

Time and Succession
Plotinus' Conception of Time as a Cosmological Principle
in *Ennead* III.7

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that Plotinus differentiates between time, which he identifies with the dispersive contemplation of Soul, and temporality, which is the ontological structure of sensible Nature. In the refutation of his predecessors, Plotinus shows why this distinction must be upheld: first, it ensures the conceptual consistency of the theory of time by taking into consideration that time must be prior to motion; second, the distinction between time and temporality ensures the ontological unity of time by removing time from the realm of dispersed phenomena and giving it the status of a principle of temporal phenomenality.

Because time thereby mediates between the creative Soul and created phenomena, it takes on a vital role in the continuity of the emanation, the procession of Being. By relating the higher creative part and the lower created part of Soul time sits at the node of Soul's twofoldness and thereby ensures a continuous emanation of sensible Nature from the higher principles.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the theory of time advanced by Plotinus. In his treatise “On Eternity and Time” (*Enn.* III.7) Plotinus defines time as “the life (ζωή) of soul in a movement of passage from one way of life (βίος) to another.”¹ According to Werner Beierwaltes, βίος refers here to different stages or states (*modi vivendi*) or the different phases of life in general, which are distinguished by what is before and after; ζωή, on the other hand, means an active force carrying the βίος.² Plotinus makes a subtle, yet crucial distinction between two different activities or movements which are inherent in Soul and which constitute the nature of time. The active force, the ζωή of Soul which precedes and carries the successive moments of βίος, is what Plotinus calls “time.”

In this thesis, I will argue that Plotinus draws a distinction between temporal succession (έφεξής) and time itself (χρόνος). I will show that, for Plotinus, temporality is the ontological structure of phenomenal reality, whereas time is the *principle* of this structure. Time, therefore, *transcends* temporality, since time is the cause of phenomenal temporality.³ I propose that Plotinus’ conception has

¹ *Enn.* III.7. 11. 42-45: “Εί οὖν χρόνον λέγοι ψυχῆς ἐν κινήσει μεταβατικῇ ἐξ ἄλλου εἰς ἄλλον βίον ζῶν εἶναι, ἄρ’ ἂν δοκοῖ τι λέγειν;”

² Werner Beierwaltes, *Plotinus: Über Ewigkeit und Zeit (Enneade III, 7)*, 3^e erg. Aufl. (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1981), 268.

³ I will use the terms “transcendence” and “principle” throughout this thesis to describe the nature of time in Plotinus’ treatise. Therefore, some preliminary remarks on these terms are in order. By “principle” I mean “metaphysical cause.” In this sense, time is the principle of temporality

both logical and ontological advantages because it ensures the conceptual consistency and ontological unity of time, and that Plotinus' treatise – especially in its refutation of his predecessors' opinions – is structured around these advantages.

Before I introduce the two advantages in more detail I need to briefly remark on our common conceptions about time and why they might be problematic. Plotinus acknowledges that we usually associate time with movement or change.⁴ This is not surprising; we are exposed to the temporal nature of the *kosmos*⁵ first and foremost by the experience of change. All around us things are moving, they come to be and cease to exist, and their forms change constantly; and for ourselves the most intimate experience of temporality is probably our own aging and eventual death. Obviously this ever-present change goes hand in hand with some sort of temporal succession. The possibility of change requires that there be a *future*, for change implies that something was *first* in a certain situation and

because time *causes* the temporal structure of everything that appears. This causation is metaphysical because it does not appear itself, it is not a *historical* event but is, rather, at work at every single moment.

For this reason, time as a principle is also *transcendent*. The term “transcendence” is problematic in the framework of this thesis, since the distinction between immanence and transcendence is not clear-cut in Plotinus. His layered ontology introduces various degrees of transcendence, on which I will touch but not elaborate in detail in this thesis. When I speak, therefore, of the transcendence of time I mean only that time is beyond the phenomenal. It does not appear but is a principle of appearance, in the sense I defined above.

⁴ I often use the terms “movement,” “motion,” and “change” interchangeably when I talk about the locomotion, qualitative, or substantial change of a phenomenon. Plotinus does know a kind of motion that is *not* associated with change, namely the activities of the hypostatic realities. Time, the life of Soul, is one of these hypostatic activities. I will introduce the concepts of motion and activity in greater detail later on in this thesis.

⁵ I use the term *kosmos* in the Greek meaning throughout the thesis. It is the ordered movement of the whole.

then in a different one. The relation between time and movement is intuitive because we necessarily experience them together. Yet, for the inquisitive mind the question remains, what precisely *is* this relationship between time and movement. Is movement the same as temporal succession? Or is time a measure of how swiftly or slowly a certain movement is progressing? Or maybe time is a certain aspect of change, which causes us to experience change and temporality the way we do? All of these are opinions about time are held by ancient philosophers, and Plotinus deals with them, among others, in his treatise on the subject. His refutations of other philosophers' views are, indeed, vital for understanding his own theory.

I propose, that Plotinus uses his predecessors to point out a (in his mind) common misconception about time: namely, that it is something that *appears*.⁶ In his analysis of these opinions then, he consistently points out how they all misplace time in the phenomenal realm; in this way, he sets the stage for his own theory, which he believes solves problems of the refuted opinions. Plotinus conceptualizes time not as something belonging to phenomenal change but, rather, as the transcendent principle thereof.

⁶ By "appearance" here, I do not mean corporeal appearance. Time is not a sensible phenomenon – we cannot directly see, hear, smell, taste, or touch it. But, as I pointed out earlier, we inevitably *experience* temporality when we experience change. In this way, we might be led to the conclusion that time is something that belongs to appearances. This is what Plotinus thinks to be at the core of all the misguided conceptions of time.

I will argue, with Plotinus, that this account has two philosophical advantages. First, Plotinus ensures the conceptual consistency of his theory of time by giving time ontological priority over all that is *in* time. Second, his theory of time remains faithful to the unity of time and the continuity of our experience of temporality by identifying time with the continuous contemplative activity of Soul (the life of Soul) and temporality with the structure of the object of Soul's contemplation.

First, Plotinus' approach ensures the conceptual consistency of the theory of time. Change presupposes time. Our experience of the flow of things coming and going in front of our eyes, and of the succession of thoughts in our minds requires a concept of time prior to this experience. If we relate time too closely to phenomenality we, therefore, run the risk of getting caught up in inconsistencies. Movement is *in* time, we will see Plotinus saying, meaning that time must be prior to movement because our experience of movement presupposes time. If we, therefore, place time in the phenomenal realm, we end up with the problem that *time is in time*. In other words, we are presupposing time in order to explain what time is, and fall into a circular argumentation. Plotinus solves this issue by proposing that time transcends the phenomenal realm and asserting it to be a principle of phenomenality.

Second, the distinction between phenomenal temporality and the principle of time ensures that the theory reflects the ontological unity of time. Our experi-

ence of temporality is continuous; therefore, it is intuitive to assume that there are no gaps, no breaks in the flux of temporal succession. Yet, Plotinus argues that some of his predecessors' theories are not faithful to this experience. Aristotle, who dedicates great effort to ensure that his theory reflects the continuity of time, is a central target of Plotinus' criticism. Aristotle defines time as a number of movement. Plotinus criticizes this approach because he thinks that it breaks the unity of time into distinct moments which Aristotle fails to reconnect. Plotinus, again, solves the issue by introducing time as a transcendent principle removed from the phenomenal realm.

Plotinus' distinction between time and temporality is closely bound up with his concept of Soul. For this reason, I will also briefly introduce this subject. Soul is the cosmological principle of dispersion in Plotinus' layered ontology. It disperses the intelligibles, which are unified in the Intellect, by contemplating them discursively and, thereby, producing multiplicity. Time, for Plotinus, is precisely this dispersive activity of Soul, which he calls the "life of Soul." Plotinus, therefore, *identifies Soul's discursive mode of contemplation with the dispersive activity that is time.*

Yet, the multiplicity that Soul creates is not outside of Soul. Rather, Soul is twofold in her nature: at her upper end she is the lowest of the hypostatic realities and, therefore, a transcendent ontological principle. Yet, at her lower end she is identified with her creations and disperses herself into multiplicity. I will begin

the second chapter of this thesis with a detailed explanation of Soul's nature and activity in Plotinus' thought. I will argue that time sits at the node between Soul's upper summit and her lower creations. In this way, the unity of time is reflected in Plotinus' theory. Time, as the contemplative activity of the hypostatic Soul, never ceases and is, thereby, continuous. Moreover, the temporality of the multiplicity in the phenomenal realm is also continuous because it is constantly being created through the contemplation of Soul. Hence, not only is the unity of time, as the life-activity of Soul, thereby ensured, but time is also the central concept that mediates the upper and lower ends of Soul. Time is the mode of Soul's contemplation; temporality is the structure of what is created through Soul's contemplation.

In sum, I argue that Plotinus' treatise on time rests on two argumentational pillars: a theory of time must be logically consistent and reflect the ontological unity of time. Plotinus achieves logical consistency by distinguishing between temporality as the structure of phenomenal reality and time as the transcendent principle that creates this structure. To stay truthful to the ontological unity of time Plotinus conceptualizes time as the contemplative activity of Soul and temporality as the mode of being of what Soul contemplates. Plotinus uses his predecessors' opinions as a springboard to showcase why his own theory is superior. He argues that his predecessors all place time within the phenomenal, which either forces them into logical predicaments or destroys the unity of time.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I will provide a detailed interpretation of Plotinus' refutation of the opinions of his predecessors. He identifies three different lines of thinking about time, which he will criticize:

either time is movement, as it is called, or one might say it is what is moved, or something belonging to movement.⁷

It sometimes does not seem quite clear whom Plotinus has in mind when he talks about these "important statements." The first one, which identifies time with motion itself, was current in the early Academy.⁸ According to Gordon Clark, a few Stoics also held this view, although Zeno and others fall into another group.⁹ The second view, which holds that time is the moved *kosmos* – the "sphere of the universe"¹⁰ – is of Pythagorean origin.¹¹ Finally, the third view, that time is something belonging to motion, seems to be the most important one for Plotinus, as he spends a large portion of his treatise on that idea. First, time, which is supposed to relate somehow to motion, may be the interval of motion – the "distance covered." This opinion is most importantly held by Zeno. Second, time could be the measure of motion, as it is famously defined by Aristotle. Lastly, time may be a consequence

⁷ *Enn.* III.7. 9. 18-19: "Ἡ γὰρ κίνησις ἢ λεγομένη, ἢ τὸ κινούμενον λέγοι ἄν, ἢ κινήσεώς τι τὸν χρόνον."

⁸ Arthur H. Armstrong, *Plotinus. On Eternity and Time (Enn III.7)*, in: *Plotinus: In six vols. Vol. 3. Enneads III. 1-9*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 318.

⁹ Gordon Clark, "The Theory of Time in Plotinus," *The Philosophical Review* 53, no. 4 (1944): 337.

¹⁰ *Enn.* III.7. 23-24: "τοῦ παντός ἄν σφαῖραν."

¹¹ *Ibid*; Armstrong, *Plotinus (Enn. III.7)*, 318.

of motion, as is said by the Epicureans.¹² I will argue that Plotinus uses different strategies to criticize these opinions – and outlining these strategies will aid me in corroborating my claim that Plotinus splits the discussion of time in *Ennead* III.7 into two parts: logical and ontological. For, indeed, the arguments that Plotinus employs against several of the criticized opinions are purely logical – namely, the arguments against the identification of time with motion, the identification of time with the moved, and Zeno’s theory of time as the interval of motion. Plotinus argues that there can be no concept of movement without presupposing a concept of time. Hence, time cannot be identified with movement, nor with anything that is moved. For nothing can move without there being a temporal succession prior to the movement, otherwise there would be nowhere for the thing to move to. Also, Zeno’s argument will be proven untenable, for it either implicitly identifies time with movement once more, or it reduces temporality to spatiality, as Plotinus shows.

After the refutation of all these opinions, Plotinus moves on to the view that time is a number or measure of motion, as it was famously held by Aristotle. Here, the discussion shifts towards a different goal. Plotinus refutes the previous opinions on logical base – he shows them to be inconsistent because they violate the

¹² *Enn.* III.7. 7. 24-26: “οἱ δὲ κινήσεως τι ἢ διάστημα κινήσεως, οἱ δὲ μέτρον, οἱ δ’ ὅλως παρακολουθοῦν αὐτῇ.” For the origins of these notions see Armstrong, *Plotinus (Enn. III.7)*, 320 and Clark, “Time in Plotinus,” 338.

necessary priority of time before movement or change; but now he adds an ontological element to the inquiry. For this reason, I deal with the refutation of Aristotle in a different sub-section, chapter 1.2. I will begin this section with a brief discussion of Aristotle's own argument, so that the context in which the proposed arguments operate may be clear. We will see that Aristotle goes to great lengths to ensure that his conception stays true to the continuity – the unity – of time. He does so by ontologically linking time with space, so that time will be the measurable aspect of a movement over a certain distance of space. Plotinus, too, is eager to preserve the unity of time in his theory, yet he deems that Aristotle's position fails to do so because Aristotle fragments time into distinct moments, despite his best efforts to forge a concept of continuous time.

But Plotinus does not simply refute the arguments of his predecessors out of a desire to set his own theory apart. I propose that his refutations contain implicit arguments that support his own view. Most important, as I will argue, is that Plotinus implicitly sets up a distinction between temporal succession and time itself. This distinction is necessary precisely for reasons that he shows throughout the refutations. None of his predecessors' opinions make this separation, and for this reason they all fail, in Plotinus' mind. For him, only by distinguishing between temporality and time can we maintain a consistent theory that ensures the unity of time.

In chapter 2, I will discuss Plotinus' own approach to a theory of time. Since he closely interweaves the subjects of time and Soul, I will briefly discuss the nature of Soul and its emanation from Intellect and the One, as it is mainly discussed in *Ennead* V.1. It is important to remember that for Plotinus, the term "soul" is not laden with as much historical meaning as it is for us nowadays. Especially important is that the many layers of soul, which I will discuss in detail in chapter 2.1, are for the most part not at all concerned with subjectivity – but this may be our first association. Rather, Soul is an ontological, cosmological, and cosmogonical principle in the Neoplatonic context; I will mostly focus on its dispersive activity by which it realizes the multitude of the things, in opposition to the unifying activity of Intellect. In this, I will find the bridge back into the discussion of time – because time, as I will argue, is, for Plotinus, nothing else than this dispersive activity of Soul which he calls the "life of Soul."

In sum, this thesis argues that Plotinus, against his predecessors, provides a concept of time as not something appearing together with moving phenomena, but rather, as the principle of dispersion which makes phenomenal movement possible in the first place. In this way, Plotinus succeeds, first, in following the logical order of the priority of time and posteriority of movement, and, second, in honouring the ontological unity of time.

CHAPTER 2 REFUTED OPINIONS

This chapter will be concerned with Plotinus' refutation of his predecessors. It will follow the arguments that Plotinus launches against the opinions of earlier philosophers and thereby negatively establish the need for a different approach – Plotinus' own theory, which we will encounter in chapter 2. But I will not only provide an explanation of Plotinus' arguments. I will also argue that these refutations are not merely a formality for Plotinus; on the contrary, hidden within them there are the two *positive* attributes of what Plotinus deems necessary for an adequate theory of time. First, the approach must honour the logical priority of temporality over change. Only if we presuppose temporality is change possible. Section 1.1 of this chapter will deal with this logical side of Plotinus' argumentation. I will argue that Plotinus achieves his goal of preserving the logical hierarchy by distinguishing between time and what I will call temporality; for Plotinus, the latter is an attribute of phenomenal reality, whereas he will construe the former as the *principle* of change – or, more generally speaking, phenomenal movement – and a principle of phenomenal reality as a whole.

Section 1.2 of this chapter focuses exclusively on Plotinus' criticism of Aristotle's theory of time. It is still based on the arguments established in section 1.1, yet, another pillar of the Plotinian theory shifts into the scope here: the unity of time – in other words, the theory gains an *ontological* aspect. I do not think that it is a coincidence that Plotinus looks towards Aristotle here, since the Stagirite goes

to great lengths to theoretically undergird the unity of time. He will do so by conceptualizing temporal movement as dependent of spatial extension. Since, in Aristotle's opinion, space is obviously continuous, time will be, too, if time is related to space. I will give a detailed account of Aristotle's theory in section 1.2.1 of this chapter. Plotinus will argue against this view, and he will use it to further corroborate his own approach. For him, Aristotle fails to ensure the unity of time because he does not honour the necessary distinction between the temporal aspect of phenomenality and time as the principle of this temporality. Section 1.2.2 will focus on Plotinus' refutation of the Aristotelean view.

2.1 THE ARGUMENTS FROM CONSISTENCY: THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TIME AND SUCCESSION

In this section, I will first deal with the rejection of the notions that identify time with movement itself or with the sphere which is moved. Plotinus' treatise is constructed somewhat in parallel to his earlier reflections on eternity, where he refutes the identification of eternity with either rest or the substance which is at rest. Second, I will look at Plotinus' critique of Zeno's theory that time is the distance or interval covered by motion.

