



## A Vision B: The Plotinian Metaphysical Basis

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## A VISION B: THE PLOTINIAN METAPHYSICAL BASIS

By ROSEMARY PUGLIA RITVO

IN the Introduction to the 1937 edition of *A Vision*, Yeats acknowledged a four-year study which focused on the philosophy of Plotinus in the translations of Stephen MacKenna as well as those of Thomas Taylor; this study can be dated between 1925 and 1929.<sup>1</sup> Yeats's statement invites an examination of Plotinian influence on *A Vision B*. The most obvious influence is marked by Yeats's statements comparing his four Principles, 'Husk', 'Passionate Body', 'Spirit', and 'Celestial Body', with the metaphysical Hypostases of Plotinus (B, pp. 193-4).

Yeats introduces his four Principles in what seems to be a late addition to the 1925 text of *A Vision*, and even there compares his concepts to Plotinus' metaphysical states.<sup>2</sup> However, a statement in the B text suggests that he did not understand the Principles until late in 1927, two years after the publication of the A text and the time during which he was immersed in his study of Plotinus. Yeats suggests that he abandoned his readings in philosophy at that time, because a communication from his Instructors clarified the all-important difference between the Faculties and Principles, 'between experience and revelation, between understanding and reason, between the higher and lower mind' (B, p. 22).<sup>3</sup>

Yeats discusses the four Principles, the obverse of his four Faculties of the incarnate soul, in Book II B, 'The Completed Symbol'. That Book II is one of the most revised parts of the B text suggests that Yeats's dissatisfaction with the first edition (A, pp. xii-xiii) may well have been related to his confusion about the four Principles. His embarrassment is reflected in the opening statement of Book II B: 'I knew nothing of the *Four Principles* when I wrote the last Book:<sup>4</sup> a script had been lost through frustration, or through my own carelessness' (B, p. 187). In any case, by

<sup>1</sup> *A Vision* (New York, 1937; rpt. New York, 1967), pp. 19-20; hereafter referred to as B. The Introduction to B is dated by Yeats '1928 and later'. Yeats's statement that he began his philosophic readings 'when the proof sheets [of the 1925 text] came' suggests a starting-date sometime in 1924 or early 1925. He may have been able to alter the first edition in proof.

<sup>2</sup> *A Vision* (London, 1925), pp. 160, 176; hereafter referred to as A.

<sup>3</sup> Yeats received the communication about the Principles between November 1927 and February 1928 while he was residing at the Hotel St. George in Cannes (B, pp. 20-1). See also Joseph Hone, *W. B. Yeats: 1865-1939* (London, 1965), p. 393.

<sup>4</sup> 'The last Book' may refer either to Book I, 'The Great Wheel', completed in 1922 and included in B with little change, or to *A Vision A*.

1927 or early 1928 he had begun to understand the relationship between the Principles and the Faculties, and in 1937 he was explaining them in terms of MacKenna's *Plotinus*.<sup>1</sup>

There has been much controversy about the poet's meaning and much scepticism about his understanding of Plotinus. In spite of its strange terminology and its apparent confusions and contradictions, *A Vision B* is, I believe, a remarkably consistent work which reveals that the poet had carefully studied Plotinus in an effort to understand the 'revelations' of the Instructors.<sup>2</sup> The following discussion should demonstrate that a Plotinian approach to Book II B is an elucidating one. It will be seen that Yeats's spiritual realm is similar to Plotinus' and that basic principles of Plotinus' philosophy are fundamental to Yeats's system.

Plotinus' metaphysical realm is a triad which he called the Hypostases:<sup>3</sup> the First Hypostasis is the One, the Second is the Divine Mind or *Nous* or the Intellectual Principle, and the Third is the Soul of the World.<sup>4</sup> Plotinus says little about the First except that it is beyond Being. He states that the Second Hypostasis arises from the superabundance of goodness in the First. Real Being or Authentic Existence [*sic*] is predicated of the Second and Third Hypostases, but not of the First (V. i. 10). The important term Authentic Existence, which Yeats borrows to explain his own authentic realm, is introduced by Stephen MacKenna in place of the usual English philosophical term 'Real Being' in an attempt to clarify Plotinus' thought.<sup>5</sup>

Four major principles of Plotinus' philosophy which Yeats understood and more or less accepted are: (1) the principle of contemplation, which specifies that all things contemplate or gaze on their priors, out of

<sup>1</sup> In a letter of 25 May 1926 to Olivia Shakespeare, in *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Allan Wade (New York, 1955), p. 715, Yeats suggests the Plotinian influence on his metaphysics.

<sup>2</sup> In *B* Yeats frequently reminds the reader of the primary role of the Instructors (e.g. pp. 70, 71, 75).

