# Thinking Being
## Introduction to Metaphysics in the Classical Tradition

# Ancient Mediterranean and Medieval Texts and Contexts

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## Studies in Platonism, Neoplatonism, and the Platonic Tradition

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# Thinking Being
# Introduction to Metaphysics in the Classical Tradition

*By*

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This book is printed on acid-free paper.

To Christine
In spousal togetherness, being to my thinking

CONTENTS

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# ABBREVIATIONS

## *Works of Plato*

| | |
|---|---|
| *Crat.* | *Cratylus* |
| *Euth.* | *Euthyphro* |
| *Gr. Hip.* | *Greater Hippias* |
| *Men.* | *Meno* |
| *Parm.* | *Parmenides* |
| *Phd.* | *Phaedo* |
| *Phdr.* | *Phaedrus* |
| *Phil.* | *Philebus* |
| *Rep.* | *Republic* |
| *Soph.* | *Sophist* |
| *Symp.* | *Symposium* |
| *Theaet.* | *Theaetetus* |
| *Tim.* | *Timaeus* |

## *Works of Aristotle*

| | |
|---|---|
| *De An.* | *On the Soul* |
| *Eth. Nic.* | *Nicomachean Ethics* |
| *Met.* | *Metaphysics* |
| *Phys.* | *Physics* |

## *Works of Thomas Aquinas*

| | |
|---|---|
| *De ente* | *De ente et essentia* |
| *De pot.* | *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia dei* |
| *De ver.* | *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* |
| *In de caus.* | *Suprum librum de causis* |
| *In de ebd.* | *Expositio libri de ebdomadibus* |
| *In de int.* | *Expositio libri peryermeneias* |
| *ScG* | *Summa contra gentiles* |
| *ST* | *Summa theologiae* |

# INTRODUCTION

## 1. *The Nature of Metaphysics*

In the fall semester of 2008 I taught a course in the graduate program at Loyola Marymount University called "Metaphysics in the Classical Tradition." Originally conceived primarily as an advanced survey of the most significant figures in classical metaphysics,[1] the course as it proceeded developed into something far richer and deeper: an articulation of the thematic continuity in the thinking of being from Parmenides to Thomas Aquinas, centered on the two fundamental questions, 'What is being?' and 'Why are there beings, rather than nothing?' The first of these questions is formulated by Aristotle but stated by him to have been asked "from of old" (*Met*. Z.1, 1028b3–5); the second, although not expressly formulated in antiquity,[2] is touched on by Plato in his account of the good as "beyond reality" and as the source of being itself (*Rep*. 509b6–10), and is central to the thought of both Plotinus and Aquinas. The result of remaining attentive to these two questions was a thematic understanding of the tradition that is liable to be lost in more specialized examinations of individual thinkers and remains altogether unthought in 'histories of philosophy' that are merely historical rather than truly philosophical. The present study, aiming to set forth that understanding, is thus intended neither as a survey nor as a history but as a properly philosophical exposition of the fundamental insights of classical metaphysics.

These two questions, which together constitute the thinking of being which is metaphysics, are odd in the extreme. The term 'being,' here and throughout this book, is used to translate Greek ὄν or τὸ ὄν, the present participle of the verb 'to be.' Corresponding to German *Seiend* (not *Sein*!) and (philosophical) French *étant*, it thus signifies *that-which-is*: either, according to context, the whole of reality, all that is taken together as one whole (as in the first question); or a thing-that-is, as in the expression 'a being' (as, in the plural, in the second question). These questions, therefore, cannot be

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[1] The term 'classical' is used here, for want of a better, to refer to ancient and medieval philosophy as a continuous tradition.

[2] This question, in the form "Why is being at all and not rather nothing?" is identified by Heidegger as the fundamental question of metaphysics: Martin Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, 4th ed. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1976), 3.

answered in any ordinary way. We usually address a 'What is something?' question by classifying and differentiating: if, for example, we are asked 'What is a dog?' we will first identify it as an animal, thus grouping it with certain other things, and then specify what kind of animal it is, thus differentiating it from these others. But we cannot answer the question 'What is being?' in this way: being can neither be grouped with nor differentiated from anything else, because there isn't anything else. Being means precisely *everything*, that-which-is taken all together as a whole, and therefore cannot be defined by the method of genus and specific difference. As for the second question, 'Why are there beings rather than nothing?' we must see at once that any answer that can actually be given will necessarily be a wrong answer, for any such answer must itself be something, some being, and thus included in that which is to be explained, rather than constituting the explanation of all beings as such. We may thus begin to wonder whether it is even meaningful to ask these questions, and hence whether metaphysics is possible at all. For such reasons the very enterprise of metaphysics is today often regarded as a mistake from the beginning. This is the so-called 'death of metaphysics:' we may speak of this being and that being, but not of being, of that-which-is as one whole. There is no such thing as 'reality.'

The dismissal of these questions and hence of metaphysics itself, however, comes at a heavy price. In opposition to the Heideggerian claim that metaphysics inevitably leads to and thus in a certain sense already is nihilism, it is the contention of this study that, on the contrary, metaphysics as traditionally undertaken is the antithesis of and the only alternative to nihilism. For nihilism consists fundamentally in the claim that there is no such thing as reality. In refusing to think being, i.e., that-which-is all together as one whole, we are in effect denying that there is any unity to all things and repudiating in principle any comprehensive account of the whole. This is the predicament of 'postmodernity,' leaving us with utter fragmentation, having no horizon of being within and against which to place whatever we may be thinking. But that means that we cannot, after all, speak even of this or that being, for to do so is already to identify it *as a being* and thus to see it within the whole. Without the horizon, nothing is a being: all things disappear from view and there is indeed no reality. To think anything at all is implicitly to think it *as a being* and is thus already to be engaged in metaphysics. Thought cannot dispense with being. The only alternative to metaphysics is to think nothing, that is, not to think. We must either think being, and so engage in metaphysics, or not think, and so embrace nihilism. Similarly, although the question 'Why are there beings, rather than nothing?' is unanswerable, it need not therefore be regarded as incoherent or

meaningless. Rather, it serves to direct our attention to beings *as beings* and therefore to being as a whole and to existence itself as, in Aquinas' words, "common to all things" (ST I, 4, 3, resp.), and thus to what Heidegger rightly called the "wonder of all wonders,"[3] that there are beings.

The essence of metaphysics, of the thinking of beings as beings which necessarily involves the thinking of being itself, is thus superbly expressed in the much-quoted words of Coleridge:

> Hast thou ever raised thy mind to the consideration of existence, in and by itself, as the mere act of existing? Hast thou ever said to thyself thoughtfully, It is!, heedless at that moment, whether it were a man before you or a flower, or a grain of sand? Without reference, in short to this or that particular mode or form of existence? If thou hast indeed attained to this, then thou wilt have felt the presence of a mystery which must have fixed thy spirit in awe and wonder … If thou hast mastered this intuition of absolute existence, then thou wilt have learned likewise, that it was this, and no other, which in early ages seized the nobler minds, the elect among men, with a sort of sacred horror. This it was which first caused them to feel within themselves a something infinitely greater than their own individual nature[4]

—and, we should add, to find in all things "something infinitely greater" than these things' own "individual nature."

As these words suggest, and as we shall find in all the philosophers to be examined, metaphysics as the thinking of being is intrinsically religious. Thales, the very first Greek philosopher reputed to have attempted an account of the whole, is said to have declared, "All things are full of Gods" (Aristotle, *De An.* A.5, 411a7), a leitmotif that is repeated in various forms throughout the metaphysical tradition. Plato quotes it with approval (*Laws* 899b9); Aristotle remarks that "all things by nature have something divine in them" (*Eth. Nic.* Z.7, 1153b33); Plotinus says of the One, or God, that "not being anywhere, there is nowhere where he is not" (V.5.8.24–25); and Aquinas argues that God, as the cause of existence to all things, is "in all things, and innermostly" (*ST* I, 8, 1, resp.). That metaphysics leads to divinity is not an accident of history but is intrinsic to the very enterprise of metaphysics. To think beings not merely as the individual things that they are but *as beings* is to see them as the presence and expression of 'something'

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[3] Martin Heidegger, "Nachwort zu: 'Was ist Metaphysik,'" in *Wegmarken*, 3rd ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1996), 307.

[4] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Friend*, vol. 3.11, in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Barbara E. Rooke, vol. 4.1 (Princeton and London: Princeton University Press and Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 514.

beyond themselves, of transcendence, of divinity. Both the secularists who reject metaphysics because it is necessarily theological, and the fideists who reject it because it offers a theology based on philosophical reason rather than on tradition, authority, or special revelation, are on their own terms right to do so. But this should not be taken to mean that metaphysics can provide only a divinity which is a conceptual idol, before which no one could fall prostrate in adoration. On the contrary, as we shall see, classical metaphysics leads directly to the "sacred horror," the "awe and wonder," of which Coleridge speaks.

## 2. *The Scope of This Study*

Our study begins with Parmenides, not only because he is the first Greek philosopher to identify being (τὸ ἐόν, in his dialect) as his central concern, but also because it is his fragment B 3, "The same is for thinking and for being," that lays the foundation for the entire tradition. The remaining four chapters, which might collectively be titled "Variations on a Theme by Parmenides," present the thought of four figures of outstanding significance in the development and articulation of this tradition: Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, and Thomas Aquinas. If other figures of extreme importance in the transmission of classical metaphysics, such as Augustine, Proclus, Avicenna, and many more, are not included, this is because the present work is intended not as a comprehensive history of philosophy but as a thematic study. The readings of these four philosophers presented here will no doubt be considered in some respects both unconventional and controversial. To be sure, each chapter addresses well recognized themes in the figure to which it is devoted, such as Plato's 'theory of forms,' Aristotle's explanation of change in terms of form and matter, Plotinus' account of the One as the source of all things, or Aquinas' distinction between essence and existence. But in each case, the interpretation of these and other ideas stands in contrast to what may be termed a 'textbook' account of the figure in question, an account that is all too common even among philosophical scholars. Here we will find a Plato who does not propose 'two worlds' and whose forms are not lifeless intelligible objects but are one with living intelligence; an Aristotle who follows Plato in identifying being as form and regarding sensible things as less than completely real, and whose unmoved mover, as the thinking of thinking, is not empty but is one with the intelligible content of all things; a Plotinus who is not an obscure 'mystic' but a coherent and profound philosopher whose thought not only belongs fully to the mainstream

of the classical tradition but may even be regarded as its fullest development; and an Aquinas whose signature doctrine of God as *ipsum esse per se subsistens* is fundamentally Neoplatonic and in continuity with Plotinus' doctrine of the One.

Such readings, while controversial, will not be altogether unfamiliar to specialists in each of these philosophers; but they are virtually unknown outside of these narrow specializations. Although some Plato scholars will readily agree that the 'two-world' interpretation of Plato is a misunderstanding, others, as well as nearly everyone who is not a specialist in Plato, think of him in these terms. Again, although some Aristotle specialists acknowledge that for Aristotle being is form, many other Aristotle scholars, and nearly everyone else, see him as an opponent of Plato on this point. A few specialists in late antique philosophy recognize that Neoplatonism is continuous with Plato and Aristotle and constitutes the mainstream of the classical tradition, but such a view is scarcely widespread among historians of philosophy. And although a growing number of Aquinas scholars admit that his thought is at bottom a form of Christian Platonism, he is still widely regarded as an anti-Platonic Christian Aristotelian whose understanding of God as *ipsum esse* is profoundly different from the Neoplatonic doctrine of the One. What emerges from these readings is not only an unconventional account of each philosopher, but also a revised picture, a new *Gestalt*, of the tradition as a whole. Although some of the individual strands of interpretation offered here may be familiar, they are seldom if ever brought together to provide such an understanding. The chief aims of the present work, then, are, first, to articulate and defend these revisionist readings by means of careful textual study and philosophical reflection, not merely to specialists on each figure but to a broader community of both scholars and students, and thus to help bring these interpretations into the mainstream of philosophical scholarship; and, second, to bring to light through such readings the fundamental nature of the tradition. For this reason, I have avoided extensive discussion of the vast scholarly literature on each of these philosophers, confining myself for the most part to citations that express my own interpretation especially well, or, occasionally, to ones that help to focus that interpretation by crystallizing the alternative with exceptional clarity. My aim is not directly to engage in academic debate but to set forth a vision, which must stand on the basis of its own interpretive and philosophical merits.

The present work is thus intended to contribute to a 'paradigm shift' in the study of the classical tradition as a whole. According to the understanding presented here, Aristotle does not stand in fundamental opposition to

Plato, and late antique philosophy as represented by Plotinus, and Neoplatonism in general, is not an aberrant or marginal development which, however interesting or even influential, is not of central importance in the history of philosophy. On the contrary, Neoplatonism is here regarded not as an offshoot but as the main trunk of the tradition as it extends from Plato and Aristotle to Aquinas. Thus, most unusually, in this study Plotinus is given equal time with Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas and indeed is granted more pages than either of the latter two. For according to this view, the classical tradition reaches its fullest flowering in the thought of Plotinus, and Aquinas is best understood not primarily as an innovator, nor as the crown or consummation of that tradition, but simply as one of its last major inheritors and representatives.[5]

In this perspective, we must concur with those who hold that the principal break in the continuity of western philosophy comes not between ancient and medieval, nor between pagan and Christian, nor even in early modernity with figures such as Galileo and Descartes, but rather between the Platonic and Aristotelian tradition up to and including Aquinas, on the one hand, and the modes of thought represented by Duns Scotus and William of Ockham on the other. It is here, not in the sixteenth or seventeenth but in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, that modernity in a philosophical rather than a merely chronological sense truly begins. With Scotistic univocity, the first principle becomes *a being*, subject to a conceptual grasp and included within the whole of reality as a member of it, as is not the case for the One of Plotinus or the God of Aquinas.[6] Between Scotus' God who is an infinite being (*ens infinitum*) and Aquinas' God who is infinite existence (*esse infinitum*), the difference is of world-shattering proportions. It is precisely here that 'metaphysics' in the pejorative, postmodern sense begins, with the reduction of the first principle to a conceptually representable being and the fading from view of the very question 'Why are there beings, rather than nothing?' And the Ockhamist denial that things really have 'whatnesses' in virtue of which they are what they are,[7] a repudiation of the very foundation of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy, already

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[5] This is not to say that there are no others after Aquinas; we may think of Meister Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa, to name but two. But from the fourteenth century on, the principal development of western philosophy takes a different direction.

[6] Duns Scotus, *Opus oxoniense*, I, 3, 1: "I say, then, first, that not only can a concept naturally be had in which God is conceived as it were accidentally, for instance, with regard to some attribute, but also a certain concept in which God is conceived by himself and quidditatively."

[7] William of Ockham, *Summa totius logicae*, II, 2: "All such [propositions] are in their

carries with it the divorce of thought from being, the loss of intelligibility, the move toward consciousness as 'subject' and being as 'object,' and the failing of the vision of all things as the presence and manifestation of the divine.

### 3. *Thought and Being*

To be is to be intelligible: on this law hangs all being and all thinking. This is not merely a common claim that happens to be made by all the philosophers studied here. Rather, this claim is constitutive of metaphysics itself, as the thinking of being and the only alternative to nihilism. Just as the thinking of being, metaphysics always already regards being and thinking as commensurate to one another. Hence it is from this starting-point that the question 'What is being?' and, at least in the case of Plotinus, the question 'Why are there beings?' will be approached. The answers to these questions, and hence the entire content of classical metaphysics, follows from and depends on the law that to be is to be intelligible. It is, perhaps, dangerous thus to expose the very cornerstone of this tradition, for if this single principle is questioned the entire structure totters, and if it is removed or destroyed the structure collapses in ruin. But the result of such a removal is, once again, nihilism, which indeed just is the denial of the intelligibility of being.[8] For if being cannot be thought, then whatever we may call 'being' or 'reality' is not reality but a construction, projection, or illusion. Thus it becomes meaningless to speak of being, and reality once more disappears, in the most literal sense: it is not phenomenal, not given to awareness, and so not there at all. If being is not intelligible, it is not being; for the only possible meaning of 'being' is that which is there to be seen, to be apprehended, that which is intelligible. Precisely as the denial of intelligibility, therefore, nihilism is the antithesis and exclusive alternative to the thinking of being which is metaphysics.

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literal sense false: 'Man is of the quiddity of Socrates,' 'Man is of the essence of Socrates,' 'Humanity is in Socrates,' 'Socrates has humanity,' 'Socrates is a man by humanity,' and many such propositions, which are conceded by nearly everyone."

[8] Cf. V. Possenti, *Terza navigatione: nichilismo e metafisica* (Rome: Armando Editore, 1998), 28: "The essence of speculative nihilism consists (and has its origin) in the incapacity to attain to an eidetic-judicative visualization of being." Possenti links this to an abandonment of the idea of intellectual intuition, and contrasts to this abandonment "a noetic apprehension of reality, in which the intellect 'weds' or celebrates its marriage with the being of things …"

Hence the dominant theme of classical metaphysics, and the guiding thread of this study, is the conjugal togetherness, the belonging to one another, of thought and being. Although this implies that being is 'idea' in the sense of that which is given to thought, this must not be understood as 'idealism' in an anti-realist sense, in the sense of regarding thought alone as primary and ultimate and deducing being from or reducing being to thought. It is rather an *intellectualism* in which thought just is the apprehension of being and being just is what is given to thought.[9] The modern opposition 'realism vs. idealism' simply does not apply here: there is no thought apart from being and no being apart from thought. Being means, and can only mean, that which belongs to thought; thought means, and can only mean, the possession of being. In this tradition being is *neither* 'mind-dependent,' in the sense of being produced by or posterior to mind, *nor* 'mind-independent,' in the sense of existing apart from or without mind. Such an antithesis presupposes an extrinsic duality between mind as 'subject' and being as 'object' which is entirely alien to classical philosophy. Since to be is to be intelligible and to think is to apprehend being, thought and being can be considered only in their togetherness: neither can be separated from or reduced to the other.

For this reason, the occasional use in this study of terms and concepts drawn from contemporary phenomenology in expounding classical metaphysics, notably 'intentionality,' 'intuition,' and 'givenness,' is not anachronistic, for they express precisely the way in which classical philosophy understands the relation between thought and being. The key insight of phenomenology is that the modern interpretation of knowledge as a relation between consciousness as a self-contained 'subject' and reality as an 'object' extrinsic to it is incoherent. On the one hand, consciousness is always and essentially the awareness of something, and is thus always already together with being. On the other hand, if 'being' is to mean anything at all, it can only mean that which is phenomenal, that which is so to speak 'there' for

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[9] For this sense of 'intellectualism' see Pierre Rousselot, *Intelligence: Sense of Being, Faculty of God* [original title: *L'intellectualisme de saint Thomas*], tr. Andrew Tallon (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1999), 16: "In opposition to those who see in intelligence an essentially egoist faculty, [Thomas] makes of it the essential power for liberation from subjectivity, and, if one can so speak, the 'faculty of the *other*.' More generally, it is for him … the 'faculty of being,' the faculty which most truly grasps, and attains, and holds being. It unites subjective intensity and objective extension in the highest degree because: if it attains being it does so by *becoming* it in a certain way, and in that precisely consists its nature." Like so much else in Aquinas, properly understood, this is true not only of Aquinas but of the entire Platonic and Aristotelian tradition.

awareness, and thus always already belongs to consciousness. Consciousness is the grasping of being; being is what is grasped by consciousness. The phenomenological term for the first of these observations is 'intentionality;' for the second, 'givenness.' "The mind is a moment to the world and the things in it; the mind is essentially correlated with its objects. The mind is essentially intentional. There is no 'problem of knowledge' or 'problem of the external world,' there is no problem about how we get to 'extramental' reality, because the mind should never be separated from reality from the beginning. Mind and being are moments to each other; they are not pieces that can be segmented out of the whole to which they belong."[10] Intended as an exposition of Husserlian phenomenology, these words hold true for the entire classical tradition from Parmenides to Aquinas. While this may seem a new and striking insight to those for whom philosophy begins with, say, Descartes, or who approach even ancient philosophy from a modern perspective, it is in fact largely a recovery of the classical vision, a recovery that would scarcely be needed had that vision not been lost in the first place. The classical understanding of being as εἶδος, that is, 'look;' Plato's presentation of knowledge as συνουσία, the being-together of soul and reality; Aristotle's interpretation of all awareness as a sameness or identity between soul and reality, of intellectual knowledge as the perfection of this identity, and hence his principle that "the soul is in a way all things" (*De An.* III.8, 431b21); Plotinus' doctrine that the intelligibles, or beings, are not outside the intellect, all express just this vision. In some cases, indeed, phenomenological terms serve as direct translations of Greek words. The word ἐπιβάλλειν as used by Plotinus, for example, corresponds closely in both etymology and meaning to 'intend' in the phenomenological sense, and he expressly refers to beings as "given" to intellect (V.5.2.9). It is not the use of these terms and concepts, but, on the contrary, the common use of modern terms such as 'subject' and 'object' that is in fact an anachronistic misrepresentation of classical thought. To employ phenomenological terms in expounding classical philosophical is not extraneously to impose contemporary concepts onto the classical tradition, but rather simply to present it as it is.

Because so much of recent philosophy, in the tradition of Nietzsche and Heidegger, has been undertaken in dialogue with and reaction to classical metaphysics as it is conceived or, too often, misconceived, it is all the more important at the present time to understand classical thought rightly. The

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[10] Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 25.

key to the whole, and therefore the dominant theme of this study, is the spousal togetherness of thought and being. The first and last lesson of metaphysics in the classical tradition is the erotic orientation of the soul toward being. This is expressed in Parmenides' image of the chariot-ride to heart's desire; in Plato's sexual and conjugal metaphors for knowledge; in Aristotle's dictum "All men by nature desire to know" (*Met*. A.1, 980a22); in Plotinus' account of being as beauty; and in Aquinas' treatment of the transcendentals good, true, and beautiful. *Ex visu amor*: this desire begins with the most rudimentary encounter with reality which is the nature of all awareness, and is consummated in the intellectual union which is at once perfect apprehension and perfect reality: thinking-being.

CHAPTER ONE

# PARMENIDES

## 1. *Milesian Background*

Parmenides is the first Greek philosopher to thematize explicitly the question of being, and may thus be regarded as the founder of metaphysics in the western tradition. But Parmenides' ideas demand to be understood against the background of earlier Greek philosophy, especially the line of thought that originates with Thales of Miletus. Thales is said to have proposed that water is the explanatory principle of all things, and Aristotle interprets this to mean that water is a uniform material 'stuff' out of which all things are made. "Many of the first philosophers held that the only principles of all things are in the form of matter; for that from which all things are, and from which they are first generated and into which they are finally corrupted, the reality remaining but changing in its conditions, this they say is the element and the principle of beings … Thales, the originator of such philosophy, says that it is water" (Aristotle, *Met*. A.3, 983b6–12, 21–22). Subsequent philosophers in this tradition are said to have attributed the same role to air (Anaximenes) or to another element. Whether or not this is what Thales himself actually meant,[1] it is this interpretation of the earliest Greek philosophy that will provide an insight into the thought of Parmenides, inasmuch as such a theory expresses the unity of being, regarding all that is as one same thing.

Any such account of reality, however, faces at least two insuperable difficulties. First, if it is taken strictly to mean that absolutely everything, without exception, is water (or air, or whatever we may select as our unitary principle), then it is impossible to explain the differentiation of this uniform stuff into the many different things that are found in the world. To the extent that all things are water, they are all the same. If all things are wholly water, they

[1] In G.S. Kirk, J.E. Raven, and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 94, it is observed that this interpretation of Thales cannot be dismissed, because "[c]ertainly his near successor Anaximenes believed that all things were made of air …, and it is invariably assumed that he was extending and refining a line of thought initiated by Thales."

are wholly the same. If, on the other hand, the same basic stuff, water, is here earth, there air, there fire, and so on, then something other than water must be invoked to account for this differentiation. But according to this theory, there is nothing other than water. If things really are different from each other, then they cannot all be nothing but water. Now, Thales is also reported to have held that soul is a source of motion, that even things that are usually regarded as inanimate have soul in them (Aristotle, *De An*. A.2, 405a19), and that "all things are full of Gods" (Aristotle, *De An*. A.5, 411a7), which may or may not mean the same thing as 'soul.' We may speculate that these ideas are an attempt to address the problem of difference by introducing soul, or Gods, to account for motion and thus for the differentiation of water into many different things. But such an attempt cannot succeed. For if soul or Gods themselves consist of water, then they cannot be the source of the differentiation of water. If they do not consist of water, then the idea that all things are water, and with it the understanding of all reality as one, has been abandoned.

The second difficulty is that as soon as we say that all things consist of water, 'water' itself ceases to have any meaning, because water can no longer be distinguished from anything else. 'Water' can no longer mean 'this colorless liquid' or 'the stuff in the ocean' or 'in the cup,' because everything else is water too. If all things are one same thing, it is impossible to identify what this one same thing is, because to do so would require distinguishing it from something else. If everything is one, all that can be said of it is that it is everything, not that it is this thing or that thing, e.g., water or air. Any attempt to understand all reality as one must face these difficulties, and it is in the context of such attempts that we should approach the thought of Parmenides.

## 2. *Being and Thinking*

The introductory section of Parmenides' philosophical poem begins, "The mares that carry me as far as my spirit [θυμὸς] aspires escorted me …" (B 1.1–2). He then describes his chariot-ride to "the gates of night and day," (B 1.11) the opening of these gates by Justice, his passage though them, and his reception by a Goddess, perhaps Justice herself. The introduction concludes with her telling him, "It is needful that you learn all things [πάντα], whether the untrembling heart of well-rounded truth or the opinions of mortals in which is no true belief" (B 1.28–30). From the outset, then, we are engaged with the urgent drive of the inmost center of the self, the θυμὸς, toward its

uttermost desire, the apprehension of being as a whole, "all things."[2] Since the rest of the poem is presented as the speech of the Goddess, this grasp of the whole is received as a gift, a revelation from the divine. The very first full-fledged metaphysician in the western tradition, then, experiences his understanding of being in religious terms, as an encounter with divinity. It is no surprise, therefore, that, according to the Goddess, the road Parmenides takes "is outside the tread of men" (B 1.27). Thus the Goddess draws a sharp distinction between "the untrembling heart of well-rounded truth" on the one hand, and "the opinions of mortals" on the other. The implication is that truth, as distinct from mere human seeming, is divine. We may be reminded of Heraclitus' dictum, "Human character does not have insights, divine has" (B 78). What, then, does Parmenides learn from the Goddess, and we from Parmenides, in the part of the poem that is traditionally called "The Way of Truth"?

The Goddess continues, "Come, I will tell you—and having heard the story keep it safe—the only ways to seek out for thinking: the one, that it is and is not not to be, is the road of persusasion, for it follows truth; the other, that it is not and is needful not to be, this I say to you is a wholly unlearnable path; for you could not know [γνοίης] that which is not [τό … μὴ ἐόν], for it cannot be done, nor express it" (B 2.1–8). At first, then, we are told that there are two 'roads' or 'ways:' 'is' and 'is not.' The second of these, however, is a way that cannot be gone, because it is impossible to know or to express "that which is not." The Goddess then explains the reason for this impossibility: "For the same is for thinking and for being [τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἔστιν τε καὶ εἶναι]" (B 3).[3] It is impossible to tread the way of non-being because there is nothing there to know, express, or think. Here at the very dawn of western metaphysics we have a suggestion of what will later be called intentionality: to think is necessarily to think something, that is, some being. To put this in grammatical terms, verbs of cognition such as γιγνώσκω or νοέω take a direct object, something that is known or thought. To 'think nothing' would mean to have no content of thought, not to think anything,

[2] Cf. Robert Wood, *A Path into Metaphysics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 125–126.

[3] The placement of B 3 immediately after B 2 is controversial. But it clearly belongs here because it completes B 2 not only metrically but also philosophically (cf. Jonathan Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 2nd ed. [London: Penguin, 2001], 80–81) by explaining *why* "you could not know that which is not." Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, *Presocratic Philosophers*, 246 n. 2, not only reject this placement but relegate to a footnote this all-important half-line, from which the entire tradition of classical metaphysics stems.

and so not to be thinking. To think nothing is not to think. Thinking, then, is necessarily the thinking, the apprehension, of some being, of something rather than nothing. This Parmenidean insight will be repeated at the end of the classical tradition by Thomas Aquinas: "Being [*ens*, that which is] falls first in the conception of intellect … wherefore being is the proper object of intellect" (ST I, 5, 2, resp.). That which is thought is first and most fundamentally some being, which may then be specified as this or that kind of being. Thinking requires and thus belongs with and is limited to being, to that which is. But this is not really a limitation at all, since it includes everything and excludes, precisely and only, nothing.

Conversely, since "the same is for thinking and for being" (B 3), being is limited to that which can be thought. Just as there can be no thinking which is not the thinking of some being, there can be no being which is not available to thought. It would be incoherent to postulate an unintelligible being, a being that cannot be thought, because to do so would already be to think this being and thus to commit a performative contradiction. If the putative being is anything at all, that is, if it is a being, then it is not unintelligible but can be thought, precisely as the something that it is. To think being at all is thus already to have affirmed its intelligibility. To think being is to think it *as thinkable*. Thus it is impossible even to suggest that being could extend further than thought, that there could be some being beyond the reach of thought. Not only are being and intelligibility co-extensive, as the Goddess here indicates, but intelligibility is the very meaning of 'being.' 'Being,' 'that which is,' can mean only 'that which is given to thought,' for since thought cannot extend to anything else, 'anything else' is mere empty noise, or nothing. Being means, and can only mean, that which is intelligible. Thinking is, wholly and solely, the apprehension of being, and being is, wholly and solely, that which is given to thought.

