CONTENTS

Introduction .......................................................... 1
Riccardo Chiaradonna, Franco Trabattoni

Contre le mouvement rectiligne naturel: Trois adversaires
(Xénarque, Ptolémée, Plotin) pour une thèse ..................... 17
Marwan Rashid

Le traité de Galien Sur la Démonstration et sa postérité
tardo-antique ....................................................... 43
Riccardo Chiaradonna

Plotinus on quality and immanent form ............................. 79
George Karandalis

As we are always speaking of them and using their names
on every occasion, Plotinus, Eun. III.7 [45]: Language,
experience and the philosophy of time in Neoplatonism .... 101
Robbert M. van den Berg

A world of thoughts: Plotinus on nature and contemplation
(Eun. III.8 [30] 1–6) .................................................... 121
Christian Wildberg

Causality and sensible objects: A comparison between
Plotinus and Proclus ................................................ 145
Chiara Russi

Physís as Heimarmene: On some fundamental principles
of the Neoplatonic philosophy of nature ......................... 173
Alessandro Lingaiti

The integration of Aristotelian physics in a Neoplatonic
text: Proclus on movers and divisibility .......................... 189
Jan Opssener
PLOTINUS ON QUALITY AND IMMANENT FORM

George Karanaphilis*

I

In this paper I intend to discuss Plotinus’ view of quality, because, I believe, it would shed some light on Plotinus’ ontology and on the relation between sensible and intelligible world, most especially, Plotinus discusses quality in Enn. II.6 [17], a short, dialectical, and obscure treatise, and then in Enn. VI.1–3 [42–44], especially in Enn. VI.2 [43] 14 and in Enn. VI.3 [44] 8–15, in the framework of his criticism of Aristotle’s theory of the categories. There are some considerable differences between Enn. II.6 [17] and Enn. VI.1–3 [42–44], both as regards the treatment of quality and also, more generally, in the nature and the spirit of Plotinus’ writing. In Enn. II.6 [17] Plotinus raises questions about what is substance and quality and tries ways to address them, but it remains unclear to what extent he commits himself to these answers. In Enn. VI.1–3 [42–44] on the other hand Plotinus is much more assertive and in Enn. VI.2 [43] 14 he appears to modify the position he takes in Enn. II.6 [17] about quality. And the question is how, if at all, in Enn. VI.2–3 [43–44], where Plotinus speaks about quality in some detail, he is guided by his polemics against Aristotle, or, if this is his personal position on the matter, how it squares with his earlier position.

I will try to show that Plotinus does have a coherent theory about quality which is considerably different from that of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, and is quite distinct in the history of philosophy. Plato in the Theaetetus (182 b) was the first to introduce the term ‘quality’, with the caution that this is a strange term, to signify what is affected (ποιητικός) in a certain way by an active cause (ποιητικό). Aristotle on the other hand

* I have greatly benefited from a set of critical remarks by Riccardo Chiaradonna and from discussion I had with Paulos Kalliga, who answered several of my questions also by making available to me his unpublished paper ‘The Structure of appearances. Plotinus’s doctrine of the constitution of sensible objects’. Yet neither of them is responsible for any shortcomings of my paper.

1 See Burnyeat (1990) 311–312.
in the *Categories* groups quality with the kinds of predicates which are
in a subject, as opposed to substance (οὐσία) which can never be in a
subject (Cat. 2 1 a 20 ff; 4 1 b 26; 5 5 a 7–21) and later on in the
*Metaphysics* (V14 1020 a 33–1021 b 25) he distinguishes between essential
and accidental qualities, that is, between features qualifying the genus
to which something belongs (e.g. man being a rational animal)
and features qualifying the individual substance (e.g. Socrates being white),
which count as accidents (cf. Met. VII.6 1031 b 22–28). Finally, the
Stoics conceive of qualities as being corporeal, inseparable from the
body they qualify.²

Plotinus' understanding of quality is, as we would expect, inspired by
Plato, but it is also very much influenced by Aristotle's relevant views.
The result is, as often with Plotinus, a highly personal doctrine about
quality. Plotinus appears to believe that all features of sensible entities
are nothing but qualities. He strongly opposes Aristotle's mature view
(Met. VII esp. 8, 17) according to which the immanent form (τὸ ἐστὶν),
such as the form of man in Socrates, is substance on the grounds
that this is the cause of something being what it is.³ In Plotinus' view
immanent Form is by no means the cause of something being what it
is, but one quality among others of a sensible entity (τὸν ὑποτελέσθαι).
That is, for Plotinus a big, white man has the qualities of bigness,
whiteness, and humanity.

Such a view has its origins in Plato, yet urges an investigation into the
sense in which Plotinus uses the term 'quality', because we would like
to know why Plotinus takes the view that a sensible entity, e.g. a man, is
considered not as being a man, that is, a substance, but as having the
quality of a man, which turns out to be like all other qualities a man
can have, such as big, white, or smart. To answer that, we first need to
understand how Plotinus conceives of substance, because it is this that
guides him to conceive of immanent Form as quality.⁴

Plotinus, we know, takes over from Plato the distinction between
Forms which are immanent in matter, that is, in sensible entities, and
transcendental Forms, which exist only in the intelligible realm, arguing
that only the latter qualify as substance (ὁσία). One reason why
Plotinus argues this is because he, following Plato, believes that only

---

⁴ For a philosophical exegesis of Aristotle's view, see Frede and Patzig (1967) 1
36–57.
⁵ For a full and documented account of Plotinus' doctrine of substance, see Chira-
donna (2002) ch. 2.