<sup>3</sup> *Plotinus*, tr. Stephen MacKenna (London, 1917-30). All quotations from the *Enneads* are from this edition. I shall follow the traditional method of identifying *Ennead*, Tractate, and Section. The reader may find it convenient to consult the one-volume fourth edition, revised by B. S. Page (New York, 1969).

<sup>4</sup> Establishing terminology is important for an understanding of Plotinus. With regard to the Second Hypostasis: MacKenna's use of the term Intellectual-Principle frequently suggests Being-in-Action, subject as opposed to object (see, for example, V. iv. 2). There are two aspects of Soul: the higher Soul which is in the Divine and the lower Soul or Nature which generates the material world. Nature functions as the *Logos* or Reason-Principle of the Universe (see III. viii. 4 and Vol. i. 120).

<sup>5</sup> MacKenna says that 'Real-Being carries some undesirable suggestion of the purely abstract; "The Authentic-Existent" comports something of the notion of Person or Individuality in an august sense and, so, is often . . . nearer to the Plotinian notion' (Vol. i. 124). MacKenna stresses the importance to Plotinus of the notion of Person at the highest levels of existence; it is a prejudice which the philosopher shared with the poet Yeats.

love for and in imitation of that which is prior (III. viii. 7; V. iii. 6): all act springs from vision and is aimed at knowing (III. viii. 7); (2) the law of necessary emanation: as they gaze they are filled by the prior and overflow, generating an image which is in turn inferior to the generator: Plotinus pictures the law of necessary emanation in an image of an overflowing fountain or a waterfall (V. ii. 1); (3) the hierarchical structure of the Cosmos (V. ii. 2), which follows from the concept of sequential generation of images of decreasing accuracy; (4) the continuity of all things, which follows from the idea that nothing is separated from its prior (V. ii. 2).

Before examining the specific Plotinian parallels, I shall provide an orientation to Yeats's cosmology, which I hope will clarify some of his terminology. Yeats envisions all existence in a threefold division:

1. At the lowest level is the world of sense which is made by the gyre of Discord: 'and then Discord separates the elements and so makes the world we inhabit' (B, p. 67). This is the realm of the four Faculties into which being divides (B, p. 86); it is the realm of the incarnate soul (B, pp. 81, 188). Here there is conflict and unceasing division because of desire: 'Life is an endeavour, made vain by the four sails of its mill, to come to a double contemplation, that of the chosen Image, that of the fated Image' (B, p. 94; cf. Plotinus, III. ii. 17).

2. On the next level is the 'homogeneous sphere' formed by Concord. This sphere is 'not the changeless eternity', but an image of the changeless eternity (B, pp. 67-8). It is not truly a sphere (B, p. 188), except when 'evoked from the point of view' of the world of sense (B, p. 89), but it is the first image of the sphere of Ultimate Reality. This spiritual realm is connected with the four Principles, 'where pure thought is possible' (B, p. 82). The four Principles are not the 'homogeneous sphere' of Concord,<sup>1</sup> but 'only' in the four Principles can Concord be found (B, p. 82). I suggest that Concord is found when Spirit and Celestial Body are at rest and in perfect unity; then 'pure thought' becomes reality; at this point Husk and Passionate Body, the two lower Principles, have disappeared (B, p. 192); I believe that Yeats is 'imagining' the 'homogeneous sphere' at the beginning of his description of the three Authentic Existants [*sic*] on pages 193 and 194 of *A Vision B*. It will be seen that the 'homogeneous sphere' is a dynamic reality, which is, for man, the highest conceivable reality and the end of an upward aspiration of soul.

<sup>1</sup> Yeats makes it clear that the life of the Principles is both spiritual and sensible (A, p. 159; B, p. 194). Specifically Yeats indicates that Husk and Passionate Body dominate during life and disappear as part of the 'sphere' (B, pp. 188, 194); thus, when Yeats is imagining the four Principles in the sphere (B, p. 193), he in fact discusses the sphere and then moves to the gyring world of sense at 'Plotinus has a fourth condition' (B, p. 194).

3. The highest level, about which Yeats says little, because it 'can be symbolised but cannot be known,' is Ultimate Reality. 'The ultimate reality because neither one nor many, concord nor discord, is symbolised as a phaseless sphere' (B, p. 193); in this statement Yeats explicitly distinguishes between ultimate reality and the realms formed by Concord and Discord, which are phasal (B, p. 188). Elsewhere he notes that Ultimate Reality must 'be all movement, all thought, all perception extinguished, two freedoms unthinkably, unimaginably absorbed in one another'.<sup>1</sup> 'Unthinkably', 'unimaginably', the unknowable—these negatives reflect Plotinus' own reticence when speaking about the One. Because of man's epistemological limitations, he can only conceive of the unknowable as a partial. Yeats says:

The whole system is founded upon the belief that the ultimate reality, symbolised as the Sphere,<sup>2</sup> falls in human consciousness, as Nicholas of Cusa was the first to demonstrate,<sup>3</sup> into a series of antinomies. (B, p. 187)

'In human consciousness' suggests that incarnate man perceives the highest level of reality only in terms of its manifestation as a series of opposites (see B, p. 193).

