

Suggestions of a Neoplatonic semiotics: Act and potency in Plotinus' metaphysics

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Abstract

In Four ages of understanding, John Deely identifies four stages of progress toward a science of semiotics. The first of these ages is “preliminaries to the notion of sign.” This is the age of ancient classical and Hellenistic philosophy (600 BC–400 AD). A prominent figure in this age is Plotinus (205–270), the founder of the Neoplatonic school. A laconic description of Plotinus' philosophy is that it is a mystical monism. For a monist, to be real is to be one. A mystic, Plotinus asserts, is someone who knows ultimate reality in a way that is beyond being and intelligence. Central to unfolding Plotinus' mystical monism is the way he adopts the act (energeia) / potency (dynamis) distinction from Aristotle. This distinction explains that Plotinus is not an ontologist, because reality (unity) transcends being (unity-in-plurality). Ennead II, 5 (25) is Plotinus' definitive work on act and potency. Once one explains how these principles operate in Plotinus' metaphysics, one can suggest what a philosophy of signs or “semiotics” looks like in Neoplatonism.

Keywords: unity; act; potency; logos; emanation; reality.

John Deely's *Four ages of understanding* (2001) is a magisterial achievement that focuses on the nature and development of the sign in the history of Western philosophy. The formal philosophical examination of the sign is *semiotics*, to which discipline John Deely has contributed significantly.¹ Early in his book, he describes the four ages of progress toward a science of semiotics: “preliminaries to the notion of sign; the development of the notion itself; forgetfulness of the notion; recovery and advance of the notion” (p. XXX). The age of “preliminaries” refers to ancient philosophy, including Classical Greek philosophy (approximately

600 to 300 BC) and Hellenistic thought (approximately 300 BC to 400 AD); the second, the first development of the integral notion of sign, to the Latin age; the third, during which the sign is forgotten, refers to modern philosophy; the last, to the contemporary, or “postmodern,” philosophical era, in which Deely hopes a recovery of the sign as an explicit project for philosophy will be realized.² A mature philosophy of the sign, as prescribed by Charles Sanders Peirce, will overcome the limitations of modern philosophy and will restore philosophy’s right to legitimacy and leadership in culture.

In this article, I return to the pre-semiotic era, specifically to the work of Plotinus (205–270), the founder of the school of Neoplatonism. I will examine the nature of potentiality, a subject on which Deely comments in his treatment of Plotinus.³ Since it is impossible to do this principle justice in Plotinus without discussing its correlate, actuality, I will complement Deely’s study by commenting on Plotinus’ assimilation of Aristotle’s principles “act and potency” (*energeia* and *dynamis*), which is the twofold formal subject of *Ennead* II, 5, the twenty-fifth treatise that Plotinus wrote.⁴ By examining this treatise, I can show that *energeia* and *dynamis* are necessary for a comprehensive grasp of Plotinus’ metaphysics. By providing this summary and commentary, I can subsequently indicate how act and potency imply a Neoplatonic semiotics.

Before commenting on II, 5 (25), a few remarks about the unique nature of Plotinus’ philosophy are in order. That Plotinus’ metaphysics is distinctive and in some respects discontinuous with the ontologies of his predecessors is something Deely recognizes and appreciates.⁵ As Deely explains, Plotinus’ thought differs from earlier ontologies, because Plotinus is no ontologist at all. Instead, his philosophy is an henology (from the Greek *to hen*, meaning one). Henology differs significantly from ontology (from the Greek *to on*, meaning being) in its account of reality. Whereas an ontology asserts that *to be real is to be*, an henology holds that *to be real is to be one*.

