Paul Silas Peterson
UNIVERSITY OF TÜBINGEN

Creatio ex pulchritudine

A comparative analysis of David Bentley Hart's doctrine of creation *versus* Plotinus's account of *prohodos* (*emanatio*)

Abstract

In the *Enneads* Plotinus articulates an account of 'creation' following in the tradition, albeit critically, of Plato's *Timaeus*. This article compares Hart's account of creation, as expressed in *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (2003), and other secondary literature, with that of Plotinus's. Some significant differences and interesting parallels are highlighted.

1 The doctrine of creation in theological aesthetics

1.1 *The question of this article: in what way is, and is not, Hart's doctrine of creation Plotinian?*

David Bentley Hart argues that when one proclaims the gospel they ought to address the most ultimate ground of Christianity. In his description of the beauty of the infinite he speaks of the Trinity, creation, salvation, and the *eschaton*. The focus of this article is on his reading of the doctrine of creation. The goal is to clarify the similarities and differences between Hart and Plotinus.

Hart believes that some Hellenistic thought is inseparable from Christianity. He remarks:

> it is arguable that 'Hellenism' is already an intrinsic dimension of the New Testament itself and that some kind of 'Platonism' is inseparable from the Christian faith [...] the alliance struck in much modern dogmatics between theology and German idealism is a far greater source of concern than any imagined 'Greek captivity' of the Church.[1]

Hart is here located in reference to Plotinus—the Father of Neoplatonism. In the *Enneads* Plotinus articulates an account of creation following in the tradition, albeit critically, of Plato's *Timaeus*.[2] This article compares Hart's account of creation, as

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1. David Bentley Hart, 'The Lively God of Robert Jenson' [digital version] *First Things*, (156, Oct. 2005, pp: 28–34). Hart's article follows Jenson's review of *The Beauty of the Infinite* in *Pro Ecclesia*, Vol. XIV, Spring 2005, Num 2, pp: 235–237.

2. John H. Gay remarks that Plotinus quoted *Timaeus* 63 times out of a total of 162 references to Plato in the *Enneads*: 'Four Medieval Views of Creation' in *The Harvard Theological Review*, (Vol. 56, No. 4., Oct., 1963, pp: 243–273) 246-7. Plotinus probably had no connection to Christian thought, so argues A. H. Armstrong, 'Part III: Plotinus' in A. H. Armstrong, edit., *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1967, pp: 195–271) 210.

expressed in *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (2003),[3] and other secondary literature, with that of Plotinus.

Jens Halfwassen calls Plotinus, along with Plato and Aristotle, 'the greatest and most influential philosopher of antiquity'.[4] His work is among the greatest influences upon 'Christian Platonism of late antiquity, the Middle Ages, as well as the philosophy of the Renaissance and German Idealism.'[5] As Georg Siegmann claims, '[t]he effects are everywhere', the influence is seen 'from Augustine's conversions and confessions to the modern mathematical-physical theory of unity (Albert Einstein, Erwin Schrödinger, J.S. Bell), from the "Arabic theology" to Heidegger's crossing out of being.'[6]

Eusebius of Caesarea cited the *Enneads* (*Enn.* 4.7 and 5.1) in his *Praeparatio euangelica*. Although Augustine came to Rome more than a hundred years after Plotinus was there,[7] he nevertheless read Plotinus's work,[8] and drew from Plotinus's metaphysics (sometimes by means of Ambrose, e.g. *De Isaac et anima*) in his development of the basic formulation of ascent and his understanding of the eternality of the soul.[9] Marks of Plotinus, and general Platonism, can be seen in his doctrines of the Trinity, creation, and the nature of evil.[10] Gregory of Nyssa was influenced by Plotinus's concept of the One.[11] As Anthony Meredith remarks: 'Side by side with this "metaphysical optimism" [evil as *privatio boni*] both Plato, his great third-century AD interpreter, Plotinus, and Gregory also believed in the beauty of being and of God.'[12] Although Gregory's theology was indebted to philosophy, as Meredith remarks, it is difficult to isolate the 'areas and extent of this indebtedness'.[13] Gregory's forming of Plotinus's thought was drawn upon by Dionysius, Aquinas (also via Augustine), Nicolas of Cusa, and the rich tradition of mystical theology flowering in the 20th Century with Hans Urs von Balthasar.[14]

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3. David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmands, 2003). Hereafter, unless otherwise specified, all parenthetical numbers in the text refer to this book.

4. Jens Halfwassen, 'Plotin,' in RGG[4] vol. 6 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003) pp. 1398–1400, here: 1398 (translation my own).

5. Halfwassen, 'Plotin,' 1400.

6. Georg Siegmann, 'Plotin,' in TRE, vol. 26 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996) pp: 712–717, here: 716 (translation my own).

7. Volker Henning Drecoll, 'Neuplatonismus,' in Volker Henning Drecoll, ed., *Augustin Handbuch* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007) pp: 72–84, here: 72.

8. Drecoll, 'Neuplatonismus,' 73.

9. Drecoll, 'Neuplatonismus,' 73ff.

10. Cf. Thomas A Wassmer, 'The Trinitarian Theology of Augustine and His Debt to Plotinus,' *The Harvard Theological Review*, (Vol. 53, No. 4, Oct., 1960) pp: 261–268; John Rist, 'Plotinus and Christian Philosophy,' in Gerson, edit., *Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, pp: 386–413; Colin E. Gunton 'Between Allegory and Myth: The Legacy of the Spiritualising of Genesis,' in Colin E. Gunton, edit., *The Doctrine of Creation: Essays in Dogmatics, History and Philosophy*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997) pp: 47–62, esp.: 57.

11. Harry A. Wolfson, 'The Identification of Ex Nihilo with Emanation in Gregory of Nyssa,' *Harvard Theological Review*, (Vol. 63, No. 1, Jan. 1970) pp: 53–60, here: 55.

12. Anthony Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, (London/New York: Routledge, 1999) 7.

13. Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 59.

14. Regarding the continuity of development from Augustine, Dionysius, Thomas Aquinas,

There are also lines which one could draw, as Halfwassen does, from Plotinus's conceptualization of the unity of opposites to Dionysius then to Eriugena to again Cusa's *coincidentia oppositorum* (who did not know of Plotinus), which was later taken up from Cusa by Giordano Bruno and J.G. Hamann, which then was followed by Hegel (who didn't know Cusa).[15]

When encountering such genealogies one may ask if this tradition of theology has been overly influenced by Plotinus's thought, and perhaps wielded the theological material of the unique and diverse Biblical narratives into a fixed pagan doctrine. Adolf von Harnack famously claimed that 'in its conception and its construction (*Ausbau*), dogma is a work of the Greek spirit on the floor of the Gospel.'[16] The goal here is not to delve into the mysterious problems of Harnack's claim, but rather to demonstrate that although Hart's account of creation has many Plotinian characteristics, by way of its cataphatic tones, it goes beyond Plotinus's theology in some important ways. With Hart, the dogma's 'conception and construction' is interwoven with the 'floor of the Gospel', and the Greek spirit appears not as a foreigner to this 'floor', but fulfilled in it.

This clarification of similarities and differences highlights the tense association between Hart and Plotinus. Though Hart is at times dismissive of Plotinus's theology, their metaphysics carry significant parallels. Hart's theology makes place for Greek thought which was employed by the Church Fathers. He argues that the Fathers had a more sophisticated interaction with Greek thought than they are sometimes assumed to have. He states that 'we have assumed too quickly that we understand how the tradition used the terms it took from Greek philosophy and bent to its purposes' (166). He also adds that 'we have not sufficiently thought through the implications of the alternatives' (166). This investigation focuses in on this interpretive reception.

The following section (2) shows that Hart's understanding of creation as an analogy of delight, which leads him to conclude that creation was unnecessary to God, contrasts with Plotinus's understanding of the necessary emanation of the One. In the third section, Hart's affirmation of *creatio ex nihilo* contrasts with Plotinus's concept of emanation. However, with these differences there is a similarity: both understand all-that-is as springing from one Source; consequently, they share an understanding of the fundamental 'unity' and continuum of being. In addition to this similarity, they both share a judgment that creation did not require effort from the Source.

Overall a trend emerges, Hart tends to agree with Plotinus's apophatic claims

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and Nicolas of Cusa on creation, and their debt to Plotinus, see: Gay, 'Four Medieval Views of Creation;' also: Brian E. Daley, 'Balthasar's reading of the Church Fathers,' in Edward T. Oakes, and David Moss, edit., *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, (Cambridge: University Press, 2004) pp: 187–206.

15. Jens Halfwassen, *Plotin und der Neuplatonismus*, (München: C.H.Beck, 2004) 77.

16. LDG¹, 1, 16 (*Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, Freiburg i.Br. 1886/1890). 'Das Dogma ist in seiner Conception und in seinem Ausbau ein Werk des griechischen Geistes auf dem Boden des Evangeliums.' (Translation my own).

and then proceeds to add cataphatic assertions.[17] Hart's apparent agreement with much of Plotinus's apophatic theology is complemented with positive cataphatic claims. In the final analysis, Hart's account of creation is found to be similar to Plotinus in some regards, yet because of the added cataphatic contours it escapes, or if one wishes to see this difference otherwise, falls from Plotinus's apophasis.

Because the place of Hart's doctrine of creation must be understood in Hart's broader theological and philosophical approach, familiarization with his overall purpose will be first necessary. Essential explanation of Plotinus's theology will follow in the second section.

1.2 Hart's question: is the infinite beautiful harmony or chaotic violence?

When Hart set out to write *The Beauty of the Infinite* he had a question in mind: '[i]s the beauty to whose persuasive power the Christian rhetoric of evangelism inevitably appeals, and upon which it depends, theologically defensible?' (1). Thus, the apologetic method of Christianity is not fundamentally, as Hart leaves out, a matter of logic alone, or an appeal to narrative alone, it is rather firstly *an appeal to beauty*. In the following subsection Hart's understanding of beauty will be addressed, here the concern is rather to identify the driving question of his book.

Attached to the claim that Christian apologetics appeals to beauty is an understanding of theology itself as rhetoric. Theology is not an appeal to a *res cogitans*, an approach which Hart calls a violent concealment of reliance upon rhetoric itself (6). Theology is also not an appeal to narrative only, something Hart calls an anti-foundationalist shelter from the ontological and epistemological questions Christian theology must address (31). For Hart theology is 'the true story of being' (31). Theology accounts for that which humanity was originally intended. The task of theology in this paradigm is both beautifully moving and utterly true. Theology does not compel belief alone, but by appealing to the beauty of the truth it compels faith.[18] There is no clear distinction between apologetics and theology for Hart.

A critical moment in Hart's project, following John Milbank, is his near equalization of this persuasive beauty and the idea of infinity itself. He states: 'the Christian tradition embraces an understanding of beauty unique to itself: one in which the thought of beauty and the thought of infinity uniquely coincide'

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17. The apophatic theological method was used by Plotinus and many Church Fathers. This method emphasized negative theological claims which may be attributed to God (e.g.: God is not evil, God is not confused). The cataphatic method, with the positive concept of revelation, enables theologians to make positive theological claims about God (e.g., God is love). See: John Peter Kenney, *Mystical Monotheism: A study in Ancient Platonic Theology*, (Hanover, NH: Brown University Press, 1991) 149. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) see chap. 3: 'The Language of Negation,' pp: 40–56.

18. David Bentley Hart, *The Doors of the Sea: Where Was God in the Tsunami?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 54.

