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The Essential Functions of a Plotinian Soul

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In reading Plotinus one might get the impression that the essential functions of a Plotinian soul are very similar to those of an Aristotelian soul. Plotinus talks of such vegetative functions as growth, nurture and reproduction. He discusses such animal functions as sense perception, imagination and memory. And he attributes such functions as reasoning, judging and having opinions to the soul. In *Plotinus' Psychology,* Blumenthal bases his whole discussion of the soul on an analysis of these functions. He concludes that Plotinus 'saw the soul's activities as the functions of a series of faculties which were basically those of Aristotle' (Blumenthal (1971), 135).

This conclusion seems to fit uneasily, however, with other claims which we find in Plotinus. At *Enn.* VI.3.1.21-28, for example, Plotinus claims that the soul belongs to the intelligible realm and that it is a foreigner in the sensible world.[1] Given its belonging to the intelligible realm, we would rather expect the soul's essential functions also to belong to this. We might expect the soul, for example, to be basically engaged in the contemplation of intelligible entities, such as Platonic Forms. Moreover, if the soul is a foreigner in the sensible world, one wonders whether the functions to which Blumenthal refers are, for Plotinus, essential functions of the soul. And if so, one might also wonder whether the essential functions of the soul in Plotinus really are those of Aristotle.

In this article I shall focus on two functions that, I will argue, are the two essential functions of the soul. The discussion of these two functions will, I hope, put the various functions mentioned above into perspective and show that the essential functions of the soul – far from being basically those of Aristotle – are those of a Platonist. Before considering the two functions of the soul, however, let us first briefly discuss in what sense we might wish to talk of functions of the soul at all. I will base this discussion on Plato and Aristotle. This will help us, I hope, to better understand Plotinus' position.

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[1] See also, e.g., *Enn.* I.6.8.16; IV.8.1.19; IV.8.5.5.

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Living things differ from non-living things in various ways. They can do many things that non-living things cannot do. A lemon tree bears fruit, and a lion sees its prey and pursues it. Human beings think about their future and make decisions. In order to explain the manifold behaviour of living beings, ancient philosophers introduced the notion of the soul. The soul enters an explanation of the behaviour of living things in basically two ways. Either the functions (or at least some of the functions) that make a living being a living being are attributed to the soul or they (or at least some of them) are attributed to the living being *in virtue of having a soul*. Aristotle famously attributes the functions that make a living being of a certain kind a living being of this kind to the composite of body and soul. He believes that the composite possesses these functions in virtue of having a soul. Plato, too, claims that the thing that makes a living being a living being is the soul (e.g. *Phd*. 105C). But, unlike Aristotle, Plato attributes at least some of the functions of the composite living being to the soul alone and not to the composite. The composite living being only possesses them, according to Plato, in a derivative sense. If it has any role to play at all, the body is at most the tool by which these functions get exercised. At *Timaeus* 45AB, for example, Plato explains that sense organs are instruments that the soul uses in order to perceive. Thus, according to Plato, the soul is not only the thing in virtue of which living beings are able to exercise sense perception, but it is also the proper subject of sense perception. Hence, unlike Aristotle, Plato makes room for functions which belong to the soul alone and for whose exercise the body is no more than a tool.

But according to Plato the soul is also active in a further way. It can exercise certain functions without any involvement of the body. In such a way the soul is able, for example, to grasp intelligible entities such as mathematical objects or Forms. What is more, the body, according to the *Phaedo* (79C), far from being a tool for this kind of cognition, is actually a hindrance to it. Thus in order to contemplate entities of these kinds, it is better for the soul to be on its own and without a body (*Phd*. 79Dff.). In this way the soul has its own life – a life that is independent of the body.

Thus both Plato and Aristotle believe that we need to attribute certain functions to living beings in order to explain their behaviour. In order to account for these functions they both introduce the notion of the soul. However, the notion of the soul enters the explanation in different ways. While Aristotle thinks that the functions of living beings are not functions of the soul but functions that the living being possesses in virtue of having a soul, Plato thinks

that, properly speaking, these functions (or at least some of them) belong to the soul. Moreover, Plato – as opposed to Aristotle – believes that the soul possesses functions that are independent of the body and in whose exercise the body has no role to play. These functions constitute the soul's own life.

Given the fact that Plotinus is a Platonist, it is not surprising that he sides with Plato in this discussion. He rejects the Peripatetic notion of the soul and in doing so he also rejects the Aristotelian conception of the functions that are related to the soul in the way discussed above. According to Plotinus the idea that the soul is essentially the thing in virtue of which corporeal living beings have certain functions is misguided. The reason why Plotinus thinks this can most easily be seen in his discussion of the way in which the late antique Peripatetics believed the soul to be in the body.

