Apprehension of Thought in *Ennead* 4.3.30

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Abstract

Plotinus maintains that our intellect is always thinking. This is due to his view that our intellect remains in the intelligible world and shares a natural kinship with the hypostasis Intellect, whose being and activity consists in eternal contemplation of the Forms. Moreover, Plotinus maintains that although our intellect is always thinking we do not always apprehend our thoughts. This is due to his view that “we” descend into the sensible world while our intellect remains in the intelligible world. Furthermore, Plotinus maintains that it is only when *logoi* unfold the content of our thoughts into the imagination that we apprehend them. This is due to a complex account between, on the one hand, the relationship between intellect and discursive reasoning, and on the other hand, the relationship between discursive reasoning and language. Plotinus tells this story with remarkable brevity in *Ennead* 4.3.30. In this paper I explain the role the imagination plays in the apprehension of thoughts through a close analysis of this treatise in connection with *Ennead* 1.4.10.

Keywords

Plotinus, consciousness, imagination, apprehension, thought

Introduction

A significant number of papers have been published on aspects *either* related to consciousness¹ *or* soul-body dualism² in Plotinus. However, no

¹ See H. Osborne (1931), H. Cobb (1938), E.R. Dodds (1960), H.R. Schwyzer (1960), A.C. Lloyd (1964), E. Warren (1964), A. Smith (1978), P. Hadot (1980), F.M. Schroeder (1986 & 1987), R. Aquila (1992), L. Gerson (1997a & 1997b), S. Stern-Gillet (2006), and P. Remes (2007: ch. 2).

² See E. Emilsson (1988), (1991), (1994), and J. Dillon (1990).

one to my knowledge has seen the connection between the two topics and has recognized that Plotinus holds (in modern parlance) a dualist theory of consciousness. This is significant because of the widespread consensus that mind-body dualism and consciousness studies begin with Descartes. Plotinus shares with Descartes and modern dualists the view that consciousness inheres only in minds (or mental states) and cannot be reduced to bodies (or physical states).³ However, he does not share the view that consciousness is primarily concerned with subjective experience. The features of consciousness with which Plotinus is ultimately concerned are those that enable the soul to recover unity and return to the One. The philosophical merit of Plotinus' theory is that it offers an anti-materialistic theory of consciousness outside the Cartesian framework.⁴

A unique feature of Plotinus' theory is that it holds that different types of consciousness occur in different layers of our experience.⁵ Plotinus uses a rich and complex terminology to explain his multi-layered theory of consciousness. This is the main reason why it has been overlooked and misunderstood. The first layer is largely the work of *sunaisthêsis* and *sumpatheia*. It provides us with awareness of our bodily parts and functions in the sensible world, and enables living things to unify themselves into structured and integrated wholes. The second layer is largely the work of *antilêpsis* and *parakolouthêsis*. It provides us with apprehension of our intentional⁶ activities, apprehension of the activity of Intellect, and second-

³ See 4.1.1.48-53, 4.3.26.42-47, 4.7.3.3-6, and 6.4.9.36-37.

⁴ S.R.L. Clark (1996) and P. Remes (2007) 28-31, 243 and (2008) 84, 108 have argued that it is incorrect to label Plotinus as a Cartesian dualist because Plotinus does not hold that mind and body are distinct substances. I fully agree that body is not a distinct substance for Plotinus. However, the sharp contrast Plotinus draws between soul and body, the interaction problems that result from this contrast, and his theory of consciousness earn him a place in the history of the mind-body problem. My view is influenced by E. Emilsson (1988) 145-148 and (1991).

⁵ I examine Plotinus' theory of consciousness in my dissertation, *Plotinus on Consciousness: A Multi-Layered Approach*. See D. Muñoz-Hutchinson (2009).

⁶ I use the term "intentional" along the lines that V. Caston (2001) 31 proposes: "by 'intentionality' we should understand that feature in virtue of which our mental states are *of* or *about* something, or more generally possess content". I characterize the activities of which there is apprehension as intentional so as to avoid suggesting that apprehension is of activities only. For Plotinus, when we apprehend a sense-perception or a discursive thought we do not simply apprehend the activity but also the object the activity is *of* or *about*. For a discussion of intentionality in Neoplatonism see R. Sorabji (2001) and D. O'Meara (2001).

order consciousness in the sensible world. The third layer is largely the work of *sunaisthêsis* and *sunesis*. It provides us with awareness of our true self in the intelligible world, integrates us fully with Being and the Forms, and unites us with Intellect. Furthermore, each layer of consciousness takes place in a different level of self. The first layer takes place in the *physical* self. This is the qualified body that is integrated with living beings in the sensible world and is the subject of affections.⁷ The second layer takes place in the *dianoetic* self. This is the “we” that is the subject of imagination and discursive reasoning in the sensible world.⁸ The third layer takes place in the *noetic* self. This is the undescended soul or pure intellect that is the subject of thinking in the intelligible world.⁹

The primary faculty involved in the second layer of consciousness is the imagination. For Plotinus, the imagination “gives to the one who has the image the power to know what he has experienced” (4.4.13.15-16). It does this by bringing activities that occur in parts of the soul to the attention of the whole soul or bringing activities that occur in the soul-body compound to the attention of the soul proper through apprehension (*antilêpsis*).¹⁰ Apprehension is a type of consciousness that occurs when images or *logoi* come to be present in the imagination. Plotinus holds that in order for the *dianoetic* self to become conscious of its intentional activities it must apprehend them by images, in the case of sense-perceptions, or by *logoi*, in the case of thoughts. In what follows I focus on how “we” apprehend our higher soul’s thoughts.

