

PORPHYRY THE APOSTATE: ASSESSING PORPHYRY'S REACTION TO PLOTINUS'S DOCTRINE OF THE ONE

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In an article in the first volume of Harris's *Studies in Neoplatonism*, Patrick Atherton described what he saw as a radical difference between the trinitarian and Neoplatonic first principles. The distinction he draws is seminal: because the first principle, or *αρχή*, produces all things, all that follows from it is determined by its nature. Whereas the unity of what Atherton describes as the 'Neoplatonic One' transcends all relation and difference,

The trinitarian *αρχή*, by contrast, appears as an attempt to reconcile the requirement of unity with that of difference within the principle itself: *ετερότης* is now recognised as a moment within the unity, as belonging to the principle *as unity*. Such a position requires a very different interpretation of the relation between the principle and its derivatives than that found in Neoplatonism.¹

Recent scholarship on Porphyry, however, suggests that the important distinction Atherton adverts to is not resolvable into distinctly Neoplatonic and trinitarian camps. What Atherton describes as 'Neoplatonism' is more diverse, as scholars debate the subtle differences between the doctrines of Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Augustine, and Proclus, among others. For example, John Dillon and Steven Strange have recently argued that Porphyry's doctrine of the first principle is in fact – as Atherton describes the two positions – 'trinitarian' rather than 'Neoplatonic'. Atherton's characterization of the Neoplatonic *αρχή* describes more narrowly the Plotinian One, for Plotinus is the only Neoplatonist who maintains the absolute transcendence of the first principle beyond all relation and difference. Plotinus's successors, beginning with his own student Porphyry, react *against* his position and develop *within* the Neoplatonic tradition different – and perhaps 'trinitarian' – doctrines of the first principle. One need not look outside Neoplatonism to locate Atherton's distinction between Christians and Neoplatonists, for the distinction is to be found within it.

Regardless of which figures fall into which camps and what we wish to call them, Atherton's distinction between these two positions is important and demonstrates not only Plotinus's difference from the Christian Platonists, but in light of recent Neoplatonic scholarship, casts into sharp relief Plotinus's difference and unique status among his predecessors and successors. The dispute over the nature of the first principle on its most fundamental level, whether absolutely transcendent or self-relational, is not so much a matter of Christians versus Hellenic Neoplatonists as it is a matter of Plotinus versus everyone else. Dillon and others are right to see the distinction between an absolutely transcendent and a self-relating first principle occurring *within* the Neoplatonic tradition, but keeping Atherton's analysis in mind, we must recognize that the first principle of

Porphyry and that of Plotinus are fundamentally distinct. The location of this distinction *within* Neoplatonism means one must refrain from glossing all the Neoplatonists with the same Plotinian brush, but rather underline Plotinus's radical position.

Porphyry's doctrine of the first principle is developed against that of Plotinus. Involving delicate distinctions, however, it is finely nuanced. Porphyry's modifications of Plotinus's doctrine result in a first principle that is utterly distinct from what Plotinus envisioned and I believe would have accepted. Porphyry's solution to the problem of how the One produces brings down the first principle from its Plotinian transcendence and includes within it difference and relation. Because Porphyry's first principle is beyond neither difference nor relation, the human completion of Porphyry's philosophical *itinerarium* requires no power beyond what the soul alone can achieve through its association with Intellect; this is not true for Plotinus, whose system gestures towards a necessary, but undeveloped, doctrine of grace. Further analysis of the distinctions between these doctrines on the first principle brings out how different Plotinus' thought is from that of other Platonists. Plotinus is a *sui generis* thinker, and we must be careful not to equate Neoplatonism with him; rather compared to both his predecessors and successors, Plotinus stands alone.

