whether the witnesses' reports are true or false and assess the case according to the rule of law. The originality of Plotinus' answer to the sceptics, I think, lies in the suggestion that truth, properly speaking, can only be predicated of our mental states and their contents, and it is to be found exclusively inside the mind. I say "properly

[45] For ἀνεπίκριτος as meaning both "undecidable" and "unevaluated" see Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones (eds.), *A Greek English Lexicon*, Oxford 1953, *s.v.*

speaking", because for Plotinus there is a sense in which it is true to say that this object in front of me is red. The point is, however, that the truth of this claim rests on "convention": we call that colour "red", and thus it is true to say that it is "red", but this "truth" does not lead one very far into a scientific inquiry.

3.10: *A summary of Plotinus' reading of* Theaet., 184b-187a

Since for Plotinus the claim that knowledge is sensation at 184b is to be developed through premises taken from the ontology and the psychology of the *Timaeus*, and not on the basis of Protagoras' views, I suggest that he takes that claim to introduce a new thesis that is examined in light of premises that Plato accepts as true. Plotinus reads *Theaet.*, 184b-d as Plato's removal of the psychological assumptions that have led Protagoras to fall into *akatalēpsia*, namely, the view that the soul is not a unitary subject of sensation, and the view that sensation is a passive affection. At 185a Plato begins to put forward his own conception of sensation as a judgement of the soul. By removing *akatalēpsia*, Plotinus goes on, and by implicitly relying on the account of sensible qualities in the *Timaeus*, Plato brings back to sensation its cognitive power. Sensation is the topic under discussion up to 185 b 11. There, in Plotinus' view, Plato begins to introduce a new type of cognitive state that is higher than sensation: true belief.

Plotinus examines the argument of the end of Part I in connection with Part II, because he reads Plato's analysis of belief and sensation in Part I in light of the Wax-Block model of the soul of Part II. He uses that model of the soul, with its account of belief formation, to explain the relation between sensation and belief that, in his view, Plato articulates at 186b 11-c 5. The τύποι of the Wax-Block are sensory representations, he says, and reason judges them through "calculations". What is neither in the discussion of the Wax-Block model of the soul nor in Part I is Plotinus' idea that there are a priori standards of truth in the soul. But Plotinus introduces this idea because he takes Plato to be still engaged with scepticism by 186b. Plato, he suggests, wants to show what knowledge is, but he thinks that to show what knowledge

is, he first has to remove all the obstacles against the possibility of its existence. Plato has removed radical *akatalēpsia*, but now that sensory apprehension is back, Plotinus says, and even some rationally warranted beliefs are possible on its basis, he has to show how the conflict of beliefs in which the sceptics remain caught is to be solved. This is a different sceptical challenge to knowledge, one that concerns not any kind of apprehension, but scientific knowledge. For Plotinus, Plato solves the conflict by suggesting that truth is not to be found outside the mind, and by introducing some a priori criteria of truth. This second sceptical challenge begins to be addressed at 186b 11-187a, but occupies Plato throughout Part II.[46]

In Plotinus' view, by the end of Part I Plato discards the thesis that knowledge is sensation, but does so in a peculiar way. Plato, in the *Theaetetus*, says that to know something you need to grasp the truth about it; but to grasp the truth about it, you need to have access to being. Then he argues that, since sensation has no access to being, it cannot grasp the truth about anything, and thus it cannot be knowledge. Finally, he suggests that, since true belief does have access to being and truth, it may be a better candidate for knowledge than sensation. Plotinus, like Cornford, reads Plato as saying that knowledge cannot be sensation because sensation has no access to intelligible being. But, unlike Cornford, he does not identify this intelligible being with the being of forms only. To be sure, real knowledge for Plotinus is knowledge of forms. But to reach truth, in his view, it is not necessary to grasp the real forms in *Nous*. Truth and being, he says, can be reached also in true beliefs, which do not rest on forms nor are completely cut off from them. The reason why belief can reach being and truth, and thus be an appropriate candidate for knowledge, is that, unlike sensation, it deals with beings, i.e. with intelligible items rather than with sensible ones. It is in these intelligible items that reason can find truth with the help of the rational copies of the forms. Knowledge cannot be sensation, then, but nonetheless sensation can be a form of apprehension, not in the sense that it is a part, or a sub-species, or a foundation of knowledge, but in the sense that it is something like knowledge.

[46] That Plotinus reads Part II in this way is not clear yet, but I will argue for this view below.

Now in an influential article that appeared in 1982, Myles Burnyeat has argued that no ancient philosopher ever conceived of truth as "subjective". His main thesis is that in antiquity no philosopher ever thought that mental states could be true, and that truth could be found in the mind.[47] The notion of subjective truth, he goes on, appears for the first time in Augustine, who, in contrast to the Ancients, claims to have knowledge of his own mental states precisely because they are mental states. In contrast to Burnyeat I think that Plotinus does operate with a notion of "subjective truth". Plotinus thinks that truth can only be found if you do not go outside the domain of your mental states, and he reaches this conclusion by working through *Theaet.* Part I. Augustine, it seems to me, takes this notion from Plotinus (either directly or indirectly), and his dependence on Plotinus is shown by the very passage that Burnyeat reads as introducing a notion of "subjective truth": *Contra Academicos* III.11.26. In that passage Augustine is presenting an argument against radical *akatalēpsia*. The sceptic, he says, maintains that there is no apprehension, but when you taste something, you can know through your own palate that it is sweet, and this shows that sensory apprehension is possible, even though it is only an apprehension of how things appear as opposed to an apprehension of their essence. Then he goes on to assimilate his claim to the Cyrenaics' thesis that only πάθη are apprehensible, and to Epicurus' thesis that all sensations are true. There is something aberrant in this conflation of Epicurean and Cyrenaic claims. As I have tried to show, the Cyrenaics (cf. my remarks on Aristocles' reading of the Cyrenaics above) did not claim to know "through their own palate" that something is sweet; in fact, unlike the Epicureans, they did not claim to know that something *is* sweet at all, but at best that it seems sweet. Augustine, I think, is working with "a revised version" of the Cyrenaics' epistemology, which in fact is not Cyrenaic at all. This "revised version", I submit, derives from Plotinus' discussion of the Cyrenaics in connection with the analysis of the second thesis that knowledge is sensation at *Theaet.*, 184b-d. Like Augustine and Descartes after him, Plotinus introduces a version of what Burnyeat calls "subjective truth" as an answer to scepticism.

[47] Myles Burnyeat, "Idealism and Greek Philosophy: What Descartes Saw and Berkeley Missed", *The Philosophical Review*, 91 (1982), pp. 3-40.

3.11. *The direct realist reading of sensory judgement*

Plotinus, then, in my view, builds a theory of sensation that is designed as an answer to radical *akatalēpsia*. I have argued that sensations for him are "obscure" beliefs, that they are not preceded by any kind of passive affection of the soul, and that their contents are relative to a perceiving subject. Let me now consider today's standard interpretation of sensation in Plotinus: the interpretation of Emilsson, which goes back to his 1988 book *Plotinus on Sense-Perception*. Emilsson's reading is something more than merely the standard reading; it is the only fully developed reading of sensation in Plotinus. Not everyone agrees with Emilsson, of course.[48] But there has been no attempt to provide an alternative to his intepretation. Emilsson maintains that Plotinus' account of sensation is in significant ways Aristotelian, that it is a direct realist account, and that it is built by Plotinus with no sceptical challenges in mind.

Emilsson argues that Plotinus' view that sensation is a "judgement" (κρίσις) of the soul should be interpreted in light of a form of direct realism, which he characterizes in terms of "common sense" direct realism.[49] Roughly speaking, this means that Plotinus would share the "commonsensical" view that the objects we are aware of in sensation are, for the most part, just as we take them to be.[50] More precisely, Emilsson maintains that a sensory judgement is formulated directly about sensible objects, and he says that it comes about in two steps. In fairness, Emilsson maintains that these two steps

[48] Those who disagree with Emilsson are but a few, however. For remarks on Plotinus' theory of sensation that point to an idealist interpretation see Lloyd, *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism* op. cit., pp. 136-137; and Rappe, "Self-Knowledge and Subjectivity in the *Enneads*" op. cit. For an interpretation that is to some extent similar to the one I am suggesting, in particular because it takes Plotinus to stand outside the direct-indirect realism distinction see Todd Stuart Ganson, "The Platonic Approach to Sense-Perception", *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 22 (2005), pp. 1-15, esp. p. 10. Emilsson's reading of sensation in Plotinus was meant to contrast with the indirect realist reading offered by Blumenthal, *Plotinus' Psychology* op. cit., pp. 67-72. I take Emilsson's arguments against this indirect realist reading to be conclusive, and it is not clear to me whether Blumenthal's views have still any currency.

[49] Emilsson, *Plotinus on Sense-Perception* op. cit. Although Emilsson speaks of "sense-perception" rather than "sensation", I will always translate αἴσθησις by "sensation", as I have done so far.

[50] Emilsson, *Plotinus on Sense-Perception* op. cit., p. 32.

blend into each other, so to say, because there is continuity between them; but I prefer to isolate them, because this makes it easier to see what he takes Plotinus to say. First step: the perceiving subject experiences a sensible quality (that is objectively present in the world) *via* a sensory affection. A sensory affection, in Emilsson's view, is not a representation or "image" of a sensible thing (in the sense of some kind of mental object standing for sensible things), but is the non-literal affection of an animated sense-organ. He also calls this sensory affection a "phenomenal experience", and he claims that it is purely passive and non-cognitive.[51] Second step: when the perceiving subject has experienced the quality of an object, he judges that object by fitting the quality, in a non-inferential way, into one of the intelligible copies of the forms that his soul contains within itself. These "copies of the forms", in Emilsson's view, are concepts, such as "sky", and, when the subject fits the qualities into them, he formulates a sensory judgement of the kind "The sky is blue".[52] Sensation, then, in Emilsson's reading of Plotinus, is a judgement such as "The sky is blue".

I have already said that I disagree with Emilsson' interpretation of sensible qualities as objective features of sensible objects. As far as I can see, Plotinus is not a direct realist. What I want to focus on is Emilsson's reading of what counts as a sensory judgement. I agree with him that sensations are non inferential judgements for Plotinus, and I also agree with him that what we judge in sensation is the sensible object out there, rather than a representation of it in the soul. But I do not think that for Plotinus a sensory judgement requires a preliminary "phenomenal experience" which is the passive experience of a quality in a sense-organ. I maintain that sensations for Plotinus are "obscure" beliefs, and they are conflicting precisely as the sceptics maintain. The strongest evidence that Emilsson presents in support of

[51] NB: Emilsson often uses "sensory affection" and "phenomenal experience" as synonyms, and so will I.

[52] Cf. Emilsson, *Plotinus on Sense-Perception* op. cit., p. 83. Emilsson also maintains (cf. p. 144), however, that sensory affections are ways in which sensible qualities are present in the sense-organs according to a mode of existence which differs from the one they have in bodies. The "phenomenal experience", for him, is a way in which an organ is "phenomenally coloured, hot" and so on. This claim does not open the door to a form of indirect realism because the sensory affection never becomes the object of the perceptual judgment in Emilsson's view. I examine this point below.

his interpretation of sensory judgement is Plotinus' account of sensory judgement in IV.4.[28].23.

IV.4.[28].23 begins with the claim that sensation is for the soul an "apprehension" (ἀντίληψις),

> in which the soul grasps the quality that approaches bodies and is stamped with their [i.e. bodies'] forms (τὴν προσοῦσαν τοῖς σώμασι ποιότητα συνιείσης καὶ τὰ εἴδη αὐτῶν ἀποματτομένης). (*Enn.*, IV.4.[28].23, 1-4; Armstrong, slightly modified).