The distinction saturates Plotinus’ writings. The following quotation from VI, 9 (9) illustrates the primacy Plotinus gives unity:

It is by The One that all existents are existents. This is equally true of those that are primarily existents and those that in some way are simply classed among the things that are real, for what could exist were it not one? Not a one, a thing is not. No army, no choir, no flock exists except it be one. No house, even, or ship exists except as the unity, house, or the unity, ship; their unity gone, the house is no longer a house, the ship is no longer a ship. Similarly quantitative continua would not exist had they not an inner unity; divided, they forfeit existence along with unity. It is the same with plant and animal bodies; each of them is a unity; with

disintegration, they lose their previous nature and are no longer what they were; they become new, different beings that in turn exist only as long as each of them is a unit. (VI, 9 [9], 1, 1–10)⁶

This quotation justifies Plotinian monism. Plotinus' writings are an attempt to show that once the philosopher takes the principle that reality is unity to its logical conclusion, he or she must conclude that only one reality exists.⁷ Moreover, since unity is the true object of philosophical science, ontology cannot be metaphysics in the true sense for Plotinus. Being represents a partial separation from reality, unity. Ontology, the science of being, examines form as its object. A being is a determinate nature (*ousia*), an entity with a form (*eidōs*), an intelligible nature, distinguishable from other entities.⁸ On the other hand, henology examines reality as it altogether transcends differentiation of any kind. This means for Plotinus, reality is not being, but a transcendent unity that is beyond the determination, specificity, differentiation, and plurality of being.⁹

Being, comprehensively understood, is the realm of Platonic forms, which Plotinus combines with Aristotle's self-thinking thought. Being, then, refers to a pure intellect, divine *Nous*, a living eternal intelligence that contemplates the sum total of all intelligibilities (Forms), which are the contents of its own mind.¹⁰ And yet, if unity is not being, there is a One or a greater reality transcending divine Intelligence. Being, accordingly, occupies a secondary or derivative place in Plotinus' metaphysics.¹¹

To express the coordination in Plotinus' worldview of being with transcendent unity, ontology with henology, Deely relies on the work of Leo Sweeney. In an excellent article, "Basic principles in Plotinus's philosophy," Sweeney distills Plotinus' metaphysics to three principles: (1) *monism*: to be real is to be one; (2) *perfection*: to be real is to be good; (3) *causality*: whatever is prior in the universe is superior to whatever is subsequent.¹² These principles enable Plotinus to explain comprehensively the universe as consisting of a first hypostasis (ultimate reality), the One/Good (Plotinus' supreme God), out of which all other realities emanate. Since the Good always communicates its goodness (*bonum difusivum sui*, as the Schoolmen would later say under the influence of Neoplatonism), successive, descending gradations of reality necessarily emanate from the One/Good. Existents subsequent to the One reflect a decrease of reality (unity) and a gradual increase of unreality (multiplicity). So emerges the first One-In-Many, the Divine Intelligence (*Nous*), the second hypostasis, the universe of being (intelligence and intelligibles). In turn, the Intelligence continues emanation, generating out of its own perfection another one-in-many, the World Soul (the third hypostasis, and the cosmic first principle of Stoic philosophy), whose perfection makes intelligible and

animate everything in the physical world, making it a *cosmos* instead of a *chaos*. Just as Intelligence is inferior to the One, so Soul is less than Intelligence.¹³

The universe of Intelligence primarily is the universe of being. All subsequent beings are *logoi* of being. For Plotinus a *logos* is a higher reality on a lower level of emanation. Hence, while the Intelligence is a *logos* of the One, the World Soul is a *logos* of the Intelligence. The universe of Soul is the *logos* of Being, meaning it is Being on a lower level of reality, a lesser level of emanation. Since being primarily is the universe of Divine Intelligence and Intelligibles (Forms), all beings posterior to Divine Intelligence are its *logoi*.¹⁴

Being refers to intelligibility, which implies a corresponding intelligence to make it its object. There is being wherever there is intelligence or intelligibility. Out of Intelligence and Soul emanate all beings until being can be no more, that is to say, until the emanation of perfections dies out against the ultimate sterility of prime matter, which constitutes “absolute indefiniteness.”¹⁵

