

6. Plotinus on the Firmest Principle*

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In *Ennead* VI 5 [23], 1, Plotinus calls the «firmest principle» the «common notion» that says that «that which is one and identical in number is everywhere, and simultaneously whole».¹ The expression «firmest principle» comes from *Metaphysics* Γ 3, where Aristotle uses it, along with the adjective «unhypothetical»,² to describe the Principle of Non-Contradiction (PNC), i.e., the principle that «it is impossible for the same thing to belong and not to belong to the same thing, at the same time and in the same respect».³ By calling the PNC the «firmest principle» and «unhypothetical», Aristotle subtly transfers to it features that Plato had reserved for the Idea of the Good in *Republic* VI-VII, while engaging in the same breath with Plato's own formulation of the PNC in *Republic* IV. This essay unpacks how Plotinus in *Ennead* VI 5 [23], 1 reacts to this Aristotelian twist to defend Platonism. We shall see that his defense is not, mechanically, a series of replies to Aristotle's objections and a reaffirmation of Plato's positions. Rather, through the development of both a distinctive interpretation of claims from the *Parmenides* and original accounts of the inborn notions of human rationality and of the causality of the intelligibles, Plotinus sets out a view whereby the firmest principle is the claim of the undivided omnipresence in the manifold of what is one and identical. This principle was destined to become a key axiom of Neoplatonist metaphysics.

* Unless otherwise noted: Greek texts are cited in the most recent OCT editions, except for Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, cited after W. D. Ross (ed.), *Aristotle's Metaphysics*; translations from Plotinus and the *Vita Plotini* modify L. P. Gerson (ed.), *Plotinus. The Enneads*, those from Plato J. M. Cooper - D. S. Hutchinson (eds.), *Plato. Complete Works*, and those from Aristotle J. Barnes (ed.), *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Thanks to Riccardo Chiaradonna for valuable feedback on a draft.

¹ Plot. VI 5 [23], 1.1-2, 8-9: Τὸ ἓν καὶ ταῦτὸν ἀριθμῶ πανταχοῦ ἅμα ὅλον εἶναι κοινὴ μὲν τις ἔννοια φησὶν εἶναι [...] Καὶ ἔστι πάντων βεβαιοτάτη ἀρχή. The expression βεβαιοτάτη ἀρχή is a Plotinian *hapax*.

² Arist., *Metaph.* Γ 3.1005b11-2: βεβαιοτάτη δ'ἀρχή πασῶν (also b17-8, 22-3); 1005b14: ἀνυπόθετον.

³ Ivi, 1005b19-20: τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ ἅμα ὑπάρχειν τε καὶ μὴ ὑπάρχειν ἀδύνατον τῷ αὐτῷ καὶ κατὰ τὸ αὐτό. Cf. also *Metaph.* B 1, 996b9-10 and Γ 6,1011b13-4

1. Aristotle, the Firmest Principle, and Plato

1.1. The science of being *qua* being and the PNC

In *Metaphysics* Γ 3 Aristotle argues that the science of being *qua* being broached in Γ 1-2 should also be concerned with the principles of demonstrations, i.e. «those which are in mathematics called axioms» or «principles of deduction».⁴ For these principles constitutively belong to being *qua* being and it is indeed for this reason that everyone uses them in demonstrations, of course in the form appropriate to the genus of that demonstration (cf. *Metaph.* Γ 3, 1005a25-7; *An. post.* A 10, 76a38-9).

The «firmest principle of all» is the PNC: «it is impossible for the same thing to belong and not to belong to the same thing, at the same time and in the same respect» (cf. *supra* nn. 2 and 3). Firmest is the principle «regarding which it is impossible to be mistaken» (*Metaph.* Γ 3, 1005b12: *περὶ ἣν διαψευσθῆναι ἀδύνατον*). Such, Aristotle explains, is the principle that is «best known» (*Metaph.* Γ 3, 1005b13: *γνωριμωτάτη*), i.e. self-evident and not in turn explained by anything else; and also «unhypothetical» (cf. *supra* n. 2), i.e. not assumed in reasoning as a hypothesis to be proven, but a necessary primitive presupposition of all knowledge and discourse (cf. *Metaph.* Γ 3, 1005b15-7). The PNC meets both such conditions. First, it is self-evident in that one cannot be mistaken about it (not in the sense that one cannot have false beliefs about it, but) in the sense that it is impossible to genuinely hold, at the same time and in the same respect, beliefs that are contradictory to each other (cf. *Metaph.* Γ 3, 1005b23-32). Second, the PNC is the first and most fundamental syllogistic principle. It is «naturally the principle even for all the other axioms»,⁵ and underlies the validity of all deductive reasoning.⁶ Thus, it cannot be assumed as a hypothesis of any sort, nor can it be explained by any prior premise or figure as the conclusion of any deduction. In short, it is impossible to give any deductive demonstration of the PNC and only an uneducated person, i.e. someone without the adequate ‘analytical’ training (cf. *Metaph.*

⁴ Arist., *Metaph.* Γ 3, 1005a20: τῶν ἐν τοῖς μαθήμασι καλουμένων ἀξιωματῶν (cf. *An. post.* I 10, 76b14: τὰ κοινὰ λεγόμενα ἀξιώματα); b7: συλλογιστικῶν ἀρχῶν. By common consensus this claim of Aristotle’s is meant to provide a solution to the second *aporia* of *Metaph.* B, cf. B 1, 995b6-10; 2, 996b26-33. More details on this *aporia* in A. Madigan (ed.), *Aristotle. Metaphysics, Book B and Book K 1-2*, pp. 40-5; M. Mignucci, *I principi delle dimostrazioni*, pp. 75-101; M. Crubellier, *Aporiai 1-2*, pp. 47-72. Section 1 of the present paper is based on R. Granieri, *Conoscere l’essere*, pp. 183-90.

⁵ *Metaph.* Γ 3, 1005b33-4: φύσει γὰρ ἀρχὴ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀξιωματῶν αὐτῆ πάντων.

⁶ Cf. M. V. Wedin, *Aristotle on the Firmness of the Principle of Non-Contradiction*.

Γ 3, 1005b4-5; with *An. post.* A 3), could believe otherwise (cf. *Metaph.* Γ 4, 1006a5-11).

That is why when in Γ 4 Aristotle sets out «to demonstrate refutatively» (*Metaph.* Γ 4, 1006a11-2: ἀποδείξαι ἐλεγκτικῶς) the PNC, i.e. to prove the impossibility of its negation – the only possible way of demonstrating it – he puts his finger on the pragmatic assumptions of the detractor of the principle. Aristotle is well aware that an opponent of the PNC cannot be refuted by being reduced to contradiction, for the obvious reason that the opponent does not judge contradictions impossible. Thus he adopts a subtler strategy: he argues that the PNC is undeniable because any meaningful discourse, including the one that purports to deny it, must actually presuppose it. For a discourse must include words that are necessarily endowed with a definite meaning, i.e., that individually mean *F* instead of non-*F*, and therefore bind *eo ipso* the speaker to the PNC. Thus, either the PNC denier gives up speaking altogether reducing her/himself to a vegetative state,⁷ or, as long as s/he concedes to say anything meaningful, s/he will have already inevitably reaffirmed *in actu* the principle s/he wants to deny.⁸

1.2. Aristotle vs. Plato on the PNC and the unhypothetical and firmest principle

The argument of Γ 3-6 and more generally the Aristotelian treatment of the PNC are matters of difficult and controversial interpretation.⁹ My aim in the rest of this section is not to offer a complete examination of these chapters, but to discuss some aspects of their Platonic background to show that here Plato (explicitly named at Γ 5, 1010b12) is hovering close at hand, and Aristotle is critically engaging with him throughout.

Let us note, to begin with, that the very formulation of the PNC in Γ 3 (1005b19-20) betrays a Platonic debt. The PNC had in all essentials already been voiced in *Republic* IV, in what is its earliest known enunciation: «it is

⁷ Cf. *ivi*, Γ 4, 1006a14-5, 1008b11-2; 5, 1010a10-5.

⁸ This type of argument is usually labelled ‘dialectical,’ with reference to the scientific use of dialectic discussed at *Top.* I 2, 101a36-b4. But there have been dissenting voices, motivated, among other things, by both the fact that Aristotle does not himself qualify it as such (διαλεκτικῶς and related terms are absent from IV 3-8), and the contrast between dialectic and philosophy emphasized in IV 2, 1004b17-26. Cf. J. Brunschwig, *Dialectique et philosophie chez Aristote, à nouveau*, pp. 124-126. Be that as it may, Aristotle devotes the rest of Γ 4 and the two subsequent chapters to the explanation of the details of such a demonstration and the assumptions of its critical target. For analyses, cf. C. Kirwan, *Aristotle. Metaphysics, Books Γ, Δ, and Ε*, pp. 86-116; and M. Crubellier, *La tactique argumentative de Métaphysique Gamma 3-6*.