Emilsson suggests that, in this passage of IV.4.23, Plotinus draws a distinction between "the grasp of qualities inherent in bodies" and "the soul's marking itself with the forms of bodies".[53] In his view, the soul would first grasp some quality in a "phenomenal experience" or sensory affection; then it would fit this quality into one of the forms that it contains within itself, such as the form of the sky or of human being. Finally, it would formulate a judgement of the type "The sky is blue" and "mark itself" with the form of the sky. But by saying that the soul "is stamped", Plotinus echoes *Tim.*, 50e 8-9, where we read that the receptacle "is stamped" with the copies of the forms.[54] Plotinus takes the receptacle to be matter, as we know, and he relies here on an implicit soul-matter analogy. But now consider where that analogy comes from: III.6.[26].15, where, after having said that matter receives "the copies of the forms" by displaying them while remaining impassible, Plotinus observes the following:

> The reason why matter remains as it is, is as follows: that which enters in no way gains anything from it—nor matter from what enters. In just such a way thoughts and appearances in the soul were not mixed with it (ἀλλ' ὥσπερ αἱ δόξαι καὶ αἱ φαντασίαι ἐν ψυχῇ οὐ κέκρανται), but depart from it, each retaining its own individuality intact, taking nothing, leaving nothing (οὐδὲν ἐφέλκουσα οὐδὲ καταλείπουσα), in that it had not been commixed […]. Here [i.e. in the soul] the representation (φαντασία) is an image, but the soul does not have the nature of an image; although the

[53] Emilsson, *Plotinus on Sense-Perception* op. cit., p. 72.
[54] This is remarked by Henry Blumenthal, "Plotinus Adaptation of Aristotle's Psychology", in R. Baine Harris (ed.), *The Significance of Neoplatonism*, Norfolk 1976, pp. 41-57, esp. p. 47. The idea that qualities somehow "approach" bodies is taken from *Phaed.*, 102d 5-103a 1.

> representation seems to pull the soul in all directions at will, in fact it uses it none the less as if it were matter or something analogous; but since the representation was often driven out by the activities within the soul, it failed to obliterate the soul […]. For the soul has activities and λόγοι within itself that stand in opposition [to the representations] (ἔχει γὰρ ἐν αὐτῇ ἐνεργείας καὶ λόγους ἐναντίους), with which it repels any approach. (*Enn.*, III 6.[26].15, 10-14; Fleet, modified).

The soul, Plotinus explains here, remains impassible in sensation, because its sensory φαντασίαι become present in it in a way analogous to that in which sensible qualities become present in matter. This means that upon seeing a sensible thing, the soul, or rather "the trace" of the soul that dwells in the body, displays the qualities of that thing without being altered. But these sensory representations are the representations that Plotinus describes in III.6.[26].4 as "obscure quasi-beliefs" and "unevaluated representations". That is, they are those conflicting representations of sensible things that Plato, for Plotinus, describes at *Tim.*, 43a ff. The soul gains control over these "obscure" and conflicting beliefs by using the λόγοι that it has latent within itself, which are the rational copies of the forms that reason uses to examine sensations, and to sort out the truth. These rational copies of the forms allow the soul to "dominate" the contents of its sensory representations, rather than being dominated by them (IV.6.[41].2, 1-9, cf. *Tim.*, 44a 7).

Plotinus actually uses Aristotelian material here. More precisely, he uses Aristotle's description of *nous* in *De an.*, III 4. Consider the following passage from *De an.*, III 4:

> If thinking is like perceiving, it must be either a process in which the soul is acted upon by what is capable of being thought, or a process different from but analogous to that. The thinking part of the soul must therefore be, while <u>impassible</u> (ἀπαθές), capable of receiving the form of an object; that is, must be potentially such as (δυνάμει τοιοῦτον) its object without being that object. Thought must be related to what is thinkable, as sense is to what is sensible. Therefore since everything is a possible object of thought, mind in order, as Anaxagoras says, to dominate (ἵνα κρατῇ), that is, to think, must be <u>pure from all admixture</u> (ἀμιγῆ); <u>for the co-presence of what is alien to its nature is a</u>

> hindrance and a block: it follows that it can have no nature of its own, other than that of having a certain capacity. […] It was a good idea to call the soul "the place of forms" (τόπον εἰδῶν), though this description holds only of the thinking soul, and even this is the forms only potentially, not actually. (*De an.*, III 4, 429a 13-29; J.A. Smith, slightly modified).

Inspired by this passage Plotinus claims that:

1) Matter is impassible (ἀπαθής, *Enn.*, III.6.[26].13, 30; *passim*).
2) The λόγοι never mix with matter (οὐ κέκρανται; μὴ ἐμέμικτο, *Enn.*, III.6.[26].15, 11-14).
3) Matter is a "place of forms" (τόπος εἰδῶν, *Enn.*, III.6.[26].13, 19).
4) Matter has no form of its own, because, if it did, this form would prevent the contrary forms from "entering" it (*Enn.*, III.6.[26].10, 1-10).

Then he applies these observations to the soul, so as to explain how sensory representations become present in it without affecting it. However, he also uses an important passage from *De an.*, III 5, I think. In *De an.*, III 5, Aristotle says that the passive *nous*, like matter, is capable of "becoming all things" (πάντα γίνεσθαι) (430a 14-15). Plotinus, I submit, takes this "becoming" to be a way of manifesting sensible qualities analogous to matter's "becoming".

But let us go back to IV.4.[28].23. Emilsson actually grounds his interpretation of the opening lines of IV.4.[28].23 on other two passages in the same chapter. It is necessary to approach them by degrees.

Plotinus explains that the soul being an intelligible thing, it would never be able to grasp by itself a sensible thing. To do this it needs a sense-organ capable of being "assimilated" (ὁμοιωθείς) to sensible qualities.[55] Emilsson explains that the assimilation in question consists in the sense-organ's "taking on" a sensible quality in a sensory affection. By this he does not mean to suggest that the sense-organ literally takes on the quality; rather, he wants to say that the quality becomes present in the animated organ according to a mode of existence that differs from the one it has in bodies.[56]

[55] On the incompatibility between intelligible and sensible natures see Emilsson, *Plotinus on Sense-Perception* op. cit., p. 69.
[56] Emilsson, *Plotinus on Sense-Perception* op. cit., pp. 72; 82-84. Emilsson claims that the eyes, for instance, "take on" a colour only in the sense of becoming "phenomenally coloured", and he points out the following: "By saying that the eyes become phenomenally coloured, I do not wish to imply that the colours that pertain to the eyes are something other than the colours

This account of "assimilation" is based on a reading of Aristotle's notion of "assimilation" as presence of the form in the sense-organ according to a different mode of existence. But I think that Plotinus does not have that notion in mind when he speaks of assimilation. Rather he has in mind *Tim.*, 45c 4, where Plato says that the body of light is οἰκειωθέν. As we have seen in the previous sections there is evidence outside IV.4.[28].23 of Plotinus' engagement with that passage. However, let us see how Plotinus himself introduces the role of sense-organs in sensation:

> There cannot, then, be nothing but these two things, what is outside and the soul, because [the soul] could not be affected at all (ἐπεὶ οὐδ᾽ ἂν πάθοι), but that which will be affected must be a third thing, and this is that which will receive the form (τοῦτο δέ ἐστι τὸ τὴν μορφὴν δεξόμενον). This must be jointly subject to like affections and of one matter with the sense-object, and it must be this [i.e. the sense-organ] which is affected and the other thing [i.e. the soul] which cognizes (συμπαθὲς ἄρα καὶ ὁμοιοπαθὲς δεῖ εἶναι καὶ ὕλης μιᾶς καὶ τὸ μὲν παθεῖν, τὸ δὲ γνῶναι). (*Enn.*, IV.4.[28].23, 19-23; Armstrong, slightly modified).

This is one of the passages on which Emilsson grounds his interpretation of the opening lines of the chapter. He reads ἐπεὶ οὐδ᾽ ἂν πάθοι like Armstrong, that is, as saying that "for the soul would not be affected";[57] but the phrase can be read otherwise, and, since Plotinus maintains that the soul is impassible, I read it as saying: "because the soul could not be affected at all".[58] This translation, it seems to me, is also required by the context. Plotinus says that there cannot be just two things in sensation: the soul and the sensible object, but one needs to introduce a third thing which will be subject to affections ἐπεὶ οὐδ᾽ ἂν πάθοι, i.e. "because the soul could not be affected at all". If the soul were capable of being affected, it is unclear why it would need a third thing to receive affections. But if the soul is not capable of being affected the sense is clear: there must be affections in sensation, and, since the

---

of the things themselves. I am simply alluding to the evident fact that a being capable of vision undergoes experiences of the colours of things that are before his eyes" (p.84).

[57] Emilsson, *Plotinus on Sense-Perception* op. cit., p. 68.

[58] Thus Guiseppe Faggin (ed.), *Plotino.* Enneadi*,* Milano 1996 *ad loc.*; Luc Brisson translates: "Sinon, il ne pourrait y avoir d'affection", see Luc Brisson and Jean-François Pradeau (eds.), *Plotin. Traités* 27-29, Paris 2005 *ad loc.*

soul cannot be subject to them, you need a third thing, i.e. the sense-organ. Thus I can see no sign in this passage of Plotinus' commitment to the existence of affections in the soul that would be preliminary to a sensory judgement. Emilsson identifies this preliminary affection with the μορφή that the sense-organ is said to receive, and it is true that Plotinus says that "the third thing", i.e. the sense-organ, is that "which will be affected" and "that which will receive the form" (τὸ τὴν μορφὴν δεξόμενον).[59] But the locution "to receive the form" is, once again, an echo of the *Timaeus*' receptacle (52d), just as "being stamped" was, and, in the *Timaeus*, "receiving the form" and "being stamped" are just two descriptions of the same thing. To be sure, there is some ambiguity in Plotinus' treatment of the affection of the sense-organ, but it seems to me that it is dispelled in the final lines of the passage, where Plotinus says that the soul in sensation only apprehends, whereas the organ suffers an affection.

However, Emilsson defends his distinction between the reception of a quality in a sensory affection and the sensory judgement by pointing to another passage that comes shortly after the passage quoted above:

> For since it [i.e. the sense-organ] is the "tool" of some kind of cognition it must not be the same either as the cognizing subject or what is going to be cognized, but suitable to be assimilated to each, to what is outside by being affected, and to what is inside by the fact that its affection becomes form (ὄργανον γὰρ ὂν γνώσεώς τινος οὔτε ταὐτὸν δεῖ τῷ γινώσκοντι εἶναι οὔτε τῷ γνωσθησομένῳ, ἐπιτήδειον δὲ ἑκατέρῳ ὁμοιωθῆναι, τῷ μὲν ἔξω διὰ τοῦ παθεῖν, τῷ δὲ ἔἴσω διὰ τοῦ τὸ πάθος αὐτοῦ εἶδος γενέσθαι). (*Enn.*, IV.4.[28].23, 29-32; Armstrong, modified).

Here Emilsson's reading finds stronger grounds, because Plotinus speaks of an affection of the sense-organ that becomes a form in the soul. But I think that Plotinus has to speak of an affection of the organ becoming a form because Plato describes sensation as the transmission of a bodily affection to the soul. Here Plotinus echoes Plato's language. But we have seen how he reinterprets Plato's point by saying that the πάθημα that is transmitted from the body to

[59] Emilsson, *Plotinus on Sense-Perception* op. cit., p. 72.

the soul is in fact a γνῶσις, that is, a form of apprehension (cf. IV.5.[29].1 and section 3.7. above).

> Here is how Plotinus describes sensory judgement:
>
> If, certainly, what we are going to say now is sound, sensations must take place through bodily organs (δι᾽ ὀργάνων σωματικῶν). […] The organ must be either the body as a whole or some member of it set apart for a particular work; an example of the first is touch, of the second, sight. And one can see how the artificial kind of organs [or tools] are intermediaries between those who judge and what they are judging (καὶ τὰ τεχνητὰ δὲ τῶν ὀργάνων ἴδοι τις ἂν μεταξὺ τῶν κρινόντων καὶ τῶν κρινομένων γινόμενα), and inform the judge of the special characteristic of the objects under consideration (καὶ ἀπαγγέλλοντα τῷ κρίνοντι τὴν τῶν ὑποκειμένων ἰδιότητα): for the ruler acts as link between the straightness in the soul and that in the wood (ὁ γὰρ κανὼν τῷ εὐθεῖ τῷ ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ καὶ τῷ ἐν τῷ ξύλῳ συναψάμενος); it has its place between them and enables the craftsman to judge his work (ἐν τῷ μεταξὺ τεθεὶς τὸ κρίνειν τῷ τεχνίτῃ τὸ τεχνητὸν ἔδωκε). (*Enn.*, IV.4.[28].23, 32-43; Armstrong, slightly modified).