Apprehension of Thought

The locus classicus for Plotinus’ account of the apprehension of thought occurs in 4.3.30. This is one of three chapters in which Plotinus discusses the imagination in detail (4.3.29-31). The first chapter establishes that memory belongs to the imagination and explains the role that the imagination plays in the memory of sense-perceptions; the second chapter

⁷ See 1.1.10.6-15 and 4.4.18.11-21.

⁸ See 1.1.7.15-24, 1.1.10.6-15, 4.4.18.11-21, and 5.3.3.

⁹ See 1.2.6.2-12, 1.4.9.29-30, 1.6.6.16-18, 4.7.10.30-37, 5.1.10.11-32, 5.3.3.3-4, 5.3.9.3-10, 6.4.14.17-32, 6.7.35.4ff, and 6.9.9.55-60.

¹⁰ See 4.4.8.9-21, 4.8.8.9-12, and 4.4.17.11-14.

establishes that the imagination is responsible for the memory of thoughts and explains the role that the imagination plays in the memory of thoughts; the third chapter explains how we experience ourselves as unified agents despite having two imaginative faculties.

The reason why Plotinus posits two imaginative faculties is because he wants to retain memories for both the higher and lower souls.¹¹ He draws on a passage from the *Odyssey*, in which Odysseus encounters the shade of Heracles in the underworld, to illustrate this.¹² Plotinus likens the higher soul to Heracles himself, who resides with the immortal gods on Mount Olympus, and the lower soul to the shade of Heracles, whom Odysseus encounters in the underworld. The point of this literary comparison is to suggest that the higher soul has memories of its own, just as Heracles himself does, as well as memories it has in common with the body, just as the shade of Heracles does in the underworld. Two faculties of imagination are required for this because Plotinus holds that “memory belongs to the imagination” (4.3.29.31-2).

Plotinus recognizes the difficulty involved with positing two imaginative faculties. If both the higher and lower soul have imaginative faculties, each of which is responsible for its own memories, it seems unlikely that the two souls would have anything in common with each other during our embodied life. With respect to this problem Plotinus claims that we experience ourselves as unities when the two souls are in harmony with each other. When the stronger soul (i.e., the higher soul) exerts its influence over the weaker soul (i.e., the lower soul) and brings the two souls into harmony, “the image (*to phantasma*) becomes one, as if a shadow followed the other and as if a little light slipped under a greater one” (4.3.31.11-13). In other words, the image of the lower soul follows the image of the higher soul the way one shadow follows another shadow, or the way a bright light consumes a dimmer light. When the two souls are in disharmony, the image of the lower soul becomes dominant and draws the attention of the soul outwards to things contrary to its nature (4.8.8.15-25). In neither case does Plotinus think we experience ourselves as two unrelated souls inhabiting a body.

¹¹) The higher soul is the undescended soul that remains in the intelligible world. The lower soul is the descended soul that informs the body and enables it to function as a living organism. See 6.7.5.11-31.

¹²) Plotinus draws on the *Odyssey*, 11.601-626 in 4.3.27 and 1.1.12.

Plotinus' account of the memory of thoughts in 4.3.30 is significantly more complex than his account of the memory of sense-perceptions in 4.3.29. The reason for this added complexity is that 4.3.29 deals with sensible objects, whereas 4.3.30 deals with intelligible objects (*noêmata*, *dianoêmata*). The type of thoughts Plotinus is concerned with in this passage are those that belong to our intellects and are of the Forms. Borrowing an analogy from Plato, these are the kind of thoughts that would be located in the highest portion of the divided line (*Republic*, 509d-511c). I quote the chapter in full:

But what is that remembers thoughts? Does the memory of these also belong to the imagination? [1] But if an image accompanies every thought, perhaps if this image remains, being a picture of the thought, in this way there would be memory of what is known. [2] But if not, we must search for another explanation. Perhaps the reception into the imagination would be of the *logos* that accompanies the thought. For the thought is without parts and has not come out into the open as it were, but escapes our notice lying within. But the *logos* unfolds its content and draws it out of the thought into the imagination and shows the thought as if in a mirror, and this is how there is apprehension (*antilêpsis*) of it, and memory and persistence. For this reason also, even though the soul is always moved towards thinking it is when it comes to be in the imagination that there is apprehension (*antilêpsis*) for us. For thinking is one thing, the apprehension (*antilêpsis*) of thinking another, and we are always thinking, but we do not always apprehend (*antilambanometha*) it. This is because what receives thoughts not only receives thoughts, but also sense-perceptions from the other side (translation mine).

