



# *Kinêsis* and the Value of *tês* and *pros* in the Plotinian Hypostases ‘Intellect’ and ‘Soul’

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## Abstract

In this paper, I argue that the term *kinêsis* bears different connotations when associated with two different Plotinian hypostases in the *Enneads*: Intellect and Soul<sup>1</sup>. I propose an interpretation of this term as intellectual movement when it is associated with the Intellect and spatial movement when it is associated with the Soul.

In the first section, I evaluate the meaning of *kinêsis* in reference to the hypostasis Intellect. In the second section, I turn to a critical examination of *kinêsis* associated with the hypostasis Soul, emphasising the conceptual complexity of the term. I develop my interpretation on the distinction between *kinêsis tês ousias* and *kinêsis pros ousias*, translating the former as ‘movement of the hypostasis’ and the latter as ‘movement from the hypostasis.’ On this revised reading, I conclude that *kinêsis* in Plotinus is a context-dependent concept that alters its significance according to the hypostasis and introductory locution (‘*tês*’ or ‘*pros*’) with which it is associated. I conclude by linking Plotinian henology with Platonic and Aristotelian doctrines to illuminate an ongoing conversation between Plotinian metaphysics and Platonic and Aristotelian concepts of movement.

**Keywords** Plotinus · Soul · Nous · Hypostases · Metaphysics · Movement

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<sup>1</sup>This study uses the referencing system adopted in L.P. Gerson and J. Wilberding, *The New Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, Cambridge 2022 in Henry-Schwyzler’s editio minor. I am following the Greek text as found in Paul Henry and H.R.Schwyzler, *Plotini Opera*, Vols I-III, ‘Oxford Classical Text’ (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964, 1977, 1982). The translations in this study are my own.

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## 1 The Hypostasis Intellect

Intellect, according to Plotinus, is engaged in an eternal act (Armstrong, 1980); depending on nothing else for its knowledge, it is its own intellectual object, and it is thus at once both subject (*noêsis*) and object (*noêton*). Viewed in this way, Plotinus' Intellect is comparable to the separable Intellect of Aristotle (Rist, 1961). As a staunch Platonist, however, Plotinus reintegrates Aristotle's description of self-thinking thought with the Platonic doctrine of a world of perfect Forms, arriving at a conception of the intelligible world in which the Forms become the contents—the *noêton*—of Intellect. In so doing, Plotinus posits a cognitive identity between the Intellect and its objects, understanding the Forms to be not only the objects of Intellect, but Intellect themselves. As a result, Intellect can be identified with the universe of Forms; furthermore, because the Forms are the determinate nature of all beings, we may also identify it with the universe of being. Each Form is both intelligible and Intellect (O'Meara, 1990; 1993).

The Plotinian Intellect would thus satisfy traditional standards of perfection by possessing two key features: form and limit. In the Platonic tradition, these two features are presupposed as the standards of a perfect metaphysical principle. In the *Philebus* (16c–d, 23c, 26d), for instance, Socrates concurs with the Pythagorean argument that reality consists of two principles, the Limited and the Unlimited, and that the former brings form and order to the latter. Aristotle continues this tradition by making form (*eidos*) essential to an existent's very reality; in causing something to be a certain kind of being, *eidos* thereby determines and limits it. There would thus appear to be a consensus among the great metaphysical systems of classical Greece that perfection consists of form (*eidos*) and limit (*peras*) (Bréhier, 1976; Brisson, 1988). It's also, however, worth considering that Plato and Aristotle each seem to prefer one to the other, on this reading: the *Philebus*' Socrates sees Limit as a principle and form as contingent to that, whereas Aristotle sees form as causing limit. They would, indeed, agree that both are essential categories. Indeed, in meeting both of these criteria, Intellect could arguably have served as the first principle of Plotinus' metaphysics.