1. THE PLOTINIAN ONE

The Plotinian One is utterly transcendent; because it must be the source of all things, it is even prior to and independent of Being, considered either as one among others or as indeterminate Being.² This speculation of a One-beyond-being is raised in Plato's *Parmenides* as a hypothesis, which according to Dodds is the clearest – and to his mind, the *only* – explicit invocation prior to the *Enneads* of an absolutely transcendent first principle.³ With a few Middle Platonic exceptions, pre-Plotinian Platonists typically identified the first principle with Being or Intellect.⁴ Plotinus argues against this because he discerns a conflict between this and another piece of Platonic orthodoxy, the doctrine that all multiplicity must derive from a prior unity. Holding to the latter as his starting point, he relegates earlier candidates for the first principle to a lower rank within his metaphysical hierarchy and projects – as did Speusippus before him – a principle prior to Being.⁵

Plotinus contends that Being cannot be a first principle because it cannot be a unity. Further, in *Ennead* VI.7.37 he describes what is in effect Aristotle's unmoved mover: self-thinking thought; Plotinus argues that this cannot be the first principle either, because it cannot think itself, or even think at all, for two reasons. First, there is no reason for the One to think, since it lacks nothing. In favor of his candidate, the relation between the One and all other things is asymmetrical: the One is good for all things, being their source, but nothing is good for the One, because it needs nothing.⁶ The One has no need of activity; thus there is nothing towards which it aims. This is the line of thought behind the proposal of the first principle as the Good. As Socrates claimed, all things desire the Good; it is that towards which all things move. The Good Itself, however, cannot desire itself without falling into a division between subject and object, that is, without becoming at once above and below Itself. The second reason is that thinking requires division and difference, a distinction between what thinks and what is thought about, between knower and object known. The One, as a unity, must be prior to all division. De Koninck explains Plotinus's objection to Aristotle's position:

How can you eliminate all duality from a being whom you describe as thinking about himself? Can thought remain *one* and *indivisible* while considering itself? And if it is one and indivisible (as Aristotle insists God must be), how can it think of this indivisible which it itself must be? It would appear, says Plotinus, that the simplest reality does not think of itself, for it would then be multiple. Hence it does not think of itself and one cannot think about it.⁷

Plotinus explains that ‘the soul [. . .] is not altogether one when it has reasoned knowledge of anything; for a reasoned knowledge is a rational process, and a rational process is many.’⁸ Elsewhere he asserts that, ‘if intellect itself is what thinks and what is thought, it will be double and not single and so not the one.’⁹ Neither thinking nor Being can be one, since they are, as Plotinus argues, ‘all things’: ‘The one then cannot be all things, for so it would be no longer one; and it cannot be intellect, for in this way it would be all things since intellect is all things; and it cannot be being; for being is all things.’¹⁰ Iamblichus makes the same point regarding this division within Intellect: ‘Knowledge, after all, is separated (from its object) by some degree of otherness. But prior to that knowledge, which knows another as being itself other, there is the unitary connection with the gods that is natural (and indivisible).’¹¹ For Plotinus the first principle can be neither a particular being among beings, nor absolutely indeterminate Being, while concurrently preserving its unity. His conclusion is that the One must therefore be prior to Being if it is to be constitutive of Being, and must also be prior to those relations into which Being falls. The Plotinian One is prior to all relation; while we relate to it, it does not relate to us.

Further, because thinking is divided and multiple, the human mind cannot think *about* it without that principle falling into the division of knower and known and becoming something it is not.¹² One cannot think about the One *qua* One; thought and speech will then be inadequate to its object, which is why the Platonists typically employ analogies and metaphors to elucidate its nature in positive, though admittedly inadequate ways, and negatively through a *via negativa*. In other words, philosophy, taken as discursive speech, is unable to attain the end it sets for itself.¹³ Armstrong explains that for Plotinus, ‘the complex reality of the Divine Mind is in principle intelligible; its transcendent source, the One, is beyond the reach of thought or language in Its infinite simplicity.’¹⁴ This is why for Iamblichus, ‘the contact we have with the divinity is not to be taken as knowledge,’ considered either as discursive reason which is a process and multiple, or as any kind of intuition in which the division of knower and known is preserved.¹⁵ Porphyry describes contact with the One conceived as so radically transcendent as ‘apprehension’ or ‘experience’; again, these words are inadequate. Whatever contact with the One is, it must not involve a distinction between subject and object or a relation of the One to any thing else.

