

**PLOTINUS ON THE ONE  
AND GOOD BEING  
THE TREATISES OF  
THE SIXTH ENNEAD**

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**PLOTINUS & STEPHEN MACKENNA & B. S. PAGE**

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# LOTINUS

ON THE ONE AND GOOD  
BEING THE TREATISES OF  
THE SIXTH ENNEAD, TRANS-  
LATED FROM THE GREEK  
BY STEPHEN MACKENNA AND B. S. PAGE

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## THE SIXTH ENNEAD

### FIRST TRACTATE

#### ON THE KINDS OF BEING : FIRST TREATISE

I.

Philosophy at a very early stage investigated the number and character of the Existents. Various theories resulted : some declared for one Existent, others for a finite number, others again for an infinite number, while as regards the nature of the Existents—one, numerically finite, or numerically infinite—there was a similar disagreement. These theories, in so far as they have been adequately examined by later workers, may be passed over here ; our attention must be directed upon the results of those whose examination has led them to posit on their own account certain well-defined genera.

These thinkers rejected pure unity on the ground of the plurality observed even in the Intellectual world ; they rejected an infinite number as not reconcilable with the facts and as defying knowledge : considering the foundations of being to be "genera" rather than elements strictly so called, they concluded for a finite number. Of these "genera" some found ten, others less, others no doubt more.

But here again there is a divergence of views. To some the genera are first-principles ; to others they indicate only a generic classification of the Existents themselves.

Let us begin with the well-known tenfold division of the Existents, and consider whether we are to understand ten genera ranged under the common name of Being, or ten categories. That the term Being has not the same sense in all ten is rightly maintained.

But a graver problem confronts us at the outset:—Are the ten found alike in the Intellectual and in the Sensible realms ? Or are all

found in the Sensible and some only in the Intellectual? All in the Intellectual and some in the Sensible is manifestly impossible.

At this point it would be natural to investigate which of the ten belong to both spheres, and whether the Existents of the Intellectual are to be ranged under one and the same genus with the Existents in the Sensible, or whether the term "Existence" (or Substance) is equivocal as applied to both realms. If the equivocation exists, the number of genera will be increased: if there is no equivocation, it is strange to find the one same "Existence" applying to the primary and to the derivative Existents when there is no common genus embracing both primal and secondary.

These thinkers are however not considering the Intellectual realm in their division, which was not intended to cover all the Existents; the Supreme they overlooked.

2.

But are we really obliged to posit the existence of such genera?

Take Substance—for Substance must certainly be our starting-point: what are the grounds for regarding Substance as one single genus?

It has been remarked that Substance cannot be a single entity common to both the Intellectual and the Sensible worlds. We may add that such community would entail the existence of something prior to Intellectual and Sensible Substance alike, something distinct from both as predicated of both; and this prior would be neither body nor unembodied; for if it were one or the other, body would be unembodied, or the unembodied would be the body.

This conclusion must not however prevent our seeking in the actual substances of the Sensible world an element held in common by Matter, by Form and by their Composite, all of which are designated as substances, though it is not maintained that they are Substance in an equal degree; Form is usually held to be Substance in a higher degree than Matter, and rightly so, in spite of those who would have Matter to be the more truly real.



There is further the distinction drawn between what are known as First and Second Substances. But what is their common basis, seeing that the First are the source from which the Second derive their right to be called substances?

But, in sum, it is impossible to define Substance: determine its property, and still you have not attained to its essence. Even the definition, "That which, numerically one and the same, is receptive of contraries," will hardly be applicable to all substances alike.

3.

But perhaps we should rather speak of some single category (as distinct from a genus), embracing Intellectual Substance, Matter, Form, and the Composite of Matter and Form. One might refer to the family of the Heraclids as a unity in the sense, not of a common element in all its members, but of a common origin: similarly, Intellectual Substance would be Substance in the first degree, the others being substances by derivation and in a lower degree.