In [1] Plotinus presents an Aristotelian account of the memory of thoughts. Aristotle holds that memory is a function of the sensitive power of the soul, and that we remember objects we formerly perceived or thought about by retaining the images that were impressed on the soul during the initial act of perceiving or thinking (*De Memoria* 449b9-450a32, 451a14-17). This involves the imagination since it is "that in virtue of which we say an image occurs to us" (*De Anima*, 428a1-2). Moreover, Aristotle makes no fundamental distinction between the memory of sense-objects and thought-objects because he holds that the objects of thought do not have separate existence apart from the magnitudes encountered in sense-perception (*De Anima*, 432a3-10). This is the basis for Aristotle's view that thinking

requires images because the content of thought is ultimately derived from sense-perception, and “images serve as sense-perceptions to the thinking soul” (*De Anima*, 431a14-15).

Plotinus rejects Aristotle’s view because it holds that the imagination is dependent upon the sensitive power of the soul, and that sensory images provide thought with content. Plotinus retains the general framework of Aristotelian psychology because it helps him explain how a unitary soul can operate through different faculties, but he rejects the Aristotelian soul-body relation to preserve the soul’s autonomy as an independent substance.¹³ This approach results in key differences between, on the one hand, the relation between the soul’s faculties and the body, and on the other hand, the source of thought-content.

Aristotle holds that imagination and memory belong to the sensitive power of the soul and are dependent on the body for their operation.¹⁴ By contrast, Plotinus holds that although imagination and memory are often concerned with information the sense-organs deliver, they neither belong to the sensitive power of the soul nor are they dependent on the body for their operation. The sensitive power operates through bodily sense organs that are spatially extended to perceive spatially extended objects (4.4.23). Plotinus denies that the memory of thoughts belongs to the sensitive power because of his views that thoughts are not spatially extended and that faculties which are responsible for grasping thoughts cannot be spatially extended (4.3.29.6-8, 4.7.8.1-18). Moreover, Plotinus holds that our intellects think the Forms without images and that the Forms provide our thoughts with content.¹⁵ In fact, Plotinus develops this view even further with his doctrine of the undescended soul—not only do our intellects think the Forms directly, but our intellects are fully integrated with the Forms in the intelligible world.¹⁶ Only an up-to-date Platonic psychology can explain the memory of such thoughts.

¹³) See 4.7.8⁵.

¹⁴) See *De Anima*, 403a5-10, 408b11-15, 428b10-16; *De Memoria*, 450a15-25; *De Insomniis* 459a14-18.

¹⁵) See 1.4.10.17-22 and 5.1.10.24-28. Compare Plato’s *Republic* 509d- 511e & 532a-534b.

¹⁶) See 4.8.3.8-30, 5.8.4.7-12, 5.8.9.15-25, 5.9.6, 6.4.16.32-36, 6.5.7, 6.6.7.1-11, 6.7.2.29-38, and 6.7.17.25-32.

In [2] Plotinus presents his own account of the memory of thoughts. Plotinus holds that we remember thoughts once we have apprehended the *logoi* that unfold the content of thoughts and show them in the imagination like a mirror. The presence of *logoi* in the imagination results in an apprehension because Plotinus holds that the intelligible entities that enter the imagination—whether these are images produced in sense-perception or *logoi* produced in discursive thinking—are self-intimating.¹⁷ In other words, it belongs to the very nature of a *logos* that having it in the imagination leads to the conscious apprehension of it and the object of thought it unfolds under the appropriate circumstances.¹⁸

Surprisingly, scholars who have commented on 4.3.30 have failed to provide a detailed explanation of **why** *logoi* accompany thoughts and **how** *logoi* unfold thoughts.¹⁹ Failure to explain this obscures *what* we apprehend and *how* we apprehend it. So I will briefly discuss the relevant features of Plotinus' theory of cognition in order to clarify the precise role that *logoi* play in the apprehension of thoughts. The three topics I want to focus on are: (i) the meaning of *logos* in 4.3.30; (ii) the relation between intellect (*nous*) and discursive reasoning (*dianoia*); and (iii) the relation between discursive reasoning and language (*logos*). Once these topics are fully explained we will be in a better position to understand the apprehension of our thoughts.

The meaning of logos in 4.3.30

There are two basic roles that *logoi* play in Plotinus' philosophy. The first is metaphysical: *logoi* provide structure and organization to the sensible world.²⁰ Soul transmits the *logoi* that it receives from Intellect into matter via the agency of the world soul and individual soul to create a well-ordered

¹⁷ I am borrowing and adapting the meaning of this term from S. Shoemaker. He defines a self-intimating state as one in which "it belongs to their very nature that having them leads to the belief, and knowledge, that one has them, or at any rate, that it normally does so under certain circumstances" (1996) 50-51.

¹⁸ I discuss this in D. Muñoz-Hutchinson (2009) 139-163.

¹⁹ G. Clark (1942) 306-7, E. Warren (1966) 282, H.J. Blumenthal (1971) 88 & (1976) 52, P. Hadot (1980) 249, J. Dillon (1986) 55-56, and S. Stern-Gillet (2006) 155 do not explain this. L. Gerson (1994) 171-173 provides an explanation in a different context, but I think it is incorrect. I will return to Gerson's explanation below.

²⁰ Plotinus deals with this role at length in his treatises *On Providence*, 3.2 and 3.3.

cosmos.²¹ The second is psychological: *logoi* unfold thoughts into definitional statements with predicative structure. It is important to point out that these roles are not distinct. Both roles involve the unfolding of something unified in Intellect into multiplicity at a lower level. The only difference is that the metaphysical role takes place in the cosmos, whereas the psychological role takes place in the human soul. It is the psychological role that pertains to the apprehension of thought.