According to Alexander of Aphrodisias, for example, everyone agrees that the soul is in the body (*DA* 13.9ff.). In some sense Plotinus would also agree with this claim. It is not obvious, however, in what sense the soul is supposed to be in the body because the expression 'being in' is ambiguous. And here Plotinus disagrees with the Peripatetics. According to Alexander the soul is in the body in the sense in which the form is in the composite. Alexander illustrates this way of *being in* with the form of the statue and the statue (*DA* 13.24ff.). Plotinus objects to this and similar views with two arguments. Firstly, in his view the Peripatetic claim amounts to saying that the soul is what it is of something else, namely of the body; thus the soul depends for its being on the body.[2] According to Plotinus, however, it is rather the other way round. The body depends for its being on the soul while the soul is independent of the body.[3] This is due to the fact that the soul is an οὐσία. (*Enn.* IV.7.8[5].40-43). Secondly, if the soul were the form of a body, then it would be inseparable from the body just as the form of the statue is inseparable from the statue. But the soul is, according to Plotinus, separable from the body (*Enn.* IV.3.20.27-30). I do not wish to discuss the merits of these arguments. In order to make them convincing we would have to elaborate on them in much more detail. All that is important for our purposes is that the premises of these arguments reveal something important about Plotinus' conception of the soul. They show that, according to Plotinus, the soul is a separate οὐσία.

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[2] For a further discussion see Corrigan (1996), 111.

[3] For this reason, Plotinus claims (following *Timaeus* 36DE) that we should say that the body is in the soul rather than that the soul is in the body (*Enn.* IV.3.22.7-11).

The fact that the soul is a separate οὐσία allows for the claim that the soul is not only responsible for its body but is also something that has a life of its own.[4] We have seen above that this is Plato's view. Depending on how strong the separation of body and soul is, it even allows for theories according to which body and soul become separate to the extent that the latter loses its function as being the thing that gives life to bodies. Descartes' dualism, for example, is such a theory. Descartes abandons the soul as a principle for explaining the behaviour of living bodies because he no longer considers it necessary. By means of his new physics he believes himself to be able to account for the behaviour of living bodies in essentially the same way that he accounts for that of non-living ones. That being done, the soul becomes superfluous for the explanation of living bodies.

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Whilst following Plato in believing that the soul has a life of its own, Plotinus does not go as far as Descartes. He still believes that the soul gives life to bodies (*Enn.* IV.7.9.6ff.). However, the giving of life to bodies is not essential to the soul. Instead, it is only the soul's *external* activity. This external activity follows from the soul's *internal* activity or, what amounts to the same, from the life that the soul possesses on its own. The soul's own life is, as I shall argue, constituted by the soul's two essential functions. We will consider in more detail how the soul's external activity follows its exercise of the two essential functions. Before doing so, however, let us first ask what these essential functions are.

We can find an answer to this question in the following passage. At *Enn.* IV.8.3.25-27 Plotinus claims: 'But when it [i.e. the soul] looks to what comes before it, it exercises its intelligence, when it looks to itself it sets in order what comes after it and directs it and rules it...'[5] I shall suggest that the looking to what comes before it is the soul's first essential function and that the looking to itself is the soul's second essential function. In what follows I shall try to explain how these two functions are to be understood.

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[4] See, e.g., *Enn.* IV.7.9.6-9: 'For the soul is the origin of motion and is responsible for the motion of other things and it is moved by itself, and gives life to the ensouled body, but has it of itself, and never loses it because it has it of itself' (Armstrong's translation).

[5] Βλέπουσα δὲ πρὸς μὲν τὸ πρὸ ἑαυτῆς νοεῖ, εἰς δὲ ἑαυτὴν τὸ μετ᾽ αὐτὴν κοσμεῖ τε καὶ διοικεῖ καὶ ἄρχει αὐτοῦ κτλ.

The first function of the soul is its looking to what comes before it. In order to explain what this means we have to explain, firstly, what the thing is that the soul looks to and, secondly, what the looking to consists in. Let us first deal with the former point. The being that is before the soul is the intellect.[6] The intellect is an entity that has its own kind of activity. Following Plato, for example in the *Republic*'s simile of the line, Plotinus believes the intellect to be the proper subject of grasping Forms. The corresponding activity of grasping, or intellection (νοεῖν), is the intellect's essential activity (*Enn.* V.3.7.18-20). Thus the intellect's activity consists in the grasping or understanding of Platonic Forms which constitute the realm of true being and reality. Plotinus does not think, however, that the intellect and the world of Forms are two distinct entities. The world of Forms is in no way separate from the intellect (*Enn.* V.4.2.46ff.). Instead, intellect and the world of Forms are identical.[7] Thus the intellect contemplates itself and sees the world of Forms. Since the intellect is the world of Forms, the soul, too, when looking at the intellect, sees the world of Forms and thus true reality and being.

