

## Beauty as Illuminated Unity in Multiplicity

### 7.1 Beauty on the Level of Sensibles

As I have pointed out throughout the analyses of treatises I.6 and V.8, the cause of beauty in the sensible world must itself be some sort of beauty which beautiful things participate in (cf. sections 2.1, 2.3 and 3.2). Beautiful bodies receive forms as *λόγοι* that come from Intellect and that are images of forms that are beautiful in themselves (cf. section 2.3 and 3.2). These formative principles unify and order the underlying matter or mass and make bodies what they are (cf. section 2.3). Formative principles are, in this sense, relatively *one* and hold the parts of the formed body together, i.e. they are at the same time the being of such bodies and their beauty. Moreover, if a *λόγος* is to dominate in matter, it must distribute its *one* to the parts of the unified body and thus also distribute being and beauty to them (cf. sections 2.2 and 2.3). Plotinus explicitly says that the being of a thing depends on its being one and identifies being and beauty (cf. section 3.4.7). Therefore, a unified body becomes what it is through the domination of a form that unifies all of the parts of the constituted whole. This form makes the whole beautiful and, simultaneously, the form's *one*, being and beauty are distributed to all the parts because a whole cannot consist of non-united, i.e. non-existing or non-beautiful parts.

We have also encountered the question of how these *λόγοι* are transmitted to matter by soul. Plotinus claims that it is possible to say that bodies acquire their beauty from both Intellect and soul. The former expression is, in a sense, more precise, since soul, in contrast to intellect, is not beautiful in itself (cf. section 2.3). Both explanations can be reconciled since Plotinus ultimately thinks that all bodies are created by a soul, either by a particular soul, in the case of artefacts (and perhaps partially our own bodies), or by the world soul, in the case of everything else. Both types of soul create bodies with the help of forms, analogously to how the Demiurge of Plato's *Timaeus* thinks the intelligible archetypes and shapes the world according to them. In this sense, soul mediates *λόγοι* to bodies, but they nevertheless ultimately come from Intellect (cf. section 2.3). In the brief discussion of productive contemplation in section 3.1, we were also able to specify this mechanism to some extent. The upper part of the world soul contemplates Intellect, but as *λόγοι* in soul, and, by projecting itself into its product—i.e. into nature—it creates. The lower part of soul (nature), silently contemplating these *λόγοι*, creates matter, before

turning to it again in order to form it. In this way, it gives a share of itself to matter and eternally gives rise to the sensible world. In the case of individual souls, Plotinus describes τέχνη as the human form of participation in Intellect. A τεχνίτης is able to form matter, i.e. to invest it with a λόγος, through his productive knowledge—i.e. his participation in τέχνη—by means of which he makes himself similar to the productive self-contemplation of Intellect. This kind of beautiful artefact is, however, beautiful only to the extent to which the matter of the mixture (i.e. body) submits to what is being created, that is, to the extent to which it participates in the invested form (cf. section 3.2).

Plotinus most frequently explains the participation of bodies in forms by means of the metaphor of illumination, through which he emphasises two points: 1) what illuminates abides like an archetype in itself; 2) what is illuminated, which is an image of the archetype, is held separate from it by illumination (cf. section 2.3). However, we must not conclude from this metaphor that everything is everywhere, since different powers of the forms as a whole become active in different bodies. Moreover, not all matters are equally disposed to receive all forms, depending on what forms they have already received. Bodies are mixtures of forms and matter, and this mixture is multi-layered, because matter is first shaped by the forms of the elements, which are then organised into higher wholes, i.e. into objects. Even matter, in the strict sense of the most distant emanation from the Good, is primarily adapted for the primary kinds of bodily forms. This also explains what it means for a λόγος to dominate in matter, since not every form is compatible with all others in a body. This is why Plotinus repeatedly contrasts his notion of beauty with that of ugliness, understood as a deficiency in participation or, as he puts it, a deficiency in the dominance of a form in matter (cf. section 2.3 and 3.2). However, I have also suggested other possibilities, i.e. life, which is normally present in a body along with other forms, but which is absent from a corpse (cf. section 2.3). This view also seems to be supported by Plotinus' claim from VI.7.3 (cf. section 6.1) that the dominance of form in matter is apparent, if no part of a thing is left unshaped. A further possibility would be the opposite excess of a form, as in the case of polydactyly or other deformities.

The beauty of bodies was often contrasted with the ugliness of matter, which Plotinus identifies with τὸ ἄπειρον and τὸ ἄόριστον, or with that which runs through a mass as a movement of contraction, in which the great becomes the small, and of expansion, in which the small becomes the great (cf. section 2.3). Therefore, the presence of a formative principle in matter makes it merely a sort of decorated corpse, because it does not overcome the undefined "nature". Rather a λόγος makes matter more manifest as what it is, that is, the undefined itself or, precisely, a corpse (cf. section 3.4.6). In this sense, what is

beautiful in bodies is λόγος itself—i.e. the intelligible—and bodies, insofar as they are matter, cannot be beautiful, or at least can only be beautiful insofar as they are a *decorated* corpse. From this perspective, the distribution of one, being and beauty takes place only on the level of the decorating λόγοι, i.e. on the level of their coherence and appropriate fullness: no λόγος must be either missing or excessively present. In his polemic against the Gnostics, however, i.e. from the perspective of productive contemplation and beauty of the intelligible archetype, Plotinus simultaneously promotes the concept of a beautiful bodily world, which one must gently accept as an image which imitates its paradigm as much as it can (cf. section 3.2).