A sensory judgement, then, is a judgement that the soul carries on through some bodily organ. The sense-organ functions as a tool—or, more precisely, "as a ruler"—, and the soul uses this tool to judge the characteristics (i.e. the sensible qualities) of an object; precisely as an artisan would use a ruler to judge the straightness of the wood on which he is working. An artisan uses a ruler because he wants to know whether something is straight or not. He has a notion of straightness, and he wants to know whether the wood he is looking at fits it or not. This squares with Plotinus' view that the soul makes an intentional use of the sense-organs. But notice how Plotinus describes the function of a ruler. He says that a ruler "acts as link between the straightness in the soul and that in the wood". Emilsson takes this remark to provide a description of the intermediate nature of the organ and its affection. The sensory affection or "phenomenal experience" is intermediate between the sensible and the intelligible, he says, and the bodily nature of the organ, he goes on, serves as link with the sensible, whereas the soul-power that resides in it provides a link with the intelligible. In this process, which is a continuum

with no break, the quality becomes form. As in the previous passage, I think that Plotinus here tries to accommodate Plato's claim that sensation consists in the transmission of a πάθημα from the body to the soul. It is true that the sense-organ here is said to report the characteristics of a sensible object, but this, I think, does not mean that its affection is communicated to the soul, where it becomes "a phenomenal experience" of the qualities of a sensible object. Rather, the point is to be explained in light of Plotinus' claim in III.6.[26].1 that a sensory judgement "has to do with affections" (i.e. it is περὶ παθήματα) that are in the qualified body. These παθήματα, in forming a continuum with the παθήματα of the sensible object, report the characteristics of the object to the soul, but this does not imply that the soul has to have a "pure", "non-conceptualized", passive experience of its surroundings.

There is one passage outside IV.4.[28].23 that may be taken to mean that a "phenomenal experience" precedes every sensory judgement, and this is in IV.4.[28].8. Plotinus observes that it is unnecessary to store in one's memory everything that one perceives:

> When it makes no difference, or the sensation is of no interest at all for the subject, but has been "moved" involuntarily by the difference in the things seen, it alone suffers this, and the soul does not receive it inside itself (ὅταν γὰρ μηδὲν διαφέρῃ, ἢ μὴ πρὸς αὐτὸν ᾖ ὅλως ἡ αἴσθησις ἀπροαιρέτως τῇ διαφορᾷ τῶν ὁρωμένων κινηθεῖσα, τοῦτο αὐτὴ ἔπαθε μόνη τῆς ψυχῆς οὐ δεξαμένης εἰς τὸ εἴσω) […]. And when the activity of the soul is directed to other things, and it is completely focused on them, it will not hold the memory of the things that have passed by, since it does not even "know the sensation" when they are present (ὅταν δὲ ἡ ἐνέργεια αὐτὴ πρὸς ἄλλοις ᾖ καὶ παντελῶς, οὐκ ἂν ἀνάσχοιτο τῶν τοιούτων παρελθόντων τὴν μνήμην, ὅπου μηδὲ παρόντων γινώσκει τὴν αἴσθησις). Then again, one might understand the point that things which happen altogether incidentally do not necessarily come to be present in the faculty of imagination, and even if they did would not be there in such a way that it would guard and observe them (οὐχ ὥστε καὶ φυλάξαι καὶ παρατηρῆσαι), if one took what was said in the following sense. This is what I mean: if it is never a primary consideration to us in local motion to cut through this piece of air and then that, or, even more, to pass through the air at all,

> there will be no observance (τήρησις) of the air nor any notion (ἔννοια) of it as we walk. (*Enn.*, IV.4.[28].8, 9-19; Armstrong modified).

The first thing to notice, I think, is that Plotinus' point here is epistemological. He speaks of παρατήρησις and τήρησις and of involuntary affections, and these are all technical terms and technical notions of the Empiricist school of medicine.[60] According to the Empiricists, the experiences that we might happen to have, and the affections we are involuntarily subject to can be memorized, and they constitute some of the grounds on which a doctor should rest his practice. The doctor, in their view, should follow the phenomena, and this "observance" (τήρησις or παρατήρησις) of the phenomena should shape his practice. It is against these views that Plotinus argues here. He wants to maintain that what affects us involuntarily, far from becoming a memory, cannot even be perceived, because sensation requires attention. The point is not, of course, that sensations can come about only if one wants to perceive. Rather, the point is that, when you perceive, your mind needs to be actively engaged and focused, so that you cannot find yourself having a memory of something you never paid attention to. Sensible things, naturally, may be the causes that stimulate the attention of the soul. If any chance affection of the body were to be perceived, Plotinus says, we would always perceive the air on our face while we walk. But this is clearly not what happens.

However, Plotinus does say here that sometimes only "sensation" is "moved", and the soul does not receive this sensation within itself. This might be taken to mean that there is some kind of non-conceptualized experience that precedes sensation. But precisely because Plotinus says that the sensation that does not enter the soul is "moved" and "suffers" by "sensation" he has to mean, I think, the affection that takes place in the living body. As this affection depends on the vegetative faculty, it is not something of which we are normally aware. In other words, I think that Plotinus here uses the word "sensation" improperly in respect to his own standards. This is not surprising since, on the Empiricist view that he is criticizing, as on the Cyrenaics' view,

[60] See Richard Walzer and Michael Frede, *Galen. Three Treatises on the Nature of Science*; and Sext. Emp., *Pyrr. hyp.*, I 19-24, and 236-241.

the affection of the living body is itself a sensation.[61] It is to the "sensation" of the Empiricists that Plotinus refers when he speaks of a "sensation" that does not enter the soul. The point is polemical, and it should not be taken to suggest that there is a "phenomenal experience" that precedes sensation, or so I think at least.

There is a final thing that I would like to note concerning Emilsson's interpretation, and it is his reading of the role of "the copies of the forms" in sensation. Emilsson suggests that for Plotinus the concepts we use when we perceive are something like "sky" in the judgement "The sky is blue", and he takes these concepts to be analogous to the κανόνες used by reason in its judgments. One of the passages he points to as evidence for this reading is I.6.[1].3:[62]

> So then the beautiful body (τὸ καλὸν σῶμα) comes into being by sharing in a *logos* which comes from the divine forms. The power ordained for the purpose [i.e. sensation] cognizes it (γινώσκει αὐτό), and there is nothing more effective for judging its own subject-matter, when the rest of the soul judges along with it; or perhaps the rest of the soul too pronounces the judgement by fitting the beautiful body to the form in itself [i.e. in the soul] and using this [i.e. the intelligible form of beauty] for judging beauty as we use a ruler for judging straightness (τάχα δὲ καὶ αὕτη λέγῃ συναρμόττουσα τῷ παρ᾽ αὐτῇ εἴδει κἀκείνῳ πρὸς τὴν κρίσιν χρωμένη ὥσπερ κανόνι τοῦ εὐθέος). (*Enn.*, I.6.[1].2, 27-3, 1-5; Armstrong, slightly modified).

This passage is in many respects obscure and tentative, and it should be developed, I think, in light of V.3.[49].3. However, the way I read it, it says that sensation judges that a certain body is beautiful by grasping its pleasant colours, for instance, or its harmonious shape, and "the rest of the soul", i.e., presumably, the rational soul that is not in the compound, may or may not judge with it, by using as a ruler the rational form of beauty. In IV.4.[28].23, where there is no doubt that Plotinus describes a sensory judgement, he says

[61] Cf. IV.4.[28].19, 26-28, where, to conclude the discussion of the Cyrenaics, Plotinus says: "But, then, the sensation itself is not to be called pain, but cognition of pain".
[62] Emilsson, *Plotinus on Sense-Perception* op. cit., p. 135.

that in a sensory judgement the soul uses the sense-organs as "a ruler", here he says that the soul uses what seem to be a priori notions as "a ruler", but the soul cannot use two different standards that function in the same way, i.e. as "rulers", for a single judgement. Thus, the soul first judges a sensible body by using the sense-organs, and then makes a second judgement by using the rational copy of beauty. The copies of the forms, in my view, are not used as standards in sensation, but are merely applied, and they are not concepts such as "sky" or "man", but such as "same", "different", "being", and "beautiful" that help us organizing the sensible qualities that we perceive into types. As the example of the artisan using a ruler in IV.4.[28].23 shows, the a priori notions that we have in our mind somehow pre-dispose us in certain ways towards sensible things. Thus we would not judge that a body is beautiful if we were not pre-disposed to recognize beauty in bodies by some notion of it that is latent within the soul, and this, I think, is Plotinus' way of developing *Phaed.*, 75e-76a. But we do not use this "beauty" as a standard; if we did our sensations could hardly be "obscure", I think.

3.12. *Criteria of truth*

Thus Plotinus, I think, calls two things "rulers": the sense-organs and what I call "the rational copies of the forms", that is, the representations of the forms used by reason. These copies of the forms and the sense-organs, then, have analogous functions, and they function as criteria for judgements.[63] The rational copies of the forms can be said to be criteria of truth, but since Plotinus believes that truth is not the province of sensation, one would like to know what he means when he presents the sense-organs as criteria. Plotinus employs the notion of "criterion" (κριτήριον) in a broader sense than that in use in the Hellenistic epistemological debates, where "criterion" is a technical term. For him a criterion is a means of judgement that can be used both appropriately and inappropriately, and that, when used inappropriately, leads

[63] Cf. *Tim.*, 65c 7, where Plato calls the "vessels" of the tongue δοκίμια, i.e. "testers"; this word is later used to refer to a criterion of truth (Sext. Emp., *Adv. math.*, VII 430).

one astray. Thus the senses for Plotinus are fallible criteria of judgement, and the same holds for the rational copies of the forms, because through them we can form beliefs that are either true or false. In my view, the entire discussion of sensory judgement and the role of the sense-organs in IV.4.[28].23 is inspired by the Democritean notion of "obscure cognition" (σκοτίη γνώμη, cf. B11 DK). Recall Plotinus' analysis of sensible qualities in III.6.[26].12 (section 1.4). There he appeals to Democritus, and he says that sensible qualities are "by convention", in the sense that we conventionally believe things to be such and such in virtue of the perceptual apparatus we have, whereas in truth they are otherwise, since they are intelligible λόγοι. For Plotinus, I suggest, there is some kind of truth that sensory judgements may have, because, after all, sensations are forms of apprehension. But this truth is "conventional", because it depends on the perceptual apparatus of a group of perceivers, and on the conventional labels a group of speakers applies to certain quality-types. But let me explain why I think that Plotinus is inspired by Democritus, when he says that the sense-organs are "rulers".

Sextus (B11 DK=Sext. Emp., *Adv. math.*, VII 138-139) informs us that ἐν τοῖς Κανόσι, i.e. in his *Canons*, Democritus distinguishes a "bastard cognition" from a "legitimate" one (γνησίη), and he says that Democritus identifies the former with cognition through the senses and the latter with cognition through the mind (διάνοια). It is not clear what exactly Democritus means by "bastard cognition"; but, undoubtedly, this cognition has less cognitive value than that which is reached through the mind. One plausible way to interpret the distinction is to say, perhaps, that whereas the mind strives to grasp the true, imperceptible structure of things, the senses only provide a starting point for the inquiry (cf. Plut. *De comm. not.*, 39, 1079E).[64] Now not only does Plotinus say that sensation is some kind of γνῶσις (cf. IV.4.[28].23, 29-32 above), he also says that sensory φαντασίαι are "obscure" (ἀμυδραί); and σκοτίη, i.e. the adjective used by Democritus to characterize the cognition through the senses can also mean "obscure". But more importantly Plotinus calls both the rational copies of the forms and the

[64] See Lee, *Epistemology After Protagoras* op. cit., p. 231.

sense-organs "rulers". Sextus, as I have mentioned above, says that Democritus wrote a treatise called *Canons*, and this treatise, we think, was about criteria for discovering the truth.[65] It is unclear what counted as a κανών for Democritus. But Sextus' report can be interpreted as suggesting that the κανόνες for Democritus were the mind and the senses. Even if we do not know whether Plotinus read Sextus, it seems to me that he was probably familiar with the things that Sextus says about Democritus' *Canons*. Plotinus takes Democritus' κανόνες to be mind and senses, and he thinks that a "bastard cognition" is reached by means of the senses, and a "legitimate cognition" by means of the mind. Then he reasons that, to be "legitimate", this last kind of cognition has to rely on a criterion that is superior to the senses, and he identifies this criterion with the rational copies of the forms. Finally, he develops Democritus' notion of "bastard cognition" through Sceptic and Stoic reflections on the nature of sensory representations. He takes sensory representations to be confused, but deems them sufficiently reliable for our everyday life, and necessary as a departure point for further inquiry into the nature of things.