But (pursuing this principle) what is the objection to including everything in a single category, all else of which existence is predicated being derived from that one thing, Existence or Substance? Because, granted that things be no more than modifications of Substance, there is a distinct grading of substances themselves. Moreover, the single category does not put us in a position to build on Substance, or to grasp it in its very truth as the plausible source of the other substances.

Supposing we grant that all things known as substances are homogeneous as possessing something denied to the other genera, what precisely is this something, this individuality, this subject which is never a predicate, this thing not present in any thing as in a subject, this thing which does not owe its essential character to any other thing, as a quality takes character from a body and a quantity from a substance, as time is related to motion and motion to the moved?

The Second Substance is, it is true, a predicate. But predication in this case signifies a different relation from that just considered; it reveals the genus inherent in the subject and the subject's essential

character, whereas whiteness is predicated of a thing in the sense of being present in the thing.

The properties adduced may indeed be allowed to distinguish Substance from the other Existents. They afford a means of grouping substances together and calling them by a common name. They do not however establish the unity of a genus, and they do not bring to light the concept and the nature of Substance.

These considerations are sufficient for our purpose : let us now proceed to investigate the nature of Quantity.

4.

We are told that number is Quantity in the primary sense, number together with all continuous magnitude, space and time : these are the standards to which all else that is considered as Quantity is referred, including motion which is Quantity because its time is quantitative—though perhaps, conversely, the time takes its continuity from the motion.

If it is maintained that the continuous is a Quantity by the fact of its continuity, then the discrete will not be a Quantity. If, on the contrary, the continuous possesses Quantity as an accident, what is there common to both continuous and discrete to make them quantities ?

Suppose we concede that numbers are quantities : we are merely allowing them the name of quantity ; the principle which gives them this name remains obscure.

On the other hand, line and surface and body are not called quantities ; they are called magnitudes : they become known as quantities only when they are rated by number—two yards, three yards. Even the natural body becomes a quantity when measured, as does the space which it occupies ; but this is quantity accidental, not quantity essential ; what we seek to grasp is not accidental quantity but Quantity independent and essential, Quantity-Absolute. Three oxen is not a quantity ; it is their number, the three, that is Quantity ; for in three oxen we are dealing with two categories. So too with a line of a stated length, a surface of a given area ; the area will be a quantity but not the surface, which

only comes under that category when it constitutes a definite geometric figure.

Are we then to consider numbers, and numbers only, as constituting the category of Quantity? If we mean numbers in themselves, they are (not quantities but) substances, for the very good reason that they exist independently. If we mean numbers displayed in the objects participant in number, the numbers which give the count of the objects—ten horses or ten oxen, and not ten units—then we have a paradoxical result: first, the numbers in themselves, it would appear, are substances but the numbers in objects are not; and secondly, the numbers inhere in the objects as measures (of extension or weight), yet as standing outside the objects they have no measuring power, as do rulers and scales. If however their existence is independent, and they do not inhere in the objects, but are simply called in for the purpose of measurement, the objects will be quantities only to the extent of participating in Quantity.

So with the numbers themselves: how can they (in these circumstances) constitute the category of Quantity? They are measures; but how do measures come to be quantities or Quantity? Doubtless in that, existing as they do among the Existents and not being adapted to any of the other categories, they find their place under the influence of verbal suggestion and so are referred to the so-called category of Quantity. We see the unit mark off one measurement and then proceed to another; and number thus reveals the amount of a thing, and the mind measures by availing itself of the total figure.

It follows that in measuring it is not measuring essence; it pronounces its "one" or "two," whatever the character of the objects, even summing contraries. It does not take count of condition—hot, handsome; it simply notes how many.

Number then, whether regarded in itself or in the participant objects, belongs to the category of Quantity, but the participant objects do not. "Three yards long" does not fall under the category of Quantity, but only the three.

Why then are magnitudes classed as quantities? Not because they are so in the strict sense, but because they approximate to Quantity,