

# *Plotinus and the Identity Theory of Truth*

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## *Abstract*

In this paper I argue that, in *Enn.* V 5[32] and V 3[49], Plotinus defends a version of the identity theory of truth – the view that truth consists in a form of identity between what is thought or said and what is the case. For Plotinus, truth obtains only in the Intellect and consists in the identity between the Intellect itself and its objects of thought. I also argue that, similarly to modern identity theorists, Plotinus’ endorsement of the identity theory stems from dissatisfaction with the notion of truth as correspondence. If the best we can do is to think or say things that merely correspond to reality, then we shall never capture the reality we wish to think or say something about and so never attain truth proper. Some scholars have argued that Plotinus’ doctrine of the Intellect in *Enn.* V 5[32] and V 3[49] is a response to sceptical arguments, such as the ones advanced by Sextus Empiricus in M VII. Others have played down that role of ancient Scepticism in Plotinus’ doctrine of the Intellect. While maintaining that Scepticism does play a role in Plotinus’ epistemology, I finally contend that this role can be fully clarified only if one looks at his doctrine of truth as identity.

## *1. The general argument*

According to identity theories of truth, truth consists in some form of identity between what is thought (or said) and what is the case. Identity theories of truth are best described and understood as a critical reaction to correspondence theories of truth.<sup>1</sup> If the best we can do is to think or say things that merely correspond to reality, then we shall never capture the reality we wish to think or say something about and so never attain truth proper. Identity theorists therefore have normally no problems with the intelligibility of the notion of correspondence as such, but rather insist that the very notion of correspondence opens a gulf between thought and reality that can never be bridged, and so threatens to jeopardise the whole project of discovering the truth about the world. Identity theorists’ concerns are well illustrated by the following passage from Frege, who is often regarded as one of the starting points for contemporary revivals of the identity theory of truth:

**T1:** A correspondence, moreover, can only be perfect if the corresponding things coincide and are, therefore, not distinct things at all (...) It would only be possible to compare an idea with a thing if the thing were an idea too. And then, if the first did correspond perfectly with the second, they would coincide. But this is not at all what is wanted when truth is defined as the correspondence of an idea with something real. For it is absolutely essential that the reality be distinct from the idea. But then there can be no complete

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<sup>1</sup> For a presentation of modern identity theories of truth, see R. Gaskin, “The Identity Theory of Truth”, in E. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2021 Edition), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/truth-identity/>>.

correspondence, no complete truth. So nothing at all would be true; for what is only half true is untrue. Truth cannot tolerate a more or less.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper, I wish to argue that Plotinus defends some version of the identity theory of truth. More particularly, he maintains that truth presupposes identity between thought and reality and hence truth can only be found in the Intellect, Plotinus' second and "knowing" hypostasis. Moreover, I shall also try to show that his motivations for endorsing an identity theory are in many respects similar to those behind contemporary approaches: as with contemporary identity theorists, Plotinus regards the notion of truth as correspondence as inadequate to capture the nature of truth and hence to guarantee knowledge of reality. My analysis will be mainly based on *Enn.* V 5[32], 1-3 (*That the intelligibles are not outside the Intellect, and on the Good*) and some parallel texts in *Enn.* V 3[49], 1-5 (*On the knowing hypostases and that which is beyond*).

In Frege's passage T1, the endorsement of the identity theory of truth seems to stem from sceptical considerations about the notion of truth as correspondence: correspondence threatens to open a gulf between thought and reality that could never be bridged. Is this the case for Plotinus as well? In this paper, I will argue that scepticism, and ancient Scepticism, plays a role in Plotinus' rejection of truth as correspondence and his endorsement of the identity theory of truth. More particularly, my view is that Plotinus' endorsement of the identity theory is in part the result of his engagement (the term is left deliberately vague) with a series of sceptical arguments along the lines of those presented by Sextus Empiricus in M VII (esp. 284-312, 354-387)<sup>3</sup>. In the arguments Sextus argues that human thought cannot know external things by relying on representations provided by sense-perception. For, even if representations should faithfully represent external things, they nonetheless will always be distinct from the things they represent. Thus, if thought bases its access to the external things on the representations provided by the senses, and by extension on representations in general, it will never grasp the external things themselves but only representations of them. Plotinus accepts the arguments but insists that they do not apply to the Intellect. For not only does the Intellect grasp its objects in a non-representational way, but it also knows them by being identical with them, by being them.

The influence of the Sceptical tradition on Plotinus' epistemology is a much-debated issue in Plotinian scholarship. Most interpreters recognise that Scepticism plays some role in Plotinus' doctrine of the Intellect and his epistemology more generally, but the way this role is declined considerably varies from one interpretation to another<sup>4</sup>. The view that Plotinus' doctrine of the Intellect in *Enn.* V 5 and V 3 should be construed as an answer to Sextus-

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<sup>2</sup> G. Frege, "Der Gedanke. Eine Logische Untersuchung", *Beiträge zur Philosophie des deutschen Idealismus* 2 (1918-1919), pp. 58-77, part. p. 60. English translation: A.M. Quinton – M. Quinon (trans.), "The Thought: A Logical Inquiry", *Mind* 65 (1956), pp. 289-311, in part. p. 291.

<sup>3</sup> As is known, this is the first of two books *Against the Logicians*, generally known as *Adversus Mathematicos* (=M), VII-VIII. More cursory treatments of the same issues can also be found in Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism* (=PH), I, 19-20; 94; II, 51; 72-75.

<sup>4</sup> For a good summary of the different approaches, see S. Magrin, "Sensation and Scepticism in Plotinus", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 39 (2010), pp. 249-97, in part. pp. 249-54. The first to notice significant parallels between Plotinus' discussion in *Enn.* V 5 and V 3 and Sextus Empiricus' argument in M VII was É. Bréhier (trans.), *Plotin. Ennéades V*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 1931 (CUF Série grecque - Collection Budé), pp. 37-48.

style sceptical arguments has been defended by Wallis<sup>5</sup> and a few others, including myself in a previous paper.<sup>6</sup> O'Meara provides a particularly strong version of this view by attributing to Scepticism a somewhat foundational role in the development of Plotinus' doctrine of the Intellect – a role analogous to the one that the Sceptical doubt plays for Augustine or Descartes in the establishment of certain and unassailable truths.<sup>7</sup> In many ways, Kühn's extensive analysis of Plotinus' doctrine of self-knowledge can be seen as the point of arrival of this interpretative tradition. For Kühn, Plotinus endorses and pushes to the extreme the sceptical arguments against the possibility of knowing external objects distinct from the knowing subject. Therefore, he constructs his own theory of the Intellect, and in particular his view on the Intellect's self-knowledge, in such a way as to make it unassailable by sceptical arguments. Even more radically, on Kühn's reconstruction, responding to the sceptical arguments also involves abandoning the subject-object model of knowledge that such arguments presuppose and endorsing Plotinian self-knowledge as the only valid model of knowledge.<sup>8</sup>

Other interpreters have been far more cautious. Chiaradonna, for instance, contends that the characteristic claims about intellectual knowledge which Plotinus presents in V 5 and V 3 cannot be construed as answers to sceptical arguments.<sup>9</sup> For Plotinus does not believe that sceptical arguments could be a real threat to his theory of intellectual knowledge. Plotinus does use sceptical arguments in V 5 and V 3, but only to illustrate or clarify claims he has independent reasons to endorse. More radically, Emilsson has argued that Plotinus' use of the sceptical material is purely instrumental.<sup>10</sup> Plotinus uses sceptical arguments and sceptical terminology, but recasts them to fit his own metaphysical and epistemological distinctions. Finally, on the other end of the spectrum, it has been denied that Scepticism plays any significant role in Plotinus' epistemology. For instance, Taormina has recently argued that, in V 5, Plotinus does not engage with the Sceptical tradition, but rather with Epicurus' theory of sense-perception, and it is therefore the rejection of this theory that leads him to conceptualise the salient features of the Intellect's mode of thinking.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> R. Wallis, "Scepticism and Neoplatonism", in W. Haase (ed.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt, Part II*, vol. 32. 2, De Gruyter, Berlin-New York 1987, pp. 911-54.

<sup>6</sup> G. Galluzzo, "Il tema della verità in Plotino", *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 10 (1999), pp. 59-88.

<sup>7</sup> D.J. O'Meara, "Scepticism and Ineffability in Plotinus", *Phronesis* 45.2 (2000), pp. 240-251. Magrin, "Sensation and Scepticism" (above, n. 4) argues that an approach similar to O'Meara's can be extended from the case of intellectual knowledge to sense-perception.

<sup>8</sup> W. Kühn, *Quel savoir après le scepticisme? Plotin et ses prédécesseurs sur la connaissance de soi*, Vrin, Paris 2009 (Histoire des doctrines de l'antiquité classique 37). Kühn's approach, often overtly critical of Plotinus' arguments, is peculiar. What is more, Kühn does not engage much with previous literature on Plotinus and Scepticism and does not seem to see his own work as part of an interpretative tradition, as it clearly is.

<sup>9</sup> R. Chiaradonna, "Plotino su pensiero, estensione e percezione sensibile: Un dualismo cartesiano?", in R. Chiaradonna (ed.), *Il Platonismo e le scienze*, Carocci-Roma Tre, Roma 2012 (Colloquium Philosophicum Nuova Serie/3. Collana del Dipartimento di Filosofia dell'Università Roma Tre), pp. 81-99.

<sup>10</sup> E.K. Emilsson, "Plotinus on the Objects of Thought", *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 77.1 (1995), pp. 21-41; Id., "Cognition and its Object", in L. Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge pp. 217-49; Id., *Plotinus on Intellect*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2011, in part. Ch. 3.

<sup>11</sup> D.P. Taormina, "What is known through sense perception is an image'. Plotinus' tr. 32 (*Enn.* V 5) 1.12-19. An anti-Epicurean argument?", in A. Longo – D.P. Taormina (eds.), *Plotinus and Epicurus. Matter, Perception, Pleasure*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 2006, pp. 113-30.

Since the relevance of the sceptical tradition to Plotinus' doctrine of the Intellect is so controversial, it may be helpful to clarify right from the start where I think that Sextus' arguments are relevant. In none of the aforementioned studies is any significant connection made between sceptical arguments and Plotinus' rejection of the correspondence theory of truth and his consequent endorsement of an identity theory<sup>12</sup>. But this connection should be made and is crucial to understanding the role of scepticism. In V 5, the crucial text for my reconstruction, Plotinus wishes to argue that truth is always in the Intellect and so the Intellect is never erroneous. Here, I agree with Chiaradonna that this is a conclusion Plotinus never seriously doubts and somehow takes for granted. He needs, however, to provide a *philosophical account* of how this is the case. He needs in other words to show what the Intellect's cognition must be like if it has to be always accompanied by truth. To do so involves showing that the Intellect's cognition cannot be structurally analogous to that characteristic of other cognitive powers, and especially sense-perception, which are vulnerable to the arguments that Sextus advances against representations-based forms of cognition. Thus, in presenting Plotinus' version of the identity theory of truth, I do not mean to imply that scepticism has a foundational role to play in Plotinus' endorsement of the identity theory of truth or that Plotinus endorses the theory in order to block sceptical arguments about truth. My reconstruction is compatible with the more cautious approach that scepticism is used to illustrate or to strengthen views that Plotinus has independent reasons to maintain. At the same time, the relevance of scepticism for Plotinus' theory of truth should not be underestimated. For, as we have seen, the motivations for endorsing an identity theory of truth include sceptical concerns about the ability of the correspondence theory to bridge the gap between thought and reality.