Yeats describes the manifestation of the unknowable as a 'falling'. This idea of descent suggests Plotinus' law of necessary emanation which postulates a concomitant production of images, decreasing in accuracy as one moves further down the hierarchy of being. The more accurate images of the unknowable First would clearly be the earlier sequents upon that First. For Yeats the earliest sequent, which he cannot know ('I try'), is the image of the four Principles in the sphere (B, p. 193). To be precise, the Principles are not a sphere (a whole), except from the point of view of the incarnate man (here Yeats); they are multiple and motion can be predicated of them.

In attempting to imagine that which is closest to the unknowable Yeats says:

When I try to imagine<sup>4</sup> the Four *Principles* in the sphere, with some hesita-

<sup>1</sup> 'Pages from a Diary Written in 1930', *Explorations* (New York, 1962), p. 307.

<sup>2</sup> Yeats is inconsistent in his use of the term 'sphere': here Ultimate Reality is 'Sphere' capitalized; elsewhere it is a 'phaseless sphere' (B, p. 193), implying that there is a phasal sphere, which, I believe, is 'the *Four Principles* in the sphere' (B, p. 193; see B, p. 240).

<sup>3</sup> For a consideration of the influence of Nicholas of Cusa on Yeats's philosophy see Virginia Moore, *The Unicorn* (New York, 1954), pp. 339 ff. Moore suggests that Cusa demonstrated through what was later called 'projective geometry' (p. 344) that the antinomies of the world we know are solved in God (p. 341). See also Mario M. Rossi, 'Yeats and Philosophy', *Cronos*, i (1947), 19-24.

<sup>4</sup> Man's epistemological limitations make it difficult to imagine this state of unity in the sphere probably because it cannot be experienced—except in so far as it is imaged in the antinomies of the material world. Plotinus sees man's reasoning power as an inferior act of soul in the sensible realm (IV. iii. 18). Imagination is a phase of this

tion I identify the *Celestial Body* with the First Authentic Existant of Plotinus' *Spirit* with his Second Authentic Existant, which holds the First in its moveless circle; the discarnate *Daimons*, or *Ghostly Selves*, with his Third Authentic Existant or soul of the world (the Holy Ghost of Christianity), which holds the Second in its moving circle. (B, pp. 193-4)

This passage describes Yeats's Divine Realm, the realm of Authentic Existence, of Real Being; what I have termed the 'homogeneous sphere'. It enlists Plotinus' image of concentric circles which the philosopher uses to illustrate the relationship among the three Hypostases:

The total scheme may be summarized in the illustration of The Good as a centre, the Intellectual-Principle as an unmoving circle, the Soul as a circle in motion, its moving being its aspiration. (IV. iv. 16; see also, III. ix. 3)

Yeats's passage does not include a reference to the First Hypostasis, here 'the Good' or centre of the circle; this exclusion is understandable, for, as we have seen, Yeats has already discussed Ultimate Reality (B, p. 193). Furthermore, in recalling MacKenna's term 'authentic existence', which, we remember, is predicated of the Second and Third Hypostases but not of the First, he clearly excludes the Absolute.

The difficulty here lies in understanding Yeats's distinctions into First, Second, and Third Authentic Existants, which are his own invention. He tells us that we should identify his Third Authentic Existant with Plotinus' Third Hypostasis, the All-Soul. How are we to understand the relationship between Yeats's first two Authentic Existants and Plotinus' metaphysics? Since Plotinus' First Hypostasis is excluded from Yeats's discussion, Yeats's First and Second Authentic Existants clearly are not to be identified with Plotinus' First and Second Hypostases. I propose that Yeats's first two Authentic Existants correlate to the two aspects of Plotinus' Second Hypostasis: the First Authentic Existant, Celestial Body, is Plotinus' Second Hypostasis considered as Being; the Second Authentic Existant, Spirit, is the Second Hypostasis considered as act, or using MacKenna's term, the Intellectual-Principle.<sup>1</sup>

A. H. Armstrong points out the complexity of Plotinus' Second Hypostasis:

*Nous* is for Plotinus both thought and object of thought, both the Divine Intellect and the Platonic World of Forms, the totality of real beings. This unity of thought and Forms in a single reality is . . . a complete transformation

Reasoning Soul, and it draws on a memory of greater unity. In Yeats's symbolism, it pictures a sphere rather than a cone: 'The *Principles* . . . are, when evoked from the point of view of the Faculties, a sphere' (B, p. 89).

