

## Plotinus Ennead 5 On Intellectual Beauty

Stephen MacKenna and A.H. Armstrong translations of Ennead 5.8.1-8

### On the Intellectual Beauty

**Stephen MacKenna translation Ennead 5.8.1.** It is a principle with us that one who has attained to the vision of the Intellectual Cosmos and grasped the beauty of the Authentic Intellect will be able also to come to understand the Father and Transcendent of that Divine Being. It concerns us, then, to try to see and say, for ourselves and as far as such matters may be told, how the Beauty of the divine Intellect and of the Intellectual Cosmos may be revealed to contemplation.

Let us go to the realm of magnitudes:—suppose two blocks of stone lying side by side: one is unpatterned, quite untouched by art; the other has been minutely wrought by the craftsman's hands into some statue of god or man, a Grace or a Muse, or if a human being, not a portrait but a creation in which the sculptor's art has concentrated all loveliness.

Now it must be seen that the stone thus brought under the artist's hand to the beauty of form is beautiful not as stone—for so the crude block would be as pleasant—but in virtue of the Form or Idea introduced by the art. This form is not in the material; it is in the designer before ever it enters the stone; and the artificer holds it not by his equipment of eyes and hands but by his participation in his art. The beauty, therefore, exists in a far higher state in the art; for it does not come over integrally into the work; that original beauty is not transferred; what comes over is a derivative and a minor: and even that shows itself upon the statue not integrally and with entire realization of intention but only in so far as it has subdued the resistance of the material.

Art, then, creating in the image of its own nature and content, and working by the Idea or Reason-Principle of the beautiful object it is to produce, must itself be beautiful in a far higher and purer degree since it is the seat and source of that beauty, indwelling in the art, which must naturally be more complete than any comeliness of the external. In the degree in which the beauty is diffused by entering into matter, it is so much the weaker than that concentrated in unity; everything that reaches outwards is the less for it, strength less strong, heat less hot, every power less potent, and so beauty less beautiful.

Then again every prime cause must be, within itself, more powerful than its effect can be: the musical does not derive from an unmusical source but from music; and so the art exhibited in the material work derives from an art yet higher.

Still the arts are not to be slighted on the ground that they create by imitation of natural objects; for, to begin with, these natural objects are themselves imitations; then, we must recognize that they give no bare reproduction of the thing seen but go back to the Reason-Principles from which Nature itself derives, and, furthermore, that much of their work is all their own; they are holders of beauty and add

where nature is lacking. Thus Pheidias wrought the Zeus upon no model among things of sense but by apprehending what form Zeus must take if he chose to become manifest to sight.

**A.H. Armstrong Translation V. 8. 1.** Since we maintain that the man who has entered into contemplation of the intelligible world and understood the beauty of the true Intellect will be able also to bring into his mind its Father which is beyond Intellect, let us try to see and to say to ourselves, as far as it is possible to say such things, how it is possible for anyone to contemplate the beauty of Intellect and of that higher world. Let us suppose, if you like, a couple of great lumps of stone lying side by side, one shapeless and untouched by art, the other which has been already mastered by art and turned into a statue of a god or of a man, of a Grace or one of the Muses if of a god, and if of a man not just of any man but of one whom art has made up out of every sort of human beauty. The stone which has been brought to beauty of form by art will appear beautiful not because it is a stone—for then the other would be just as beautiful—but as a result of the form which art has put into it. [*Compare and contrast the earlier treatise I. 6 (1). 2. 25-7, where sometimes art gives beauty to a whole house with its parts, and sometimes nature gives beauty to a single stone*] Now the material did not have this form, but it was in the man who had it in his mind even before it came into the stone ; but it was in the craftsman, not in so far as he had hands and eyes, but because he had some share of art. So this beauty was in the art, and it was far better there ; for the beauty in the art did not come into the stone, but that beauty stays in the art and another comes from it into the stone which is derived from it and less than it. And even this does not stay pure and as it wants to be in the stone, but is only there as far as the stone has submitted to the art. If art makes its work like what it is and has—and it makes it beautiful according to the forming principle of what it is making—it is itself more, and more truly, beautiful since it has the beauty of art which is greater and more beautiful than anything in the external object. For a thing is weaker than that which abides in unity in proportion as it expands in its advance towards matter. Everything which is extended departs from itself: if it is bodily strength, it grows less strong, if heat, less hot, if power in general, less powerful, if beauty, less beautiful. [*This is the normal doctrine of Plotinus: cp. especially III. 7. 11. 23-7 (on the soul's self-extension into time)*]