2.1.1 TIME IS NOT MOVEMENT

The identification of time with motion itself is dismissed in a rather short manner.¹³

It is not possible for it [time] to be movement, whether one takes all movements together and makes a single movement out of them, or whether one takes it as ordered movement, for what we call movement, of either kind, is in time.¹⁴

Motion, whether all motion or a particular motion, is *in* time, and can therefore not be identified with time. The term “motion” (κίνησις) in Plotinus is rather complicated, for he uses it in two different senses: first, as the movement of a body (σῶμα) or of the *kosmos* (κίνησιν τοῦ παντός). This movement happens only on

¹³ The argument is, in fact, so short that Clark feels inclined to suspect it, although being “formally logical,” to be “a merely verbal argument.” Clark, “Time in Plotinus,” 338. I am not sure if I grasp the meaning of Clark’s critique. I take it to say something like this: the argument that time cannot be the same as motion because motion is *in* time is logically sound. It depends on the exact semantics of “in time” though. Clark compares Plotinus with Aristotle, stating that “in the *Physics* IV 12, 221a4, Aristotle says that to be in time means to be measured by time. He had previously said that not only is motion measured by time but, conversely, time is measured by motion, because they define each other (220b15).” But that the meaning of “in time” cannot be the same in both Plotinus and Aristotle does not seem surprising. For Aristotle, time is a measure of motion. Of course, the measure is dependent on what is being measured, otherwise it would have to measure without measuring anything. But for Plotinus, as we will see, time is the name of the activity of the Soul that gives birth to motion, and subdues everything moving to it. *Enn.* III.7. 11. 25-35. This activity of the Soul he calls a kind of motion (κίνησις), as well. But we have to be careful here: obviously, Plotinus uses κίνησις in two different ways; the movement of the *kosmos*, which is characterized by temporality and spatiality; and the activity of Soul, which he will indeed call “time”, but which is neither temporal nor spatial, because it is the cause of both temporality and spatiality. This movement, Plotinus says, is the life (ζῳή) of the Soul. So, Plotinus’ argument against the identification of time with the motion of the *kosmos* is certainly not “merely verbal.” It is consistent with his own approach which makes time, as the moving life of Soul, the cosmological principle of the movement of the *kosmos*, which makes time primal to this movement.

¹⁴ *Enn.* III.7. 8. 1-5: “Κίνησιν μὲν οὐχ οἷόν τε οὔτε τὰς συμπάσας λαμβάνοντι κινήσεις καὶ οἷον μίαν ἐκ πασῶν ποιοῦντι, οὔτε τὴν τεταγμένην. ἐν χρόνῳ γὰρ ἡ κίνησις ἐκατέρα ἢ λεγομένη.”

the lowest ontological level, the sphere of sensible phenomena. Movement, in this sense, is subjected to temporality and spatiality and is powerless to create anything below itself. Second, there is movement as a cosmological principle. This movement is hypostatic activity, in Soul, in Intellect, and even in the One, and it is crucial to Plotinus' theory of emanation. This kind of motion is neither temporal nor spatial, but is the self-unfolding activity of each *hypostasis* (ὑπόστασις). On the level of Soul, Plotinus makes the crucial distinction in *Ennead* III.7. 11. 25-35:

Soul, making the world of sense in imitation of that other world, moving with a motion which is not that which exists There, but like it, and intending to be an image of it, first of all put itself into time, which it made instead of eternity, and then handed over that which came into being as a slave to time, by making the whole of it exist in time and encompassing all its ways with time. For since the world of sense moves in Soul – there is no other place of it (this universe) than Soul – it moves also in the time of Soul.¹⁵

The movement (κίνησις) of Soul is what Plotinus will actually define as time: the life (ζῴη) of Soul. But this is not the kind of motion about which he is taking when he argues against the identification of time with motion. He is absolutely clear about this when he states that

¹⁵ *Enn.* III.7. 11. 25-35: “οὕτω δὴ καὶ αὐτὴ κόσμον ποιοῦσα αἰσθητὸν μιμήσει ἐκείνου κινούμενον κίνησιν οὐ τὴν ἐκεῖ, ὁμοίαν δὲ τῇ ἐκεῖ καὶ ἐθέλουσαν εἰκόνα ἐκείνης εἶναι, πρῶτον μὲν ἑαυτὴν ἐχρόνωνσεν ἀντὶ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦτον ποιήσασα. ἔπειτα δὲ καὶ τῷ γενομένῳ ἔδωκε δουλεύειν χρόνῳ, ἐν χρόνῳ αὐτὸν πάντα ποιήσασα εἶναι, τὰς τούτου διεξόδους ἀπάσας ἐν αὐτῷ περιλαβοῦσα. ἐν ἐκείνῃ γὰρ κινούμενος - οὐ γὰρ τις αὐτοῦ τοῦδε τοῦ παντός τόπος ἢ ψυχὴ - καὶ ἐν τῷ ἐκείνης αὐτὸ ἐκινεῖτο χρόνῳ.” Plotinus also draws a similar contrast between psychic motion and bodily motion in *Enn.* III.7. 13. 30-45 and 50-65.

as Soul presents one activity after another, and then again another in ordered succession, it produces the succession along with activity.¹⁶

The movement of Soul is here described as an activity (ἐνέργεια) that has creative power. The movement of the *kosmos*, on the other hand, is merely succession (ἐφεξῆς). This succession cannot be identified with time, since it is produced by time and moving in time.¹⁷

This distinction between motion *in* time and atemporal motion is vital to understanding Plotinus' system. In more modern terms, I will call this the distinction between time and temporality. Temporality, i.e. the succession that characterizes the sensible phenomena, is merely the lowest end of the ontological hierarchy, in which the unity of the Highest Reality is dispersed into a manifold. Time, i.e. the cosmological principle of this dispersion in Soul, is itself atemporal; otherwise we would be forced to say that time is in time, which does not make any sense. Rather, all temporal phenomena are in time in the sense that they spring from the time-activity of Soul.

In this light, Plotinus' next argument will be understandable. He says that movement can stop, but time cannot. To the obvious reply that the motion of the *kosmos* never stops, Plotinus answers that

¹⁶ *Enn.* III.7. 11. 35-40: "Τὴν γὰρ ἐνέργειαν αὐτῆς παρεχομένη ἄλλην μετ' ἄλλην, εἴθ' ἕτεραν πάλιν ἐφεξῆς, ἐγέννα τε μετὰ τῆς ἐνεργείας τὸ ἐφεξῆς."

¹⁷ As we see, Plotinus stays consistent throughout all of the treatise. One might, however, accuse him of not giving the theories he opposes a fair chance, since he always assumes his own view, and disproves the others based on it.

it would go round to the same point not in the time in which half its course was finished, and one would be half, the other double time; each movement would be movement of the universe, one going from the same place to the same place again, and the other reaching the half-way point.¹⁸

The revolution of the sphere returns to the starting point in any given time, but does not return to that point in half the time, although both the half motion and the complete motion are the movement of the *kosmos*. For this reason, movement cannot be identified with time. Movement, in this case, means the movement of the sensible which we see all around us. As soon as we open our eyes we see movement, and it never stops. This movement is characterized by a temporal succession – we experience reality as a flow of different things coming and going, one after another. But, if we follow Plotinus, this succession is not time itself because it presupposes time. This is what Plotinus means here, when he says that motion happens *in* time. What time itself is, he does not reveal yet; he will define it later as the *principle* of the succession that characterizes the movement of the *kosmos*. Time will be the cosmological (and cosmogonical) activity that creates the distinct moments, which then follow each other in succession.

With the distinction between time and temporality in mind, we can meet Clark's critique that this "seems to be little more than a confusion between the

¹⁸ *Enn.* III.7. 8. 10-15: "καὶ αὕτη περφέροίτο ἅ εἰς τὸ αὐτό, οὐκ ἐν ᾧ τὸ ἥμισυ ἦνυσται, καὶ ὁ μὲν ἂν ἕξη ἥμισυς, ὁ δὲ διπλάσιος, κινήσεως τοῦ παντὸς οὐσης ἑκατέρας, τῆς τε εἰς τὸ αὐτὸ ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτοῦ καὶ τῆς εἰς τὸ ἥμισυ ἠκούσης."

continuous revolving of the sphere as time itself and a single revolution as a unit of time.”¹⁹ The continuous revolution of the sphere is nothing other than the continuous succession of moments that is the revolving *kosmos*, i.e. it is temporality. A certain length of the succession is the revolving of the *kosmos*, as well. But since succession is only a feature of sensible phenomena, it is not a problem that we can think of it as manifest in succession in general *or* as a certain part of it, just as I can think of space as space in general *or* just the space filling the room in which I am sitting. Time, however, is the principle of the succession of the phenomenal realm, and therefore cannot be identified with the succession in general, nor with a certain length of it, and most certainly, as Plotinus wants to point out in his argument, not with both. Otherwise, we would again face the problem that we would have to say that time is in time, or rather, this time, that is, a certain length of time, is in time. We cannot say that because time must be the principle which *gives rise to succession*; it does not have any parts. Of a certain length of succession, however, we can very well say that it is part of succession in general because they are both sensible phenomena. They are part of the same ontological tier.²⁰

¹⁹ Clark, “Time in Plotinus,” 339.

²⁰ Clark proposes a similar solution to the problem: “Aristotle and Plotinus reject the identification of time with motion because they do not believe it does justice to the unity of time” *Ibid.*, 340. The unity of time as a principle is indeed Plotinus’ incentive. Nevertheless, I think that Clark fails to make clear the vital point of the distinction between succession as phenomenal and time as principal. Clark does refer to it though, saying that “time has its existence in the activity of soul – how could it be otherwise? But souls are not themselves in time; only their affections and productions are; time is posterior to souls; for what is in time is inferior to time” It must be noted that Plotinus indeed thinks of the souls as in time, when he speaks of the Soul temporalizing itself. *Ibid; Enn. III.7. 11. 25-35*. Only the hypostatic Soul is atemporal, since time is its movement-activity. In-

The distinction between time and the temporality of successive moments, which I have established in this section, is the first point of anchor for this thesis. It serves as one of two argumentative pillars of Plotinus' idealist conception of time. The second pillar will be the argument from the necessary unity of time, which I will elaborate through the scope of Plotinus' critique of the Aristotelean theory of time. But first, Plotinus argues against two other views on the nature of time. He follows the refutation of time as *movement* with an argument against time as that which is *moved* and time as the *interval* of motion.

2.1.2 TIME IS NOT THE MOVED

If time is not to be identified with movement, much less can it be identified with that which is moved. For, if movement itself is only *in* time, in the sense of being caused by Time²¹ as the cosmological principle of the movement-succession of the *kosmos*, then that which is subordinate to this succession can be time even less:

If then, time is not the movement of the sphere, it can hardly be the sphere itself, which was supposed to be time because it is in motion.²²

dividual souls however are temporal manifestations of Soul and therefore *in* time.

²¹ To clarify the argument, I will from now on use "Time" with a capital T to refer to Time as the cosmological principle. To refer to the more common sense of time or to temporal succession I will stick to the lower case, "time."

²² *Enn.* III.7. 8. 20-25: "Εἰ τοίνυν μηδὲ ἡ κίνησις τῆς σφαίρας ὁ χρόνος, σχολῆ γ' ἂν ἡ σφαῖρα αὐτή, ἢ ἐκ τοῦ κινεῖσθαι ὑπενοήθη χρόνος εἶναι."

This argument barely consists in one sentence, but it contains a valuable point: Plotinus refutes the view that time is to be identified with succession. From this, he follows that time also cannot be identified with that which is *characterized by* succession. This seems like an intuitive point – to the extent that it may seem almost redundant. Plotinus may have felt the same way, which would explain why he spares but a sentence on it. Nevertheless, there is an aspect of Plotinus’ argument that is worth emphasizing: time is not moving! This is an important point to keep in mind here. Too often we commonly identify time as something that moves; we only need to think about the popular proverb “time flies.” Plotinus reminds us that time is actually *not* flying; the successive moments *in* time are coming and going, but Time itself stays quite the same.

2.1.3 TIME IS NOT THE INTERVAL OF MOTION

Next, Plotinus turns to the Stoic theory of time. For Zeno, time is the interval (διάστημα) of motion, a measure of swiftness and slowness.²³ If we were to take up this view, we would encounter a serious problem: there is not only one interval. Even in the Stoic definition itself we already see this issue: a swift movement will cover a greater distance than a slow one in the same time. As Clark points out, “a unit that measures, but is different from, all intervals would have a better claim

²³ Clark, “Time in Plotinus,” 340-341.

to be called time.”²⁴ But the theory explicitly identifies time with the interval itself.

And since there are many such intervals, Plotinus argues that

if it is the distance covered by the movement, first, this is not the same for all movement, not even uniform movement, for movement is quicker and slower, even movement in space. And both these distances covered [by the quicker and slower movement] would be measured by some one other thing, which would more correctly be called time. Well then, of which of the two of them is the distance covered time, or rather of which of all the movements, which are infinite in number?²⁵

Another approach would be not to identify time with the distance covered not by all kinds of motion, but just the movement of the universe. This view was held by the Stoics Archytas and Chrysippus, and it avoids the impossible conclusion that there are many times, because the revolution of the *kosmos* is uniform and one. Nevertheless, this conception must face a similar objection: either time is a measure of the distance covered by the movement of the *kosmos* (but that is not the Stoic view) or time is the distance itself (which is what the Stoics are proposing). But what exactly do they mean by “distance covered?” It could be the interval of the cosmic motion itself. But that is nothing other than this motion, and nothing further:

²⁴ *Ibid.* 341.

²⁵ *Enn.* III.7. 8. 20-30: “Εἰ μὲν διάστημα, πρῶτον μὲν οὐ πάσης κινήσεως τὸ αὐτό, οὐδὲ τῆς ὁμοειδοῦς. θᾶττον γὰρ καὶ βραδύτερον ἢ κινήσις καὶ ἢ ἐν τότῳ. Καὶ εἶεν ἂν ἄμφω μετρούμεναι αἱ διαστάσεις ἐν ἑτέρῳ, ὃ δὴ ὀρθότερον ἂν τις εἴποι χρόνον. Ποτέρας δὲ αὐτῶν τὸ διάστημα χρόνος, μᾶλλον δὲ τίνος αὐτῶν ἀπείρον οὐσῶν;”

But if it [time] is the distance covered by the movement of the universe, if the distance in the movement itself is meant, what would this be other than the movement?²⁶

And that time can be identified with the movement of the *kosmos* has already been refuted above. Or “distance covered” could refer to a definite quantity; but then we are talking about space, like the movement of a ball that rolls over the floor. The distance that the ball covers is definitely measured in space, not in time. Lastly, the revolution of the *kosmos* could have an interval because it always repeats itself; it always comes back to the point of its origin, and then starts anew. But then there are again multiple intervals, and therefore multiple times. Thus, Plotinus says:

The movement, certainly is quantitatively determined; but this definite quantity will either be measured by space, because the space it has traversed is a certain amount of space, and this will be the distance covered; but this is not time but space; or the movement itself by its continuity and the fact that it does not stop at once but keeps on forever, will contain the distance. But this would be a multiplicity of movement; [...]²⁷

In this case, the quantity of the movement is merely a number, like two or three. But the distance covered by, for example, two revolutions is an interval of space.

²⁶ *Enn.* III.7. 8. 30-35: “Εἰ δὲ τῆς τοῦ παντός διάστημα, εἰ μὲν τὸ ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ κινήσει διάστημα, τί ἂν ἄλλο ἢ ἡ κίνησις ἂν εἴν;” See Clark, “Time in Plotinus,” 341.

²⁷ *Enn.* III.7. 8. 30-40: “τὸ δὲ τοσόνδε τοῦτο ἦτοι τῷ τόπῳ, ὅτι τοσόδε ὄν διεζήληθε, μετρηθήσεται, καὶ τὸ διάστημα τοῦτο ἔσται. τοῦτο δὲ οὐ χρόνος, ἀλλὰ τόπος. ἢ αὐτὴ ἡ κίνησις τῇ συνεχείᾳ αὐτῆς καὶ τῷ μὴ εὐθὺς πεπαῦσθαι, ἀλλ’ ἐπιλαμβάνειν αἰεὶ, τὸ διάστημα ἔχει. Ἀλλὰ τοῦτο τὸ πολὺ τῆς κινήσεως ἂν εἴν.”

So, what the Stoics discover is either an interval of space or a quantity of motion as a number, and this quantity can only occur *in* time.

We can thus summarize Plotinus' refutation of the Stoic view by stating that to define time as the interval or distance covered by motion is either ultimately to identify time with motion itself – which has already been refuted – or to conflate time with space. The Stoic view, therefore, proves to be untenable.