⁹ Overview in P. Gottlieb, *Aristotle on Non-contradiction*.

clear that the same thing will not be willing to do or undergo opposites at the same time, in the same respect, and in relation to the same thing».¹⁰ The underlying idea of the PNC is surely also at work in various pre-Platonic texts (e.g., Parm. fr. 7, 1; 8, 46 DK), but it is this *Republic* passage that formally enunciates it for the first time. Plato puts it here at the service of an argument aimed at proving the tripartite division of the soul, of which the PNC forms a key premise (contradictory psychic drives must be assigned to different parts of the soul). Probably due to this instrumental function, Plato does not devote a thematic discussion to it. The only exceptions are the remarks appended at *R. IV* 436d4-e5, aimed at preemptively shielding it from some potential sophisticated objection (cp. Arist. *Int.* 6, 17a33-7), and resulting in the following conclusion: «we shall not, then, be at all impressed by arguments of this sort, and still less shall we be convinced that one thing, remaining itself, can ever at the same time and in the same respect and in relation to the same thing, undergo, be, or do opposites» (*R.* 436e7-437a1).¹¹ The fundamental intuition of the principle, however, reappears in other dialogues.¹² There is little doubt that Aristotle is alive to these texts, and the terminological affinity between his formulation of the PNC in *Γ* 3 and that of *Republic IV* is hard to miss.

Even more interesting, however, is that Aristotle qualifies the PNC as the «firmest» (βεβαιωτάτη) and «unhypothetical» (ἀνυπόθετον) principle. Both expressions, as is well-known, are of Platonic origin. But Plato uses them not with regard to the PNC, but to the Idea of the Good. In *Republic VI-VII* he describes the Idea of the Good as the «unhypothetical» (*R.* 510b6-7, 511b5: ἀνυπόθετον) principle in which dialectic «will be firm» (*R.* 533d1: βεβαιώσεται). Aristotle's use of ἀνυπόθετον is especially revealing. The term is: a Platonic coinage; not attested in any dialogue other than the *Republic*; an Aristotelian *hapax*; and never attested again before the 2nd century BCE except (possibly) at *Ps.-Pl. Def.* 414b5: σοφία ἐπιστήμη ἀνυπόθετος.¹³ Further-

¹⁰ *Pl. R. IV* 436b9-10: δῆλον ὅτι ταῦτόν τάναντία ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν κατὰ ταῦτόν γε καὶ πρὸς ταῦτόν οὐκ ἐθελήσει ἄμα. On Plato's talk of contrariety in this passage, cf. G. Lachance, *Platonic Contrariety (enantia): Ancestor of the Aristotelian Notion of Contradiction (antiphrasis)?*.

¹¹ For further discussion, cf. L. Bloom, *The Principle of Non-Contradiction in Plato's Republic* (some of whose conclusions, however, seem to me far-fetched).

¹² Cf. e.g. *Pl. Euthyd.* 293c8-d1; *Phd.* 102e8-103b5; *Tht.* 188a10-b1; *Sph.* 230b7-8. On Plato's use of the PNC in his critical engagement with eristic arguments, cf. I. J. Campbell, *Plato, the Eristics, and the Principle of Non-Contradiction*.

¹³ I say «possibly», because the *Pseudo-Platonic Definitions* have been recently dated between the 1st century BC and 1st century CE by E. Benati, (*Platone*), *Horoi*, p. 93 and *passim*.

more, both Plato and Aristotle assign the study of their respective unhypothetical principle to the philosopher, in opposition to the mathematician.¹⁴ The reference is therefore unequivocal: Aristotle is deliberately transferring to the principle of all axioms characteristics that Plato assigned to the Good. The question arises of what the reasons for this move may be.

To answer, we need to turn to *Republic* IV and briefly take another look at the sequence in which the formulation of the PNC is situated (436b9-437a8). Following the enunciation of the principle at 436b9-c2, Socrates provides – not a deductive demonstration of it, which he never offers, although he does not openly deny its possibility – but an application of it (cf. *R.* 436c4-d3), first expressed in general form (it is not possible for the same thing to be at rest and in motion at the same time and in the same respect), then through a more specific example, which is also a response to a potential counterexample (if a stationary man moves his hands and head, it is not the same subject that is stationary and moving: one part of the man is stationary, another is moving). Then he considers a further possible, more sophisticated counterexample (objects in purely rotary motion, e.g., spinning tops, are they not stationary and in motion at the same time and in the same respect?) and refutes it (no, because they are stationary with respect to the axis, but in motion with respect to the circumference). Finally, he reaffirms the PNC (cf. *R.* 436e7-437a1) and adds that, instead of going through all possible objections to it and «assure ourselves that they are not true» (*R.* 437a5: βεβαιούμενοι ὡς οὐκ ἀληθεῖς οὔσας), we can «hypothesize» (*Ibid.*: ὑποθέμενοι) it as correct and proceed further, but with the explicit agreement that if it should ever emerge that things are otherwise¹⁵ (Plato therefore entertains the possibility of being mistaken on the PNC), all the consequences derived from it would be unwarranted (cf. *R.* 437a6-8).

In *Republic* IV, therefore, the PNC is: stipulated; not demonstrated deductively; defended by way of example from some possible objections in the form of counterexamples; provisionally assumed as a hypothesis, thus affected by a degree of uncertainty. It may be profitable to read these considerations in the light of the image of the divided line in *Republic* VII. In that context, hypothetico-deductive disciplines, such as the mathematics, are judged epistemically defective because they draw conclusions from hypotheses that they assume

¹⁴ Cf. *Pl.* *R.* VII 510b4-d3, 511b2-c1; *Arist. Metaph.* Γ 3, 1005a27-31.

¹⁵ *R.* 437a6-7: ἐάν ποτε ἄλλη φανῆ ταῦτα ἢ ταύτη.

as known and do not account for.¹⁶ In this regard they are contrasted to dialectic, the «copying-stone of learnings» (R. 534e2-3: *θριγκὸς τοῖς μαθήμασιν*)¹⁷ capable of overcoming hypotheses through the grasp of the Good, the unhypothetical principle that gives true stability to knowledge (cf. R. 511b2-c1). We can infer that the argument developed by Socrates in Book IV on the basis of the PNC has epistemic deficiencies comparable to those of the mathematics, i.e. an ‘hypotheticity’ that only the dialectical apprehension of the Good enables one to overcome.

My claim is that in *Metaph.* Γ Aristotle critically engages with these Platonic views. Aristotle, too, stipulates the PNC and maintains (explicitly) that it cannot be demonstrated deductively, but only refutatively. However, this does not imply for him that one should embark on the task of individually refuting every potential counterexample. Rather one needs to show that it cannot be denied by any meaningful discourse, not even the very one that purports to deny it. Further, and more importantly, Aristotle rejects that the PNC can ever be a hypothesis. It is rather a primitive and necessary condition for all knowledge and reasoning. To assume the PNC as a hypothesis, as Socrates does in *Republic* IV, is to misconceive its axiomatic status. Nor is it possible to be in error about it, a possibility that *Resp.* 437a6-8 entertains. The PNC is itself maximally ‘secure’ and does not need to be ‘secured’ by anything else: it is the principle of all axioms.

The foregoing invites us to conclude, with Myles Burnyeat, that «when Aristotle speaks of the principle of non-contradiction as ‘unhypothetical’ (Γ 3, 1005b14: ἀνυπόθετον), he is dethroning the Platonic Good (the One), which in the *Republic* (510b7, 511b6) is famously called ‘unhypothetical’, in favour of a principle which was the *Republic*’s first example of a mere hypothesis (437a6)».¹⁸

2. Plotinus on omnipresence and firmness against Aristotle

Over the past century, criticisms of the PNC, notably in its Aristotelian formulation, have come from many quarters.¹⁹ The most weighty and influ-

¹⁶ Cf. Pl. R. 510b4-d3, 533b5-c7; and I. Mueller, *Mathematical Method and Philosophical Truth*.

¹⁷ Cf. R. Granieri, *Conoscere l'essere*, pp. 74-86, with references.

¹⁸ M. Burnyeat, *A Map of Metaphysics Zeta*, p. 136.