I have left *logos* untranslated in 4.3.30 to avoid blurring its meaning. It is tempting to translate *logos* by a term that implies some sort of linguistic utterance. After all, *logos* is the verbal noun of *legein*, “to speak.”²² However, I think this temptation is misleading because it implies that uttered speech unfolds the thought and delivers it to the imagination. What exactly could this mean? Does the uttered statement, “I am thinking of a circle,” unfold my thought about a circle, deliver it to the imagination, and thereby render it conscious? No. This cannot be the case since one cannot verbally report on a thought unless it is already conscious, i.e., unless it is already unfolded into the imagination and reflected like a mirror-image to the whole soul. This is precisely what *logos* is supposed to explain, so it cannot refer to uttered speech. The remaining alternative is that *logos* refers to unuttered speech, a kind of internal utterance that has all the features of language except sound.²³

It is useful to view 4.3.30 against the backdrop of Plato’s formulation of thought as silent speech.²⁴ In the *Theaetetus*, Plato introduces thinking (*dianoesthai*) as an internal dialogue the soul has with itself that involves assertion and denial and results in judgment (189c7-190a7). In the *Sophist*, Plato develops this further by claiming that thought (*dianoia*) and speech (*logos*) are the same, except that thought is speech that occurs without the voice when the soul converses with itself, whereas speech is the stream of sound that travels from the soul through the mouth

²¹) For example, see 4.9.3.24-28, 5.2.1.23-25, and 2.1.5.18-24.

²²) For example, E. Brehier uses ‘formule verbale’ for the first occurrence and ‘langage’ for the second occurrence, R. Harder uses ‘Begriff (*Wort*)’ for both, A.H. Armstrong uses ‘verbal expression’ for both, and L. Brisson uses ‘discours’ for both.

²³) See *logos siôpôn* at 3.8.6.12.

²⁴) J. Heiser (1991) 8-9 also thinks Plotinus has Plato in mind in 4.3.30. He cites 6.9.10.6-7 and 5.3.3.3-4 as possible signs of evidence that Plotinus adheres to Plato’s idea that thought is silent speech.

(263e3-8). In these passages Plato defines thinking in terms of the structure of language because language has a predicative structure, and this enables him to show that judgment differs from sensation in having propositional content. It is helpful to understand the *logos* that accompanies thoughts and unfolds their content along the lines of the soul conversing with itself because *logos* plays a similar role in Plotinus' theory of embodied cognition.

The relation between intellect and discursive reasoning

The major difference between the *noetic* self and the *dianoetic* self is that the former is undescended, whereas the latter fully descends into the temporal sensible world. As a result of this descent, the cognitive capacities of the *dianoetic* self lessen in proportion to the amount of being and unity it retains during the descent. Whereas the *noetic* self grasps the Forms whole, all-at-once, and directly, the *dianoetic* self grasps the Forms unfolded into parts, step-by-step, and through *logoi*. In short, our souls think differently than our intellects.²⁵ This is easy to miss because Plotinus often uses the term *noein* (a term we might expect to be reserved for the activity of *nous*) for both soul and intellect! However, when Plotinus is speaking carefully he distinguishes the soul from intellect by calling it discursive reasoning (*dianoia*), or a dividing intellect (*merizôn nous*).²⁶ I think Plotinus calls the soul a dividing intellect because its mode of cognition involves dividing the Forms into definitional statements (*logoi*) that have predicative structure, e.g., *S is P*, where *S* is a subject and *P* is an essential property predicated of *S*. The reason why the soul divides the Forms into definitional statements has to do with Plotinus' epistemology and his philosophy of language. I will elucidate this by focusing on the relevant aspects of the relationship between intellect and discursive reasoning on the one hand, and the relationship between discursive reasoning and language on the other hand.

At the level of the hypostasis Intellect—where the *noetic* self resides—the objects of thought are the Forms. At the level of discursive

²⁵) For the difference between discursive reasoning and intellect, see 5.8.6.1-15; cf. 5.5.1.38-42, 1.8.2.8-15, and 5.3.17.21-40.

²⁶) For dividing intellect, see 5.9.8.21-23, and 6.5.2.1-7. For discursive reasoning, see 5.3.6.18-23, and 5.1.3.13-15.

reasoning—where the *dianoetic* self resides—the objects of discursive reasoning are *logoi*. The reason for the difference in object is that the *dianoetic* self is not fit to grasp the Forms directly since they are not internal to our dividing intellects. Plotinus holds that only faculties that possess their objects can know the Forms directly and have true knowledge (5.5.1, 5.3.5). This is only true of Intellect since it shares the same activity with the Forms (5.9.8.15-16, 5.3.5.36-9). Moreover, Plotinus seems to hold as a general principle that cognitive powers that do not innately possess the internal activities of their objects are acted on by the object's external activities, i.e., its images or traces.²⁷ Consequently, such cognitive powers grasp only images or traces, not the real things. Insofar as discursive reasoning does not possess the Forms innately as Intellect does, it is acted on by the external activity of the Forms.²⁸ These are *logoi* (3.2.2.15-18, 3.5.9.18-23).