2. A PORPHYRIAN TENSION

Although Plotinus commits Platonic heresy by projecting a One beyond Being, his claims are nevertheless consistent. Porphyry, by contrast, wavers between two descriptions of the first principle. There is a tension between his endorsement of Plotinus’s arguments that the One must be beyond Being and division, on the one hand, and his claims that the first principle is Intellect, on the other. On the first point, echoing Plotinus Porphyry distinguishes between Intellect and the One, recognizing the division within Intellect and stressing that the One must be beyond all partibility: ‘Intellect is not the principle of all things; for intellect is many things; but, prior to *the many*, it is necessary that there should

be *the one*.¹⁶ Dillon points out that ‘the whole of ch. 43 of Porphyry’s *Sententiae* [. . .] is devoted to demonstrating that *nous* cannot be the first principle because *nous* is multiple, and requires a unity prior to it.’¹⁷ He further argues that in the anonymous *Commentary on the Parmenides* ‘we have evidence [. . .] of a One, distinct from Intellect, which is the subject of the First Hypothesis.’¹⁸ This is all standard Plotinian doctrine. In a recent article, Dillon considers all the passages of the *Sententiae* that indicate a Plotinian doctrine of the One and concludes that Porphyry’s own conviction ‘[. . .] does not involve any radical retreat from the Plotinian position in a “Middle Platonic” direction.’¹⁹ Such texts reveal Porphyry to be a faithful heir to and supporter of Plotinus’s doctrine of the One. One might expect that if Porphyry deviated from Plotinus’s position on the first principle, he would have made his disagreement explicit.²⁰ The tension arises, however, because despite Porphyry’s apparent agreement with Plotinus on this point, he also claims that the first principle is Intellect, the second of Plotinus’s hypostases, and not a One-beyond-being.

While scholars such as Dillon and Strange have stressed the similarities between the positions of Plotinus and Porphyry on the first principle, others have underscored the difference between them. For example, Wayne Hankey writes that ‘For Porphyry, at the level of the spiritual hypostases Being is drawn up into the One.’²¹ Contemporary scholars who make this point are in good company, for even Proclus, the great *diadochos*, recognized that the first principle of Porphyry is Intellect. In his *Commentary on the Parmenides*, Proclus

seems to be assuming that Porphyry is proposing that the first hypothesis, despite its accumulation of negatives, actually concerns the same figure as is the subject of the second hypothesis, that is (in terms borrowed from the *Chaldean oracles*), the ‘Father’ of the intelligible triad of Being, Life and Intellect.²²

There is textual support in Porphyry’s works for arguing that he believed the first principle to be Intellect or *Nous*. Describing the soul’s return to the first principle, he describes the involvement with *Nous* in ways similar to Plotinian *henosis*. In his *De Abstinentia*, for example, ‘the return is to one’s real self, nothing else; and the joining is with one’s real self, nothing else. And one’s real self is the *intellect* [my emphasis], so the end is to live in accordance with the intellect.’²³ Viewed within Plotinus’s scheme, this would mark merely a stage of the ascent, not its culmination: ‘but as one goes to the primary one must lift oneself up from the things of sense which are the last and lowest, and become freed from all evil since one is hastening to the Good, and ascend to the principle in oneself and become one from many, when one is going to behold the Principle of the One.’²⁴ What are we to make of Porphyry’s two seemingly contradictory claims regarding the first principle?