¹⁹ Cf. E. Berti, *Objections to Aristotle's Defence of the Principle of Non-Contradiction*.

ential have been raised by Jan Łukasiewicz and the proponents of dialetheism and paraconsistent logics, notably Graham Priest.²⁰ But already in antiquity critical reactions were not spared. This applies particularly to later Platonists, such as Proclus and Damascius, who argued that any attempt to grasp the One, the first principle of all, requires moving beyond the PNC. Thus, we cannot rely on it as the firmest principle.²¹ Aristotle himself, after all, confined the applicability of the PNC to beings *qua* beings, whereas the first principle of Neoplatonic metaphysical systems is typically placed *beyond* being, following a strong interpretation of the famous passage at *Republic* VI 509b7-9.²² Further, in Syrianus' commentary on *Metaphysics* Γ, we also find a meticulous critical assessment of the Γ 3 pronouncements on the PNC, which has already been subjected to close scholarly scrutiny.²³

In the remainder of this essay I focus on Plotinus' reaction in *Ennead* VI 5 [23], 1 to Aristotle's presentation of the PNC. I want to show that here Plotinus tackles Aristotle's anti-Platonic stance in *Metaph.* Γ and defends the Platonic perspective. It will emerge that Plotinus' defense does not consist in a mechanical reaffirmation of Plato's positions through a series of replies to Aristotle's objections. Thus, for example, Plotinus does not endeavor to reaffirm the hypothetical status of the PNC or simply to re-argue that the firmest and unhypothetical²⁴ principle is the Good, as opposed to the PNC. Rather, drawing from the *Parmenides*, Plotinus sets out a distinctive Platonist view of the firmest principle, based on an original account of the inborn notions of human rationality and of the causality of the intelligibles, whereby the firmest principle is the claim of the undivided omnipresence in the manifold of what is one and identical.

²⁰ Cf. J. Łukasiewicz, *Über den Satz des Widerspruchs bei Aristoteles* (Eng. tr. J. Łukasiewicz, *Aristotle and the Law of Contradiction*); F. Berto, *Teorie dell'assurdo*; G. Priest et al., *Dialetheism*.

²¹ Cf. i.a. C. Steel, *Beyond the principle of contradiction?*; J. Halfwassen, *Sur la limitation du principe de contradiction chez Denys*; Id., *Wie rational kann die Rede vom Absoluten sein?*; L. Pitteloud, *Beyond the Principle of Non-Contradiction*.

²² R. VI 509b7-9: οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ἀλλ' ἔτι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρᾶξιν καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος. Overview of most interpretations of this passage in the ancient Platonist tradition in M. Baltes, *Is the Idea of the Good in Plato's Republic Beyond Being?*. On later Platonist views on the first principle see J. Greig, *The First Principle in Late Neoplatonism*.

²³ Cf. esp. A. Longo, *Siriano e i precedenti pre-aristotelici del principio della contraddizione*; Ead., *Siriano e i principi della scienza*; Ead., *The Principle of Contradiction* (comparing Syrianus and Łukasiewicz); D. J. O'Meara, *Le fondement du principe de non-contradiction chez Syrianus*.

²⁴ For the record, the term ἀνυπόθετον and cognates never occur in the *Enneads*.

2.1. *The project of VI 4-5, Plato's Parmenides, and Aristotle's Metaphysics Z 14*

Ennead VI 4 [22] and *5* [23] form a single, continuous treatise on the nature and causality of the intelligible and its omnipresence in the sensible.²⁵ Porphyry divided it up into two and entitled it *That Being, One and Identical, Is Simultaneously Everywhere Whole* (Περὶ τοῦ τὸ ὄν ἐν καὶ ταῦτόν ὄν ἅμα πανταχοῦ εἶναι ὅλον). This title is inspired by *Parmenides* 131a8-b2, part. b1: «Do you think, then, that the form as a whole – one thing – is in each of the many? Or what do you think?» – ‘What’s to prevent its being one, Parmenides?’ said Socrates. ‘So, being one and the same, it will be simultaneously, as a whole, in things that are many and separate; and thus it would be separate from itself.’²⁶ Porphyry’s choice is broadly fitting: one can naturally see it as a driving aim of Plotinus in this treatise to show the illegitimacy of the inference drawn in the last sentence of the *Parmenides* passage just quoted and, accordingly, to explain and defend the possibility of the omnipresence of the intelligible, in identity and unity, throughout the sensible.²⁷ Plotinus’ fundamental thesis – which anticipates aspects of contemporary realist theories of the multilocation of universals²⁸ – is that the intelligibles, unlike the

²⁵ There are two excellent commentaries on this treatise: C. Tornau, *Plotin, Enneaden VI 4–5* [22–23]; and E. K. Emilsson – S. K. Strange, *Plotinus, Ennead VI.4 & VI.5*. My debt to Tornau is especially considerable.

²⁶ Πότερον οὖν δοκεῖ σοι ὅλον τὸ εἶδος ἐν ἐκάστω εἶναι τῶν πολλῶν ἐν ὄν, ἢ πῶς; Τί γὰρ κωλύει, φάναι τὸν Σωκράτη, ὃ Παρμενίδη, [ἐν εἶναι]; Ἐν ἄρα ὄν καὶ ταῦτόν ἐν πολλοῖς καὶ χωρὶς οὖσιν ὅλον ἅμα ἐνέσται, καὶ οὕτως αὐτὸ αὐτοῦ χωρὶς ἂν εἴη. For discussions of this passage (in the broader context of 130e–131e), begin with V. Harte, *Plato on Parts and Wholes*, pp. 64–73; and F. Ferrari, *Platone, Parmenide*, pp. 56–63. See also *Prm.* 144c6–d2: «So the one is attached to every part of being and is not absent from a smaller or a larger, or any other, part.’ – ‘Just so.’ – ‘So, being one, is it, as a whole, in many places at the same time? Look at this carefully.’ – ‘I am – and I see that it’s impossible.» (Πρὸς ἅπαντι ἄρα [ἐκάστω] τῷ τῆς οὐσίας μέρει πρόσεστιν τὸ ἔν, οὐκ ἀπολειπόμενον οὔτε μικροτέρου οὔτε μειζονος μέρους οὔτε ἄλλου οὐδενός. — Οὔτω. — Ἄρα οὖν ἐν ὄν πολλαχοῦ ἅμα ὅλον ἐστί; τοῦτο ἄθρει. — Ἄλλ’ ἀθρῶ καὶ ὁρᾷ ὅτι ἀδύνατον).

²⁷ «[The title] is, however, misleading in that it does not mention soul, whereas for the most part the being which is said to be everywhere at once as a whole in the treatise is soul, and not what the title and its Parmenidean origin may suggest, namely the Platonic Ideas. This latter topic is indeed addressed but the main focus is on the soul-body relationship.» (E. K. Emilsson – S. K. Strange, *Plotinus, Ennead VI.4 & VI.5*, p. 18). True, but Porphyry may simply be using the perspicuous and effective incipit of VI 5 [23], hence the *Parmenides* phrase, with reference to the intelligible as a whole and not only to Forms.

²⁸ Cf. e.g. D. M. Armstrong, *Nominalism and Realism*, p. 79: «First, there is the problem about the multiple location of a property. Consider the curtain and the carpet again. Suppose now that one but not the other ceases to be red. *Redness* has not ceased to exist. But has not *one redness* ceased to exist? If the redness of curtain and carpet is identical, as the orthodox view maintains, then the one entity must be conceived of as being wholly present in a multitude of different places and times. How can this be? The upholder of the Identity view (as we may in this chapter call the doctrine that properties and relations are universals) will reply to this argument by saying that it begs the question. It treats identity of property as if it were identity of a particular. A particular cannot be wholly present in a multitude of different places and times. But a property can. This is to say no more than: a number of different particulars can all have the very same property». Further references in C. Gilmore *et al.*, *Location and*

sensibles, are incorporeal and immaterial, therefore separate and without extension and spatial location, perfectly unitary, cohesive in themselves, and interpenetrated, so they can be present in an undivided, total and non-spatial way in everything that depends on them. The dilemma of participation, as well as the problem of the soul's permeation of the cosmos,²⁹ can therefore be solved by adopting the appropriate metaphysical perspective and understanding the intelligibles' distinctive nature and causality.³⁰ To suppose that the intelligibles, by being omnipresent in the sensible, would fragment, parcel out, separate from themselves, gain spatial location, and become extended, is to misconceive what it properly means to be intelligible, and to adopt an erroneous physicalist perspective which ultimately puts intelligibles and sensibles on the same ontological footing.³¹

In the course of the argument for this thesis, at the beginning of VI 5 [23] Plotinus quotes almost *verbatim* the *Parmenides* line which inspires Porphyry's title: «A common notion says that that which is one and identical in number is everywhere, and simultaneously whole, whenever all human beings are naturally moved to say that the god in each of us is one and identical.»³² The quotation is only 'almost' *verbatim*, notably due to one chief addition: «in number» (VI 5 [23], 1.1-4: ἀριθμῶ), also reiterated and stressed in ensuing chapters (cf. e.g. VI 5 [23], 3.19-24; 11.31-4). The addition is probably inspired by Aristotle. In *Metaph.* Z 14 Aristotle argues, among other things, that a Platonic Form cannot be both a separate *ousia* and *in* the things it contributes to constituting (including other Forms), while remaining «one and identical in number» (1039a28: ἓν καὶ ταὐτὸν τῷ ἀριθμῶ) – the latter being also a feature Aristotle acknowledges to his own substance in *Categories* 5, 4a10-11 («It seems most distinctive of substance that that which is one and identical in

Mereology, §4.1. Note, however, that Plotinus would not subscribe to the immanence of the property in question (nor, for that matter, to the very claim that it is a 'property').

