

Beauty as a Stepping-Stone (Treatise I.6)

The very first *Ennead*, I.6 *On Beauty*, represents an introduction to Plotinus' philosophy through the prism of beauty. I shall begin my analysis by summarising the phenomenal field of beauty in the treatise (section 2.1) and by highlighting its relevant context, i.e. Plato's *Symposium* and the Stoic conception of beauty as symmetry (section 2.2). In the manner of an ascent, I shall then focus on the cause of beauty and ugliness in bodies (section 2.3) and soul (section 2.5), and the impact of beauty on the latter (section 2.4). Finally, I shall address the intricate question "What is the primary beauty in treatise I.6?", i.e. whether it is the Intellect or the Good (section 2.6).

2.1 The Phenomenal Field of Beauty

Plotinus begins with an examination of the scope of the beautiful, i.e. what beauty is predicated of. Many people call things perceived by sight (ἐν ὄψει) or hearing (ἐν ἀκοαίς) beautiful, as well as things taken from the arts in general (ἐν μουσικῇ καὶ ἀπάσῃ; cf. I.6.1.1–3). The examples Plotinus gives in the treatise for the former group are the following:

1. bodies (σῶμα/σώματα; cf. I.6.1.7, 12–13, 14–16; I.6.2.1–2, 27–28; I.6.3.5–6; I.6.4.20–22; I.6.5.43–48; I.6.6.29–30; I.6.7.20–21, 35; I.6.8.5–6, 13)
2. body parts: e.g. a face (πρόσωπον; cf. I.6.1.38)
3. a human-shaped statue (ἄγαλμα; cf. I.6.9.8–11)
4. a part of a statue: e.g. a face (πρόσωπον; cf. I.6.9.8–11)
5. a colour (χρῶμα; cf. I.6.1.30–31; I.6.3.17; I.6.7.34)
6. light (φῶς; cf. I.6.1.30–31)
7. gold (χρυσός; cf. I.6.1.33; I.6.5.50–53)
8. lightning (ἀστραπή; cf. I.6.1.33–34)
9. the stars (ἄστρα; cf. I.6.1.33–34); the evening/morning star (ἔσπερος/ἑῶς; cf. I.6.4.11–12)
10. an individual stone (εἶς λίθος; cf. I.6.2.24–27)
11. a house (οἰκία; cf. I.6.2.24–27; I.6.3.6–7)
12. fire (πῦρ; cf. I.6.3.19–20)
13. a reflection in the water (εἶδωλον ἐφ' ὕδατος; cf. I.6.8.9–10)
14. the various types of sensual beauty experienced by Odysseus during his stay with Circe and Calypso (ἔχων /scil. Ὀδυσσεύς/ ἡδονάς δι' ὀμμάτων καὶ κάλλει πολλῶ ἀισθητῶ συνών; cf. I.6.8.20 and Hom. *Od.* 5 and 10)

For the latter group, i.e. beautiful things perceived by hearing, the following examples are to be found in I.6:

15. melodies (μέλη; cf. I.6.1.3)
16. rhythms (ῥυθμοί; cf. I.6.1.3)
17. sounds (φωνή; cf. I.6.1.34–35)
18. perceptible harmonies (ἁρμονίαι φανεραί; cf. I.6.3.28–33)

Both groups share several characteristics. In particular, they may at times appear beautiful and at other times not (cf. I.6.1.37–40), which implies that they are not beautiful in themselves. Rather, they are beautiful only by participation (I.6.1.12–13). Moreover, insofar as they are beautiful, they cannot be composed of ugly parts (I.6.1.26–30). These characteristics will be described in more detail shortly (see section 2.3).

However, Plotinus continues, those who advance upwards from sensible beauties to soul, will also call the following things beautiful:

19. practices (ἐπιτηδεύματα; cf. I.6.1.4–5; I.6.4.8; I.6.5.2–3; I.6.6.29; I.6.9.3)
20. customs (νόμοις; cf. I.6.1.43)
21. actions (πράξεις; cf. I.6.1.5; I.6.6.28)—i.e. the products of virtue (cf. I.6.5.3–4; I.6.9.4)
22. ways of life (τρόποι; cf. I.6.5.3)
23. characters (ἕξεις; cf. I.6.1.5)
24. intellectual activities (ἐπιστημαί; cf. I.6.1.5; I.6.4.8)
25. studies (μαθήματα; cf. I.6.1.44)
26. discourses (λόγοι; cf. I.6.1.41–42)
27. theorems (θεωρήματα; cf. I.6.1.44), as well as their mutual agreement (ὁμολογία τε καὶ συμφωνία; cf. I.6.1.45–49)
28. imperceptible harmonies (ἁρμονίαι ἀφανείς; cf. I.6.3.28–33; Heraclitus DK 22 B 54 and Kalligas 2014, com. ad loc.)
29. virtue (τὸ τῶν ἀρετῶν κάλλος; cf. I.6.1.1–6, 49–50; I.6.4.9; I.6.5.11–12; I.6.9.13–14), along with individual virtues like justice and self-control (δικαιοσύνη καὶ σωφροσύνη; cf. I.6.4.10–11; I.6.5.12–17),
30. soul, which is beautiful as such (ψυχή; cf. I.6.5.4–5; I.6.6.16–17, 27; I.6.9.2–3)¹

In passing, Plotinus sketches a distinction between two types of beings: those that only participate in beauty and those that are themselves beautiful, like virtue (ἀρετῆς ἢ φύσις;² cf. I.6.1.13–14). The difference is supposed to lie in the

1 The list of beauties in soul in I.6.1.40–44 is an obvious reference to Plato's *Symp.* 209e6–212a8.

2 Cf. Kalligas' commentary (2014) on the translation of *physis* ad. loc.

fact that, in the case of participating things, we can distinguish their being bodies, on the one hand, and their being beautiful, on the other. Something can, for example, be a table, but it is not, by that fact, necessarily beautiful (cf. I.6.1.14–16). We can surmise that in the case of a thing that is beautiful in itself, it would be impossible to find a non-beautiful specimen of that type of thing, since its very being is linked with beauty.

This is probably the case of the intelligibles, as well as of the whole Intellect. And, in fact, Plotinus does go on shortly thereafter to speak about the beauty of:

31. the Intellect (cf. I.6.1.53–54; I.6.6.17, 26–27) or the god (θεός; cf. I.6.9.25, 32–34)
32. the Forms, ideas (εἶδη, ιδέαι; cf. I.6.9.35–36) or real beings (ὄντως ὄντα; cf. I.6.5.19–20; I.6.6.21; *Phdr.* 247c7)
33. the place of the Forms (τόπος τῶν εἰδῶν; cf. I.6.9.40–41, *Rep.* 517b5)
34. the things that come from Intellect (τὰ παρὰ νοῦ; cf. I.6.6.17)

Finally, by the end of the treatise:

35. the Good has been repeatedly said to be beautiful (cf. I.6.7.1–3, 14–21, 28–30)
36. or even identified with Beauty (cf. I.6.6.23–24, 25–26, I.6.7.28–30, I.6.9.42–43)

However, in this case, beauty is in some sense different because:

37. it is inconceivable (κάλλος ἀμήχανον; cf. I.6.8.2, *Rep.* 509a6)
38. it should perhaps rather be termed “the beautiful” (καλλονή; cf. I.6.6.25–26)
39. the reaction of soul to this beauty is different, since it causes a painless shock (cf. the use of ἐκπλήττεσθαι ἀβλαβῶς; I.6.7.16–17 and section 2.4 below)

Moreover, the Good is also said to transcend beauty (cf. I.6.9.37–39) and to be beautiful only in a loose way of speaking (cf. I.6.9.39–42), so that it is *prima facie* not clear how we are to understand this contradiction. I shall address this question in the next section (2.2) and revisit it in sections 2.6, 3.5, 6.6 and 7.4.

