

TELEOLOGY AND NOUS IN PLOTINUS'S ENNEAD VI.7*

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ABSTRACT *In this paper, I argue that Plotinus's critique of divine deliberation in Ennead VI.7 does not seek to banish teleology altogether from his philosophy of nature. Rather, his critique aims to situate teleology within his own metaphysical system so as to reconcile it with the basic principles governing the intelligible universe. In this sense, Plotinus does not propose that we expunge all reference to notions of utility and benefit from our natural explanations; he merely wishes to render those notions coherent with an ontology in which the intelligible always takes precedence over sensible reality. To this end, Plotinus introduces, first, what I call a vertical teleology, where the different animal species create the necessary conditions for the maintenance of higher forms of intelligible life, such as genera. Second, Plotinus advances what I call a horizontal teleology, where the various animal organs serve to provide a minimal coefficient of noetic content to each species in its respective ontic level. Plotinus thus sketches the outlines of a properly 'noetic' teleology in Ennead VI.7.*

Keywords *Plotinus, Teleology, Intellect, Philosophy of Nature.*

RESUMO *Neste artigo, argumento que a crítica de Plotino contra a deliberação divina na Enéada VI.7 não busca banir toda teleologia de sua*

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filosofia da natureza. Ao contrário, sua crítica procura adequar a teleologia ao seu sistema metafísico de forma a torná-la consistente com os princípios básicos que regem o universo inteligível. Nesse sentido, Plotino não propõe banir das explicações naturais toda referência às noções de utilidade ou benefício, mas busca conciliar essas noções com uma ontologia na qual o Intelecto tem sempre prioridade sobre o mundo sensível. Para esse fim, Plotino introduz, em primeiro lugar, o que chamo de uma teleologia vertical, segundo a qual as diferentes espécies animais criam as condições necessárias para a manutenção de formas mais elevadas de vida inteligível, como genera. Em segundo lugar, Plotino introduz uma teleologia horizontal, por meio da qual os vários órgãos animais fornecem um coeficiente mínimo de conteúdo noético para cada espécie em seu respectivo nível ontológico. Desse modo, Plotino esboça uma teleologia propriamente 'noética' na Enéada VI.7.

Palavras-chave Plotino, Teleologia, Intelecto, Filosofia da Natureza.

If we were to ask a child drawing a picture of an ox, 'Why does the ox have horns?', we would sooner expect her to reply, 'Because it is an ox', than 'For defense'.¹ Plotinus would be on the side of the child: the forms do not exist for some external reason (such as safety) but for completeness (VI.7.2, 1-11). Pierre Hadot (1987, p. 625) echoes this idea when he prefaces his commentary on *Ennead VI.7* with the following verses by the German priest and poet Angelus Silesius (1949, p. 39):

*Die Ros' ist ohn warum; sie blühet, weil sie blühet,
Sie acht nicht ihrer selbst, fragt nicht ob man sie siehet.*

The rose is without why, it blooms because it blooms
It pays no attention to itself, asks not whether it is seen.

For Plotinus, the rose blooms not for reproduction or survival, but because blooming forever belonged to the rose's essence in eternity. This means that no conception of what is good or beneficial for a *physical* being can serve as an explanation of the existence of any of its features in Intellect (*nous*). Such is the claim of the first three chapters of *Ennead VI.7*. But this attack on the

1 A similar version of the ox-drawing example was given by Schroeder (1992, p. 18).

notion of a beneficial end (*telos*) does not seek to eradicate all teleology from Plotinus's philosophy of nature; rather, I shall argue, Plotinus embeds teleology within an ontology which precludes the intelligible from being determined by the sensible. To this end, he first rejects what he considers a case of illegitimate teleology in a literal reading of Plato's *Timaeus*.² He then sketches the outlines of what I call a properly 'noetic' teleology in *Ennead* VI.7. My analysis will hopefully elucidate important features of Plotinus's teleological thinking.³

1. The Context of VI.7

Ennead VI.7, "How the Multitude of the Forms Came into Being and On the Good", opens with a critique of any literal reading of Plato's account of demiurgic creation. According to the *Timaeus*, a divine craftsman (demiurge) organized our world in the best possible way, seeking to bring about a maximally good order through planning and calculation (*logismos*: 30b, 34a-b). The causal power which the demiurge wields over our cosmos is termed 'forethought' or 'foresight' (*pronoia*: 30b-c; *prohorasis*: VI.7.1, 32-38) precisely to suggest that divine planning explains several features of the physical universe (Noble & Powers, 2015, p. 51). One of these features, for instance, is the fact that we have a body with four limbs:

To keep the head from rolling around on the ground without any way of getting up over its various high spots and out of the low, they [the demiurge and its children] gave it the body as a vehicle to make its way easy. This is the reason why the body came to have length and grow four limbs that could flex and extend themselves, divinely devised for the purpose of getting about (44e).⁴

Plotinus does not focus on the details of how the formation of the sensible universe came about; for instance, he does not address how the gods joined head and limbs. Rather, he inquires whether the fact that a human body has four limbs depends on divine planning (Schiaparelli, 2010, p. 468). His argument is that Intellect cannot devise any plans regarding the physical cosmos, or indeed harbor any thoughts whatsoever about physical states of affairs. To clarify this argument, let us turn to his critique of demiurgic creation.

2 As we shall see, Plotinus is not critical of Plato per se, but of a literal reading of the *Timaeus*'s *eikós mythos* (or 'likely story') of the artisanal creation of the universe by a divine craftsman.

3 My argument in this paper is greatly indebted to Thaler's (2011) teleological reading of VI.7.1-14; my hope is to contribute to a teleological analysis of VI.7 by qualifying Plotinus's proposed teleology specifically as *noetic* and, as we shall see, by tracing two dimensions of such a teleology: a vertical and a horizontal one.

4 All references to the *Timaeus* come from Zeyl's translation; see Plato (1997).

In the *Timaeus*, the demiurge is faced with pre-cosmic ingredients in a disorderly state; and since he is supremely good, he desires to make everything as good as possible (30a). With this goal in mind, he constructs the cosmos as a living being endowed with soul and intelligence (30b-c); and to make the cosmos complete in every way, he selects the form of a “complete living being” as its proper intelligible model (30c-31a). The ‘complete living being’ here means the form of Animal, which is ‘complete’ because it contains the whole of the animal kind, rather than one of the specific animal kinds which are its parts (30c). These decisions reveal that the demiurge is planning the best cosmic order. His planning, moreover, has three basic characteristics: first, his thoughts are *about* the sensible cosmos; second, these thoughts involve the discovery of *means to ends*; and third, these thoughts concern *prospective* states of affairs (Noble & Powers, 2015, p. 52). Plotinus, however, denies that the divine thought in charge of our cosmos could have any of these characteristics, and accordingly he rejects that the physical universe results from planning. He gives at least two reasons for this rejection: one concerns the nature of the *demiurge* and another the nature of the *forms*. I will analyze these two criticisms in order.

