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DAMIAN CALUORI

## **Divine Practical Thought in Plotinus**

Plotinus follows the *Timaeus* and the Platonist tradition before him in postulating the existence of a World Soul<sup>1</sup>. Just like any other individual soul, the World Soul has to care for a particular body, namely, in this case, the sensible world as a whole. Since the sensible world, according to Plotinus, is organized rationally and since the World Soul is crucially in charge of caring for it, there is a question concerning the sort of thinking that is involved in the World Soul's caring for the sensible world. I will take for granted (for the purposes of this paper) that Plotinus' World Soul is engaged in the contemplation of the world of Forms and that this is necessary for its taking care of its body. After all, in order to know what the sensible world must look like, the World Soul has to know the paradigm whose excellent image the sensible world is. I will argue, however, that according to Plotinus the contemplation of Forms is not sufficient for the creation and maintenance of the sensible world. Rather, he postulates in addition another kind of thinking, practical thinking, which is necessary for the creation and maintenance of the sensible world too. I will further argue that this thinking is timeless. My focus will be on *Ennead IV 4, 9-12*.

### 1. THE RULING PRINCIPLE OF THE SENSIBLE WORLD

In the context of these chapters Plotinus discusses the question of what class of living beings possess memory and in particular whether divine beings belong to this class. Memory, Plotinus insists at *Ennead IV 4, 7*, presupposes a change in the person's mind such that the person's awareness is no longer directed at the object she has memory of (or, more precisely, it presupposes that the awareness is not always directed at its object so that there is at least one moment in time at which it is not directed towards it). A being that is in a state of eternal contemplation (and whose awareness is eternally directed at the object of this contemplation), for example, will have no memory of the object of her contemplation. Asking whether the souls of the stars, who are, according to Plotinus, divine beings (beings eternally engaged in the contemplation of God) remember God, Plotinus answers:

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Eyfi Emilsson, Peter Turner and an anonymous reader for their very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

« Well, they always see him. As long as they see him, it is impossible for them to say that they have seen him. For this happens to those who have ceased to see him » (*Enn.* IV 4, 7, 1-3)<sup>2</sup>. Thus, it is impossible for divine beings to say anything implying that their seeing God occurred *in the past*. Since the quoted passage is supposed to be an argument for the claim that the stars do not remember God, we can conclude that memory is of things that specifically occur in the past — a claim that we can also find in Aristotle<sup>3</sup>. Plotinus already anticipated this result at *Enn.* IV 3, 25, where he states that we ought not to attribute memory to God because there is « no earlier and later » and there is no change in the intelligible realm<sup>4</sup>. If the mental activity someone is engaged in is unchangingly the very same forever then this person cannot distinguish — as far as this unchanging mental activity is concerned — past, present and future. Thus, as far as this unchanging mental activity is concerned, there can be no mental activity that is specifically about or directed towards its past (nor specifically about its present nor specifically about its future). There are no temporal distinctions to be made in unchanging mental activities as such<sup>5</sup>. I will come back to this below. For now let us simply note that it is in this context that Plotinus asks whether the ruling principle (*to hêgemonoun*) of the sensible world possesses memory.

What is this ruling principle? At *Enn.* IV 4, 9, 1-6 Plotinus refers to *Phaedrus*, 246E4-5 where Zeus is said to give order to the sensible world and to care for everything, being the great leader in heaven. Plotinus combines this reference with one to *Philebus*, 30D1-2 where Socrates attributes to Zeus a royal soul and a royal intellect (*nous*). Thus, Zeus, possessing an intellect and a soul, orders the sensible world and cares for it. In the following chapter, *Enn.* IV 4, 10, Plotinus claims that what orders (*to kosmoun*) the sensible world is twofold: on the one hand it is the Timaeian Craftsman and on the other the World Soul. Furthermore, Plotinus explains that he sometimes uses the name 'Zeus' to refer to the Craftsman and sometimes to the ruling principle (*to hêgemonoun*) of the All. Clearly, the ruling principle, being thus distinct from the Craftsman, will be one of the two entities that order the sensible world whose ruling principle it is. We can thus

<sup>2</sup> Note that Plotinus here uses the perfect of the verb 'seeing' (« they have seen him ») as a tense and not as an aspect: the perfect here indicates the past.

<sup>3</sup> ARISTOTLE, *De memoria*, 449b9-30.

<sup>4</sup> In the same chapter, Plotinus urges us not to confuse memory with something else that is sometimes called 'memory', namely Platonic recollection. The argument I am presenting in the case of memory can easily be adapted to the case of Platonic recollection.

<sup>5</sup> By 'temporal distinctions' I mean distinctions between A-properties in the sense of McTaggart's A-theories of time. For A-theories, the distinction between past, present and future is fundamental. See J. M. E. McTAGGART, *The Unreality of Time*, « Mind », 17, 1908, pp. 457-474.

conclude that the ruling principle of the All is the World Soul<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, when Plotinus earlier referred to Zeus by quoting the *Phaedrus* and the *Philebus*, he will have meant by 'Zeus' the Craftsman (assuming that the World Soul does not possess a soul)<sup>7</sup>.

Plotinus immediately sets aside the Craftsman to focus on a discussion of the World Soul. For, he claims, « as far as the Craftsman is concerned, we must completely eliminate 'earlier and later' (*to prosô kai opisô*) by attributing to him a single unchangeable (*atrepton*) and timeless (*achronon*) life » (*Enn.* IV 4, 10, 4-6)<sup>8</sup>. Since the life of the Craftsman is unchangeable and timeless, we cannot make temporal distinctions (in the sense specified) in it. Thus, there is nothing in the Craftsman's life that specifically occurs in the past. For this reason, there is no need to discuss further whether the Craftsman possesses memory: he does not. For, as I argued above, memory is specifically about the past and thus presupposes distinguishing between past and non-past. Accordingly, Plotinus can rule out that the World Soul possesses memory if he can show that the World Soul is only engaged in mental activities that are unchanging<sup>9</sup>. If all of the World Soul's mental activities are such that, as far as they are concerned, we cannot distinguish between past and non-past, then the World Soul will not have memory.

Now it is clear that the World Soul is engaged in activities that involve change. After all, there are many changes in the sensible world — indeed, the sensible world is crucially undergoing change all the time. And, in some way or other, the World Soul, being the ruling principle of the sensible world, is in charge of these changes and brings them about. Must we attribute memory to the World Soul because it brings about change in its body?

If I have dinner and later remember that I had dinner then having had dinner is certainly necessary for my remembering it (otherwise, I would only *seem* to remember, being subject to an illusion or a mistake). However, it is not sufficient

<sup>6</sup> Plato uses the expression 'ruling principle' at *Ti.*, 41C to refer to the highest and immortal of the three forms of individual soul he distinguishes there: the rational soul. For example, the ruling principle of Socrates will be his rational soul (as opposed to the two non-rational forms of soul Plato distinguishes in the *Timaeus*). The Stoics also emphasize the ruling function of the soul by calling the rational soul *hêgêmonikon*.