2.2 The Context of the Question: The *Symposium* and Beauty as Symmetry

As is obvious from the ascending structure of the treatise,³ the hierarchy of the ascension⁴ and direct quotes from and hidden paraphrases of the *Symposium*,⁵ Plotinus is basing the treatise strongly on the passage 199d1–212a7 of this Platonic dialogue.⁶ Here, after a brief discussion between Socrates and Agathon (cf. *Symp.* 199d1–201c9), the former recounts his meeting with the Mantinean sorceress Diotima (cf. *Symp.* 201d1–209e4) and how she initiated him into the mysteries of love (cf. *Symp.* 209e5–212a7). According to this passage, *erōs* is always *erōs for* something, i.e. for beauty, and presupposes a preceding *lack* (cf. 199d1–201a1). If we look more deeply into the topic, however, we see that *erōs* is, like any desire, a desire for the good—or more precisely a desire to possess the good always (cf. *Symp.* 205e7–206b10). Such a need is expressed in terms of giving birth in the beautiful, with respect to body and soul (τόκος ἐν καλῷ καὶ κατὰ τὸ σῶμα καὶ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν; cf. *Symp.* 206b7–8). By giving birth, lovers partake in the eternal and immortal (cf. *Symp.* 206c1–208b9). Those whose pregnancy is of the body do this by physical procreation, giving birth to children. By contrast, those who are pregnant in their souls give birth to virtue (cf. *Symp.* 208c1–209e4). However, the lovers themselves, their conception of beauty and the offspring they give birth to all evolve gradually on the so-called *scala amoris*. This ascent is, to a certain extent, spontaneous, but most lovers—including Socrates himself—require guidance. They start by loving a single body, then advance to loving all beautiful bodies, before arriving at the superior beauty of soul. In this higher realm, they recognise the beauty of practices, laws and knowledge, until they catch sight of the form of beauty itself, in which every beautiful thing partakes. Here, they give birth to true virtue, becoming godlike and attaining immortality as far as possible for a human being (cf. *Symp.* 209e5–212a7 and section 2.4).

As a mythological being, *Erōs* is a divine spirit situated between the immortal gods and mortal human beings, with various responsibilities related to

3 See the similar observation by Tornau (2011) in his introductory note to I.6.

4 Cf. I.6.1.5–6; I.6.6.27–29; I.6.9.1–6.

5 To name the most obvious, see I.6.1.12–14, 14–16, 20, 42–44; I.6.2.4–6; I.6.4.25–26; I.6.5.1–5; I.6.7.21–24; I.6.8.2. However, Tornau (2011) and Kalligas (2014) provide further references in their commentaries.

6 The literature on Plato's *Symposium* is, of course, vast. To name just a few studies from various philosophical traditions, see Krüger 1939, Allen 1991, Sier 1997, Patočka 1997 or Scheffeld 2006.

his intermediary status. He was born from the god Poros, who got drunk at Aphrodite's birthday celebration, and from Penia. As such, he inherited the character of a resourceful and cunning hunter, but is at the same time in a constant state of need (cf. *Symp.* 202b5–204c5). I shall delve deeper into Plotinus' understanding of this myth when discussing the role of *erōs* in treatise VI.7 (see section 6.6).

This very short exposé of Plato's doctrine has provided one of the basic keys for understanding what Plotinus is trying to say in I.6. He chooses the *Symposium* as a background text for at least three reasons:

1. Like Plato, he wants to lead his reader from bodily beauty through that of soul to the beauty of Intellect and beyond. This is made quite explicit at the beginning of the treatise (cf. I.6.1.1–20).
2. Plato's doctrine represented common ground for Plotinus' students.
3. Plotinus must have believed that Plato's doctrine, if properly understood, is the most proper context for posing this question, since he undoubtedly considered Plato's notion of beauty and *erōs* to be correct.

Interpreting treatise I.6 in light of the *Symposium* has important consequences. From the very start, it potentially gives us a hint as to how Plotinus could have spoken of the beauty of the Good, while claiming that the Good is beyond beauty. In the *Symposium*, beauty is, in fact, at the summit of the *scala amoris*, although we know from Plato's *Republic* (508a4–509a7) that the highest form is the Good. However, as is probably also the case in the *Symposium*, if one considers the Good from the perspective of love, it will manifest itself as the ambiguous pair of the beautiful and the good. This results from the fact that the Good is the ultimate object of desire, which is, however, realised as giving birth in the beautiful, so that there is an intimate connection of both. Moreover, the evolution of a lover's understanding of beauty along the *scala amoris* is to be understood as comprising a two-dimensional movement: First, there is a horizontal expansion (cf. the use of ῥώνυμι and ἀξάνω in *Symp.* 210d6–7) on the first two levels, i.e. a movement from one body to all bodies and from a single psychic aspect to all psychic aspects, so that just before grasping the single form of beauty, the lover sees a vast sea of beauty (πολὸν πέλαιρος τοῦ καλοῦ; cf. *Symp.* 210d4). Second, there is a vertical shift from the bodily to the psychic, and then again from the level of soul to the form of beauty. It seems that, by nature, this transformation of the notion of beauty ultimately leads to the search for the principle and source of beauty, i.e. the Good. In the ascent from bodily beauty to the Good, the ultimate goal of one's desire appears as beauty on each level, but the final step reveals the Good as the ultimate source of beauty. From the opposing, top-down perspective, beauty appears on each level after the Good, as a particular manifestation of it. In any case, all of these preliminary remarks

about the relationship between the Good and beauty will need to be pursued further in treatise I.6 (cf. section 2.6) and beyond (cf. sections 3.5, 6.6 and 7.4).

When identifying the context of Plotinus' enquiry, a further, rival conception of beauty must be addressed, which a contemporary reader would probably have had in mind. More specifically, Plotinus states that beauty is not the good proportion of the parts in relation to each other and to the whole (συμμετρία τῶν μερῶν πρὸς ἄλληλα καὶ πρὸς τὸ ὅλον), with the addition of good colour (εὐχρῶια)—i.e. being well-proportioned (σύμμετρος) and measured (μεμετρημένος), as the Stoics claim (cf. I.6.1.20–25).⁷ Plotinus argues against this conception on different levels and suggests that symmetry is an epiphenomenon of beauty, rather than its cause (cf. Smith 2016, com. ad I.6.1.21–54 and Kalligas 2014, com. ad I.6.1.20–25). He begins by pointing out phenomena that are not accounted for by this theory, because they are simple and not composed of visible, well-proportioned parts, e.g. a beautiful colour, light, gold,⁸ lightning, sound or—rather surprisingly—the stars⁹ (cf. I.6.1.30–36). Moreover, the same thing may sometimes appear beautiful and at other times not, even though it has the same proportions, for instance, a beautiful face (cf. I.6.1.37–40) which, in treatise VI.7.22, is said to be ugly on a corpse (cf. part. 5.4). Advocates of the conception of beauty as symmetry also encounter problems in the case of psychic, or rather intelligible phenomena more generally, where it is not obvious what parts should be well-proportioned with respect to which whole, for example in the case of beautiful ways of life (cf. I.6.1.40–45). Most important here, however, is Plotinus' rejection of the claim that beauty is an attribute of a whole which consists of non-beautiful parts (cf. I.6.1.26–30). Even in this case, we see that he draws inspiration from Plato, who explicitly considers this question at the end of *Hipp. Maj.* (297d9–304a4), where Socrates proposes the definition “pleasure through sight and hearing”. Like Plato, Plotinus also advocates a distributive notion of beauty, i.e. he thinks that if the whole is beautiful, its

7 Cf. Johannes Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 2.62.15–63.5 (= *SVF* III.278), Galen, *PHP* 5.2.49–3.1 (= *SVF* II.841), *DL* 7.99–100, Cicero *N.D.* 2.15. However, Plotinus might also be referring to Plato's *Tim.* 87c4–d8, *Phlb.* 64e5–7, *Symp.* 196a4–8 and Aristotle's *Met.* M 3, 1078a36–b1 or *Top.* III 1, 116b21–22. For the historical background of the notion of beauty as symmetry, see Schmitt 2007, Čelkyté 2020 and Hon and Goldstein 2008.