2. Critique of Demiurgic Creation

The great mistake of an artisanal view of creation, according to Plotinus, is that it understands the intelligible in terms of the sensible—that is, the prior in terms of the posterior. In this way, we could say, it confuses the *order of discovery* (where we start in the sensible world and move towards a contemplation of the intelligible forms) with the *order of being* (where the emanative hierarchy descends from the One to Intellect to World-Soul, and so on). Given our position in the physical world, we tend to conceptualize the universe from the standpoint of our hypostasis, and to view the sensible cosmos as the *telos* of the creative process. Hence, we come to think of the divine craftsman as devising the intellectual form of the human body *in order to* protect our head from hitting rocks or other things on the ground. But the gist of Plotinus’s argument is that this kind of teleology—where the *telos* of Intellect is directed outside itself towards the sensible realm—attributes, in one way or another, precedence to the physical over the intelligible. The first three chapters of VI.7 therefore show that no appeal to what is good or beneficial for a physical animal can explain the existence of any of its organs in Intellect. The intelligible forms of the various animals and their organs must have *already* existed in the intelligible prior to, and independently of, their function in the physical world.

Plotinus's effort to address this issue leads him to introduce a new teleological model that grants priority to Intellect. But to advance this model, Plotinus must first explain how the artisanal account of creation misunderstands the nature of the demiurge and the nature of the forms, respectively.

2.1. *The Demiurge*

Plotinus's charge against divine planning hinges upon an assumption born out of the *Timaeus*'s exegetical tradition. This assumption involves two identifications: (1) that of the demiurge with a divine Intellect, and (2) that of the intelligible model towards which the demiurge looks with the Platonic forms (Noble & Powers, 2015, p. 52). Several Middle Platonist thinkers seem to have deemed these identifications compatible with the idea that god plans our cosmos.⁵ By contrast, Plotinus makes it clear that, once we accept other Platonic presuppositions, the association between the demiurge and Intellect, and between the model for the sensible cosmos and the Platonic forms, rules out any possibility for divine planning—or, in fact, for any demiurgic thought directed at the sensible world.

The problem with the first identification is that the psychological conditions requisite to practical deliberation cannot exist at the level of *nous*. Plotinus stresses that deliberation can only occur when an agent wishes to avoid an undesirable situation by pursuing a better alternative (Thaler, 2011, p. 164). In fact, he claims that planning arises from the fear that a desired situation will not obtain, and that planning seeks to ensure a preferred outcome rather than another (VI.7.1, 36-38). But this desire presupposes the kind of *contingency* that does not exist in Intellect. For when we look to the sensible world, we can distinguish between things that are *actual* and things that are *possible*, but in *nous* all things are actual insofar as they are intelligible. What is actual here is actual there, and what is possible here is *also* actual there—for all possible things are intelligible and therefore actually exist in Intellect. So there could not be any deliberation between possible alternatives in an environment where only the actual exists. This is what Plotinus means when he asks how an agent could possibly deliberate when faced with only one alternative:

Planning is a 'this instead of that'. But when there is only one of them, why should there be a plan? How then can the alone and the one and the simple contain explicitly

5 Noble and Powers (2015, p. 53, fn. 5) provide the following examples of Middle Platonist authors who adopt the *Timaeus*'s description of the demiurge as planning the cosmos: Philo of Alexandria (*De opificio mundi*, 16 ff.), Apuleius (*De Platone et dogmate eius*, 1.8, 1.10), Plutarch (*De animae procreatione in Timaeo*, 1025a-f, 1027a; *De sera numinis vindicta*, 550d-e), and Alcinoüs (*Didaskalikos*, 12.2-3, 14.4).

the ‘this so that there should not be that’, and ‘there had to be this if not that’, and ‘that appeared useful and this preservative when it came to be’? (VI.7.1, 38-44).⁶

To deliberate between two alternatives presupposes contingency in the world; but since nothing in Intellect is contingent, there can be no deliberation. Furthermore, the very kind of discursive or inferential thinking typical of someone who deliberates pertains to our embodied souls and is directed at sensible objects. Such a discursive and inferential kind of thought would in fact entail succession in time (a ‘this after that’), and this is incompatible with the unified character of God’s non-discursive knowledge, which thinks ‘all at once’ (*athroon*) or ‘all together’ (*homou panta*: V.8.6, 1-15). ‘The future’ is already present in *nous*: it comes to be later in time, but not in *nous*. So, if the demiurge could deliberate, it would not exist at the level of Intellect, but only at the level of the sensible where things come to be one after the other in spatial-temporal succession. Plotinus finds it necessary, therefore, to *de-anthropomorphize* Plato’s account of the demiurge in the *Timaeus*. To do that, he interprets Plato’s words as a *metaphor* indicating that our world is ordered *as if* by the rational plan of a wise craftsman (VI.7.1, 30-33).⁷ Plotinus replaces the notion of artisanal creation with the view that our world unfolds—without any deliberation or planning—from a perfectly enfolded Intellect, where things exist ‘all together’.

2.2. The Forms

There is another aspect to Plotinus’s critique of the deliberative model of creation: the very nature of the objects that comprise the intelligible realm forbids any further additions or changes because of deliberation. So, for example, when the demiurge and its children saw that the human head had to roll around amidst rocks and other pointy objects, they looked to their arsenal of Platonic forms and found four limbs as a suitable addition to the head. But if the model to which the gods look is to be identical to the Platonic forms, this kind of deliberative thinking makes no sense. For in the intelligible realm,

6 All references to the *Enneads* come from Armstrong’s translation; see Plotinus (1968-1988).

7 VI.7.1, 30-33: “There is no planning there at all, but it is *called* planning to show that all things there are as *they would be* as a result of planning at a later stage, and foresight because it is *as a wise man would foresee it.*” (my italics). Plotinus, therefore, is not critical of the *Timaeus*’s *eikōs mythos* of the creation of the universe, but rather of any *literal* approach to the dialogue (Chiaradonna, 2014b, pp. 205-207). Through a metaphorical reading of words like ‘planning’ and ‘foresight’, Plotinus can uphold the Platonist identification of the subject of thought (demiurge) with a divine Intellect (*nous*), and of the object of thought (the model towards which the demiurge looks) with the Platonic forms.

what a thing *is* and *its reason for being* are always the same (VI.7.2, 3-9).⁸ In *nous*, 'that' and 'why' coalesce. So, whereas in the sensible world we separate 'man' and 'limbs' by asking the question, 'Why does man have four limbs?', in the intelligible realm the fact (*to oti*) and the reason why (*to dioti*) necessarily coincide. This unity of fact and reason in the intelligible, Plotinus tells us, comes from the unity of Intellect itself:

If you open each individual form itself back upon itself, you will find the reason why in it... [For if a form] belongs to Intellect, where would it get its reason why from? But if someone were to say, 'from intellect', it is not separate, supposing that it is also itself Intellect; if then Intellect must have these things in no way deficient, they must not be deficient in the reason why. But Intellect in this way has each and every reason why of the things in it; but it is itself individually all the things in it, so that none of them has come to be in need of a reason why, but it has come to be along with it and has in itself the cause of its existence (VI.7.2, 18-27).

