

eliminated from them all suggestion of duration, succession, change without decay, and history, that they would hardly be recognizable as accounts of life at all, and certainly not of the fullest and most perfect life.

#### CONCLUSION

My conclusion, then, is that the accounts which Plotinus gives of the eternal life of Intellect are not fully consistent or coherent, and in particular that he is not always successful in confining his descriptions of it within the limits imposed by the concept of non-durational eternity, on which he so strongly insists. He is, perhaps we may say, a very Plotinian soul who both wants and does not want to have everything all together at once. In general he tries to pack too much and too varied a content of tradition and experience into his account of his Second Hypostasis for consistency. This may be the reason why none of his successors, pagan or Christian, could take over his doctrine of Intellect simply as they found it. Our survey of the variety of his accounts raises some important questions for discussion: first about the reasons, traditional and personal, which led Plotinus to try to combine the idea of a life which, just because it is life at its most intense, must be presented as moving and changing both in relation to its source and within itself with the concept of non-durational eternity; and then the very much larger question, perhaps too large for appropriate discussion here, whether non-durational eternity is a concept which can be usefully employed in any philosophical or theological context.<sup>1</sup>

(1) The discussion of eternity as *Nunc Stans* in the chapter on *Time* in Edwyn Bevan's Gifford lectures *Symbolism and Belief* (first published London, 1938; reprinted in the Fontana Library, London, 1962) is relevant here. Bevan's tentative conclusion (p. 90) is that 'it would seem an inappropriate conception for the eternal life of the blessed and an even less happy symbol for the unimaginable life of God than Royce's idea of a specious present.'

#### ELEMENTS IN THE THOUGHT OF PLOTINUS AT VARIANCE WITH CLASSICAL INTELLECTUALISM

PLOTINUS is, up to a point, a classical intellectualist in the manner of Aristotle, and, he would himself have certainly thought, of Plato. He professes, that is, to give an account of everything that is in any degree real in the universe (and even a kind of account of the unreal) which is certainly and unchangingly true and can be demonstrated to be so by rational processes. This account culminates in the description of an eternal realm of intelligible intellect which can be (and indeed really always is) our own, certainly and impermutably possessed. This systematic account of reality, as is well known, breaks down, and we have to break out of it, in a very startling way at the top. Beyond the Platonic-Aristotelian Intellect-Intelligible, the world of real being which is *Noûs* and *νοητά*, lies the One or Good beyond being, which is neither intelligent nor intelligible. When we have completed our understanding of reality, we have to leave it all behind in order to find what turns out to be the only thing we want, the source of all values and the goal of all desire, which alone makes it worth the effort to attain to *Noûs* on the way, as it is the only reason why *Noûs* is there at all. I find the phrase . . . τὸ ἐπέκεινα αὐτοῦ ὄντιον χάριν καὶ οἱ πρόσθεν λόγοι which marks the transition from *Noûs* to the One in Chapter 9 of the treatise *On Contemplation* (iii 8[30]) rather significant. Certainly in what the Germans now call the *Grossschrift*<sup>1</sup> and in the closely related treatise written a year or two later, *On How the Multitude of the Forms came into being and On the Good*,<sup>2</sup> the great elaborate descriptions of the intelligible world seem to be designed to lead us to a point from which the indescribable One can be indicated. Plotinus, however, normally presents the knowledge that the One is there as attainable partly, though not wholly, by an intellectual process; we find, when we think things out to the end, that we must go beyond the duality of thought and object of thought and the plurality of Ideas to the ultimate unity from which the double-sided, structured, finite perfection of the ultimate intelligible proceeds: though it is something else than a mere desire to carry a logical process to its end which drives us on.

I propose here to consider some odd aspects of Plotinus' thought about thinking at all levels which fit badly with the classical intellectualism to which, at all levels below the highest, he consciously aspired, and which reveal in him a temper of mind very different from that of Aristotle, or of the side of Plato in which most philosophers (though not all theologians) have been interested in modern times. I shall make no attempt to link these aspects into a sort of anti-intellectualist system, which would be both absurd and unhistorical, and I shall not conceal the fact that I think that Plotinus would be, probably, very annoyed with me for writing about him like this. He might even have decided, if he had read this paper, that he ought to have done more about revising his writings, and to have removed some passages which I find particularly interesting as liable to misunderstanding and likely to start undesirable trains of thought in the minds of barbarian readers; for I do not want, either, to conceal my opinion that if you lay some emphasis on these odd aspects of Plotinus' thinking you may arrive at an account of what goes on in the human mind (at least in my mind) and of what it may discover in the world a good deal more adequate, and a good deal more adaptable and flexible, than the classical intellectualist systems or the various reductionist, no-nonsense, clear and coherent accounts which have generally superseded them in our own time.

In writing this paper I have realised yet again how much I, like many others, have been helped to understand Plotinus by the all too brief, but always illuminating, remarks which E. R. Dodds has from time to time made upon him. I owe a great deal, in particular, to

<sup>1</sup> iii 8 [30], v 8 [31], v 5 [32], ii 9 [33].