Let us now turn to the second point and try to explain what the soul's looking at consists in. It is the soul's intellectual activity or – as Armstrong translates – the exercise of its intelligence. This activity is constitutive of the soul. It is an activity that essentially belongs to the soul.[8] But, if this is so, the following problem arises. The intellect's essential activity consists in the contemplation of these Forms. If the soul's essential activity consists in the very same type of contemplation of the very same objects as the intellect's, does not the soul itself become an intellect? Moreover, what Armstrong translates as 'exercise of its intelligence' is the Greek word 'νοεῖν' which we would expect to refer to the activity of the intellect (νοῦς). But if the soul, in its contemplation of Forms, does not differ from the intellect, how can this activity be constitutive of the soul? The answer to this is, I think, the following.

The soul's intellectual activity is not intellection properly speaking. Accordingly, the word 'νοεῖν' is ambiguous. The soul has its own way of understanding the eternal truths of the intellect. This consists in its understanding

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[6] At *Enn.* V.1.3.4-9, e.g., Plotinus calls the intellect the soul's upper neighbour.

[7] The view that the world of Forms is not separate from the intellect was already held in Middle Platonism. Some Middle Platonists believed that Forms are thoughts in the mind of God. See, e.g., Seneca, *Letter 65* or Philo of Alexandria, *Opif.* 16, Alcinoos, *Didask.* chs. 9-10. See also Pépin (1956) and Armstrong (1960).

[8] See, e.g., *Enn.* III.9.5: 'The soul itself must be like sight and what it sees is intellect; before it sees it is indeterminate, but naturally adapted to intellection'.

of λόγοι (e.g. *Enn.* III.2.2.15; III.5.9.17-23).[9] Together, these λόγοι constitute a whole which is (at least) analogous to the whole of an axiomatic science. In the latter, many different λόγοι are connected with each other by deductive relations. Understanding the science consists in understanding the λόγοι and their interconnections. But, of course, the point of the science does not consist in an understanding of the λόγοι alone. Rather it consists in understanding the *objects* of the science. If I understand geometry, I understand the definition of a circle, the Pythagorean theorem etc. All of these are λόγοι. But in understanding these λόγοι, I understand what a circle is and I understand what properties a triangle possesses. These are *objects* of geometry, and I cannot grasp them immediately. I cannot immediately grasp the circle, for example. However, I can grasp the circle indirectly in grasping its definition. More generally, the only means to grasp a geometrical object is, for me, to grasp it through the science of geometry. The analogy would be that the intellect immediately grasps the objects themselves, i.e. the objects that are analogous to the circle, the triangle etc. It does not need any kind of mediation. The soul, on the other hand, cannot have immediate cognitive access to these objects. Instead it grasps the λόγοι in virtue of which it understands the intelligible objects. It grasps, for example, the definition of the circle or the theorem of Pythagoras, and only in this way can it understand the circle or certain properties of triangles.

This way of grasping objects is not restricted to mathematics. According to Plotinus, metaphysics (or dialectic) also proceeds in this way. The objects of metaphysics are – for a Platonist – Forms. Let us look at one example. If we wish to understand what a human being is (i.e. the Form *Human Being*) then we might try to find a definition, for example 'rational living being', a definition that we also find in Plotinus (*Enn.* VI.7.4.11). According to Plotinus, I take it, this definition grasps what, according to the soul, the Form *Human Being* is. In grasping *Human Being* in this way, we already grasp it as a λόγος consisting of two parts. As Plotinus puts it at *Enn.* VI.7.10.15f.: 'And the λόγος is living being and something else, which is not identical with living being.'[10]

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[9] As already Witt discovered: 'Soul, by beholding the eternal Ideas, conceives immaterial λόγοι' (Witt (1931), 106). Witt does not explain, however, the difference between the soul's and the intellect's contemplation of Forms. Rist (1967) devotes a whole chapter to the λόγος. According to his interpretation, the λόγος has only a creative role to play in Plotinus and he does not seem to consider that it has a function in the contemplation of the intellect.

[10] καὶ ὁ λόγος δὲ ζῷον καὶ ἄλλο τι, ὃ μὴ ταὐτὸν τῷ ζῷον.

The 'something else' being, I assume, the specific difference that distinguishes *Human Being* from all other species of living being. On the level of intellect, these two parts of the definition (the 'living being' and the 'something else') are not two distinct parts. They are only aspects of one thing, the Form *Human Being*. This Form is such, however, that it can be unfolded into a definition on the level of soul.

This is one way in which the soul's contemplation of Forms differs from the intellect's contemplation of the very same Forms. The soul grasps the Forms via λόγοι while the intellect grasps them immediately. The other way is closely related to the first one. The intellect grasps all Forms at once. Its cognitive activity is in this sense holistic. The soul, however, is able to think about one λόγος at a time without necessarily actively thinking about all other λόγοι at the very same time. Compare the soul to a mathematician who is in the middle of proving some theorem. The mathematician knows at each step of his proof all the axioms, definitions and theorems that are necessary for the whole proof. This does not imply, however, that he – at each step – actively thinks about all of them. He only actively thinks about those propositions that he needs for the next step in his proof. In a similar way, the soul knows all λόγοι and in this way it knows all Forms. But unlike the intellect, the soul does not necessarily actively think about all λόγοι (and so all Forms) at once.

