problem of reading! It still seems impossible to be sure whether they were 'I'm trying to bring back the divine in myself to the divine in the universe', or 'Give back the divine in yourself to the divine in the universe'. Perhaps the obscurity is irrelevant and appropriate. As Plotinus died, says Porphyry, a snake crept under his bed and disappeared into a hole in the wall.

Some time after Plotinus' death Amelius consulted the oracle of Apollo as to the whereabouts of his master's soul. The God replied in characteristically turgid hexameters which Porphyry has recorded and modern scholars have dutifully abused. Yet for all that, the verses tell us something of the truth about Plotinus and his world. The third century A.D. could not have been, even in Rome, a happy age. The world was in continuous tumult as emperors rose only to be butchered by their half-civilized soldiery. Hellenism was changing beyond all recognition and thinking men began to fear the end of the world. It was a 'blood-drenched' life, as Apollo called it,[66] and Plotinus strove and succeeded in rising above it. The God of Socrates could still speak the truth after all.

3

THE PLOTINIAN ONE

Perhaps no philosopher has been accorded more respect and less understanding than Plotinus. The reasons for this are manifold: the desire to over-emphasize the originality of other thinkers by playing down Plotinus' achievement; the misunderstandings engendered by a too literal-minded interpretation of key phrases; a false theory of the 'atmosphere' of ancient philosophy, particularly of Platonism; and the simple fact that Plotinus' Greek is at times almost untranslatable in our present state of knowledge. A number of important questions about the One have failed to find an answer for one or other of these reasons. Such questions are: Does the One exist, and if so, how? Is the One infinite? This chapter is intended not only to answer some of these questions, but to indicate why they have often proved recalcitrant in the past.

It is certain that the answer one receives to any question will be influenced by the way in which that question is framed. Of the Plotinian One the question might be asked: Is it Being or non-Being? And some of those who understand this sort of question will reply Non-Being. The further question will follow: Is the Plotinian One in fact then non-existent? And again the answer will be Yes. Plotinus will then be condemned as blind to existence and a prisoner of his own concepts. That would be a mistake, but it is easy to see how such a mistake can arise. It can arise from a confusion of Aristotelian form with Platonic. Let us therefore examine the question along these lines.

In the thought of Plato one of the fundamental axioms is that for something to be it must be eternal. Things which 'are' in the world of generation and destruction are often said to be *becoming*, but not *being*. This does not mean that they do not exist, but that they are not fully Beings, because Being must be

eternal. Yet particulars do *exist*, and, even more important, Forms also exist. Being (τὸ ὄν) is not identical with existence, but Beings, that is Forms, most certainly exist. When Plato talks about a Form of Justice, he does not mean a concept of Justice, nor does he regard Justice as a universal which can only exist in the mind of a thinker,[1] nor does he mean the essence of Justice; he means Justice and nothing else, Justice regarded as an actually existent thing.[2] It is no accident that the Form of Beauty is described as αὐτὸ ὅ ἐστι καλόν. The Forms do not partake of Existence or Being.[3] They are described each one as ἕκαστον τὸ ὄν.[4] Each one is the same as itself,[5] a perfect example for the particulars which partake of it. As Gilson says,[6] 'To be, for any given thing—I should say "for any given Form"—is first of all to be that which it is'. Each Form therefore is itself, but it is itself as an actually existent self. Platonism is not, as Gilson supposes,[7] indifferent to actual existence. Rather it sees nothing else and attempts to describe what it sees. The Forms are the only permanent existents because they are not liable to change and destruction.

