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NOTES ON UNIO MYSTICA  
IN PLOTINUS\*

H o l g e r     T h e s l e f f

It has often been noticed that Plotinus' thought seems to contain two different trends that are in part difficult to reconcile: the philosophical system, which is largely metaphysical but which operates with the well-established more or less rational apparatus of Greek philosophy; and the intuitional or even pronouncedly irrational aspect culminating in the philosopher's mystical experience which is traditionally called 'ecstasy'. The combination of these two trends is at times extremely confusing.<sup>1</sup>

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\* A Swedish version of this paper was read at a symposium arranged by Platonselskabet in Copenhagen in June, 1979. It will be published separately.

1 This fact has been often noticed and discussed. I have been using in particular the following books on Plotinus: A.H. Armstrong, Plotinus. In: The Cambridge History of Later Greek & Early Medieval Philosophy, 1967, 193-268; R. Arnou, Le désir de dieu dans la philosophie de Plotin, 1921; Atti del convegno internazionale sul tema: Plotino e il neoplatonismo, Problemi attuali di scienze e di cultura, Quad. 198 (1970); E. Bréhier, La philosophie de Plotin, 1928; F. Heinemann, Plotin, 1921; W.R. Inge, The Philosophy of Plotinus I-II<sup>3</sup>, 1929; Die Philosophie des Neuplatonismus, hrsg. von C. Zintzen, Wege der Forschung 436, 1977; P.V. Pistorius, Plotinus and Neo-Platonism, 1952; Plotini Opera, edd. by P. Henry & H.-R. Schwyzer I-III (ed. maior), 1951-1973; Plotins Schriften, übers. von Richard Harder, Neubearbeitung ... von R. Beutler & W. Theiler I-VI, 1956-1971; Plotinus, The Enneads, transl. by S. MacKenna, 2nd ed. revised by B.S. Page, with a foreword by E.R. Dodds and an introduction by P. Henry, 1956; J. Rist, Plotinus, The Road to Reality, 1967; H.-R. Schwyzer, Plotinos, RE 21, 1951, 471-592; O. Söhngen, Das mystische Erlebnis in Plotins Weltanschauung, 1923; Les Sources de Plotin, Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique, Fond. Hardt (1957), 5, 1960; Th. Whittaker, The Neo-Platonists<sup>4</sup>, 1928.

There is no reason to doubt that Plotinus' experience of the *unio mystica* was psychologically genuine.<sup>2</sup> Apparently this particular state did not occur very frequently. Porphyry (V.Plot. 23) mentions that Plotinus had attained it four times during the six years they spent together; the vague word *πολλῶνκις* in Ennead 4,8,1,1 (an early tract) does not convey very much. But the intensity of this subjective reality must have been felt by Plotinus as being in harmony with his metaphysical system and, indeed, as making it more credible.

This is not the place to discuss the psychological aspect of mystical phenomena.<sup>3</sup> In the following I shall attempt a philological approach to the *unio mystica*. It will be of some interest to examine, somewhat more closely than is usually done, the explicit forms of language and thought in which Plotinus dressed his mystical experience. A study of terminology may help to clarify, not only the actual phenomenon as experienced by Plotinus, but its genesis (because our experiences are always likely to be influenced by traditional manners of thought or linguistic practice), and its later interpretation (because we are apt to understand terms according to their predominant use).

Since Plotinus regarded himself as an orthodox Platonist, he naturally used primarily Platonic phrases and forms of thought when trying to describe or otherwise articulate his *unio mystica*. In this particular area his Platonic sources are first of all the Symposium and the Phaedrus and the central parts of the Republic, more occasionally other passages such as the central 'digressions' in the Theaetetus and the Seventh Letter.<sup>4</sup> Other Greco-Roman sources appear to be of very peripheral importance. Certain mystery religions may have suggested one or two additional ideas: the association with mysteries of course already occurs in the Symposium. But, as far as I can see,

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2 Often pointed out, see e.g. Arnou 273ff.

3 Cf. R.C. Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane*, 1957, and the references given by C.-M. Edsman, in: *Mysticism, Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 5 (1970) 10ff.