To relate these observations to Deely’s consideration of potentiality, Plotinus’ universe consists of an ultimate principle of perfect active power (*dynamis ton panton*, II, 8 [30], 10, 1), the One/Good. This principle produces a universe of beings, entities whose nature is unity-in-difference. These ones-in-many gradually descend from the Divine *Nous* to the World Soul to nature and the lowest forms of physical matter, which adjoin the inertness or sterility of imperfection, as emanation plays out and unreality, prime matter, alone remains.¹⁶ Prime matter is a stark other (*heteron*), contrary to the goodness and oneness of reality, and the principle of imperfection.¹⁷ But since prime matter is pure passive potency, then passive potency defines the opposite of reality, and announces metaphysically where unreality begins.¹⁸ So Plotinus “bookends” emanation with two principles of potency: absolute infinite *active power* (the One/Good: *panton ton onton dynatotaton*, V, 4 [7], 1, 25) and absolute, imperfect *passive potency* (prime matter: *to dynamei on*, II, 5 [25], 1, 1).

1. A commentary on *Ennead II, 5 (25)*¹⁹

My remarks on Plotinus’ text will reinforce the above observations, make evident why act and potency are central principles in Plotinus’ metaphysics, and provide pointers for a Neoplatonic semiotics. Hereby, I will complement John Deely’s study on Plotinus.

One of the most important features of *Ennead II, 5 (25)* is that it does not treat simply of *hē energieia* (act) and *hē dynamis* (potency) but, in the

interest of a more subtle and complete analysis, adds to these the notion *to energeia on* (being in act) and *to dynamei on* (being in potency). These distinctions Plotinus sets down in the first two of the five chapters of the treatise. It is also significant that Plotinus separates these expressions into two sets: *hē dynamis* as the correlate of *hē energeia*; *to dynamei on* of *to energeia on*. By insisting that this order be respected, Plotinus indicates that each term has a distinct and technical meaning. Indeed, his use of these terms is obviously careful throughout the treatise. Before I identify to what philosophic purpose Plotinus puts these terms, I will record the meaning of each.

1.1. *Being in potency (to dynamei on)*

It is best to begin with this distinction because it describes sensible matter and thereby is the basis of illustrations Plotinus employs. Plotinus defines being in potency as something which can become something else after what it already is (1, 10–15). For example, bronze is a being in potency because it can become a statue; water, because it can become something else altogether, such as air or even bronze (1, 12–21). In the first instance, bronze retains its essence but acquires additional form through an extrinsic agent (the sculptor); in the second, water actually loses its nature, acquiring from outside another essence. From these helpful examples, we may infer that something is in potency when it can receive either accidental or substantial form from an extrinsic cause. Hence, being in potency is passive *dynamis*: that which can be a substrate (1, 29–31) for another or rather that which can be formed by another (*par' allow*: 2, 33–34).

That Plotinus follows Aristotle in this description of being in potency is indicated on several counts. First, the Greek expression *to dynamei on* is the precise phrase that occurs in Aristotle's frequent remarks on passive potency.²⁰ Second, Plotinus' repeated comments on bronze in II, 5 (25) echo Aristotle's common use of *chalkos* (bronze) and *andrias* (statue) to illustrate being in potency.²¹ Third, Plotinus' comment early in the text that being in potency cannot belong to the intelligible world on grounds that no change occurs There (1, 6–8), coupled with his examples of substantial and accidental change in bronze and water, signals that being in potency functions as the principle of change for his philosophy just as it does for Aristotle's. Being in potency is the basis for change because it can acquire form successively. Because of this third parallel, Plotinus is willing to largely accept Aristotle's doctrine of prime matter as pure passive potency (chs. 4–5).

Finally, Plotinus also accepts Aristotle's distinction between prime matter (*protē hylē*) and second matter (*eschatē hylē*), as is indicated by his illustrations regarding bronze (see especially 2, 1–8). Prime matter is being in potency in an absolute sense, while second matter is such only relatively. The latter is already a composite being (matter and form), but it can acquire other forms, accidentally or substantially.