---

² This has been well emphasized by Hadot (1990) 126; Strange (1987) 965–970;
⁷ See also Esb. VI.3 [44] 15.24–31, 16.1–6. On the use of τὸν ὑποτελέσθαι in this context
and its Platonic antecedents see Chirardonna (2004a) 21.
differences which can be perceived by the senses. The following passage is significant in this regard.

For this sensible substance is not simply being, but is perceived by sense, being this whole world of ours; since we maintained that its apparent existence (διαφοραν ὑποδομον) was a congress of percepts (ὑποδομον τῶν πρῶτον ὑποδομον), and the guarantee of their being comes from sense-perception. But if the composition has no limits, one should divide according to the species-forms (εἴδη) of living things, the bodily species (εἴδος) of man, for instance. For this, a species-form of this kind, is a quality of body, and is not out of place to divide by qualities (VI.1 [44] 10.14–20; Armstrong’s trans.).

The passage clearly shows that for Plotinus sensible entities are not beings strictly speaking exactly because they are made up of perceptible qualities, which means that the criterion for their existence is perception, not reason. What is perceived is subject to change, which is the case with sensible entities. Yet the passage also shows that Plotinus singles out immanent Form as the quality by means of which we recognize sensible entities, especially living ones, as such, e.g. as man or horse. The idea apparently is that we come to know reality (or, in Plotinus’ terms, ‘divide reality’) through Forms of X or Y, rather than through shapes, sizes, colours, or other such qualities.

This seems to be right. When we encounter Socrates, we do not see something short, ugly, and moving, but a man who is short, ugly and moving. This, however, seems to suggest that immanent Form plays a more important role in the perception of reality than any other feature of a sensible entity; it is the immanent Form which helps us identify something as such. If this is so, one may be tempted to argue against Plotinus that the immanent Form should not be considered as merely one of the qualities of a sensible entity, such as colour and size, but it should enjoy a more elevated ontological status, since it is through this that we recognize something as such.

Plotinus appears to reply that it is the transcendent Forms which account for something coming into being and hence also for the existence of any sensible entity, while immanent Forms are derivative entities which come about through the activity of the transcendent Forms. This alone is sufficient to establish (for a Platonist at least) that immanent Forms are ontologically inferior to transcendent ones, because, as Plotinus standardly maintains, a generated entity is of an inferior genus to that of its cause. For Plotinus then immanent Forms are bound to be qualities, since their cause of existence is substance. Yet things are more complex, because Plotinus maintains that transcendent Forms do not act directly on matter, that is, they do not bring about immanent Forms directly, but rather operate through intermediate intelligible entities, the λόγοι. It is the λόγοι which inform matter so that the sensible entity comes into being as a sum of such qualities. One reason why Plotinus postulates this process is because he, following Plato and Numenius, maintains that matter is disordered and ‘taints’ whatever comes in contact with it, so the intelligible entities should be kept as distanced as possible from matter (δὲ θηρῶν ἐκ λόγος χείρων, VI.1 [44] 9.33–34). It actually seems that the λόγοι stem from the world-soul, not from the transcendent Forms themselves, in which case the distance between the transcendent Forms and the sensible entities is as wide as possible. There are two reasons then accounting for the low ontological status of the immanent Forms in Plotinus, first their generation through substances, secondly their contact with matter.

A critic can grant all this but still argue against Plotinus that the immanent Form differs from all other qualities of a sensible entity, in that the immanent Form, though derivative from the λόγοι, which ultimately make something what it is, e.g. human, has a special role in the causal process of something becoming X or Y. That is, the critic would continue, the immanent Form is the ultimate link in the causal chain of the coming to be of a sensible entity, which involves the world-soul, the λόγος, through which the immanent Forms come into being.

Plotinus does not seem to deny this. He rather appears to maintain that the immanent Form accounts for something becoming F while it is the transcendent Form which accounts for being F (VI.3 [44] 2.1–4). But if this is so, then the immanent Form, one may insist on objecting, should not be ranked together with all other qualities observable in a

---

sensible entity but rather should enjoy a special status, since it is in virtue of that Form that something, according to Plotinus, becomes E.

The above objection is also supported by the following consideration. Plotinus argues in *Enn. II.4* [12] (*On Matter*) that it is the Form which brings along with it qualities such as size, shape, and colour and thus informs matter (II.4 [12] 8.23–28). That is, if something is to become an elephant, the Form of the elephant brings with it also the suitable size, shape, color and so on. One may argue that Plotinus refers to the transcendent Form here. But this does not seem to be true, because, as I said above, the transcendent Form does not come in any contact with matter, which is the subject of II.4 [12]. This receives some confirmation from statements like the following: ‘when the form comes to the matter it brings everything with it; the form has ἐκτὸς everything, the size and all that goes with and is caused by the formative principle’ (II.4 [12] 8.24–26; Armstrong’s trans.). The fact that the Form enters in matter is a clear indication that Plotinus refers to the immanent Form here. Besides, only immanent Forms can relate to size. In the present context Plotinus advances the idea that matter is organized so that it becomes something through a Form which is immanent in it. This is in accordance with Plotinus’ general view I mentioned above that matter is organized when it receives qualities, such as shape, size, and density, through the activity of the λόγος. The upshot is that immanent Forms do play a significant role in the coming to being of something.

It seems then that we have both epistemological and metaphysical reasons to be reserved against Plotinus’ idea that the immanent Form is a mere quality. It is actually Plotinus himself who provides us with reasons to believe that immanent Forms enjoy a special ontological status. What is worse, Plotinus can be accused of ‘being inconsistent in holding that the immanent Form is a mere quality like all other qualities, and at the same time maintain that this is what makes us recognize a thing as such, e.g. a man. This would mean that Plotinus’ ontology is at odds with his epistemology. In the following section I will try to show that this charge does not apply to Plotinus.

