

Introduction

1.1 Beauty in Plotinus: Where and How to Start?

It is well-known that Plotinus wrote two treatises on beauty. The first, I.6 *On Beauty*, is also the very first of the *Enneads* and belongs to the group of twenty-one treatises written before Porphyry's arrival in Rome. The second, v.8 *On Intellectual Beauty*, belongs rather to Plotinus' middle period (it is the 31st chronologically) and was very probably part of a larger treatise, which Harder calls the *Großschrift*¹ and which consists of treatises III.8[30] *On Contemplation*, v.8[31] *On Intellectual Beauty* and v.5[32] *That the Intelligibles Are Not Outside the Intellect and on the Good*, reaching its climax in II.9[33] *Against the Gnostics*.²

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- 1 Cf. Harder 1936. The considerable degree of interconnection between the four treatises in question has since become widely accepted, although some have raised serious objections (cf. Wolters 1981, D'Ancona 2009, Narbonne 2011). For a summary of the debate on this topic, see Dufour 2006. To briefly summarise my own position which is similar to that of Darras-Worms (2018, pp. 9–15): 1) I think there is more or less strong textual evidence for the continuity of Plotinus' thought in treatises 30–33. This is, in fact, the core of Harder's thesis: III.8 is on contemplation, while v.8 starts by asking how it is possible to attain contemplation of Intellect and ends by asking whether this is enough or whether we should adopt another approach, such as the one laid out in v.5. This treatise ends with a summary to the effect that beauty (from v.8) and beings (from v.5) must come from the Good (causality being one of the main topics in III.8). All of this serves as background to the debate with the Gnostics, as is once again attested at the beginning of II.9, where we find a brief summary of what the Good (from III.8 and v.5), the Intellect (from v.8 and v.5) and soul (from III.8) are, while the attack on the Gnostics largely relies on the idea of continuity (from III.8). 2) The continuity between III.8 and II.9 does not necessarily imply the existence of a *Großschrift* that Porphyry himself cut into pieces with scissors, as Narbonne jokingly interprets Harder's thesis (although treatises v.8 and v.5 were probably divided in a similar way). 3) This continuity of thought does, however, indicate, on my reading, that in this period Plotinus was dealing with a bundle of interconnected topics, such as the true nature of the intelligible (described from various perspectives as being beautiful, as being true, as having the intelligibles in itself and as being contemplation) and what this means for other levels of reality (In what sense is the Good both contemplation and something intelligible? How is everything below the level of Intellect contemplation?). 4) All of this was crucial for the debate with the Gnostics (see below), although Aristotle, as usual, is also in dialogue with various other philosophers and schools (e.g. Plato, the Stoics).
 - 2 An interesting supplement to the *Großschrift* is treatise VI.6[34] *On Numbers*. For the discussion of its connection with the *Großschrift* and its relevance for the concept of beauty, see further below and chapter 5.

There does not seem to be any serious reason to suppose a significant evolution in Plotinus' philosophy. Even leaving aside the problematic nature of developmental theories from a hermeneutical perspective, there exists some positive evidence for consistency in Plotinus' thought. In his *Life of Plotinus*, Porphyry gives at least four reasons for adopting a unitary perspective. The first two arguments are rather indirect: First, Plotinus began to write in his fifties, i.e. when he had already reached relative philosophical maturity. Second, "he worked out his train of thought from beginning to end in his own mind, and then, when he wrote it down, since he had set it all in order in his mind, he wrote as continuously as if he was copying from a book" and when he "had written anything he could never bear to go over it twice, even to read it through once was too much for him" (*VP* VIII.8–11 and 1–4).³ This approach can easily lead to incoherence in the various expressions of his thought, although, if true, it testifies to the existence of an extremely concentrated mind. Thus, in my opinion, when we encounter potentially contradictory passages, our first attempt to resolve the contradiction should be to seek out a specific perspective from which both A and non-A can be predicated. This suggestion is given further support by the fact that the majority of what Plotinus writes about cannot be expressed, in the strict sense of the term. This situation holds not only for the Good, which is beyond all predication, but also for Intellect, which is the intelligible structure that our language merely imitates, as well as for matter, since we can only have an image of it as of an indefinite mass or a void, as Plotinus puts it in treatise 11.4 *On Matter* (cf. 11.4.11–12). However, this does not prevent Plotinus from attempting to talk about these things, and his terminological vagueness does not imply vagueness in his thinking, but rather the opposite. As such, Plotinus' writing is to a considerable extent the embodiment of the ideal of modern hermeneutics: the flow of his ideas is a constant attempt to express *verbum interius* and he shows no mercy towards his own laboriously constructed images, constantly seeking to express himself with ever greater precision.⁴