Thinking and being, then, have the same content: there can be nothing included in one that is not included in the other. On this ground it might well be argued that the all-important fragment B 3 of Parmenides should be read according to its most literal translation, "It is the same to think and to be" or "Thinking and being are the same."[4] But even if we do not

[4] Cf. Martin Henn, *Parmenides of Elea* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 53–54, esp. 54: "[T]he infinitives νοεῖν and εἶναι, construed more as datives of reference, and less as mere substantive infinitives, leave dangling a third thing (namely, τὸ αὐτό), which presumably exists *for* both Thought and Being, as if both await in bated supplication the entrance of this mysterious third item which exists equally for both. But what is this third thing to which Thinking and Being must refer in order to have significance? Answer: there is no separate third thing, *denn*

press the Goddess's dictum this far, it establishes at least the identity of being and the intelligible that is at the heart of the metaphysical enterprise. This identity is not merely a particular metaphysical claim. Rather, it is metaphysics itself, inasmuch as metaphysics is the thinking of being and therefore the thinking of being as that which is intelligible. This should not be taken to imply an 'idealism' in any subjectivist sense, as if thought were prior to being and being were posterior to or a product of thought: as we have seen, thought apart from being makes no more sense than being apart from thought. What it does imply is that thought and being necessarily belong together, in that thinking is the apprehension of being and being is what is given to thought. Neither thought nor being can be considered in isolation from the other. This is precisely why, in our own time, the so-called 'death of metaphysics' consists fundamentally in the denial that being is intelligible, which leads inevitably to, or indeed is identical with, nihilism. For if being is not intelligible, then not only is there no truth, since thought cannot apprehend being, but there is no being, since whatever we may apprehend is not being. The only alternative to Parmenides' insight that "the same is for thinking and for being," the insight which *is* metaphysics, is the postmodern and nihilistic notion that reality itself is a construct, a myth, an illusion, that there is no such thing as reality.

### 3. *What Is Being?*

If 'being' means anything at all, then, it means that which is intelligible. What more can we learn of it? Since the road of non-being has been found to be a no-thoroughfare, a road to nowhere, and hence no road at all, the Goddess continues, "A single story of a way yet remains: that it is" (B 8.1–2). Proceeding down this road, she declares, "On this there are very many signs that, being ungenerated and indestructible, it is whole, of one kind and unshaken and complete. It neither was once, nor will be, since now it is, all together, one, continuous. For what birth of it will you seek? How, whence did it grow? I will not allow you to say or think from that which is not; for it is not to be said or thought that it is not" (B 8.3–9). The reason for this is that what we are considering here is being itself, that-which-is taken all together as one. Hence there can be nothing else, nothing other

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*dasselbe ist Denken und Sein!*" Henn adds, rightly, "One who misses the lesson of Fragment B 3 misses the lesson of the poem."

than itself, for it to come from or go to: anything 'else' would be some being, and would thus already be included in that-which-is. To think that-which-is coming into or going out of existence would therefore be, impossibly, to think nothing before it or after it. Since that-which-is is, so to speak, already everything, there is no alternative to it. Consequently, not only is it ungenerated and incorruptible, but there can be no change whatsoever within it. "Thus coming to be is extinguished and destruction unheard of" (B 8.21). To change would be to become something else, but there cannot be anything else: being is already everything. And since without change there can be no passage of time, being has no past or future: "It neither was once, nor will be, since now it is, all together, one, continuous" (B 8.5–6). As these lines make especially clear, we are thinking being all together as one, not spread out over an extent of time. Nothing is past or future because all is included together in the apprehension of being. To think that-which-is, all together at once, is to think it without temporal extension.

Indeed, the Goddess argues not only that being is undifferentiated in time, but that it is not differentiated in any way whatever. It is undivided, continuous, uniform, all the same. "Nor is it divided, since it all is alike; nor something more in some way, which would keep it from holding together, nor anything less, but it is all full of that which is. So it is all continuous; for that which is draws near to that which is" (B 8.22–25). This is a continuation of the same line of reasoning. To think being as many, as having internal differentiation or parts, would be not to think it as one, as that-which-is. To think being simply as being is to think it as all the same. In the end, being is undifferentiated in time, in space, and in any way at all, because it is undifferentiated in thought. The Goddess is simply unfolding the implications of thinking being *as being*, and therefore, necessarily, as one. It is at this point that the connection between Parmenides and his Milesian forebears emerges most clearly. As we saw in considering Thales, if reality is one, then it is all the same, and there can be no way of allowing for difference. And so, rather than making an illegitimate and inevitably unsuccessful attempt to do so, Parmenides bites the bullet and acknowledges that being, just as being, is one, all the same, without differentiation. And if we ask, 'What is it?' the answer clearly cannot be, for instance, water, for this could be meaningful only by being distinct from something else; but there isn't anything else. All that can be said of being, therefore, is that it is being. What is everything? Everything is everything. What is that-which-is? It is that-which-is. All we can do is to keep repeating that being is being (and nothing else), and this is in effect what the Goddess does for some forty-nine lines (B 8.1–49) of the "Way of Truth."

This conclusion, unsatisfactory as it may seem, should not be dismissed as trivial. Parmenides has attained—or rather, according to his own account, has been vouchsafed—an intellectual vision of the unity of all things, transcending time, change, and difference, the unity of all things just as being. And as he himself indicates, this is a religious or even in some sense a mystical vision, one that takes him "far from the tread of men," the way "on which mortals wander, knowing nothing" (B 6.4–5).

At the same time, however, this vision is not without its own difficulties. First, as has often been observed, undifferentiated being, in that it cannot be identified as this or that, as anything in particular at all, looks uncommonly like—nothing. Denied all determination, internal or external, being loses its intelligibility and thus ceases to be anything. As both Plato and Plotinus will later argue, being must somehow include determination, and therefore otherness as well as sameness, in order to be intelligible and so to be being. Secondly, the Goddess's account inevitably raises the question of what we are to make of "the opinions of mortals" (B 1.30), the at least apparent fact of difference, multiplicity, and change in the world. Her approach seems to be simply to dismiss this as unreal. Upon completing the Way of Truth, she continues, "With this I cease for you the trustworthy account and thought about truth. From here on learn mortal opinions, listening to the deceitful order of my words" (B 8.50–52). Thus all that follows, the "Way of Seeming" with its account of the processes of nature, is "deceitful." It is as though she said, "Everything I am going to say from now on is false. Now, here is how the cosmos is constructed, how animals procreate," and so on. Since the world of change and difference is not being, it can only be nothing. But, even apart from the question of why the Goddess, or Parmenides, would offer an avowedly false account, this dismissal of the world as it is ordinarily experienced by "mortals" is unsatisfactory. For even if it is pure 'maya,' even if it is not merely appearance but sheer illusion, nonetheless this illusion itself *is*. To dismiss the world as illusion does not account for the occurrence of the illusion itself. It is not being, and yet it somehow is. As we shall see, Plato and Aristotle will grapple with this problem. But they will do so, not in simple repudiation of Parmenides but rather in continuity with him, for they will remain within the Parmenidean framework in which being is that which is intelligible, and, just insofar as it is intelligible, is timeless, changeless, "ungenerated and incorruptible, whole, of one kind and unshaken and complete" (B 8.3–4).

CHAPTER TWO

# PLATO

## 1. *Reading Plato*

The very attribution to Plato of anything that can be called a 'metaphysics' is at present controversial, and demands at least a preliminary *apologia*. As recent work on Plato has indefatigably observed, Plato never speaks to us in his own voice[1] but rather presents his philosophy in the form of dramatic dialogues, which must therefore be read dialogically, rather than as treatises from which doctrinal statements may be excerpted, and dramatically, with full attention to factors such as setting, context, the characters of the various interlocutors, and their interplay and development in the course of the dialogue. But this welcome directing of attention to the dialogical and dramatic nature of Plato's writing need not and should not be taken to mean that Plato has no definite ideas to express, or that, simply because he does not set out a dogmatic 'system,' he has no metaphysics in the sense of a vision or understanding of the nature of reality. It has been argued that if Plato wished to present any definite doctrines, then his use of the dialogue form was a singularly foolish choice.[2] The point is well taken; but this is an argument that cuts both ways. For if, on the other hand, Plato did not wish the reader to come away with the impression that the ideas expressed by the leading speaker in each dialogue, when interpreted with due heed to their dramatic presentation, are the message of the dialogue itself and are to be taken as true, then, equally, he wrote foolishly. The entire history of Plato interpretation demonstrates this: the views of the leading speaker, however interpreted, have almost always been regarded as Plato's views.[3] On this basis, although

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[1] Even letters are 'dramatic' in that a letter is not a treatise, addressed to an indeterminate readership, but is addressed to a specific person or persons in specific circumstances. Thus even if the letters speak in Plato's own voice, they do not so speak *to us*.

[2] E.g., Drew Hyland, *Questioning Platonism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 2: "If indeed, [Plato] had chosen the dialogue format in the belief that it was the best way to present clearly and persuasively his own philosophic views, that is, to accomplish what treatises accomplish, he surely made an obtuse choice. And Plato, I think we can all agree, was not an obtuse man."

[3] Cf. Lloyd Gerson, "Plato *Absconditus*," in *Who Speaks for Plato?: Studies in Platonic*

Plato never speaks directly in his own voice, we may nonetheless justify the use of the convenient locution 'Plato says' in quoting the dialogues.[4] To insist on reading Plato dialogically and dramatically is not to deny that Plato has anything to tell us. Rather, it merely raises the hermeneutical question of how to arrive at his meaning.

The dramatic form of presentation also highlights the fact that metaphysics is for Plato profoundly personal and existential. It can never be an abstract 'system,' detached or detachable from human life, but is always about ourselves. The cave-parable, for instance, expresses among other things a certain metaphysics, a certain account of the nature of reality. But the prisoners, as Socrates says, are "like us" (*Rep*. 515a5), and if we fail to notice this we will misinterpret the metaphysics itself. The existential nature of metaphysics, although most vividly set forth in Plato's dialogues, is not unique to Plato but is common to all classical thinkers. It is found in Parmenides, where we begin with a chariot-ride to the divine disclosure that satisfies the heart; in Aristotle, who insists on passing "from the things that are most knowable and most clear to us to the things that are most clear and most knowable by nature" (*Phys*. A.1, 184a17–18); in Plotinus, where the levels of reality are levels of the self; and in Thomas Aquinas, whose metaphysics is presented in an explicitly theological and indeed devotional context. This

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*Anonymity*, ed. Gerald A. Press (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 209–210: "We can surely say that if Plato did not intend for his readers to attribute to him belief in the truth of these and many other propositions [e.g., that pleasure is not the good or that forms are objects of knowledge] then he failed miserably … The antimouthpiece camp must hold that the history of Platonism rests upon a colossal mistake … [I]f Plato intended to promulgate ἀπορία or suspension of belief based upon balanced opposite assertions, he was a spectacular failure. He wrote dialogues in which a thousand-year tradition found a positive philosophy." At the words "colossal mistake," my library copy of this book has been marked by an anonymous reader as if to say, "Yes, exactly, so it does." But if so, Plato himself must be held responsible, and thus, to use Hyland's word, "obtuse" (above, 24 n. 2) for writing in such a way as to suggest "a positive philosophy" expressed by the principal speaker.

[4] Cf. D.C. Schindler, *Plato's Critique of Impure Reason: On Goodness and Truth in the* Republic (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 208), 34–35: "If it is indeed the case that Plato intends to use the whole of the dialogue [i.e., the *Republic*], in the interrelation of its various (philosophical and literary) parts, to communicate some insight, then it is legitimate to present the insight one attempts to discern in one's interpretation of the dialogue as belonging to Plato. According, we will often use expressions such as 'Plato says' and 'in Plato's view,' in our discussion of the dialogue. If these expressions most frequently refer to claims coming out of Socrates' mouth—which is of course the source of nearly all of the words spoken in the body of the *Republic*—it is not because we are assuming that Socrates simply stands as Plato's mouthpiece. Rather, it is because Socrates represents the primary agent in the philosophical drama that Plato authored." The same may be said, *mutatis mutandis*, with regard to other dialogues and their principal speakers.

existential dimension belongs intrinsically to the metaphysical enterprise, which, just as the thinking of being as a whole, necessarily engages the person as a whole.

The attribution to Plato of a coherent metaphysics has also been inhibited by the long-standing prevalence of a diachronic and developmental approach to his work, which divides the dialogues into 'periods' ('early,' 'middle,' and 'late,' with occasional subdivisions such as 'late middle') and interprets apparent differences or contradictions between them as representing significant changes in Plato's views over time. Recently, however, we have seen a salutary and long-overdue swinging of the scholarly pendulum back toward a synchronic and unitarian view of the dialogues as a single corpus. A growing recognition of how insecure the supposed chronology of the dialogues actually is and of the extent to which it depends, circularly, on presuppositions about the doctrinal changes that it is used to support, together with doubts regarding the supposedly doctrine-neutral stylometric method of dating, have seriously weakened the developmental approach.[5] Further, attention has been drawn to ancient reports that throughout his life Plato went back and revised his earlier works,[6] which, if true, must utterly vitiate any diachronic reading of the dialogues. Even more important, supposed differences in doctrinal content which have been regarded as changes in Plato's thought from one period to another can often be better explained, and found not to be mutually inconsistent, by means of a less superficial, more insightful interpretation. In this respect dramatic and unitarian approaches to the dialogues support one another. For example, as we shall see, there is no real contradiction between the statements in the supposedly 'early' dialogues that the forms are 'in' things and those in the so-called 'middle' dialogues that they are 'separate,' or between the emphasis in the 'middle' dialogues on the changelessness of true reality and the insistence in the 'late' *Sophist* that "that which completely is" must somehow include motion and life (*Soph*. 248e6–249a2). A philosophically reflective

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[5] See, *inter alia*, Rosemary Desjardins, *Plato and the Good: Illuminating the Darkling Vision* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), 89–90 n. 24; Charles L. Griswold, "Comments on Kahn," in *New Perspectives on Plato, Modern and Ancient* ed. Julia Annas and Christopher Rowe (Washington: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2002), 129–144; and above all Jacob Howland, "Re-Reading Plato: The Problem of Platonic Chronology," Phoenix 45 (1991): 189–214. Howland concludes (214), radically but soundly, "In sum, so long as we insist upon bringing chonological distinctions to the study of the dialogues, the texts we confront will continue to reflect the commitments of extrinsic interpretative schemes. In that case, we may do many things, but I do not believe that we shall be reading Plato."

[6] Howland, "Re-Reading Plato," 201–203; Desjardins, *Plato and the Good*, 90 n. 24.

reading that does not merely isolate such statements but interprets them with careful regard to Plato's dramatic, metaphorical, and mythic mode of discourse can reconcile such apparent contradictions and lead to a more profound understanding of his thought than the quick-and-easy attribution of them to different periods. Such a reading uncovers, if not a 'system,' at least a coherent philosophical vision, which is developed in various directions and with regard to different issues and problems in different dialogues. In this, rather than in a chronological sense, we may speak of 'development' in Plato's thought. The discussion of 'Plato's metaphysics' is the attempt to articulate this vision, not indeed in its entirety, but specifically with respect to Plato's understanding of the nature of reality.

Unlike the developmental approach, a unitarian reading of Plato can fully take into account the many ways in which the dialogues intersect one another to form not a linear series but a network, or better, to use one of Plato's favorite metaphors, a woven tapestry, so that the corpus as a whole, like a tapestry or a living organism, has an integral unity and is more than the sum of its parts. In this respect as in many others, the form of Plato's work reflects its content. Just as, according to Plato, "through the interweaving of forms with each other discourse comes to be for us" (*Soph.* 259e5–6), so through the interweaving of dialogues with each other understanding of Plato comes to be for us. So too, Plato's ubiquitous use of myths, metaphors, and images, as well as the mimetic nature of the dialogue form itself, reflects the mimetic structure of reality, in which one level of being is an image of a higher level. Reading the dialogues is thus an exercise in what Plato demands that we do with regard to the world as a whole: not to take it at face value but to recognize it as an image and pass through it to an intellectual apprehension of the reality that it both expresses and conceals.

## 2. *Being as Form*

Plato's metaphysics, centered on the concept of 'form,' can reasonably be said to begin with the problem of sameness and difference. How can many things, which, in that they are many, are different from each other, nonetheless be the same and so truly bear the same name? How, for example, can many different acts be pious (or impious) (*Euthyphro*), many different things be beautiful (*Greater Hippias*), many different states of character be virtues (*Meno*)? In that, while being different, they are also in some respect the same, there must be something the same about them, or, as Socrates says in the *Meno*, they must all "have some one same form [ἕν γέ τι εἶδος ταὐτον]"

(*Men*. 72c7). The word here translated, traditionally but inadequately, as 'form,' is εἶδος, or, in other similar passages, the related word ἰδέα (e.g., *Euth*. 5d11, 5e3). As has often been pointed out, these words are related to words for 'seeing,' and, less directly, 'knowing,' in Greek and other Indo-European languages.[7] Their fundamental meaning is the 'look' or 'appearance' of something, the way it shows up to the gaze. This is of the utmost importance, for it means that unlike the English word 'form,' these words intrinsically and immediately convey a *relation to awareness*: to say that things have a certain εἶδος is to say something about how they show up or appear to an apprehending consciousness. Many different things "have some one same form" (*Men*. 72c7) in that they all display the same content to the gaze, and so are truly identified as all pious, all beautiful, or all virtues.

If there were no such 'looks' in things, all identification of things in terms of what they are would have no basis in reality. "Are not those who are just, just by justice? … Therefore this, justice, is something [ἔστι τι τοῦτο, ἡ δικαιοσύνη]? … Then those who are wise are wise by wisdom and all good things are good by the good … And these are somethings [οὖσί γέ τισι τούτοις]? For indeed it can't be that they are not … Then are not all beautiful things beautiful by the beautiful? … And this is something [ὄντι γέ τινι τούτῳ]" (*Gr. Hip*. 287c1–d2). If certain things truly are just, or wise, or good, or beautiful, there must be in each case a common look that all such things have and display. If, for example, there were no such thing as beauty, it would not be true of anything that it is in fact beautiful, for nothing would actually have this look, this character or identity. If I point to a certain thing and say of it, "This is beautiful," this could not be a true statement about the thing itself unless that thing, and all other things of which this statement is true, do in fact have beauty as a common 'look.' The example of beauty is particularly illuminating, precisely because it is all too easy to reply that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder," that it is not actually a feature of things, that in calling something beautiful I am not stating a true fact about the thing but rather expressing how I feel about the thing. In that case, there would of course be no need to posit a form 'beauty itself.' But we must recognize the implications of this position. If this is so, then nothing actually has beauty as a feature of itself, it is not true of anything that it is in fact beautiful: nothing is beautiful. This leaves us, indeed, with a very dull, grey world, in which

[7] Εἶδος and ἰδέα are cognate with Latin *video*, *visio*, etc; German *Wissen*; English *wit*, *wise*, *wisdom*; and Sanskrit *Veda*. We should, perhaps, hear distant echoes of all these words when we encounter the term 'form' in Plato.

beauty has no reality and reality has no beauty; but it might, perhaps, be true. Likewise, if there is no form 'justice' that is present in all just things and absent from those which are not just, then nothing—no person, act, law, or institution—is in fact just. This would imply an ethical subjectivism, but might, again, be the case. But if we extend this line of reasoning to *all* the 'looks,' all the characters in terms of which things are identified—not only beautiful and just, but, to take other examples from Plato, large and small, hard and soft, healthy, strong, and so on—and deny the existence of *all* forms, the result is not merely that nothing is beautiful, and that nothing is just, but that nothing is anything. Without forms, not only language and thought but reality itself collapses. In order to be anything at all, a thing must be something, that is, it must have and display certain 'looks,' characters, identities, in virtue of which it is what it is rather than—nothing.

Forms, then, are the very 'whatnesses' of things that enable them to be anything at all. Without such identities or whatnesses, without forms, there is no truth, nothing is anything, and there is no reality. "Do we say that the just itself is something [τι εἶναι δίκαιον αὐτὸ], or not?—We say so indeed, by Zeus.—And also the beautiful [is] something, and the good?—How not?—Have you ever seen any of these with your eyes?—In no way … Or by any other sense, through the body, have you grasped them? I am speaking about all things such as largeness, health, strength, and, in one word, the reality [οὐσίας] of all other things, what each thing is" (*Phd*. 65d4–e1). This is not the introduction of an abstruse theory of mysterious, occult entities, located in 'another world,' on top of, and duplicating, the familiar world of particular things which are large, strong, or healthy. Plato is rather making a common-sense observation: of course there is such a thing as health or strength; otherwise there would be no difference in reality between healthy and unhealthy organisms, between strong and weak bodies. Of course there is such a thing as justice; otherwise there would be no difference in reality between those things that are just and those that are unjust. This is precisely the argument that Plato deploys in the *Sophist* against the materialistic "giants:" justice and other virtues, for instance, must be real in that they *make a difference* in the world (*Soph*. 247a2–b1). In everyday life, we all think and act on the view that there are such things: we desire health in our bodies, we demand strength in our building materials, we work for justice in society. To be sure, certain kinds of subjectivists or relativists may deny the existence of, say, beauty or justice, and such a denial is acceptable if we are willing to admit the consequence that nothing is truly beautiful or just. But if there are no forms at all, then nothing has any identity and, consequently, nothing has any reality and there is no truth about anything.

It is in just this sense that, after listing these forms, Plato refers to these and all other forms as "the reality [οὐσίας] of all other things, what each thing is" and then, immediately, as "what is most true [ἀληθέστατον] of them." (*Phd.* 65d13–e2). A thing is real, is anything at all, just insofar as it has some form, some whatness, some identity. Hence forms are the reality *of things* in that they are the whatnesses in virtue of which things are what they are, are something rather than nothing, and so have any reality. As Heidegger argues, ἀληθές, 'true,' means more basically 'unhidden,' and thus 'available,' 'accessible,' 'in the open,' 'there to be seen.'[8] The forms are "what is most true of things" (*Phd.* 65e1–2) just as their 'looks,' that in them which is given to awareness, the intelligible identities in terms of which things can be identified by thought. Without forms, without 'looks' or whatnesses in things, there would be no connection, no community, between thought and things, and so no truth in things, nothing there to be 'seen' by thought, and so, once again, no reality. Plato's understanding of reality as form, then, is not at all a matter of setting up intelligible forms in opposition to sensible things, as if forms *rather than* sensible things are what is real. On the contrary, forms are the very guarantee of sensible things: in order that sensible things may have any identity, any truth, any reality, they must have and display intelligible 'looks,' or forms, in virtue of which they are what they are and so are anything at all. It is in precisely this sense that forms are the reality of all things. Far from stripping the sensible world of all intelligibility and locating it 'elsewhere,' Plato expressly presents the forms as the truth, the whatness, the intelligibility, and hence the reality, *of* the world.[9]

In this passage as in many others, Plato's identification of forms as reality is paired with a reference to them as that which is "true." To say that the 'looks' that things have are the reality of things, is to say that things are real just insofar as they show some 'look,' some identity that is given to, apprehended by, thought. It is in this sense that the reality of things is what is "most true" of them. Plato's doctrine of reality as intelligible form is thus an expression of the community between thought and being. Forms

[8] Although Heidegger's etymological explanation of ἀλήθεια has been questioned, the constant interplay between ἀλήθεια and λανθάνω/λήθη in Plato (e.g., *Phd.* 64b7–10; *Phdr.* 248b6–c7) indicates that in Plato's usage it bears this meaning. Plato very frequently characterizes not merely propositions but things or beings as ἀληθές, 'true.'

[9] Cf. Stanley Rosen, *Nihilism: A Philosophical Essay* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969), 196: "The world of ideas is not another world, it is the whatness of this world." Since 'whatness' is Rosen's (not inaccurate) gloss for οὐσία, this has the advantage, unlike 'two-world Platonism,' of being what Plato actually says.

are 'ideas-in-things' in that they are the common content of thought and things, that in things which can also be present in thought. Significantly, the single clearest statement in all the dialogues of why there must be forms occurs in the *Parmenides*, after a battery of arguments seemingly directed against forms,[10] and is placed in the mouth of Parmenides himself: "But on the other hand, Socrates, if someone will not admit that there are forms [εἴδη] of beings …, nor mark off some form [εἶδος] of each one, he will not have anywhere to turn his thought, as he does not admit a form [ἰδέαν] of each of beings which is always the same, and thus he altogether destroys the power of discourse" (*Parm.* 135b5–c2). Without forms, thought and being would be alienated from one another, having no common content. But in that case there would be no thought, since there would be no apprehension of being, and no being, since nothing would be given to thought. Plato's understanding of being as form can thus be seen as an elaboration of Parmenides' dictum, "The same is for thinking and for being" (B 3).

Plato's metaphysics of being-as-form, then, is rooted most fundamentally in his repudiation of nihilism, in his unwavering commitment to the existence of truth and the reality of being. The only alternative to the acknowledgement of forms, as intelligible identities of things that make things what they are, is the nihilistic claim that nothing is anything, that there is no truth, that there is no such thing as reality. In Plato's time, such a nihilistic denial of reality was expressed by the Protagorean dictum, "Man is the measure of all things" (*Theaet.* 152a2–3). For if man is the measure of all things, then nothing actually is anything in itself. All things 'are' to each person as they appear to that person (*Theaet.* 152b2–c2), and there is no reality of things themselves, in relation to which such appearances could be true or false. And if there is no truth of things, there can be no knowledge as distinct from opinion, that is, no apprehension of reality itself as distinct from 'how it appears to me.'[11] Forms, as the reality and truth of things, intelligible whatnesses or identities which are not imposed by human convention but which things actually have and display, are Plato's response to the sophistic denial of reality as distinct from appearance and of knowledge as distinct from opinion. Hence in the *Laws* he replies to Protagoras, "For us God would be most the

[10] These arguments are in fact best understood as directed at various misinterpretations of the forms, and especially against the view of forms and instances as both beings in the same sense and hence as additional to one another. See J.N. Findlay, *Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 235–236; R. Patterson, *Image and Reality in Plato's Metaphysics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985), 51.

[11] Cf. Schindler, *Plato's Critique*, 51, 61–62, 84.

measure of all things, far more than, as they say, any man." (*Laws* 716c4–6). For as we shall see, forms, just as the reality, the truth, the intelligible contents of things, are divine.

Here, then, we have Plato's answer to the age-old question, τι τὸ ὄν, "What is being?" Being, τὸ ὄν, that which is, is εἶδος, form, the looks in things that are there to be seen by intellect and in virtue of which anything has any identity, any intelligibility, and hence any reality at all. Henceforward, not only in Plato but throughout the philosophical tradition we are considering, οὐσία will mean not simply 'reality' in an unspecified sense, but, more precisely, reality *qua* that which is intelligible. Being, as what is given to thought, consists of 'looks,' that is, intelligible whatnesses, identities, ideas, that show up in varying connections and contexts, and thus lend a share of intelligibility, and hence of reality, to the world around us.

### 3. *The Meaning of Separation*

If forms, as intelligible contents or 'ideas-in-things,' are not another world but, in Plato's own expression, the reality *of* things as their whatnesses, what are we to make of the famous (or infamous) 'separation' (χωρισμός) of the forms, the indications found at various points in the dialogues that forms are 'separate' or 'apart' (χωρίς) from their instances? This, perhaps, more than anything else, has led to to misinterpretations of Plato's metaphysics and demands to be carefully understood. First, as a look that is common to many different things, a form is necessarily distinct from each and all of them. This point emerges most clearly in the *Meno*, with the example of shapes and colors:

> If someone asked you … "What is shape, Meno," if you said to him that it is roundness, if he then said … "Is roundness shape or a certain [τι] shape?" you would surely say that it is a certain shape—Yes indeed.—For this reason, that there are other shapes?—Yes … And again, if he asked likewise what color is, and when you said that it is white he rejoined, "Is white color or a certain color?" you would say that it is a certain color, because there are others … If then he pursued the argument as I did and said, "We always come to many; don't give me that, but since you call these many things by one certain name, and say that none of them is not a shape even though these things are opposite to each other, what is this which covers the round no less than the straight, which you call 'shape'?" (*Men*. 74b4–e2)

This example, in which the instances are not only distinct from but opposed to each other, reinforces the point that whatever is the same about them all cannot be any one of them. Thus, when Socrates introduces the forms in

the *Parmenides* he suggests that we must "distinguish as separate [διαιρῆται χωρὶς] the forms themselves by themselves" (*Parm*. 129d7–8). 'Separate,' here, need not mean more than 'distinct:' Socrates *distinguishes* largeness, for example, as one intelligible look, from the many large things, each of which has and displays, but is not, the one intelligible identity largeness itself.

Forms, moreover, are radically distinct, and in that sense 'apart,' in that they are not themselves sensible things. With our eyes we can see large things, but not largeness itself; healthy things, but not health itself. The latter, in each case, is an idea, an intelligible content, something to be apprehended by thought rather than sense, a 'look' not for the eyes but for the mind. This is precisely the point Plato is making when he characterizes forms as the reality of all things. "Have you ever seen any of these with your eyes?—In no way … Or by any other sense, through the body, have you grasped them? I am speaking about all things such as largeness, health, strength, and, in one word, the reality [οὐσίας] of all other things, what each thing is" (*Phd*. 65d4–e1). Is there such a thing as health? Of course there is. Can you see it? Of course not. This does not mean that the forms are occult entities floating 'somewhere else' in 'another world,' a 'Platonic heaven.' It simply says that the intelligible identities which are the reality, the whatness, of things are not themselves physical things to be perceived by the senses, but must be grasped by thought. If, taking any of these examples—say, justice, health, or strength—we ask, "How big is it? What color is it? How much does it weigh?" we are obviously asking the wrong kind of question. Forms are ideas, not in the sense of concepts or abstractions, but in that they are realities apprehended by thought rather than by sense. They are thus 'separate' in that they are not additional members of the world of sensible things, but are known by a different mode of awareness. But this does not mean that they are 'located elsewhere,' or that they are not, as Plato says, the very intelligible contents, the truth and reality *of* sensible things.

It is in this sense, too, that Plato's references to the forms as 'patterns' or 'paradigms' (παραδείγματα), of which instances are 'images,' must be understood. As Socrates says to Euthyphro, "Teach me what this form [i.e., piety] is, so that, looking to it and using it as a paradigm [παραδείγματι], I may say that whatever you or anyone else does, if it is such [τοιοῦτον], is pious, and if it is not such, I may say that it is not" (*Euth*. 6e3–6). All too often, 'paradigm' is taken to mean 'model to be copied.' The following has been offered as an example of this meaning of παράδειγμα in classical Greek: "[T]he architect of a temple requiring, say, twenty-four Corinthian

capitals would have one made to his own specifications, then instruct his masons to produce twenty-three more just like it."[12] Such a model is itself one of the instances: when we have the original and the twenty-three copies, we have twenty-four capitals of the same kind. It is the interpretation of forms as paradigms in this sense that leads to the 'third man argument' by regarding the form as another instance and the remaining instances as 'copies' of the form. This interpretation of Plato's 'paradigmatism' reflects a pictorial imagination of the forms as, so to speak, higher-order sensibles located in 'another world,' rather than as the very intelligible identities, the whatnesses, of sensible things.