4 The Platonic parallels are recorded in the ed. maior of Henry & Schwyzer.

Pythagoreanism is irrelevant. However, the possibility of more distinctly Oriental influences must surely be taken into account, though they are easily exaggerated and the extant sources, including Philo and Gnosticism,<sup>5</sup> do not seem to offer very obvious parallels. It is probably true that the jungle of syncretistic ideas which are somehow concerned with ecstatic experiences and ὁμοίωσις θεῶν, and which were characteristic of this period, form a general religious background to Plotinus, a vague frame of reference rather than a precisely identifiable group of doctrinal sources. It would be more important to know what kind of man Ammonius Sakkas was, the Alexandrian teacher of Plotinus, but here too we know next to nothing. Finally, various parallels with Indian Vedānta mysticism have sometimes been adduced.<sup>6</sup> I believe, however, that it can be shown that the differences between the Indians and Plotinus are actually greater than the resemblances, and that the hypothesis of direct influence is not a very likely one. But this specific problem calls for a separate treatment.

Be this as it may, Plotinus at any rate expresses his 'doctrine of ecstasy' chiefly in Platonic terms. And it will be sufficient for the present purpose to make a general distinction between Platonic ideas and non-Platonic ones taken as a single group.

Plotinus' 'doctrine of ecstasy' can be, and indeed has been, systematized in different ways.<sup>7</sup> Clearly, a systematization of this or any Plotinian doctrine should be possible: no conspicuous trends of development have been detected in the three chronological periods mentioned by Porphyry; Plotinus began writing down his thoughts at a comparatively late date when his metaphysical view is likely to have been more or less settled; and he always expounds merely facets

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5 The tract against the Gnostics, Enn. 2,9, does not suggest a connection between Plotinian ideas of *unio mystica* and Gnostic ideas.

6 The chief champion of the theory of Indian influence upon Plotinus was Bréhier. Recently an Italian scholar, Franco Lombardi, Atti etc. (above, note 1) 455, has tried to explain the name Sakkas as Indian.

7 All comprehensive expositions of the thought of Plotinus include such systematizations. The most detailed one, with a wealth of references, is that of Theiler in the last volume of Harder's edition.

of a system which he appears to have in mind all the time - and indeed, which the unfortunate reader is supposed to bear in mind constantly, too. In the following I shall adopt a systematization of the *unio mystica* doctrine which does not correspond exactly to any other that I have seen. I trust, however, that the divergences from generally accepted views will affect only the arrangement and points of emphasis and not the factual basis.

1. Preparation. In contrast to Indian mystics and, for instance, Buddhists, Plotinus is not very explicit on the preparatory behaviour required for reaching the union. It is sometimes said<sup>8</sup> that the whole of Plotinus' philosophy is nothing but a preparation for ecstasy, but then the important discrepancy between the philosophical and the mystical trend is ignored. It is true that, in connection with the union doctrine, Plotinus does several times refer to an intellectual and ethical process of purification and ennoblement which suggests the philosopher's progress in the Symposium or the Republic.<sup>9</sup> This is conventional Platonism which Plotinus has taken over rather mechanically. In some other passages, however, he obviously goes beyond Plato in recommending abstention from all that is corporeal, the ἀφελε πάντα idea.<sup>10</sup> This latter thought is apparently meant to be taken seriously since Plotinus believes that it is possible for a soul in incarnation not only to ὁμοιωθῆναι θεῷ but, through its noetic dynamics, to free itself from δόξα and αἰσθησις and to become wholly spiritualized.<sup>11</sup> And unlike Plato, he introduces an irrational component at the end of the process. This is particularly clear in Enn. 6,9,7 where he points out (14) that the soul has to attain a 'formless' state, to become ἀνείδεος, in order to receive impressions of the Ἔν. A further difference from Plato can be seen in the 'centri-

8 E.g. H. Ludin Jansen, *Mysticism etc.* 1970 (above, n. 3) 102.

9 Cf. 1,6,9,2-6, 9,34-39; 5,8,11,16; 5,9,2,10-11; 6,7,36,3-10; 6,9,3,3, 4,14-16, 4,31-34; also e.g. 1,6,7 pm.; 3,9,2,4-8; 4,7,10,30-40.