²⁹ Addressed since the beginning of VI 4 [22]: «Is the reason that soul is everywhere present to the universe that the body of the universe has a certain size, and it is the nature of soul to be 'divisible about bodies'?» (1, 1-3: Ἄρα γε ἡ ψυχὴ πανταχοῦ τῷ παντὶ πάρεστιν, ὅτι σῶμά ἐστι τοῦ παντός τοσονδε, περὶ τὰ σώματα φύσιν ἐχουσα μερίζεσθαι). As often noted, Pl. *Ti.* 35a2-3 and 36d2 lie behind this remark.

³⁰ Cf. R. Chiaradonna, *Plotino*, pp. 33-48. On Plotinus' account of participation and being in VI 4-5 [22-3], cf. esp. C. D'Ancona, *AMORFON KAI ANEIDAEON. Causalité des Formes et causalité de l'Un chez Plotin*; S. K. Strange, *Plotinus' Account of Participation in Ennead VI.4-5* and R. Chiaradonna, *Plotino e la scienza dell'essere*.

³¹ This way of considering the objections of the first part of the *Parmenides*, and more generally various objections to Plato's conception of participation and the soul-body relationship, is still echoed in recent Platonic studies, e.g. in F. Ferrari, *Parmenide, il Parmenide di Platone e la teoria delle idee*.

³² VI 5 [23], 1.1-4: Τὸ ἓν καὶ ταὐτὸν ἀριθμῶ πανταχοῦ ἅμα ὅλον εἶναι κοινή μὲν τις ἔννοια φησιν εἶναι, ὅταν πάντες κινούμενοι αὐτοφύως λέγωσι τὸν ἓν ἐκάστῳ ἡμῶν θεὸν ὡς ἓνα καὶ τὸν αὐτόν.

number is able to receive contraries».³³ More particularly, Z 14 sets forth a dilemma for «those who say the Ideas are substances and can exist apart, and at the same time make the Form consist of the genus and the differentiae».³⁴ The dilemma, which mirrors that of the ninth aporia of Book B (concerning principles),³⁵ revolves around the distinction between identity by number and by species (on which cf. e.g. *Top.* A 7, 103a9-10; *Metaph.* Δ 16, 1016b31-3): (i) if a Platonic Form (e.g. Animal) is in itself one and identical in number, it cannot be identical to the Form present in that of which it is an internal constituent and which is itself a distinct unity (e.g. the Animal in itself cannot be identical to the Animal *in* the Human and *in* the Horse), otherwise it would be separate from itself; (ii) but if it is not numerically one, it cannot secure essential unity to the various things of which it is an internal constituent (the Animal *in* the Human and *in* the Horse would be two different Animals), so definition and science would be impossible. Horn (i) of the dilemma closely echoes the difficulty raised at *Parmenides* 131a4-e7,³⁶ which contains the passage inspiring the title of VI 4-5 [22-23] and Plotinus' exordial quotation in VI 5 [23]. Here (and elsewhere) Plotinus takes it upon himself to show that the Z 14 dilemma is a false one, arising from an inadequate, i.e. physicalist, way of considering intelligible substances. And he does so by also appropriating the Aristotelian concepts of identity by number and by species.³⁷ His point is that unlike the

³³ Μάλιστα δὲ ἴδιον τῆς οὐσίας δοκεῖ εἶναι τὸ ταῦτόν καὶ ἐν ἀριθμῷ ὄν τῶν ἐναντίων εἶναι δεκτικόν. The parallel with *Cat.* 5, 4a10-11 was pointed out by A. Longo, *L'assimilation originale d'Aristote dans le Traité VI. 5 [23] de Plotin*, p. 159 and n. 12. For the link between *Metaph.* Z 14, 1039a33-4 and *Cat.* 5, 4a10-11, cf. i.a. M. Frede - G. Patzig, *Aristoteles «Metaphysik Z»*, vol. 2, p. 269.

³⁴ Arist., *Metaph.* Z 14.1039.24-6: τοῖς τὰς ἰδέας λέγουσιν οὐσίας τε χωριστὰς εἶναι καὶ ἅμα τὸ εἶδος ἐκ τοῦ γένους ποιῶσι καὶ τῶν διαφορῶν.

³⁵ Cf. *Metaph.* B 4, 999b24-1000a4. Here Aristotle asks whether the principles are one (1) in number or (2) in species. But if (1) – he argues – there would be nothing else besides these principles, because the latter could not enter, as repeatable entities, into the many different combinations yielding many multiple things; if (2) no principle would really be one, not even Unity and Being (alleged to be the Platonic principles) and science would be impossible, insofar as it requires understanding the plurality of its subject matter under numerically single principles. Analysis of this *aporia* in C. Wildberg, *Aporiai 9–10*, pp. 151-9. The relevance of Z 14 and B 4 was brought out by C. Tornau, *Plotin, Enneaden VI 4–5 [22–23]*, p. 320. Cf. also R. Chiaradonna, *Plotino e la scienza dell'essere*, p. 129.

³⁶ Cf. e.g. W. D. Ross, *Aristotle's Metaphysics*, vol. 2, p. 212; and M. Frede - G. Patzig, *Aristoteles «Metaphysik Z»*, vol. 2, p. 270. *Contra*, cf. M. M. McCabe, *Some Conversations with Plato: Aristotle, «Metaphysics» Z. 13-16*, p. 93 n. 56: «the *Parmenides* does not treat of forms in terms of genus and differentiae». True, but Aristotle may well have reworked the *Parmenides* difficulty through his own concepts and terminology.

³⁷ Therefore, while I agree with A. Longo, *L'assimilation originale d'Aristote dans le Traité VI. 5 [23] de Plotin*, pp. 156-7 that in VI 5 [23] Plotinus «arrive [...] à utiliser des termes, des concepts et des règles de méthode codifiés par Aristote», it seems to me doubtful that this shows that later treatises such as VI 1-3 [42-4] showcase «un changement dans l'attitude de Plotin» towards Aristotle, and Plotinus «ne polémique pas directement contre lui» in them. After all, even in VI 1-3 [42-44] Plotinus appropriates numerous theses and arguments of Aristotelian or

sensibles, which are subject to becoming and endowed with an identity that is ‘fluid’, defective, and solely according to species, the intelligibles are perfectly identical to themselves *in number*,³⁸ without this preventing them from being participated in by their participants and thereby present in them. Within this anti-Aristotelian framework Plotinus also makes key remarks on the ‘firmest principle’.

2.2. *The principle of omnipresence as a common notion*

Plotinus begins VI 5 [23] by describing the principle that «that which is one and identical in number is everywhere, and simultaneously whole» (hereafter PO: ‘Principle of Omnipresence’) as a «common notion» (VI 5 [23], 1.2: κοινή έννοια). This expression is a *hapax* in the *Enneads*.³⁹ To clarify its meaning, some context is in order. Let us begin by noting that in *Metaph.* B 2 Aristotle calls the PNC one of the «common beliefs from which everyone demonstrates». ⁴⁰ The term δόξα is here used in the neutral and generic sense of ‘belief’ (cf. e.g. *Int.* 11, 21a32-3), rather than ‘opinion’, i.e. an inferior and instable type of cognition contrasted with ἐπιστήμη, like e.g. in *An. post.* A 33.⁴¹ With the same meaning it occurs at the end of Γ 3, where Aristotle pronounces the PNC «an ultimate belief» which «all who carry out a demonstration refer to». ⁴² It is less clear, however, in what sense that belief is «common», whether as widespread, i.e. shared by all and to which everyone *de facto* assents (regardless of what they profess, cf. Γ 3, 1005b25-6); or ‘common to all sciences’, *qua* one of the deductive principles (cf. *supra* n. 4) that apply across the board, regardless of the disciplinary singularity of each. In the latter sense Aristotle also calls these principles «axioms» (ἀξιώματα), «so-called common axioms» (κοινὰ λεγόμενα ἀξιώματα) or just «common things» (τὰ κοινὰ),⁴³ and contrasts them with the principles «proper» (ἴδια) to each science and related to its specific underlying genus (cf. e.g. *An. post.* A 7, 75b17-20; 10, 76a37-

Peripatetic origin, cp. e.g. VI 1 [42].25.7 with Arist., *Metaph.* B 3.998b22-28; or VI 1 [42], 25.19-22 with *Top.* A 5, 102a31-2, 18, 108b22-3; *Metaph.* Δ 28, 1024b4-5; VI 1 [42], 25.12-33 with e.g. *Metaph.* B 3, 999a6-16; *De an.* B 3, 414b20-33; *Pol.* Γ 1, 1275a34-8. The fact remains that Longo must be commended for having shown in detail the pervasive presence of Aristotle in VI 5 [23], a point which constitutes a basic premise of the present essay.