The primary role of discursive reasoning is to process, evaluate, and judge the imprints it receives from sense-perception and intellect (5.3.2-3). It does this by processing imprints in succession, which presupposes time. As Plotinus says, “for discursive thought, in order to express anything in words, has to consider one thing after another: this is the method of description” (5.3.17.23-25). Furthermore, unlike most contemporary philosophers Plotinus holds that expressing our thoughts through words is a sign of deficiency. He writes, “what [the soul] utters, it utters because of its deficiency, with a view to examining it, trying to learn what it possesses” (3.8.6.26-29). Though language is essential for functioning in the sensible world, it reflects the fact that the *dianoetic* self functions in time and no longer possesses the Forms directly.

The relationship between discursive reasoning and language

The feature of discursive reasoning and language that I want to draw attention to is their common structure. I am using the term common structure to mean roughly what Ludwig Wittgenstein means by “logical form.”²⁹

²⁷ The causal model that underlies Plotinus' hierarchical ordering of reality is the doctrine of double activity (5.4.2.21-38). According to this model, every being has an internal activity that belongs to it and constitutes its nature, and an external activity that flows from it and is a trace or image of its internal activity. Thus, *logoi* are the external activity of the Forms.

²⁸ My view is influenced by E. Emilsson (2007) 77-8, 125, & 135.

²⁹ In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* Wittgenstein defines logical form in the following

The propositions that discursive reasoning produces and the meaningful utterances that language produces are predicationally structured, e.g., “man is a rational animal.” Moreover, Plotinus thinks that linguistic utterances reflect the constitution of discursive thoughts. The linguistic utterance “man is a rational animal” reflects the discursive thought “man is a rational animal” as something that is unfolded and separated into parts, namely “man,” “rationality,” and “animal.” I think it is helpful to understand how linguistic utterances reflect thoughts along the lines of how pictures depict facts in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. For Wittgenstein, pictures are models of reality that present objects and states of affairs in logical space (2.1, 2.11, 2.12). Furthermore, pictures depict reality in virtue of the fact that the elements of a picture stand to each other in the same determinate ways that the elements of an object stand to each other (2.1.31, 2.14, 2.15). Logical form is the determinate ways that the elements stand to one another (2.18). The parallel in Plotinus can be seen from the following passage:

Just as the spoken *logos* is an imitation of the *logos* in soul, so the *logos* in soul is an imitation of that in the other. Moreover, just as the uttered *logos* is broken up into parts in relation to the *logos* in soul, so the *logos* in soul, which is an interpreter of that, is in relation to that which is before it (1.2.3.27-31; cf. 5.1.3.8-10).³⁰

In this passage Plotinus draws a threefold distinction between *logoi*. The first *logos* refers to linguistic utterances, the second refers to the forms in soul, and the third refers to the Forms in Intellect. The relation amongst them is that of imitation, the first imitates the second and the second imitates the third.³¹ Of particular importance is Plotinus’ claim that spoken *logoi* are “broken up into parts” in relation to the *logos* in soul. This coheres

manner: “[w]hat any picture, of whatever form, must have in common with reality, in order to depict it—correctly or incorrectly in any way at all, is logical form, i.e., the form of reality” (2.18).

³⁰ The background to this passage is likely Stoic. As many commentators have noted, Plotinus appears to be echoing the Stoic distinction between uttered speech (*logos pro-phorikos*) and speech in the soul (*logos endiathetos*). See SVF II, 135.

³¹ I do not think that Plotinus’ choice of term here is significant. The basic idea is that the spoken *logos* is a copy of the *logos* in soul insofar as it preserves the same predicative structure.

with Plotinus' comments elsewhere that the forms in soul are unfolded and separated. For example, he says, "... we also possess the forms in two ways, in our soul, as it were unfolded (*aneiligmēna*)³² and separated (*kekôrismena*), and in Intellect all together (*homou ta panta*)" (1.1.8.7-9). The unfolded and separated forms that "we" possess in our souls are the same entities we encountered as *logoi* in 4.3.30. Taken together with 1.2.3.27-31, we can say that linguistic utterances are images of the unfolded and separated forms in soul, and the unfolded and separated forms in soul are images of the 'all-together' Forms in Intellect. Linguistic utterances are images of the unfolded and separated forms in soul in virtue of possessing the same "logical form." However, it is important to note that the *logoi* in soul are "interpreters" of the Forms in Intellect. It is significant that Plotinus includes this parenthetical comment. For the *logoi* in soul are not merely copies of the Forms in the way spoken *logoi* are copies of the *logoi* in soul, since the *logoi* in soul are unfolded and the Forms in Intellect are unitary. This is what I suspect Plotinus is hinting at with his usage of the term interpreter (*hermēneus*).³³

The best explanation of how the soul unfolds Forms into definitions is that of Damian Caluori.³⁴ I will use one of his examples from Plotinus' metaphysics to illustrate this. The Form *Human Being* exists as a unified whole in Intellect. Though it has relations to other Forms insofar as it is interconnected with them, nonetheless all of its properties remain fundamentally unitary. When the soul attempts to understand *Human Being* it cannot grasp it as a unified whole for the reasons explained above. Rather, it defines it as a rational living being (*zōon logikon*).³⁵ Insofar as we grasp it as a rational living being, we grasp it as a definition consisting of two parts. As Plotinus says, "the *logos* is living being plus something else, which is not the same as living being" (6.7.10.15). Plotinus probably has in mind the specific difference of rationality that distinguishes man from

³²) In addition to 4.3.30 and 1.1.8 Plotinus mentions the unfolded forms in our souls in 5.8.6 and 4.4.1.