But forms cannot be paradigms in this sense. Just as the intelligible 'look' that is common to many things of the same kind, a form, as we have seen, is not an additional thing of that kind.[13] Likewise, it makes no sense to say that a body, a physical, sensible thing, is a copy, in the sense of a replica or duplicate, of an intelligible idea. Indeed, Plato expressly distinguishes between a copy and an image: "Would there be two things, that is, Cratylus and an image of Cratylus, if some God copied not only your color and shape, as painters do, but also … all the things you have—if he set such other things beside you? Would such then be Cratylus and an image of Cratylus, or two Cratyluses?—Two Cratyluses, it seems to me, Socrates." He then remarks, "Do you not perceive how far images fall short of having the same features [τὰ αὐτὰ] as the things of which they are images?" (*Crat*. 432b5–c6, d1–3). An image, in Plato's terms, then, is not another thing of the same kind as the paradigm, having characteristics in common with it. But παράδειγμα need not mean 'model' in this sense. It can also mean 'plan,' 'design,' 'pattern,' and it is in this sense that Plato refers to the forms as paradigms. To take the same example, the architect, instead of giving the masons a model capital and instructing them to produce twenty-three more, could give them instead a plan, a diagram, or even simply a set of specifications, and instruct them to

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[12] Patterson, *Image and Reality*, 13–14.

[13] Cf. Findlay, *Plato*, 38–39: "The Eide are … predicable *of themselves* in a true or primary manner to which the manner in which they are predicable of their instances is essentially secondary and derivative. (Not, we may stress, the other way round, as in modern accounts where instances of Justice are taken to be just in the primary manner, and the self-predication of Justice of Justice is thought to be a confused misapplication of this primary predication, as if Plato was silly enough to think of Justice Itself, which is just in the sense of simply *being* Justice, as merely another extraordinary *case* of Justice … That Plato did not make the confusion of which he is accused is shown, for example, in his insistence that the eidetic Number Three does not, like its instances, contain three members, but is what it is to have them."

produce twenty-four 'such capitals.' In this case the paradigm is the pattern, the design, the set of specifications, which is not itself a capital at all. The true paradigm, indeed, is the architect's idea, of which the written diagram or specifications are merely a symbolic representation. Such a paradigm is not a physical or sensible thing at all: it has neither size or shape nor color, but is a pure thought-content, an idea. It thus has no features whatsoever in common with the physical things of which it is the paradigm. They are images of it, not in that they are copies, additional things of the same kind, but in that it is the intelligible pattern that shows up in them as their structure and in virtue of which they are such as they are, e.g., capitals of a certain kind. This one same pattern in present and may be seen 'in' each of them as its structure, while the pattern considered 'itself by itself' is 'separate' in that it is not one of them but is a pure idea. While the notion of an idea as a model of which sensible things are copies is manifest nonsense, the conception of a plan or pattern captures precisely the sense in which a single intelligible idea is both the paradigm of many sensible things and the common 'look' displayed by them all. Thus the craftsman making a shuttle looks, not to a model shuttle that he copies, but to "the form [τὸ εἶδος]" or idea of shuttle, "what a shuttle is [αὐτὸ ὅ ἔστιν κερκὶς]" (*Crat.* 389b3, 5), that is, the structure or pattern a thing must have in order to function as and thus to be a shuttle. Such a paradigm, as not any sensible thing but rather an intelligible pattern, may be considered 'separate' from its images in that it is another kind of reality, prior to, independent of, and irreducible to them. At the same time, this pattern, this one same intelligible content, is the very identity that they have and display, and thus is the whatness, the reality, of them. There is thus no conflict between saying that the forms are 'separate' as intelligible paradigms and that they are 'in' things as the 'looks' or whatnesses that they have.

'Separation,' then, is simply a spatial metaphor for the radical ontological distinction between intelligible identities and the things that have and display, but are not, these identities. Forms are 'separate' or 'transcendent,' not in the sense of being located elsewhere (what could this mean, since forms are not physical or spatial entities at all?) but in that, as intelligible identities, they are distinct from, other than, the instances that they inform, the things whose whatnesses they are.[14] There is no opposition or

[14] Cf. Giovanni Reale, *Toward a New Interpretation of Plato*, tr. John R. Catan and Richard Davies (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of American Press, 1997), 130: "[T]he error of many interpreters is to have mistaken this distinction of levels and the differences between

contradiction between 'transcendence' and 'immanence,' between 'separate from' and 'present in,' once we recognize that all such expressions are spatial metaphors. Where, among all the beautiful things in the world, is beauty? Everywhere and nowhere: everywhere, in that wherever there is a beautiful thing, there is beauty, present in it, by which it is beautiful; nowhere, in that it is not any one of these things or confined to any one of them as opposed to the others. An intelligible content, an idea, a paradigm or pattern, in this sense transcends the many things that have and display it. And this pattern, the common look of all these things, can in principle be known, as Plato is fond of saying, "itself by itself," just as this one same intelligible identity. This phrase "itself by itself" (αὐτὸ καθ᾽ αὑτό), which Plato so often uses with regard to forms (e.g., *Phd*. 66a2, 78d5–6, 83b1–2, 100b6; *Symp*. 211b1; *Parm*. 128e6–129a1, 129d7–8, 130b8, 133c4; *Rep*. 524d10) refers to a form considered just as the one same idea that is common to all the instances, rather than as it shows up in or belongs to this or that instance. The 'theory of forms' is not the postulation of 'another,' abstract world, but is concerned rather with our level of cognition, our mode of grasping reality: do we grasp the intelligible identities, the reality of things, as unitary ideas, 'themselves by themselves,' or do we apprehend them only as they show up to us in the experience of this or that instance? It is in this sense that we must understand the distinction between, for example, the largeness or likeness "in us" or that "we have," that is, the largeness or likeness of this or that large or like thing, and largeness or likeness "itself" or "in nature" as a unitary paradigm which is not the largeness of anything (*Phd*. 102d6–7, 103b5; *Parm*. 130b4). "Each [form] is itself one, but, appearing everywhere in association with actions and bodies and one another, each appears many" (*Rep*. 476a5–7). One and the same form can be seen as it 'appears' or shows up in association with various different instances, or can be known intellectually, 'itself by itself,' as a single intelligible content, one idea, distinct from each and all of them.[15]

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them, for an absurd and unwarranted 'separation,' taking the Ideas to be, 'superthings' separated physically, rather than metaphysically, from things, as if they were simply invisible sensibles to be contrasted with sensibles."

[15] Cf. John Sallis, *Being and Logos: Reading the Platonic Dialogues*, 3rd ed. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 394: "[T]he distinction between the knowable and the opinable is not fundamentally a distinction between two kinds of things, between which some relation would subsist, but rather a distinction between two ways in which an *eidos* can show itself. It is a distinction between a showing in which an *eidos* shows itself as it itself is (as one) *and* a showing in which an *eidos* shows itself as it is not (as many). In both cases *what shows itself is the same thing* (the *eidos*)—which is to say that the knowable and the opinable are not two parallel regions of things" (italics in original).

Nor does the understanding of forms as the intelligible whatness and so the reality of things imply that forms are dependent on their instances. We ordinarily think of a character or identity as dependent on the thing to which it belongs. But upon further reflection we find that the reverse is in fact the case. The thing is dependent on the various characters, features, or identities it has, as what make it what it is and so enable it to be anything at all. But a character or identity, as a pattern, a single intelligible idea which is capable of informing, of showing up in many different things, does not depend on its instances.[16] The instance owes everything to the various forms it has, for without them it would not be anything. But the forms owe nothing to the instances to which they belong. Instances are radically conditioned by their forms, but forms 'themselves by themselves,' as unitary intelligible contents, are unconditioned by, and in that sense independent of, their instances.

Such an account of the non-reciprocal dependence of instances on their forms often gives rise to the question of whether a form could exist without any instances. In fact, nowhere in the dialogues does Plato mention any uninstantiated forms, but always presents forms as the intelligible patterns and identities of things in the world. "We are accustomed to posit some one form for each many to which we apply the same name" (*Rep*. 596a6–7). The question is sometimes raised, then, as to whether a form could or would exist at at time when it had no instances. If, for example, at some time in the past or future there were no bees, would this mean that what Plato calls "the reality of bee [μελίττης … οὐσίας]" (*Men*. 72b1), i.e., the form 'bee-ness,' would not then exist? Such a question betrays a misunderstanding of what a form is. As a pure idea, an intelligible content, a form is not datable, not located in time, any more than it is located in space. A bee is generated at a certain point in time, exists for a certain span, and then ceases to exist. But bee-ness, the one same look "by which they [i.e., bees] do not differ but are all the same" (*Men*. 72c2–3) simply timelessly *is* that one intelligible content. As an idea, it has no history, no date or temporal extension. Plato's many

[16] Cf. J.N. Findlay, "Toward a Neo-Neo-Platonism," in *Ascent to the Absolute* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1970), 251: "To the ordinary … mind these natures or characters are things parasitic upon the individual things that exemplify them or instantiate them … while the individual things have no such dependence upon these natures or characters, but simply include them as the appanages. To Platonism, however, this ordinary view of things is completely misguided: it is the things of ordinary experience which are in truth parasitic upon the true things or forms, and which are merely the multitudinous reflections or instantiations of these true things and nothing in themselves at all."

statements that intelligible reality is "changeless" or "always the same" (e.g., *Phd*. 78d1–80b3; *Rep*. 479a2–3, 479e7–8, 484b4, 500c2–3; *Tim*. 28a2) must be interpreted to mean, not that forms remain unchanged through all time, but rather that, as ideas, they are strictly non-temporal realities. Otherwise, indeed, we would have to think of them, absurdly, as growing older as time passes. This is a failure to grasp what it means to be an idea, an intelligible identity, rather than a sensible thing. The timelessness of the forms is just what Plato expresses in his discussion of eternity in the *Timaeus*: "The 'was' and the 'will be' are forms of time which have come to be, which we unthinkingly apply, not correctly, to eternal reality. For we say that it was and will be, but according to true speech only the 'is' belongs to it; but the 'was' and the 'will be' are said properly about the becoming which passes in time—for they are motions, but that which is always immovably the same does not become either older or younger through time …" (*Tim*. 37e3–38a4). This is clearly a paraphrase and elaboration of Parmenides' description of the timelessness of true being: "It neither was once, nor will be, since now it is, all together …" (B 8.5). To ask whether a form exists at a time when it has no instances, then, is to make the mistake of locating it in time. Speaking, as it were, from its own, non-temporal point of view, any form has instances, in that instances of it occur at some points within the sequence of time, even if such instances do not occur at every point in time any more than they do at every point in space. Thus bee-ness is instantiated in the sense that bees are among the kinds of things that occur in the world, even if there do not happen to be any at a given moment in time. The very identities that temporal things have and display, then, are themselves timeless, just as intelligible ideas. In raising up our thought from the apprehension, by sense, of changing, sensible things to the intellectual apprehension of the intelligible whatnesses that these things have, we ourselves are transcending temporality.

In all of these senses, then—as intelligible rather than sensible, as what enable sensible things to be anything at all, as paradigms, as ontologically (not spatially) transcendent, as independent, unconditioned, timeless realities—forms are, as Plato so often says, "divine" (e.g., *Phd*. 80a2, 80b1, 81a5, 83e2, 84a8; *Rep*. 500c9, 500e3). But this is to say that the very truth and reality *of things* is divine. The divinity of being-as-form is an expression not merely of its eternality, but of its transcendence of the relativity, so vaunted by the sophists, of mere human convention and opinion. Without forms, nothing would have any actual identity or be anything at all, and all that we call 'reality' would be a construction or projection of human language and culture, devoid of truth. The forms are divine precisely as the guarantee of any reality to the world. Without such divine paradigms informing things,

and in relation to which human opinions can be judged, the things themselves would have no truth or reality. Man would indeed be the measure of all things, and human opinion would lapse into complete nihilistic relativity. Plato's doctrine of being as form, and hence as divine, is a repudiation of this: not man, but God, is the measure of all things (*Laws* 716c4–6). This is why metaphysics, understood as the antithesis of nihilism, is intrinsically religious. In order that things in the world may have any identity, any intelligibility, any reality at all, they must have and display intelligible, timeless, divine paradigms that make them what they are. Since to be is to be intelligible, to be anything at all is therefore to have some share of divinity. Reality as what is *true*, what is not merely human or relative but fixed, normative, the same for all, as what is not merely opined but known, is divine. From Plato onward, therefore, throughout the classical tradition, being will be identified, not merely with the intelligible, but with the divine.

## 4. *The Levels of Being*

Plato's identification of intelligible forms as reality is sometimes taken to invite the misconception that for him sensible things are simply unreal or illusory. In fact, while this may be Parmenides' position, it is not that of Plato. On the contrary, as we have seen, Plato invokes forms precisely in order that sensible things may have any identity and hence any reality at all. Sensible things, then, are not nothing, but, in that they are not themselves pure intelligible whatnesses, neither are they reality itself. They are real just insofar as they have and display some form, some intelligible identity. Hence, as Plato indicates, sensible things lie 'in between' complete reality, i.e., the intelligible identities that inform them, and complete unreality, i.e., simply nothing.

At first sight, the notion of 'levels of reality,' the idea that only form, as that which is purely intelligible, is "really real" (*Phdr.* 247c7), and that sensibles are therefore less than completely real and yet are not nothing, makes no sense. How could anything be 'in between' being and non-being, or 'share in' both? Being, we are inclined to say, is not the sort of thing that can come in degrees of more and less, like weight or heat. "To be or not to be, that is the question," and the only question.[17] This is, perhaps,

[17] Cf. Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952), 16; Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Being* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 139–140.

the voice of common sense. But it is also, we should realize, the voice of Parmenides: "Come, I will tell you … the only ways to seek out for thinking: the one, that it is and is not not to be …; the other, that is is not and is needful not to be" (B 2.1–5). Plato, on the other hand, softens this harsh antithesis by allowing for degrees of reality. "That which completely is [τὸ … παντελῶς ὂν], is completely knowable [γνωστόν], while that which in no way is [μὴ ὄν … μηδαμῇ], is altogether unknowable [ἄγνωστον]" (*Rep*. 477a2–3). Taken by itself, this amounts to a paraphrase of Parmenides: that which is, is that which is knowable, and that which is not, is altogether unknowable. "For you could not know (γνοίης) that which is not [τό … μὴ ἐόν], for it cannot be done" (B 2.7). It is hard to believe that Plato did not have Parmenides in mind when he wrote these lines. But if so, then the next lines are a direct defiance to Parmenides: "If then something is such as to be and also not to be, would it not lie in between that which purely is and that which in no way is?" (*Rep*. 477a6–7). Parmenides could not admit any 'in between:' for him there are only two roads, that of being and that of non-being, and since the latter is a dead end, "a single story of a way yet remains: that it is" (B 8.1–2). And for Parmenides, since sensible things do not lie on the road of being, they are simply unreal. Plato, on the other hand, scandalously proposes a third way between the alternatives of complete being and complete non-being.

Plato's 'in between' becomes comprehensible only when being is identified with intelligibility and thus considered not, as it were, by itself, but rather in its relation to awareness. Being, that which is, reality, can be 'seen,' can be given and apprehended, more or less adequately, and therefore the content of different modes of apprehension can be more or less real. The 'in between' status of sensible things must be understood in phenomenological terms, that is, in terms of different modes of givenness and apprehension. Plato articulates these modes of apprehension, in relation to which the levels of being must be understood, in the threefold distinction of knowledge, opinion, and ignorance. "Then as knowledge (γνῶσις) is concerned with that which is, and unknowing [ἀγνωσία] by necessity with that which is not, something in between ignorance [ἀγνοίας] and knowledge [ἐπιστήμης] must be found which is concerned with that which is in between, if there is such a thing" (*Rep*. 477a9–b1). Knowledge, γνῶσις or επιστήμη, as the apprehension of "that which completely is" (*Rep*. 477a3), is the intellectual 'vision' or apprehension of "the reality of things" (*Phd*. 65e1), of forms 'themselves by themselves.' Unknowing or ignorance, then, means not 'seeing' anything, no apprehension of being at all. That which lies in between knowledge and ignorance turns out to be δόξα (*Rep*. 478d3, 11), a term which is

conventionally translated 'opinion' but is in fact related to δοκεῖν, 'to seem or appear.' Opinion, as a mode of apprehension in between knowledge and ignorance, is thus correlated to appearance, as a level of being in between complete reality and complete non-being. Sensible things have and display intelligible identities whereby they can be identified and in virtue of which they are anything at all, but they are not themselves these intelligible identities. As we have seen, a form may be apprehended intellectually, as it is, 'itself by itself,' just as a unitary intelligible content, unconditioned by any particular instantial context; or it may be apprehended as it appears, or shows up, as a feature of this or that sensible thing, conditioned and limited by the context of this or that appearance. "Each [form] is one, but, appearing everywhere in association with actions and bodies and one another, each appears many" (*Rep*. 476a5–7). What is given to the senses, then, and hence the entire realm of the sensible, consists of appearances of forms. Sensible things are thus neither reality itself, or more precisely 'itself by itself,' nor simply nothing, but are rather appearances, or images, of the forms, just as, to take the example we used earlier, the twenty-four capitals of the same kind are images of their common pattern which itself is nothing physical or sensible and can be known, intellectually, as a pure idea, but which appears, or is manifested, as the structural characteristics of each of the capitals.

If we reflect on the notion of 'appearance,' it ceases to be obvious that there is no middle road, no intermediate between being and non-being. An appearance of a thing—for example, a reflection, as an appearance of that which is reflected—*is not* the thing itself, nor is it another thing, additional to the thing itself. When Socrates stands before a mirror, making a reflection, the reflection is neither a second Socrates nor another, additional person: there remains only one Socrates, one man. But neither is the reflection, what is seen in the mirror, simply nothing, and to see it is not to see nothing at all, or to suffer a hallucination. Appearance is not the same as illusion. It is coherent, in accord with ordinary usage, and in a significant sense true, to say, "I see Socrates in the mirror," while realizing at the same time that I am not looking at Socrates himself at all. To see the reflection is both to see Socrates, as he appears here, and not to see Socrates, 'himself by himself.' Thus what is seen in seeing the reflection or appearance, both is and is not the real thing. And this is precisely how Plato characterizes the 'in between' status of the sensible, as that which is opined rather than intellectually known: "We said earlier, then, if something should appear [φανείη] such that it at once is and is not, this would be such as to lie in between that which purely is and that which altogether is not, and neither

knowledge nor ignorance would be concerned with it, but that which we say is in between ignorance and knowledge" (*Rep*. 478d5–9). We should note the characteristically Platonic pun: that which appears, or as we might say 'turns up,' in between being and non-being, is, precisely, appearance itself. Sensible instances, therefore, as the multiple, differentiated appearances, given to sense, of the unitary forms that are apprehended by intellect, are neither reality 'itself by itself,' the intelligible, nor simply nothing, but 'in between.'

Thus, when we follow Plato's phenomenological approach and consider being *as given to awareness*, which is what we mean by being and the only way of speaking meaningfully of it, then his 'degrees of being' make perfect sense. The reality of things, "that which completely is" (*Rep*. 477a3), is their intelligible forms, the whatnesses that things display. But these may be apprehended intellectually, 'themselves by themselves,' or by way of the senses, as they appear, "in association with actions and bodies and one another" (*Rep*. 476a6–7), as the characters of these or those particular instances. It is in just this sense that, for example, "largeness in us" is distinct from "largeness itself" or "in nature" (*Phd*. 102d6–7, 103b5; cf. *Parm*. 130b4). "Largeness in us" is largeness as it appears, apprehended in association with this or that instance; "largeness itself" is the unitary form apprehended intellectually, 'itself by itself.' The distinction is not between two metaphysical entities additional to one another, but is rather analogous to the distinction between a thing as seen in a mirror and the same thing as seen by itself. Thus what is given to the senses is neither reality itself, nor unreality, but appearance. It is in this sense that sensible things are neither completely real nor absolutely nothing, but are images of real beings, of unitary intelligible forms which they display but which they themselves are not.

Knowledge and opinion, then, as distinct modes of awareness, are not directed toward two different sets of 'objects,' of which one is completely real and the other, incomprehensibly, less than completely real and yet not nothing. Rather, they are higher and lower ways in which reality may be apprehended. Opinion, the mode of apprehension correlated to appearance as distinct from reality 'itself by itself,' thus lies in between knowledge and ignorance. Here again, unlike Parmenides, Plato carefully distinguishes between ignorance, a total failure to apprehend reality at all, and opinion, an apprehension of reality as it appears and hence an imperfect apprehension of reality. The distinction between knowledge and opinion, therefore, unlike that between knowledge and ignorance, is not a simple opposition, but is rather a distinction between the perfect and therefore paradigmatic apprehension of reality, and a less perfect apprehension of reality. Opinion

is thus analogous to seeing reality in a mirror, rather than to not seeing it at all, and sensible things, as what is given to this mode of apprehension, are analogous to reflections, neither reality itself nor simply nothing.

Image without reality, an image which is not an image of anything, is not image but sheer illusion. Hence if there were no divine, paradigmatic reality of things, then sophists like Protagoras and Thrasymachus would be right: knowledge would be impossible and all opinions would be equally valuable and equally worthless, because there would be no truth against which to measure them. Or rather, they could be evaluated only in terms of power rather than of truth.[18] But for Plato, because there is reality, there can be a difference between image and illusion, and hence between opinion and ignorance. Opinions can be better or worse, more true or less true, more adequate or less adequate apprehensions of reality, although even true opinion is not knowledge itself, the intellectual vision of intelligible, divine reality 'itself by itself.'

## 5. *The Ascent of the Soul*

If the levels of reality are levels of presentation and apprehension, then the many 'ascents' in the dialogues, the images of 'going to' the forms or true being, express not a passage from one 'world,' one set of objects, to another, but rather, as Plato repeatedly indicates, the ascent of the soul, a psychic, cognitive ascent, from one mode of apprehension to another, and hence not from one reality to a different reality, but from appearance to reality. This, above all, is why Plato's metaphysics is no mere 'theory,' a postulation of abstract entities called 'forms,' but is rather an account of the existential condition of human beings. As Socrates says, the prisoners in the cave, seeing shadows of puppets and taking them for reality, are "like us" (*Rep*. 515a5).

In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates likens the soul to a pair of winged horses and their charioteer, and describes its 'journey,' following the Gods, to "the place above the sky" (*Phdr*. 247c3).[19]

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[18] Cf. Schindler, *Plato's Critique*, 64: "The elimination of any difference between being and appearance … entails a shift in the fundamental criterion. The question is no longer, 'What is true?' but is now, 'What is capable of bringing about the most desirable outcome?' There is a total collapse here into effective power."

[19] Translating this phrase as "the place beyond heaven" obscures the spatial imagery of a geocentric cosmos in which one may ascend from earth, through the celestial spheres, to the place that is literally above the sky and thus outside the entire cosmos.

> What occupies this place … is colorless and shapeless and intangible, really real reality [οὐσία ὄντως οὖσα], visible [θεατὴ] to intellect alone, the soul's steersman, about which is the kind of knowledge that is true. Now the thought of a God is nourished by intellect and undefiled knowledge, as is that of every soul which cares to take in what is appropriate; seeing [ἰδοῦσα] at last that which is (τὸ ὄν) it rejoices, and beholding the true [θεωροῦσα τἀληθῆ] it is nourished and delights … In its circuit [the soul] looks upon [καθορᾷ] justice itself, it looks upon moderation, it looks upon knowledge, not that which pertains to becoming … but the real [οὖσαν] knowledge concerning that which is really being [τῷ ὅ ἐστιν ὂν ὄντως]. And having beheld and feasted on the other things likewise that really are [τὰ ὄντα ὄντως], going back inside the sky, it comes home. (*Phdr*. 247c3–e4)

The strongly visual imagery and the references to a "place" may incline us to read this as a voyage to 'another world.' But Socrates has already warned us that he is telling not "what the soul actually is" but rather "what it is like" (246a5) and later expressly refers to this story as a "mythic hymn" (265c1). The "place above the sky" is not in fact a place, since what is 'there' has no shape or color, is not bodily at all. Rather, the flight is a mythic representation of the psychic, cognitive attainment of an intellectual apprehension of the intelligible identities, 'themselves by themselves,' that inform and are displayed by, or appear in, sensible things. The forms are metaphorically represented in spatial terms as 'outside' the entire cosmos in that they are not themselves sensible things, not additional members of the sensible world. Indeed, the chariot-flight of the soul recalls Parmenides' chariot-ride to a similar destination: the understanding of being, τό ἐόν, that which is. Forms are reality (οὐσία), or more precisely "really real reality," (οὐσία ὄντως οὖσα), just in that they are the intelligible contents by which sensible things are anything at all. Thus here again we find Plato's pairing of reality with intelligibility: just as, in the *Phaedo*, the forms are "the reality of things" as "what is most true of things" (*Phd*. 65e1–2), so here they are "really real reality" in that that are "visible to intellect alone," and "that which is" (τὸ ὄν) is equated with "the true" (τἀληθῆ). As always, Plato's identification of form as what is real, or really real, is accompanied by, and must be understood in terms of, his reference to them as what is true, or intelligible.

That the soul's flight is purely cognitive and spiritual in nature becomes still more evident when Socrates describes the 'fall' of the human soul as a turning to τροφῇ δοξαστῇ, "opinion-food" (*Phdr*. 248b5). The fall is thus a descent not to a different set of objects but to a lower level of apprehension, to opinion rather than knowledge as our mode of encountering reality. Socrates then describes the process of 'returning' to knowledge: "[A soul] that never sees the truth [τὴν ἀλήθειαν] will not come to this [i.e., human]

shape. For a human being must understand what is said according to form, going from many sense-perceptions to a one taken together by reasoning; but this is recollection of the things our soul saw when, traveling with a God, it looked down on the things that we now say are, and raised its head up to that which really is [τὸ ὂν ὄντως]" (249b5–c4). The ascent to the forms, then, is a passage from sense-perception to intellectual knowledge, a cognitive movement from the many appearances given to sense to a unified intellectual apprehension of the one intelligible reality of which they are appearances. The entire myth of the soul's flight, its fall, and its recollection of what it saw must therefore be understood not as a chronological narrative of the soul's life-history, its movement from one 'world' to another and its experiences in these different worlds, but rather as a mythic representation of different levels of cognitive apprehension. The divine level is the intellectual apprehension of forms; the human soul, as imperfectly intellectual, is not at this level but may be on its way to it, working from the multiplicity of sensible appearances toward intelligible unities. Thus, later in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates describes the "method of collection and division," or dialectic, as "seeing them together, gathering into one form [εἰς μίαν … ἰδέαν] the things that are scattered everywhere" and "being able to cut according to forms [κατ' εἴδη] at the natural joints" (*Phdr*. 265d3–4, 265e1–2). He then alludes back to the myth: "I myself am a lover of these divisions and collections, so that I may be able to speak and think; and if I judge that anyone else is able to see a one which is by nature over many, I follow 'behind in his track as if he were a God'"[20] (*Phdr*. 266b3–7). To "follow … a God" to "the place above the sky" (*Phdr*. 247c3) is thus to recognize, intellectually, the intelligible looks, the samenesses and differences, that articulate sensible things, enabling them to be anything and enabling us "to speak and think," to understand the world, at all.

In the *Republic*, the divided line is expressly presented as an image of varying levels of cognitive apprehension. "It is like a line divided in two, having unequal sections. Divide each section again according to the same ratio, the kind of what is seen and that of what is thought (τὸ … τοῦ νοουμένου), and with regard to clarity and unclarity [σαφηνείᾳ καὶ ἀσαφείᾳ] in relation to each other, one section of the visible will be for you images …" (*Rep*. 509d6–e1). The articulation of the line in terms of degrees of "clarity and unclarity" plainly indicates that the four sections of the line represent greater and lesser degrees of adequacy in the givenness and apprehension

[20] Homer, *Odyssey* II.406.

of being. The divided line, in fact, is a refinement of the distinction between knowledge and opinion. The upper portion represents intellectual knowledge, the lower opinion (*Rep*. 533e7–534a2).[21] Each of these is then subdivided into a higher and a lower level, yielding four sections in all. Socrates continues, "Would you be willing to say … that it is divided with regard to truth and not [truth] [ἀληθείᾳ τε καὶ μή]: as the opinable is to the knowable, so the likeness is to that to which it is likened?" (*Rep*. 510a8–10). The image of the divided line is thus explicitly phenomenological, articulating higher and lower levels of truth or unhiddenness, of givenness and apprehension. Hence Socrates summarizes the line thus: "For the four sections, take these four conditions that come about in the soul [παθήματα ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ]: intellection [νόησιν] for the highest, thought [διάνοιαν] for the second, belief for the third, and imaging for the last; and order them in a ratio, considering that they share in clarity [σαφηνείας] as far as the things in them share in truth [ἀληθείας]" (*Rep*. 511d6–e4). Here, again, he expressly refers the sections of the line, not to four different sets of objects, but to four "conditions in the soul," that is, modes or levels of the apprehension of reality. That which is grasped at a higher level is more real just in that it 'shares more in truth,' in unhiddenness, that is, in that it is more perfectly intelligible. In considering the divisions of the line, we may too easily forget that a line is, most fundamentally, a continuum, and that a 'divided line' is therefore an articulated continuum. In constructing this image, therefore, Plato is presenting, not an opposition of the sections of the line to each other, but rather a range of higher and lower levels within a continuum of modes of apprehension. And since the two lowest sections represent not ignorance but opinion, it follows that at any point on the line there is some degree of 'clarity,' of truth, of unhiddenness, that is, some presentation and apprehension of being, however 'dim' this may be in comparison with higher levels.