³⁸ Cf. VI 4 [22], 1.23-9; also IV 3 [27], 8. 22-30, with R. Chiaradonna, *Sostanze intelligibili e unità numerica in Plotino*.

³⁹ Occurrences of φυσική έννοια are missing entirely, see below n. 66.

⁴⁰ Arist. *Metaph.* B 2, 996b27-8: τὰ κοινὰς δόξας ἐξ ὧν ἅπαντες δεικνύουσιν. Cf. also *Ph.* A 4.187a27-8.

⁴¹ Cf. *i.a.* H. Bonitz (ed.), *Aristotelis Metaphysica*, vol. 2, p. 142; M. Mignucci, *I principi delle dimostrazioni*, p. 80.

⁴² Arist. *Metaph.* Γ 3.1005b32-3: πάντες οἱ ἀποδεικνύοντες εἰς ταύτην ἀνάγουσιν ἐσχάτην δόξαν.

⁴³ Cf. Arist. *Metaph.* B 2.997a13; *An. post.* A 7.75a42, 10.76a37-41, b10, 14; and *supra* n. 4.

41). Perhaps the distinction between these two options is tenuous. Aristotle might mean that insofar as everyone who appropriately engages in demonstrative (i.e. scientific) reasoning necessarily makes use of these principles, they are *eo ipso* common to all the sciences.⁴⁴ It is also disputed what exactly Aristotle has in mind when he says that everyone demonstrates *from* (ἐξ) these common principles. He might mean that they serve as universal demonstrative *premises*. But since he also denies that (except in special cases) common principles as such can figure in direct demonstrations (cf. *An. post.* A 10, 77a5-25), he may suggest that they yield a demonstrative premise only once instantiated and specialized with respect to a given genus. Or he might mean that they are *formal* principles of demonstrations – which need not prevent them from being formulated in assertoric form, and serving as assertions grounding and validating inferential rules.⁴⁵ Connected to this is the problem that some examples of common principles that Aristotle mentions do not seem to apply to *all* but only to a *plurality* of sciences, such as the principle that «if equals are taken from equals, the remainders are equal», which seems to concern only the mathematics (cf. e.g. *An. post.* A 10, 76a41). We cannot tackle this issue here.⁴⁶ But this last point gives us the occasion to observe that the principle about equals also famously figures as the third of the axioms prefacing Euclid's *Elements* and branded «common notions» (κοινὰ ἔννοιαι).⁴⁷ We may therefore plausibly surmise, with Ross, that «[the phrase κοινὰ δόξαι at *Metaph.* B 2, 996b28] is the ancestor of κοινὰ ἔννοιαι, Euclid's terms for axioms».⁴⁸

More importantly and famously, however, 'common notion' is also a trademark Stoic concept.⁴⁹ According to the Stoics, the κοινὰ ἔννοιαι are a type

⁴⁴ Alexander's reading may go in this direction, cf. Alex. *Aphr. in Metaph.* 187.16-8 Hayduck = 155.20-2 Golitsis (tr. Madigan): «[The second *aporia*] concerns the axioms, which are the principles of demonstrations, and which he calls 'common opinions' because all those who demonstrate make use of them» (τὸ περὶ τῶν ἀξιωματικῶν, ἃ εἰς ἀποδείξεων ἀρχαί, ἃ καὶ κοινὰς δόξας λέγει τῷ πάντας ἀποδεικνύοντας προσχρησθαι αὐτοῖς).

⁴⁵ Discussion and references in V. De Risi, *Aristotle on Common Axioms*, who defends the latter reading. A supporter of the former is M. Mignucci, cf. e.g. his *I principi delle dimostrazioni*, pp. 80-4.

⁴⁶ See again V. De Risi, *Aristotle on Common Axioms* for discussion.

⁴⁷ Cf. *Eucl.* 10, 4-5 Heiberg (but cf. *infra* n. 49). Valuable recent discussion of Euclid's common notions (and their Aristotelian background) in V. De Risi, *Euclid's Common Notions and the Theory of Equivalence*.

⁴⁸ W. D. Ross, *Aristotle's Metaphysics*, vol. 1, p. 229.

⁴⁹ Main sources collected in A. A. Long - D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, pp. 236-57 (chs. 39-40). Indeed, the label is so distinctive of Stoic thought that even its very appearance in Euclid has seemed dubious, leading some to suspect that the entire list of 'common notions' in the *Elements* is a post-Hellenistic interpolation. One need not go that far, but it does not seem implausible that, while the principles are Euclidean (or pre-Euclidean), the label itself may be of Stoic origin. Cf. R. B. Todd, *The Stoic Common Notions*, pp. 72-3 for discussion.

of cognition common by nature to all humans *qua* rational.⁵⁰ They are not innate concepts,⁵¹ but rather notions naturally formed and spontaneously arising following the correct gradual development of the rational soul (thus, they are also called ‘natural’, φυσικαί). The Stoics explain this by arguing that we are constructed in such a way that, on the condition that we grow up in a natural environment that provides us with normal cognitive impressions and that this developmental process is not undermined by any distorting factor, we will all form the same natural notions when we come to the age of reason. Accordingly, these notions are common insofar as they are *de iure*, not *de facto*, shared and grasped by all healthy human adults. In fact, in the great majority of cases, the normal development of human rationality is indeed compromised by distorting factors of sorts. Thus, common notions do not boil down to mere ‘common opinion’, ‘common sense’, universal consensus, or what people generally assume as true.⁵² Further, the fact that they are formed according to natural mechanisms guarantees their correctly representing the world. Thus, the Stoics, notably Chrysippus, also maintain that common notions serve as a criterion of truth,⁵³ and provide the seeds for further and more advanced knowledge, obtained through a rational articulation of them (διάρθρωσις).

The Stoic doctrine of common notions had a considerable impact on post-Hellenistic philosophies, including Platonism and Aristotelianism, despite the profound divergences of their epistemologies from both each other and the Stoics’. Among the Platonists, while authors such as Plutarch bitterly polemicized against the Stoics on this concept, notably in his *De communibus notitiis adversus stoicos*,⁵⁴ there is evidence that others – presumably also finding support in the occurrences of the term *ἔννοια* in the dialogues⁵⁵ –

⁵⁰ In the rest of this paragraph I summarize a complex and debated doctrine, unfortunately attested by scant textual evidence, and on which the scholarly literature is vast: cf. at least F. H. Sandbach, *Ennoia and ΠΡΟΛΗΨΙΣ in the Stoic Theory of Knowledge*; R. B. Todd, *The Stoic Common Notions*; M. Schofield, *Preconception, Argument, and God*; D. Obbink, ‘What All Men Believe–Must Be True’; M. Frede, *Stoic Epistemology*, esp. pp. 319–20; C. Brittain, *Common Sense*; H. Dyson, *Prolepsis and Ennoia in the Early Stoa*; K. Ierodiakonou, *The Stoics on Conceptions and Concepts*, pp. 245–6; and T. Bénatouil, *Contested Concepts*, pp. 350–3.

⁵¹ Cf. Aët. IV 11, 1591.3–5 Mansfeld–Runia, < SVF 2, 83, FDS 277; with J. Mansfeld–D. Runia (eds), *Aëtiana V*, pt. 3, p. 1599 (and more generally pp. 1591–1609 on *caput* 11).

⁵² Cf. esp. C. Brittain, *Common Sense*.

⁵³ Cf. D.L. VII.54 Dorandi = SVF 2.105; Alex. Aphr. *Mixt.* 217.3–4 Bruns < SVF 2.473, FDS 310 (on the latter text see recently de Haas, *De mixtione V–VI: Common Notions and Bodies Receiving Bodies*).

⁵⁴ Cf. again T. Bénatouil, *Contested Concepts*.