However, Plotinus is aware that Intellect cannot be the first perfect existent because it is being and is therefore composite—a unity of logically distinguishable items. As one out of many, the Plotinian Intellect is dependent; as such, it cannot be first in reality, but instead comes into being:

How the Divine Intellect comes into being must be explained; everything moving necessarily has an object towards which it advances, but since the Supreme [the One] can have no such object, we may not ascribe motion to it. Origin from the Supreme must not be taken to imply any movement in it. It must be radiation like the brilliant light encircling the sun and ceaselessly generated from that unchanging substance. Of course, the divisibility belonging to the circle does not apply to the One; here [in the Intellect] is a unity, but there [in the One] is the Unity which is the potentiality of all existence.

Ennead, 4.3.17.1-7

Given the importance of *kinêsis* in the generation of Intellect, here introduced, it will be helpful to analyse Plotinus' use of the term. In fact, Plotinus seems to distinguish between two phases in the generation of Intellect from the One.

At 4.7.8.13-22, the generation of the hypostasis Intellect is described as a procession in which the products are initially contemplated by the Intellect in the One and then differentiated by the Intellect in a movement of reversion. In this process, Intellect engages in two kinds of *kinêsis*. The first, *kinêsis tês ousias* (Enn. 4.7.8.13), which I translate as 'movement with respect to substances' involves the Intellect's mere contemplation of the undifferentiated products in the One; the second, *kinêsis pros ousias* (Enn. 4.7.8.21), translated in this study as 'movement from substances', occurs when the Intellect determines, delimits, and differentiates the products of the One.

In describing these processes here, Plotinus uses the terms *prohodos* and *epistrophê* with no mention of the term *energeia*; as a result, it might be argued that these acts of Intellect do not involve *kinêsis* at all. This objection can be avoided, however, if we consider *kinêsis* not in the limited sense of spatial movement (which would in any case contradict the immobility of hypostases assumed in the Plotinian henology), but rather as an activity of contemplation or intellectual activity by the hypostasis. This latter interpretation would then allow for an understanding of *kinêsis* in relation to the Intellect.

Previous attempts to understand this relation have been hindered by Plotinus' use of the term *kinêsis* in a variety of incompatible contexts; if the One does not share properties with the Intellect, and the Intellect is not similar to the Soul, we may wonder how one term could maintain a consistent meaning when describing these different modes of reality. Owing to the ambiguity of Plotinus' Greek here, I would argue that the qualifying phrases used are pivotal to a proper understanding of the term. When referring to the One, Plotinus never qualifies *kinêsis* with any qualifying phrases; when referring to the Intellect, however, Plotinus often (but not always) distinguishes between *kinêsis tês ousias* and *kinêsis pros ousias*. I understand *kinêsis tês ousias* to refer to the first activity of the Intellect—contemplation of its producer, the One; in contrast, *kinêsis pros ousias* would refer to the first action *deriving from* the Intellect as hypostasis—the differentiation of the products of the One. Recognition of this distinction allows for an improved understanding of the role of *kinêsis* in the activity of the Intellect.

Plotinus expands on this relationship between *kinêsis*, otherness, and the Intellect in the Sixth Ennead stating the following:

The nature of production forbids that the Intellect is the Good, upon which the Intellect depends for its being. The Intellect results from an eternally prior in which it is an active power a sight [indeterminacy]. This sight needs an object, and it turns to behold the Good [the One], which it cannot completely grasp. The inadequacy of its vision turns its objects [the potential existents in the One] into multiple forms, which are the essential contents of the Intellect, and the eternal reasons for all successive existents. The Intellect unites all this multiplicity into one nature, and thus it is a cosmos of sameness and differences.  
Ennead, 6.2.3.5-9

In this passage, the Intellect would seem to represent the totality of the intelligible world inasmuch as difference and identity coexist within it, because thought and being (understood as a thought and its thinker) are two different entities whose unity characterises the reality of the second hypostasis, Intellect. The Intellect is everything together simultaneously defined by the identity and difference that constitute it, it contains both unity and multiplicity.