Every original maker must be in itself stronger than that which it makes; it is not lack of music which makes a man musical, but music, and music in the world of sense is made by the music prior to this world. But if anyone despises the arts because they produce their works by imitating nature, we must tell him, first, that natural things are imitations too. Then he must know that the arts do not simply imitate what they see, but they run back up to the forming principles from which nature derives; then also that they do a great deal by themselves, and, since they possess beauty, they make up what is defective in things. For Pheidias too did not make his Zeus from any model perceived by the senses, but understood what Zeus would look like if he wanted to make himself visible. [*The " Pheidias commonplace ", on the basis of which Plotinus develops his own view of the artist's direct access to the intelligible world, goes back at least to the age of Cicero (cp. Cicero Orator II. 8-9 and, for the continuance of its use down to the time of Plotinus, Philostratus Life of Apollonius VI. 19. 2). Plotinus is of course here in disagreement with Plato, for whom the artist is a mere copyist of the realities of the sense-world (cp. Plato Republic X 597Bff.). On the question of whether this disagreement was conscious and*

*deliberate, see J. M. Rist, Plotinus (Cambridge 1967) 183–4 and my paper "Tradition, Reason and Experience in the Thought of Plotinus" (in Plotino e il Neoplatonismo, Rome 1974) 179.]*

**Stephen MacKenna translation Ennead 5.8.2.** But let us leave the arts and consider those works produced by Nature and admitted to be naturally beautiful which the creations of art are charged with imitating, all reasoning life and unreasoning things alike, but especially the consummate among them, where the moulder and maker has subdued the material and given the form he desired. Now what is the beauty here? It has nothing to do with the blood or the menstrual process: either there is also a colour and form apart from all this or there is nothing unless sheer ugliness or (at best) a bare recipient, as it were the mere Matter of beauty.

Whence shone forth the beauty of Helen, battle-sought; or of all those women like in loveliness to Aphrodite; or of Aphrodite herself; or of any human being that has been perfect in beauty; or of any of these gods manifest to sight, or unseen but carrying what would be beauty if we saw?

In all these is it not the Form-Idea, something of that realm but communicated to the produced from within the producer, just as in works of art, we held, it is communicated from the arts to their creations? Now we can surely not believe that, while the made thing and the Reason-Principle thus impressed upon Matter are beautiful, yet the Principle not so alloyed but resting still with the creator—the Idea primal and immaterial—is not Beauty.

If material extension were in itself the ground of beauty, then the creating principle, being without extension, could not be beautiful: but beauty cannot be made to depend upon magnitude since, whether in a large object or a small, the one Idea equally moves and forms the mind by its inherent power. A further indication is that as long as the object remains outside us we know nothing of it; it affects us by entry; but only as an Ideal-Form can it enter through the eyes which are not of scope to take an extended mass: we are, no doubt, simultaneously possessed of the magnitude which, however, we take in not as mass but by an elaboration upon the presented form.

Then again the principle producing the beauty must be, itself, ugly, neutral, or beautiful: ugly, it could not produce the opposite; neutral, why should its product be the one rather than the other? The Nature, then, which creates things so lovely must be itself of a far earlier beauty; we, undisciplined in discernment of the inward, knowing nothing of it, run after the outer, never understanding that it is the inner which stirs us; we are in the case of one who sees his own reflection but not realizing whence it comes goes in pursuit of it.

But that the thing we are pursuing is something different and that the beauty is not in the concrete object is manifest from the beauty there is in matters of study, in conduct and custom; briefly, in soul or mind. And it is precisely here that the greater beauty lies, perceived whenever you look to the wisdom in a man and delight in it, not wasting attention on the face, which may be hideous, but passing all

appearance by and catching only at the inner comeliness, the truly personal; if you are still unmoved and cannot acknowledge beauty under such conditions, then looking to your own inner being you will find no beauty to delight you and it will be futile in that state to seek the greater vision, for you will be questing it through the ugly and impure.

This is why such matters are not spoken of to everyone; you, if you are conscious of beauty within, remember.