The treatment of the view that identifies time as an interval concludes this section of the thesis – and, I propose, a section of Plotinus' treatise on time, as well. We have now established the distinction between time and temporality, and discussed the arguments that undergird it. Plotinus utilizes some of his predecessors' theories to show that, if time (as a principle of movement) and temporality or succession (as an attribute of moving phenomena) are not held apart, one's theory of time falls prey to inconsistencies. Plotinus agrees with his opponents that time must have something to do with movement. Indeed, this point seems intuitive. Movement and succession are our first indicator that there is something that we may call time. "Our ageing, the sun rising and setting, and rising again and setting again, the phases of the moon: these phenomena make manifest a first, and probably insuperable, notion of time," as José Baracat puts it.²⁸ But Baracat

²⁸ José Baracat, "Soul's, Desire, and the Origin of Time", *Literary, Philosophical, and Religious Studies in the Platonic Tradition*, ed. John F. Finamore and John Phillips (Sankt Augustin: Academia, 2013), 28.

also asserts that succession alone “would manifest nothing more than the unintelligible and inarticulate occurrence of phenomena” if there were not something prior to it.²⁹ Plotinus succeeds in showing that succession and time must be distinct by critiquing views that do not uphold this difference: the view that time is the same as succession; the view that time is *in* succession; and the view that time is the velocity with which the succession proceeds. The first view is rejected because to think succession we must presuppose time. That the second view is untenable follows from that argument, as well; if succession presupposes time, that which is *in* succession presupposes time all the more. Lastly, the third view is shown to be reducible to the already refuted first view or to be a conflation of the concepts of time and space.

Plotinus’ own view will solve – arguably, of course – these problems by conceptualizing time as the principle of movement that *transcends* the temporality of *immanent* phenomena. But before he proceeds to work out his own account, he first turns to another famous definition of time: time as the measure of movement. This view is famously put forth by Aristotle, and Plotinus’ refutation of it will serve as the second pillar of this thesis. Until now, I have argued (with Plotinus) that time is necessarily a transcendent principle because phenomenal succession presupposes the concept of time. Hence, the argument was mainly *lo-*

²⁹ *Ibid.* 33. See also Peter Manchester, “Time and the Soul in Plotinus, Enn. III 7 [45], 11.” *Dionysius* 2 (1978): 28.

gical. But now, Plotinus argues from the structure of time itself. He will show that time must be thought of as transcendent if we suppose it to be *unified*. Hence, the following arguments will be mainly *ontological*. By arguing that Aristotle's conception fails to ensure the unity of time – although Aristotle goes to great lengths to do exactly this – Plotinus also implicitly disproves another intuition about the nature of time: that it consists of distinct moments. As I will show, Aristotle tries to conceptualize time as the countable aspect of the successive moments of the flow of phenomena – in other words, for Aristotle, time is that which makes movement measurable. He goes on to assert that the phenomenal reality is *continuous* because the counted moments are infinitely divisible. Plotinus will argue that this is not enough to unify the phenomenal reality (nor to unify the nature of time). For him, the unity of our reality can only be conceptually ensured if we understand time to be the transcendent principle of movement (not a measure of it).

2.2 THE ARGUMENT FROM ONTOLOGY: THE UNITY OF TIME

In the ninth section of *Ennead* III.7 Plotinus directs his critique towards a rather intuitive notion of time. We might look at our wrist – if we wear a watch – and find that time may function as a measure. Plotinus particularly focuses on the position that time is “a number of change in respect of before and after,” which is famously put forth by Aristotle in his *Physics*.³⁰ I shall dwell for a moment on this

³⁰ *Phys.* 219b1: “τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν ὁ χρόνος, ἀριθμὸς κινήσεως κατὰ τὸ πρότερον καὶ ὕστερον.”

definition; first, it will be crucial to have a grasp on what Aristotle proposes to understand Plotinus' criticism. Second, I shall argue that Plotinus focuses on only a small portion of the Stagirite's argument in order to make an important point for his own theory. Both of these aims require a closer look at Aristotle's concepts.

2.2.1 ARISTOTLE'S THEORY OF TIME

Aristotle's definition presents us with three key elements: first, time is related to change, second, it refers to something 'before and after', and third, it does so by being a number. I shall therefore analyze the argument following this threefold structure. First, we need to clarify in what way time is related to change. For Aristotle, there can be no time without change or alteration.³¹ He uses both the terms μεταβολή and κίνησις, which usually refer to different types of change, and also motion through space. Aristotle clarifies what he means in a remark upon his theory:

It might also be wondered what kind of change time is a number of. Could it be the number of any kind of change? And in fact things come to be and cease to be in time, increase in time, alter in time, and move in time. So in so far as there is such a thing as change, time is a number of any and every change. And so, speaking generally, it is a number of continuous change, rather than a number of a particular kind of change.³²

³¹ *Phys.* 218b21: "Ἀλλὰ μὴν οὐδ' ἄνευ γε μεταβολῆς." See also 218b35-219a2.

³² *Phys.* IV.14. 223a29-b1: "ἀπορήσειε δ' ἂν τις καὶ ποίας κινήσεως ὁ χρόνος ἀριθμὸς. ἢ ὅποιασοῦν; καὶ γὰρ γίγνεται ἐν χρόνῳ καὶ φθείρεται καὶ ἀύξάνεται καὶ ἀλλοιοῦται καὶ φέρεται. ἢ

So it is change in general – substantial, qualitative, and locomotive – and not any particular kind of change that is connected to time. The reason why Aristotle thinks that time requires change seems rather intuitive: if nothing ever changed we would have no notion of the passage of time, or duration, or any concept of temporality at all. Nevertheless, time and change are not identical; in support of this claim he proposes two arguments before he even begins his treatise: change is always found in particulars, whereas time is universal. He writes,

the change of anything exists only in the thing that is being changed, or where that changing thing happens to be; time, however, is both everywhere and present alike to all things.³³

Moreover, change happens more slowly or more quickly; yet, speed or velocity is related to temporality but does not pertain to time itself. For what changes in a shorter span of time is called fast, while that which changes in a longer span of time is called slow.³⁴ Time is not change then, but nevertheless never found

οὖν κινήσις ἐστὶ, ταύτη ἐστὶν ἐκάστης κινήσεως ἀριθμὸς. διὸ κινήσεως ἐστὶν ἀπλῶς ἀριθμὸς συνεχοῦς, ἀλλ' οὐ τινός.” Richard Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum: theories of antiquity and the early middle ages*, (London: Duckworth, 1983), 85. Aristotle usually distinguishes between three different kinds of change: substantial change (μεταβολήν) (i.e. creation and destruction), qualitative change, and locomotion (both κινήσις). He makes it clear here that he means κινήσις as well as μεταβολή in the context of the discussion of time. See also *Phys.* IV.10. 218B19-20: “μηδὲν δὲ διαφερέτω λέγειν ἡμῖν ἐν τῷ παρόντι κινήσιν ἢ μεταβολήν.” Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum*, 74.

³³ *Phys.* IV.10. 218b10-13: “ἡ μὲν οὖν ἐκάστου μεταβολή καὶ κινήσις ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ μεταβάλλοντι μόνον ἐστὶν, ἢ οὗ ἂν τύχη ὄν αὐτὸ τὸ κινούμενον καὶ μεταβάλλον. ὁ δὲ χρόνος ὁμοίως καὶ πανταχοῦ καὶ παρὰ πᾶσιν.”

³⁴ *Phys.* IV.10. 218b13-20: “ἔτι δὲ μεταβολή μὲν ἐστὶ θάττων καὶ βραδυτέρα, χρόνος δ' οὐκ ἔστιν. τὸ γὰρ βραδύ καὶ ταχύ χρόνω ὠρισται, ταχύ μὲν τὸ ἐν ὀλίγῳ πολὺ κινούμενον, βραδύ δὲ τὸ ἐν πολλῷ ὀλίγον.”

without change. From this argument, Aristotle concludes that time must be a certain “aspect of change.”³⁵

Change, in turn, relies upon what Aristotle calls a certain “magnitude” (μέγεθος)³⁶ This step needs some further explanation. Why does Aristotle introduce another element into the discussion and propose that “change follows magnitude, and time follows change?”³⁷ The key to answering that question seems to lie in the understanding of the term ‘following.’ Ursula Coope explains that in this case “the claim that X follows Y implies that certain important features of X are the way they are *because of* corresponding features of Y.”³⁸ And the feature of time that Aristotle wants to ground in magnitude is continuity. Our experience of temporal succession is continuous; there are no breaks or gaps in the flow of change. Since, for Aristotle, time is an aspect of change, he concludes that time inherits its continuity from change. This claim seems to be at least problematic. The reliance of temporal continuity on the continuity of change is not an evident concept; nevertheless, Aristotle provides no argument to support it.³⁹ Moreover, he maneuvers

³⁵ *Phys.* IV.11. 219a9: “τῆς κινήσεως τί ἐστὶν ὁ χρόνος.” We could object here that this argument does not necessarily follow. Just because time and change always occur together, it does not mean that time is an aspect of change. We could just as well assume that change is an aspect of time, or that they are interdependent. As I already argued, Plotinus thinks that temporality is a phenomenon that always occurs with phenomena. Yet, this is because they are both caused by Time (the cosmological principle) in the way that phenomena are *always* temporal, i.e. moving forward to something that has not been there before.

³⁶ *Phys.* IV.11. 219a11.

³⁷ *Phys.* IV.11. 219b15: “ἀκολουθεῖ γὰρ, ὡς ἐλέχθη, τῷ μὲν μεγέθει ἢ κινήσει, ταύτη δ' ὁ χρόνος, ὡς φάμεν.”

³⁸ Ursula Coope, *Time for Aristotle: Physics IV. 10-14*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2005), 48.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

himself into another problem: he now needs to account for the continuity of change in order to ground the continuity of time. This is the reason why he brings magnitude into the theory. For him, magnitude seems to be evidently continuous, and what is more, it is related to change in such a way that it can undergird the continuity of both change and time. He claims that “it is because magnitude is continuous that change is too, and because change is continuous, time is too.”⁴⁰

Now, what exactly does Aristotle mean by magnitude? I can imagine three different ways in which this could be understood. First, Aristotle could mean a certain length of time. This would make no sense at all, since what he would be saying then is that time is continuous because time is continuous. Second, and more plausible, he could mean a certain degree of qualitative change. Coope clarifies this option with the example of the ocean changing colours: “when the sea changed gradually from dark blue to a lighter blue, the magnitude along with it changed would be the spectrum of lighter and lighter shades of blue.”⁴¹ But, according to her, this possibility of this understanding must be ruled out because it cannot ground Aristotle’s understanding of continuity. For Aristotle, to be continuous means to be “divisible into parts which are always further divisible,” i.e. continuity means infinite divisibility.⁴² In *De Sensu*, Aristotle denies that qualit-

⁴⁰ *Phys.* IV.11. 219a12-13: “διὰ γὰρ τὸ τὸ μέγεθος εἶναι συνεχές καὶ ἡ κίνησις ἐστὶν συνεχής, διὰ δὲ τὴν κίνησιν ὁ χρόνος.”

⁴¹ Coope, *Time for Aristotle*, 51.

⁴² *Phys.* VI.2. 232b24-25: “συνεχὲς τὸ διαιρετὸν εἰς αἰεὶ διαιρετά.” See Coope, *Time for Aristotle*, 51, 55.

ive states are infinitely divisible.⁴³ I suggested earlier that the relation of “following” between time and change, and change and magnitude must be interpreted as a causal relationship: A follows B means that A has certain features *because* B has corresponding features. The magnitude in question must be continuous, i.e. infinitely divisible, in order to ground the continuity of change and time. Therefore, magnitude can neither be understood temporally nor qualitatively.

The only remaining option is to understand magnitude as spatial magnitude, i.e. a certain distance between two points in space from each other. In this light Aristotle’s remarks following his insistence that time relies on change which, in turn, relies on magnitude become transparent:

Now, what is before and after is found primarily in place. In that context it depends on position, but because it is in magnitude, it must also be found, in an analogous fashion, in change. And since time always follows the nature of change, what is before and after applies also to time.⁴⁴

This reading confronts us with a problem. It comes to mind quite naturally that a certain motion should be related to the spatial magnitude – its path, so to speak – over which it is moving. But, as we saw earlier, Aristotle does not limit the notion of change to locomotion when it comes to the discussion of time. He expli-

⁴³ Coore, *Time for Aristotle*, 51.

⁴⁴ *Phys.* IV.11. 219a14-21: “τὸ δὴ πρότερον καὶ ὕστερον ἐν τόπῳ πρῶτόν ἐστιν. ἐνταῦθα μὲν δὴ τῆι θέσει. ἐπεὶ δ’ ἐν τῷ μεγέθει ἔστι τὸ πρότερον καὶ ὕστερον, ἀνάγκη καὶ ἐν κινήσει εἶναι τὸ πρότερον καὶ ὕστερον, ἀνάλογον τοῖς ἐκεῖ. ἀλλὰ μὴν καὶ ἐν χρόνῳ ἔστιν τὸ πρότερον καὶ ὕστερον διὰ τὸ ἀκολουθεῖν αἰεὶ θατέρῳ θάτερον αὐτῶν.”

citly includes substantial and qualitative changes. So, as Coope puts the question, “in what way are qualitative changes related to spatial paths?”⁴⁵ One way to think about the problem would be to regard a change in place as also a kind of change in quality; we would then think about the being in a certain place of a thing as a certain temporal quality of this thing. It is a certain quality of X to be at the place p_1 , and a different quality of X to be at p_2 . In between those two qualities there must have happened a change over a certain spatial magnitude.

But let us also consider an example that is not so clearly spatial. I mentioned earlier the qualitative change of the colour of the ocean becoming gradually lighter. This change is not obviously following along a certain spatial magnitude. It seems to me that Coope offers an explanation that can solve the issue and is also grounded in the text. She points to Aristotle’s treatment of the continuity of change in *Phys.* VI.4 and 5:

[Aristotle] claims there that a qualitative change is infinitely divisible only accidentally and that its infinite divisibility is explained by the divisibility of the changing thing.⁴⁶

If we think of it that way we must indeed assume that what is infinitely divisible about a certain X are X’s spatial properties, since every length of space X is occupying can be infinitely divided into smaller parts. The nature of a change, then,

⁴⁵ Coope, *Time for Aristotle*, 52.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*; *Phys.* VI.4. 235a17-18, 235a34-36, VI.5. 236b2-8.

looks like this: one part (in space) of a thing (which is undergoing a change) *still* features a certain quality, while another part of it *already* features another quality. The change becomes more and more prevalent as more and more parts of the changing thing feature the new quality. Aristotle puts it the following way:

Everything that changes is necessarily divisible. For every change has a starting-point and an end-point, and when something – the thing itself and all its parts – is at the end-point of its change, it is no longer changing, and when it is at the starting-point of its change, it is not yet changing, because anything which remains the same in itself and in its parts is not changing. It necessarily follows, therefore, that part of the changing object is at the one point and part is at the other point. After all, it cannot be at both points or at neither point.⁴⁷

In other words, a change in quality relies on a change in form. A thing changes qualities through a continuous rearrangement of its parts, and this happens in space. In our example of the changing colour of the ocean, the change is continuous because lighter shades of blue are gradually spreading through all the infinitely divisible parts of the ocean's surface. The structure of the change, therefore, depends on the structure of spatial magnitude, insofar as the change is continuous because a certain spatial magnitude over which it happens is also continu-

⁴⁷ *Phys.* VI.4. 234b10-18: “ἐπεὶ γὰρ ἕκ τινος εἷς τι πᾶσα μεταβολή, καὶ ὅταν μὲν ᾗ ἐν τούτῳ εἰς ὃ μετέβαλλεν, οὐκέτι μεταβάλλει, ὅταν δὲ ἐξ οὗ μετέβαλλεν, καὶ αὐτὸ καὶ τὰ μέρη πάντα, οὕτω μεταβάλλει, τὸ γὰρ ὡσαύτως ἔχον καὶ αὐτὸ καὶ τὰ μέρη οὐ μεταβάλλει, ἀνάγκη οὖν τὸ μὲν τι ἐν τούτῳ εἶναι, τὸ δ' ἐν θατέρῳ τοῦ μεταβάλλοντος· οὔτε γὰρ ἐν ἀμφοτέροις οὔτ' ἐν μηδετέρῳ δυνατόν.”

ous.⁴⁸ The instantaneous stages of change are what Aristotle calls “nows,” which are characterized by corresponding to a “before and after” in magnitude, change, and time. This point shall prove to be crucial for Aristotle’s definition of time as number, since what is being numbered are precisely the nows.