Plotinus thus closely associates identity and difference with calmness and movement, stating that movement and calmness must be considered genres precisely because identity and difference exist. He further associates movement with the very act of thought, which places its object before itself; as a result, he argues that movement takes place whenever the Intellect thinks. Such an argument would seem to proceed from the assumption that thought is movement and difference. In intelligible reality, however, thought simultaneously entails identity with its own object—an identity that is essential if the Intellect is to possess an overall unity while still retaining its intrinsic plurality. This identity is also essential to ensure the stable and immutable reality of single intelligible entities, whose immutability is characterised by calmness, which is itself necessary precisely so that thought may remain unchanged.

However, Plotinus stipulates that difference will remain until both thinker and thought exist or, rather, until the archetypal duality that intrinsically characterises thought itself is realised. If thought were to be deprived of difference, it would be reduced to pure, immobile identity, which would strip it of relations of any kind; the Intellect would lose its dynamic-relational dimension and would find itself constricted by the immobility of silence. At the same time, difference is not possible without thought, which necessarily involves the division or duality of subject and object. I hope to have shown that thought is not possible without difference, but the reverse, here claimed, is maybe not evident yet. Here is the following interpretation: the act of thinking constantly exists in both alterity and identity. These acts are not cyclical, but they occur at the same time. This means that the thinking subject must grasp the objects of thought separately; in turn, the thought object can only be multiple, otherwise there would be no potential for insight. As such, objects of thought require a *heterotês* to establish a difference between them and so that they can eventually be understood as a relational plurality; in this way, they appear both different from one another and at the same time identical to each other. Every single idea is an act in itself but also has the potential to be identical to the whole intelligible world.

Plotinus uses the term *diaphora* ('difference') at 6.8.12.4, juxtaposing it with the term 'otherness' which is used throughout the entirety of the passage. I would argue that although the Neoplatonic philosopher uses the term *heterotês* to express the alterity of intelligible objects, he finishes with the term *diaphora* to indicate the principle on which the plurality of these objects depends—a plurality that can exist only as a result of the movement of the archetypal duality of thinker and thought. As I have shown, this duality intrinsically characterises intelligible reality, rendering it inherently multiple, dynamic, and vital. Thus, identity and difference can be found simultaneously in the Intellect, determining its unity and multiplicity in calmness and movement.

## 2 The Hypostasis Soul

The third and final intelligible principle of Plotinian henology is the Soul, which is the principal product of the Intellect. Inferior to its source, it cannot encompass all beings at once, nor is it eternal like the Intellect is. Instead, the life of the Soul must manifest itself successively, which causes the emergence of time. The One provides a foundation and location for all existents: the Intellect is the foundation of every being and the Soul is the location in which the cosmos takes shape and form. To clarify further the schema is as follows: the power of the One is to provide a foundation and location for all existents. The foundation and location are distinct from the foundation for every being and from the location in which the cosmos takes shape and form (Dodds, 1960). Rather, the Intellect is the foundation, and the Soul is the location. Although the Intellect is composed of a plurality, it is similar to the One in its own inherent unity; although the Soul is active, it is similar to the One in its contemplative nature. Contemplating the Intellect that produced it, the Soul generates a sensible realm, the living cosmos, which is (as Plato suggests at *Timaeus* 37d) the living image of the noetic realm (Caluori, 2015). As the most inferior of the intelligible hypostases, the Soul connects the intelligible realm to the sensible world through its own bipartite composition; its superior part belongs to the intelligible realm and remains in eternity there, while its lower part descends into the sensible realm by falling from the intelligible into the body. Despite this distinction, however, the Soul remains a single unified intelligible principle.

As an image of the noetic realm, the sensible world of generation and destruction attracts the lower part of the Soul, which falls into the sensible world and unites with a body to generate a living thing. In falling, the lower part of the Soul experiences a descending movement, whereas the higher part of the Soul, like every other intelligible being, remains at rest among the intelligible principles (the One and the Intellect). Indeed, although the Soul is understood as a single unified existent entity, it is said to undergo three different spatial movements. First, the higher part of the Soul remains at rest in the noetic realm; as Plotinus states of the Soul's higher part, 'the Soul now knows no movement since the Supreme knows none' adding that 'before we had our becoming here in the Lower Sphere we existed in that Higher Sphere, people different than we are now, some of us gods: we were pure souls, pure minds filled with the knowledge of all reality'. Second, the lower part of the same Soul falls into bodily matter, individuating that matter and giving it life. At 4.3.7.10 Plotinus describes this fall as follows:

Now, in the Lower Sphere we have lost that first simplicity, we have turned into a dual thing, that is, into a mind–body composite, sometimes even little more than a material body, with our original spiritual natures dormant.