10 Cf. 1,2,1,1-9, 3,5-6, 6,2-13; 1,6,7,5-9, 8,22-27; 1,8,8,28-29; 5,3,17,3; 6,9,3,19, 7,17, 11,49-51.

11 See below, on νοιωθῆναι.

petal' conception of Plotinus which will be commented on below.<sup>12</sup> But then Plotinus also, occasionally, operates with the Platonic ἔρωσ idea at this preliminary stage, with love of καλόν as a means of preparation for attaining the *unio mystica*.<sup>13</sup> Here again the imagery comes from the Symposium, possibly with Aristotelian overtones, but certainly without the implication of a successively generalized and sublimated Socratic παιδευαστία, which is so very essential in Plato's conception. The Platonic ἔρωσ does indeed look odd in its Plotinian context, and this fact will become even more obvious below.

2. The relation between the Plotinian hypostases is problematic in several respects. For the present purpose it will be sufficient to take account of a few points only.

First, Plotinus apparently did not mean to imply that Ἔν, Νοῦς (i.e. the World of Forms) and Ψυχὴ are distinctly separated.<sup>14</sup> For the most part, he seems to understand the relation as a mutual participation (μετοχή): as ψυχὴ takes part in νοῦς because the Form of soul lies in Νοῦς and the chief manifestation of soul is νοῦς, so νοῦς takes part in ψυχὴ because of its dynamic influence (the so-called 'emanation'), its πρόνοια, etc.; and the same seems to apply, at least in part, to the relation between Ἔν and Νοῦς in spite of the transcendence of the former.<sup>15</sup> In this respect, too, Ἔν is somehow 'extrapolated' from the relation of the two lower hypostases. Perhaps it could be said also that the analogy between macrocosmos and microcosmos contributes to the explanation of this relation: just as there is no distinct line of demarcation between νοῦς and the other aspects

12 Probably this conception is dominant in the much-discussed passage 5,5,8,3-8 (cf. 3,8,6) where it is said that when the soul is sufficiently prepared the Ἔν should not be pursued any more: οὐ χρὴ διώκειν, ἀλλ' ἡσυχῆ μένειν, ἕως ἂν φανῆ. Cf. Rist, Plotinus, 225.

13 Cf. 1,6,6,19-20; 6,7,34 pm.; 6,9,9,24-38.

14 The Ἔν of course is transcendent, yet somehow present in Νοῦς and Ψυχὴ; cf. below. In passages such as 2,9,1,18-19 ἕτερα ἀλλήλων indicates difference, not separation, but with some allusion to the Platonic doctrine of ταυτότης / ἕτερότης; cf. also Rist, Plotinus, 215,219.

15 E.g. 3,8,9-11.

of the individual soul,<sup>16</sup> so, too, there are no clear boundaries between the metaphysical hypostases. At any rate the individual soul is potentially capable of cultivating and purifying its νοῦς so as to become νοῦθεΐσα, a term often used by Plotinus; and so the contact with the First Hypostase is theoretically and philosophically feasible for a ψυχὴ νοῦθεΐσα because νοῦς somehow 'borders' on Ἐν - though the attainment of absolute ταύτης and the complete removal of the subject/object relation is of course ultimately a mystical and not a philosophical question.

Secondly, Plotinus apparently considered the relation between the hypostases to be, in principle, of an abstract nature difficult to grasp in words. Properly speaking it cannot be quantified or localized. Νοῦς cannot really be said to be something 'more' or 'less' than Ψυχὴ, or 'above' it or 'outside' or 'inside' it. Rather, Νοῦς and Ψυχὴ are different metaphysical 'levels' without local relation and, correspondingly, Ἐν can only be imagined as a further 'level' by means of extrapolation into transcendence.