Aristotle foresees the problem that the terms “before” and “after” are usually associated with time. Since he does not want to fall into the trap of circularity when grounding time in the notion of something being before and after, he makes it clear that these terms are to be taken first in a spatial sense, whereby they depend on the position of the changing thing.⁴⁹ As we have seen, change relies on that part of the infinitely divisible spatial extension of the changing thing in which it is happening. We can see, therefore, why a certain stage of a change must be closely related to the position in which it is happening. Aristotle calls these stages of change the boundaries of a certain moment. And here is where time enters the argument: two instantaneous stages of a change are the limits of what is an instant of time:

However, we know time too when we distinguish change by distinguishing its limits as before and after; and we say that time has passed when we have received an impression of the before and after in a process of change. We distinguish time by taking the before and the after

⁴⁸ Coope, *Time for Aristotle*, 52-53.

⁴⁹ *Phys.* IV.11. 219a14-15: “τὸ δὲ πρότερον καὶ ὕστερον ἐν τόπῳ πρῶτόν ἐστιν.”

of change to be different and by supposing there to be something which comes between them.⁵⁰

So, a before and an after in a change denote two distinct instantaneous stages of this change, which enclose between them an instant of time. A certain change will therefore have a finite number of instantaneous stages, which happen over a certain magnitude of space, and which 'entail', in a sense, a certain number of instants of time.

Hence, Aristotle affirms that "we can take for granted the notion that what is limited by a now is a stretch of time."⁵¹ This is why for Aristotle it is so important that time can be *counted*. It is made up of instants which are bounded by instantaneous stages of a change happening in a certain magnitude in space. And here we have Aristotle's famous definition of time: "a number of change in respect of before and after [...] in the sense of that which is numbered, not in the sense of that by which we number."⁵²

We can summarize Aristotle's position in this way: we need to ensure the *theoretical* continuity of time, since our *experience* of the temporal flux is not broken by any gaps. For Aristotle, this is only possible if we base the continuity of

⁵⁰ *Phys.* IV.11. 219a22-26: "ἀλλὰ μὴν καὶ τὸν χρόνον γε γνωρίζομεν ὅταν ὀρίσωμεν τὴν κίνησιν, τῷ πρότερον καὶ ὕστερον ὀρίζοντες· καὶ τότε φαμέν γεγονέναι χρόνον, ὅταν τοῦ προτέρου καὶ ὕστερου ἐν τῇ κινήσει αἴσθησιν λάβωμεν. ὀρίζομεν δὲ τῷ ἄλλο καὶ ἄλλο ὑπολαβεῖν αὐτά, καὶ μεταξύ τι αὐτῶν ἕτερον."

⁵¹ *Phys.* IV.11. 219a28-29: "τὸ γὰρ ὀριζόμενον τῷ νῦν χρόνος εἶναι δοκεῖ· καὶ ὑποκεῖσθω."

⁵² *Phys.* IV.11. 219a36-b8: "ὅταν δὲ τὸ πρότερον (219b.) καὶ ὕστερον, τότε λέγομεν χρόνον. [...] ὁ δὲ χρόνος ἐστὶν τὸ ἀριθμούμενον καὶ οὐχ ᾧ ἀριθμοῦμεν."

time in the continuity of space. He seems to think that space is just obviously continuous, and, therefore, he sees no need to further undergird the unity of space. Moreover, precisely because space is obviously continuous, it is able to provide the grounds for this feature of time as well. Hence, Aristotle conceptualizes change as structurally dependent on the space *in which* the change is happening. This does not only pertain to locomotion, but also to qualitative and substantial changes, in the way we have seen – a gradual movement in the spatially extended parts of the whole that undergoes change. The continuity of this movement is ensured because these spatially extended parts are infinitely divisible – which is precisely Aristotle’s definition of continuity: infinite divisibility.

Now, if we look at change itself, it is, therefore, happening gradually. There are continuous – I have also said “instantaneous” before – stages of every particular change; Aristotle calls these stages “nows.” And here is where time enters the theory. Time is what happens *in between* these nows, in the way that between two nows there is a certain span of time. By counting these “periods”⁵³ of time we can, therefore, *measure* change. This is why Aristotle calls time a measure of movement.

⁵³ For the lack of a better word, I call them “periods.” It is not an ideal term, though, because these periods are not really temporally extended, since the nows are – because of their structural dependence on spatiality – infinitely divisible and, therefore, instantaneous.

2.2.2 TIME IS NOT THE MEASURE OF MOVEMENT

Whether Plotinus' arguments against Aristotle are successful is debated in the literature. Richard Sorabji calls part of Plotinus' criticisms a "bogey."⁵⁴ For Clark, Plotinus' arguments are either "sound but [...] do not meet Aristotle's position squarely" or "meet Aristotle squarely but are not sound."⁵⁵ It is possible that the reason why some of Plotinus' arguments might be seen as subpar is that he may not really be concerned with a proper refutation of Aristotle. Rather, he uses his critique of Aristotle's concept as a launch pad for his own approach. I will argue that, in Plotinus' mind, a concept of reality that features temporality as an *independent phenomenon* is doomed to fail. To be clear, by 'independent phenomenon' I do not mean that it is not related to other phenomena. As we have seen, Aristotle clearly proposes that time is indeed related to motion, and to space. Nevertheless, time has a certain nature *distinct* from the motion to which it belongs. As Plotinus points out, if we think about a number measuring something, it must be "possible to think of the number, and the measure is a measure, with a certain nature, even if it is not yet measuring, so time, too, must have its own nature since it is measuring."⁵⁶ For Plotinus, we shall see, temporality is not a phe-

⁵⁴ Sorabji, *Time, Creation, and the Continuum*, 89.

⁵⁵ Clark, "Time in Plotinus," 346.

⁵⁶ *Enn.* III.7.9. 10-15: "νοεῖν τὸν ἀριθμὸν, καὶ τὸ μέτρον μέτρον ἐστὶ φύσιν ἔχον τινά, κἂν μήτω μετρῆ, οὕτω δεῖ ἔχειν καὶ τὸν χρόνον μέτρον ὄντα." Michael Wagner, *The Enigmatic Reality of Time. Aristotle, Plotinus, and Today*. Ancient Mediterranean and Medieval Texts and Contexts, ed. Robert Berchman and Jacob Neusner, Studies in Platonism, Neoplatonism, and the Platonic Tradition, ed. Robert Berchman and John Finamore, vol. 7 (Boston: Brill, 2008), 329: "[The claim that

nomenon that accompanies every occurring motion; temporality will be *the nature* of everything that appears (and moves) because it is created by the movement of Soul – and this movement is what Plotinus calls Time.

Michael Wagner identifies three steps in which Plotinus argues against every part of Aristotle's approach independently – although, we might say, sometimes redundantly, since he refutes positions that Aristotle criticizes as well. This may be another reason why scholars such as Clark have been led to the conclusion that Plotinus' critique is left wanting.

(1) Time is a continuous measure which measures a motion by being a magnitude running along with movement. (*Enn.* III.7.9. 17-19)

(2) Time is not a magnitude running along with movement, but the number of that magnitude. (*Enn.* III.7.9. 44-45)

(3) Time is the number of motion measuring according to before and after. (*Enn.* III.7.9. 56-57)⁵⁷

Argument (3) most closely resembles Aristotle's position. Nevertheless, (1) and (2) can be said to run up to (3); (1) is tackling the question whether a line running along with movement can properly be said to measure that movement; (2) is the conclusion of (1): in order to measure the movement, the line running along with

time measures motion] proposes that time does this by being something distinct from every particular motion, and so capable of measuring it."

⁵⁷ Wagner, *The Enigmatic Reality of Time*, 328. Numbering altered.

it must itself be numbered; and (3) expands (2) to mirror Aristotle's argument more closely by adding the moments of "before and after."

Plotinus criticisms centre around two main points, to which he comes back throughout his dealing with Aristotle's definition. First, if time is to be continuous it cannot have a number; otherwise it will be an aggregation of numeric units, rather than a unified phenomenon. Second, Plotinus asserts that what precisely makes the number of motion not just any, but a *temporal* measure remains unanswered.

It is important to remember that, for Aristotle, a continuous magnitude, to which (1) refers, is such by virtue of being infinitely divisible; it must not be constituted by minimal parts.⁵⁸ Plotinus seems to refer to this concept in a short detour at the beginning of *Ennead* III.7.9, when he asks whether time could measure all movement in general or only regular movement.⁵⁹ This question is rhetorical; only regular, i.e. continuous, movement can be measured. The reasoning here seems to be that discontinuous movement cannot be measured by a continuous form of measurement, such as time. Plotinus does not argue further for the premise that time must be continuous; it seems obvious, though, to assume there

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 329.

⁵⁹ The way Plotinus speaks about regular and irregular movement seems to refer to continuous and discontinuous movement. Clark comes to the same conclusion. He also points out that Aristotle, as we said, regards all motion as continuous in his discussion of time in *Phys.* IV. In this case Plotinus' point that only regular movement can be measured does not hit Aristotle. But elsewhere Aristotle does maintain that some forms of movement are irregular. Clark, "Time in Plotinus," 342-343. *Phys.* VI.5. 236a35-b20 and VII.4. 248a5-10.

are no breaks in the temporal flux – as we saw, Aristotle went to great lengths to establish the continuous nature of time. Plotinus, on the other hand, does not seem to feel the need to undergird theoretically temporal continuity. For him, this aspect of time may be sufficiently established by his own theory, by which time will be the continuous activity of Soul.

After Plotinus presumably disposes of the minor issue that time – if it is a measure – can only measure continuous movement, he proceeds with his main argumentation. Clark proposes that this step takes place in Plotinus’ analogy of the number ten, which measures both ten horses and ten cows, and the measuring unit that measures both liquids and solids:

But if one uses the same measure for both kinds of movement [regular and irregular] and in general for all movement, quick and slow, the number and measure will be like the ten which counts both horses and cows, or like the same measure of liquids and solids.⁶⁰

Clark concludes that “this analogy shows, as Aristotle admitted, that the number ten as such is no more time than it is a horse. To understand number in this sense does not enlighten us on the nature of time.”⁶¹ Yet this analogy does not seem to show that time cannot measure like the number ten does. Plotinus gives the answer a few lines later when he asserts that time shall not be “made up of abstract

⁶⁰ *Enn.* III.7.9. 5-10: “Εἰ δὲ τῷ αὐτῷ ἑκατέραν καὶ ὅλως πᾶσαν, ταχεῖαν, βραδεῖαν, ἔται ὁ ἀριθμὸς καὶ τὸ μέτρον τοιοῦτον, οἷον εἰ δεκάς ἔιν μετροῦσα καὶ ἵππους καὶ βοῦς, ἢ εἰ τὸ αὐτὸ μέτρον καὶ ὑγρῶν καὶ ξηρῶν ἔιν.”

⁶¹ Clark, “Time in Plotinus,” 343-344.

units" (μοναδικός).⁶² He believes that time must be continuous, and therefore not constituted by digits like the number ten, which is constituted by ten times one.

Clark then continues his analysis:

If, however time is not the ten, it may be the quart, that is, it may be a measure which has of its own apart from the wheat or motions measured. Let there be an analogy between ten quarts of wine and ten measures (hours) of motion. The definition therefore identifies time with this measure. It is a quantity.⁶³

The problem here is that Plotinus does not appear to have made the distinction that Clark is drawing. On the contrary, the text indicates that Plotinus thought that both the ten that measures horses and cows, and the measure of liquids and solids are measuring in quite the same way, namely by counting *distinct* units. The point is that the transition from the minor first point about *irregular* movement to the main line of argumentation against time as a *continuous* measure has actually not yet taken place. Plotinus is saying here that if time is to measure both regular and irregular movement, then it must be a digit like ten, because only thus could it measure both regular and irregular movement, just as the ten can measure both horses and cows, or quarts can measure both wheat and wine. We can certainly question whether the comparison between regular and irregular movement and horses and cows is excruciatingly awkward. Nevertheless, we need to be clear

⁶² *Enn.* III.7.9. 15-20.

⁶³ Clark, "Time in Plotinus," 343-344.

about the structure of the different lines of argumentation that Plotinus puts forth. He only begins to tackle argument (1), as it was outlined above, in line 17, not in line 5 as Clark proposes:

But if it [time] is a continuous measure [i.e. a measure that measures only continuous movement], then it will be a measure because it is a certain size, like a length of one cubit. It will be magnitude, then, like a line which will obviously run along with movement.⁶⁴

Note, that Plotinus is using the term “magnitude” (μέγεθος) for the first time here. He is not just changing the analogy of the measuring quart, as Clark proposes,⁶⁵ but starting a whole new argument. This also seems to be the reason why Clark suggests that Plotinus does not really meet Aristotle’s position in his argumentation. He says that

it is not surprising that Plotinus argues against identifying time with the number by which we count. In this he is merely repeating Aristotle. But what is surprising is that the chapter as a whole does not get much beyond this denial that time is a digit, and the uncomfortable question arises, Did Plotinus completely misunderstand Aristotle? At any rate it can hardly be said that this chapter meets the Aristotelean position squarely.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *Enn.* III.7. 9. 15-20: “Εἰ δὲ συνεχὲς μέτρον ἐστὶ, πόσον τι ὄν μέτρον ἔσται, οἷον τὸ πηχυαῖον μέγεθος. Μέγεθος τοίνυν ἔσται, οἷον γραμμὴ συνθέουσα δυλονότι κινήσει.” A cubit is an ancient measuring unit based on the forearm length from the tip of the middle finger to the bottom of the elbow.

⁶⁵ Clark, “Time in Plotinus,” 345: “In examining the suggestion that time is a quantity, Plotinus first (line 19) changes his analogy. The quantity, instead of remaining a quart, becomes a line running along with the motion.”

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 344.

But, as we shall see now, Plotinus does not continually argue against the position that time is a digit; he rather refutes time as a digit, and then moves on to show that the Aristotelean position leads to a view that cannot escape the issue of reducing time to the measure by which we count, despite Aristotle's best efforts to mitigate this problem. It is not the goal of this thesis to prove Plotinus either right or wrong in his criticism of Aristotle. But it is important for us to understand what Plotinus is saying, in order to understand both his own view and why he thinks his own approach is superior to Aristotle's.

In line 17, Plotinus finally launches into his main line of argumentation. He is now working to disprove argument (1): that time measures motion by being a certain quantity, or magnitude running along with the movement. First, he wonders why a magnitude running along with movement should measure that movement just by virtue of running along with it. Moreover, if time measures motion simply by running parallel to it, then why should time be thought of as measuring motion and not the other way around? Second, Plotinus raises another question: suppose this line-like magnitude measures motion, still it is unclear how it does that. What about the magnitude makes it a measure? Moreover, what makes it a temporal measure, one that measures the temporal aspect of the movement that it measures?

The first argument against (1) is stated in a series of questions: "But how will this line running along measure that with which it runs? Why should one of

them measure the other rather than the other the one?"⁶⁷ The gist of this argument seems clear enough; it is not clear why a line should measure something solely by virtue of running along with it. Moreover, suppose it would do so, then the question arises, why should the line running along measure motion, and not vice versa.⁶⁸ Clark argues that this argument is not valid, unless Plotinus can show why such a reciprocal relationship between time and motion is impossible. Moreover, he points towards the passages where Aristotle admits that, indeed, time and motion measure each other.⁶⁹ Clark's criticism here does make a valid point. Nevertheless, if we want to define time as a measure, then it seems just as valid to ask which of the several elements in question is measuring and which is measured.

Wagner illustrates this point with several examples, one of which I would like to take into consideration:

As my wrist-watch ticks away the seconds, do these magnitudes of time called *seconds* measure the mechanical or electronic activity in the watch responsible for the ticks of its second-hand or for the ascending numerals of its digital seconds-readout, or do those mechanical or electronic activities measure the second-magnitudes? [...] Plotinus wonders [...] which of the two should more properly be desig-

⁶⁷ *Enn.* III.7. 9. 19-21: "Ἀλλ' αὕτη συνθέουσα πῶς μετρήσει τὸ ᾧ συνθεῖ; Τί γὰρ μᾶλλον ὀποτεροῦν θάτερον;"

⁶⁸ Wagner, *The Enigmatic Reality of Time*, 331.

⁶⁹ Clark, "Time in Plotinus," 345. See *Phys.* IV 12 220b14-16: "οὐ μόνον δὲ τὴν κίνησιν τῷ χρόνῳ μετροῦμεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῇ κινήσει τὸν χρόνον διὰ τὸ ὀρίζεσθαι ὑπ' ἀλλήλων· ὁ μὲν γὰρ χρόνος ὀρίζει τὴν κίνησιν ἀριθμὸς ὧν αὐτῆς, ἡ δὲ κίνησις τὸν χρόνον."

nated to be *time*? Is it more properly the purported temporal magnitude thought to proceed alongside of a motion, or is time more properly the motion as it itself (temporally) exists and proceeds?⁷⁰

The point is, that if X measures Y, X will be prior to Y – at least for Plotinus. If I use a ruler to measure a piece of paper I may come to the conclusion that the paper is 30 centimetres long. It seems counter-intuitive to propose that, in the same way, 30 centimetres are one piece of paper long. In the same way, we could imagine a movement that lasts 30 seconds. It seems very counter-intuitive and, indeed, excruciatingly awkward to say that 30 seconds are the movement long. Again, it is not the purpose of this section to prove or disprove the validity of Plotinus' arguments against Aristotle. Nevertheless, we should not dismiss them too readily.