In order to see bodily nature as a beautiful image, one must understand it in relation to its archetype. This is not something everyone is capable of, although the desire for beauty and, through it, for the Good is the common denominator of all kinds of erotic desires (cf. section 6.6). As we have seen, Plotinus says that musicians, lovers and philosophers are disposed to ascend to Intellect (cf. section 2.4) and, with the appropriate guidance, grasp its beauty and subsequently correctly understand the beauty of the sensible world. The beauty of the sensible plays a double role in such an ascent. Plotinus warns his readers in both treatises on beauty (cf. section 2.4 and 3.3) about the fate of Narcissus, who mistook his image for himself. Beauty is thus capable not only of motivating the ascent to a higher beauty, but also, in a sense, of binding us to itself, because it is so impressive. The error the soul makes in confusing an image with its original may have fatal consequences. Plotinus urges us to understand beauty on the level of sensible things as a mere image of a higher beauty, but, as I have already stressed, we must simultaneously not despise it, because it is still an image imitating its paradigm as much as it can. The concept of bodily beauty as a beautiful image of intelligible forms thus contains a double warning: 1) We should always bear in mind that it is merely an image of a higher beauty and, in this sense, use it to ascend to its paradigm. 2) We should praise it as a necessary manifestation of this higher beauty in a weaker form and not despise it. In treatise III.5, we have even noted an unusually accommodating attitude towards bodily beauty. Plotinus claims that the beauty of bodies is the completion of their paradigm, and as far as those lovers who understand such beauty as a mere image remain temperate and do not engage in unnatural sexual intercourse, there is nothing wrong with desiring bodily beauty (cf. section 6.6).

## 7.2 Beauty on the Level of Soul

In the case of the soul, it is also possible to say that it becomes beautiful by partaking in Intellect, which unifies it (cf. section 2.5). Part of both individual souls and of the world soul, the soul in Intellect, in fact never leaves Intellect. This core of each soul is consequently always beautiful. The rest of the world soul also eternally remains in the state of best possible contemplation below Intellect and is therefore as beautiful as a soul can be. In the case of individual souls, losing their global perspective creates their individual perspective, opening the door to forgetting their true nature. Such souls must restore the proper partaking in Intellect and, in this way, they can become beautiful again. In contrast to the mode of partaking proper to bodies, however, individual souls become beautiful through purification, conversion and likening to god, which restore them to their original, virtuous and beautiful state (cf. section 2.5). This purification implies a change in the attitude of the soul towards bodily nature and a focus on the intelligible, ultimately leading it to receive an imprint from Intellect which unifies this soul and dominates it (cf. section 2.5). The archetype of this likening may be found in the life of Intellect itself, i.e. in its “itself-thinking that it itself is” (cf. section 2.5 and Emilsson 2007, p. 109). The outcome of the purification is the merging of the soul with Intellect, i.e. the soul becomes aware of itself as a part of Intellect. At the same time, however, it becomes a formative power (*λόγος*), which imprints itself in the parts of the soul that are not united with Intellect. These become virtuous and gain a share in the beauty that the highest part has always been (cf. section 2.5). This explanation for the outcome of purification was motivated by an effort to account for how Plotinus could, at the same time, suggest that there remains a certain distance between a virtuous soul and Intellect (because, properly speaking, there is virtue only in soul), and simultaneously claim that, after purification, the soul becomes truly beautiful, i.e. a form (in Intellect).

In the analyses of treatises v.8, 11.2 and parts of 11.9, we were also able to specify the change a soul undergoes in becoming virtuous (cf. section 3.3). The starting point of this reconstruction of Plotinus' thought was the case of heavenly bodies, which perform eternal, circular movements in an attempt to imitate the stability and purity of Intellect and direct themselves at it. The heavenly bodies and the heavens as such are directed by the individual souls of heavenly bodies and the world soul respectively, which have never lost their original orderly form, in contrast to individual souls here below. In this sense, they always remain equally beautiful and their beauty is manifest in the heavens. Furthermore, if individual souls below the level of celestial bodies lose their original orderly state because of their involvement with particular bodies

or due to the loss of the world soul's global perspective, it seems to follow that the λόγος received by an individual virtuous soul restores the circular movement of the soul (cf. section 3.3). The circular movement of an individual soul of this sort still differs from that of the world soul, however, because being virtuous still means being an individual, whose role differs from that of the gods. More likely, the circular movement of an individual soul is the underlying mechanism of the transformation of the attitude towards bodies, which Plotinus describes in virtuous souls.

In contrast to the beauty of the world soul and of the individual souls of heavenly bodies, the beauty of an individual soul below the level of celestial bodies may vary according to its degree of pollution or purification. However, Plotinus also describes the process of purification as an immersion in one's innermost self, i.e. as a form of knowledge, and he even expresses it in relative terms on a scale of increasing beauty. The culmination of this scale is union with Intellect, where we find the identity of the knower and the known, or beauty itself (cf. section 3.4.8). This also means that, just as was the case for bodies, the beauty of souls corresponds to their degree of being and unity (cf. section 3.4.7). Soul, as such, possesses the *one* more fully than bodies do and is consequently more beautiful. As opposed to Intellect, where everything is everything else, a soul has many different powers, which make it only a ἐν καὶ πολλά (cf. v.1.8.23–26) or, as Plotinus says in vi.2, *one nature that is many*. Moreover, it is also many, since it is a contemplative activity that is directed towards itself, which cannot be simple (cf. section 4.2).

From a different perspective, however, individual souls below the level of celestial bodies, can surpass the world soul and the souls of celestial bodies, because the former have the ability to ascend even higher than Intellect. Nevertheless, this path always leads through Intellect, since part of it—drunken Intellect or Intellect in love—eternally ascends to the Good (cf. section 6.6). The ascent of individual souls is enabled by the fact that ἔρως (the son of heavenly Aphrodite, who corresponds to the soul in Intellect) is the desire for Intellect's beauty and through it for the Good (cf. section 6.6). In individual souls, ἔρως causes powerful πάθη, which either bind these souls to the bodily beauty they see or enable them to ascend to the paradigm of the beauty, which was what really aroused them (but cf. section 7.5). These different reactions of individual souls are based on their correct or incorrect understanding of bodily beauty as a mere image of intelligible beauty, as well as on their desire to procreate eternally (cf. section 6.6). In ascending, the soul follows the light which shines down from what is above onto what is below, i.e. ultimately from the Good down onto Intellect. In this final ascent towards the Good, ἔρως never really vanishes, because the Good, transcending both form and

formlessness, cannot be reached. In this sense, the love for the Good is unlimited (cf. section 6.6).<sup>1</sup>