⁵⁵ Cf. esp. *Phd.* 73c9; *R.* VII 524e5; *Tht.* 191d6; *Phlb.* 59d4; *Ti.* 47a6; *Lg.* VI 769e7; also *Ps.Pl.*, *Def.* 414a10. These

incorporated and reshaped (viz. deformed) it in the framework of the doctrines of recollection and Forms, and their accounts of inquiry. This is especially conspicuous in Antiochus, the Anonymous *Theaetetus* commentator, Alcinoüs, and Galen.⁵⁶ The modes of interaction have been diversified and often involved also the appropriation of Aristotelian concepts. They have been studied in depth.⁵⁷ Here I will confine myself to saying, very briefly and generally, that for the Middle Platonists common notions are pre-philosophical concepts deposited in our souls as mnemonic traces of our prenatal experience of the Forms. They serve as starting-points of scientific inquiries and must be articulated through reason – maintaining the function of criteria of judgment – in real definitions, in which their recollection is accomplished, and ultimately in a systematic understanding of the world. Despite considerable differences (e.g. Alcinoüs seems unique in stressing the role of induction in awakening common notions and triggering recollection; Galen does not link common notions to recollection)⁵⁸ it is at least clear that the Platonists, here as on other topics, have pursued a project of subordinative appropriation. Similarly, on the Peripatetic front, there is evidence that Alexander of Aphrodisias, especially in his *Metaphysics* commentary, engaged in the construction of a distinctive Peripatetic theory of common notions as starting points of deductive arguments, into which he brought together, under a distinctively Stoic label, the Aristotelian concepts of both universal *endoxa* as dialectical premises and primitive axioms, anchoring this theory in the two-pronged Aristotelian thesis that all knowledge derives from a previous one (cf. esp. *An. post.* A 1) but not every knowledge can be proved (cf. esp. *An. post.* A 13).⁵⁹

So when Plotinus chooses – again, only here in the *Enneads* – to speak of ‘common notion,’ he finds behind himself a considerable amount of reflection associated with this phrase. It had received an innatist and metaphysical twist

occurrences are insufficient to claim that the Middle-Platonists were *merely* following the dialogues, as H. Dörrie - M. Baltes, *Der Platonismus in der Antike*, 6.2, pp. 128-30.

⁵⁶ Cf. Cic. ac. I 30-2, 42; Anon. in *Th.* 15.3-30, 23.1-12, 46.43-9, 47.37-48.3 Bastianini-Sedley; Alc. *Did.* 150.20-32; Gal. *PHP* V.593, *MM* X 40, *Diff. Puls.* VIII 704-9 Kühn; in fact, also Plut., fr. 215 Sandbach = Dam. in *Phd.* 1, 280.

⁵⁷ Cf. esp. R. Chiaradonna, *Platonismo e teoria della conoscenza stoica tra II e III secolo d. C.* (stressing the differences between these authors); M. Bonazzi, *À la recherche des idées*; Id., *Platonist Notions and Forms*; G. Boys-Stones, *Platonist Philosophy 80 BC to AD 250*, ch. 13.

⁵⁸ Cf. again R. Chiaradonna, *Platonismo e teoria della conoscenza stoica tra II e III secolo d. C.*; and more recently Id., *Concepts in Late Antiquity*.

⁵⁹ Cf. F. A. J. de Haas, *Deduction and Common Notions in Alexander's Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics A 1-2*; Id., *De mixtione V-VI: Common Notions and Bodies Receiving Bodies*; Id., *Alexander of Aphrodisias on Concepts*.

from the Platonist quarter and had been linked to axiomatic and the theory of deductive demonstration from the Peripatetic one. Both aspects, I submit, are conspicuous in VI 5 [23].1. Here is how Plotinus elaborates on the claim that PO is a ‘common notion’:

[1] That that which is one and identical in number is everywhere, and simultaneously whole, is a common notion, they say, whenever all human beings are naturally moved to say that the god in each of us is one and identical. [2] And if one does not demand of them how this happens, and is unwilling to examine rationally their belief, they would posit this, realizing it in their thought, and they would rest there, supported by that which is one and identical, and they would not want to be cut off from this unity (VI 5 [23]1.1-8, trans. Gerson).⁶⁰

There are two main claims in this passage. The first ([1]) is an empirical argument for PO as a common notion. Citing Euripides’ fr. 1018 Nauck² (= Men. *Mon.* 434 Meineke) in support («Our intellect is a god in each of us»)⁶¹ Plotinus claims that we humans all have a natural impulse to affirm the presence of the divine as one and identical in each of us.⁶² He belabors this *prima facie* counterintuitive point in VI 5 [23], 4.1-13 averting that anyone who has a concept of god unreflectively denies that it is in one place and not in another, parceled out, divided and corporeal. All this, Plotinus reckons, shows that by nature we intuitively and pre-theoretically believe in the omnipresence of what is one and identical. PO is therefore an innate notion. Scholars disagree on whether common notions have for Plotinus an innate or empirical origin.⁶³ The debate

⁶⁰ Τὸ ἓν καὶ ταῦτὸν ἀριθμῶ πανταχοῦ ἅμα ὅλον εἶναι κοινὴ μὲν τις ἔννοιά φησιν εἶναι, ὅταν πάντες κινούμενοι αὐτοφυσῶς λέγωσι τὸν ἓν ἐκάστῳ ἡμῶν θεὸν ὡς ἓνα καὶ τὸν αὐτόν. Καὶ εἴ τις αὐτοὺς τὸν τρόπον μὴ ἀπαιτοῖ μηδὲ λόγῳ ἐξετάζειν τὴν δόξαν αὐτῶν ἐθέλοι, οὕτως ἂν καὶ θεῖντο καὶ ἐνεργοῦντες τοῦτο τῇ διανοίᾳ οὕτως ἀναπαύονται εἰς ἓν πως συνερείδοντες καὶ ταῦτόν, καὶ οὐδ’ ἂν ἐθέλοιεν ταύτης τῆς ἐνότητος ἀποσχίζεσθαι. Numbering is of course mine.

⁶¹ Cf. also Arist. *Protr.* 73, 48, p. 308 Gigon = 10c, pp. 42-3 Ross; *EN* X 7, 1077b28; Cic. *Tusc.* 1, 65 (all referenced by C. Tornau, *Plotin, Enneaden VI 4-5 [22-23]*, p. 323).

⁶² Note that αὐτοφυσῶς at VI 5 [23], 1.3 is another Plotinian *hapax*. It occurs only once in Aristotle (T 15, p. 83 Gigon) and twice in Pl. *Grg.* 513b4 and *Lg.* I 642c8. The latter passage may be a source for Plotinus. Here Megillus affirms that the Athenians «are unique in that they are good not because of any compulsion, but spontaneously (αὐτοφυσῶς), by a divine gift (θεῖα μοίρα)». This may corroborate an innatist reading of Plotinian common notions, cf. below nn. 63-66 and text thereto. But note also that the term occurs at the very beginning of Alexander’s *in Metaph.* 1, 9 Hayduck = 2, 25 Golitsis (and here, too, it is a *hapax*, the only other occurrence being at 521, 8 Hayduck, which is Ps.-Alexander’s text), where Alexander is explaining the exordial sentence that «all humans by nature desire to know».

⁶³ Innatists include J. F. Phillips, *Stoic Common Notions in Plotinus*; A. Michalewski, *Plotinus on the Conception of Time* (Ennoia Chronou); R. Chiaradonna, *Concepts in Late Antiquity*. Empiricists include: B. van den Berg, *As we are always speaking of them and using their names on every occasion*; and (more nuanced) P. Remes, *Plotinus on starting points of reasoning*.

has especially focused on the *ennoia* of time mentioned in III 7 [45].⁶⁴ While I cannot fully discuss details here, I side with the innatists and argue that PO can hardly be a notion obtained *a posteriori*. First, as we will better see in a moment, Plotinus maintains that the distorting influence of sensory experience on our *logos* spoils our common notion of PO. It is therefore quite implausible that sensory experience is also the source of PO. Second, at VI 5 [23], 1.9-11 Plotinus asserts that «our souls proclaim [PO] not as a generalization from particulars, but as coming before all particulars»⁶⁵, which suggests that the notion of PO precedes ordinary experience. Thus, that notion seems better interpreted as an innate trace of the intelligible in our soul, a pre-philosophical mental content that is a ‘latent residue’ of our hypostatic origin, to which we are always partly tied thanks to our undescended intellect.⁶⁶ On this point, then, Plotinus seems roughly in agreement with various earlier Platonists, like Alcinous.