<sup>2</sup> vi 7 [38].

Section IV of his paper *Tradition and Personal Achievement in the Philosophy of Plotinus*,<sup>3</sup> and what I shall say about the first topic which I propose to discuss is little more than a paraphrase of the first paragraph of this (pp. 5-6). Dodds begins it by saying 'This self-exploration is the heart of Plotinism, and it is in the analysis of the Self that he made his most original discoveries.' I do not propose to discuss here the very difficult questions that arise from Dodds's description of the first of these discoveries, that of 'the vital distinction between the total personality (*ψυχή*) and the ego-consciousness (*ἡμείς*)' (I have some doubts about both these English translations). But Dodds is undoubtedly right in saying that the Psyche is for Plotinus 'as Plato put it (*Timaeus* 90A) like a tree growing upside down, whose roots are in Heaven, but whose branches extend down into a physical body; its experience ranges through the entire gamut of Being, from the negative darkness of matter to the divine darkness of the One; that it is a continuum; and that we are never conscious of some parts of it at all. Plotinus, in fact, as Dodds points out, had discovered the unconscious. We (and still more whales) have sensations of which we are unconscious (iv 4 [28] 8; iv 1 [10] 12): we can have unconscious desires (iv 8 [6] 8): and unconscious dispositions resulting from previous experiences, which may affect us much more powerfully than those of which we are conscious (iv 4 [28] 4). Dodds rightly stresses the importance of this anticipation of Freud. And it may be interesting to move at once higher up the continuum of the Plotinian Psyche and consider another passage in which Plotinus seems to me to approximate (though only to approximate) to Polanyi's doctrine of tacit knowledge. The passage is in iv 9 [8] 5, and Plotinus is explaining the (to me rather dubious) doctrine, to which he often adverts, that the whole of an *ἐπιστήμη* ('science' or body of knowledge or discipline) is present in each of its parts. This is my translation of what he says:

But someone might say that in knowledge the part is not a whole. Now there too that which has been brought into readiness (*τὸ προχειρισθέν*) because it is needed is a part, and this part is put in front, but the other parts follow as unnoticed possibilities, and all are in the part [which is brought forward]. And perhaps this is the meaning of 'whole' and 'part' here: there [in the whole body of knowledge] all the parts are in a way actual at once: so each one which you wish to bring forward for use is ready: but in the part only that which is ready for use is actual: but it is given power by a kind of approach to the whole. But one must not think of it as isolated from all other rational speculations: if one does, it will no longer be according to art or knowledge, but just as if a child was talking.

This is only an approximation to the idea of 'tacit knowledge', because Plotinus is still operating, naturally enough, with a rather Aristotelian conception of an *ἐπιστήμη* as a static, complete, finished structure. And he does go on in the following lines to speak of the possibility of what seems to be a complete, conscious, explication of an *ἐπιστήμη*, using the example of geometrical analysis. But he concludes the chapter by saying 'But we do not believe this because of our weakness, and it is obscured by the body: but There [in the intelligible world] all and each shine out.' So it does not look as if he thought that the complete, conscious possession of a fully articulated body of knowledge was the normal sort of human knowing here below. In any case it is interesting that he observed that the *τεχνικός* or *ἐπιστημονικός* has a great deal in his mind besides what at any one time he can consciously advert to, and that he can only use what he has ready to hand competently and intelligently because all the rest is there. I wonder whether the 'child talking' of his example could possibly be one of his wards whose lessons he used to hear,<sup>4</sup> who would often recite statements learnt by heart which they could not explain or relate to anything else because there was not yet enough *δυνάμει λαμβάνοντα* in their minds to enable them to do so.

<sup>3</sup> *JRS* 1 (1960) 1-7.

<sup>4</sup> *Life* ch. 9.