### 7.3 Beauty on the Level of Intellect

Divine Intellect is repeatedly identified as the primary seat of beauty (cf. sections 2.6 and 3.5). Plotinus gives two reasons for this. The first is that there is nothing that is not beautiful in Intellect, since every part of it is the whole and all of the other parts, such that beauty is, in this sense, everywhere in beauty (cf. section 3.4.6). Even intelligible matter, as something simple, always formed and living a defined and intelligible life, can be said to be beautiful, while not hindering beauty from being everywhere in beauty (cf. section 3.4.6). The second reason concerns the intermediate position of Intellect between what can be called the deficiently beautiful, i.e. soul and bodies, and what is more than beautiful, i.e. the Good (cf. section 3.5). However, Plotinus specifies this intermediate position as being at the same time differentiated and bound together in a firmer fashion than soul is (cf. section 3.5). The intermediate position of Intellect consists, therefore, of its being a specific unified multiplicity of such a kind that all of its parts are all of the other parts and the whole (cf. section 3.4.3). In this sense, the unique *unitas multiplex* of Intellect is the deeper reason lying behind the two justifications given for Intellect's being made the primary seat of beauty, namely 1) that beauty *there* is everywhere in beauty and 2) that Intellect occupies an intermediate position between the Good and soul.

We were also able to confirm this observation later in treatise VI.6. There, Plotinus identifies beauty with being a measure or number, i.e. something limited, and with something that is not limited externally, but by its very being. This is precisely the case with number, which refers to the actuality of each form. Number is, therefore, another suitable notion for capturing both of the essential aspects of beauty: the fact that it is limited and the fact that this limit is not external (cf. section 5.4). Anything externally limited is, for Plotinus, merely a decorated corpse (cf. section 3.4.6). As number, Intellect is multiple, but limited. These conclusions were also confirmed by parts of treatise VI.7 (cf. section 6.1).

Let me also try to briefly summarise what we have learned so far about the unified multiplicity of Intellect, which we identified with beauty. I have identi-

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<sup>1</sup> Moreover, love of the Good would probably not vanish even if it could be reached, since in VI.8.15.1–2 the Good is said to be love of itself, insofar as it is beautiful.

fied five mutually interconnected perspectives Plotinus uses to describe unified multiplicity. The first one related to the nature of intelligible objects, which all contain each other and the whole of Intellect (cf. sections 3.4.3 and 3.4.4). The second one concerned the hierarchy within the intelligibles including the unifying and multiplying role of the highest kinds (cf. section 3.4.4 and chapter 4). The third one was connected with the nature of the act of intellection proper to Intellect (cf. section 3.4.4). The fourth one related to the inner “arithmetic” structure of Intellect (cf. section 3.4.4 and chapter 5). And the last one focused on how Intellect acquired its unity and multiplicity in its genesis (cf. sections 3.4.4, 5.3 and 6.3). I have also outlined some of the overlaps between these perspectives (cf. section 3.4.4), which all aim to show that Intellect thinks everything at once, but as differentiated.

Anything that is to be called beautiful must be unified and this is true in the highest possible degree for everything in Intellect and for Intellect as a whole. From this perspective, it would seem that the more multiple a thing is, the less beautiful it is, but this does not actually seem to be the case, at least in Intellect. Its limited wholeness was, on the contrary, what made it more beautiful, in contrast to a hypothetical state in which Intellect is unfolded. Only when it has become everything and wanders through everything in itself does it attain its true majesty and beauty (cf. sections 5.4 and 6.1). After all, not only its unity, but also the multiplicity which came to be in Intellect is derived from the Good, and Intellect is perhaps surprisingly ἀγαθοειδής even insofar as it is multiple (cf. section 6.3).

However, the beauty of Intellect is not only derived from the Good in the same sense as everything else in Intellect, but it is, in fact, its manifestation (cf. section 6.4). The Good shines on Intellect and its light is what allows Intellect to be seen as truly beautiful. It also shines on all of the intelligibles and on the whole of Intellect and enables everything in it to be seen in its own beauty (cf. sections 6.4 and 6.6). This illumination is, however, something extra, in addition to Intellect’s own characteristics, something even beyond its unity and multiplicity. I have tried to interpret the crucial passages in VI.7.22 as distinguishing between two hypothetical types of beauty, depending on whether Intellect is illuminated or not. In the latter case, its beauty is said to be inactive and does not arouse the soul’s interest (cf. section 6.4). In the former case, Plotinus talks rather about warmth from the Good or its grace, which awakens the soul, such that it naturally rises toward both Intellect and the Good (cf. section 6.4). Although Plotinus does not explicitly say in VI.7.22 that the state of Intellect in which it is illuminated can be identified with beauty, I have tried to show that this is a reasonable interpretation that avoids two extremes. Among other reasons, this is because if we simply add beauty into these passages, we might

overlook an important distinction between two types of beauty. At the same time, if we refuse to call illuminated Intellect beautiful, we will face various difficulties. Plotinus does, in fact, call the Good beautiful in treatise VI.7, while other *Enneads* also attribute to beauty the ability to stimulate erotic desire and to make the soul ascend to the Good. Moreover, I have tried to show that Plotinus might have good reason to avoid referring to beauty in VI.7.22, given that he wants to stress the added value of illumination and to explain how the Good is manifest in Intellect (cf. section 6.4). The true and primary beauty in Intellect is, consequently, unity in multiplicity *illuminated* by the Good. Only when the Good shines on it does beauty become the object of desire, which is, in fact, always a desire for the Good through beauty. This more profound concept of beauty does not reject the identification of beauty with unity in multiplicity. Rather, it places it into a broader perspective which better captures the referential character of beauty in relation to the Good and stresses the enriching role of multiplicity in Intellect, since, from a genetic point of view, Intellect is primarily ἀγαθοειδής as life (cf. section 6.4).

