

The Causality of the First Principle and the theory of Two Activities in Plotinus Enn. V.4 [7]

Andrei Timotin

This article was originally published in

Platonism and its Legacy

*Selected Papers from the Fifteenth Annual Conference
of the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies*

Edited John F. Finamore and Tomáš Nejeschleba

ISBN 978 1 898910 886

Published in 2019 by

The Prometheus Trust, Lydney.

This article is published under the terms of **Creative Commons
Licence BY 4.0**

Attribution — You must give appropriate credit, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

No additional restrictions — You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

The Prometheus Trust is a registered UK charity, no. 299648

www.prometheustrust.co.uk

The Causality of the First Principle and the theory of Two Activities in Plotinus *Enn.* V.4 [7]

Andrei Timotin

This paper deals with one aspect of the Plotinian theory of causes, namely the causality of intelligible realities, as it is formulated especially in *Enn.* V 4.¹ Its main purpose is to highlight the main difficulties with which Plotinus is confronted in his attempt to explain how the realities come into being from the One and the significance of his use of Aristotelian notions in this context.

In the brief two chapters of *Enn.* V 4 [treatise 7 in Porphyry's chronological order], Plotinus studies an issue previously formulated in *Enn.* V 9 [5] 14 and IV 8 [6] 6: knowing how all things, and first of all the divine Intellect, proceed from the First Principle.² From the beginning, this question involves a major difficulty, namely explain how something comes into being from the First Principle, which always rests in itself. The unchangeable character of the First Principle, which is simple, perfect, and rests in itself, represents an axiom which Plotinus never ceases to repeat and which nothing in his work contests.³ The One produces, therefore, without being altered by this operation. The aim of *Enn.* V 4 is to solve this difficulty by explaining the conditions of possibility of this procession and by establishing the type of causality defining the relationship between the First Principle and the realities that proceed from it.

Plotinus' solution to this aporia involves two stages: in a first stage, in the first chapter of *Enn.* V 4, Plotinus explains that producing is a necessity which results directly from the state of perfection. Plotinus starts from the premise that every thing that attains its perfection is able to produce and concludes that the First Principle, which is perfect

¹ This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian National Authority for Scientific Research, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project PN-II-RU-TE-2014-4-0569. I would like to thank Seamus O'Neill for revising my English and the anonymous referee for his useful remarks.

² See D'Ancona Costa (1992); (1996); (2009); Tazzolio (2004); Fronterotta (2014); Corrigan (2015).

³ On the unchangeable character of the First Principle and the derivation of all things from the One, see O'Meara (1993) 60-69.

in the highest degree (πάντων τελεώτατον), is not only capable of producing, but, in virtue of its perfection, is at the highest degree able to generate:

Plot. *Enn.* V 4 [7], 1, 24-36:

If the First is perfect, the most perfect of all (πάντων τελεώτατον), and the primal power (ἡ πρώτη δύναμις), it must be the most powerful of all beings (πάντων τῶν ὄντων δυνατώτατον) and the other powers must imitate (μιμεῖσθαι) it as far as they are able.⁴ Now when anything else comes to perfection we see that it produces, and does not endure to remain by itself, but makes something else. This is true not only of things which have choice, but of things which grow and produce without choosing to do so, and even lifeless things, which impart themselves to others as far as they can: as fire warms, snow cools, and drugs act on something else in a way corresponding to their own nature—all imitating the First Principle as far as they are able by tending to everlastingness and generosity. How then could the most perfect, the first Good, remain in itself as if it grudged to give of itself or was impotent, when it is the productive power of all things (ἡ πάντων δύναμις)? How would it then still be the Principle?⁵ (tr. Armstrong)

This important passage sets out two fundamental Plotinian axioms regarding the First Principle, which make possible a definition of the relation between the One and the other realities:

1) The first axiom is the description of the First Principle as πρώτη δύναμις “primal power”.⁶ The δύναμις of the One is related in this

⁴ On imitating the First principle, see Pradeau (2003) 81-103.