My argument will proceed as follows. In Section 2, I briefly present Sextus' arguments. In Section 3, I show, in line with Wallis, that Plotinus is familiar with Sextus-style arguments and takes them to be effective against any representational account of sense-perception and by implication against any representation-based theory of intellectual knowledge. Section 4 will be devoted to Plotinus' notion of truth and to my contention that it should be understood as an identity theory. In Section 5, I show that the identity theory of truth is also relevant to Plotinus' defence of the Intellect's self-knowledge in V 3. Section 6 will examine two alternative reconstructions of V 5 that differ from mine in some crucial respects. These are Emilsson's anti-representationalist reconstruction of Plotinus' argument and Taormina's claim that V 5 should be read as a piece of anti-Epicurean polemic, as these interpretations either minimise

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<sup>12</sup> Partial exceptions are Emilsson, "Plotinus on the Objects of Thought" (above, n. 10), pp. 28-29 and "Cognition and its Object" (above, n. 10), pp. 37-38, who briefly talks about correspondence and identity, but offers a reconstruction of Plotinus' argument that radically differs from mine; and Kühn, *Quel savoir après le scepticisme?* (above, n. 8), pp. 144-156, whose analysis of truth in Plotinus in terms of self-knowledge is rather at odds with my approach (see below, n. 39). H. J. Blumenthal, "Plotinus and Proclus on the criterion of truth", in P. Huby – G. Neal (eds.), *The Criterion of Truth. Essays Written in Honour of George Kerferd together with a Text and Translation (with Annotations) of Ptolemy's On the Kriterion and Hegemonikon*, Liverpool U.P., Liverpool 1989, pp. 257-80, in part. pp. 266-7, rightly stresses the importance of the notion of truth for the understanding of V 5 but does not offer any general conceptual framework for the particular notion of truth at stake in the treatise. S. Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism. Non-Discursive Thinking in the Texts of Plotinus, Proclus and Damascius*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 2000, p. xiii, attributes to Plotinus an identity theory of truth and regards it as one of the foundational tenets of Neoplatonism. She does not seem, however, to take the expression "identity theory" in a fully technical sense – which is what I wish to do in this paper. Similar considerations apply to B. Ham (trans. and ed.), *Plotin. Traité 49 (V, 3)*, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris 2000, part. pp. 134-41.

or exclude the significance of sceptical arguments for Plotinus' notion of truth. I conclude (Section 7) with some general remarks about the nature of truth in Plotinus<sup>13</sup>.

## 2. Sextus' arguments against representations

I will start with Sextus. The arguments I am interested in appear in the section (343-369) of *M VII* devoted to "the criterion through which", i.e. the section in which the answer to the problem of the criterion of truth is formulated by naming different cognitive powers (senses and thought) and evaluating their credentials to act as a criterion of truth, either separately or jointly. After turning down the separate claims of senses and thought to act as a criterion, Sextus considers the suggestion (354 ff.) that the criterion might be a combination of sense-perception and thought, or, more precisely, that "thought grasps the external things using sense-perception as an instrument".<sup>14</sup> The main argument Sextus provides against this further possibility can be reconstructed in the three fundamental steps:

1. Sense-perception does not supply the external things to thought, but only the effect of the external things upon it (i.e. a presentation of the external things).
2. Thought cannot grasp the effect of the external things upon sense-perception, otherwise it would be self-perception (because it would be affected perception-like and so would be perception).
3. Even conceding that thought grasps the effect of the external things upon sense-perception, it will not know the external things. (i) For the external things are not like their effects on us (i.e. the external thing is unlike the presentation). (ii) But even if we say that the presentation is like the external things, it would be nonetheless distinct from the external things just as all likenesses are distinct from the things they are like.

Here I am interested in step 3) of Sextus' argument, which is worth quoting at some length:

**T2:** (357) (...) And even if it [scil. thought] does grasp the effect (πάθος) upon the senses, it will not know the external things. (i) For the external things are not like the effects in us, and the appearance (φαντασία) differs by a long way from the thing that appears (...) (ii) In addition, even if we concede that the external things are like the effects in us, it is absolutely not the case that thought will apprehend the external things by grasping the effects in us. For what are like certain things are other than those things they are like. (358) For this reason, if thought comes to know the things that are like the external things, it does not come to know the external things, but the things that are like them<sup>15</sup> (trans. Bett).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> For the Greek text of Plotinus, see Plotini *Opera*, ed. P. Henry – H.R. Schwyzer, Oxford U.P., Oxford 1964-1982 (Oxford Classical Text). The translation used throughout this article is: Plotinus, *Enneads*, Vol. I-VI., A.H. trans. by A.H. Armstrong, Harvard U.P., Cambridge MA 1969-1988 (Loeb Classical Library).

<sup>14</sup> Sextus, *M VII*, 354, cf. Sexti Empirici *Opera Omnia*, vol. II, ed. H. Mutschmann, Leipzig, Teubner 1914, p. 81: Λείπεται ἄρα λέγειν ἀμφοτέρα, τουτέστι τὴν διάνοιαν ὡς ὑπουργῶ χρωμένῃ τῇ αἰσθήσει λαμβάνειν τὰ ἐκτός.

<sup>15</sup> Sextus Empiricus, *M VII*, 357-358, p. 82 Mutschmann: (...) κἂν λάβῃ δὲ τὸ τῶν αἰσθήσεων πάθος, οὐκ εἴσεται τὰ ἐκτός. ἀνόμοια γὰρ ἐστὶ τὰ ἐκτός τοῖς περὶ ἡμᾶς πάθεσιν, καὶ μακρῶ διαφέρει ἢ φαντασία τοῦ φανταστοῦ (...) ἄλλως τε, κἂν ὅμοια δῶμεν εἶναι τοῖς περὶ ἡμᾶς πάθεσιν τὰ ἐκτός, οὐ πάντως τὰ περὶ ἡμᾶς πάθη λαμβάνουσα ἢ διάνοια καταλήφεται τὰ ἐκτός. τὰ γὰρ ὅμοια τισιν ἕτερα ἐστὶν ἐκείνων τῶν οἷς ὅμοιά ἐστιν. διόπερ εἰ τὰ ὅμοια τοῖς ἐκτός ἢ διάνοια γνωρίζει, οὐ τὰ ἐκτός γνωρίζει ἀλλὰ τὰ ὅμοια ἐκείνους.

<sup>16</sup> R. Bett (trans. and ed.), *Sextus Empiricus. Against the Logicians*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge, 2005, p. 70.

In T2, the term that Bett translates as the “effect” upon the sense is *πάθος*, i.e., more literally, the “affection” of the senses. Sextus argues that, if thought relies on affections of the senses, it will not know the external things. The structure of Sextus’ argument is bipartite: thought will not know the external things, (i) whether the affections are unlike the external things themselves or (ii) whether they are like them. The use of the notions of similarity and dissimilarity (like/unlike) suggests that the *πάθη* Sextus is talking about have representational content. In line with this, in T2 *πάθος* is used interchangeably with *φαντασία*, i.e. a “presentation” of the external object, which certainly has representational content and is a representation of the external object. Thus, Sextus’ passage contains a radical critique of the cognitive status of any representation-based account of sense-perception and by implication of any account of thought in which thought draws on the material coming from sense-perception. Even if it is formally confined to sense-perception and perception-based thought, however, Sextus’ argument is so general in character to be easily repackagable as a critique of the cognitive status of any representation-based form of knowledge, whether perceptual or intellectual knowledge. On this generalised version of the argument, any cognitive faculty or power that relies on representations of its putative objects will never grasp such objects and will have no knowledge of them. This is exactly the way Plotinus takes argument, as we shall shortly see.

Sextus makes two points against sense representations, which correspond to the two horns of the dilemma we have just considered: (i) either representations are unlike the external objects or (ii) they are like them.<sup>17</sup> (i) First, he says that representations are unlike the objects they represent. I take it that Sextus’ point here is that representations do not or may not represent the objects they purport to represent as they are – and in this sense they are unlike the objects. Thus, thought will not apprehend the external objects, if the representations through which it is supposed to apprehend such objects are unlike them. That this is the correct interpretation of Sextus’ first point seems to be confirmed by Sextus’ discussion earlier on in M VII, 190-200, of the Cyrenaics’ position, according to which “affections” (*πάθη*) are the criterion of truth.<sup>18</sup> This view is predicated on the principle that, while we may be in error about the properties of the things that produce our affections, we are never in error about the affections themselves, i.e. the way we are affected.<sup>19</sup> One point the Cyrenaics make to show that we may be in error about the properties of external things is that, for instance, to be affected whitely is no guarantee that the thing that produced the affection in us is actually white.<sup>20</sup> For one can be affected whitely also by non-white things and more generally the same affections can be produced by objects with entirely different properties. Thus, representations can be very unlike the things they represent in terms of correspondence between their representational content and the objects they represent.<sup>21</sup> (ii) Second, Sextus argues that, even if representations are conceded to be like the objects they represent, thought will never apprehend the external objects, because representations are not the external objects themselves. Thus, even if representations should represent external objects accurately, thought will not know external objects in that representations and external objects remain distinct.

<sup>17</sup> For a similar, but not entirely identical, argument, see Sextus Empiricus, *PH* II, 72-75.

<sup>18</sup> For the relevance of the Cyrenaics, see Wallis, “Scepticism and Neoplatonism” (above, n. 5), pp. 913-16.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Sextus Empiricus, *M* VII, 191; 194.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Sextus Empiricus, *M* VII, 192.

<sup>21</sup> For the Cyrenaics’ theory of knowledge, see V. Tsouana, *The Epistemology of the Cyrenaics*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 1998.

Sextus' point here is metaphysical: representations are metaphysically distinct from external objects. This is so because representations are the effects of the objects' action on the faculty, and cause and effect are always distinct. Before we move to Plotinus, let me note one final thing about this passage, that is, Sextus' insistence on the objects being external to the faculty. This suggests that there must be a connection between the externality of the objects and the claim that thought can never apprehend them. This connection is exploited and pushed to the extreme by Plotinus.

### 3. Plotinus' argument in V 5[32], 1-2.

My general aim in this paper is to show that such arguments as the ones presented in the previous section play a role in Plotinus' rejection of the correspondence theory of truth and his consequent endorsement of an identity theory of truth. The first step in this direction is to flesh out Wallis's claim that Plotinus is familiar with Sextus-style arguments and takes them to be effective against any representational account of sense-perception, and by implication against any theory of intellectual knowledge that is based on a representational account of sense-perception. More than that, Plotinus believes that any account of intellectual knowledge that makes it structurally analogous to sense-perception is vulnerable to Sextus-style arguments. This is what I aim to show in this section. In the next, I will address the identity theory of truth.