Third, the idea of development is not foreign to Porphyry, who claims that Plotinus' power (*δύναμις*) varied in the *Enneads*: "The power of the treatises varies according to the period in which he wrote them, in early life, in his prime,

3 Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this book are from Armstrong. Although a new translation by Gerson et al. has recently been published, its strengths and weaknesses have yet to be determined. Since several translators were involved in this translation, the style seems to me slightly less consistent as compared to Armstrong's brilliant work.

4 Cf. e.g. Grondin 1991.

or in his illness. The first twenty-one show a slighter capacity, not yet attaining to the dimensions of his full vigour. Those produced in his middle period reveal his power at its height: these twenty-four, except for the short ones, are of the highest perfection. The last nine were written when his power was already failing, and this is more apparent in the last four than in the five which precede them" (*VP* VI.27–37). Porphyry's judgement on the fluctuating strength of Plotinus' powers of expression is controversial, since, for example, one of the treatises that is most highly regarded by almost everyone, VI.9 *On the One or the Good*, belongs to the period of his supposedly diminished capacities. This is not my point here, however. Porphyry thinks that changes have occurred during the sixteen years of Plotinus' literary production, but that these changes concern his powers rather than his teachings. Finally, the last argument rests on the fact that Porphyry thought it possible to divide and rearrange his treatises in a rather brutal and somewhat artificial way in order to produce six *Enneads* ordered according to their topics: ethics, physics and metaphysics (the latter dealing, in turn, with soul, Intellect and the One).⁵ This editorial procedure implies that although each *Ennead* contains treatises from different periods, Porphyry's view is that this should not cause any difficulties.

Is it then necessary to read the two treatises on beauty separately? Yes and no. For reasons I have already at least partly discussed, we should not be afraid to illuminate certain passages with help of other treatises, even ones from different periods, especially when we face problems that cannot be resolved solely on the basis of the treatise we are examining. At the same time, we should take into consideration Porphyry's statement that: "He took their subjects [scil. of his treatises; O.G.] from problems which came up from time to time in the meetings of the school" (*VP* V.61–62). This means that some treatises may treat different problems, whereas others treat the same ones. It is thus possible to use Porphyry's chronological ordering in order to try to examine the *Enneads* from the perspective of the problems discussed.⁶ What I mean by this is that there are groups of treatises from different periods which deal with shared or closely related topics. In this sense, there is indeed a development. It would be

5 See the critical comments on Porphyry's arrangement of the *Enneads* by, for example, Armstrong, Gerson and O'Meara (Armstrong 1967, Gerson 2010, O'Meara 1993). At the same time, cf. the interesting attempt by Slaveva-Griffin (2008) to explain Porphyry's course of action as expressing an intrinsic tendency in Plotinus' philosophy. She argues that "just as the substantial number organises the intelligible realm as many-in-one, so does its material image, the monadic number, arrange the multiplicity of the treatises into *kosmos*, which is turned inward towards its intelligible essence" (p. 282).

6 Cf. a similar observation by Hadot (1986, p. 232) and Darras-Worms (2018, pp. 7–9).

quite odd to suppose that Plotinus dealt with the same problems when writing his first and his thirty-first treatises.⁷