8 The references might once again be to Plato's *Phlb.* 51b–d, *Leg.* VII 812d and *Hipp. Maj.* 289e.

9 An interesting interpretation is suggested by Smith (2016, com. ad I.6.1.34), who claims that Plotinus might be referring to Venus, which appears at first alone in the sky. Otherwise, this example makes little sense. Iozzia (2015, pp. 59–60) correctly notices that all of the examples share a connection with light, which will play a crucial role in Plotinus' understanding of beauty (cf. chapter 6), but even so, the stars as a whole are far from simple, so this does not explain the role of this example in the argument.

parts must be too.¹⁰ Therefore, he argues, it is absurd to call two bad statements which are in agreement beautiful, because a beautiful thing cannot consist of ugly parts (cf. I.6.1.45–49).

It seems to me that this is, in fact, the most important point for Plotinus, because it is precisely the distributive nature of beauty that accounts for the fact that symmetry cannot be the cause of beauty, but only accompanies it. The notion of symmetry assumes that the parts can constitute a higher whole, that is, a structure possessing a quality which the parts themselves do not have. Plotinus, by contrast, will put forward a notion of beauty as a unifying form, which must unite existing parts, that is, parts that participate in a form and are therefore themselves beautiful.¹¹ As we shall see, Plotinus will identify the extent to which such a distribution is successfully achieved within a given body, through the domination of the form over matter (cf. section 2.3). The paradigm of the completely successful distribution of form and beauty of the whole to each part, is of course the Intellect itself. For this reason, Plotinus ultimately asks how the symmetry theory could explain its beauty (cf. I.6.1.54).

2.3 The Cause of Beauty and Ugliness in Bodies

As has already been mentioned, bodies become beautiful by participation, a process which needs to be described in more detail. What is beautiful is what receives form, or, more precisely, what shares in a formative principle (*λόγος*) coming from the divine forms. By participating in a form, a thing becomes unified and ordered, inasmuch as the formative principle dominates in matter (cf. I.6.2.13–18).¹² Or as Plotinus puts it in VI.9, beauty is present “where the nature of the one holds the parts together” (VI.9.1.15–16). What is ugly, by contrast, is that which does not share in form or formative principle at all (i.e. matter itself), or what is not completely dominated by it (cf. I.6.2.13–18). This definition of beauty also explains the earlier rejection of the non-distributive

10 Cf. Gál 2012.

11 This is why I consider Anton's (1964), Smith's (2016) and Kalligas' (2014) reconstructions of Plotinus' argument and the assessment of its validity to be wanting: they focus on the simplicity argument and fail to see the point of the distributive account of beauty. The point of Plotinus' argument has been well noted by Vassilopolou (2014, p. 492) and to a certain extent also by Kuisma (2003, pp. 163–165). See also Čelkytė 2020, chapter 6.

12 As Beierwaltes (1986, p. 299) rightly points out, the form at issue here is not an external one, the shape of the object so to say, but rather form as the inner structural and intelligible principle of a thing.

notion of beauty. If beauty consists of participation in a form which makes a given thing one, it must consist of beautiful parts insofar as they are parts, i.e. insofar as each of them is one. As Plotinus puts it once again in VI.9 “it is by the one that all beings are beings” (VI.9.1.1). If a formative principle dominates in a body, it unites its parts and, in order to do so, these parts must themselves be united. Beauty is, in this sense, distributed from the whole of a body to its parts, if a formative principle seizes hold of the body in question (cf. I.6.2.18–27).

At the same time, we come to a better understanding of the distinction between things that are beautiful by participation and those that are beautiful by nature. The latter must be the forms themselves, taken as a whole, which are beautiful simply by being what they are, i.e. a unified multiplicity (cf. section 3.4). However, it is not yet clear how the forms constitute a unified multiplicity.¹³ Moreover, it is important to notice that Plotinus does not say here that beauty is caused by the form of beauty, as Plato does, but merely that it is caused by *a form*.¹⁴ Both of these issues relate to Plotinus’ specific conception of the Intellect, where each form is all of the others and also the whole of them.¹⁵

It would seem useful, at this point, to outline this concept here, although only with respect to the problem we have just encountered: i.e. how a formative principle is present in a body such that it can either dominate it and make it beautiful, or fail to do so. The most elaborate text on this topic is treatise VI.5[23] *On the Presence of Being, One and the Same, Everywhere as a Whole II*. Plotinus criticises here the illumination simile—which he himself often employs—as empty talk, if we take it to mean that the forms are “placed separately on one side and matter a long way off on the other and then illumination comes to matter from somewhere up there [...] and the Idea is reflected in matter as if in

13 The identification of beauty with participation in form, i.e. with being unified multiplicity has been noticed by Lee 2004, p. 79, Kuisma 2003, pp. 65–73, Leinkauf 2007, pp. 89–90 and Halfwassen 2003, pp. 88–89, and 2007, p. 46.

14 But there are passages in the *Enneads* (cf. VI.6.1, VI.6.8, VI.6.14 and VI.3.12), which suggest that beauty is a particular form or which even explicitly say so. For a discussion of this topic see section 5.2. I consider those interpreters who claim that there is a form of beauty in Plotinus wrong, especially if they base their claim on I.6, which simply does not say this. It is nevertheless a widespread error: cf. Rist (1967, pp. 62–63), Anton (1967/68, p. 92), D’Ancona Costa (1996), Alexandrakis (1997) and Klitenic Wear (2017, pp. 1–2, but cf. her com. ad I.6.5.10 and, even more oddly, her com. ad I.6.6.23–24). Some of Beierwaltes’ statements (2013, p. 8) also seem to suggest this, although in other texts, he is more careful (cf. 2011, pp. 244–245). The opposite view is defended by Darras-Worms (2018, p. 156), Smith (2016, pp. 24–25), Tomulet (2014), Kalligas (2014, p. 194), Karfik (2014a), Omtzigt (2012, pp. 78–79), Gerson (2010, p. 183, footnote 22), O’Meara (1993, p. 91) or Schubert (1973, p. 69).

15 For a detailed analysis of Intellect in Plotinus, see especially Emilsson 2007.

water” (VI.5.8.4–6 ... 16–17). The correct interpretation of illumination requires a grasp of two points. That which illuminates abides like an archetype in itself, while that which is illuminated is an image of the archetype that is kept separate from it by illumination (cf. VI.5.8.12–15). Anything that participates, loves the archetype as something beautiful that it cannot assimilate itself to as such; rather, it is only able “to lay” with it (παράκειμαι), i.e. to be in its presence, and this acquires a share in it (cf. VI.5.10.1–11). Plotinus compares this presence of the one in many (without the one becoming many) to sharing a thought, which is not one thing for me and something else for others, but rather the same for everyone (cf. VI.5.10.11–23). This comparison is further illustrated with another brilliant simile: to think that people sharing a thought have different thoughts is similar to thinking that if we touch the same thing with each of our fingers in turn, each of our fingers touches something different (cf. VI.5.10.24–26). Moreover, we must understand that a form is not only present in many things, abiding in itself, but it is present as a whole to all. Such is the case of life in a living being and, in the same way, all souls are one (cf. VI.5.9.10–13). In treatise I.6, Plotinus illustrates the rule of form and its presence in all things, by comparing it with the impact of fire on other bodies. It warms them without becoming cold, and shines and glitters, giving colour to everything else, while it itself has colour in a primary sense (cf. I.6.3.19–28). In other words, it acts like an abiding archetype.

Why then is everything not everywhere? Plotinus answers this question on two different levels. First, this lack of omnipresence is caused by an incapacity of the recipient (ἀδυναμία τοῦ ὑποκειμένου; cf. VI.5.11.31), such that not all matter is equally disposed to receive a certain form, depending on what forms it has already received (cf. VI.5.11.35–36). Even prime matter is primarily adapted for the primary kinds of bodily forms (cf. V.5.11.36–38). It is a kind of spatial indefiniteness, which we always imagine as a void. This void acquires a certain size (μέγεθος) and quality (ποιότης), thus becoming a mass (ὄγκος). It may receive other forms only afterwards (cf. II.4.11–12). The second reason why everything is not everywhere is that not all matter participates in every form, but different powers of the forms as a whole come to be active in different bodies (cf. VI.5.11.36).