<sup>7</sup> Given that Plotinus distinguishes between hypostasis Soul and World Soul, it is tempting to identify the royal soul of the Craftsman with the hypostasis Soul and his royal intellect with the hypostasis Intellect. I will not argue for this here, however, and nothing in what follows hinges on it. I argue for it in D. CALUORI, *Plotinus on the Soul*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2015, ch. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Compare this to *Enn.* IV 3, 25 briefly referred to above.

<sup>9</sup> Even a weaker claim will do if we assume that awareness is necessary for having memory: that all mental activities of which the World Soul is ever aware, must be unchanging. But, of course, if the stronger claim holds true (that there is no unchanging mental activity in the World Soul), the weaker one will hold true too.

for my remembering it. It is possible to do things without recalling them or, what is more: without even forming a memory of them. In *The Nature of Mind* David Armstrong discusses the case of a long-distance truck driver:

« After driving for long periods of time, particularly at night, it is possible to ‘come to’ and realize that for some time past one has been driving without being aware of what one has been doing. The coming-to is an alarming experience. It is natural to describe what went on before one came to by saying that during that time one lacked consciousness »<sup>10</sup>.

Armstrong goes on to explain that, in this case, in one sense the truck driver did not lack consciousness, namely in the sense that the driver saw the road, other cars etc. Armstrong calls this *perceptual* consciousness. In another sense of ‘consciousness’, however, he did lack consciousness, namely in the sense that he was not aware of his driving, of his seeing the road etc. Thus, the truck driver saw the road (other cars etc.) without being aware of it. At *Enn.* IV 8, 8, 7-9 Plotinus makes a similar observation: « For we do not realize everything that happens in a part of the soul before it comes to the whole soul »<sup>11</sup>. Now it seems plausible that one only forms memories of things of which one is aware. The truck driver will not remember the last stretch he drove when he ‘comes to’. This is why coming to is, in Armstrong’s phrase, « an alarming experience ». However, even if one denies this and assumes that we can form memories of things that we did not consciously experience, these considerations certainly show that if I do not even perceive what I am doing, then I will not be able to remember it. (Here ‘perception’ must be understood to cover not only the kinds for which we use the five sense but also perception of states internal to the body and proprioception). This is because I will not have been able to form any memory of it. If the World Soul never mentally grasps the changes it brings about (nor, for that matter, any other changes that may occur externally to it) then it will never remember them and thus there will be no need to attribute memory to the World Soul on the basis of the claim that it rules the ever-changing sensible world.

So Plotinus’ task is twofold: (i) he has to show that the World Soul does not obtain any mental content from the sensible world. (ii) He has to show that the internal cognitive activity of the World Soul, even the cognitive activity whose intentional object is a sensible world, is unchanging. In other words: (i) the World Soul must not be actively involved in any sort of perception (in the sense

<sup>10</sup> D. ARMSTRONG, *The Nature of Mind*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1980, p. 60.

<sup>11</sup> In particular, he thinks, that human beings, when incarnated, are at best rarely aware of their own thinking in the intelligible world. I discuss this in more detail in CALUORI, *Plotinus on the Soul*, ch. 6.

of 'perception' specified above). (ii) The thinking of the World Soul, even the thinking whose intentional object is a sensible world, must not involve any change.

In what follows I will only be concerned with the second task and more specifically with the task to show that even the World Soul's thinking whose intentional object is a sensible world, is unchanging. For reasons that I will discuss below, I will call the unchanging thinking whose intentional object is a sensible world, 'practical thinking'. Before discussing, however, why this sort of thinking is practical, I first want to discuss why Plotinus thinks it is unchanging (at least in the case of the World Soul).

## 2. REASONING AND UNDERSTANDING

If Plotinus believes there to be a sort or form of thinking in the soul that is unchanging then there are at least two sorts or forms of thinking in the soul according to Plotinus. For he does not deny that there are processes of reasoning which certainly involve change. What Plotinus wants to deny, however, is that such processes occur in the World Soul. At *Enn.* IV 4, 9, 1-9 Plotinus considers an objection to his view that Zeus possesses no memory. The opponent claims that, surely, if Zeus possesses providential foresight (*pronoia*) of how things come to be and has authority over the realm of things that are coming to be (*ginomena*), then he will have an excellent memory. For, the opponent reasons, Zeus must know at any moment in time the number of past revolutions of the heavens so as to devise, compare and reason (*logizesthai*) what to do in order to exercise the next step in the process of creation. The opponent seems to assume that Zeus devises the future of the sensible world with a view to its past and seems to have in mind a view of craftsmanship according to which a craftsman, in the process of making his product, has to reason and to have in mind what has been made up to now in order to know what to do next.

This is certainly an utterly reasonable view of craftsmanship. If you are in the process of building a house, for example, it is of course important that you know when the walls are built so that, after the walls are in place, you can start putting a roof on top. The process of building a house takes place in time and the steps to be undertaken in order to build the house depend, among other things, on this temporal order: some things can only be done when other things have already been done. Importantly, the house builder himself is also in this temporal order and has to decide what to do next on the basis of what has been done up to now. In other words, the craftsman himself must also be *in time* such that the now of his action is *his* now or *his* present.

Plotinus denies that the World Soul needs to reason. He rhetorically asks at *Enn.* IV 4, 11, 11-13: « What reasoning (*logismos*) or what counting or what

memory can there be when wisdom (*phronêsis*) is always present, active, ruling and providentially arranging things (*dioikein*) in the same way? ». What precisely is meant by wisdom here shall concern us later. For now let us simply note that wisdom is *active*. In what follows I will call the activity of wisdom ‘understanding’<sup>12</sup>. Hence, understanding, thus understood, is an activity and not merely a capacity; it must be a form of thinking. Furthermore, it must be distinct from reasoning. Since Plotinus wants to deny both that there is change in the World Soul (as is shown by his denial that the World Soul possesses memory), understanding must be an unchanging activity.

At *Enn.* IV 4, 12, 5-13 Plotinus further considers the difference between reasoning and understanding:

« For what else is reasoning than the desire to find wisdom (*phronêsis*) ... ? For the person reasoning resembles someone who plays the cithara in order to acquire the art of cithara-playing and the one training in order to acquire a habit and in general the learner who wants to acquire knowledge. For the person reasoning is looking to learn what the wise person already possesses. Hence, understanding (*phronein*) is in the one who stands still. The reasoning person herself is witness to this. For as soon as she finds what is necessary, she stops reasoning. And she has stopped because she has arrived at understanding ».

What precisely is the difference between the activity of reasoning and that of understanding? As a first attempt at understanding it, we may be inclined to call the former, as opposed to the latter, an incomplete activity in Aristotle’s sense: it stops as soon as it has achieved its aim because its aim is outside of itself. Understanding, by contrast, is complete in the sense that it is not aiming at anything besides itself but rather has its aim in itself. Thus, we may want to identify the latter as an instance of what commentators of Aristotle call a complete actuality or activity (*energeia*) as opposed to the former, which according to this model would be an instance of Aristotelian incomplete actuality or activity.

### 3. COMPLETE AND INCOMPLETE ACTUALITY

Aristotle’s famous distinction between two types of actuality (*energeia*) can be found in several of his writings, perhaps most famously at *Physics*, III, 1-3<sup>13</sup>. At

<sup>12</sup> The relation between wisdom and understanding is reflected in the fact that the Greek verb for understanding (*phronein*) has the same root as the Greek noun for wisdom (*phronêsis*).