The fact that illuminated Intellect is said to be the primary seat of beauty does, however, raise a further crucial question. Are we to posit a form of beauty in Intellect, as Plato does, or does beauty rather somehow characterise Intellect as such? As we have seen, there are several passages in the *Enneads* that seem to suggest that there is, in fact, a form of beauty (cf. section 2.3 and 5.2). At the same time, in all of these cases, Plotinus discusses topics other than beauty, and the context of these claims might suggest their dialectical purpose, which is to make a point in an independent argument. Taken together with the fact that Plotinus clearly avoids talking about the existence of the form of beauty in both treatise I.6 and V.8 and connects beauty merely with the presence of *a* form (cf. sections 2.3 and 3.2), it seems to follow that he does not in fact endorse the existence of a form of beauty. Furthermore, the identification of beauty with being, on the one hand (cf. section 3.4.7 and 4.4–4.5), and its being considered as a candidate for one of the highest kinds, on the other (cf. section 4.5), might be taken to suggest that beauty is somehow special, that even if it were a form, it would not be simply one form among others. Similarly, my identification of beauty with the (illuminated) unity in multiplicity of Intellect implies that it is not just a form, because unity in multiplicity characterises each individual form, as well as the Intellect as a whole. Rather, it seems to be a predicate that primarily characterises Intellect as such, because Intellect is always one and many or one-many, even as unified number (cf. chapters 4 and 5). Also, it can be said to be one and many from various perspectives (cf. section 3.4.4). Therefore, its unity and multiplicity is, rather, distributed from Intellect as a whole to its “parts”, i.e. to individual forms, and its beauty along with it. I would con-



sequently argue that Intellect is primarily beautiful as a whole and that the beauty of each individual form in it is derived from this primary beauty of the whole (cf. Corrigan 2005, pp. 216–217). This interpretation does, however, to a certain extent change the participation model that was previously discussed. It is not by participating directly in *a* form that a thing becomes beautiful, but by participating through the mediation of this form in the unity and multiplicity of the whole Intellect, which is reflected in the participated form.

This would indeed make beauty a special characteristic of Intellect, although not the only one of this kind. We have encountered several other predicates that could be considered to apply primarily to Intellect as a whole and only secondarily to its parts. These include the virtues (ἀρεταί), knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) and the very name “Intellect” (νοῦς) discussed in treatise VI.2 as potential candidates for the highest kinds (cf. section 4.5), to which we might add the designation “active actuality” (ἐνέργεια) and “wisdom” (σοφία). Moreover, in a different sense, the highest kinds themselves (cf. section 4.1), including the aforementioned being which Plotinus identifies with beauty, characterise Intellect as such, among other reasons because they are principles. Additionally, the one in Intellect, or the monad, was also said to be a principle. However, each part of Intellect, including the highest kinds, was said to be in every way many (cf. section 4.3). As one and many, Intellect is number (cf. section 5.3), and as encompassing number, Intellect is a complete living being, which lives as a whole, while its parts are also alive. Finally, its activity and its life are eternal, and eternity characterises Intellect once again as a whole. For this reason, we should attempt to shed some light on the differences and potential overlaps between beauty and these general predicates, i.e. life, being and the other highest kinds, the one in Intellect, multiplicity, number, intellection, active actuality and eternity, knowledge and wisdom, and the virtues.

When we reflect on the notion of life in the *Enneads*, we find it used in various senses (cf. section 6.4). I have proposed to understand “being alive” as referring to a fully constituted activity (i.e. being the complete living being or encompassing number). As such, however, this activity is always productive and begets what is ontologically lower. If we leave aside, for now, the question of whether the Good itself could be said to be such a fully constituted and productive activity, then life seems to refer primarily to the effluent activity of the Good, which becomes Intellect. However, this activity also continues within Intellect as the movement of its inner differentiation, making it the complete living being. And being complete, it is also the productive component of its contemplation, i.e. its outpouring resulting in the constitution of its lower image. In this sense, life is not simply a particular content of Intellect, i.e. a form in it, but rather characterises Intellect genetically, i.e. both in

its birth and in its birth giving. It is precisely on the boundary between these two poles that Intellect—as life—is the fully constituted complete living being, with “life” denoting here Intellect as a whole. As has been noted (cf. section 6.4), life, in this sense, is quite close to beauty, which refers to the same fully constituted activity, but with respect to its source and, in this sense, concerns its ascent, whereas life refers to this activity in its outpouring and thus concerns its descent. Beauty therefore focuses rather on the *unity* of a multiplicity, whereas life focuses on its *multiplicity* and *multiplying* character. However, the main focus is, in both cases, vertical, in the sense of relating two ontological levels. Nevertheless, the close connection between life and beauty makes it possible for Plotinus to say that there is no beauty in a corpse, or even that where there is life, there is beauty, because beauty and life presuppose a constituted activity of contemplation, which is produced by what is above and which is itself productive.

The highest kinds are said to be both genera and principles, out of which Intellect is composed and from which the whole of it is derived (cf. section 4.1). There are five highest kinds: Being—the most firmly established of all; Movement—or what makes Being perfect, its life, actuality and very being; Rest—or what makes Being exist in the same state and in the same way; the Same and the Other—which make possible, on the one hand, distinctions between all of the highest kinds and, on the other hand, their union. These kinds mutually condition each other and are all-pervading, in the sense that all other forms necessarily partake in them, and are composed out of them, as it were. The highest kinds, however, are also numbers, because they are one and many, and number is even said to be the very being of Being. At the beginning of the genesis of Intellect, Being was unified number and, by the end, it had become encompassing number.