The image of the cave, immediately following the line, offers a more graphic, imaginative presentation of these "conditions in the soul." A cave is, most definitely, a place; but we are expressly warned, in another typically Platonic pun, not to take this literally. "A strange image you express, and strange prisoners" (*Rep*. 515a4), remarks Glaucon: "Strange," here, translates ἄτοπον, literally 'placeless.' The prisoners, who are "like us" (*Rep*. 515a5) represent souls, so that, although in one sense we may be said to be 'in the

[21] Plato's terminology fluctuates: at 511d8 he calls the highest of the four sections νόησις; at *Rep*. 533e7–534a3 he uses this term for the two upper sections taken together, and refers to the highest as ἐπιστήμη. But as Plato himself says just here (*Rep*. 533e1–2), the terminology is unimportant.

cave,' in a deeper sense the cave is in us, as a condition in the soul. The structure of the cave-image as a whole, like the divided line, emphasizes the continuity of what the prisoners see with reality itself. The prisoners are not seeing something other than real things; rather, they are seeing shadows of statues of real things. Like a reflection, a shadow of a thing, or a shadow of an image of a thing, is not another thing, but a dimmed, blurred, flattened, distorted presentation of the thing itself. Since this is what is given to the prisoners, reality, that is, intelligible whatness, is to a minimal degree unhidden to them, while remaining largely hidden to them in that they do not see it 'itself by itself.' To ascend out of the cave, then, is to ascend to more and more adequate presentations and apprehensions of reality, until we see reality directly, 'itself by itself.' Once again, the stages in the ascent represent not different 'worlds' or sets of objects, but levels of apprehension of reality.

Thus Plato repeatedly characterizes these levels in terms of clarity and of truth or unhiddenness. "In every way, then, such [people] would not think that the true [τὸ ἀληθὲς] was anything other than the shadows of the artifacts" (*Rep*. 515c1–2). This is all that is given, all that is "true" or unhidden to them, and therefore is what counts as reality for them. The soul takes as being, as reality, that which is unhidden to it. Here again, as in the *Phaedo* and the *Phaedrus*, we find the pairing of being with truth. The released prisoner, having been turned from the shadows to the statues that cast them, is "somewhat closer to that which is [τοῦ ὄντος] and is turned toward things that are more [πρὸς μᾶλλον ὄντα]" (*Rep*. 515d2–3), but, until his eyes adjust to the light, "he would consider that the things he saw earlier were more true [ἀληθέστερα] than those which are now shown" (*Rep*. 515d6–7), and would "flee, turning back toward the things which he is able to look upon, thinking that they are clearer in being [τῷ ὄντι σαφέστερα] than those which are shown" (*Rep*. 515e2–4). Once brought outside the cave, he would at first be "not be able to see even one of the things which are now called true [ἀληθῶν]" (*Rep*. 516a2–3). The ascent, then, to use an Aristotelian turn of phrase, is from that which is most clear to us, to that which is most clear, that is, intelligible, in itself. The varying levels expressed by the cave-image are levels of unhiddenness, of truth, and *therefore* of reality.

Diotima's 'ladder of love' in the *Symposium* represents a comparable ascent of the soul from instances of beauty to the beautiful itself. At the culmination of her discourse, Diotima offers an account of how beauty presents itself to the philosopher at the highest level: "The beautiful will not appear [φανταθήσεται] to him as any face or hands or anything else of those things that body shares in, nor any speech or any knowledge, nor

being somehow in anything else [ἐν ἑτέρῳ τινι], as in an animal or in earth or in the sky or in an other [ἔν τῳ ἄλλῳ], but itself by itself with itself always being uniform …" (*Symp*. 211a5–b2). In this sentence the participle 'being' is dependent on the main verb 'appear.' The distinction Diotima makes is thus between two ways in which beauty can appear, two modes of presentation and apprehension. At the peak of his ascent the philosopher apprehends beauty not "in an other," that is, as the beauty of this or that beautiful thing, but rather "itself by itself," as the single intelligible reality that informs them all. Here again, the distinction is not between two different objects, the beauty of this or that beautiful thing and 'beauty itself,' but between two ways in which the same reality may be given and apprehended: as it appears, "in an other," as a feature of this or that instance, or "itself by itself," as the one intelligible character that it is.[22] Once again, the levels of being, expressed here in the distinction between images and "the true [τοῦ ἀληθοῦς]" (*Symp*. 212a4–5), are levels of unhiddenness, of givenness, of presentation to and apprehension by the soul.

In the *Phaedo*, we find yet another mythic expression of these levels of presentation and apprehension. Here the 'ascent to the forms' is figuratively described as 'death,' which is defined as "the departure of the soul from the body" (*Phd*. 64c4–5). This "departure," of course, cannot be literal, since the soul is not a spatial entity, and the entire story of the soul's 'departing from' the body and 'going to' the forms, like the chariot-flight, the cave, and the ladder of love, is yet another spatial metaphor, which is immediately reinterpreted not as literal, biological death but as psychic, cognitive purification, the soul's 'ascent' to the intellectual apprehension of "truth" (τῆς ἀληθείας ἅπτεται, *Phd*. 65b9), that is, of the forms as the reality, the intelligible whatness, of things. Thus Socrates says, "Does not purification turn out to be this, … to separate the soul from the body as far as possible and accustom it to gather together and collect itself by itself outside the body, and to dwell as far as possible, both now in the present [ἐν τῷ νῦν παρόντι] and in the future, alone by itself, freed from the body as from bonds?" (*Phd*. 67c5–d2). "Both now in the present and in the future:" the philosopher's soul does not await biological death to 'die,' to be 'free from the body,' to apprehend and 'be with' divine reality. Death is thus a metaphor for the cognitive ascent to intellectual apprehension. "When the soul investigates itself by itself, it goes there,

[22] Cf. Sallis, *Being and Logos*, 394, quoted above, 31 n. 15. Sallis continues, "A beautiful thing is just that which stands forth in a showing in which the beautiful itself shows itself as it is not …; this—and only this!—is the proper sense in which a beautiful thing is an *image* of the beautiful itself."

to that which is pure and ever being and immortal and always the same, and because it is akin to this it comes to be ever with it, whenever it comes to be itself by itself and this is possible for it, and it ceases from wandering and remains the same with things which are always the same insofar as it is grasping such things, and this condition of it is called wisdom" (*Phd.* 79d1–7). Here for a moment the metaphor drops away: there is no reference to death, but only to the soul's "investigating itself by itself," i.e., intellectually, rather than through the body, i.e., sensuously. As we saw earlier, insofar as the soul apprehends forms 'themselves by themselves' it transcends temporality. In yet another characteristic pun, Plato identifies Hades (ᾍδης), the mythical 'place' to which the separated soul goes, with the invisible (ἀιδῆ) (*Phd.* 80d6, 81c11), that is, intelligible reality. The "truly Hades [Ἅιδου ὡς ἀληθῶς]" (*Phd.* 80d6–7) is the unhiddenly invisible, that is, being as intelligible, invisible to the eyes but 'visible,' unhidden, to the intellect (cf. *Phdr.* 247c7–8).

'Where' a soul is, therefore, as in the cave-image, is an expression of what is unhidden to it and thus what it takes for reality. "If … [the soul] departs from the body polluted and impure, in that it always is with [συνοῦσα] the body and cares for and loves it and is bewitched by it, by desires and pleasures, so that it opines that nothing else is true [ἀληθὲς] except the corporeal, which one can grasp and see and drink and eat and use for sexual enjoyment, but is accustomed to hate and fear and flee from that which is dark and invisible to the eyes but is intelligible and grasped by philosophy, do you think that a soul like this will depart pure, itself by itself?" (*Phd.* 81b1–c2). As in the cave-parable, the entire account of the soul's 'departure' is couched in phenomenological terms, in terms of what is true, unhidden, or clear to the soul. Philosophy "exhorts [the soul] to gather and collect itself to itself, to trust in nothing but that of beings, itself by itself, which it thinks [νοήσῃ] itself by itself, and not to consider anything true [ἀληθές] whatever it investigates by other means in other things; for this is sensible and visible, while that which [the soul] itself sees is intelligible and invisible …" (*Phd.* 83a7–b4), and again, "The soul of every man is necessitated, when it senses intense pleasure or pain, to consider that concerning which it undergoes this to be most clear and most true [ἐναργέστατόν … καὶ ἀληθέστατον], although it is not so" (*Phd.* 83c5–8). Hades, the invisible, the divine, then, represents not 'another world,' a place to which the soul goes when a person physically dies, but rather reality, the intelligible content of things as given to the soul cognizing reality 'itself by itself,' intellectually, rather than 'through the body,' by way of the senses. 'This world' and 'Hades' thus represent not two worlds, but reality as given

at lower and higher levels of presentation and apprehension. Hence the myth at the end of the *Phaedo* closely parallels the cave-parable, and again expresses the ascent from appearance to reality. Living in the hollows of the earth, we think that we are on the surface (*Phd.* 109c3–4, d6–7). If someone were to see (ὁρῶσι) and look at (κατιδεῖν) and behold (θεωοῦσα) what is there he would "know that that is truly sky and the true light and truly earth [ὁ αληθῶς οὐρανὸς καὶ τὸ ἀληθινὸν φῶς καὶ ἡ ὡς ἀληθῶς γῆ]" (*Phd.* 109e4–110a1). Here again Plato highlights the continuity from one level to another: the true surface is "variegated, marked out with colors, of which the ones here, which they use in painting, are samples. But there all the earth is of these, and of ones even much brighter and purer than these … Precious stones here are fragments of [the stones there] … but there is none there that is not such and even more beautiful. The cause of this is that those stones are pure and not eaten away or corrupted like those here …" (*Phd.* 110b7–e5). What is given to the senses, "our precious stones here," are fragmentary, differentiated appearances of the intelligible or true realities known by intellect.

In rejecting the conventional 'two-world' reading of Plato's metaphysics and instead understanding the forms as the whatness, the intelligible contents, and hence the reality of sensible things, we may seem to be abandoning the transcendence that is usually associated with Plato and is so vividly conveyed by the images of flight, of ascent, and of death that we have been interpreting. What is left, we may ask, of 'the world of forms,' the 'Platonic heaven?' What has become of the Plato of Raphael's *School of Athens*, gesturing upward? In truth, transcendence has not been lost, but rather demands to be rethought. Forms, the intelligible 'looks' of things, are transcendent to sensibles in that they are other, distinct, unconditioned by and ontologically prior to sensible things, and are thus a 'higher' reality, more real in that they are purely intelligible, attainable only by an effort of psychic purification, of interiorization, of intellectuality. Hence Plato's metaphors of voyaging, of climbing, of struggling upward, of flight, of dying. As "conditions in the soul" (*Rep.* 511d7), the levels of apprehension and presentation are ethical and existential conditions. What is clear or true, unhidden to us, is what we take as real and hence what we pursue. Thus the sensual soul in the *Phaedo* finds nothing to be "true," unhidden, and hence real, save that which one can eat, drink, or enjoy sexually (*Phd.* 81b1–c2). Thus the prisoners in the cave—who are "like us" (*Rep.* 515a5)—live a life of competition in the discernment of shadows (*Rep.* 516c8–d2), the all-too-human struggle for pleasure, power, and prestige. In the *Phaedrus* myth, this competitive jealousy, which characterizes human as distinct from divine souls, is one of

the principal factors that prevents the former from fully 'seeing' intelligible reality (*Phdr*. 248a6–b1). The philosopher, on the other hand, striving toward divinity, rises above this merely human competition: "For one who has his thought truly toward the things that are [ἀληθῶς πρὸς τοῖς οὖσι] there is no leisure to look down to the affairs of men, and, fighting with them, to be filled with envy and hatred; but rather, seeing and beholding things which are ordered and always the same, which neither wrong nor are wronged by each other but are all in order and according to reason, to imitate and become like these as far as possible … The philosopher, associating with what is divine and orderly, becomes orderly and divine as far as is possible for man" (*Rep*. 500b8–d1).

Intelligible reality, then, is transcendent, but this does not mean that it is 'separate' or 'elsewhere' except metaphorically. We should bear in mind that 'transcendence' itself is in origin a spatial metaphor, literally meaning 'rising past.' The transcendence in question is a spiritual transcendence, from appearance perceived by sense and mediated by human culture to divine reality apprehended directly by intellect. Appearance and reality are not two realities. What we begin with, at the level of culturally mediated sense-experience, is not reality 'itself by itself.' The recognition of this fact is accompanied by shock and pain, and the ascent beyond it demands a conversion and a death. But neither is what we start with simply nothing. It is a dim, inadequate presentation and apprehension of reality, from which we must ascend. Since being is equated with intelligibility, the reality of things, reality itself by itself, real reality, is non-spatial, non-temporal, supersensible, "colorless and shapeless and intangible, really real reality, visible to intellect alone" (*Phdr*. 247c6–8). The sensible, precisely in that it is not nothing, in that it has some identity, some intelligible content, points 'beyond' itself to that which it itself is not, but which shows up in it. In displaying some intelligibility, the sensible thus points to the intelligible reality of which it is the image, and the ascent is therefore a cognitive, ethical, spiritual ascent from appearance to reality. To 'see' the forms is to be at the intellectual level of apprehension, to have intellect as the 'condition in our soul.' 'The Platonic heaven,' to paraphrase the gospel, 'is in you.'

## 6. *Knowledge as συνουσία*

Because the passage from sensible things to intelligible forms is not a neutral turning of our cognition from one set of objects to another but rather a psychic ascent from one mode of apprehension to another, it follows that

the relation between intellectual apprehension and intelligible being is not one of extrinsic duality. Plato's extensive use of the 'ocular metaphor' for knowledge which is implicit in the very word εἶδος, according to which the forms are 'looks' that the soul 'sees,' is often taken to mean that Plato thinks of knowledge in terms of an extrinsic relationship between the knower as 'subject' and the forms as 'objects.' But if we find such subject-object dualism in Plato, this is only because we ourselves are thinking like moderns and presuppose that 'seeing' must be interpreted in this way. In fact, what Plato means by 'seeing' is much closer to what in phenomenological terms is called 'intuition' (*Anschauung*), which may be analyzed into the intentionality of apprehension and the givenness of what is apprehended. Understood in this way, 'seeing' implies not extrinsic objectification but, on the contrary, the immediate togetherness of seeing and seen. Insofar as I see anything, I am 'out there' with that which is seen, and, conversely, that which is seen is 'in' me as the content of my visual awareness. Seeing, or any mode of awareness, implies not a separation between subject and object but rather a joining, a being-together, of apprehension and reality. And it is in precisely these terms that Plato presents the relation between intellectual apprehension and intelligible being, or the forms. The forms, as intelligible 'looks,' are given to and are thus in intellect as its content, and indeed Plato occasionally refers to them not only as νοητά and γνωστά, intelligible and knowable, but as νοούμενα or γιγνωσκόμενα, that-which-is-thought or known (e.g., *Rep*. 580c1, e2).[23] Conversely, the soul, insofar as it is intellectual, is together with the forms, possessing them as that-which-it-thinks or knows. Plato thus understands the relation of thought and being not as an extrinsic subject-object duality but as a συνουσία or being-together, a conjugal union of the knowing and the known.

One of the chief ways in which Plato expresses this togetherness is through the myth of recollection. It is all too rarely recognized that Plato's account of our coming to know the forms as a recollection of what we knew in a previous, discarnate existence but forgot upon being born in the body is not a 'theory' or a 'doctrine' but a myth, even though it is clearly presented

[23] The latter terms are often translated "objects of thought" and "objects of knowledge." But this is misleading. To use the term 'object' is to attribute to Plato a modern subject-object dualism which is alien to his thought. 'Object,' like its German equivalent *Gegenstand*, implies something which stands 'over against' and is thus extrinsic to thinking or knowing. The Greek passive participles, on the other hand, meaning "that which is thought" and "that which is known" (or still more briefly and precisely, "the thought," "the known") imply rather the *content of* thinking and knowing, not something outside of it.

as such not only in the *Phaedrus* but in the *Phaedo* and the *Meno* as well.[24] In the *Meno*, it is first introduced as a tale told by priests and poets (*Men*. 81a10–b6). Then, upon completing the argument for recollection through the discovery of mathematical knowledge in the untaught slave-boy, Socrates says, "Then if for us the truth of beings is always in the soul [ἀεὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια ἡμῖν τῶν ὄντων ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ], the soul would be immortal, so that you must boldly try to seek and to recollect [ἀναμιμνήσκεσθαι] what you do not now know, that is, what you do not remember [μεμνημένος] … *I would not altogether rely on this account in other respects*; but if we hold it necessary to seek what one does not know we would be better and more courageous and less idle than if we hold that it is not possible to find it and need not seek: for this I would altogether contend in both word and deed" (*Men*. 86b1–c2). The key point on which Socrates insists, then, is not the recollection-myth itself, but that knowledge is possible for us, and hence we must seek it, because "the truth of beings is always in the soul." The real conclusion of the argument is not that the soul literally pre-exists but that "the truth of beings" is found not outside of but within the soul. This, indeed, is all that is justified by the conversation with the slave-boy: it shows, at most, that since he did not receive his knowledge of mathematical truth from outside, he discovered it within himself. It does not and cannot prove that he acquired this knowledge at some time in the past, before he was born. The word "always" points in the same direction: if the truth is *always* in the soul, then it was not received at some time in a previous existence prior to which it was not there, but rather is intrinsic to the soul. The idea that this knowledge was acquired in a previous existence must therefore be taken as a mythic expression of the soul's intrinsic possession of truth, that is, the intelligible whatnesses of things.

In the *Phaedrus*, as we have seen, the story of the soul's journey, including its pre-natal flight "above the sky" (*Phdr*. 247c3) to behold the forms, is explicitly identified as a myth, expressing different modes of cognitive

[24] For a thorough account of why recollection should be regarded as a myth see Kenneth Dorter, "Equality, Recollection, and Purification," *Phronesis* 17 (1972), 215–217. Dorter summarizes (217): "There are thus a number of reasons for supposing the doctrine of recollection to be a genetic myth depicting the relationship between the embodied soul and the forms: the indications in the direction of the purification account that occur toward the end of the discussion of recollection in the *Phaedo*; the mythological context in which the doctrine of recollection is always presented; the simplemindedness of the details of recollection, and their incompatibility with those of purification; the depiction of the 'prenatal' soul in the *Phaedrus*, as tripartite, which implies that it is really incarnate; the way in which the details of the *Phaedrus* myth echo those of the *Phaedo*'s account of incarnate learning; the similarity between the *Phaedrus* myth and the genetic myth of the *Timaeus*."

apprehension. In the *Phaedo*, the soul's 'going to' the forms at death, and hence also its 'coming from' the forms at birth, is a less vivid and graphic version of the same myth. If the spatial dimension of the soul's 'journey' is obviously mythic, then so too is the temporal dimension. To imagine, that is, to picture the soul pre-existing in time, is necessarily to picture it being in some place at that time. In the *Phaedo*, Plato expressly links the spatial and temporal aspects of the recollection-story through the words of Cebes, who throughout the dialogue is shown to have an incorrigibly pictorial and bodily notion of the soul (e.g., *Phd.* 70a1–6; 87b4–88b8): "This [i.e., recollection] is impossible, unless our soul exists somewhere [που] before [πρὶν] it comes to be in this human form" (*Phd.* 72e7–73a2). As the spatial location of the soul and the forms in "the place above the sky" (*Phdr.* 247c3) or in "Hades" (*Phd.* 80d6, 81c11, 83d9) is clearly mythic in that it represents both the soul and the forms as bodies, so is the temporal location of the soul and the forms that is implied by 'pre-existence.' Taken literally in a temporal sense, the story of pre-existence and recollection is altogether grotesque: it would mean that at a certain date, say, in 429 BCE, a year before Plato's birth, Plato's soul was "above the sky," "looking at" the forms. This not only assimilates the soul to a body, but assimilates intellectual apprehension to sense-perception, a taking in of content from outside, whereas the whole point of the recollection-story is that our knowledge of the forms is *not* taken in from outside but is "always in the soul" (*Men.* 86b1–2).

What the argument for recollection in the *Phaedo* actually demonstrates is that our knowledge of the forms is non-empirical in just this sense. Socrates begins by making the familiar distinction between equal things and "the equal itself," or the form equality: "We say, I suppose, that there is something equal, I mean not a stick [equal] to a stick or a stone to a stone or anything else of that sort, but besides all these things something else, the equal itself" (*Phd.* 74a9–11; cf. 74c4–5). He then asks, "Whence do we receive knowledge of it?" (*Phd.* 74b4). We do in fact have such knowledge: if we did not know such a criterion, we could not identify anything we experience as unequal. "When someone, seeing something, thinks that what I now see wants to be such as some other of beings but is deficient and is not able to be such as that, but is inferior, it is necessary, I suppose, that he who is thinking this knows beforehand [προειδότα] that to which he says it is like, but deficiently" (*Phd.* 74d9–e4). For that matter, without the knowledge of equality neither could we identify anything we experience as equal. In making such judgments, we are bringing to bear an idea of equality and saying that the things perceived either do nor do not display this 'look.' On the one hand, the experience of equal things is what, as we say, 'calls to mind,' or arouses in us, the

knowledge of equality: "From these equal things, although they are different from that equal, you have nonetheless come to think and have received the knowledge of it" (*Phd.* 74c7–9). On the other hand, sense-experience does not provide or account for this knowledge. Since equality itself, like any form, is not a sensible thing but an intelligible idea, it cannot come to us by way of the senses. Nor can we have arrived at it by 'abstraction' from what we perceive, for this would require that we first identify such things as equal, which in turn requires that we already have the idea of equality. Since we apply this paradigmatic idea in judging what we perceive, our knowledge of it is in some sense prior to sense-experience: "Then it must be that before we began to see and hear and otherwise sense, we received knowledge of what the equal itself is, if we were going to refer thither the equal things from the senses …" (*Phd.* 75b4–7). Consequently, Plato uses the metaphor of recollection to describe this discovery within ourselves of something that does not come into us from outside by way of the senses. The metaphor is both apt and powerful, because of the oddity of the everyday experience of forgetting and recalling. If I have forgotten something, or simply happen not to be thinking of it at the moment, in a sense I do not know it: it is not present to my awareness, I am not apprehending it. But if, upon being reminded, I recall it, I do not re-acquire it as a new piece of knowledge. Rather, I discover it within myself as something that, in some sense, I knew all along. What we have forgotten but can recall we both know, in that it is within us, and do not know, in that we are not currently apprehending it. Recollection thus serves as a superb metaphor for our coming to know the forms, which in one sense we do not initially know but which, "by using the senses" (*Phd.* 75e3), we recognize as always already at work within our cognition.

The soul's 'pre-existence,' then, must be taken as a metaphorical expression of its intrinsic possession of intelligible reality within itself. Since our knowledge of the forms does not come into us by way of the senses, it is non-empirical and in that sense *a priori*. Indeed, we rarely notice that this common philosophical expression, which has become sedimented as a technical term for that aspect of our cognition which is not empirical, is itself a temporal metaphor.[25] What is *a priori* is 'prior' to sense-experience *only* in the sense that it does not come to us by way of such experience. The meaning of Plato's myth is that our knowledge of the forms is *a priori* in just this sense.

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[25] Heidegger, of course, calls attention to the temporality of the *a priori*. See Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, tr. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), § 22c, 324–325.

Indeed, whenever we speak of an *a priori* dimension of knowledge not only are we using a metaphor, but, whether we realize it or not, we are invoking Plato's myth of pre-existence and prior knowledge. Since we do not mean it literally ourselves, why should we think that Plato does so, when in fact he openly tells us that it is a myth?

The myth of pre-existence and recollection, then, is an expression of the human condition as 'in between,' a condition of not being Gods, that is, not being sheer intellectual apprehension itself, and yet capable of attaining such apprehension to some degree. This is indicated by the distinction in the *Meno* between 'remembering' (μεμνημένος), that is, immediately apprehending, and 'recollecting' (ἀναμιμνήσκεσθαι), that is, working toward apprehension (*Men.* 86b3–4). Such attainment is possible because of the latent presence within us of divine reality. What the argument shows is that the divine, paradigmatic forms are in us, for without them we could not think at all or make any identifying judgments about what we perceive. The very intelligible identities which are the reality of things must belong intrinsically to the soul, for otherwise we could never come to know them and thus would not be capable of intellect. "[A soul] that never sees the truth [τὴν ἀλήθειαν] will not come to this [i.e., human] shape. For a human being must understand what is said according to form, going from many sense-perceptions to a one taken together by reasoning; but this is recollection of the things our soul saw when, traveling with a God, it looked down on the things that we now say are, and raised its head up to that which really is [τὸ ὂν ὄντως]" (*Phdr.* 249b5–c4). Just as, in the *Meno*, the real conclusion of the argument for recollection is that "the truth of beings is always in the soul" (*Men.* 86b1–2), so, in the *Phaedo*, the conclusion is that intelligible reality "is ours [ἡμετέραν οὖσαν]" (*Phd.* 76e1–2). Since intellect, that is, intellectual apprehension, just is the possession of the forms, it follows that reality, as intelligible, lies not outside of but within such apprehension, and hence within us insofar as we have intellect. The real point of the story of recollection, then, is not literal, temporal pre-existence, but rather interiority: we do not take in divine, intelligible being from outside, but find it within ourselves. Like the discarnate afterlife, the discarnate 'pre-life' is a mythic representation of the higher, divine mode of apprehension that is possible for us, and which we must discover as a higher, divine dimension of the self, our share in what is divine and eternal, and in that non-temporal sense our share in immortality.[26] Understood in this way, the myth

[26] Cf. Dorter, "Equality," 217–218: "By depicting the logically pre-empirical in terms of

of recollection is not, as it is often said to be, entirely absent from the *Republic*. In the cave-parable, after remarking that the prisoners are "like us," Socrates asks, "Do you suppose that they see anything *of themselves and each other* except the shadows cast by the fire on the cave-wall in front of them?" (*Rep*. 515a5–8). The prisoners see not only the shadows of the puppets but also shadows of themselves, and take these for their true selves. The implication of this is that to 'turn around' and 'ascend' out of the cave, to come to know intelligible reality rather than merely sensible appearance, is also to return to oneself, to come to know the true self, the divinity within. As in the myth of recollection, knowledge of reality coincides with self-knowledge.

Thus, as we are told in the *Phaedo*, "There is an equal necessity that those things [i.e., the forms] exist and that our souls exist before we are born" (*Phd*. 76e5–6). Recognizing the soul's pre-existence as a metaphor for its intrinsic possession of divine, intelligible being, we can see that these positions are 'equally necessary' because they are in fact two sides of the same understanding of reality. The existence of forms is an expression of the intelligibility of being. As intelligible, as form, being is not set apart from intellectual apprehension as an extrinsic 'object,' but is given to and is thus within such apprehension as its content. This is implied by the very term εἶδος, 'look.' Conversely, as a 'seeing,' intellectual apprehension is not set apart from being as an extrinsic 'subject,' but is rather the possession of being. Thus both the account of being as form and the account of knowledge as recollection represent not an extrinsic duality but rather an intrinsic belonging-together of intellect and being. Just to the extent that we have intellect, we do not 'see' being, or the forms, as it were, from outside, but find it within ourselves and are intimately united with it.

Plato frequently expresses this togetherness of the intellectual soul with intelligible being as a συνουσία, a 'being-with' the forms. In the *Phaedo*, he uses this term to refer both to the unphilosophical soul's association with the body and to the philosophical soul's communion with intelligible, divine reality (e.g., *Phd*. 81c5, 83e3; see also 68a6–7). This word, signifying most literally 'being-with' or 'being-together,' expresses a wide range of meanings, from social to educational to sexual association, and was used by the Greeks to refer, among other things, to the relationship, at once educational and

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temporal priority, recollection provides a particularly vivid and literal metaphor of the presence in us of the pre-empirical, and of the consequence that, since we are thus in contact with what is eternally true, a measure of immortality attaches to us."

sexual, between ἐραστής and ἐρώμενος. Plato's usage of it often has strongly erotic connotations. In the Seventh Letter (341c6) it refers to a philosophically transformed version of the ἐραστής-ἐρώμενος relationship. In the *Symposium*, the party itself is referred to as a συνουσία (*Symp*. 172c1; 173a4, b3),[27] and in the culmination of Diotima's speech she first uses this term in its erotic sense, with regard to the youths whom lovers are eager to "see and be with [ὁρῶντες τὰ παιδικὰ καὶ συνόντες]" and again "to behold and be with [θεᾶσθαι … καὶ συνεῖναι]" (*Symp*. 211d6–8), and then applies it to the philosopher's relationship with the form of the beautiful itself: "Do you think, then, that it would be a poor life for a man, looking at and beholding that in the way that is necessary, and being with [συνόντος] it? Or do you not think … that only there will it come about for him, seeing the beautiful by that to which it is visible, to beget not images of virtues, in that he is not laying hold of an image, but true [virtue], in that he is laying hold of what is true [τοῦ ἀληθοῦς]?" (*Symp*. 211e4–212a5). The intellectual soul's relation to intelligible being, then, is no mere extrinsic 'looking at,' but is rather an intimate communion, a possession, a 'mingling' or 'joining' represented by the image of sexual union.

Indeed, Plato is by no means exclusively wedded to the 'ocular metaphor' for knowledge. He frequently presents knowledge not only under the metaphor of vision but also under those of touching, holding, sexual union, and eating.[28] Thus in the *Symposium* the philosopher can "beget" (τίκτειν) true virtue because he "lays hold of" (ἐφαπτομένῳ) the beautiful itself. Likewise in the *Phaedo*, we are told that the philosopher's soul "touches" or "lays hold

[27] Nehamas and Woodruff's translation of συνουσία here as "affair" (Plato, *Symposium*, tr. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989]) succeeds rather well, if perhaps unintentionally, in capturing the social and sexual *double entendre* of Plato's word.