However, Plotinus' broad notion of criterion should not be taken as a sign that he is not interested in the Hellenistic debate on the criterion. In fact, when he presents the sense-organs and the rational copies of the forms as "rulers" his goal is precisely that of taking a stand in the debate on the criterion. Sextus, in *Pyrr. hyp.*, II 15 summarizes the terms of that debate by saying that there are three kinds of criteria: there is a criterion "by which" (ὑφ' οὗ) something is judged, the artisan, say; a criterion "by means of which" or "through which" (δι' οὗ), a ruler, say; and a criterion "according to which" (καθ' ὅ), e.g. the application of the ruler. That the Platonists were interested in this distinction among criteria is attested by Alcinous, who, in chapter 4 of the *Didaskalikos*, identifies the criterion "by which" with *nous*, and the criterion "through which" with "natural reason" (λόγος φυσικός).[66] When

[65] See Lee, *Epistemology After Protagoras* op. cit., p. 230.
[66] See Gisela Striker, Κριτήριον τῆς ἀληθείας, in Ead., *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* op. cit., pp. 22-76, esp. p. 69; David Sedley, "Alcinous' Epistemology", in Keimpe Algra, Pieter W. Van der Horst, and David T. Runia (eds.),

Plotinus says that the sense-organs and the rational copies of the forms are "rulers", he wants to say that they are criteria "through which", and he probably says this to oppose Platonists like Alcinous. Consider the following passage from V.3.[49].3:

> For we perceive through sensation (δι᾽ αἰσθήσεως), even if it is we ourselves who are the perceivers:[67] do we then reason like this, and "think-through" like this (καὶ διανοούμεθα οὕτως καὶ διὰ νοοῦμεν οὕτως;)?[68] No, it is we ourselves who reason and we ourselves who think the thoughts that are present to reason; for this is what we ourselves are. (*Enn.*, V.3.[49].3, 32-36).

Plotinus here opposes the view that we could be said to think "through" reason or "through" *Nous*, as if they were our instruments. It is we who think, and we who reason, he claims. Thus instead of taking a faculty of the soul to be a criterion "through which", as Alcinous does, Plotinus takes the standards used by the soul to be a criterion "through which". He operates this change, I submit, because he takes the view that we think "through" reason to presuppose something like the presence of a *homunculus* in our soul. If reason is an instrument, he holds, someone has to use it, but is unclear who could use it. It could be the intellectual faculty of our soul, he goes on, but then it is not easy to see why we make mistakes, if the best part of us uses reason.

Reason and the soul in general are for Plotinus criteria "by which". Recall that in IV.4.[28].23 the soul that judges in sensation is said to play the role of an artisan. At IV.3.[27].3, 22-24, he says that the soul is like a judge. Plotinus' starting point is always the *Theaetetus*, I think, and in particular 185d 3 ff., where Plato says that we perceive "with the soul", τῇ ψυχῇ: Plotinus takes this as a dative of agent, and then elaborates in the following way:

Polyhistor. Studies in the History and Historiography of Ancient Philosophy, Leiden 1996, pp. 300-312.

[67] I do not accept Igal's emendation: Igal inserts a μή, and thus he reads "even if it is *not* we ourselves who are the perceivers", but this is in contrast with Plotinus' view that "we" are the soul-body compound, even if properly speaking we are our rational soul. Cf. IV.4.[28].18. Plotinus has complex views on what counts as "we", and there are various with which "we" can be identified, but we generally are our rational soul or our reason. See Remes, *Plotinus On Self* op. cit.

[68] I do not accept Igal's emendation: Igal reads καὶ διὰ <νοῦ> νοοῦμεν, the point he wants to stress, i.e. that Plotinus plays on etymology here, is sound I think, but since the manuscripts have διανοοῦμεν it is perhaps sufficient to split the word to get the point across.

> What is it that which examined these things (τὸ δὲ ἐπισκεψάμενον περὶ τούτων)? Is it we or our soul? It is we, but "by the soul" (τῇ ψυχῇ). And what do we mean by "by the soul"? Did we examine "by having" it (τῷ ἔχειν)? No, "as soul" (ᾗ ψυχή). (*Enn.*, I.1.[9].13, 1-3).

You can "have" only something that is not your, Plotinus suggests here, but the soul is not other than you; rather the soul is you, and when the soul judges it is you who judges.

Finally, Plotinus identifies what Sextus calls the criterion "according to which" with the forms, i.e. the real forms in *Nous*, which we have latent in our intellectual faculty. This emerges from V.3.[49].3:

> But ought we to go on to say that it [i.e. *Nous*] belongs to soul? But we shall say that it is our *nous*, being different from the reasoning faculty and having gone up on high, but all the same ours, even if we should not count it among the parts of our soul. Or we could say that it is ours and not ours; and this is why we use it and do not use it (διὸ καὶ προσχρώμεθα αὐτῷ καὶ οὐ προσχρώμεθα)—but we always use discursive reason—and it is ours when we use it, but not ours when we do not use it. But what is this "using"? Is it when we become it and speak like it? No, according to it by our rational power that first receives it (κατ᾽ ἐκεῖνο οὖν τῷ λογιστικῷ πρώτῳ δεχομένῳ). (*Enn.*, V.3.[49].3, 22-32; Armstrong, modified)

This passage immediately precedes V.3.[49].3, 32-36 that I have quoted above where Plotinus explains that we do not use reason, but we are soul and reason. The point of V.3.[49].3, 22-32, I take it, is not to show that *Nous* is ultimately not ours, since for Plotinus we can become *Nous*, and the intellectual faculty of our soul is potential *Nous*. As I read it, V.3.[49].3, 22-32 says that when we strive to gain knowledge, although we "have" *Nous*, we are still unable "to use" it consistently. Sometimes we "use" it, and sometimes we do not. What Plotinus means by "using" here is to be explained in light of Aristotle's reinterpretation of the Aviary model of the soul in *Theaet.* Part II. There Plato says that when we form a belief about a non-sensible thing, we might "have" knowledge of that thing, of arithmetic say, but we do not have it "at hand". Aristotle takes "having knowledge" to amount to a dispositional state, and he thinks that "having a piece of knowledge at hand" is like "using" the

knowledge we have. This "using", he maintains, is an actualization of the dispositional state that we have.[69] When Plotinus says that we do not always use *Nous* he means that, despite the fact that we have *Nous* as latent knowledge in the soul, we are not always able to reactivate this knowledge. When we do reactivate it "we speak κατά it", that is, we apply one of the real forms. On this account, the forms are the criterion "according (κατά) to which", and they are the only infallible criterion of truth.

Briefly, then, for Plotinus we are our rational soul, and we judge sensible objects and sensory representations so as to form beliefs that may be either true or false. We are generally not *Nous*; we "have" *Nous* as a dispositional knowledge latent within our soul. But we can become *Nous* by learning how to exercise our latent knowledge by "grasping in our hands" the forms one by one, that is, by reactivating the forms, and by using them in our judgements as our ultimate criteria of truth. This last point, I take is, is also made for the sake of polemics, since, if Sextus is right, the role of criterion "according to which" is ascribed by the Stoics to cataleptic representations.

3.13. *Plotinus' reading of* Theaetetus part II

Let me present a sketch of how I take Plotinus to interpret *Theaet.*, Part II. In *Theaet.* part II, Plato discusses the thesis that knowledge is true belief which he has put forward as a consequence of his examination of sensation at 184b-187a. The thesis is quickly dismissed at the end of part II (200d-201c) with the observation that true beliefs can be second-hand, whereas knowledge must be first-hand. There is a whole art, Socrates says, that indicates that knowledge cannot be true belief: the art of persuasion. Consider the case of a jury that has to decide a case; the lawyers will persuade the jurors to judge in one way or another, and they may persuade them in such a way that they will judge the case correctly. But the jurors will not have knowledge of the facts, because only an eye-witness could have that knowledge. The jurors will evaluate the case on the basis of reports. If they deem those reports to be

[69] See Stephen Menn, "The Origins of Aristotle's Concept of ἐνέργεια: ἐνέργεια and δύναμις", *Ancient Philosophy*, 14 (1994), pp. 73-114.

sound they will judge one way, if they do not find them sound, they will judge in another way. Plato's way of setting out the problem with false belief deserves closer scrutiny. But Socrates puts forward three paradoxes about false belief: you cannot think what is false, he says, if by this you mean knowing what you do not know or not knowing what you know; nor can you think what is false in the sense of thinking "what is not"; nor, finally, can you think what is false in the sense of mistaking things you know for other things you know. As a way out from these paradoxes, Socrates introduces a first model of the soul, the so called Wax-Block model, which is based on the idea that the soul is like a wax-block where sensible objects, in sensation, leave an "imprint" (τύπος). This imprint is a memory that the soul uses to identify sensible objects. If the sensible object is correctly aligned by the soul with its imprint, the judgement of the soul is true, if it is incorrectly aligned, that is, if it is aligned with the imprint left by another object, the judgement is false. This model does provide what is at least a partial solution of the paradoxes about false belief, because it explains false belief in terms of a misidentification of the contents of sensation. Sensations are not accurate, Plato seems to suggest, and thus, in trying to find out what it is that we perceive we might actually arrive at the wrong conclusion. But the Wax-Block model of the soul, despite its virtues, is rejected, because it can explain only mistakes that come about through sensation, and it leaves unexplained the mistakes we make in thinking, when sensation is not engaged, and sensible items are not under scrutiny. Thus a new model of the soul is introduced: the Aviary model. Thoughts, Plato says, are like pieces of knowledge we have acquired through learning. Insofar as we have acquired them we "have" them stored in our mind as birds in an aviary; but we do not always "have" these pieces of knowledge "at hand", and we make a mistake in thinking anytime we grasp a bird-thought in place of another bird-thought, as when, say, we want to know what five plus seven make, and, in place of twelve, we "grab" eleven. However, even this new model of the soul is rejected, and in Part III a new definition of knowledge is put forward: knowledge is true belief plus an account.

Why exactly the account of false belief on the Aviary model fails is a matter of dispute, but Socrates seems to suggest that it is because it leads to a

regress: to assess whether something you know, such as 5, and something else you know, such as 7, make 12 or 11, you would need some further criterion, a further piece of knowledge that you should have acquired somehow, against which you could test the results of your calculations.

The most salient feature of Plotinus' reading of Part II is that he combines the two models of the soul that Socrates introduces. We have seen that he constantly refers to the Wax-Block model in speaking of sensations, because sensations for him are "imprints" in the soul, although he uses "imprint" only as a metaphor for thought. It is because he takes "imprint" to be a metaphor that he can discard Socrates' claim at 195c-d that the Wax-Block model does not apply to thoughts. The Wax-Block, for Plotinus, is only Plato's way to refer to the faculty of representation, and the faculty of representation is the part of the soul that is in charge of sensation. In III.6.[26].15 Plotinus claims that this part of the soul is analogous to the receptacle, and Plato's description of the receptacle may indeed recall his description of the soul as wax-block in the *Theaetetus*.[70] But we have seen in the previous section that Plotinus is of the view that we "have" the forms in our soul, but we do not always use them. I have suggested that this remark should be read in light of Aristotle's interpretation of the Aviary model of the soul, and evidence for this conclusion is to be found in I.1.[53].9, 14 where, in discussing the topic of false belief, Plotinus says that it is possible "to have" (ἔχειν) *Nous,* and not "have it at hand" (μὴ πρόχειρον ἔχειν). I.1.[53].9, 14 shows, I think, that "having" *Nous* and "having it at hand" in Plotinus are ways of referring to our "having" *Nous* as a dispositional state and to our "use" or actualization of *Nous*. Plotinus is aware that the Aviary model seems to lead to a regress, but stops this possible regress by presenting the forms in *Nous* as pieces of knowledge that are ultimate standards of truth, to be identified with some a priori notions that are not acquired through learning, but have always been latent in our immortal soul.