Obviously Plotinus did not think of the individual incarnated soul as being able to make shamanistic trips outside the body while striving to become νοῦθεΐσα. On the contrary, if he wished to visualize what happens to the soul - and even if he did not wish to, we can see that he could not avoid using concrete imagery - he was forced to admit that the process of purification and ennobling of the soul, the νοῦθῆναι and the ultimate ecstasy, somewhat paradoxically occurred within itself, 'internally', 'inwards'. This idea is implied in several passages.<sup>17</sup>

The imagery describing this process is not necessarily disturbed by the idea of πρότερον (πρῶτον) / ὕστερον which Plotinus very often applies to the relation between the hypostases. To Plotinus, the universe is without beginning and end in time or space. Words such as πρῶτον, πρότερον, ὕστερον, ἀρχή, etc. in their metaphysical context

16 Cf. 3,4,3,21-27: every individual is a κόσμος νοητός.

17 Cf. 1,6,8-9; 3,8,6,37-40; 4,8,1; 5,3,7; 5,8,2,41-43, 10,39-43, 11 pm.; 6,7,34,25, 35-36 pm.; 6,8,16,12; 6,9,3,20-21, 4,31, 7 pm., 11 pm.

evidently imply rank and dignity rather than a temporal or local relation. Νοῦς is 'primary' in relation to Ψυχή first of all because of its position in the metaphysical hierarchy, its power of influence, its πρόνοια, and so forth. A ψυχή νοωθεῖσα has simply reached a higher rank. But if we want to introduce a spatial dimension, we do not find it particularly difficult to imagine the 'leader', the πρῶτον, as being somewhere in the centre - just like the Emperor in Rome, to use a simile which I suppose Plotinus might well have used.

More difficult is the dimension 'higher' / 'lower', 'up' / 'down'. Naturally the Enneads abound in examples of the commonly Greek and commonly human manner of regarding what is primary or leading as being 'over' and 'above' what is secondary or subject to leading. Consequently the soul is very often said to be striving 'higher' or 'upwards'.<sup>18</sup> This is of course a genuinely Platonic view, too. Not only are the steps of sublimated love in the Symposium pointing 'upwards', but, above all, the cosmological conception implied in the Phaedrus and the Timaeus indicates that Plato in fact visualized a spherical universe with the World of Forms 'outside', i.e. 'above' the sphere of fixed stars, and so, for Plato, the spiritual (or Ideal) is really placed 'higher' than the corporeal and not only in a metaphorical sense.<sup>19</sup> Plotinus, however, is not interested in cosmology or in placing his metaphysics in a cosmological frame. For him, the metaphysical terminology of 'up' / 'down', 'higher' / 'lower' is just traditional metaphorical language.

This can be seen elsewhere than in Plotinus' attempts to substitute a dimension 'in' / 'out' for the traditional 'up' / 'down'.<sup>20</sup> The same centripetal conception seems to underlie three or four other complexes of imagery in the Enneads. According to one of these typical similes, "Ev abides in the centre of all, surrounded by the lower hypostases like the leader of a chorus surrounded by his dancers

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18 Occasionally, however, with reservations, e.g. 5,5,8,20; 6,8,16,12.

19 Very occasionally in Plato the 'inside' is clearly seen to be more valuable, e.g. Symposium 215b, Phaedrus 279b.

20 See the passages in n. 17.

or singers, or like the central point of concentric circles.<sup>21</sup> Another simile implies that the soul, via Νοῦς, approaches ΎEv as if returning to its father's home from its wanderings.<sup>22</sup> The idea of ΎEv as a father may recall the imagery of the 6th book of the Republic (506e ff.), though non-Platonic religious sources are probably more relevant here. And for the imagery complex of ΎEv as a god of mysteries inside his temple, the predominant sources are obviously non-Platonic.<sup>23</sup> The idea of a mystery of course also occurs in Plato, most clearly in the Symposium (209e ff.); and the Alcibiades episode is connected with this: the Socratic statue of a Silenus, when 'profaned' (cf. 212d ff.) and 'mutilated' (215b ff.) by Alcibiades, appears to contain ἀγάλματα θεῶν (215b3). But whereas for Plato the initiation into the 'inner' reality, or the profanation of it, will only expose images of truth, Plotinus seems to visualize the interior of a temple where the purified and initiated soul will gradually be able to meet the Master inhabitant himself, God.