Since the Forms alone are permanent, they are, as one might expect, causal. This is made clearest of all in the *Phaedo* where it is said to be through the Form—the existent Form—Beauty, that beautiful particulars come to be beautiful.[8] The word 'cause' is specifically used in this context—much to the annoyance of Aristotle.[9] The Platonic Forms are not universals; they are real existent finite 'bits' of Being. And here then is a new point. Beauty is nothing but Beauty; it is Beauty itself, as Gilson says, for Plato had learned from the Pythagoreans that the limited and Limit are good, and that the unlimited is bad. And if the Form is to be exactly what it is, that is, to be selfhood, it must be limited to its own self; it must be defined, and it must be finite. Indeed this must lie behind the assertion of the *Phaedo* to which we have referred, that it is uniform (μονοειδές).

But unless we are to be satisfied with making statements

like Justice is just, Beauty is beautiful, we are liable to find that the 'selfhood' of the Forms inhibits our knowledge of them. For as soon as we try to make statements about the Forms, we find ourselves attributing aspects to their Being which are not precisely their selfhood. We may say that Justice is good, for example, or that Courage is holy. If we are to be able to say anything about a Form, therefore, other than that it is a self-predicating standard, we will find that it is not simply a one, but a one and many. Now since each Form is exactly what it is, it would seem to be the same as itself, that is, in Plato's language, to have no otherness in itself; yet since it is in terms of the intelligible world in some sense a multiplicity, it cannot be entirely a unity. Hence we arrive at the conclusion that the Forms, which are single finite Beings, must in some way be distinct from unity. Hence finite Being must in some way be distinct from unity.

We do not know how far Plato pushed this line of enquiry. We know that at *Republic* 509B he proposes that the Good is 'beyond Being' (οὐσία), which should mean 'beyond finite Being', but there is in fact no evidence that Plato took this further step. To do so would have been to abandon the traditional association of Goodness with Limit. The Good beyond finite Beings may for Plato have been limited by itself, in the sense of being a limit beyond other limits. It is in such a realm that we are bidden seek for it in the latter part of the *Philebus* where the notions of measure and proportion seem to afford the best key to its nature.[10]

There is no need here to argue the fact that Plato came to think of his first principle as the One rather than the Good,[11] though both names were doubtless always current. The Good is the One and the Forms are 'ones'—henads and monads as Plato calls them in the *Philebus* (15AB). And to this One were transferred the difficulties of the Good. The One too is beyond the Forms in some sense. Again we should expect to find some kind of notion of infinity; again we find apparently nothing of the sort. Indeed the very name 'One' indicates the

Platonic emphasis. What is the One but another attempt to find something which is exactly what it is? And Plato does not see that by regarding the One as a limit of limits, he is liable to cause the same difficulties in the case of the One as arose in the case of Form, that is the difficulties of the One and the Many. It is hard to see how Plato's One, if it is finite (as it must be), can escape from the problems of the Beings, the Forms. Plato knew how to separate Unity from finite Being; the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides* shows that. What he could not do was to postulate an *infinite* Being. The 'beyond Being' of Plato must mean a finite Being in some way beyond other finite Beings! No wonder it all sounded so paradoxical to the ancients!

Plotinus lived five centuries after Plato in a very different world. Yet he professes to follow Platonic teachings. We might say that as Plato is to Socrates, Plotinus is to Plato. He is the man who understands the Master's intentions even better than the Master himself. He is a systematic thinker whose main interest is the Absolute or One, which he equates with the Platonic Good. He is therefore in a sense the heir of Plato's difficulties, and his solutions are of the utmost importance. We should expect to find within the Plotinian system a radical disjunction between the One and the others, and at the same time, since, as we shall see, everything, even matter, derives from the One, an examination of the ontological relations between the One and the others.

We have remarked that Being, which for Plato is at times at least less than the Good or One, must be understood as finite Being. That this is the general classical view is stated by a number of modern commentators, not all of whom are prepared, however, to see what it implies for Plato and Plotinus. Fr Sweeney,[12] for example, rightly quotes with approval the remark of Fr Owens that 'Perfect Being for the Greeks meant limitation and finitude', without at the same time admitting that to place the One beyond Being means for Plotinus simply to place it beyond finitude, to make it intrinsically infinite.