⁵ Εἰ τέλεόν ἐστι τὸ πρῶτον καὶ πάντων τελεώτατον καὶ δύναμις ἡ πρώτη, δεῖ πάντων τῶν ὄντων δυνατώτατον εἶναι, καὶ τὰς ἄλλας δυνάμεις καθόσον δύνανται μιμεῖσθαι ἐκεῖνο. Ὅτι δ' ἂν τῶν ἄλλων εἰς τελείωσιν ἦ, ὁρῶμεν γεννῶν καὶ οὐκ ἀνεχόμενον ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ μένειν, ἀλλ' ἕτερον ποιοῦν, οὐ μόνον ὅτι ἂν προαίρεσιν ἔχη, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅσα φύει ἄνευ προαιρέσεως, καὶ τὰ ἄψυχα δὲ μεταδιδόντα ἑαυτῶν καθόσον δύνανται. οἷον τὸ πῦρ θερμαίνει, καὶ ψύχει ἢ χιών, καὶ τὰ φάρμακα δὲ εἰς ἄλλο ἐργάζεται οἷον αὐτά – πάντα τὴν ἀρχὴν κατὰ δυνάμιν ἀπομιμούμενα εἰς ἀιδιότητά τε καὶ ἀγαθότητα. Πῶς οὖν τὸ τελεώτατον καὶ τὸ πρῶτον ἀγαθὸν ἐν αὐτῷ σταίη ὡσπερ φθονῆσαν ἑαυτοῦ ἢ ἀδυνατήσαν, ἢ πάντων δύναμις; Πῶς δ' ἂν ἔτι ἀρχὴ εἴη; We use the *editio minor* by P. Henry and H.-R. Schwyzer, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1964-1982).

⁶ On the First principle as power, see D'Ancona Costa (1996) 371-374; Pigler (2003); Aubry (2007) 215-247; Corrigan (2017).

context to its perfection, and is thus defined as the power to be the perfect cause of all things (ἡ πάντων δύναμις).⁷ The term δύναμις has an obvious Aristotelian resonance, but the meaning Plotinus assigns to it in this context covers only a limited segment of the semantic field defined by Aristotle in books Δ and Θ of the *Metaphysics*. Plotinus leaves aside the passive sense that δύναμις can assume (as potentiality), in order to retain only the opposite aspect, of an active, efficient power, the capacity of producing effects. In Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, the two meanings of δύναμις, the passive and the active one, are closely connected.⁸

Moreover, in book Θ of the *Metaphysics*, actuality (ἐνέργεια) is defined as actual existence, as opposed to the virtual one (δύναμις):

Arist. *Metaph.* Θ 6, 1048a 32-34:

Now actuality (ἐνέργεια) is the existence of the thing not in the way we call potentially (δυνάμει); and we call potentially, for example, Hermes in the wood and the half line in the whole, because they could be separated, and also someone not contemplating we call a knower, if he is capable of contemplating; and in contrast we call other things actually (ἐνεργεία).⁹ (tr. Makin)

Δύναμις, in the sense of potentiality, is thus opposed to what is fully realized, to what has an actual existence (ἐνέργεια). On the contrary, in Plotinus, as far as intelligible realities are concerned, ἐνέργεια is not opposed to δύναμις, for in the intelligible universe there is nothing that is potential or indeterminate;¹⁰ every intelligible reality has an actual existence in virtue of its perfection and, correlatively, of its productive δύναμις: what has the most perfection has, by definition, the most power. In other words, the intelligible is at the same time ἐνέργεια and

⁷ Cf. Plot. *Enn.* III 8 [30], 10; V 1 [10], 7; V 3 [49], 15; VI 8 [39], 9.

⁸ Arist. *Metaph.* Θ 1, 1046a 19-21: φανερόν ὅτι ἔστι μὲν ὡς μία δύναμις τοῦ ποιεῖν καὶ πάσχειν. "It is obvious then that there is a single possibility of acting and being affected"

⁹ ἔστι δὴ ἐνέργεια τὸ ὑπάρχειν τὸ πρᾶγμα μὴ οὕτως ὥσπερ λέγομεν δυνάμει. λέγομεν δὲ δυνάμει οἷον ἐν τῷ ξύλῳ Ἑρμῆν καὶ ἐν τῇ ὅλῃ τὴν ἡμίσειαν, ὅτι ἀφαιρεθεὶς ἂν, καὶ ἐπιστήμονα καὶ τὸν μὴ θεωροῦντα, ἂν δυνατὸς ἦ θεωρῆσαι. τὸ δὲ ἐνεργεία. We use W. Jaeger's edition of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (Oxford, 1957).

¹⁰ Cf. Emilsson (2007) 29-30. On Plotinus' notion of ἐνέργεια, see recently Tollefsen (2012) 21-32.

δύναμις, actuality and power, in the sense of efficient power, related to perfection; excepting, of course, the First Principle, which is beyond being and actuality.