Plotinus is telling us that the distinction between 'internal' and 'external', so pertinent to the physical world, disappears in the case of Intellect and its forms (Thaler, 2011, p. 165). Since each individual form reflects Intellect in its entirety, the analysis of each form will disclose its connections with all other forms and hence reveal everything that can account for its existence (VI.7.2, 18-19). Any attempt to determine the 'reason why' of a form will ultimately point to Intellect. But since Intellect, in turn, is not separate from its forms but is identical to them all, each form must have its own 'reason why' within itself (VI.7.2, 21-27). Deliberation, then, cannot add anything to a form which it did not already contain. That is to say, the gods could not have looked at the form of the human head and tried to figure out another appropriate form to go along with it—as if these forms existed discretely and independently (*partes extra partes*), or as if the limbs could be added to the head *a posteriori*.

Once we accept that the form of human limbs could not have been devised for the sake of the human head, we arrive at the problem of the incompatibility of the forms with the notion of utility (VI.7.3, 15-19). Plotinus claims that when we explain an organ's features through its safeguarding function (say, 'eyebrows are meant to protect the eyes'), we assume that what requires protection (the eyes) is more essential to the form than the organ doing the

8 Plotinus offers Aristotle's example of an *eclipse* (from *Metaphysics* H 4. 1044b9-15 and *Posterior Analytics* B 2. 90a15) to show that the coalescence of fact and reason may be observed even in certain occurrences of the sensible world (VI.7.2, 11-12). If someone asks what a lunar eclipse *is*, we will explain what *causes* it: 'A lunar eclipse is when the moon stands between us and the sun, and so on'. But notice that this definition is precisely an explanation of the cause. Plotinus is here suggesting that, in Intellect, *every* definition would be an explanation of the cause.

safeguarding (the eyebrows). This, in turn, means that the essence of a form exists prior to one of its parts, and that the part is ‘for the sake of’ the whole. But in Intellect there is no relation of priority between the parts and the whole of each form, since they are equally “for each other” (VI.7.3, 19; cf. Thaler, 2011, p. 167). Thus, Plotinus says:

Why then eyes? That there shall be everything. And why eyebrows? That there shall be everything. For even if you say, ‘for preservation’, you are speaking of a safeguard of the substance which exists in it; but this means you are saying that it contributes to its essential nature. Thus, then, the substance existed before this safeguard and the cause therefore was a part of the substance; and this safeguard, then, is something other, but what it is belongs to substance. All things therefore are for each other, and the whole is perfect and all-complete and its existing beautifully is with the cause and in the cause, and the substance and the essential nature and the reason why are one (VI.7.3, 15-23).

Ultimately, then, human bodies have eyes and eyebrows in order to instantiate everything which their form contains (VI.7.3, 13-15).⁹ But is Plotinus giving us a proper explanation of animal features? Taking our eyes as examples, we can see that Aristotle would give a different explanation. Since our human nature includes the power of sight, we have eyes and eyebrows because they are components without which sight would not exist or not function properly. Aristotle appears to have used the concept of a hypothetical necessity in order to explain the different parts of an organism: if sight is a component of our human essence, then eyebrows will be needed given this essential structure (Rappe, 2002, pp. 82-83; Cooper, 1987, pp. 243-244). In this case, then, we can classify the eyebrows as protective and therefore as something which teleologically contributes to a beneficial end.

Plotinus’s objection, however, is that in this case the *reason* for the eyebrows (our human nature as sighted) would exist before the safeguarding organ itself (the eyebrows). But this separation of ‘that’ and ‘why’ is impossible because, if the form of the human being determines that there be a safeguard, then this means that the safeguard is in fact *a part of* the essence and must therefore arise simultaneously with it. Consequently, Plotinus challenges any attempt to develop a functional analysis of animal parts in such a way as to specify which parts function for the sake of others. As Rappe (2002, p. 84) puts it, we find here a collapse of the distinction between the parts of an animal which are *components of* its essence, and the parts which are *contributory* towards

9 As Plotinus says, “A thing is beautiful because it is everything—for this is what form is, being everything—and because it controls matter; but it controls matter if it leaves no part of it unshaped; but it does so leave it if any shape is wanting, an eye, for instance, or something else” (VI.7.3, 13-15).

its essence. Plotinus is forbidding any appeal to the proper functioning of a particular sense (sight) as a means of determining the function of its auxiliary organs (eyebrows). Due to the strict unity of Intellect, no form of an organ can exist for the sake of the animal form that incorporates it—for, as we have seen, the parts and the whole are “for each other” (VI.7.3, 19; cf. Thaler, 2011, p. 167).

We have discovered that Plotinus abandons most of the theoretical underpinnings behind Aristotelian teleology. But this does not mean that all teleology has vanished from his account.¹⁰ What has disappeared, in fact, is the notion that particular organs (such as eyebrows) are means for the instantiation of essential components of human nature (such as sight). This instantiation, moreover, is that of the intelligible *in the sensible*. Since the world here below presents us with sunlight, wind, dust and other elements which pose a threat to our sight, eyebrows and eyelids are needed to ensure that we exist as sighted beings. Our sighted existence, in turn, is necessitated by our physical survival—by our need to respond to external threats, to escape from enemies, to identify

10 Some readers might object that the use of the term ‘teleology’—a compound word derived from the Greek *telos* (the end) and *logos* (explanation)—refers above all to the final cause in Aristotle and should not be applied to Plotinus’s metaphorical reading of the *Timaeus*. Luc Brisson (2019, p. 116), for instance, argues that, for Aristotle, *telos* designates the object of a desire (in particular, the prime mover as the object of desire of all things), whereas in the case of the *Timaeus telos* designates only the good intention of a provident craftsman. The demiurge is, of course, good and even the best of causes, but he is not the object of desire for the beings he has fashioned, according to Brisson (2019, p. 119). Plotinus, however, strikes a harmony between Plato and Aristotle by insisting that, just as the causal role of the unmoved mover maintains the ordered and teleological change of nature through the medium of desire, so too in the *Symposium* and the *Republic* the beautiful and the good function as the goal of all striving. According to Corrigan (2018, p. 30), there is a strong affinity between Aristotle’s theory of the unmoved mover—as both external good and the principle of internal good in the universe—and Diotima’s presentation of desire in relation to all forms of the beautiful in the *Symposium*. Such affinity is intensified if we add the ascent to the good in the *Republic* (esp. 7.521c-537d). This is precisely the way in which Plotinus interprets the *Symposium*, *Republic* and *Timaeus* together in late antiquity:

The knowledge or touching of the Good is the greatest thing, and Plato says it is the greatest study [cf. *Rep.* 505a2]... but we are put on the way to it by gaining footholds in the intelligible and setting ourselves firmly there and feasting on its contents. But whoever has become at once contemplator of himself and all the rest and object of his contemplation, and, since he has become substance and intellect and the complete living being [cf. *Tim.* 31b1], no longer looks at it from outside—when he has become this he is near, and that Good is next and above him, and already close by, shining upon all the intelligible world. It is there that one lets all study go; up to a point one has been led along [*paidagōgêtheis*, cf. *Symp.* 210e3, 210a6-7] and settled firmly in beauty and as far as this one thinks that in which one is, but is carried out of it by the surge of the wave of Intellect itself and lifted on high by a kind of swell and sees suddenly, not seeing how, but the vision fills his eyes with light and does not make him see something else by it, but the light itself is what he sees (VI.7.36, 3-25).