(4).[19] On the grounds of this coincidence, Hart's investigation leads him to two narratives of the infinite. One is the Christian account of the infinite as beauty, a way 'that leads beyond, and ultimately overcomes, all violence' (2). The other, following Milbank's characterization,[20] 'finds the grammar of violence inscribed upon the foundation stone of every institution and hidden within the syntax of every rhetoric' (2). The former is what Hart defends as the Christian account, the latter is identified with a strand of early Greek thought resurrected for the modern age by Friedrich Nietzsche. In defense of the Christian picture of the infinite, Hart is sensitive to show that the Christian account of creation is not one of primordial violence but peaceful beauty.

1.3 Hart's answer: the infinite of which Christianity speaks is persuasive beauty

> Within Christian theology there is a thought – a story – of the infinite that is also the thought – the story – of beauty; for pagan philosophy and culture, such a confluence of themes was ultimately unthinkable (151).[21]

Hart's understanding of beauty does not follow Benedetto Croce's *Aesthetic*, a concept of beauty as 'the pretty, the merely decorative, or the inoffensively pleasant' (15). In this characterization, it must be deconstructed 'as a gracious stillness artificially imposed upon the surface of the primordial ontological tumult' (16). Hart's appeal to beauty is not stillness or masked ontological chaos, but peacefulness:

> Only if the theme of beauty, as essentially peace, adheres to every moment of the Christian story, at its every juncture, without lapsing into equivocation, is Christian beauty one with Christian truth, rather than deceit, false enticement, aggression (4).

Augustine, and other Church Fathers, also associated beauty with peace, as Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen argues: Augustine followed Plotinus in emphasizing the qualities of symmetry, proportion and order; in this account 'chaos cannot be beautiful.'[22] From this tradition Hart speaks of the 'peaceful offer' (3) of theology, one which must make an appeal to a compelling beauty at every juncture of its presentation. For Hart, even the death of Christ is, in a way, beautiful (373–94): it is an overcoming of the totality of violence, and a drawing of 'creation back into the eternal motion of divine love' (371). As this reading of Golgotha demonstrates, the theme of beauty spans Hart's theology.

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19. Cf. Milbank's 'infinitizing' of beauty: Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 434–8.

20. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 278–291.

21. For a focused treatment of this theme, see: David B. Hart, 'Christ or Nothing,' *First Things*, (no. 136, October 2003) pp: 47–57.

22. Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen, edit. *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 13. Augustine wrote a book on beauty, it was however lost: Augustine, *Confessions*, bk. IV, ch. 13, para. 20; see also: Hilary, *The Trinity*, VIII, para. 48; II, para. 49. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, para. 10, 11. John Chrysostom, *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God*, para. 56–59. Augustine, *Confessions*, bk. IV, ch. 13, para. 20; bk. X, ch. 6, para. 8; bk. XIII, ch. 28, para. 43.

Ruth Lorand begins her volume on aesthetic order by noting that '[b]eauty is paradoxical.'[23] Hart is clearly aware of this ambiguity, though he frequently employs the word 'beauty' he complies that beauty is impossible to define (17). Though it can be remarked upon 'the word "beauty" *indicates* nothing' (16, emphasis his), not a quality, property, function, or reaction (16). Yet in its vagueness 'nothing else impresses itself upon our attention with at once so wonderful a power and so evocative an immediacy' (16). Rather than defining beauty, Hart provides 'general "thematics" of the beautiful' (17). The six themes of beauty which he offers are: objectivity, a form of distance, an evoking of desire, a crossing of boundaries, a standing against gnosticism, and a resistance of reduction to the 'symbolic'. These themes, especially the one assumed, 'peace' (4), constitute the bedrock of Hart's theology.

Through an appeal to this indefinable beauty, as opposed to rationality, Hart separates himself from what he calls the 'project of Modernity'. This is a project captivated by 'comprehensive metanarratives and epistemological foundations by way of a neutral and unaided rationality' (3), an appeal to supposedly uninhibited people who are free of 'cultural and linguistic conditions' (3).[24] In Hart's account, Christianity is not responsible for this project:

> Christian theology has no stake in the myth of disinterested rationality: the church has no arguments for its faith more convincing than the form of Christ; enjoined by Christ to preach the gospel, Christians must proclaim, exhort, bear witness, persuade—before other forms of reason can be marshalled (3).[25]

Rather than an appeal to a disinterested rationality, Hart's apologetic is directed at aesthetic sensibilities. For Hart Christianity must always 'appeal first to the eye and heart, as the only way it may "command" assent, the church cannot separate truth from rhetoric, or from beauty.' (4) This is similar to Augustine, who modified his background in Hellenism and set forth this conceptualization of beauty and truth as fundamentally connected.[26] Hart's contemporary appropriation of this theological tradition, in many ways, follows the lead of Balthasar, who re-

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23. Ruth Lorand, *Aesthetic Order: A Philosophy of Beauty and Art*, (London: Routledge, 2000) 1.

24. For a similar narration of Modernity and aesthetics: Thiessen, edit. *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader*, 155–159. For comparison: Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche*, (Manchester: University Press, 2003) 52.

25. Hart's employment of the 'form of Christ', and the inseparability of aesthetics and reason is not dissimilar to the treatment of these themes by Hans Urs von Balthasar, cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982) 28ff.; 215ff. Raymond Gawronski, 'The Beauty of the Cross: The Theological Aesthetics of Hans Urs von Balthasar,' *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, (5.3, 2002) pp: 185–206; Regarding the priority of rhetoric over logic see: Milbank, who draws from Balthasar: *Theology and Social Theory*, 328.

26. Cf. W. Beierwaltes, 'The love of Beauty and the Love of God,' in A. H. Armstrong, edit., *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality*, (New York: Crossroad, 1986) pp: 293–313. Carol Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine*, (Oxford: University Press, 2005) 14ff. Augustine, *Letter to Januarius*, letter 88, 9; *Expositions on the book of Psalms*, on Psalm, XLV; *Letter to Paulina*, ch. 48; *Soliloquies*, para. 2, 3; *Divine Providence and the Problem of Evil*, para. 51.

asserted aesthetics as a primary transcendental.[27] This tradition views beauty as not only a mystery to be admired but as a directive guide in theology, metaphysics, ethics, and apologetics. Hart's identification with this tradition can be seen in his treatment of the doctrine of creation. The presentation will lead to Hart's above mentioned thematics of beauty; in his account creation displays a form of distance (280ff), an evoking of desire (269ff), and is properly conceived of as peaceful (274–288).

1.4 How the doctrine of creation displays infinite beauty

Hart's conception of the doctrine of creation becomes clear when proceeding from his emphasis on the importance of beauty. For when he addresses why creation has come about, how it came about, and the nature of it, he frequently returns to the peaceful harmony of the infinite. Hart thinks of creation as first given in primal harmony, a beautiful expression of God (275ff). This beauty of creation, and the harmony of being, is argued for throughout Hart's treatment of the doctrine of creation.

Augustine also joins beauty and the doctrine of creation. As Carol Harrison has pointed out, Augustine employed beauty in his argument against the Manicheans.[28] All of creation is beautiful. In this understanding, evil is merely a distortion of beauty, a privation of goodness and truth (*privatio boni*). This stood against the Manichean dualistic account of good and evil. As Augustine remarks in *Soliloquies:*

> God, through whom all things, which of themselves were not, tend to be. God, who withholdest from perishing even that which seems to be mutually destructive. God, who, out of nothing, hast created this world, which the eyes of all perceive to be most beautiful. God, who dost not cause evil, but causest that it be not most evil. God, who to the few that flee for refuge to that which truly is, showest evil to be nothing. God, through whom the universe, even taking in its sinister side, is perfect (bk. 1, par. 2).[29]

Similarly, Hart posits peaceful beauty as the truth of creation against a certain mythology of ontological violence. There is no chaos in this narration—there is only a will towards chaos (259).

The following section shows that the very inception of creation is not one of necessity; creation is not born from a lack in God, but is brought to existence as an analogy of trinitarian delight. Following this description of the context of creation, in the third section the question of 'how' God creates will be addressed. In Hart's account, God creates out of nothing through peaceful harmony; God

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27. Cf. Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 121. See also: Oliver Davies, 'The Theological Aesthetics,' in Oakes, et al., edit., *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Von Balthasar*, pp: 131–142, esp.: 135.

28. Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine*, 23.

29. Saint Augustine, *The Soliloquies of St. Augustine*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: A Selected Library of the Christian Church* (First Series). 14 vols. Ed. by Philip Schaff, [1886] (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1999) vol. 7, p. 537.

offers creation as an additional harmonious difference to the already good difference resident in the Trinity. Hart speaks of creation as God's peaceful rhetoric, spoken by God as a 'rhetorical embellishment'—an expression of the peaceful and beautiful God.

2 Necessity or delight? The context of creation in Plotinus and Hart

In the section dealing with the context of creation, Hart begins with eight Scriptural quotations regarding creation.[30] The passages emphasize the goodness of creation, and creation's response unto God in joy and celebration. Hart argues that creation is a good and unnecessary gift of love from the Trinity, an *analogia delectationis*. This account contrasts with Plotinus's understanding of the emanation of the many from the One, an act which he conceives of as a necessary *prohodos* (*emanatio*, emanation) of the One.

2.1 Analogia delectationis: creation as delightful abundance of trinitarian love

The Christian vision of the world [. . .] is not some rational deduction from empirical experience, but is a moral and spiritual aptitude—or, rather, a moral and spiritual labor. The Christian eye sees (or should see) a deeper truth in the world than mere 'nature,' and it is a truth that gives rise not to optimism but to joy.[31]

In the first paragraph of Hart's treatment of creation he begins with a firm assertion that 'every finite being is groundless' (250), created from nothing. Rather than a declaration of isolation, for Hart this utter contingency of our existence highlights the very wonder of it: we are 'summoned from nothingness, framed by grace, receiving all while meriting nothing' (250–1). For Hart, *creatio ex nihilo* 'speaks of a God who gives of his bounty, not a God at war with darkness' (258), it is 'artistry for the sake of artistry' (251). This understanding of creation as 'artistry for the sake of artistry' sets Christian theology apart from a certain ancient mythology. It rejects any account of creation that emphasizes violence in the beginning, or a devalued quality of creation as an 'effluence of divine substance' (251). Peacefulness is front centered in Hart's account of the context of creation; with this emphasis, the corollary of beauty now follows.

The description of creation as 'artistry for the sake of artistry' may lead to thinking of creation as existing unto itself as a work of artistry set apart from the Creator. Against this view, Hart argues that one should think of creation as 'hanging' upon the perichoretic *ousia* in transit (252). Hart draws upon Augustine and Hillary's descriptions of creation as the 'proclamation of divine beauty' (252)[32]

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30. Gen. 1:31; Job 38:4, 7; Ps. 96:11–13; Prov. 8:30–31; Isa. 55:11; 2 Macc. 7:28; Heb. 11:3; Rev. 4:11.

31. Hart, *The Doors of the Sea*, 58.

32. Hart notes: *De civitate Dei*, 2.4.2 (cf. 6.4); *De vera religione* 52–54 ; *Confessiones* 11.4. Also, Hilary in *De Trinitate* 1.6–7.

to establish the analogous correspondence between creation and God. As Hilary remarks: 'must not the Lord of all this beauty be understood as the most beautiful?' (*De Trinitate* 1.7).[33] The next section focuses on the analogous nature of creation to God. Here it is important to take note of Hart's analogous understanding of creation, for it is by this connection that he can speak of creation as sharing in the beauty of God. Understanding creation as the 'proclamation of divine beauty' reveals two things for Hart: it speaks of creation as an analogy of God, i.e., creation is itself a description of God's glory; and it ascribes the beauty of God (although in a lesser form, p. 300) to creation. Creation is analogous to God, and by virtue of this analogy it is beautiful.