Plotinus develops this analysis in *Enn.* II 5 [25],¹¹ where he examines the notions of ἐνέργεια and δύναμις in order to clarify their use in the sensible and intelligible world. In chapter 3, he questions the presence of “being in potentiality” (ἐν δυνάμει) in the intelligible (3.4-22), and then he addresses the question of the status of “being in actuality” (ἐνεργεία), first for the Intellect 4.23-32), then for the Soul (4.32-34) and for the intelligible in general (4.35-40). The One is not taken into account in this analysis precisely because it transcends both being and actuality. At the end of this study, Plotinus concludes that the intelligibles are all actual and are all actualities, for in the intelligible world there is nothing which is not fully actual and perfect:

Plot. *Enn.* II 5 [25] 3.23-32:

But how are we to understand actual existence (ἐνεργεία) there? Is it like the way in which the statue, the compound of matter and form, exists actually (ἐνεργεία), because each intelligible thing has already received its form? Rather because each of them is form and is perfectly what it is. For intellect does not move from a potentiality (ἐκ δυνάμεως) consisting in being able to think to an actuality (εἰς ἐνέργειαν) of thinking — otherwise it would need another prior principle which does not move from potentiality to actuality but the whole is in it. For potential existence (δυνάμει) wants to be brought to actuality (εἰς ἐνέργειαν) by the coming to it of something else, so that it may become something actually (ἐνεργεία), but that which has itself from itself unchanging identity, this will be actuality (ἐνέργεια). So all the primary beings (τὰ πρῶτα) are actuality (ἐνέργεια); for they have what they need to have from themselves and forever. [...] ¹² (tr. Armstrong)

¹¹ See Narbonne (1998).

¹² Τὸ δὲ ἐνεργεία πῶς ἐκεῖ; Ἄρα ὡς ὁ ἀνδριάς τὸ συναμφοτέρων ἐνεργεία, ὅτι τὸ εἶδος ἕκαστον ἀπειλήφεν; Ἡ ὅτι εἶδος ἕκαστον καὶ τέλειον ὃ ἐστὶ. Νοῦς γὰρ οὐκ ἐκ δυνάμεως τῆς κατὰ τὸ οἶόν τε νοεῖν εἰς ἐνέργειαν τοῦ νοεῖν – ἄλλου γὰρ ἂν προτέρου τοῦ οὐκ ἐκ δυνάμεως δέοιτο – ἀλλ’ ἐν αὐτῷ τὸ πᾶν. Τὸ γὰρ δυνάμει βούλεται ἐτέρου ἐπελθόντος εἰς ἐνέργειαν ἄγεσθαι, ἵνα ἐνεργεία γίνηται τι, ὃ δ’ αὐτὸ παρ’ αὐτοῦ τὸ ἀεὶ οὕτως ἔχει, τοῦτο ἐνέργεια ἂν εἴη. Πάντα οὖν τὰ πρῶτα ἐνέργεια. ἔχει γὰρ ὃ δεῖ ἔχειν καὶ παρ’ αὐτῶν καὶ ἀεὶ.

Plot. *Enn.* II 5 [25] 3.35-40:

But, granted that everything there exists actually (ἐνεργεία) in this way, is everything there actuality (ἐνέργεια)? Why not? Certainly, if it is well said that nature there is sleepless, and life, and the best life, the noblest actualities (κάλλιστα ἐνέργεια) would be there. All things there, then, both exist actually and are actualities (ἐνεργεία ἄρα καὶ ἐνέργεια τὰ πάντα), and all are lives, and the region there is a region of life and the origin and spring of true soul and intellect.¹³ (tr. Armstrong)

The idea that intelligibles are actualities and are always in actuality has an Aristotelian origin, too. The argumentation of *Enn.* II 5 presents, in fact, remarkable affinities with Aristotle's argumentation in the book Θ of *Metaphysics* concerning the relation of anteriority between ἐνέργεια and δύναμις in the domain of both perishable and eternal beings (Θ 8).¹⁴ Aristotle thus asserts that every eternal being is necessarily actual, for every power presupposes the possibility of opposites, that of being and of not being; but eternal always exist and cannot be in a state of non being:

Arist. *Metaph.* Θ 8, 1050b 7-17:

For eternal things are prior in substance to perishable things, and nothing eternal is potentially (οὐθὲν δυνάμει ἄδιον). Here is the reason. Every potentiality (δύναμις) is at the same time for the contradictory; for while what is not capable of obtaining cannot obtain in anything, everything that is capable can fail to act (τὸ δυνατὸν δὲ πᾶν ἐνδέχεται μὴ ἐνεργεῖν). So what is capable of being (τὸ ἄρα δυνατὸν εἶναι) can both be and not be; so the same thing is capable both of being and of not being. And what is capable of not being can fail to be; and what can fail to be is perishable, either without qualification or in that way in which it is said that it can fail to be, either in respect of place or in respect of quantity or quality; and without qualification is in respect of substance. So nothing that is imperishable without qualification is potentially without qualification (but nothing prevents its