<sup>1</sup> For purposes of clarity we will follow MacKenna's custom of distinguishing between the act and the essence of the Second Hypostasis by referring to the act as the Intellectual-Principle; the Divine Ideas or Being as the object of intellection.

of the Platonic World of Forms. It is no longer a structure, logically or mathematically conceived, of static universal norms, but an organic living community of interpenetrating beings which are at once Forms and intelligences, all 'awake and alive,' in which every part thinks and therefore in a real sense *is* the whole.<sup>1</sup>

Yeats understood the Second Hypostasis in a way similar to Armstrong's explanation. In the Second Hypostasis there is identity and difference; it is 'an Intellectual-Principle and an Intellective Essence, no concept distinguishable from the Intellectual-Principle, each actually being that Principle. The Intellectual-Principle entire is the total of the Ideas, and each of them is the (entire) Intellectual-Principle in a special form' (V. ix. 8). Yeats reflects this relationship between the Intellectual-Principle and the Ideas in his first definition of Spirit and Celestial Body: they 'are mind and its object (the Divine Ideas in their unity)' (B, p. 187).

Plotinus emphasizes the identity of the Second Hypostasis, warning that it is man's 'separating habit' that causes him to distinguish the thinker from the thought (V. ix. 8), but there is a sense in which we are accurate in making the distinction: for 'not by its thinking God does God come to be; not by its thinking Movement does Movement arise. . . . The object of this intellection must exist *before* [my italics] the intellective act (must be the very content not the creation of the Intellectual-Principle)' (V. ix. 7). Yeats's decision to call the Celestial Body, or 'ideal forms' (B, p. 191), the *First Authentic Existant* reflects a close reading of Plotinus. Perhaps his terminology arose from this statement in *Ennead* V. v. 5: 'What we know as Being, the *first sequent upon The One* [my italics] advanced a little outward, so to speak, then chose to go no further, turned inward again and comes to rest and is now the reality and hearth . . . of the universe.'

With the Second Hypostasis motion and rest begin. To Plotinus all movement springs from contemplation and is aimed at knowledge (III. viii. 7). Contemplation is characteristic of all things. However, the Second Hypostasis is essentially unmoving because its primary act is the act of self-intellection, an 'intellection inbound with Being' (VI. vii. 40; II. iii. 18). As 'Maker of the All', it does not look outside itself but to its own content, the Authentic Beings (V. ix. 5); thus, subject and object are one. Yeats tells us that the Spirit 'holds' the Celestial Body in an 'unmoving circle' (B, p. 194). The term 'holds' refers to the act of contemplation, which is unmoving because '*Spirit's* object is of like nature to itself' (B, p. 198).

Although the Second Hypostasis is essentially unmoving, motion is predicated of it. Yeats represents this idea in his image of Spirit gyring to and from the Celestial Body (B, p. 198). The gyring of Yeats's Spirit

<sup>1</sup> A. H. Armstrong, *Plotinus* (New York, 1962), p. 33.

may be understood partially as a metaphoric statement of contemplation and emanation.<sup>1</sup>

But to Plotinus and Yeats motion in the Authentic Realm does not carry the same meaning as it does in the sensible realm. It is 'timeless', without extension (VI. i. 16). In the Intelligible Realm the Act of Being is not 'upon any future' but upon an 'eternal present' (VI. ii. 8). Yeats echoes: although Spirit appears to us as the future because we seek it 'as complete self-realisation', Celestial Body is 'the timeless' (B, pp. 191-2).

Thus far we have observed that Celestial Body and Spirit are the first to fall from Ultimate Reality: this unity is in fact a duality: 'mind and its object' (B, p. 187); a plurality: 'Divine Ideas in their unity' (B, p. 187); an identity (B, pp. 189, 198); a thinker and an object of thought; a being in motion and at rest. In Yeats's discussion of the first two Authentic Existents we find the five Primals or categories which Plotinus predicates of Authentic Existence. These include Being, Motion, Stability, Identity, and Difference (VI. ii. 8).

