In this paper I intend to discuss Plotinus’ view of quality, because, I believe, it would shed some light on Plotinus’ ontology and on the relation between sensible and intelligible world, most especially. Plotinus discusses quality in *Enn.* II.6 [17], a short, dialectical, and obscure treatise, and then in *Enn.* VI.1–3 [42–44], especially in *Enn.* VI.2 [43] 14 and in *Enn.* VI.3 [44] 8–15, in the framework of his criticism of Aristotle’s theory of the categories. There are some considerable differences between *Enn.* II.6 [17] and *Enn.* VI.1–3 [42–44], both as regards the treatment of quality and also, more generally, in the nature and the spirit of Plotinus’ writing. In *Enn.* II.6 [17] Plotinus raises questions about what is substance and quality and tries ways to address them, but it remains unclear to what extent he commits himself to these answers. In *Enn.* VI.1–3 [42–44] on the other hand Plotinus is much more assertive and in *Enn.* VI.2 [43] 14 he appears to modify the position he takes in *Enn.* II.6 [17] about quality. And the question is how, if at all, in *Enn.* VI.2–3 [43–44], where Plotinus speaks about quality in some detail, he is guided by his polemics against Aristotle, or, if this is his personal position on the matter, how it squares with his earlier position.

I will try to show that Plotinus does have a coherent theory about quality which is considerably different from that of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, and is quite distinct in the history of philosophy. Plato in the *Theaetetus* (182 b) was the first to introduce the term ‘quality’, with the caution that this is a strange term, to signify what is affected (πάσχον) in a certain way by an active cause (ποιητική). Aristotle on the other hand...
in the *Categories* groups quality with the kinds of predicates which are in a subject, as opposed to substance (οὐσία) which can never be in a subject (*Cat.* 2 1 a 20 ff.; 4 1 b 26; 5 3 a 7–21) and later on in the *Metaphysics* (V.14 1020 a 33–1021 b 25) he distinguishes between essential and accidental qualities, that is, between features qualifying the genus to which something belongs (*e.g.* man being a rational animal) and features qualifying the individual substance (*e.g.* Socrates being white), which count as accidents (cf. *Met.* VII.6 1031 b 22–28). Finally, the Stoics conceive of qualities as being corporeal, inseparable from the body they qualify.2

Plotinus’ understanding of quality is, as we would expect, inspired by Plato, but it is also very much influenced by Aristotle’s relevant views. The result is, as often with Plotinus, a highly personal doctrine about quality. Plotinus appears to believe that all features of sensible entities are nothing but qualities. He strongly opposes Aristotle’s mature view (*Met.* VII esp. 8, 17) according to which the immanent Form (ἐδοξοῦσα), such as the Form of man in Socrates, is substance on the grounds that this is the cause of something being what it is.3 In Plotinus’ view immanent Form is by no means the cause of something being what it is, but one quality among others of a sensible entity (ποιόν/ποιότης). That is, for Plotinus a big, white man has the qualities of bigness, whiteness, and humanity.

Such a view has its origins in Plato, yet urges an investigation into the sense in which Plotinus uses the term ‘quality’, because we would like to know why Plotinus takes the view that a sensible entity, *e.g.* a man, is considered not as being a man, that is, a substance, but as having the quality of a man, which turns out to be like all other qualities a man can have, such as big, white, or smart. To answer that, we first need to understand how Plotinus conceives of substance, because it is this that guides him to conceive of immanent Form as quality.4

Plotinus, we know, takes over from Plato the distinction between Forms which are immanent in matter, that is, in sensible entities, and transcendent Forms, which exist only in the intelligible realm, arguing that only the latter qualify as substance (οὐσία). One reason why Plotinus argues this is because he, following Plato, believes that only

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3 For a philosophical exegesis of Aristotle’s view, see Frede and Patzig (1987) I 36–57.
4 For a full and documented account of Plotinus’ doctrine of substance, see Chiaradonna (2002) ch. 2.