Referring to this fall at 3.9.6.5–6, he states:

καὶ εἰσέδω εἰς τὸ πρόσφορον σῶμα, ὡς εἰκάσαι τὰ γινόμενα οἷον δυνάμει μάγων καὶ ὀλκαῖς τισιν ἰσχυραῖς κινεῖσθαι τε καὶ φέρεσθαι.

Notably, in this description, Plotinus associates three important verbs: *kineō* (‘to move’), *pherō* (‘to bring’), and *gennaō* (‘to bear’ or ‘become’). This association would seem to indicate (as I mention above) that the Soul’s fall is a movement in which it is ‘brought’ (*pheresthai*, the passive infinitive of *pherō*) by the material world and ‘becomes’ (*gignomena*) a mind–body composite—that is, a human being. *Gennaō* comes from τὰ γιγνόμενα. Let me elaborate on Plotinus’ usage to show that he sees that etymological connection, as otherwise it may be argued that γιγνομαι is used commonly enough to have lost a full semantic connection with *gennaō*. The reference to γιγνομαι already points to the idea of the soul becoming something else. The extra force of a connection with the verb emphasises it. Third, the lower part of the soul ascends to the intelligible realm once again, provided that it has been able to remember its proper intelligible nature through virtue, dialectics, and contemplation.

As I have noted, the Soul maintains its unity despite its changing movements in the intelligible world: its rest, descent, and ascent. It also maintains this unity despite the variety of movements, both local and circular, that it experiences in the sensible world, as the higher part of the Soul is the principle and source for all movements in the sensible world. Sweeney (1957) provides a useful description of the range of movements made by the third hypostasis, focusing on those movements of which the Soul is the *archē*. Schwyzer (1951) argues that Plotinus required a principle of ‘multiplicity’ to explain the sensible; although his henology had already established a potential principle (the One) and an actual principle (the Intellect) to be the *archai* of every being, it still required a reason for the living multiplicity of beings and their passing away, and Plotinus determined this principle to be the Soul, which gives life and movement to everything:

That One Soul – a member of the Intellectual kosmos and there merging what it has of partial into the total- has broken away, so to speak, from the All to the part and to that devotes itself becoming partial [merike] with it: thus fire that might consume everything may be set to apply its all-power upon some trifle. So long as the soul remains utterly unattached it is the soul not singled out; when it has accepted separation – not that of place but that of act determining individualities – it is a part, no longer the soul entire, or at least not entirely in the first sense; when, on the contrary, it exercises no such outward control it is perfectly the All-Soul, the part in it latent. As for the entry into the World of the Shades, if this means into the unseen, that is its release; if into some lower place, there is nothing strange in that, since even here the soul is taken to be where the body is, in place with the body.

Ennead,4.7.10.1–13

Plotinus’ view of the Soul in this passage may initially seem inconsistent. Elsewhere, Plotinus states that the Soul is one despite the many movements that it undergoes in the intelligible world and causes in the sensible world. Here, however, Plotinus argues that the One Soul (that higher part of the soul which remains among the intelligible) ‘devotes itself’ to the part by ‘becoming partial with it’. Should this partial status be understood in quantitative terms, for instance, by taking the lower part of the Soul as a distinct part, Plotinus contradicts himself, because what is one (‘That

One Soul – a member of the Intellectual kosmos’) cannot have parts and be divisible. While the higher part of the Soul (the One Soul) remains in the noetic realm, its lower part also falls into the sensible realm, where it is understood as the partial individual soul. Because all living beings have a soul, many individual souls exist in the sensible realm, but this whole variety of souls is also part of one Soul, the lower part of the intelligible Soul.