Before moving to the next level of Yeats's hierarchy I should like to examine the principles of contemplation and emanation, which are of great importance to the dynamic systems of Yeats and Plotinus. To both men there is at all levels of existence a movement toward self-realization. For Plotinus, the movement is a striving for unity, founded on the love of a subsequent for its begetter (V. i. 6). The intellection or contemplation is achieved in varying degrees according to the nature of the contemplator: some possess the vision completely, others 'in mimicry and in image' (III. viii. 1). The craftsman's act, the artist's act, the acts of human beings—the procreative act—each is the expression of a contemplation (III. viii. 7). But in the divine world as well as in the sensible there is a movement in two directions: the upward or inward movement toward truer unity (the Act of the Essence) and the act going out from the Essence: 'The first Act is the thing itself in its realized identity, the second Act is an inevitably following outgo from the first, an emanation distinct from the thing itself' (V. iv. 2). To Plotinus then every stage of reality is marked by the return to source and the outward flow; each subsequent stage decreases in unity, is a lesser image, until one reaches bare matter, the recipient of form. All things, even matter, strive toward the good, seeking the unity they lack.

<sup>1</sup> The movement of Spirit away from Celestial Body is an image of emanation, but the movement toward Celestial Body suggests the contemplative act of the highest level of Soul, the Intellectualive Soul in Plotinian terms. Here and elsewhere Yeats blurs the distinction between Spirit and Soul (see, for example, B, p. 226). Plotinus too blurs the distinction between the Intellectual-Principle and the Intellectualive Soul (cf. V. iii. 3, V. vi. 1; see Émile Brehier, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, tr. Joseph Thomas (Chicago, 1958), p. 6).



In *A Vision* Yeats indicates a movement toward self-realization on all levels: Spirit moves toward union with itself as object, Celestial Body (B, pp. 188-9); the *Daimon* (an aspect of Soul) moves toward its prior, Spirit (B, p. 189); the incarnate Soul endeavours unsuccessfully to achieve a 'double contemplation' (B, p. 94). To Yeats, as to Plotinus, there are varying degrees of success. The greatest success is in the union of Spirit and Celestial Body: speaking metaphorically about the self-contemplation of the first two Authentic Existents, Yeats tells us that Spirit 'clings to *Celestial Body* until they are one and there is only *Spirit*; pure mind, containing within itself pure truth, that which depends only upon itself' (B, pp. 188-9). As Plotinus says, 'In proportion to the truth with which the knowing faculty knows, it comes to identification with the object of its knowledge' (III. viii. 6); and again, the Intellectual-Principle 'knows itself as self-depending' (V. iii. 6). For Yeats, as for Plotinus, in the sensible world the saint or sage achieves the greatest vision (A, p. 215; cf. III. iv. 6); for him 'the total life has suddenly displayed its source' (B, p. 180).

We have been examining relationships at the highest level of Yeats's realm of Authentic Existence. The next level is the level of the Third Authentic Existent, the soul of the world. This level is identified with Plotinus' Third Hypostasis, the All-Soul. The Third Authentic Existent is not equated with one of the four Principles; rather the soul of the world is 'the discarnate *Daimons*, or *Ghostly Selves*' (B, p. 194).<sup>1</sup> The 'Ghostly Self' is further defined as the term for the particular *Daimon* when it inhabits the 'homogeneous sphere' (B, p. 193). Although Yeats is inconsistent in his use of the two terms (cf. B, pp. 189, 211), the distinction serves to signal the double nature of the soul which is at the juncture of the divine and the sensible.

Plotinus defines the Soul of the World as an emanation of the Second Hypostasis: 'a Form or Idea representing the Divine Intellect as the Divine Intellect represented its own prior, The One' (V. ii. 1). Soul exists on a number of levels; on its highest level it is a transcendent unity (IV. iii. 4), circling the Second Hypostasis and united with it (V. i. 7). From the unity Soul arise the *Logos* of the Universe and the particular differentiated souls (IV. iii. 4; III. ii. 16). The emanation of Soul carries forth the Ideas in the Divine Mind into the sensible order. In its 'weakened vision' it engenders in time; it produces separate images (IV. iv. 14-16). Soul arises from the motionless Intellectual-Principle, but generates, in turn, in a downward movement 'Sense and Nature, the vegetal principle' (V. ii. 1).

<sup>1</sup> Yeats specifies 'discarnate' because the *Daimon* has a relationship with the particular incarnate soul (B, p. 83) which takes it out of the sphere (see B, pp. 189-90).

Yeats's diagram of the triangles on page 194 of *A Vision B* pictures the Soul's relationship to the Authentic Realm and the sensible. The Third Authentic Existant forms the third angle of the upper triangle; this tells us that the Soul of the World arises from the Spirit and the Celestial Body, the Act and Being of Plotinus' Second Hypostasis, and that its highest phase remains on the same level as these Principles, a part of the Authentic Realm. That it 'holds the Second in its moving circle' indicates its contemplation of its prior and its emanation of discrete images in time and space. Specifically for Yeats the Third Authentic Existant is 'reflected first as sensation and its object (our *Husk* and *Passionate Body*), then as discursive reason (almost our *Faculties*)' (B, p. 194). These two reflections correspond to Plotinus' Unreasoning and Reasoning phases of the incarnate soul (IV. iii. 23).