The imagery of 'awakening' to a more primary hypostasis may seem to be more neutral as regards spatial dimensions.<sup>24</sup> Yet Plotinus himself had experienced it as an 'awakening inwards' (Enn. 4,8 [6],1,1).<sup>25</sup>

21 Cf. 1,6,7,25; 5,1,11,4-15; 6,5,4,20-24; 6,9,8-11 pm. It is to be noted that if Plotinus was influenced by the myth of the circular procession of the divine armies in the Phaedrus (cf. 247a, 252d, etc.) he has given to it a radically different sense, because here each leader is heading his troupe and what is important is not the centre (except for the enigmatic Pythagorean Ἔστ(α) but the 'outside' of the periphery.

22 Cf. 1,6,8,16-21; 5,5,12,36-37; 6,7,23,3-4, 35,7-19; 6,9,7,32-33, 9,34-38. If, strictly speaking, the home is not necessarily 'inside' something else, the idea at least implies 'intimacy'.

23 Cf. 1,6,7-9; 2,9,9,45-52; 3,5,4,23-25; 4,7,10,30-40; 4,8,1,7; 5,1,3,2-3, 6,12-15, 11,4-15; 5,3,7,1-12, 8,47-48, 17,30-31; 5,5,6 pm., 8,24-27, 12,9-11; 5,8,10,39-43; 5,9,2,25; 6,7,34,11-12, 35,7-19; 6,9,6,12-17, 7,4-5, 9,39-48, 11,1-4, 11,13-32. Cf. also the idea of ὁμοιωθῆναι θεῷ, e.g. 1,2,1,1-9; 1,6,6,19-20.

24 Cf. 1,6,8,26, 9,1-2; 3,6,5,11-29; 4,4,5,8-11; 4,8,1,1; 5,5,12,10-11; 6,7,22,15, 22,36; 6,9,4,13. On the other hand, in the Republic 7,515e the philosopher in fact 'ascends' from the cave.

25 Πολλάκις ἐγειρόμενος εἰς ἑμαυτὸν ἐκ τοῦ σώματος καὶ γινόμενος τῶν μὲν ἄλλων ἔξω, ἑαυτοῦ δὲ εἰσω, ... He could not have been more explicit.

The ἔρωc imagery which we have already touched upon, looks even more curious when we consider this obviously centripetal conception. Apparently Plotinus was aware of some of the difficulties here. Since Ἔν according to one of his fundamental doctrines is also the absolute Good, Τάγαθόν, and since ἀγαθόν and καλόν are closely related in Greek linguistic usage, he seems to be inclined to combine the thought with which Plato played in the Symposium (206b ff.) that every living being wishes to love and beget in καλόν, with the more sober Platonic and Aristotelian idea that every being strives (ὀρέγεται, ἐφίεται) for ἀγαθόν. Sometimes, however, he tries to differentiate between ἔρωc which is directed towards καλόν (and hence does not reach the first hypostase), and ὄρεξιc or ἐφεσιc which is directed towards ἀγαθόν;<sup>26</sup> and sometimes, again, καλόν is regarded as an 'aspect' of ἀγαθόν.<sup>27</sup> He is far from consistent in this matter, and once he even appears to identify Τάγαθόν with Ἔρωc.<sup>28</sup> It is clear that the Platonic ἔρωc doctrine was for Plotinus an essential truth which he did not want to abandon in spite of the difficulties which it involved for his system. The next section will perhaps clarify some aspects of this problem.

3. The contact with Ἔν. At the outset we may note that Plotinus makes it clear, in various ways, that the last step is irrational in spite of the rational process of preparation.<sup>29</sup> The description of the ecstatic experience as coming 'suddenly' (ἐξαίφνης) points in the same direction though here Plotinus has also managed to find a direct

26 Cf. 1,6,4-5, 7 pm.; 3,5 pm.; 5,5,12 pm.; 5,6,5,8-12; 5,8,10,23; 5,9,2,2-23; 6,7,21 pm., 32,26-30; 6,9,9,24-38.

27 Cf. 1,6,6,16-29, 7 pm., 8,2, 9,34-43; 4,8,1,3, 5,5,12 pm., 5,8,2, 35-46, 10,24, 11,19; 5,9,2,18-19; 6,7,22 pm., 32-33, 35,36, 36,3-4; 6,9,4,10, 11,16-17.