The crucial text for my analysis is the first part of *Enn. V 5[32]*, which is significantly entitled *That the intelligibles are not outside the Intellect, and on the Good*. The first three chapters of the treatise are about the internality of the objects of thought, while the rest is about the good. Plotinus' starting point in the treatise is the claim that the second hypostasis, the Intellect, can never be false and so believe what is not the case. Thus, the Intellect is always true and truth is always in the Intellect. Plotinus' aim in the first three chapters of the treatise is to provide a philosophical account of this claim, i.e. to show what the Intellect's cognition must be like if it has to be always accompanied by truth. How does he go about this? By showing first of all that the Intellect's cognition is not representational in character and so is not vulnerable to the arguments someone like Sextus might level against representation-based theories of knowledge. Plotinus' argument contains several lines of thought, but the main one can be summarised in the following steps:

- A) The Intellect can never be in error and believe what is not. The true intellect, in other words, must always be true. (V 5[32], 1.1-6).
- B) Therefore, the Intellect cannot base its knowledge on demonstration. For even assuming that it knew something by demonstration, some must be self-evident to it. (V 5[32], 1.6-12).
- C) But, with regards to things that are self-evident, where does it acquire the confidence that they are so? Certainly, not through sense-perception. For, (i) in the case of objects of sense-perception, it is unclear whether they do not exist in the underlying subjects, but only in the affections of the sense-organs, and sense-perception needs intellect or discursive thought to make judgements about them.<sup>22</sup> (ii) And even if it is conceded that

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<sup>22</sup> V 5[32], 1.15 is the only mention in the argument of discursive thought (*διάνοια*), the mode of cognition that is characteristic of the soul (the Soul as a hypostasis, the World-Soul and the individual soul). For reasons that will become apparent below, Plotinus is particularly interested in making a contrast with the model of sense-perception. But it is clear from the general thrust of his argument that the objects of the Soul's cognition are not internal in the

- they exist in the underlying subjects, what is known through sense-perception is an image of the thing and not the thing itself: for the thing itself remains outside. (V 5[32], 1.12-19).
- D) It follows that intellectual knowledge, the knowledge that is characteristic of the Intellect, cannot be understood according to the model of sense-perception. (V 5[32], 1.24-28; 1.46-49).
- E) This means that the objects of the Intellect cannot be external to it: the Intellect knows its objects by having them. For, if the objects of the Intellect are external to it, the Intellect will not possess truth, but falsehood. (V 5[32], 1.50-68; 2.1-9)
- F) More precisely, the Intellect knows its objects by being identical with them, by being them. For, if the objects of the Intellect are distinct from it, the Intellect will not possess truth, but falsehood. (V 5[32], 1.28-30; 1.32-41).
- G) Thus, truth in the Intellect cannot consist in a form of agreement with something else, i.e. in a form of correspondence between thought and reality, but rather in some form of identity between the two. (V 5[32], 2-18-24).

Step A) in the argument is a general statement of the thesis Plotinus wants to give a philosophical account of: the Intellect is always true and is infallible.<sup>23</sup> The expression in V 5, 1.2, *μη τὰ ὄντα δοξάζειν*, which I neutrally paraphrased as “believe what is not”, admits of a weaker and a stronger reading. On the weaker reading, it could simply mean “make false judgements”, “believe what is not the case”. Strictly speaking, of course, the Intellect does not “believe”, but knows, and does not make judgements, either, as judging is a discursive activity characteristic of the Soul, not of the Intellect.<sup>24</sup> But the verb *δοξάζω* could here be used to designate an unspecified form of intellectual cognition or grasp, to be further determined. However, on a stronger and possibly more plausible reading, the expression *τὰ ὄντα* could mean “what is real”, “the real beings”, and even “the true beings”.<sup>25</sup> For the Intellect’s objects of thought are Plato-style Forms, i.e. intelligible contents of thought that are also the real or true beings.<sup>26</sup> Thus, on the stronger reading, Plotinus would state right from the start that not only is the Intellect’s cognition always true, but it is also about the true beings, which are its objects of thought. Thus, the Intellect cannot fail to grasp the true beings, its objects of thought.

We can leave aside Step B), i.e., that true intellectual knowledge cannot be based on demonstration, as this is less relevant to my general argument.<sup>27</sup> Steps E), F), G lead to Plotinus’ understanding of the notion of truth and will be discussed at length in the next section. That discussion will include an explanation of Plotinus’ shift from the claim in E) that

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way the objects of the Intellect are. For more on this, See Emilsson, *Plotinus on Intellect* (above, n. 10), pp. 142-3. Moreover, the short discussion of knowledge by demonstration in Step B) may be an allusion to discursive thought, at least to the discursive thought of individual souls.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Plot, *Enn.* V 9[5], 2.21-22.

<sup>24</sup> Cf., e.g., Plot, *Enn.* V 3[49], 2.2-9.

<sup>25</sup> See, for instance, Plot., *Enn.* V 3[49], 5.27-28; V 8[31], 4. 46-47; V 9[5], 3.7; 5.13; 5.43; 6.1, where the expression clearly has this meaning.

<sup>26</sup> The presentation of the Intellect as the place of Plato’s Forms, the true beings, and so as the true Being itself is particularly evident *Enn.*, V 9[5], in part. Chs. 5-10. This early treatise covers, in a simplified and less sophisticated way, much of the same ground as V 5[32], 1-3, including the doctrines of the internality of the Intellect’s objects and of the identity between the Intellect and its objects.

<sup>27</sup> For an analysis of this step see, P.-M. Morel, “Plotinus, Epicurus and the problem of intellectual evidence. Tr. 32 (*Enn.* V 5) 1”, in Longo-Taormina (eds.), *Plotinus and Epicurus* (above, n. 11), pp. 96-112, in part. pp. 96-102.

the objects of the Intellect must be internal to it to the arguably stronger claim in F) that they must not be other than, i.e. must be identical to, it. Let us focus, for the time being, on Steps C) and D), i.e. Plotinus' assessment of the suggestion that intellectual knowledge can be based on sense-perception and the general conclusion he intends to draw from such an assessment.

In Step C), Plotinus presents an argument to the effect that the Intellect cannot know the truth through sense-perception. The argument is strongly reminiscent of Sextus' passage **T2** and may be worth reading in full:

**T3:** From where will it [the Intellect] acquire the confidence (πίστιν) that things are so? For there is a lack of confidence about even those objects of sense-perception which seem to inspire the strong confidence in their self-evidence, whether their apparent existence (τὴν δοκοῦσαν ὑπόστασιν) may be not in the underlying realities, but in the ways the sense-organs are affected (...) For even if it is agreed that they are in the underlying sense-realities which sense-perception is to grasp, that which is known by sense-perception is an image of the thing (τοῦ πράγματος εἶδωλον), and sense-perception does not apprehend the thing itself (αὐτὸ τὸ πρᾶγμα): for that remains outside<sup>28</sup>.

**T3** has been at the centre of a scholarly controversy about the nature of sense-perception in Plotinus. On the face of it, this text seems to present an anti-realist and representational theory of sense-perception, according to which sense-perception does not grasp the properties of the external objects, but only images and representations of them. This is strongly suggested by the contrast between “images” and “the thing itself” that is introduced in the final lines of the text. This has created problems for those interpreters, like Emilsson, who argue for an interpretation of Plotinus' theory of perception in terms of direct realism<sup>29</sup>. On this view, sense-perception perceives sensible objects and their properties directly, without the mediation of any image or representation internal to the perceiving faculty. The reading of **T3** that Emilsson offers to align it with direct realism about perception will be examined in Section 6. But a couple of observations may help us to place **T3** in its appropriate argumentative context. For it seems wrong to read **T3** in isolation from what precedes and follows it. Sense-perception is introduced to give some content to the distinction in B) between things that the Intellect knows by demonstration and things that are self-evident to it. People who maintain that the Intellect knows its objects by demonstration are forced to concede that not everything can be demonstrated and at least some things must be self-evident to the Intellect. The suggestion is then advanced that the things that are self-evident get their evidence from sense-perception<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> Plot., *Enn.* V 5[32], 1.11-19: πόθεν δὲ αὐτῷ πίστιν, ὅτι οὕτως ἔχει, παρέξεται; ἐπεὶ καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς αἰσθήσεως, ἃ δὴ δοκεῖ πίστιν ἔχειν ἐναργεστάτην, ἀπιστεῖται, μὴ ποτε οὐκ ἐν τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις, ἀλλ' ἐν τοῖς πάθεσιν ἔχει τὴν δοκοῦσαν ὑπόστασιν καὶ νοῦ δεῖ ἡ διανοίας τῶν κρινούντων· ἐπεὶ καὶ συγκεχωρημένου ἐν τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις εἶναι αἰσθητοῖς, ὧν ἀντίληψιν ἡ αἴσθησις ποιήσεται, τό τε γινωσκόμενον δι' αἰσθήσεως τοῦ πράγματος εἶδωλόν ἐστι καὶ οὐκ αὐτὸ τὸ πρᾶγμα ἡ αἴσθησις λαμβάνει· μένει γὰρ ἐκεῖνο ἔξω.

<sup>29</sup> E.K. Emilsson, *Plotinus on Sense-Perception*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 1988, Ch. 6.

<sup>30</sup> An interesting question is why Plotinus considers perception, in addition to intellectual knowledge, as a source of self-evident and undemonstrable premises of demonstration. Riccardo Chiaradonna (in correspondence) has suggested to me that Galen's lost *On Demonstration* may be the source of Plotinus' argument here. For there, Galen argues that what is evident to sense-perception or to the intellect must be accepted as true, and so it is sense-perception and intellectual knowledge that provide undemonstrable premises. See R. Chiaradonna, “Common Conceptions and Philosophical Enquiry: Plotinus and Porphyry”, in Id., *Ontology in Early Neoplatonism. Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2023 (CAGB. Quellen und Studien), pp. 187-204, par. pp. 191-3, for the

This suggestion is discarded in **T3** (=C)), as sense-perception is inadequate to guarantee the kind of evidence intellectual cognition requires. The focus of the argument, therefore, is not the introduction of Plotinus' own views on sense-perception, but to show the inadequacy of sense-perception to provide the Intellect with the evidence required. If this is correct, then Plotinus may not even be speaking in propria persona here, i.e. may not even be using his own view of sense-perception to make the point, and may be using as a model a theory of perception that he believes is particularly inadequate in the relevant respect. An interpretation along these lines has been defended by Taormina, who thinks that in **T3** Plotinus attacks Epicurus' theory of sense-perception. I will discuss Taormina's interpretation in Section 6. For the time being, we may want to keep an open mind as to whether **T3** presents Plotinus' own views on the nature of sense-perception or someone else's theory.