Plotinus was a noticing sort of philosopher and, it seems, one of the most important things which he noticed was that there was a great deal in our selves and their experiences which we did not and sometimes could not notice, and that these unnoticed components were not at all insignificant. This leads us to consider what for him was a much more important area of the normally unnoticeable, the domain of what we might call the 'super-conscious'. Plotinus' thought about consciousness and its importance is unusual and rather disconcerting. (There is a brief but interesting discussion of it by Dodds with references to a possible Aristotelian background, in the article already cited, p. 6). The doctrine is one which he seems to have held consistently: it is stated in an early, a middle, and a late treatise (iv 8 [6] 8; iv 3 [27] 30, cp. iv 4 [28] 2-4 which is part of the same discussion of memory; i 4 [46] 9-10). It is that consciousness, in the sense of being aware that we are thinking, that anything is going on in our minds, is an epiphenomenon, secondary and relatively unimportant. We should perhaps note at this point (it will be discussed more later) that any sort of programming of our thought (and action) and deciding what we are going to think about (and do) is excluded by Plotinus not only from the activity of the divine mind but from that of the human mind at its highest. I think that the *ἀντιλήψις* which he regards as secondary and unimportant is something more than what we usually mean by 'self-consciousness'; though the examples which he gives from ordinary life at the end of i 4.10 are examples of activities which will be hindered if we stop to think (it seems to be implied, with a certain complacency) that it is we who are doing them, like reading or acting courageously. Plotinus here does seem to be suggesting that if, when I am reading the *Enneads*, I keep on saying to myself 'I am reading the *Enneads* (how clever of me!)' my concentration on and understanding of the Platonic philosophy will be impaired, and if when on active service I advert consciously to the fact that I am leading my troops into battle (how brave of me!) both my virtue and my military efficiency will be diminished. So I think that we can say he is talking here about what we mean by 'self-consciousness'. But through most of chapters 9-10 he is contemplating with perfect equanimity the possibility that the sage may be deprived by disease or magic arts (probably including the administration of drugs) of anything which we could call consciousness in any sense at all, and saying that he will be none the less a sage for that and his well-being will not be diminished. It is in this connection that he expounds the doctrine which we find in all the passages cited that consciousness depends on the penetration of our thinking to the lower part of our psyche which is intimately connected with the body, and this may distort it, or may be unable to receive it at all, as the result of some disturbance or defect of a bodily organ or our whole physical make-up. In iv 3.30 he suggests interestingly that we can only remember our thoughts when the *λόγος* which accompanies the *νοήματα* gets into our (more or less Aristotelian) *φανταστικόν*:<sup>5</sup> and memory, as becomes clear in the later course of this discussion, is not very important and disappears altogether in our higher states when we are fully concentrated in the intelligible world. It seems, then, that our brains may stop working completely and we shall be none the worse philosophers for that: and that the clear formulation, conceptualisation and verbal expression of our primary non-discursive thoughts (all this may be implied in the phrase *τοῦ λόγου τοῦ τῷ νοήματι παρακολουθοῦντος* iv 3.30, 6) is a secondary and not really very important part of our philosophical activity. Of course the ability to communicate our thoughts to others depends upon it. But though Plotinus thought it an absolute duty to communicate his philosophy to others and convince them rationally of its truth, as his life and writings show clearly, the essential of the philosophic life lay for him not in communication but in contemplation. One should communicate with others as long as one can: when one cannot any more, one should be happy to be relieved of the necessity. This startling doctrine that consciousness is secondary and

<sup>5</sup> The passage from iv 4.4 already cited makes it clear that 'superconscious' dispositions are even more powerful than 'subconscious' ones in making us be what we do not know.

unimportant provides Plotinus' answer in advance to the later Neoplatonists who said that his doctrine that part of us never 'comes down', but always remains in the intelligible, was contrary to the observed facts of human experience. They said<sup>6</sup> 'It is obvious that we are not always in a state of unbroken divine intellection': but Plotinus would have replied, 'Why should you expect to be conscious, except intermittently, of your true, eternal self? Of course we should try to be so as far as we can, but whether we are or not depends to a great extent (like everything else in what most people regard as normal human life and thinking) on circumstances beyond our control, and it is not really very important.' The same way of thinking would have enabled him to remain quite unperturbed if a materialist had pointed out to him that by the administration of the appropriate drug he could change his whole personality and style of thinking, or stop him thinking at all.

We have so far been looking at some of the more original things which Plotinus has to say about the human mind: and, on this evidence, he is already beginning to look a very odd sort of classical intellectualist—or perhaps an unusually observant and consistent one. We must now turn to consider some of his stranger observations about the Divine Intellect (*Noûs*). It would be paradoxical, but perhaps not entirely untrue to the thought of Plotinus, to say that Divine Intellect for him is sometimes remarkably 'unintellectual', just as the One is not one in any sense which we can understand.<sup>7</sup> By 'unintellectual' I mean that, in these odder passages of the *Enneads* which I am going to consider, *Noûs* does not behave at all like the normal conception of a 'pure intellect', that is, I suppose, a kind of disembodied paradigm of the perfect metaphysical philosopher. Aristotle's god has been accused of being rather like Aristotle. I suppose one might say that the *Noûs* of Plotinus is rather like Plotinus. But, if this is so, one must say that in some ways Plotinus was much more like the romantic poets and painters some of whom he so deeply influenced than he was like an academic philosopher. Of course I am not trying to give an account here of the whole of his teaching about the Divine Intellect. I am merely trying to present the stranger and more original elements in it, not always, perhaps, consistent with others, which have been responsible for a great deal of his wide-ranging influence. The first point which I want to discuss is the rejection by Plotinus of the 'artisan' concept of creation: the concept, that is, which results from a literal interpretation of the *Timaeus*, in which the maker of the physical universe either has eternally before him or deliberately forms a detailed intelligible plan which he then proceeds to carry out. This Plotinus deliberately rejects.<sup>8</sup> I do not propose to go into the long development of thought which lies behind his rejection. It has been interestingly discussed by J. Pépin in his *Théologie cosmique et théologie chrétienne* (Paris, 1964) and there may be more to be discovered about it. What concerns us here is the more important part of Plotinus' conception of 'non-artisanal' creation (the less important part is his contemptuous rejection of the stock Epicurean objection, 'Where did God get his construction machinery from?'). His divine intellect is not just an abstract intelligible structure or pattern; it is, as we shall see, extremely powerful and dynamic and furiously alive and it really does make the world, through the intermediary of soul (he remarks in v 8.7, 16 that it does not really matter very much for the present purpose whether we suppose this intermediary or not, but elsewhere it is clearly his thought that Intellect must employ Universal Soul to make the physical universe). But he regards it as completely absurd to suppose that it thinks things out or plans. The only way in which an eternal intellect which is identical with the paradigms or exemplary causes of physical things