1.2. *Being in act (to energeia on)*

Knowledge of *to dynamēi on* prepares one for its correlate, *to energeia on*, a phrase which also appears in Aristotle. Being in act refers to something that is completed by form (2, 3–8). Accordingly, *to energeia on*, unlike *to dynamēi on*, may belong in the intelligible world, for intelligible beings are completed by form. However, the matter that is there completed by form is “intelligible matter” (see II, 4 [12], 1–5) and potency (*hē dynamis*) rather than being in potency (*to dynamēi on*). Unlike sensible matter, the matter in the Intelligible World (the world that constitutes the objects of *Nous*, the second hypostasis) is indeterminate but real and, as such, truly unites with form. That is to say, intelligible matter and form are only logically distinct (II, 5 [25], 3, 8–12). In the intelligible world there is no sensible matter, no being in potency, and therefore no change. In the sensible world, however, every being in act is subject to change and therefore is also a being in potency. Each sensible thing is a composite of matter and form but is in potency to some extrinsic being. Therefore, with the exception of prime matter, every being in potency is also a being in act.

Plotinus asks (2, 3–8) an important question regarding the relationship of being in potency to being in act: Where there is change, does being in potency really become being in act or is the resulting being in act altogether different from the prior being in potency? There is no simple answer to this question. The resulting being in certain ways is the same but in other respects is different from the original being in potency. This is true whether one considers the being in potency as second or as prime matter. If second matter is considered in itself, that is, as being an act, then it is different from the product it becomes, because every being in act is a distinct composite of matter and form. But if second matter is considered not in and of itself but relatively to whatever form it will acquire, then it is partly the same as the resulting being in act. In other words, if second matter is considered as a being in potency, it may be said in a sense to be the same as the product. It is the same in that it remains as the substrate for the newly received form. This is true, however,

only of accidental change; in substantial change the form is altogether lost and therefore cannot be part of the product.

Like second matter, prime matter is also partly distinct from and partly identical with the resulting being in act, depending on one's point of view. Since matter is never itself in act, matter is necessarily different from the resulting composite. But matter is certainly a part of the composite, since it is the ultimate substrate of the latter.

1.3. Act (*hē energeia*)

Plotinus states that *hē energeia* is form (*to eidos*; 2, 28–31). In doing this, he follows Aristotle, whose neologism, *energeia*, became an alternate expression for *eidos* in his corpus.²² Plotinus follows Aristotle by identifying *energeia* with *eidos*. How does *hē energeia* relate to the prior two distinctions, being in potency and being in act? Being in potency receives and becomes substrate of act (*hē energeia*). Since being in potency is passive *dynamis*, act comes to being in potency only through the agency of another (*par allou*; 2, 33–34). The resulting union of being in potency (substrate) and of act (form) brings about a being in act. Hence, *to energeia on* denotes the whole, whereas *hē energeia* denotes the part. At times Plotinus uses *hē energeia* and *to energeia on* interchangeably (3, 1–40). This is permissible in that an existent is an intelligible unity because of its form.

1.4. Potency (*hē dynamis*)

Finally, there remains *hē dynamis*, which is ordinarily translated as “potency.” How exactly does *hē dynamis* differ from *to dynamei on*? Plotinus answers that the former is active potency or power but that the latter is passive potency. Whereas being in potency is determined by another (*par allou*), potency determines itself, or rather the agent who exercises the potency determines it. Plotinus explains this through his allusion to the sculptor (*kata to poiein*; 1, 21–26). The sculptor's perfections (his or her talent, imagination, and artistic judgment) cause operations perfecting not only external objects but also the sculptor's active powers themselves. Through the sculptor's active powers (*dynameis*), he perfects himself. One and the same agent is origin and recipient of act.

Plotinus further elaborates this point through the illustrations of the knower (2, 15–26) and the moral agent (2, 34–36). Knowledge is possible through knowing powers that belong to a subject who himself is perfected (that is, acquires *energeia*) through the exercise (activities) of those

powers. Moral conduct is the result of powers (habits) that themselves are further perfected by that conduct.