How, then, is this specification useful for our purposes? We should now be able to articulate a clearer understanding of how a given thing comes to be ugly, i.e. of how a formative principle may fail to dominate its matter. This can happen in cases where a formative principle tries to dominate a body that had previously received another formative principle, which is not (in a body) compatible with the new one. But this is, perhaps, not the only possibility. We have already encountered the reference to a face, which is ugly as a corpse (cf. I.6.1

and VI.7.22). Here, it is more likely that something is missing, i.e. life, which the soul previously brought with it, but now no longer does. A third possibility might be the case of an excess of form, as in polydactyly or other deformities that were very well-known to the Greeks (cf. also Kalligas 2014, com. ad I.6.2.13–18). Although we should now have a better understanding of what participation in a form means, we have encountered an interesting circle within Plotinus' thought. What is beautiful is what participates in a form, and participation in a form is explained as the attraction of the participating thing towards the beautiful form. Therefore, what we explain beauty with is itself explained by beauty. But this should probably not bother us too much, because, as we have seen, Plotinus has at his disposal other means of explaining participation, i.e. the archetype-image model, which is the true point of illumination.

However that may be, later on in I.6, Plotinus presents a slightly different picture, or at least seems to. In the sixth section, he mentions in a brief summary that it is soul which is given beauty by the Intellect, while everything else receives beauty from the soul (cf. I.6.6.26–32). This may seem surprising, at first glance, since it was previously said that bodies are made beautiful by the presence of a form or a formative principle and not by soul. However, Plotinus discusses this issue in the second section of treatise V.9[5] *On Intellect, the Forms and Being*, where he is concerned with the question of the source of the soul's power for its ascent (cf. V.9.2.1–2). According to these passages, he who ascends must be a lover disposed towards true philosophy, one who is dragged upwards by beauty (cf. V.9.2.2–10). However, the crucial point for us here is Plotinus' explanation of what makes a body beautiful. He says that, in one way, it is the presence of a form, in another, the soul that moulded it and put this particular form in it (cf. V.9.2.16–17). All that is bodily is created by a soul, whether a particular soul in the case of artefacts (and perhaps, at least partially, our bodies¹⁶) or the world soul in everything else. However, both types of soul create bodies precisely with the help of forms, in analogy with the Demiurge of Plato's *Timaeus*, who thinks the intelligible archetypes and shapes the world in accordance with them.¹⁷ For this reason, it can be said that the bodily acquires its beauty both from Intellect and from the soul. The former expression is in a sense more precise, since the soul is not beautiful in itself, in contrast to Intel-

16 It seems that some parts of our bodies are ruled by the world soul, whereas others by individual souls. For a discussion of this topic, see Blumenthal 1971 and in a more general context Blumenthal 1996.

17 Cf. Plato's *Tim.* 27d–29d, 30a–b, 53b, and 69b–c. See also the discussion of these passages in Karfik 2004.

lect.¹⁸ Otherwise, Plotinus explains, we could not say that some souls are wise and beautiful, while others are stupid and ugly (cf. v.9.2.19–20). Similarly, in treatise iv.7[2] *On the Immortality of the Soul* Plotinus explains that “a part of the soul always remains in the Intellect and a lower part enters the bodily world and imparts order and beauty according to the pattern which it sees in Intellect, is as if pregnant by the intelligibles and labouring to give birth” (iv.7.13.5–8). In this way, “the Intellect which remains the same [...] fills all things through soul with beauties and sets them in order” (iv.7.13.18–19).

2.4 The Impact of Beauty on Soul

A further important motif in treatise i.6 is the impact of beauty on soul. For a beautiful thing to arouse the soul however, it must be first recognised as such. In other words, the unifying formative principle of a beautiful thing must be extracted from it and evaluated by a special power of the soul. Plotinus likens this ability to using a ruler to judge straightness (cf. i.6.3.1–5). This requires an explanation. Basing his account on various sections of the treatises iv.4, v.3 and i.1, Emilsson presents Plotinus’ conception of sense perception in the following way (cf. Emilsson 1998): Bodies do not directly leave an impression on the soul. Rather, what the soul receives is a certain translation of the impressions perceived by the living body into a specific intelligible form. However, this latter form somehow preserves the spatial features of the bodies. The special judging power of the soul is discursive reasoning (*λογισμός*). It is able to compare these hybrid intelligible images with the forms themselves, because the soul has access to them through its highest part in Intellect. In this way, the soul remembers on the basis of sense perception what it always already knew. It recognizes the sensible as at first glance akin to itself (*συγγενής*; cf. also the discussion of good as *οἰκεῖον* in vi.7.27 in section 6.5), or more precisely, that part of the sensible that is real, i.e. its form.

The basic outline of the impact of beauty on soul after it is recognised as beautiful is derived from Plato’s *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. In the former dialogue, love is likened to the soul’s sickness (cf. the use of *νοσέω*), which drives animals and certain people to copulate and then to rear their offspring, even going so far as to die for them (cf. *Symp.* 207a5–b6). Similarly, other people are willing to undergo all kinds of dangers to attain immortality through honour

18 In a very specific sense even the Intellect can be said not to be beautiful in itself. See sections 2.6, 6.6 and 7.4.

and fame, or even to die for them (cf. *Symp.* 208c1–e1). In each case, the soul of the lover is in a state of shock or ecstasy (cf. the use of ἐκπλήσσω in *Symp.* 211d5), willing to do anything for the beloved. In the best-case scenario, when one encounters a person with a beautiful body and soul, one welcomes both of these, is full of thoughts of virtue and embarks on the process of education (cf. *Symp.* 209b4–c2).

For the description of erotic longing, however, the latter dialogue, *Phaedrus*, is even more important.¹⁹ This dialogue describes love as madness (μανία) that should not be understood as evil, since it may, in fact, be the cause of the greatest goods and bring the greatest happiness, if it is granted as a divine gift. Examples of such divine manias include prophecies, purifications, poetry and erotic love (cf. *Phdr.* 244a3–245c1). Love is, in the end, described as a state of soul (πάθος, cf. *Phdr.* 252b2) caused by sensible beauty, which reminds the soul of the true beauty (cf. *Phdr.* 248d5–6) that the soul contemplated on the outer edge of heaven before its embodiment (cf. *Phdr.* 247b6–248b1, 254b5–7). This remembrance causes the soul to start to grow wings again, as it wants to fly, but cannot (cf. *Phdr.* 249d6–7). However, this growing of wings in turn causes pain (cf. *Phdr.* 151c1–e), such that the lover shivers and is gripped by something like fear when he or she sees the beloved (cf. *Phdr.* 251a–252a). In other words, love always causes a mix of joy and arousal, on the one hand, and pain and stinging, on the other (cf. *Phdr.* 251d7–8, 251e3–152a1). Moreover, since beauty “shone out (ἐλάμπεν) [...] among its companions there” (*Phdr.* 250c8–d1, transl. Waterfield), i.e. in the intelligible realm, it has a specific gleam even in the sensible world (cf. *Phdr.* 250d1–e1). As a result, it may not only cause the soul to remember true beauty, but also attract the soul to itself (cf. *Phdr.* 250e1–251a1). Correspondingly, there are two types of love, a left one (i.e. a bad one) and a right one (i.e. a good one; cf. *Phdr.* 265e1–266b1). The former leads us to surrender to pleasure, behaving like animals and pursuing unnatural pleasures (cf. *Phdr.* 250e4–251a1). The latter instils reverence and awe, since these are the appropriate πάθη to experience with respect to the divine reflected in the sensible (cf. *Phdr.* 251a1–7, 252d5–e1, 254e8–255a1). True love thus leads to the taming of the bad horse within the lover’s soul (cf. *Phdr.* 254d7–255a1), to the formation of an erotic relationship—or rather friendship—between followers of the same god prior to embodiment (cf. *Phdr.* 255d6–e2) and finally to a

19 The following summary is fully indebted to the interpretation in Špinková 2009, pp. 117–124. As in the case of *Symposium*, the literature on Plato’s *Phaedrus* is vast. To name just a few examples from various philosophical traditions, see Asmis 1986, Rossetti 1992, Heitsch 1997 or Rowe 1986.

likening of both the lover and the beloved to god (cf. *Phdr.* 253b3–c2). Consequently, a loving soul becomes a more and more transparent image of the god and thus beautiful (cf. *Phdr.* 255b7–d3).