Having struggled with the aporias in Porphyry’s surviving works, contemporary scholars are inclined to give Porphyry more credit as an expounder of Plotinus’s philosophy than their predecessors were. Many now regard Porphyry as a competent philosopher in his own rite who understood his master while contributing to and expanding on the subtleties of Plotinus’s doctrine, rather than contradicting or confusing it. Steven Strange warns that we must determine whether or not the distinctions between Plotinus and Porphyry, such as the one mentioned above, represent actual disagreements or cases where ‘Porphyry is merely expanding upon or trying to explicate Plotinus.’²⁵ A second option is possible, however, namely that when Porphyry ‘thinks he is explicating Plotinus he is really disagreeing with him.’²⁶ That is, commentators on these subtle distinctions and ‘mere expansions’ seem to gloss over drastic consequences to Porphyry’s tinkering with his master’s innovation. It would take little effort to give Mona Lisa a

moustache, but I doubt that Da Vinci would fail to notice the addition or think it improved her appearance.

Whatever Porphyry's intent and despite his great acumen, I suggest that his clarifications and emendations concerning Plotinus's first principle produce radical consequences, distancing his entire philosophical *itinerarium* from that of Plotinus. His Plotinian apostasy of returning to the equation of One with Being of Platonic orthodoxy does violence to the equally Platonic maxim that Plotinus stressed, namely, that all multiplicity derives from a prior unity. The extent to which Porphyry retains unity in his first principle is dubious, and his position falls victim to arguments Plotinus wielded effectively against his predecessors. From the Plotinian vantage point Porphyry, though sophisticated, represents a step backwards rather than forwards.

3. THE PORPHYRIAN ONE

The tension between Porphyry's rival claims stems from his attempt to solve a problem left by Plotinus: how his One, being beyond Being, difference, and all relation, could be productive of anything. Explaining the productivity of the first principle is a fundamental problem for all Platonists, for even Plato inherited this puzzle from the Pre-Socratics. In the *Republic* Plato provides a poetic metaphor to suggest that the form of the Good is the source of all intellectual and physical light and life, bestowed by a kind of emanation not unlike the power of the sun.²⁷ A philosopher, however, not content with the poetic image and probing the rational substructure beneath this metaphor, attempting to explain precisely how this overflow of goodness occurs, is faced with a formidable task. Nevertheless, the Sun Analogy suggests a way forward to one considering the productive activity of the first principle, and Plato's successors would be occupied by this question long after the master's death.

In a recent analysis, Dillon concludes that, for Porphyry, the 'attempted solution to this conundrum is [. . .] a finely nuanced one, the subtleties of which seem to have been ignored or disdained by his successors.'²⁸ In contrast to his successors who address this problem by a multiplication of the levels of being, Porphyry makes a distinction within the One itself, or at least, a distinction between two ways in which the One should be considered: 'For Porphyry, the One must be viewed in two aspects, according to the first of which it is totally transcendent, simple, and unqualified by any characteristic, while according to the second it is actually the presiding element, or 'Father', of a primal creative triad.'²⁹ Interestingly, Beierwaltes sees a similar idea emerging in the Trinity of Dionysius. He writes,

When we consider the matter philosophically, the Christian concept of God as the Absolute and as the universal origin has its roots in the relationless transcendent One. Yet as an inwardly relational being he has his roots in the second, i.e. reflexive One, so that he could be conceived as an inner trinitarian movement of thinking, (intellectus, sapientia) speaking (verbum), willing and loving (Spiritus Sanctus).³⁰

Dillon explains that Porphyry 'is concerned to keep the two aspects of the Plotinian One, as he discerns them, together, merely striving to introduce some degree of formalization into their relationship with the help of the Chaldaean triad.'³¹ The first is meant to maintain the Plotinian absolute transcendence of the One-beyond-being, while the second considers the One in its relational, or creative, aspect as productive of Intellect. Although

even Intellect must be produced somehow from the One, Plotinus consistently preserves their distinction.