¹³ Ἄλλ' ἐνεργεία μὲν πάντα καὶ οὕτως, ἐνέργεια δὲ πάντα; Ἡ πῶς; Εἰ δὴ καλῶς εἴρηται ἐκείνη ἢ φύσις ἄγρυπνος εἶναι καὶ ζωὴ καὶ ζωὴ ἀρίστη, αἱ κάλλιστα ἂν εἶεν ἐκεῖ ἐνέργεια. Καὶ ἐνεργεία ἄρα καὶ ἐνέργεια τὰ πάντα καὶ ζωαὶ τὰ πάντα καὶ ὁ τόπος ὁ ἐκεῖ τόπος ἐστὶ ζωῆς καὶ ἀρχὴ καὶ πηγὴ ἀληθοῦς ψυχῆς τε καὶ νοῦ.

¹⁴ See Narbonne (1998) 76-78.

being so in a certain respect, for example, in respect of quality or location); so all [eternal things] are in actuality (ἐνεργεία ἄρα πάντα).¹⁵ (tr. Makin)

2) The second axiom concerning the First Principle in *Enn.* V 4 states that production, far from being the sign of a deficiency, represents a consequence of the state of perfection, being an expression of power, in the Plotinian sense of the term (of active, efficient power). As Plotinus states clearly in *Enn.* V 1 [10]: “All things, when they come to perfection, produce. The One is always perfect and therefore produces everlastingly”.¹⁶

This axiom is fully developed in *Enn.* III 8 [30] 3-4, in which Plotinus shows that production is a corollary of contemplation (θεωρία).¹⁷ In *Enn.* III 8, Plotinus considers all existing realities from the point of view of contemplation and shows that each form of existence contemplates its origin and, by contemplating it, perfects itself and produces in its turn. Plotinus thus shows that the last manifestations of the soul of the world contemplate the rational power of the soul of the world (chapter 1-4), which itself contemplates the Intellect (chapters 5-6), which contemplates the First Principle (chapters 8-11). Only the First Principle does not contemplate, since there is no higher reality to which it can direct itself; perfection is not, in its case, a state towards which it tends, but its very nature.

The First Principle therefore generates by virtue of its perfection, but Plotinus still has to describe how this production can take place. In order to answer this question, Plotinus develops a doctrine known as

¹⁵ τὰ μὲν γὰρ αἴδια πρότερα τῇ οὐσίᾳ τῶν φθαρτῶν, ἔστι δ' οὐθὲν δυνάμει αἴδιον. Λόγος δὲ ὄδε. πᾶσα δύναμις ἅμα τῆς ἀντιφάσεώς ἐστιν. τὸ μὲν γὰρ μὴ δυνατόν ὑπάρχειν οὐκ ἂν ὑπάρξειεν οὐθενί, τὸ δυνατόν δὲ πᾶν ἐνδέχεται μὴ ἐνεργεῖν. τὸ ἄρα δυνατόν εἶναι ἐνδέχεται καὶ εἶναι καὶ μὴ εἶναι. τὸ αὐτὸ ἄρα δυνατόν καὶ εἶναι καὶ μὴ εἶναι. τὸ δὲ δυνατόν μὴ εἶναι ἐνδέχεται μὴ εἶναι. τὸ δὲ ἐνδεχόμενον μὴ εἶναι φθαρτόν, ἢ ἀπλῶς ἢ τοῦτο αὐτὸ ὃ λέγεται ἐνδέχεσθαι μὴ εἶναι, ἢ κατὰ τόπον ἢ κατὰ τὸ ποσὸν ἢ ποιόν. ἀπλῶς δὲ τὸ κατ' οὐσίαν. οὐθὲν ἄρα τῶν ἀφθάρτων ἀπλῶς δυνάμει ἔστιν ἀπλῶς (κατὰ τι δὲ οὐδὲν κωλύει, οἷον ποιὸν ἢ πού). ἐνεργεία ἄρα πάντα.

¹⁶ Plot. *Enn.* V 1 [10] 6.37-38: πάντα δὲ ὅσα ἤδη τέλεια γεννᾷ. τὸ δὲ αἰεὶ τέλειον αἰεὶ καὶ αἴδιον γεννᾷ.

