

**External Examiner's Report on the Dissertation of Ota Gál "Beauty as Unity in Multiplicity in Plotinus" Submitted in 2019 at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies**

**I. Brief summary of the dissertation**

This thesis focuses on Plotinus' account of beauty against the wider background of Plotinus' metaphysics. After a chapter (1) devoted to some methodological issues, Ota Gál (henceforth OG) devotes two chapters (2-3) to Plotinus' treatises I.6 and V.8. The general outcome of his discussion is that beauty is primarily to be found in Intellect and that beauty is connected with unity in multiplicity. Chapter 4 investigates Plotinus' account of the Intellect and of its structure: in doing so, OG considers some key passages from treatises VI.6 and VI.2. Chapter 5 contains an extensive discussion of treatise VI.7 where OG outlines the relation subsisting between beauty, good, life and other predicates.

**II. Brief overall evaluation of the dissertation**

This is a good thesis that provides a comprehensive outline of Plotinus' metaphysics from a specific point of view (the account of beauty as unity in multiplicity). The work is based on an extensive knowledge of Plotinus' treatises and on an adequate knowledge of the critical debate. Whilst the thesis suffers from certain minor flaws (see below for details: some sections are paraphrastic; OG mentions passages from Plotinus without discussing these texts in detail; some issues raised by recent scholarship are neglected), the overall evaluation is good: this is a useful work which sheds light on several aspects of Plotinus' philosophy. I recommend this thesis for a public defence.

**III. Detailed evaluation of the dissertation and its individual aspects**

As said above, OG outlines Plotinus' views on beauty as unity in multiplicity and he does so through a detailed analysis of some treatises from the *Enneads*. These are Plotinus' two treatises on beauty (I.6 and V.8) and a set of related treatises (III.8; VI.2; VI.6; VI.7, etc.). The thesis is clearly structured; its objective is clear and the author is successful in pursuing that objective.

From a formal point of view, the thesis is consistent and accurate. As far as I can judge, the English is correct. Apart from some minor inaccuracies, I would notice that throughout his thesis OG consistently uses the term “Ennead” in order to designate each of Plotinus’ *treatises* (e.g. p. 3: “Is it then at all necessary to read both the *Enneads* on beauty separately?”; p. 11; “which is intrinsic to the *Enneads* of the *Großschrift*”, etc.). This is obviously wrong (“Ennead” denotes each *group* of 9 treatises in Porphyry’s edition of Plotinus).

OG’s use of primary and secondary sources is certainly correct. However this thesis suffers from a certain paraphrastic approach. At least some of Plotinus’ key passages should have been quoted and discussed in detail, with reference to the Greek text. Unfortunately, OG does not provide this kind of analysis and detailed paraphrases or summaries often replace philological and philosophical discussions. An outcome of OG.’s method is that some important issues in Plotinus’ philosophy are mentioned rather than really analysed. In addition to this, OG does not always integrate recent scholarship into his discussion and for this reason his arguments sometimes suffer from some shortcomings. For some examples, see below, Section IV.

These remarks are not meant to downplay OG’s contribution. On a number of issues, OG’s analysis is interesting and original. I would especially mention his valuable discussion about the relation between the account of number in treatise VI.6 and that of the supreme genera in treatise VI.2. The approach outlined at p. 100 seems very plausible: “The solution I propose, is not to try to connect individual kinds to particular types of number or to the monad and the dyad, but to understand them as related through the mediation of the problem of unity and multiplicity.” Further examples of OG’s insightful interpretation are the remarks devoted to the relation of grace and beauty in treatise VI.7, the account of the relation between life and beauty, the fine analysis of the Intellect’s being *agathoeidēs*.

#### **IV. Questions for the author**

As said above, OG mentions some important issues in Plotinus’ philosophy which would have deserved to be addressed in more detail.

Here are some examples: p. 51: “The following passages relate to the inner linkage of Intellect with itself, to each of its parts being a whole, which emphasizes the paradoxical nature of Intellect compared to the relationship between a scientific theorem and science as a whole (cf. V.8.4.47-50)”.

OG mentions this analogy, which plays a very important role in Plotinus' account of intelligible realities and of their structure that entails unity in multiplicity. Some important contributions are devoted to this subject: see in particular Ch. Tornau, 'Wissenschaft, Seele, Geist: Zur Bedeutung einer Analogie bei Plotin', *Göttinger Forum für Altertumswissenschaft*, 1, 1998, 87-111, which is unfortunately missing from OG's bibliography. Plotinus apparently uses the relation between single theorems and science as a whole in order to replace Aristotle's genus/species relation (see IV.3.2; VI.2.20). For all of these reasons, it would have been useful to have a precise commentary of passages where this analogy occurs (in particular VI.2.20). I would ask OG to focus more precisely on Plotinus' use of this analogy and on Plotinus' rejection of the part/whole model in explaining the structure of intelligible beings (see IV.3.2). Does OG think that these views are compatible with what he says about genera and principles in VI.2? As OG puts it, "as such, it [Intellect] must in some way be united by a limited number of highest kinds that are something like elements out of which the intelligible cosmos is constructed. In other words, the kinds Plotinus is looking for cannot be just genera (*genē*), i.e. that which has lesser genera, species and individuals under itself (cf. VI.2.2.12-13), but they must simultaneously be principles (*archai*), out of which the being is composed and the whole of being derived (*ek tūtōn to holon hyparchei*; cf. VI.2.2.13-14)". This certainly is a correct *paraphrase* of what Plotinus says at the beginning of VI.2, but the point is: how can a composition like that subsist in Intellect, given what OG correctly says e.g. about differentiation in Intellect at p. 53? Is there any internal tension in Plotinus' remarks?