<sup>13</sup> For the following discussion see M. F. BURNYEAT, *Kinêsis vs. Energeia: A Much-Read Passage in (but not of) Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, « Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy », 34, 2008, pp. 219-292: pp. 259-262.

*Physics*, 201b31-33 Aristotle states: « Change (*kinêsis*) is believed to be an actuality of a sort (*energeia tis*), but incomplete; the reason is that the potential being (*to dunaton*), whose actuality it is, is incomplete ». At *DA*, 417a16-17 Aristotle says with reference to the *Physics*-passage: « For change (*kinêsis*) is an actuality of a sort but incomplete, as has been said elsewhere ». At *DA*, 431a6-7 he contrasts change, which is an actuality only in a qualified way (namely an actuality of what is incomplete), with actuality unqualifiedly (*haplôs*), which is of what is complete<sup>14</sup>. The difference, as Burnyeat argues, is not one between two species of actuality, a complete and an incomplete one, but rather « the difference between an *energeia* in the full sense of the term and one from which you cannot expect everything you would normally expect from an *energeia* »<sup>15</sup>. Thus, Aristotle distinguishes between actuality in the full sense from what is actuality only in a qualified and weaker sense. Keeping this in mind, we may still call them respectively complete actuality and incomplete actuality, the latter being change, without thereby implying that they are species of a genus *actuality*<sup>16</sup>.

Aristotle, also famously, provides a test for distinguishing between complete and incomplete actuality (at least) in the case of activities: the present-perfect test<sup>17</sup>. We can see that sense perception, for example, is a complete actuality if we can at the same time truly say that someone sees (or hears) (present) and has seen (or has heard) (perfect). If we can do so, we can conclude that the actuality of sense perception is complete. Thus successfully passing the present-perfect test may be seen as a marker of a complete actuality. Look at an example for incomplete actuality: Building is incomplete as an actuality because we cannot truly say at the same time that someone is building (present) and has built (perfect)<sup>18</sup>. The focus of this test is on the *aspect* of the verb, rather than its *tense*<sup>19</sup>. That is, the

<sup>14</sup> For further explanations of this distinction see also *Met.*,  $\Theta$ , 8, 1050a23-b2.

<sup>15</sup> BURNYEAT, *Kinêsis vs. Energeia*, p. 264.

<sup>16</sup> While many scholars refer to *Met.*,  $\Theta$ , 6, 1048b18-35 to discuss change (*kinêsis*) and actuality (*energeia*), Burnyeat has recently forcefully argued that this famous passage is an intrusion into *Metaphysics*,  $\Theta$  and should not be seen as a foundational text for Aristotle's metaphysical or physical views: « A more important lesson from this investigation is that present-day scholarship should stop citing the Passage [i.e. *Met.*,  $\Theta$ , 6, 1048b18-35] as a source of standard Aristotelian doctrine. It is a freak performance » (BURNYEAT, *Kinêsis vs. Energeia*, p. 276). Whether or not one is convinced by Burnyeat's argument, as a matter of prudence, I will not refer to what he calls the Passage for present purposes. For further discussion see S. MAKIN, *Aristotle Metaphysics Book  $\Theta$* , Clarendon Press, Oxford 2006, pp. 128-154.

<sup>17</sup> If, on the basis of Burnyeat's argument, one is inclined no longer to refer to this test in attempting to clarify Aristotle's distinction, one can skip this paragraph. Nothing in what follows depends on it.

<sup>18</sup> Examples at *Sens.*, 446b2-6; *EN*, 1174a19-21; *Met.*,  $\Theta$ , 8, 1050a23-b2.

<sup>19</sup> D. W. GRAHAM, *States and Performances: Aristotle's Test*, « *Philosophical Quarterly* », 30, 1980, pp. 117-130; A. KOSMAN, *Substance, Being, and Energeia*, « *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* », 2, 1984, pp. 121-149; MAKIN, *Aristotle Metaphysics Book  $\Theta$* , pp. 148-150.



point of the perfect (as used here) is not to say that an activity went on in the past and is now no longer going on (as we might suppose from using the test in the case of an incomplete actuality). Rather, by saying that someone has done something (perfect) we say that the activity is complete and successful.

Going back to Plotinus : can we distinguish between reasoning and understanding by saying that reasoning is an incomplete actuality (in Aristotle's sense) while understanding is complete ? The present-perfect-test seems to give us the right result ('right' with a view to *Enn.* IV 4, 12, 5-13). I have understood something whenever I understand it but if I have achieved the aim of reasoning, I am no longer reasoning. So it may seem that Plotinus uses Aristotle's distinction to explain the difference between the activity of reasoning (qua activity) and that of understanding (qua activity). The problem with this is, however, that Plotinus *criticizes* Aristotle's notion of incomplete actuality. I will now briefly discuss this critique as developed by Plotinus at *Enn.* VI 1, 15-22 and then look at Plotinus' own view on change in the sensible world at *Enn.* VI 3, 21-26.

At *Enn.* VI 1, 16 Plotinus criticizes Aristotle's notion (as he understands it) of change (*kinêsis*) as an incomplete actuality (*energeia*) and aims to show, against Aristotle, that change and actuality are one and the same<sup>20</sup>. Plotinus uses an interpretation of Aristotle's incomplete actuality that, according to Iamblichus, goes back to the Stoics<sup>21</sup>. This is what Simplicius reports :

« And the Stoics do not grasp change in the right way, says Iamblichus, when they say that 'incomplete' is said of change, not because it is not actuality ; for they say that it is altogether actuality, but because it possesses the 'again and again', not in order to arrive at actuality (for it is this already) but in order to bring about something distinct which is subsequent to itself »<sup>22</sup>.

Thus, according to the Stoic understanding of Aristotelian « incomplete actuality » (an understanding rejected by Iamblichus), actuality is called 'incomplete' because it possesses the 'again and again' in order to bring about something distinct, which is subsequent to it. Before discussing what this all is supposed to mean, let us look at how Plotinus renders the same or at least a similar point :

<sup>20</sup> For a commentary on this passage see C. NATALI, *La critica di Plotino ai concetti di attualità e movimento in Aristotele*, in C. NATALI, S. MASO eds., *Anitaristotelismo*, Hakkert, Amsterdam 1999, pp. 211-229.

<sup>21</sup> BURNYEAT, *Kinêsis vs. Energeia*, p. 284.

<sup>22</sup> SIMPL., *In Cat.*, p. 307, 1-5 Kalbfleisch.

« But if someone said that change is incomplete actuality, nothing would prevent us from first setting actuality [as a genus] and then to subordinate change, being incomplete, as a species. For 'incomplete' is said of it, not because it is not actuality — for it is altogether actuality but also possesses the 'again and again', not in order to arrive at actuality — for it is this already — but in order to bring about something which is distinct, subsequent to itself »<sup>23</sup>.