1.2 Treatise v.8: Plotinus the Defender, or the Top-Down Perspective

What, then, are the questions that Plotinus poses in the two treatises on beauty, and what was he aiming at in writing them? It is relatively easy to define the context of v.8, which (as already mentioned) is quite probably an integral part of the *Großschrift* culminating in 11.9 *Against the Gnostics*, and supplemented by v1.6 *On Numbers*, which completes the discussion of problems associated with Plotinus' concept of number started in v.5.4. In order to attack the Gnostics, Plotinus needs a firm foundation—a foundation that is provided in 111.8, v.8 and v.5 with their conception of contemplation, beauty, Intellect and the Good. Note the way in which Plotinus poses questions and introduces the topics of these treatises. Treatise 111.8 *On Contemplation* begins as follows: “Suppose we said, playing at first before we set out to be serious, that all things aspire to contemplation, and direct their gaze to this end—not only rational but irrational living things, and the power of growth in plants, and the earth which brings them forth—and that all attain to it as far as possible for them in their natural state, but different things contemplate and attain their end in different ways, some truly, and some only having an imitation and image of this true end—could anyone endure the oddity of this line of thought?” (111.8.1.1–8). Similarly in v.8, the topic is presented in the following way: “Since we maintain that the man who has entered into contemplation of the intelligible world and understood the beauty of the true Intellect will be able also to bring into his mind its Father which is beyond Intellect, let us try to see and to say to ourselves, as far as it is possible to say such things, how it is possible for anyone to contemplate the beauty of Intellect and of that higher world” (v.8.1.1–6). And v.5, which follows immediately on v.8 and represents another way to “clear understanding of the intelligible region” (v.8.13.22–24) starts with the question of whether anyone could say that “Intellect, the true and real Intellect, will ever be in error and believe the unreal?” (v.5.1.1–2).

In all of these cases, Plotinus tries to elaborate on what is implied by premises like “everything aspires to contemplation”, “contemplation of Intellect is the contemplation of beauty”, “Intellect can never be in error” or “Intellect is

⁷ Cf. similar statements by Armstrong (in the *Preface* to his translation of the *Enneads*, p. vi11), Bussanich (1985, pp. 12–14) or Atkinson (1983, p. x).

a second god". What he is aiming at is the elaboration of the continuity of different ontological levels (particularly in 111.8), their corresponding continuous beauty (particularly in v.8) and a proper understanding of Intellect, not only with respect to its own object of thought, but also to its source, the Good (particularly in v.5).⁸ He then uses the concepts of continuity, beauty and a definite, defined number of hypostases to attack the Gnostics who are wrong precisely about these points (among other things). They despise the bodily world since they do not understand that it is an image of the intelligible (cf. 11.9.3–4, 11.9.8, 11.9.13). Consequently, they do not understand its beauty (11.9.5, 11.9.7–8, 11.9.16–17), and they also pointlessly multiply the number of ontological levels, attributing evil to Intellect because they do not understand what it is and how it is generated (cf. 11.9.1–4, 11.9.11–12).

Accordingly, Plotinus' tone changes in 11.9, which swarms with mocking questions⁹ of the following kind:

If [...] it [scil. the soul; O.G.] made the world as the result of a moral failure [...] when did it fail? [...] If it began to fail, why did it not begin before? [...] If it forgot them [scil. the intelligible realities; O.G.], how is it the craftsman of the world? [...] Why, if it had any memory at all, did it not want to ascend there? For whatever advantage did it think was going to result for it from making the universe? [...] And when, too, is it going to destroy it? For if it was sorry it had made it, what was it waiting for? [...] What other fairer image of the intelligible world could there be? [...] What sphere could be more exact or more dignified or better ordered in this circuit [than the sphere of this universe] after the self-enclosed circle there of the intelligible universe?

11.9.4.1–32

These numerous questions can be condensed into one: How could they possibly bring forward proofs and not only make arbitrary, arrogant assertions? (cf. 11.9.10) Or even better: Who, if he is not out of his mind, could tolerate such ideas? (cf. 11.9.8). Obviously, Plotinus' strategy here is to point out absurd

8 Cf. Kalligas 2000 and Darras-Worms 2018, pp. 11–12.

9 Armstrong aptly summarises Plotinus' probable attitude towards the Gnostics as follows: "They despise and revile the ancient Platonic teaching and claim to have a new and superior wisdom of their own: but in fact anything that is true in their teaching comes from Plato, and all they have done themselves is to add senseless complications and pervert the true traditional doctrine into a melodramatic, superstitious fantasy designed to feed their own delusions of grandeur." See his "Introductory Note" to 11.9 in his translation of the *Enneads*.

deviations of the Gnostic teachings from his own views developed in III.8, v.8 and v.5. This strategy can be shown to be at work even in the case of beauty, my primary object of interest, since Plotinus raises questions of the following kind:

If someone who sees beauty excellently represented in a face is carried to that higher world, will anyone be so sluggish in his mind and so immovable that when he sees all the beauties in the world of sense, all its good proportion and the mighty excellence of its order, and the splendour of forms which is manifested in the stars, for all their remoteness, he will not thereupon think, seized with reverence, ‘What wonders, and from what source?’