Dillon argues that Porphyry's triad consists of the One, Being, and the *skhesis*, or relation, between them. These two aspects of the One are not *essentially*, but rather, *conceptually* different: 'the One in its purity and One in conjunction with Being.'³² This third element is not a separate hypostasis, but rather is some sort of link that emerges as a kind of difference or otherness, as Atherton points out - 'ετερότης'. While this is a later Neoplatonic development, Dillon suggests it has its origins in Porphyry:

But it is plain that later Neoplatonists, starting with Porphyry, saw this Otherness, or Difference, [of which Plato speaks] also as the third, and linking, element in a triad. It is in fact the *skhesis* that obtains between One and Being: they are *different* from one another, and that is the relation between them.³³

Atherton, describing the difference between the Neoplatonic and trinitarian first principles, writes,

The primary opposition, then, between the two positions can be characterised as follows: for the Neoplatonists the unity of the *αρχή* is a *unity of indeterminateness* – just because it is the source of all the differences between things, prior even to the difference of subject and object, the principle excludes distinction from itself and is, in this way, 'one'; on the trinitarian position however, the principle is a *self-determining unity* – determinateness does not fall *outside* the unity of the principle: rather, in the completest differentiation the principle returns upon itself, is one with itself.³⁴

Porphyry, as Dillon interprets him, is more trinitarian than Neoplatonic, as Atherton defines these categories. The first principle has a character drastically different from what it has in Plotinus's metaphysics. The One in Porphyry's scheme is beyond neither relation nor otherness, but rather it is the very otherness or difference that links the transcendent and creative aspects of the first principle. Strictly speaking, for Plotinus one cannot say that the One is different from Being, for to say so would be to put the One, which is beyond all relation, *into* relation. For things to relate to one another, they need to have something in common, and things that are different share this aspect of difference in common and relate to one another.³⁵ From the perspective of the lower looking upwards, the One might be thought of inadequately as being different from all other things, including Being Itself; but one says nothing true about the nature of the One by this assertion, it being prior to difference itself. Dillon sees the One of Plotinus, which Porphyry maintains as the One in its pure aspect, as 'the One which is the subject of the negations of the hypothesis.'³⁶ While Porphyry's first principle is indeed the One of a completed negative theology, this is not the Plotinian One, but rather the One of Christian trinitarian theology.³⁷ The distinction between Plotinus and Porphyry here is clear and of serious consequence for each thinker's *itinerarium* as a whole.

As Porphyry attempts to account for the productivity of the Plotinian One by bringing the first and the second principles into relation, the first becomes more like the second than the second becomes like the first. This is evident in Strange's interpretation; noting Dillon's connection between the absolute transcendence of the One and its productive activity in Porphyry, he sees Porphyry's One as having a 'dual status'; that is, 'as both somehow being identical with the strictly transcendent One of the first hypothesis and as also having its role as constituent of the One-Being of the second hypothesis, which on the Neoplatonic interpretation is to be identified with the hypostasis *Nous*.'³⁸ Porphyry understands the transcendent to have an aspect of *Nous*, which is also Intellect or Being. Evident here is

Porphyry's characteristic blurring of the distinction between the first and second hypostases, which remain clearly separate for Plotinus. Further, Porphyry's first principle is relational in the difference between its transcendence and its creative aspect, and is thus not beyond relation altogether, as is the Plotinian One. Dillon has recently argued that 'This does not of course mean that Porphyry has rowed back from Plotinus' epoch-making assertion of a One above Being and Intellect.' However, this is precisely what it means, leaving aside whether Porphyry realised it or not.³⁹ Dillon's article proceeds to inquire into Porphyry's claims concerning the One and Intellect '[. . .] to see what conclusions we may draw about Porphyry's overall view of the relations between the two'; but, as we have seen, Plotinus's One does not 'relate' to anything.⁴⁰

Pierre Hadot has shown that Porphyry is the link between Plotinus, who maintains the absolute transcendence of the One-beyond-being, and Augustine, who judges that the first principle is Intellect or Being. Porphyry's shift away from Plotinus's doctrine might account for the former's seeming middle-position between those of Plotinus and Augustine. Pierre Aubenque suggests that besides understanding the first principle to be beyond Being Itself, there is another way to avoid the difficulties of division involved in considering the first principle as Being. Rather than understanding the One as beyond Being Itself, Porphyry deepens (*approfondit*) 'the notion of being,' as a kind of Being before all determination.⁴¹ Aubenque argues that Being, considered as such, is '*absolument simple et indéterminé, puisqu'il est le fondement de toute détermination.*'⁴² Conceptually, it is more accurate to think of the first principle as the 'act of being' (*à l'acte d'être*), rather than *a* being. According to either view, the first is not *a* being; it is either beyond Being (Plotinus), or absolutely indeterminate Being (Aubenque's Porphyry). In either case the first principle is not an object, and therefore not subject to predication, again revealing that Porphyry's doctrine heralds a decisive shift from Plotinian transcendence towards an Intellectual and relational first principle.