[28] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 38–39, remarks, "There was … no particular reason why this ocular metaphor seized the imagination of the founders of Western thought. But it did … The notion of 'contemplation,' of knowledge of universal concepts or truth as θεωρία, makes the Eye of the Mind the inescapable model for the better sort of knowledge. But it is fruitless to ask whether the Greek language, or Greek economic conditions, or the idle fancy of some nameless pre-Socratic, is responsible for viewing this sort of knowledge, as *looking* at something (rather than, say, rubbing up against it, or crushing it underfoot, or having sexual intercourse with it)." Rorty later, following Heidegger, associates the "ocular metaphor" specifically with Plato (157, 159, 162–163). In view of Plato's regular and repeated accounts of intellectual knowledge in terms of, precisely, touching, holding, eating, and sexual intercourse, this is either disingenuous or reflects a profound ignorance of, or disregard for, the text of Plato.

of" (ἐφαπτομένη, *Phd.* 79d6) divine reality, and that it is "nourished" (τρεφομένη) by "the true and divine" (*Phd.* 84a8–b1). In the *Phaedrus*, the soul not only "sees" but is "nourished" (*Phdr.* τρεφομένη, 247d2; τρέφεται, 247d4) and "feasts on" (*Phdr.* ἑστιαθεῖσα, 247e3) true being. In *Republic* IX Plato gives an extended description to the soul's being nourished by and filled with intelligible reality (*Rep.* 585b9–586b4). Such expressions, implying that intelligible reality is the food, and thus the very content, of the intellectual soul, indicate a far more intimate union than a mere extrinsic gaze. The images of touching, eating, and sexual union are drawn together in the *Republic*:

> It is natural that the true lover of learning strives toward that which is (τὸ ὄν), and does not remain with each of the many things that are opined [δοξαζομένοις] to be, but proceeds and does not dull or cease from love [ἔρωτος] until he grasps [ἅψασθαι] the nature of each thing which is by that in the soul to which it is proper to lay hold [ἐφάπτεσθαι] of this—proper, as akin; having approached and coupled [μιγεὶς] with that which really is [τῷ ὄντι ὄντως], having begotten [γεννήσας] intellect and truth [νοῦν καὶ ἀλήθειαν], he knows and truly lives and is nourished [τρέφοιτο] … (*Rep.* 490a8–b6)

"Intellect," that is, the soul's apprehension of being, and "truth," that is, being's unhiddenness to the soul, are engendered together in the erotic communion, the συνουσία, of thought and reality. Far from thinking of knowledge as an objectifying 'gaze' of the soul upon the forms as intelligible 'objects' extrinsic to itself, Plato understands intellectual apprehension rather as a 'being with' the forms, a possessing of being as its very content, and, correspondingly, being, or the forms, as contained within intellectual apprehension: "The truth of beings is always in the soul" (*Men.* 86b1–2) and intelligible reality "is ours" (*Phd.* 76e1).

## 7. *The Good*

Plato's presentation of the good as the first principle of knowledge and of being must be understood in terms of this conjugal togetherness. The analogy of the good to the sun is introduced by the observation that light is the "yoke" that "yokes together" sight and that which is seen: "By no small idea, then, the sense of sight and the power of being seen are yoked [ἐζύγησαν], by a more precious yoke [ζυγῷ] than those by which other things are yoked together [συζεύξεων], if light is not worthless" (*Rep.* 507e6–508a2). The center of the analogy, pointed up by the threefold use of the term 'yoke,' is the joining together of the seeing and the seen. Plato's image is that of two oxen united under a common yoke, or indeed of two people

united in wedlock.[29] Like any act of consciousness, seeing is an overcoming of separation, a joining, a coming together, of self and reality, a togetherness of seeing and the seen. To see something is to have that thing present to oneself as the content of one's visual awareness. But in the absence of light, things in the world and the power of sight cannot come together, which is to say that there is no seeing and nothing is seen. By providing light, the sun enables the joining, the togetherness of vision and visible things, and in this sense "causes" (αἰτιάσασθαι, *Rep*. 508a4) both seeing and being seen. Plato continues, "This, then, say I called the offspring of the good, which the good begot as an analogue to itself; what that [i.e., the good] is in the intelligible place, with regard to intellect and the things that are thought [τε νοῦν καὶ τὰ νοούμενα], this [i.e., the sun] is in the visible, with regard to sight and the things that are seen" (*Rep*. 508b12–c2). The sun is thus analogous to the good in that the good provides the yoking-together, the συνουσία, of intellectual apprehension (νοῦς) and intelligible contents (τὰ νοούμενα), and thus enables there to be any intellection and any intelligible reality.

In what way, then, is the good the source of this togetherness, of knowing and being known, and therefore, since to be is to be intelligible, of reality itself? For Plato, the good of anything consists in the harmonious integration of its multiple components into a coherent whole, enabling it to function as a single thing which is not merely the sum of its parts.[30] In the *Republic* itself, for example, the good for the city and for the soul is the harmonious binding together of the parts of each so that it acts as one whole rather than as many things (e.g., *Rep*. 422e2–423c4; 443d1–e2). So too, in the *Timaeus*, the divine intellect makes the cosmos as good as possible by binding together the elements, through mathematical proportion, into a unified whole (*Tim*. 31b8–c4, 32b3–c2). In the *Phaedo*, arguing that if the cosmos is intelligently arranged than it is ordered with a view to what is best, Plato rebukes those who offer merely mechanistic accounts of natural phenomena by pointing out that they "do not seek the power for these things to be established as

[29] We may note that, like Greek σύζευξις, συζεύγνυμι, the Latinate term 'conjugal' in English refers to marriage under the image of 'yoking together.'

[30] It is well known that in his so-called 'unwritten doctrines' Plato identifies the good with the one, or unity. It is less widely recognized that this identification is also evident in the dialogues themselves. See Reale, *New Interpretation*, 145–151, 193–209, 271–274, and Desjardins, *Plato and the Good*, 87–88, 105–112, esp. 111: "And so, from the dialogues themselves we have been led full circle back to Plato's intriguing lecture on the Good, and to … the assertion that ultimately the Good is to be understood as Unity itself." See also Schindler, *Plato's Critique*, 116–117.

well as possible as they are in fact set down, nor do they consider it to have any divine force [δαιμονίαν ἰσχὺν] … and they think that the good and the 'ought' do not bind together and hold together [τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ δέον συνδεῖν καὶ συνέχειν] anything, as truly [they do]" (*Phd.* 99c1–6). And in the *Philebus*, a central theme of which is the combination of a multiplicity of elements into a single whole, we are told that what is "most precious" (τιμιώτατον, *Phil.* 64c5) in such a mixture, and what renders it "dear" (προσφιλῆ, *Phil.* 64c6), is measure, for this is what makes the difference between a coherent, integrated, unified whole and a mere collection: "Every combination which does not somehow possess measure and the nature of symmetry of necessity destroys its components and, above all, itself; for such a thing will be not a combination but, truly, an uncombined collocation [οὐδὲ γὰρ κρᾶσις ἀλλά τις ἄκρατος συμπεφορμένη], bringing disaster to whatever things are contained in it" (*Phil.* 64d9–e3). This integrating measure is manifested as the beauty and the excellence of the mixture: "Now the power of the good has taken refuge for us in the nature of the beautiful; for measureliness and proportion happen everywhere to become beauty and excellence" (*Phil.* 64e5–7). Consequently, "Therefore, if we cannot capture the good in one form, let us say, taking it with three, beauty and proportion and truth, that this, as one,[31] we would most rightly hold responsible for what is in the mixture, and that through this such a thing comes to be good" (*Phil.* 65a1–5). The conclusion, then, is that the good for anything is the integration, the 'binding together,' of many components into one complex whole, and is manifest in that whole at once as its beauty, its proportion, and its truth.

It is the latter term, truth, that comes to the fore in the analogy of the sun to the good. "When [the soul] fixes itself on that which truth and being [ἀλήθειά τε καὶ τὸ ὄν] shines on, it has thought and known [ἐνοήσέν τε καὶ ἔγνω] this and appears to have intellect [νοῦν ἔχειν]. But when [it fixes itself] on what is mixed with darkness, what comes to be and passes away, it opines and is dimmed, changing opinions up and down, and seems then not to have intellect … Say, then, that this, which provides truth to the things that are known and gives power to that which knows, is the idea of the good" (*Rep.* 508d4–e3). As we have seen, what is "most true" (*Phd.* 65e2) of a thing is its form, that is, its intelligible whatness, that in it which is given to intellectual apprehension and in terms of which it can be identified at all. But only in virtue of the good, that is, unity-as-integration, does anything have such

[31] We may reasonably suspect another Platonic word-play here: these three, beauty, proportion, and truth, are one, i.e., are one with each other; and they are one, i.e., are unity itself.

an identity. It is the coherent arrangement or co-ordination, the binding together of the parts into a single functional whole, that makes many pieces of wood, for example, to be a bed, rather than just so many pieces of wood. So too, it is the integration of many elements, tissues, and members into a single living organism that make something a tree, or a dog, rather than an incoherent jumble of unconnected stuffs. This integration is its good, as what enables it to function and thus to be itself, the one identifiable thing that it is, at all.[32] In every case, the integration of parts into one coherent whole makes a thing what it is, gives it an intelligible whatness, provides not only its beauty but its truth, its formal identity. Without integration which is the good for all things, then, there would be no forms, no intelligible identities in things, nothing there in them for thought to grasp, and so no intellectual apprehension and no reality of anything.[33]

Thus, as the sun provides light which is the 'yoking together' of seeing and the seen and without which there is neither seeing nor anything seen, so the good provides "truth and being" (*Rep*. 508d5), the yoking together of thinking and that which is thought, of νοῦς and the νοούμενα, without which there is neither intellectual apprehension nor anything apprehended, any intelligible content, any reality. Here once more we find the pairing and virtual identification of 'truth' and 'being,' the two terms together governing a singular verb. Just before the analogy of the sun, Plato reminds us that the forms are the being of all things (*Rep*. 507b2–7). Thus truth, as intelligible identity, is the being of anything, for without this whatness the thing would have no intelligibility and would not be anything. And the good is what lets things have such identity, or truth, and so lets them have any being, that is, be anything at all. Just as without light provided by the sun there would be no actually visible world, so without truth, the intelligibility provided by the good, there would be no reality.

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[32] Cf. Desjardins, *Plato and the Good*, 101–102: "When a many is bonded together … in a mutually interactive tension which empowers them in that relation to do and be more than the mere sum of each and all in isolation, then they constitute the kind of 'one' we call a 'whole' … [T]he mark (and test) of a genuine whole thus rests on what Plato talks of as 'power' or *dunamis* and interprets in terms of function. When new power is thus constituted by the parts in combination, power reflected in the fact that more can be predicated of the combination than of the parts in isolation, then … we call it a 'whole' and recognize it as a newly generated entity."

[33] The 'bad forms' to which Plato often refers, e.g., the unjust, the ugly, etc., may be understood to be included in their good counterparts as possible modes of deviation from them: "It is necessary that the same person [who knows what is best] also know what is worse" (*Phd*. 97d4). See Findlay, *Plato*, 43, 139, 375.

Therefore, "Say that not only is their being known present to the things that are known by the good, but also that their being and reality [τὸ εἶναι τε καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν] come to them by it …" (*Rep*. 509b6–8). The good, as what lets there by any form in anything, is what lets there be reality. Without the good, there would be no truth, no 'looks' in things for thought to apprehend. Things would have no intelligible whatnesses, and so nothing would be anything. In the absence of the good, therefore, reality itself would vanish, just as in the absence of light visible things disappear.[34] This is exactly why the sophistic denial of absolute values leads to the nihilistic reduction of reality to appearance, of divine knowledge to human opinion. Without "truth and being" provided by the good, as Plato says, the soul "does not have intellect" and so cannot know but can only opine (*Rep*. 508d4–9). To say that the good provides truth and being means that the good lets there be any real whatness to things, and so any distinction between knowledge and opinion, between reality and appearance, and thus lets there be any reality at all.[35] The good, as measure, unifies all things, and without its "divine force" (*Phd*. 99c2–3) not God but man would be the measure of all things. There would be no truth of things, and so no reality. Thus, as Plato says, not only does the good "provide truth to the things that are known" and "power to that which knows," and is itself therefore "more beautiful" than knowledge and truth (*Rep*. 508e4–6) as their enabling condition, but indeed, the very "being and reality" of that which is not merely opined but known, that is, the intelligible whatnesses of things, "comes to them by the good."

For this reason, "the good is not reality [οὐκ οὐσίας], but passes even beyond reality [ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας] in seniority [πρεσβείᾳ] and power" (*Rep*. 509b8–10). The meaning of this claim is both more exact and less mysterious than it is often found to be, and depends on a precise understanding of the term οὐσία. Οὐσία, that is, reality-as-intelligible, is form, the intelligible identities that show up in things, making them what they are. The good,

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[34] Cf. Desjardins, *Plato and the Good*, 118 n. 31: "Since it is only the light of the sun that makes possible any act of vision …, it follows that the sun, as that which links (and indeed makes possible) both the act of sight and the seeable, is strictly speaking the condition of there being an actually visible world. Similarly, so the analogy runs, since it is the Good which links (and indeed makes possible) both the act of knowing and whatever is knowable and in that sense real, so is the Good similarly the condition of there being an actual and knowable world."

[35] Cf. Schindler, *Plato's Critique*, 114: "[T]ruth means, at least in part, the difference between being and appearance. If this inference is justified, then to say that the good bestows truth on things means that *it is precisely the good that establishes the difference between being and appearance*" (italics in original).

then, is not οὐσία, that is, not included among these as any one distinct intelligible whatness in virtue of which things differ from each other. Rather, as the enabling condition whereby anything has any unity, any integrity, any intelligible identity, and so any truth or reality at all, the good is more fundamental than form or reality itself. In just this sense the good it not form, not reality, but prior to, or, as Plato puts it, "senior" to it and superior in power. Thus when Plato refers to the good as an ἰδέα, which would ordinarily mean an intelligible form, the term ἰδέα cannot bear its usual sense: the precise and emphatic statement that the good is οὐκ οὐσία rules this out. The good may be called an ἰδέα in, as it were, an analogous sense, in that unity-as-integrity is a common 'look' which is displayed by many things, and indeed must be displayed by all things just insofar as they are anything at all. But it is clear that the good is not merely one such look among or alongside the others.[36] The analogy of the sun expresses just this: the sun, Plato remarks, is not only the cause of sight, but is also seen by it (*Rep*. 508b9–10). So too, the good is not only the principle or condition of intellectual apprehension and of being as that which is apprehended, but is itself known by intellect. But just as seeing the sun is very different from seeing any of the things that it illuminates, so the good is given to intellect in a radically different way from all 'other' intelligible contents. The sun is not visible in the same way as other things. We cannot look directly at it (except, indeed, when it is partially obscured by clouds, that is, when it is not completely unhidden), and we cannot precisely 'pin it down,' pick it out, discern just where the sun ends and something else begins. Likewise, the good is indeed, as Plato repeatedly says, known by intellect, not by some other faculty, but not in the same way as the 'other' forms. The

[36] Cf. Rosen, *Nihilism*, 184: "If the good were a *what* or an Idea in the same sense as, let us say, the Idea of a man, a horse, or justice, then it would be a determinate shape or form, heterogeneous with respect to the other Ideas; there would be no way to explain how such a determinate idea transmits intelligibility to the others. The good is 'beyond' the Ideas in the sense that it is not a determinate form, but the intelligibility shared by these Ideas. If 'being' (οὐσία) is used to designate the Idea, then the good is 'beyond being.' On the other hand, to the extent that goodness may be identified as intelligibility, it has a kind of reflexive visibility, shape, or look, and, in this sense, may be called an Idea. Hence Socates' fluctuation in terminology." So also C.J. de Vogel, *Philosophia I: Studies in Greek Philosophy* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1986), 184: "One must remember that ἰδέα is a very general term, which by Plato could be used in a far less 'technical' sense than we are accustomed to take it … When Plato begins by speaking of 'the Good' as ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα and next explains that it does not belong to intelligible Being but surpasses this 'in dignity and power', we must follow him and acknowledge that apparently he did not intend to say that the Good is 'an Idea.'"

good must be recognized by intellect not as this one distinct intelligible content, but rather as the principle of all such contents.

It is in this sense that we should understand the subsequent passages in which Plato refers to the good as "the brightest of being [τοῦ ὄντος τὸ φανότατον]" (518c9) and "the happiest of being [τὸ εὐδαιμονέστατον τοῦ ὄντος]" (*Rep*. 526e3–4), and as "the best in beings [τοῦ ἀρίστου ἐν τοῖς οὖσι]" (*Rep*. 532c5–6). In the two former phrases, the singular rather than plural form of 'being' (ὄν) may suggest that they mean not 'the brightest or happiest of beings,' i.e., that being which, among all other beings, is brightest or happiest, but rather 'that which is brighter or happier than (any and every) being.'[37] Likewise, the third phrase need not mean 'the best among beings' but can mean rather 'that which, in beings, is best,' i.e., that in virtue of which beings are good, just as, at *Philebus* 64c5–6, the good is referred to as what is "most precious" in a mixture as that which makes the whole mixture "dear." The good is not merely one being, one form, among the others, but the very luminosity in virtue of which any being, any form, is there to be seen at all. It is 'what is best in beings' as the integration whereby they are beings. However we interpret these formulations, the express and unambiguous phrase οὐκ οὐσία (Rep. 509b9) is decisive: the good is not the reality of anything, but the enabling condition for the reality of all things.[38]

Thus it is not the case that οὐσία, that is, being-as-intelligible-form, reigns supreme in Plato's metaphysics. For Plato, being is indeed form, as that which is "most true" (*Phd*. 65e2), or intelligible, of things. But being-as-form is itself conditioned and therefore secondary: only in virtue of goodness is there any form, truth, or reality in anything. Reality itself, just as intelligible identity, is a result of unity-as-integration. Ultimately, therefore, not form or reality but the good, which is not οὐσία, not reality but beyond reality, is the first principle on which all intelligibility, and thus all reality, depends.

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[37] On this comparative use of the superlative see de Vogel, *Philosophia I*, 185, and Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), §1434. The same usage occurs occasionally in English, as in the song lyric, "Last night I had the strangest dream I ever dreamed before …"

[38] Cf. Reale, *New Interpretation*, 208–209: "In the end, the claim that the Good (One) is above Being means that it is its supreme source or origin. Thus, to speak of the brightest of beings or of Being itself is to use the term 'Being' in a prototypical sense, and hence in a sense different from its common use. In the end, the expression 'brightest of beings' means the same as the claim that the Good is above Being … Thus, just as the One, insofar as it is a condition of numbers, is not a number, so likewise the One, insofar as it is a condition of being, is not a being, in the sense that the conditioning entity is metaphysically differentiated from what is conditioned."

## 8. *The Forms and the Demiurge*

In the *Timaeus*, Plato offers a story (μῦθον, *Tim*. 29d2) of the making, or more precisely the construction, of the sensible cosmos by a God who is identified as intellect (νοῦς, *Tim*. 39b7, 47e4) and is characterized as the craftsman (δημιουργὸς, *Tim*. 28a6, 29a3) of the cosmos. Although only the *Timaeus* provides a detailed account of this construction, the figure of the divine, demiurgic intelligence is not unique to this dialogue but occurs in many others as well. In the *Phaedo*, Plato speaks with approval of Anaxagoras' idea that "intellect is the orderer and cause of all things" (*Phd*. 97c1–2),[39] and punningly critiques Anaxagoras because he "did not use intellect" (*Phd*. 98b8–9) but gave mechanistic explanations of natural phenomena rather than the teleological explanations that ought to follow if the world is ordered by intellect. The *Timaeus* can indeed be regarded as Plato's undertaking of what he criticizes Anaxagoras for failing to do: to describe the cosmos, in that it is ordered by divine intelligence, as good and beautiful. The *Republic*, too, makes reference to the "craftsman" of the world (*Rep*. 507c7–8, 530a6). In the *Sophist*, the Eleatic Stranger remarks that "making has two parts … the divine and the human" (*Soph*. 265b4–6), and continues, "All mortal animals, and the plants that grow on earth from seeds and roots, and the inanimate bodies constituted in earth …, surely we shall not say that they came to be after previously not being except by some crafting God [θεοῦ δημιουργοῦντος] …?" (265c1–5). He then says, "I will affirm that the things that are called 'by nature' are made by divine art [θείᾳ τέχνῃ]" (*Soph*. 265e2). The idea that the cosmos is ordered by divine intelligence plays a major role in the *Statesman*, the *Philebus*, and the *Laws* as well, and is evidently a consistent and prominent aspect of Plato's vision of the world.[40]

What distinguishes craftsmanship from other modes of production, such as mechanical causation or biological procreation, is that a craftsman works intelligently, arranging his material according to a pattern, a plan or design, a paradigm, that is grasped by thought. So, for instance, in the *Cratylus*, Plato remarks that a carpenter makes a shuttle "looking to" (βλέπων) the form (τὸ εἶδος) which is "what a shuttle is" (*Crat*. 389a6–b6). Likewise, in the *Republic*, Plato depicts the philosopher-king as an artist or craftsman

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[39] Cf. Anaxagoras, B 12.

[40] On the divine demiurgic intelligence in dialogues other than the *Timaeus* see Reale, *New Interpretation*, 308–328, and Fritz-Peter Hager, *Der Geist und das Eine* (Bern and Stuttgart: Haupt, 1970), 5–29.

(δημιουργὸν, *Rep*. 500d6) and says that such people, in 'painting' a virtuous city and virtuous souls, "would look [ἀποβλέποιεν] in either direction, toward the just and beautiful and moderate and all such things by nature [i.e., the forms justice, beauty, etc.], and toward what they are making in humans …" (*Rep*. 501b1–4). In *Republic* X, the craftsman (δημιουργὸς) of a table or a bed makes each by looking (βλέπων) to the form (ἰδέαν) of each (*Rep*. 596b6–8). For Plato, then, artistic production or craftsmanship, demiurgy, is always a matter of 'looking to' an intelligible paradigm and arranging the product so that it becomes an image of it. To say, then, that the world as a whole is a work of divine craftsmanship is to say that, just as a work of human art reflects the paradigm that the artist beholds in his mind, so the cosmos expresses, or is an image of, the intelligible paradigm that the divine intellect apprehends: "Having been generated thus, it was crafted [δεδημιούργηται] according to that which is apprehended [περιληπτὸν] by reason and thought and is always the same. These things being the case, again, there is every necessity that this cosmos is an image of something" (*Tim*. 29a6–b2). To this extent, the myth of the making of the cosmos may be read as a presentation in story form of the idea that sensible things are images of divine, intelligible paradigms, or forms. Whereas other dialogues usually discuss particular things as images of certain forms—e.g., large things as images of largeness, or beautiful things as images of beauty—the *Timaeus* presents the sensible world, taken all together as one whole, as an image of the forms taken all together as one whole.

This is not to say that the figure of the demiurge himself is purely mythic. The forms, taken as a whole, are the totality of all that is given to thought and are thus are the content of intellectual apprehension. To say that the world reflects the forms is thus to say that it reflects νοῦς, or intellect. Conversely, as we have seen, intellectual apprehension is the possession of and thus 'is together' with intelligible reality. Unlike a human soul, which is not purely intellectual but may be said, in one of Plato's favorite phrases, to 'have intellect' and thus to share in divinity to a greater or lesser extent just insofar as it apprehends intelligible reality, the demiurge just is intellect, which is to say that he is intellectual apprehension or intelligence itself. As such, therefore, he coincides or is together with the forms. A human craftsman, e.g., an architect, does not discover a blueprint extrinsic to himself and construct a house according to it. Rather, the pattern, the paradigm of the house, is in his mind as his idea, the content of his thought. If the architect is not altogether one with his idea, this is because it is not the case that a human architect is nothing but the thinking of this paradigm. The demiurge of the cosmos, on the other hand, is nothing but thinking, nothing but

intellectual apprehension itself, and thus is one with that which it thinks, that is, intelligible reality, the paradigm of the cosmos.

Plato consistently presents the relation between craftsman and paradigm in just this way. In the *Republic*, explaining why only the philosopher is suited to rule the city, he points out that the "lovers of sight and sounds," "having no clear paradigm in their soul [μηδὲν ἐναργὲς ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ ἔχοντες παράδειγμα], cannot, as painters do, looking to [ἀποβλέποντες] what is most true, always referring thither and beholding it as precisely as possible, thus establish here laws concerning beautiful and just and good things …" (*Rep*. 484c7–d2). This implies that the philosopher, on the other hand, insofar as he knows the forms or is intellectual, does have such a "clear," that is, intelligible, paradigm *in his soul*. Thus Plato subsequently remarks that that philosopher "seeing and beholding things that are ordered and always the same, neither wronging nor being wronged by each other, being all in order according to reason, imitates these things and is likened to them as far as possible. Or do you suppose there is any way in which someone can consort [ὁμιλεῖ] with what he admires without becoming like it? … Then the philosopher, consorting [ὁμιλῶν] with what is divine and orderly, becomes as orderly and divine as is possible for a man" (*Rep*. 500c2–d1). The term that Plato twice uses here to describe the relation between the philosopher and the divine reality that he "beholds" is ὁμιλεῖν, which, much like συνεῖναι, signifies anything from social to marital to sexual togetherness.[41] It is at this point that Socrates depicts the philosopher as a "craftsman" who "looks to" to the forms and "paints" the virtuous city and souls "using the divine paradigm" (*Rep*. 500d6–e4). Significantly, these two passages occur shortly before and shortly after the graphic account of the philosopher's soul coupling with and being nourished by being (*Rep*. 490a8–b7). In describing the philosopher as a demiurge, then, Plato indicates that his soul is in communion (ὁμιλία) with the intelligible paradigm to which it looks, and that this paradigm, as that which he 'sees' intellectually, is not separate from but is in his soul. So, in the *Timaeus*, we are told that the demiurge of the cosmos, or God, "looked to" (ἔβλεπεν, *Tim*. 29a3) the eternal, intelligible paradigm in making the world. As we have seen, this 'ocular metaphor' for intellectual apprehension implies not an extrinsic subject-object relationship but rather the 'yoking' or 'togetherness' of knowing and the known: the seeing is with the seen and the seen is in the seeing. Thus, as Plato here says, the paradigm is apprehended (περιληπτὸν, *Tim*. 29a7), that is, more liter-

[41] At *Phaedo* 81c5 Plato uses ὁμιλία and συνουσία conjointly as synonyms.

ally, 'embraced' or 'surrounded,' by thought. The demiurge and the forms, then, are united in the συνουσία of intellectual apprehension and intelligible content. The forms, taken all together as the totality of all possible thought-contents,[42] constitute thought itself, that is, the demiurge. The world, we may say, reflects intelligence, which is both the act-of-thinking, i.e. God or the demiurge, and that-which-is-thought, i.e. the forms or the paradigm.[43]

In this way we can understand Plato's references to the paradigm of the cosmos as "the intelligible living thing" (*Tim.* 39e1) and as the "living thing … of which the other living things … are parts. For that [i.e., that living thing] possesses all the intelligible living things, embracing them in itself [ἐν ἑαυτῷ περιλαβὸν]" (*Tim.* 30c3–8). We should note Plato's use here of περιλαμβάνω, the same term employed just before, at 29a7, to refer to the paradigm as "apprehended" by thought. If the forms were inert, lifeless objects, extrinsic to the living intelligence that 'sees' them, how could they be living? But if we recognize that the seen, or known, is not outside of the seeing or knowing, these references make perfect sense: the forms are living as the contents of living intelligence, of thought itself. Thus in the *Timaeus* Plato characterizes the paradigm in a variety of ways. First he calls it "that which is changeless and is apprehended [*or* embraced/surrounded] by reason and thought" (*Tim.* 29a6–b1). A few lines later he says that the demiurge "wanted all things to become as like himself [παραπλήσια ἑαυτῷ] as possible" (*Tim.* 29e3), suggesting that the cosmos is an image of the demiurge himself. Next he calls the paradigm the "living thing" of which all other intelligible living things are parts (*Tim.* 30c3–6). Taken together, these passages suggest that the forms, the demiurge, and the intelligible living thing are different ways of referring to the same paradigmatic reality. In that the sensible cosmos is an image of intelligible being, or the forms, it is a likeness of the demiurge himself, because these forms are the content of intellectual apprehension. As such it is an image of "the intelligible living thing" (*Tim.* 39e1), for the paradigm thus unites, in indissoluble togetherness, the act-of-thinking and

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[42] Cf. Findlay, "Neo-Neo-Platonism," 258–259: "Plato's whole endeavour was to *unify* the possibilities of being into one single, systematically ordered picture," and again, "[W]hat Plato was basically intent on [is] not the construction of a set of isolated conceptual meanings, but of a whole map of the intelligible universe of possibilities seen from the standpoint of a paradigmatic intelligence that can compare and integrate them all."

[43] This must not be mistaken for the quite different theory that the forms are 'thoughts of God' in the sense that the demiurge is prior to and produces or 'makes up' the forms. Rather, the forms, taken all together as one whole, are the content of the act-of-thinking which is the demiurge. Neither the seeing nor the seen, the apprehension nor the apprehended, can be prior to the other.

that-which-is-thought. Just as an image of the forms, the world is an image of living intelligence itself. Here again we may see Plato's metaphysics as a development of Parmenides' dictum, "The same is for thinking and for being," or, alternatively, "Thinking and being are the same" (B 3).

## 9. *The Motion of Intellect*

In the *Sophist*, which is closely linked to the *Timaeus* through its reference to the natural world as the work of a "crafting God" and of "divine art" (*Soph.* 265c5, e2), Plato expressly ridicules the conception of the forms as inert, lifeless objects. The "friends of the forms" (*Soph.* 248a4), we are told, say that "by the body through sensation we commune with becoming, but through reasoning, by the soul, with real reality, which you say is always the same, while becoming is different at different times" (*Soph.* 248a10–13). The Eleatic Stranger takes the supposed 'changelessness' of real reality to mean that, according to the "friends of the forms," it neither does (δρᾶν, *Soph.* 248c5; ποιεῖν, *Soph.* 248c8) nor undergoes (πάσχειν, *Soph.* 248c8) any activity. He then points out that if knowing and being known are things done and undergone (*Soph.* 248d4–e4), these would therefore, according to the "friends," be excluded from reality, and exclaims, "But, by Zeus! Shall we easily be persuaded that, truly, motion and life and soul and thought are not present in that which completely is [τῷ παντελῶς ὄντι], that it neither lives nor thinks, but, solemn and holy, not having intellect, it is standing unmoved?" This, Theaetetus replies, would be a "dreadful thing to say [δεινὸν … λόγον]" (*Soph.* 248e6–249a3). To avoid this conclusion, we must somehow admit into "that which completely is" intellect, life, soul, and hence, in some sense, motion.