This lower part, Plotinus explains, has fragmented itself into many individuals and living beings. In claiming that ‘the soul is taken to be where the body is, in place with the body’, Plotinus makes two major claims. First, he assigns location to the soul; as I have argued above, the role of the One is to provide a foundation and location for all existents, with Intellect serving as foundation and Soul as location. Second, Plotinus confirms that the Soul’s placement in the body is not the *entelechia* of the body, as the Soul is in place with it, and not vice versa. He thus emphasises the Soul’s significance as a principle of the body’s life and movement of the body, while also showing that the soul and the body do not constitute a compound (*synolon*). Because the soul is in place with the body, it does not become divisible in the body, and thus remains an immaterial—rather than a corporeal—principle. Plotinus therefore rejects Aristotle’s idea of the soul as *entelechia* of the body, as well as the materialist doctrine of the soul suggested by the Stoics (Dillon, 1992), and reaffirms the Soul’s nature as intelligible despite its movements in the intelligible realm and those movements in the sensible realm of which it is the principle.

Observing the variety of movements that occurs in the sensible realm, Plotinus argues further that the Soul, as the principle of movement, ‘operates diversely in different living beings’:

Soul, on the contrary, operates diversely in different living beings, and has quite contrary effects on anyone; its productions contain the solid and the soft, the dense and the sparse, bright and dark, heavy and light. If it were material, its quality- and the colour it must have- would produce one invariable effect and not the variety actually observed.

Ennead, 6.8.1.21-24

For Plotinus, this provides further evidence for the immateriality of the Soul, as only an immaterial principle can produce different types of movements; if body were the principle of movement in the sensible realm, only movement originating from the body could be experienced. Just as the Intellect is the source of a variety of existent beings, and is thus the immaterial principle responsible for the existence of every being, so too is the Soul the immaterial principle responsible for the movement of every existing being.

The Soul and the Intellect are then both immaterial but intelligible. Whereas the Intellect produces beings (or *noêta*), the Soul produces movements and life in the beings made by the Intellect. In arguing that the Soul is the principle of movement, Plotinus follows the Platonic distinction between the soul as active and the body as a passive receptacle (Szelezák, 1992). This distinction can be traced to arguments made in the *Phaedrus* (245c5–246a2) and Book 10 of the *Laws* (895e10–896b3), wherein in both the soul is said to cause its own *kinêseis* in contrast with the body, which is

said to derive its *kinêseis* from an external source. In the *Phaedrus* (245c5–9), Plato claims that the soul is a ‘self-mover’ (*to auto kinoun*) and the ‘spring and source of motion’ (*peghe kai arche kineseos*) for all other things, each of which is ‘moved by another’ (*upo allou kinoumenon*). In the *Laws* (895e10–896b3), Plato similarly defines the soul as ‘self-motion’ (*to eauto kinein*) and declares it to be the ‘source of motion’ (*arke kineseos*) and ‘cause of all change and motion for all things’ (*metabole te kai kineseos apases aitia apasin*).

Plotinus identifies the self-motivated movement of the Soul with agency and the externally motivated movement of the body with passivity, claiming that ‘motions... from the things themselves’ are ‘actions’ (*poiêseis*), while ‘motions from others’ are ‘affections’ (*peiseis*, 6.1.19.5–12). While Plotinus’ description of the Soul’s self-derived motions here originates from Plato, it also appears to be designed to counter an Aristotelian criticism of Plato’s self-motion thesis. In *De Anima* 1.3 (406b11–15), Aristotle contends that a self-moving Platonic soul must be understood as a substance acting upon itself; if this were the case, ‘the soul would depart from its nature’. Plotinus’ claim that the Soul’s movement would *not* ‘depart from its nature’, in terms recalling Aristotle’s critique (*he energeia he kata zoe ouk existasa*, Enn. 3.6.3.26), responds to Aristotle’s argument by stating that such a problem would not arise provided that the soul’s self-derived motion is understood as its natural activity (*energeia*) (Rist, 1995).