These interpretations of Porphyry are insightful and elucidate the subtleties of his doctrine; but again, they do so by distancing his views from those of Plotinus rather than harmonizing them or developing them in consistency from his Plotinian beginning. The relation between the One and what it produces must remain aporetic in Plotinus's philosophy by necessity, given the character of his first principle. Strictly speaking, the productivity of the Plotinian One cannot be explained or even thought, because these activities are relational and discursive. The discursive tools we have at our disposal are inadequate for the job at hand. Dilating on Plotinus's position that the unity of the first principle must be beyond the duality of Intellect, Atherton writes, 'such a view of the principle led to the difficulty that the first derivation could not be logically deduced from it: there seemed to be no logical reason why such an abstractly self-identical unity should divide itself into the subject-object relation of *νοῦς*.'⁴³ This ineffability of the One and how it produces give rise to what have been identified as 'mystical' elements in Plotinus's philosophy. There is no logical explanation for the One's production because logic itself is discursive, divided, and relational, and thus cannot do justice to the One *qua* One. Plotinus is a victim of his own achievement: by convincingly arguing for the unity of the One going beyond Being, he has no way back down; having somehow scaled the radically transcendent heights, a descending ladder is unavailable.

While this might not be ultimately satisfactory from a purely philosophical standpoint, so that a shift away from Plotinus's One-beyond-being towards a self-relating principle is necessary to explain emanation and the existence of things, we must still be careful not to confuse what Porphyry understands to be the first principle with what Plotinus projected.

By giving Porphyry the credit he is due, Dillon shows how Porphyry's position is perhaps not just a misunderstanding of Plotinus, but rather a reasoned and apparently subtle modification that develops Plotinus's doctrine to answer an essential question.⁴⁴ As Strange notes, Porphyry's differences from Plotinus indicate 'not so much Porphyry's harmonizing tendency [with Aristotle, etc.] in opposition to Plotinus' more hard-line attitude, but Porphyry's understanding of some of Plotinus' deeper motivations.'⁴⁵ However, Porphyry's developments are ultimately open to the same criticisms Plotinus leveled against Aristotle and others who did not intuit the necessity for the first principle transcend to Being. Granted that Porphyry is sympathetic to Plotinus's stance on the first principle, nevertheless his alternative explanation moves decisively away from it and pays the price of losing its defining character.

4. CONCLUSION

The Porphyrian conclusion is opposed to the Plotinian premise; the subtlety of the move does not compensate for the severity of the result. Porphyry's attempt to explain emanation from the One in a logical and discursive manner reveals Porphyry's difference from Plotinus and betrays his apostasy from the Plotinian doctrine of transcendence. This difference between these doctrines of the One has far-reaching consequences as regards their respective *itineraria* of the soul. The transcendence of the Plotinian One necessitates that achieving the end requires a power beyond the soul's capacity. Though it is a matter of debate, I believe that implicit in the writings of Plotinus is a doctrine of grace that is necessary if the soul is to reach its end.⁴⁶ For Plotinus philosophy, taken as discursive reasoning, is a necessary preparation, and perhaps a *sine qua non*, if we are to attain *henosis* - but it is not sufficient. Porphyry does not require grace because he lowers the first principle to a level achievable by the unaided activity of the soul; Porphyry's intellectual end requires only an intellectual *itinerarium*. This also explains Porphyry's dismissive attitude towards theurgy: at best theurgy can purify the lower soul, but the higher soul is purified only by rational activity. The soul must be prepared for its ascent beyond discursive activity toward the final *θεωρία*, which is a participation in the multiplicity of *Nous*, that is, a moving within the noetic realm from one idea to the next.⁴⁷ The differences between the *itineraria* of Plotinus and Porphyry have their root in their beginning and their end - in their respective doctrines of the One. These differences are not only theoretical but, as in all things Platonic, concern the juncture of theory with praxis, that is, the necessity that philosophy be a way of life.