¹⁷ See Narbonne (2011) 117-127.

the theory of two activities (or of the double-ἐνέργεια).¹⁸ We will see why this name is not entirely satisfactory. According to this theory, each substance has a primary or internal activity proper to itself (ἡ τῆς οὐσίας ἐνέργεια) and gives rise to a secondary activity external to, or different from, the primary activity (ἡ ἀπ' ἐκείνης).

In accordance with this theory, of Aristotelian origin,¹⁹ the First Principle would have a primary activity, proper to itself, in virtue of which it rests in itself and is always identical to itself. But the First Principle would also give rise to a second activity, which is the expression of the overabundance of its perfection, and which is the divine Intellect. In order to exemplify this theory, Plotinus gives as an example the case of fire giving off heat as its first and proper activity, and giving it off to other things, without being affected and modified, as its secondary activity²⁰:

Plot. *Enn.* V 4 [7], 2, 27-37:

But how, when that abides unchanged, does Intellect come into being? In each and every thing there is an activity (ἐνέργεια) which belongs to substance (οὐσίας)²¹ and one which goes out from substance; and that which belongs to substance is the active actuality which is each particular thing, and the other activity

¹⁸ The theory is mentioned, though more briefly, in *Enn.* II 9 [33] 8.22-24, where it is applied to Intellect, and in IV 3 [27] 10.31, where it is applied to soul. See also, e.g., *Enn.* IV 5 [29] 7.13-23; V 1 [10] 6.28-53; V 3 [49] 7.19-34; VI 2 [43] 22.26-29. The first modern study on this theory is Rutten (1956). Valuable treatments of the topic may also be found in Lloyd (1990) 98-105; Gerson (1994) 23-37; Narbonne (2001) 61-79; Emilsson (2007) 22-68.

¹⁹ On the Aristotelian origin of the theory of two activities, see already Rutten (1956), Lloyd (1990) 98-105, and especially Emilsson (2007) 52-68. Hadot (1968) 228-231 advanced the hypothesis of a Stoic origin – a hypothesis renewed by Narbonne (2001) 61-79 –, although without contesting Plotinus' debt to Aristotle in this respect.

²⁰ The fire is a standard, though not entirely appropriate illustration – inspired by Platonic references (Pl. *Ti.* 58c; *Phd.* 103d) – of the theory of two activities. Cf. Plot. *Enn.* II 6 [17] 3.16-20; V 1 [10] 3.9-10; V 3 [49] 7.23-24. As Atkinson remarked, “fire is material, and, therefore, passive. Its external activity marks a diminution in the power of its internal activity, whereas Plotinus insists that by procession from the One the efficiency of the hypostasis is not reduced.” See Atkinson (1983) 58; cf. also Gerson (1994) 235 and n. 29.

²¹ As Atkinson has shown, the connection of the primary internal activity with οὐσία is derived from Aristotle, though, “the way in which Plotinus connects the two concepts is most un-Aristotelian”. See Atkinson (1983) 57.

derives from that first one, and must in everything be a consequence of it, different from the thing itself: as in fire there is a heat which is the content of its substance, and another which comes into being from that primary heat when fire exercises the activity which is native to its substance in abiding unchanged as fire. So it is also in the higher world; and much more so there, while, the Principle abides “in its own proper way of life”, the activity generated from the perfection in it and its coexistent activity acquires substantial existence, since it comes from a great power, the greatest indeed of all, and arrives at being and substance (εἶναι καὶ οὐσίαν).²² (tr. Armstrong)

By the theory of the two activities Plotinus tries to reconcile the immutability and autarky of the First Principle with its capacity to give birth to a reality different from itself, which would be a necessary result of the overabundant character of its perfect nature or, in Plotinian terminology, of its δύναμις. The doctrine of the two activities has the role of explaining precisely these two contradictory aspects of the nature of the First Principle.

This doctrine, however, also involves some problematic aspects, which Plotinus will not fail to point out elsewhere, notably in *Enn.* VI 7 [38],²³ in chapters 15 to 18, where he reconsiders the role of the First Principle as “cause” of all things. Since each of the three hypostases is a causal principle, a causal δύναμις, the external activity that each of them produces could be considered its effect. This theory is inconsistent insofar as it asserts that, by virtue of the absolute transcendence of the First Cause, the One gives what he does not have,²⁴ since the One is infinitely superior and radically different from what emanates from it:

²² Ἀλλὰ πῶς μένοντος ἐκείνου γίνεται; Ἐνέργεια ἡ μὲν ἐστὶ τῆς οὐσίας, ἡ δ' ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας ἐκάστου. καὶ ἡ μὲν τῆς οὐσίας αὐτό ἐστὶν ἐνέργεια ἕκαστον, ἡ δὲ ἀπ' ἐκείνης, ἣν δεῖ παντὶ ἔπρασθαι ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἐτέραν οὖσαν αὐτοῦ. οἷον καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ πυρὸς ἡ μὲν τίς ἐστὶ συμπληροῦσα τὴν οὐσίαν θερμότης, ἡ δὲ ἀπ' ἐκείνης ἡδη γινομένη ἐνεργοῦντος ἐκείνου τὴν σύμφυτον τῇ οὐσίᾳ ἐν τῷ μένειν πῦρ. Οὕτω δὲ κάκει καὶ πολὺ πρότερον ἐκεῖ μένοντος αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ οἰκείῳ ἤθει ἐκ τῆς ἐν αὐτῷ τελειότητος καὶ συνούσης ἐνεργείας ἡ γεννηθεῖσα ἐνέργεια ὑπόστασιν λαβοῦσα, ἄτε ἐκ μεγάλης δυνάμεως, μεγίστης μὲν οὖν ἀπασῶν, εἰς τὸ εἶναι καὶ οὐσίαν ἦλθεν. This image can be found in an identical context in *Enn.* V 1 [10], 6, 34-35. See O'Meara (1975) 44 n. 38.

²³ See Hadot (1987).

²⁴ See Lloyd (1976); Chrétien (1980).

Plot. *Enn.* VI 7 [38], 15, 15-20:

For that Good is the principle, and it is from that that they are in this Intellect, and it is this which has made them from that Good. For it was not lawful in looking to him to think nothing, nor again to think what was in him; for then Intellect itself would not have generated them. Intellect therefore had the power from him to generate and to be filled full of its own offspring, since the Good gave what he did not himself have.²⁵ (tr. Armstrong)

Plot. *Enn.* VI 7 [38], 17, 1-5:

But how can these be in Intellect, and be Intellect, when they are not there in what fills it, nor, again, in it itself which is filled? For when it was not yet filled, it did not have them. Now, there is no necessity for anyone to have what he gives, but in this kind of situation one must consider that the giver is greater, and that what is given is less than the giver.²⁶ (tr. Armstrong)

Once again, Plotinus expresses the transcendence of the donor in relation to the receiver in Aristotelian terms,²⁷ asserting that the donor must be in actuality, whereas what receives the gift can only be in potentiality: “For that which is actual (ἐνεργεία) must be first, and those that come after must be potentially (δυνάμει) those before them; and the first transcended the seconds and the giver transcended the gift”.²⁸ The use of the Aristotelian opposition between in-actuality and in-potentiality is not, however, very appropriate in this context. It does not apply to the relation between the First Principle and the Intellect,

²⁵ Ἀρχὴ γὰρ ἐκεῖνος καὶ ἐξ ἐκείνου ἐν τούτῳ καὶ οὗτος ὁ ποιήσας ταῦτα ἐξ ἐκείνου. Οὐ γὰρ ἦν θέμις βλέποντα εἰς ἐκεῖνον μηδὲν νοεῖν οὐδ’ αὖ τὰ ἐν ἐκείνῳ. οὐ γὰρ ἂν αὐτὸς ἐγέννα. Δύναμιν οὖν εἰς τὸ γεννᾶν εἶχε παρ’ ἐκείνου καὶ τῶν αὐτοῦ πληροῦσθαι γεννημάτων διδόντος ἐκείνου ἃ μὴ εἶχεν αὐτός.

²⁶ Ἀλλὰ πῶς ταῦτα ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ αὐτός, οὐκ ὄντων ἐκεῖ ἐν τῷ πληρώσαντι οὐδ’ αὖ ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ πληρουμένῳ; Ὅτε γὰρ μήπω ἐπληροῦτο, οὐκ εἶχεν. Ἡ οὐκ ἀνάγκη, ὅ τις δίδωσι, τοῦτο ἔχειν, ἀλλὰ δεῖ ἐν τοῖς τοιοῦτοις τὸ μὲν διδὸν μείζον νομίζειν, τὸ δὲ διδόμενον ἔλαττον τοῦ διδόντος.

²⁷ See, e.g., Arist. *Metaph.* B 1, 993b24-27. Like Plotinus, Aristotle uses fire as an illustration of the causal theory (see also Arist. *GC* II 3, 330b26; *Mete.* I, 340b22-24). On Plotinus’ theory of causation and its Aristotelian (but also Platonic) origins, see Atkinson (1983) 57.