**A.H. Armstrong Translation V. 8. 2.** But let us leave the arts; and let us contemplate those things whose works they are said to imitate, which come into existence naturally as beauties and are so called, all the rational and irrational living creatures and especially those among them which have succeeded since the craftsman who formed them dominated the matter and gave it the form he wished. What then is the beauty in these? Certainly not the blood and the menstrual fluid; rather, the colour of these is different and their shape is either no shape or a shapeless shape or like that which delimits something simple. *[The text and meaning of this passage must remain somewhat doubtful, but fairly good sense can be made of it in the way followed here, with the deletion of \*\*\* an as an inept gloss on \*\*\* (matter cannot have an outline, even the simplest). \*\*\* of course normally means "shapeless" in the sense of "misshapen", "ugly". Plotinus seems to correct himself twice in speaking of the shape of blood and menstrual fluid—first reflecting that if they are formed material realities, even of the most elementary kind, they cannot have no shape, and then finding an \*\*\* somewhat too paradoxical. His final way of putting it, which seems to imply that a complex shape is necessary for beauty, again contrasts with the aesthetic perception of the beauty of simple things (light, a single stone) so strongly asserted in I. 6. 1-2 against the "good proportion" theory of beauty (see notes on ch. 1 there)]* From what source, then, did the beauty of Helen whom men fought for shine out, or that of all the women like Aphrodite in beauty? Then again, what is the source of the beauty of Aphrodite herself, or of any other beautiful human being or of any god of those who appear visibly, or even of those who do not appear but have in themselves a beauty which could be seen? Is not this beauty everywhere form, which comes from the maker upon that which he has brought into being, as in the arts it was said to come from the arts upon their works? Well, then, are the things made and the forming principle in matter beautiful, but the forming principle which is not in matter but in the maker, the first immaterial one, is that not beauty? But if it was the mass which was beautiful in so far as it was mass, it would necessarily follow that the forming principle which was the maker, since it was not mass, was not beautiful; but if the same form, whether it is in something small or something large, moves and influences the soul of one who sees it in the same way by its own power, beauty is not to be attributed to the size of the mass. It is further evidence of this that we do not yet see a thing while it is outside us, but when it comes within, it influences us. But it comes in through the eyes as form alone: or how could it get through something so small? But the size is drawn in along with it, since it has become not large in bulk but large in form. Further the maker must be either ugly or neutral or beautiful. Now if it was ugly it would not make the opposite, and if it was neutral why should it rather make something beautiful than something ugly? But certainly nature which produces such beautiful works is far before them in beauty, but we, because we are not accustomed to see any of the things within and do not know them, pursue the external and do not know that it is that within

which moves us: as if someone looking at his image and not knowing where it came from should pursue it. [A reference to the story of Narcissus: cp. I. 6. 8. 9-12] But the beauty also in studies and ways of life and generally in souls [Cp. Plato Symposium 210B—C] makes clear that what is pursued is something else and that beauty does not lie in magnitude: it is truly a greater beauty than that when you see moral sense in someone and delight in it, not looking at his face—which might be ugly—but putting aside all shape and pursuing his inner beauty. But if it does not move you yet, so that you call someone like this beautiful, you will not when you look inward at yourself be pleased with your beauty. It would be in vain for you to seek beauty when you are in this state, for you will be seeking with something ugly and impure. This is why discussions about these sorts of things are not for everybody; but if you have seen yourself beautiful, remember them.

**Stephen MacKenna translation Ennead 5.8.3.** Thus there is in the Nature-Principle itself an Ideal archetype of the beauty that is found in material forms and, of that archetype again, the still more beautiful archetype in Soul, source of that in Nature. In the proficient soul this is brighter and of more advanced loveliness: adorning the soul and bringing to it a light from that greater light which is Beauty primarily, its immediate presence sets the soul reflecting upon the quality of this prior, the archetype which has no such entries, and is present nowhere but remains in itself alone, and thus is not even to be called a Reason-Principle but is the creative source of the very first Reason-Principle which is the Beauty to which Soul serves as Matter.

This prior, then, is the Intellectual-Principle, the veritable, abiding and not fluctuant since not taking intellectual quality from outside itself. By what image, thus, can we represent it? We have nowhere to go but to what is less. Only from itself can we take an image of it; that is, there can be no representation of it, except in the sense that we represent gold by some portion of gold—purified, either actually or mentally, if it be impure—insisting at the same time that this is not the total thing gold, but merely the particular gold of a particular parcel. In the same way we learn in this matter from the purified Intellect in ourselves or, if you like, from the gods and the glory of the Intellect in them.

For assuredly all the gods are august and beautiful in a beauty beyond our speech. And what makes them so? Intellect; and especially Intellect operating within them (the divine sun and stars) to visibility. It is not through the loveliness of their corporeal forms: even those that have body are not gods by that beauty; it is in virtue of Intellect that they, too, are gods, and as gods beautiful. They do not veer between wisdom and folly: in the immunity of Intellect unmoving and pure, they are wise always, all-knowing, taking cognizance not of the human but of their own being and of all that lies within the contemplation of Intellect. Those of them whose dwelling is in the heavens are ever in this meditation—what task prevents them? —and from afar they look, too, into that further heaven by a lifting of the head. The gods belonging to that higher Heaven itself, they whose station is upon it and in it, see and know in virtue of their omnipresence to it. For all There is heaven; earth is heaven, and sea heaven; and animal and plant and man; all is the heavenly content of that heaven: and the gods in it, despising neither men nor anything else that is there where all is of the heavenly order, traverse all that country and all space in peace.

