FOUNDATIONS OF ARITHMETIC IN PLOTINUS: 
ENN. VI.6 (34) ON THE STRUCTURE AND THE 
CONSTITUTION OF NUMBER

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The treatise VI.6 [34] “On Numbers” (περὶ ἀριθμῶν) of the Enneads is dedicated to the consideration of the place and the ontological status of number in the whole structure of being and thinking, the number as mediating between the original unity of the One and the multiplicity of the infinite. Plotinus dedicates V.5.4-5 (a part of the “Großschrift” (III.8; V.8; V.5; II.9) which immediately precedes Enn. VI.6) to the consideration of the One in its relation to number, outlining the main questions on the structure of the number, as if postponing their solution to a later point. In the Enn. VI.6 we do not find however any discussion specially dedicated to the problem of the constitution of number as such. The question remains explicitly not resolved, neither in V.5 nor in VI.6: Plotinus skips it, leaving the problem without a final definitive answer. In the present paper I undertake an attempt to reconstruct the constitution, derivation and construction of number in Plotinus in its various representations, recurring to the hints Plotinus provides in his texts. The “foundations of arithmetic” I understand here in the sense of Frege, as a comprehensive study of number in its different aspects and in its specific constitution qua number.²

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Plotinus discerns between what he calls essential number (οὐσιώδης ἀριθμός) and quantitative or monadic number (μονοδικός, τὸ ποσόν).³ The latter is the image (εἰκόνα) of the former through participation (μετοχή, V.5.4.3; μετα-

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λήψις, V.5.5.11-12). The quantitative number is that which provides quantity, i.e. is that by which things are numbered and counted. The essential number always provides existence (ὁ τό εἶναι ἀεὶ παρέχων, V.5.4.18). In the act of numbering the quantitative number constitutes quantity in the numbered as the realization or actualization of the essential number. Krämer and Szlezák point out that the distinction between these two types of number comes back to Plato and the early Academic discussions, traces of which are preserved in Aristotle's criticism of the ideal (essential) and mathematical the (quantitative) numbers in *Met.* M 6-9.

The essential number in Plotinus is introduced as contemplated primarily in or “over” (ἐπιθεωρούμενος) the forms-εἰδη (VI.6.9.35-36). In order to fit the essential number as the ordering principle into the structure of being, Plotinus has to split being (οὐσία, τό εἶναι, V.5.5.22) into being properly (ὁν) and beings (ὅντα), i.e. to discern between being as one and as many. This distinction is not however itself the real one, for being remains a synthetic conjunction of the dual unity of ἐν-ὁν or ἐν-πολλά which appears as the structure of all-unity within the νοῦς (ὁμοῦ ἐν ἑν πάντα). Plotinus faces the choice of presenting the being of νοῦς either as the duality of thinking-νοῆσις which thinks itself as thought-νοητά (V.1.4.30-34; V.9.7.6 sqq. et al.) or as the triad of being, intellect and life. The difficulty which arises here is how to understand the being-beings distinction. Thus, in the case of the νόησις-νοητό division the former, on the one hand, appears to be the ὁν, while the latter seems to represent the ὅντα. On the other hand, the being-ὁν is prior to the intellect-νοῦς and the thinking-νοῆσις is already a multiplicity bound into a unity, the ἐν ὁν of the second hypothesis of the *Parmenides.* Now, in the triad of being, intellect and life qua living being the last term represents the cosmos of all forms in which the intellect fulfills its being, i.e. thinks itself as the νοητά. Since, however, every thought object,

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