Plotinus also engages with Aristotle’s views on the nature of human beings. In claiming that a human being operates at every metaphysical level, Plotinus implies that an accurate explanation of human nature will involve all levels of reality—an idea that recalls Aristotle’s psychology (*DA* 2.2, 413a21), in which plants have vegetative souls, animals have both vegetative and sensitive souls, and human beings have both of these as well as rational souls. The human soul is thus a unity of functions of different metaphysical levels, some of which are shared by other living things and some of which are particular to human beings; a complete explanation of humanity will require an understanding of all these levels of the soul (Cilento, 1973).

### 3 Concluding Remarks

Plotinus firmly rejects materialist accounts of the soul, both the pneumatic views of the Stoics and the atomist doctrine of the Epicureans, instead following Plato and Aristotle in understanding the Soul as an immaterial form. As Creuzer (1977, 17) writes, the body in Plotinian philosophy cannot be a principle of activities such as life, motion, or cognition because it is a composite. However, even if Plotinus denies that the Soul is the *entelechia* of the body, he affirms that the two are related, as the soul is in relation (*kata schêsin*, Enn. 4.3.9.18) to the body. In so doing, Plotinus adapts the Aristotelian metaphor of the steersman and ship (*DA* 2.1, 413a8), which depicts the soul as the actuality of the body in the same way that a steersman is the actuality of a ship. For Plotinus (as for Plato), the soul cannot be the *entelechia* of the body, as this would render the Soul inseparable from the body (as in Aristotle). By using the metaphor of the steersman, however, Plotinus can adhere to Platonic doctrine, as the steersman is separate from the ship, just as the Soul remains an intel-



ligible principle that is separate from the body. I would argue that this adaptation of the steersman metaphor, along with Plotinus' use of the Aristotelian notion of relation (*schêsis*), constitutes an original Plotinian synthesis of Platonic and Aristotelian doctrines, and further demonstrates how Plotinus uses, elaborates, and sometimes rejects both Plato and Aristotle, rather than merely using Plato to refute Aristotle.<sup>1</sup>

To conclude, I have proposed an interpretation of two key formulations used by Plotinus in the *Enneads*: *kinêsis tês ousias* and *kinêsis pros ousias*. Arguing that the term *kinêsis* is essential to our understanding of Plotinian henology, I have shown that Plotinus views every single idea as an act in itself but with the potential to be the whole intelligible world. In the first part of this paper, I evaluated the role of *kinêsis* in relation to the hypostasis Intellect, explaining that procession (the *prohodos* or *energeia tês ousias*) is that *kinêsis* in which the products of thought (*noêta*) are contemplated by the Intellect in the One, while reversion (*epistrophe* or *energeia pros ousias*) is that *kinêsis* in which the Intellect acquires form and actively differentiates the undifferentiated reality of the One. I thus concluded that the Intellect presents us with a complex kinetic schema comprising both *kinêsis tês ousias*, in which the undifferentiated products in the One are merely contemplated by the Intellect, and *kinêsis pros ousias*, in which the Intellect determines and differentiates the products of the One. In the second section, I discussed the hypostasis Soul, arguing that the same conceptual complexity found in the hypostasis Intellect is present in the hypostasis Soul. Closely examining the Soul's struggle to separate itself from the material world and ascend to the intelligible realm, which is characterised by continual and incessant intellectual activity, I concluded that the description of this struggle is an expression of a complex kinetic activity that pervades both hypostases. Based on this evidence, in the third and final section, I suggested possible avenues for further inquiry, focusing on Plotinus' fusion of both Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysical doctrines in the development of his henology.

**Declarations** I, Alba Miriello, solemnly declare that I am not and shall not be in any situation which could give rise to a conflict of interest in what concerns the process of the publication of this manuscript.

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<sup>1</sup> Szlezák (2005, 166) analyses the Platonic and Aristotelian sources on which Plotinus draws for his formulation of this concept; Halfwassen (2004, 67–69) illustrates how the identity of being and thought contains within itself their original difference. Emilsson (2007, 152–160) provides a useful discussion on the nature of the relationship between thinker and thought.

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