Plotinus' description of the impact of beauty on soul follows a very similar pattern. Having recognised a beautiful thing as beautiful, the soul is reminded of Intellect, since they both come from the same source.²⁰ On the one hand, Plotinus draws on the heritage of *Phdr.* 253e–256a (and perhaps some other texts; cf. Iozza 2015, pp. 81–84) and talks about excitement, “wonder (θάμβος) and a shock of delight (ἔκπληξις ἡδεῖαν) and longing (πόθος) and passion (ἔρωσις) and a happy excitement (πτόησις μεθ' ἡδονῆς)” (1.6.4.16–18). On the other hand, he recalls the *Symposium*: the soul recognises and welcomes beauty and adapts itself to it, but when it encounters ugliness, it shrinks back, rejects it and turns away from it, being out of tune with and alienated from it (cf. 1.6.2.1–11 and *Symp.* 206d3–7).

Encountering true beauty, i.e. the beauty of Intellect, has an even deeper impact. The soul now understands that intelligible beauty is by far superior to sensible beauty and is “delighted and overwhelmed and excited” (ἡσθηῖναι καὶ ἔκπληξιν λαβεῖν καὶ πτοηθῆναι; cf. 1.6.4.13–14), since these πάθη are what intelligible beauty causes in a loving soul, “wonder and a shock of delight and longing and passion and happy excitement” (θάμβος καὶ ἔκπληξιν ἡδεῖαν καὶ πόθον καὶ ἔρωσις καὶ πτόησιν μεθ' ἡδονῆς; cf. 1.6.4.16–17).²¹

However, there are, in fact, two aspects always present in *erōs*: longing for the beloved and the understanding of the true object of the desire. In other words, there is the movement of the soul caused by the need in *erōs*, on the one hand, and the direction of this movement, which is subjected to our understanding, on the other. This does not come as a surprise, if we recall that the parents of *Erōs* are *Poros* and *Penia* (see section 2.2 above). Plotinus illustrates the necessity of arriving at an understanding of the true object of our desire by briefly recounting the story of *Narcissus* in 1.6.8. In one version of the story, *Narcissus* drowns when trying to grasp his own reflection in the water (cf. 1.6.8.8–

20 The soul is, in fact, rather reminded of its own origin in Intellect, because it is reminded of beauty itself, i.e. of Intellect, as we shall see later. For the discussion of Plotinus' understanding of *ἀνάμνησις* in relation to that of Plato and Saint Augustine cf. Karfiková 2015, esp. pp. 32–42.

21 With respect to beauty, *ἔκπληξις* is used in *Criti.* 115d1–2 and mentioned in the context of pleasure in the *Phileb.* 47a8. *Πτοέω* is used by Plato in an erotic context in *Phd.* 108b1, with respect to *ἐπιθυμία* in *Phd.* 68c9, and to the irrational part of soul in *Rep.* 439d7 and 336b7. In all of these passages however, *πτοέω* has rather negative connotations, evoking an ignorant soul dominated by desire and doing foolish things.

16).²² Plotinus parallels this story with the blindness of a soul caused by bodily beauties, which will draw it down into Hades “where intellect has no delight” (I.6.8.15). Bodily beauty, which is as much a reflection as was the image of Narcissus in the water, thus may not only motivate the ascent to a higher beauty, but also bind us, because it is so impressive. The error that the soul makes in confusing an image with its original may have fatal consequences, whether a literal drowning, as in the case of Narcissus, or the metaphorical drowning of a soul in Hades.

That said, is this ambiguity inherent in beauty—i.e. its ability to deceive, or rather its spectacular nature that clears the way for the soul to fall into error—caused by the bodily nature of beautiful things? Or is it rather caused by beauty itself, such that it both stimulates an enquiry into its origin and, at the same time, impedes it? If the latter is the case, we may even ask whether the beauty of the Intellect could impede our ascent to the Good? To answer this question, let us consider once again VI.9[9] *On the Good or the One*. In the fourth section, Plotinus discusses, among other things, the fact that the soul, which ascends through Intellect to the Good, must also rise above knowledge, i.e. all that is known, and every object of vision, even the beautiful ones. The reason for this is that all beautiful things only come about after the Good, like the light of the day emanating from the sun. Plotinus’ formulation “even beautiful” (παντὸς ἄλλου καὶ καλοῦ θεάματος δεῖ ἀποστῆναι; cf. VI.9.4.7–10) seems to suggest that there is some special peril in beauty. However, more will be said about this in sections 3.2, 6.4 and 6.6, since Plotinus’ warnings about the beauty of Intellect become more explicit in later treatises.

The above-mentioned cognitive aspect of *erōs* is based on the disposition of each soul and the guidance it receives. But whose souls are disposed and what dispositions do they have? What kind of guidance do they need? How are we to understand the transformation they undergo? A whole treatise, I.3[20] *On Dialectics*, is devoted to this topic. Its guiding question is to determine the identity of those who can proceed upwards from the beauty of the bodies, and the kind of guidance they need (cf. I.3.1.5–6 and 10–12). Plotinus says that the person who can ascend to the intelligible—and perhaps even further, to the Good—is the one who has seen all or most things, i.e. the one who was born a philosopher, a musician or a lover (cf. I.3.1.6–9).²³ A philosopher ascends by nature, but the other two must be guided on their path (cf. I.3.1.9–10). When

22 Cf. esp. Ov. *Met.* 3.341. For other sources see Kalligas 2014, com. ad I.6.8.9–16 and Smith 2016, com. ad I.6.8.8–16.

23 The relevant background here is, of course, once again Plato’s *Phaedrus*. For a brief comparison of Plato’s and Plotinus’ accounts, see Kalligas 2014, com ad I.3.1.6–9.

attempting to lead a musician upwards, one must start with what excites him, i.e. harmony and unity in songs and verses, and everything rhythmical and shapely. However, he must be taught to abstract from the material of these bodily images of beauty, as well as to understand that it was an intelligible harmony (*νοητὴ ἁρμονία*) and universal beauty that excited him. He must then be trained in philosophy (cf. 1.3.1.21–35). A lover (who may be a musician who has undergone a transformation) is characterised by a memory of beauty which he is unable to grasp in its separateness. Instead, he is fascinated by visible beauty. He must be shown that the beauty of one body is, in fact, the same in all bodies, but is not itself of a bodily nature and can, moreover, be manifested more fully in other things, such as beautiful ways of life, laws, arts, sciences or virtues. And then he must also be shown their common source (cf. 1.3.2.).²⁴ The philosopher, by contrast, ascends naturally. He only needs to be shown the way which leads through training in mathematical studies, perfecting his virtue and receiving instruction in dialectics (cf. 1.3.3).²⁵

What conclusions can we draw from this for our purposes? It seems that in order to be able to see the intelligible beauty, one must be a musician, a lover or a philosopher, and one also stands in need of guidance, if only to be shown the right way. On this upward path, one needs to learn the art of abstraction, which means starting to see the forms as causing the beauty of beautiful things. However, one also needs to understand that these causes are common to many beautiful things and that they manifest themselves differently on different ontological levels. Furthermore, in order to better comprehend the immaterial nature of the forms, one must also receive training in mathematical sciences dealing with entities of a non-bodily nature, as well. Moreover, it is necessary to perfect one's virtue because, as Plotinus puts it, "people cannot speak about the splendour of virtue who have never even imagined how fair is the face of justice and moral order" (1.6.4.10–12). And eventually training in philosophy or dialectics is necessary, i.e. in the valuable part of philosophy (cf. 1.3.5.9), so that one may grasp the common cause of beauty on the level of soul and ascend to the Intellect. First, however, we must turn to soul and understand its beauty.

