

The One: Exposition
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CONTENTS:

Purpose of quote sequence: reveal complexity of the One; organize understanding of formless grades
Primary goals: understanding One's complete perfection; discovering paradigmatic thought-model
Maintaining One's integrity in thought
Intellect operates in dualities; don't abolish plurality of frameworks
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Two views of Truth, practical and ultimate
The Philosopher-Sage enunciates Logos; priority of stating God's existence; transmission of wisdom-knowledge
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Paradigmatic inclusion of principles in the One's super-knowledge
We are preoccupied with an understanding of our understanding; not to be confused with acquaintance with the Reality

BOOKS QUOTED FROM OR REFERENCED:

- Plotinus, *The Enneads* (MacKenna translation, 4th ed.)
- John N. Deck, *Nature, Contemplation, and the One: A Study in the Philosophy of Plotinus*

- Rene Guenon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*
- Rene Guenon, *The Multiple States of Being*

PLOTINUS QUOTES REFERENCED: V.4.2, VI.8.16, VI.9.5, VI.9.6

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NOTES:

- **RETYPE AD PAPER presented in class (V09MP).**
- This is **1983 03/18d, The One: Exposition Paper, and the fourth entry associated with this date. 1983 03/18a = Plotinus; One Class. 1983 03/18b= Invocatory Prelude Paper. 1983 03/18c = The Divine Numbers 1-6 Paper.**
- This paper is read and discussed in WG Class 1983 0318a Plotinus; One.

THE ONE: EXPOSITION

[Paper as read by AS in WG Class 1983 0318a Begins]

Arranging the series of quotes recited in the course of this discussion in a specific sequence is meant to accomplish a dual purpose. On the one hand it should reveal something about the mysterious and infinite complexity of the One, and simultaneously it should organize and order for our understanding the formless grades within the unshaped, the unfigured, which we will refer to as its indivisible aspects. The inquiry aims to reveal both the meta-ontological source of Plotinus' revelations, which is a Soul rooted in the One [Scan File reads: the Soul which is rooted in the One], and the reasoning that is based on and flows from the Soul as an Authentic Existent in the Intellectual-Principle, i.e., we are speaking of an inspired Truth [Scan File reads: i.e., this is inspired Truth]. The first priority is to arrive at some understanding of the complete perfection of the One itself. Secondly and concomitantly will be the discovery of a paradigmatic thought-model that will indicate how any "one"--whether Idea, God, Number, or Being--is necessarily constituted. This developing insight may then become a key that will unlock some of the mysteries in Plotinus' teachings and disclose for the spiritual aspirant the inner significance of the theory of participation.

It is important to continually bear in mind that our thought must always keep the One intact while we develop our understanding of it as a paradigm for other referents or principles. Thus, though we necessarily employ an incorrect mode of thinking in the effort to glimpse realities that are beyond thinking [Scan File reads: thought], we will never fragment the unity of the One. When we speak, for example, of the "partless aspects" of the indivisible unity, we cannot help but recognize and try to account for the fact that we are employing and addressing an intellect that operates in dualities. We cannot do otherwise. But this very problem, strangely enough, precisely indicates that we are not to abolish the plurality of frameworks that are available to us and which are applicable to the universal relativity that is both suspended from the One and included within it. We must explain how universal relativity is included in the One in a special way. This interpretation will attempt to portray and to account for that possibility and will permit us to expound the two views of truth--the practical and the ultimate. These two views are the ultimate truth that is both the substratum of the appearance and the truths within the appearance--that is, truths that are not reduced to nor resolved into that Ultimate.

The Philosopher-Sage enunciates the Logos (the Word), and the knowledge he communicates is primarily Wisdom. He is required to be precise within the given structures, the cultural mores, and the needs of his era, yet his stance is also outside of and beyond these forms. Hence it is only natural that first in the order of importance should be his statements about the existence of God, the One-Only--for, following upon this certitude that is the very core of all that he will say, he also transmits for our benefit a wisdom-knowledge or *prima philosophia* conascent with the foundations of our world and our being.