The dialectical situation in this passage, as often in Plotinus, is far from straightforward. However, I take it that Plotinus does *not* endorse the antecedent of the first sentence. He denies, as I will try to show, that there are incomplete activities and therefore does not commit himself to the view that incomplete actuality is a species of a genus actuality. Accordingly, the rest of the passage quoted is exegetical — with critical remarks interspersed — without committing Plotinus to the view on incomplete actuality expressed in it.

Plotinus (mis-)understands Aristotle as postulating the existence of a genus 'actuality' with two species: complete and incomplete actuality. Accordingly, 'incomplete' would be the differentia that distinguishes the species 'incomplete actuality' from its genus and from the species 'complete actuality'. Plotinus thus starts his discussion of Aristotle (as he understands him) with 'incomplete actuality' as a species of the genus 'actuality'. Like the Stoics referred to by Iamblichus, he argues that actuality in itself is not incomplete but rather complete. If this is correct, it is already hard to see how the (real or imagined) Aristotelian proponents of the view discussed in this passage can account for the differentia of the *other* species of the genus 'actuality', namely of the species 'complete actuality'.

Let us now look at the differentia of the opponents' species 'incomplete actuality', namely the differentia 'incomplete'. How does Plotinus think they understand it? I take it that Plotinus uses the expression « possessing the 'again and again' » as an explanation of the differentia 'incomplete'. This is suggested by the quotation from Iamblichus above who reports that actuality is said to be incomplete *because* it possesses the 'again and again'.

Unfortunately, it is rather unclear what is meant by 'again and again'. Aristotle uses this expression three times in his *Physics*<sup>24</sup>. In terms of Plotinus' source, the most promising of these seems to be *Phys.*, 220b14 where Aristotle considers in what sense time is a number. He states that time is the number that is counted (rather than the number with which we count) and distinguishes the number (remaining the same) from the things of which it is a number. The number of a hundred horses is the same as that of a hundred men but the things of which it

<sup>23</sup> *Enn.* VI 1, 16, 1-8.

<sup>24</sup> *Phys.*, 220b14; 227b17; 267b11.

is the number (horses, men) is different. Aristotle, in the immediately following lines, states that there may be one and the same (type of) change occurring again and again and so also the same (type of) time. His examples are a year, spring and autumn. Although this passage looks promising at first sight, it is not very helpful for explaining how Plotinus uses the expression 'again and again'. For in the *Physics*-passage Aristotle uses the 'again and again' only for one type of change (namely recurring changes like seasons) and not for change in general and thus not for change qua incomplete actuality.

Simplicius has also preserved Iamblichus' remarks on the passage quoted above:

« But how, says Iamblichus, is it possible to say that actuality, the most perfect of all things, is incomplete? In what way is it, remaining stable in its being actual, increased according to the 'again and again', like things that proceed according to number? »<sup>25</sup>.

We learn from this passage that change (incomplete actuality) is thought to *increase* according to the 'again and again'. The most plausible way to understand this increase according to the again and again is, I would suggest, one in time. The summer recurs again and again, and we can count each occurrence and in this way count time. Accordingly, Plotinus, summing up his discussion of *Enn.* VI 1, 18, describes the position he is examining at *Enn.* VI 1, 19, 1-3 as one that identifies incomplete actuality as actuality to which time is added. Moreover, in his treatise on eternity and time, *Enn.* III 7, Plotinus dialectically attributes the 'again and again' to change, comparing it to the 'again and again' of flowing water (*Enn.* III 7, 8, 37-41). The point of the comparison is presumably to show that his opponents see change as being extended in time<sup>26</sup>. If this is right then the definition of 'incomplete actuality' under scrutiny in our passage explains the differentia 'incomplete' by the latter's extension in time.

We are now in a position to see why Plotinus *rejects* the view that change is incomplete activity and thus the antecedent of the first sentence of *Enn.* VI 1, 16 quoted above. Plotinus wants to deny that change can be defined as incomplete actuality because, in his own view, time is *posterior* to change, so that time cannot enter the definition of change. He claims: « And change needs time as little as what is called 'actuality'... And if actuality is in timelessness, so also is change in so far as it is unqualifiedly (*haplôs*) change »<sup>27</sup>. Against Aristotle (as Plotinus understands him) he comes to the conclusion that there are no good grounds for

<sup>25</sup> SIMPL., *In Cat.*, p. 307, 6-9 Kalbfleisch.

<sup>26</sup> See BURNYEAT, *Kinêsis vs. Energeia*, p. 283, n. 158.

<sup>27</sup> *Enn.* VI 1, 16, 14-16. See also *Enn.* VI 3, 22, 43-44.

assuming that we can distinguish complete from incomplete actuality as species of a genus 'actuality': actuality and change are one and the same.

However, it is important to note that Plotinus' position does not imply that there is no sense in which we can rightly say of a change that it is extended in time. His point rather only is that the extension in time is *not essential* to any kind of change. If an object is changing then this change-of-the-object will take place in time because the object is changing from one state to another state. So we must distinguish, for example, between walking (as a change) and walking *a certain distance*. The latter (quantified change) will take time while the former (change as such) does not<sup>28</sup>. This is precisely what Plotinus means when he says that what is incomplete is — not change or activity — but the *subject* of change. Not change is brought to completion but that which change changes (*Enn.* VI 1, 16, 9)<sup>29</sup>.

#### 4. CHANGE AND STATIC ACTIVITY

Now if Plotinus believes that change and actuality are one and the same then he will not want to explain the difference between reasoning and understanding in terms of complete and incomplete actuality. In so far as both are actualities, it would seem, they are not distinct from one another. Aristotle's distinction (as understood by Plotinus) will not help us explain the difference. In order to see how reasoning and understanding are different as activities, we will have to see how *kinêsis* in the intelligible world is different from *kinêsis* in the sensible world. Let us first look at the latter, which is discussed at *Enn.* VI 3, 21-26<sup>30</sup>. It should be noted right from the start that Plotinus' discussion of *kinêsis* in the sensible world focuses on change of *bodies*. So if we want to understand reasoning as a mental process (that is, a change occurring in the soul), we will also have to see how this discussion applies to the soul.

Plotinus considers change as one of the highest genera (and thus one of the categories) of the sensible world. Accordingly, it cannot be defined. To give us a sketch of the notion of change Plotinus is about to develop in these chapters, he describes, at the beginning of his discussion, change in outline as the way or passage (*hodos*) from a potentiality to that which results from this potentiality (*Enn.* VI 3, 22, 3-4). It will be helpful for our purposes to note that change in

<sup>28</sup> For extended or quantified change (*posê kinêsis*) (as opposed to change *simpliciter*) see *Enn.* VI 1, 16, 8-13 and E. K. EMILSSON, *Plotinus on Intellect*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007, pp. 34-38.

<sup>29</sup> As a critique of Aristotle, this seems to miss the point. For Aristotle explains, as we have seen, that incomplete actuality is called incomplete because *the potential being (to dunaton)* whose actuality it is, is incomplete.

<sup>30</sup> For a discussion of *kinêsis* in *Enn.* VI 1 and *Enn.* VI 3 see R. CHIARADONNA, *Sostanza Movimento Analogia. Plotino critico di Aristotele*, Bibliopolis, Napoli 2002, pp. 147-225.

the sensible world relies on a potentiality of the thing that is subject to change. Plotinus gives three examples: (i) A potential statue arrives at a particular form. The way or passage to arrive at this form is the change of making a statue. (ii) A potential walker arrives at walking. The way or passage to arrive at walking is the change that is walking. (iii) A potential dancer arrives at dancing. The way or passage to arrive at dancing is the change that is dancing.