**Stephen MacKenna translation Ennead 5.8.4.** To 'live at ease' is There; and to these divine beings verity is mother and nurse, existence and sustenance; all that is not of process but of authentic being they see, and themselves in all: for all is transparent, nothing dark, nothing resistant; every being is lucid to every other, in breadth and depth; light runs through light. And each of them contains all within itself, and at the same time sees all in every other, so that everywhere there is all, and all is all and each all, and infinite the glory. Each of them is great; the small is great; the sun, There, is all the stars; and every star, again, is all the stars and sun. While some one manner of being is dominant in each, all are mirrored in every other.

Movement There is pure (as self-caused), for the moving principle is not a separate thing to complicate it as it speeds.

So, too, Repose is not troubled, for there is no admixture of the unstable; and the Beauty is all beauty since it is not resident in what is not beautiful. Each There walks upon no alien soil; its place is its essential self; and, as each moves, so to speak, towards what is Above, it is attended by the very ground from which it starts: there is no distinguishing between the Being and the Place; all is Intellect, the Principle and the ground on which it stands, alike. Thus we might think that our visible sky (the ground or place of the stars), lit as it is, produces the light which reaches us from it (though of course this is really produced by the stars—as it were, by the Principles of light alone, not also by the ground as the analogy would require).

In our realm all is part rising from part and nothing can be more than partial; but There each being is an eternal product of a whole and is at once a whole and an individual manifesting as part but, to the keen vision There, known for the whole it is.

The myth of Lynceus seeing into the very deeps of the earth tells us of those eyes in the divine. No weariness overtakes this vision which yet brings no such satiety as would call for its ending; for there never was a void to be filled so that, with the fullness and the attainment of purpose, the sense of sufficiency be induced: nor is there any such incongruity within the divine that one Being There could be repulsive to another: and of course all There are unchangeable. This absence of satisfaction means only a satisfaction leading to no distaste for that which produces it; to see is to look the more, since for them to continue in the contemplation of an infinite self and of infinite objects is but to acquiesce in the bidding of their nature.

Life, pure, is never a burden; how then could there be weariness There where the living is most noble? That very life is wisdom, not a wisdom built up by reasonings but complete from the beginning, suffering no lack which could set it inquiring, a wisdom primal, unborrowed, not something added to the Being, but its very essence. No wisdom, thus, is greater; this is the authentic knowing, assessor to the divine Intellect as projected into manifestation simultaneously with it; thus, in the symbolic saying, Justice is assessor to Zeus.

(Perfect wisdom:) for all the Principles of this order, dwelling There, are as it were visible images projected from themselves, so that all becomes 'an object of contemplation to contemplators immeasurably blessed'. The greatness and power of the wisdom There we may know from this, that it embraces all the real Beings, and has made all and all follow it, and yet that it is itself those beings, which sprang into being with it, so that all is one and the essence There is wisdom. If we have failed to understand, it is that we have thought of knowledge as a mass of theorems and an accumulation of propositions, though that is false even for our sciences of the sense-realm. But in case this should be questioned, we may leave our own sciences for the present, and deal with the knowing in the Supreme at which Plato glances where he speaks of 'that knowledge which is not a stranger in something strange to it'—though in what sense, he leaves us to examine and declare, if we boast ourselves worthy of our profession. This is probably our best starting-point.