Similarly Gilson regards the One beyond Being as a non-existent One.[13] For these interpreters questions about the finitude of *Being* in the classical sense of the word do not arise. But here we may be merely playing with words. The question before us is not whether Plotinus said that the One is 'beyond Being', but what he meant by saying this. And in view of the general Greek use of 'Being' to mean 'finite Being', the *prima facie* meaning of the phrase 'beyond Being' should be 'infinite Being'.

Within recent years there has been a long and learned discussion on the infinity of the Plotinian One, and from it we can learn much. The chief participants are now in basic agreement that the One is infinite in itself as well as infinite in power.[14] What I shall have to say here will be by way of assimilating this understanding of the One's infinity to our general grasp of Plotinus' conception of the real.

Let us look at a few of the ways in which the One transcends the finite Beings, namely the Forms. It is beyond what is best (1.8.2.8); it is creative of being and of self-sufficiency—the close association of these two should be noticed as reinforcing the notion that the Forms are essentially finite (5.3.17.12); it is without form (ἀνείδεον, 5.5.6.4) or a shapeless form (ἄμορφον εἶδος, 6.7.33.4); it is again ἀνείδεον in 6.7.32. And there is more than this, for strictly speaking it is indescribable (ἄρρητον τῇ ἀληθείᾳ, 5.3.13.1); no name can be appropriate to it (5.5.6.12). It is simply 'the not this' (5.5.6.13). In what way could Plotinus say better that it is not finite? He could hardly use such language as this if it were only a finitude higher than that of the Intelligible World.

Then why does Plotinus generally call it 'the One'? Surely because it is exactly what it is, an entirely indivisible unity. All his problems about the One's knowledge flow from this fact. Plotinus fears (6.7.37) that to admit that the One has knowledge even of itself is to allow us to see it not as simply itself but as a duality. We know that it has some kind of knowledge but that this knowledge must be of an entirely unique

kind, incomprehensible to us. Its whole nature is beyond our knowledge, but since we must give it a name of some kind, 'the One' will be the most appropriate so long as we do not make the mistake of associating it with the unity of any (finite) Being (6.9.5.38ff.).

The One must be the cause of all finite Beings; it is through the One that such Beings exist. These Beings are not merely more finite examples of unity; they are different in kind from the One, since the One is actually their creator. This point should be stressed, for it is only in the light of the One's infinity that its rôle as creator of all else can properly be grasped, and the enormous difference between Plotinus and Plato be seen. According to the *Timaeus*, the physical world is built upon an eternal, quasi-material substrate. Matter is not made by the Forms; it is only given definite shape by the Forms. Nor is it the creation of the Demiourgos, whose task it is to organize the 'material' before him. In the world of Plotinus, however, things are quite different. The One is the actual maker of Beings, that is of the Forms, as we have seen in 5.3.17.9ff. And not only of the Forms, for Plotinus tells us clearly there that the One is the maker of everything. In 3.8.10 we find among other descriptions of the One the statement that it is like a spring which not only never runs dry but always remains exactly as it was despite the stream of water that eternally flows from it. But the creation-motif is seen at its strongest in 6.8.19. This most important chapter includes the suggestion (l. 13) that the phrase 'beyond Being' was spoken in riddling manner by the ancients, a clear indication that Plotinus regards himself as going at least beyond the letter of the *Republic*, for surely Plato must be the chief thinker meant. To this is added the doctrine that when the One had 'made' Being—we should notice the word 'made' (ἐποίησε) again, for it occurs four times here—he left it 'outside' himself, that is, he remained wholly transcendent.[15] What is more, as Plotinus specifically says in the last sentence of the chapter, this making is not merely 'in accordance with his being', that is, it is not

merely a necessary thing. This is perhaps the strongest expression used anywhere in the *Enneads* to deter the reader from supposing there is any necessary production of the hypostases. The action seems to be wholly mysterious, as is fitting if the One is truly infinite.