The highest kinds also seem to primarily refer to Intellect as a whole, because: 1) they are the *highest* kinds, i.e. kinds that unite the whole of Intellect; 2) they are principles or constitutive components of Intellect; 3) they are numbers. Intellect as such is the primary Being, is Movement itself and Rest itself and is what is both the Same and Other. Individual forms, by contrast, are like this only derivatively, i.e. by partaking in the highest kinds, or by being composed out of these as it were. In this way, again, where there is being as the representative of all of the highest kinds, there is always unity in multiplicity, and therefore beauty, at least in the narrower sense of unilluminated *unitas multiplex*. As a result, Plotinus was able to identify being and beauty.

Then again, beauty does differ from being and all of the other kinds. It would not be identical with being even if it were the sixth-highest kind, but it is not even one of the highest kinds, as Plotinus makes quite clear (cf. section 4.5).

As noted above (cf. section 6.4), the highest kinds are mostly used by Plotinus to explain structural relations within Intellect, and, in this sense, are a part of a horizontally oriented view of Intellect,<sup>2</sup> whereas life and beauty (in the broader sense of the word as illuminated *unitas multiplex*) belong rather to a vertically oriented description, life in a descending manner and beauty in an ascending one. The vertical description, according to which Intellect becomes illuminated, which arouses erotic desire and brings about epistrophic movement, presupposes, in this sense, the horizontal one.<sup>3</sup> This was, in fact, the point of Plotinus' argument against beauty being one of the highest kinds, if one understands it as that which, as it were, shines upon the forms (cf. section 4.5). It seems, in the end, that from the horizontal perspective, Intellect can only be beautiful in the narrow sense of the word, i.e. as unilluminated, because this illumination already implies verticality. As we have seen, however, such beauty is either painful and terrifying or perhaps, in the end, boring (cf. section 6.6). By contrast, the fact that beauty is the manifestation of the Good and that the Good is the final cause of the ascent along the *scala amoris* is something that establishes a close connection between the Good and beauty (see section 7.4). But their closeness, in fact, disrupts the identification of beauty and being above the level of Intellect, because although it is, in a sense, possible to say that the Good is beautiful (see section 7.4), Plotinus mostly avoids saying that the Good exists, always stressing that it is beyond being.

In conclusion, in contrast to the highest kinds, beauty is not a kind or even a principle. Instead, it belongs to the group of predicates that do not focus on the horizontal description of Intellect, but rather on a vertical (ascending) one, which brings it closer to the Good. Nevertheless, a predicate of this kind does presuppose what the horizontal perspective shows to be the case, i.e. that Intellect is a specific unified multiplicity. Beauty, in the broader sense of the word, therefore comprises both unity and multiplicity and can be connected with the notion of number, which it shares with the highest kinds (cf. section 5.4). However, we must ultimately conclude that even numbers are beautiful in the broader sense of the word, as derived from the Good through the monad, i.e. as illuminated.

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2 Then again, there are the previously discussed passages in the *Enneads*, where Plotinus describes the genesis of Intellect with the help of movement and otherness. As has been noted before (cf. footnote 10 in section 5.4, and 24 in section 6.3), these claims are quite enigmatic and reconciling them with the more standard (horizontal) role of the highest kinds, if possible, would be a difficult task.

3 Of course, the converse is also true. The horizontal description presupposes the vertical one, insofar as what is described needs to be generated first.

That said, we should consider the similarities and differences between the notion of beauty and that of number in more detail. And, in this context, two further predicates—the one in Intellect, or the monad, and the multiplicity of Intellect—should be addressed. As we have seen, the monad should probably not be called beautiful, because—in contrast to being and the other highest kinds—it is not number, it is not many (except in allowing for prior and posterior) and it is not a genus (cf. section 4.3). There are many reasons for this, of which the two most important for Plotinus are probably the fact that the one in Intellect would, as one of the highest kinds, not be one primarily and the fact that the one cannot be differentiated in itself, as a genus needs to be, because it creates species (cf. section 4.3). Therefore, the one in Intellect is only a principle. However, if it does not allow for multiplicity, it cannot be beautiful, given that we have identified beauty with (illuminated) unity in multiplicity. Moreover, it would probably not be correct to simply call Intellect as a whole “the monad”, since the latter is, together with the dyad, rather the generative principle of Intellect. However, insofar as the one is present in Intellect with being and insofar as this being is one, it would be possible to say that Intellect is such a one: i.e. the one-that-is.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, if the monad itself is relatively clearly distinguished from beauty, how does this one-that-is differ from beauty? By the same token, insofar as we distinguish this one-that-is from the monad, it is not, in fact, different from being itself, such that the same differences from and similarities to beauty could be found (see the discussion of being above). Moreover, this one-that-is is not simply one anymore, but becomes multiple, i.e. it becomes number (see below).

Along the same lines, we could have doubts whether multiplicity is to be counted among the characteristics of Intellect as a whole. It would be strange to simply call Intellect multiple without any qualification. It seems that multiplicity might be considered to be a predicate of this sort in two possible senses. The first one would be that of the dyad, but just as the monad did not qualify as a holistic attribute of Intellect, the dyad as such must also be rejected. Moreover, Plotinus does not consider it as a potential candidate for one of the highest kinds, with the result that we do not find a clear statement about the dyad being a principle in Intellect in the same sense as the monad is. Its role is, moreover, obscured by its enigmatic relation not only to the notion of life, but also to otherness (cf. section 6.3). Nevertheless, it is different from beauty in all of these possible senses. If it is a principle, the opposite should be applied to it

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4 I use this term, of course, with reference to the second hypothesis in Plato's *Parmenides* (142b–155). My reasoning below follows, to some extent, the argument of these passages.

as in the case of the monad, i.e. it cannot be beautiful because it is not one. If it is life or otherness, then its relation to beauty is such as was already described (cf. the discussion of life and the highest kinds above). The second possible qualification of multiplicity that could be considered an attribute of Intellect primarily referring to it as to a whole, might be a defined and intelligible multiplicity or rather (if we exclude the case of soul) the most unified multiplicity. In this case, however, this multiplicity would once again be number.