**A.H. Armstrong Translation V. 8. 4.** For it is "the easy life" [is a stock Homeric phrase for the gods : cp. e.g. Iliad 6. 1382] there, and truth is their mother and nurse and being and food—and they see all things, not those to which coming to be, but those to which real being belongs, and they see themselves in other things; for all things there are transparent, and there is nothing dark or opaque; everything and all things are clear to the inmost part to everything; for light is transparent to light. Each there has everything in itself and sees all things in every other, so that all are everywhere and each and every one is all and the glory is unbounded; for each of them is great, because even the small is great; the sun there is all the stars, and each star is the sun and all the others. A different kind of being stands out in each, but in each all are manifest. Movement, too, is pure: for the mover does not trouble it in its going by being different from it. Rest is not disturbed, for it is not mixed with that which is not at rest. Beauty is just beauty, because it is not in what is not beautiful. Each walks not as if on alien ground, but each one's place is its very self and when it ascends (so to speak) the place it came from runs along with it, and it is not itself one thing and its place another. The thing itself is Intellect and its ground is Intellect; it is as if one were to suppose that in the case of this visible heaven of ours which is luminous that the light which comes from it was born to be the stars. Here, however, one part would not come from another, and each would be only a part; but there each comes only from the whole and is part and whole at once : it has the appearance of a part, but a penetrating look sees the whole in it, supposing that someone had the sort of sight which it is said that Lynceus [*For the legend of Lynceus see Cypria XI Allen and Apollonius Rhodius I 151-5*] had, who saw into the inside of the earth, a story which speaks in riddles of the eyes which they have there. They do not grow weary of contemplation there, or so filled with it as to cease contemplating: for there is no emptiness which would result in their being satisfied when they had filled it and reached their end; and things are not different from each other so as to make what belongs to one displeasing to another with different characteristics; and nothing there wears out or wearies. There is a lack of satisfaction there in the sense that fullness does not cause contempt for that which has produced it: for that which sees goes on seeing still more, and, perceiving its own infinity and that of what it sees, follows its own nature. Life holds no weariness for anyone when it is pure : and how should that which leads the best life grow weary ? This life is wisdom, wisdom not acquired by reasonings, because it was always all present, without any failing which would make it need to be searched for; but

it is the first, not derived from any other wisdom; the very being of Intellect is wisdom: it does not exist first and then become wise. For this reason there is no greater wisdom: absolute knowledge has its throne beside Intellect in their common revelation, as they say symbolically Justice is throned beside Zeus. [*Justice is throned beside Zeus in Sophocles Oedipus Coloneus 1381-2 (in Antigone 451, for obvious dramatic reasons, she dwells with the gods below, in the world of the dead)*]. In Plato Laws IV 716A2 she is the constant follower of God. It is interesting that Plotinus distinguishes absolute knowledge and Intellect even in their common revelation: they are clearly not quite the same thing for him.] All things of this kind there are like images seen by their own light, to be beheld by "exceedingly blessed spectators". [Cp. Plato Phaedo 111A3] The greatness and the power of this wisdom can be imagined if we consider that it has with it and has made all things, and all things follow it, and it is the real beings, and they came to be along with it, and both are one, and reality is wisdom there. But we have not arrived at understanding this, because we consider that the branches of knowledge are made up of theorems and a collection of proportions; but this is not true even of the sciences here below. But if someone wants to dispute about these, let them go for the present; but about the knowledge there—which Plato observed and said "that which is not a knowledge different from that in which it is", but how this is so, he left us to investigate and discover, if we claim to be worthy of our title [of Platonists]— perhaps it would be better to start from this point:

**Stephen MacKenna translation Ennead 5.8.5.** All that comes to be, work of nature or of craft, some wisdom has made: everywhere a wisdom presides at a making.

No doubt the wisdom of the artist may be the guide of the work; it is sufficient explanation of the wisdom exhibited in the arts; but the artist himself goes back, after all, to that wisdom in Nature which is embodied in himself; and this is not a wisdom built up of theorems but one totality., not a wisdom consisting of manifold detail co-ordinated into a unity but rather a unity working out into detail.

Now, if we could think of this as the primal wisdom, we need look no further, since, at that, we have discovered a principle which is neither a derivative nor a 'stranger in something strange to it'. But if we are told that, while this Reason-Principle is in Nature, yet Nature itself is its source, we ask how Nature came to possess it; and, if Nature derived it from some other source, we ask what that other source may be; if, on the contrary, the principle is self-sprung, we need look no further: but if (as we assume) we are referred to the Intellectual- Principle we must make clear whether the Intellectual-Principle engendered the wisdom: if we learn that it did, we ask whence: if from itself, then inevitably it is itself Wisdom.

The true Wisdom, then (found to be identical with the Intellectual-Principle), is Real Being; and Real Being is Wisdom; it is wisdom that gives value to Real Being; and Being is Real in virtue of its origin in wisdom. It follows that all forms of existence not possessing wisdom are, indeed, Beings in right of the wisdom which went to their forming, but, as not in themselves possessing it, are not Real Beings.

We cannot, therefore, think that the divine Beings of that sphere, or the other supremely blessed There, need look to our apparatus of science: all of that realm (the very Beings themselves), all is noble image, such images as we may conceive to lie within the soul of the wise —but There not as inscription but as



authentic existence. The ancients had this in mind when they declared the Ideas (Forms) to be Beings, Essentials.