Hart follows Aquinas in describing the beauty of the Trinity. The Trinity is beautiful by virtue of the relations between the Three Persons.[34] The beauty of creation is understood as expression of the love within the Trinity (252–3)—it is itself an analogous expression of the delight within the Trinity. This account is similar to the treatment Gilles Emery offers on Aquinas's trinitarian doctrine of creation. He remarks: 'Saint Thomas explains that the procession of the persons is the origin (*origo*) of the procession of creatures'.[35] He notes that this description of creation occurs nearly twenty times in Aquinas's corpus. On one occasion, Aquinas states the relationship this way: 'the temporal going-forth of creatures is derived [*derivatur*] from the eternal going-forth of the persons'.[36] The trinitarian procession thus constitute the order of creation.[37] Following in this direction, Hart emphasizes the beauty of the Trinity as the order of creation.

By viewing creation as delightful artistry analogous to the delight within the Trinity, Hart asserts, with Augustine and Irenaeus, that creation is not necessary to God.[38] Augustine's metaphorical explanation of this depicts a man losing an eyebrow:

> for these little things [creation] are to be measured not by their own greatness

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33. Hilarius Pictaviensis, *De Trinitate Libri Duodecim*, 1, 7. PL, 10, 30C: 'nonne hius ipsius pulchritudinis Dominum necesse est totius pulchritudinis esse pulcherrimum intelligi'. See also: Ps. 19, Rom. 1:20, (translation my own).

34. Hart notes: Aquinas, *Summa Theol*. I inq. I, tract. 3, art. 2, ad 2. Here Aquinas records Alexander of Hales.

35. Gilles Emery, O.P., 'Trinity and Creation,' in Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow, editors, *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005) pp: 58–76, here: 59.

36. Aquinas, General *Prologue* of the *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum: Super Boetiuum de Trinitate, Prologus*, quoted in: Emery, 'Trinity and Creation,' 59.

37. Emery, 'Trinity and Creation,' 60.

38. Augustine, *The City of God*, XI, 22; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer*. 2, 1, 1. Cf. William A. Christian, 'Augustine on the Creation of the World,' *The Harvard Theological Review*, (Vol. 46, No. 1. Jan. 1953) pp: 1–25, esp.: 23. Wassmer, 'The Trinitarian Theology of Augustine and His Debt to Plotinus,' 263; Barth (following Luther) also insisted on an understanding of creation as unnecessary grace, so argues: Martin Henry, 'Karl Barth on Creation,' *Irish Theological Quarterly*, (69, 2004) pp: 219–223, here: 220. Cf. Colin E. Gunton, 'The Doctrine of Creation,' in Colin Gunton, edit., *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1997) pp: 141–157, here: 142; Christoph Schwoebel, 'God, Creation and the Christian Community: The Dogmatic Basis of a Christian Ethic of Createdness,' in Gunton, edit., *The Doctrine of Creation*, pp: 149–176, esp.: 156.

(which does not exist), but by the wisdom of their Designer; as, in the visible appearance of a man, if one eyebrow be shaved off, how nearly nothing is taken from the body, but how much from the beauty! (*The City of God*, XI, 22)

It is noteworthy that Augustine sees creation as *adding* to the beauty of God: for if it is taken away 'nothing is taken from the body, but how much from the beauty!' However, as Hart argues, it is not '"substantially"' from God, or metaphysically cognate to God's essence, or a pathos of God' (158), rather, creation is a reflection of the Divine Life, 'one of delight [. . .] fellowship and love' (158). As a *reflection* of the delight with in the Trinity, creation is not necessary to God.

With this assertion, he immediately qualifies for this is not to suggest that creation is 'merely the spontaneous' (256). Hart emphasizes God's apathetic freedom, a 'perfect and unimpeded fullness with which the divine nature is itself' (256). This positions the act of creation outside the 'deliberative liberty of a finite subject' (256)—a 'Scotus' doctrine which makes 'God's nature a slave of his will' (256). Similarly, in *The Doors of the Sea* Hart argues that thinking of God as requiring passions to love the world denies the transcendence of God:

> [n]o doubt [ascribing God emotions] give us a sense of our own significance, and certainly it accords with our own experiences of love; but it also effectively denies the transcendence of God and the plenitude of his charity. In fact, it dissembles the very nature of love; for love is not – in its inmost essence – a reaction.[39]

As that God's will and nature coexist in transcendent harmony and fullness, or rather almost equalization (freedom is a 'perfect and unimpeded fullness with which the divine nature is itself' [256]), Hart dismisses any notion that God created because it was necessary. In this regard, Hart follows Irenaeus, Athanasius, and Gregory the Theologian, noting that for God 'there might just as well have been no creation (for creation adds nothing to God, but only participates in him)' (256).[40] Although, as he remarks, this is not to say creation is not necessary in some other sense. Hart argues that it may be understood as aesthetically necessary (256). Hart's reading of divine impassibility, despite its occasional unpopularity,[41] is an unequivocal rejection of Hegel's logic that creation is adding to God's becoming. This theological position allows him to answer 'no' to the question Ivan Karamazov poses: '[i]f the universal and final good of all creatures required, as its price, the torture of one little girl, would that be acceptable?' (165). He answers no, for as he compels in *The Doors of the Sea*:

> rather than showing us how the tears of a small girl suffering in the dark were necessary for the building of the Kingdom, [God] will instead raise her up and wipe away all tears from her eyes. . .[42]

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39. Hart, *The Doors of the Sea*, 76–7.

40. Irenaeus, *Adersus haereses* 2.10.4; Athanasius, *Contra Arianos* 3.59–62; Gregory the Theologian, *Oration* 29.6.

41. Cf. Jenson, book review, 237; Clark Pinnock, 'Systematic Theology,' in Clark Pinnock, et al., edit. *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, (Downers Grove and Carlisle: InterVarsity and Paternoster, 1994) pp: 101–125.

42. Hart, *The Doors of the Sea*, 104.

As this demonstrates, Hart's insistence on divine impassibility is directed to a noble end; his theology works to preserves the goodness of God. Those who begin with different aims, however, find it harmful to speak of creation as 'unnecessary'. Some find this description devaluing creation in an age that already lacks recognition of the goodness of creation.[43]

When Hart speaks of creation as unnecessary, a reader may easily assume him to be collapsing Karl Rahner's trinitarian formula:[44] preferring the immanent over and above the economic. Hart's absolute rejection of Hegel, and his tenacious insistence that creation adds nothing to God, has been identified as a problem by Robert Jenson. He remarks: '[i]f God's history with us does not change him, is the only alternative that it manifests him?'[45] As Jenson clarifies, he wanted to write '*merely* manifests him';[46] in this sense, Jenson questions the value Hart ascribes to creation, and more subversively, it seems, the aesthetic appeal of such an account.

The impassibility of God is not the subject of this article, but a way forward can at least be suggested. Critics of the non-necessity of creation could find a helpful rejoining point in Hart's Christology. For example, when treating salvation he articulates the mysterious joining of creation and Christ in the incarnation:

> [t]he recapitulation of creation in Christ occurs within the one creative utterance of God in his eternal Word: Christ can redeem the world, and restore it to its own nature by uniting it to his, because as Logos he is eternally the source, place, and end of all creation's logoi (327).

Here there is no devaluing of creation's worth, creation is rather the object of God's loving redemption.

If one forces words, there may be a need for more clarification by way of *excursus* in this area of necessity, for it is not clear how Hart could properly ascribe aesthetic necessity (256) to the Trinity. It is not clear how this follows from his commitment that there can be no lack whatsoever in the Trinity (163). This language prima facie excludes necessity.[47] Furthermore, what is the difference between aesthetic necessity and ontological necessity? Why is aesthetic necessity permissible whereas ontological necessity excluded? A few remarks should be made in clarification of these problems: first, Hart orders the doctrine of God over and above necessity, unlike late scholastic integration of Arabic philosophy,

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43. Cf. John Macquarrie, *Thinking about God*, (London: SCM, 1975) 58; for suggested reimaginations of the God creation relationship see: Sallie McFague, *Models of God*, (London: SCH, 1987) 202; and for comparison: Fergusson, *The Cosmos and the Creator*, 94ff; Michael Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1996) 124–163.

44. 'The "economic" trinity is the "immanent" trinity and the "immanent" trinity is the "economic" trinity.' Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (London: Burns and Oates, 1970) 22.

45. Jenson, book review, 237.

46. Jenson, book review, 237, emphasis mine.

47. Hart draws upon E.L. Mascall; a divergence can be however identified: Mascall remarks that creation is 'altogether unnecessary to God.' *He Who Is: A Study in Traditional Theism,* (London: Longmans, Green, 1945) 112.

e.g., as seen in Scotus, which explains God through necessity;[48] and secondly, Hart strongly argues that creation is not ontologically necessary for God, thus the type of 'necessity' which is here ascribed to God's act of creation, is not to be equated with *necessitas indigentiae*, rather *per naturam*, which prohibits any account of contingency: with Hart there is *no lack* driving this necessity, God's being is clearly not contingent on creation.[49] Despite these qualifications, it seems that there nevertheless remains a *necessitas inevitabilitatis* which perhaps too abruptly confronts Irenaeus's *libere et sponte* (*Adv. haer*. IV, 20, 1), and more specifically, the active, willing character of 'Let there be light' (Gen. 1:3), or rather more explicitly: σὺ ἔκτισας τὰ πάντα καὶ διὰ τὸ θέλημά σου ἦσαν καὶ ἐκτίσθησαν (*tu creasti omnia et propter voluntatem tuam erant et creata sunt*, Rev. 4:11). If it is true that the Christian distinctive, vis-à-vis the Platonic, is the decisive *voluntas Dei* to create, can this *voluntas* be understood in such a way that does not damage its harmony *cum natura Dei*?

Hart states that: '[t]he Bible [. . .] depicts creation [. . .] as a kind of deliberative invention ("Let us make. . . ") [. . .]' (251), but the full weight of this claim is not carried over into his articulation of necessity: 'creation is "necessary" in [an] aesthetic sense: it has been from eternity fitting to God's goodness to be a loving creator' (256). Creation is here not eternal, but it has been *ab aeterno* fitting. Of course, one can happily declare that it has been *ab aeterno* fitting, but is this to say enough? Does this not suggest, ever so subtly, a certain inevitability? Is not here the rightful and crucial role of *voluntatis Dei* to be addressed?[50] An essential account of *voluntatis Dei* could on the one hand avoid the equalizing collapse of

48. Ursula Wolf, 'Notwendigkeit,' in: *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, edit. Joachim Ritter, Karlfried Gründer, (Basel/Stuttgart 1984) vol. 6, pp: 946–986.

49. I would like to thank Dr. Hart for his suggestion to address the important distinction between necessity *per naturam* and necessity of contingency in this *excursus*.