28 6,8,15,1-10; this may be an occasional lapsus. Rist, *Eros & Psyche*, 1964, 78-83 probably makes too much of it.

29 Cf. 5,3,7,14, 10,39-42, 13,1, 17,17-38; 5,5,4,8, 7,24-35, 8,1-3, 10,8; 5,8,10,5-11, 10,32-33, 11,6; 5,9,2,24; 6,7,22,9; 34,16-21, 35 pm., 36,15-18; 6,9,3 pm., 4,1-16, 7,9-16, 10,4-20, 11 pm. Cf. also 2,9,9, (against the Gnostics), and 4,8,1,1-11; 6,8,13,1-15, 19,1-3. The only passage where the term ἔκστασιc refers to *unio mystica* is 6,9 (9),11,23, cf. *ibid.* 10,1 ἐξεληλυθεν. But in 5,3 (49),7,14 where νοῦ ἔκστασιc is denied, the implications are somewhat different.

association with Plato (Symposium 210e4).<sup>30</sup> Another Platonic idea which seemed to Plotinus to introduce an irrational component into the 'doctrine of ecstasy' was the play with philosophical *μανία* in the Phaedrus (notably 245b ff.), and consequently we find Plotinus often using this idea in connection with the *ἔρω*s doctrine (e.g. Enn. 4,7,35). But Plotinus did not take account of the fact that *μανία* in Plato functions only on lower levels and by no means constituted an explanation of the direct contact with the Absolute (i.e. the Forms) which in Plato's view, must be fundamentally rational.

The irrationality of the final step leading to *Ἔν* partly depends upon the transcendent nature of *Ἔν* / *Τάγαθόν*. This becomes emphasized in the Plotinian system much more explicitly than in Plato.<sup>31</sup> Obviously Plotinus' view is religiously founded in a sense and manner that is quite different from that of Plato.

Hence, for instance, the imagery of light connected with *Ἔν* has been developed by Plotinus from its Platonic source in a religious direction.<sup>32</sup> The 'Light from Above' is a central idea in many religions and mystics, too, often seem to have experienced phenomena of intense light.<sup>33</sup>

Disregarding for the moment the distinctly erotic aspect, many features in Plotinus' description of the contact with *Ἔν* are predominantly un-Platonic. So, notably, are the soul's total, naked solitude when encountering *Ἔν*,<sup>34</sup> *Ἔν*'s mysterious pres-

30 Cf. Enn. 5,3,17,29; 5,5,7,34; 5,8,11,10-11; 6,7,34,13, 36,18. Cf. in Plato Ep. 7,341d, and note the comments of Philo, Leg.alleg. 2,31; Plut. de Iside 77,382d.

31 The much-debated *ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας* in Republic 6,509b is rather isolated and, besides, intentionally hyperbolic (cf. 509c2). Plotinus of course took it quite seriously.

32 In Plato above all the similes of the Sun and the Cave are relevant (Republic 6,506b ff., 7,514a ff.). Cf. Enn. 1,6,7-9; 3,6,5,21; 3,8,6,37-40; 4,7,10,30-40; 4,9,5,26-28; 5,3,7,9-12, 17,29-37; 5,5,6-8, 10,10, 11,5-6; 5,8,10-11; 6,7,16,27-35, 22 pm., 31,1-2, 34-36 pm.; 6,9,3-4, 7-11 pm.