**A.H. Armstrong Translation V. 8. 5.** Some wisdom makes all the things which have come into being, whether they are products of art or nature, and everywhere it is a wisdom which is in charge of their making. But if anyone does really make according to wisdom itself, let us grant that the arts are like this. But the craftsman goes back again to the wisdom of nature, according to which he has come into existence, a wisdom which is no longer composed of theorems, but is one thing as a whole, not the wisdom made into one out of many components, but rather resolved into multiplicity from one. If then one is going to make this the first, that is enough: for it no longer comes from another and is not in another. But if people are going to say that the rational forming principle is in nature, but its origin is nature, from where shall we say that nature has it—is it perhaps from that other? If it is from itself, we shall stop there; but if they are going on to Intellect, we must see at this point if Intellect generated wisdom; and if they assent to this, from where did it get it? If from itself, this is impossible unless it is wisdom itself. The true wisdom, then, is substance, and the true substance is wisdom; and the worth of substance comes from wisdom, and it is because it comes from wisdom that it is true substance. Therefore all the substances which do not possess wisdom, because they have become substance on account of some wisdom but do not possess wisdom in themselves, are not true substances. One must not then suppose that the gods or the “exceedingly blessed spectators ” in the higher world contemplate propositions, but all the Forms we speak about are beautiful images in that world, of the kind which someone imagined to exist in the soul of the wise man, images not painted but real. This is why the ancients said that the Ideas were realities and substances. *[The “images in the soul of the wise man ” (and probably the “ images ” in ch. 4, line 43) come from the speech of Alcibiades in praise of Socrates at the end of the Symposium, where he speaks of the wonderful images which are concealed within his Silenus-like outside: Plato Symposium 215B1-3 and 216E6-217A1. The form of reference (“ someone imagined ”) is curious for a reference by Plotinus to a Platonic passage, but Plotinus is probably attributing the imagination of the Silenus-figure containing divine images to Alcibiades himself rather than to Plato. It brings out excellently that the Forms in Intellect are concrete living realities, not mental abstractions like propositions, a point on which Plotinus is much concerned to insist in this treatise.]*

**Stephen MacKenna translation Ennead 5.8.6.** Similarly, as it seems to me, the wise of Egypt—whether in precise knowledge or by native intuition—indicated the truth where, in their effort towards philosophical statement, they left aside the writing-forms that take in the detail of words and sentences—those characters that represent sounds and convey the propositions of reasoning—and drew pictures instead, engraving in the temple-inscriptions a separate image for every separate item: thus they exhibited the absence of discursiveness in the Intellectual Realm.

For each manifestation of knowledge and wisdom is a distinct image, an object in itself, an immediate unity, not an aggregate of discursive reasoning and detailed willing. Later from this wisdom in unity

there appears, in another form of being, a copy, already less compact, which announces the original in terms of discourse and unravels the causes by which things are such that the wonder rises how a generated world can be so excellent.

For, one who knows must declare his wonder that this wisdom, while not itself containing the causes by which Being exists and takes such excellence, yet imparts them to the entities produced according to its canons. This excellence, whose necessity is scarcely or not at all manifest to search, exists, if we could but find it out, before all searching and reasoning.

What I say may be considered in one chief thing, and thence applied to all the particular entities:

**A.H. Armstrong Translation V. 8. 6.** The wise men of Egypt, I think, also understood this, either by scientific or innate knowledge, and when they wished to signify something wisely, did not use the forms of letters which follow the order of words and propositions and imitate sounds and the enunciations of philosophical statements, but by drawing images and inscribing in their temples one particular image of each particular thing, they manifested the non-discursiveness of the intelligible world, [*On the kind of images of which Plotinus is speaking here see E. de Keyser La Signification de d'art dans les Ennéades de Plotin (Louvain 1955) 60-2, who points out that Plotinus speaks of temples, not of sacred writings, and is therefore not misunderstanding the semi-alphabetic hieroglyphics of the sacred books but speaking of the purely ideogrammatic symbols which do appear on the temple walls.*] that is, that every image is a kind of knowledge and wisdom and is a subject of statements, all together in one, and not discourse or deliberation. But [only] afterwards [others] discovered, starting from it in its concentrated unity, a representation in something else, already unfolded and speaking it discursively and giving the reasons why things are like this, so that, because what has come into existence is so beautifully disposed, if anyone knows how to admire it he expresses his admiration of how this wisdom, which does not itself possess the reasons why substance is as it is, gives them to the things which are made according to it. That, then, which is beautiful in this way, and which is with difficulty or not at all discovered by research to be necessarily like this, if one were to find it out, exists before research and before reasoning ; for instance—for let us take one great example of what I am saying, which will also fit all other cases-

**Stephen MacKenna translation Ennead 5.8.7.** Consider the universe: we are agreed that its existence and its nature come to it from beyond itself; are we, now, to imagine that its maker first thought it out in detail—the earth, and its necessary situation in the middle; water and, again, its position as lying upon the earth; all the other elements and objects up to the sky in due place and order; living beings with their appropriate forms as we know them, their inner organs and their outer limbs—and that having thus appointed every item beforehand, he then set about the execution?