The One is absolute positivity: pure universal existence inbound with the totality of possibilities and infinity of power. Perhaps it might be more meaningful and provocative to say that it is Intelligence--or, better still, Pure Intelligence. Sufficient and complete in itself, *the Only Perfection* is without peer and is beyond any limitation, dependence, need, or multiplicity of any kind. This affirmation of its transcendence does not imply that the One is a blank homogeneity or a zero, but, rather, that it is unlimited fullness. To aim the understanding "beyond being" does not mean that it must at some point fall into an abyss of nothingness. On the contrary, whatever aseity characterizes any principle or idea is removed and the infinity of the transcendent is then conceptually available. We hope to be able to unfold

the peculiar way in which the transcendent One is *inclusive* of all and the cause of all and everything that is, explaining as we proceed, *how* and why it is properly described as a non-dual fullness rather than as a nothingness.

In several tractates of the *Enneads*, Plotinus describes the essential characteristics of the One-Only. Our ensuing statements will try to explicate them in detail, yet we must follow his example and take great care in discussing these characteristics, for it is misleading and incorrect to speak of such “attributes” except in a most precise way, albeit a somewhat strange and mysterious way.

In tractate V.4.2, Plotinus refers to that which is above the Intellectual-Principle as “self-distinguishing throughout...that self-intellection which, stemming from an inner consciousness, takes place...in a mode other than that of the Intellectual-Principle.” [Deck trans.] Again, in VI.8.16 (Deck trans.), he calls it an eternal “wakefulness” (or a consciousness) that cannot be separated from the totality of its indeterminate contents--contents that are not other than or different from the container.

On page 19 of *Nature, Contemplation, and the One*, John Deck asserts that “the One is called an eternal super-knowledge.” He is referring to his translation of tractate VI.8.16, 31-36: “If, now, its (the One’s) act does not become but is always, and is a kind of wakefulness which is not other than the one who is awake, being a wakefulness and an eternal super-knowledge, it will *be* in the way it is awake. The wakefulness is beyond being and Nous and intelligent life; the wakefulness is itself.”

Deck asks, is this “a wakefulness which is a *super*-knowledge, or a wakefulness which is above knowledge?” Bearing in mind that there are other interpretations, Mr. Deck, a sincere and discriminating devotee of the Sage, tends to identify the One’s wakefulness with its super-knowledge. “Plotinus goes on to say,” he says, “that the One is not, so to speak, imperceptive, but everything of it is in it and with it [i.e., it is entirely self-contained]; it is entirely self-discerning; life is in it and all things are in it; and its self-knowledge is itself, a self-knowledge by a kind of *synesthesia* being in eternal stasis and in a knowledge otherwise than knowledge according to the Nous.” [V.4.2, 16-20, Deck translation, square brackets in quote are Deck’s]

“Thus knowledge,” Deck concludes, “which appears in a way in nature, more fully in soul, perfectly in the Nous, is not absent from the highest ‘nature,’ the One: the continuity of knowledge is not abruptly broken in the ascent from the Nous to the One.”

Deck’s concentration here is intensely and sharply focused on the true meaning of the One. His is a magnificent exposition in positive terms of the master’s teaching on the One. He has seized the jugular vein of the doctrine when, a few lines later (page 21), he states further that “the self-identical *synesthesia* of the One can be a super-knowledge in a positive sense.

The statement that the One “will *be* in the way it is *awake*” is a particularly emphatic assertion of the identity of wakefulness (consciousness) with existence. Now we are not discussing the identity of Being and Knowledge, such as is found in the Intellectual-Principle, but the true identity and intact perfection of the One. As our discussion develops, we will perceive how all the so-called contents of this super-intelligence are--as it (the One). But first we must fully encounter the uniqueness of this conception of the Absolute: our minds should be brought to a halt by what we are being asked to consider. Pure unconditioned being in all its universality is being conceived here as identity with intrinsically appropriate super-intelligence: eternal stasis reigns. We are presented with a Supreme Intelligence that does not loosen, dwindle, or divide itself, nor is it modified or spread out among the lower orders of reality. This is the initial premise. Appreciating this intact perfection is a necessary and absolute prerequisite so to arrive at a proper understanding of emanation.