²⁸ Plot. *Enn.* VI 7 [38], 17, 7-9: Πρῶτον γὰρ δεῖ τὸ ἐνεργεία εἶναι, τὰ δ’ ὕστερα εἶναι δυνάμει τὰ πρὸ αὐτῶν. καὶ τὸ πρῶτον δὲ ἐπέκεινα τῶν δευτέρων καὶ τοῦ διδομένου τὸ διδὸν ἐπέκεινα ἦν.

since precisely the Intellect is not potentially what the One is in actuality, because of the absolute transcendence of the First Principle.²⁹

Further in the same chapter, Plotinus, resuming and expanding the analyses of *Enn.* V 4, asserts that what emanates from the One is an ἐνέργεια (17.10), which is identified with Life, the first state of the divine Intellect. It is a trace, a small mark that comes from the One, as heat comes from the fire (18.3-5) or light from the sun (V 3 [49] 12.40). This ἐνέργεια accurately corresponds to the second ἐνέργεια of *Enn.* V 4, the emanation that spreads from the First Principle like the heat from the fire. This ἐνέργεια does not pre-exist in the One, for the One transcends it absolutely. The second activity of the First Principle, Life, as the primordial state of the divine Intellect, is not, literally, an activity of the One, for this Life is not the Life of the One, a Life which would properly characterize the First Principle. It is only a trace, an image (εἶδωλον) of the One.³⁰ That is why the name, “theory of the two activities” is not appropriate as far as it concerns the First Principle, for its second activity is not really *its* own activity, but simply an emanation which proceeds from it.

The theory of the two activities is also meant to establish a causal relation within the procession of the intelligible realities and thus to define the First Principle as the cause of the lower realities. The first activity of every thing is defined in relation to the first activity of the higher reality that gave birth to it. The One would be the cause of the Intellect insofar as the Intellect would represent the second activity of the One, although, as we have seen, this description is not entirely suitable. Similarly, in the descending order of the procession, the divine Intellect is the cause of the soul, since the soul (as δίανοια) represents the second activity of the Intellect.

The definition of a proper causality of the First Principle is not exempt from some problematic aspects either, as Plotinus himself shows in *Enn.* VI 9 [9].³¹ Plotinus presents here his theory of the First Principle in a systematic way for the first time. In his view, it is necessary to admit an absolutely simple reality beyond the intelligible

²⁹ See Hadot (1987) 273.

³⁰ Cf. Plot. *Enn.* IV 5 [29] 7.16-18; V 1 [10] 6.33; V 2 [11] 1.15-21; V 3 [49] 7.23-24 . See Emilsson (2007) 27 and Pradeau (2003) 69-70 and 81-82.

³¹ Hadot (1994). On the causality of the First principle, see also D’Ancona (1996) 370-374 and Aubry (2007), 222-239.

world and the divine Intellect. In the first chapters, using the method of “negative theology”, Plotinus defines the One as a reality which has no attribute and whose very name “One” does not indicate that the predicate of the unity belongs to him.³² In this context, Plotinus questions, in chapters 5 and 6, whether it is possible to assert that the One is the “cause” of the realities that come into being from it. Plotinus already pointed out, in the last lines of chapter 3, that asserting the One as “cause” (even as “final cause”³³) does not imply that the One acquires an attribute, in this case the attribute of “cause” of something. The One has no attribute; but it is our attribute to be “caused” by it.³⁴

In conclusion, one could say that Plotinus uses some of Aristotle’s main categories (actuality, power, cause) in order to deal with one major problem of his philosophy, namely the causality of intelligible realities, as it appears in *Enn.* V 4 and in other related Plotinian texts. I emphasised some remarkable affinities between Aristotle and Plotinus in this respect: they concern, for instance, the use of the notion of active power, the demonstration that the intelligible is always in actuality, and the claim that nothing potential can be attributed to it.

Bibliography

Editions

Aristotelis Metaphysica, recognovit brevique adnotatione critica instruxit
W. Jaeger. Oxford, 1957

Plotini Opera ediderunt P. Henry et H.-R. Schwyzer, 3 vols. Oxford,
1964-1982.

³² On Plotinus and negative theology, see Armstrong (1979) XXIV.

³³ See Fronterotta (2014).