33 Cf. W. Beierwaltes in Die Philosophie etc. (above, n.1) 109-117.

34 Cf. 1,6,7,9, 7,34-39; 3,6,5,11-29; 3,8,37-40; 5,5,4,6-11, 6,17-21, 6,28, 8,3-4; 6,7,31,21-29, 34 pm.; 6,9,3,25-36, 4,33, 7,13-23, 9,14, 9,50-52, 10,1, 11,13, 11,40-51. Cf. also above n. 10.

ence,<sup>35</sup> the touch,<sup>36</sup> the union,<sup>37</sup> and the being brought to rest.<sup>38</sup> It is true that Plotinus may here also seem to be trying to apply Platonic notions to his mystical experience. For instance, there is probably a kind of connection between the idea of union and the late Platonic discussion of ἕν versus πολλά, and between the idea of rest and the στάσις / κίνησις doctrine.<sup>39</sup> This is not the place to analyze these possible connections in detail. At any rate they remain quite peripheral. There is a good illustration of Plotinus' manner of applying Platonic phrases loosely and superficially to his system, at the end of the last tract (6,9): the formula τέλος τῆς πορείας, so suggestive in this context, is taken from the Republic 7,532e; but Plato does not refer to the soul's journey but to the toilsome path which Socrates and his audience have trodden in order to describe the Ideal State.

In many of the descriptive traits already mentioned there are more or less clear associations with the ἔρωσ doctrine. Sometimes Plotinus is very explicit.<sup>40</sup> His overtness in depicting the union in terms of erotic imagery has often seemed embarrassing to earlier generations of scholars.<sup>41</sup> I do not feel in any way qualified to discuss the psychological aspect of the matter. However, it can hardly be denied today that Plotinus may have experienced something that reminded him of sexual ecstasy. What is more likely to puzzle the modern reader are the inconsistencies and anomalies of his exposition in this particular context.

35 Cf. 1,6,7,4; 5,3,17,30; 5,5,7,34-35, 8 pm.; 5,8,11,6; 6,7,31,34, 34 pm., 36,13-15; 6,9,4,21-26, 7,5, 9,48-49, 11,26.

36 Cf. 5,3,10,39-42, 17,25-26, 17,34; 5,6,6,35; 6,7,36,4; 6,9,4,26-28, 7,4-5, 8,27-29, 9,19.

37 Cf. 1,2,1,1-9, 3,5-6, 6,2-13; 1,6,7,38, 9,17-18, 9,22-34; 3,8,6,37-40, 8 pm., 3,9,2,4-8; 5,3,7,9-12, 17,29-36; 5,5,4,6-11, 7,24-35, 8, 21; 5,6,5,12-19; 5,8,10-11 pm.; 6,7,16,27-35, 34-36 pm.; 6,9,3-4 pm., 7-11 pm.

38 Cf. 4,8,1,4-7; 5,3,7,12-25; 6,7,23,3-4, 35,3, 35,42-44; 6,9,3,44-49, 4,19-20, 8 pm., 9,13, 11 pm.

39 For the former, see P. Henry, *Introd. to MacKenna's translation* (2nd ed., 1956) p. XLV-LI; for the latter, see e.g. Rist, *Plotinus* 221.

40 Notably 1,6,7 pm.; 5,3,17,15-28; 5,9,2,10; 6,7,22, 31-35 pm.; 6,9,4,18-20, 9 pm., 11,7, 11,24.

41 E.g. Inge and Arnou. I have the feeling that even Rist (both in his book on Plotinus and in *Eros & Psyche*, 1964) avoids the heart of the problem.

To take just one example: in Enn. 6,9,9,33-38 Plotinus explains that the soul longs for a union (ἔνωθῆναι) with God (i.e. Ἐν) in love (ἔρωσ), just like a virgin who is longing for her father.<sup>42</sup> Here the introduction of the ideas of a father and his virgin daughter (the ψυχή is of course feminine!) is probably due to a somewhat clumsy effort to gloss over a rather too strikingly sensual vocabulary (cf. e.g. 1,6,7,12-14 συγκερασθῆναι, ἡδονή, 6,7,34-35 δεινοὶ πόθοι, εὐπαθεῖ, μακαρῶν αἴσθησις, 6,9,11,4-12 μίγνυσθαι).