II

Before coming to Plotinus, it is useful to remember that such a question of consistency applies to philosophers of all ages—sometimes is called the integration challenge. The issue is basically the following. Ontology and epistemology must be reconciled in such a way that epistemological explanations do not assume entities excluded by a certain ontological theory, and ontology should be constructed in such a way so that an adequate epistemology can be drawn from it.

Plato is clearly conscious of this challenge. Plato’s Forms are initially introduced in order to allow for epistemological accounts of a certain kind, that is accounts explaining why we recognize F’s as such, that is, as we name them, e.g. tree, man, or piety. When we recognize a tree as such, this is not in virtue of its colour or its size, but rather in virtue of something that makes the size and the colour, the size and the colour of a tree. Plato calls this ‘the Form of the tree’. Yet for Plato colour and size also have a being, since they also exist in the tree. Plato does not seem to distinguish between the being of size, such as big or large, and the being of a tree. For Plato a sensible F participates both in the Form of tree as well as in the Form of largeness, greenness, and so on. Plato, however, appears to maintain that it is the Forms which make something the thing it is and also make us recognize it as such, which means that the epistemological role of Forms is in line with their ontological role. For, I take it, Plato’s idea is not that we are made in such a way so that we are able to know the things of the world in virtue of Forms, but rather that the world is made in such a way so that the Forms play the role they do in human cognition. And this is because the Forms are the entities which make things being what they are, that is, the Forms are the essences of things. For Plato then there is some correspondence between how the world is and how we perceive it. This leads Plato to suggest in the *Republic*, for instance, that true knowledge cannot be obtained without reference to the Forms. Plato’s epistemology may seem to require a distinction between substances and qualities, which Aristotle later makes, since, as I said, for the most part we do not perceive merely properties but things having properties. It is this Aristotelian suggestion that Plotinus denies, arguing that sensible entities only appear to be F or Y, but they are neither F nor Y.

The above simplistic account of Plato’s theory of Forms aims only to show that Plato is sensitive to the integration of epistemology and ontology, and so must be also Plotinus who tries to defend Plato’s

---

philosophy—as he understands it. We must bear in mind, however, that neither of them appears to distinguish between these branches of philosophy in the way we do today. Yet in both Plato and Plotinus the questions of what kind of being something is and how can be known are indeed addressed as distinct problems and do bear on each other. In dialogues like the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, for instance, the discussion about how things can be known is inextricably connected with the discussion about kinds and ways of being. The objections against the Forms presented in the *Parmenides*, on the other hand, such as the objection whether we should assume Forms for everything we perceive including worthless things like hair and dirt, show that there is awareness that epistemological and metaphysical questions should be treated jointly.

The epistemological and ontological role of the Forms was an issue for Platonists long before Plotinus. The first who attempted to reconstruct a system of Platonic philosophy, Antiochus, appears to have been seriously confronted with this problem. Antiochus tends to interpret Platonic Forms as equivalent to the Stoic *notiones* and *ratiocines* of the mind (Gicl., *Acad.* 1.31–32), a move which suggests that one role he attributes to Plato’s Forms is that of concepts. Yet Antiochus also appears to maintain that Plato’s Forms are both transcendent and immanent (*Acad.* 1.30, 33), which leaves open to discussion the question of how he actually squared the Platonic theory of Forms with the Stoic common notions.\(^{13}\) Antiochus’ theory gives rise to two related questions, first how transcendent Forms become immanent in sensible entities and also in human minds, a question non-applicable to the Stoics who rejected the existence of transcendent Forms and also of a priori knowledge, and secondly whether Forms account only for the essences of sensible entities or for all their features.

Those who rejected Stoic epistemology, like Plutarch, also encountered difficulties in integrating the epistemology with the metaphysics of the Forms, though of a different kind. One such difficulty is how the cognitive role of the Forms (when, for instance, a man knows different kinds of beings through them) squares with the metaphysical role that the Forms play in the use the Demiurge in the *Timaeus* makes of them in order to bring the world about. It is open to discussion whether in the case of the Demiurge the Forms play a cognitive role, as they do in humans, or only a metaphysical role, that is, they operate only as models for everything that comes into being. Platonists in late antiquity are divided into those who maintain that Forms have a cognitive role for both humans and God, and those who believe that Forms are cognitive for humans only.\(^{14}\) While for the former the Forms exist only in the divine intellect,\(^{15}\) for the latter they exist separately and constitute a distinct principle.\(^{16}\) A way out of this the one that Plotinus develops. Plotinus maintains that the Forms exist outside the demiurgic mind but in the cosmic soul. Porphyry would abandon Plotinus’ view adopting a position closer to that of Amelius, as he would identify the demiurge with the cosmic soul.\(^{17}\)

In the case of Plotinus the alleged tension between his epistemology and metaphysics can be expressed as follows. Plotinus maintains that the immanent Form is a mere quality of a sensible entity like all other qualities, such as size and shape, but he also appears to suggest that the immanent Form plays a significant role in our perception of sensible reality and also that it brings along with it qualities like size and shape. The first, epistemological, question which arises is this: if immanent Form is just a quality and sensible entities a mere conglomeration of matter and qualities, as Plotinus argues, how do we perceive sensible things as they are? Why do we not perceive them as a sum of qualities, that is, as clusters of colours, sizes and shapes, but instead we perceive them as Fs and Ys? And how are we able to name them F or Y unless we recognize their Form as an essential feature, i.e., as a feature that makes them the thing they are? If immanent Forms do play a significant role in our perception of sensible reality, then how justified is Plotinus in arguing that immanent Form is a quality and the individual F or Ys are a mere conglomeration of matter and qualities (V.I.3.444, V.8.19–23)?