The issue is related to another criticism that Plotinus proposes right after the passage quoted above. He remarks that a measure running along with movement might not be fit to measure movement in general, but only the particular movement with which it runs.⁷¹ Clark criticizes that Plotinus seems to be deceived by his own example here: "A concrete line, a given path, may accompany but one motion; but time accompanies all."⁷² Clark again cites Aristotle who had given an answer to that issue himself:

⁷⁰ Wagner, *The Enigmatic Reality of Time*, 332.

⁷¹ *Enn.* III.7.9. 20-25: "Καὶ βέλτιον τίθεσθαι καὶ πιθανώτερον οὐκ ἐπὶ πάσης, ἀλλ' ἢ συνθεῖ."

⁷² Clark, "Time in Plotinus," 345.

Suppose, however, that two things undergo change now, with the result that time would be the number of both changes. Then there is another time and there are two equal times at once. Or perhaps this is not so, because any time which is equal and simultaneous with another is in fact one and the same time.⁷³

Perhaps the problem lies in Aristotle's formulation of his theory on magnitude, change, and time. Remember that, for him, time is continuous because it follows a continuous movement, which is in turn continuous because it follows a continuous spatial magnitude. Aristotle adds the cryptic note that this is the reason why "the amount of change corresponds on any occasion to the amount of time that seems to have passed."⁷⁴ As Coope points out, this statement is only sensible if Aristotle, indeed, focuses on particular movements here, and not movement in general: "If A is moving more quickly than B, then in the same period of time, A's movement will be greater than B's. He can make this remark only because he is thinking here of a single moving thing progressing at a uniform rate."⁷⁵ Is Aristotle inconsistent here? I will not answer this question, but confine my argument to pointing out that Plotinus might not be so wrong after all. We also have to keep in mind, that Aristotle might be quite content with a theory that relates time only to particular movements. After all, particulars are the main agents in Ar-

⁷³ *Phys.* IV 14, 223b1-4: "ἀλλ' ἔστι νῦν κεκινήσθαι καὶ ἄλλο ὧν ἑκατέρας τῆς κινήσεως εἶη ἂν ἀριθμός. ἕτερος οὖν χρόνος ἔστιν, καὶ ἅμα δύο ἴσοι χρόνοι ἂν εἶεν. ἢ οὐ; ὁ αὐτὸς γὰρ χρόνος καὶ εἷς ὁ ἴσος καὶ ἅμα."

⁷⁴ *Phys.* IV. 11. 219a12-13: "ὅση γὰρ ἡ κίνησις, τοσοῦτος καὶ ὁ χρόνος αἰεὶ δοκεῖ γεγονέναι."

⁷⁵ Coope, *Time for Aristotle*, 50.

istotle's ontology, whereas for Plotinus, the good Platonist, the particular is merely an imperfect manifestation of higher principles. Besides, we need to be patient with Plotinus' arguments; remember that he is not yet tackling Aristotle's approach head on. He is still concerned with refuting argument (1): time is a magnitude running along with movement.

In a second line of arguments, Plotinus investigates the measuring magnitude itself more closely. Suppose this time-magnitude does measure motion by virtue of running along parallel, still it is not clear how it measures and why it measures temporally:

Just as the movement, if it had to be measured, could not be measured by itself but by something else, so is it necessary, if the movement is to have another measure besides itself, and this was the reason why we needed the continuous measure for measuring it – in the same way there is need of a measure for the magnitude itself, in order that the movement, by fixing at a certain length of that by which it is measured as being a certain length, may itself be measured.⁷⁶

Wagner summarizes the problem by asking, “what accounts for the temporal magnitude purported to proceed alongside of the motion being itself a certain temporal magnitude, being a magnitude of a certain temporal quantity?”⁷⁷ If we

⁷⁶ *Enn.* III.7.9. 37-43: “εἰ ἔδει μεμετρήσθαι, οὐχὶ ὑπ’ αὐτῆς ἔδει μεμετρήσθαι, ἀλλ’ ἐτέρῳ, οὕτως ἀνάγκη, εἴπερ μέτρον ἔξει ἄλλο ἢ κίνησις παρ’ αὐτήν, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἐδήθμεν τοῦ συνεχοῦς μέτρον εἰς μέτρησιν αὐτῆς, τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον δεῖ τῷ μεγέθει αὐτῷ μέτρον ἴν’ ἢ κίνησις, τοσοῦδε γεγεννημένου τοῦ καθ’ ὃ μετρεῖται ὄση, μετρηθῆναι.”

⁷⁷ Wagner, *The Enigmatic Reality of Time*, 333.

imagine a certain movement we can visualize Plotinus' problem: how do we know how much time the movement took up? According to Plotinus, Aristotle proposes we can know that because there is a certain magnitude that this movement covers and that is, therefore, running along with it. But now, Plotinus asks further, how do we know how great this magnitude is? We seem to need yet another element, a certain number that this magnitude has, in order for it to measure motion.

Therefore, Plotinus proposes that Aristotle's account requires a second magnitude that tells us how great the first magnitude is by endowing the first magnitude with a certain temporal quantity. He thus introduces a third element into the theory, which brings him to investigate argument (2): "And the number of the magnitude which accompanies the movement, but not the magnitude which runs along with the movement, will be that time which we were looking for."⁷⁸

But, as Plotinus points out, this restatement of our approach to the nature of time leaves us in yet an even greater predicament. For why should this number be anything else than an accumulation of numeric units (μοναδικός), a view which Plotinus already refuted in the beginning. Again, Clark criticizes Plotinus here for not moving past the notion of time as a digit-like number. Moreover, there is another issue that is returning in Plotinus' critique: if time is a number made up of

⁷⁸ *Enn.* III.7.9. 43-45: "Καὶ ὁ ἀριθμὸς τοῦ μεγέθους ἔσται τῇ κινήσει παρομαρτοῦντος ἐκεῖνος ὁ χρόνος, ἀλλ' οὐ τὸ μέγεθος τὸ συνθέον τῇ κινήσει."

abstract units, then all we are talking about is a certain amount of time, and never time itself:

But what could this be except number made up of abstract units? And here the problem must arise of how this abstract number is going to measure. Then, even if one does discover how it can, one will not discover time measuring but a certain length of time; and this is not the same thing as time.⁷⁹

Plotinus does not pay further heed to the problem that the concept of time as a number or measure always comes back to time as a digit. He seems to think that his rationale so far was enough to prove that neither argument (1) nor (2) can establish a satisfying theory of time. (1) proposes that time is magnitude running along with motion. This leads to the problem that it cannot be explained how this magnitude is supposed to measure. (2) tries to answer this conundrum by proposing that time is a third element, a number running along with the magnitude. Yet, this restating of the definition leaves us in even greater predicament: it does not clarify the relation between the movement and the measure and, what is more, it throws us back to the definition of time as constituted of distinct moments – an, thus, as *not unified*. Clark responds that “the rejection of the digit and the distinction between time and a unit of time may be legitimate, but neither the

⁷⁹ *Enn.* III.7.9. 45-59: “Οὗτος δὲ τίς ἂν εἶν ἢ ὁ μοναδικός; Ὅς ὅπως μετρήσει ἀπορεῖν ἀνάγκη. Ἐπεὶ, κἄν τις ἐξεύπη ὅπως, οὐ χρόνον εὐρήσει μετροῦντα, ἀλλὰ τὸν τοσόνδε χρόνον. τοῦτο δὲ οὐ ταύτῳ χρόνω. Ἐτερον γὰρ εἰπεῖν χρόνον, ἕτερον δὲ τοσόνδε χρόνον.”

one nor the other undermines Aristotle's position."⁸⁰ As I indicated earlier though, I think that Clark misses the point here: Plotinus does understand that Aristotle has tried to make a point against time as a number-like digit himself; but so far it seems that the Aristotelean theory just cannot support that point.

The issue might be restated as follows: as we have seen, for Aristotle, time is a continuous measure of a change which continuously spreads over and through a certain magnitude of space. This connection to space ensures both the continuity of the change and the measure, time, since space is the only one of the three elements that is evidently continuous by virtue of being infinitely divisible. Plotinus' answer to Aristotle's approach now seems to be this: if time is a measure running along with movement, then how does it measure the movement? The mere fact that it runs along with movement does not account for that question. Time then needs to have a certain countable quantity which endows it with the ability to measure or be measured.

So far Aristotle and Plotinus agree; remember that, for Aristotle, time was ultimately the countable aspect of a certain movement or change by which we can determine the magnitude of that movement. But now Plotinus goes on to say that a number like that is, in fact, *never* continuous; it is always made up of distinct units – how else would it be countable? But, suppose it somehow could be con-

⁸⁰ Clark, "Time in Plotinus," 346.

tinuous, still Aristotle's claim that this measure must accompany all motion simultaneously is, according to Plotinus, not reflected in the Stagirite's theory of time. Indeed, the measure seems to be always inevitably tied to the *particular* movement it is measuring. How time transcends these particulars and becomes a measure of all motion seems to remain nebulous.

Moreover, nothing has so far been able to account for the temporal quality of that line-like magnitude, or the quantifier of that magnitude, which is running along with motion. What makes this measure, which is supposed to be time, actually temporal, and not just any kind of measure? Wagner summarizes the issue in few words:

A temporal measure measures the temporal existence of a motion because the sort of measure it is is a temporal measure. This is the sort of measure it is, however, just because it is or utilizes some temporal quantity. And this quantity is a temporal quantity because it is quantifiable and the sort of quantifier which quantifies it is a temporal quantifier. But, what accounts for a quantifier being a temporal quantifier?⁸¹

Any kind of measure that measures temporally in this way presupposes time itself, just as a temporally existent motion presupposes time, as Plotinus argued against the identification of time and movement itself.⁸² This point is tied to Plotinus' critique that Aristotle's time is always only measuring particular move-

⁸¹ Wagner, *The Enigmatic Reality of Time*, 334.

⁸² *Ibid.*

ments. As he points out, “before saying ‘a certain length of time’ one ought to say what it is that is of a certain length.”⁸³ Here, I think, lies the main issue that splits Plotinus and Aristotle. Aristotle is quite fine with noting how time appears phenomenally and induce from that a general theory about it. Plotinus, the stern Platonist, will not accept a science moving like that because he thinks the appearances need to be derived from their principles, and not the other way around.

But, maybe – and here Plotinus moves into argument (3) – what makes time measure temporally is not something *other* than the temporal measure, but rather a *distinctive way* in which it measures, namely by running along with movement and *measuring it according to before and after*. Definition (3) is, therefore, an attempt to specify (2) and explain how time measures motion. The three attempts at defining time as the measure of motion are not distinctly different from each other, but (2) was a response to (1), which was not able to answer the question how time measures and why temporally. Now, that Plotinus has shown that (2) is not satisfactory in this regard, as well, he tries one last time to improve on the definition.

(3) can be seen as closest to Aristotle’s actual definition: time is the number of motion measuring according to before and after.⁸⁴ Yet, Plotinus immediately cri-

⁸³ *Enn.* III.7.9. 49-51: “πρὸ γὰρ τοῦ τοσόνδε δεῖ ὃ τί ποτ’ ἐστὶν εἰπεῖν ἐκεῖνο, ὃ τοσόνδε ἐστὶν.” See also *Enn.* III.7.9. 77-78: “Εἰ μὴ τις ἀπολαβὼν μέρος τι αὐτὸν μετροῖ, ἐν ᾧ συμβαίνει εἶναι καὶ πρὶν μετρηθῆναι.”

⁸⁴ *Enn.* III.7.9. 56-57.

ticizes that also the proponent of (3) may not be absolved from the problem that (1) and (2) have as well: what exactly is it that makes our measure measure temporally or, in this case, according to the before-and-after? Thus Plotinus begins his critique by stating that “it is not yet clear what this number which measures by the sequence of ‘before’ and ‘after’ is.”⁸⁵ Definition (3) still begs the question, insofar it does not explain what exactly it is about the measure that makes it a temporal one. First of all, there is more than one before and after; there is the temporal before and after and the spatial before and after. Remember, that Aristotle derives the temporal from the spatial before and after. He grounds the temporal continuity of a movement in the spatial magnitude over and in which this movement happens. Plotinus seems to wish to maintain the priority of temporality over spatiality.⁸⁶ Given his Platonic background it may not be surprising that he clashes with Aristotle over this issue. Thus Plotinus insists that “in general, ‘before’ and ‘after’ mean, ‘before,’ the time which stops at the ‘now,’ and ‘after,’ the time which begins from the ‘now.’”⁸⁷ So to define time as a measure that measures motion in accordance to before and after is somewhat unclear as to why the measure measures actually the temporal before and after of the movement, and not the spatial one.

⁸⁵ *Enn.* III.7. 9. 57-58: “Ἀλλ’ οὖν κατὰ τὸ πρότερον καὶ ὕστερον οὕπωδ ἦλος ὅστις ἐστίν.”

⁸⁶ Wagner, *The Enigmatic Reality of Time*, 335.

⁸⁷ *Enn.* III.7. 9. 64-66: “Ἔστι γὰρ ὅλως τὸ πρότερον καὶ ὕστερον τὸ μὲν χρόνος ὁ εἰς τὸ νῦν λήγων, τὸ δὲ ὕστερον ὃς ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν ἄρχεται.”

However, let us grant that time measures the temporal before and after of movement. After all, it is time we are talking about; it seems justified to assume that a temporal measure measures the temporality of movement, and not any other kind. Still, Plotinus insists that a measure that measures according to before and after measures *according to time*; and thus this kind of measurement cannot be itself time because it *presupposes time*. Definition (3), therefore,

purports to give an account of time whereas it instead gives an account of something which presupposes time – or which at most is a manifestation or, perhaps, a consequence of time – and so in that sense as well it begs-the-question regarding the reality and nature of time as such,

as Wagner summarizes.⁸⁸

Moreover, if it is true that definition (3) is question begging, then it also does not solve the issue why a number that measures motion, temporally or otherwise, should be anything else than an aggregation of numeric units. In his critique of (2), Plotinus maintains that a temporal magnitude is not itself time, but presupposes time. Otherwise time would be constituted of these temporal quantities, instead of being one unified phenomenon. To redress these temporal quantities as before-now and after-now does not help this issue, it merely gives it a different name.

⁸⁸ Wagner, *The Enigmatic Reality of Time*, 336.

Plotinus summarizes his criticisms in few remarks at the end of *Ennead* III.7. 9. First, he insists that none of the three possible definition that he proposes can explain why the number of motion should be temporal, and not just any kind of number. Thus he now asserts again that “when number is added to movement [...] why should time result from its presence [...]?”⁸⁹ Second, if time is truly continuous it cannot be measured, nor itself be a measure or number because number is an aggregation, not a unity: “since time is, and is said to be unbounded, how could it have a number?”⁹⁰

These summarizing questions conclude Plotinus’ engagement with the opinions of other philosophers. In the next chapter, I will provide a close reading and interpretation of Plotinus’ own account in which he attempts to solve the problems that he identified in other theories.

⁸⁹ *Enn.* III.7. 9. 68-74: “ἀλλ' οὖν διὰ τί ἀριθμοῦ μὲν γενομένου χρόνος ἔσται.”

⁹⁰ *Enn.* III.7. 9. 76-77: “Ἀπείρου δὲ τοῦ χρόνου ὄντος καὶ λεγομένου πῶς ἂν περὶ αὐτὸν ἀριθμὸς εἶν;”

CHAPTER 3 PLOTINUS' ACCOUNT OF TIME

In this chapter, I will finally focus on Plotinus' own positive theory of time. We will see how he himself tries to solve the problems set out in the previous chapter: how to devise a theory of time that honours the logical priority and ontological unity of time. I have argued in chapter 1 that Plotinus already makes an implicit argument in the refutation of his predecessors; I proposed that we must, with Plotinus, make a distinction between Time – the cosmological principle of change – and temporality which is an attribute of the phenomenal universe. In the refutation of his predecessors, Plotinus' argument stays in the negative; yet, we still can work our way through Plotinus' arguments to see the ground on which he tries to refute the other opinions. All of these opinions try to place Time in the phenomenal realm, either as movement, or the moved, or the interval of movement, or a measure of movement. In all these opinions, time is something that *appears*. And precisely on this ground, Plotinus is able to attack them – he points out that it does not seem to be possible to view Time as something phenomenal. For this reason, Plotinus argues for the conceptual separation of the temporality that is visible in the appearing things – becoming and ceasing – from the principle of this movement, which he thinks is more fit to be called “Time.”