Since sensations are to be examined on the Wax-Block model and the grasp of forms on the Aviary model, the two models of the soul for Plotinus

[70] The receptacle and the wax-block are both called ἐκμαγεῖον (*Theaet.*, 191c 9; *Tim.*, 50c 2); both of them receive τύποι (*Tim.*, 50d 4-6).

are to be linked somehow. What links them together in his view are the faculty of representation and the power that reason has to deal both with sensory representations and with a priori notions. In the background there is always the conception of the soul of the *Timaeus*. In the *Timaeus* the gods organize the human body around two parts of the soul, the rational and the irrational one (70e ff). But they locate in the part of the body where the irrational part "is lodged" a special organ: the liver. The liver acts as a mirror and is stamped with the thoughts coming from "above", that is from *nous*. The gods fashion the liver as a mirror for thoughts in order to establish a contact between rational and irrational soul. They know that the irrational soul does not have the ability to listen to reason directly, but it can be led under reason's control by means of the reflections in the liver. These reflections of thoughts render the irrational soul amenable to reason's rules, but only reason has the power to evaluate and interpret them. Plotinus abandons the myth, and assigns the function of the liver to the faculty of representation. Recall that for him there are two faculties of representation: one is a rational faculty, and the other is an irrational faculty, and they generally operate together, he says. He claims that these faculties are like a mirror (IV.3.[27].30), and he maintains that the rational faculty "reflects" the thoughts that come from *Nous*, which then become present in the irrational faculty as concepts to be applied in sensation.

To conclude, let me examine Plotinus' account of false belief. Plotinus' account of false belief starts from the view that mistakes cannot be explained on the Aviary model: what we "grab" in our hands are the forms in *Nous* for him, and with the forms at hand no one could make mistakes. He seems to maintain that mistakes rest on misidentifications, but he also complicates the account of misidentification that Plato develops through the Wax-Block model. For ease of reference I quote again a passage from V.3.[49].3 which seems most pertinent:

> Well, then, sensation sees a human being and gives its "imprint" to the reasoning faculty (ἔδωκε τὸν τύπον τῇ διανοίᾳ). What does reason say? It will not say anything yet, but only takes notice, and stops at that; unless perhaps it asks itself (πρὸς ἑαυτὴν διαλογίζοιτο) "Who is this?" if it has met the person before, and says, using memory to help it, that it is Socrates. And if it unfolds the details of his form (ἐξελίττοι

> τὴν μορφήν), it divides what the φαντασία gave it; and if it says whether he is good, its remark originates in what it knows through sensation (ἐξ ὧν μὲν ἔγνω διὰ τῆς αἰσθήσεως), but what it says about this it has already from itself, since it has a κανών of the good in itself. How does it have the good in itself? Because it is like the good, and it is strengthened for the sensation of this kind of thing by *Nous* illuminating it: for this is the pure part of the soul and receives the traces (ἴχνη) of *Nous* coming down upon it [i.e. the copies of the forms]. (*Enn.*, V.3.[49].3, 1-12; Armstrong, modified).

The irrational faculty of representation, like the wax-block, receives a sensory representation, and reason identifies it by using a memory that has been acquired through sensation: misidentification is possible, and it accounts for some of the false beliefs we form on the basis of sensation. But there are other kinds of possible mistakes. Plotinus says here that if reason wants to find out something specific about Socrates, that is part of the contents of a sensory report, e.g. whether he is tall, it begins "to divide and combine" those contents. What this means, I take it, is that reason examines the size of various parts of Socrates' body. In so doing it can presumably make mistakes, and judge that Socrates is tall, when in fact he is short. But this is not a mistake that rests on misidentification. Reason can apparently make the same kind of mistake in dealing with thoughts that have not been acquired through sensation. Consider what Plotinus says in V.3.[49].2:

> We could say at once that its [i.e. of the soul] sensitive part is perceptive only of what is external […]; for it perceives the παθήματα in the body by itself, but the reasoning faculty in it makes its evaluation starting from the sensory representations present to it by combining and dividing them (τὸ δ' ἐν αὐτῇ λογιζόμενον παρὰ τῶν ἐκ τῆς αἰσθήσεως φαντασμάτων παρακειμένων τὴν ἐπίκρισιν ποιούμενον καὶ συνάγον καὶ διαιροῦν); and, as for the things which come to it from *Nous*, it observes what one might call their imprints (τύπους), and has the same power [i.e. of judging by combining and dividing] also in respect to them (περὶ τούτους); and it continues to acquire understanding as if by recognizing the new and recently arrived imprints and fitting them to those which have long been within it: this process is what we should call the "recollections" of the soul. (*Enn.*, V.3.[49].2, 2-14; Armstrong, slightly modified).

Reason can "divide" and "combine" also the a priori notions that come to it from *Nous*, and it finds reflected in the rational faculty of representations. Presumably, as it divides and combines those notions it forms beliefs that are pure thoughts, in the sense that their content is not derived from sensory reports. But reason might make mistakes in this process, too, and form a false belief such as that 7+5=11, or that 4 is a prime number.

However, Plotinus seems determined to rest ultimately even the mistakes that are due to a wrong "division" and "combination" on a misidentification. Thus imagine that you want to know whether Socrates is tall, you "divide" and "combine" the contents of a sensory representation of Socrates, you isolate their parts, but finally you need to have a criterion to settle the issue. This criterion is the rational copy of the form or a priori notion of tallness, say, that reason has available. To find out whether Socrates is tall, then, you need to find out whether his tallness is the same or different from the a priori notion of tallness that you possess, and your reason may say that it is the same, when in fact it is not. But also this a priori notion of tallness, apparently, can be "divided" and combined". You might wonder, for instance, what tallness really is, not just the tallness of a man, but tallness in general; and also in order to settle the matter at this more abstract level, you will ultimately need a criterion of tallness. This is the real form in *Nous* that reason can "grab".

The "combining and dividing" to which Plotinus refers is, I think, the process of "going through the elements" described in *Theaet.* Part III. This use of Part III in connection with Part II is not surprising, since we have seen that Plotinus uses the Wax-Block model, which is in Part II, so as to elaborate on the notion of sensation as judgement of the soul that, in his view, is put forward in Part I. Probably he thinks that the account of false belief in part II is too simple, and that one needs to explain how the contents of sensations and of a priori notions can be analyzed, and not merely identified or misidentified. The account of belief in the Aviary, for Plotinus, is in fact an account of how we "grab" a form. But "grabbing a form" is knowledge, because each time we activate our *nous* in fact we "use" or actualize *Nous*. Thus Plotinus, I think, believes that the issue of what knowledge is is settled by the end of Part II, and he infers that the discussion of the third definition of knowledge in Part III is

only there to help the reader have a better understanding of how true and false beliefs are formed.

In any case, ultimately Plotinus discards the thesis that knowledge is true belief for the same reason as Plato's, that is, because true belief can be second-hand, whereas knowledge must be first-hand (cf. V.5.[32].1, 1-6). In fact, Plotinus radicalizes the point, since for him true belief not only *can* be second-hand, but is always second hand, since both sensory reports and rational copies of the soul are merely representations. But the discussion of false belief provides him with the opportunity to present an account of how a scientific inquiry is to be pursued. To summarize, the account is as follows. You have a sensation, which is an "obscure" belief such as "This is white, with a face, and so on". This belief is examined by reason as if it were a judge in a law-court. As a judge, reason cannot evaluate whether the sensible object you see is Socrates by coming to know that object. It can only evaluate the sensory report, and say whether it is correct or not. In daily life reason evaluates sensory reports by matching them to memories, and at best it examines their content by singling out its components. But sometimes the content of a report cannot be dealt with that quickly. If reason wants to know whether Socrates is good or beautiful, for instance, it must start a more serious inquiry. This is because some qualities in a sensory report are "summoners" (*Rep.*, 523a-524e). Consider goodness, for instance; if reason is to find out whether Socrates is good, it will start with a provisional notion of goodness that it has gathered from sensory reports, such as "kind to his parents". But, then, it will begin to examine the notion of "kind to his parents", to separate its content, and to wonder why being kind to one's parents is something good. It will use hypotheses (recall that the λόγοι are reached through hypothesis in III.6.[26].12, see section 1.4), and it will reach a better notion of goodness, that it will have to analyze again in the same way, until it reaches the form of the good itself.

Plotinus spells out what one knows when one "grabs" a form by appealing to Aristotle. A form, he suggests, should be conceived of in the way of a scientific definition. Consider the following passage:

> In reality there in the intelligible there is man and the reason why (διὰ τί) there is man, if the man there must also himself be an intellectual reality, and eye and the reason why there is eye; or they would not be there at all, if the reason why was not. But here below, just as each of the parts is separate, so also is the reason why. But there all are in one, so that the thing and the reason why of the thing are the same. But often here below also the thing and the reason why are the same, as for instance "what is an eclipse". What then prevents each and every thing being its reason why, in the case of the others too, and this being its substance? Rather, this is necessary. (*Enn.*, VI.7.[38].2, 4-14; Armstrong)

This passage is inspired by Aristotle's *Anal. Post.*, II 2, as indicated by the example of the eclipse. There Aristotle explains that to know what something is we need to grasp its scientific definition. A scientific definition is a definition that includes the reason why of the thing defined. Thus, for instance, since the cause of a lunar eclipse is the earth's screening, a lunar eclipse is to be scientifically defined as "privation of light from the moon by the earth's screening". Plotinus endorses Aristotle's point, which is that to know you must know what something is, and to know what something is to articulate its cause into its definition. Hence, he maintains that forms in *Nous* can be viewed as scientific definitions on the Aristotelian model, that is, as definitions that give the reason why of the thing defined.

Like Aristotle, Plotinus believes that to reach a scientific definition we need to embark in an inquiry that starts from the "what it is" (τὸ τί ἐστιν):

> Since everywhere the "what it is" is the starting point, and it is said that those who have defined well know most of the attributes (καὶ τοῖς καλῶς ὁρισαμένοις λέγεται καὶ τῶν συμβεβηκότων τὰ πολλὰ γινώσκεσθαι). (*Enn.*, VI.5.[23].2, 24-26; Armstrong, slightly modified).

This passage is again inspired by Aristotle, for also for Aristotle a scientific inquiry must start from the "what it is".[71] Scientific definitions, Aristotle maintains, are reached starting from nominal definitions. Assume that you are acquainted with something, and you want to know what it is. You first need to have clear in mind what its name means, and, for this to happen, you need to

[71] See Aristot., *Anal. Post.*, II 8-10.

put forward a nominal definition of that thing. A nominal definition gives you a summary account, on which you can subsequently improve. Say that you want to know what thunder is, for instance; you first put forward a nominal, "rough" definition, such as "thunder is noise in the clouds", and then you proceed to find out what the proper, scientific definition is by looking into the cause of thunder. When you have found the scientific definition of thunder you know what thunder is. Plotinus, I think, follows these methodological remarks, insofar as he takes sensory representations to provide reason the information it needs to search for what something is. In sensation, for instance, you may apprehend that this is sweet and granular; reason examines this "obscure" belief, and it tries to figure out what it is that is sweet and granular (cf. *Phil*., 38a). In saying what it is that is sweet and granular, reason puts forward a nominal definition, which is based exclusively on sensory reports ("Sugar is a granular and sweet thing"), but this nominal definition, in some cases, is the starting point of a proper scientific inquiry into the causes of each thing.