³³) J. Rist (1967) 100-103 points out that Philo also refers to *logos* as *hermēneus*. However, the *logoi* to which Philo refers are the spoken *logoi*, whereas the *logoi* to which Plotinus refers are the *logoi* in soul. Regrettably, Rist does not address why Plotinus calls the *logos* in soul a *hermēneus*.

³⁴) I am summarizing his view. See D. Caluori (2007) 79-83.

³⁵) See 6.7.4.11-12.

other animals. Thus, the *logos* that unfolds the Form *Human Being* into the definition “rational living being” expresses an essential predication. Caluori’s view that “λόγοι represent the content of the world of Forms in a predication structure” (2007:83) complements my view that language and discursive reasoning share a predicative structure.

We are now in a better position to understand how the imagination apprehends thoughts in 4.3.30. I want to begin explaining this by first answering the two questions I posed above. The first question was functional, **why** do *logoi* accompany thoughts. The second question was explanatory, **how** do *logoi* unfold thoughts? As to the first, we can say that *logoi* accompany thoughts because the level of self at which the imagination operates—the *dianoetic* self—thinks the Forms through *logoi*. As to the second, we can say that *logoi* unfold the content of thoughts by dividing and separating the Forms into definitional statements, which represent the Forms in a predication structure on the level of discursive reasoning and language. How does this help us understand apprehension?

One way to interpret the theory of apprehension in 4.3.30 is to take *logos* as a word or statement standing for a thought; e.g., “circle” and “the area of a circle is πr^2 ,” treat *logoi* as effects of thought, then apply an argument from effect to cause to explain our apprehension of the thought. This is the view of Lloyd Gerson (1994:171-173). He says, “[t]his awareness [that thinking is occurring] is apparently owing to an inference from the existence of *logoi* in us to their cause” (1994:173). However, we must take caution in ascribing Gerson’s view to Plotinus for several reasons. First, Plotinus nowhere mentions that inference is involved in the apprehension of sense-perceptions or thoughts. It is true that apprehension is indirect and mediated insofar as we apprehend via *logoi*, but this neither entails nor involves inference. Second, treating the *logoi* in 4.3.30 as mere stand-ins for thoughts does not explain how *logoi* unfold the content of thoughts and show them in the imagination as if in a mirror. It is true that *logoi* in soul stand for thoughts insofar as they are imitations of the Forms (recall the threefold division of *logoi* at 1.2.3.27-31 and 5.1.3.8-10), but this is not their role in 4.3.30. Gerson does recognize that the Forms are unfolded and separated in soul and that the dividing intellect is responsible for this, but he does not recognize the role that *logoi* play in apprehension. This is likely the reason why he opts for the “inference from cause to effect” explanation of apprehension.

As I mentioned above, the imagination is the primary faculty involved in the second layer of consciousness and the primary type of consciousness in the second layer requires images. In the case of our lower psychic faculties, Plotinus thinks we become conscious of our sense-perceptions and desires by apprehending the images that are formed in the imagination. Here the intentional object of apprehension is an image. In the case of our higher psychic faculties, Plotinus thinks we become conscious of our thoughts once *logoi* have unfolded their content and shown them in the imagination like a mirror. Here the intentional object is a *logos*. What are we to make of this difference? I think it is helpful to keep in mind that the *logoi* discursive reasoning grasps are the external acts of the Forms in Intellect. Insofar as they are the external acts of the Forms, they are images or traces. Hence, the *logoi* that unfold thoughts into the imagination are image-like. This explains why Plotinus likens the imagination to a mirror in 4.3.30—mirrors reflect images.

Plotinus develops the mirror metaphor further at 1.4.10.6-16. There he says the following:

It seems as if apprehension (*antilêpsis*) exists and is produced when thought bends back, and the activity according to the life of the [higher] soul is projected back, just as in a mirror when there is a smooth, bright, and calm surface. When the mirror is present in these circumstances, the image is produced. When it [the mirror] is not present or when it is not in the right state, the object of which the image would have been is [still] present in actuality; in the same way regarding the soul, when that sort of thing in us which reflects the images of reasoning and thought (*hō emphainetai ta tês dianoias kai tounou eikonismata*) is untroubled, it sees and knows them similar to the case of sense-perception, along with the prior knowledge that intellect and discursive reasoning are active (translation mine).

In this passage Plotinus describes how the *dianoetic* self becomes conscious of our intellectual activity by likening the imagination to a mirror.³⁶ The

³⁶ Scholars have long noted that *Timaeus* 70e ff is a likely source for Plotinus' description of the imagination as a mirror. In this passage, the younger gods situate the liver in the lowest part of the soul to assist the rational part in controlling the appetites. Plato writes, "... the god conspired with this very tendency by constructing a liver, a structure which he situated in the dwelling place of this part of the soul. He made it into something dense,

term calm (*hêsuchazon*) suggests Plotinus is probably thinking of a reflection in a pool of water rather than the surface of a mirror. Plotinus does not mention the imagination explicitly here, but we know from 4.3.30 that he likens the imagination to a mirror and the “sort of thing in us which reflects the images of reasoning and thought” can only be the imagination. So we can be confident that Plotinus is talking about the imagination.