There is much to comment in this passage, but I will restrain myself to a single point. Plotinus sees here that the beautiful (which belongs to the world of forms) leads to the Good (which is above form). The outpouring of light from the Good makes the beautiful visible; and the beautiful, in turn, is the lure of love and desire that leads back to the final cause itself, the Good. Despite Brisson’s warning, therefore, we find that Plotinus allows for final causality in Plato precisely because Intellect and its contents have the form of the Good (VI.7.16, 8-9). A ‘noetic’ teleology is itself grounded by the relation of Intellect to the Good as the first principle of reality.

food and resources, and so on. The problem with this framework is that it finds the *telos* of the forms outside of *nous*, in the earthly flourishing of the animal, as if the sensible could determine the intelligible. Plotinus's critique of artisanal creation—his discussion of the demiurge (cf. §2.1) and the forms (cf. §2.2)—rejects what I would like to call an *external teleology* which locates the *telos* of the forms in their instantiation in the sensible world. But before analyzing the kind of teleology that Plotinus accepts and defends, I must give a more thorough explanation of why Intellect does not need the sensible for its determination.

3. Intellect does not look here below

Why is Intellect so self-sufficient and self-determining when it comes to its relationship with the sensible world? Why could the form of eyebrow not be calibrated towards certain requirements of the sensible world? To address this question, I find it helpful to discuss the notion of *truth* in Intellect, to which I now turn.

As Emilsson (2007, p. 165) puts it, Intellect makes no mistakes. Its thoughts are always true on account of two facts: (a) there is no external object against which Intellect's thoughts would have to correspond and in relation to which they might be corrected; and (b) knower and known are so intimately tied that they can never mismatch. Such ideas are developed in *Enneads* V.3 and V.5, where Plotinus insists that truth in Intellect is not "of something else" (V.3.5, 26) and "does not agree with something else, but with itself, and says nothing other than itself, but it is what it says and it says what it is" (V.5.2, 18-21). Plotinus is distinguishing truth in Intellect from another truth with which we are more familiar—a truth which indeed 'agrees with something else' and is 'of something else'.¹¹ But what sort of truth is it that agrees with itself? We can think of this truth in terms of 'what is real': truth in this sense would not *say* something, but *be* something. But Plotinus does mention that truth in Intellect "is what it says, and says what it is" (V.5.2, 20-21). So truth in Intellect must not only *be* but also *say*. This is a property that truth in Intellect would share with ordinary truth: truth in Intellect would belong not only to being but also to cognition. As Emilsson (2007, p. 166) phrases it, "Intellect, somehow, in saying what it is, is what it says, and vice versa: in being what it is, it says what it is. In

¹¹ Here it does not matter whether we hold a correspondence or a coherentist theory of truth, for in both cases an idea is true only *in terms of something else*, whether a thing or another idea. In correspondence theory, an idea is true if it corresponds to a thing which is *external* to it; and in coherentism, an idea is true if it coheres with other ideas within a system, all of which are *external* to it.

other words, its thought coincides with its being". Intellect is thus where reality and thought always converge. The sensible realm, on the contrary, includes both reality without thought (formless matter, ugliness, evil) and thought without reality (false ideas, delusions, illusions).

The necessary coincidence of being and thought in Intellect means that the truth of the forms does not rely on any external thing. This eliminates two erroneous explanations for the existence of the intelligibles—both of which point to external, sensible things as the intelligibles' *raison d'être*. For Plotinus, "God or one of the gods" (VI.7.1, 1) did not have to look here below either (a) to come up with the idea of, say, a horse (as if abstracting from the particular horses found on earth) or (b) to create an earthly reality that would correspond to the idea of horse in Intellect (VI.7.8, 1-12). Instead, the form of horse has always existed fully and truthfully in Intellect before its generation in the sensible realm. There was no need for a corresponding sensible horse for its intellectual form to be true; and likewise, Intellect did not have to 'catch up' with the sensible world by 'looking here below' and fashioning a formal double to the horse on earth. Being completely true *in itself*, Intellect can only have one reason for the generation of the sensible realm: *bonum est diffusivum sui*.¹² Thus, Plotinus says that Intellect does not possess the form of horse "in looking to the things here below" (theory a) or by wishing to "make the things here below" (theory b); instead, the intelligibles are independent of the sensibles and produce them out of overabundance: "For it was not possible to stop at the intelligibles there. For who could bring to a stop a power able both to abide and to go forward?" (VI.7.8, 13-15).

The discussion outlined so far leads Plotinus to conclude that the reason why man has eyebrows or four limbs (to return to our previous example) is that man has a prior and eternal model in Intellect—a model which is complete and contains the reason for all its parts. Plato's metaphor of deliberation and planning has thus been stripped of its mythical cloak in order to reveal the *real* relation of the forms to their sensible counterparts. And yet, by laying bare the "hidden" meaning of the Platonic myth, Plotinus has found himself in still deeper waters, facing new and fundamental difficulties in accounting for the relation between intelligible and sensible realities. He has shown that in reading the *Timaeus* we should overlook any reference to divine deliberation and emphasize instead the comprehensive nature of the intelligible realm that

12 The doctrine of the good as self-diffusive begins with *Tim.* 29e: "He was good, and one who is good can never become jealous of anything. And so, being free of jealousy, he wanted everything to become as much like himself as was possible".

serves as the model for our world.¹³ But this conclusion raises the following problem: how can there be intelligible principles for organs whose function seems fashioned to suit the exigencies of a physical environment? The kind of teleology to which Plotinus was opposed in VI.7.1-3 considered certain organs as useful for an animal insofar as they mitigated the hardships brought about by its physical environment. But, as we have seen, Plotinus rejects this kind of teleology, since it subverts the priority of the intelligible over the sensible by regarding the former as geared towards the latter. No appeal to the benefits that certain organs have in the physical world can explain their intelligible forms: intelligible animals do not need any intelligible nourishment, nor are their lives threatened by intelligible predators (Thaler, 2011, p. 169). But if that is so, how can we explain the existence of limbs or eyebrows in the intelligible?