<sup>6</sup> E.g., Proclus *In Alc.* pp. 104–5 Westerink: *In Parm.* iv, 948 Cousin.

<sup>7</sup> vi 9 [9] 6.

<sup>8</sup> iii 2 [47] 1–2. v 8 [31] 7 (the fullest refutation).

ii 9 [33] 8. In all these passages he seems to have Gnostics (and, incidentally, orthodox Christians) who believed in a temporal beginning of the world in mind (v 8 and ii 9 are both parts of the great treatise

which ends with his famous attack on the Gnostics), but he is not simply concerned to defend the eternity of the world. It is of interest to note that Marjorie Grene in *The Knower and the Known* says 'The artefact analogy is basic to Darwinism, both old and new, as it is to natural theology' (p. 195). But it was not basic to the natural theology of Plotinus.

can make the physical universe is by the 'sort of sudden appearance' (v 8.7.14), without thought, will, or planning, of a material image of itself. This sort of spontaneous creativity does not seem to me to be adequately described as a mere automatic process (though it certainly does not involve an 'act of free will' in the sense of a choice between alternatives, arbitrary or well reasoned; this would be characteristic for Plotinus only of a low stage of human activity), or as the unexplained consequence of the eternal existence of an abstract intelligible structure or pattern, which would still be open to Aristotle's well-known objection to the ineffectiveness of Plato's ideas. It is a kind of eternal outburst of spontaneous creativity, and, as all conceptions of divine creativity must have, it has a human analogy. In his fullest statement of his doctrine in v 8.7 he says that if we *were* the paradigms, substance and forms of what we make, our craftsmanship would dominate without any trouble (11.28–31); and he thinks that we can be. We have already had a hint of this in his doctrine of consciousness. Perhaps the best way of conveying some idea of how Plotinus saw human intellect at its highest, when it has rejoined divine intellect, is to give some of the paraphrase which an unknown tenth-century (or earlier) Arab made (as usual without acknowledgement) of iv 3 [27] 18. It is a paraphrase rather than a translation, loose and inflated, though containing some genuine Plotinian phrases. But it does bring out the peculiarity of his thought with which we are concerned here rather well. The relevant passage is as follows.<sup>9</sup> 'When soul enters bodies . . . she . . . grows weak and takes refuge in thought and reasoning. For thought is the deficiency of the mind, because mind is defective and imperfect when it needs reason and thought. Similarly, in the case of perfect art, the artist does not need thought but does his work without reflection or thought, while in the case of defective art the artist needs thought and reflection, because, if he wishes to do something and is a weak craftsman, he reflects and thinks how he should act. . . . Someone may ask: If souls do not think in their own disembodied world, how can they be rational? We reply: They can do without reason there—the reason which exists in potentiality, with thought and reflection. But the intellectual reason, which exists in actuality, never departs from the soul but is with her always, and she does not think.' To represent God as the Architect or Artisan of the universe, carefully thinking it all out with his designs and plans, as fundamentalist Platonists and most Jews and Christians were content to do, would be for Plotinus and his Arab interpreter to represent him as a very poor sort of artisan: and, it would seem, a philosopher who never did anything but 'think', in the sense in which we normally use the word, would be a very poor sort of philosopher. 'Thought is the deficiency of the mind.' It would be truer to say that the world grows out of God like a tree than that he plans and makes it. Again Plotinus appears as a very odd, or perhaps an exceptionally perceptive, intellectualist.

The human analogy which we have just been considering may lead on to a very brief consideration of the well-known difficulty of drawing a clear line between  $\Psi\upsilon\chi\eta$  and *Noûs* in the thought of Plotinus, and a certain discomfort he seems to feel, which leads to some inconsistencies, about the place of *διάνοια*, ordinary human reasoning, in his system. Much work, some still unpublished, has been done on this lately, and in particular I do not wish to anticipate the very careful examination of the whole question by Dr. H. J. Blumenthal in his paper read at the Rome Plotinus Congress in 1970. But the subject is relevant to our main theme, and something must be said about it. A good deal of the difficulty which Plotinus finds in settling on a clear and well defined distinction seems to result from a certain fluctuation at this point between ideas deriving from Plato and others deriving from Aristotle. There are many passages in the *Enneads* in which a sharp and firm distinction is drawn between *Noûs*, whose proper activity is *νόησις*, non-discursive thought, and  $\Psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ , whose characteristic activities are *διάνοια*, discursive thought, and the reproduction of the