There is another, and more important, aspect of **T3** that needs to be taken into account. The role of **T3** is to prepare the ground for the claim in D) that the Intellect's knowledge cannot be understood by taking sense-perception as a model. This claim is further unpacked in F) as the claim that the objects of the Intellect cannot be external to it, but must be internal. Thus, Plotinus must be using a model of sense-perception which sets itself in direct opposition to the model of intellectual knowledge he wishes to endorse. And it is here that Sextus becomes relevant. A comparison with the arguments in M VII clearly shows that, whether or not the theory of perception that is being considered is Plotinus', it is an anti-realist and representational theory of perception – a theory where a distinction is made between the external sensible objects, or their properties, and the internal, subjective, representations of them in the perceiving faculty.<sup>31</sup> This point is easy to see. Exactly like Sextus, Plotinus levels a two-step criticism against a representation-based theory of sense-perception. The first step covers the case in which sense-perception is unlike its objects, as Sextus puts it; the second deals with the case in which it is like them. (i) There is in principle no guarantee that perceptual representations will correspond to how things are in the objects that produce them. Here, Plotinus' point seems to be even more radical than Sextus'. He observes that we lack the confidence that the apparent existence (τὴν δοκοῦσαν ὑπόστασιν) of the objects of perception is indeed in the underlying objects, i.e. in the outside world, and not only in the affections, i.e. representations, of the perceiving faculty. So, on one reading, the cases that Plotinus has in mind are not cases of simple misrepresentation of the external world, as it was for Sextus, but rather of radical illusion, if it is the existence of the objects, i.e. the bodies, that is at stake here. The text, however, does not need to be taken so radically. The existence Plotinus is talking about may be the existence of the properties of the bodies and not of the bodies themselves and the point may simply be that sense-perception may not present

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claim that Plotinus was familiar with Galen's *On Demonstration* and its main doctrines (for Galen's doctrine of demonstration, see B. Morison, "Logic", in R.J. Hankinson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Galen*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 2008, pp. 66-115, par. pp. 70-5). Chiaradonna's suggestion about V 5, 1 is indirectly confirmed by P. Kalligas, *The Enneads of Plotinus. A Commentary*, Vol. 2, trans. by N. Koutras, Princeton, Princeton - Oxford 2023, pp. 305-6, who mentions among the sources of Plotinus' argument in V 5[32], 1.6-12 Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* VIII 3, 6.7-7.4. But the main source for that section of *Strom.* VIII may well be Galen's *On Demonstration* (see M. Havrda, "Galenus Christianus? The Doctrine of Demonstration in *Stromata* VIII and the Question of its Source", *Vigiliae Christianae* 65(2011), pp. 343-75).

<sup>31</sup> This interpretation is also endorsed by Wallis, "Scepticism and Neoplatonism" (above, n. 5), pp. 915-16; O'Meara, "Scepticism and Ineffability" (above, n. 7), p. 244; and Kalligas, *The Enneads of Plotinus* (above, n. 30), p. 306.

the properties of bodies as they are in their extra-cognitive existence, i.e. as they are. This reading seems to be confirmed by VI.3[44], 10.15-16, where Plotinus describes “the apparent existence” (τὴν δοκοῦσαν ὑπόστασιν) of a sensible substance as a “congress” (σύνοδον), i.e. a conglomeration, of perceptible qualities. Here, clearly, the phrase “the apparent existence” (which recurs identical in T3) of a sensible substance should not be taken to imply that the sensible substance appears to exist (but may not exist), but rather that a sensible object is a conglomeration of qualities that appear, i.e. manifest themselves, to the senses.<sup>32</sup> Thus, it is the properties of a sensible object in their perceptible existence that are at stake, and not the existence of the sensible object as such. This reading would align even more closely Plotinus’ point with Sextus’ cases of misrepresentation of the external world by sense-perception. To recall just one example: the same representation can be produced by objects with entirely different properties, as Sextus makes clear in his presentation of the Cyrenaics’ view on the criterion of truth.<sup>33</sup> (ii) Second, Plotinus further argues that, even if what is in the perceiving faculty should correspond content-wise to what is in the object, sense-perception will not grasp the object itself, but only an image of it: for the object remains outside.

The close parallelism between the arguments presented by Sextus and Plotinus’ discussion of sense-perception in V 5[32] shows that the contrast between the image of the thing and the thing itself should be understood as the contrast between a representation of the thing in the perceiving faculty and the external thing. Throughout V 5[32], 1 the notion of image is further clarified in terms of impressions (τύποι):<sup>34</sup> in the case of sense-perception, and of any cognition modelled upon sense-perception, the faculty receives impressions that are the result of the action of the external object on the faculty. Although the full implications of the impression language will be clarified in Section 6, it seems clear that impressions are images of the external objects by being representations of them. Thus, Plotinus’ argument in C)-E)

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<sup>32</sup> For Plotinus’ view of sensible objects as bundles of inessential qualities, see the recent discussions (and the relevant literature) in R. Chiaradonna, “Plotinus on Sensible Particulars and Individual Essences”, in A. Torrance – J. Zachhuber (eds.), *Individuality in Late Antiquity*, Routledge, Farnham - Burlington 2014, pp. 47–61; Id., “Plotinus on Hylomorphic Forms”, in D. Charles (ed.), *The History of Hylomorphism: from Aristotle to Descartes*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2023, pp. 197–220. See also P. Kalligas, “The Structure of Appearances: Plotinus on the Constitution of Sensible Objects”, *Philosophical Quarterly* 61 (2011), pp. 762–82.

<sup>33</sup> Plotinus’ view of sensible objects as bundles of inessential qualities may explain one apparently awkward feature of the highly polemical discussion in V 5, 1, i.e. that Plotinus does not consider, not even to explicitly rule it out, the option that the Intellect might grasp intelligible contents by abstraction from sensible objects, i.e. the objects of perception. The reason is that, for Plotinus, abstraction does not work as a model even at the level of the human thought and of the human soul. For, if sensible objects are bundles of inessential qualities, then abstracting the content of such qualities would not get the human soul any closer to grasping the true, intelligible essences of things. By contrast, for Plotinus, intelligible contents are grasped by the human soul by activating the inborn forms that it contains in itself, the forms the human soul has from the Intellect, as these are just the intelligible forms in the human soul (see V 3 [49], 2.9-11; 4.21-22). Of these forms in the soul perceptible qualities are just inessential imitations (see VI 3 [44], 15.35-36). If abstraction does not work for the human soul, so much the less can it work as a model of cognition for the Intellect, as the Intellect on any account must grasp the real essences of things. On the connection between Plotinus’ view of the metaphysical structure of sensible objects and abstraction, see R. Chiaradonna, “Plotinus’ Account of the Cognitive Powers of the Soul: Sense Perception and Discursive Thought”, *Topoi* 31 (2012), pp. 191–207. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for pointing me to the issue of abstraction and the importance of its absence from Plotinus’ discussion.

<sup>34</sup> Plot., *Enn.* V 5[32], 1.24-27; 46-49. Cf. also V 5[32], 1.62-68.

seems to be straightforward enough. T3 ends with the claim that, in the case of sense-perception, the thing itself remains outside, i.e. is external to the perceiving subject. This lays the ground for Plotinus' claims in D) and E). To be immune to Sextus-style arguments, intellectual knowledge cannot be structurally analogous to sense-perception, cannot in other words be based on representations produced on the Intellect by external objects. It follows that the objects of the Intellect must be internal to it.

A close consideration of Sextus' text will also help us to clarify one final, and crucial, aspect of Plotinus' argument in V 5[32]. In *M* VII.357-358 Sextus argues that, if thought bases its apprehension of things on the representations provided by sense-perception, it will not grasp the external things. And this is true even if representations should faithfully present the properties of external objects. For a representation, being the effect of the external things on the perceiving faculty, will always be distinct from the external things themselves, which are its cause. Representations, therefore, are always other than, that is, metaphysically distinct from, the objects that produce them. Now, Plotinus seems to endorse this aspect of Sextus' argument as well, as he constantly switches in V 5[32], 1-2 from an internality claim to an identity claim<sup>35</sup>. Not only must the objects of the Intellect be internal to it, they must also be identical to it; or alternatively: the objects of the Intellect must be internal by being identical to it. As my hesitation suggests, the relationship between the internality claim and the identity claim is rather complex. Intuitively, the identity claim could be taken to *strengthen* the internality claim: internality is not enough to guarantee intellectual truth and knowledge, and identity is required. Or it could be taken to *clarify* the internality claim: internality should be understood as identity. I will discuss the relationship between the two claims in the next section. To do so, however, requires introducing Plotinus' conception of truth as identity and his rejection of the correspondence theory of truth.

#### 4. From internality to identity: Plotinus' notion of truth

Unlike Sextus, Plotinus makes explicit the connection between the rejection of representation-based knowledge and the rejection of a correspondence theory of truth. In a long passage at the end of V 5[32], 1, Plotinus explicitly claims that, if the Intellect knows only images or representations of intelligible objects, i.e. its objects of thought, then the Intellect's thought will be false and contain no truth, as the Intellect will not know its objects but only their representations<sup>36</sup>. Plotinus is even more explicit at the end of chapter 2 when he says that the truth of the Intellect cannot possibly consist in an agreement between the Intellect and something else, i.e. something distinct from the Intellect<sup>37</sup>. I take Plotinus' point to be that if the best the Intellect can do is to have thoughts that agree with how things are, then the Intellect will never know the truth about things in that its thoughts will always remain distinct from the things they are about. Thus, truth cannot consist in a relation of correspondence or agreement between the Intellect (or his thoughts) and something else. What truth consists in, by contrast, is a form of identity between the Intellect (or its thoughts) and its own objects, in such a way that what is thought and what is the case are one and the same. Only by being identical with its objects can the Intellect bridge the

<sup>35</sup> Plot., *Enn.* V 5[32], 1.30-32; 63-65.

<sup>36</sup> Plot., *Enn.* V 5[32], 1.50-68.

<sup>37</sup> Plot., *Enn.* V 3[49], 2.9-24, part. 18-20.

gap between thought and reality. The following passage makes Plotinus' line of argument particularly clear:

**T4:** So that the real truth is also there [scil. in the Intellect], which does not agree (συμφωνοῦσα) with something else, but with itself, and says nothing other than itself, but it is what it says and it says what it is.<sup>38</sup>

A basically identical passage appears in *Enn.* V 3[49], 5.<sup>39</sup> I take the phrase “[the real truth] does not agree with something else, but with itself” to be a marker of Plotinus' rejection of a correspondence theory of truth.<sup>40</sup> Agreement or correspondence between two distinct things, thought and reality or language and reality, cannot guarantee that truth is in the Intellect. The phrase “[the Intellect] is what it says and it says what it is” has puzzled interpreters. Emilsson, for instance, observes that the phrase is clearly metaphorical since strictly speaking the Intellect does not say anything.<sup>41</sup> The Intellect knows its objects intuitively and not discursively, that is, it does not reason about its objects, but simply grasps them.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the Intellect's mode of cognition is not propositional.<sup>43</sup> Although it must be true in some sense that the Intellect grasps a plurality of intelligible contents, it is not propositions that it grasps, but Forms. Thus, it is true that the Intellect does not say anything, strictly speaking, especially if “saying” is taken to be equivalent to “stating”. But on the interpretation that I am suggesting, Plotinus' wording makes perfect sense. Plotinus is working from within the framework of the correspondence theory of truth. According to the correspondence theory, truth obtains when what is said corresponds to or agrees with what is (the case), where “is said” should be taken to stand for every form of expression of reality, be it verbal, mental or what have you. Now, Plotinus has been arguing that truth cannot be some form of correspondence or agreement between two distinct things, as this will not be truth but falsehood. Truth must rather consist in identity between what is said and what is. Plotinus expresses exactly this idea by saying that “[the Intellect] is what it says and it says what it is”, where the language is for the last time the standard language of the correspondence theory of truth that is being rejected. And the use of the ‘saying’ language is appropriate, as the Intellect's activity of thinking has content, expresses something, and actually is its own content and what it expresses. The peculiarities of Plotinus' formulation of his own understanding of truth may mislead readers into thinking

<sup>38</sup> Plot., *Enn.* V 5[32], 2.18-20: ὥστε καὶ ἡ ὄντως ἀλήθεια οὐ συμφωνοῦσα ἄλλω ἀλλ' ἑαυτῇ, καὶ οὐδὲν παρ' αὐτῆν, ἄλλο λέγει. <ἀλλ' ὃ λέγει>, καὶ ἔστι, καὶ ὃ ἔστι, τοῦτο καὶ λέγει.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Plot., *Enn.* V 3[49], 5.25-26. See also for the same idea and a similar wording, Plot., *Enn.* III 7[45], 4.11-12. Kühn, *Quel savoir après le scepticisme?* (above, n. 8), pp. 146-7, puts emphasis on the reflexive character of Plotinus' formulation and so seems to think that it is crucial that it is truth itself, and not something else, that truth agrees with. This would parallel Plotinus' account of the Intellect's self-knowledge as genuinely reflexive. Differently from Kühn, I do not take the Intellect's self-knowledge to play an explanatory role with respect to Plotinus' conception of truth. Quite the reverse, I think that Plotinus rejects truth as correspondence and endorses truth as identity, and this applies to the issue of self-knowledge as well. For more on my approach see below, Section 5, pp. 299-300.