³⁴ Plot. *Enn.* VI 9 [9], 3: Ἐπεὶ καὶ τὸ αἴτιον λέγειν οὐ κατηγορεῖν ἐστὶ συμβεβηκός τι αὐτῷ, ἀλλ’ ἡμῖν, ὅτι ἔχομέν τι παρ’ αὐτοῦ ἐκείνου ὄντος ἐν αὐτῷ. δεῖ δὲ μηδὲ τὸ « ἐκείνου » μηδὲ ὄντως λέγειν ἀκριβῶς λέγοντα, ἀλλ’ ἡμᾶς οἷον ἔξωθεν περιθέοντας τὰ αὐτῶν ἐρμηνεύειν ἐθέλειν πάθη ὅτε μὲν ἐγγύς, ὅτε δὲ ἀποπίπτοντας ταῖς περὶ αὐτὸ ἀπορίας. “For to say that it is the cause (αἴτιον) is not to predicate something incidental of it but of us, because we have something from it while that One is in itself; but one who speaks precisely should not say “that” or “is”; but we run round it outside, in a way, and want to explain our own experiences (πάθη) of it, sometimes near it and sometimes falling away in our perplexities about it.” (tr. Armstrong).

Translations

- Atkinson, M. (1983). *Plotinus, Ennead V.1. On the three principal hypostases*. A Commentary with Translation. Oxford.
- Hadot, P. (1987). *Plotin, Traité 38 (VI, 7)*. Introduction, traduction, commentaire et notes. Paris.
- (1994). *Plotin, Traité 9 (VI, 9)*. Introduction, traduction, commentaire et notes. Paris.
- Makin, S. (2006). *Aristotle, Metaphysics. Book Θ*. Translated with an Introduction and Commentary. Oxford.
- Narbonne, J.-M. (1998). *Plotin, Traité 25 (II 5)*. Introduction, traduction, commentaire et notes. Paris.
- Plotinus* with an English translation by A. H. Armstrong, 7 vols., Cambridge, Mass., Second edition, 1988.

Secondary literature

- Armstrong, A.H. (1979). *Plotinian and Christian Studies*. London, Variorum.
- Aubry, G. (2007). *Dieu sans la puissance. Dunamis et energeia chez Aristote et chez Plotin*. Paris.
- Chrétien, J.L. (1980). “Le Bien donne ce qu’il n’a pas”, *Archives de philosophie* 43: 263-278.
- Corrigan, K. (2015). “Divine and Human Freedom: Plotinus’ new understandig of creative agency”, in *Causation and Creation in Late Antiquity*, ed. A. Marmodoro and B.D. Prince. Cambridge, 131-149.
- (2017). “The Sources and Structures of Power and Activity in Plotinus”, in *Divine Powers in Late Antiquity*, ed. A. Marmodoro, A.-I. Viltanioti. Oxford, 17-37.
- D’Ancona Costa, C. (1992). “*Ámorphon kai aneídeon*. Causalité des Formes et causalité de l’Un chez Plotin”, *Revue de philosophie ancienne* 10: 69-113.
- (1996). “Plotinus and later Platonic philosophers on the causality of the First Principle”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. L. P. Gerson. Cambridge, 356-385.

- (2009). “Modèles de causalité chez Plotin”, *Les Études philosophiques* 90.3: 361-385.
- Emilsson, E.K. (2007). *Plotinus on Intellect*. Oxford.
- Fronterotta, F. (2014). “La critique plotinienne de la causalité finale dans le traité VI 7 (38) des *Ennéades* (chap. 1-3 et 25)”, *Chôra* 12: 47-66.
- Gerson, L.P. (1994). *Plotinus*. London.
- Hadot, P. (1968). *Porphyre et Victorinus*, I. Paris.
- Lloyd, A.C. (1976). “The principle that the cause is greater than its effects”, *Phronesis* 21: 146-156.
- (1990). *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism*. Oxford.
- Narbonne, J.-M. (2001). *La métaphysique de Plotin*. Paris.
- (2011). *Plotinus in Dialogue with the Gnostics*. Leiden-Boston.
- O’Meara, D.J. (1975). *Structures hiérarchiques dans la pensée de Plotin. Étude historique et interprétative*. Leiden.
- (1993). *Plotinus. An Introduction to the Enneads*. Oxford.
- Pigler, A. (2003) “La surbondance de l’Un puissance de toutes choses chez Plotin”, *Laval théologique et philosophique* 59, 257-277.
- Pradeau, J.-F. (2003). *L’imitation du principe. Plotin et la participation*. Paris.
- Rutten, Ch. (1956). “La doctrine des deux actes dans la philosophie de Plotin”, *Revue philosophique de la France et de l’étranger* 146: 100-106.
- Tazzolio, F. (2004). “Le problème de la causalité du Principe chez Plotin”, *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 102: 59-71.
- Tollefsen, T.T. (2012). *Activity and Participation in Late Antique and Early Christian Thought*, Oxford.