In his own account, he sets out to do precisely this: conceptualize Time as the principle of the dispersion of the ideals; and only after this dispersion, then, is change possible – for change requires multiplicity. This account of Time is, not

surprisingly, consequent on Plotinus' basic ontology. Whatever criticisms one might level at Plotinus, it would be hard for anyone to deny that his thinking is highly systematic and philosophically consistent with his first principles. Plotinus' theory of Time relies heavily on the structure and creative power of his third ὑπόστασις, the Soul; for this reason, I shall take a detour before I delve into the topic of Time itself, and provide a short summary of Soul as an ontological principle in section 2.1. In section 2.2, I will then focus on Plotinus' theory of Time. Here, I must emphasize that he casts his own theory in the form of a myth. This cannot surprise us; the theory of Time is bound up with the theory of Soul's emanation from the Intellect and the One, which is a myth as well. It seems befitting that Plotinus formulates the theory of Time in the same way.

3.1 THE STRUCTURE OF SOUL AND THE SENSIBLE

First, we need to develop a clear understanding of Plotinus' concept of Soul before we can inquire into the nature of Time. It needs to be noted that Plotinus uses the term "soul" in a myriad of ways. There is the ὑπόστασις Soul, which is the third and lowest of the divine principles of reality. This principle disperses itself into several cosmological tiers of entities and functions. Deepa Majumdar classifies these tiers in three levels: the Absolute Soul (αὐτοψυχή); the ὑπόστασις Soul which is the unified cosmological principal (πᾶσα ψυχή); and lower species of

souls, which are generated by the creative power of the ὑπόστασις Soul. Among those are the World Soul (ψυχή του παντός) and our individual souls.⁹¹

The highest form of soul is the Absolute Soul (αὐτοψυχή), which is the archetype of the Soul in the Intellect:

But is there, before the individual soul, and before the universal soul the Absolute Soul or Life? [We must] say that Absolute Soul must be in Intellect before Soul comes to be in order that it may come to be.⁹²

This form of Soul is not yet the ὑπόστασις; it does not leave the Intellect (νοῦς) (which is the second cosmic ὑπόστασις and, therefore, the principle of Soul and everything below) to become a principle on its own. The ὑπόστασις Soul is established only through the creative power of the Intellect. It is an expression and activity that stems from the Intellect and moves around it:

This activity springing from the substance of the Intellect is Soul, which comes to be this while Intellect abides unchanged. [...] But Soul does not abide unchanged when it produces: it is moved and so brings forth an image.⁹³

⁹¹ Deepa Majumdar, *Plotinus on the Appearance of Time and the World of Sense* (Hampton: Ashgate, 2007), 44.

⁹² *Enn.* V.9. 14. 20-23: “Περὶ δὲ ἄλλην καθόλου, καὶ τῆς καθόλου αὐτοψυχὴν ἤτοι τὴν ζωὴν; ἢ ἐν νῶ πρὶν γενέσθαι ψυχὴν, ἵνα καὶ γένηται, αὐτοψυχὴν ἐκείνην λέγειν.” Majumdar, *Appearance of Time*, 44.

⁹³ *Enn.* V.2. 1. 15-20: “καὶ αὕτη ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας ἐνέργεια ψυχῆς τοῦτο μένοντος ἐκείνου γενομένη [...] ἢ δὲ οὐ μένουσα ποιεῖ, ἀλλὰ κινηθεῖσα ἐγέννα εἶδωλον.”

Soul is thus a lesser image of Intellect (εἰκὼν νοῦ).⁹⁴ While the totality of νοῦς dissolves the multiplicity of being in its own simplicity, the essence of Soul is the unfolding of this unified manifold into distinct moments. Halfwassen points out that when Plotinus speaks of the “image” of Intellect, he means “visibility,” or “making visible” what is in itself invisible in the Intellect: the multiplicity of being.⁹⁵ Plotinus explains this relation using an allegory:

Just as a thought in its utterance is an image of the thought in soul, so soul itself is the expressed thought of Intellect, and its whole activity, and the life which it sends out to establish another reality.⁹⁶

The outspoken thought is the verbally manifested representation of the pure thought in soul, and just as the expression of the thought into language does not take anything from the thought that is purely and solely in thinking, so too does the expression of the *infolded* multiplicity within Intellect into the *outfolded* multiplicity of Soul not take anything away from the unity and simplicity of its source.

The emanation of one reality (ὑπόστασις) from another, which does not alter or take anything from the original reality, is a metaphysical concept of utmost importance in Plotinus’ ontology; it ensures 1) that none of the ὑποστάσει have to give anything up, or move towards something that is outside of themselves. This is

⁹⁴ *Enn.* V.1. 3. 5-10.

⁹⁵ Halfwassen, *Plotin und der Neuplatonismus*, 98.

⁹⁶ *Enn.* V.1. 3. 5-10: “καίπερ γὰρ οὔσα χρῆμα οἶον ἔδειξεν ὁ λόγος, εἰκὼν τίς ἐστι νοῦ. οἶον λόγος ὁ ἐν προφορᾷ λόγου τοῦ ἐν ψυχῇ, οὕτω τοι καὶ αὐτὴ λόγος νοῦ καὶ ἡ πᾶσα ἐνέργεια καὶ ἦν προῖεται ζοῆν εἰς ἄλλου ὑπόστασιν.”

the underlying concept of Plotinus' puzzling assurance that Soul "gives itself to multiplicity and does not give itself."⁹⁷ Soul is expressing its own nature in an outward activity without undergoing change or movement towards that to which it gives birth. 2) This kind of emanation allows Plotinus to explain how the One (ἓν) as the highest principle (ὑπόστασις) is present throughout all the lower layers of reality. Intellect, the unified plethora of being, is an "image of the Absolute" (εἰκόνα ἐκείνου),⁹⁸ just as Soul is an image of Intellect. And just as we saw that the pure thought in the soul finds its manifest expression in language, so too does the Intellect express the unified manifold which is its nature (οὐσία)⁹⁹ in a spread-out manifold that has its own existence apart from Intellect: the Soul.¹⁰⁰ And just as Soul remains unchanged while giving birth, so too does Intellect:

But one must understand that the activity on the level of Intellect does not flow out of it, but the external activity comes into existence as something distinct.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ *Enn.* IV. 9. 5. 1-5: "ἐκείνη μὲν οὖν μία, αἱ δὲ πολλαὶ εἰς ταύτην ὡς μίαν δοῦσαν ἑαυτὴν εἰς πλῆθος καὶ οὐ δοῦσαν."

⁹⁸ *Enn.* V.1. 7. 1.

⁹⁹ *Enn.* V.9. 5. 20-25.: "The objects of his [Intellect's] thought must exist before the universe, not impressions from other things but archetypes and primary and the substance of Intellect." "πρὸ τοῦ κόσμου ἄρα δεῖ εἶναι ἐκεῖνα, οὐ τύπους ἀφ' ἐτέρων, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀρχέτυπα καὶ πρῶτα καὶ νοῦ οὐσίαν."

¹⁰⁰ Halfwassen points out that the Greek term that Plotinus uses for "existence" is ὑπόστασις. He literally translates this term to the German "Niederschlag", a term used, for example, for the sediments on the bottom of a bottle of wine. I think its best English representation in this context is "condensation" (like the condensation of steam on a window). So, to follow Plotinus' metaphor, Intellect is expressing its own nature which then 'condenses' and forms something that is rather like it, yet has its own nature and existence apart from it. Halfwassen, *Plotin und der Neuplatonismus*, 98.

So, the metaphor of emanation does not describe an emergence of the Intellect out of itself. Rather, Intellect always stays resting in itself, but its inward activity produces another outward activity and reality, in which the unified nature of Intellect separates into the manifold, as Halfwassen describes it.¹⁰² Soul is this outward activity (προφορά),¹⁰³ which gains its own separate existence, but nevertheless is *from* Intellect.

But one must understand that the activity on the level of Intellect does not flow out of it, but the external activity comes into existence as something distinct.¹⁰⁴

Soul is, therefore, in the centre of Plotinus' ontological order; there is being below and above it.¹⁰⁵ Soul is in between the indivisible νοῦς and the divisible sensible beings. Because of that it is also itself both divisible and indivisible. At its upper summit Soul is an archetypal form united with Intellect. At its lower end it creates and shares in the sensible.¹⁰⁶ Intellect is the "One-Many" (ἐν πολλά): manifold because of its structure as intellection, but unified because this intellection is

¹⁰¹ *Enn.* V.1. 3. 10-15: "δεῖ δὲ λαβεῖν ἐκεῖ οὐκ ἐκρέουσιν, ἀλλὰ μένουσιν μὲν τὴν ἐν αὐτῷ, τὴν δὲ ἄλλην ὑφισταμένην."

¹⁰² Halfwassen, *Plotin und der Neuplatonismus*, 99.

¹⁰³ *Enn.* V.1. 3. 7.

¹⁰⁴ *Enn.* V.1. 3. 11-12: "δεῖ δὲ βαλεῖν ἐκεῖ οὐκ ἐκρέουσιν, ἀλλὰ μένουσιν μὲν τὴν ἐν αὐτῷ, τὴν δὲ ἄλλην ὑφισταμένην."

¹⁰⁵ Majumdar, *Appearance of Time*, 45-46.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

self-intellection; subject and object are identical. Soul is the “one and many” (ἓν καί πολλά) because it is unified in itself, but dispersed throughout its creations.¹⁰⁷

We see this dual nature of Soul also in its activity. Because Soul is the outgoing being of Intellect, it also imitates Intellect’s activity:

Since then its existence derives from Intellect soul is intellectual, and its intellect is discursive reasoning, and its perfection comes from Intellect, like a father who brings to maturity a son whom he begat imperfect in comparison with himself.¹⁰⁸

The nature of Soul is intellectual. But its intellection is unlike νόησις in Intellect, which is self-intellection as self-realization of the unified Being. Soul’s intellection is realized in calculative thoughts (λογισμοί). These thoughts constitute Being not as unified, but as spread out into the multiplicity of beings, through which they move discursively. This discursivity is the fundamental difference of Soul from Intellect: whereas Intellect’s noetic activity, or self-intellection, is a “being always already at its destination” because it is always already identical with its object, Soul’s dianoetic thinking is always a “being on the way.” And as this ongoing search for the intelligible, Soul is the dispersed activity of the Intellect which is always already there.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ *Enn.* V.1. 8. 25-30.

¹⁰⁸ *Enn.* V.1. 3. 10-15: “οὓσα οὖν ἀπὸ νοῦ νοερά ἐστι, καὶ ἐν λογισμοῖς ὁ νοῦς αὐτῆς καὶ ἡ τελείσις ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ πάσιν ὡς πατὴρ ἐκθιπέψαντος, ὃν οὐ τέλειος ὡς πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐγέννησεν.”

¹⁰⁹ Halfwassen, *Plotin und der Neuplatonismus*, 99.

As Intellect's inward self-intellection unfolds the unity of Being into the multiplicity of the intelligible beings, so too does Soul unfold itself into the multiplicity of its thoughts, which become the *λογοί*, rational principles that are dispersed images of the intelligibles (*εἶδη*). And just like the inward self-unfolding of Intellect creates an outward unfolding into Soul, so too does Soul, through its discursive thinking of the *λογοί*, create the world of discrete singulars: the sensible phenomena, which exist apart from each other, and in succession.

Through this metaphysics of consecutive emanation Plotinus builds an ontology, all layers of which are ultimately a manifestation of the One itself, which gives unity and being to everything below. The One is this Absolute Unity itself, and therefore absolutely beyond Being. The Intellect is the infolded unity of Being, and therefore the One-Many (*ἓν πολλά*). Soul unfolds this unity into multiplicity while it still remains unified, and is therefore the One-and-Many (*ἓν καί πολλά*). The rational forms of individual phenomena that Soul creates are only Many-and-One (*πολλά καί ἓν*) because the Soul distinguishes unity and multiplicity; yet since the rational forms stay immanent in Soul, they are still unified in their belonging to Soul:

So the soul is one and many in this way: the forms in body are many and one; bodies are many only.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ *Enn.* IV.1. 2. 50-55: “ἔστιν οὖν ψυχὴ ἓν καὶ πολλά οὕτως. τὰ δὲ ἐν τοῖς σώμασιν εἶδη πολλά καὶ ἓν. τὰ δὲ σώματα πολλά μόνον.”

While the forms of the phenomena (σώματα) remain unified in their immanence in Soul, the sensible phenomena are only many. They dissolve into the divergence of space and succession of time. Yet, although all three ὑπόστασεις maintain their own natures respectively, they are not, in fact, independent from each other. Since reality is principled by the One from top to bottom, Plotinus' cosmology is a layered ontology, but not an ontology of layers, we might say. Reality is ultimately unified, but shows forth a hierarchy of principles; but these principles are not independent phenomena (in fact, most of them are not phenomenal at all.) Hence, not even sensible Nature is on its own. Rather, it is the lower nature of Soul and manifestation of Soul's activity; Soul, in turn, is the lower nature of Intellect and the manifestation of Intellect's activity.

Here, we can get back to explaining the nature of Time and temporality within Plotinus' philosophy. In the course of the following section we will see how the structure of Time and temporality – laid out in a myth of origination – closely follows the structure of Soul.

3.2 TIME – THE ACTIVITY OF SOUL

Plotinus thinks of Soul as the principle of the dispersion of unity into multiplicity. And while the unity of Being remains at rest in eternity, Plotinus makes Time into the mode of this dispersion. In *Ennead* III.7. 11, he puts forward the famous definition that “time is the life (ζωή) of soul in a movement of passage

from one way of life (βίος) to another.”¹¹¹ According to Beierwaltes, βίος refers here to different stages or states (*modi vivendi*) or the different phases of life in general, which are distinguished by what is before and after; ζωή on the other hand means an active force carrying the βίος.¹¹² Thus, we now face the task of unpacking what exactly Plotinus means when he speaks of the “life of Soul,” and why he uses two different terms for it. I will argue, that by “life” Plotinus refers to the activity of Soul, which is discursive thinking (διάνοια) and that the twofoldness of this life follows the structure of the double act of creation – inward and outward – which I described above.

It is most worthy of noting that Plotinus’ argumentation, which leads up to the quoted passage, takes the form of a “myth of the fall, in which through boldness and the desire to be self-causing pre-existent ‘Mind’ [νοῦς] lapsed into the condition of souliness,” as Manchester explains.¹¹³ Hence, the story of origination is not to be taken literally. Plotinus rather illustrates metaphysical principles through the use of mythology. This means that there was no point in time when this lapse or fall happened; these are images for cosmic principles whose powers are active at every moment. As Clark explains, “although the text says that the Soul after a period of rest chose to seek a fuller life and started to move, the truth is

¹¹¹ *Enn.* III.7. 11. 42-45: “Εἰ οὖν χρόνον λέγοι ψυχῆς ἐν κινήσει μεταβατικῇ ἐξ ἄλλου εἰς ἄλλον βίον ζωὴν εἶναι, ἄρ’ ἂν δοκοῖ τι λέγειν;”

¹¹² Beierwaltes, *Plotinus (Enneade III.7)*, 268.

¹¹³ Manchester, “Time and the Soul,” 102.

that this curious power of the Soul has always been active.”¹¹⁴ This point is supported by the Platonic assertion that the cosmos does not have a temporal beginning, but is a logical derivation from higher principles.¹¹⁵ The first indication of the allegorical character of the account is that Plotinus begins with a reference to the Muses: “one could hardly, perhaps, call on the Muses, who did not then yet exist, to tell us ‘how time first came out.’”¹¹⁶ Although the Muses are dismissed as a source of information about the origin of time here, their appearance is, nevertheless, a clear indicator for the mythical form of what follows, as Manchester notes.¹¹⁷ Moreover, as we will see, the agents of the following story, Time and Soul, are asked to answer for themselves; the abstract concepts at play are personified and enter into dialogue with each other. Manchester notes that Plotinus can take advantage of the fact that Greek is a gendered language; hence, the personal pronouns “he” (for Time) and “she” (for Soul) are able to indicate the distinctions more clearly than can English, in which they both are referred to by “it.” For this reason, Manchester has adapted Armstrong’s translation of the text accordingly, which I found useful for the purposes of this thesis.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Clark, “Time in Plotinus,” 353-354.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 354.

¹¹⁶ *Enn.* III.7. 11. 7: “ὅπως δὴ πρῶτον ἐξέπεσε χρόνος, τὰς μὲν Μούσας οὐπω τότε οὔσας οὐκ ἄν τις ἴσως καλοῖ εἰπεῖν τοῦτο.”

¹¹⁷ Manchester, “Time and the Soul,” 121.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 116-119. The remaining quotations in this chapter follow Manchester’s alterations. I only change the personal pronouns referring to time and Soul. I ignore all other alterations Manchester has made to Armstrong’s translation.

We must take ourselves back to the disposition which we said existed in eternity, to that quiet life, all a single whole, still unbounded, altogether without declination, resting in and directed towards eternity. Time did not yet exist, not at any rate for the beings of that world; we shall produce time by means of the form and nature of what comes after.¹¹⁹

These words form the introduction to the story. Before time existed, there was only a state of eternity which is defined as “quiet,” “whole,” “without declination,” and “resting.”