Another example comes from p. 35: "If I am right in my assumption that the *Enneads* of the *Großschrift* are united by the focus on the controversy with the Gnostics, it is necessary to examine V.8 in the context of the other three *Enneads*, the preceding III.8 and following V.5 and II.9. Since V.8 comes after III.8 which is devoted to Plotinus' concept of contemplation, etc."

OG is somewhat overconfident in assessing the focus of Plotinus' *Großschrift* (if indeed there is anything like the *Großschrift*: OG refers to the *status quaestionis* in Dufour 2006, but after that work some very important contributions have been devoted to this issue: from different perspectives, Harders' hypothesis has been challenged by J.-M. Narbonne, *Plotinus in dialogue with the Gnostics*, Leiden, 2011 and C. D'Ancona, 'Modèles de causalité chez Plotin', *Les études philosophiques*, 90, 2009, pp.361-385: both of these contribution are missing from OG's bibliography). D'Ancona makes a very good case that Plotinus' main focus in III.8 is Aristotle's account of nature and motion rather than Gnosticism. I would ask OG to explain further his

reading of Plotinus' so-called *Großschrift*. For example: how would OG's explain Plotinus' notion of productive contemplation in treatise III.8 against the background of Aristotle's views about the status of art and *poiësis*? On these issues, D'Ancona has some important remarks, and the same holds for P.-M. Morel, 'Comment parler de la nature ? Sur le Traité 30 de Plotin', *Les études philosophiques*, 90, 2009, pp. 387-406 and J. Wilberding, 'Automatic Action in Plotinus', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 34, 2008, pp. 443-477 (this outstanding article is missing from OG's bibliography).

My third example comes from OG's section on VI.7.1-2. A detailed commentary of these chapters (or at least of some parts of them) would have been more than welcome. OG's paraphrase is based on Rappe 2002 and, while being generally correct, it remains too quick and superficial. OG writes: "Such notion of cause is based once again on Plotinus' understanding of Intellect as a specific unity in multiplicity where all parts are all the other parts and the whole (see chapter 3.15). He formulates this in Ennead VI.7 in Aristotelian terminology by saying that in Intellect, the essence of a thing (*to ti ên einai*) and its cause (*to dia ti*) coincide (cf. VI.7.2.13-16 and VI.7.3.20-22). By saying this however, Plotinus does not want to imply that the cause of everything is form, which is nevertheless true (cf. VI.7.2.16-18). Rather, he means that if we unfold each and every form back upon itself, we shall discover its cause in it (cf. VI.7.2.19). Plotinus paradoxically uses the verb *anaptyssō* with pros auto (scil. *to eidos*; O.G.)".

OG's interpretation of the verb *anaptyssō* in VI.7.2 seems plausible to me but, again, OG offers a mere paraphrasis of Plotinus' chapter rather than a proper discussion. In his note 118 OG refers to A. Schiaparelli's work as a "A detailed analysis of these parts with respect to its Aristotelian and Platonic origins". I would like to ask some more details about this crucial issue. How is Plotinus' account of intelligible being precisely related to Aristotle's account of form as cause (and of Aristotle's views about parts and wholes)?

The fourth (and last) example focuses on OG's remarks about the One and its causal power. At p. 119 OG writes: "In other words, Intellect received the power (*dynamis*) to generate forms as its offspring and to be filled full of them. In this sense, the Good gave Intellect what it itself did not have." Here OG quickly mentions a crucial issue in Plotinus' account of causation which would have certainly deserved a longer analysis. OG rightly refers to D'Ancona 1992, a classical contribution on this subject, but this reference is not sufficient, especially because D'Ancona's account has been the focus of interesting discussion (see L. Lavaud, *D'une métaphysique à l'autre. Figures de l'altérité dans la philosophie de Plotin*, Paris, 2008; A. Michalewski, *La*

*Puissance de l'intelligible: la théorie plotinienne des Formes au miroir de l'héritage médioplatonicien*, Leuven, 2014). I would ask OG to say something more about Plotinus' model of causation and its philosophical background (Plato, Aristotle, maybe the Stoics).

## **V. Conclusion**

I recommend the submitted dissertation with the tentative grade of **pass**.

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