<sup>40</sup> See W. Kühne, *Conceptions of Truth*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2003, pp. 102-3.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Emilsson, “Cognition and its Object” (above, n. 10), p. 237; Id., *Plotinus on Intellect* (above, n. 10), p. 165.

<sup>42</sup> On the Intellect's non-discursive mode of cognition, see: Emilsson, *Plotinus on Intellect* (above, n. 10), Ch. 4; Rappe, “Reading Neoplatonism” (above, n. 12).

<sup>43</sup> Although I cannot go into the issue here, it seems to me to be clear enough that, for Plotinus, the objects of non-discursive thought are not propositional. See the comprehensive discussion of the issue in Emilsson, *Plotinus on Intellect* (above, n. 10), Ch. 4.

that his is a limiting case of the correspondence theory of truth, the case in which what is said and what is the case coincide. But this way of presenting things would be wrong, for Plotinus' point is precisely that correspondence is not enough and should be replaced with identity, even though to make this point he may need to use the language of the correspondence theory of truth. We certainly can say that there are two things and that they are identical, but what there is in reality is just one thing.

One final issue needs to be addressed. In Section 3, when considering Plotinus' reaction to Sextus-style arguments against representation-based theories of knowledge, I noted that Plotinus repeatedly switches from the internality claim (the objects of the Intellect are internal to it) to the identity claim (the objects of the Intellect are identical to it). Now, we have seen that it is the identity claim, and the ensuing endorsement of the identity theory of truth, that results from Plotinus' rejection of the correspondence theory of truth. So, what is the relationship between the internality claim and the identity claim for Plotinus? In the abstract, the two claims do not seem to be equivalent. It is not difficult to imagine a model of intellectual knowledge in which the objects of thought are internal to the intellect, but remain distinct from it. Actually, from a historical perspective, this model is arguably endorsed before Plotinus by a number of Middle Platonists who maintain that Forms are Divine Ideas. There are several variants of this general doctrine, as Divine Ideas can be presented as simply in the Divine Intellect or as thoughts of the Divine Intellect, or even as products of it. This is not the place to go into the details of the doctrine of Divine Ideas, but what is clear is that, at least on some versions of this model, the objects of the Divine Intellect may well be internal, but not fully identical to it<sup>44</sup>. Be that as it may, one might rightly argue that only an identity claim can block all the implications of Sextus' sceptical arguments. For Sextus' point that knowledge is impossible because objects are distinct from the intellect's thoughts about them is taken care of by the identity claim, but not (or not obviously) by the internality claim alone.

If Plotinus wants to introduce a distinction between the internality claim and the identity claim, then the latter should be seen as a way of strengthening the former. Internality is not enough and identity is needed. But another interpretation suggests itself, according to which the identity claim is a way of clarifying the internality claim, i.e. of explaining what kind of internality is at stake in Plotinus' argument. Internality, in other words, must be understood as identity. If it is true that Plotinus is influenced in his account of the Intellect by Sextus-style sceptical arguments, then one of his main polemical targets in V 5[32] is the claim that the Intellect knows its own objects by receiving impressions that are the result of the causal action on the Intellect of external objects. Against this claim Plotinus argues that the Intellect knows its objects not through impressions, but, as he repeatedly says, by having such objects with itself or, in other words, by having them as internal objects. Thus, the

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<sup>44</sup> On Plotinus' engagement with the doctrine of Divine Ideas see Emilsson, "Plotinus on the Objects of Thought" (above, n. 10) and below, n. 50. In its several variants, this doctrine has been associated with such figures as Philo of Alexandria, Atticus, Alcinous and Numenius. For a short, but effective reconstruction of the history of the doctrine, see Kalligas, *The Enneads of Plotinus* (above, n. 30), pp. 302-5; see also the still important contribution by A.H. Armstrong, "The Background of the Doctrine 'That the Intelligibles are not Outside the Intellect'", in E.R. Dodds *et al.* (eds.), *Les Sources de Plotin, Entretiens sur l'antiquité Classique*, vol. 5, Fondation Hardt, Genève 1960, pp. 393-425. Other classic discussions include M. Jones, "The Ideas as the Thoughts of God", *Classical Philology* 21 (1926), pp. 317-36; A.N.M. Rich, "The Platonic Ideas as the Thoughts of God", *Mnemosyne* 4.7 (1954), pp. 123-33; J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, Duckworth, London 1977; H. Tarrant, *Scepticism or Platonism*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 1985, in part. pp. 115-26.

internality claim is a way to block the idea that the Intellect might know its objects through impressions caused by external objects. However, even though Sextus expresses himself in terms of externality, there is more to his argument than the objects being external to the faculty. For impressions are representations, and representations threaten to make knowledge impossible in a deeper sense: if the intellect's thoughts are representations, the intellect will never know things, simply because the intellect's thoughts are distinct from its objects. To take care of this aspect of Sextus' argument, Plotinus clarifies that the objects of the Intellect are internal in the sense of being identical with it. Thus, the internality claim and the identity claim are not for Plotinus two distinct claims. And it is internality as identity that Plotinus has in mind throughout the argument. The emphasis on the internality claim is possibly the result of Sextus' language, who does not consider the case that the objects of a faculty may be internal to the faculty but distinct from it and works with a model in which the objects of a faculty are external to, and so obviously distinct from, it.

### 5. A word on the Intellect's self-knowledge

It is important to realise that Plotinus' rejection of the correspondence theory of truth and his endorsement of an identity theory emerges in other contexts in which the Intellect's mode of cognition is at stake. Plotinus' discussion of the Intellect's self-knowledge in *Enn.* V 3[49], 1-5 is a case in point. It is not my intention here to analyse Plotinus' argument in detail.<sup>45</sup> I will rather confine myself to a few observations to emphasise the role of the notion of truth. This will show a significant level of parallelism with the account of the objects of thought in V 5[32]. Plotinus maintains that the Intellect must possess genuine self-knowledge and its knowledge must be genuinely reflexive.<sup>46</sup> As is known, this claim is broadly inspired by Aristotle's account of divine intellectual knowledge in *Metaph.* Λ 7 and 9, in all probability through the mediation of Alexander of Aphrodisias' account of the active intellect,<sup>47</sup> and introduces one of the characteristic features of the Intellect's mode of cognition. Similarly to the case of Intellect's infallibility in V 5[32], what Plotinus does in V 3[49], 1-5 is not so much to prove that the Intellect genuinely knows itself. This is rather an assumption he makes from the start. His aim is to provide a *philosophical account* of the Intellect's self-knowledge, i.e. to show how intellectual self-knowledge is possible.<sup>48</sup> Roughly, in Chapters 2-4 of the treatise, Plotinus examines the cognitive faculties that are traceable to the nature of the Soul, that is, perception and discursive thought, and denies that they are capable of either self-knowledge at all or of genuine self-knowledge. Chapters 1 and 5, by contrast, are devoted to an explanation of the Intellect's self-knowledge.

Plotinus' approach in V 3[49] is dialectical, as much as it is in V 5[32]. His strategy is to show what the Intellect's self-knowledge is by excluding models of self-knowledge that do

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<sup>45</sup> For Plotinus on self-intellection, see I. Crystal, "Plotinus on the Structure of Self-Intellection", *Phronesis* 43.3 (1998), pp. 264-86; I. Crystal, *Self-Intellection and its Epistemological Origins in Ancient Greek Thought*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2002; Emilsson, *Plotinus on Intellect* (above, n. 10), pp. 144-52; and the extensive discussion in Kühn, *Quel savoir après le scepticisme?* (above, n. 8), pp. 199-311.

<sup>46</sup> Plot., *Enn.* V 3[49], 1.15-28.

<sup>47</sup> On the role of Alexander of Aphrodisias in Plotinus' doctrine of the Intellect, see: Armstrong, "The Background of the Doctrine" (above, n. 44); Kühn, *Quel savoir après le scepticisme?* (above, n. 8), pp. 361-95.

<sup>48</sup> Plot., *Enn.* V 3[49], 1.12-13; 27-28.

not qualify as genuine self-knowledge. As has been noticed,<sup>49</sup> Plotinus' argument is influenced once again by Sextus' discussion in *M VII*. In *M VII*, 310-312, Sextus argues that thought cannot know itself. For, if thought knows itself, it must do so either (i) as a whole or (ii) by employing one of its parts for the purpose. Neither option, however, is viable. (i) Thought cannot apprehend itself as a whole – for if it did, thought would be an apprehending faculty with no object to apprehend: thought as a whole would be exhausted by the subjective side of knowing and there would be no object to know on the objective side. (ii) Neither can thought know itself by employing one of its parts for the purpose, for in that case the problem will arise of how that part will know itself, either as a whole or by using one of its parts – which would immediately set off an infinite regress. Thought, therefore, cannot know itself.

Now, Plotinus' discussion in *V 3*[49], 1 and 5 is complex and at times difficult to follow. But a few things are clear. He certainly agrees with Sextus that the Intellect cannot know itself by using one of its parts.<sup>50</sup> For self-knowledge by parts is not genuine self-knowledge. In that form of self-knowledge, the part that knows the other(s) will not know itself, and so the Intellect will not know itself as a knowing subject. In other words, self-knowledge by parts is not, as Plotinus puts it, self-knowledge, but one thing knowing another.<sup>51</sup> Thus, Plotinus must accept the first horn of Sextus' dilemma and claim that the Intellect knows itself as a whole, without splitting itself into parts. The issue is to show how this is possible without falling into the difficulty pointed out by Sextus, that is, without making the Intellect devoid of any object of thought and so of any content. Plotinus' solution consists, once again, in the identity between the Intellect and its objects.<sup>52</sup> Since the Intellect is its objects, in thinking its objects the Intellect is literally thinking itself. This should not be understood in the sense that, in thinking its objects, the Intellect thinks something like itself or knows its own nature. The idea is rather that the Intellect's thinking of its objects is the Intellect's thinking of itself, and of itself as a thinking subject.<sup>53</sup> This difficult idea may be clarified if we consider a slight change of emphasis in *V 3*[49] with respect to the discussion of the internality of the objects of the Intellect in *V 5*[32]. In examining the Intellect's self-knowledge, Plotinus puts emphasis, more than he does in the earlier treatise, on the nature of the Intellect as an activity. The Intellect is essentially a constant and timeless activity of thinking and there is no distinction between the substance of the Intellect and its activity of thinking.<sup>54</sup> Consequently, in *V 3*[49] Plotinus

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<sup>49</sup> See É. Bréhier (trans.), *Plotin. Ennéades*, *V* (above, n. 4), p. 32-3; Wallis, "Scepticism and Neoplatonism" (above, n. 5); Crystal, "Plotinus on the Structure" (above, n. 44); Ham (trans. and ed.), *Plotin. Traité 49* (above, n. 12), pp. 100-1; Kühn, *Quel savoir après le scepticisme?* (above, n. 8), pp. 35-44; Kalligas, *The Enneads of Plotinus* (above, n. 30), p. 271.