Yet the idea that the One is the creator of all, either in a temporal or an extra-temporal sense, occurs again at 4.8.6.18. Either matter has always existed, says Plotinus, or its coming to be is a necessary effect of the existents, that is, the Forms, that are already there. Even if the latter explanation is true (and this is surely not Plotinus' own opinion) then not even so (οὐδ' ὥς) is matter to be thought of as apart from the procession from the One, apart from being a product of the One. The use of the phrase 'not even so' shows us that whether matter be regarded as temporal or not, it is still not to be thought of as separate.[16]

There is good reason for emphasizing the fact that for Plotinus everything is in some sense a product of the One, for we can learn from it that the One and the others are radically opposed, as far apart as creator and creatures must be. Hence although the One is always present to those who look for it (6.9.7 and 8), its complete transcendence and its independence of its products must be continually re-emphasized.[17] This is how we may explain a favourite metaphor of Plotinus', the metaphor by which he calls Being, that is, finite Being, a trace of the One. *Ennead* 6.7.17 presents this idea in association with other themes we have already noticed. In line 10 we learn that the One is beyond act, the act of the Forms, that is, and therefore beyond life. Life is a trace of the One (l. 13); and in line 40 the Intelligible World itself, Mind and its powers, is a trace of the One. And Mind is Form. The trace, we may say, is specific. Hence the One cannot be a Form, a finite Being. Rather it is shapeless and formless. It is the *maker* of Form (εἰδοποιεῖ). Just as a man walking on the beach will leave his footprint behind him, so the presence of the One will leave a finite trace which is the Intelligible World.

This idea of a trace occurs again in *Ennead* 5.5.5—that famous chapter where the words for Being and Existence (ὄν, εἶναι, οὐσία) are said to be derived etymologically from the word for One (ἕν). In the world of Forms, says Plotinus, the trace of the One has established (finite) Being, so that existence is a trace of the One. This trace is represented by the fact that the words for Being and Existence look etymologically similar to, and thus can be thought of as bearing the mark of, the One. For it is because the One imposes a unity, a finite and defined nature, that the Forms can be said to exist at all (6.9.1.1).

The Forms are a trace of the One, but just as a trace is essentially different—despite the sympathetic magicians—from him who made the trace, so the One is essentially different from the Forms. The Forms are finite Being; they could not exist if they were not finite. The One, on the other hand, is superior to them precisely at this point. The phrase 'beyond Being' does not mean, says Plotinus (5.5.6.11 ff.), that the One is some 'this' (for it makes no positive statement about it), nor is it its name; it only implies that the One is not a 'this' or 'that'. As Clarke says,[18] 'To allow that Plotinus' negative dialectic merely excludes form and limit extrinsically from the One while still allowing them intrinsically...is quite simply to rob the whole negative theology of all point and efficacy'. In reply to this Sweeney claimed that 'the One's unique reality and entity...could also involve and *be* (his italics) limit and perfection of its own unique sort; hence infinity of nonbeing need not signify that the One's unique reality itself is infinite'.[19] But this will not do, for if, after all, the One's perfection is limited, even in a unique way, all we could say is either that he is limited by being unlimited, or infinite, that is, that he is his own limit, or that he is limited by something else. Both alternatives are in fact ruled out by Plotinus himself in 5.5.11.2–3, where we read that the One 'is limited neither in relation to others, nor in relation to himself'. Given this clear text, there is no alternative but to say

that he is simply infinite.[20] Like his power, he is infinite to the core (6.5.12.5).