24 As earlier commentators have already noticed (cf. Kalligas 2014, com. ad 1.3.2.5–12), these passages echo once again the ascent to the form of beauty from Diotima's speech in Plato's *Symposium*.

25 The reference here is naturally to Plato's *Rep.* II and VII. Cf. also Kalligas 2014, com. ad 1.3.3.5–7, 1.3.3.8–10 and 1.3.4.1.

2.5 The Cause of Beauty and Ugliness in Soul

When Plotinus considers beauty on the level of soul, he does so once again by contrasting it with ugliness. A soul sees itself as beautiful “possessing a moral order [...] and [...] all the other light of virtues [...] [with—added by O.G.] the godlike light of the Intellect shining upon all this” (I.6.5.11–17). This is, according to Plotinus, the case of a soul “separated from the lusts which it has through the body with which it consorted too much, and freed from its other affections, purged of what it gets from being embodied” (I.6.5.54–57). This is where the ugliness comes in, because it is understood as a blemish, analogous to dirtying one’s body with mud (cf. I.6.5.43–48). In both cases, we have something that was originally beautiful, but that becomes contaminated by something external, such that this beauty can no longer be seen unless all of the filth is wiped off.

What, then, is this mud that can cover our soul? Plotinus says here, with explicit reference to Plato’s *Phaedo*, that it is our inclination towards the body and matter (cf. I.6.5.48–50).²⁶ As in Plato, we may distinguish two causes of such behaviour. In one sense, it is caused by matter, in another sense by the soul itself, which incorrectly understands itself as being part of the bodily world and is accordingly overly concerned with bodies. This preoccupation with bodies fills the soul with various kinds of lusts, disturbances and fears, such that it becomes cowardly and jealous, enjoying impure pleasures and delighting in ugliness (cf. I.6.5.26–32). This is precisely what we must purge ourselves from. Our soul will then become beautiful on its own, for it was originally beautiful.²⁷ Plotinus even says here that those things that really exist, are beautiful, but we will need to say more about this, when we deal with the Intellect, since soul has its root in the Intellect (cf. I.6.5.20–21 and section 3.4.7). While bodies become beautiful by participating in forms, soul itself is beautiful insofar as it abides alone, purged from the mud of the sensible world (cf. I.6.5.50–58). According to treatise IV.7.10, it is as if gold were to have a soul and be able to see its true beauty after being cleaned. But is this the full truth? Does becoming virtuous mean that we should withdraw from the world as completely as possible?

26 Cf. Plato, *Phd.* 66a–67b and 80e–84b. See the discussion of this concept in Špinka 2009.

27 An interesting interpretation of this process is proposed by Tomulet (2014, p. 55). He distinguishes two steps: 1) the washing of soul, i.e. its separation from things that are foreign to it; 2) purification, which refers to repairing the inner damage to the soul caused by its mixture with matter. However, this damage cannot, of course, be caused by matter as such, but by the soul’s erroneous understanding of itself.

In order to answer these questions, we must make another digression, this time to treatise 1.2[19] *On Virtue*.²⁸ There too we find the idea of escaping all that is of bodily nature, but such an escape is here understood as what makes us godlike, by becoming righteous and holy (δικαίος καὶ ὅσιος) and altogether in virtue (ἐν ἀρετῇ) with the help of wisdom (φρόνησις; cf. 1.2.1.4–5). This process is once again identified with purification, since the point is to purge ourselves from our entanglement with bodies. In this sense, a soul “will be good and possess virtue when it no longer has the same opinions but acts alone—this is intelligence and wisdom—and does not share the body’s experiences—this is self-control—and is not afraid of departing from the body—this is courage—and is ruled by reason and intellect, without opposition—and this is justice” (1.2.3.15–19). Once again, this presupposes that the nature of soul is itself beautiful, and that it may again become so when it has been purged. However, Plotinus is more specific here. Yes, the soul has a good nature, but, at the same time, it is unable to remain in the real good. It thus has a natural tendency to incline in both directions. For this reason, it must come to be like what is akin to it (συνεῖναι τῷ συγγενεῖ) and this is achieved through conversion (ἐπιστρέφω), which runs parallel to purification and culminates in virtue, now understood as “sight and the impression of what is seen, implanted and working in” the soul (1.2.4.19–20). In other words, the more the soul frees itself from its enchantment with bodies, the more it focuses its attention on the intelligible and becomes like it. It becomes sight that sees itself, and this unity of the seeing and the object seen is imprinted in the soul and becomes active in it, i.e. it dominates the soul in a manner analogous to how form dominates matter.

But a purged, virtuous soul does not withdraw from the body it ensouls, in the sense that this body ceases to exist and that the man, as a soul-body compound, dies. It only needs to try to escape into the intelligible world *as far as possible* in order to become virtuous (cf. 1.2.5). Or, to put it from the perspective of the Intellect, the soul must not revert to the Intellect fully, because virtue belongs to the soul (cf. 1.2.6.13–19). When Plotinus tries to describe this paradoxical intermediate stage between utter freedom from all bodies and remaining an embodied soul, he speaks about changing the way in which we perceive what comes from bodies. The soul “only makes itself aware of pleasures when it has to, using them as remedies and reliefs to prevent its activity being impeded [and—added by O.G.] it gets rid of pains or if it cannot, bears them quietly and makes them less by not suffering with the body” (1.2.5.7–12). And even the

28 For a general outline of Plotinus’ ethics, cf. Stern-Gillet 2014, Bene 2013, Smith 1999 and Dillon 1996.

lesser parts of the soul that are, as such, unable to directly share in the Intellect can change: it is like a person who lives next door to a sage and becomes like him, or at least treats him with such respect so as not to dare to do anything he would not approve of (cf. I.2.5.25–27).

But as we have said, the soul does not fully depart from the bodily world and does not fully revert to the Intellect, since virtue belongs to the soul (cf. I.2.6.13–19). Plotinus even says that the Intellect is not itself virtuous (cf. I.2.1.5–6), just as Intellect cannot be said to possess arrangement or order in a spatial sense. Nevertheless, soul becomes like the Intellect by becoming virtuous and we can build a well-arranged and ordered house modelled on the Intellect. In other words, the archetypes of virtues, as well as those of order and arrangement, are to be found in the Intellect. There is an asymmetrical resemblance between an archetype and its image: an archetype is not similar to its image, although the image is like its archetype and does resemble it (cf. I.2.2.4–10). Plotinus then tries to specify how Intellect contains—or rather is—such an archetype in relation to the virtues: “intuitive thought *There* is knowledge and wisdom, self-concentration is self-control, its own proper activity is ‘minding its own business’; its equivalent courage is immateriality and abiding pure by itself” (I.2.7.3–7). Virtue in the soul is the image of this activity of Intellect (cf. I.2.6.13–19).

What does all this mean for our original question about whether becoming virtuous means withdrawing from the world as completely as possible? We see that the answer is affirmative. We should withdraw from the body as much as possible, but it does not mean ceasing to exist as bodies. Rather, it means changing our attitude towards bodily nature, focusing on the intelligible and ultimately receiving an imprint from Intellect which unifies our soul and dominates it. Yet, if we are to maintain, at the same time, that the soul is in its own nature a kind of beauty, we must understand this process as a reunion with what it has always been, but only becomes aware of in this moment. Now this situation is certainly linked with the fact that the soul has its roots in the Intellect, but it nevertheless entails a serious systemic ambiguity. It is as if soul were to become aware of itself as a part of Intellect, because after purification it becomes a true reality, which exists as beauty. At the same time, however, there must still be a certain distance between the soul and Intellect, because there is no virtue *there* but only in the soul. Plotinus is obviously aware of this since in VI.8[39].5 he says that “virtue is *a kind of* other intellect (οἶον νοῦς τις ἄλλος), a state which *in a way* intellectualises the soul (οἶον νοωθῆναι; italics by O.G.)” (VI.8.5.34–35).