<sup>50</sup> Plot., *Enn.* *V 3*[49], 1.4-12; 5.1-15.

<sup>51</sup> Plot., *Enn.* *V 3*[49], 1.11-12; 5.15. Perhaps, Plotinus' rejection of the view that the Intellect might know itself with one of its parts, i.e. by splitting into a part that does the knowing and a part that is known, could be seen as an implicit criticism of the 'Forms as Divine Ideas' doctrine, which does not guarantee the degree of unification required of the Intellect's cognition. For, on this doctrine, Forms somehow remain distinct from the subject that knows them. What is clear is that in *V 9*[5], 7.14-18 Plotinus rejects a particular version of this doctrine, i.e. the one according to which the objects of the Intellect are thoughts in the sense that they come into being when the Intellect thinks of them and so are somehow the products of its thinking activity. On Plotinus' view, by contrast, the objects of the intellect are simultaneous with and identical to it, as it were right from the start (on this, see Emilsson, *Plotinus on Intellect* (above, n. 10), p. 156, n. 23; Kühn, *Quel savoir après le scepticisme?* (above, n. 8), pp. 173-6).

<sup>52</sup> Plot., *Enn.* *V 3*[49], 5.21-28.

<sup>53</sup> Plot., *Enn.* *V 3*[49], 5.41-48.

<sup>54</sup> Plot., *Enn.* *V 3*[49], 5.36-41. Positing a distinction between the substance of the Intellect and its activity of thinking would introduce some level of potentiality into the Intellect's substance. For, if the substance of the

puts more emphasis on the point that the Intellect's activity of thinking is the same as the activity of its objects of thought.<sup>55</sup> In other words, the Intellect's objects of thought are not only contents of thought, i.e. Forms, but also acts of thought,<sup>56</sup> and the Intellect is identical to all of them, individually and collectively. For there is no real plurality in the Intellect.<sup>57</sup> Since the identity Plotinus has in mind is an identity between knower and known, this identity can indifferently be described from the subjective side (the objects of the Intellect are acts of thought) or from the objective side (the objects of the Intellect are contents of thought), without any significant difference in doctrine. The Intellect, its thinking activity and its objects are one and the same thing.<sup>58</sup> However, quite apart from differences in emphasis, Plotinus' solution to the problem of the Intellect's self-knowledge is exactly the same as his solution to the problem of the Intellect's infallibility. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that in presenting his account of the Intellect's self-knowledge Plotinus should introduce once again his version of the identity theory of truth and his rejection of the correspondence theory:

**T5:** (...) The contemplation must be the same as the contemplated, and Intellect the same as the intelligible; for, if it is not the same, there will be no truth; for the one who is trying to possess realities will possess an impression (τύπων) different from the realities, and this is not truth. For truth ought not to be the truth of something else, but to be what it says.<sup>59</sup>

The similarities between **T5** and **T4**, taken together with its immediate context, are striking. Exactly as in **T4** and V 3[49], 1-2 more generally, in **T5** Plotinus states that the Intellect does not know its objects through impressions and representations, as this would make its objects external to and distinct from it and would deprive the Intellect of truth. He also says, even more significantly, that truth does not consist in some form of agreement between the Intellect and something else, but in identity between the Intellect and its objects.

But how exactly does the identity theory of truth apply to the case of self-knowledge? And why is it important for this issue as well? I think answers to these questions are more easily provided if we consider what self-knowledge would look like if truth as correspondence were endorsed. If we try to understand the Intellect's self-knowledge in terms of correspondence, then a split will immediately be introduced between the Intellect as knower and the Intellect as known. In light of Sextus-style arguments, this will make the Intellect's self-knowledge difficult to explain. For, even if the split between Intellect as knower and intellect as known is not understood as a division into parts (which Plotinus rejects), still knower and known

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intellect and its activity are distinct, then the Intellect would have in principle the potentiality of not exercising its activity. But no potentiality can be found in the Intellect, since the Intellect is activity, i.e. actuality.

<sup>55</sup> Plot., *Enn.* V 3[49], 5.36-43. Cf. *Enn.* V 9[5], 8.15-19 for a particularly explicit formulation of this idea.

<sup>56</sup> Plot., *Enn.* V 3[49], 5.31-37. This idea is not completely absent from V 5[32], cf. *Enn.* V 5[32], 1.32-38.

<sup>57</sup> The view that there is no real plurality in the Intellect does not exclude a conceptual distinction in the Intellect between subject and object. After all, the Intellect qua knower is distinct, conceptually, from the Intellect qua known – and the metaphysical distinction between the Intellect and the One seems to imply that the Intellect cannot be unqualifiedly simple. For the distinction of subject and object in Plotinus' Intellect, see Emilsson, *Plotinus on Intellect* (above, n. 10), pp. 157-60 (though I disagree with some of his formulations of the distinction in mereological terms, which may wrongly suggest that the distinction is real after all).

<sup>58</sup> Plot., *Enn.* V 3[49], 5.43-44.

<sup>59</sup> Plot., *Enn.* V 3[49], 5.21-26: (...) δεῦ τὴν θεωρίαν ταῦτόν εἶναι τῷ θεωρητῷ, καὶ τὸν νοῦν ταῦτόν εἶναι τῷ νοητῷ· καὶ γὰρ, εἰ μὴ ταῦτόν, οὐκ ἀλήθεια ἔσται· τύπον γὰρ ἔξει ὁ ἔχων τὰ ὄντα ἕτερον τῶν ὄντων, ὅπερ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀλήθεια· τὴν ἄρα ἀλήθειαν οὐχ ἑτέρου εἶναι δεῦ, ἀλλ' ὁ λέγει, τοῦτο καὶ εἶναι.

must be distinct for them to enter into a relation of correspondence. And hence it will become unclear how the Intellect can really be said to know itself. This problem disappears, however, if self-knowledge is understood along the lines of an identity theory. For in this case, knower and known are not two distinct items that are in a relation of correspondence, but one and the same thing. We may still want to distinguish knower and know notionally or conceptually, in line with the duality present in the expression “self-knowledge”, but we should be aware that no real duality corresponds to such distinct notions. Another way of making my general point is to say that, if the Intellect knows itself as an object of thought distinct from itself, as the correspondence theory of truth requires, it does not matter in the least whether or not its self-knowledge is accurate: it does not matter in the least whether or not the Intellect’s self-knowledge is a perfect representation of itself. For the Intellect will not know itself, but something different from itself. This second way of phrasing the point perfectly illustrates the link between Plotinus’ defence of the Infallibility of the Intellect in V 5[32] and his account of the Intellect’s self-knowledge in V 3[49]. In both cases, the model of intellectual knowledge to be rejected is one that explicitly or implicitly views truth as the matching of two distinct items and so tends to present intellectual knowledge as irreducibly representational.

#### 6. *The question of εἶδωλα: representations or expressions?*

We have seen the role that the identity theory of truth plays in Plotinus’ clarification of the Intellect’s mode of cognition. We have also seen in what way sceptical arguments are relevant to Plotinus’ endorsement of the identity theory. In this section, I wish to discuss one crucial aspect of my reconstruction, i.e., the emphasis that I place on the notion of representation. In order to do so, I will go back to V 5[32] and consider two accounts of the argument in the treatise that significantly differ from mine in crucial respects. I will focus on Emilsson’s anti-representational account and on Taormina’s recent contention that the section on sense-perception in V 5[32], 1 (Part C and D of my summary in Section 3) should be read as a piece of anti-Epicurean polemic and not as a response to sceptical arguments.

##### 6.1. *Emilsson on εἶδωλα*

The crucial move in my account is the interpretation of the term “image” (εἶδωλον), which Plotinus repeatedly uses in V 5[32], as meaning or being understandable as “representation”. Thus, for me, the contrast between “images” and “the thing itself” is the contrast between representations and the objects they represent, and as a consequence the contrast between grasping a representation and grasping the thing itself is the contrast between grasping only representations of an object (without grasping the object) and grasping the very object behind the representations. Sense-perception only grasps representations of objects (without grasping the objects themselves), while the Intellect does not work with representations and grasps objects themselves. Of course, according to Plotinus, the Intellect’s manner of cognition is non-representational in a very strong sense in that it presupposes identity between the representing and the represented. Still, the starting point of his argument remains on my view the contrast between representations and the objects themselves and the sceptical implications that this contrast may potentially have. Let us call my interpretation the Representation Interpretation.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> The Representation Interpretation is also defended, if I am not mistaken, by Kühn, *Quel savoir après le scepticisme?* (above, n. 8), pp. 123-32.

Emilsson has advanced an entirely different account of the ground for Plotinus' claim that in the Intellect thought and object are identical.<sup>61</sup> His starting point is an interpretation of the term "image" (εἶδωλον) which is radically different from mine. For Emilsson, an image is in general the expression of a higher reality in a lower level of reality, i.e. the way in which a higher level of reality is present as a trace or image in a lower level of reality. To give one example that is pertinent to the texts we are considering, the sensible qualities of ordinary material objects are for Plotinus just expressions or images in matter of an intelligible nature or essence, which, being intelligible, is also imperceptible.<sup>62</sup> For Plotinus, in other words, sensible objects are only a bunch of sensible qualities in matter, where the sensible qualities are just expressions or images of an imperceptible and intelligible essence. Thus, for Emilsson, the contrast that Plotinus draws between "images" and "the thing itself" is not, as I have argued, the contrast between the representations of an object in a cognitive faculty and the object that representations represent. Rather, the contrast is one between the sensible expressions or images of an intelligible essence in matter and the intelligible essence itself. Consequently, for Emilsson, the opposition between sense-perception and intellectual cognition should be re-thought in light of the non-representational meaning of εἶδωλον. The reason why sense-perception only grasps images of the thing itself is not, as in my interpretation, that sense-perception is stuck with representations and so cannot grasp the objects representations represent. The reason is rather that sense-perception only grasps the sensible qualities of a material object, and such qualities are just expressions or images of the intelligible nature of the object, which remains inaccessible to sense-perception. Analogously, the motivation behind the claim that the objects of the Intellect are internal to it is not, as I suggested, that otherwise the Intellect would know only representations of intelligible objects. The point is rather that the Intellect must know the intelligible nature of things, and not the expressions of such a nature in the sensible world. And the only way to make the Intellect know the intelligible nature of things is to make its objects internal to it – and actually to make its objects identical with it. Let me call Emilsson's interpretation the Expression Interpretation as opposed to my Representation Interpretation. Emilsson does acknowledge some role for the sceptical tradition in Plotinus' argument for the internality of the Intellect's objects of knowledge in V 5[32] as well as for Plotinus' account of self-knowledge in V 3[49]. But his interpretation of εἶδωλον strongly diminishes such a role. For him, Plotinus' view of truth and knowledge is in no sense a response to Sextus-style arguments, but rather the result of the internal theoretical demands of Plotinus' system. Plotinus, we could say, borrows the Sceptics' terminology but reinterprets it in light of his most characteristic ontological and epistemic claims.