Plotinus identifies the first emanation of the All-Soul as the Reason-Principle of the Universe. This Reason-Principle or *Logos* is a 'radiation' from both the Intellectual-Principle and the Soul of the World (III. ii. 16; cf. Yeats's lower triangle, B, p. 194). This governing or harmonizing Principle (III. ii. 2) is not a perfect unity (III. ii. 16). It is a unification of conflicting Reason-Principles (soul-parts or *Logoi*), some of which remain in unity above and some of which are reflected into the sensible (IV. i. 1). Plotinus states that the Intellectual Cosmos contains the 'unembodied' souls while souls here have entered body and 'undergone bodily division'.

Yeats's Ghostly Selves and *Daimons* are similar to Plotinus' Reason-Principles. The Ghostly Selves are the Reason-Principles remaining in unity in the sphere, and the incarnate *Daimons* are the *logoi* of particular souls. In *A Vision A* the *logos* function of the *Daimon* is clear: 'She is that being united to man which knows neither good nor evil, and shapes the body in the womb, and impresses upon the mind its form' (A, p. 220).

We have discussed Plotinus' idea that all things seek their priors; that all act springs from contemplation and is aimed at knowledge (III. viii. 7). Yeats's discussion of the *Daimons* indicates a similar upward movement. Spirit is 'the *Daimon's* knowledge' (B, p. 189): this statement is logical because the Spirit, an aspect of the first emanation, would be prior to the *Daimon*, an aspect of the Third. Spirit is the object of the *Daimon's* contemplation. The *Daimon*, in achieving Vision of the Spirit, 'knows all other *Daimons* as the Divine Ideas in their unity. They are one in the *Celestial Body*' (B, p. 189). Yeats here is referring to the identity which is attendant upon true knowing and which is postulated of the highest level of being.

Plotinus stresses that Souls may return to their origin in the Supreme. Man may know himself by the Intellectual-Principle and become identical with it (V. iii. 4). This movement toward 'rest unbroken' is described in

*Ennead* V. i. 4, in a moving passage which Yeats seems to echo throughout Book II B. Rest, one of the five Primals of Authentic Existence, preserves identity (V. i. 4). Yeats may have had in mind this final identity, the end of all striving, when the soul knows itself at the highest level as one with Spirit and Celestial Body, earlier in *A Vision*: in Book I he states, 'Presently I shall have much to say of the sphere as the final place of rest' (B, p. 69).<sup>1</sup>

Plotinus describes the relationship between the begetter and the begotten when they are alone in their sphere by saying that the begotten is attached to its prior 'by a bond of sheer necessity, separated only in being distinct' (V. i. 6). Yeats seems to echo: 'The *Celestial Body* is identified with necessity; . . . when they [the *Daimons*] are known to the *Spirit*, they are known as intellectual necessity, because what the *Spirit* knows becomes a part of itself' (B, p. 189).

We recall A. H. Armstrong's description of the Second Hypostasis as 'an organic living community of interpenetrating beings which are at once Forms and intelligences, all "awake and alive", in which every part thinks and therefore in a real sense *is* the whole'.<sup>2</sup> Armstrong's understanding of the Second Hypostasis is similar to Yeats's own statement that 'Reality is a timeless and spaceless community of spirits which perceive each other. Each spirit is determined by and determines those it perceives, and each spirit is unique.'<sup>3</sup>

Yeats is not speaking of Ultimate Reality here, for his Ultimate Reality would have no perception.<sup>4</sup> The assertion of uniqueness reflects Plotinus's belief in the eternity of the particular archetype (V. vii), to which Yeats refers in the 'Introduction to "The Words upon the Window-pane"'. According to Yeats, Plotinus was

the first to establish as sole source the timeless individuality or daimon instead of the Platonic Idea. . . . This timeless individuality contains archetypes of all possible existences whether of man or brute, and as it traverses its circle of allotted lives, now one, now another, prevails.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Compare this statement with Plotinus' 'authentic sphere': 'For here is contained all that is immortal: nothing here but is Divine Mind; all is God; this is the place of every soul. Here is rest unbroken' (V. i. 4). The apparent verbal echoes in Book II B of the inspiring *Ennead* V. i. 4 are not surprising, for *Ennead* V may well have been the object of Yeats's scrutiny in 1926. Inasmuch as MacKenna's translation was appearing in single volumes, Yeats's reference to MacKenna's *Plotinus* in the May 1926 letter to Olivia Shakespeare (see p. 35 n. 1) was probably to the most recently published fourth volume which contained the Fifth *Ennead*. See also *Journal and Letters of Stephen MacKenna*, ed. E. R. Dodds (New York, 1937), p. 235.