The One then is no particular finite Being. It is, as Plotinus frequently says, 'other than Being'. Since it is not finite Being, can it be reasonably said that it is 'not-Being beyond Being', as Porphyry puts it (*Sententiae*, ch. 26), or even 'Nothing', the term ventured later by Scotus Erigena? We can doubtless trace the historical sequence which led to Erigena's suggestion, and Plotinus would have accepted it if it meant 'no particular finite thing', but he would probably have preferred the phrase of Porphyry—though to the best of my knowledge he does not use it himself—because it is nearer to what he regarded as a primary authority for his position, namely Plato's *Sophist*. We recall in that dialogue that the Eleatic Stranger finds it necessary to re-examine the dictum of his spiritual father Parmenides that 'not-being does not exist'. The Eleatic Stranger wishes to translate the phrase 'not-Being' into 'other than Being', and thus, in the context of the dialogue, to support the intelligibility of negative propositions. But the view that not-Being (τὸ μὴ ὄν) should be thought of as 'other' than particular Being (θάτερον τοῦ ὄντος) is one which Plotinus was very ready to seize upon as an explanation of the relationship of the One 'beyond Being' to the finite existent Beings, the Forms. Porphyry's description of the One as a 'not-Being beyond Being' therefore could be—though it need not be—another version of Plotinus' frequent distinction by otherness of the One from the Forms, the One-and-Many, though by a variation of genius Plotinus holds that all otherness is in the others, none in the One. In this opinion he is presumably drawing on the *Timaeus* (35A), where the World-Soul, but not its maker, has otherness in its composition.

Be that as it may, however, we may briefly look at Plotinus' own usage. In 5.1.6.53 separation from the One is only by otherness, that is, in the language of the *Sophist*, the One is not-Being through being other than Being. Yet, as we have said, and as Plotinus specifically says in 6.9.8.31 ff., although

it is by otherness and difference (ἑτερότης, διαφορά) that the others are separate from the One, there is no otherness (ἑτερότης) in the One itself. This is a splendid variant on Plato's idea. Plato says that not-Being is to be explained as 'otherness'; Plotinus uses the distinction to separate the One which is beyond Being from Beings, but instead of calling the One the 'wholly other' or even 'not-Being beyond Being', as Porphyry does, he emphasizes that it is in a sense the Beings which are not-Being—we should understand of course 'not-infinite-Being'—because they are other than the One. In *Ennead* 2.4.5.28ff. the 'raw material' of the intelligible world, that is, Intelligible Matter, is in fact actually spoken of as being itself otherness.

So far we have asserted that the One is infinite Being and that the Forms, which are other than it, are finite. By infinite Being we have meant infinity in all respects: the One is infinite in itself and infinite in its power. We must now investigate how it is that the Forms, though essentially finite, each one being what it is, its own self, have a certain kind of infinity too.[21] When we were speaking of Plato we touched briefly on the difficulty that although his Forms are intended to be 'just themselves' (μονοειδές) yet there is a sense in which they are multiple. This, we remarked, may have had something to do with the fact that Plato came to feel in some way that he needed a superior principle, which he called the Good and the One, which might reign in pure undivided unity. In Plato this highest principle is left in comparative obscurity. It is a mystery which can be alluded to but not spoken of. For Plotinus, however, although the One is ineffable, there is nevertheless a great deal to be said of it. Fundamentally it is entirely itself, as each one of the Forms was originally designed to be. It is, as he says at 6.8.14.44, 'primarily itself and itself in a way that transcends finite Being' (πρώτως αὐτὸς καὶ ὑπερόντως αὐτός). As we have seen, the only way it can be thus itself, without Plotinus' running into problems akin to those about the multiplicity of Forms that so troubled Plato,

is for it to be not one and many, but infinite in itself. When we come to the level of the Divine Mind, however, this solution is no longer available. Νοῦς is not infinite of itself, though it has what recent commentators have referred to as a limited infinity which enables Plotinus to call it ἄπειρος.