This quote confronts us with an important question: what does Plotinus mean by “we” when he says that *we* must take ourselves back (ἀναγαγεῖν ἡμᾶς αὐτούς), and that *we* have produced Time (εἰργάσμεθα, γεννήσομεν)?¹²⁰ I follow Machester and Baracat and reject a reading that interprets this “we” as individual subjects (αἱ ψυχαί). Both of them point towards a passage in chapter 13 of *Ennead* III.7, where Plotinus states that Time is in all individual souls (including the World-Soul, ψυχή τοῦ παντός) not because they bring Time into being, but because they share in the ὑπόστασις Soul (πᾶσα ψυχή): “Is time, then, also in us? It is in every soul of this kind, and in the same form in every one of them, and all are one.”¹²¹ Time must be in every individual soul by participation only, otherwise

¹¹⁹ *Enn.* III.7. 11. 1-7: “Δεῖ δὴ ἀναγαγεῖν ἡμᾶς αὐτούς πάλιν εἰς ἐκείνην τὴν διάθεσιν ἣν ἐπὶ τοῦ αἰῶνος ἐλέγομεν εἶναι, τὴν ἀτρεμῆ ἐκείνην καὶ ὁμοῦ πᾶσαν καὶ ἀπειρον ἥδη ζῶην καὶ ἀκλινῆ πάντη καὶ ἐνὶ καὶ πρὸς ἕν ἐστῶσαν. Χρόνος δὲ οὕτω ἦν, ἢ ἐκεῖνος γε οὐκ ἦν, γεννήσομεν δὲ χρόνον λόγῳ καὶ φύσει τοῦ ὑστέρου.”

¹²⁰ *Enn.* III.7. 11. 1, 6, 19.

¹²¹ *Enn.* III.7.11. 13. 66-70: “Ἄρ’ οὖν καὶ ἐν ἡμῖν χρόνος; Ἡ ἐν ψυχῇ τῇ τοιαύτῃ πάσῃ καὶ ὁμοειδῶς ἐν πάσῃ καὶ αἱ πᾶσαι μία. Διὸ οὐ διασπασθήσεται ὁ χρόνος· ἐπεὶ οὐδὲ ὁ αἰὼν ὁ κατ’ ἄλλο ἐν τοῖς

Time would be split up among the multiplicity of the individual souls, and every soul would produce her own Time.¹²² “We,” then, in line 1 is to be understood as an editorial we. It refers to the lecturer who speaks about the nature of Time and to the lecturer’s audience.¹²³

The “we” in lines 6 and 19 must be interpreted differently, though. Baracat takes it as “a metaphysical ‘we’;” for him, it stands for the ὑπόστασις Soul and, by participation only, for the World-Soul and the individual souls, as well.¹²⁴ Manchester sees these lines as more significant than Baracat. He argues that “we,” in this case, actually means “we, the speakers and readers,” who must express what Time – asked to speak for himself – can only say *silently*. Hence, “we have constructed time” is a surrogate for Time saying “I have constructed myself” – which is what Soul, breaking from Intellect, would like to say, and what Time, indeed, does say.¹²⁵ The significance, for Manchester, does not lie in our speaking for Time, but rather in Time’s silence. He says that Time’s silence should be seen in the context of an earlier text, *Ennead* III.8,¹²⁶ in which Plotinus uses the same mode of exposition, asking sensible Nature why she makes things, and lets her answer for herself. This is what she says:

ὁμοιδέσει πᾶσιν.” Manchester, “Time and the Soul,” 120; Baracat, “Soul’s Desire,” 32-33.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Manchester, “Time and the Soul,” 120.

¹²⁴ Baracat, “Soul’s Desire,” 33.

¹²⁵ Manchester, “Time and the Soul,” 121.

¹²⁶ According to the chronology of Plotinus’ treatises, *Enn.* III.8 is treatise 30, *Enn.* III.7 is treatise 45.

You ought not to ask, but to understand in silence, you, too, just as I am silent and not in the habit of talking. Understand what, then? That what comes into being is what I see in my silence, an object of contemplation which comes to be naturally, and that I, originating from this sort of contemplation have a contemplative nature.¹²⁷

According to Manchester this silently – which means “naturally,” as we see in the quote – executed activity is a most important feature of Soul and of Time, as well; for, as we shall see, Time *is* this silent activity of Soul. In an earlier, shorter treatise on time, *Ennead* IV. 4 [28]. 15-17, Plotinus follows this line. Manchester summarizes the position as follows:

In [...] chapter 15 he [Plotinus] had established that souls, which are eternal, rank higher than Time, which in turn ranks higher than the things which are in Time, namely the affections and doings of souls.¹²⁸

Here, Time is *in* Soul not in the sense of *Ennead* III.7, where Time is in Soul because it is Soul’s activity, but in the very direct sense that there is something of Soul both above and below Time: above it is the eternal ὑπόστασις, and below are the temporal and sensible productions of the ψυχά. ¹²⁹ In *Ennead* IV.4. 16, Plotinus explores the relationship between the temporal structure of sensible Nature – the ‘one thing after another’ – in comparison to the order of the higher Soul. Here, a

¹²⁷ *Enn.* III.8. 4. 3-7: “Ἐχρῆν μὲν μὴ ἐρωτᾶν, ἀλλὰ συνιέναι καὶ αὐτὸν σιωπῆ, ὡπερ ἐγὼ σιωπῶ καὶ οὐκ εἶθισμαι λέγει. Τί οὖν συνιέναι; Ὅτι τὸ γενόμενόν ἐστι θέαμα ἐμόν, σιωπώσης, καὶ φύσει γενόμενον θεώρημα, καὶ μοι γενομένη ἐκ θεωρίας τῆς ὠδὶ τὴν φύσιν ἔχειν φιλοθεάμονα ὑπάρχειν.”

¹²⁸ Manchester, “Time and the Soul,” 122.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

distinct problem arises: if the temporal structure is also the order of Soul, the eternal nature of Soul is destroyed; if, on the other hand, Soul has a different order than sensible Nature, then there are two orders, the relation of which will be hard to establish. As Plotinus says,

Now if the arranging principle is other than the arrangement, it will be of such a kind as to speak, in a way; but if that which gives orders is the primary arrangement, it no longer says, but only makes this after that. For if it says it, it does so with its eye on the arrangement. How then is it the same? Because the arranging principle is not form and matter, but only form and power, and Soul is the second active actuality after Intellect; but the 'this after that' is in the [material] things which cannot all exist at once.¹³⁰

If the ordering principle of Soul were different from the order of sensible Nature, Soul would act in a *speaking* kind of way in opposition to the silent activity of Nature. This is not permissible. The ordering and the ordered cannot be made different in the way that the ordered would become *external* to the ordering. For, as I mentioned in the previous section on the structure of Soul, sensible Nature is not exterior to the Soul; rather, sensible Nature is the lower manifestation of Soul *itself*, of Soul's creative power. Plotinus reiterates this point in the quotation above: Soul is not form and matter, but form and *power*, and the backdrop of this

¹³⁰ *Enn.* IV.4. 16. 13-21: "ἢ εἰ μὲν ἄλλο τὸ τάττον καὶ ἡ τάξις, οὕτως ὡς οἶον λέγειν· εἰ δὲ τὸ ἐπιστατοῦν ἢ πρῶτον τάξις, οὐκέτι λέγει, ἀλλὰ ποιεῖ μόνον τόδε μετὰ τόδε. εἰ γὰρ λέγει, εἰς τάξιν πλέπων λέγει· ὥστε ἕτερον τῆς τάξεως ἔσται. πῶς οὖν ταύτόν; ὅτι μὴ ὕλη καὶ εἶδος τὸ τάττον, ἀλλ' εἶδος μόνον καὶ δύναμις, καὶ ἐνέργεια δευτέρα, μετὰ νοῦν ἔστι ψυχὴ· τὸ δὲ τόδε μετὰ τόδε ἐν τοῖς πράγμασιν οὐ δυναμένοις ἅμα πάντα."

power is sensible Nature. Hence, “the distinction between the active ordering and the resultant order has to be withdrawn,” as Manchester explains.¹³¹

In *Ennead* III.7 then, Plotinus comes to identify this silent power of Soul with Time. As I argued before, for Plotinus, Time is not simple succession, the ‘this after that.’ As Baracat notes, mere succession would manifest nothing but an unintelligible array of appearances; only if the ordering principle (Time) is ontologically prior and present in Soul can succession be interpreted as a manifestation of this principle.¹³² So, Time is not the mere succession of the temporally structured phenomena; it is “the power of constant *arrival* in succession,” as Manchester puts it.¹³³ But this power does not belong to sensible Nature, but to the *λογοί*, the intellectual unities in Soul; and the *λογοί* have this power through the activity of Soul. Halfwassen calls this constant arrival the *futurity* of Soul, it is Soul’s nature to always go to something that she has not had before.¹³⁴ Since she is not all together one with her contents, in that she does not have them all at once like Intellect, she

¹³¹ Manchester, “Time and the Soul,” 122.

¹³² Baracat, “Soul’s Desire,” 33.

¹³³ Manchester, “Time and Soul,” 123.

¹³⁴ Halfwassen, *Plotin und der Neuplatonismus*, 107-108. Futurity, here, means that Soul is directed at something she does not yet possess. Yet, this “not yet” is not to be understood in temporal terms. The *λογοί*, which Soul perceives discursively, are always already in Soul (for outside of Soul there is nothing.) But Soul does not relate to her contents as Intellect does – whereas Intellect and the intelligibles are immediate, Soul needs the mediation of discursivity to see the *λογοί*. And discursivity, or dianoetic intellection, is nothing else than going through the forms one by one, instead of having them all at once. We might say that the forms are opaque for Soul, so she must consider them individually (whereas for the Intellect they are transparent.) Hence, Soul’s futurity is to be understood metaphysically, not temporally. It is, nevertheless, Soul’s metaphysical futurity which *causes* the temporal dispersion of all Nature below Soul.

can only establish her unity by *never ceasing* to go from the contemplation of one form to the next:

For this is the way in which it will imitate that which is already a whole, already all together and unbounded, by intending to be always making an increase in its being, for this is how its being will imitate the being of the intelligible world.¹³⁵

Following from all this, we can now say that the structure of Time is most intricately involved in the structure of Soul's twofoldness. Time sits precisely at the node of Soul's higher and lower end.¹³⁶ It relates the creative higher Soul with the created lower soul; even more, Time *is* the creative power by which Soul creates. And the stylistic trope of silence, which Plotinus uses for both Soul's creative power and Time, corroborates the reading that Plotinus actually identifies Soul's power with Time.

After these preliminary remarks, we can now move towards Plotinus' main line of argumentation for Time as the life of Soul.:

one might perhaps (even if the Muses did exist then after all) ask time when he has come into being to tell us how it did come into being and appear. He might say something like this about himself; that before, when he had not yet, in fact produced this 'before' or felt the need of the 'after,' he was at rest with eternity in real being; he was not yet time, but he himself kept quiet in that. But since there was a restlessly

¹³⁵ *Enn.* III.7. 11. 56-59: "Οὕτω γὰρ μιμήσεται τὸ ἤδη ὅλον καὶ ἀθρόον καὶ ἄπειρον ἤδη, εἰ ἐθέλησει αἰεὶ προσκτώμενον εἶναι ἐν τῷ εἶναι· καὶ γὰρ τὸ εἶναι οὕτω τὸ ἐκείνου μιμήσεται."

¹³⁶ Manchester, "Time and the Soul," 123.

active nature, which wanted to control herself and be on her own, and chose to seek for more than her present state, she moved, and time moved with her; and so, always moving on to the 'next' and the 'after,' and what is not the same, but one thing after another, we made a long stretch of our journey and constructed time as an image of eternity.¹³⁷

Again, we see how Plotinus follows the structure that we have now outlined. According to Manchester, Plotinus makes two interwoven points. The first part of the argument, which I quoted above, is concerned with how Time came into being (γενόμενος); the second part will outline how Time appears (έκφανεῖς) within sensible Nature. Until now, I have, following Manchester, made sure to specify *sensible* Nature every time I mentioned φύσις, since this is the context of the discussion in *Ennead* III.8. But the “restless active nature” staging a play with Time is not the sensible Nature, but the higher Nature of Soul, the hypostatic Soul (πᾶσα ψυχή). And when Soul starts to move, and Time moves with her, she constructs him as the “image of eternity.” Therefore, as we said, Time is not constructed as external to Soul, but as “the image of eternity, that is to say, as an intelligible form of perfection which, when added to the sensible universe, makes it a *better* image of its paradigm, not a worse one,” as Manchester explains.¹³⁸ Time coincides with

¹³⁷ *Enn.* III.7. 11. 9-19: “ἀλλ' ἴσως, ἔπερ ἦσαν καὶ αἱ Μοῦσαι τότε, αὐτὸν δ' ἂν τις τάχα τὸν γενόμενον χρόνον, ὅπως ἐστὶν ἐκφανεῖς καὶ γενόμενος. Λέγοι δ' ἂν περὶ αὐτοῦ ὧδέ πως· ὡς πρότερον, πρὶν τὸ πρότερον δὴ τοῦτο γεννηθῆσαι καὶ τοῦ ὑστέρον δεηθῆναι, οὐν αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ ὄντι ἀνεπαύετο χρόνος οὐκ ὢν, ἀλλ' ἐν ἐκείνῳ καὶ αὐτὸς ἡσυχίαν ἦγε. Φύσεως δὲ πολυπράγμονος καὶ ἄρχειν αὐτῆς βουλομένης καὶ εἶναι αὐτῆς καὶ τὸ πλέον τοῦ παρόντος ζητεῖν ἐλομένης ἐκινήθη μὲν αὐτή, ἐκινήθη δὲ καὶ αὐτός, καὶ εἰς τὸ ἔπειτα ἀεὶ καὶ τὸ ὑστέρον καὶ οὐ ταυτόν, ἀλλ' ἕτερον εἶθ' ἕτερον κινούμενοι, μῆκός τι τῆς πορείας ποιησάμενοι αἰῶνος εἰκόνα τὸν χρόνον εἰργάσμεθα.”

¹³⁸ Manchester, “Time and the Soul,” 125.

Soul's self-origination; even more, since Time expresses Soul's nature – her being-directed towards the future – he makes her self-origination possible in the first place. Only because Time originates a metaphysical structure of before and after can Soul have her discursive nature apart from the Intellect.

Plotinus follows this mythical origin of Time with his explanation of how Time appears. Again, I alter Armstrong's translation to make the pronominal relations clearer. Until now, the two actors were Soul's Nature and Time; now, they are Soul's power (feminine) and the Logos (masculine).

For because soul had an unquiet power, which wanted to keep on transferring what she saw there to something else, she did not want the whole to be present to it all together; and, as from a quiet seed the formative principle [the *Logos*], unfolding himself, advances, as he thinks, to largeness, but does away with the largeness by division and, instead of keeping his unity in himself, squanders it outside himself and so goes forward to a weaker extension; in the same way Soul, making the world of sense in imitation of that other world, moving with a motion which is not that which exists There, but like it, and intending to be an image of it, first of all put herself into time, which she made instead of eternity, and then handed over that which came into being as a slave to time, by making the whole of it exist in time and encompassing all its ways with time.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ *Enn.* III.7. 11. 20-33: “Ἐπεὶ γὰρ ψυχῆς ἦν τις δύναμις οὐχ ἡσυχος, τὸ δ' ἐκεῖ ὁρώμενον αἰεὶ μεταφέρειν εἰς ἄλλο βουλομένης, τὸ μὲν ἀθρόον αὐτῇ πᾶν παρεῖναι οὐκ ἠθέληεν· ὥσπερ δ' ἐκ σπέρματος ἡσύχου ἐξελίττων αὐτὸν ὁ λόγος διέξοδον εἰς πολὺ, ὡς οἶεται, ποιεῖ, ἀφανίζων τὸ πολὺ τῷ μερισμῷ, καὶ ἀνθ' ἐνὸς ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἐν αὐτῷ τὸ ἐν δαπανῶν εἰς μῆκος ἀσθενέστερον πρόεισιν, οὕτω δὴ καὶ αὐτὴ κόσμον ποιοῦσα αἰσθητὸν μιμήσει ἐκείνου κινούμενον κίνεσιν οὐ τὴν ἐκεῖ, ὁμοίαν δὲ τῇ ἐκεῖ καὶ ἐθέλουσαν εἰκόνα ἐκείνης εἶναι, πρῶτον μὲν ἑαυτὴν ἐχρόνωσεν ἀντὶ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦτον ποιήσασα· ἔπειτα δὲ καὶ τῷ γενομένῳ ἔδωκε δουλεύειν χρόνῳ, ἐν χρόνῳ αὐτὸν πάντα ποιήσασα εἶναι, τὰς τοῦτου διεξόδους ἀπάσας ἐν αὐτῷ περιλαβοῦσα.”