Plotinus provides a further important hint about how to understand this when he escalates his formulations concerning the purification in I.6.6: “who

has not been purified will lie in mud [...] just as pigs, with their unclean bodies” (1.6.6.4–6), or when he notes that the “greatness of soul is despising (ὑπεροψία) things here” (1.6.6.11–12). The outcome of the purification is explicitly identified here with the soul’s becoming a form in the Intellect (cf. 1.6.6.16–21).²⁹ At the same time, however, soul becomes a formative power (λόγος), i.e. that which emanates from the Intellect and imprints itself in the soul (cf. 1.6.6.13–16). This may be a clue to understanding how Plotinus can suggest that there remains a certain distance between a virtuous soul and Intellect, while simultaneously claiming that the soul becomes truly beautiful after purification. When the highest part of the soul becomes aware of itself as a part of the Intellect,³⁰ it also becomes a formative principle which imprints itself in those parts of the soul that are not united with the Intellect. These parts of the soul become virtuous and acquire a share in the beauty that the highest part becomes, or rather always was.

To sum up, even in the case of the soul, there is some sort of partaking in the Intellect which unifies it. This partaking differs from that of bodies. First of all, bodies partake in the soul and only through the soul do they partake in the Intellect, whereas the soul partakes directly in the Intellect. Moreover, in the case of bodies, we do not actually purge them of their bodily being; we only do so in our soul, when we judge them to be beautiful, because they are beautiful precisely only insofar as they are forms. In their creation and subsequent existence, Plotinus only speaks about the domination of a form and not about

29 I remain sceptical about the identification of beauty and being in 1.6.6.21 (as stressed by Smith 2016, com. ad loc.), although, as we shall see (part 3.10 and 4.1.4), Plotinus does indeed advocate it. However, what is identified with beings (τὰ ὄντα) here is the beautiful (καλλοσύνη), i.e. the Good (see below and sections 6.6 and 7.4), leading me to think that Plotinus is speaking very loosely here and merely contrasting what is evil, ugly and non-existent, on the one hand, and what is good, beautiful and truly existent, on the other.

30 It is, of course, problematic to call an individual intellect (within the Intellect) the highest part of soul without any qualification. From the perspective of soul, its individual intellect (within the Intellect) is its principle and core. From a top-down perspective, however, soul is distinct from Intellect and from the individual intellects within it. Their relationship is rather that of an archetype and its image. Therefore, it is difficult to decide whether, for a soul, uniting with the Intellect means fully transcending itself and becoming Intellect, or if it can still in some sense be called soul. It seems to me that if we disconnect a soul’s individual intellect from the rest of soul and if we deny that individual intellect is something like “the highest part of soul”, it becomes very difficult (if not impossible) to explain the union with Intellect, let alone with the Good. For a discussion of Plotinus’ enigmatic account of soul and its parts, see Caluori 2015, Karfik 2014b and Blumenthal 1996, 1974, 1971.

having to reach the form first by purging the body. As we have seen, this domination of a form within a body can be hindered by other forms and, perhaps, by inadequate participation in a form (both in the sense of an excess and a lack). In the case of the soul, the emphasis is laid on the related processes of purification, conversion and becoming godlike. This process restores the soul to its original virtuous and beautiful state, whose archetype is not a singular form, but rather the very life of the Intellect, i.e. in its “itself-thinking that it itself is” (cf. Emilsson 2007, p. 109).

2.6 The Hierarchy of Beauty and What Is at the Top

After this relatively elaborate explanation of sensible and psychic beauty, Plotinus advances further to Intellect. He repeatedly identifies Intellect with beauty itself (cf. 1.6.6.17–21, 26–27, 1.6.9.25, 32–34, 35–36, 40–41) or true beauty (ἀληθινός; cf. 1.6.4.14). However, he does not provide any details about how to understand its beauty in 1.6. He only implies that intelligibles are probably not beautiful by participation, but in themselves (cf. sections 2.1 and 2.3) and, in an enigmatic passage, suggests that there is a close connection between the fact that forms are true beings and that they are beautiful: “What does ‘really exists’ mean? That they exist as beauties.” (Τί ὄντα ὄντως; Ἡ καλά.; 1.6.5.19–20). We will have to investigate the beauty of Intellect and the link between being and beauty elsewhere (cf. esp. section 3.4).

In the remainder of treatise 1.6, Plotinus focuses on the further ascent, i.e. to the Good. As I have already mentioned (cf. section 2.2 above), adopting this approach in the context of ascending the *scala amoris* leads to an ambiguity with respect to its summit. The first time Plotinus touches upon this issue is in 1.6.6.21–27, where he decides to make a positive statement about the Good using the *via eminentiae*, pointing out its completeness. As compared to Intellect, which may seem both good and beautiful only from a certain perspective (e.g. in comparison with the first evil), beauty and goodness are truly identical in the Good, while Intellect is in this sense “only” beauty itself. However, we should be careful here, since the identity of the beautiful and the good in the first principle does not mean that Intellect is not the primary beauty, because the Good can be said to be beautiful in some other sense, for instance as the source of the beautiful (cf. a similar observation by Kalligas 2014, com ad 1.6.6.21–32).

In fact, Plotinus soon enough makes clear how this is to be understood. At the end of 1.6.6, he calls the Good the source of beauty and the beautiful (καλλονή) which is also the good (cf. 1.6.6.25–27), while the Intellect is to be

understood as beauty itself. Similarly in v.9[5], Plotinus makes use of Plato's *Phileb.* 64e, saying that beauty is an impression of the Good in multiplicity, while the Good itself remains altogether one (cf. v.9.2.26–27). In this sense, beauty stands in front of the Good, like a porch (cf. v.9.2.25–26). The possible identification of the good and the beautiful in 1.6.6 should not, therefore, be overestimated. Rather, it seems to be required by the symmetry of the argument, which identifies, on the one hand, ugliness with evil, and, on the other hand, beauty with the good (cf. Smith 2016, com. ad 1.6.6.26 and Tornau 2011, com. ad 1.6.6.21–24). Moreover, as we shall see later (cf. sections 3.5 and 6.6), there are passages in the *Enneads* that speak against this identification (VI.9.4 VI.9.11, V.8.8, V.5.12, VI.7.32–33).

The second potentially confusing passage is section 1.6.7, where Plotinus describes his own experience with the ascent beyond Intellect to the Good. In order to achieve this, he says, we must once again prepare ourselves, in the sense of purifying and stripping off everything that we took on in our descent. This claim is to be understood in connection with *aphairesis*, i.e. abstraction or taking away (cf. 1.6.7.1–12). Only when guided by negative theology can we ascend above even Intellect to the Good, which Plotinus, with reference to his own experience, calls beautiful (cf. 1.6.7.2–3), walking a thin line between making a positive and a negative statement. It is a positive statement insofar as he does, in fact, predicate something of the Good. However, he calls it beautiful, and beauty is precisely what the Good as such transcends (cf. 1.6.9.37–39). Since the Good is the ultimate object of our erotic desire, however, it makes good sense in terms of the *via eminentiae* to call the Good “beautiful”. Moreover, it is also of use here since we connect desire and pleasure with beauty. To correct this statement, however, Plotinus goes on to add that we desire this beauty as good (cf. 1.6.7.2–5). And in fact, he immediately turns to the pleasure we experience in the ascent to the Good, speaking of a shock of delight (ἐκπλαγείη μεθ’ ἡδονῆς)³¹ which causes no harm (ἀβλαβής), a fullness of wonder and delight (ἄγασθαί τε καὶ θάμβους πίμπλασθαι), loving with true passion and piercing longing (ἐρᾶν ἀληθῆ ἔρωτα καὶ δριμεῖς πόθους). In the face of this kind of beauty, everything else seems utterly useless and despicable (cf. 1.6.7.12–21).