The difference between (i) on one hand, and (ii) and (iii) on the other is this. In (i) the change produces something else, i.e. something (namely the statue) that is not constitutive of the change, whereas neither walking (ii) nor dancing (iii) have anything « after [them] when the change has stopped » (*Enn.* VI 3, 22, 12-13)<sup>31</sup>. Rather, they arrive at what results from them already by an exercise of the corresponding potentiality. I note in passing that in Aristotle, as understood by Plotinus, (i) would be an incomplete actuality while (iii) would be a complete actuality. (ii) may be controversial; Plotinus criticizes Aristotle, justifiably or not, for holding that (ii) is incomplete (*Enn.* VI, 1, 16, 9-14). In any case, for Plotinus there is only a distinction between activities at the end of which there is a product distinct from both activity and producer and activities without there being any such distinct product at the end of the activity. Yet Plotinus' main point does not concern this distinction. Rather, even in the former case the things that a change may produce are not essential to the change and do not complete it. Qua change, both types of change are the same.

A further feature of change in the sensible world is important for our purposes: what all changes in the sensible world have in common is that the thing that is undergoing change, in so far as it is undergoing change, is not at rest. That is, the subject of change is no longer in the same state as it was before it was changing:

« But what is common [to all species of change]? That each thing is not in the same [state] in which it was previously and that it is neither standing still nor at complete rest but, in so far as change is present, it possesses a direction towards something else... »<sup>32</sup>.

For there to be a change in the sensible world, thus, there must be a subject to change. This subject must be in two states that are ordered as prior and posterior. If change occurs, then the subject ceases to be in the prior state and is going to be in the posterior state; it does not stand still in so far as change is present. In so far as a thing stands still, it is not changing and in so far as it is changing, it

<sup>31</sup> Note how Plotinus carefully does *not* claim that the thing produced is the aim or *telos* of the change.

<sup>32</sup> *Enn.* VI 3, 22, 35-40.

does not stand still. Thus, a crucial feature of the sensible world is this: *kinêsis* and *stasis* exclude one another: « And change in objects in the sensible world [*perita aisthêta*], sent in from something else, shakes, drives, wakes up, and pushes the things being changed by it so that they do not sleep and do not remain in sameness... » (*Enn.* VI 3, 23, 1-4).

Now Plotinus thinks that souls, being immaterial entities, are quite distinct from bodies. So we may wonder whether we can use change in bodies as a model to explain change in the soul at all or whether changes that occur in souls are rather fundamentally different from changes in bodies. One important difference is certainly this: according to Plotinus there cannot be any mental activity that would count as an affection of the soul in the sense that the soul, through such an affection, would be subject to an alteration. In the case of bodies, by contrast, such alterations are clearly possible and regularly occur in fact. Let us briefly look at sense perception as an example to illustrate this.

At *Enn.* III 6, 1-4 Plotinus states:

« We said that sense perceptions are not affections but activities and judgments concerning affections; affections belong to something else, for instance to the qualified body, while the judgment belongs to the soul because the judgment is not an affection... ».

Plotinus calls sense perception a judgment (*krisis*) in this passage and insists that the soul is not affected when perceiving. He also states that the thing that is affected by perception is a body. As Emilsson has shown, the judgment mentioned in this passage possesses (like in Alexander of Aphrodisias) the same function as assent possesses in Stoic epistemology: it is an assent to an impression or presentation<sup>33</sup>. In the same context, still discussing sense perception, Plotinus states: « the activity [of sense perception] is not an alteration but it [i.e. the soul] simultaneously approaches what it possesses » (*Enn.* III 6, 2, 35f.). The soul « approaches what it possesses » in the sense that, when perceiving, it does so by means of innate concepts. So perception in the soul is crucially the activation of concepts that the soul already possesses and thus it is an actualization of a capacity. Having clarified this, we may still call mental activities (such as that of sense perception) affections as long as we distinguish them from affections that are alterations. In doing so we may refer to Aristotle who, in *DA*, II, 5, distinguishes two uses of the term 'affection': In one use, 'affection' refers to the actualization of a potentiality and Aristotle insists that this actualization is not an alteration. This notion of affection is available to Plotinus, too, when he discusses affections

<sup>33</sup> E. K. EMILSSON, *Plotinus on Sense-Perception*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1988, ch. 7.

of the soul. Of course, in Plotinus, the actualization occurs in the soul rather than in a hylemorphic whole of which the soul is thought only to be the constitutive form (as opposed to a separate substance). Yet this does not imply that Plotinus cannot consider some kinds of mental activities as affections in the sense of actualizations of potentialities.

What is reasoning? Like sense perception, reasoning is a mental process. It is based on presentations and consists in analyzing them and relating them to one another: « For perception is reception of a form or of an affection of a body and *reasoning and opinion are based on perception* » (*Enn.* I 1, 2, 26f.). We receive further details in another passage:

« That which reasons in it [i.e. in the soul], in combining and dividing, makes its judgment about the presentations that are available to it as derived from sense perception; and, as for the things which come to it from the thinking part, it observes what one might call their impressions, and has the same capacity also in dealing with these... »<sup>34</sup>.

Thus, both sense perception and reasoning are mental processes occurring in the soul. When perceiving and when reasoning, the soul changes from one state to another, distinct, state. Now for many mental processes that occur in a temporal order it is fairly clear that they *cannot* occur at the same time and that they *must* be temporally ordered. Sense perception, for example, often depends on sensory objects in the sensible world in such a way that, while these objects are changing, the soul perceiving them is too<sup>35</sup>. However, it is far less clear whether we can generalize this and claim that, for *every* mental process, its various stages *cannot* occur at the same time (even though, of course, they *do not* occur at the same time as a matter of fact if they are stages of a mental *process*). So why is it in the case of reasoning that the different stages of the reasoning process do not occur at the same time? Plotinus seems to think that the fact that it is a process is explained through a certain weakness of the reasoning *subject* (namely a lack of understanding). So perhaps the fact that the different stages of a reasoning process occur in a temporal order is not grounded in a state of affairs according to which the object of thought possesses incompatible parts that could not be thought at the same time in the same soul. Rather mental processes occur (and are extended in time) due to limitations of the reasoning subject.

<sup>34</sup> *Enn.* V 3, 2, 7-13. The thinking part here is not the reasoning faculty but rather the part of the soul that eternally remains in the intelligible realm.

<sup>35</sup> Again, the sort of change may well be quite different: the body being perceived is altered while the soul perceiving it actualizes different concepts at different times.

However that may be, I hope these explanations of mental processes are sufficient to show that we can use change of bodies as a model to explain mental change even though at least many changes in bodies are alterations — a sort of change we do not find in souls. Both change in body and in soul are transitions from one state to another; both possess a subject of change, namely a body or a soul respectively. While it is true that bodies are quite distinct from souls, change in both cases relies on potentialities of a subject that get actualized through change. Finally, in both cases, while and in so far as change is present to the subject, rest is absent from it.