<sup>9</sup> 'Dicta Sapientis Graeci' ii 18. 2–13. tr. Geoffrey Lewis, ap. *Plotini Opera II* ed. P. Henry and Hans Rudolf Schwyzer, p. 37: cp. *Praefatio* pp. xxxii–iv.

intelligible realities as well as may be in the world of sense.<sup>10</sup> This distinction, basically Aristotelian though with a Platonic element, is part of what may be called Plotinus' official doctrine of the Three Hypostases. But there are a number of other very important passages, sometimes in the same treatises, where this distinction becomes very much blurred and sometimes disappears altogether. The activity of soul on its highest level, when it is most truly itself is described as exclusively 'noetic', without any 'dianoetic' or discursive element (here we may perhaps see a more Platonic kind of thinking). And the activity of cosmic soul in forming and governing the material world is generally, though not always—the great passage on the origin of time in iii 7 [45] 11 is a notable exception—described in 'noetic' terms, as involving no discursive thought or reasoning from premises to conclusions.<sup>11</sup> The characteristic soul-activity of discursive thought does not fit comfortably into Plotinus' account of the activity of cosmic soul: even in iii 7.11 the starting-point from which he arrives at his account of the origin of time, in a tendency of universal soul to fuss about making its own discursive world in which things are separated out and arranged in rows instead of being held together in a single act of intuition, seems to be our own experience of time (cp. chapter 1 of the treatise). This, I think, makes it very difficult for Plotinus to give any very satisfactory reason for distinguishing clearly, as he does,<sup>12</sup> three distinct non-discursive cosmic activities, of Intellect, Soul and Nature, arranged in descending hierarchical order, the last being very inferior, only a sort of dream-like form-dropping. Discursive thought seems again to be a weakness, and perhaps a distinctively human weakness.<sup>13</sup> This does not at all mean that Plotinus thought it could ever be dispensed with in this world. Porphyry's account of his teaching and his own writings show clearly that he thought it absolutely necessary, and a matter of duty, to reason, argue and discuss all the time, to raise all possible questions and difficulties and try to find answers to them by normal rational methods. To behave in any other way would have seemed to him thoroughly un-Hellenic and unphilosophical.<sup>14</sup> But he does sometimes seem to think that it would be better if we were not bound to do this here below—if we could keep our vision of the intelligible clear and make others share it without all this arguing. Plotinus would have conscientiously attended philosophical conferences and *colloquia*, and have discussed anything anyone wanted to discuss for as long as anyone wanted to discuss it. But I am not sure that he would have enjoyed doing so.

As Dr. Blumenthal has pointed out in the paper already referred to (supplementing, and in part correcting, some remarks of my own), this blurring of the distinction between *Ψυχὴ* and *Νοῦς* sometimes works the other way. Not only life, but life as process, with time and change and a sort of history, which on Plotinus' own official account should be characteristic only of the activities of embodied soul, sometimes force their way into his accounts of the intelligible world and give some of them much of the disconcerting magnificence and power which accounts for their strong and persistent influence. It has often been remarked that the connection between the intelligible and the sensible worlds in Plotinus is very close.<sup>15</sup> I quote again from the article of Dodds already cited (p. 4): 'I think we should not be wrong in saying with Bréhier that for Plotinus the intelligible world is the sensible minus its materiality (which includes its spatiality and its temporality). But this higher world is

<sup>10</sup> E.g., i 1 [51] 8; iii 7 [45] 11; iii 8 [30] 7-8; v 1 [10] 3-4; v 3 [49] 3 and 6-9.

<sup>11</sup> The most important of these are in two great treatises written within a year or two of each other, vi 4-5 [22-23] and iv 3-4 [27-28]: cp. especially vi 4.14; iv 3.15-18; iv 3.25-iv 4.8; but cp. also i 4 [46] 10, 10-21 (part of the passage already cited on consciousness); iii 4 [15] 3 (especially 1.22); iv 7 [2] 10 (especially 11.33-36); and the passages cited above (n. 8) rejecting the 'artisan' idea of creation.

<sup>12</sup> Especially in the treatise *On Contemplation* iii 8 [30].