In what follows, I will explain how Plotinus introduces a notion of beneficial end (*telos*) that coheres with the nature of Intellect. In the next two sections (§§4-5), I will discuss Plotinus's attempts to provide a novel conception of teleology whose *telos* is no longer directed towards the physical world, but instead towards the very maintenance of the intellectual realm. This new teleology will arise after two separate discussions. The first is an investigation into the *telos* of the many irrational species within Intellect (§4). In this case, the diversity of species serves to sustain higher forms of intelligible life, such as *genera*, culminating in the complete Animal and thereby constituting a *vertical teleology*. The second discussion explains the function of the intelligible principles operative behind the animals' safeguarding organs (§5). Here, as the particular species descend from their originating *genera* in the emanative process, they lose certain attributes but compensate for this loss with other intelligent features. In this way, all species retain a minimal coefficient of noetic content which allows for their membership in *nous*. This constitutes a *horizontal teleology*, for it involves not the *telos* of the species aiming upwards towards their genus, but rather a *telos* proper to the internal constitution of the species themselves, aiming for their maintenance in the noetic sphere. We shall conduct these two investigations in order.

4. Irrational Animals, or: The Problem of Genus and Species

In *Ennead* VI.7.8, Plotinus raises the question of how non-rational animals can have their principles in the intelligible. Supposing that the intelligible

13 Plato himself stresses this comprehensiveness in *Tim.* 30c2-d1; cf. Thaler (2011, p. 168, fn. 19).

principles are all equally rational, how can these principles give rise to animals with such widely different degrees of rationality, some seeming to lack it altogether? For instance, why should there be a horse in the intelligible realm in the first place? Even if we find an excuse for the inclusion of *rational* animals, what majesty would there be in the presence of so great a multitude of *irrational* beings in Intellect? (VI.7.8, 15-18).

We are struck here with the problem of accounting for *nous*'s perfection *despite* its possession of the noetic correlates of "cheap" (*eutelês*) irrational animals (VI.7.9, 1-5). Plotinus is facing the challenge of how to account for the *logoi* of irrational animals in the intellectual cosmos. His initial line of response to this difficulty is to claim that these *logoi* must (in accordance with his theory of *nous*) be intellects and so, far from being 'cheap', are in fact filled with worth and value (Noble & Powers, 2015, p. 63). I have already discussed the intimate union of knower and known in Intellect (cf. §3). This means that Intellect, despite possessing the *logoi* of irrational animals, can never think something unintelligent. What appears unintelligent in Intellect is in fact intelligent, since both the thinker of the irrational form is Intellect, and its thought is Intellect (Rappe, 2002, p. 86). In other words, since "the thought is the same as the thing" (the principle of identity of thought with its object: VI.7.9, 28), how can that which thinks (Intellect) be thoughtful and that which is thought (the irrational animal) be thoughtless? (VI.7.9, 29). Hence, Plotinus says that the thinker of 'horse' is Intellect, and the thought of 'horse' is *also* Intellect, so that Intellect permeates all things, just as life permeates all particular kinds of life whether rational or irrational (VI.7.9, 30-35). The consequence of this unity of thinker and thought is that everything in Intellect is fully permeated by and filled with intelligence. Intelligence (*noesis*), in turn, is a broader category than reasoning (*dianoia*, *logismos*).¹⁴ All beings in Intellect are filled with intelligence, even if not all of them are rational.

However, Plotinus's provisional response regarding the intelligent *logoi* of irrational animals does not yet guarantee that the perfection of *nous* has not been compromised. After all, he seems to concede that the intellects of irrational beings are probably inferior to those intellects within divine *nous* that correspond to rational animals. Even if all animals in Intellect are permeated with intelligence, some clearly have it more than others by displaying rational features. This raises the question: "Why are animals not equally rational? And why are men not equally so in comparison to each other?" (VI.7.9, 16-17).

14 Cf. Dillon & Gerson (2004, p. 134): "Thinking is broader than reasoning, which connotes practical thinking".

These observations force Plotinus to explain how the existence of such inferior intellects in *nous* is consistent with its optimal condition overall (Noble & Powers, 2015, p. 63). And Plotinus thinks that he can meet this challenge by contending that the inclusion of these inferior intellects in *nous* contributes to its perfection by making it complete (*teleios*: complete; *pantelês*: all-perfect; VI.7.10, 4-7; VI.7.12, 1-4).

This concept of perfection in completeness may at first appear as a *deus ex machina*, rescuing Plotinus's argument without substantive motivation within the framework of his thought. But, in fact, the view that completeness of *nous* involves an extensive plurality of inferior forms has a firm basis in the principles governing *nous*'s internal constitution (Noble & Powers, 2015, p. 64). The temptation to be resisted here is to look to the sensible realm as an extrinsic reason for the plurality of inferior forms (e.g., horns exist for defense, horses play a role within the food chain that sustains the whole animal kingdom, etc.). For if this were the case, the rational principles within Intellect would produce the multitude of irrational animals *only after* descending into the physical universe in the emanative process. Several commentators have in fact erroneously held this view. Rappe (2002, p. 83), for instance, reads Plotinus's account of the generation of species as occurring *not* within Intellect but only at an inherently deficient, embodied level. This would mean that the *differentiae* that distinguish animals from each other are in fact not part of their essences, since they derive from a physical necessity that has nothing to do with their original forms. The differences between a hippopotamus and a cockroach, or between a lizard and a lion, for example, would not figure in their respective forms within Intellect, but only in the various physical manifestations of certain principles. But in the context of VI.7, this reading is mistaken for two reasons.¹⁵ First, notice that Plotinus refers to these different manifestations as the principles' *energeia* (VI.7.9, 34-38). That is, each principle becomes active by instantiating itself as a particular intelligible form (say, the form of horse), and this seems to imply that we have not yet left the intelligible realm:

[The horse] is not thoughtless but a particular kind of intellect... For just as any particular life does not cease to be life, so neither does an intellect of a particular kind cease to be intellect: since the intellect appropriate to any particular living being does not cease to be the intellect of all, of man also, for instance, granted that each part, whichever one you take, is all things, but perhaps in different ways. For in actuality [*energeiāi*] this thing is one, but it has the power [*dunatai*] to become all [*panta*]. But

15 Here I follow Thaler (2011, p. 175, fn. 30) in considering the *differentiae* that distinguish animals from each other as resulting from an emanative process *within* Intellect.

we apprehend in each what it actually is; and what it actually is, is the last and the lowest, so that the last and lowest of this particular intellect is horse, and being horse is where it stopped in its continual outgoing to a lesser life, but another stops lower down (VI.7.9, 30-38).