11.9.16.48–55

Plotinus insists on two crucial points, namely that beauty can inspire an enquiry into its own source (that is, an ascent to a higher ontological level) and that this world is beautiful because it is an image of the intelligible cosmos, the Intellect. The point, of course, is to demonstrate that the sensible world is dominated by a single principle, the Good, manifesting itself on different levels as beauty, and that it is not created by or imbued with evil forces (like the demiurge Yaldabaoth or some similar entity in other versions of Gnosticism). In this sense, Plotinus proceeds from Intellect down towards its image, since it is only beautiful precisely to the extent that it is an image of Intellect (cf. Darras-Worms 2018, pp. 16–17).

1.3 **Treatise 1.6: An Introduction to Plotinus, or the Bottom-Up Perspective**

The first group of twenty-one treatises is different both in tone and in aim from the later ones, as well as asking different questions. Ontological considerations which are later presupposed and whose implications are elaborated in the *Großschrift* are presented here as something which our soul must first reach and comprehend. Plotinus concentrates on persuading his reader about the existence of the basic principles of his universe and introducing their soul to the different ontological levels. Moreover, he explicitly poses the question of how we can aspire to reach these. Let us list again some of the questions from these treatises, which I have organised in ascending order: “What is this one matter which is also continuous and without quality?” (11.4.8.1–2); “What is it which makes us imagine that bodies are beautiful and attracts our hearing to

sounds because of their beauty?" (I.6.1.18–19); "And how are all the things which depend on soul beautiful?" (I.6.1.10–11); "What nature does this [scil. the soul; O.G.] have?" (IV.7.2.1); "How could one reach it [scil. the realm of the intelligible; O.G.]?" (V.9.2.1–2); "How will he [scil. someone who is by nature a lover and truly disposed to philosophy from the beginning; O.G.] ascend to it, and where will his power come from?" (V.9.2.10–11); "Why, then, must we go on up when we have reached the level of soul, and not suppose that it is the first reality?" (V.9.4.1–2); "Has the intelligible, then, virtues?" (I.2.1.15–16); "What is virtue?" (I.2.2.10–11), "How does the Intellect see, and whom does it see? And how did it come into existence at all and arise from the One so as to be able to see?" (V.1.6.1–2); "What then are the things in the one Intellect?" (V.9.9.1); "Where did the intelligible matter come from, from where did it get its being?" (II.4.2.9–10); "Whence, then, does this [scil. Intellect; O.G.] come?" (V.4.1.22); "How does it come from the First?" (V.4.1.24), "What could the One be, and what nature could it have?" (VI.9.3.1); "But why is the generator not Intellect?" (V.4.2.4); "In what sense, then, do we call it one, and how are we to fit it into our thought?" (VI.9.6.1–2); "How then do all things come from the One?" (V.2.1.3–5).

Of course, one could rightly point out that the unifying principle of the first twenty-one treatises is absolutely arbitrary, namely that they were written before Porphyry's arrival in Rome. For this reason, Hadot proposes to divide them into six subgroups, the first dealing with soul, the second dealing with problems of Platonic theory of forms and Aristotle's conception of the Intellect, the third dealing with the Good and the ascent to the Good, the fourth consisting solely of treatise II.4, which is devoted to matter, the fifth examining virtue and purification (this group ought to include I.6) and the sixth group comprising what is left over, III.1 and II.6.¹⁰ I have no substantial objections to this ordering. Moreover, I do not want to press my point too hard and to try to find a characteristic that is unique solely to the first twenty-one treatises and no others. However, it does make sense to presuppose—and the questions quoted above offer some support for this claim—that when one begins to make a record one's doctrines, it is normal to begin with some sort of introduction to its key elements. In Plotinus' case, this mainly means the three hypostases. However, the hypostases are not lifeless presuppositions in our minds that we derive from reality and that, so to speak, must exist in order for us to be able to explain our experience. Rather, they are something real and living, which our soul can encounter. Only when we have experienced them directly can we truly understand what Plotinus is trying to say—or at least this is how he sees things.