50. Though Hart clearly and by all measures does not claim that creation be understood simultaneously with God, it is not clear how this conclusion could be sufficiently avoided. Thus, his account is distinguishable but not distant from that of Meister Eckhart's, one which was condemned by Pope John XXII's Bull 'In agro dominico' (03.27.1329); therein some of Eckhart's teachings are listed: '(1) Interrogatus quandoque, quare Deus mundum non prius produxerit, respondit tunc, sicut nunc, quod Deus non potuit primo producere mundum, quia res non potest agere, antequam sit; unde quam cito Deus fuit, tam cito mundum creavit. [951] (2) Item concendi potest mundum fuisse ab aeterno. [952] (3) Item simul et semel, quando Deus fuit, quando Filium sibi coaeternum per omnia coaequalem Deum genuit, etiam mundum creavit. [953].' DS 951–953. [(1) It was once asked why God had not previously produced the world, he responded then as now, saying that God could not first bring forth the world because a thing cannot act before it is; as soon as God was, he created the world. (2) Likewise, one can conceed that the world was from eternity. (3) Equally: At one and the same time as God was, just as He brought forth the Son, whom in all things is the same God, he also created the world. (translation my own)] Hans Urs von Balthasar's praising of Gregory of Nyssa is insightful at this point: '"Les deux ne font qu'un" ἓν ἀμφότερα [In Hex. 1, 69A]. Les créatures sont doc à la fois rationnelles parce que provenant de la sagesse suprême, et des actes de volunté libre subsistants: Ἡ δὲ τοῦ θελήματος ὕπαρξις οὐσία ἐστίν, l'essence (existante) est la subsistance de la volunté [De an. et res. III, 124B]. C'est là l'apport salutaire et indestructible du "Nominalisme" dans toute philosophie, l'empêchant d'atteindre une nécessité indépendante de la liberté divine.' *Présence et Pensée: Essai sur la philosophie religieuse de Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1988) 143.

voluntatis et necessitatis with Bruno: "Voluntas divina est [. . .] ipsa necessitas [. . .] Necessitas et libertas sunt unum" (*De Immenso et Innumerabilibus* I, 11). On the other hand, it could also avoid Leibniz's rational *voluntatem* ('il faut qu'il y ait une raison'[51]), even if Leibniz saw this *raison* directed by the wisdom and goodness of God. One is also not limited to Luther's 'libenti voluntate',[52] where humanity, as Thomas Rheinhuber explains, 'wird notwendig [. . .] durch die Notwendigkeit Gottes'.[53] *Voluntas Dei* could rather be conceived in Hart's aesthetic direction more immediately *per naturam*, that is more specifically *per Trinitatem*. Perhaps by seeing *in creatione* an eternal analogy *ad processionem*, in always greater dissimilarity, can we attempt to harmonize our understanding of *voluntatis et naturae*, while affirming Gen. 1 and Rev. 4. Could we say that creation was willed anew in God in eternal loving wisdom, but it was not a spontaneous novelty, for it has eternal correspondence by way of analogy to the loving and giving nature of God, who cannot be thought of Christianly except as Trinity? *Nonne necesse est, nodum necessitatis, voluntatis et naturae non solum ex Deo, sed etiam ex Trinitate intellegendum esse?* Is it not so that the knot of necessity will and nature must be understood, not only from God, but also from the Trinity? Or does one, with these words, tread on the banks of another shore which wraps creation in the garb of the Creator's self-fulfillment? Most certainly, it seems, if this analogy is not conceived *in maior dissimilitudo* (as Eckhart fails to emphasize).

What is at the root of this problem of necessity, will and nature? It seems to me that the problem is related to what Hart has called the 'Christian revolution'; at stake in this knot is a personal conception of God over and against an impersonal force, dynamism, or faceless energy that degenerates into lower forms of willing or preferential personalism; to argue, among other aspects, *pro voluntatem*, be it entirely conditioned and directed *ab natura* (or as Gregory of Nyssa has it at one place: Ἡ δὲ τοῦ θελήματος ὕπαρξις οὐσία ἐστίν[54]), is to do no more than argue for the central theme of Hart's most recent book.[55]

Proceeding to our goal, Hart's theological assertion that God created without ontological necessity expressing an analogy of delight will be compared with that of Plotinus's account of creation.

2.2 Plotinus on the context of creation

Plotinus asked why the world exists explicitly in the *Enneads*:

The mind demands the existence of these beings, but it is still in trouble over the problem endlessly debated by the most ancient philosophers: from such

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51. *Die Philosophische Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, edit. C. I. Gerhardt, 7 vol. (Berlin, 1875–90) vol. 6, p. 616.

52. *De servo arbitrio*, 125, 27. Cited in Thomas Reinhuber, *Kämpfender Glaube: Studien zu Luthers Bekenntnis am Ende von* De servo arbitrio (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000) 121.

53. Reinhuber, *Kämpfender Glaube*, 121.

54. De an. et res. III, 124B. Cited in Balthasar, *Présence et Pensée*, 143.

55. *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2009), e.g.: '[. . .] the form of God and the form of the human person had been revealed [. . .] all at once' 182.

a unity as we have declared The One to be, how does anything at all come into substantial existence, any multiplicity, dyad, or number? Why has the Primal not remained self-gathered so that there be none of this profusion of the manifold which we observe in existence and yet are compelled to trace to that absolute unity?[56]

As Dominic O'Meara remarks, Plotinus's presupposition that everything must come from the 'One' as opposed to 'many' seems to be a difficult starting point, for a multifaceted being could provide an easier explanation.[57]

There is a dissimilarity between Hart and Plotinus in this respect, for as a trinitarian Christian Hart must understand creation springing from 'many' and not 'One' to begin with. At a fundamental level then, Hart cannot accept the reflective paradigm of the 'One and the many'—this would be a conflation of reality from a Christian perspective (180). Thus, where Plotinus begins with One, Hart begins with the Trinity. For the purposes here it is necessary to briefly explain why, in Plotinus's thought, the One did not remain 'self-gathered'.

To answer this question, one must first understand Plotinus's One, and its place in Plotinus's thought. Gay remarks that Plotinus's aim was to explain the multiplicity of reality in terms of unity, the One being this ultimate ground of unity.[58] In Plotinus's words (recorded by his disciple Porphry) his ultimate purpose was to 'bring back the divine in man to the divine in the All.'[59] This mystical ascent of Plotinian philosophy encourages the individual to awake to his true-self and live by a universality of experience.[60] This union with the One, which Armstong suggests is most analogous to 'the union of lovers',[61] is an embrace of the goodness, beauty, and truth of the One. This embrace is always hindered, for the One is beyond grasp and comprehension. It is beauty (*Enn.* I, 6), goodness (VI, 9), and the true explanation of all reality (V, 1) yet these descriptions cannot limit the One in any way, for the One is ungraspable. John Kenny remarks, 'it is the basis of all being and the standard of all value, but it is itself beyond being and beyond goodness.'[62] Further, John Bussanich states: '[w]e speak *about* it, but in reality these efforts only amount to 'making signs to ourselves about it'; it is not possible for anyone to say what it is.'[63] It is utterly transcendent, overwhelming even the

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56. Plotinus, *Enn.* V, 1, 6. Quoted in Plotinus, *The Enneads*, translated by Stephen MacKenna, Second Edition revised by B.S. Page (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1956) hereafter *Enn.*

57. Dominic O'Meara, *Plotinus. An Introduction to the Enneads*, (Oxford: University Press, 1993) 62.

58. Gay, 'Four Medieval Views of Creation,' 248.

59. Porphry, *Life of Plotinus*, cited in: Armstrong, 'Part III: Plotinus,' 222.

60. Armstrong, 'Part III: Plotinus,' 236. See also: John H. Fielder, '*Chorismos* and Emanation in the Philosophy of Plotinus,' in R. Baine Harris, edit., *The Significance of Neoplatonism*, (Norfolk: International Society for Neoplatonic Studies, Old Dominion University, 1976) pp: 101–120, here: 112.

61. Armstrong, 'Part III: Plotinus,' 263.

62. Kenney, *Mystical Monotheism*, 113.

63. John Bussanich, 'Plotinus's metaphysics of the One,' in Lloyd P. Gerson, edit., *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1993) pp: 38–65, here: 38, emphasis his. See also: Armstrong who argues: 'beyond Intellect lies the total indetermination of the One or

limiting dichotomous language of the word 'transcendent'; as Kathryn Tanner remarks on Plotinus's conception, 'if God [the One] transcends the world, God must transcend that sort of characterization, too.'[64] This One is both the universal source of all-that-is and at the same time utterly transcending all-that-is.

As the demiurge of all-that-is, from the One (τό ἕν) , in two moments springs, the *nous* (νοῦς), and from the *nous* springs the *psyche* (ψυχή), or world-soul. From the world-soul, as a contemplative by-product, springs matter. As Rist remarks: '[t]here is no activity on the part of the One, still less any willing or planning or choice [. . .] there is simply a giving-out which leaves the Source unchanged and undiminished.'[65] In this regard all-that-is has come from the One by an act of *prohodos* (πρόοδος), emanation, or 'going forth' (*Enn*. IV, 8, 5).

O'Meara notes that Plotinus followed Plato's myth of creation in the *Timaeus* in that he concluded *implicitly* with Plato that the One gives of itself 'without envy' (Plato, *Timaeus*, 29) because it is 'good' (*Tim*. 29).[66] However, as remarked above, Plotinus's understanding of the One transcends the very notion of 'good'; and this is why his conclusion is an implicit apophatic claim ('without envy'), rather than an explicit positive assertion. Plotinus leaves behind Plato's anthropomorphism, for he cannot search what cause led the One to produce (*Enn*. V, 8, 7). However, he can observe natural elements. In this regard, through empirical observations Plotinus came to a similar conclusion as Plato. From the general assertion that things give of themselves when they are mature, it seemed to him that the One must also operate this way.[67] This is an analogy that works from lower being upward to the One (*Enn*. V, 4, 1). Plotinus noted the natural operations of fire, sun, and snow, observing that, as O'Meara remarks, 'each substance (e.g. fire) has a primary (or internal) activity proper to itself and gives rise to a secondary activity (e.g. heat) external to, or different from, the primary activity.'[68] Thus, analogically, it is plausible that this paradigm operates in the One as well. As O'Meara remarks: the absolute simple activity, which is the One, 'gives rise to a secondary activity which is different from it.'[69] In this sense, where primary activity leads to secondary difference, the One is understood to be 'without envy'.

'Without envy', however, is a somewhat neutral postulation of Plotinus's understanding of why the One emanated. Armstrong has suggested a more antagonistic reading of the *Enneads*. Concerning the original emanation, he suggest that it be understood (following the Neopythagoreans) as 'a kind of radical orig-

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Good,' 'Part III: Plotinus' 238. Cf. *Enn. V*, 3, 13; V, 3, 14.

64. Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) 42.

65. J. Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1967) 67.

66. O'Meara, *Plotinus*, 63.

67. O'Meara, *Plotinus*, 63. Kenney remarks additionally that 'perfection' suggests 'productivity' in Plotinus's thought: '[t]he One is the ground of value, and this perfection entails for Plotinus that it be productive.' *Mystical Monotheism*, 104.

68. O'Meara, *Plotinus*, 63.

69. O'Meara, *Plotinus*, 63.

inal sin, a wish for separation and independence'.[70] Armstrong notes, however, that this should not be overly emphasized.[71] Following O'Meara's reading of Plotinus one can understand that Plotinus believed the One to emanate because of the primary activity of the One.[72] Yet, as Armstrong has pointed out, Plotinus's theology retains a negative evaluation of this act, if only in a minor sense.