As can be seen, the description of the impact of the Good on the soul is different from that of beauty, although they share certain features. Both are shocking, because the soul reacts to the apparition of something divine (or union with it, in the case of the Good). However, while the shock caused by beauty is always

31 Cf. Plato's *Phdr.* 250a and also the discussion of this in section 6.6.

mixed with pain, since beauty is not the ultimate object of desire, the Good does not cause harm, but rather, as what is ultimate, brings utter bliss. I will revisit this issue later in section 3.5, when dealing with treatises v.8 and v.5. For the present discussion, all of this provides support for the claim that beauty and the Good are not identified in I.6, because Plotinus does his best to emphasise the differences between both, even though he uses them interchangeably in this particular context. This approach is once again partly informed by the exegetical reasons hinted at in section 2.2. However, this should not obscure the possibility that there is a philosophical reason for this as well. Is there a deeper connection between the Good and beauty allowing for such interchange? This question will have to be further pursued in different treatises, especially VI.7 (cf. section 6.6).

Moreover, although lines 28–30 of the seventh section claim that the Good is beauty most of all (μάλιστα κάλλος) and the primary beauty (τὸ πρῶτον), the whole context of I.6.7 suggests that we should be cautious. When Plotinus describes the preliminary measures we must take before uniting with the Good, he describes the Good in a variety of ways: it is simple (εἰλικρινής), singular (ἄπλός) and pure (καθαρός) and uncontaminated by flesh or body (μὴ σαρκῶν, μὴ σώματος ἀνάπλεων; cf. I.6.7.21–24). These are all ways of expressing the absolute unity and transcendence of the Good. Plotinus further marks off the Good as the source and goal of everything when he says that it is that “from which all depends and to which all look and are and live and think” (I.6.7.10–12) or when he says that all things except the Good itself “are external additions and mixtures and not primary, but derived from it” (I.6.7.24–25,). An extremely emphatic expression of this can be found by the very end of the seventh section, where Plotinus says that for the vision of the Good we “should give up the attainment of kingship and of rule over all earth and sea and sky” (I.6.7.37–39). He also tries to approach the Good on the basis of things which come from it: everything that is looks, exists, lives and thinks because of the Good, “for it is cause of life and mind and being” (I.6.7.12). Finally, he makes use of analogies: someone who has encountered manifestations of gods and spirits despises bodily beauty, just as a soul which has united with the Good despises everything else. In other words, Plotinus uses all the systematic means of language to try to describe the Good, in this case, in the context of beauty.³²

If we then find a statement about the Good being beauty in the context of other ways of speaking about the highest principle, it seems reasonable to interpret it on analogy with the standard statement that the Good both is and is not

32 Cf. *Ennead* VI.7.36, discussed in section 6.6, and also Alcinoos, *The Handbook of Platonism*.

everything (cf. Halfwassen 2014, Bussanich 1996 or Schroeder 1985). It is the source of beauty and as such cannot lack it. However, it is not beauty, since it is even more than beauty or is situated above it (cf. 1.6.9.37–39). From the perspective of negative theology, the primary beauty is the Intellect.

More will be said about the relationship between the Good and the beautiful in treatises v.8, v.5 (part of the *Großschrift*) and vi.7 (from the same creative period). Large parts of these are devoted to this topic. For the time being, however, I will limit myself to pointing to vi.9[9].11, where the union with the Good is described. Plotinus says there that he who has united with the Good “had no thought of beauties, but had already run up beyond beauty [...] like a man who enters into the sanctuary and leaves behind the statues in the outer shrine; these become again the first things he looks at when he comes out of the sanctuary” (vi.9.11.16–21; cf. 1.6.8.1–6). This means that beauty is once again identified primarily with Intellect and one even has to leave it behind when uniting with the Good. In this sense, even though it may seem in some passages of 1.6 that the Good, rather than Intellect, is the primary beauty, we must understand this as part of a context-dependent approach to the first principle. Sometimes it makes better sense to say that the Good is beautiful and sometimes it makes sense to set it apart from beauty, depending on the intention of the passage. As Plotinus puts it in vi.9.3, when trying to express his experience of union with the Good, “we run round it outside, in a way, and want to explain our own experiences of it, sometimes near it and sometimes falling away in our perplexities about it” (vi.9.3.53–55). In the case of 1.6, where the ascent to the highest principle is described using beauty as a stepping-stone (cf. 1.6.1.20), it is useful to show that it leads all the way up to the Good, while further specifications may be added later.

The third confusing passage is section 1.6.8, where Plotinus tries to describe the ascent of the soul with the help of the literary tradition. However, he makes it clear from the very beginning that this beauty is inconceivable or even impossible (*κάλλος ἀμήχανον*; cf. 1.6.8.2). The word *ἀμήχανος* has a strong connotations in Platonic context. It is used by Plato in *Rep.* 509a6 in the allegory of the sun, where it refers to the Good, which is superior to knowledge and truth in beauty.³³ Therefore, it can once again be read as a means of differentiating “the beauty of the Good” from that of Intellect or rather to emphasise that the Good may *appear* as beauty from the perspective of love.

33 It is also used in a different and probably less relevant context in *Symp.* 218e2, where the beauty Alcibiades sees in Socrates is said to be significantly superior to Alcibiades’ physical beauty.

The last section of I.6, the most cited of the confusing passages, provides both a summary of the treatise, as regards the hierarchy of beauties, and a relatively clear solution to the Good-vs.-beauty dilemma. With implicit reference to Plato's *Rep.* 515e–516a, Plotinus describes here the ascent of a lover (or, of course, a musician or a philosopher). He proceeds step by step in order to become accustomed to all of the light. The first step involves seeing the beauty in ways of life, then in virtuous deeds and, finally, in the souls of virtuous people (cf. I.6.9.1–6). In order to see their souls, the lover must turn inwards towards his own soul (since all souls are one soul),³⁴ and he sees their beauty only if he sees his own beauty, i.e. if he too is virtuous (cf. I.6.9.6–15). However, a virtuous, purified soul, as we know, is one that already, in a sense, has become aware of itself as a part of the Intellect and thus, as Plotinus puts it here, becomes true light (*φῶς ἀληθινόν*; cf. I.6.9.18). But if only a soul that becomes like Intellect may see the beauty that is Intellect, this ultimately means that the soul becomes a part of the Intellect. However, this also always means that the soul becomes the whole of Intellect, and as such it contemplates itself—beauty contemplating beauty—by merging with the inner life of Intellect (cf. I.6.9.30–34). Or rather, we should probably avoid saying that the soul becomes a part of Intellect, but instead say that it becomes aware of itself as a part of Intellect, which it always has been. In the same way, we should not say that it merges with the inner life of the Intellect, but rather that it becomes aware of itself as having always already merged with it.³⁵

Plotinus is, however, ready once again to go beyond Intellect up to the Good and specifies what we have already dealt with, its simultaneous being beauty and being beyond it. He says that “the nature of the Good [...] holds beauty as a screen before it” (I.6.9.37–39). This means that beauty is to be identified primarily with the Intellect, which is prior to the Good from the perspective of the ascending soul and which, in this passage, is once again said to be beauty, because all things are beautiful through it (cf. I.6.9.36–37). At the same time, however, Plotinus insists that it is possible to say that the Good is the primary beauty. He explains this contradiction, by saying that it depends on whether, in a discussion, we need to distinguish the Good from the Intellect. If we do, then it is the Intellect which is the seat of beauty, while the Good is beyond it, as its wellspring and origin. If we do not distinguish them, it is possible to use “the beautiful” and “the Good” interchangeably, at least in a loose way of speaking (*ὄλοσχερῆς λόγος*; cf. I.6.9.40–43). But why would we not make this distinction?

34 Cf. treatise IV.9.

35 Cf. footnote 30 above.

Because what is of primary importance for Plotinus at this point—i.e. in the very first treatise paving the way to the intelligible—is that beauty comes from *there*. The details can be filled in later, namely in v.8 *On Intelligible Beauty*.³⁶

³⁶ Cf. similar comments by Harder (com. ad 1.6.9.39–43), Kalligas (2014, com. ad 1.6.9.39–40 and 1.6.9.43–44) and O'Meara (1993, p. 94). For a brief overview of Plotinus' sources for the disjunction between the Good and beauty, see Edwards 1991.