Notes

1 J. Patrick Atherton, 'The Neoplatonic "One" and the Trinitarian "APXH": the conflict over the unity of the principle and its relation to the "identity" of the absolute in Schelling and Hegel,' in R. Blaine Harris, ed., *The Significance of Neoplatonism: Ancient and Modern*, vol. 1, (Norfolk, Virginia: The International Society of Neoplatonic Studies, 1976): 173-185, at 174.

2 For a clear and succinct summary of this position, cf. Atherton, 175-79. Cf. also A.H. Armstrong, *An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy* (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1959).

3 Cf. E.R. Dodds, 'The *Parmenides* of Plato and the Origin of the Neoplatonic "One"', *Classical Quarterly* 22 (1928), 129-142, at 132.

4 On the historical development of these doctrines in the Middle Platonic period, cf. John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

5 On the first principle of Speusippus, cf. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 12.

6 Cf. Thomas Whittaker, *The Neo-Platonists, A Study in the History of Hellenism*, 2nd ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), who writes, “[the One] is perfectly self-sufficing; there is no good that it should seek to acquire by volition. It is good not in relation to itself, but to that which participates in it,” (57) and John Bussanich, ‘Plotinus’s Metaphysics of the One,’ In *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 38–65: ‘The distinctness of the One from everything else supports the further claim that the One has no relations to other things, whereas the relations of others to the One are real’ (43).

7 Thomas De Koninck, ‘Aristotle on God as Thought Thinking Itself’, *Review of Metaphysics* 47: no. 3 (1994), 471–515, at 477. Atherton also explains this distinction between the positions of Aristotle and Plotinus, cf. Atherton, 176–78. On the incorrect identification of this Aristotelian first principle with Aristotle’s God, cf. Jean-Marc Narbonne, *Levinas and the Greek Heritage*, by Jean-Marc Narbonne (pages 1–96), followed by *One Hundred Years of Neoplatonism in France: A Brief Philosophical History*, by Wayne Hankey (pages 97–248). *Studies in Philosophical Theology* (Leuven/Paris/Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2006), at 28–34.

8 *Ennead* VI.9.4.1–5. Cf. also *Ennead* V.3.17.20–5: ‘for discursive thought, in order to express anything in words, has to consider one thing after another: this is the method of description; but how can one describe the absolutely simple?’ I use the text in Plotinus, *Enneads*, vols. I–VII, trans. A.H. Armstrong, Loeb Classics Library (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1966–1988).

9 *Ennead* VI.9.2.35. On Plotinus’s opposition to the doctrine that the first principle is a One-being, cf. also *Ennead* VI.9.

10 *Ennead* VI.9.2.40–5.

11 *De Mysteriis* I.3. I use the text in Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, Writings from the Greco-Roman world, trans. Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon, and Jackson P. Hershbell (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003).

12 On this, cf. O’Daly’s excellent book, Gerard O’Daly, *Plotinus’ Philosophy of the Self* (Shannon, Ireland: Irish University Press, 1973), especially Chapters 3 and 4.

13 Cf. *Ennead* VI.9.4.1–5.

14 Armstrong, 182.

15 *De Mysteriis* I.3.

16 *Sent.* 15. For the English translations I use Porphyry, *Select Works of Porphyry*, trans. Thomas Taylor (London: University Microfilms International, 1978).

17 John Dillon, ‘Porphyry’s Doctrine of the One,’ In *Chercheurs de sagesse. Hommage à Jean Pépin*, publié sous la direction de Marie-Odile Goulet-Cazé, Goulven Madec, Denis O’Brien, Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité 131 (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1992), 356–66, at 357.