More striking still, however, is Plotinus' general conception, if considered in relation to Plato's theory of love. As has already been pointed out, the doctrine of μανία in the Phaedrus has been interpreted by Plotinus to suit his own purposes. Plato's view was really quite different. In the Phaedrus he seems to consider love mainly as a relation between two earthly individuals. Here μανία explains how the soul may recover its wings, but it does not explain, directly, the soul's meeting with the Forms.<sup>43</sup> The theory of the sublimation of ἔρωσ, again, which occurs only in the Symposium and in a very fragmentary form in the Republic,<sup>44</sup> implies that the philosopher's love is gradually directed towards higher and wider objects. Consequently ἔρωσ gradually loses its original character of sexual love and becomes a metaphor. This imagery illustrates man's impulse towards eternity and towards the acquisition of even more valuable spiritual possessions in order to be able to 'create' on still higher levels and in this way to reproduce this ἀρετή for the benefit of mankind.

Plotinus appears to confuse these two rather different Platonic theories of love. His tendency is clearly tied in with the fact that he needed an irrational factor throughout, and probably the erotic imagery somehow corresponded to what he had personally felt in connection with

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42 This emendation of the text seems to be quite certain.

43 Elsewhere (cf. my 'Tankar kring det specifika i Symposions eroslära', Platonselskabet, Konferensen i Oslo 1973, Rapport [1974], 17-19) I have tried to argue that there is a considerable difference between the theories of love in the Phaedrus and the Symposium, and that Plato later in his life abandoned the rather rigid system of the Symposium.

44 Notably in Books 5 and 6.

*unio mystica*. Whereas at the last stages of his sublimated ἔρωσ (Symposium 206de, 212a, Republic 6,490ab) Plato engages only in some very occasional, and perhaps ironical, play with sexuality, this aspect is quite obvious in Plotinus' picture and plays an integral part in it. On the other hand, what is essential in Plato's conception, the striving for immortality and for great intellectual achievements, is mentioned by Plotinus only in passing and without enthusiasm (notably Enn. 6,9,10-11). Plotinus is first and foremost concerned with what he felt as a unique, transcendent but subjective experience ultimately connected with personal well-being. The extrovert tendency towards ever wider and more cosmic objects, so important to Plato, means little to Plotinus. For him, as we have seen, it is the introvert dimension which is relevant - 'Vergeistigung als Verinnigung', to put it somewhat anachronistically. And it is chiefly for this reason that the erotic imagery looks so very curious here. It is its very Platonic overtones that make it so unsuitable a vehicle for Plotinus' centripetal view.

To sum up: I believe we have to look for the causes of various anomalies characteristic of Plotinus' conception in the application of a traditional apparatus of terms and concepts to an intensely personal experience and a partly new system of thought. By emphasizing the tendency 'inwards' as important instead of the tendency 'outwards' or 'upwards', Plotinus apparently followed a post-classical ethico-religious pattern (which would be worthwhile tracing).<sup>45</sup> Probably he felt that his own experience of *unio mystica* lent support to this view. And no doubt Plotinus, unlike Plato, can be called a 'mystic'. Nevertheless, Plotinus wished to regard himself as a Platonist. And since Plato appeared to offer various forms of thought, and a rich imagery, which largely corresponded to what he himself had felt essential in his experience of the union - the feeling of ἔρωσ, the suddenness, the

45 Cf. e.g. Marc. Aur. 7,59 ἔνδον βλέπε, ἔνδον ἢ πηγὴ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ. Various observations relating to this problem have been made by P. Henry, l.c. (above n. 39) XLVf.; C. Zintzen, Rh.Mus. 108 (1965) 71-100 (also in Die Philosophie etc., above n. 1, 391ff.); G.J.P. O'Daly in Atti etc., above n. 1, 159ff.

irrational implications, the attaining of rest, the ταύτης - Plotinus adopted them rather generously and somewhat superficially, without perhaps reflecting very much upon how well or how badly they suited his own vision at all points.

But by introducing Plato's ἔργον in this context, Plotinus in fact added an interesting complication to the interplay of rationalism and irrationalism, and of *amor* and *caritas*, in the subsequent history of ideas.