At the end of the passage, we see the doubled act of Soul again: first she temporalizes herself, then she puts all her creations into Time as well. Plotinus is not saying here that Soul herself is temporal. By “temporalizing herself” he refers to the concurrent origination of Soul and Time. Soul breaks free from the Intellect and in this act Time occurs as Soul’s discursive activity. That Soul makes all her productions enslaved to Time, on the other hand, means that sensible Nature is subject to temporality, it is characterized by temporal succession. In this way, Time is not only psychological, but also physical; it is not just the epistemological structure of Soul’s contemplation, but also an ontological structure of reality.¹⁴⁰ Time is the ontological structure of the hypostatic Soul, temporality the structure of phenomenal reality. Here, we see the twofold nature of Soul and Time most clearly: in her inward contemplation of the intelligible forms Soul, unlike Intellect, must proceed in a forward movement, going from one form to the next – this is her dianoetic activity, which Plotinus’ calls Time. This inward contemplation produces an outward creation, sensible Nature, which is ordered, according to Soul’s mode of contemplation – in a temporal manner, one thing after another.

The actions of the Logos in the quoted passage above further support this interpretation. As we established, each hypostatic reality in Plotinus’ ontological

¹⁴⁰ Halfwassen says, “die Zeit ist für Plotin nicht nur wie für Kant die Form unserer subjektiven Anschauung, sondern zugleich die objektive ontologische Struktur der Welt des Werdens.” Halfwassen, *Plotin und der Neuplatonismus*, 109.

hierarchy receives from above its own Nature, but is also productive of what is below. It is Soul's nature to contemplate the intelligible forms through Time – one after another – and in this contemplation the forms, which are unified in the Intellect, are drawn apart (διάστασις) and become the λόγοι. When these are materialized in Soul's outward activity and become sensible Nature, they are no longer capable of creation, since Nature has here reached the bottom of the hypostatic realities. Sensible Nature is, therefore, no ὑπόστασις herself; she is only created, but does not create. In Soul, however, the Logos is still powerful, and this power seems to come from Soul's temporalization. Manchester summarizes his position as follows:

It seems to be Soul's temporalizing herself that gives her Power, so that the making of Time as an image of eternity that attended the establishment of Soul as a Nature in argument 1 is the very thing that gives her Power her in argument 2.¹⁴¹

We need to always remember that Plotinus' theory of Time is not meant to be taken literally. Time's emergence from Soul's fall is a myth that Plotinus uses to illustrate metaphysical principles. "Although the text says that the Soul after a period of rest chose to seek a fuller life and started to move, the truth is that this curious power of the Soul has always been active," as Clark explains.¹⁴² As I said in

¹⁴¹ Manchester, "Time and the Soul," 127.

¹⁴² Clark, "Time in Plotinus," 353.

the introduction of this section, the theory of Time follows Plotinus' ontological philosophizing in this aspect; also the theory of the emanation of the principles of reality out of the One takes the shape of a myth. Both of these narratives are intertwined with each other, to the point that the treatise on time can actually be seen as a highly sophisticated exploration of the powers and doings of Soul. Time, indeed, is deeply involved in the mythical creation of the sensible by Soul. For once, Time is the mode of contemplation through which Soul's creativity finds its expression. But, more than that, Time is also the copula between Soul's creativity and her creations. Through his concept of Time, Plotinus is able to describe the continuity of the procession of Being from the higher to the lower Nature of Soul. In other words, Time mitigates and unifies the twofoldness of Soul, her higher creative and lower created Nature. For this reason, Time itself is twofold in the same way. At its ontological summit, Time is the activity of Soul, her discursive contemplation. At its lower end, Time expresses itself as the temporal succession in which the contemplation of Soul is expressed as sensible Nature.

We can understand why Plotinus holds this approach to be superior to the opinions he refutes. His own theory solves, at least in his mind, a very specific problem. Yet, it is the problem with which, I believe, his philosophizing as a whole is always concerned; it is the issue of the relation between unity and multiplicity. Plotinus philosophical project is centred around finding an adequate expression for how the *kosmos* can be one, albeit expressed in a multiplicity of phenomena.

His treatment of Soul and Time have a significant role in this endeavour; their twofold Natures constitute the link between the unity of Being and the dispersed beings; Soul is nothing else than the principle of dispersion that must stand as a mediation between them, Time is more accurately the activity of dispersion that is expressed through the principle Soul. In this way, Plotinus not only establishes a *kosmos* of multiples *out of unity*, he is, moreover, able to think Soul and Time as unified within this outgoing procession. In his opinion, his predecessors failed to do that – although we might mention that their projects may have had different agendas.

CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSION

Plotinus is ever concerned about one fundamental question: how can the *kosmos* be one if all we experience is multiplicity? Plotinus tries to answer this question by establishing an intricate ontological hierarchy. In section 2.1, I focused on how the hypostatic Soul is in the centre of this hierarchy. The Soul provides the mediation between between unity and multiplicity. Since the mode in which Soul contemplates Being is discursive, Soul introduces discursivity into Being, as well. Plotinus' hypostatic Soul is, therefore, a principle of reality; it ensures that he can conceptualize reality as both unified and multiple, both of which are necessary for the *kosmos* to be intelligible. Since our rational apparatus works discursively, our reality must possess a discursive structure, as well. Yet, this discursive structure relies on a deeper metaphysical unity. Only thus can the *relations* between the multiple things, on which rational thought relies, be *real*. Without unity, the *kosmos* would fall apart into singulars which are unintelligible as well.

Of course, this is not the only theory of reality, nor is it the only valid one. It is the one that Plotinus proposes – and it certainly has several philosophical advantages. One of these can be seen in Plotinus' theory of time, which is consistent with the rest of his ontology. By defining Time as the mode of Soul's contemplation, as her discursivity which disperses Being into multiplicity, Plotinus is able to provide a highly consistent theory of time. Moreover, the ontological unity of time

is preserved because Plotinus is able to separate Time as the principle of dispersion from the succession of phenomena.

I have agreed with Plotinus in the previous chapter, that other accounts of time do not make this distinction. They make time into something that follows phenomenal change in one way or another. According to those opinions, time is always ultimately broken apart because it must follow the structure of dispersed phenomena – hence, time will be dispersed as well. This might not be a problem at all if we are not concerned with preserving the unity of time. Yet, I would like to argue that, first, a theory that preserves the unity of its object is always better suited to explain the respective object. Second, our *experience* of the temporal flow is indeed *one*; the succession with which we are faced at every moment is unbroken.¹⁴³

Hence, it seems simply intuitive that our theory of time should reflect this unity. Plotinus eludes the problem of dispersing time by conceptualizing Time as the cosmological principle of dispersion, yet not as part of that dispersion. As I

¹⁴³ Someone might suggest here that our experience of temporality may, contrary to what I am proposing, indeed have certain gaps. Examples for these gaps could be sleep, or meditation, moments in which we are not aware of the passage of time. Yet, first, this does not undermine the argument that *when* we experience temporality we experience it as continuous. We do not experience distinct moments following each other, we cannot really distinguish between one “now” and the next. The nows, so to speak, continuously melt into each other. Second, I would like to suggest that even those spans of time that we arguably do not experience – for example if we are asleep – do not constitute real “gaps” in our experience of temporality. We are immediately aware that change has happened, and time has passed as soon as we wake up. Moreover, we experience this “gap” not as something that stopped the temporal flow for a while, the gap rather becomes a moment within this flow, something of which we are aware in an immediate way.

proposed, this distinction between Time and succession makes Plotinus' theory better suited to preserve both the logical consistency and the ontological unity of time than are the other opinions that he considers. Plotinus succeeds in arguing the superiority of his own approach by posing it as the solution to issues that are raised in the critique of the opinions of his predecessors. All of these other theories may try to meet the criteria of conceptual consistency and ontological unity as well. Yet, Plotinus shows how they all ultimately fail because they try to place time in the phenomenal instead of placing the phenomenal in time.

I dealt, here, with the opinions that time is motion; that time is that which is moved; that time is the interval of a motion; and that time is the measure or number of motion. What all these views have in common is that they conceptualize time as appearing *together* with phenomenal movement. Plotinus is able to criticize these opinions by showing that they all lead into either logical or ontological contradictions. This is because phenomenal movement *presupposes* a concept of time, as Plotinus points out in every one of the refutations of other opinions. For this reason, we cannot identify time and movement with each other. The view that time is that which is moved falls flat for the same reason. Since movement presupposes time, that which is moved does so all the more.

Zeno's view that time is the distance covered by motion, i.e. an interval, receives a little more intricate critique. Ultimately, Plotinus asserts that to identify time with this interval will inevitably reduce time either to movement itself, a

view that has already been refuted, or conflate time with space. The latter claim seems somewhat more straightforward: the distance covered by a (loco)motion will certainly be spatial. Yet, there is also a certain amount of time which is covered by a particular movement – be it locomotion or another form of change. Refuting this view, Plotinus asks what exactly the movement or movements are of which time is supposed to be the interval. If it is just any motion, then we face the problem that there must be multiple times just as there are multiple different motions. If it is solely the movement of the *kosmos*, we can avoid this problem, yet, we are now presented with a different predicament; the distance that a movement covers, if not understood spatially, is not distinct from the movement itself, unless we want to say that there is a temporal distance that the movement covers and identify this temporal distance with time. But this would assert that time is time, a statement quite true, yet certainly a useless explanation of what time is.

This argument, just as the arguments against time as movement and time as the moved, operates in a purely logical way; it reduces the view under attack to an absurdity. What is at the base of this absurdity is Plotinus' discovery that time cannot successfully be conceptualized as something that shows up together with appearances – be it as phenomenal movement, as something *in* movement, or as an interval of movement. All these views must fall prey to the logical problem that we must *presuppose* a concept of time before we can meaningfully speak of motion. Plotinus sees that to solve this issue he must make time prior to movement,

at least, in a first step, conceptually. That is what he means when he says that movement is *in* time. He admits that, intuitively, movement is closely related to temporality, but he calls this temporality the succession of the appearances and divorces it from his concept of Time, which he conceptualizes as the principle that makes this succession possible.

But Time cannot only be *conceptually prior* for Plotinus. Time is, for him, a principle that makes succession possible by dispersing the unity of the intelligible Being. Hence, Time has an *ontological priority* as well; it is a cosmological and cosmogonical principle with a crucial role to play in the Plotinian emanation. By differentiating between Time and temporality, Plotinus not only tries to solve the conceptual issue of the relation between time and motion; he also tackles the issue of how to reflect the ontological unity of time in his theory. He sets out to achieve this goal in the same way in which he tackled his conceptual concerns: by criticizing a famous predecessor. This time it is Aristotle who serves as a springboard for Plotinus' approach. That Plotinus utilizes Aristotle in this way is not surprising. Aristotle's account demonstrates a great effort to ensure the unity of time, which makes it easy for Plotinus to engage with this precise topic through a critique of the Stagirite's position. He argues that Aristotle's view is ultimately unable to explain why the measuring number is, indeed, a continuous measure of temporality instead of just any aggregation of numeric units.

Aristotle defines time as the number or measure of movement according to before and after. What he means by that is that time is a certain aspect of movement, namely the aspect that makes a particular movement *countable*. What is supposedly counted are instants or stages of the movement which follow each other in the way that one instant is *before* and one is *after*. Aristotle, moreover, recognizes that we experience the temporal flux as continuous and places great significance on the question of why that is. He answers that time is continuous because it is an aspect of a continuous movement. In a second step, Aristotle grounds the continuity of movement by asserting that any particular movement happens in and over a certain extent of space, which, in his opinion, is evidently continuous.

Plotinus criticizes this definition because it is not clear why this number of motion, which Aristotle defines as time, is temporal and not just any kind of number. He points out that if time is supposed to measure movement, it needs to have a certain magnitude and that it is not clear why this magnitude should be anything else than an accumulation of numeric units or, in other words, distinct moments that are, indeed, *not continuous*. Moreover, Plotinus asks how time is actually doing the measuring simply by running along with motion. In this scenario it would be as plausible to affirm that time measures motion as that motion measures time, since the two are always moving with each other. But even if it were clear that the line running along with movement is actually measuring this move-

ment there would still be one issue left to consider: if time were to be this line or magnitude it would only ever occur with particular movements. In this case, we are actually defining a specific portion of time and not time itself. Moreover, we can even look back to Plotinus' earlier criticisms and assert that movement must presuppose time – hence, it cannot occur only when motion is happening. We *experience* time – or, rather, temporality – when movement occurs, but that does not mean that time is dependent on movement.

Aristotle says that time is an aspect of movement, namely, that aspect that makes movement countable according to what comes before and what comes after. Yet, there are two different meanings of what is before and what after in a movement; it can refer to places in space or moments in time. Aristotle acknowledges this problematic and asserts that time measures motion in accordance to the temporal before and after. He, then, nevertheless relates the temporal before and after intimately with the spatial one, since he grounds the continuity of the temporal moments in the continuity of space. Plotinus does not accept this solution and seems to hold that time cannot be related to space in this way, since the temporal before and after must be prior to the spatial one.

That time must have priority over space for Plotinus can already be deduced from his criticisms against the other views of time concerning logical consistency. He points out that if, as Aristotle seems to assert, the temporal before and after is the temporal aspect of a movement in space, i.e. in the spatial before and after,

then time is presupposed before the explanation of what time is. The argument is circular. We may assume that time is not something distinct from movement – a line running along with it or the magnitude of this line – but an aspect of the movement itself, namely, the aspect that makes the movement countable. For this reason, Aristotle insisted that time is a number that is counted, not a number by which we count. But, according to Plotinus' criticism, it does not really matter if time is a measure because it can be counted or because it is a tool which we can use to count the magnitude of movement. What matters is that in either case what is counted can only be distinct units that, when added up, constitute an accumulation of moments, but not a unified flux.

Concerning the ontological unity of time, for Plotinus, there are only two possibilities. Either we simply do not care about it and are content with a theory that does not give heed to the unification of its concept of time. Or we must take time out of the phenomenal altogether. Phenomena are always already dispersed; their nature is multiplicity. If we tie the concept of time to this multiplicity, it will inevitably follow this characteristic and be itself multiple and dispersed. Of course, we have to point out that for Plotinus the multiplicity of the phenomenal in general can only be properly unified by deriving it from the principle of ultimate unity. Platonism is characterized by the prioritizing of unity over multiplicity. Yet, this approach has philosophical advantages, one of which is that, if we are interested in a concept of unified time, we can achieve this goal with relative

ease by defining time as a principle of phenomenal multiplicity, instead of as part of it.

Plotinus does precisely that: for him, Time is the cosmological activity that draws the unity of Being apart into distinct entities, through which our discursive reasoning can now move one after another. He distinguishes Time from the temporal succession that we experience; that temporality is how Time is expressed in the phenomenal realm, and it is subjected to Time, in the sense that it is caused by Time. Time has, therefore, a most important role to play in the mediation between unity and multiplicity, in which Plotinus is so interested. Soul is the principle of the dispersion of Being; through her contemplation she draws the unity of Being apart into rational unities. Time is the mode of this contemplation of Soul, which draws the intelligible out into discursivity by contemplating the intelligibles one after another. This Time-like contemplation of Being is what causes sensible Nature, the backdrop manifestation of Soul's contemplation, to move in a phenomenal expression of Soul's Time-activity: the sensible moves in temporal succession.

After all this, we can also understand why Plotinus thinks it is necessary further to ground Time in eternity. I have not discussed the parts of *Ennead* III.7 that deal with eternity in this thesis because I want to show that Plotinus' view is a consistent theory without the derivation of time from eternity; his theory is intended to solve a specific set of problems and, I believe, it succeeds in doing that. But

it makes sense that if Time is the dispersive activity of Soul, then Being needs to be unified, i.e. not dispersed, prior to that.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, Being is unified in the higher principle, Intellect. And just as Time is the contemplative activity of Soul that *disperses* Being, so is eternity the contemplative activity of Intellect that *unifies* Being, or, as Plotinus says, the life of Intellect, which is “a life that abides in the same, and always has the all present to it.”¹⁴⁵ Just as the life of Soul, Time, is characterized by the ontological gap between the contemplation and the contemplated, so is the life of Intellect, eternity, characterized by the absence of that gap. It always has the all present to it and thereby ensures the unity of Being which Soul disperses. Considering the relation between the unity and multiplicity of Being there is, therefore, more work to be done concerning the unity of Being in the eternal Intellect. Yet, this is a project for the future. In this thesis, I only propose that Plotinus’ theory of Time, the life-activity of Soul, offers a consistent account that ensures the conceptual and ontological unity of time and that it plays a vital role in the continuity of the emanation of Being.

¹⁴⁴ “Prior” here means metaphysically prior, not temporally prior.

¹⁴⁵ *Enn.* III.7. 3. 15-18: “ταῦτα πάντα ἰδὼν αἰῶνα εἶδεν ἰδὼν ζωὴν μένουσαν ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ ἀεὶ παρὸν τὸ πᾶν ἔχουσαν.”

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