Before assessing Emilsson's interpretation, it may be useful to mention another factor that motivates his reading of V.5. For Emilsson, Plotinus' theory of sense-perception is not representationalist, but is rather an instance of direct realism.<sup>63</sup> Sense-perception, in other words, grasps the sensible qualities of material objects directly without the mediation of

<sup>61</sup> See n. 10 above for references.

<sup>62</sup> Emilsson, *Plotinus on Sense-Perception* (above, n. 29), p. 169 n. 18, provides the following texts in support of this view, which is uncontroversially Plotinian: *Enn.* II 4[12], 5.18-19; III 6[26], 7.28; 13.31-2; V 9[5], 3.36-7; 5.18; 13. 4-5; VI 3 [44], 15.26-37.

<sup>63</sup> Emilsson, *Plotinus on Sense-Perception* (above, n. 29). For the representationalist interpretation, see Magrin, "Sensation and Scepticism" (above, n. 4).

representations, presentations etc. Emilsson's account of sense-perception explains why he cannot go along with the Representation Interpretation of V 5[32] and with the reading of the term "image" that it implies. Emilsson takes the section on sense-perception in V 5[32], 1 to present Plotinus' own view.<sup>64</sup> Since Plotinian sense-perception does not use representations, Emilsson thinks, the contrast that Plotinus draws between images and the thing itself cannot possibly be the contrast between representations and external objects. I will come back to this point in a moment when considering Toarmina's account of V 5[32]. But one thing to note already is that, as I have hinted in Section 3, it is unclear whether, when Plotinus introduces sense-perception in V 5[32], he is speaking in propria persona. It is equally possible that his discussion of sense-perception is dialectical and is assuming for the sake of argument an account of sense-perception that he himself does not share. Should this be correct, it would remove one motivation to endorse Emilsson's interpretation.

Emilsson's Expression Interpretation has some advantages. First, the expression meaning of εἶδωλον is certainly well attested in Plotinus' texts, where the term is synonymous with ἵχνος ("trace"), εἰκὼν ("image") or μίμημα ("imitation"), which are similarly used to indicate the way in which a higher level of reality is present in a lower level. Second, Emilsson's interpretation squares with the so-called two-activity theory, which is one of Plotinus' distinctive metaphysical doctrines.<sup>65</sup> For Plotinus, each hypostasis has both an internal and an external activity, the internal activity being the functioning activity of the hypostasis and the external one the creative activity which produces inferior levels of reality. To say as Emilsson does that the images Plotinus talks about are the expressions in matter of an intelligible essence is perfectly in line with the two-activity theory. The sensible qualities in matter are just the products of the intelligible essence's external activity and so are images and expressions in matter of such a nature. No connection with the two-activity theory, by contrast, is detectable in my interpretation.

Despite its advantages, Emilsson's interpretation can hardly be correct as an account of V 5[32], 1-3. Two reasons strongly suggest that the Representation Interpretation should be preferred. The first is Plotinus' use in V 5[32], 1.24-27, but also in V 3[49], 2.10 and 2.12, of the τύπος language, the language of impressions. In the first text, for instance, Plotinus writes:

**T6:** Then the acts of intelligence (νοήσεις) will be impressions (τύποι); but if this is what they are, they come to it from outside and are impacts (πληγαί). But then how will the impressions be made, and what shape are things like intelligibles? And intellection will be of what is external, just like sense-perception.<sup>66</sup>

Unlike εἶδωλον, τύπος ("impression") and πληγή ("impact") do not lend themselves easily to Emilsson's interpretation in terms of expression. Impressions and impacts are clearly presentations of the external objects that are imprinted in the knowing faculty. These impressions are distinct from the qualities of the external objects. Hence, it is no chance that Plotinus says that, if the Intellect knows objects through impressions, then the objects

<sup>64</sup> Emilsson, *Plotinus on Sense-Perception* (above, n. 29), pp. 114-21.

<sup>65</sup> For a presentation of this doctrine and a discussion of the relevant texts, see Emilsson, *Plotinus on Intellect* (above, n. 10), Ch. 1.

<sup>66</sup> Plot., *Enn.* V 5[32], 1.24-27: ἔπειτα καὶ αἱ νοήσεις τύποι ἔσονται· εἰ δὲ τοῦτο, καὶ ἐπακτοὶ καὶ πληγαί. πῶς δὲ καὶ τυπώσεται, ἢ τίς τῶν τοιούτων ἡ μορφή; καὶ ἡ νόησις τοῦ ἕξω ὥσπερ ἡ αἴσθησις.

will remain external, as is the case with sense-perception. For impressions are internal to the faculty, while the objects that produce them are external. Further evidence for this reading comes from *Enn.* IV 6[41], 1.29-32 – a crucial text for the debate about realism and antirealism in Plotinus’ account of sense-perception<sup>67</sup>. In the text, Plotinus states that, if we apprehended impressions (τύπους) of visible objects, we would not be seeing the actual things, but only images (ἰνδάλματα) and shadows (σκιάς) of them, with the result that the things themselves would be different from the things we see. And it is clear that here the notion of τύπος introduces representations of the external things, and not expressions of essences in matter. Now, it has been observed that Plotinus uses the notion of τύπος to introduce some of his key philosophical doctrines.<sup>68</sup> But these non-polemical uses of the notion of τύπος are hardly relevant to the context of V 5. And in any case, even if Plotinus should be prepared in some contexts to endorse the impression model to describe aspects of his own theory of sense-perception,<sup>69</sup> which is disputed, it seems clear to me that in V 5[32] the τύπος language is employed either to describe a model of sense-perception that he ultimately rejects or to stress the limitations of sense-perception from within his own theory. Either way, the Intellect’s cognition cannot be conceived on the impression model: for if it could, the Intellect’s objects would be distinct from it and so the Intellect would not know them.

The language of impressions leads me to the second reason to resist Emilsson’s interpretation, i.e. that Emilsson underestimates the importance of the Sextus-style principle that impressions are metaphysically distinct from the things of which they are impressions. But it is precisely this principle that explains Plotinus’ endorsement of an identity theory of truth. Whether or not impressions represent external things correctly, they remain nonetheless distinct from the things that produce them – which is why we need an identity theory of truth. And this is exactly what Plotinus says, *apertis verbis*, in our text **T5**, which may be worth quoting again here:

**T5:** (...) The contemplation must be the same as the contemplated, and Intellect the same as the intelligible; for, if it is not the same, there will be no truth; for the one who is trying to possess realities will possess an impression (τύπον) different from the realities, and this is not truth. For truth ought not to be the truth of something else, but to be what it says.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>67</sup> For commentary on this text see Emilsson, *Plotinus on Intellect* (above, n. 10), pp. 127-9; Morel, “Plotinus, Epicurus” (above n. 27), p. 110; Taormina, “What is Known” (above, n. 11), p. 126.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Morel, “Plotinus, Epicurus” (above n. 27), pp. 110-11, with appropriate references to key Plotinian texts. A particularly interesting use is to refer to the imprints on the Soul (and on the human soul) of the intelligible forms coming from the Intellect, i.e. the innate forms that the Soul contains in itself (cf. V 3[49], 2. 10 and above, n. 33).

<sup>69</sup> Plot., *Enn.*, V 3[49], 3.1-12 may be a case in point. On this text, see P.-M. Morel, “La sensation messagère de l’âme: Plotin, V, 3[49], 3”, in M. Dixsaut – P.-M. Morel – K. Tordo-Rombaut (eds.), *La Connaissance de soi: études sur le traité 49 de Plotin*, Vrin, Paris, 2002, pp. 208-28; Magrin, “Sensation and Scepticism” (above, n. 4), p. 286-7. Another difficult text in this respect is Plot., *Enn.*, I 1[53], 7.9-16, on which see Emilsson, “Cognition and its Object” (above, n. 10), p. 220; Id., *Plotinus on Intellect* (above, n. 10), p. 129; “Magrin, “Sensation and Scepticism” (above, n. 4), p. 286-7; Chiaradonna, “Plotino su pensiero, estensione e percezione sensibile” (above, n. 9), pp. 87-96.

<sup>70</sup> Plot., *Enn.* V 3[49], 5.21-26.

Although I think that Emilsson's interpretation does not fit the general thrust of Plotinus' argument in V 5[32], it must be admitted that there is a rather difficult passage at the beginning of V 5[32], 2 that seems to invite Emilsson's Expression Interpretation:<sup>71</sup>

**T7:** One must not, then, look for intelligibles outside, or say that there are impressions (τύπους) of the real beings in Intellect, or by depriving it of truth make the intelligibles unknowable and non-existent and finally abolish Intellect itself. But, since one must bring in knowledge and truth and watchfully preserve reality and the knowledge of what each thing is (τί ἕκαστόν ἐστιν) – but not [only] the knowledge of each thing's qualities (ποῖόν τι ἕκαστον), since [if we only had that] we should have an image and trace of realities, and not possess and live with and be fused with realities themselves – we must attribute all [real existences ] to the true intellect.<sup>72</sup>

At first sight, the contrast in T7 between “what each thing is” and “each thing's qualities” seems to square with Emilsson's contrast between the sensible qualities of a material object and the intelligible essence of the object, of which such qualities are expressions in matter. However, since the general line of argument in V 5[32], 1-3 suggests that Emilsson's interpretation can hardly be right, one needs to be cautious in taking the passage quoted as evidence for the Expression Interpretation. After all, the very first lines of T7 present the τύπος language, which, as we have seen, does not lend itself very easily to the Expression Interpretation. Indeed, T7 does not force us to endorse Emilsson's interpretation. Although Armstrong's translation may suggest otherwise, technically Plotinus does not talk of the qualities of objects, but simply of “how each thing is” or “what each thing is like” as opposed to “what each thing is”. And this distinction is fully compatible with the Representation Interpretation. For, if a faculty only knows representations of things, it only knows how things are, what things are like, and not what they really are. After all, Sextus was pointing out, in the best-case scenario, representations of things can be like them and never be the things themselves.<sup>73</sup> Thus, even if the contrast between “how each thing is” and “what each thing is” is verbally similar to Emilsson's contrast between qualities and essences,<sup>74</sup> we do not need to take them as the same opposition. And given the general thrust of Plotinus' argument, we probably should not.

<sup>71</sup> See Emilsson, *Plotinus on Intellect* (above, n. 10), p. 132 for commentary.

<sup>72</sup> *Enn.* V 5[32], 2, 1-9: οὐ τοίνυν δεῖ οὔτε ἕξω τὰ νοητὰ ζητεῖν, οὔτε τύπους ἐν τῷ νῷ τῶν ὄντων λέγειν εἶναι, οὔτε τῆς ἀληθείας ἀποστεροῦντας αὐτὸν ἀγνωσίαν τε τῶν νοητῶν ποιεῖν καὶ ἀνυπαρξίαν καὶ ἔτι αὐτὸν τὸν νοῦν ἀναιρεῖν. ἀλλ' εἴπερ καὶ γνῶσιν δεῖ καὶ ἀλήθειαν εἰσάγειν καὶ τὰ ὄντα τηρεῖν καὶ γνῶσιν τοῦ τί ἕκαστόν ἐστιν, ἀλλὰ μὴ τοῦ ποῖόν τι ἕκαστον, ἅτε εἰδῶλον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἴχνος ἴσχοντας, ἀλλὰ μὴ αὐτὰ ἔχοντας καὶ συνόντας καὶ συγκραθέντας αὐτοῖς, τῷ ἀληθινῷ νῷ δοτέον τὰ πάντα.