Plotinus appears to have a coherent and elaborate answer to the above questions. Following Plato, he contends that man can perceive things as they are, and inspired by the *Theoetetus*, he argues that perception cannot take place without reason,\(^{18}\) which practically means that perception

---

\(^{13}\) On Antiochus’ view of Plato’s Forms and his epistemology, see Karamanolis (2006) 69–70.


\(^{15}\) This was notoriously the view held in the circle of Plotinus by people like Amelius, *Periph.*, *Epíkeia* 16, cf. V.5 [32]. Porphyry also falls in this category. See n. 17.

\(^{16}\) This is the case with Antiochus and most probably also Plutarch.

\(^{17}\) He notoriously maintained that the Forms exist in the demiurgic intellect, going as far as to identify the two (Proc., *In Tim.* II 1.306.32–307.4, II 1.322.1–7, II 1.431.20–23).

amounts to judgment (κρίνειν). The question, of course, is what the judgment is about. If sensible entities are composite of matter and form, elēcē as Plotinus argues, then one would be tempted to maintain that the judgment must be about the Form of a sensible entity. That is, the judgment ‘this is a tree’ is a judgment about the Form of the perceived entity, as this is the crucial element for knowing it as such. Plotinus, however, opposes this idea. According to Plotinus sensible entities cannot be known as such, because there is nothing in them to guarantee stability and also meaning. What we perceive through our sense organs is a bunch of images which is not informative about what something is (V.3 [32] 1.12–19). Reason is needed for the reconstruction of what is the object which gives rise to sense affections. And for Plotinus reason operates by resorting to transcendent entities. Only they, which are characterized by stability, can bring about stability and meaning, which means that only they can convey knowledge. Plotinus maintains then that every time we come to know this or that sensible entity, this happens because our mind gains access to transcendent intelligible entities which are the ultimate causes of the sense impressions. Such intelligible entities are not the transcendent Forms but rather the λόγοι, of which the perceptible qualities are manifestations. According to Plotinus ‘the soul’s power of perception need not be of sensibles but rather it must be apprehensive of representations produced by perception in the organism’ (I.1 [53] 7.9–11). If this is so, then for Plotinus the immanent Form does not play any special role in the process of knowing a sensible entity.

This account seems to me to leave room for the following question. We can grant to Plotinus that man’s mind comes to know a sensible entity through reference to intelligible, transcendent entities, but how can one do that without being guided through the Form which is immanent in matter? One could argue that it is the immanent Form which our sense organs perceive and it is through this that we are guided to the intelligibles. In this case then the immanent Form does play a special role in the way we come to know reality and should be distinguished from the other qualities of a sensible substance like shape and size, even if one rejects Aristotle’s doctrine of substance, as Plotinus does.

This is not a puzzling question for Plotinus who appears to make a sharp distinction between sensation and perception. Sensory affections like vision, hearing, or touch, he argues, are merely affections (πνεύματα). Perception on the other hand is a way to cognize, to understand reality, and for this to happen sensus is only the initial stage. Affections become Forms (IV.4 [28] 23.29–32) and perception is a kind of awareness (δινήσεις) of these Forms which pre-exist in the soul and are intermediate between transcendent and immanent Forms. It is these Forms the ones which account for perception, as it is through them that we come to recognize the various sensible qualities as such. This is a process within the soul which has little to do with external reality, as it is basically an act of thinking, a process of reflection of the transcendent reality (I.1 [53] 7.9–16). Through the process of awareness of the Forms, the soul, which according to Plotinus (IV.8 [6] 8) never fully descends in the sensible world, becomes united with them (VI.5 [23] 7.1–8) and hence connects man with the intelligible world and more precisely with the Intellect, which accounts for all thinking. If for Plotinus the human soul perceives through the Forms in an act of thinking, which is ultimately possible thanks to our relation to the Intellect, then the Form in matter does not play any special role in human perception. Of course, one can insist that the Forms in the soul are stimulated by the immanent Forms, but Plotinus would respond that perception is an intellectual process which is carried out entirely in the human soul through the Forms, and in this the immanent Forms, like all external stimuli, play hardly any role.

If this is so, then whatever objections one may have against Plotinus’ theory of cognition, that of inconsistency with his own ontology, as

20 V.I.3 (44) 8.7–9.
22 Emrison (1988) 120.

24 See III.6 [26] 1.1–3 and the comments of Fleet (1995) 72–76; Kailigas (2004) 461–463. Cf. IV.3 [27] 5.21–25. As Fleet rightly points out, Plotinus is inspired by the “trans. 186 b 2 E, where Socrates argues that affections of sensible qualities (ἔνθεσις) reach the soul through the body but the soul then employs reasoning (σκέψις) in order to make a judgment about them.
25 These forms are called τίμων (IV.3 [28] 26.27–29; IV.6 [41] 1.19–40; V.3 [49] 2.10; 3.1–2) or ψηφοφορία (IV.3 [27] 31.1); V.3 [49] 2.8. Plotinus makes clear that these τίμων are intellecrtive, not physical, as the Stoics maintained, that is, they pertain to the intellect (see p. 113). I.1 [53] 7.9–11; cf. also IV.3 [27] 26.29–32; V.3 [49] 3.1–2).
regards the role of immanent Forms in particular, is ruled out. If a sensible entity is known through the mind’s access to transcendent Forms, this does not make it necessary to raise the status of the immanent Form to that of substance. Quite the contrary is the case.