The idea is that when a pool of water is calm it reflects an image of the object in front of it. However, when a pool of water is disturbed it does not reflect an image of the object. The object is still there; the mirror just doesn’t reflect it. Similarly, when the imagination is calm it reflects an image of the thought to the whole soul. When it is not calm, the imagination does not reflect an image. The activity of intellect is still going on in the higher undescended soul. The imagination just doesn’t reflect it. Though Plotinus does not mention the conditions under which the imagination is calm, he is likely referring to the state in which the lower imagination is harmonized with the higher imagination (4.3.31.9-21). As we saw above, when the higher imagination exerts its influence over the lower imagination, “the image (*to phantasma*) becomes one, as if a shadow followed the other and as if a little light slipped under a greater one” (4.3.31.11-13). In other words, the lower imagination follows the higher imagination the way one shadow follows another, or the way a bright light consumes a dimmer light. When the two souls are in disharmony, the lower imagination becomes dominant and draws the attention of the soul outwards to things contrary to its nature (4.8.8.15-25). The pool of water becomes choppy, as it were.

Plotinus offers the mirror as a metaphor to understand the apprehension of thoughts. The key to unlocking the meaning of this metaphor lies in Plotinus’ description of apprehension in lines 6-9 as thought “bending back (*anakamptontos*)” and the activity of the higher soul “projecting back (*apôsthentos*).” This is the closest Plotinus ever comes to a definition of

smooth, bright, and sweet, though also having a bitter quality, so that the force of the thoughts sent down from the mind might be stamped upon it as upon a mirror that receives the stamps and returns visible images” (71a6-71b3). However, the usage of the term *hêsuchazon* suggests to me that he also has in mind *Republic* 510a1 where Plato includes reflections in water as types of images. For a discussion of these passages and others related to *Timaeus* 70eff, See A. Sheppard (2003).

apprehension in the *Enneads*. So what is it supposed to mean? Let us begin with Armstrong's translation of lines 6-9: "[i]t seems as if awareness exists and is produced when intellectual activity is reflexive, and when that in the life of the soul which is active in thinking is in a way projected back." This translation is very misleading because it makes it sound as if our intellect is the subject of apprehension, e.g., as if intellect has a second-order consciousness of its first-order thoughts. This cannot be the case since Plotinus makes it clear in lines 4-7 that intellect and the higher soul exist "prior" to apprehension.³⁷ Our intellect cannot be "that which reflects the images of reasoning and thought" if it exists prior to that which reflects. It would be like saying intellect is both the mirror and the source of the images in the mirror. So how are we to understand these lines?

The point Plotinus is trying to make is that the imagination "projects back" thoughts to the *dianoetic* self the way a mirror projects back images to the source of the images. What makes this difficult to see is that the mirror metaphor is faulty. When an object is placed in front of a mirror, the mirror reflects the image back to the object in front of it. When the content of a thought is unfolded into the imagination, the imagination does *not* reflect the content of the thought back to the thought. Rather, it reflects the content of the thought on a lower level. The subject of a thought is the *noetic* self, the subject of the apprehension of a thought is the *dianoetic* self. The metaphor breaks down because ultimately that which reflects exists on a lower level than that which is reflected. Thus it is incorrect to suppose, as Edward Warren does, that "*antilêpsis* arises when the concept is thrown back on itself, as if in mirror" (1964: 283).

The important thing to notice is that Plotinus thinks the apprehension of thoughts occurs "similar to the case of sense-perception." I take this to mean that just as we apprehend sense-perceptions once the image is produced in the imagination, so too do we apprehend thoughts once *logoi* have unfolded their content into the imagination. There is an important difference, however. Unlike sense-perceptions, thoughts do not terminate in the imagination.³⁸ This is because thoughts—or more generally, the

³⁷) Our intellect is prior to the faculties of the compound in the same way that the hypothesis Intellect is prior to the levels of reality beneath it. This is a psychological instance of his theory of causation. See 5.2.1, 5.5.9.30-40, and 4.5.7.50-52.

³⁸) For the idea that sense-perceptions terminate in the imagination, see 4.3.29.23-25, and 4.4.19.4-8.

activity of our intellects—take place without images (1.4.10.18-22). The *noetic* self remains ever active in the intelligible world, and is not in need of images to contemplate reality. It is “we”—the *dianoetic* self—who need *logoi* to think the Forms, and apprehend our thoughts concerning them.