10 Cf. Hadot 1993, section *Analytic bibliography*.

For this reason, the question of the motivation for and the range or scope of the soul's ascent plays a crucial role in these introductory writings. Plotinus himself makes clear where we should start:

We ought to consider this first. What is this principle which is present in bodies [scil. that makes them beautiful; O.G.]? What is it that attracts the gaze of those who look at something and turns and draws them to it and makes them enjoy the sight? If we find this, perhaps we can use it as a stepping-stone and get a sight of the rest.

1.6.1.17–21, word order slightly modified

I think that this is precisely the context of treatise 1.6. Beauty represents a perfect stepping-stone, enabling us to catch sight of everything. It is something we are familiar with from the sensible world, something which can move our soul and which, with the right guidance, can be used to draw us up to its source and perhaps even to *the Source*. Of course, Plotinus knew all of this already from having read Plato, which is perhaps the reason why treatise 1.6 was the very first to be written. Put simply, if in the *Großschrift* Plotinus proceeds downwards from the intelligible, in order to demonstrate the beauty of the sensible world as its image, in 1.6 and the following introductory treatises, the approach is the other way around. I shall therefore take a lesson from this in my own enquiry and concentrate first on 1.6, in order to catch a glimpse of the rest. At the same time, v.8 probably contains some further details since it is addressed to a “man who has entered into contemplation of the intelligible world and understood the beauty of the true Intellect” (v.8.1.1–3).

I shall thus start, in chapter 2, with a discussion of treatise 1.6, where I shall look for the outlines of the doctrine of beauty. Chapter 3 then deals with treatise v.8, which is of use in specifying Plotinus' concept of beauty in more detail. In these two chapters, I study the basic outlines of Plotinus' doctrine. This approach seems natural, because these two treatises are generally considered to enquire into this topic and are, in fact, given the title (by Porphyry, of course) *On (Intelligible) Beauty*. Since the conclusion of both of these chapters is that beauty is primarily to be found in the Intellect and that it is closely linked with unity in multiplicity, this topic will need to be investigated in more detail. For this reason, in chapter 3, I sketch five mutually interconnected perspectives that I have identified in the *Enneads*, which Plotinus takes to describe the unity in multiplicity specific to the Intellect. Two of these perspectives, which concern the nature of intellection and intelligible objects, are at least partially sketched in chapters 2 and 3. The perspective relating to the genesis of Intellect is analysed in chapters 3–6. For this reason, chapters 4 and 5 focus for the

most part on the two remaining perspectives, which are connected to Intellect's hierarchical and structural unity in multiplicity.

1.4 *On the Kinds of Being: Plotinus the Exegete*

The first perspective, dealt with in chapter 4, is that of the highest kinds, as presented in treatise VI.2 *On the Kinds of Being II*, where Plotinus also considers the one in Intellect and beauty as candidates for the highest kinds. Treatise VI.2 belongs to the same period as the *Großschrift*, and is itself also part of a larger treatise devoted to the highest kinds, comprising VI.1[42], VI.2[43] and VI.3[44]. Treatise VI.1 engages in a polemic against the Peripatetic (VI.1.1–24) and Stoic (VI.1.25–30) conception of categories. Plotinus' attitude here is, to a certain extent, similar to his attitude in II.9. In both cases, he is attacking a rival doctrine: in II.9, various claims made by the Gnostics, in VI.1, the account of the highest kinds or categories advanced by Aristotle and his school and by the Stoics. Consequently, the questions he asks here are not used as means to explore an unknown field or to add precision to preliminary accounts, but are raised in order to point out ambiguities in rival theories or even to demonstrate that they are nonsensical.¹¹ As in II.9, Plotinus does this in a more (in the case of Stoic doctrines) or less (mainly in the case of Peripatetic ones) derisive way. Surprisingly, his attacks here lack his usual open-mindedness and sense for the author's intention, leading treatise VI.1 to be depreciated by some commentators.¹² In VI.2, Plotinus' attitude is different. He himself declares that “the next thing would be to say how these things look to us, trying to lead back our own thoughts to the thought of Plato” (VI.2.1.4–5). Here, we encounter Plotinus the exegete, who develops a genuinely Platonic conception of the highest kinds.¹³ This treatise contains nearly three times fewer questions than VI.1 and nearly two times fewer than VI.3,¹⁴ while the tone is once again an exploratory one, in which asking questions helps us to be more specific and to advance the argument. Treatise VI.3 thus stands somewhere between the two previous ones: it attacks Aristotle's doctrine of categories, to some extent, but only in order to

11 Cf. for example VI.1.20–21 on affection, which consist almost solely of such questions.

12 E.g. Armstrong (cf. his “Introductory note” to *Enneads* VI.1–3 in his translation of Plotinus) or Atkinson (1983).

13 As Atkinson points out with reference to other places in the *Enneads* and Plato's *Soph.* 254d4 ff. and *Parm.* 145e7 ff. See Atkinson 1983, p. 96.