And here we may very profitably call Proclus to witness as an aid to the understanding of the views of Plotinus. In proposition 93 of the *Elements of Theology*[22] Proclus writes that in things which have Being—again the world of Forms is meant—all infinitude is infinite only to inferior principles. This is a way of saying that in the domain of Being (the Plotinian Νοῦς) there are, within the finite nature of the whole, certain respects in which the hypostasis is both finite and infinite. In the thought of Proclus this doubleness is only to be accounted for by the reification of two further principles, finitude itself and infinitude itself, between the One and Being. These principles are described in proposition 159. Their rôle in the thought of Proclus himself need not concern us here. What is important is to recognize that they are the reified version of two distinct logical moments in the process of the emergence of Νοῦς from the One as described by Plotinus.[23] These two moments, for which we should look in 2.4.5 and 6.7.17, are first, the moment of the appearance of unlimited, undefined, Intelligible Matter, whose character, as we saw above, is 'otherness'—this is the αὐτοαπειρία of Proclus—and then the turning back of this otherness to its source—Proclus' Limit itself. Apparently in Proclus' system Limit itself is prior since it is more akin to the One (*in Parm.* 1124.1)[24]—this is rather un-Plotinian—but what matters for our present enquiry is the general position of Plotinus that Proclus is representing in his own peculiar way. Plotinus explains by his doctrine of the two logical moments, reified by Proclus, that in finite Beings, that is Forms, the world of Νοῦς, there are aspects of finitude and infinitude. The One, in contrast to this, is infinity itself.

We can profitably go still further along this line of enquiry. In 6.2.8.39, where Plotinus is discussing the categories of the

Intelligible World, the world of Being, he deduces—in accordance with what he supposes he has learned from Plato's *Sophist*—that in addition to Being, Motion and Rest, we must distinguish the two further categories of Sameness and Otherness, which represent, surely, the 'two logical moments' once again. If we sum up then the characteristic antitheses which describe the world of finite Beings, the world of the Forms, we can say that these Beings are both finite and infinite, that each of them partakes of Sameness and Otherness, of Unity and Multiplicity. Only when we realize this clearly are we able to understand the enormous gulf which Plotinus has fixed between the One and the Many, between infinite and finite Being.

This gulf might seem so great as to be unbridgeable. It might seem that human beings, living in the world of the finite, could not, except in some mystical way, aspire to knowledge of the One itself. And indeed we have seen that it is 'unspeakable', that 'no name names it', not even the name 'the One'. But yet the very fact that Plotinus can argue to its existence from its effects, can demonstrate from these finite Beings which exhibit a 'trace' of the One that there must be a One itself, indicates that there is some manner in which we can know something about the One, even if we cannot grasp it essentially. Plotinus does not pose as a specific problem the question of how he can make so many statements about a One which is unknowable, but we may perhaps hazard a guess that he holds to some kind of doctrine of analogy as a justification of his position.

This suggestion will probably be unpopular. One can imagine the reaction, for example, of Sweeney, who has written:[25] 'Of course Plotinus's universe is greatly different, since primacy is not given to being but to unity, and analogy of being between God and creatures is replaced by absolute ontic dissimilarity.' We should, however, be aware already of the dubious nature of this version of the relation between being and unity, and of the incorrectness of seeing Plotinus' thought

in terms of an antithesis of this kind. But what about the alleged ontic dissimilarity between the One and the others? We have seen already that the true relation between the One and the others is best expressed by the language of infinite and finite Being. If this is so, we may say that there would, *pace* Sweeney, appear to be some kind of link between the One and the others, unless our term Being is to be wholly divested of meaning.

What is this link? Plotinus sees it in the fact that something of cause is left in effect, some trace of the One is present in the others. Hence in a strange and analogous way he is able to say not only that the Intelligible World is Beauty, but that the One itself is Beauty, or a Beauty above Beauty.[26] We know that this means that the One is the cause of Beauty, just as it is the Good as cause of the good, and God as cause of the divine.[27] But although the One is called the One, Beauty, Goodness, God, it must not be limited by the limitations these terms convey when applied to the Divine Mind and the lower levels of reality. Although the One and the others are not separated by a Barthian gulf, yet the word 'Infinite' is not merely an empty compliment to a One which is only a superior version of the same kind of Being as the others.[28] The only justification for Plotinus' procedure would appear to be some kind of doctrine of analogy—a doctrine, however, of which he only gives hints, for example in 3.8.10, but which alone could support the possibility of the ascent of finite Being to infinite, of the soul to God.