The intelligible principle becomes active, therefore, by manifesting itself as a horse *within* Intellect. The *differentiae* between animals seem to come from the principle's various activations as it travels through *nous*—that is, before any instantiation in the physical universe. Moreover, if each animal organ belonged strictly to the physical instantiation of a principle and not to an intelligible manifestation of it, it would be hard to explain why Plotinus then proceeds to tackle the problem of the function of horns and claws in Intellect, and why he spends so much time addressing this issue. These two reasons make clear, I think, that we should understand the plurality of inferior forms according to the internal principles of the intelligible realm. Intellect structures its contents according to relations of priority and posteriority (e.g., each genus is prior to its subordinate species), and inferior forms are a necessary outcome of successive stages in the articulation of *nous*'s contents (Noble & Powers, 2015, p. 64). Thus, when describing the process of actualization in VI.7.9, Plotinus is not referring to *nous*'s production of lower hypostases (say, the physical universe), but rather to the actualization of genus into species *within* Intellect itself.

The completeness of Intellect is thus a product not merely of intelligible principles (say, those behind the animal genus) but also of their process of activation (into species). This activation functions as a movement of descent whereby intelligible principles travel downward within *nous* until they reach a stop. Depending on the distance travelled, each principle instantiates itself with a certain degree of clarity (VI.7.9, 18). This explains why some instantiations of a principle are gods; others, which have travelled farther, become rational animals; while others, which have stopped lower down, constitute the irrational species (VI.7.9, 19-23). The intelligible principle behind the animal genus, therefore, first activates itself as rational animals of various kinds (some being more rational than others) until it reaches the irrational animals further down in the emanative process.

The important point for Plotinus, I would say, is that the animal genus could not exist without the irrational animals that contribute to its heterogeneity. For if the genus could only have its superior species (say, the most rational human being), the genus would be reduced to a single species—namely, its highest one. The loss of diversity would thereby reduce the Animal to merely one of its actualizations, so that what was higher and prior in the emanative hierarchy (genus) would become lower and posterior (species). The genus

therefore cannot exist without an inner plurality of species that sustains it precisely *as a genus*. We already find here the outline of a *vertical teleology*, where the multitude of heterogeneous species exists within Intellect *in order to* sustain higher forms of intelligible life, such as the Animal. But to understand this kind of teleology, we must first clarify why plurality and otherness are crucial for the maintenance of the Animal within Intellect.

4.1. Otherness in Intellect

Plotinus's metaphysical hierarchy surely culminates in the One's perfect unity. But this perfect state of affairs is not all there is: from the absolute singularity of the One come plurality and otherness. We then get the interplay of otherness and sameness in Intellect as Plotinus's allusion to Plato's *Sophist*. The following lines provide a clear example of this:

One must always understand Intellect as otherness and sameness if it is going to think. For [otherwise] it will not distinguish itself from the intelligible by its relation of otherness to itself, and will not contemplate all things if no otherness has occurred to make all things exist: for [without otherness] there would not even be two (VI.7.39, 5-9).

We find in this passage both the difference between subject and object (the 'relation of otherness to itself') and within the object itself (otherness 'makes all things exist').¹⁶ Regarding the first difference, Plotinus argues in *Ennead* V.3 that thinking requires a subject/object duality. He begins by claiming that without an object distinct from the subject there can be no vision (V.3.10, 14-16). He then casts this claim in terms of the need for activity (*energeia*) to act *on* an object: activity requires a distinction between the agent and that on which the agent acts (V.3.10, 16-26; cf. Emilsson, 2007, p. 84). Thus, Plotinus says, "that which is active must be acting *on something else*" (V.3.10, 20)—otherwise it would be immobile and not constitute an activity proper. At the same time, however, the agent is not entirely different from that on which the agent acts: together they form one movement. For example, just as tango requires the differentiation between the partners (it takes two people to dance), it also unites them in a single movement (without which they could not be said to be dancing). In a similar way, the activity of thinking involves both otherness and sameness: "The proper objects of thought must be the same and the other in relation to the Intellect" (V.3.10, 26). In other words, the object thought must be different from the activity which thinks it, but together they must constitute one movement.

¹⁶ This point has been corroborated and developed by Emilsson (2007, p. 80ff).

In *Ennead* V.3, Plotinus also addresses the need for difference *within* the object of thought. Beyond the duality of Intellect and its objects of thought, “each of the things that are being thought brings out along with itself sameness and otherness, for what will the thinker think which does not contain different things?” (V.3.10, 27-29). Plotinus says here that if the activity of thinking “directed its gaze to a single object without parts, it would be speechless” (V.3.10, 31). This means that the object of thought cannot be ‘without parts’ because speaking—or, in this case, thinking—requires a delimitation of what is thought, setting it apart from other things. Hence, thinking implies that we discern what something is from what it is not; the very act of thinking what something *is* is also the act of thinking what something *is not* (Emilsson, 2007, p. 87). This explains why Plotinus says that

if the absolutely partless had to speak itself, it must, first of all, say what it is not; so that in this way too it would be many in order to be one. Then when it says ‘I am this’, if it means something other than itself by ‘this’, it will be telling a lie; but if it is speaking of some incidental property of itself, it will be saying that it is many or saying ‘am, am’ or ‘I, I’ (V.3.10, 34-37).

This quotation is rather cryptic. Following the steps of both Emilsson (2007, p. 88) and Ham (2000, p. 196), I make sense of this passage in the following manner: if the partless tries to say something about its identity (‘I am this’), it will have to say that it is identical with something else (‘ x is y ’), but Plotinus calls this a ‘lie’. To understand why he calls it a lie, let us assume that the ‘this’ is a property of the partless (‘I am *this*’). In this case, the property either reveals something new about the partless (hence the partless would be ‘many’ and no longer partless), or else the property does not differ at all from the partless itself (in which case the partless would be uttering mere gibberish— ‘am, am’ or ‘I, I’—which is the same as not saying anything at all). In other words, if we say, ‘ x is y ’, y must either reveal a new aspect of x (in which case x would not be partless), or else we would be saying ‘ x is x ’, which is just as tautological as saying, ‘am, am’ or ‘I, I’. This *reductio ad absurdum* implies that thinking the partless always negates its partlessness. For the activity of thinking to say something about its object, this object must be *plural* (i.e., have many parts, have otherness and sameness within itself). An undifferentiated object does not allow for any intellectual apprehension: we can only apprehend what is differentiated from and seen against a certain context (V.3.10, 40-44; cf. Emilsson, 2007, pp. 88-89).

This account suggests that otherness is an essential feature of thought.¹⁷ First, we have the differentiation of a subject from the object as the condition *sine qua non* of thought; then, we find that the object of thought must itself be plural. Now, if we return to Plotinus's example of the horse as an irrational animal within Intellect, we recall that the horse came about by proceeding from the animal genus. This movement of procession introduced otherness between the genus (Animal) and the species (horse). This otherness in turn fulfilled the conditions necessary for thought: the differentiation between the Animal and the horse allowed the Animal to be a subject who thinks an object, i.e., the horse (condition 1); and the differences among the many species within the Animal constitute an *internal* otherness which allows the Animal to be an object of thought for itself (condition 2). Now, recall that Intellect must constantly think all the beings in it (cf. §3)—everything in *nous* is both subject *and* object of its thought, for everything “is what it says, and says what it is” (V.5.2, 20).¹⁸ In this case, the movement of alienation (in the sense of ‘othering’) allows the genus to become both subject *and* object of its thought. First, it becomes a subject by acquiring the necessary distance from its objects of thought (i.e., the many species within it). Second, it becomes an object of thought for itself by appearing as varied and plural. We thus return to our previous section (cf. §4), where it became clear that the animal genus could not exist if it were reduced merely to its highest or most rational species. In fact, there needs to be internal variance within the genus if the genus is to be thought at all—that is, if it is to exist as a form within *nous*. To be both thinker and thought is the intelligibles’ mode of existence, and only a heterogeneous genus can sustain the internal variance necessary for the activity of thought to take place.