Such designing was not even possible; how could the plan for a universe come to one that had never looked outward? Nor could he work on material gathered from elsewhere as our craftsmen do, using hands and tools; feet and hands are of the later order.

One way, only, remains: all things must exist in something else; of that prior—since there is no obstacle, all being continuous within the realm of reality—there has suddenly appeared a sign, an image, whether given forth directly or through the ministry of soul or of some phase of soul matters nothing for the moment: thus the entire aggregate of existence springs from the divine world, in greater beauty There because There unmingled but mingled here.

From the beginning to end all is gripped by the Forms of the Intellectual Realm: Matter itself is held by the Forms of the elements and to these Forms are added other Forms and others again, so that it is hard to work down to crude Matter beneath all that sheathing of Form. Indeed since Matter itself is, in its degree, a Form—the lowest—all this universe is Form and there is nothing that is not Ideal Form as the archetype was. And all is made silently, since nothing had part in the making but Being and Idea—a further reason why creation went without toil. The Exemplar was the Form-Idea of an All and so an All must come into being.

Thus nothing stood in the way of the Form, and even now it dominates, despite all the clash of things: the creation is not hindered on its way even now; it stands firm in virtue of being All. To me, moreover, it seems that if we ourselves were archetypes, Ideas, veritable Being, and the Idea with which we construct here were our veritable Essence, then our creative power, too, would toillessly effect its purpose: as man now stands, he does not produce in his work a true image of himself: become man, he has ceased to be the All; ceasing to be man—we read —'he soars aloft and administers the Cosmos entire'; restored to the All he is maker of the All.

But—to our immediate purpose—it is possible to give a reason why the earth is set in the midst and why it is round and why the ecliptic runs precisely as it does, but, looking to the creating principle, we cannot say that because this was the way, therefore things were so planned: we can say only that because the Exemplar is what it is, therefore the things of this world are good; the causing principle, we might put it, reached the conclusion before all formal reasoning and not from any premisses, not by sequence or plan but before either, since all of that order is later, all reason, demonstration, persuasion.

Since there is a Source, all the created must spring from it and in accordance with it; and we are rightly told not to go seeking the causes impelling a Source to produce, especially when this is the perfectly sufficient Source and identical with the Term: a Source which is Source and Term must be the All-Unity, complete in itself.

**A.H. Armstrong Translation V. 8. 7.** this All, if we agree that its being and its being what it is come to it from another, are we to think that its maker conceived earth in his own mind, with its necessary place in the centre, and then water and its place upon earth, and then the other things in their order up to heaven, then all living things, each with the sort of shapes which they have now, and their particular internal organs and outward parts, and then when he had them all arranged in his mind proceeded to his work? Planning of this sort is quite impossible—for where could the ideas of all these things come from to one who had never seen them? And if he received them from someone else he could not carry them out as craftsmen do now, using their hands and tools; for hands and feet come later. The only

possibility that remains, then, is that all things exist in something else, and, since there is nothing between, because of their closeness to something else in the realm of real being something like an imprint and image of that other suddenly appears, either by its direct action or through the assistance of soul—this makes no difference for the present discussion—or of a particular soul. *[The insistence on the immediate and intimate relationship of the intelligible and sensible universes and the comparative unimportance of the mediation of soul should be noted. Soul in Plotinus never has a world of its own intermediate between the intelligible and sensible worlds; it belongs to both worlds, and is normally thought of as linking them; but here it seems to be hardly necessary even as a link.]* All that is here below comes from there, and exists in greater beauty there: for here it is adulterated, but there it is pure. All this universe is held fast by forms from beginning to end: matter first of all by the forms of the elements, and then other forms upon these, and then again others; so that it is difficult to find the matter hidden under so many forms. Then matter, too, is a sort of ultimate form; *[This passing remark, which is very difficult to reconcile with Plotinus's normal view of \*\*\* as the principle of evil (there are no evil Forms in Plotinus), is the nearest he ever comes to a totally positive valuation of matter]* so this universe is all form, and all the things in it are forms; for its archetype is form; the making is done without noise and fuss, since that which makes is all real being and form. So this is another reason why the craftsmanship of Intellect is also without toil and trouble. And it is the fashioning of an All, so an All is the maker. There is nothing to hinder the making, and even now it has the mastery, and though one thing obstructs another, nothing obstructs it; for it abides as an All. But I think also that if we were archetypes and real being and forms all at once, and if the form which makes things here below was our real being, our craftsmanship would have the mastery without toil and trouble. And even now, man also is a craftsman, of a form other than himself since he has become something else, what he is; for he has ceased to be the All now that he has become man; but when he ceases to be man he "walks on high and directs the whole universe" *[Cp. Plato Phaedrus 246C1-2.]*; for when he comes to belong to the whole he makes the whole. But to return to our main theme: you can explain the reason why the earth is in the middle, and round, and why the ecliptic slants as it does; but it is not because you can do this that things are so there; they were not planned like this because it was necessary for them to be like this, but because things there are disposed as they are, the things here are beautifully disposed: as if the conclusion was there before the syllogism which showed the cause, and did not follow from the premises; *[the world-order]* is not the result of following out a train of logical consequences and purposive thought: it is before consequential and purposive thinking; for all this comes later, reasoning and demonstration and the confidence *[produced by them]*. For since *[the intelligible world-order]* is a principle, all these follow immediately and just as they do; and in this sense it is well said that we should not enquire into the reason why of a principle, *[Cp. Aristotle Physics A 5. 188a27-30, though Plotinus is as usual very much adapting Aristotle's doctrine to his own system and his own purpose]* and of a principle like this, the perfect one, which is the same as the goal; but that which is principle and goal is the whole all together and is without deficiency.