14 Or, more precisely, one must take into account the length of each treatise, so that number of questions per line is more accurate. There are nearly two times fewer questions per line in VI.2 than in VI.1 and around one-fifth fewer questions per line in VI.2 than in VI.3.

adapt it for the sensible world, as an image of the intelligible one. Both the tone and the questions raised are, in this sense, less hostile than in VI.1.

1.5 *On Number: Plotinus the Explorer*

Chapter 5 develops the second important perspective for giving an account of the unity and multiplicity of Intellect, namely that of number, which is dealt with particularly in VI.6[34] *On Number*, a sort of appendix to the *Großschrift*. As already noted, in V.5.4 Plotinus postpones a thorough discussion of different problems associated with his concept of number, that is, until treatise VI.6. Here he introduces his notion of substantial number (οὐσιώδης ἀριθμός) and thoroughly discusses its relation to Intellect and to the primary kinds. Plotinus presents a systematic defence of the Platonic concept of *true numbers* especially against Aristotle's criticism, but at the same time he develops his own original version of this concept in dialogue with the Middle Platonists and the Neopythagoreans.¹⁵

Correspondingly, Plotinus' approach to raising questions and determining the problems to be discussed changes once again in VI.6. Having discussed the question "Is multiplicity a falling away from the One, and infinity a total falling away because it is an innumerable multiplicity and for this reason is evil in so far as it is infinity, and are we evil when we are multiplicity?" (VI.6.1.1–4), Plotinus turns to the main topic of the treatise: "we must now consider how the numbers are in the intelligible" (VI.6.4.1–2). This is followed by a swarm of exploratory questions: "What then is the nature of numbers?" (VI.6.5.1); "Is it an accompaniment of each substance and something observed in it?" (VI.6.5.1–4); "But how is there a dyad and a triad, and how are all unified, and how could such and such number be brought together into one?" (VI.6.5.4–6); "But if the one itself and the decad itself exist without the things, and then the intelligible things, after being what they are, are going to be, some of them henads and some of them dyads or triads, what would be their nature, and how would it come into existence?" (VI.6.6.1–4); "The starting-point of our investigation is: can number exist by itself, or must the two be observed in two things, and the three likewise? And indeed, also the one which is among numbers?" (VI.6.9.5–8); "Is not Being, then, unified number, and the beings number unfolded, and Intellect number moving in itself, and the Living Being inclusive number?" (VI.6.9.29–32); "What, then, is the proper cause of number?" (VI.6.14.27–28);

¹⁵ Cf. Slaveva-Griffin 2009.

“But in what way is the number in you?” (VI.6.16.37); “What then is the line there in the intelligible, and where?” (VI.6.17.16).

In this sense, the reader once again assumes the role of an explorer, as was the case in the first group of twenty-one treatises. However, treatise VI.6 differs from these earlier ones insofar as it does not contain an ascent from bodies up to the Good. Rather, it is already underway on the intricate roads of reflection on unity, number and multiplicity in the intelligible. In this sense, although VI.6 is explicitly anticipated in the *Großschrift*, it nonetheless focuses to a considerable extent on its own subject matter, abandoning the controversy with the Gnostics, which was at the centre of the treatises in the *Großschrift* (cf. Corrigan 2005, p. 202). Nevertheless, a proper understanding of unity and multiplicity is necessary in order to grasp beauty in the Platonic way, and this is undoubtedly why a relatively large amount of space is more or less explicitly devoted to this topic here.