A pause is required here so that we may intently examine this nugget of gold, for it is a capital point, and we must insistently push our minds in this direction. First, what is the nature of the utter simplicity and complete perfection of the One? Only after we have firmly grasped this nature can the second question arise: how can this unique and unknowable Absolute be brought into relationship with anything else? The question may become meaningless if there isn't anything else, that is, if there are only illusory modifications of itself. But assuming that there are other principles--not necessarily outside the One--the question will naturally arise as to the nature of the relationship between the One and the others, and it is to this issue that we will direct our attention.

Plotinus clearly states that the One's simplicity is not that of a spatial point or a quantitative unit to be enumerated with others, "nor is its impartibility that of extreme minuteness; on the contrary, it is great beyond anything, great not in extension but in power..." [VI.9.6] In a preliminary fashion he dismisses the elementary associations that the word 'One' may have. We will find, as we go along, more and more of what he does mean by the One, and then we can compose the meaning of the word according to his statements about it. We are not to bring *our* definition of the One, and the psychological associations it may have for us, to this term. Now this very positive description of the Unity's power as beyond any determination or limitation means that unlimited power should be understood as an indivisible aspect that is identical with Unity. In this sense, it is beyond God, Divine Mind, or Being. Such a total affirmation is not only beyond any combination of the possibilities or determinations in the Intellectual-Principle, which includes the totality of all essences and Ideas, but points beyond to an ultimateless Ultimate "utterly a self-existent, with no concomitant whatever. This self-sufficing is the essence of its unity...supremely adequate, autonomous, all-transcending, most utterly without need." [VI.9.6] It is the Alone. This One is not, therefore, an abstraction from other principles. On the contrary, all other principles are *literally* divine outflowings from the superabundance of its Perfection. The later principles are all dependent on It; but the One depends on none. For any principle or being to be at all, it must first be a unity: the first principle of all principles is Unity itself, the principle of all principles. A similar definition of this simplex is provided by Rene Guenon in *The Reign of Quantity* (p. 95):

"If true unity is also to be described as "simple," that word must be understood in quite a different sense, so that it conveys only the essential indivisibility of true unity, and so as to exclude the idea that unity is in any way "composite," and this implies that it cannot rightly be conceived as made up of parts of any kind. ... On the other hand, although the principial unity is absolutely indivisible, it can nevertheless be said to be of an extreme complexity..."

"[Thus], when we say that universal Possibility is infinite or unlimited, it must be understood that we speak of nothing less than the Infinite itself, envisaged under a certain aspect, yet only in so far as one may say that there are aspects to the Infinite. For the Infinite is truly "without parts," and there can thus be no question of a multiplicity of aspects existing "distinctively" within it. It is we who do, so to speak, conceive of the Infinite under this aspect or that, since we can do no other." [Rene Guenon, *The Multiple States of Being*, p. 33]

Now similarly, the Plotinian affirmation and commentaries on the nature of the One do not preclude the possibility that the unity of every principle, every principle such as Number, Being, Life, Intellect, is paradigmatically included in the One's super-knowledge. The precise way in which these beings or unities are unoriginatedly and indivisibly actual within the One is the thread theme that we hope

to develop as we proceed. However, let us continue [AS adds: now] into the nature of this “wakefulness which is not other than the one who is awake”; pure Being-Consciousness.

Obviously, no symbol is adequate to this Absolute. But we are preoccupied with an understanding of our understanding of it, and Plotinus assures us that “there is a certain rough fitness in designating it as unity.” [VI.9.5] We are articulating in words and symbols our conceptions of it, but must keep in mind that although we are trying to make sense or meaning of his remarks, nonetheless, we are still confined within the sensible and should not assume this understanding to be an intimate acquaintance with the Reality that is beyond it. There are many who assume that the correctness of conceptual schematas within their imagination is a certification and domination by the reality, and there are even others who go further and insist that imagination is that reality. In confronting such obstacles, the Sage may more easily dissolve the difficulties with pregnant silence than with words.

[Paper as read by AS in WG Class 1983 0318a Ends]