The second claim ([2]), however, seems to draw a line. Here Plotinus makes a remark about how the common notion of PO relates to *logos*: if no one cross-examines us through *logos* on that notion and does not ask us to account for it rationally, we would remain tranquil in it and in the unity and identity it professes (similar scenario with time and eternity, cf. III 7 [45], 1.1-8). Some commentators take this to imply that that notion is wholly ‘non-discursive’,⁶⁷ but this seems to me to sit uneasily with the repeated occurrence in this passage of *verba dicendi* (cf. VI 5 [23].1.2: φησιν; 3: λέγωσι; 9: φθέγγονται). In any case, the point is that instead of serving as a tool to articulate that notion scientifically and accomplish recollection, as per various Middle Platonists, our *logos* seems to ruin it. Why? Plotinus explains it at VI 5 [23], 2.1-6: our reason tends to direct itself towards the bodily world and be oriented by sensory experience, so to become correspondingly fragmented and pluralized and to carry out scientific inquiries within a physicalist framework, relying on bodily principles and mistakenly attempting to account on their basis for the nature of the intelligibles and for the notions connected to them, including PO. In short, our *logos*, under the influence of sensory experience, divides and sep-

⁶⁴ See esp. the papers by van den Berg and Michalewski cited in the previous note.

⁶⁵ [...] ἦν [sc. ἀρχήν] ὡσπερ αἱ ψυχαὶ ἡμῶν φθέγγονται [, μὴ ἐκ τῶν καθέκαστα συγκεκριαλιωθεῖσα, ἀλλὰ πρὸ τῶν καθέκαστα πάντων προελθοῦσα (tr. Strange-Emilsson).

⁶⁶ On the undescended intellect, cf. part. IV 8[6], 8.1-6, with R. Chiaradonna, *La dottrina dell'anima non discesa in Plotino e la conoscenza degli intelligibili*; also Id., *Plotino*, pp. 81-116. Regarding the common notions’ provenance, note that Plotinus avoids the expression φυσικὴ ἔννοια entirely (cf. *supra* n. 39), which may be read as a conscious choice to stress that common notions come to us ‘from above’.

⁶⁷ E.g. R. Chiaradonna, *Plotino e la scienza dell'essere*, p. 118 n. 5.

arates what in the intelligible world is perfectly unified, and ultimately treats the intelligibles on a par with the sensibles. So when it turns to rationally examine PO, it blurs it and ultimately fails to grasp it.

This cannot, however, be the whole story. If Plotinus refused *every* role to rational inquiry *vis-à-vis* common notions, he would intendedly leave no room for philosophical inquiry and full rational knowledge and claim that we should be content with a pre-theoretical understanding of the world.⁶⁸ This is rather implausible. So what if – one may ask – we make a different use of *logos* and exercise it starting from the appropriate, intelligible principles, as Plotinus himself recommends in the rest of VI 5 [43], 2?⁶⁹ Plotinus does not make it explicit, but the following seems a safe guess. If we put in place a superior way of reasoning, reorienting our intellectual gaze ‘upwards’ and adopting a different epistemic perspective that starts from principles appropriate to the intelligibles, we can effectively clarify and articulate the common notion of PO and make cognitive progress, until we successfully grasp the content of the common notion in all its fullness – a cognitive achievement in which discursive reasoning no longer takes place and our intellect identifies itself completely with its object.⁷⁰ I take it that this is indeed part of the moral of VI 5 [43], 2 and VI 5 [43] more broadly. Notably, in VI 5 [43], 5 Plotinus sets out to articulate PO through a “regimented” use of *logos* that guides us, for clarity (cf. VI 5 [43], 5.1: σαφηνείας μὲν ἔνεκα), to its understanding through the analogy (cf. VI 5 [43], 5.22: ἀνάλογον) of the circle, its center, and the radii departing from the center.⁷¹ Regimented *logos* succeeds in understanding, through such an analogy, the one-many relation in the intelligible world, i.e. the notion of a plurality that is generated (cf. VI 5 [43], 5.2-3: τοῦ πλήθους τοῦ γενομένου), seamlessly, from a center that is its source and in which the many things are «all together» (VI 5 [43], 5.3-4: ὁμοῦ πάντα). Such a positive use of *logos* that sheds light and articulates the common notion of PO is surely different from that recalled in VI 5 [23], 1.

⁶⁸ As rightly stressed by R. Chiaradonna, *Des notions communes à la philosophie*, p. 120 (nuancing and complementing Id., *Platonismo e teoria della conoscenza stoica tra II e III secolo d. C.*, pp. 234-8), to consult with Id., *Concepts in Late Antiquity*, and P. Lautner, *Concepts in the Neoplatonist Tradition*, also for the Porphyrian and more broadly Neoplatonist posterity of the doctrine of common notions.

⁶⁹ On this section of VI 5 [43], 2 and Plotinus reworking of Aristotle’s theory of proper principles in the *Posterior Analytics*, cf. R. Chiaradonna, *Plotino e la scienza dell’essere*.

⁷⁰ The literature on discursive and non-discursive reasoning in Plotinus is vast, cf. at least E. K. Emilsson, *Plotinus on Intellect*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2007, ch. 4.

⁷¹ Cp. *i.a.* VI 8 [39], 18. Reference discussion of the analogy, its pervasive Plotinian use and its sources, in R. Chiaradonna, *L’analogia del cerchio e della sfera in Plotino*.

Tacking stock: PO is an innate, pre-philosophical mental content conveyed by the immediate and natural apprehension of the divine within us, unique and identical. This content comes to the soul directly from the intelligible (it therefore has no empirical origin) and is a ‘latent residue’ of our hypostatic origin. As such, it presents itself in a confused and indistinct state, but is nonetheless true and an effective starting point for knowledge. When we commit ourselves to articulating and clarifying this content, we can have two distinct attitudes, corresponding to two contrasting ways of exercising *logos*:

- i) We adopt an ordinary and common way of reasoning, based on a divided type of reasoning, which operates in a physicalist framework and attempts to account for the intelligible from sensible, and therefore improper, principles. In this way, we cannot achieve real philosophical knowledge and, indeed, the *logos* spoils the common notion, further obscuring it and ultimately dispersing its truthful content.
- ii) We adopt a superior way of reasoning, reorienting our intellectual gaze ‘upwards’ by adopting a different perspective that starts from principles appropriate to intelligibles. In this way, we can effectively clarify and articulate the common notion of PO and make cognitive progress, until we successfully grasp the content of the common notion in all its fullness.

2.3. *The principle of omnipresence as the firmest principle*

Various elements examined so far in VI 5 [23] suggest that Plotinus is here developing a multilayered anti-Aristotelian argument. This becomes striking at VI 5 [23], 1.9 where he calls PO «the firmest principle», a phrase taken from *Metaphysics* Γ 3 and there put at the service of anti-Platonic remarks. Plotinus, as I said, does not engage in mechanically answering Aristotelian objections to Plato. For instance, he does not argue, against Aristotle and with Plato, that the PNC has the status of a hypothesis or that the Good is the firmest principle. Rather he deploys his reading of the *Parmenides* to single out a principle that he considers firmer and more fundamental than PNC and – we may add – even potentially in conflict with it: if «that which is one and identical in number is everywhere, and simultaneously whole», it is both here and not here and one and many at the same time and in the same respect.

The identification of PO as the firmest principle is part of a Plotinian project of constructing a science of intelligible being, a project which is fundamentally anti-Aristotelian but also draws heavily on the theory of science of the *Posterior Analytics* and, relatedly, on the interpretation of metaphysics as a demonstrative science defended and established by Alexander of Aphrodis-

ias.⁷² In commenting on the *Metaphysics*, especially (but not exclusively) Book Γ, Alexander developed an account of the Aristotelian science of being *qua* being that made it rigorously matching the epistemological requirements set in the *Posterior Analytics*, notably the one whereby the unity of a demonstrative science rests on three main factors: (1) what is demonstrated, i.e. the conclusion, catching the *per se* attributes of a given subject (the *per se* attributes of being *qua* being); (2) the axioms, i.e. that from which, being appropriate to the subject of demonstration, scientific demonstrations proceed; (3) the underlying genus, i.e. the subject of demonstration.⁷³ Following this blueprint, Plotinus sets out the knowledge of the intelligibles as a science that has as its subject matter, precisely, intelligible being and which demonstrates its *per se* attributes starting from appropriate (i.e. non-physical) principles. PO is the most fundamental of these axiomatic principles.⁷⁴

But how and why exactly is PO the *firmest* principle? Plotinus does not spell it out. The remainder of VI 5 [23], 2 is devoted to showing that PO is prior even to the principle that «all things desire the Good» – itself an Aristotelian principle⁷⁵ – that is the One.⁷⁶ We may intuitively figure out why: it is because the One is pervasively present in everything (cf. VI 5 [23], 1.26: «everything is one», ἐν ἅρα πάντα τὰ ὄντα) and constitutes all things in their fundamental structure that everything, insofar as it turns to tend to its own constitutive origin (cf. VI 5 [23], 7), desires the One – and the same holds for every intelligible unity *vis-à-vis* its participants. It may be important in this connection to note, incidentally, that PO does not concern the nature of the One but its relation to posterior things: one cannot have a common notion of the One as such, but only in its relation to the intelligible Being, which is the object of science.⁷⁷ But all this still tells us preciously little in response to our question.