Potency, therefore, is the active power of a living agent. The agent, moreover, has act through his or her own active powers, because an agent perfects himself or herself through powers and their immanent operations.

These technical distinctions furnish the principles for an analysis of the intelligible world that appears in chapter three of II, 5.²³ As noted already, if *to dynamei on* is the principle of change, it cannot belong in the intelligible world. Hence, while it is correct to call intelligible beings potencies (more precisely, active powers), it is incorrect to call them beings in potency (3, 8–22).

Being in act applies to the intelligible world because intelligible beings are composites of matter (albeit intelligible matter) and form. True, the matter There is a potency rather than a being in potency; nonetheless, it is a logically distinct constituent of an intelligible being that, as composite, may be called a being in act. Because an intelligible being is a composite of potency and act rather than of being in potency and in act, it is a real unity of parts only logically distinct. This differentiates it sharply from sensible beings, for the latter are composed of sensible matter that repels form (as Plotinus notes at III, 6 [26], 14, 29–35) and thus never really unites with its act. It is for this reason that sensible beings are poor imitations, mere shadows, feeble *logoi* of intelligible beings.

Without *energeia* belonging to the intelligible order, there could be no *energeia* in the sensible, for the sensible exists as a participant or *logos* of the intelligible. As the *logoi* of *Nous* reflect a descending hierarchy of perfections, the entire universe of beings may be considered a gradation of *energeiai*.²⁴

How precisely does potency (*hē dynamis*) belong in the intelligible world? Potency is the procession out of the One which, through its own perfection and tendency (*epheisis*) reverts back to its source so as to become *energeia*.²⁵ Potency in emanation is that indeterminate perfection which makes possible an order of existents (*energeiai*) which are distinct from the One. Thus, Plotinus applies to production (which he describes at length in V, 4 [7]) the realization that active power and act can describe the same existent. Just as a knower or moral agent may under her own power perfect herself, so the intelligence may under its own power attain its perfection. After proceeding (*prohodos*) out of the One, it reverts (*epistrophē*) to its source, so as to contemplate and love it. In this eternal moment of contemplation it becomes *energeia*.

The indeterminate power (*hē dynamis*) which accounts for intelligible being is, of course intelligible matter, which V, 4 (7) calls “the Indefinite

Dyad” (*aoristos dyas*; V, 4, 2, 7), showing how Plotinus borrows from Aristotle’s account of the “unwritten doctrines” (*agrapha dogmata*) of Plato in order to explicate his own Neoplatonic theory of the generation of the hypostases. This priority of *dynamis* in the generation of the Intelligence implies an important assertion. The kinship of intelligible matter to the indeterminacy of the One (which is itself sheer active power) makes it a perfection even greater than that of being or act itself. In other words, it is intelligible matter, not form, that is the supreme perfection in the intelligible world.²⁶ This, of course, sharply contrasts intelligible matter with its sensible counterpart, sensible matter, which Plotinus paradoxically describes in the closing passages of II, 5 (chs. 4–5) as “truly false” and “really unreal.” As pure being in potency, sensible matter is nothing in itself; yet it is in potency all beings since it may serve as the substrate successively of all forms. In order to be the substrate of all forms, matter must never be any single form and therefore is unable to unite truly with any form. As the eternal capacity for form, matter is never itself in act. As being in potency matter is powerless to acquire form without an extrinsic agent.

All of this places sensible matter in stark contrast with intelligible matter. As active potency informed by *energeia*, intelligible matter partly describes the multiple and dynamic interrelationships of the perfect beings which constitute the intelligible world.

2. Suggestions for a Neoplatonic semiotics

The Greek word for sign, *semeion*, has a very limited usage in Plotinus. As a rule it refers to mathematical objects, such as points on a line or the center of a circle.²⁷ Beyond this literal restriction of the Greek usage, there are nonetheless grounds in Plotinus’ work to situate a doctrine of signs, even if one’s judgments on the doctrine are speculative and analogical. Fortunately, Plotinus’ philosophy of act and potency furnishes some clues as to how signification has a basis in Plotinus’ Neoplatonic philosophy.