III

So far so good, but there are also metaphysical reasons against the idea that the immanent Form is a quality like all other qualities in a sensible entity, which can be characterized as accidental, that is, they are either subject to change or happen to occur but have nothing to do with the kind of being that something is, e.g. a man. As has been seen above, Plotinus himself appears to maintain that the immanent Form brings about the qualities necessary for something becoming X. This seems to suggest that the Form of a man should not be equalled with qualities, like big, white, clever, or dirty, which are accidental for being a man.

Aristotle was the first to distinguish between substantial and accidental differences. As a substantial difference he appears to consider a feature which is characteristic of a certain genus, the characteristic of man being biped animal, for instance. Aristotle counts as accidental differences, on the other hand, individual differences which are not characteristic of a genus, like differences in temperature, in colour, in weight of bodies, or virtue and vice (Met. V.14 1020 a 53–1021 b 25). Aristotle considers both substantial and accidental features to be qualities, yet in a different sense. Quality in the first sense is a quality of the genus in which something belongs, e.g. animal, but not a quality of the species which qualifies, e.g. man, in the case of the being biped feature (Met. VII.14 1039 b 2–7). Such a quality is not subject to change insofar as genera on the whole are not subject to change. Quality in the second sense, however, qualifies an individual F and can be subject to change; a man’s colour does not change but temperature and weight do. In the scheme of the categories presented in the Categories quality in the first sense is not classified under quality but rather as a difference of the species, that is, as a predicate of substance (Cat. 5 3 a 33–b 9). The category of quality is rather reserved for accidental qualities which characterize individuals.

Later generations systematized this distinction as a distinction between qualities which complement substance and qualities which do not, that is, accidental qualities. The problem which arises here is that according to Aristotle substantial qualities are not in a subject, because they constitute the subject, but on the other hand they are not said of a subject either, because from the Aristotelian point of view this is at odds with his own conception of substance. As regards primary substance, which is confined to individuals, this is not the case because substantial differences concern only genera, which in the Categories are considered as secondary substances. But even as regards secondary substances, which are universals, substantial differences are not said of a subject either, because in their case all features are part of the universal they qualify and none of them is an accident. In the case of man, for instance, being biped, rational, having a head are not accidents.

This poses a problem which attracted the attention of both Plotinus and Porphyry. Attention to such a problem is indicative of their strong interest in Aristotle’s ontology. This interest is driven first by the fact that Aristotle both in the Categories and in Metaphysics VII presents a theory of substance which powerfully contradicts that of Plato, and secondly by the fact that Aristotle has a systematic theory about quality which Plato lacks. Plotinus and Porphyry differ in their attitude to the problem of substantial qualities, and this is telling about their different appreciation of Aristotle’s ontology as a whole. Porphyry includes substantial qualities (οὐσιολογίας ποιμένικες) in his definition of substance, which suggests that for him these qualities are intermediaries between substance and quality but side more with substance. Plotinus on the other hand does use the term οὐσιολογίας ποιμένικ (VI.3 [44] 14.31) but only in the sense of a quality pertaining to a substance (i.e. a transcendental entity), not in the sense of a quality which complements a sensible entity. Plotinus maintains that the so-called substantial qualities are not part of substance and should not be included in the definition of substance, as Porphyry would argue later, but rather that they are in subject (VI.3 [44] 5.24–30). This means that Plotinus opposes Aristotle’s distinction between two kinds of qualities.

Plotinus rejects the difference between substantial and accidental qualities on twofold grounds: first, because he does not accept the view that sensible entities are substances; secondly, because he seems to believe

---

38 See Lucius apud Simp., In Cat. 48.1–11, Dex., In Cat. 23.17–24.1 and the comments of Kalligas (1997b) 292–295.

39 Porph., In Cat. 94.29–96.1, Simp., In Cat. 78.29–24, 96.1–35.
that there is not room for an intermediary ontological entity between substance and quality, and since substance cannot produce substance but only an ontologically lower entity, immanent Form is bound to be a quality. What underlies all this is Plotinus’ understanding of substance as a simple and unified entity. If one accepts Aristotle’s view that there are substantial qualities which complement substance, this amounts to suggesting that substance is composite. Plotinus agrees that sensible entities are composite, as Aristotle himself maintains. He actually argues that sensible substances can be seen as composite in several ways, as composite of matter and form, as composite of parts, as composite of qualities and matter. Yet for Plotinus matter is not something real but a non-being, a function rather than an entity, because it lacks characteristic features, being something indefinite (II.4 [12] 13.30–32). This means that matter does not contribute anything to the constitution of a sensible entity. This in turn means that for Plotinus a sensible entity is composite strictly speaking only insofar as it is constituted by qualities. Matter accommodates these qualities (e.g., size, shape, colour) but does not possess them. It is in this sense that Plotinus considers sensible entities as being composite. Given their composite character, Plotinus refrains from considering them as substances. Qualities, however, can be part of composites, i.e., composite sensible entities.

The above account gives the impression that Plotinus does not distinguish between the kind of quality that immanent Form is and all other qualities which we, following Aristotle, would consider as accidental. Yet this is not very precise. Plotinus does distinguish between two kinds of qualities in Enn. II.6 [17], a short treatise dedicated to the distinction between substance and quality. As I already said in the beginning of this paper, one problem with this difficult, if not obscure, treatise lies in its dialectical or even aporetic character. Plotinus tries different views about the question of how substance should be distinguished from quality, but remains unclear if he eventually commits himself to one.