With these two specifications regarding the one in Intellect and its multiplicity in mind, we should turn to the predicate number, which is precisely what is born from the interaction between the monad and the dyad. As such, it was said to be the limit of being and its actuality, and I have interpreted the notion of number as denoting the specific unified multiplicity of Intellect from a structural perspective (cf. section 5.3). In this sense, the notion of number, and of substantial number as well, describe Intellect from a horizontal perspective, in the sense of focusing on its inner structure, which relates them to beauty, while differentiating them from it in the same way as from the highest kinds. As I have tried to show, the four qualified uses of number (i.e. unified, unfolded, moving in itself and inclusive), all work as a shorthand for the different perspectives from which Plotinus describes the utmost unified multiplicity of Intellect (cf. section 5.3). In this sense, these uses could be understood as filling out this horizontal description, while still remaining within the Intellect itself. The designations of Intellect as “unified” and “unfolded number” focus on the generation of Intellect, in the sense of its inner structuring, “number moving in itself” focuses on its intelligible activity, while “encompassing number” focuses on its interconnected wholeness. Nevertheless, none of these designations captures the ascending verticality implied by the notion of beauty as illuminated unity in multiplicity.

The last bundle of predicates, namely, intellection, active actuality and eternity, knowledge and wisdom, and the virtues, focus neither on the inner structure of Intellect, such as the highest kinds or the notion of number, nor on the relation of Intellect to what is above or below it, as in the case of beauty and life. Rather, they try to capture *how* Intellect is what it is. It is what it is by being νοῦς, i.e. intellectual self-relation, and as such it becomes structured and all of the differentiated contents emerge in it as individual intellects. However, this inner constitution of Intellect is not a process, but rather the eternal, active actuality of everything, such that Intellect as a whole is ἐνέργεια and αἰών (cf. I.1.7.3) and each of its contents is like this secondarily. In this sense, Intellect does not need to come to know its contents, but always already knows them, while each of its contents knows itself. Therefore, Intellect is ἐπιστήμη and individual intellects in it are ἐπιστήμαί. However, it is not even a conglomerate of discrete, self-

related, knowing intellects, but each part contains all of the other parts and the whole, such that Intellect can be called σοφία, because wisdom was identified with the immediate, ordered givenness of everything in everything (cf. section 3.4.5). The focus of all of these predicates on the *how* of Intellect is perhaps most obvious in the case of ἀρεταί, which Plotinus describes in the following way: "... 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" (1.2.7.3–7). Therefore, neither of these holistic attributes of Intellect comprises the reference above as beauty does. They share with beauty at most the field of unified multiplicity, where they describe how it exists. Their focus is, in this sense, simply different.

#### 7.4 Beauty and the Good

When dealing with the question of the primary seat of beauty, we have encountered contradictory assertions with respect to the beauty of the Good. As we have seen, Plotinus says, in some cases, that it is the Good that is the primary beauty (cf. sections 2.6 and 6.6), in others, that it is Intellect (cf. sections 2.6 and 3.5), while, in yet other cases, he remains ambiguous (cf. section 2.6). In dealing with these contradictory statements, my basic strategy has been to contextualise them and to try to fit them into the general outline of Plotinus' philosophy. What I mean by this is the paradox that the Good is simultaneously beyond all predication and, in a sense, capable of having everything predicated of it, since it is the source of all things.

We found the most striking theses about the beauty of the Good in treatise VI.7.32–33. Even there, however, things are more complicated, since Plotinus distinguishes between the ἀρχή (the Good) which is both ἀνείδειον and ἄμορφον, the beauty of Intellect, which is called ἄμορφον εἶδος, and finally all of the forms which are simply εἶδη and μορφαί (cf. section 6.6). I have argued that the notion of ἄμορφον εἶδος is very apt for describing beauty, because it captures its intermediary character and points to the fact that beauty leads to the Good, being its intelligible manifestation (cf. section 6.4). In this sense, the beauty of Intellect is indeed differentiated from the Good. On the other hand, Plotinus does claim in these passages that the Good possesses beauty of another kind, that it is beauty above beauty—beauty that makes beauty, its principle and term—calling it the all-beautiful or super-beautiful (cf. section 6.6). He even goes further with these expressions and says that the Good creates beauty as shapeless as the Good itself is, but in shape in another way, such that the first nature of the beautiful is formless (cf. section 6.6). Nevertheless, I have tried

to show that these and other statements about the Good in treatise VI.7 are, first and foremost, meant to present the Good as the superlative, all-powerful source and principle of everything which is beyond everything, i.e. different from it and also independent of it.

This cannot, however, be the whole explanation, because it is one thing to say that the Good both is and is not all predicates, and another to repeatedly connect it with one predicate, such as beauty, and, moreover, to present beauty as the very manifestation of the Good (cf. section 6.4). Therefore, I have pointed out some characteristics of beauty that make it suitable to be used in the ascent to the Good, that reflect the Good in some way and that bring the notion of beauty so close to that of the Good that they may easily be confused with each other. One of these was the referential character of beauty to what is above and its ability to arouse *ἔρωσ*, i.e. the desire to become one with the beloved which, in the end, is the Good (cf. section 6.6). Moreover, since beauty is the manifestation of the Good, it is the Good in something else (cf. section 6.4 and 6.6). In this sense, the Good becomes diminished, but beauty preserves the energy required for the ascent back upwards and, by referring to its source, it shows us the direction of this ascent (cf. section 6.6). Alongside these characteristics, beauty preserves the Good's oneness as much as it can, i.e. as unity in multiplicity (cf. section 6.6). A final reason was an exegetical one, namely to harmonise Plato's claims from various dialogues (cf. section 6.6).