Although we cannot go further than this in demonstrating the existence of some kind of theory of the analogy of finite Being to infinite, we can perhaps derive some help in seeing what Plotinus was trying to do from the attempts—and failures—of some of his successors, to expound a theory of the One. Such writers as Porphyry, the author of the anonymous commentary on the *Parmenides*,[29] and the Christian Neoplatonist Victorinus, offer explanations of the One which look remarkably similar, but in the case of the commentator and of Victorinus certainly, and probably in that of Porphyry as

well, differ on a most important matter of terminology from Plotinus; for whereas Plotinus' first principle is beyond Being (ὑπὲρ τοῦ εἶναι, ὑπὲρ τῆς οὐσίας), theirs is 'Being by itself' (τὸ εἶναι μόνον).

For the anonymous commentator we should not say that this 'Being by itself' is not-being (τὸ μὴ ὄν); rather we should say that we ourselves and all Beings (πάντα τὰ ὄντα) are nothing in comparison to it.[30] That is, for the One to exist, everything else must be annihilated. This manner of expressing the position could only have arisen in the mind of someone who, unlike Plotinus, had forgotten the original purpose of the Forms, namely to be perfect selfhood, perfect examples of finite Being. The Forms, out of which the One has historically developed, are here themselves annihilated. If this is so, what are we to make of the later passage where the commentator says that the first principle is 'Being by itself that is prior to the existent' (αὐτὸ τὸ εἶναι πρὸ τοῦ ὄντος)?[31] What indeed can we say except that in such a philosophy the existent (the Form?) in some sense does not exist at all? This result is far from what Plotinus wished to achieve and, as we can now see, is the direct result of a misunderstanding of the relationship he supposed to exist between the One and the Intelligible World.

We know from Damascius that Porphyry at some time equated the One with an entity which later Neoplatonists—and probably Porphyry himself—called ὕπαρξις.[32] This ὕπαρξις is to be equated with Being by itself, without determination (αὐτὸ τὸ εἶναι), regarded as prior to the determined Being of the Forms. What Porphyry understood by this 'Being by itself' we cannot be absolutely certain from his own writings, and we should content ourselves for the moment with the fact that he uses the term 'not-being' (τὸ μὴ ὄν) for the One in the *Sententiae*.[33]

When we turn to Marius Victorinus, a fourth-century rhetorician who attempted to combine the Neoplatonism of Porphyry with Christianity, we know more firmly where we stand. For Victorinus the first Principle, God the Father, is

'pre-Being' (προόν).[34] Beyond what exists (*Supra* ὄν),[35] he is what the Greeks call 'the existence' (τὸ εἶναι)[36] and what Victorinus frequently translates as *exsistentia*[37]—by which he means ὕπαρξις. Now although *Supra* ὄν is Plotinian enough, Plotinus would have rejected τὸ εἶναι, and, as we shall see, ὕπαρξις as well. For ὕπαρξις (*exsistentia*) means the same as τὸ εἶναι μόνον (Being just by itself); it is Being without form, prior to all determination. This at first sight might look Plotinian enough too, but a glance at the other term for the One (τὸ μὴ ὄν) will show us its true meaning. In his letter to Candidus,[38] Victorinus distinguishes four ways of 'not-being'. One of these is a not-being that is other than Being (*iuxta alterius ad aliud naturam*)—this is the kind familiar from Plato's *Sophist* and whose relevance to Plotinus we have already discussed—and another is the not-being which is above Being, that is, the τὸ μὴ ὂν ὑπὲρ τὸ ὄν of Porphyry. But instead of assimilating these two kinds of not-being, as a true Plotinian would have done when speaking of the One, Victorinus tries to keep them apart and to equate his first Principle with 'not-being that is above Being' only. It is true that he says that this not-being that is above Being is 'another' kind of Being (*aliud* ὄν) and this partially saves him from disaster, but had he assimilated the two kinds of not-being from the start he would have grasped the Plotinian idea more firmly.