Accordingly, the essential activity of the soul is not intellection properly speaking. In passages where he wishes to mark clearly the distinction between the intellect's and the soul's kind of thinking, Plotinus calls the latter dianoetic thinking (διάνοια) and contrasts it with intellection properly speaking (e.g. at *Enn.* V.5.1.38-39).[11] If the intellect's contemplation of the intelligible realm differs from the soul's in the way described, then the first essential function of the soul can be constitutive of the soul without making the difference between intellect and soul disappear.[12]

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As we shall see, the first function of the soul is related to its second function, and is even a presupposition for the exercise of the second function

[11] Compare also Lloyd (1969-70) and Lloyd (1986).

[12] Blumenthal (1974), 211 discusses, amongst other things, the problem considered here. This problem is resolved, I think, if we understand the soul's contemplation of the intellect in the way suggested above.

to which I now wish to turn. The second function has two parts, one theoretical and one practical. I will first discuss the theoretical part.

As we saw in the quotation above, the soul exercises its second function when it looks into itself. What it sees when it looks into itself, is, I think, the paradigm according to which the sensible world should be set in order, directed and ruled. Thus, the difference between the soul's first essential function and its second essential function is this. In its first essential function the soul contemplates the world of Forms. In its second essential function it sees in itself a paradigm for the sensible world. I shall explain this shortly.

But before doing so, let me discuss what might seem to be a puzzling aspect of the claim that the soul finds the paradigm of the sensible world in itself. For we might think that the intellect, who is the world of Forms, is the paradigm of the sensible world. It is a Platonic commonplace that the sensible world is an image of the world of Forms. Plato tells us in a famous passage of the *Timaeus*, for example, that the divine Craftsman looks at the Forms as a model for the creation of the sensible world (*Tim*. 39E), a passage that Plotinus discusses in detail at *Enn*. III.9.1. But if the world of Forms is the paradigm in whose image the sensible world is made and, as we have seen, the world of Forms is the intellect, then how can the soul find it in itself?

We have seen above that the soul sees Forms mediated through λόγοι. When the soul looks at itself it sees these λόγοι which unfold the content of Forms. In this sense there is no contradiction with the claim that the world of Forms is the paradigm of the sensible world. But according to Plotinus the unfolding into λόγοι is crucial in order to have a paradigm for the sensible world. What distinguishes the Forms as they are in the intellect from their representations as λόγοι in the soul is the structure that λόγοι – as opposed to Forms – possess. For λόγοι are predicationally structured. They are structured in such a way that there is a subject and an attribute, and that the attribute gets predicated of the subject. In a λόγος that unfolds a Form, for example, we find an essential predication that expresses the definition of the corresponding Form. I have already referred to Plotinus' use of the classic example of the definition of *Human Being*. In this way the soul not only possesses the content that it receives from the intellect and that it wants to realise in the sensible world. It also possesses this content in a predicational structure. Plotinus follows Aristotle in postulating that this predicational structure is the basic metaphysical structure of the sensible world. This can be seen from the fact that, according to Plotinus, the primary entities of the sensible world are sensible substances (namely bodies) of which all

other things in the sensible world can (either essentially or accidentally) be predicated (*Enn.* VI.3.8.9-11).

Thus, if the soul looks into itself then it sees λόγοι. These λόγοι represent the content of the world of Forms in a predicational structure. Represented in this way they are the paradigm of the sensible world. In this sense it is clear that Plotinus does follow Plato in believing that the sensible world is an image of the world of Forms. But according to Plotinus the soul needs to represent the content of the world of Forms in an appropriate way. This representation is provided by the theoretical part of the second function of the soul.

The difference between the soul's first function and the theoretical part of its second function might seem to be negligible. For already in its first function the soul sees the world of Forms unfolded as λόγοι. However, there is a crucial difference. Whereas the soul, in its first function, sees the λόγοι as representations of the world of Forms and contemplates the world of Forms via λόγοι, it sees the same λόγοι in the theoretical part of its second function as a paradigm of the sensible world. Thus, although the soul sees the same λόγοι in its first function and in the theoretical part of its second function, the λόγοι serve two distinct purposes. In the first function they provide the soul with the knowledge of the world of Forms whereas in the second function they provide the soul with a paradigm for the sensible world.

But the possession of a paradigm, although necessary, is not sufficient for giving order to and directing and ruling the sensible world (*Enn.* IV.8.3.25-27). For in order to do so, the soul also has to know how to achieve this aim. It has to know how to act in order to realise the paradigm. So the soul needs to have not only theoretical but also practical knowledge. This kind of knowledge is called practical wisdom (φρόνησις). It is the practical part of the second function. Before discussing further what practical knowledge consists in, I first wish to rule out a conception of practical knowledge that is not Plotinus'.