Before turning to *kinêsis* in the intelligible world, a note on translation. Up to now I have translated *kinêsis* as change. Both for Aristotle and for Plotinus' notion of *kinêsis* in the sensible world this is, I think, an adequate translation. However, in what follows I wish to turn to Plotinus' view of *kinêsis* in the intelligible world. We will see that 'change' would not be a good translation there. Instead, I will translate '*kinêsis*' as 'activity' if the word refers to *kinêsis* in the intelligible world.

Plotinus argues that the highest genera (or categories) of the intelligible world are the five highest genera of Plato's *Sophist*: *kinêsis*, *stasis*, being, sameness and difference. These genera are not exclusive: every item (at least every item that is not a highest genus) in the intelligible world participates in all five genera. At *Enn.* VI 2, 7 Plotinus discusses activity (*kinêsis*) as one of the highest genera and he considers this the genus of all life. The reason for emphasizing life is, I think, that Plotinus identifies the intelligible world with the Timaeon Living Being. Accordingly, everything in the intelligible world is alive. That is, everything in the intelligible world is active and belongs to the corresponding highest genus of *kinêsis*. Now even though there is activity in the intelligible world, there is no change. Everything in the intelligible world remains always the same. That is, everything also participates in the highest genus of *stasis*. Thus, *kinêsis* and *stasis* in the intelligible world do not exclude one another. Rather everything in the intelligible world participates not only in being but also in activity and stasis: « Hence, all things are being, activity and stasis; these are all-pervading genera, and each thing [in the intelligible world] that is posterior [to the highest genera] is a being, a stasis and an activity » (*Enn.* VI 2, 8, 25-27). A paradigm of static activity is intellectual contemplation which consists in an unchanging active state of understanding reality.

##### 5. THE PRACTICAL THINKING OF THE WORLD SOUL

I hope that these considerations have already indicated how we must distinguish between reasoning and understanding. Understanding is an activity that is static. It does not belong to the sensible world but rather to the intelligible world. By



contrast, reasoning is a form of change; it is not static. As long as one is reasoning and in so far as one is reasoning, one does not stand still. Earlier I quoted the following passage :

« For the person reasoning is looking to learn what the wise person already possesses. Hence, understanding (*phronein*) is in the one *who stands still*. The reasoning person herself is witness to this. For as soon as she finds what is necessary, she stops reasoning. And she has stopped because she has arrived at understanding »<sup>36</sup>.

Plotinus here explicitly claims that the person who possesses understanding *stands still*. The passage does not tell us whether the understanding of the wise person is a static *activity* or simply a disposition. However, in the case of the World Soul the case is clear. For the World Soul, possessing understanding, stands still in its cognitive *activity*<sup>37</sup>. Its understanding is neither a change in the sensible world nor an inactive state. It rather is an unchanging activity in the intelligible world.

What sort of understanding is it? As I stated initially, this paper focuses on the World Soul's *practical* thinking and not on its theoretical contemplation of the world of Forms. I now wish to show what I mean by 'practical thinking' and in particular that it is indeed unchanging according to Plotinus.

When discussing change in the sensible world, I claimed that change presupposes the subject of change to be in different states that are ordered: for every change (and for every stage of a change), there is a prior and a posterior state of the subject of change<sup>38</sup>. The sensible world as a whole is also subject to change. Thus, the sensible world as a whole, in so far as it is changing, must also be ordered according to prior and posterior. We may call this the temporal order of the sensible world. At *Enn.* III 7, 11, 35-40 Plotinus claims that, while in the intelligible world everything is together, in the sensible world one thing occurs after another. This presupposes that the latter possesses a temporal structure that allows things to occur at different times respectively, prior and posterior.

Establishing this order presupposes rationality, according to Plotinus. It matters greatly in what order things occur. After all, the sensible world is to be an excellent image of the world of Forms. The way in which the sensible world is organized is through providence. This is what Plotinus claims at *Enn.* III 3, 2, 6-11 :

« The all [i.e. the sensible world] is ordered by a general-like providence (*stratêgikê pronoia*) which sees the actions and experiences and what must be ready, food and

<sup>36</sup> *Enn.* IV 4, 12, 5-13.

<sup>37</sup> See the quotation from *Enn.* IV 4, 11, 11-13 above.

<sup>38</sup> I take Plotinus to refer to Aristotle's notion of prior and posterior in the latter's discussion of time and change. See *Phys.*, 219a20-21.

drink and not least all the weapons and war engines ; everything that occurs as a consequence of their being interwoven is foreseen, so that the result possesses room to be well ordered ; and everything comes in a well-planned way from the general... ».

The sensible world, thus, is providentially arranged : everything in it « is foreseen ». Moreover, everything is organized in a well-planned manner. We have already encountered this idea earlier when Plotinus attributed to Zeus providential foresight.

Here is another passage confirming that the rational order of the sensible world is due to divine providence. At *Enn.* IV 4, 39, 11-17 Plotinus compares the rationality (*logos*) that governs the world to the rationality that governs a state :

« But perhaps the rationality of the world is better compared to the rationality that establishes the order and law of a state — a rationality that already includes the knowledge of what the citizens are going to do and by account of what they are going to do it ; with a view to all of this, it legislates and weaves together by means of laws everything they experience and do and the honors and dishonors of their actions in such a manner that everything [in the state] happens as if it had been brought into harmony spontaneously »<sup>39</sup>.

Further evidence can be found in his two treatises on providence (*Enn.* III 1 and *Enn.* III 2-3)<sup>40</sup>.

The view that providence is or presupposes knowledge of the future and that the World Soul possesses this sort of knowledge can also be found in our passage. Plotinus makes it clear that the providential arrangement (*dioikêsis*) of the sensible world presupposes understanding. At *Enn.* IV 4, 12, 18-22 Plotinus attributes more specifically knowledge of future events to the World Soul : « Moreover, if it also knows the future (*ta mellonta*) — it would be absurd to say that it does not — how will it not also know how they will turn out ? But if it also knows how they will turn out, why would it still need to reason and to compare the past to the present ? ». Thus, the World Soul knows the future of what it is sempiternally producing.

<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, this passage claims that the sensible world is ordered by means of *laws*. This idea goes back (at least) to later Stoics, such as Seneca, who also believe that the government of the sensible world is accomplished by a law that they call the law of nature. It is important to note that this law of nature accounts not only for the factual order of the world but also, normatively, for its goodness : due to Fate the factual and the normative order coincide (SENECA, *Prov.*, 5.6f.). This does neither in Stoicism nor in Plotinus imply that providence does not care for everything down to the smallest detail. In any case, as his comparison with the state shows, Plotinus does not believe in such an implication.

<sup>40</sup> See also E. SONG, *Aufstieg und Abstieg der Seele. Diesseitigkeit und Jenseitigkeit in Plotins Ethik der Sorge*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2009, and CALUORI, *Plotinus on the Soul*, ch. 2.