Plotinus description of a scientific inquiry reflects the segments of the line in *Rep*., VI: the lowest segment (εἰκασία) is sensation, the second (πίστις) is belief about sensory reports, the third (διάνοια) is belief that examines sensory reports on the basis of rational copies of the forms. The last segment, however, νοῦς, is approached through this process of inquiry, but is only approached. The scientific inquiry of the *Theaetetus* leads you to the forms, but is not an examination of forms. This further examination into the structure of *Nous* will have to be pursued with the *Sophist* at hand. The dialectic of the *Sophist* starts where that of the *Theaetetus* ends. To see what kind of dialectic is pursued in the *Theaetetus* it suffices to read the following passage, I think:

> Why then should one seek to make the soul free from affections (ἀπαθῆ) through philosophy if it is free in the first place? The answer is that the φάνταμα, so to speak, which enters the soul in what we have called its affective part causes the consequent affection, i.e. the disturbance (πάθημα ποιεῖ, τὴν ταραχὴν); […] reason (ὁ λόγος) sought to remove entirely such a thing—the so-called affection—and not to let it occur […]. It is as if someone wanting to remove the apparitions

> presented in dreams (τὰς τῶν ὀνειράτων φαντασίας) were to wake up the soul that is subject to such apparitions […] But what would the purification (ἡ κάθαρσις) of the soul consist in if it was in no way stained? […] Purification would be to leave it alone in isolation, and looking at nothing else (καταλιπεῖν μόνην καὶ μὴ μετ᾽ ἄλλων ἢ μὴ πρὸς ἄλλο βλέπουσαν), having no alien beliefs (δόξας ἀλλοτρίας ἔχουσαν), whatever the nature of these opinions or affections (ὅστις ὁ τρόπος τῶν δοξῶν, ἢ τῶν παθῶν) […]. (*Enn.*, III.6.[26].5, 1-17; Fleet, modified).

The φάντασμα that enters the soul here is the content of a sensory report that enters the faculty of representation, the so-called "affective part of the soul" (III.6.[26].4, 45), and the "affections" that trouble our soul are described a few lines later as "beliefs" (III.6.[26].5, 17). The view that is presented here is that we need to "purify" our soul from false beliefs to allow it to function properly. The soul forms false beliefs when it does not correctly examine sensory reports, but allows them to "take the lead", so to say. Since sensory reports are "obscure" and conflicting, they will tend to produce inconsistent beliefs, and this will be the source of the soul's troubles. Now, the *Theaetetus* is supposed to offer a method that we can use to free ourselves from false beliefs, and to reach the forms. But, once we see that Plotinus describes this method as some kind of "purification", it is just natural to suggest that he identifies it with the "noble sophistry" described as a form of purification from inconsistent beliefs at *Soph.*, 231b. Plotinus, I think, views the "noble sophistry" as a Socratic art, and reads the *Theaetetus* as the place where Plato explained that art and showed its function. Socratic dialectic has the function of bringing our beliefs in line with the forms in *Nous*, of making them consistent by using a priori standards to sort out their conflict.

3.14. *Plotinus and the anonymous commentator on the* Theaetetus

Plotinus' reading of the end of *Theaet.* Part I, and his reading of part II are in line, once again, with the remarks of the anonymous commentator on the *Theaetetus*. The Anonymous says that part I is about refuting the wrong conception of knowledge that Protagoras has. But he does not say that the

refutation of Protagoras' thesis that knowledge is sensation leads to the conclusion that sensation, for Plato, is not knowledge at all. He says that Plato targets Protagoras because he wants to refute "those who had overestimated" the cognitive power of sensations (οἱ τὰς αἰσθήσεις ἐκτετιμηκότες, col. III 7-9). If Plato is only opposed to the overestimation of sensation, in the Anonymous' view, it makes sense to suggest that the Anonymous takes Plato to be in favour of some more modest conception of the cognitive power of sensation. This is all the more likely when we consider that, for the Anonymous, the thesis that knowledge is sensation that is put forward at 184b, is a new thesis. I suggest that, like Plotinus, he takes Plato to elaborate there his own account of sensation, which shows how sensation can be cognitive without being knowledge.

Like Plotinus, in dealing with Protagoras, the Anonymous engages with the Cyrenaics, the Pyrrhonists, and with Democritus' idea that there are two kinds of cognitions, one of which is "bastard", while the other is "legitimate" (col. LXII 33-38).

Again like Plotinus he seems to suggest that in the *Theaetetus* Plato is interested not in knowledge as a structured and systematic science, but in what he calls "simple knowledge" (col. XV), where "simple knowledge" seems to be "a piece of knowledge", the knowledge of a theorem of geometry, say, as opposed to geometry. Finally, analogously to Plotinus, the Anonymous reads the *Theaetetus* as a dialogue that should lead us towards a progressively more refined understanding of what knowledge truly is (col. III 1-29).

The Anonymous, however, shows a tendency which is absent in Plotinus: that of downplaying the threat of scepticism (col. LIV 45-LV 2), which indicates that he probably did not read Part I and II as containing Plato's answer to *akatalēpsia* and to the threat posed to knowledge by the "undecidable" conflict of beliefs the sceptics drew attention to.

Conclusion

To attempt a final assessment of Plotinus' overall reading of the *Theaetetus* I would need to examine in more detail his interpretation of Part II and Part III. But I think that the main lines of this reading can be extracted already from my previous remarks on Part I. Plotinus' reading shares aspects in common with both Burnyeat's and Cornford's. Burnyeat argues that the *Theaetetus* not only presents a dialectical exchange, but also requires the reader to actually engage in a dialectical exercise. Plotinus, it seems, maintains a similar view. For him the *Theaetetus* is the dialogue that has to free our minds from error, and lead us towards the examination of our sensory beliefs; but the dialogue can fulfil this role only if the reader reasons through it together with its characters, and if he engages his own beliefs in the discussion. However, like Cornford, Plotinus reads the *Theaetetus* in light of the psychology and metaphysics of what today are generally considered Plato's later dialogues, and especially in light of the *Timaeus*. Among the modern interpretations of the *Theaetetus*, Plotinus' resembles most of all the "non-aporetic" interpretation by Dorothea Frede, and the "maieutic" interpretation by David Sedley. This comes as no surprise, if we consider that the "maieutic" interpretation is inspired by the views of the anonymous commentator, and that, if I am correct, Plotinus' reading of the dialogue belongs to the same family as that of the Anonymous. Like Sedley, Plotinus holds that the *Theaetetus* is an exercise in Socratic dialectic, but Plotinus views this dialectic as "Socratic" only to some extent. For Sedley it would be a mistake to confuse the voice of Socrates with that of Plato, for Plato deliberately distinguishes the two so as to show that Socrates is "the midwife of Platonism", because Platonism develops and answers his queries. But for Plotinus, I think, the voice that speaks in the dialogue is Plato's, only it is that of a Plato who is concerned to show his readers how, starting from sensation, they can reactivate their latent memories of the forms by examining their inconsistent beliefs. That is, Plotinus takes Plato's dialectic in the *Theaetetus* to be a dialectic for beginners, which differs from the more advanced one of the *Sophist*, which for him studies the relations between the real forms in *Nous*

for Plotinus. As he says in I.3.[20].1, his treatise *On Dialectic*, there are two stages in the path that leads "up there": one leads to the intelligible world from the regions "down here", and the other is for those who are already "up there" and want to proceed. The *Theaetetus*, I suggest, provides guidance through the first stage, by leading its readers to realize that the world is not as it seems, and that it depends on purely intelligible causes that must be grasped through a priori criteria of truth.

Not only does Plotinus find a way to show how Socrates' philosophical method fits into Platonism, he also seems to provide a new way to understand the so-called thesis of The Unity of the Academy. Rather than downplaying the scepticism of the Academics and adopting a cautious attitude towards the core metaphysical commitments of Platonism, so as to establish some kind of continuity throughout the history of the school, Plotinus uses the radical scepticism of the Second Academy in support of his strong metaphysical views. Scepticism, for him, is an important stage in the road towards truth, because it forces you to question your ordinary views about the sensible world and knowledge. You cannot reach truth unless you first free your mind from the obstacles that stand on the way to it. Plotinus, it seems to me, believes that the Academics understood this, and that they carried on this mission on a grand scale by questioning not only their own beliefs but also the philosophical views of other schools. He does not deny that the Academic sceptics were radical sceptics, and he does not want to suggest that Platonism requires one to keep an open mind on all issues. Rather, he wants to say that scepticism is propedeutic to Platonism, which is the only school of thought that has an answer to it, and thus it can make room for it, and even benefit from it, without getting caught in its snares.

In any case, Plotinus' reading of Part I, and especially his anti-Stoic use of the refutation of Protagoras seem to give us more perspective on two issues at least: his conception of sensible things and of sensation. Both of these issues are part of an ongoing debate about Plotinus' general epistemological stance. Since Plotinus often refers to sensible things in terms of "images" or "shadows", and since he maintains that these "shadows" are appearances on "the mirror of matter", some argue that he has to be an idealist, broadly

speaking, because he takes sensible objects to be unreal in themselves and to be something only to the extent that they appear to us. Others, in contrast, suggest that the references to "images" and "shadows" do not reveal that for Plotinus the world is only a series of appearances, because they are to be explained in light of the metaphysics of the λόγοι and of the theory of the double activity. Plotinus, on this view, is a realist, who believes that the world is out there as we perceive it, and that sensible things are "unreal" only to the extent to which they lack the perfect being of forms. When we see that Plotinus' talk of the "shadowy" appearances of sensible objects is meant as a criticism of his opponents' account of the sensible world, and it is not intended to portray his own views, it becomes clear, I think, that he cannot maintain that the sensible world is merely an appearance. But, likewise, when we see that this criticism works only on the assumption that sensible qualities are not objective features of things, but rather are relative to the perceiver, we can no longer maintain, I think, that Plotinus is a realist in the sense that he maintains that sensible things are "out there" just as we perceive them independently of any perceiving subject. By our standards Plotinus is a realist in matters pertaining to sensation, but he does not hold that things are "out there" as we perceive them in an unrestricted way. To be sure, he thinks that fire is hot by nature, but he also maintains that the real *locus* of its heat is its intelligible λόγος, and that heat can be said to be intrinsic to fire only in the sense that it is produced by this λόγος. Only the essential qualities of bodies for Plotinus are intrinsic to the bodies in which they are perceived to inhere. The accidental qualities, though real, are not intrinsic to the bodies in which they are perceived. Plotinus arrives at this curious form of realism by combining his metaphysics of λόγοι with an interpretation of what Plato means by "coming to be" (γίγνεται) in terms of "appearing to be". The sensible world for Plotinus is one where things "seem to be" their forms, in the sense that they manifest in a transitory and relative way the characteristics that their forms have in a stable and intrinsic manner. However, even if Plotinus is not an idealist, if by this we mean the view that sensible things exist only insofar as they are contents of a mind, this does not mean that he could not be an idealist in some other sense. More and more, scholars have begun to point out that

"idealism" can mean many things, and that different thinkers could have arrived at an idealist position through different routes. This attention to idealism, at least in the field of Ancient philosophy, has been stimulated by Burnyeat's remarks on idealism and Greek philosophy, and by his controversial thesis that there is no significant form of idealism in philosophy before Berkeley. Against this thesis it is pointed out that a substantial Greek philosophical tradition, which begins with Aristotle, and to which Plotinus belongs, identifies the highest substance with *Nous*. It is with this tradition, I think, that one needs to engage to assess the issue of Plotinus' idealism. Plotinus thinks that *Nous* is substance and real being, and he even maintains that nature builds the sensible world through contemplation (III.8.[30]). These could be signs of idealism, but they do not lead far, if one conceives of idealism as the view that reality is mental. In Plotinus neither *Nous* nor nature are minds. *Nous* is not a mind because it is a self-subsisting knowledge above minds, and nature is not a mind because, in being irrational, it cannot think in any ordinary sense of the word, whereas minds, I assume, are so called because they think or they have the capacity to do so. A more promising path opens if we think of idealism as the view that reality is in some sense "spiritual", by which I mean that it is and rests on *Geist*, "Spirit" or "Thought". But, also here, one has to examine how this "Thought" fits nature's contemplative but irrational activity. All I want to suggest is that before assessing the issue of whether Plotinus is or is not an idealist we should try to see what it would mean for him to be an idealist. To do this, I think, we need to start by considering his notion of "contemplation" (θεωρία), which he uses to characterize the activity of both that which is above minds (*Nous*) and that which is below them and actually bring about the world (nature). I hope that in future work I will be able to explore these issues in more depth.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

Bouillet M.-N. (ed.), *Les* Ennéades *de Plotin*, Paris 1857-61, 3 Vols.