Plotinus, therefore, conceives of thought and intelligible life in *nous* as ends, and of otherness and heterogeneity as the required means of guaranteeing their existence. This is his way of introducing a new teleological model that does not include any features that are foreign to Intellect.¹⁹ For unlike in the

17 In fact, otherness or differentiation seems to be necessary *only* for thought or speech, but not for some other modes of encounter (such as touch). Plotinus says: “The thinker must apprehend one thing different from another and the object of thought in being thought must contain variety; or [else] there will not be a thought of it, *but only a touching and a sort of contact without speech or thought*, pre-thinking because Intellect has not yet come into being and that which touches does not think” (V.3.10, 40-44, my italics). This touching seems to involve the otherness of subject and object (our first kind of otherness), but not the internal otherness of the object of thought (our second kind of otherness). Vision seems to see things always ‘in parts’, whereas touching is ‘partless’.

18 Likewise, as Plotinus says, “Intellect itself is what thinks and what is thought” (VI.9.2, 32-33).

19 Plotinus’s ‘noetic’ teleology will no longer accept input taken exclusively from the sensible. The *Timaeus* distinguishes between two types of causes: auxiliary causes (*sunaitiai*) and proper causes (*aitiai*). The first causes explain the action of necessity (*ananke*), which is “deprived of intelligence, producing only haphazard and disorderly effects,” whereas the second causes explain the action of Intellect (*nous*), which “possesses

physical world, 'survival' in Intellect does not consist in preserving an animal's life from external threats. Rather, it involves preserving the *noetic* conditions for thought and life. This amounts to a *vertical teleology* where the maintenance of a plurality of different species (rational and irrational) serves to uphold higher forms of intelligible life—culminating in the complete Animal as the highest genus.

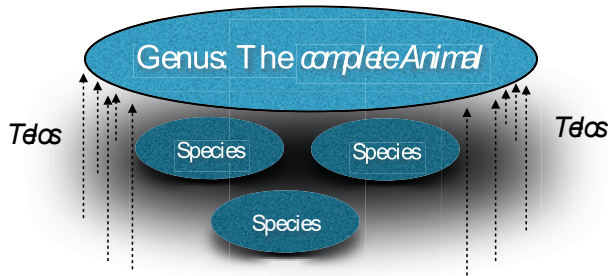


Figure 1: The Vertical Teleology.

5. Parts of Animals, or: The Problem of Deficiency and Compensation

After explaining how *nous* contains the noetic correlates of irrational animals, Plotinus now addresses the more specific problem of Intellect's inclusion of the different *parts* of animals. He introduces the problem in the following way. In VI.7.9, 39-46, he claims that as the intelligible principles

understanding" (*Tim.* 46e4-6). When discussing the example of vision, for instance, Timaeus insists that the mechanical description of sight (eyes "conduct light," 45b4) is an example of auxiliary cause (*sunaitia*, 46e7), whereas the proper cause of vision points to its function and usefulness (46e8). For Timaeus, the function of vision—and therefore its proper cause—is that, through the observation of the planets and their motions, it has made possible the invention of number (47a6), which has led us to knowledge of time and of the nature of the universe (47b1). In the end, it was through vision that philosophy emerged (47b2). The distinction between these two types of causes matches another distinction between two irreducible dimensions of the universe—namely, Intellect (which is an *aitia*) and necessity (which is a *sunaitia*). Such a distinction, in turn, highlights two ways of accounting for the existence of reality, or rather two types of explanation which are hierarchically ordered: a less fundamental one, which consists in establishing *how* a reality is what it is, and another, more fundamental, which determines *the reason for* (or finality of) that reality. It is by establishing the end or purpose of an object (allowing for the emergence of philosophy) that its structure (the mechanism of vision) is necessarily determined (Pittetoud, 2019, p. 88). The mechanical or material explanation of vision is thus subordinated to its *teleological* explanation. This teleological explanation, moreover, is precisely a *noetic* one for Plotinus, since, on the one hand, any act of Intellect is already complete in the demiurge without the need for auxiliary causes (VI.7.1, 45); and on the other hand, the data of sensible reality can only make sense within a *synhyposstasis* (co-reality or joint existence, VI.7.2, 37) of Intellect and Soul which grants intelligibility to the structures of sensible things. Plotinus's teleological account, therefore, can only accept sensible input from the perspective of the *telos* proper to the noetic realm.

travel downward within *nous*, their resulting forms lose progressively more traits that are fully rational, but find other traits to compensate for this loss. So, after a given stage in the principles' descent, the loss of certain traits made it difficult to sustain intelligible life; and because of that, nails and claws appeared, and then fangs and the nature of horns (VI.7.9, 42-44). Plotinus, however, insists that the cure for this deficiency came from Intellect itself. Whichever traits appeared to compensate for the lack of more rational faculties were taken from Intellect's own unlimited store of such devices (VI.7.9, 44-46; cf. Thaler, 2011, pp. 175-176). Thus, Plotinus says:

As the powers unfold they always leave something behind on the higher level; and as they go out they lose something, and in losing different things different ones find and add on something else because of the need of the living being which appeared as a result of the deficiency; for instance, since there is not yet enough for life's purpose, nails appeared, and having claws and fangs, and the nature of horn; so that where the intellect came down to, at that very point it comes up again by the self-sufficiency of its nature and finds stored in itself the cure for the deficiency (VI.7.9, 39-46).

Plotinus's account here has strong teleological resonances. First, he claims that the organs in question emerged *in order to* cure some deficiency, and he defined this deficiency as a state in which life cannot be sustained ('there is not yet enough for life's purpose'). This makes it clear that such organs serve a certain purpose, and that this purpose is a legitimate part of their explanation (Thaler, 2011, p. 176). Moreover, notice that this teleological account is distinct from the previous one. Here, it is no longer a matter of upholding a higher intelligible form (the genus) by differentiating species from each other and creating a heterogeneous intelligible topography. In this case, each species—having individuated itself from the genus by losing certain traits of the complete Animal—supplants this deficiency with a cure that it finds stored within itself (VI.7.9, 46). Recall that our account of the vertical teleology required the emergence of irrational animals within *nous* for the maintenance of the animal genus. But having lost rationality (*dianoia*, *logismos*), these species within the animal genus must still have the same level of intelligence (*nous*) as any other intelligible form within Intellect. They must retain the same level of intelligence because each form must reflect Intellect in its entirety, for if you "open each individual form itself back upon itself", you will find the whole of Intellect (VI.7.2, 18; cf. §2.2). No individual form can reflect Intellect *in its entirety* if it does not contain within itself the same degree of noetic content as all the other forms within *nous*. Thus, since intelligence is a broader category than reason (cf. §4), the loss of rationality must be compensated with other intelligent features which guarantee a certain indispensable coefficient of

noetic content, without which the forms cannot serve as mirrors of the entire intelligible realm.²⁰ We find here, I suggest, a *horizontal teleology* which does not strive upwards towards the maintenance of the genus, but instead works *at the level of the species themselves*.