In developmental readings of Plato this argument is often taken to mean that, contrary to the doctrine of the 'middle dialogues,' Plato is now including not only changeless, lifeless, intelligible forms but also living, changing things into the realm of being.[44] On this interpretation, τῷ παντελῶς ὄντι must be understood to mean 'being as a whole,' and motion is admitted

[44] E.g., F.M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1935), 244–247; David Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), 108–110; Lesley Brown, "Innovation and Continuity: The Battle of Gods and Giants, *Sophist* 245–249," in *Method in Ancient Philosophy*, ed. Jyl Gentzler (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1998), 201–203; Kenneth M. Sayre, *Plato's Late Ontology: A Riddle Resolved*, new ed. (Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2005), 224–225.

into reality in the sense that being as a whole includes living and changing things *in addition to* changeless forms. To support this reading, the text of *Soph.* 249b5–6 is emended through the insertion of the word πάντων[45] so that it reads, "It turns out that if *all* beings are unmoved then there is no intellect about anything anywhere," implying that, on the contrary, *some* beings must be moved. According to this interpretation, the argument continues with the observation that if, on the other hand, all beings are moved, then likewise there can be no intellect (*Soph.* 249b8–c5), for intellectual knowledge must be knowledge of changeless realities. *Some* beings, then, must be unmoved. The conclusion, therefore, is that "being and the all" (*Soph.* 249d4) must include both immovable forms and moving things.

But this interpretation cannot be sustained.[46] First, τῷ παντελῶς ὄντι means not 'being as a whole' but rather 'that which completely is:' παντελῶς is an adverb expressing degree or intensity of being, not an adjective expressing inclusivity.[47] Indeed, this is precisely the same phrase that Plato uses at *Republic* 477a3 to refer to the forms, or intelligible reality, identifying it as that which is completely knowable. So too, here in the *Sophist*, it refers to the intelligible as the wholly real. If motion were allowed into reality only in the sense that not forms alone but also moving things are beings, then the forms themselves would remain inert and lifeless, "not having intellect" (*Soph.* 249a2).[48] But it is precisely this view of intelligible reality, of the forms, that Plato is here mocking and rejecting, and which is contradicted in the *Timaeus* as well, where the paradigm of the cosmos is identified as "the intelligible living thing" (*Tim.* 39e1). The whole point of the Stranger's argument is that intelligible being *itself* must in some sense involve life, thought, and

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[45] This 'emendation' is endorsed by Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, 241 n. 1; Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, 109 n. 1; Brown, "Innovation and Continuity," 202 n. 43; Richard S. Bluck, *Plato's* Sophist (Manchester: University Press, 1975), 99; Nicholas P. White, tr., in Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 271 n. 18.

[46] For a somewhat different defense of the conclusion reached here see Lloyd P. Gerson, "The 'Holy Solemnity' of Forms and the Platonic Interpretation of *Sophist*," *Ancient Philosophy* 26 (2006), 291–304.

[47] Cf. de Vogel, *Philosophia I*, 182, 196–197.

[48] Cf. de Vogel, *Philosophia I*, 196–197: "For, after all, the Stranger from Elea did not say that something had to be *added* to that solemn and holy world of 'that which perfectly IS'—a moving kind of being to that which by its very nature was unmoving—, but his problem was: how that which IS in a perfect way (τὸ παντελῶς ὄν, not παντελές!), could itself be deprived of life and thinking. This problem could not be solved by *adding* to it a different kind of being which does possess life and thinking … [T]hat which is νοητόν *properly speaking* would remain as 'solemn and holy' as ever: no life and motion, no soul and thinking would be proper to it" (italics in original).

motion. The unwarranted insertion of πάντων at *Soph.* 249b5 is nothing but a flagrant case of altering the text to make it say what a certain interpretation requires. What the Stranger actually says is, "It turns out that if *beings are immovable* [ἀκινήτων … ὄντων], then there is no intellect about anything anywhere" (*Soph.* 249b5–6). The point is not that *some* beings must be moved, but that beings in general, intelligible reality as a whole, must be moved, if there is to be intellect. Thus in the next speech, πάντ' does not modify ὄντα, thereby suggesting that it ought to be included in the previous speech as well, but is rather substituted as an equivalent of ὄντα: "And if, again, all things [πάντ'] are borne about and moved, on this account too we will take away the same thing [i.e., intellect] from beings" (*Soph.* 249b8–10). The Stranger points out that in order to allow for intellectual knowledge, beings must, on the one hand, in some sense be moved, while all things—that is, the very same things, beings—must, on the other hand, in some sense also be immovable.

The equivalence of ὄντα and πάντα, referring to all beings taken together, is indicated by the chiastic use of the terms τὸ πᾶν and τὸ ὄν in the conclusion of the argument: "To the philosopher … it is necessary, for these reasons, neither to accept, from those who assert either one or many forms, that the all [τὸ πᾶν] is static, nor, again, to listen at all to those who in every way [πανταχῇ] move being [τὸ ὄν], but rather to say, as in the children's prayer, that being and the all [τὸ ὄν τε καὶ τὸ πᾶν] is as many things as are immovable and in motion [ὅσα ἀκίνητα καὶ κεκινημένα], both together" (*Soph.* 249c10–d4). Here the singular τὸ πᾶν replaces ὄντων of 249b5, and the singular τὸ ὄν replaces πάντ' of 249b8. The equivalence of these terms is then confirmed by their repetition in the explicit hendiadys τὸ ὄν τε καὶ τὸ πᾶν, "being, that is, the all." Thus the question to which the answer is 'Both' is not, 'Does being consist of immovable things or of moving things?' but rather, 'Is being as a singular totality immovable or moving?' Only this reading makes sense of the comparison to the "children's prayer," which implies a demand for two things that at least apparently exclude each other, a demand, as we say, to eat your cake and have it too. Even if the children's prayer means only a demand for both of two offered alternatives, it still implies an insistence on both when it seems that we are required to choose one or the other. If the conclusion were merely that some beings are immovable and others are moving, there would be no paradox or apparent contradiction, no seemingly exclusive choice. Thus we are told that the philosopher, like a child demanding to 'have it both ways,' must say, not, as the text is often translated, that being is both the things that are immovable and the things that are in motion, but rather that it is "as many things

as are immovable and in motion, both together:" the pronoun ὅσα is not repeated, thus again suggesting that it is the same things that must be both immovable (in some sense) and moving (in some sense). This accords with the requirement to reject the claim that being is in motion "in every way [παντα̂χῇ]" (*Soph.* 249d2). The conclusion, therefore, is not that being consists both of things that are immovable and of things that are moving, but that being consists of things that are both immovable and moving.[49]

How then is this seeming contradiction to be resolved? Let us note that the only 'motion' that is actually demanded by the argument and attributed to being is the intellectual activity of knowing and being known, a kind of 'motion,' in the sense of doing and undergoing, that need not involve change in the sense of alteration over time. The motion ascribed here to "that which completely is" (*Soph.* 249a2), therefore, is what Plato in the *Laws* calls "the motion of intellect [νοῦ κίνησις]" (*Laws* 897d3), that is, the activity of intellectual apprehension, a 'motion' which is not a change and which is represented by the image of a sphere rotating in a fixed location (*Laws* 898a3–b3). This image perfectly captures the non-contradictory coinciding of motion and rest: the entire sphere is at once completely moving and completely stationary. The children's prayer is granted. Aristotle will later coin the term ἐνέργεια to refer to an activity which is not a movement (κίνησις) toward a not-yet-achieved end, and, significantly, will take seeing and knowing as his prime examples of such activities (*Met.* Θ.6, 1048b18–35). Plato's terminology is different in that he uses the world κίνησις to cover both motion in the sense of change and the changeless activity of intellect, but the image of the rotating sphere, as well as the argument in the *Sophist*, make it clear that what he means by the 'motion' and 'life' of true reality is what Aristotle would call not motion (κίνησις) but the activity (ἐνέργεια) of intellect.[50] This 'motion,' therefore, does not violate the timeless immutability of the forms as intelligible ideas.

The *Sophist*'s attribution of motion, life, and intellect to "that which completely is" (*Soph.* 249a2), then, is best understood in conjunction with the *Timaeus*' account of the paradigm of the cosmos as "the intelligible living thing" (*Tim.* 39e1) and with Plato's many presentations of knowledge

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[49] Cf. the less literal but still accurate translation in James Duerlinger, *A Translation of Plato's* Sophist *with an Introductory Commentary* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005, 2009), 113: "But like children who request [both when offered a choice of two things], he must say that being and all things are both [at rest and in motion]" (brackets in original).

[50] On this terminological point see Lloyd P. Gerson, *Aristotle and Other Platonists* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 41n. 60, 217; idem, "'Holy Solemnity,'" 297–298.

as a 'being together' of the knowing and the known, of thinking and reality. The forms, taken all together as one whole, are living, in that they are the content of, and in this sense one with, living intelligence itself. Interpreted in this way, the view of the forms expressed in the *Sophist* is not an isolated statement at odds with the changelessness of true being that Plato insists on elsewhere, but rather accords with all his treatments of thought and being. The myth of recollection, as we saw, says that the forms are found not outside the soul but within it insofar as it is intellectual: "The truth of beings is always in the soul" (*Men.* 86b1–2) and intelligible reality "is ours" (*Phd.* 76e1–2). Pure intellect itself, therefore, just is the containing, the possessing, the apprehension, of the forms. Again, Plato's use of touching, eating, and sexual union as images for knowledge show that he does not think of it as a detached 'gaze' of the soul upon inert 'objects' extrinsic to itself, but, on the contrary, as an overcoming of any externality between knower and known. The latter two images, especially, suggest not merely no distance, but less-than-zero distance, between intellect and being. These metaphors thus represent a coinciding in which the two are joined in such a way that they occupy, as it were, the same space and so 'are together:' συνουσία. It is significant that Plato uses the same expression, δεινὸν λόγον, to characterize both the denial of life to being in the *Sophist* (249a3) and the denunciation of ἔρως in the *Phaedrus* (242d4). The human soul has an intrinsically erotic orientation toward being, and this ἔρως drives its movement toward the togetherness with being which is knowledge. Hence these two δείνοι λόγοι are in fact one and the same: the repudiation of ἔρως is the separation of soul and life from being. As we see in the *Republic* (490a8–b7), intellect and truth, apprehension and being-apprehended, are begotten in the erotic communion of soul and being. The forms are inseparable from soul, life, and intellect in that they are the very contents of intellectual apprehension: not νοήματα, mere concepts or products of thought (a proposal that is ruled out at *Parm.* 132b7–c11), but νοητά and νοούμενα, the things-that-are-thought. Thus it is not the view of the forms as one with living intelligence, but rather the common misconception of the forms as inert, lifeless objects, that is at odds with Plato's regular and consistent understanding of the nature of true being.[51]

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[51] To claim, as does Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, 245, in support of his interpretation of the *Sophist*, that "[t]he Forms are never represented as living and thinking beings," is not only to argue in a circle with regard to the *Sophist*, but also to disregard Plato's account of the intelligible paradigm of the cosmos as living (*Tim.* 30c3–8, 39e1).

## 10. *The Receptacle of Becoming*

According to the *Timaeus*, a full account of the cosmos as an image of the forms requires a discussion not only of the intelligible paradigm, or being, and the sensible images, or becoming, but also of what Plato calls "the receptacle of all becoming" (*Tim*. 49a5–6). The later development of this idea in the philosophical tradition from Aristotle onwards may incline us to think of the receptacle as 'matter' (ὕλη), but in fact neither this term nor the concept it expresses is genuinely Platonic. Matter, as a metaphysical category, is conceived on the analogy of the 'stuff' that a thing is made out of, e.g. wood (whence the term ὕλη), clay, etc. But this is not how Plato presents the receptacle: it is not that *out of which* sensible things are made, but rather that *in which* they occur, "the nature which receives all bodies" (*Tim*. 50b6). As such it is not itself a part or a metaphysical component of bodies. Bodies, for Plato, are not composites of form and receptacle, but are rather nothing but images or appearances of forms: "The things that enter into and depart from [the receptacle] are imitations of the eternal beings …" (*Tim*. 50c4–5). Hence it is inappropriate to speak of 'material things' in the context of Plato's metaphysics. We should always use instead the expression 'sensible things,' which refers to the mode in which they are given to awareness rather than to a component of them which is other than form.

Timaeus summarizes his account of forms, sensibles, and receptacle thus: "It must be admitted that one kind is that which is always the same in form, ungenerated and indestructible, neither receiving into itself anything other from without nor itself going into any other, invisible and otherwise insensible, that which it falls to intellect to investigate. A second is that which has the same name and is like this, sensible, generated, always borne along, coming to be in some place [ἔν τινι τόπῳ] and again perishing from it, apprehended by opinion with sensation. A third kind, again, is space which always is, not admitting corruption, providing a seat [ἕδραν] for for all things that have becoming …" (*Tim*. 52a1–b1). The receptacle, then is the 'place' (τόπος) for the images of forms that constitute sensible things, and is therefore identified as the 'space' (χώρα) in which they occur. Sensible things, unlike the forms 'themselves by themselves' as intelligible ideas, are spatially located. As we have seen, in the *Symposium* (211a5–b2), for example, Plato distinguishes between beauty apprehended "itself by itself" as a unitary intelligible content, and beauty as it appears "in some other," as the beauty *of* this or that particular thing, and therefore as showing up in some location. Likewise, in the *Republic* (476a5–7), we are told that each form is one, but "appearing everywhere," that is, here and there, in

different places, "each appears many." Spatial location is thus an aspect of the differentiation of the appearances from one another and from the form as intellectually apprehended "itself by itself." Consequently, space, as the "seat" or receptacle in which these appearances occur, is a dimension of the status of sensible things as differentiated images, or appearances, of unitary forms.

Plato concludes the *Timaeus* with these words: "Having received and been filled with mortal and immortal living things, thus this cosmos, a visible living thing containing visible ones, image of the intelligible, a sensible God, greatest, best, most beautiful, and most perfect, has come to be, this which is the one only-begotten universe" (*Tim*. 92c5–9). The expression "image of the intelligible" is provocatively ambiguous. Does it mean 'of that which is intelligible, the intelligible in general'? Or 'of the intelligible living thing,' implied by antithesis with "visible living thing?" Or 'of the intelligible God,' implied by antithesis with "sensible God?" The ambiguity is no doubt deliberate, and there is no need to choose among these alternatives. The intelligible in general, intelligible being as a whole, is itself the intelligible living thing, as the content of intellect which is the intelligible God. This, intellect and the intelligible in their togetherness, is the divine reality of which the sensible world is an image. We must note, finally, how intensely positive Plato's evaluation of the sensible cosmos here is. The world as given to the senses is not, indeed, reality itself, but this does not mean that it is nothing, or that it is worthless. Precisely as exhibiting intelligible whatnesses, as an image of true, divine reality, the cosmos is "greatest, best, most beautiful, and most perfect." If we make the mistake—at once ethical, epistemic, and metaphysical, and hence existential—of taking it as ultimate reality, then, indeed, it becomes an idol, blocking our way to the divine. But this is not the world's fault, but our own, for failing to recognize it as an image and so to look beyond it to that which it expresses. Seen as image, the world reflects and presents true, divine being to us, and our experience of it is the starting-point for our psychic ascent to the intellectual apprehension of and union with divine reality, with reality which is the divine, and even "beyond reality" (*Rep*. 509b9) to the good as the source, the enabling condition, of divine reality itself.

CHAPTER THREE

# ARISTOTLE

## 1. *The Principles of Change*

While Plato's metaphysics may be said to begin with the problem of sameness and difference, Aristotle's begins with the phenomenon of change. From the outset, therefore, Aristotle no less than Plato is addressing the heritage of Parmenides, who denied both difference and change to reality. Book A of the *Physics*, in fact, is in large part an explanation, in explicit opposition to the Eleatic philosophers, of how change is possible.

Aristotle observes first that any change must involve a pair of contrary characters or attributes, of which one is present before the change and the other after. If, for example, a thing becomes pale, it must previously have been of some color other than pale. "Pale comes to be from not pale, and not from everything [other than pale], but from dark or what is in between" (*Phys*. A.5, 188a39–b2). In general, "Everything which comes to be comes to be from, and everything which passes away passes away into, its contrary or something between" (*Phys*. A.5, 188b23–25). But the contraries alone, though necessary, are not sufficient to explain change. For in addition to these there must be what Aristotle calls "something underlying" the contraries, (*Phys*. A.5, 189a29; 189b1, 14), that which is characterized by one of the contraries before the change and by the other after the change. There must, for example, be a man who is first dark and then pale, or wood which first is not a house and later is a house. And this is true even in changes where, instead of something gaining or losing an attribute, a complete thing comes into or goes out of existence, as in the generation or death of a living thing: "But that realities[1] too, and the things that simply are, come to be from something underlying, would become clear to one who investigates. For there is always something which underlies, from which what comes to be comes to be, as plants and animals from seed" (*Phys*. A.7, 190b1–5). Likewise, we may add, when a living thing dies it does not simply 'blink out,' but decomposes into something else. Its identity as a

[1] On the use of the term 'reality' to translate οὐσία in Aristotle, see below, 82–83.

living thing is lost, but it material components are not. Any changeable thing must therefore include "something underlying" which, unlike either of the contraries, is present both before and after the change. Otherwise, we would not have a thing undergoing change, but rather one thing being annihilated and another thing coming to be out of nothing. It was precisely because Parmenides interpreted change in this way that he argued that it is impossible, since nothing can neither be nor be thought, and to this extent Aristotle is in agreement with him (*Phys*. A.8, 191a23–33, 191b13–15). But Aristotle explains that change can occur because a thing can come from and go to relative, not absolute, non-being, coming from or going to, not nothing, but something that it previously was not (*Phys*. A.8, 191a33–b17). And this necessarily involves the composition, within the changeable thing, between the character that is gained or lost and the underlying thing that gains or loses it.

Thus, Aristotle concludes, "that which comes to be is always composite" (*Phys*. A.7, 190b10), and "everything comes to be out of the underlying and the shape" (*Phys*. A.7, 190b20–21). Here Aristotle uses the term μορφή, 'shape,' to refer to the character that is gained or lost, but a few lines later (*Phys*. A.7, 190b25, 28) he substitutes the more general term εἶδος, and it is clear that he means not merely 'shape' in a narrow sense but more broadly 'character' or 'identity,' of which shape in the literal sense is only one kind. His first example of a μορφή, in fact, is "the musical" (ἡ μουσικὴ, *Phys*. A.7, 190b29), which is obviously an intelligible attribute rather than a literal shape. For Aristotle as for Plato, then, a changeable thing has 'looks,' that is, intelligible characters in virtue of which the thing is what it is: a house, for instance, rather than just wood; a man, rather than just flesh; a musical man, rather than just a man. Things are not merely what they are made out of, but possess forms, looks, intelligible structures or identities without which they would not be what they are. There is a real difference, for example, beween a table and a heap of wood; but this difference is nothing material. What distinguishes a table from a heap of wood is not an added material ingredient, but a certain shape, a structure, a form, which the table has and the heap lacks. And this form itself, as a structure or pattern, is not a material thing but an intelligible content and in that sense an idea.

But what of the other component, that which underlies the form that is gained or lost? In some cases, as in that of a man becoming musical, this is itself a complete thing: in this case, the man. But in cases where a complete thing comes into or goes out of being, the 'underlying something' is the stuff that the thing is made out of, to which Aristotle gives the name 'matter' (ὕλη). "For as bronze to a statue or wood to a bed or the matter to

anything else of those which have shape and is shapeless before it receives shape, so this stands to reality and the 'this something' and that which is" (*Phys*. A.7, 191a7–12). This is a generic term by which he refers, not to any one reality, but to whatever a given changeable thing is made out of: "Matter is among those things that are relative to something [πρός τι], for there is different matter for a different form" (*Phys*. B.2, 194b9). Thus we may speak of the matter *of* something, as the 'underlying stuff' which can have or lack the form by which the thing is what it is, but never of matter just by itself. "The underlying nature," or matter, "must be known by analogy" (*Phys*. A.7, 191a8), because it is impossible to think, speak, or give an account of 'matter-in-general' apart from any form. The matter of a table, for example, is wood; but wood is not just matter, but has its own formal structure in virtue of which it is wood rather than merely the chemical components that wood is made out of, and which are the matter of wood. And these components in turn have some form, some intelligible identity by which they are what they are, and are made out of some still more basic matter. However deep we look in a thing, we must always find some form, never matter alone. Nothing can be 'just matter,' for it would have no 'look,' no identity, no intelligibility, and so would not be anything at all. Anything is matter, rather than form, only relative to some further form of which it is capable. In the absence of all form, what we find is not pure matter but simply nothing, for in the absence of all form, all idea, all 'look,' there is nothing to be seen, nothing to apprehend, nothing given to the gaze of awareness at all.

At the same time, however, Aristotle also insists that the matter in a thing cannot simply be identified with the lack or privation of form which is one of the pair of contraries. For the matter underlies both the form and the privation, and it survives the change, while the privation is present before and absent after, or absent before and present after. Matter and privation cannot be the same because "that which remains [i.e., matter], is cause together with the form of the things which come to be, as a mother" (*Phys*. A.9, 192a13–15). Thus, Aristotle argues, "We say that matter and privation are different, and one of these—matter—is non-being accidentally, but the other [is non-being] in itself, and the one—matter—is close to and in a way is reality, but the privation in no way" (*Phys*. A.9, 192a3–7). That is, privation is simply the absence, the non-being of a certain intelligible character, while matter in a certain sense is the reality, in that it is the stuff that the thing consists of. Just because, as we have seen, the form is not an additional ingredient, therefore the matter in a way is the whole thing: it is the thing considered in a certain aspect, i.e., without regard to its formal structure. The crucial point of Aristotle's insistence that matter is not merely privation of

form but is a real aspect of all changeable things, is that such things, just in that they are changeable, are not purely intelligible, do not consist of form alone. If they did, they would be nothing but intelligible contents, nothing but ideas, not patterned things but simply patterns, and as such would be changeless. Any thing *has* some form, some 'shape,' some intelligible identity; but in that a thing is changeable, it *is not* simply this identity, but involves an aspect which is not form, not itself idea or intelligible content, and to this aspect of changeable things Aristotle gives the name 'matter.'

Thus, having established the composition, within all changeable things, of form and matter, Aristotle concludes, "Since there is something divine and good and desirable [ὄντος γάρ τινος θείου καὶ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ ἐφετοῦ], we say that one thing [i.e., privation] is opposite to this, but the other [i.e., matter] is by nature such as to desire and yearn for this according to its nature ... But neither is form such as to desire itself (for it is not deficient), nor is the contrary [i.e., the privation], for contraries are destructive of each other. But it is the matter [that desires form], as the female the male and the ugly the beautiful" (*Phys*. A.9, 192a17–24). Here Aristotle characterizes the form in things as "divine and good and desirable." Occurring as it does in this context, where Aristotle has just worked out the basic distinction between form and matter, it is clear that this phrase refers to form in general, the form in anything. As he says elsewhere, "All things by nature have something divine in them" (*Eth. Nic*. Z.7, 1153b33). For Aristotle as for Plato, form is divine in that form by itself is pure idea, purely intelligible, incorporeal, changeless. In changeable things, however, form is precisely not by itself, but in composition with matter. That which is opposed to form is privation, while that which "desires and yearns for" form is matter, which can be said to desire form in that, to the extent that it is not itself form, not intelligible, it needs form as its own completion, for without some form it would not be anything at all.

In all changeable things, then, just in that, *qua* changeable, they are not pure form, there is, so to speak, a residue of unintelligibility. This residue, just as unintelligible, by definition can never be discovered by itself. But it is always there, as an aspect of changeable things which is not form. Aristotle follows Plato in recognizing that what is purely intelligible, pure idea, is changeless, and hence that changeable things are not purely intelligible. Plato, as we have seen, nowhere thematizes 'matter' as a metaphysical concept. He expresses the partial unintelligibility of sensible things by describing them as images or appearances rather than wholly real. In the *Timaeus* (52a1–b1), the 'receptacle' of bodies, which in some respects is clearly the origin of Aristotle's theory of matter, is conceived not as a stuff out of which

they are made but rather as the 'place' or 'space' in which these images come and go. Aristotle, on the other hand, expresses the partial unintelligibility of changeable things by saying that such things are not form alone but composites of form and matter, that which is never itself a 'look' given to apprehension.

## 2. *Nature as Form*

From this understanding of what Aristotle means by 'form' and 'matter,' it follows that, within the changeable thing, matter and form are not equal partners. Rather, form, as intelligible whatness, plays the fundamental role not only in the understanding of the thing but in the thing itself, accounting for its mode of existence, its being what it is and behaving as it does. This is the point of Aristotle's insistence in *Physics* B that form, rather than matter, is the 'nature' (φύσις) of a thing.

At the beginning of *Physics* B, Aristotle defines nature by distinguishing natural things from the products of human art. The latter, he observes, "have no innate [ἔμφυτον] tendency of change" (*Phys*. B.1, 192b19) apart from that of their matter, which is itself a product not of art but of nature. "Natural" things, on the other hand, such as animals, plants, and the elements, "have *in themselves* a principle of motion and rest" (*Phys*. B.1, 192b14). Hence Aristotle concludes that "nature is a certain principle and cause of being in motion and being at rest in that to which it belongs primarily according to itself" (192b21–23). Thus Aristotle uses the term φύσις, originally meaning 'growth,' to refer to whatever it is *within the thing itself* (not imparted *ab extra*) that accounts for its characteristic modes of activity, its being what it is and doing what it does. Now, "some people," Aristotle remarks, think that the nature of a thing is its matter, the stuff it is made out of (*Phys*. B.1, 193a10). But this, he argues, cannot be correct. "We would not say that anything is according to art if it is only potentially a bed and does not yet have the form of the bed, nor that it is art; neither in things constituted by nature [would we say that they are according to nature or are nature], for what is potentially flesh or bone does not yet have its nature [i.e., the nature of flesh or bone] before it receives the form according to the account which we express defining what flesh or bone is, and is not by nature" (*Phys*. B.1, 193a33–b3). The matter of a thing, taken by itself, is only potentially such a thing; that is, it is capable of being such a thing, but, without the form, is not actually the thing and does not perform that thing's characteristic activities. In the case of a bed, wood, considered simply as wood, apart from a certain intelligible structure

or form, is not a bed and cannot do what a bed does, that is, support a recumbent person. If a bed were a natural thing, therefore, that form, not the wood, would be its nature. So too, in the case of a natural things, whatever it is that flesh, for example, is made out of (water, earth, etc.) is not flesh just by itself. To extend the example further for the sake of clarity, flesh in turn, as the matter of an animal, is not an animal just by itself, and conversely, a living animal is not simply flesh, but is flesh ordered according to a certain intelligible structure. In short, the matter of a thing, considered by itself, lacks the 'shape,' the structure, the intelligible unifying identity in virtue of which the thing is not merely so much stuff but is one definite thing of a certain kind. What a thing is made out of does not account for what the thing is. Hence Aristotle concludes that the nature of a thing, that in it which accounts for its being what it is and acting as it does, is not its matter but its form. "So in another way the nature of things that have in themselves a principle of motion would be the shape and the form … And this, rather than matter, is nature" (*Phys*. B.1, 193b3–7).

This primacy of form over matter emerges still more fully from Aristotle's account of how the formal, efficient, and final causes of a thing "often come to one" (*Phys*. B.7, 198a25). The first of these is "the form [εἶδος] and paradigm [παράδειγμα]; this is the account of what it is to be" (*Phys*. B.3, 194b27).[2] The formal cause or form, then, is the whatness, the intelligible identity of a thing, answering the question 'Why?' in the sense of 'What is it about this thing such that it is a thing of this kind rather than some other?' Here Aristotle uses the Platonic term παράδειγμα to refer to the form. Aristotle's forms, no less than Plato's, are 'paradigms,' not in the sense of models cut off from the things whose forms they are, which as we have seen is a misunderstanding of Plato's spatial metaphors, but in that they are not themselves sensible things but intelligible structures or patterns that make things what they are.[3] Many different things are the same in that they

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[2] 'Is' here translates ἦν: the imperfect is best understood not as a past tense but as expressing a continuing or timeless truth. See Mark Shiffman, in Aristotle, *De Anima*, tr. Mark Shiffman (Newburyport, MA: Focus, 2011), 102.

[3] Joseph Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*, 3rd ed., rev. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978), 179–180, notes that in the corresponding passage of *Metaphysics* (A.3, 983a28), Aristotle uses the term οὐσία rather than the Platonic term παράδειγμα, adding, "The change of terminology … may have some significance … The Entity [Owens' translation of οὐσία] of a thing cannot, as is the case with the Platonic archetype, be outside the thing itself." But as we have seen, this is a misunderstanding of what Plato means by 'paradigm.' Hence there is no need to see a change in Aristotle's thought or a rejection of Platonism in this terminological variation. See further below, 86.

exhibit one and the same pattern or 'look:' "That which is already a whole, such-and-such a form in these flesh and bones, is Callias or Socrates; and it is different on account of the matter, for this is different, but the same in form; for the form is indivisible" (*Met*. Z.8, 1034a6–8). At the simplest level, as in the case of an artifact, the formal cause or form of a thing is its shape (μορφή). But at least in the case of natural things, the form is more than this. It is the innate (ἔμφυτον) principle of unity and identity for the thing as a whole, comparable only by analogy to the mere shape of a cup, a statue, or a bed. Form, as intelligible whatness, is as we have seen the thing's nature, its intrinsic mode of being and acting in virtue of which it is what it is, a thing of this kind rather than any other.