In the same passage, Plotinus insists that the knowledge of the future that the World Soul possesses is not the sort of knowledge of the future that a diviner possesses. What is the difference? One difference is that the World Soul's wisdom, as opposed to the diviner's knowledge, is productive<sup>41</sup>. Another difference is this: Divination works on the basis of signs that are present to the diviner and on the basis of which the diviner predicts future events. A distinction between present and future, a temporal distinction, is thus a crucial element of the art of divination. Moreover, the diviner herself is in time, now predicting events that are to occur later relative to the diviner's present. The wisdom of the World Soul, however, is different: « The wisdom about the future and that about the present are the same through standing still » (*Enn.* IV 4, 26-28).

These claims lead to at least two problems. First, if the sensible world, in all its complexity, is arranged by divine providence and if the World Soul knows how to arrange the sensible world in such a way as to include everything down to the smallest detail — how can the understanding of this arrangement be unchanging? How could it possibly know *what* to do *when* if its thinking is unchanging? I claimed above that it is crucial for the ordinary craftsman himself to be *in* time so that he knows *when* the walls are to be ready so as to put a roof on top. Note that he must not only know that they are ready on Wednesday, for example, but rather also when Wednesday is in relation to his present (that it is the day after tomorrow, for example). If the cognitive activity of the builder of the house was exclusively unchanging, he would be outside of the temporal order: how could he possibly know that *now* this or that must be done? If he was outside of the temporal order, there would be no now, no present, to him.

Second, one may wonder whether the World Soul's thinking should not rather be called 'productive' (as opposed to practical) thinking, because, one may think, the aim or *telos* of its thinking is, after all, the sensible world that it produces. And, one may think, practical thinking is not productive. Let us consider the second question first. The distinction between practical, non-productive action and productive action I have in mind here is Aristotle's. At *EN*, 1140b6-7 he states: « For while producing has an end other than itself, this cannot be the case for action. For the action's being good (*eupraxia*) is itself its end ». Accordingly, Aristotle also distinguishes between practical wisdom and craft in that the

<sup>41</sup> Galen, in his *On Prognosis*, discusses the difference between medicine and divination. This is important to him because both medical prognosis and divination are about the future. Both arts rely on signs. However, he points out that one crucial difference is that medicine, as opposed to divination, is productive. See P. VAN NUFFELEN, *Galen, Divination and the Status of Medicine*, « The Classical Quarterly », 64, 2014, pp. 337-352.

former is concerned with non-productive action while crafts are concerned with production (*EN*, 1140b1-6)<sup>42</sup>.

Our discussion so far has shown that Plotinus crucially does not distinguish the sort of actuality that building a house is, for example, from the sort of actuality that dancing is; they are actualities of the same sort. They are both complete also in the sense that neither has its goal or *telos* outside of itself. But if so, then Plotinus will not accept Aristotle's distinction between practical wisdom and craft (*technê*) either. Now if this is right then Plotinus will have to explain the following consequence. If the World Soul's thinking whose intentional object is a sensible world (the thinking I call 'practical') does not possess a goal outside of itself then the aim (*telos*) of the creation and maintenance of the sensible world (which is the exercise of a craft) is not the sensible world. For if the sensible world was the aim of the World Soul's productive thinking, the World Soul's productive thinking would « have an end other than itself ».

Now in our passage, *Enn.* IV 4, 11-12, Plotinus explicitly calls the World Soul a producer and compares its activity to that of a perfect (and wise) craftsman. But how is it possible that productive activity (and thus also productive thinking) has its aim in itself and not in the product it produces? In an earlier paper I argued that Plotinus found a solution to this problem in Stoicism<sup>43</sup>. According to the second *telos*-formula of Antipater the goal of life consists in « doing everything in one's power, constantly and unwaveringly, to obtain the primary natural things » (*SVF* III, p. 253.3-7)<sup>44</sup>. Now what the Stoics think crucial is that one does this, not in order to obtain the primary natural things, but rather *in order to do everything in one's power* to obtain them. The Stoics illustrate this with the example of the archer who does everything in his power to hit the mark — not *in order to hit the mark* but rather *in order to do everything in his power to hit the mark* (*Cic., Fin.*, III 22). In other words, what the Stoic archer is really after is exercising his art skillfully. Whether or not he hits the mark is indifferent to him<sup>45</sup>. It is in this sense not his (external) *aim* to hit the mark.

<sup>42</sup> For Aristotle's distinction see V. POLITIS, *Aristotle's Advocacy of Non-productive Action*, « *Ancient Philosophy* », 18, 1998, pp. 353-279.

<sup>43</sup> D. CALUORI, *The essential functions of a Plotinian soul*, « *Rhizai* », 2, 2005, pp. 75-93. Note that the Stoics, as opposed to Aristotle, considered the good life to be based on a *craft* (the *technê tou biou*).

<sup>44</sup> Primary natural things are things that, according to the Stoics, are not good but rather indifferent. Yet they do have value and are thus preferred indifferents.

<sup>45</sup> For the Stoics on this point see G. STRIKER, *Antipater, or the art of living*, in EAD. ed., *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996, pp. 298-315. There is dispute as to whether it is completely irrelevant, according to the Stoics, or only qualifiedly so (for the goodness of the person's life). I remain neutral on the question of interpretation of the Stoics but I suggest that Plotinus understood the Stoic point in the unqualified sense.

In analogy, the aim of the thinking of the Plotinian World Soul about the creation and maintenance of a sensible world (and of the ensuing activity which leads to the creation and maintenance of the sensible world) is not the sensible world (as an external product). The World Soul rather aims at thinking properly about the creation and maintenance of a sensible world. In other words, the World Soul, being a supremely rational being, aims at exercising its practical rationality skillfully and perfectly. Hence, the practical thinking of the World Soul possesses its aim in itself. There is thus no essential difference between non-productive practical thinking and productive thinking ('thinking' in the sense of understanding).

The fact that the World Soul's practical aim exclusively consists in thinking properly about the creation and maintenance of a sensible world does not imply that it is not motivated to create and maintain the sensible world. Rather, its rational motivation to do so belongs to the exercise of its rationality. Plotinus states at *Enn.* IV 4, 12, 43-47: « But in works which one masters alone, what else would someone need than himself and his will (*boulêsis*)? But this is the same as his wisdom. Thus, someone like that does not need anything else for production... ». The proper practical thinking whose intentional object is a sensible world has as a consequence the creation and maintenance of a sensible world<sup>46</sup>.

This leads us to the first question asked above. Given the enormous complexity of the sensible world, how is it possible for the World Soul, by unchangingly thinking about the order of a sensible world, to act in it so as to make it an excellent image of the world of Forms? Now if the World Soul's activity in the sensible world itself varies so that it depends on *when* the World Soul does *what* then it is indeed hard to see how the World Soul should be able to do so without being subject to change. Doing different things at different times, the later things depending on earlier achievements, presupposes that one is aware of when to do what. Moreover, one has to be aware of it *at the right time*. In other words, the agent herself must also be *in* the temporal order in which she acts. In such cases, there will be a now at which the agent does something that she has not done before.