---

98 See the comment of Ratten (1961) 71–82.
102 For a discussion of the distinction between substance and quality in Enn. II.6 [17], see Chiraradoss (forthc.) and below.
104 But the specific differences which distinguish substances in relation to each other are qualities in an epistemic sense, being either activities and rational forming principles, or parts of forming principles, making clear what the thing is, none the less even if they seem to declare that the substance is of a specific quality. And the qualities in the strict and proper sense, according to which beings are qualified, which we say are powers, would in fact in their general character be a sort of forming principles and, in a sense, shapes, beauties, and uglinesses in the soul and in the body in the same way (VI.1 [42] 10.20–26; Armstrong’s trans.). Cf. VI.1 [42] 11.16–21.
Now, Plotinus appears to distinguish two kinds of qualities in the sensible realm, qualities which complement a so-called sensible substance and qualities which are merely accidental properties. In the case of fire, for instance, Plotinus argues, the heat of the fire complements what is fire, and in this sense it is part of the substance of fire (μέρος ὀσίας II.6 [17] 3:13). If you take the heat in any other sensible entity, say a glass of milk, then, Plotinus suggests, this is not any longer part or shape of substance (μορφὴν ὀσίας II.6 [17] 3:21) but only a shadow, an image of it, and this, he maintains, is a quality strictly speaking (II.6 [17] 3:14–20). Plotinus continues as follows.

All, then, which is incidental (συμβεβηκὸς) and not activities and forms of substance, giving definite shapes, is qualitative (κατὰ τύπον). So, for substance, states and other dispositions of the underlying realities are to be called qualities, but their archetypal models, in which they exist primarily, are the activities of those intelligible realities. And in this way one and the same thing does not come to be quality and not quality, but that which is isolated from substance is qualitative, and that which is with substance is substance or form or activity; for nothing is the same in itself and when it is alone in something else and has fallen away from being form and activity. That, then, which is never a form of something else but always an incidental attribute, this and only this is pure quality (II.6 [17] 3:20–29; Armstrong’s trans.).

The Aristotelian terminology is striking in this passage. Plotinus uses it on purpose in order to make a distinction of qualities which is different from Aristotle’s distinction between accidental and substantial qualities. Plotinus rather distinguishes between accidental and non-accidental qualities. The former are accidents (συμβεβηκότα), while the latter are constitutive of a sensible entity (δεόντα λέγοντα συμπληροῦν ὀσίαν, II.6 [17] 2:19–21). Non-accidental qualities mark off an entity as such, say fire or man, contributing to them what is their characteristic feature, heat and reason respectively. Such qualities are the result of the activity of the λόγος.67 When Plotinus argues that matter becomes qualified through the activity of the λόγος (III.8 [30] 2:19–25) he refers to such non-accidental qualities which he also calls properties (διάλογος, II.6 [17] 3:4, 10). Accidental qualities on the other hand differentiate entities of the same kind. As Plotinus says earlier in the same treatise, these qualities contain what is extra and comes after substance, such as virtues and vices, ugliness and beauty (II.6 [17] 2:25–27). The source of such accidental qualities is not specified, but clearly their source is not the λόγος. Plotinus argues that only accidental qualities are qualities strictly speaking, while non accidental qualities are parts of the sensible entity (II.6 [17] 3:24–28).

This theory, though different from that of Aristotle, is very close to Aristotle’s distinction between substantial and accidental qualities. Plotinus does not call the qualities which come into being through the intelligible, transcendent λόγος ‘substantial’ because he does not accept the existence of sensible substances in the first place, yet he preserves the Aristotelian distinction of qualities.

The problem now is that in Enn. VI.2 [43] 14 Plotinus explicitly denies that there are qualities which complement substances. I quote:

We did think right (ἀξίωμα) to say elsewhere that the elements which contributed to the essential completion of substance were qualities only in name, but those which came from outside subsequent to substance were qualities [in the proper sense], and that those which came after them were already passive affections. But now we are saying that the elements of particular substance make no contribution at all to the completion of substance as such;68 for there is no substantial addition to the substance of man by reason of his being man, but he is substance at a higher level, before coming to the differentiation, as is also the living being before coming to the ‘reasonable’ (VI.2 [43] 14:14–22; Armstrong’s trans.).

Plotinus’ reference to his difference from his previous position, apparently the one held at Enn. II.6 [17], could not be clearer. To begin with, Plotinus makes clear that at II.6 [17] he did commit himself to the position I ascribed to him above, namely that there are two kinds of qualities, one of which contributes to the completion of sensible entities and one which does not, the accidental qualities. The verb ἀξίωμα is a verb of commitment to a view.69 If this is so, then the problem becomes more accentuated. Does Plotinus change his mind? Is his new position incompatible with his previous one?

Scholars have been divided. K. Corrigan has argued that in Enn. VI.2 [43] Plotinus takes a different point of view without changing his thinking about substance and quality.60 But this rests on a certain interpretation of VI.1–3 [42–44] that Corrigan takes, according to

---

which Plotinus does not reject Aristotle's theory of substance but he modifies it from a Platonic point of view. This does not seem to me a charitable interpretation of VI.1-3 [42–44]. As I have tried to show elsewhere, Plotinus does reject Aristotle’s theory of substance in Enn. VI.1–3 [42–44] even as regards the sensible world. If this is so, then we have to admit that Plotinus does change his mind and takes a different position from that maintained in Enn. II.6 [17]. This is what Riccardo Chiarello has argued. In his view, Plotinus revises his earlier position, in which he adopted a more Peripatetic conceptual apparatus, to a position more strictly Platonic, which is understandable given his confrontation with Aristotle’s doctrine. In a more recent contribution to the question Chiarello appears to qualify this view maintaining that Plotinus’ later position is a development of his earlier one. This seems to me to be going in the right direction. Plotinus does take in Enn. VI.1–3 [42–44] a position different from that outlined in Enn. II.6 [17], but the two are not incompatible. On the contrary, they can well be part of a single theory.