<sup>2</sup> Armstrong, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> From a paper dictated to Mrs. Yeats at Cannes in 1937 and quoted in Virginia Moore, *op. cit.*, pp. 378-9.

<sup>4</sup> 'Pages from a Diary Written in 1930', p. 307.

<sup>5</sup> *Explorations*, ed. cit., p. 368. Yeats refers to this Plotinian concept several times: see, for example, 'Introduction to "The Resurrection"', in *Explorations*, pp. 396-7;

This 'timeless individuality' or sole source is the Second Hypostasis, which through its act is the Maker of the All (V. ix. 5). Here Yeats calls it 'the timeless individuality or daimon'; we know that *daimon* means Spirit. Spirit—spirits—One and many—in the 'homogenous sphere' each many is a one because there is identity, true unity (cf. V. iii. 15).

The contents of the Spirit ('timeless individuality') then are the archetypal ideas or spirits (individual *daimons*), which Yeats terms the Celestial Body. The word 'body' suggests the plurality of beings in the First Authentic Existant. (In V. vii. 1 Plotinus warns against doubting the apparent limitlessness in the Intellectual.) In his 'Pages from a Diary Written in 1930' Yeats describes the relationship among the Ideas in this way: the 'spaceless, timeless beings . . . behold and determine each other'.<sup>1</sup> Beholding, of course, is the act of contemplation. What does Yeats mean by 'determine'? He had made the same observation in the statement dictated to Mrs. Yeats: 'Each spirit is determined by and determines those it perceives.'<sup>2</sup> Yeats's meaning may perhaps be clarified by the following Plotinian description of the relationship between the indeterminate Intellectual-Principle and its object Being:

the Act of the Intellectual-Principle is intellection, which means that, seeing the intellectual object towards which it has turned, it is consummated, so to speak, by that object, being in itself indeterminate like sight . . . and determined by the intellectual object. (V. iv. 2)

Earlier it was stated that Yeats's decision to consider the Celestial Body as the First Authentic Existant reflected a precise understanding of the philosopher, who referred to Being as 'the first sequent upon The One' (V. v. 5). The passage on determination of the act by the essence here cited also suggests that the intellectual object is prior to the act, for, as Plotinus continues, the former is self-gathered, not deficient in the sense of needing an object (V. iv. 2). In *A Vision A* Yeats says that Spirit is 'almost abstract mind' (A, p. 160), perhaps indicating the indeterminacy of the Act of the Second Hypostasis.

Let us clarify Yeats's terms: the 'Ideas' or 'Spirits' are archetypal forms which are the content of the Celestial Body, the First Authentic Existant, or the Being of Plotinus' Second Hypostasis. Celestial Body is the object of Spirit's contemplation (B, p. 187). The term 'Spirit' *per se* is in part<sup>3</sup> 'Bishop Berkeley', in *Essays and Introductions* (New York, 1968), pp. 407-9): here, believing that the later Berkeley espoused timeless individuality, Yeats places the philosopher in the company of Plotinus and the 'choir of immortal love'; see also, B, p. 247. F. A. C. Wilson in *W. B. Yeats and Tradition* (New York, 1958), p. 245, suggests the influence of Plutarch, *Morals*, IV. 14, on Yeats's concept of the *Daimon* as developed in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*. While Plutarch was an early influence, it is clear that Plotinus contributed to Yeats's later concept.

<sup>1</sup> *Explorations*, p. 305.

<sup>2</sup> Moore, op. cit., pp. 378-9.

<sup>3</sup> See above, p. 40 n.

mind (B, p. 187), the Second Authentic Existant (B, p. 194), or Plotinus' Second Hypostasis considered as Act. 'Ghostly Self' is the term for the individual archetype, the personal idea or spirit, when viewed on the next level of Authentic Existence, the level of the Soul of the World. The 'Ghostly Self' is an image of its prior and can return to unity with it. 'Daimon' is used both as an alternative for Ghostly Self or as the *logos* of the incarnate soul (cf. B, pp. 192, 193).

Yeats's 'Daimon' is similar to the guiding spirit which, Plotinus says, is elected before birth by each particular soul (II. iii. 15). This Spirit-Guide aids the accomplishment of the soul's destiny; it is "the power which consummates the chosen life" (III. iv. 5). The Spirit-Guide is not the operating spirit of the incarnate soul; it is the prior of the operating spirit, its dominant, which 'presides inoperative while its secondary acts' (III. iv. 3). Man has his own operating phase, 'a freely acting cause' (III. ii. 10); the individual soul determines its own destiny by the force of act, and therefore can be judged (III. iv. 5).