Bréhier Émile (ed.), *Plotin.* Ennéades, Paris 1924-1938, 7 Vols.

Beutler Rudolf, Harder Richard, and Theiler Willy (eds.), *Plotins Schriften*, Hamburg 1956-71, 6 Vols.

Henry Paul and Schwyzer Hans-Rudolf (eds.), *Plotini opera*, Oxford 1964-82, 3 Vols.

Armstrong A.H. (ed.), *Plotinus. The Enneads*, Cambridge MA, 1966-1988, 7 Vols.

Guiseppe Faggin (ed.), *Plotino.* Enneadi*,* Milano 1996

Kalligas Paul (ed.), ΠΛΩΤΙΝΟΥ ΕΝΝΕΑΔΕΣ, ΑΘΗΝΑΙ, 3 Vols. (to date)

Brisson Luc and Pradeau Jean-François (eds.), *Plotin. Traités*, Paris, 7 Vols. (to date)

OTHER SOURCES

Algra Keimpe, Van der Horst Pieter W., and Runia David T. (eds.), *Polyhistor. Studies in the History and Historiography of Ancient Philosophy*, Leiden 1996

Allen R. E. (ed.), *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, London-New York 1965

— "Aristotle on Substance, Accident, and Plato's Forms", *Phronesis*, 22 (1977), pp. 146-160

— "Aristotle on Inefficient Causes", *Philosophical Quarterly*, 32 (1982), pp. 311-326

— and Barnes Jonathan (eds.), *Sextus Empiricus. Outlines of Scepticism*, Cambridge 1994

Ausland H. W., "On the moral origin of the Pyrrhonian philosophy", *Elenchos*, 10 (1989), pp. 359-434

Baltes Matthias and D'Ancona Cristina, "Plotino, *L'Immortalità dell'anima*. IV 7 [2],8[4]", in Riccardo Chiaradonna (ed.), *Studi Sull'Anima in Plotino*, Napoli 2005, pp. 19-58

Baltes Matthias, *Die Weltentstehung des Platonischen Timaios nach den Antiken Interpreten*, Leiden 1976-78, 2 Vols.

Barnes Jonathan and Mignucci Mario (eds.), *Matter and Metaphysics*, Naples 1988

—"Antiochus of Ascalon" , in Miriam Griffin and Jonathan Barnes (eds.), *Philosophia Togata*, Oxford 1989, pp. 51-96

—"The Beliefs of a Pyrrhonist", in Myles Burnyeat and Michael Frede (eds.), *The Original Sceptics: A Controversy*, Indianapolis 1997, pp. 58-91

Bastianini Guido and Sedley David (eds.), "Commentarium in Platonis *Theaetetum*", in *Corpus dei papiri filosofici greci e latini*, vol. III, Florence 1995, pp. 227-562

Bett Richard, *Pyrrho, his Antecedents, and his Legacy*, Oxford 2000

Blumenthal Henry J., *Plotinus' Psychology*, The Hague 1971

—"Plotinus Adaptation of Aristotle's Psychology", in R. Baine Harris (ed.), *The Significance of Neoplatonism*, Norfolk 1976, pp. 41-57

Bonazzi Mauro, "Un dibattito tra academici e platonici sull'eredità di Platone. La testimonianza del commentario anonimo al *Teeteto*, in *Papiri Filosofici. Miscellanea di studi IV*, Firenze 2003, pp. 41-74

—*Academici e Platonici. Il dibattito antico sullo scetticismo di Platone*, Milan 2003

Boudouris K. J. (ed.), *Hellenistic Philosophy*, Athens 1994, Vol. II

Brennan Tad, *The Stoic Life*, Oxford 2005

Brisson Luc, "Plato's Theory of Sense Perception in the *Timaeus*: How it Works and What it Means", in John J. Cleary and Gary M. Gurtler (eds.), *Proceedings of The Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, 13 (1997), pp. 147-176

—"*Logos* et *logoi* chez Plotin. Leur nature et leur rôle", *Cahiers Philosophiques de Strasbourg*, 8 (1999), pp. 87-108

—"Entre physique et métaphysique. Le terme ὄγκος chez Plotin, dans ses rapports avec la matière (ὕλη) et le corps (σῶμα)", in Michel Fattal (ed.), *Études sur Plotin*, Paris 2000, pp. 87-111

Brittain Charles, *Philo of Larissa: The Last of the Academic Sceptics*, Oxford 2001

—"Middle Platonists on Academic Scepticism", in Robert W. Sharples and Richard Sorabji (eds.), *Greek and Roman Philosophy 100BC-200AD*, London 2007, 2 Vols., Vol. II, pp. 297-316

—"Non-Rational Perception in the Stoics and Augustine", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 22 (2002), pp. 253-308.

Brochard Victor, "Protagore et Démocrite", in Id., *Études de philosophie ancienne*, Paris 1912, pp. 23-33

—*Études de philosophie ancienne*, Paris 1912

Brown Lesley, "Understanding the *Theaetetus*", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 11 (1993), pp. 199-224

Brunschwig Jacques, "La Théorie Stoïcienne du Genre Suprême", in Jonathan Barnes and Mario Mignucci (eds.), *Matter and Metaphysics*, Naples 1988, pp. 19-128

—"Once again on Eusebius on Aristocles on Timon on Pyrrho", in Id., *Papers in Hellenistic Philosophy*, Cambridge 1994, pp. 190-211

—*Papers in Hellenistic Philosophy*, Cambridge 1994, pp. 190-211

Burnyeat Myles, "Plato on the Grammar of Perceiving", *Classical Quarterly*, 26 (1976), pp. 29-51

—"Idealism and Greek Philosophy: What Descartes Saw and Berkeley Missed", *The Philosophical Review*, 91 (1982), pp. 3-40

—*The* Theaetetus *of Plato*, Indianapolis 1990

—and Frede Michael (eds.), *The Original Sceptics: A Controversy*, Indianapolis 1997

Caston Victor, "Why Aristotle needs Imagination", *Phronesis*, 41 (1996), pp. 20-55

—"The Spirit and the Letter: Aristotle on Perception", in Ricardo Salles (ed.), *Metaphysics, Soul, and Ethics in Ancient Thought*, Oxford 2005, pp. 245-320

Chiaradonna Riccardo, *Sostanza, Movimento, Analogia. Plotino critico di Aristotele*, Napoli 2002

—(ed.), *Studi Sull'Anima in Plotino*, Napoli 2005

—and Trabattoni Franco (eds.), *Physics and Philosophy of Nature in Greek Neoplatonism*, Leiden 2009

Chiesara Maria Lorenza, *Aristocles of Messene. Testimonia and Fragments*, Oxford 2001

Cleary John J. and Wians William (eds.), *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, 10 (1994)

—and Gurtler Gary M. (eds.), *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, 13 (1997)

Code Alan, "Aristotle: Essence and Accident" in Richard Grandy and Richard Warner (eds.), *Philosophical Grounds of Rationality*, Oxford 1986, pp. 411-439

Cooper John, "Plato on Sense-Perception and Knowledge", *Phronesis*, 15 (1970), pp. 123-146

Cornford Francis McDonald, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge: The* Theaetetus *and the* Sophist *of Plato translated with a Commentary*, London 1935

Crystal Ian, "Plotinus on the Structure of Self-Intellection", *Phronesis*, 43 (1998), pp. 264-286

D'Ancona Cristina, "Le rapport modèle-image dans la pensée de Plotin", in Daniel De Smet, Meryem Sebti, and Godefroid De Callataÿ (eds.), *Miroir et Savoir*, Leuven 2008, pp. 1-47

De Smet Daniel, Sebti Meryem, and De Callataÿ Godefroid (eds.), *Miroir et Savoir*, Leuven 2008

Decleva Caizzi Fernanda, *Pirrone. Testimonianze*, Napoli 1981

—"La 'materia scorrevole'. Sulle trace di un dibattito perduto", in Barnes and Mignucci (eds.), *Matter and Metaphysics*, Naples 1988, pp. 425-470

Dillon John, *The Middle Platonists*, Ithaca 1996

Emilsson Eyjólfur, *Plotinus on Sense-Perception*, Cambridge 1988

—"Plotinus on the Objects of Thought", *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 77 (1995), pp. 21-41

—"Plotinus and soul-body dualism", in Stephen Everson (ed.), *Companions to Ancient Thought 2: Psychology*, Cambridge 1991, pp. 148-165

—"Cognition and Its Object", in Lloyd P. Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, Cambridge 1996, pp. 217-249

—*Plotinus on Intellect*, Oxford 2007

—"Plotinus on Sense Perception", in Simo Knuuttila and Pekka Kärkkäinen (eds.), *Theories of Perception in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy*, Dordrecht 2008, pp. 22-33

Everson Stephen (ed.), *Companions to Ancient Thought 1: Epistemology*, Cambridge 1990

—(ed.), *Companions to Ancient Thought 2: Psychology*, Cambridge 1991

Fattal Michel (ed.), *Études sur Plotin*, Paris 2000

Fazzo Silvia (ed.), *Alessandro di Afrodisia*. La Provvidenza. Questioni sulla Provvidenza, Bari 1999

Fine Gail, "Protagorean Relativisms", in John J. Cleary and William Wians (eds.), *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, 10 (1994), pp. 211-243

—(ed.), *Plato*, Oxford 2000

—"Subjectivity, Ancient and Modern. The Cyrenaics, Sextus, and Descartes", in Jon Miller and Brad Inwood (eds.), *Hellenistic and Early Modern Philosophy*, Cambridge 2003, pp. 192-231

Fleet Barrie (ed.), *Plotinus.* Ennead III.6. On the Impassivity of the Bodiless, Oxford 1995

Frede Dorothea, "The Soul's Silent Dialogue: A Non-Aporetic Reading of the *Theaetetus*", *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, 35 (1989), pp. 20-49

—"The Philosophical Economy of Plato's Psychology: Rationality and Common Concepts in the *Timaeus*", in Michael Frede and Gisela Striker (eds.), *Rationality in Greek Thought*, Oxford 1996, pp. 29-58

Frede Michael, *Essays in Ancient Philosophy*, Minneapolis 1987

—"Observations on Perception in Plato's Later Dialogues", in Id., *Essays in Ancient Philosophy*, Minneapolis 1987, pp. 3-10

—"Stoics and Skeptics on Clear and Distinct Impressions", in Id. *Essays in Ancient Philosophy*, Minneapolis 1987, pp. 151-176

—"The Original Notion of Cause", in Id., *Essays in Ancient Philosophy*, Minneapolis 1987, pp. 125-150

—"Numenius", *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II 36.2 (1987), 1034-1075

—"Being and Becoming in Plato", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, Suppl. Vol. (1988), pp. 37-52

—"The Stoic Conception of Reason", in K. J. Boudouris (ed.), *Hellenistic Philosophy*, Athens 1994, Vol. II, pp. 50-63

—and Striker Gisela (eds.), *Rationality in Greek Thought*, Oxford 1996

Gallop David (ed.), *Plato. Phaedo*, Oxford 1975

Ganson Todd Stuart, "The Platonic Approach to Sense-Perception", *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 22 (2005), pp. 1-15

Gelzer Thomas, "Plotins Interesse an den Vorsokratikern", *Museum Helveticum*, 39 (1982), pp. 101-131

Genequand Charles, *Alexander of Aphrodisias On the Cosmos*, Leiden 2001

Gentzler Jyl, *Method in Ancient Philosophy*, Oxford 1998

Gerson Lloyd P., *Plotinus*, London 1994

—(ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, Cambridge 1996

Gill Christopher and McCabe Mary Margaret (eds.), *Form and Argument in Late Plato*, Oxford 1996

Gill Mary Louise, *Aristotle On Substance. The Paradox of Unity*, Princeton 1989

Giusta Michelangelo (ed.), *L'opuscolo pseudogalenico* ὅτι αἱ ποιότητες ἀσώματοι, Memorie dell'Accademia delle Scienze di Torino, Classe di Scienze Morali, Storiche e Filologiche, ser. 4a, n. 34, Turin 1976

Glucker John, *Antiochus and the Late Academy*, Göttingen 1978

Göransson Tryggve, *Albinus, Alcinous, Arius Didymus*, Göteborg 1995

Graeser Andreas, *Plotinus and the Stoics. A preliminary Study*, Leiden 1972

Grandy Richard and Warner Richard (eds.), *Philosophical Grounds of Rationality*, Oxford 1986

Griffin Miriam and Barnes Jonathan (eds.), *Philosophia Togata*, Oxford 1989

Hahm David E., *The Origins of Stoic Cosmology*, Ohio 1977

Hankinson R. J., "Natural Criteria and the Transparency of Judgement. Antiochus, Philo and Galen on Epistemological Justification", in Brad Inwood and Jaap Mansfeld (eds.), *Assent and Argument*, Leiden 1997, pp. 161-216

Harris R. Baine (ed.), *The Significance of Neoplatonism*, Norfolk 1976

Henry Paul, "Une comparaison chez Aristote, Alexandre et Plotin", in *Les sources de Plotin. Entretiens Hardt V*, Geneva 1960, pp. 429-444

Hicks R. D. (ed.), *Diogenes Laertius. Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Cambridge MA 1925, 2 Vols.