<sup>13</sup> iv 3.18; iv 4.12. <sup>14</sup> Cp. ii 9.6. <sup>15</sup> Two passages in which Plotinus himself stresses this close connexion are iv 8 [6] 6, 23-28 and v 8 [31] 7, 13-16; cp. ii 9 [33] 8, 39-43. In this last great statement of pagan faith (which could be turned into a far better pagan Platonist creed than Thomas Taylor's) the sensible world is brought unusually close, not only to the intelligible world but to the One.

not to him an abstraction from the lower; it is more like what Bradley was to call a concrete universal, a totality of pure relations existing in its own right, of which the spatio-temporal *κόσμος* yields only a distorted image. To Plotinus this world was intensely real, and he succeeds far better than Plato does in making it real to his readers.' This is a good intellectualist account of the intelligible world of Plotinus, and a perfectly accurate summary of his official doctrine, as expounded in many places in the *Enneads*. But there are some passages among those in which Plotinus manages most successfully to make the intelligible world real to his readers in which, perhaps, he may have managed to keep spatiality out of it, but has certainly let in temporality; and I do not think it can be got out again either by his own extreme paradoxes or by talking about 'metaphor' or 'poetic language'. I have discussed these passages fairly fully in my paper read at the Royaumont Congress in 1969 and now published.<sup>16</sup> Here I shall only give a summary account of them, and draw attention to the main philosophical point that emerged in the discussion of the paper. There are two groups of passages to be considered. In one of these groups the relationship of Divine Intellect to its source, the One or Good, is described in terms which seem to me incurably durational, in that they involve change and a history of at least two episodes which is the actualisation of a potency<sup>17</sup> (though Plotinus repeatedly asserts elsewhere, as he should on his avowed principles, that Divine Intellect is Pure Act, with no element of actualisable potency in it at all—a position he finds it very hard indeed to maintain consistently.) Then there are two great, closely related descriptions of the intelligible world, written within a year or two of each other,<sup>18</sup> which have always seemed to me to be based on some kind of direct experience of the kind which led Plotinus to say twice that we *are* each of us an intelligible universe,<sup>19</sup> and which I think may have been fairly close to the experiences fully described by Richard Jefferies in *The Story of My Heart*. In these passages he carries his, in itself quite traditional, insistence on life in the intelligible world to a point which takes him well outside the limits of a classical intellectualism of Aristotelian or commonplace Platonic type, and might have led him, if he had developed this way of thinking and speaking about the Intelligible further, to conclusions which would have disconcerted him considerably (in fact he tries to draw back on the brink, though I am inclined to think that by the time he does so, in these passages, he has already fallen in). The total effect of these passages cannot be given by selective quotation. They should be read as a whole. And when one has finished reading them it is hardly possible to avoid the conclusion that Plotinus has done something rather more than use, as he often does in the *Enneads*,<sup>20</sup> all the resources of a vividly sensuous imagination with a strong preference for quite violently dynamic images to supplement abstract thinking and expression. He seems to be so convinced of the value of life as we experience it that he must insist on its presence in unbounded variety and passionate intensity in the intelligible world, even if it inevitably brings with it the values of change, variety and newness for which, on the official account, there is no room in a Platonic world of forms. The philosophical point which (as I intended) emerged clearly, thanks to Professor A. C. Lloyd, from the discussion on my Royaumont paper, was one made by Professor W. C. Kneale some time ago.<sup>21</sup> It is that it is impossible to give any adequate account of life, especially perfect life or the fulness of life, without introducing temporality and process and change into that account. Timelessness and life

<sup>16</sup> 'Eternity, Life and Movement in Plotinus' Accounts of *Noûs*' (in *Le Néoplatonisme*, Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris 1971, pp. 67-76).

<sup>17</sup> ii 4 [12] 5; iii 8 [30] 11; v 3 [49] 11; v 4 [7] 2; vi 7 [38] 16-17.

<sup>18</sup> v 8 [31] 3-4 and vi 7 [38] 9-13.

<sup>19</sup> iv 7 [2] 10, 34-36; iii 4 [15] 3, 22.

<sup>20</sup> Cp. H. R. Schwyzer, art. 'Plotinus' in *RE* 21.1

col. 526-527. It is hoped that an English translation of a version of this invaluable article revised by the author may eventually be published.

<sup>21</sup> See *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 1960-61, pp. 87-198. This paper was interestingly discussed by the Right Rev. I. T. Ramsey, Bishop of Durham, in his presidential address to the Society for the Study of Theology in 1969.

do not seem to go together very well. Theologians and Platonic philosophers who understand this may still find it necessary to talk about 'eternal life', but they must realise that the phrase is highly paradoxical. What I want to emphasise here is that Plotinus found himself compelled, perhaps rather against his will, to notice this. I will quote a sentence from the first of my two passages which I think makes this clear (the subject is *νοῦς*):

ὄρων γὰρ μᾶλλον ὄρα, καὶ καθορῶν ἄπειρον αὐτὸν καὶ τὰ ὀρούμενα τῇ ἑαυτοῦ συνέπεται φύσει.