The point to be made here is an identification of a difference between Hart and Plotinus regarding the 'why' of creation. Plotinus, from his empirical observation, apophatically comes to nearly the same conclusion as Plato's mythological 'without envy'. He notes that one may not really answer the question of 'why', as he states, 'we are rightly told not to go seeking the causes impelling a Source to produce' (*Enn.* V, 8, 7). Following such leads Halfwassen claims that the reason for the πρόοδος finally remains 'ungraspable'.[73] In comparison, Hart's understanding of the Trinity can lead him to claim cataphatically that the Trinity gives out of a delightful abundance. The Trinity which is 'always already one of infinite musical richness' (277) gives creation which '*is* divine glory' (277, emphasis his). It is this beauty of creation, this 'sheer eloquence with which creation proclaims divine glory, that 'corresponds' to God' (309). Moreover, Hart argues analogically, that one may speak of God delighting in the beauty of his creation as similar to the way in which humans enjoy beauty (315). These emphases expand Plotinus's 'without envy'. With Hart the context of creation was original delightful beauty of the Trinity giving forth more delightful beauty in creation. In this regard, Hart's cataphatic additions contrast with Plotinus in describing the context of creation. The next question to be covered is whether or not the One *needs* the others.

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> The world, we must reflect, is a product of Necessity, not of deliberate purpose: it is due to a higher Kind engendering in its own likeness by a natural process (*Enn.* III, 2, 3).

The meaning of 'necessity' whereby Plotinus's One creates has typically been juxtaposed negatively with the theistic supposition of a God who creates as a free act of love. For example, Gay remarks upon two ways of conceiving of the natural world: one understands it 'as necessary, bound by consubstantial ties to whatever else has being',[74] while the other conceives of it as 'possessing being only through the free power of something else which is itself necessary.'[75] Lloyd P.

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70. Armstrong, 'Part III: Plotinus,' 242. He also adds that 'Plotinus says explicitly in one passage that it would have been better if it had never been.' 242. Cf. *Enn.* III, 8, 30, 32ff; VI, 9, 9, 5, 22; V, 1, 1, 3–5; III, 7, 11. See also John H. Fielder, who uses the phrase 'sheer necessity,' '*Chorismos* and Emanation in the Philosophy of Plotinus,' 105.

71. Armstrong, 'Part III: Plotinus,' 242. See also, Fielder, '*Chorismos* and Emanation in the Philosophy of Plotinus,' 105.

72. O'Meara, *Plotinus*, 63.

73. Halfwassen, *Plotin und der Neuplatonismus*, 89 (translation my own).

74. Gay, 'Four Medieval Views of Creation,' 243.

75. Gay, 'Four Medieval Views of Creation,' 243.

Gerson claims that this dichotomy provides a way to differentiate between a non-creationist, and creationist theology, the term necessity often being the categorical question which is used to decipher the two.[76]

Deprived freedom is among the negative associations accompanying 'necessity'. In this regard, it seems inappropriate to blandly accuse Plotinus of depriving the One of freedom. This would be to suggest that the One existed as subject to some other higher order, and this is not the case with Plotinus's One, which cannot be directed but is beyond all constraints. O'Meara suggests that some of these negative associations have drawn on literal readings of Plotinus's pictorial metaphors to explain the emanation of the many from the One (e.g.: heat necessarily coming from fire, etc.). A more careful reading, O'Meara suggests, would have to acknowledge the limited view of humanity in this regard: the One is 'said to be the source and basis of the qualified forms of freedom in others'.[77] In this regard, one must acknowledge 'the One's ineffability and the fact that we are attempting to conceive of what lies beyond the limitations and constraints of freedom in which we live.'[78] Thus, O'Meara argues that Plotinus is misunderstood when his metaphors are over interpreted to arrive at conclusions that would contradict Plotinus's established conceptions of the One.[79]

Similarly, Gerson argues that one must beware of contrasting Plotinus's metaphors with technical language and in so doing, force them into binary oppositions with other conceptions.[80] For example, arguing that Plotinus's metaphor of heat proceeding from the sun, leading to the consequential idea of 'emanation', could not be included in the semantic domain of the word 'creation'. In this regard, Gerson notes Thomas Aquinas's use of the term *'emanatio'* in reference to *creatio ex nihilo* (*Summa Theol.* I, q. 45, a. 1). Gerson continues in arguing that the conjunction of emanation metaphors with the categorical tag 'non-creationist' overlooks a nuance in the rationale of Plotinus for arriving at the metaphor. Gerson argues that Plotinus began his reflection on emanation from a standpoint of the simplicity of the One, which did not act out of a process of 'discursive reasoning'.[81] This apophatic assertion led Plotinus to conclude that the One must emanate necessarily from simplicity. In this regard, the 'necessity' of Plotinus must be understood near to the prior assertion that the One does not act through a process of deliberation. Therefore, 'necessity' is mitigated by an understanding of the nature of the One. As Bussanich remarks: '[t]he One necessarily is what it is (VI, 8, 10, 15–20), but this necessity is identified with the One's absolute freedom, thereby insuring that the One is not constrained to be what it is by anything external to it

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76. Lloyd P. Gerson, 'Plotinus's Metaphysics: Emanation or Creation?' *Review of Metaphysics*, 46:3 (1993: Mar.) pp: 559–574, here: 560. K. Kremer argues however that 'Plotinische Emanation und christliche Kreation stellen also keine Gegensätze dar.' 'Emanation', in *HWPh*, vol. 2 (Basel: Schwabe, 1972) 446.

77. O'Meara, *Plotinus*, 69.

78. O'Meara, *Plotinus*, 69.

79. O'Meara suggests that *Enn.* VI, 8, be read in light of Porphyry's later interpretation, *On Free Will and the Will of the One*: O'Meara, *Plotinus*, 68.

80. See also Halfwassen, *Plotin und der Neuplatonismus*, 89ff.

81. Gerson, 'Plotinus's Metaphysics: Emanation or Creation?' 561. Cf. *Enn.* III, 2, 3.

or independent of it.'[82] There is no simple distinction between will and nature in the One.

What then may be said of the necessity of the One? W. R. Inge remarks that for Plotinus the world's existence is due to 'the necessity of there being "a second nature"'.[83] He notes that:

> if there were no necessity for each principle to 'give of its own to another', the Good would not be the Good, Spirit would not be the Spirit, and Soul would not be Soul [*Enn.* II, 9, 3]. Without Spirit, the One would have no object for its activities; it would be alone and deserted, at a standstill. For activity is not possible in a being which has no inner multiplicity, unless it acts on another [*Enn.* V, 3, 10].[84]

Thus, 'necessity' in this context is not ontological necessity, but a need for activity. This 'necessity' cannot mean that the One requires emanation in the way that it is necessary for its existence. Plotinus's emphasis on the complete self-sufficiency and independence of the One must be acknowledged; as Inge notes, the One is 'without need, sufficient to Itself, aspiring to no other'[85] (cf. *Enn.* I, 8, 2). Rather than conceiving of 'necessity' as an external force, Inge summarizes Plotinus's understanding of the necessity of the One's emanation as being analogous to an artist: 'akin to the necessity for self-expression on the part of an artist; it is not a vital necessity of growth or self-preservation.'[86] In this analogy of the artist, says Inge, one can conceive of the nature of necessity in the One: it is not necessary in any ultimate sense, but rather a limited sense. Indeed, the analogy of an artist, though generally helpful, when used in a strict sense breaks down, for this artistic analogy cannot be meant to suggest that the One has a unique concern, or knowledge for its work of art, for this would contradict Plotinus's claim that the One creates without knowledge of the others. As Bussanich remarks, '[t]he One produces eternally [. . .] without knowledge of its products',[87] he further quotes *Enn.* VI, 7, 39: '[i]t follows that the Supreme will know neither itself nor anything else but will hold an august repose.' With this in consideration, Inge's claim should hold only in the limited sense of 'a need for activity'. As Plotinus argues, the One without the others would be alone: '[i]t is of the essence of things that each gives of its being to another: without this communication, The Good would not be Good' (*Enn.* II, 9, 3). As Inge summarizes, 'activity is not possible in a being which has no inner multiplicity, unless it acts on another'.[88] Within these qualified understandings of the One, Plotinus suggests some necessity of emanation for the sake of activity. Therefore, the language of 'necessity', however limited it may be, cannot be excised from the vocabulary of Plotinus's One. As

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82. Bussanich, 'Plotinus's metaphysics of the One,' 43.
83. W. R. Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus v. II*, (London: Paternoster, 1918) 120.
84. Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus v. II*, 120.
85. Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus v. II*, 121.
86. Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus v. II*, 121.
87. Bussanich, 'Plotinus's metaphysics of the One,' 49.
88. Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus v. II*, 120.

Inge remarks, for Plotinus 'there is a "mysterious power"'[89] which compels the One to create. This compulsion to create is in the primal simplicity of the One itself, it is not outside the One forcing it to create. As Bussanich claims: 'the One's giving cannot not have occurred'.[90] Taken together, Gerson, O'Meara, Bussanich, and Inge suggest that Plotinus can be conceived of as offering an understanding of 'necessity' which does not require a negative connotation of the One as 'bound' in any simple way.

2.3 Context of creation in comparison

Hart and Plotinus both think of the 'others' as unnecessary for the existence of the Source. Yet they both retain some form of necessity; for Plotinus it is a necessity for activity, for Hart it is an aesthetic necessity. The substantive difference between Hart and Plotinus is Hart's trinitarian starting point, a point of departure which is already a completely enriched and loving Trinity: it does not need creation to add to it but expresses in the fullness of love yet another difference, the good of creation. Here, unlike the necessity in Plotinus's One, which results in the mysterious movement or the need for activity, the Trinity is already resident in harmonious difference—there is no need for another. Plotinus's apophatic method could not ascribe intellection to the One, and thus he concluded that the many exist because of some form of necessity. Comparatively, Hart's cataphatic method leads him to argue that Christian thought conceives of creation as an 'unnecessary, untrammelled, and contingent expression of a divine delight that is always already "differential"' (104). God graciously makes a place for others in the 'divine interval of love's superabundance' (185). Unlike the One, which is first inwardly requiring another or activity (in a non-bound sense), Hart argues the Christian Trinity there is 'no inward, unrelated gaze, no stillness prior to relation, or suspended indialectical relation to otherness' (185). Following Gregory of Nyssa, who also transformed Plotinus's thought in this way,[91] Hart argues that God's love gives without need rather than an 'unresponsive speculative completion of the world's necessity' (191–2). In this articulation Hart is nearer to Early Church thought, for, as Gerhard May argues, the freedom of God to choose to create was the decisive issue which distinguished Christian thought from Neoplatonic theology.[92] Whereas Plotinus's One necessarily emanates others – not in a bound sense, but understood from an apophatic necessity – the trinitarian God creates out of a delightful abundance of love. It seems that for Plotinus, such robust positive descriptions of the Source would be similar to Plato's anthropomorphisms of the creation narrative, which degrade the One's august repose in mythical and primitive cataphatic language.

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89. Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus v. II*, 120.

90. Bussanich, 'Plotinus's metaphysics of the One,' 49. Cf. Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*, ch. 6.

91. Wolfson, 'The Identification of Ex Nihilo with Emanation in Gregory of Nyssa,' 55.

92. May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts*. Cf. Wolfson, 'The Identification of Ex Nihilo with Emanation in Gregory of Nyssa,' 55.

3 Emanation or *ex nihilo*? The act of creation with Plotinus and Hart

Hart's section dealing with 'how' God created begins with eleven Scriptural quotations[93] which emphasize an understanding of creation as springing from God's initiative, and specifically God's voice; these passages articulate creation as a moving wonder filled with the wisdom of God. Hart casts God's connection to creation in terms of 'language', God's loving divine expression. Creation is spoken as an endlessly fluctuating surface reflecting God's existence. As such, creation is an analogy of God; God is not alien to creation, but is 'infinitely more beautiful' (300) than it. The focus here is on Hart's first order argument, that the act of creation is a harmonious divine expression, language of God. This will be set in comparison with Plotinus's understanding of the emanation of the many from the One.