18 *Ibid.*

19 John Dillon, ‘Intellect and the One in Porphyry’s *Sententiae*’, *The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition* 4: no. 1 (2010), 27–35, at 34.

20 Dillon and Strange also share this view. Cf. John Dillon, ‘What Price the Father of the Noetic Triad? Some Thoughts on Porphyry’s Doctrine of the First Principle,’ in *Studies on Porphyry*, eds. George Karamanolis and Anne Sheppard (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 2007), 51–59, Dillon, ‘Intellect and the One,’ 34, and Strange, 20. On the pride that Porphyry seems to have taken in being Plotinus’ faithful disciple, cf. Strange, 23–24.

21 Wayne Hankey, ‘The Postmodern Retrieval of Neoplatonism in Jean-Luc Marion and John Milbank and the Origins of Western Subjectivity in Augustine and Eriugena’, *Hermathena* 165 (1998), 9–70, at 41.

22 Dillon, ‘Porphyry’s Doctrine of the First Principle,’ 52. Cf. also Dillon, ‘Porphyry’s Doctrine of the One’: ‘Plainly Porphyry was noted in the tradition of the Athenian School for postulating this extreme simplification of the Neoplatonic system of hypostases, apparently retreating even from the relatively simple and fluid system of his master Plotinus, and in effect collapsing the realm of the One back into Intellect,’ 357.

23 Porphyry, *On Abstinence From Killing Animals*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell UP, 2000, 1.29.4; For the text in Greek I use Porphyrius, *Philosophi Platonici: Oscula Selecta*, ed. Augustus Navck, Hildesheim, Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, (coll. ‘Biblioteca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana’), 1963. Discussing the first principle of Porphyry, Hankey writes, ‘At this point, Porphyry, as reconstructed by Pierre Hadot, comes back to mind, for this is most like his primary *einai*, “to be” simplified beyond predication: “the most intensive possible unity of thought and being without difference.”’ Hankey, ‘The Postmodern Retrieval of Neoplatonism,’ 51.

24 *Ennead* 6.9.3. 18–22.

25 Strange, 18.

26 *Ibid.*

27 Cf. *Republic* 517b-d.

28 Dillon, ‘Porphyry’s Doctrine of the First Principle,’ 53.

29 *Ibid.*, 53.

30 Werner Beierwaltes, ‘Unity and Trinity in Dionysius and Eriugena’, *Hermathena* 157 (1994), 1–20, at 5.

31 Dillon, ‘Porphyry’s Doctrine of the First Principle,’ 54.

32 *Ibid.*, 56.

33 *Ibid.*, 57.

34 Atherton, 174.

35 On the One as being beyond relation, cf. John Bussanich, ‘Plotinus’s Metaphysics of the One,’ In *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 38–65, at 44–45.

36 Dillon, ‘Porphyry’s Doctrine of the First Principle,’ 54.

- 37 Cf. Beierwaltes, 'Unity and Trinity.'
- 38 Strange, 32.
- 39 Dillon, "Intellect and the One," 28.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 29.
- 41 Pierre Aubenque, 'Plotin et le dépassement de l'ontologie grecque classique,' in Hadot (éd.) *Le Néoplatonisme* (Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1971): 101–108, at 107.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 107.
- 43 Atherton, 181.
- 44 Cf. also Dillon, 'Intellect and the One,' 34.
- 45 Strange, 22.
- 46 On this debate, cf. John Dillon, "'A Kind of Warmth': Some Reflections on the Concept of "Grace" in the Neoplatonic Tradition,' in Lewis Ayres, (ed.) *The Passionate Intellect: Essays on the Transformation of Classical Traditions*, Rutgers University Studies in Classical Humanities Volume 7 (New Brunswick, U.S.A.: Transaction Publishers, 1995), 323–32.
- 47 *De Abstinencia* 1.29.2.