It should now be obvious that the imagination plays a critical role in the life of the embodied individual, both with respect to cognition in general and consciousness in particular. Even if we were to discount the role the imagination plays with respect to the lower psychic faculties because it draws the soul outwards towards multiplicity, it apprehends things contrary to the soul’s nature, and it is a strike of something irrational from outside,³⁹ we cannot discount the role the imagination plays with respect to the higher psychic faculties. But does it really matter? Are “we” any better off because of the apprehension of our thoughts? On the one hand, no, we are not better off with apprehended thoughts since our thoughts take place anyway regardless of whether or not we apprehend them.⁴⁰ On the other hand, yes, we are better off with apprehended thoughts because this brings us closer to recovering the *noetic* self. As Plotinus says, “[b]ut does not the “we” include what comes before the middle? Yes, but there must be apprehension (*antilêpsin*) of it. We do not always use all that we have, but only when we direct our middle region (*to meson*) towards the higher principles” (1.1.11.5-7).⁴¹ I take this to mean that in order for our intellect—“what comes before the middle”⁴²—to begin to play a constitutive role in the “we,” the *dianoetic* self must apprehend it. Once we apprehend our intellectual activity and realize that we are this activity (1.4.9. 29-30), the recovery of the *noetic* self begins.

³⁹ This is the view of S. Stern-Gillet (2006). The passages that she mentions in connection with this point are 1.8.15.18-19, 4.8.8.16-24, and 6.83.10-18. However, it is not sufficiently appreciated that in these passages Plotinus is talking about the lower imagination.

⁴⁰ This is especially evident in 1.4.9-10 where Plotinus explains why the *spoudaios* is happy even though he is not conscious of his happiness.

⁴¹ I am in disagreement with H.S. Schibli (1989) 214, who thinks the middle region is the “middle soul.” There is no such thing as a “middle soul” in Plotinus. There is a higher soul that remains in the intelligible world, and a lower soul that is projected onto body to form a living being. The interpretation that best fits the texts is that the middle region is the imagination. Cf. 2.9.2.5-9.

⁴² The phrase “what comes before the middle” refers to intellect.

Conclusion

It is a new development in Greek philosophy that the imagination is responsible for the apprehension of intellectual activity. In order to highlight this development further, I want to conclude with a passage in which Plotinus broadens the scope of apprehension to include the activity of the hypostases. To understand this passage we must keep in mind that Plotinus does not solely locate the intelligible world somewhere “out there” in a transcendent realm. Rather, he also locates the intelligible world *within the soul* and maintains that we can reach it by turning inwards and ascending upwards through a process of purification.⁴³ He begins the chapter in which this passage occurs by asking, “why, then, if we have such great things [i.e., One, Intellect, and Soul] do we not apprehend them?” (5.1.12.1-2). He responds with the following:

For not everything that is in the soul is immediately perceptible, but it reaches us when it enters into perception (*aisthêsin*). But when each thing that is active does not give a share of [its activity] to that which perceives, it [the activity] has not pervaded the whole soul. Therefore, we do not recognize it yet since we are with the perceptive power, and are not a part of soul but the whole soul. And further, since each part of the soul is living it always exercises the activity belonging to it on its own. But we recognize it when a sharing [of its activity with that which perceives] occurs and apprehension takes place. Moreover, if there will be apprehension (*antilêpsis*) of the activities that are present in this way, we must turn that which apprehends inwards (*to antilambanomen eis to eisô epistrephein*) and make it attend to what is there, just as if someone expecting to hear a voice that he wanted to hear withdrew from other voices, and roused his power of hearing to catch what, when it comes, is the best of all sounds that can be heard; in this way we must let perceptible sounds go here, except insofar as it is necessary, and keep the soul's power of apprehension (*tên tês psuchês eis to antilambanesthai dunamin*) pure and ready to hear the sounds from above (5.1.12.13-21: Armstrong modified).

In this passage Plotinus claims that *aisthêsis* presents activities to consciousness by bringing activities that occur in parts of the soul to the attention of the whole soul. This might seem incompatible with my claim that the subject of apprehension is the imagination. However, it is important to

⁴³) See 5.1.10.5-9 and 4.7.10.30-36.

note two things. First, Plotinus does not restrict the verb *aisthanesthai* to the qualified body's perception of external objects; rather, he uses it broadly to include the soul's perception of internal images. We can be confident that this belongs to the imagination⁴⁴ since the passage in which Plotinus distinguishes between the qualified body's perception of external objects and the soul's perception of internal images coheres with other passages in which Plotinus attributes the apprehension of internal images to the imagination.⁴⁵ Second, Plotinus holds that the imagination is the faculty that is responsible for presenting activities that occur in parts of the soul to the attention of the whole soul.⁴⁶ On my view, then, Plotinus is claiming that the activity of the hypostases escapes the attention of the whole soul unless the imagination apprehends their activity. That the higher imagination can purify itself by turning inwards and listening to the voices from above is a remarkable development in Greek philosophical thought.⁴⁷

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⁴⁴ E. Emilsson (1988) 114-117 & 133-134 and F. Fronterotta (2003) 208 hold similar views.

⁴⁵ Compare 1.1.7.9-14 with 3.6.1.6-15, 4.3.26.30-33, 4.3.29-30, 4.4.8.9-21, 4.4.13.15-16, 4.4.17.11-14, 4.4.28.36-43, and 4.8.8.9-12.

⁴⁶ See 4.4.8.9-21 and 4.8.8.9-12.

⁴⁷ J. Dillon (1986) 61-63 explains how this development ultimately led to the view of the imagination as an organ of artistic creativity that was influential in late antiquity and beyond.

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