Inwood Brad and Mansfeld Jaap (eds.), *Assent and Argument*, Leiden 1997

Ioppolo Anna-Maria, "Presentation and Assent: a physical and a cognitive problem in early Stoicism", *Classical Quarterly*, 40 (1990), pp. 433-449

Johansen Thomas K., *Plato's Natural Philosophy*, Cambridge 2004

Kalligas Paul, "*Logos* and the Sensible Object in Plotinus", *Ancient Philosophy*, 17 (1997), pp. 397-410

Keuls Eva C., *Plato and Greek Painting*, Leiden 1978

King Peter (ed.), *Augustine*. Against the Academicians *and* The Teacher, Indianapolis 1995

King Richard, *Aristotle and Plotinus on memory*, Berlin 2006

Knuuttila Simo and Kärkkäinen Pekka (eds.), *Theories of Perception in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy*, Dordrecht 2008

Kupreeva Inna, "Qualities and Bodies": Alexander against the Stoics", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 25 (2003), pp. 297-344

—"Alexander of Aphrodisias on Mixture and Growth", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 27 (2004), pp. 297-329

Lee Mi-Kyoung, *Epistemology After Protagoras*, Oxford 2005

Liddell Henry George, Scott Robert, and Jones Henry Stuart (eds.), *A Greek English Lexicon*, Oxford 1953

Lloyd A. C., "Neoplatonic logic and Aristotelian logic-I", *Phronesis*, 1 (1955-1956), pp. 58-72

—"Plotinus on the Genesis of Thought and Existence", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 5 (1987), pp. 155-186

—*The Anatomy of Neoplatonism*, Oxford 1990

Long A. A., "Aristotle and the History of Greek Scepticism", in Dominic O'Meara (ed.), *Studies in Aristotle*, Whashington, DC, 1981, pp. 79-106

—and Sedley David, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, Cambridge 1987, 2 Vols.

Mann Wolfgang-Rainer, *The Discovery of Things*, Princeton 2000

Mansfeld Jaap, "Two Attributions", *Classical Quarterly*, 41 (1991), pp. 541-544

Marzolo Carlo (ed.), *Plotino.* Che cos'è l'essere vivente e che cos'è l'uomo? I 1[53], Prefazione di Cristina D'Ancona Pisa 2006

Menn Stephen, "The Origins of Aristotle's Concept of ἐνέργεια: ἐνέργεια and δύναμις", *Ancient Philosophy*, 14 (1994), pp. 73-114

—*Plato on God as* Nous, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* Monograph Series, Carbondale 1995

—*Descartes and Augustine*, Cambridge 1998

—"The Stoic Theory of Categories", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 17 (1999), pp. 215-247

—"Plotinus on the Identity of Knowledge with its Object", *Apeiron*, 34 (2001), pp. 233-246

—"Aristotle's Definition of Soul and the Programme of the *De anima*", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 22 (2002), pp. 83-139

—"Plato and the Method of Analysis", *Phronesis*, 47 (2002), pp. 193-223

Mignucci Mario, "The Stoic Notion of Relatives", in Barnes and Mignucci (eds.), *Matter and Metaphysics*, Naples 1988, pp. 129-222

Miller Jon and Inwood Brad (eds.), *Hellenistic and Early Modern Philosophy*, Cambridge 2003

Modrak Deborah, "Perception and Judgment in the *Theaetetus*", *Phronesis*, 26 (1981), pp. 35-54

Moraux Paul, *Der Aristotelismus bei den Griechen*, Berlin 1973-2001, 3 Vols.

Morel Pierre-Marie, *Démocrite et la recherche des causes*, Paris 1996

Morrison Donald, "The Taxonomical Interpretation of Aristotle's *Categories*", in Anthony Preus and John P. Anton, *Essays in Ancient greek Philosophy V: Aristotle's Ontology*, Albany 1992, pp. 19-46

Morrow Glenn, "Necessity and Persuasion in Plato's Metaphysics", in R. E. Allen (ed.), *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, London-New York 1965, pp. 421-437

Mueller Ian, "Platonism and the Study of Nature" (*Phaedo* 95e ff.)", in Jyl Gentzler, *Method in Ancient Philosophy*, Oxford 1998, pp. 67-89

Natorp Paul, "Aristipp in Platons Theätet", *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 3 (1890), pp. 347-362

Nehamas Alexander, "Predications and Forms of Opposites in the *Phaedo*", *Review of Metaphysics*, 26 (1972-3), pp. 482-90

O'Brien Denis, *Theories of Weight in the Ancient World*, 2 Vols., Leiden 1984

—"Plotinus on Matter and Evil", in Lloyd P. Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, Cambridge 1996, pp. 171-195

O'Meara Dominic (ed.), *Studies in Aristotle*, Whashington, DC, 1981

—(ed.), *Platonic Investigations*, Washington, D.C., 1985, vol. 13

—"Plotinus on How Soul Acts on Body", in Id. (ed.), *Platonic Investigations*, Washington, D.C., 1985, vol. 13, pp. 247-262

—"The hierarchical ordering of reality in Plotinus", in Lloyd P. Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, Cambridge 1996, pp. 66-81

—"Scepticism and Ineffability in Plotinus", *Phronesis*, 45 (2000), pp. 240-251

Opsomer Jan, *In Search of the Truth: Academic Tendencies in Middle Platonism*, Brussels 1998

Orth E., "Les œuvres d'Albinos le Platonicien", *L'Antiquité Classique*, 16 (1947), pp. 113-114

Owen G. E. L., *Aristotle on Dialectic*, Oxford 1968

—"Dialectic and Eristic in the Treatment of the Forms", in Id. (ed.), *Aristotle on Dialectic*, Oxford 1968, pp. 103-125

Patterson Richard, *Image and Reality in Plato's Metaphysics*, Indianapolis 1985

Preus Anthony and Anton John P., *Essays in Ancient greek Philosophy V: Aristotle's Ontology*, Albany 1992

Rappe Sara, "Self-knowledge and subjectivity in the *Enneads*", in Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, Cambridge 1996, pp. 250-274

—"Scepticism in the Sixth Century? Damascius' *Doubts and Solutions Concerning First Principles*", *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 36 (1998), pp. 337-363

Rashed Marwan (ed.), Aristote, *De la Génération et de la Corruption*, Paris 2005

Remes Pauliina, *Plotinus on Self. The Philosophy of the "We"*, Cambridge 2007

Rutten Christian, "La doctrine de deux actes dans la philosophie de Plotin", *Revue Philosophique*, 81 (1956), pp. 100-106

Salles Ricardo (ed.), *Metaphysics, Soul, and Ethics in Ancient Thought*, Oxford 2005

Scharle Margaret, "Elemental Teleology in Aristotle's *Physics* 2.8", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 34 (2008), pp. 147-183

Sedley David, "The Stoic Criterion of Identity", *Phronesis*, 27 (1982), pp. 255-275

—"Sextus Empiricus and the Atomists' Criteria of Truth", *Elenchos*, 13 (1992), pp. 19-56

—"Alcinous' Epistemology", in Keimpe Algra, Pieter W. Van der Horst, and David T. Runia (eds.), *Polyhistor. Studies in the History and Historiography of Ancient Philosophy*, Leiden 1996, pp. 300-312

—"Three Platonist Interpretations of the *Theaetetus*", in Christopher Gill and Mary Margaret McCabe (eds.), *Form and Argument in Late Plato*, Oxford 1996, pp. 79-103

—"A New Reading in the Anonymous 'Theaetetus' Commentary (PBerol. 9782 Fragment D)" in *Papiri filosofici: Miscellanea di studi*, vol. I, Florence 1997, pp. 139-144

—"Platonic Causes", *Phronesis*, 43 (1998), pp. 114-132

—*The Midwife of Platonism*, Oxford 2004

—*Creationism and Its Critics in Antiquity*, Berkeley 2007

Sharples Robert W. and Sorabji Richard (eds.), *Greek and Roman Philosophy 100BC-200AD*, London 2007, 2 Vols.

Sorabji Richard, *Matter, Space, & Motion*, Ithaca 1988

Stamatellos Giannis, *Plotinus and the Presocratics*, Albany 2007

Stopper M. R., "Schizzi Pirroniani", *Phronesis*, 28 (1983), pp. 265-297

Strange Steven, "The Double Explanation in the *Timaeus*", in Gail Fine (ed.), *Plato*, Oxford 2000, pp. 399-417

Striker Gisela, *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics*, Cambridge 1996

—"The Ten Tropes of Aenesidemus", in Ead., *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics*, Cambridge 1996, pp. 116-134

—Κριτήριον τῆς ἀληθείας, in Ead., *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics*, Cambridge 1996, pp. 22-76

Tarrant Harold, *Scepticism or Platonism? The Philosophy of the Fourth Academy*, Cambridge 1985

—*Plato's First Intepreters*, Ithaca 2000

Taylor A.E., *A Commentary on Plato's* Timaeus, Oxford 1928

Taylor C. C. W. (ed.), *The Atomists: Leucippus and Democritus. Fragments*, Toronto 1999

Todd Robert B., "The Author of the *de qualitatibus incorporeis*: If Not Albinos, Who?", *L'Antiquité Classique*, 46 (1977), pp. 198-204

Tsouna Voula, *The Epistemology of the Cyrenaic School*, Cambridge 1998

Vlastos Gregory, *Platonic Studies*, Princeton 1981

—"Reasons and Causes in the *Phaedo*", in Id., *Platonic Studies*, Princeton 1981, pp. 76-110

—"The 'Two-Level Paradoxes' in Aristotle", in Id., *Platonic Studies*, Princeton 1981, pp. 323-334

Wagner Michael F., "Plotinus on the nature of physical reality", in Lloyd P. Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, Cambridge 1996, pp. 130-170

Wallis R. T., "Scepticism and Neoplatonism", *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II 36.2 (1987), pp. 911-954

Walzer Richard and Frede Michael, *Galen. Three Treatises on the Nature of Science*, Indianapolis 1985

Westenberger Joannes, *Galeni qui fertur de qualitatibus incorporeis libellus*, Diss., Marpurgi Cattorum 1906

White F. C., "Particulars in *Phaedo*, 95e-107a", *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* Suppl. Vol. 2 (1976), pp. 129-147

Wilberding James, *Plotinus' Cosmology: A Study of* Ennead II.1.(40), Oxford 2006

—"Plotinus and Porphyry on the Seed", *Phronesis*, 53 (2008), pp. 406-432

Wildberg Christian, "A World of Thoughts: Plotinus on Nature and Contemplation", in Riccardo Chiaradonna and Franco Trabattoni (eds.), *Physics and Philosophy of Nature in Greek Neoplatonism*, Leiden 2009, pp. 121-143

Williams C. J. F. (ed.), *Aristotle's De Generatione et Corruptione*, Oxford 1982