Influenced by Aristotle, we might think that the acquisition of practical knowledge requires experience and hence such things as sense perception and memory. This is not Plotinus' view. On the contrary, Plotinus thinks that sense perception and similar influences that come from the body tend to distract the soul and confuse it, so that instead of helping the soul acquire wisdom they rather tend to distract the soul from exercising the wisdom that it already possesses (*Enn.* IV.8.8.16-23).

I have already at the beginning of this article referred to a passage in Plato's *Phaedo* (79C) which states that sense perception is disturbing for the soul. Another such passage can be found in the *Timaeus*. According to *Timaeus* 42A there are two things that disturb a soul: on the one hand sense perception and

on the other things like desire, pain, and fear. I will call things of the latter type 'lower emotions'.[13] The context of the discussion in the *Timaeus* makes it clear that souls possess sense perception and lower emotions only if, and because, they are incarnated in human (or animal) bodies (cf. *Enn.* IV.8.8.16-23). They inform the soul about the state of the body and its environment and in this way help the soul to decide what action might be best suited to help the survival of its or – depending on the situation – another body. If my soul gets informed (by sense perception, perhaps combined with fear), for example, that a lion is about to attack me, my soul under normal circumstances would decide to make my body run away, or shoot the lion, or whatever else the soul considers appropriate.

There are embodied souls, however, who possess neither sense perception nor memory.[14] These souls are the souls of the stars and the World Soul. Plotinus argues for this conclusion at length (*Enn.* IV.4.6-17) and I do not wish to consider his discussion in any detail. Unlike souls incarnated in sublunary bodies, these souls have no need for sense perception or memory. Neither would lower emotions be of any use to them. The basic reason for this is, according to Plotinus, that their bodies, unlike ours, are perfect and do not need to have any kind of exchange with the environment.

Now the fact that these divine souls do not rely on any kind of experience does not prevent them from being wise. On the contrary – they are in a sempiternal state of wisdom and they rule what they have to rule on the basis of this practical wisdom. This can be seen from the following passage in which Plotinus considers the World Soul's administration (διοίκησις) of the sensible world: 'What discursive reasoning (λογισμός)[15] or what calculating or what memory can there be when practical wisdom is always present, active

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[13] I will call them 'lower emotions' because these emotions are due to the soul's sublunary incarnation and thus come, in Plotinian parlance, from below. They have to be contrasted with emotions that the soul possesses while, for example, contemplating the intellect. Examples of such emotions might be serenity or joy. In the present context I only wish to talk of lower emotions.

[14] To be precise: they possess the capacity for sense perception and memory but they will never exercise it.

[15] I am translating 'λογισμός' as 'discursive reasoning' and understand the word 'discursive reasoning' only in the restricted sense explained in this passage. Dianoetic reasoning (διάνοια), however, includes both discursive reasoning and the kind of dianoetic reasoning that, for example, the World Soul exercises. Dianoetic reasoning thus understood is quite generally the way in which the soul reasons – namely thinking in terms of λόγοι.

and ruling?' (*Enn.* IV.4.11.11ff.).[16] According to this passage the ruling of the sensible world is based on practical wisdom. Since the sensible world is ruled by the World Soul, the World Soul always rules on the basis of practical wisdom. But because the World Soul possesses practical wisdom there is no need for memory or discursive reasoning. In the same chapter, *Enn.* IV.4.11, Plotinus states that, unlike discursive reasoning (λογισμός), practical wisdom is unchanging (11.26). It is the aim of discursive reasoning. As soon as this aim is achieved there is no more change (*Enn.* IV.4.12.6f.).

In thinking discursively we try to decide how to act. The end of this process consists of practical wisdom. We are then in a state in which we *know* how to act. The World Soul is always in this state. Since it knows how to act it does not have to think about it discursively. In the same passage, Plotinus compares the relation of discursive reasoning and practical wisdom to the relation of learning to play the lyre and knowing how to play it. As soon as you know how to play the instrument, you are no longer learning how to play it.

Thus, the World Soul and the souls of the stars possess neither sense perception nor memory nor do they think discursively. Moreover, since there is no need for them to procreate because their bodies last forever, they do not have any vegetative functions. This clearly shows how different a Plotinian soul is from an Aristotelian soul. It also shows that the functions of the soul that I have listed at the beginning of this essay are not essential functions of the soul. The soul only makes use of them if it has to care for a sublunary body. For this reason we should not, I think, base our interpretation of Plotinus' psychology on them.[17]

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Let us now resume our discussion of what, according to Plotinus, practical knowledge is. We have seen that it is the knowledge which allows the soul to set in order, direct and rule what comes after it. Given that through its theoretical activity the soul knows the paradigm that it wants to realise in the sensible world, it also needs to know how to realise it. Let us come back to the example of Human

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[16] Τίς οὖν ὁ λογισμὸς ἢ τίς ἀρίθμησις ἢ τίς ἡ μνήμη παρούσης ἀεὶ φρονήσεως καὶ ἐνεργούσης καὶ κρατούσης καὶ κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ διοικούσης;

[17] However, a proponent of the Aristotelian line could still object that what is true of the World Soul and the souls of the stars does not apply to sublunary souls. In doing so he could try to restrict the Aristotelian interpretation of Plotinus' functions of the soul to souls in the sublunary world. I will argue against this below.