1.6 Treatise VI.7: The Many Faces of Plotinus and Beauty

Having considered Intellect’s hierarchical and structural unity in multiplicity and its relation to the question of beauty, I then turn in chapter 6 to treatise VI.7[38] *How the Multitude of the Forms Came into Being and on the Good*. This treatise is relevant to the question of beauty, and not only because of the famous chapters 32 and 33, which deal with the relation of beauty to the Good. Treatise VI.7 also develops with greater complexity several motifs already encountered in previous chapters, like that of life, light, the genetic unity and multiplicity of Intellect and the impact of beauty on the soul. However, this treatise is a very complex one consisting of several parts that are only loosely connected.¹⁶ Pierre Hadot (cf. 1988, pp. 20–26 and 76–81) divides the treatise into six parts, each dealing with a Platonic question and commenting on Plato’s dialogues: the first (VI.7.1–7) is devoted to the interpretation of *Tim.* 45b3, the second (VI.7.8–14) elaborates on the contents of Intellect, taking into account the relevant passages from the *Parmenides* (esp. 130a–d), the third part (VI.7.15–24.4) develops the question of the resemblance to the Good on the grounds of *Rep.* 509a, the fourth (VI.7.24.4–30.30) considers different accounts of the good from the perspective of the *Philebus* and *Republic*, the fifth part

16 Siegmann’s interpretation (cf. 1990) of the treatise as being simply on the Good (reflected in his original translation of the title of VI.7: *Wie kam die Vielheit der Ideen zustande? Vom Guten!*) is, in this sense, not persuasive. For chapters 1–14, at least, do not fit into this scheme very well.

(VI.7.30.29–35.45) elaborates on the relationship between beauty and the Good as sketched out in *Phileb.* 64e, *Phdr.* 250c–256e and *Symp.* 211b–212c, and the last part (VI.7.36–42) proves that the Good does not think, which is, according to Plotinus, made clear in *Rep.* 505a and 519c, as well as *Parm.* 142a. The treatise, as Hadot puts it (1988, p. 21), has a kind of musical structure, in which these themes reappear in slightly different forms throughout the whole work. Nevertheless, this does not mean that there was a pre-existing composition for this musical piece, because, as Plotinus himself admits (cf. VI.7.7.17–18), he gets sometimes carried away with some of the topics being discussed (cf. also Hadot 1988, p. 16). The main tone of VI.7 is therefore exegetical (as in VI.2), but the multi-layered nature of the treatise explains why Plotinus adopts different personas in different parts, e.g. that of a teacher lending an ear to his doubting students in the first two parts (VI.7.1–14, cf. also the similar observation by Armstrong in his “Introductory Note” to *Ennead* VI.7) or that of a ruthless opponent in the fourth and sixth parts, where he enters into a discussion with Aristotle and other philosophical schools.

The function of the questions Plotinus raises in the text changes accordingly, so that—to use the same examples—most of the questions raised in the first two parts sound rather like those of a doubting student, e.g.: “For why should there be horns for defence there?” (VI.7.10.1–2); “Does then the world there have everything that is here?” (VI.7.11.3–4); “How then are there plants there?” (VI.7.11.6), “And how does fire live?” (VI.7.11.6–7); “And how does earth?” (VI.7.11.7); “And how in general can these things here be there in the intelligible?” (VI.7.11.8).¹⁷ On the other hand, the questions of the fourth and sixth part are rather sharp, e.g.: “Well then, if evil acquired a perception of itself, would it be satisfied with itself?” (VI.7.28.17–18); “Then, if it is going to think, it will not presumably think itself alone, if it is going to think at all; for why will it not think all things? Will it not be able to?” (VI.7.39.10–12).¹⁸ Consequently, different parts of treatise VI.7 seem to address different questions with different purposes, and it therefore requires a specifically close reading with respect to the changing context in order to be able to understand its claims correctly.

The last chapter of this book then summarises and relates the conclusions of previous chapters and tries to answer the question what the status of beauty is on the level of sensibles (section 7.1), of soul (section 7.2) and in Intellect (section 7.3), as well as in what sense the Good can be said to be beautiful (section

17 Similar questions are also raised in VI.7.1.25–27, VI.7.3.14–15, 22–29, VI.7.4.37–38, VI.7.8.4–5, VI.7.9.4–5, 15–16, and VI.7.11.18.

18 Similar questions are also raised in VI.7.28.16–17, 18–19, VI.7.29.24–25, and VI.7.37.7–8.

7.4). Section 7.3 also tries to distinguish beauty from several other predicates that characterise the Intellect, such as life, being and the other highest kinds, the one in Intellect, multiplicity, number, intellection, active actuality and eternity, knowledge and wisdom and, finally, the virtues. The very last section 7.5 derives several characteristics of beauty that permeate its predication on different ontological levels.