'As it sees it goes on seeing still more, and, perceiving its own infinity and that of what it sees, goes along with its own nature.'<sup>22</sup>

The immediate context of this sentence is rather startling, even for this extraordinary passage. Plotinus is trying to explain with some care why Divine Intellect does not get bored with itself: which means that the idea that it might do so must have crossed his mind. Now it is surely remarkable, that a great philosopher in the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition should even have thought of this possibility. We shall return to the theme of divine dullness in Plotinus shortly. Of course this thorough-going acceptance of life in its full and real meaning, with all the risks of inconsistency which it involves, in the intelligible world, makes that world even more our material world 'seen from the inside' than the passage quoted above from Dodds suggests; the intelligible world becomes the material world glorified and unified, something like Jefferies' 'cosmos of thought'; and it is our world. We can be in it here and now if we choose to make the effort. If Plotinus had followed this way of thinking further and more consistently than he ever does it might have led him to a drastic revaluation of nature, body and imagination (though he often values them more highly than most of his contemporaries, Christian or pagan). It might have led to the two-level hierarchy of intelligible and sensible becoming much less important, or even to the disappearance of the eternal intelligible world as a distinct 'degree of being'. In these passages one can see the way opening to later poetic and religious Platonisms, to Traherne and William Blake and beyond.

The part of Plotinus' thought about Divine Intellect which is most at variance with, or goes furthest beyond, classical intellectualism, is of course his constant doctrine that the One or Good does not itself think and is beyond the reach of any thought, even that of *Νοῦς*, which in attempting to think the One beyond being only succeeds in thinking, and so eternally constituting, itself as the One-Being.<sup>23</sup> It is only in the unthinking state which is eternally contemporaneous with its thinking state, when it is 'in love, mad, and drunk', that Intellect can attain to that union with the One which is (in both senses) the end of philosophy.<sup>24</sup> I have attempted to discuss some implications of this doctrine elsewhere,<sup>25</sup> and will only remark here that it is the most striking evidence that Plotinus is prepared, sometimes, to raise very radical and awkward questions about thinking, in any sense in which we can understand the word. Is it the highest activity of minds, divine or human? Is it even always a desirable activity?

There are two isolated and unique passages in the *Enneads* which make the relationship between Divine Intellect and the Good appear even stranger than they are in the normal doctrine of Plotinus. In one it appears as a possible distraction on the last stage of our ascent, and in the other as, considered in and by itself, a bore. The first is v 5 [32] 12, the passage in which a very suggestive contrast is drawn between the psychological effects on us of the Good and of Beauty: the Good *καὶ κοιμωμένους παρέστι καὶ οὐ θαμβεῖ ποτε ἰδόντας*

<sup>22</sup> v 8.4, 32-34.

<sup>23</sup> ii 4 [12] 5, 31-35; v 3 [49] 11, 1-12; v 4 [7] 2, 4-10; vi 7 [38] 15-17.

<sup>24</sup> vi 7 [38] 35, 24-5.

<sup>25</sup> In a paper, 'The Escape of the One', read to the Sixth International Conference on Patristic Studies in 1971, and to be published in a forthcoming volume on *Studia Patristica*.

(1.12) and it is ἥπιον καὶ προσηγνὸς καὶ ἀβρότερον καὶ, ὡς θέλει τις, παρὸν αὐτῷ (11.32-3). In contrast with this quiet, gentle, continuous presence of the Good, which is there whether we notice it or not, Beauty θάμβος ἔχει καὶ ἐκπληξιν καὶ συμμιγῆ τῷ ἀλγύνοντι τὴν ἡδονὴν (11.34-5). And, he says in a famous image, Beauty can draw those who are ignorant of what is going on away from the Good 'as the lover draws a child away from the father' (11.35-6). It is important to realise that, as the whole context makes clear, it is intelligible beauty, the beauty of the World of Forms, which is in question here: the passage cannot possibly mean that we are liable to be distracted from our spiritual quest by the beauties of the sense-world, which would be commonplace Platonism enough. It is Platonic metaphysics at what most people before, and a great many after, Plotinus would have thought was its highest, which may get in the way. It is the *eros* of the philosopher as Plato understood it which may seduce us from reunion with our father, waiting quietly for us, always available. Philosophy may provide the philosopher with the ultimate temptation which will lead him away from what he really desires and needs. But in the same chapter Plotinus speaks disapprovingly of those who 'quarrel' with intelligible Beauty and wrongly think that they are as good as it is because it too is secondary and derivative (11.24-33). The Intelligible may have been dethroned, but it still stands next to the king. The suggestion seems to me a probable one that Plotinus here has anti-intellectual religious people, most likely Gnostics, in mind. He is, perhaps, saying that no religious man can afford to despise philosophy, and there is no short cut to God which dispenses one from the exercise of intelligence to the limit. Certainly he insists on this in general very strongly. One may have to negate everything in the end: but one cannot negate it till one has understood it thoroughly. And negation does not mean abandonment. Philosophy is permanently necessary for any sound religion. But, again, it is interesting that Plotinus has noticed something which philosophers in the ancient tradition do not often notice, though anti-intellectual religious people notice it often enough (sometimes for 'dogmatic, prejudiced and thoroughly disreputable reasons, but sometimes because of well-merited dislike for the philosophers with whom they have come in contact) that philosophy can, in the last resort, be an obstacle to our search after God. And an eternal intelligible world, with all its visionary beauty, is particularly liable to get in the way.