**Stephen MacKenna translation Ennead 5.8.8.** This then is Beauty primally: it is entire and omnipresent as an entirety; and therefore in none of its parts or members lacking in beauty; beautiful thus beyond

denial. Certainly it cannot be anything (be, for example, Beauty) without being wholly that thing; it can be nothing which it is to possess partially or in which it utterly fails (and therefore it must entirely be Beauty entire).

If this principle were not beautiful, what other could be? Its prior does not deign to be beautiful; that which is the first to manifest itself —Form and object of vision to the intellect—cannot but be lovely to see. It is to indicate this that Plato, drawing on something well within our observation, represents the Creator as approving the work he has achieved: the intention is to make us feel the lovable beauty of the archetype and of the Divine Idea; for to admire a representation is to admire the original upon which it was made.

It is not surprising if we fail to recognize what is passing within us: lovers, and those in general that admire beauty here, do not stay to reflect that it is to be traced, as of course it must be, to the Beauty There. That the admiration of the Demiurge is to be referred to the Ideal Exemplar is deliberately made evident by the rest of the passage: 'He admired; and determined to bring the work into still closer likeness with the Exemplar': he makes us feel the magnificent beauty of the Exemplar by telling us that the Beauty sprung from this world is, itself, a copy from That.

And indeed if the divine did not exist, the transcendently beautiful, in a beauty beyond all thought, what could be lovelier than the things we see? Certainly no reproach can rightly be brought against this world save only that it is not That.

**A.H. Armstrong Translation V. 8. 8.** Who, then, will not call beautiful that which is beautiful primarily, and as a 'whole, and everywhere as a whole when no parts fail by falling short in beauty? Certainly [one would not call beautiful] that which is not as a whole beauty itself, but has a part of it, or not even any of it. Or if that is not beautiful, what else is? For that which is before it does not even want to be beautiful; for it is this which first presents itself to contemplation by being form and the contemplation of intellect which is also a delight to see. For this reason Plato, wishing to indicate this by reference to something which is clearer relatively to ourselves, represents the Craftsman approving his completed work, wishing to show by this how delightful is the beauty of the model, which is the Idea.

For whenever someone admires a thing modelled on something else<sup>2</sup>, he directs his admiration to that on which the thing is modelled. But if he does not know what is happening to him, that is no wonder: since lovers also, and in general all the admirers of beauty here below, do not know that this is because of the intelligible beauty: for it is because of the intelligible beauty. Plato deliberately makes it clear that he refers the "was delighted" to the model by the words which follow: for he says, "he was delighted, and wanted to make it still more like its model", [*The reference is to Plato Timaeus 3707—D1. But there is nothing in Plato to suggest the interpretation given by Plotinus here, which is wholly based on his own doctrine that all perfect activity is contemplation, and that creation or action should be the spontaneous reflex of contemplation: this was fully expounded in the first part of the present work, III. 8, and applied to the creation of the universe in ch. 7 of this treatise*] showing what the beauty of the model is like by saying that what originates from it is itself, too, beautiful because it is an image of the intelligible

beauty: for, if that was not transcendently beautiful with an overwhelming beauty, what would be more beautiful than this visible universe? Those who blame it, then, do not do so rightly, except perhaps in so far as it is not the intelligible world.