This closeness of beauty to the Good is probably also the reason why beauty belongs rather to the group of predicates attributed to the Good which exhibit asymmetrical appropriateness in relation to their opposites. One example of such a predicate is the designation "Good" or "One", whose opposites cannot be predicated of the Good in any sense. Similarly, it would be extremely odd to call the Good ugly—or perhaps only in the sense of not being intelligible beauty. However, this would still be very inappropriate, because it could be better expressed by attributing to the Good all of the names that Plotinus actually ascribes to it in VI.7.32–33, like the super-beautiful, beauty above beauty, beauty that makes beauty, etc. (cf. section 6.6).

Beauty as a suitable predicate for the ascent to the Good can indeed often be found in contexts where Plotinus tries to make use of all of the different means of language to express the inexpressible nature of the Good (cf. sections 2.6 and 6.6), and it is also often connected with an attempt to express the infinite love we feel for it (cf. sections 2.6, 3.5 and 6.6). However, in some of these passages, Plotinus also clearly distinguishes them, for instance, in V.5.12 (cf. sections 3.5 and 6.6), where he differentiates between the gentleness, kindness and grace of the Good and the terrifying and wondrous nature of the beautiful, which brings pleasure mingled with pain. As I have tried to briefly show, this distinction calls

to mind the difference between the beautiful and the sublime from the history of aesthetics, because there is beauty and something more, which is μέγα, and they have a different impact on soul: one is gentle, the other terrifying. In opposition to the tradition, however, their effects are mismatched to their causes in Plotinus (cf. section 6.6).

More importantly, there are further reasons given in treatise v.5 for distinguishing beauty from the Good (cf. section 3.5). The beautiful needs the Good, but the Good does not need beauty. Nothing can exist without the Good and everyone longs for it in virtue of a divine instinct, as it were, such that it is present even to those who are asleep, and when one becomes aware of it, it is recognised as always already present. By contrast, beauty must be seen first to arouse longing and, again, as something unfamiliar it is terrifying and causes pain. Beauty makes us remember what is above, whereas the Good does not, both because—as always already present—it cannot be forgotten or, by extension, remembered and because there is nothing above it to refer to. Furthermore, the Good is good for others and not for itself (cf. section 6.5), whereas beauty is beautiful only for itself. Finally, no one is satisfied with only seeming to have the Good, whereas this suffices for many in the case of beauty (cf. section 3.5).

Other passages from the *Enneads* support the thesis that the Good not only is beauty (as its source), but also transcends it. In vi.9.11, Plotinus claims that he who unites with the Good has already run up beyond beauty and left it behind, like statues in the outer shrine of a temple (cf. section 2.6). In the same spirit, he also says in i.6.9 that the nature of the Good holds beauty as a screen before it (cf. section 2.6). One reason mentioned by Plotinus as an explanation for his ambiguous statements is a context-dependent need to distinguish the Good from Intellect. If we draw a line between them, then the primary seat of beauty will be Intellect. If we do not, it is possible, loosely speaking, to refer to the beautiful and the Good interchangeably (cf. section 2.6). We know, however, that it is ultimately necessary to distinguish them, since Intellect is not absolutely simple (cf. section 6.7). Along the same lines, the last section of vi.7 claims that beauty is to be posited in Intellect and that the Good is above beauty as its source (cf. section 6.7).

In conclusion, the relationship between beauty and the Good is ambiguous. On the one hand, the Good, as absolutely transcendent, is not beautiful and, in opposition to beauty, it is not multiple (but one), does not refer to what is above (but is the ultimate reference point) and is not illuminated (but is that which illuminates everything). At the same time, it is the source of beauty and is manifest in it, such that beauty preserves several of its characteristics, insofar as it can. Through beauty, the Good reaches to the very border of being,



and attracts everything back to itself.<sup>5</sup> As Siegmann (1990, p. 148) appositely puts it, with the appropriate erotic undertones, beauty is this manifest promise which allows us to glimpse what we are looking for, but immediately retreats into its purer form, which is above and which is, in the end, the Good. As I have suggested, it would be more apt from a systematic viewpoint to reserve a special term for the beauty of the Good in this sense, for instance the “beauteous” (*καλλονή*), which Plotinus seems to use only with reference to the beauty of the Good. He does not, however, consistently adhere to this terminological nuance.

### 7.5 Beauty as Such

To conclude this summary, I shall identify some common features of beauty throughout the levels of reality considered above. As we have seen, in the case of bodies, soul and Intellect, Plotinus warns the admirer of beauty about the fate of Narcissus (cf. sections 2.4 and 3.2). When discussing the beauty of soul, we were forced to conclude that the reference to the cause of beauty must concern the character of beauty itself, and not its being in soul (in this case), since the soul can also be ugly (cf. sections 2.4 and 3.3). Plotinus even explicitly connects this referential character to beauty, when he says that the presence of beauty in soul leads us to deduce what that which comes before soul is like, i.e. in this case, the Intellect (cf. section 3.3). Consequently, it is a feature of beauty itself to be ambiguous in this sense, i.e. both to refer to its cause and to bind its admirer to itself. It should also be clear that this ambiguity is caused by the fact that beauty is the manifestation of the Good, which preserves several of its characteristics (cf. sections 6.4, 6.6 and 7.3–7.4). Therefore, it is specifically predisposed to be confused with the Good and to bind its admirer to itself. On that account, it should also be clear why this consideration does not apply to the Good, given that it does not have any further cause and that it is the ultimate principle. Even in this sense, its beauty or beauteousness, if one uses this predicate, is different from the beauty of everything else. Much more debatable is, however, whether this magnificence of the Good does, in fact, bind its admirer to it. Parts of treatise VI.9.7 could be understood along these lines. Plotinus talks there about the union of Minos with the Good and adds that afterwards “he may think civic matters unworthy of him and want to remain always above (*ἄνω*); this is liable to happen to one who has seen much (*τῷ πολὺ*)

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5 There is, of course, no intentionality in this on the side of the Good. It does so only incidentally.