A sign is something that indicates something else. If so, Plotinus’ doctrine of *logos* illuminates the conditions and elements of signification. A *logos* is a higher reality on a lower level of emanation. Accordingly, metaphysics for Plotinus is a universe of signs. Each existent points toward a higher existent of which it is a *logos*. For example, the movement or animation of sensible beings is a *logos* of the World Soul. The temporal or successive life of the World Soul is a *logos* or participant in the eternal

life and beatitude of *Nous*.²⁸ In turn, the *Nous* is a *logos* of the One/Good.²⁹

Since Plotinus is a monist, every sign (each *logos*), in the last analysis, must signify the One. This must be the case if a sign indicates something real. For a monist, there is only one reality, which Plotinus names the One/Good. However, curious consequences follow this observation. A sign must occupy the realm of unreality, for unreality is differentiation. The nature of a sign is to differ from its object, so it can signify it. Hence, signification is parasitic on a falling away from reality. In a monism whatever is different from the One is unreal. This entails that in order for a sign to exercise its proper function, it must be unreal.

But, of course, no being (and *logoi* are always beings; prime matter is beneath all *logoi*, because a *logos* must always be a being in act) is altogether unreal. It is a mixed reality, a combination of unity and multiplicity. Every being is a one-in-many. This means that to the extent any being is real, it is *identical* with the One.

This leads to the difficulty that either the sign is an identity signifying itself or the sign is an unreality signifying what is real. The latter alternative seems to be what is operative in Plotinus. The unreality of multiplicity is an appearance, not a reality, that functions as a sign of something real, one of the hypostases, and ultimately, the One.

Thus far, I have spoken of signs with reference to metaphysical objects and relations in Plotinus. But, of course, any analysis of signs is incomplete unless it addresses the presence and operation of signs in human knowledge, that is, signs in sense experience and in intellectual awareness. To supply such an account, one must engage Plotinus' philosophy of the human person. To do this effectively, one must realize that Plotinus is not only a monist. He is also a mystic. His philosophy is a mystical monism.

The above remarks on *logos* as sign are ways of signifying reality in the hierarchy or stages of emanation. Emanation expresses the generation of the universe from a downward perspective, from the level of the One through all successive *logoi*. But emanation in Plotinus is complemented by a corresponding upward perspective: a *remanation*, if you will. This is the mystical ascent necessary for the soul to find perfection, divine union with the First Hypostasis.

This mystical ascent can be charted, as the soul, retreating into its interiority, consolidates its active power, begins to achieve cognitive and affective unification, and thus becomes more like the hypostases. The soul's increasing unification, perfection, and reality is validated by literal union with ascending hypostases. This union is a sign of the soul's pilgrimage toward perfection. Union with the Soul, followed by union with the Intel-

ligence, confirms its migration toward reality and happiness. The ascent to the levels of the third and second hypostases is a sign of metaphysical perfection, which is at once descriptive of reality manifest in emanation and of unification and perfection of the human spirit. In other words, these levels are signs of the human person becoming a perfect being. They are signs of actuating (*energeia*) the power (*dynamis*) of the human person to be the Form of Human Nature in union with pure Intelligence, the second hypostasis.

In the end, neither being nor sign can apply to the One. Being and signification always imply a one-in-many. Mystical ascent has its signposts — union with the being of the World Soul and with the absolute Being of the Divine Intelligence. But the destination of remanation — literal union with ultimate reality, the First Hypostasis (the One/Good) — is without analogue in being. It is beyond being and signification.

Such seems to be the paradoxical character of any doctrine of signs that emerges out of Plotinus' Neoplatonic worldview. It is a doctrine that nonetheless has some character and texture in light of his doctrine of act and potency, a doctrine that illumines his account of emanation, *logos*, and, in turn, his entire metaphysics.