The final cause of a thing, in turn, is its 'end' (τέλος), or 'that for the sake of which,' answering the question 'Why?' in the sense of 'What for?' In the *Metaphysics* Aristotle calls this cause "the good" (*Met*. A.3, 983a34), i.e., the good of the thing. Here again we must follow the analogy between art and nature. In the case of an artifact, its final cause is its purpose or function. As its form does not belong intrinsically to it but is imposed *ab extra* by the human craftsman, so too its end is assigned from without. The final cause of a house, for example, is to provide shelter; but this is only because houses are designed and made for this purpose by humans. In the case of a natural thing, on the other hand, the final cause is intrinsic to the thing itself. Its 'function' or 'work' (ἔργον) is not merely what it does for something else, as, for example, plants provide food for animals, for in that case natural things would have no finality and hence no intelligibility within themselves. The function of a natural thing, rather, is its activity as the fulfilment of its nature, its acting as the kind of thing that it is. "The function [ἔργον] is the end [τέλος], and the activity [ἐνέργεια] is the function. Wherefore the word 'activity' is derived from 'function', and directs toward fulfilment [ἐντελέχειαν]" (*Met*. Θ.8, 1050a22–24). In terms that are at once more literal and clearer, the thing's being-at-work (ἐνέργεια), its doing its characteristic work (ἔργον), is its being in-possession-of-its-end (ἐντελέχεια), that is, its completion or fulfilment as the kind of thing that it is.

For this reason Aristotle explains that "the what it is," the formal cause, and "that for the sake of which," the final cause, "are one" (*Phys*. B.7, 198a26; cf. 198b4). The form, the whatness of a thing, is its distinctive way of being. To be a stone, for example, is (among other things) to be heavy, hard, and brittle, and these characteristics can be understood as modes of activity: tending downward, resisting pressure, shattering when struck. To be a plant is to exercise the life-functions of nutrition, growth, and reproduction, and to be a plant of a specific kind is to do these in a specific way. In short,

to be a thing of a certain kind is to do certain activities.[4] Hence the form, the intelligible identity of a thing, is its end or good, not in the sense of an extrinsic purpose but in the sense of fulfilment. A thing is what it is, having and exhibiting its intelligible identity, its characteristic 'look,' just to the extent that it fulfils its nature or is 'in possession of its end.' Thus the form of a thing is the principle of its motion, its behavior and development, in that it is the end, the fulfilment, toward which it tends. Form is "divine and good and desirable" (*Phys*. A.9, 192a17) just as completion or fulfilment, as the unifying whatness that lets a thing be one definite being of a certain kind, rather than merely unintelligible stuff, which by itself, apart from all form, would be nothing. "And since nature is twofold, as matter and as form [μορφή], and the latter is end [τέλος] … this [i.e., nature as form] would be the cause for the sake of which" (*Phys*. B.8, 199a32–33).

From this account it emerges that the efficient or moving cause, too, is one with the formal and final cause. "For what it is and that for the sake of which are one, and that from which the motion first [comes] is the same in form as these; for a man generates a man" (*Phys*. B.7, 198a26–28). As this example indicates, the efficient cause in the sense of the maker or producer of a thing must have in itself the same form, the same 'look' or pattern, that the product will have. In biological procreation, for example, a living thing generates another of the same kind; in craftsmanship, the artisan has in his mind, as an intelligible idea or paradigm, the very form that he will impose on the raw material. The efficient cause can be such a cause only in virtue of the form it possesses, and this form determines what it is the cause of. But further, within the thing itself, the form is the mover, the principle of its activity or behavior. Even in the case of an artifact, its form determines what it does. A cup, for example, holds water because of its shape: the same metal hammered flat or shaped into a sphere would not do so. In a natural thing, the form determines its mode of activity and in that sense is its moving cause. Thus in *On the Soul*, after arguing that the soul is the form, the whatness, of a living thing, and as such is its fulfilment (*De An*. B.1, 412a19–21, 412b13–14), Aristotle explains that "the soul is the cause and principle of the living body. But these are said in many ways, and likewise the soul is a cause in the three ways that have been distinguished; for it is that from which the motion comes, and that for the sake of which, and the soul is the cause as the reality [i.e., the form] of ensouled bodies" (*De An*.

[4] On form as activity see further below, 90.

B.4, 415b9–12). Thus all these causes or modes of explanation—whatness, end, and mover—reduce to form, the intelligible 'look' or pattern in virtue of which a thing is what it is and acts as it does, and so actually is anything at all.

Aristotle's understanding of nature as form draws heavily on the analogy between art and nature, an analogy which is sometimes regarded as illegitimate. Simply because an artifact has not only a raw material but a pattern, a maker, and a purpose, why should we assume that the same is true of natural things? Aristotle himself is aware of this objection: "This raises the problem of why [we should not think] that nature acts, not for the sake of something and because it is better, but as Zeus sends rain, not so that the grain will grow, but by necessity …" (*Phys*. B.8, 198b17). His reply is not only that the regularity of natural phenomena suggests an immanent teleology (*Phys*. B.8, 198b34–199a7), but, more fundamentally, that despite the real difference of nature from art the analogy between them is legitimate: "Thus if a house were among those things which come to be by nature, it would come to be as, now, it does by art; and if the things that are by nature came to be not only by nature but also by art, they would come to be just as they do by nature. One thing is for the sake of another. In general, art either imitates the works of nature or completes those that nature cannot bring to completion. If, then, the things that are by art are for the sake of something, it is clear that so too are those that are by nature" (*Phys*. B.8, 199a12–19). The key point here is that matter cannot of itself account for the structure that it has. In the case of art, for example, wood, simply *qua* wood, does not have what it takes to be a house. But likewise, in the case of natural things, water and earth, simply *qua* water and earth (or, as we might say today, hydrogen, oxygen, carbon, etc.) do not have what it takes to be flesh, and flesh *qua* flesh does not have what it takes to be an animal. Hence, in nature no less than in art, we must distinguish between what a thing is made of and its intelligible structure, the pattern or 'look' that it has. In short, for Aristotle as for Plato, there are *ideas in things*, not only in artifacts but in natural things, in the sense that in any thing there is a content of thought, a 'look' that is given to awareness, an intelligible unifying identity and in that sense an end, a good, a fulfilment that lets the thing be what it is and so be anything at all. Nature is like art, not in every respect, but just in that it manifests ideas. Without such ideas or 'looks,' there would be no intelligibility and hence no being to anything. The analogy of nature to art, and so Aristotle's doctrine of nature as form and as end, is at bottom a statement that the world has some intelligibility and hence some reality, that it is not alien to thought and therefore nothing. It is thus no surprise that this doctrine will

lead to Aristotle's account of pure idea, pure thought itself, as the first principle of all, and of all things as imitating or reflecting this principle. Just in possessing and manifesting some form, some idea, some intelligibility, "all things by nature have something divine in them," (*Eth. Nic*. Z.7, 1153b33) for form itself, as intelligible idea, is "divine and good and desirable" (*Phys*. A.9, 192a17).

## 3. *Reality as Form:* Metaphysics *Z*

Because form is what enables things to be anything at all, Aristotle argues at length in *Metaphysics* Z that being, that which is, in the primary and fundamental sense from which all other senses are derived, is form. He is thus fully in continuity with Plato in identifying reality, οὐσία, as form, εἶδος.

The word 'reality' is chosen here to translate οὐσία for several reasons. First, this was the term used to translate οὐσία in our treatment of Plato, for instance in his account of forms as "the reality of things" (*Phd*. 65d13) and as "really real reality," (*Phdr*. 247c7) and of the good as "beyond reality." (*Rep*. 509b9). As we saw, form for Plato is the reality of things precisely as their intelligible whatness, so that οὐσία could even be glossed as 'whatness,' and we shall find Aristotle using the term οὐσία in just the same way. To translate it differently is thus artificially to introduce a difference between the two philosophers which is not there in the original Greek. Second, the traditional term 'substance' as a translation of οὐσία is hopelessly misleading, especially in modern English where it inevitably connotes matter. Not only is this not what Aristotle means, but it is almost the exact opposite of what he means by οὐσία. Third, we require a term that immediately suggests 'being,' since οὐσία is derived from the participial form of εἶναι, to be. Indeed, the word 'being' would be a good translation of οὐσία, had we not already appropriated this term, as an equivalent of 'that which is,' to translate τὸ ὄν. 'Reality,' although not etymologically connected with 'to be,' is the closest equivalent and carries exactly the right connotation. Fourth, 'reality' in English, like οὐσία in Aristotle's usage, means both 'the quality of realness,' 'that in virtue of which something is real' (as in Plato's phrase "the reality of things," *Phd*. 65d13) and also 'that which is real.' When οὐσία is translated as 'reality,' Aristotle's fundamental question, which is otherwise obscure and demands extensive explication, becomes immediately perspicuous: "That which is sought of old and now and always, and is always problematic, 'what is being [τί τὸ ὄν]?' is this, 'what is reality [τίς ἡ οὐσία]?'" (*Met*. Z.1, 1028b3–4).

For Plato, forms are that which really is, just as the reality, that is, what is "most true" (*Phd.* 65e2) or intelligible, of all things; and as we shall see, Aristotle comes to the same conclusion.

Aristotle begins *Metaphysics* Z by observing that although "being [τὸ ὄν] is said in many ways … it appears that the first of these is the 'what,' which signifies the reality [οὐσία]" (*Met.* Z.1, 1028a10). Already, then, Aristotle is equating being with whatness and this in turn with reality. As in Plato, the whatness of a thing is its reality, as the intelligible identity that lets it be anything and so be at all. Aristotle then remarks that rather than what is signified by predicates such as 'to walk' and 'to sit' and 'to be healthy,' "rather that which walks and is seated and is healthy is some among beings [τῶν ὄντων τι]," and that "these appear rather to be beings [ὄντα] because there is something definite underlying them; and this is the reality and the particular" (*Met.* Z.1, 1028a20–27). Here the particular thing, rather than its whatness, is the being (ὄν) and the reality (οὐσία); but if this is so, it is only in virtue of its form or whatness: "And we judge that we know [εἰδέναι, cognate with εἶδος, form] each thing most, when we know what it is" (*Met.* Z.1, 1027a37–39). There is an ambiguity, then, as to whether that which is (τὸ ὄν), that is, reality (οὐσία), is the particular thing or its whatness. Hence it is at this point that Aristotle raises the question, "What is that which is, that is, what is reality?" (*Met.* Z.1, 1028b3–4).

Having identified reality as 'the underlying thing' that supports various accidental features such as 'walking' or 'being healthy,' Aristotle asks in Z.3 what this underlying thing is, introducing three candidates: "In a certain way it [i.e., that which underlies] is said to be matter, in another way the shape [μορφή], in a third that which is from these; by the matter I mean, for instance, bronze, by shape the arrangement of the form [τὸ σχῆμα τῆς ἰδέας], and by that which is from these, the statue, the whole-together [τὸ σύνολον]" (*Met.* Z.3, 1029a2–6). He then adds, "Therefore if the form is prior to the matter and more being [μᾶλλον ὄν],[5] it is also prior to that which is from both for the same reason" (*Met.* Z.3, 1029a6–8). Aristotle will conclude that this is in fact the case: form is prior to and is more being, more that-which-is, not only than matter, but than the composite of matter and form. At this point he gives no explanation of why this is so, but as we continue we shall see that it is because form is what is intelligible in things.

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[5] Since μᾶλλον can mean either 'more' or 'rather,' it is not clear whether Aristotle is saying that the form is being *more* than the matter is being, or that the form, *rather than* the matter, is being.

Aristotle then modifies the claim that 'the underlying thing' is reality. For as he says, if this is so, "matter will become reality" (*Met*. Z.3, 1029a11). As we have seen, matter underlies all structure, features, and characteristics whatsoever, so that

> when other things are taken away, it appears that nothing [i.e., nothing but matter] remains … I mean by matter that which in itself [καθ' αὑτὴν] is neither something [μήτε τι] nor any quality nor anything else which is said among the things by which being [τὸ ὄν] is defined. For there is something about which each of these is predicated, whose existence [τὸ εἶναι] too is different from each of the predicates; for the other things are predicated of the reality, and this of the matter. Thus the ultimate [underlying thing] in itself is neither something, nor a quantity, nor anything else. (*Met*. Z.3, 1029a12–13, 20–25)

But for this very reason, Aristotle argues, matter cannot be reality: "But this is impossible; for it seems that to be separable and to be some 'this' [τόδε τι] belong most of all to reality" (*Met*. Z.3, 1029a28–29). Matter cannot be reality because matter cannot exist by itself, without form, in that matter, considered by itself (καθ' αὑτὴν) as underlying all formal characters whatsoever, is not any 'this,' that is, has no identity, no intelligibility, and so is not anything.

Hence Aristotle concludes that of the three candidates, "the form and that which is from both would seem to be reality more [or, rather] than the matter." (*Met*. Z.3, 1029a29–30). Matter having been ruled out, only two candidates remain: form, and the compound of form and matter. Here we have arrived at the very crossroads of Aristotle's metaphysics. For Plato, the reality of things is form, as that which is "most true" (*Phd*. 65d13–e2) of them. We might expect Aristotle, on the other hand, to argue that it is the compound of form and matter, the thing as a whole, that is the reality. Would this not be Aristotle the hylomorphist, for whom, in contrast to Plato's 'idealism' and 'otherworldliness,' the real is neither form alone nor matter alone, but always and only both together? We may think once again of Raphael's *School of Athens*, where Aristotle spreads out his hand horizontally in opposition to Plato's upward gesture. But Aristotle does not take this road. Instead, he now declares that of the remaining two candidates, "the reality which is from both, I mean out of matter and shape, is to be dismissed, for it is posterior and obvious." (*Met*. Z.3, 1029a30–32). Just has he has already suggested at 1029a6–8, the composite of matter and form is not primary but is posterior to form, "the third" candidate (*Met*. Z.3, 1029a33), which now turns out to be, in reality, first.[6]

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[6] In the *Categories* (5, 2a11–13), Aristotle identifies the particular thing, e.g., this man or

If the composite is posterior to the form, this can only be because it includes matter, which is just to say that it is less than fully intelligible. It has and displays an intelligible identity, and hence is not nothing and is 'some this,' but, in that it is subject to change, it is not nothing but that identity, not pure intelligible content, not pure idea. Form alone is more being (ὄν) than the composite, and is more reality (οὐσία), reality in the primary sense, just in that it is purely intelligible. Aristotle thus follows Plato in 'demoting' the sensible, changeable thing, the composite of form and matter, from the rank of fundamental reality: it is less real, less a being, than pure form, precisely because, in that it is sensible and changeable, it is less than completely intelligible.[7] As in Plato, this is not to say that it is altogether unreal. Rather, it is real just in that it has some intelligible identity. But for that very reason, the reality of it is that identity, or form. Thus Aristotle continues, "It is agreed that there are some realities among sensible things, so that we must first seek among these. For it is useful to proceed toward what is more knowable. For learning comes to be thus for all, through the things that are less knowable by nature to those that are more knowable. And this is the task …, from the things which are more knowable to oneself, to make the things which are knowable by nature knowable to oneself" (*Met.* Z.3, 1029a35–b8). If the sensible things with which we begin are by nature "less knowable" than something else, the latter can only be pure form, which as nothing but idea is purely knowable, purely intelligible, in itself. He then continues, "But the things which are knowable and primary to some people are often scarcely knowable and *have little or nothing of being* [μικρὸν ἢ οὐθὲν ἔχει τοῦ ὄντος]. But nonetheless, one must try, from the things that are barely knowable but known to oneself, to know the things that are completely knowable, proceeding, as was said, from the former things themselves" (*Met.* Z.3, 1029b8–13). Here in two sentences Aristotle distills

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this horse, as 'primary reality' on the ground that it underlies the various accidents that are predicated of it. The question of how this is to be related to the identification of form as primary reality in the *Metaphysics* is one of the most vexed issues in the interpretation of Aristotle. This need not be seen as a contradiction, or even as a case of 'development.' The *Categories*, as its title indicates, is a treatise on *predication*. For that purpose, the particular thing, corresponding to the subject of a sentence, is the 'primary reality.' But when that thing is understood in metaphysical terms as a composite of form and matter, we discover that the form, as intelligible whatness, is the reality of it, and thus is reality in the primary sense. We should note that in *Metaphysics* Z.3 Aristotle has expressly said that the understanding of reality as 'the underlying thing' is in need of qualification. On the relation between *Categories* and *Metaphysics* see Walter E. Wehrle, *The Myth of Aristotle's Development and the Betrayal of Metaphysics* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).

[7] Cf. Gerson, *Aristotle*, 193–195 and 193 n. 84.

the entire metaphysical and gnoseological import (although not the cultural and ethical aspects) of Plato's cave: we begin with sensible things, which, like the shadows on the cave wall, are "scarcely knowable" and "have little … being" but are what is "true" (*Rep*. 515c2) and "clear" (*Rep*. 515e4) to the prisoners (who are "like us," *Rep*. 515a5), what is given to and so counts as reality for them. From these we proceed to what is "more knowable" in itself or "by nature," and by implication more fully is, or is real. And this is the "third" candidate, neither matter nor the composite but form alone, or, as Plato would say and Aristotle will say, "itself by itself" (*Met*. Z.11, 1037a2).

Aristotle's arguments against the supposedly Platonic 'ideas,' then, are best understood not as a repudiation of the fundamentals of Plato's metaphysics of being-as-form, but rather as a rejection of the 'two-world' Platonism which, as we have seen, was never Plato's. The conclusion he draws from such arguments is, "It is clear that there are not forms of [sensible] things *in the way in which* some say" (*Met*. Z.14, 1039b19). Thus, for example, the paradigms that Aristotle rejects (e.g., *Met*. A.9, 991a21–b1; Z.8, 1034a2–5; M.5, 1079b25–35) are paradigms understood as models of which sensible things are copies, rather than as the very intelligible patterns *of* sensible things, and Aristotle himself occasionally refers to forms as paradigms in the latter sense (*Phys*. B.3, 194b27). Similarly, Aristotle argues that if forms are separate then they cannot be the reality of things, and conversely that if they are the reality of things then they cannot be separate (*Met*. A.9, 991a11–14, 991b2–3; M.5, 1079b16–18). But for Plato, forms, just as the reality of things (*Phd*. 65d13), are 'separate' not in the sense criticized by Aristotle of being another set of things reduplicating the sensible, but rather in that, as intelligible identities, they are distinct from and, *qua* conditioning rather than conditioned, ontologically prior to the sensible things whose identities they are, a position to which Aristotle has no objection and which, as we are now seeing, he indeed endorses. Aristotle's identification of reality as form is thus more authentically Platonic than the 'two-world Platonism' that he rejects.[8]

[8] The fundamentally Platonic character of Aristotle's identification of reality as form has often been noted, and in various ways explained away, dismissed, or simply deplored by anti-Platonic Aristotelians. Thus, for example, Daniel Graham, *Aristotle's Two Systems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 288, calls it "an unnecessary and damaging concession to Platonism." The tendentious wording merely reflects Graham's own anti-Platonic bias; we could as well call it "a necessary and constructive affirmation of Platonism." Graham, like many others, would like Aristotle to identify the hylomorphic composite as primary reality (275–278); but since, as he admits (276), Aristotle "never seriously considers" this, we can scarcely call such a position 'Aristotelian.'

The subsequent chapters of *Metaphysics* Z point to the same conclusion. Chapter four turns to a discussion of what is usually termed the 'essence' of things, another traditional translation which is more confusing than helpful. The phrase translated as 'essence' is τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι, literally 'the-what-(it)-is-to-be.'[9] The key term here is τί, 'what:' the 'essence' of a thing is what it is to be such a thing, that which we have been calling 'whatness,' the intelligible identity by which the thing is what it is. As Aristotle says later, the essence of a thing is that which is expressed by a definition: "The definition is the account [λόγος] of the what-it-is-to-be." (*Met.* Z.5, 1031a13). And this, as we saw in the *Physics*, is the form or formal cause of the thing (*Phys.* B.3, 194b28). By 'what a thing is,' then, Aristotle means not the thing itself, as a form-matter composite, but its intelligible identity or whatness, that is, its form. And this, according to Aristotle, is the reality of the thing: "The what-it-is-to-be is said to be the reality of each thing" (*Met.* Z.6, 1031a18). This is so close to *Phaedo* 65d13–e1, where Plato refers to the forms as "the reality of all things, what each thing is," that we may wonder if Aristotle's "is said" is in fact a direct reference to Plato. The likeness is obscured only by the unfortunate convention of translating the same terms differently in the two philosophers. For Aristotle too, since the 'essence' or whatness of a thing is its form, form is the reality of all things just as that which is intelligible in them. "By form I mean the what-it-is-to-be and primary reality of each thing" (*Met.* Z.7, 1032b2), and again, "I call reality without matter the what-it-is-to-be" (*Met.* Z.7, 1032b15).

Reality, then, as intelligible identity, can be with or without matter. Without matter, it is 'essence,' that is, pure whatness or idea, pure intelligible content. Matter, as unintelligible, is thus not strictly speaking part of or included in reality, for if it were, the essence, which as just whatness excludes matter, could not be the reality of the thing. Reality *per se*, as that which is intelligible, is form. But reality can be, so to speak, diluted with matter, which is not itself reality any more than water added to wine is itself wine. Pure reality would be form alone, as that which is purely intelligible. The composite of form and matter, then, is a 'diluted' reality in that it is not pure idea, not purely intelligible: it is less real, less a being, than form alone, as we saw Aristotle indicating in chapter three.

In chapter ten, Aristotle returns to the original three candidates for reality, remarking that each of the three is somehow reality (*Met.* Z.10, 1035a1–3). Since form alone has been identified as reality and as "primary reality" (*Met.*

[9] For the use of the present tense in translating this phrase see above, 78 n. 2.

Z.7, 1032b2), this must be understood in terms of Aristotle's statement that "being is said in many ways" (*Met.* Z.1, 1028a10) and his account of what is customarily called πρὸς ἕν equivocity. In this kind of non-univocal predication, a term may be used in different senses, all of which are related to one primary or 'focal' sense (*Met.* Z.4, 1030a32–b3). In the case of the term 'reality' (οὐσία), it follows from what we have seen that form alone, as purely intelligible, is the primary and focal meaning; the composite is called a reality in that it has some form; matter, then, may be called reality through its inclusion in the composite, as that which underlies form. The composite, therefore, is reality not in the primary sense but only in a secondary, subordinate, and derivative sense, in that it has some intelligible identity but is not itself that identity, while matter is reality in a still more subordinate, tertiary sense. Since not the composite but the form is reality in the primary and fundamental sense, the matter in changeable things is a lessening, a diminution of intelligibility and therefore of reality. As Aristotle says, "There is some matter in everything which is not what-it-is-to-be and form itself by itself [αὐτὸ καθ' αὑτὸ] but some 'this'" (*Met.* Z.11, 1037a1–3). Here Aristotle adopts one of Plato's favorite expressions, "itself by itself," to refer to form as pure intelligible whatness or idea.[10] Thus "in the account of the reality the parts as matter will not be present" (*Met.* Z.11, 1037a24–25). "The reality is the form that is within [τὸ εἶδος τὸ ἐνόν], from which, and the matter, the whole-together is called reality" (*Met.* Z.11, 1037a28–30), and "by primary [reality] I mean what is not said to be something in something else [ἄλλο ἐν ἄλλῳ], in something underlying as matter" (*Met.* Z.11, 1037b3–5).

The last chapter of *Metaphysics* Z begins thus: "Let us say again what and what sort of thing reality is, making as it were another beginning; for perhaps from this it will be clear also concerning whatever realities are separated from sensible realities" (*Met.* Z.17, 1041a7–9). This is clearly a reference ahead to the discussion in Book Λ of the unmoved mover or movers, the divine beings who are forms not in any matter. Because form, as intelligible, is reality, matter cannot exist in separation from form, but, as Aristotle clearly indicates, form can exist in separation from matter.[11] Here again, therefore,

[10] Here again, the continuity between Plato and Aristotle is obscured by the convention of translating the same phrase differently in the two philosophers, or rather by not translating but glossing it with other expressions when it occurs in Aristotle.

[11] The supposition that 'separate forms' are somehow un-Aristotelian reflects not only a preconceived anti-Platonism and a disregard for the text of Aristotle, but also a failure to understand Aristotle's doctrine of form as intelligible content and as activity, such that form without matter just is at once act-of-thinking and that-which-is-thought.

we find the ascent from what is most intelligible to us but least intelligible in itself, to that which is most intelligible in itself, which is pure form and pure reality. "Reality," as Aristotle then says, is "a principle and cause" (*Met.* Z.17, 1041a10), and as we have seen the fundamental principle and cause of anything is form. "One might investigate why man is such-and-such an animal" (*Met.* Z.17, 1041a21), or again, "why these things [i.e., these materials] are a house" (*Met.* Z.17, 1041b6). He answers, "Because what it is to be for a house is there. And why is this a man, or why is this body such? So we will seek the cause—and this is the form—by which the matter is something; and this is the reality" (*Met.* Z.17, 1041b6–9). The form or whatness of a thing, then, is its reality. Form, not matter, makes a thing what it is and is therefore its "cause of being" (*Met.* Z.17, 1041b28), enabling it to be anything, to have any reality at all. Any thing is, or is real, only insofar as it has some form. Hence form "itself by itself" (*Met.* Z.11, 1037a2) is primary reality and that on which all less-than-primary reality depends.

### 4. *The Priority of Act*

Aristotle's understanding of changeable things in terms of potentiality and actuality, too, leads to the primacy of pure intelligible idea as the cause of all lesser actualities. Potentiality in the passive sense, the ability of a thing to be acted on and so changed (*Met.* Θ.1, 1046a11–14) is closely connected with matter (*Met.* Θ.1, 1046a23–25), as that which is able either to have or to lack a given form. "All things that come to be by nature or art have matter; for each of them is able both to be and not to be, and this is the matter in each" (*Met.* Z.7, 1032a20–22). Wood, for instance, is "able both to be and not to be" a house, or bronze a statue. In the case of art, the matter receives the form from outside itself through being acted on by the artisan. Nature differs from art precisely in that the principle of actualization by which a thing is moved from potentiality to actuality—a seed, for example, becoming a full-grown plant—is intrinsic to the thing itself. Such natural development, in that it does not involve the seed being worked on from outside as, say, bronze is turned into a statue, implies that the form, the fulfilment toward which the thing is moving, must somehow already be present in the potential thing, e.g., the seed, to move and direct its development. If this were not so, there would be no intelligible cause for the thing's developing as it does, nothing to explain, for example, why an acorn grows into an oak tree rather than into a maple or a cedar, or indeed into a dog or a man. The form is present in the seed, not as its own 'shape' or structure, for it does not yet display

that structure, but rather, therefore, as a paradigm, a pattern. The intelligible content which will be the structure of the completed whole must already somehow be in the seed to account for its developing as it does. This pattern, the final cause or fulfilment toward which the thing is moving, directs the process of becoming from within, in a way analogous to that in which an idea in the artist's mind directs the making of a statue from without. Hence, as Aristotle indicates, the end is the beginning in the sense that the τέλος, the fulfilment of a thing, is the ἀρχή, the moving principle that directs its development. "Everything that comes to be proceeds toward a principle [ἀρχὴν] which is also an end [τέλος]; for the principle is that for the sake of which, and becoming is for the sake of the end. But the end is the activity [ἐνέργεια], and the potentiality is acquired for the sake of this" (*Met.* Θ.8, 1050a7–10).

Form, therefore, as intelligible pattern, is not merely structure or identity in a static sense, but, as Aristotle indicates, activity or 'energy' (ἐνέργεια), the driving and directing force that moves things from potentiality to fulfilment. It is ironic that Aristotle should often be charged with a theory of 'static' forms, when in fact he gave us the very word 'energy' in an effort to explain what he means by form.[12] In nature as in art, it is idea or pattern, which as fulfilment is the end toward which the process is directed, that drives the entire process of coming-to-be. In art, it is the idea in the artisan's mind that does this; in nature, it is the idea, the intelligible identity, intrinsic to the natural thing although not yet fully realized as its structure, that does so. But once again, if development were not moved by idea, by intelligible pattern, in nature as in art, then the world at large would have no intelligibility and therefore no reality.

For this reason Aristotle insists on the priority of actuality, that is, of form-as-activity, over potentiality: "To all such [potentiality] actuality [ἐνέργεια]

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[12] Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Being* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 29–30, remarks that "[t]he notion of *form*" has been explained "by reference to the Aristotelian system of categories, substantial forms being what corresponded in reality to true predicates in the first category, and accidental forms being what corresponded to true predicates in the remaining nine categories." This is an utterly inadequate account of what Aristotle (or Aquinas) means by 'form.' Even forms such as 'musical' or 'pale,' in that they are modes of being, must be understood as activities, not merely as "what correspond to predicates," and such an account scarcely even begins to apply to forms such as the souls of living things, still less to the pure, immaterial activity that is an unmoved mover or God. Not surprisingly, Kenny continues, "But it is hard to see how the notion of pure form can be explained by reference to predication." Since Aristotle clearly recognizes such pure forms, or 'separate realities,' the understanding of form merely in terms of predication must be abandoned in favor of an understanding in terms of 'energy' or activity.

is prior in account and in reality; and in time it is [prior] in one way, and in another not" (*Met.* Θ.8, 1049b11–13). Actuality is prior in account, in that the potential is defined in terms of the actuality to which it is relative. With regard to time, "That which is actual [ἐνεργοῦν, literally 'at work'] is prior in form, but not in number" (*Met.* Θ.8, 1049b18–19). That which is potential, e.g., a seed, can become actual only by being moved by a form that is already actual. In art, this is the idea in the mind of the artist. In nature, it is the form in a prior actual member of the same species or thing of the same kind: "To this man who already is in actuality and to this grain and to this seeing, prior in time is the matter and the seed and what is capable of seeing, which are potentially man and grain and seeing, but not yet in actuality. But prior in time to these are other beings in actuality, from which these come to be. For, always, that which is in actuality comes to be from that which is in potentiality by that which is in actuality, as man from man, the musical from the musical …" (*Met.* Θ.8, 1049b20–26). As we have seen, matter cannot account for its own coming to have form. Hence, if matter is to receive some form, if the potential is to become actual, the form that it is going to receive must already exist. Otherwise, there would be no explanation for the thing's developing as it does, and so the intelligibility of the natural world would be lost. Finally, actuality is prior "in reality" (οὐσίᾳ, *Met.* Θ.8, 1049b12, 1050a4) in that actuality, or fulfilment, is form, and form, more than matter, is reality. "It is clear that the reality and the form is actuality. And on this account it is clear that actuality is prior in reality to potentiality …" (*Met.* Θ.8, 1050b2–4). In short, all the respects in which actuality is prior to potentiality—in formula, in time, and in reality—are various aspects of the principle that idea or pattern, as that which is intelligible, is the fundamental causal and explanatory principle of all things, which is itself a development of the ultimately Parmenidean understanding that all things exist, or are beings, just insofar as they have some intelligibility.