The other passage is a famous one, which has been much discussed, generally in connection with the aesthetics of Plotinus. It is vi 7 [38] 22. He certainly dismisses classical aesthetics in it in a few devastating lines. But the metaphysical consequences of it (if Plotinus had ever fully worked them out) would be even more far-reaching than the aesthetic. What is stated, quite explicitly and very forcibly, is that *Νοῦς*, considered here as object of contemplation, again as in v 5.12 the intelligible beauty, is, in and by itself, incapable of acting upon or attracting the soul: the eternal realities are there (1.5-6) but they don't work. They are incapable of acting upon or attracting the soul without the light, the colour, the life, the *χάρις* (all these images are used in the chapter) which come directly from the Good. The soul's utter lack of interest, enthusiasm, and activity when confronted with the intelligible without what comes upon it from the Good and makes it lovable is vividly described. It is as somnolent and mentally inactive as the audience at a boring lecture or concert: *ὑπὲρ δὲ ἀναπέπτωκεν ἡ ψυχὴ παρ' αὐτῆς καὶ πρὸς πᾶν ἀργῶς ἔχει καὶ παρόντος νοῦ ἐστὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν νοηθῆς* (1.12-14). We remember that we saw some reason to think before that the possibility had crossed the mind of Plotinus that the world of pure thought might be boring, even to pure thought itself (p. 20). Now we find that, at least at this one moment in Plotinus' thinking, the soul engaged in the highest intuitive contemplation in the world of pure thought of which it is a part would find this world of eternal reality and intelligible beauty a bore if the glory which comes directly from the Good did not shine upon it and make it interesting and lovable. Even before the soul attains to the mystical union, it appears that it finds metaphysical contemplation by itself unattractive and dull—

and this is precisely why it, in and with the Divine Intellect itself, must go on further. The discovery that a world of eternal realities, a pure divine thought identical with its objects, can, if there is nothing beyond to irradiate it, be uninteresting and unsatisfying, is surely a very remarkable one for a philosopher in the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition to make. And perhaps it carries with it an implication which Plotinus, who believed there was one true perennial philosophy, certainly never saw, but which seems amply borne out by the history of philosophy. This is that boredom is the disease from which most philosophies, especially the great classical intellectualist systems, die, at least temporarily (they show a remarkable capacity for resurrection). They cease to exercise influence because people get tired of them, not because their basic propositions are decisively refuted (a remarkably difficult thing to do; philosophical discussions seem incurably open-ended, however often philosophers triumphantly announce that they have closed them). Perhaps Plato and Neoplatonism survive, on the whole, so well, and crop up as such powerful influences so frequently, often altogether outside academic philosophy, because, if Plato had a system, no one has yet discovered what it was, and there is so much in Plotinus which does not fit into the true Platonic intellectual system which he undoubtedly believed he had worked out. I hope I have made it sufficiently clear that there is a most important systematic side of the thought of Plotinus, and that neither he nor many, perhaps most, of his interpreters would approve of the way I have isolated certain passages in this paper and put them together to give a picture of sorts of the 'wild' Plotinus whom Plotinus himself could not altogether tame.

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## XVII

### TRADITION, REASON AND EXPERIENCE IN THE THOUGHT OF PLOTINUS

#### I. INTRODUCTORY

The question 'What are the motives which led him to adopt the philosophical positions which he seriously maintains?' is always worth asking about any great philosopher. Most people now would agree that the simple answer, 'Because these positions seemed to him reasonable, in the sense of being rationally deducible from generally accepted assumptions', 'though it must tell some of the truth, if the person concerned is to be regarded as a philosopher at all, does not, probably in any case, tell the whole truth about the motives of any philosopher. Furthermore, when a philosopher belongs, as Plotinus did, to a traditionalist world of thought in which originality was disapproved of and the wisdom of the ancients highly regarded, it becomes particularly important to determine what part tradition played in determining his philosophical positions; and if a philosopher's thought has, as that of Plotinus has, a strong religious element, and there seems to be some evidence that he had powerful and vivid religious or mystical experiences which influenced his mind, it is worth trying to consider carefully how far his philosophical positions are determined by these experiences.

The interplay of tradition, reason and experience in the thought of Plotinus is of course infinitely subtle and complex, and our evidence is in important ways defective. Plotinus, as far as we know, kept no spiritual or philosophical journal; he did not address himself in writing in the manner of Marcus Aurelius. And, though Porphyry's *Life*, as we shall see (in II below), may give us some hints about what parts tradition, reason and experience played in the philosophical thinking of his master, Porphyry does not really tell us very much.

Further, both the first-hand information in the *Life* and the writings collected in the *Enneads* belong to the last years at Rome. We have no writings from the intellectually formative years of Plotinus, and very little relevant information about them. If, like a philosophical Odysseus, he had wandered far through strange countries of the mind before coming to that spiritual home in which he seems so securely (though not complacently) installed in those last years, we have no record of those journeyings. We