3.1 Divine Expression: creation as a rhetorical embellishment

When speaking of Christian metaphysics Hart proceeds from the claim that God is the beginning and end of all things – 'the first and last word' (291) – 'God speaks God, and creation occurs within that speaking, as a rhetorical embellishment' (291). Following from the preliminary scriptural emphasizes, Hart draws upon Augustine, Dionysius, Maximus the Confessor, and Nicholas of Cusa to identify an understanding of creation as 'spoken': 'there is no reality or truth prior to language [...] there is no species of intelligibility that wholly escapes the logic of poetic analogy, metaphor and deferral' (292).[94] Therefore, creation is an expression of God, spoken by God. Here Hart expresses a pan-en-theistic conception of creation-Creator relations. As he remarks: the 'Christian Logos must be conceived of as containing all of creation and history within itself' (104). Yet, this is not to suggest that it overwhelms the differences, or reduces its value to a condition of 'impoverishment and distortion' (104), but rather, as the spoken expression of God, creation is 'comprised by God's being' (104).

Hart conceives of creation as a love gift of expression *within* the being of God. The divine expression is found within the 'trinitarian dogma' (267) of *agape*, a gift that is never lost, but displays the harmony of *eros* and *agape*. In this regard, creation – the gift of God – is given by God, to God (within God's being). Then as an excess of this inner life, 'through the pneumatological generosity of the trinitarian life' it is 'given to creatures' (268). Thus, creation, as a gift, is not to be received as a possession, but 'grace' (268): creation is drawn into the infinite circle of the erotic charity of the divine gift (268). In this regard, rather than existing univocally outside the being of God, the act of creation is a departure from the

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93. Gen. 1:3; Ps. 19:1–4; Isa. 55:10–11; Wis. 11:20, 13:1–5; Sir. 24:25–29, 43:27–30; John 1:1; Rom. 1:20–21; Eph. 3:14–15; Rev. 22:13.

94. Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* 1.2.6–5.11; Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, 1.1.6; Maximus the Confessor, in seventh *Ambiguum*; Nicholas of Cusa, *De filiatione Dei, Compendium* 8; George Berkely, *Alciphron* 4.7–15; Johann Hamann, *Aesthetica in nuce*; Hart also takes note of the general theological tradition of *liber naturae*.

already present overarching theme of love within the Trinity (281): it is extended and 'unfolded in the Trinity' (281).

Hart presents this account as in keeping with the traditional doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. The inner fulfillment of the Trinitarian life, which suggests no needs, or lack, creates not as an act of overcoming some previous, alternative power, force, nothingness, energy, or chaos: 'there is nothing in the way of an exterior necessity that could evoke creation from God' (257). Instead, creation is an unfolding of the already present love economy of the Trinity; God expresses an additional act of love in creating.

Hart extends this rationale to the 'face of the deep' of Genesis. He argues that this passage should not be taken so literally as to obscure 'the difference between God's transcendent act of giving being to what is not and the oscillating play of finitude's forms and forces within creation' (257). In Hart's account, when this Biblical language generates such an ontology it becomes a theology of 'malign mythic narratives' (257), a 'pagan philosophy' (258). Rather than these accounts, Hart suggests:

> [e]ven the waste and darkness (the *tohu* and *bohu*) of Genesis 1:2 is the crea-ture of God (Gen. 1:1): not an autonomous, intractable, and formless matter subdued and shaped by the imposition of form, but only the dormant fallow creation waiting for God to bring it graciously to foison (258).

Though this reading of Genesis 1 has been employed from Augustine to John Milton,[95] many Old Testament scholars explicitly argue that the passage speaks of no such previous contingency between the Creator and *tohu wabohu*.[96] The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* was not developed from exegesis of this passage.[97]

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95. Augustine, *The Confessions*, XII, 8; Regina Schwartz, 'Milton's Hostile Chaos: ". . . And the sea was No More,"' in: *ELH*, (vol. 52, No. 2, Sum., 1985) pp: 337–374, here: 337.

96. Cf. Gerhard May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts: die Entstehung der Lehre von der Creatio ex Nihilo*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1978) 23ff. Rabbi Gamaliel II also claimed that God created the *tohu wabohu*. May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts*, 23. Wilfried Härle claims that in Genesis 1 'Sie [Schöpfung aus dem Nichts] ist aber in Gen 1 insofern angelegt und vorbereitet, als dort für den Akt der Schöfung das Verbum "bara" verwendet wird [. . .]' *Dogmatik*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007³) 420–21. Härle follows G. von Rad who also leaves the door open for this understanding: *Das erste Buch Mose. Genesis* (Göttingen, 1949) 37. C. Westermann is however more specific in his critique: 'es ist dann auch falsch, aus der Vokabel als solcher die creatio ex nihilo abzulesen [. . .]' *Genesis 1–11*, (Neukirchen 1974) 138. See also Walter Groß, 'Creatio ex nihilo, I. Biblisch': RGG⁴ vol. 2, pp: 485–487. Groß remarks: 'Im 2.Jh. Werden als wichtigste Gründe [für *creatio ex nihilo*] genannt: kein zweites Prinzip neben Gott; Gottes Allmacht und freier Wille.' 487. See also: Bruce K. Waltke, 'The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1–3: Part IV: The Theology of Genesis 1,' *Bibliotheca Sacra* (no. 132, 1975) pp: 327–42, here: 329; Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis: The Story of Creation* (Chicago: University Press, 1963) 101; Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970) 7; Walter Bruggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982) 25; Victor Hurowitz 'The Genesis of Genesis,' *Bible Review*, (n. 21, 2005) pp: 37–53, esp.: 52; David Winston, 'The Book of Wisdom's Theory of Cosmogony,' *History of Religions*, (Vol. 11, No. 2, Nov., 1971) pp. 185–202, esp.: 199–200. And for a critique of *creatio ex nihilo*, see: Catherine Keller, *The Face of the Deep: a theology of becoming*, (London: Routledge, 2003).

97. Cf. May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts*. Ted Peters, 'Cosmos and Creation,' *Word & World* (4/4, 1984) pp: 372–390, here: 385ff; David Fergusson, *The Cosmos and the Creator: An introduction to*

The creation narrative of Genesis is a large step in this direction, however.[98] Hart correctly identify the Hebrew narrative's distancing from the *Chaoskampf* theme.[99] For Hart, the view of creation as God domesticating chaos obscures some important theological themes. Indeed, it 'veil[s] the freedom and unconstrained joy of the God who expresses himself in creating and in loving what he creates.' (258). It is the affirmation of *creatio ex nihilo* that creation is not a 'war with darkness' (258), nor do creation and God exist in a 'totality of violence' (258), but rather, *creatio ex nihilo* teaches of a 'God who gives of his bounty' (258). There is no dark-side to creation, 'creation is in its entirety, the shining surface that it shows to God' (258). The chaos theory of creation is a 'mythos of the sublime, the legend of Dionysus, the cultic legitimation of every warlike state' (259). The Christian view stands in contrast to this: it affirms creation as a good gift 'contained by God's infinity' (259). In this way, the 'disorders and derangements of the surface' (259) are not representative iceberg tips of a noumenal chaos, but rather 'wounds to be healed' (259)—'there is no chaos, but only a will toward chaos, and the violence it inflicts upon being' (259).[100]

One consequence of Hart's affirmation of *creatio ex nihilo* is his emphasis on the 'unseen' reality: the universal harmony of creation's inception. In this way, rather than the necessary cycle of life and death (the 'disorders and derangements of the surface' p. 259) as the ultimate ground of creation, Hart focuses on the primal harmony of creation. Indeed, as he remarks in *The Doors of the Sea:*

The Christian should see two realities at once, one world (as it were) within another: one the world as we all know it, in all its beauty and terror, grandeur and dreariness, delight and anguish; and the other the [sic] world in its first and ultimate truth, not simply 'nature' but 'creation,' an endless sea of glory, radiant with the beauty of God in every part, innocent of all violence.[101]

In his affirmation of creation out of nothing Hart recovers a vision of the ultimate harmony of creation itself, not as it is seen, but as it was intended. Though Hart often distances himself from dialectic theology, here he proposes a clear dialectical and un-resolved tension. By drawing this claim from the doctrine

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the Theology of Creation (London: SPCK, 1998) 1–22; Gunton 'The Doctrine of Creation,' 145; Daniel J. Treir, 'Creation,' in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, edit., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Publishing, 2005) pp: 144–146, esp.: 144.

98. G. von Rad, *Das erste Buch Mose. Genesis*, (Göttingen 1949) 37.

99. J. Richard Middleton argues that there are 'three crucial dimensions of this creation account that directly contradict the *chaoskampf* theme.' *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1*, (Grand Rapids: Brazo, 2005) 264. See also: Waltke, 'The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1–3,' 333; Gerhard Hasel, 'The Polemic nature of the Genesis Cosmology,' *Evangelical Quarterly* (46, 1974) pp: 81–102.

100. In a footnote Hart reflects upon the scientific discourse of 'chaos theory', he points out that it is actually in keeping with his argument. For in 'chaos theory' there is an openness to magnificent complexities, 'there is, in short, a sort of baroque interminability of exposition in the fabric of things.' p. 259, n. 114.

101. Hart, *The Doors of the Sea*, 60 (cf. 22, and 101–2). Hart's insistence of reading creation theologically is in notable similarity with Barth: Henry, 'Karl Barth on Creation,' 219–220. See also Gunton on the doctrine of creation as creed: 'The Doctrine of Creation,' 141ff; Ted Peters, *Science, Theology, and Ethics*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003) 34.

of *creatio ex nihilo*, Hart is in great similarity with Irenaeus's first affirmation of *creatio ex nihilo*. For Irenaeus, the affirmation of the temporality of matter was the indicative claim leading to the imperative exclusion of the mythical account of creation from Achamoth: a belief that creation's 'solid substance [came] from her sadness, all mobile substance from her terror,'[102] that creation was the consequence of 'so great an amount of tears, or perspiration, or sadness'.[103] Hart, with Irenaeus, affirms *creatio ex nihilo*, and hence, creation *not out of* violence, sadness, labor, or terror.[104] From this standpoint, the primal harmony of creation should be the focus of Christian reflection on creation. Surely this need not be understood contrary to what St. Paul describes looking to the other horizon (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18).

Whereas Hart finds an ally with Irenaeus in affirming the primal harmony of creation from the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, he finds another with Augustine in affirming the ultimate analogous nature of creation itself. Augustine taught that creation was not from God's self (as that it would equal God), but that it was created from nothing 'in your [God's] Wisdom, which is born of your substance'.[105] Thus, as it was created in God's Wisdom, which was born of God's substance, Augustine puts creation at the bottom of a flow of existence proceeding from the Trinity. He complicates any pantheism, and in notable similarity with Plotinus,[106] redeems creation from a dualism:

> You created heaven and earth; but you did not create them out of yourself. If you had, they would be equal to your only-begotten Son and therefore to yourself too, and it could not possibly be right that something not proceeding from you should be equal to you. And there was nothing else in existence besides you from which you might create them, God, Three in One and One in Three, and therefore you created heaven and earth out of nothing.[107]

For Augustine, creation was born out of Wisdom (that which is of God's substance) and so still not equal to the transcendent God.[108] By emphasizing the radical

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102. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, 2, 10, 3. *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325.* Ed. by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 10 vols. [1885] (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1999) v. 1, p. 370. Christopher Stead argues that the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, which Irenaeus employed, followed that of Theophilus of Antioch c. 180 AD. *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity*, (Cambridge University Press, 1994) 68. This point is also addressed by May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts*.

103. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, 2, 10, 3.

104. Cf. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 2, 10, 4. Irenaeus claims that humanity was not created perfect (*Adv. Haer.* IV, 38). This passage must be closely interpreted. For Irenaeus, creation not being perfect is roughly tantamount to saying that creation is not God (*Adv. Haer.* IV, 38), it is not to say – and it hardly need by mentioned – that God created an evil, or fallen creation. Irenaeus follows St. Paul: 'we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory' (2 Cor. 3:18). Only Jesus Christ is the perfect God-man (*Adv. haer.* III, 16).

105. Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. by Rex Warner (London: New English Library, 1963) XII, 7. See also: XI, 5. Cf. Augustine, *City of God*, XIV, 11. Similarly: Aquinas, *Summa*, I, 45.

106. Cf. Rist, 'Plotinus and Christian Philosophy,' 391–2.

107. Augustine, *The Confessions*, XII, 7.

108. As Larissa Carina Seelbach remarks: 'Wenngleich seine Auslegungen dabei ganz er-

transcendence of God, a God who gave existence to that which is closer to non-existence, he situated creation in a hierarchy of being having its existence from the infinite triune God:

> You created a great thing and a little thing (for you are almighty and good, to make all things good) – a great heaven and a little earth [. . .] one close to you, the other close to nothing, one which has only you superior to it, the other which is of all thing the most low.[109]

Thus, for Augustine creation was created from nothing by the Wisdom of God and thus good, but not from Godself and thus not divine. Heaven is nearer to God than earth, and earth is nearer to nothing than heaven.[110] This articulation of the doctrine, as John Betz argues, retains both a profound immanence (creation made by Wisdom), and transcendence between God and creation.[111] Rather than being of Greek origin alone, Betz argues that this can also be seen in Scripture.[112] It also represents a faithful articulation of the Nicene Creed, which as Jaroslav Pelikan argues: 'insisted that the creation of man and of the cosmos could not be understood apart from him as Creator, but that he had to be seen apart from his creatures.'[113] Augustine's Christianizing of Greek thought leads to a conceptualization of the devote life as a seeking upward, an ascent to God.[114]

Proceeding in this tradition, Hart argues that when one thinks of creation they ought to conceive of it as analogous to the more profound and infinite analogate. In this regard, Hart argues that the greatest beauty of the world can never acquire the wonderful beauty of the infinite God: 'God differs infinitely from created beauty not by being utterly alien to it, but by being infinitely more beautiful' (300).[115] This infinite continuum is an example of what Hart identifies

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heblich differieren, läßt sich doch ein klares, allen Ausführungen zugrundeliegendes Motiv ausmachen: das Verbot einer Grenzverletzung zwischen Schöpfer und Schöpfung und das Insistieren auf dem ontologischen Unterschied zwischen beiden.' 'Schöpfungslehre,' in Volker Henning Drecoll, ed., *Augustin Handbuch* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007) pp: 470–479, here: 470.

109. Augustine, *The Confessions*, XII, 7.

110. For an exposition on Augustine's creation account see: Christian, 'Augustine on the Creation of the World,' 18–22. See also: Wassmer, 'The Trinitarian Theology of Augustine and His Debt to Plotinus.'

111. Cf. John R. Betz, 'Beyond the Sublime: The Aesthetics of the Analogy of Being (Part Two),' (22:1 January 2006) pp: 1–50, esp.: 12ff. See also: *Confessions*, III, 6. Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 11. On the conflation of nature and supernature see also: John Montag, SJ, 'Revelation: The false legacy of Suarez,' in John Milbank, et al., edit., *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, (London: Routledge, 1999) pp: 38–63.

112. Betz, 'Beyond the Sublime: The Aesthetics of the Analogy of Being (Part Two),' 15. Cf. Ps. 139; Isa. 55:8, 66:1; 1 Cor. 2:9ff.

113. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, I The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)*, (Chicago: University Press, 1971) 204.

114. Augustine, *Johannis evangelium tractatus*, 63, 1. Cf. *Confessions*, III, 6; *X, xvi, 25*. Ps. 105:4. See Drecoll, 'Neuplatonismus,' pp: 72–84.

115. Hart is in keeping with Betz's recent treatment of this subject in two articles in *Modern Theology*: 'Beyond the Sublime: The Aesthetics of the Analogy of Being (Part One),' (21:3 July 2005) pp: 367–411; 'Beyond the Sublime: The Aesthetics of the Analogy of Being (Part Two).' Betz's argument commences in asserting *analogia entis* as an indispensable Christian doctrine.

as the transforming of Neoplatonic thought into the Christian narrative. As he remarks:

> Christian thought, insofar as it appropriated a Neoplatonic morphology of being, transformed it in accord with its own narrative; what remained then was a formidable collection of concepts and terms, now integrated into a more generous scheme of signification and rendered analogous by another, radically more transcendent analogate (104).

Hart's understanding of the Patristic transformation of Neoplatonic thought into the Christian narrative, with its more radically transcendent God, is similar to Pelikan's explanation. He remarks that the Patristic doctrine of creation emphasized the utter contingency of the world by virtue of its understanding of a more transcendent God.[116] In this sense, John Rist speaks of Augustine completing Platonic thought 'so as to become Christianity'.[117]

Two things have been shown in this section. First, Hart's explication of the doctrine of creation out of nothing, which leads him to conclude for a primal harmony in creation, can also be seen in Irenaeus. Secondly, Hart's conception of creation as 'hanging' from the Triune being is similar to the thought of Augustine, who was indebted to the Platonic milieu of Mediterranean spirituality. Plotinus's account will now be addressed. Plotinus sees emanation as an agnostic event, the One did not know of the emanation of the 'others'. With this, as a follower of Plato, Plotinus thought of matter as eternal. Finally, the act of creation did not require effort of the One, nor did it take from the Source.

3.2 *The One's eternal and effortless emanation and agnosis of the many*

For Plotinus, beginning with the *nous*, all-that-is has sprung from the One; all things have come from this primal simplicity leading finally to the lowest level of contemplation in the animated body. He remarks:

> The One is all things and no one of them; the source of all things is not all things; and yet it is all things in a transcendental sense—all things, so to speak, having run back to it: or more correctly, not all as yet are within it, they will be (*Enn.* V, 2, 1).[118]

In this ultimate derivative sense, matter flows forth from the higher One. As O'Meara remarks '[m]atter is not then an independent cause; it ultimately derives, as does everything else, from the One.'[119] This conclusion, that all things are commenced from the One, and that all is contingent on the One, is what Rist calls 'Plotinus's most important tidying-up'[120] of Plato's thought. Rather

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116. Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 256ff.
117. John Rist, 'Plotinus and Christian Philosophy,' 409.
118. This text was noted by Bussanich, 'Plotinus's metaphysics of the One,' 46. Cf. *Enn.* II, 8, 11; V, 3, 15, V, 5, 5; VI, 6, 13; VI, 7, 32.
119. O'Meara, *Plotinus*, 78. Cf. *Enn.* III, 4, 1.
120. Rist, 'Plotinus and Christian Philosophy,' 391.

than Alcinous's interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus* where, as O'Meara remarks, 'the world is constituted from the co-operation of a variety of pre-existing independent causes',[121] for Plotinus, all of the parts find their harmony in the original One.

This 'tidying-up' of Plato's thought is taken together with the traditional Platonic doctrine of the eternality of matter in the *Enneads*. In his keeping with the Platonic tradition, as O'Meara notes, Plotinus 'accepts the Aristotelian doctrine that the world has no beginning and interprets the *Timaeus* as illustrating the eternal constitution of the world by transcendent causes.'[122] In this regard, Plotinus remarks that 'there is [. . .] a permanent substratum [*hupokeimenon*]' (*Enn.* II, 4, 4) to matter. This follows from his conception that 'the many' (intellect, world-soul, matter) have *always* derived from the One in a state of contingency. The act of emanation should not be thought of chronologically. As Harris argues, the emanative analogies were employed by Plotinus to secure a 'permanent structure of *spiritual* essences. The procession is not a procession in time. He is describing the logical, and not the chronological order of being'.[123] From the One's simple activity of rest, the many emanate eternally forth.

That Plotinus understood emanation to take place out of time may raise speculative inquiry about a possible similarity to the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*.[124] As Kenny has remarked, '[i]t has been suggested that Plotinus should have adopted a *creatio ex nihilo* doctrine and treated "otherness" as a movement into finitude from the infinite ground of the One.'[125] In this way Plotinus could have easily established a clear line of distinction between the One and the many, preserving their unique identities; Kenny argues to the contrary:

> [t]o demand that this line of theistic demarcation, between the first principle and all others, in terms of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is to force upon Plotinian theology a foreign logic. For Plotinus, the One is ultimate, simple, transcendent, and thus unique [. . .] it is apophatic theology that remains the dominate and most salient element in Plotinian theism: the One is ultimate and alone because it is a hid divinity.[126]

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121. O'Meara, *Plotinus*, 72.

122. O'Meara, *Plotinus*, 77. Time itself emerges as a privation from the One (*Enn.* III, 7, 11). Plotinus conceived of time in terms of movement, and thus contrasted it to the preferred idea of rest. It was thought of as an essence between the world-soul and physical world, cf. Andrew Smith, 'Eternity and Time,' in Gerson, edit., *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, pp: 196–216. See also: Plato, *Timaeus*, 38b 6: 'Time and the heavens came into being at the same instant,' noted by Smith, 'Eternity and Time,' p. 216, n. 35.

123. R. Baine Harris, 'Description of Neoplatonism,' in R. Baine Harris, edit., *The Significance of Neoplatonism*, (International Society for Neoplatonic Studies, Old Dominion University Albany: Norfolk, 1976) 5, emphasis his.

124. Gunton, 'The Doctrine of Creation,' 149.

125. Kenny, *Mystical Monotheism*, 148. In contradistinction, K. Kremer argues that 'Plotinische Emanation und christliche Kreation stellen also keine Gegensätze dar.' 'Emanation', in *HWPh*, vol. 2 (Basel: Schwabe, 1972) 446.

126. Kenny, *Mystical Monotheism*, 149.

The gathering center of Plotinian theology, the utterly transcendent One, did not impel speculation concerning a demarcation point. For Plotinus, all-that-is is 'beginningless'. With this emphasis, two other keys to Plotinus's understanding of emanation must be addressed. Plotinus understood the emanation of the many from the One to be effortless on the part of the One, furthermore, the One does not know the many.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

> Consider the universe: we are agreed that its existence and its nature come to it from beyond itself; are we, now, to imagine that its maker first thought it out in detail- the earth, and its necessary situation in the middle; water and, again, its position as lying upon the earth; all the other elements and objects up to the sky in due place and order; living beings with their appropriate forms as we know them, their inner organs and their outer limbs- and that having thus appointed every item beforehand, he then set about the execution? Such designing was not even possible [. . .] (*Enn.* V, 8, 7).