Being and assume that the λόγος by which the soul grasps the Form *Human Being* is 'rational animal'. In its practical function the soul has to think about how to realise the rational animal. The soul has to consider that in order to make a rational animal it has to create a body that is able to be acted upon in certain highly complex ways. Presumably a brain of high sophistication is necessary for the soul to act on the body in the appropriate way. This brain has to be placed into a head that is hard enough to offer reasonable protection to this delicate organ. The head, in its turn, has to be connected with a suitable trunk, arms, legs etc. The *Timaeus* provides us with a probable account of how a wise Craftsman might go about ordering the sensible world and the living beings in it.

In this way, practical decisions have to be taken; taking certain decisions influences further decision making, and makes some further decisions more attractive and others less so. Perhaps this aspect of the ordering of the sensible world can be compared to playing chess. Amongst possible opening moves there is a range of standard moves, none of which is intrinsically better than any other. But as soon as you have opened the game, some further moves (even if legal) are no longer reasonable to make because they would be bad moves, while others, depending on the opening move, are good moves. Among these further intrinsically equally good moves, again, the player has to choose and his decision will have consequences for the evaluation of further moves etc. In the same way the sensible world could have been ordered in various ways – some of them making it a perfect image of the world of Forms. But the soul, in its practical wisdom, has ordered it in one of these best possible ways. As we have seen, the soul in so far as it has practical wisdom has not had to go through a *process* of thinking about how the sensible world is best to be ordered. It did not have to reason discursively (λογίζεσθαι). Instead, it is in a sempiternal state of possessing the corresponding knowledge.

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Like the first function, the second function that I have discussed is an essential function of the soul (*Enn.* IV.7.10.13). If this is true then all souls possess this function. Plotinus' claim that the World Soul and the souls of the stars possess practical knowledge and base their actions on it may be convincing. But one might doubt whether the souls of sublunary beings do so. For they often take wrong decisions. But if so, then they do not base their decisions on practical knowledge and one wonders whether they possess practical knowledge at all. But if they do not possess practical knowledge then there are souls who lack the second function. But then, how can the second function be essential?

In order to answer this question, I firstly wish to point out that, according to Plotinus, the souls of sublunary beings sometimes do share with the World Soul in the government of the sensible world (e.g. *Enn.* IV.8.4.5-9). When a soul shares with the World Soul in the government of the sensible world, then it will base its actions on practical wisdom (and hence possess it) and be in full awareness of the paradigm of the sensible world. Moreover, Plotinus claims that a part of each of our souls always remains in the intelligible realm, even if our soul descends into the sublunary world (*Enn.* IV.8.8.1ff.). This part of our souls is in the same position as the World Soul and the souls of the stars. It sempiternally exercises its two essential functions. Despite their descent, then, our souls do not lose their wisdom. But through their descent they get confused and lose sight of it. This confusion is due to the fact mentioned earlier that they have to take into account sense perception and lower emotions in order to make decisions. We have already seen above that Plato in the *Phaedo* professes a similar view. The descent of the soul and the precise reason for the confusion are complicated issues and would need further elaboration. However, for present purposes it is sufficient to note that Plotinus accounts for the fact that souls in the sublunary world often do not base their decision on their practical wisdom but that this does not imply that these souls do not possess practical wisdom.

Although as a matter of fact very few souls do so, even souls in the sublunary world are principally able to base their decisions on practical knowledge. But decisions in the sublunary world are more complicated because they usually have to be taken in concrete situations. In order to take the right decisions of this kind the soul not only has to possess practical knowledge, it also has to know how concretely to apply it.[18] It has to think carefully about how to act thereby taking into account information that it receives, for example, through the senses.

A soul of a human being, for example, has to take decisions related to the feeding of its body, thereby taking notice of the concrete state of its body. Having taken notice of the body's need for food it has to think practically about how to go about feeding the body. It has to decide, for example, what kind of food is most appropriate, how to acquire this food, when to feed the body etc. Thus, in order to take the right decision in this case, the soul has to consider many concrete and contingent facts. The feeding of the body is something that the

[18] For the relationship between practical wisdom and its application also see, for example, Epictetus, *Diss.* II.11.

soul has to do because it has to care for its body.[19] It would be wrong for the soul, however, to ignore its body in order to focus – selfishly – on more lofty activities and thereby let the body starve to death. If the soul did so, it would not only harm its body but also itself because it would have taken a wrong decision.