However, if my activity is uniformly and regularly the same then I am able to be engaged in this activity without ever directing my attention to it (assuming that no one will ever interfere; that I will be able to do it without effort and without

<sup>46</sup> For how this works see D. CALUORI, *Reason and Necessity: The Descent of the Philosopher Kings*, « Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy », 40, 2011, pp. 7-27. Explaining this from the point of view of Plotinus' distinction of internal and external activity see C. RUTTEN, *La doctrine des deux actes dans la philosophie de Plotin*, « Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'étranger », 146, 1956, pp. 100-106; A. C. LLOYD, *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1990, pp. 98-107; D. O'MEARA, *Plotinus. An Introduction to the Enneads*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1993, chs. 6-7; and EMILSSON, *Plotinus on Sense-Perception*, ch. 1f.

getting tired etc.). I do not need to know that *now* I have to do this or that in particular if what I do now is no different from what I did before or what I will do later. In other words, I can exercise a uniform and regular activity without there being a now at which I have to do this or that in particular. For if my activity always remains exactly the same then, as far as this activity is concerned, it is not necessary to make temporal distinctions. If so, it is not necessary to assume that an agent engaged in such a uniform and regular activity is herself in time.

It seems to me that we can indeed attribute to the World Soul such a uniform and regular activity. At *Enn.* IV 8, 2, 28 Plotinus claims that the World Soul rules the sensible world by means of an effortless command<sup>47</sup>. What is this effortless command? In order to understand what Plotinus means here, it is worthwhile to look at a passage in the pseudo-Aristotelian *De Mundo*<sup>48</sup>. There are so many textual similarities between *Enn.* IV 8 and *De Mundo* that it seems clear that Plotinus knew either *De Mundo* or a text dependent on it (or on which it depended). I suggest that *De Mundo* helps us understand the World Soul's effortless command. The author of *De Mundo* explains how God rules the sensible world as follows: « by means of a simple revolution of the whole heaven completed in a night and a day, the various motions of all the heavenly bodies are initiated » (*Mu.*, 399a1-6). Now the Plotinian World Soul, just like *De Mundo*'s God, commands all the stars to move in such a way as to establish the cosmic order of the sensible world. The World Soul does so by means of a simple revolution of the whole heaven. The World Soul's own *immediate* activity in the sensible world is, if this interpretation is correct, the movement of the sphere of the fixed stars. It is a regular and uniform activity that will never be in need of the World Soul's attention. In order to be active in this way, the World Soul does not need to be in time. Rather, it sempiternally keeps the sphere of the fixed stars at the same speed on the same path. Of course, it does so knowing that by doing so it will make sure that the whole sensible world (and not just the outermost sphere) is an excellent image of the world of Forms.

Perhaps this explanation of the World Soul's activity does not appear satisfactory because Plotinus in many passages clearly holds that the World Soul is active *throughout* the sensible world, being thus active in various ways which go far beyond the movement of the outermost sphere (for example at *Enn.* IV 3, 22). So

<sup>47</sup> See also *Enn.* IV 8, 2, 16.

<sup>48</sup> For a comparison see C. TORNAU, *Plotin. Enneaden VI 4-5 [22-23]. Ein Kommentar*, Teubner, Stuttgart - Leipzig 1998, pp. 66-68. Tornau discusses a difference between the Ps. Aristotle and Plotinus according to which Ps. Aristotle locates God in space while Plotinus does not. I do not think that this difference affects the point I am making in this paper.

how can the World Soul be active in the whole sensible world if what I argued above is true? Again, *De Mundo* can help:

«For God is truly the preserver of everything and the creator of whatever is completed in this world without, however, taking upon himself the toil of a self-working and laborious living being. Instead, he uses an indefatigable power by means of which he prevails even over what appears remote »<sup>49</sup>.

The author of *De Mundo* identifies as a mistake the view of his opponents that what God's divine power does is the immediate work of God. In the following lines, he compares God to the Persian Great King who, although being the king of a huge empire and thus arranging everything in it, did not even have to leave his palace in order to do so. Instead, he remained there, using his power to arrange things in his realm. What holds true of the Great King, our author claims, also applies to God: «it is more honorable, more becoming for him to reside in the highest place, while his power, penetrating the whole cosmos, moves sun and moon and turns the whole heaven and is the cause of the preservation for the things upon Earth » (*Mu.*, 398b6-10). These considerations solve our problem if we assume that the activity of the World Soul's power (the power penetrating the whole sensible world) is not an *immediate* activity of the World Soul. And, indeed, there is no reason to insist that the World Soul is *immediately* active in the sensible world other than by moving the outermost sphere.

For here is an alternative: apart from the movement of the outermost sphere, the World Soul's power in the sensible world is exercised — not immediately by the World Soul — but by other agents working on behalf of the World Soul. Consider again the Great King of Persia:

«the King himself, it is said, lived in Susa or Ecbatana, invisible to everyone, in a marvelous palace... Outside [the walls of the palace] the leaders and most distinguished men were drawn up in order, some as personal bodyguards and attendants to the King himself, some as guardians of each outer wall... and others — each responsible for taking care of a particular task, as they were necessary »<sup>50</sup>.

If the generals of the Great King fight and win a battle then the Great King has fought and won a battle. He is able to do so without ever leaving Susa or Ecbatana because his power is exercised by agents working in his name and on his behalf. Similarly, the work of the Plotinian World Soul in the sensible world

<sup>49</sup> *Mu.*, 397b20-24. Plotinus denies that the World Soul is self-working (*autourgos*) at *Enn.* IV 8, 2, 26-30, using the same expression as Ps. Aristotle.

<sup>50</sup> *Mu.*, 398a13-26.

is for the most part exercised by agents of the World Soul, most prominently by the stars who exercise the power of the World Soul and thus contribute, each according to its own function, to the order and excellence of the sensible world<sup>51</sup>.

## 6. CONCLUSION

I referred above to *Enn.* IV 4, 10 where Plotinus, focusing his discussion on the World Soul, sets aside the Craftsman by saying: « as far as the Craftsman is concerned, we must completely eliminate ‘earlier and later’ (*to prosô kai opisô*) by attributing to him a single unchangeable (*atrepton*) and timeless (*achronon*) life » (*Enn.* IV 4, 10, 4-6). I have argued that such an unchangeable and timeless life is also to be attributed to the World Soul even though part of its life consists in practical thinking. Given the results presented in this paper, nothing seems to hinder attributing the same sort of thinking also to the Craftsman himself if we find a way to distinguish between the Craftsman and the World Soul — a distinction on which Plotinus insists<sup>52</sup>.

<sup>51</sup> For more details see CALUORI, *Plotinus on the Soul*, ch. 5.

<sup>52</sup> For an attempt at doing so see CALUORI, *Plotinus on the Soul*, chs. 3 and 5.

## ABSTRACT

### *Divine Practical Thought in Plotinus*

Plotinus follows the *Timaeus* and the Platonist tradition before him in postulating the existence of a World Soul whose function it is to care for the sensible world as a whole. It is argued that, since the sensible world is providentially arranged, the World Soul’s care presupposes a sort of practical thinking that is as timeless as intellectual contemplation. To explain why this thinking is *practical*, the paper discusses Plotinus’ view on Aristotle’s distinction between *praxis* and *poiêsis*. To explain why it is *timeless*, it studies Plotinus’ view on Aristotle’s distinction between complete and incomplete actuality. The focus is on *Enn.* IV 4, 9-12.

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