Let me explain. As I have already said, Plotinus is committed to the view that only transcendent entities qualify as substances because only they have natures or essences, which means that only they have identities (τι εἶναι). Sensible entities do not have essences, so they are not substances with identities X or Y but they rather are ἤλεκτρα substances (τοῦ δικτύου). A sensible entity is not a man or a tree but a like a man or a tree (VI.3 [44] 15.27–31). Sensible entities then consist in qualities, ποιηματα in a very specific sense, namely in the sense that they resemble real substances. This is because real substances, which are transcendent entities, bring about such resemblances of themselves through their activity on matter. Plotinus finds the term ποιηματικοι suitable for conveying the sense of something resembling a substance. In this sense ποιηματικοι applies especially to immanent Form. As I have argued above, Plotinus maintains that this Form has a constitutive role in the becoming of X, such that a number of essential features of X are determined by it. If X is an elephant, it is bound to have a certain size, shape, and colour. But of course, it may also be a particularly big, tall, heavy, or aggressive elephant. These are also qualities, but they are not what make X becoming ἤλεκτρα a real substance, i.e., an elephant. They are rather accidental qualities, as they do not play a role in something becoming X. Such qualities are not accounted for by the λογος which inform the matter so that something comes into being. And the reason is that they do not account in any way for the x being the kind of thing it is.

Plotinus makes this distinction also in Enn. VI.1 [42] 10, when he distinguishes between the rationality of man and man’s ability to box (VI.1 [42] 10.16–17). In this context Plotinus again distinguishes between qualities strictly speaking (χρωματα), namely what I call accidental qualities which do not contribute to the coming to being of a sensible entity (VI.1 [42] 10.53–56), and qualities homonomously (ἴσομαθα) speaking, which contribute to something being a thing of a certain sort (τοῦ δικτύου) and are the result of the activity of λογος (VI.1 [42] 10.20–27). This appears to square with what Plotinus says in Enn. II.6 [17] 3, when he argues that the heat of the fire should not be considered as its quality but as its form or activity, unless we use the term quality in a different sense, that is, in the homonomous sense mentioned above.

Plotinus appears to operate with a narrow and wide sense of quality. In a wide sense all features of a sensible x are qualities. In a narrow and strict sense, however, only accidental features are qualities, while immanent Forms, as the results of the activity of λογος, contribute to the coming to being of something, man or elephant. Yet immanent Forms remain mere resemblances of the λογος, they are like them (πουες ψυχας), and in this sense ποιηματικοι. Depending on the aim of his treatises, Plotinus changes his focus. In Enn. II.6 [17] he uses quality for two different kinds of features, namely the imprints of the activity of the transcendent λογος on the sensible world which make something becoming X, and accidents which differentiate Xs. In Enn. VI.1–3 [42–44], however, Plotinus wants to show that immanent Forms, which fall in the first class of features, do not qualify as substances but as qualities, because they are derivative from intelligible entities and because of their instantiation in matter.

Such differences of focus, however, do not speak against the existence of a coherent theory of quality in Plotinus. From the above it emerges that for Plotinus ‘quality’ is a class of ontological entities pertaining

---

41 Good arguments against such an interpretation have been advanced by Chiarello (2002). For a brief exposition of Plotinus’ position, see Karamanolis (2006) 234–236.

42 See n. 41 above.


44 Chiarello (forthc.c).

to the sensible world, to bodies; lack of qualities (ἀξίωμα) is indicative that something is not a body (I.4 [46] 8.2). Quality indicates an incorporeal (IL7 [37] 2.29, VI.3 [44] 16.18–19), an affection (νοθεία; VI.3 [44] 16.39) of a body caused by the activity of an intelligible entity. But given Plotinus’ views about the hierarchy of reality, quality is not merely an ontological class, as it is for Aristotle, but also a derogatory term, as it points to a lower reality of entities. A quality amounts to the degraded existence of a genus, be it intelligible substance or intelligible quality.\(^{46}\) An individual man, Socrates, argues Plotinus, becomes a kind of human (τουσδέ) through the participation to the Form of man (μεταλήμενος ἀνθρώπου ὁ τις ἄνθρωπος, VI.3 [44] 9.29). The sensible Socrates, argues Plotinus, is not Socrates strictly speaking but colour and configurations of those parts which are imitations of real ones involved in his forming principle (VI.3 [44] 15.34–36). In other words, the category of quality is the mark of failure of a sensible entity to be this or that.

IV

One question which arises from the above is how the qualities which characterize sensible entities can ultimately constitute entities with some unity, like the ones we perceive around us. This question becomes particularly serious if we remember that for Plotinus matter is a non-being, which means that it is the qualities that constitute an entity so that this is of a certain sort X or Y and with certain features. The question is what guarantees the unity of such an entity.

As I have already said, Plotinus makes clear that immanent Forms which constitute a sensible entity derive from transcendent forming principles (VI.2 [45] 5.1–5), the λόγος.\(^{47}\) Yet not all characteristics of sensible entities have such a forming principle. Individual differences of entities of the same kind do not appear to have their origins in similar forming principles. Plotinus wonders whether such accidental characteristics are due to imperfect λόγος (VI.1 [42] 10.60, 11.5), but he does not affirm that. Reason, human size and shape belong to the first category when it comes to the coming to being of a man, this or that shape and size belong to the second. This is because the former account for something being the kind of thing it is, whereas the latter do not. What comes about is an agglomerate of qualities but not a random agglomerate of qualities. Rather, the entity that comes about is determined as to what it becomes. So there is a certain degree of unity which is due to the activity of an intelligible, transcendent principle.