From this example we can see that the souls in the sublunary world are also active there. The soul has to apply its practical knowledge, it has to make use of sense perception and memory, for example, and it has to think about many contingent facts. All these activities are necessary for the soul's work in the sublunary world. But not only the souls in the sublunary world but also the souls of the stars and the World Soul are active in the sensible world even if their work is less burdensome (*Enn.* IV.8.2.26-30). Thus, all souls are, in some way or other, active in the sensible world. However, their activity in the sensible world is not essential to them, as Plotinus argues at VI.8.5. Instead, they follow from the soul's practical knowledge (*Enn.* VI.8.5.31-37).

We might be puzzled here. For the soul's practical wisdom consists in knowing how the sensible world and the things in it should be arranged. Does this not imply that giving order to the sensible world is the aim of the soul's practical thinking? But if its aim is an activity in the sensible world then it is hard to believe that this activity is not essential to the soul. In order better to understand Plotinus' solution to this problem it is helpful, I think, to look at the following discussion in Stoicism. For it seems to me that Plotinus inherited the solution to this problem from there.[20]

For the Stoics, 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).[21] Now at the same time, according to the Stoics, the obtainment of the primary natural things is irrelevant to happiness. Some opponents of the Stoics thought that this amounts to a circle or at least to a paradox.[22] That it need

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[19] To rule out a possible misunderstanding: every soul has to care for the sensible world and not only for its body. It ought not to be egoistic in this sense. But under normal circumstances caring for the sensible world is – for a soul in the sublunary world – most easily done in caring for its particular body.

[20] For the following, see Striker (1996) and Reiner (1969).

[21] The primary natural things (τὰ κατὰ φύσιν), according to the Stoics, are those things whose acquisition or possession contributes to the maintenance of one's natural constitution (Cic. *Fin.* III.20). Under normal circumstances, health, for example, is one of them (Stob. II.83.10-84,2=SVF III, p. 30.6-13).

[22] For example, Plutarch, *Comm. Not.* 1070ff., Alexander of Aphrodisias, Mantissa 159.15ff.

not be can be seen from the famous example of the archer (Cic. *Fin*. III.22). The archer does everything in his power to hit the mark. But he does not do so, and this is the difficult part, in order to hit the mark. Instead he does so, in order to do everything in his power to hit the mark. As Striker remarks: 'This is, to be sure, complicated but not absurd' (Striker (1996), 305). It means that the archer aims at exercising his art skilfully. If he has exercised his art in such a way that – as far as what is in his power is concerned – the hitting of the mark follows from his exercise, then he has achieved his aim. This is what he was striving for. But it is not his aim to hit the mark. His hitting of the mark is only something that *follows* (or not) from the skilful exercise of his art. Thus he has fulfilled his task whether he has hit the mark or not – as long as he has done everything in his power to hit it. Whether, as a matter of fact, he hits the mark or not is completely irrelevant to the success of the archer's action. Understood in this way archery – just like acting and dancing (Cic. *Fin*. III.24-25) – has its aim in itself. For our purposes, however, the archer is a better example, because unlike the latter two, it takes into account the thing that follows from the exercise of the art – namely hitting the mark.

In the same way it is irrelevant for the Stoic sage to obtain the primary natural things. It is only relevant – and of the highest relevance indeed – that he has done everything in his power to obtain them. It is crucial that he thought about the obtainment of the primary natural things in the right way, for example, and that he has taken the right decisions to obtain them. The obtainment itself does not matter.

Let us now apply this Stoic idea to a Plotinian soul. The aim of the soul consists in the proper exercise of its essential functions and hence also in the proper exercise of its thinking about how to order the sensible world. But the aim of the soul does not consist in the arranging of the sensible world. The aim rather consists in the *thinking* about the arranging of the sensible world in the right way. The ordering of the sensible world follows from this thinking without being the aim of this thinking.

Let us look at an example. Let us assume that the soul of the moon thinks about the direction of the movement of its body. It will carefully take into account all relevant factors and it will consider which direction of the moon will be best for the sensible world. On the basis of this consideration it will take the right decision and decide in what direction its body has to be moved. Although, because of its thinking, the body of the moon will be moved precisely as wished by the soul of the moon, this physical movement was not the *aim* of the soul of the moon. The aim of the soul of the moon was rather to think about this in the right way and to take the right decision. Thus, although it is true

that the soul of the moon moves the body of the moon, this is not an essential function of the soul of the moon. It is rather a consequence that follows from the essential functions of the soul of the moon.

If we still have doubts as to whether we are entitled to use the above piece of Stoic ethics in Plotinus, then perhaps, the following consideration helps to dispel them. I wish briefly to consider two notions that are important in Plotinus' ontology in general, namely the notions of internal and external activity. I will then show that Plotinus uses these notions in the case of the soul in precisely the sense that I have suggested.