The non-time-bound act of emanation is carried out, according to Plotinus, without labor on the part of the One, and without knowledge of that which is emanating forth. As Kenney remarks, the One produces 'without a central conception of divine volition'.[127] Plotinus leaves behind Plato's understanding of creation which emphasized a laborious activity that brought forth the many; Plotinus's account of emanation is not an analogy of a calculating artist deliberating about the form of the artistic expression and then using tools to make something. For Plotinus the One emanates in effortless contemplation. Just as the *nous* derives effortlessly from the soul, the soul contemplatively emanates the world.[128] The One, as Plotinus remarks, did not work on material gathered from elsewhere as a typical craftsman, he did not use 'hands and tools; feet and hands are of the later order' (*Enn.* V, 8, 7). The One emanates in an outflow from which 'there is no lessening, either in its emanation [. . .] nor in itself, the starting point' (*Enn.* V, 8, 8). As Bussanich remarks, '[a]ccording to the principle of undiminished giving, the One [. . .] produces eternally [. . .] from an inexhaustible reality [. . .] without undergoing any change or alteration.'[129] Gerson argues that Plotinus's use of this conceptualization divested the One of responsibility for evil.[130]

Preceding the concept of the effortless act of giving from an 'inexhaustible reality' is a radical transcendence attributed to the One. In the terms of Plotinus, the One exhibits the fullest sense of an 'august repose', the One transcends the

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127. Kenney, *Mystical Monotheism*, 104. Cf. J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism*, (Oxford: University Press, 1982).

128. As O'Meara argues: *Plotinus*, 76. Cf. *Enn.* V, 8, 7; III, 8, 4.

129. Bussanich, 'Plotinus's metaphysics of the One' 49. See also: Armstrong, 'There is no thinking things out or planning, no willing or choosing [. . .] [t]he universal order springs from Soul spontaneously, as a tree grows, the laws of nature are not laid down in advance and then applied, but are the immediate undesigned result of Soul's contemplation of the higher order of Intellect,' 'Part III: Plotinus,' 253. Cf. *Enn.* III, 8, 8; VI, 9, 9.

130. Gerson, 'Plotinus's Metaphysics: Emanation or Creation?' 573.

negative movement of intellectual deliberation, and is far removed from any analogy of artistic expression. The One does not know nor is it concerned with the emanation. As Plotinus notes, '[i]t follows that the Supreme will know neither itself nor anything else but will hold an august repose'[131] (*Enn.* VI, 7, 39). In so doing Plotinus went beyond the artisan model of Plato, finding the deliberative intellection of Plato's mythology depreciative of the transcendent attribute of the One. He continues: 'Plato dealing with essential being allows it intellection but not this august repose [. . .], the most august [. . .] is That which transcends (the movement of) Intellection' (*Enn.* VI, 7, 39). Plotinus's concept of radical transcendence was incompatible with the process of intellection.

Even if this emanation can be thought of, as Gerson compels, a modified instrumental species of a creationism theology (the One acting '*per se*' rather than a '*per accidens*'),[132] it could not stoop to attributes such as 'loving', or 'caring', it could never be aware of the many. As Bussanich remarks: 'the many' have come from the One without 'deliberation or inclination [. . .] and without knowledge of its products [. . .].'[133] The act of creation is therefore both effortless, and takes place without knowledge of the others.

There are three characteristics of a Plotinian account of 'how' the One emanates. First, the act of emanation takes place without a beginning in time: matter in Plotinus's scheme is eternal. Second, the act of emanation takes place without effort, as an act of contemplation. Finally, the One emanates the others without a particular intellectual knowledge or concern for the others. What then are the similarities and differences between Hart and Plotinus on the act of creation?

3.3 *The act of creation in comparison*

Hart and Plotinus both hold that all-that-is did not come about through the combination of independent pre-existing causes co-operating together.[134] Plotinus's apophatic method led him to part ways with Plato in asserting that matter itself springs from the One, as opposed to Plato's creation myth where matter was waiting to be shaped by 'work'. In this regard, Plotinus's conception shares relative similarity with what would become creedal Christian faith. As Gerhard May remarks '[b]y deriving matter from the One [. . .] Plotinus breaks through a philosophical dogma and achieves at this point a consensus with Christian thinking.'[135] In Hart's claim that the gift of creation is *by* God *ex nihilo*, he stands in agreement with Plotinus's negative judgment of pre-existing causes cooperating together to bring the world about. They are unified in their negotiation of a common obstacle. However, though this similarity is significant, their agreement *against* pre-existing

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131. For Plotinus the very act of 'knowing' (its deliberative intellectual process) was the problematic attribute which could not be ascribed to the One.

132. Gerson, 'Plotinus's Metaphysics: Emanation or Creation?' Cf. Lloyd P. Gerson, *Plotinus. Arguments of the Philosophers.* (London: Routledge, 1994) 27ff.

133. Bussanich, 'Plotinus's metaphysics of the One' 49.

134. Cf. O'Meara, *Plotinus*, 72; also Rist, 'Plotinus and Christian Philosophy', 391.

135. *Creatio Ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of 'Creation out of Nothing' in Early Christian Thought*, trans. By A. S. Worral (T & T Clark: Edinburgh, 1994) 5.

sources could not shadow the substantial dissension between them regarding the temporality of creation: for Plotinus it is eternal, for Hart (though *ab aeterno* 'fitting' [256]) it is temporal.

An additional similarity between Hart and Plotinus is their analogical understanding of creation and God. As Hart remarks, creation and God are differentiated from one another by the profound infinity of the supreme analogate (191–192). Yet the One could not be Hart's Trinity: the One cares not for, and knows not of the others, whereas the God of Hart loves the others. In this way, Hart correctly remarks that creation '"corresponds" to God in ways that the thought of Plotinus could never allow' (192). The Trinity is more profoundly immanent to creation than Plotinus's One is to the others. That is to say, the Trinity transcends Plotinus's 'august repose', a concept that could not imagine movement in transcendence. The Trinity, as already differential, remains fully God even when embracing the movement of differences. Plotinus's apophatic claim that all came from the One led him to an understanding of a continuum of existence, Hart adds to this a cataphatic understanding of a loving triune God.

Third, both apophatically conceive of all-that-is as coming to be without effort. As Hart argues, creation is a rhetorical expression of God, not a laborious overcoming of some pre-existing force. Yet with this agreement in the negative 'without effort' there is a dissimilarity regarding the 'how'. For Hart, creation comes to be as a musical polyphony of good differences from an already good harmony of difference (or movement) within the Trinity;[136] for Plotinus, on the other hand, all differences emerge as an effortless decomposition from the resting One. As Hart argues, Christian theology could never conceive of creation in these terms: 'for Christian thought difference does not *eventuate* at all, but is' (180, emphasis his). Furthermore, for Hart creation is a loving act on the part of the Trinity where God knows and cares for what is created. With Plotinus, however, the One does not know and does not care for the others. As Hart remarks regarding Plotinus: 'the One [. . .] is not mindful of us' (191) but the Christian God which creates out of the love which is the Trinity 'is turned toward it [creation] and regards it, and takes it back to himself without despoiling it of its difference' (192). In the very areas where Hart and Plotinus agree they also share significant disagreements under closer investigation.

4 Conclusion: apophatic and cataphatic as a comparative paradigm

A theme emerged in this study on more than one occasion: Hart agreed with a Plotinian apophatic claim and then added a cataphatic assertion. For example, in the second section, Hart's trinitarian starting point led to significant differences with Plotinus regarding 'why' creation took place. Though Hart would be happy to agree with Plotinus's implicit conclusion, that the One is 'without envy', he

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136. On this theme of creation as musical harmony, see: 274–288. Similarity: Catherine Pickstock, 'Music: Soul, city and cosmos after Augustine,' in John Milbank, et al., edit., *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, (London: Routledge, 1999) pp: 243–277.

spoke more, noting that God created out of a delightful abundance of love. Another similarity from this section (a similarity that does not fit so nicely within the apophatic and cataphatic paradigm) was regarding the idea of 'necessity': both agreed that the many were not necessary for the existence of the Source. Yet they both also retained some form of mitigated necessity: Plotinus retained some necessity for *activity*, whereas Hart retains an *aesthetic* necessity. As that Hart abbreviates God's volition to nature, and as that Plotinus ascribes no intellection to the One, this language of 'necessity' could not be left behind. The important distinction in their concepts of necessity concerns the nature of the Source: for Plotinus the One *required* others (in a non-bound way), for Hart the Trinity was *already in differential harmony*.

In the third section it was shown that Plotinus and Hart agreed that all-that-is did not come from multiple pre-existing substances working together. To this Hart added an additional claim, that creation took place *ex nihilo*, and that it was not eternal. The apophatic and cataphatic paradigm emerged regarding the 'effortlessness' of the act of creation: they both agree that the act was not a laborious overcoming of something, or a taking from the Source. Yet, where Plotinus sees this as a degeneration of the One, Hart adds positively that the act was an expression of love. The paradigm also holds true regarding their shared understanding of a continuum, or hierarchy, of being between the Source and all-that-is. Hart's cataphatic trinitarian starting point allowed for this stable hierarchy to be itself overcome; the loving God who does not shun but embraces, cares for, and is mindful of the others could not be similar to the One of Plotinus who does not know the others.

At first glance, Hart's account of creation appears Plotinian, upon closer investigation, however, this charachterization becomes inadequate. His employment of the Church Fathers, and consequently their appropriation, or transformation, of Platonic and Plotinian language, was not in anyway a rejection of Biblical revelation, but rather an articulation of it. The result is a modification of the Platonic and Plotinian language and concepts, ultimately setting out a metaphysic of the doctrine of creation.[137] Two criticisms were made. The first concerned the nexus of creation, necessity, and God's will and nature. Despite Hart's criticism of necessity at creation, he holds to a certain form of aesthetic necessity. The crucial account of *voluntatis Dei* is not clearly acknowledged at creation. In reflection, perhaps this lack threatens the entire emphasis on the gratuity of creation despite his passionate rejection of Hegel. Can *donum* be conceived *sine voluntate?* The second criticism concerned exegesis. If there was one place where there appeared to be a certain, possibly sudden incorporation of the Biblical narrative, it was in his interpretation of Gen. 1. This was an admittedly theological, and not finally an

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137. Rist argues that Platonic thought, in its Neoplatonic form, should not be excised from Christian theology. For if 'Christianity tries to purge itself entirely of Platonic modes of self-explanation, it will falter into little more than a fundamentalism.' 'Plotinus and Christian Philosophy,' 409. He concludes that 'the necessity for some part of Plotinian (and not simply Platonic) underpinning for Christian *theology* is as strong now as when Augustine first came to grasp the facts of the case.' 'Plotinus and Christian Philosophy,' 409.

exegetical claim—although, can these finally be divided? In this case, he posits a previous contingency between the *tohu wabohu* and God. This exegetical claim is not necessary to sustain his theological argument and goes against a received readings of Gen. 1 among many Biblical scholars. A better way forward is a double affirmation of the diversity of the Biblical witness (in its various stylistic mediums), and of the developmental essence of doctrine. In other words, the *tohu wabohu* account a creation can be understood directly in context of its ancient competitors, for there it can be seen, from the eyes of a theologian, as an early developmental step towards *creatio ex nihilo* against the *Chaoskampf* theology. The *sensus litteralis* has been overemphasized in strands of exegesis since Nicholas of Lyra (c. 1270–c. 1349), but there is a way to preserve its utility for today.

These minor criticisms do not shadow the rightfully praised theology in Hart's book. Hart's accounts of creation as a delightful analogy of the Trinity and as a divine rhetorical embellishment, both illuminate, and by way of integration through the Christian tradition, transform the splendor of Plotinus's philosophy.