<sup>73</sup> Emilsson, *Plotinus on Intellect* (above n. 9), p. 133 also mentions V 9[5], 5.17-19 as a text in support of his interpretation: “What it [scil. the Intellect] thinks is not in the realm of sense-perception, as they suppose. For the form on the matter in the things of sense is an image (εἰδῶλον) of the real form, and every form which is in something else comes to it from something else and is a likeness (εἰκὼν) of that from which it comes”. But this text is only superficially parallel to V 5[32], 1-2. For Plotinus is simply saying, as he should, that the forms of sensible objects are forms in matter and so cannot be the intelligible forms that the Intellect grasps and from which forms in matter come. This is uncontroversial and is not a point Plotinus argues for in V 5, 1-3 where there is no mention of forms.

<sup>74</sup> See in particular Plot., *Enn.* VI 3[44], 15.26-31, where the pronoun ποιόν is used in the sense Emilsson wants. But, while ποιόν is a technical term to indicate a quality (VI 3 is the third of a series of three treatises discussing the Aristotelian categories), the corresponding interrogative pronoun ποῖόν does not need to mean “of what quality” in a technical sense and can have wider application.

## 6.2. Epicureanism and Scepticism in Taormina's account of V 5[32], 1

I wish to move now to Taormina's rather different account of the argument in V 5. Like myself and unlike Emilsson, Taormina takes εἶδωλον to mean the representation of the external objects in the sense organ and not the expression in matter of an intelligible essence. But her reasons for taking this view significantly differ from mine. For Taormina, in V 5[32], 1. 12-19, that is the section of the chapter on sense-perception (= Step C) in my reconstruction), Plotinus is not speaking in propria persona, but is rather engaging with and criticising Epicurus' doctrine of sense-perception. Pushing to the extreme a suggestion by Bréhier,<sup>75</sup> Taormina argues that V 5[32],1 presents a unitary doctrine of sense-perception, which can ultimately be traced back to Epicurus. This doctrine hinges on a few fundamental tenets. (i) The first is the claim, which Plotinus considers and rejects, that sense data are evident to the highest degree and so provides the strongest grounds for "confidence" or "belief", as Taormina translates the crucial term πίστις.<sup>76</sup> (ii) The second tenet is the contrast between image (εἶδωλον) and external (ἔξω), which is cashed out by Plotinus as the contrast between affections (πάθη) and substrates (ὑποκείμενα) on the one hand and image of the thing (τοῦ πράγματος εἶδωλον) and the thing itself (αὐτὸ τὸ πρᾶγμα) on the other.<sup>77</sup> This finds parallels, Taormina argues, in Epicurus' doctrine, according to which perception "occurs through the direct contact between the images originating from external solid objects and sense organs".<sup>78</sup> (iii) This mechanism is further detailed in Epicurean texts as a process whereby the perceiving subject "receives the images or impressions (τύποι) from outside, and with them the properties of the external objects from which they detached themselves".<sup>79</sup> Taormina's argument is rather comprehensive, as it not only includes the examination of texts by Epicurus and Epicurean sources, but also extends to consider polemical testimonia by authors of a different philosophical persuasion, and further texts by Plotinus that bear traces of Epicurus' doctrine of sense-perception. For Taormina, Plotinus' engagement with Epicurus' theory of sense-perception excludes that Sextus' arguments play any role in the discussion of the Intellect's form of cognition in V 5[32].

Now, one may feel that not all comparisons and parallels drawn by Taormina carry equal weight.<sup>80</sup> The contrast, for instance, between the affection internal to the sense organ and the external object is equally emphasised by Sextus, as we have seen. The term ὑποκείμενον, which is of common use and in any case not particularly distinctive of the Epicurean tradition, is also used by Sextus, sometimes with the qualifier ἐκτός ("external"), to indicate the external object.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, the term τύπος is so common in Hellenistic epistemology that it can hardly be taken to suggest, at least in isolation, a connection with Epicurus' theory of perception in particular.

<sup>75</sup> Bréhier (trans.), *Plotin. Ennéades*, V (above, n. 4), pp. 83-4; Cf. Plotini *Opera* (above, n. 13), app. ad V 5[32], 1.12-14.

<sup>76</sup> Taormina, "What is known through sense perception" (above, n. 11), p. 120.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>80</sup> See Emilsson, *Plotinus on Sense-Perception* (above, n. 29), p. 118, for criticisms of Bréhier's suggestions.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. for instance: Sextus Empiricus, *M VII*, 83-4; 195; 206; 344; 364; 382.

But Taormina's remarks on the notion of *πίστις*, confidence or belief, have some force, especially because Plotinus' arguments against the reliability of sense-perception are arguments against the view that sense data are evident to the highest degree and so offer the strongest grounds for confidence or belief.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, there is no doubt that the notion of *εἶδωλον* plays a technical role in Epicurus' epistemology.<sup>83</sup> I personally remain unconvinced that Epicurus is relevant to Plotinus' argument.<sup>84</sup> But Taormina's general interpretation of V 5[32], 1.12-19 cannot be entirely ruled out.

Be that as it may, what is not compelling about Taormina's argument is her contention that, since the section on sense-perception in V 5[32], 1 should be construed as a criticism of Epicurus' theory of perception, sceptical arguments play no significant role in Plotinus' understanding of truth in the Intellect. For, if my reconstruction of the dialectic in V 5[32], 1 is correct, this conclusion is unjustified. The discussion of sense-perception is relevant to the general argument of V 5[32], 1-3 only to the extent that it shows that intellectual cognition cannot be conceived on the model of sense-perception – at least if one wishes to preserve the intuition that intellectual cognition is invariably true and fundamentally infallible. Sense-perception is inadequate because it cannot provide the kind of truth that Plotinus wants to attribute to intellectual cognition. Now, Plotinus may or may not be using his own theory of sense-perception to make this point. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that Taormina is right that he is actually using Epicurus' theory of sense-perception as a model. Still, my general reconstruction of the argument in V 5[32], 1-3 stands. For Epicurus' theory of sense-perception is vulnerable (or at least Plotinus thinks it is) to the sceptical arguments Sextus presents in *M VII*. Epicurus' theory presupposes a distinction between external objects and their images or representations in the perceiving faculty. Therefore, on Epicurus' account, objects remain external to the perceiving faculty. Moreover, they remain metaphysically distinct from the images or representations they produce in the sense. Thus, the sceptical arguments apply, as Plotinus' reasoning implies. Thus, Taormina's claim that in V 5[32] Plotinus presents and criticises Epicurus' theory of sense-perception, even if true, is not incompatible with my claim that sceptical arguments are instrumental to defending an identity theory of truth. For, on any account, sense-perception remains vulnerable to the sceptical arguments.

### 7. Conclusions: Truth in Plotinus

In this paper, I have argued that Plotinus endorses a version of the identity theory of truth in *Enn.* V 5[32] and V 3[49]. I have also shown that his endorsement of the identity theory of truth stems from some form of dissatisfaction with the correspondence theory. If this is the case, it is quite appropriate for Plotinus to use sceptical material in order to justify

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<sup>82</sup> See, however, *Enn.* VI.3[44], 10.16-17, where Plotinus uses *πίστις* in a non-polemical context to refer to the guarantee that sense-perception offers of the being of the perceptible qualities of objects.

<sup>83</sup> More linguistic parallels are offered by Morel. "Plotinus, Epicurus" (above n. 27), p. 109. He points in particular to Plotinus' use of *πληγή* ("impact") to describe a model of sense-perception in which the sense organ receives the shape of sensible things through material images (cf. V 5[32], 1.25); and to his use of *μορφή* (shape) itself to raise the question as to what (literal) shape the Intellect would have if it knew its objects through impressions (cf. V 5[32], 1, 26; 46). Despite this evidence, Morel hesitates to fully endorse Taormina's interpretation. See above, n. 30 and Kalligas, *The Enneads of Plotinus* (above, n. 30), p. 306 for alternative suggestions as to the sources of Plotinus' discussion of sense-perception.

<sup>84</sup> My scepticism is shared by Kalligas, *The Enneads of Plotinus* (above, n. 30), p. 306.

his endorsement of the identity theory. For Sextus' arguments imply – or at least do so on Plotinus' reading – that no truth can ever be obtained if the things that are supposed to be true (representations, propositions, etc.) and the things with respect to which they are true (objects, states of affairs, facts) are distinct. And this is exactly the kind of consideration that opens the way for the endorsement of the identity theory.

My arguments, however, does not imply that Plotinus' doctrine of truth is grounded in his engagement with scepticism. Another side of Plotinus' reflection on truth, which I could not explore in this paper, is his idea that the objects of the Intellect, the objects with which the Intellect is identical, are the true Beings. Thus, the Intellect itself, since it is its own objects and is thinking itself by thinking its own objects, is the true Being and ultimately Truth itself. This ontological notion of truth, according to which truth is a property of things and not of cognitive states, is developed quite independently of sceptical arguments and is rather the result of Plotinus' interpretation of some key texts by Plato, as I have tried to show elsewhere<sup>85</sup>. Plato's realm of Forms is the realm of true Beings and so of the Truth. For Plotinus, the Intellect is not just the realm of Forms, is also identical with the Forms, with each of them and all of them simultaneously. Thus, Plotinus has a unified and comprehensive notion of truth, which merges epistemic and ontological notions in his doctrine of the Intellect.

This seamless fusion of the ontological and epistemic notion of truth is particularly evident in *Enn.* III 7[45], the treatise *On eternity and time*. In Chapter 4, Plotinus argues at some length that eternity, beauty and truth are constitutive attributes of each Form and all Forms, i.e., attributes that characterise each and every Form's being. Each and every Form, and so the Intellect as a whole as the place of Forms, is constitutively eternal, beautiful and true: this is what being is for each and all of them. Without prewarning, Plotinus freely switches in the chapter from the ontological notion of truth as a constitutive property of the intelligible world to the identity theory of truth I have been describing in the previous sections:

**T8:** and There [*scil.* in the Intellect] the truth is not correspondence (*συμφωνία*) with something else, but really belongs to each individual thing of which it is the truth.<sup>86</sup>

The switch from the ontological notion of truth to the identity theory suggests that, for Plotinus, these two aspects of truth come to the same thing and that the identity theory is just one aspect of a more comprehensive notion of truth, in which ontology and epistemology naturally merge. For in the Intellect there is no difference between the truth of beings and the truth of thought. Thus, it is in all probability this comprehensive notion of truth, and not so much Plotinus' desire to respond to the sceptical challenges, that grounds his endorsement of the identity theory. The fact remains, though, that *Enn.* V 5[32] and V 3[49] are mainly concerned with the epistemic notion of truth, and at the epistemic level the identity theory of truth is best presented as a consequence of scepticism about the adequacy of the truth as correspondence. No wonder, therefore, that this is exactly the way it is presented by Plotinus.

<sup>85</sup> Galluzzo, "Il tema della verità" (above, n. 4).

<sup>86</sup> Plot., *Enn.* III.7[45], 4.11-12: καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια δὲ οὐ συμφωνία πρὸς ἄλλο ἐκεῖ, ἀλλ' αὐτοῦ ἐκάστου οὔτερον ἀλήθεια.