Yeats says the 'Daimon' is like a stage manager (director) who offers the actor (soul) 'an inherited scenario', but leaves it, to 'improvise . . . the dialogue and details of the plot' (B, p. 84; cf. III. ii. 17, where Plotinus also employs a drama metaphor). The 'Daimon' has a clear relationship to the four faculties of the incarnate soul (B, p. 83), but the incarnate soul can choose: will is choice (B, p. 73).

Yeats's 'Daimon', unlike Plotinus' 'Guiding Spirit', which 'in so far as we are particular human beings' is superior to our life (III. iv. 5), has a propensity for the sensible world; it seeks completion in the Husk and Passionate Body (B, p. 190). Furthermore, unlike Plotinus' Guiding Spirit, which can be changed according to the life led during an incarnation (III. iv. 3), Yeats's Daimon is called the 'ultimate self' (B, p. 83).<sup>1</sup>

We have examined the contents and relationships in Yeats's Divine Realm. His use of Plotinus' image of concentric circles indicates his acceptance of an unknowable absolute, transcendent yet immanent—the centre of the circle; of a hierarchical Divine Realm; of a Divine Realm having intellection, having motion and rest. In this image Yeats accepts too the doctrine of contemplation. Yeats's inclusion of the diagram of the two triangles (B, p. 194), which he rejects in part (B, p. 195), indicates his acceptance of the doctrine of emanation, pictured by Plotinus similarly in the image of an overflowing fountain (V. ii. 1). As Yeats says, 'this diagram implies a descent from *Principle* to *Principle*, a fall of water from ledge to ledge' (B, p. 194).

<sup>1</sup> There may be *Daimons* of 'nations, cultures, schools of thought' (B, p. 209). In Book III he equates 'incarnate' *Daimons* with the unconscious (B, pp. 234, 239). See also Yeats's comments on 'the tutelary spirits of Plotinus' ('Pages from a Diary', pp. 309-10).

Yeats's 'homogeneous sphere' of perfect unity, the image of the unknowable, is Celestial Body and Spirit at rest; a duality of knower and known, this perfect unity in its act pours forth a divine image, the soul of the world, whose content is the discarnate Daimons or Ghostly Selves. In both the image of the concentric circles and the image of the triangles Yeats sets forth the relationship between the Divine and the sensible. Soul holds its prior (Celestial Body and Spirit) in its vision; it pours forth what Yeats calls Plotinus' 'fourth condition'. This fourth condition, which reflects the Third Authentic Existant, and by extension the Second and First, is the sensible world, life as we know it on earth. This emanation is Soul represented in its function as 'life-principle' of the sensible realm.<sup>1</sup>

Yeats also accepts Plotinus' idea of a double movement at all levels of being. Thus we understand that the individual soul can reach perfect unity in a movement back to source. When in the Divine, Husk and Passionate Body, lower manifestations of Soul, disappear in the Ghostly Self (B, pp. 188, 192, 194; cf. III. iv. 6). Finally, the individual *Daimon* or Ghostly Self can achieve perfect union and become one with its prior, Spirit and Celestial Body, the sphere of final rest.

Clearly Yeats's understanding of Plotinus is far more precise than has been supposed. That Plotinus is not easy to comprehend is evident in the difficulties experienced by his translators. It is instructive to observe changes in subsequent editions of MacKenna's translation: many appear in passages which have most clearly influenced Yeats. Yeats, of course, did not have the interest in Plotinus that a logician or a translator would have. From his frequent allusions in *A Vision* to his Instructors it is obvious that his aim was to explicate their ideas and terminology. He was their student, but he needed philosophic study to comprehend their complex ideas (B, pp. 19-20); they, in turn, 'no more than tolerated' the intrusion (B, p. 21).

*A Vision* is contradictory and inconsistent; its rather poor organization does not permit easy access to its ideas. However, examination reveals that its central Plotinian metaphysical basis, implied in the image of the concentric circles, is supported in the less obvious descriptive passages as well as in the geometry (which space limitations preclude our examining at this time). Inasmuch as many of Plotinus' ideas were known to Yeats from other readings in Neo-Platonism and appeared in earlier Yeatsian prose, one might wonder why the poet involved himself in the lengthy and seemingly serious study in the Twenties. The answer becomes evident upon reading the magnificent poetic translation which was Stephen MacKenna's gift to the world.

<sup>1</sup> In my study of the incarnate soul in *A Vision* B I have found further Plotinian influence.