ἰδόντι)” (VI.9.7.26–28, transl. Armstrong). I am personally inclined to take this ἄνω to refer to Intellect. It would be odd for Plotinus to say that a person who has experienced the union with the Good has seen much (πολύ), especially without any qualification. Moreover, it is in the very nature of the Good to give rise to everything: it is *the Good* after all (cf. V.4.1, V.1.6). Uniting with it, i.e. becoming it, can, in this sense, scarcely cause someone to want to do the opposite to what is the nature of the Good. Therefore, I read these passages as referring to the beauty of Intellect. Nevertheless, we see here again that the Good can be called beautiful only in a qualified sense (cf. sections 6.6 and 7.4).

Another characteristic of beauty, which is noteworthy, is the fact that it pervades the whole ontological system of Plotinus: It can, in a sense, be predicated of the Good as its source. It characterises Intellect. Soul is originally beautiful and should strive to attain beauty again. Moreover, in the case of bodies, Plotinus devotes the whole of treatise II.9 to stressing their beauty. This implies that one of the specific features of beauty—in contrast to other predicates, such as freedom—is that it can address human beings even on the basic level of the senses. When we combine this basic accessibility with its referential character, we may better understand why Plotinus says that beauty can be used as a stepping-stone enabling us to catch sight of everything, and perhaps even why he devoted his very first treatise to this topic (cf. section 1.3). But again, one must bear in mind that even those who are disposed towards beauty need guidance, since beauty is ambiguous, which is something Plotinus already calls attention to in his early treatises (cf. sections 2.4). The only truly non-beautiful element in the whole system is matter (ὑλη), which is repeatedly called “ugly”, as something completely lacking form or unity, i.e. as pure diversity. At the same time, matter thus also lacks being and, in this sense, beauty does indeed pervade Plotinus’ whole *ontological* system.

A further important element, however, that is connected to the previous ones, is the identification of beauty with being (cf. sections 3.4.7 and 4.4–4.5) and, moreover, with being one (cf. sections 2.3 and 3.4.7). Although I have already shown that this identity is not absolute—since being is different both from the one in Intellect and from beauty (cf. section 7.3)—I shall, for the moment, continue to follow this line of thought, in order to further develop the notion of beauty as (unilluminated) unity in multiplicity. If Intellect is identified as the primary seat of beauty (cf. sections 2.6 and 3.5) and being (cf. chapter 4), and is the greatest possible unity in multiplicity (cf. section 3.4 and chapter 4), such that it enables beauty to be everywhere in beauty (cf. section 3.4.6), it follows that beauty is, precisely, unity in multiplicity. It is the unique *unitas multiplex* of Intellect that both explains the intermediate position of Intellect between Uranus and Zeus and makes beauty exist itself by itself in

Intellect, since all levels of reality differ insofar as they have or are *one*. Plotinus expresses this clearly in v.8.13, by joining the characteristics of being bound and being different (cf. section 3.5). Moreover, if Plotinus puts unified multiplicity, beauty and being on the same level, this means that the two components of *unitas multiplex* (i.e. unity and multiplicity) each have a different weight. Although multiplicity is a condition for meaningfully calling something beautiful, it is only a necessary condition. Not everything multiple is beautiful: multiplicity itself, i.e. matter, is ugly. Multiplicity is, however, a condition for us to be able to consider attributing the predicate of beauty to something. Unity, which ought to dominate this multiplicity, is, then, a sufficient condition, that is to say, everything that is unified multiplicity is beautiful (in the narrow sense of the word; cf. section 6.6). Multiplicity as such rather qualifies a thing as ugly (cf. section 5.1). In other words, we must understand it as a condition of the possibility of the predication of both beauty and ugliness.

As we have seen, however, unilluminated unity in multiplicity is either terrifying and painful or boring (cf. section 6.6). Unity in multiplicity represents a precondition for being able to predicate beauty of anything, because a thing exists only as unified multiplicity. However, in order for everything to be truly beautiful, it must be illuminated by what is above, in addition to being such unified multiplicity. In the case of bodies, this means relating them to their intelligible paradigms through soul with the help of λόγοι (cf. section 7.1). For soul, it means becoming virtuous, i.e. becoming aware of the intelligible activity of Intellect and becoming illuminated by it, and, in this sense, receiving an impression of it (cf. section 7.2). And for Intellect, it means catching a glimpse of that which enables its intellection, i.e. the light of the Good (cf. section 7.3).

When put like this, it becomes obvious that illumination, as a condition for true beauty, is implicitly present in both treatises on beauty, I.6 and v.8. In VI.7, this dimension only becomes more pronounced. Since, however, each thing has its unity from what is above, understanding a thing as unified multiplicity always implies seeing it as illuminated. Only a puzzled and mistaken soul can fail to understand this and think that what it admires somehow has its unity from itself. The conception of beauty as illuminated unity in multiplicity is not, in this sense, a substantial shift away from that of beauty as the unilluminated one, but rather the same theory thought through in detail.

That beauty is characterised as illuminated unity in multiplicity explains not only why beauty refers primarily to Intellect, but also both of the other features of beauty, namely its all-pervasiveness and its referential character. Since everything that is united is beautiful precisely insofar as it is united, everything that exists can be said to be beautiful, although different unities are more or less beautiful in proportion to their degree of unity. Moreover, those who do not

understand in what sense the intelligible is united can mistake a very beautiful body for the highest possible *unitas multiplex* (think again of the case of Narcissus), while even those who see beauty in soul may be tempted to think that it is already the ultimate (cf. Plotinus' question of whether soul is already what is being sought in VI.9.1, or his statement that it might seem that one could stop at the level of soul in VI.2.4.25–27). This danger is imminent to the highest degree in the case of the inconceivable unity of Intellect, which was said to draw a child away from its father as the young beloved does (cf. section 3.2), and to cause some of the spectators of the royal court's procession to leave before the king himself appears, thinking they have seen enough (cf. section 3.5). The higher the beauty, the more impressive its unity, and therefore also the danger of mistaking it for its source.