These speculations for a Neoplatonic semiotics are my response to John Deely's provocative remarks in *Four ages of understanding* on potentiality in Plotinus.

Notes

1. The bibliographical citations of Deely's work at the end of *Four ages of understanding* extend for five pages (Deely 2001: 765–769).
2. Just before his discussion of Plotinus, Deely looks ahead to the postmodern age and remarks:

Science in the modern age will establish itself principally by concentrating on the physical dimension of the outer world; mystics of all ages will concentrate primarily on the inner world; but, as we shall see, not until the emergence of the Fourth Age of understanding in postmodern times will the action of signs be sufficiently thematized to account for the interdependencies of the two realms in the constitution of integral human experience, from mystical to scientific, sensible to intelligible, through the action of signs without which there would be neither self nor world to speak about. (Deely 2001: 117)

3. Deely (2001: 122–125) comments on potentiality especially in his remarks on matter.
4. Porphyry edited Plotinus' 54 treatises and arranged them into six books of nine. Hence, he called them "the *Enneads*," from the Greek work *enneas*, meaning nine. Fortunately, Porphyry reported the chronological order of Plotinus' writings. The convention in Plotinian scholarship is to refer to the chronological order in parentheses when

- citing the treatise. Hence: II, 5 (25): the fifth treatise of the second *Ennead*, the twenty-fifth Plotinus wrote.
5. See the remarks in Deely (2001: 119–130).
 6. Except for a couple of adjustments, I have followed Elmer O’Brien’s (1978: 73) translation of this passage.
 7. That Plotinus takes his philosophy to this logical conclusion is persuasively argued by Mamo (1976: 199–216).
 8. This understanding of being follows Plato and Aristotle. It appears in almost all of Plotinus’ writings. It is given explicit treatment in VI, 7 (38), especially chapters 13, 17, 18, 37, and 40.
 9. Accordingly, Plotinus refers to the supreme reality, The One/Good, in terms that echo Plato when speaking of the Form of the Good: *epekeina einai tēs ousias* (V, 4 [7], 2, 42).
 10. See V, 9 (5), “On intellect, the forms, and being.” Especially note “If the Intelligence has wisdom not borrowed from without, if it knows something, it knows it of itself, and if it has something, it has it of itself. If it knows out of itself, it is itself what it knows” (ch. 5, 4–7, my translation).
 11. VI, 9 (9), 4–5 makes this exceedingly clear.
 12. See Sweeney (1961: 506–516) for a definitive statement of this gradation of realities.
 13. VI, 9 (9) is a definitive statement of this gradation of realities.
 14. *Logos* as the manifestation of a higher reality on a lower level of emanation is explained well by Gelpi (1960: 301–315).
 15. As “absolute indefiniteness,” it is utterly removed from being. See III, 4 (15), 1, 1–12.
 16. IV 7 (2) 3, 24–25 makes it clear that without soul matter would not exist at all.
 17. In his treatise on matter, II, 4 (12), 16, 24–27, Plotinus declares that prime matter is non-being.
 18. This is evident in II, 5 (25), 4–5.
 19. A version of some of these comments I originally developed in an earlier article, Hancock (1994: 39–58).
 20. The following texts are instances of *to dynamēi on* in Aristotle. *De Gen.* Gamma, 317 b 16; *Meta.* Beta, 6, 1002 b 33; Gamma, 4, 1004 b 28; Theta, 8, 1050 b 8; Lambda, 6, 1071 b 19, Nu, 2, 1089 a 28; in this last text Aristotle explicitly identifies *to dynamēi on* as the principle of change. Aristotle does not use the expression as formally as Plotinus, however, because occasionally it expresses active potency in his writings: e.g., *Meta.* Theta, 3, 1047 a 25; Delta, 7, 1017 b 1–10.
 21. For examples: *De Gen.* Alpha, 10, 328 b 8–14; *Pol.* Alpha, 8, 1256 a 5–10; *De Part. An.* Alpha, 1, 640 b 23–29; *Meta.* Delta, 2, 1013 b 6–10; *Phys.* Alpha, 7, 190 a 25–27; Beta, 3, 195 a 33–40; *De Gen. An.* Alpha, 18, 724 a 23–27.
 22. In *Ennead* IV, 7 (2), the first treatise in which Plotinus employs *energeia*, he appears to comment on *De Gen.* Alpha, 10, 327 b 22–26. He remarks on this text so as to refute a Stoic doctrine about mixture (*krasis*). Aristotle’s text reads:

Some things are in potency while others are in act, the ingredients of a compound can be in one sense and yet not be in another sense. The compound may be in act other than the ingredients from which it has resulted; nevertheless, each of the ingredients may still be in potency what it was before they combined.

Supported by this quotation, as well as by other passages from Aristotle (e.g., *Meta.* Zeta 3, 1029 a 29–30; 7, 1017 b 21–22; Eta 3, 1043 b 1; Theta 3, 1047 a 1–2; 8, 1050

b 2–3), Aristotle seems to say that *energeia* refers to that which is a distinguishable or determinate or intelligible nature, namely, an *eidōs* or *ousia*. Plotinus implies the same in his criticism of the Stoics.

Plotinus employs the term *energeia* 768 times (compared with Aristotle's 537 times). Hence, there are plenty of opportunities in the *Enneads* for Plotinus to indicate his agreement with Aristotle. The following treatises especially show the connection of *energeia* with *ousia* and *eidōs*: IV, 7 (2); V, 9 (5); VI, 9 (9), II, 5, (25); III, 6 (26); VI, 7 (38); VI, 2 (43), V, 3 (49).

23. Chapter three is brief and elliptical. What follows is my attempt to make explicit what is implicit there.
24. *Nous* is perfect contemplation, life, and act. Thus, all products of *Nous* are ever diminishing, ever dimmer contemplations, lives, and acts. See VI, 7 (38), 17, 39; III, 8 (3), 8, 14–24.
25. It is appropriate to employ this term *epheis* (meaning tendency or proclivity) and apply it here to the stage of *prohodos* or intelligible matter in the second hypostasis:

this proclivity may ... be compared with what Plotinus elsewhere describes as unconscious contemplation. In the eighth treatise of *Ennead* 3 he asserts that all things, even down to the vegetable world, are striving (the word *ephiesthai* which brings us back to *epheis*) after contemplation. In such an urge is the symbol of existence even among inferior beings of the world of sense, it would be foolish to deny it to the substrate (*to hypokeimenon*) of the Second Hypostasis. The likelihood is that the Dyad or Matter betrays in its *epheis* towards the One that symbol of existence shared by all things with the smallest claim to reality. (Rist 1956: 101)

26. Rist draws this conclusion in another passage:

Intelligible Matter, the first effluence from the One, possesses by its very indeterminacy a kinship with the One which the Forms do not possess. As we read in *Enn.* 2.4.3, Matter “there” is everything at the same time. It has nothing into which it can change, for it already possesses everything. This indeterminacy which can, on its return to its Source, yield any one of the eternal Forms, has of itself something more akin to the One than have these later determinations. The Forms are perfectly what they are; they are perfect being. Intelligible Matter has a shadow of the superiority of *to epekeina* in its potential of becoming *all* Real beings. (Rist 1956: 105–106)

27. For a representative list of uses of *semeion* in Plotinus, see Sleeman and Pollet (1980: 935–936).
28. See *Ennead* III, 7 (45), “On time and eternity.”
29. Perhaps the *logos* as sign in Plotinus is analogous to the concept as sign in the moderate realism of Aristotle or St. Thomas Aquinas. In content or nature the concept is identical with the thing signified. However, whereas the thing has a real existence, the concept has only an intentional mode of being. Still, this analogy is problematic. For the human person and his or her knowing powers are real in every respect, not just appearances. The reality of the knower is not just the content of the concept. The reality of the *logos*, however, is the higher reality in which it participates. To the extent the *logos* or the knower are distinct from this higher reality, they are unreal.

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