More can be said about the need for a minimal coefficient of noetic content. According to Plotinus, for a form to be a form, it must function as a microcosm of the entire intelligible realm by revealing its causal relations with all other forms within *nous* (VI.7.2, 25-27). In other words, when you unpack the 'that' of a form (its definition), you also reveal its 'reason why' (its many causal relations with other forms). These causal relations, in turn, point to all other beings in the intelligible realm with greater or lesser clarity—just as the hurricane relates remotely to the rustling of a butterfly's wing. And since 'that' and 'why' coalesce in the intelligible realm (VI.7.2, 3-9), all causal relations must feature within a form's very essence or definition. This means, in effect, that no form in Intellect can have any less noetic content than any other form, for all forms reflect all others and point to all others, and no form can reflect another with more noetic content than itself. Think here, for instance, of Descartes's (2017, §41) insistence that the *idea* of heat, or of a stone, cannot exist in me unless it is put there by some cause which contains as much reality as I conceive to be in the heat or in the stone themselves. According to Descartes, in order for a given idea to contain such and such degree of reality *as a representation*, it must derive this reality from a cause which contains at least this same degree of reality *as an actual or existent thing*.²¹ But since, in our case, we are comparing different forms within Intellect—and not ideas and the things represented by them—we could say that all forms must contain the same degree of *noetic reality* as all others, since they are all caused by, and derive their reality from, all other forms within *nous*.

Such degree of noetic reality is maintained by a compensation that guarantees an equal distribution of intelligence throughout the 'complete living being'—even as the movement of actualization descends from genus into species and leads to the loss of rationality. The various organs and parts of animals allow for an equal distribution of noetic reality by compensating for the loss of rationality at each ontic level with non-human kinds of intelligence. So, while human beings can look at smoke in the horizon and *infer* the presence of fire, another species might sense the presence of fire through the alteration

20 My notion of an indispensable coefficient of noetic content is consistent with what Chiaradonna (2014a, p. 225) calls the principle of conservation of the self-sufficiency of Intellect at each ontic level.

21 I am referring here to Descartes's distinction between formal and objective reality in Meditation III, §41.

of heat waves. And while human beings can study the animal kingdom and determine the usual location of their preys, bats can identify the tiniest insects via echolocation. Human intelligence is characterized by inferential thinking and discursive rationality, while the bat’s intelligence is embodied in certain safeguarding organs which humans lack. Plotinus therefore develops a sophisticated and rather variegated view of intelligence (*nous*), without reducing it to a purely inferential or discursive rationality (*dianoia, logismos*). For him, intelligence, far from following an anthropocentric paradigm, is more like a diverse continuum of different intensities of organized life (Corrigan, 2014, pp. 378-379). All animals have intelligence in such different ways that the barriers are porous: the inferential thought-process that leads from smoke to fire is neither inferior nor superior to the heat-sensing mechanism that leads an animal to sense the presence of fire. The various animal organs allow the intelligence of the ‘complete living being’ to manifest itself in different ways throughout the intelligible universe. Therefore, while the forms of irrational animals may be inferior according to a rationalistic metric, they are just as intelligent as any other intelligible being according to Plotinus’s more comprehensive measure.

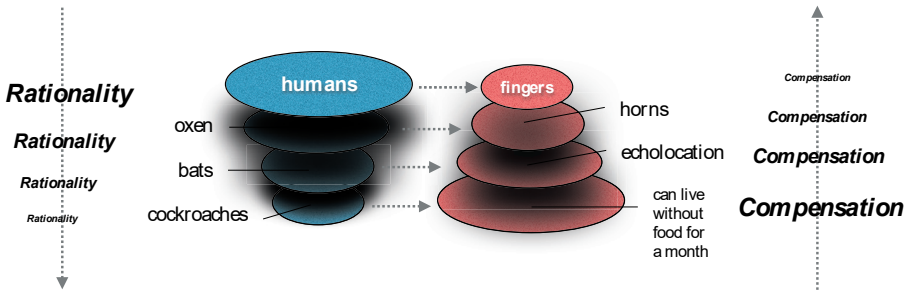


Figure 2: The Horizontal Teleology.

Conclusion: Plotinus’s ‘Noetic’ Teleology

We have described a kind of teleology which coheres with the nature of Intellect for Plotinus. For even if Plotinus does not deny that, here below, safeguarding organs preserve the lives of physical animals, he still shows that these benefits do not constitute the *reason* for the organs’ existence. Rather, the organs are in place because they belong to the animals’ essences in Intellect. These essences, in turn, require such organs on account of the internal principles governing the intelligible universe. Safeguarding in the sensible world is thus

a good that reflects that of safeguarding in Intellect. And we can say more: safeguarding in Intellect is in turn a good that reflects the Good itself (Thaler, 2011, p. 179). This means that the teleological model outlined in this paper is itself grounded on the relation of Intellect to the Good as the first principle of reality. Intelligible life is for Plotinus the first offshoot of the Good (VI.7.16, 8-9). In fact, Plotinus says that life in Intellect is “the *activity* of the Good” or an “activity *from* the Good” (VI.7.21, 4-5, my italics; cf. Thaler, 2011, p. 179). In this way, the various species and their safeguarding organs can display a variegated view of the ‘complete living being,’ revealing that Intellect is “good from many good-formed [parts], a good richly varied” (VI.7.15, 24-25).

In short, Plotinus has not straight-out rejected the notion of teleology through his critique of demiurgic creation (cf. §§1-3). What he has in fact resisted is any attempt to subordinate the intelligible to the sensible, and to locate the forms’ *raison d’être* in features of the physical world. Indeed, *Ennead* VI.7 can be read as a defense of a kind of teleology that coheres with the nature of *nous*. I suggested, first, that irrational species exist within Intellect *in order to* generate an internal otherness which grants *life* to the animal genus (the vertical teleology: cf. §4). I then suggested that the various parts of animals exist within Intellect *in order to* grant non-human (and non-rational) kinds of intelligence to species at different ontic levels, thereby guaranteeing a minimal coefficient of noetic content to all forms within *nous* (the horizontal teleology: cf. §5). I have thus sketched the outlines of a properly ‘noetic’ teleology in *Ennead* VI.7.

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