Yet this is a low degree of unity. For Plotinus sensible reality lacks unity strictly speaking which is characteristic of substance, it is a realm of images, appearances, and this is why he insists that sensible entities are made up of qualities only. As has been seen, Plotinus uses the testimony of perception to strengthen this conclusion. However, the testimony of perception also suggests that certain unity exists, and Plotinus is not blind to that. If there were no unity, we would not be able to know the worlds around us. To account for that limited unity of sensible entities Plotinus distinguishes between the immanent Form as a quality in one sense and accidental qualities or qualities strictly speaking, which are like Aristotle’s accidents. The former brings about a reflection of the unity of its cause, while the latter do not. The fact that sensible entities are subject to change and destruction is an indication of some degree of unity.

Plotinus wants to affirm such a relative unity of sensible entities not only for epistemological but also for metaphysical reasons. Plotinus wants to affirm a continuity between the intelligible and the sensible realm. This continuity is important also if he is to avoid some clash between his epistemology and his metaphysics. If man has the ability to know the sensible world and this happens through the mind’s ascent to the transcendent Forms, there must be something that is knowable, and this is the result of the activity of the λόγος. The unity they bestow on the sensible realm stems from the world-soul and is ultimately guaranteed by the Intellect. Plotinus argues that everything is present in the Intellect, which is the source of all life and activity (IL5 [25] 3.36–41).

V

I have argued that Plotinus has a coherent theory of quality, despite his differences in focus in his treatises. This theory is marked by Aristotelian influence, since Plotinus does make a distinction similar to that of

---


47 Plotinus is far from clear as regards the way the intelligible entities act as formative principles in the sensible world. He notoriously uses a metaphorical language which is far from being precise, as he himself admits (VI.5 [23] 8.6–7) and he acknowledges the difficulty for more precision (8.9–10).
Aristotle’s between substantial and accidental qualities, but he transforms
the metaphysics of it precisely because Plotinus does not accept that
the sensible world contains substances. As a result, we have a distinc-
tion between accidental and non-accidental qualities; the former are
qualities strictly speaking, while the latter are not. Plotinus’ theory is
characteristic of the way Peripatetic influence shaped his philosophy. His
theory of quality is unique in the history of philosophy, differing much
from the relevant views of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. Originality
though does not guarantee longevity. Porphyry will modify Plotinus’
theory considerably in favour of a more Aristotelian position.

AS WE ARE ALWAYS SPEAKING OF THEM AND USING
THEIR NAMES ON EVERY OCCASION
PLOTINUS, ENN. III.7 [45]: LANGUAGE, EXPERIENCE
AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF TIME IN NEOPATONISM

Robert M. van den Berg

I. Introduction

The discussion of ‘time’ in the Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy starts by
listing the classical definitions of time by Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, and
Augustine, only to conclude that all of these are unhelpfully circular
because they employ temporal notions. Time, the reader is told, might
be too basic to admit of definition, but fortunately modern philosophy
has made some progress in understanding time ‘by analysis both of
how we ordinarily experience and talk about time and of the deliver-
ances of science’.

Even though the Cambridge Dictionary suggests otherwise, this approach
to time is not something new. Ever since the Stoics and the Epicureans,
ancient philosophers frequently appeal to concepts, often referred to
as ‘common notions’, that are based on experience and that coincide
with the meaning of words. Earlier generations of scholars had already
noted that such common notions also figure in Plotinus’ celebrated
discussion of eternity and time. However, since their interest was
mainly in Plotinus’ doctrines about the nature of eternity and time, it
is only now that there is a growing interest in Plotinus’ arguments for
his views, that the role of these notions receives closer scrutiny. In this
paper I will examine their role in the treatment of time by Plotinus
and other Neoplatonists. The first part of the paper will argue that in
Plotinus we should distinguish between two types of common notions,
one based on our perception of the phenomena in the physical world,
the other on intuitions of metaphysical reality. To this difference in
origin corresponds a difference in epistemological status and hence a

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Armstrong, A. H. (1960) 'The Background of the Doctrine that the Intelligibles are not outside the Intelligents', in Les Souvenirs de Platon, Entretiens sur l’Antiquité Classique 5 (Genève) 301-413 ('Discussion' 415-415).


Ballièreaux, O. (1994) 'Thémétistique et le néoplatonisme. Le voix καθηκοντας et l’immor-


rum V.1 (Berlin).


— (2005a) *La dottrina dell’anima non insondata in Plotino e la conoscenza degli intellettuali*, in E. Canone (ed.), *Per una storia del concetto di meta*, I, Enrico Intellittuale Europeo 99 (Firenze) 27–49.


— (forthcoming) *I concetti generali, astrazioni e forme in Porfirio*, in *I concetti, astrazioni e forme in Porfirio*.


BIBLIOGRAPHY


BIBLIOGRAPHY

2, Studies in Arabic Versions of Greek Texts and in Medieval Science, Jerusalem and Leiden 1986, 256–263.


BIBLIOGRAPHY


BIBLIOGRAPHIE

M. Skutella, introduction et notes par A. Solignac, traduction de É. Tréhoiré (?) et G. Bouissou, Bibliothèque Augustinienne 14 (Paris).


Tarrant, H. (1985) *Socinianism or Platonism? The Philosophy of the Fourth Academy, Cambridge Classical Studies (Cambridge).*


(1964) *Die Verbreitung des Neoplatonismus, Problematika 1* (Berlin et Zürich).