For the point is that when Plotinus holds that the One is other than finite Beings, though all the 'otherness' resides in these finite Beings, he is not simply saying that the One is different from the Forms in being Being without determination, nor is he saying that the One is a kind of substrate for the Forms which are themselves determinations of that substrate. What he is saying is that the One is a different kind of being from finite being, that is, that he is infinite being. The ὕπαρξις of Porphyry and the *exsistentia* of Victorinus' God seem to be the equivalents not of Plotinus' One, which they are supposed to represent, but of his Intelligible Matter, which is in fact indeterminate being, neither finite nor infinite, but

simply indefinite! Clearly such a God would not do for Victorinus, who must insist that his God exists (hence he is an *aliud* ὄν), but the difficulty that Victorinus is in can now be seen as arising from an attempt to apply the inadequate notion of *exsistentia* (ὕπαρξις) to a God who cannot be *reduced* to such a Porphyrian notion. Plotinus' God as infinite Being would not have led Victorinus into these difficulties, had Victorinus been able to grasp the notion of divine infinity at all. But since even Porphyry, Plotinus' disciple and friend, seems to have mistaken the One above finite Being for something which is not strictly any kind of Being at all, we can hardly grumble that Victorinus did the same thing.

We can see from the various examples of the anonymous commentator on the *Parmenides*, Porphyry and Marius Victorinus, into what difficulties a thinker may be led by failing to grasp the nature of the gulf between the infinite One and the finite Forms. The alternatives open to anyone who fails to grasp the One's infinity are either an annihilation of the Forms themselves through the attempt to keep the One in existence, or a reduction of the One to simple indetermination, truly a doctrine of mystification. And historically there were other curious results of failure to understand Plotinus' great achievement. Iamblichus,[39] apparently recognizing that Plotinus' first Principle ought not even to be called the One, supposes that there are two principles beyond the intelligible world of Forms, the One and a nameless and unnameable Principle beyond it. This must be seen either as a piece of literal-mindedness—from which Iamblichus and many other late Neoplatonists suffered, and which rendered him incapable of grasping why Plotinus called the unnameable One a One at all—or else as an attempt to bridge the gulf between infinite and finite by a 'law of mean terms', which demands something partly nameable and partly unnameable between the nameable and the unnameable.

But whichever was Iamblichus' reason, he can only have misunderstood what Plotinus was doing. And if Greek-

speakers failed to see this clearly, it was only to be expected that when the Neoplatonic idea of Being was rendered into Latin the difficulties would be insuperable. In the *Liber de Causis* there occurs the phrase *Prima rerum creatarum est esse*.[40] It is not surprising that this word *esse* was taken to mean existence *simpliciter* by those medieval thinkers who could not have had any idea of the implications of finitude built into the Greek τὸ εἶναι. The mistake is less pardonable when repeated in modern times.

All this evidence from writers other than Plotinus has been adduced to make understanding of Plotinus' own position doubly clear. This position can briefly be summarized as follows: the One is infinite, the others finite; the One is creator, the others creatures; the One is entirely itself, entirely infinite, the others are both finite and infinite in the way we have described; the One has no otherness, the others are other than the One. It is not the case that while the Forms exist, the One does not. Rather the One exists in an infinite way, the others finitely. There is no excuse for saying that the One does not exist and for thus confusing it with absolutely unqualified matter and absolute evil. To make such a confusion is to cast away the most important metaphysical proposition of Plotinus.