Plotinus uses the notions of internal and external activity on all levels of his ontological hierarchy.[23] He claims that the internal activity of something is essential to it and that by exercising its internal activity, an external, non-essential activity follows. Perhaps we can give at least some intuitive content to these claims if we look at the following examples (*Enn.* V.4.2.27-33; *Enn.* V.1.6.28-35). They will also show, I hope, how this relates to the above discussion of the Stoic τέλος-formula. The fire's essential activity (ἐνέργεια) is its being hot. But its heat also heats bodies in its environment. While the heat of the fire in itself belongs to the fire and is essential to it, the heating of other bodies is not an essential activity of the fire. But it follows from the essential activity of the fire. Analogously, snow's essential activity is being cold but it also cools bodies in its environment. The cooling of these bodies is not an essential, internal activity of the snow but rather its external activity. It follows from the snow's internal activity without being the aim of it. Although it seems difficult to spell out the details of this account – a task that would also go far beyond the scope of the present paper – the intuition behind these examples is perhaps sufficiently clear. [24]

Moreover, whatever its details, we can see that it shares crucial aspects with the discussion of the Stoic τέλος-formula. Plotinus' internal activity corresponds to the archer's exercise of his art while the external activity corresponds to the archer's hitting of the mark.[25] The internal activity of a thing

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[23] For a discussion of the relationship of internal and external activity and its place within Plotinus' ontology see O'Meara (1993), chs. 6-7.

[24] According to Rutten (1956), Lloyd (1987) and Lloyd (1990) the model goes back to Aristotle's Physics.

[25] While archery is a stochastic art, i.e. an art whose perfect exercise does not necessarily yield the expected consequence (an unexpected gust might blow the arrow off course), Plotinian external activities follow without exception their internal activities. For our purposes this difference does not matter.

does not aim at something outside itself. Through the exercise of it, however, an external activity (on a lower ontological level) follows.

Plotinus also uses the notions of internal and external activity in relation to the soul (*Enn.* IV.3.10.31-32). The soul lives a life of its own and it is also active in relation to what comes after it, namely the corporeal world. The soul's own life is its internal activity and the activity in relation to what comes after it, is its external activity. Plotinus explicitly states that the soul's activity in the sensible world, is its *external* activity. It 'goes out to something else' (10.36), namely to the corporeal world. It is this activity that 'makes alive all the other things which do not live of themselves [i.e. bodies], and makes them live the sort of life by which it lives itself' (ibid.).[26] As we would expect from the more general discussion of internal and external activity above, the soul's external activity is dependent on its internal activity. Plotinus claims that what the soul gives to the body is an *image* of life. The life of which the body receives an image is the soul's own life. It consists in its internal activity. 'So since it [the soul] lives in a λόγος, it gives a λόγος to the body, an image of that which it has...' (10.38-39).[27]

The internal activity of the soul consists in the exercise of its two essential functions, namely the contemplation of the intellect and the thinking about the ordering of the sensible world. This is the life of the soul – ideally a stable and unchanging life in the intelligible realm that does not aim at the ordering of the sensible world. The ordering of the sensible world is only the soul's external activity. Unlike its internal activity, the external activity is not essential to the soul. Instead it follows from the proper exercise of the two essential functions just like the hitting of the mark follows the proper exercise of the art of archery.

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If we now look back at the discussion of Plato's and Aristotle's views of the functions of the soul, we can clearly see that a Plotinian soul is very different from an Aristotelian one. Its essential functions are not at all those argued for by Aristotle. Even the exercise of the functions that we might be inclined to call Aristotelian is merely the soul's external activity and hence not essential to it.

Instead, Plotinus follows Plato. Like Plato, he claims that the soul has a life of its own – a life situated in the intelligible world, independent of, and

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[26] *Ζῆν οὖν καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ποιεῖ, ὅσα μὴ ζῇ παρ᾽ αὐτῶν, καὶ τοιαύτην ζωήν, καθ᾽ ἣν αὐτὴ ζῇ.*

[27] *Ζῶσα οὖν ἐν λόγῳ λόγον δίδωσι τῷ σώματι, εἴδωλον οὗ ἔχει κτλ.*

separate from, the body. Views of this sort were ubiquitous in late antiquity. But often it remains unclear how the soul's otherworldly life differs from that of an intellect. Plotinus, however, explains the soul's own life in the intelligible world as one consisting of two essential functions. In doing so he is able to draw a clear distinction between the soul's first function, its contemplation of the Forms, and that achieved by the intellect. The distinction drawn between intellect and soul, however, does not threaten its independence from the sensible world. Even in properly exercising its second function, its thinking about how to order the sensible world, the soul is not bound to it but retains its place in the intelligible world.[28]

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