⁷² This has been thoroughly shown by R. Chiaradonna, *Plotino e la scienza dell'essere*.

⁷³ Cf. esp. P. Donini, *Unità e oggetto della metafisica secondo Alessandro di Afrodisia*; M. Bonelli, *Alessandro di Afrodisia e la metafisica come scienza dimostrativa*; G. Guyomarc'h, *L'unité de la métaphysique selon Alexandre d'Aphrodise*; F. A. J. de Haas, *Deduction and Common Notions in Alexander's Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics A 1-2*.

⁷⁴ Here we also see the Alexandrian connection between common notions and axiomatics. Cf. *supra* n. 59 and text thereto.

⁷⁵ Cf. Arist. *EN A 1*, 1.1094a1-3, and already Pl. *R.* 505d-506a. Further Plotinian references for the same principle in C. Tornau, *Plotin, Enneaden VI 4-5 [22-23]: Ein Kommentar*, p. 326.

⁷⁶ Cf. Plot. II 9 [33], 1.5-6; and esp. VI 9 [9] (entitled *On the Good or the One*), with C. Steel, *L'un et le bien: les raisons d'une identification dans la tradition platonicienne*.

⁷⁷ Cf. R. Chiaradonna, *Plotino*, pp. 117-37, part. 124-9.

I propose the following explanation. It seems to me that PO is the firmest principle in a sense quite similar to the one applying to the PNC in *Metaph.* IV 3. That is to say: PO is the firmest principle in that it is «best known» (cf. *Metaph.* Γ 3, 1005b13: γνωριμωτάτη), i.e. self-evident and about which one cannot be mistaken (regardless of one's own beliefs about it).⁷⁸ Aristotle declared the PNC to be such a principle because it is impossible to genuinely hold, at the same time and in the same respect, contradictory beliefs (cf. *Metaph.* Γ 3, 1005b23-32). Similarly, PO is self-evident, in that it is a common notion («which our souls proclaim», cf. *supra* n. 65 and text thereto) and cannot really be denied. For to do so would ultimately mean admitting the possibility of pure (i.e. thoroughly dispersed and indeterminate) multiplicity, which is impossible and unthinkable.⁷⁹ As Plotinus remarks at V 6 [24], 3.2-4: «there can be no many if there does not exist a one from or in which the many exist, or generally a one which is counted first among all the rest, which we must grasp alone in itself».⁸⁰ The point is famously belabored at length in VI 9 [9], 1. Given that hylomorphic substantial forms cannot serve as veritable principles of unity,⁸¹ and even less can a material principle such as the Stoic *idiōs poion* (cf. VI 1 [42], 29), the only remaining viable candidate is, according to Plotinus, the Platonic separate Form and, ultimately, the One. But rigorously positing such an entity entails subscribing to PO. So since pure multiplicity is off-limit, PO is undeniable. In this sense, it is prior to all particulars (cf. again n. 65 and text thereto), that is, it is a primitive axiomatic principle in which on which all others and ultimately the whole body of scientific knowledge must be grounded.

The Plotinian response to the anti-Platonic undercurrent of Γ 3 can then be summarized as follows. In developing the metaphilosophical project of a Platonist science of being – which both draws from and subverts the theory of science of *Posterior Analytics* and Alexander's use of it to account for the science of being *qua* being – Plotinus isolates PO, whose content is an almost *verbatim* quotation from the *Parmenides*, as the primitive axiomatic principle, the firmest principle, replacing Aristotle's PNC.

⁷⁸ Cf. also in this direction C. Tornau, *Plotin, Enneaden VI 4–5 [22–23]: Ein Kommentar*, p. 325; and A. Longo, *L'assimilation originale d'Aristote dans le Traité VI. 5 [23] de Plotin*, pp. 159–60.

⁷⁹ Cf. Pl., *Phlb.* 17e3-4; Arist., *Ph.* A 4, 187b7-8; Thphr. *Metaph.* 9b4-5 Gutas; Aristox., *apud* Porph., in *Ptol. harm* 79.9–10 Düring; Plot. VI 1 [42], 1.8-9; Porph. *Isag.* 6, 11-23 Busse.

⁸⁰ οὐ δύναται γὰρ πολλὰ μὴ ἐνὸς ὄντος, ἀφ' οὗ ἢ ἐν ᾧ, ἢ ὅλως ἐνὸς καὶ τούτου πρώτου τῶν ἄλλων ἀριθμουμένου, ὃ αὐτὸ ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ δεῖ λαβεῖν μόνον. Cf. also V 3 [49], 12.9-10.

⁸¹ Cf. R. Chiaradonna, *Plotinus on Hylomorphic Forms*.

If this reading is on the right track, it will come as no surprise to find at the beginning of two cardinal texts of Neoplatonist metaphysics such as Porphyry's *Sentences* and Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, principles ostensibly inspired by PO. The *Sentences*, a condensed handbook of Plotinian philosophy,⁸² begin with two statements, whose inspiration at VI 4-5 [22-3] has already been remarked⁸³ and amenable to further specification with reference to PO – the principle which, after all, gives the title to VI 4-5 [22-3].⁸⁴ Proclus may also have had VI 5 [23], esp. ch.1 in mind when enunciating and constructing the demonstration of the first proposition of the *Elements of Theology*: «Every manifold in some way participates unity» (p.1.1 Dodds).⁸⁵ The demonstration proves that pure multiplicity is not possible (p.1.2-14 Dodds), a thesis which we have seen to be complementary to PO.⁸⁶ We can therefore reasonably conclude that through PO Plotinus established a key axiom of Neoplatonic metaphysics.

3. Conclusion

Let us briefly summarize the conclusions of this essay:

- 1) In *Metaph.* Γ 3 Aristotle calls the PNC, that is, one of the axioms that the science of being *qua* being must also be concerned with, «the firmest principle» and «unhypothetical». In doing so Aristotle transfers to the PNC features that Plato had assigned to the Idea of the Good in *Republic* VI-VII and engages in the same breath with Plato's own formulation of the PNC in *Republic* IV. The main descriptions of the PNC are therefore pervaded, among other things, by an anti-Platonic intent.
- 2) In *Ennead* VI 4-5 [22-3] Plotinus takes it upon himself to show that the intelligibles, unlike the sensibles, are incorporeal and immaterial, there-

⁸² Cf. M. O. Goulet-Cazé, *Le Genre littéraire des Sentences*.

⁸³ Cf. L. Brisson (ed.), *Porphyre. Sentences*, vol. 2, p. 384 (note by G. Madec).

⁸⁴ Cf. *Sent.* 1: «All body is in a place, but none of those things in themselves incorporeal, as such, is in a place» (Πάν μὲν σῶμα ἐν τόπῳ, οὐδὲν δὲ τῶν καθ' αὐτὰ ἀσωμάτων ἢ τοιοῦτον ἐν τόπῳ). *Sent.* 2: «Things in themselves incorporeal, precisely in virtue of the fact that they are superior to all place, are everywhere, not in extension, but partlessly» (Τὰ καθ' αὐτὰ ἀσώματα, αὐτῶ ᾧ κρείττονα παντός ἐστι τόπου, πανταχῆ ἐστιν, οὐ διαστατῶς, ἀλλ' ἀμερῶς).

⁸⁵ Πάν πληθος μετέχει πη τοῦ ἐνός.

⁸⁶ For other parallels among VI 5 [23], *Sent.* 1-2 and *Inst. prop.* §1, cf. C. D'Ancona, *Les Sentences de Porphyre*, pp. 198-200, 251.

fore separate and without extension and spatial location, perfectly unitary, cohesive in themselves, and interpenetrated, so they can be present in an undivided, total and non-spatial way in everything that depends on them. In this way he offers a solution to one of the *aporiai* of the first part of the *Parmenides* that had also inspired Aristotle's criticism of Platonic Forms in *Metaphysics Z 14*.

- 3) More particularly, in VI 5 [23], 1 Plotinus, defending Platonism from the Aristotelian criticisms pervading Γ 3, calls PO the «the firmest principle» and describes it as a 'common notion'. In the latter description, Aristotelian, Stoic, Peripatetic and Platonist theoretical vectors converge. By common notion Plotinus means an innate trace of the intelligible in our soul, a pre-philosophical mental content that is a 'latent residue' of our hypostatic origin, to which we are always partly tied thanks to our undescended intellect. We can distort or develop this trace depending on the modalities of exercise of our *logos*, whether inspired by corporeal or intelligible principles. The first description is directly inspired by Aristotle and intends to replace PNC with PO as better known, self-evident, and undeniable principle. PO thus becomes an axiom of the Platonist science of being that Plotinus undertakes to construct in these treatises, an axiom that will be inherited by the main systems of Neoplatonic metaphysics after Plotinus.

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