## 5. *The Unmoved Mover*

Aristotle's doctrine of the priority of actuality thus leads directly to his account of the divine first principle on which depend "the universe and nature" (*Met.* Λ.7, 1072b14), that is, the entire sensible cosmos. All change, all development, all actualization, requires a cause which must itself already be actual. Even the rotation of the celestial spheres, which involves no coming-to-be but is merely motion in place, and which on Aristotle's theory accounts for generation and corruption in the sublunar realm, is the

actualization of a potentiality (*Met.* Λ.7, 1072b4–7), and so must have a cause. Ultimately, therefore, we must arrive at a cause of motion, of actualization, of the 'life' of the universe as a whole, and this cause must itself be unmoved, that is, changeless. Such a cause is therefore pure actuality, for if it included within itself any potentiality, we would have to look for a further cause of its actualization. Thus, "Since that which is moved and moves [i.e., causes other things to move] is intermediate, there is a mover which, not being moved, moves [i.e., causes other things to move], being eternal and reality and actuality [ἀίδιον καὶ οὐσία καὶ ἐνέργεια]" (*Met.* Λ.7, 1072a24–26).

These three characteristics are in fact three aspects of the same fundamental point. 'Eternal,' here, clearly means 'changeless:' "Since there is something which moves, itself being unmoved, being in actuality, this in no way receives being otherwise" (*Met.* Λ.7, 1072b7–9). Likewise, in that it has no potentiality, this mover is therefore actuality itself, pure actuality, nothing but actuality: "There must, then, be such a principle of which the reality is actuality" (*Met.* Λ.6, 1071b20). And as pure actuality, it is pure form, idea, intelligible content, with no matter, and so is reality itself: "The first what-it-is-to-be does not have matter, for it is fulfilment" (*Met.* Λ.8, 1074a36–37). We saw in *Metaphysics* Z that composites of form and matter are posterior to and less real, less beings, than form alone, and that reality in the primary sense is form, or whatness, as that which is intelligible *per se*. Consequently, an unmoved mover, as pure form, pure whatness or idea, is therefore pure reality, that which in itself is "completely knowable" (*Met.* Z.3, 1029b12) and so completely being. As such, an unmoved mover is reality in the primary sense, and anything else is a reality in a lesser or secondary sense, just insofar as it has some share of what an unmoved mover is purely, that is, form, whatness, idea. We proceed from sensible things, which are not nothing but are realities just to the extent that they have some form, some intelligibility, to the unmoved movers, which are nothing but form, purely intelligible, and hence pure reality.

In that this is a purely intelligible, immaterial, eternal principle of all actualization, Aristotle refers to this as "God" (*Met.* Λ.7, 1072b25–31). Here, then, we find the same threefold identity that we saw in Plato: reality = form = divinity. The crucial point, in terms of Aristotle's metaphysics, is not that the unmoved mover is 'God' in a monotheistic sense, but that reality, as changeless intelligible idea, is divinity.[13] We can now see just why, according

[13] Θεός in non-Christian Greek is a predicate term, not a proper name. See Owens, *Doctrine of Being*, 171 n. 47: "There is no need to see any indication of monotheism in Aristotle's

to Aristotle, "all things by nature have something divine in them" (*Eth. Nic.* Z.7, 1153b33), in that form in general, the form in anything, is divine (*Phys.* A.9, 192a17): pure form is what this God is, and therefore the form, the intelligible content, the aspect of idea in anything, is that thing's share of what the unmoved mover is purely, solely, exclusively. The reality *of things*, which is the form in them, is their share in divinity; reality in its purity, "itself by itself," just is the divine.

The unmoved mover causes motion, that is, actualization of potentiality, just as pure form or idea, just as intelligible content: "It moves [i.e. causes others to move] in this way: the desirable and the intelligible move without being moved. The primaries of these are the same" (*Met.* Λ.7, 1072a26–27). Whether in art or in nature, as we have seen, form, that is, intelligible pattern or idea, is "desirable" as end, as fulfilment, and as such is what drives and directs any process of actualization. That-for-the-sake-of-which, form as fulfilment, "moves [i.e., causes motion] as loved [ἐρώμενον]" (*Met.* Λ.7, 1072b3–4). The unmoved mover, as form without matter, is fulfilment (*Met.* Λ.8, 1074a36–37), and thus moves other things by being in this sense "loved." Here Aristotle uses the Platonic language of ἔρως to express the desirability of form as the divine. All things, then, in tending toward their own actualization, their own fulfilment, are tending toward divinity, realizing form in their own greater and lesser ways.[14] The form in anything is "divine and good and desirable" (*Phys.* A.9, 192a17): the form which is the reality of anything is its limited, imperfect share of what the unmoved mover is purely and perfectly, that is, idea. In this way all things, in having some form, some whatness, and so in having any reality at all, are imitating or reflecting the divine which is

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use of the definite article with 'god.' The usage is the same with 'the wise man' … 'The wise man' does not imply in any way that there is only one such individual. 'The god' similarly means any one possessing divine nature." Cf. Richard Bodéüs, *Aristotle and the Theology of the Living Immortals*, tr. Jan Garrett (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 4: "Θεός in the singular can refer to any one god in the class of gods … However, most often, it refers to the god in general, that is, collectively or generically, the individual beings that can be subsumed under the common idea …: the god, like the human being or the horse, is a species of living beings …"

[14] Cf. Jonathan Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 295–296: "[F]orm or primary substance at its highest-level actuality simply is God. And the desire which God inspires is *none other than the desire of each organism to realize its form*. Each natural organism has within it a desire to do those things necessary to realizing and maintaining its form. This desire is part of the organism's form or nature itself: form is a force in the organism for the realization and maintenance of form … [F]rom a metaphysical perspective, one can see that in trying to realize its form, the organism is doing all that it can do to become intelligible. It is also doing the best job it can do it imitate God's thought—and thus to imitate God himself" (italics in original).

pure form, pure whatness, and so pure reality. It is thus just as intelligible idea or pattern that the divine is the cause of all motion, all actualization.

But Aristotle's divinity is not only intelligible content or form but also thought itself, the act-of-intellection. Here we find, perhaps more explicitly although with less graphic imagery, the togetherness or coinciding of thought and being that we discovered in Plato. "Thought thinks itself by participation in the intelligible; for it becomes intelligible in touching and thinking, so that intellect and the intelligible are the same; for intellect is what is receptive of the intelligible, that is, of reality [τοῦ νοητοῦ καὶ τῆς οὐσίας]. And it is in act in possessing" (*Met.* Λ.7, 1072b20–23). We should note here the Platonic equation of the intelligible, τοῦ νοητοῦ, with reality, τῆς οὐσίας. Form in things is the aspect of idea in them, the community between thought and things, the content of things which is also a content of thought. The very notion that 'things have forms' is an affirmation of this community. But if form in things is the aspect of idea, of thought-content, in them, then form "itself by itself" (*Met.* Z.11, 1037a2), without matter, as pure idea, just is thought itself. Intellectual apprehension, or knowledge, is idea, the intelligible content or reality of things, without matter.[15] But this is exactly what the unmoved mover is: idea, intelligible content, reality without the dilution of matter. As such he is knowledge itself. This is what Aristotle means by saying that the unmoved mover is νοῦς, intellect, or more precisely νόησις, act-of-intellection. In the case of other things, matter is precisely the difference between thought and thing: it is the non-intelligible, non-idea aspect of the thing, that in the thing which is not given to thought. But where the thing itself is nothing but idea, there is no difference between thought and thing: the thing itself, as pure idea, is thought. "In some cases the knowledge is the thing … Since, then, that which is thought and the intellect [τοῦ νοουμένου καὶ τοῦ νοῦ] are not different with regard to things that do not have matter, they will be the same, and the thinking [ἡ νόησις] will be one with that which is thought [τῷ νοουμένῳ]" (*Met.* Λ.9, 1075a1–5).[16] Just as idea, the unmoved mover is at once content of thought and act of thinking. Thus he is

[15] Cf. Owens, 444 n. 29: "The doctrine of the soul, as developed in the *De Anima*, shows that to know means to have a form without matter. Sensation consists in the reception of sensible forms without their matter … Mind is related to the knowable in proportionally the same way … A form without matter is already something knowing. It is a mind."

[16] In Aristotle as in Plato (see above, 47 n. 23), it is inappropriate to translate νοούμενον as "object of thought." Indeed, if 'object,' like German *Gegenstand*, means 'that which stands over against,' then it means almost the exact opposite of what Aristotle intends: that which is thought or known does *not* stand over against but rather is one with the thinking or knowing.

knowledge or thought itself, not 'thinking' in the sense of coming-to-know, but sheer apprehension-of-reality, that is, of form, which is one with that which is apprehended. Aristotle's unmoved mover is changeless, therefore, not in the sense of being inert, but, on the contrary, as pure activity (ἐνέργεια) with no passivity or potentiality and hence as unaffected by anything. As pure activity, he is not lifeless but life itself (*Met.* Λ.7, 1072b27–31). Like Plato, Aristotle understands pure intellectual apprehension, what Plato called the "motion of intellect" (*Laws* 897d3), as a life-activity that involves no change over time.

Hence Aristotle argues not only that the unmoved mover is thought, that is, act-of-thinking, but that he is "thought thinking itself," "the thinking of thinking" (*Met.* Λ.9, 1074b34–35). For if divine thinking were to think anything other than itself, then it would be lesser than that which it thinks and potential in relation to it: the divine thinking would be made to be what it is by that which it thinks (*Met.* Λ.9, 1074b18–20). Consequently, as pure actuality with no potentiality, it can only be the thinking of itself, that is, of thinking (*Met.* Λ.9, 1074b33–35). But this should not be taken to mean that divine thinking is 'empty,' devoid of content.[17] On the contrary, Aristotle specifically insists that it must have content: "If it thinks nothing, what would be its dignity?" (*Met.* Λ.9, 1074b18). His point in insisting that the unmoved mover thinks only himself is not that he thinks nothing, but that what he thinks is not other than or extrinsic to himself.[18] As Aristotle observes, the notion that if the divine thinking thinks only itself then it is empty erroneously applies the model of sense-perception to thinking, presupposing that what is thought must be extrinsic to the thinking just as what is sensed is extrinsic to the sensing: "But it appears that knowledge and sensation and opinion and understanding are always of another, and of itself only as a by-product … For it is not the same to be an act-of-thinking and to be that which is thought" (*Met.* Λ.9, 1074b36–75a1) This is not Aristotle's own position, but an objection to which he will reply: "Rather, in some cases the knowledge is the thing." In what cases? "Since, then, that which is thought and the intellect [τοῦ νοουμένου καὶ τοῦ νοῦ] are not different with regard to things that do not have matter, they will be the same, and the thinking [ἡ νόησις] will be one with that which is thought [τῷ νοουμένῳ]" (*Met.* Λ.9,

[17] Cf. Owens, *Doctrine of Being*, 458–459 n. 23: "Matter as such has no intelligible content whatsoever. The whole 'content' is the form. It is therefore meaningless to ask what the Aristotelian 'self-thinking' is about, on the ground that it is deprived of sensible reference."

[18] Cf. Gerson, *Aristotle*, 198.

1075a1–5). In the case of material things, matter is the difference, the element of externality, between cognition and that which is cognized. But where the latter is nothing but idea, there is no such externality. To say that the divine thinking thinks itself, therefore, is to say that it is the thinking, not of nothing, but of intelligible reality (*Met.* Λ.7, 1072b22), form without matter. As "the thinking of thinking" (*Met.* Λ.9, 1074b34–35), divine intellection is the apprehension of the intelligible content of things, that is, reality itself, with no admixture of unintelligibility, of unreality, of matter. Since the unmoved mover is knowledge itself, he just is the formal, intelligible content of the world without matter, and this is what he knows in knowing himself.[19]

Thus, as in Plato, we may add a fourth term to the threefold equation of reality, form, and divinity: thought itself (νοῦς or, more precisely, νόησις) is form without matter, and thus is reality and divinity. All things are to some degree intelligible or knowable, not alien to thought but having and displaying ideas, in that they imitate, reflect, and strive toward thought, knowledge, idea itself.[20] Thought or knowledge itself, as pure idea, is the

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[19] Cf. Charles Kahn, "On the Intended Interpretation of Aristotle's Metaphysics," in *Aristoteles Werk und Wirkung*, vol. 1, *Aristoteles und seine Schule*, ed. Jürgen Wiesner (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1985), 326: "Essences considered apart from matter are ungenerated and imperishable … Taken as immaterial and delineated by their universal definition, such essences are fully intelligible (*noēta*) … They also, on my reading of Λ 9, provide the content for the noetic act of the divine Intellect." Kahn adds (327 n. 24), "The more completely a human being engages in noetic contemplation, the more fully he grasps the formal structure of the cosmos. If the divine represents the goal to which human thought at its best aspires, surely the divine must grasp the *whole* of this structure rather than *none* of it! … Reflexion must be reflexion *on* something which is not itself reflexion … Hence *nous* is determined or defined by the essences which are its objects … The counter-objection, that the divine mind would be less perfect if it knew anything *other* than itself, is spurious, just because in actual *noēsis* the knowing subject is *identical* with its object. Drastically put, the Prime Mover is simply the formal-noetic structure of the cosmos *as conscious of itself*" (italics in original). See also Thomas de Koninck, "Aristotle on God as Thought Thinking Itself," *Review of Metaphysics* 47 (1994), 471–515.

[20] Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Metaphysics: From Parmenides to Levinas*, tr. Lukas Soderstrom (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 66, reaches the "startling conclusion" that "although he never ceased stigmatizing Plato's ideas for their *chorismos* or being-separate, Aristotle turns out to be the real philosopher of separation. Unlike Plato who had seen the presence of the ideas and the divine everywhere, Aristotle now appears as the thinker of the great chasm separating the divine from the sensible … Whereas Aristotle incites us to meditate on the radical transcendence of the divine, Plato … brings us to think about the immanence, the omnipresence of the divine: 'all things are full of gods' (*Laws*, 899 b)." This is sound as regards Plato but less so with respect to Aristotle, for whom, too, "all things by nature have something divine in them" (*Eth. Nic.* Z.7, 1153b33). We must rather follow Kahn, "Intended Interpretation," 328: "Aristotle's god is after all identical with the formal structure of the world considered *sub specie aeternitatis*, that is, under the aspect of unqualified actu-

first principle of all things: "On such a principle depend the universe and nature" (*Met*. Λ.7, 1072b14). This is not to reduce reality to thought in a subjectivist sense but rather to identify thought with reality, as that which is intelligible.[21] At the highest level of both, consciousness and being coincide. Thought, or idea, is reality, and is the ground of all the partial realities, the partial intelligibilities, that make up the world. In the end, Aristotle's identification of the divine as at once reality (οὐσία) and thought (νόησις) once again echoes Parmenides' dictum, "The same is for thinking and for being" (B 3). Aristotle begins by opposing Parmenides in defending the reality of changeable things, but he then recognizes, like Plato, that this is a partial, imperfect reality, and in the end agrees with Parmenides as to the nature of reality itself as that which is purely intelligible and therefore changeless.

## 6. *Life, Sense, and Intellect:* On the Soul

As pure form, the unmoved mover is the highest, most perfect mode at once of being, life, and consciousness. This provides the key to understanding Aristotle's discussion, in *On the Soul*, of the ranks of beings, from living beings as distinct from inanimate things, to sentient beings, to intellectual beings.

Beginning with the generalized concept of soul (ψυχή) as whatever it is about a living thing such that it is living rather than non-living or inanimate (ἄψυχος), Aristotle argues that the soul is therefore the "reality, as form, of a natural body having life potentially" (*De An*. B.1, 412a20–22). The soul, that is, is the 'essence,' the intelligible whatness of a living thing, that in virtue of which it is not merely so much 'stuff,' e.g., flesh, but one organic

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ality, where there is no real distinction between cognition and its object. The Prime Mover will be identical with all forms, including the *ti ēn einai* of natural substances, considered as objects of its own thought; it will *not* be identical with these forms considered as potentially embodied in this or that matter … The Prime Mover will in this sense be not only the final but also the formal cause of the universe, in much the same way that essence is *prōtē ousia*: as form *not* embodied in matter. This will help to explain the statement of Λ 10, that the best principle is to be found in the universe both as commanding general and also as the ordering of the whole (1075a11–15)." Nothing could be more Platonic: as we have seen, this is precisely the sense in which, for both Plato and Aristotle, forms are 'paradigms:' the *same* intelligible content is present in thought as pure idea and in things as their structure or whatness. For this reason, the sensible cosmos and the unmoved mover in Aristotle do not constitute 'two worlds' any more than do sensibles and forms in Plato.

[21] Cf. Lear, *Aristotle*, 307–308.

whole of a certain kind. "If some tool, such as an axe, were a natural body, then the reality of it would be what-it-is-to-be for an axe [τὸ πελέκει εἶναι], and this [would be] its soul" (*De An*. B.1, 412b11–14). This identification of soul as form and whatness in a living thing implies continuity as well as profound difference between living and non-living things. All things, even inanimate ones, must have some form, or they would not be anything at all. But living things have a distinctive and superior kind of form, called 'soul.' For a living thing is far more integrated, more one whole, than a non-living thing. The unity, and hence the identity and the being, of a non-living thing is little more than the contiguity of its parts. If a rock, for example, is divided, we simply have two smaller rocks. In a living thing, on the other hand, the members of its body constitute an organic whole, such that each part both conditions and is conditioned by the other parts and the whole. A living thing is thus one being to a far greater extent than a non-living thing. It evinces a higher degree of unity, of integration, of formal identity, and its soul is this very integration of its parts into one whole. As such the soul is the reality of the living thing, that in virtue of which it is what it is and so is a being: "For the reality is the cause of being to all things, and to live, for living things, is to be, and the soul is the cause and principle of these" (*De An*. B.4, 415b13–14). Life in living things, then, is not a character superadded to their mere being. Rather, life *is* their being, the higher, more intense mode of being proper to living things as distinct from others.

The distinction between living and non-living things is therefore not a mere 'horizontal' distinction, as if all things are equally beings, of which some are living and others are not. It is rather a 'vertical' or hierarchical distinction: a living thing is more a being than a non-living thing, in that it is more integrated, more a whole, more one thing. Hence Aristotle's examples of sensible realities are nearly always living things. A non-living thing has little reality (but not none), having little of the unity, the selfhood, the intelligible identity that makes a living thing a being. Here again, we begin with what is most knowable to us, but in itself least knowable and least a being, and ascend to what is in itself more knowable and more a being. If non-living things are relatively clear to us, relatively easy to understand, this is because there is so little in them to see or understand, so little form. Living things are less clear to us precisely because they have so much more more form in themselves, and thus are beings in a higher way. And this explains why, according to Aristotle, the unmoved mover is life itself (*Met*. Λ.7, 1072b27–31): life in anything is a lesser, imperfect version of what the unmoved mover, as pure form and pure being, is perfectly and absolutely.

Having discussed soul in general as the form, the whatness, and so the reality of living things, Aristotle then distinguishes three principal kinds of psychic activity, or life-functions. These are the nutritive, common to all living things; the sensitive and appetitive, common to all animals; and the intellectual, unique, among sublunar beings, to humans. "First we must speak about food and reproduction; for the nutritive soul is there in the others as well, and is the first and most common potentiality of soul, by which there is life for them all. Its functions are to reproduce and to use food" (*De An*. B.4, 415a23–26). In both of these functions, the soul as form is actively perpetuating itself. Through nutrition it maintains itself in the individual (*De An*. B.4, 416b14–20); through reproduction, in the species. Through the soul's nutritive function, the living thing incorporates alien material into its own body. "The food is affected by that which is fed, but not the latter by the food, as the carpenter is not [affected] by the matter, but the latter by the former … Insofar as [the food] is undigested, opposite is nourished by opposite, but insofar as it is digested, like by like" (*De An*. B.4, 416a35–b1, 5–7). Aristotle's analogy is striking: as the carpenter forms wood into, say, a chair, assimilating it to the form, the pattern, which is in his mind, so the living thing transforms food into itself, assimilating it into its own formal identity. But since the individual living thing cannot endure forever, through reproduction it generates others of the same kind, having the same form, the same look, the same intelligible identity: "For this is the most natural of the functions for living things …, to make another such as itself, an animal an animal, a plant a plant, so that they may participate in the everlasting and divine as far as they are able; for all things yearn for this, and for the sake of it do whatever they do by nature … Since then they cannot share in the everlasting and divine by continuation, because nothing receptive of corruption remains one and the same in number, each participates in it as far as it can, sharing in this, one more, another less; and the same thing does not remain, but something such as it, one [with it] not in number but in form" (*De An*. B.4, 415a27–b9). Nutrition and reproduction, then, the most basic life-functions common to all living things, are their striving for, imitation of, and share in the immortality and divinity of pure, eternal form. Thus it is that form, in itself divine, "moves as loved" (*Met*. Λ.7, 1072b3–4).

Aristotle turns next to sensation, describing the sense-faculty as a potentiality which is actualized through being affected from without by the sensible thing. "Sensation comes about in being moved and affected … It is clear, then, that the sensitive is not in actuality but only in potentiality, just as that which is inflammable is not on fire itself by itself, without that which burns

[it]" (*De An.* B.5, 416b34, 417a7–9). In a way analogous to but significantly different from nutrition, the result of being so affected is a likeness between the perceiver and the perceived: "A thing is affected in one sense by that which is like, and in another sense by that which is unlike … for it is affected by the unlike, but once it has been affected, it is like" (*De An.* B.5, 417a18–21), and again, "The sensitive is potentially such as the sensible thing already is in fulfillment … It is affected when it is not like, but once it has been affected it becomes like and is such as that" (*De An.* B.5, 418a3–6). Sensation, then, effects a likeness, a sameness of form, between the sentient living being and the sensible thing. The sensible property of the thing, e.g., its color or texture, comes to be present in the perceiver's soul as the content of his awareness. Thus, as Aristotle says later, "In general, then, with regard to all sensation, it is necessary to understand that sensation is receptive of the sensible forms without the matter, as wax receives the imprint of the ring without the iron or gold …" (*De An.* B.12, 424a17–21). What is received is a 'sensible form' in that it is a 'look,' a character of the thing, which is given to awareness by way of sensation.

This is why sensation is, for us, the starting-point for knowledge: we are aware of a thing just in that the very same quality that is in the thing is in ourselves, as awareness. This, indeed, is just what awareness is: a togetherness, a communion, a con-formity, that is, a sameness of formal content, between self and thing.[22] To be aware, to apprehend, to cognize a thing, just is to have in one's soul the formal content of the thing without its matter. Aristotle's understanding of cognition could be expressed almost in algebraic terms: if, as we have said, the forms in things are the aspect of idea, of that which is given to awareness, in them, so that a sensible thing is idea-plus-matter, then idea, that is, what is given to awareness, is thing-minus-matter. The awareness of a thing just is its form, without matter, in the soul of the sentient being. Matter, again, is precisely the difference between things and the awareness of things; conversely, awareness just is the formal content of things without matter. To be aware, to cognize, then, is to have the things in the world present in oneself, without their matter. We may well be reminded

[22] Aristotle's theory of sensation should not be taken in a 'representationalist' sense, for then what is in the thing and what is in the perceiver would not be the same. Aristotle indicates that the very form of the thing itself, not a copy or effect of it, comes to be in the perceiver. If this were not the case, we would not be aware of the thing itself, but only of the representation or effect of it in us. See Wood, *Path into Metaphysics*, 165, and the 'sensing' side of Wood's diagram, 168.

here of Plato's account of vision as a 'yoking-together' of seeing and the seen. What I see, or sense, is in me, as the content of awareness, and I, as awareness, am 'out,' or with, that which is sensed. Thus, as Aristotle says, "the soul is in a way all the beings. For beings are either sensible or intelligible; and knowledge is in a way the things that are known, and sensation the sensible things" (*De An*. Γ.8, 431b20–23). The distinctive power of sentient beings, that is, humans and animals as distinct from plants and non-living things, is the capacity to receive into and have within themselves not only their own forms but the formal content of other things, in principle of all things. Consciousness in general, as the distinctive capacity of sentient beings, is an openness to receiving, possessing, coinciding with, the whole of reality. At the level of sense-awareness, this coinciding is only partial: the thing includes matter but the awareness does not, so there remains a difference between the two, a less than complete identity. Since the thing is not purely intelligible, it is not wholly given, does not fully coincide with awareness. At the highest level, the coinciding is complete: the unmoved mover, as form without matter and thus pure idea, is at once the knowing and the known, intellect and the intelligible, perfect consciousness and perfect reality.

Thus we come to Aristotle's discussion of intellect, the distinctive faculty of the human soul, as the highest and most perfect mode of consciousness, therefore of life, and therefore of being. Sensation "differs [from intellectual knowledge] in that the things that make the actuality, the visible and the audible and likewise the rest of the sensible things, are outside. This is because sensation in actuality is of the particular, but knowledge is of universals; but these in a way are in the soul itself" (*De An*. B.5, 417b20–24). By sensation, we are aware of particular characterized things, this green, smooth-barked tree, this large, brown dog, taking in merely their sensible forms. In intellectual apprehension, on the other hand, we grasp the intelligible whatness which is the same in all such things, treeness, dogness, with none of the partial externality between apprehension and the apprehended that is implied by matter. Since that which is known is itself pure idea with no matter, pure 'look,' wholly given, it is *in* the intellectual soul as the content of thinking. Thus, as Aristotle explains, the relation between knowledge and the known is analogous, but not identical, to that between sense and the sensed: "If thinking is like sensing, it would be either being affected by the intelligible, or something else of this sort. It must, then, be impassible, but receptive of the forms and potentially such [as the intelligible] but not it; and as the sensitive is to the sensibles, so is intellect to the intelligibles" (*De An*. Γ.4, 429a13–18). The difference is that in sensation, the

sense becomes like, or the same in form as, the sensible thing, but is not simply the same as the thing, because the sensible thing involves matter as well as form. Intellect, on the other hand, simply is what it knows, because what it knows is itself pure idea, nothing but thought-content. In knowing an idea, intellect is that idea. "The intellect is in a way potentially the intelligible, but in actuality nothing before it thinks … For in the case of things without matter, the thinking and that which is thought are the same [τὸ αὐτό ἐστι τὸ νοοῦν καὶ τὸ νοούμενον]; for theoretical knowledge and that which is known in this way are the same" (*De An*. Γ.4, 429b30–430a5). Actualized intellect is the intelligibles and the intelligibles, the ideas, are the intellect in act. When the reality in question not merely has some intelligibility but is purely intelligible, and hence is reality in the primary and fullest sense, the coinciding, the union, between thought and being is perfect. This is reality in the most complete sense precisely in that it is wholly given to and thus one with thought, and thought in the most complete sense precisely in that it is the perfect apprehension of and thus one with reality. As in Plato's understanding of intelligible form as "really real reality" (*Phdr*. 247c7) and of knowledge as the soul's συνουσία with it, so too in Aristotle's doctrine of reality as form and of intellectual apprehension as one with the intelligible, we hear once more the echo of Parmenides: "The same is for thinking and for being" (B 3).

Since intellect in knowing is the immaterial, intelligible ideas that are known, Aristotle argues that intellect itself must be immaterial. For if it were 'mixed' with matter, it could not become the immaterial ideas. "It must, then, since it thinks all things, be unmixed, as Anaxagoras says,[23] so that it may rule, that is, so that it may know … That of the soul which is called intellect, then …, is in actuality none of beings before it thinks. Wherefore it is well said that it is not mixed with the body; for it would then come to be of some quality, such as cold or hot, or would even be some organ, like that which is sensitive; but in fact it is none" (*De An*. Γ.4, 429a18–27). With regard to intellect, therefore, Aristotle's account of man is not thoroughgoingly hylomorphic any more than is his account of reality as a whole. At the apogee of each he arrives at a principle which is form without matter, pure idea, pure intellect. As immaterial, the intellect is not strictly speaking included in the hylomorphic composite of body and soul, and there are indications earlier in *On the Soul* that the definition of soul as the form of the body does not include the intellect: "The intellect seems

[23] Anaxagoras, B 12.

to be inborn, being a reality [οὐσία τις οὖσα], and not to be corrupted … The intellect perhaps is something more divine [i.e., than the corruptible individual], and is impassible" (*De An*. A.4, 408b19–20, 29–30), and again, "That the soul, or some parts of it if it is by nature divisible, is not separable from the body, is not unclear; for in some cases the actuality is of the parts themselves. But in some cases nothing prevents [their being separable], because they are not the actualities of any body" (*De An*. A.1, 413a4–7). Likewise in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle remarks that the contemplative life

> would be higher than what is in accord with the human; for not insofar as he is man will he live in this way, but insofar as something divine exists in him; and as far as this differs from the composite, so far does its activity differ from what is in accord with the other virtue. If, then, intellect is divine in relation to man, so too is the life according to it divine in relation to human life. But we must not listen to those who urge us, being human, to think what is human, and being mortal, what is mortal, but rather, as far as possible, take it upon ourselves to be immortal, and do all things to live according to the best of what is in oneself; for even if it is small in bulk, in power and dignity it far surpasses all things. This even appears to be each [person], if it is what is authoritative and better; it would be strange, then, if one should choose not his own life but that of another. (*Eth. Nic*. K.7, 1177b27–1178a4)

Here the twofold nature of man, as soul-body composite and as intellect, is fully explicit. Paradoxically, what makes us human is the presence in us of that which is not merely human but rather, in that it is not part of the hylomorphic composite but is strictly immaterial, is divine.

As that which is capable of becoming the intelligibles, intellect is a potentiality, and as such "nothing," "none of beings," has no intelligible content, "before it thinks" (*De An*. Γ.4, 429a24, 429b32). But the actualization of a potentiality must always be brought about by a prior actuality, which already actually is what the potential is to become. "Since, as in nature as a whole, there is something which is matter for each kind, and this is potentially all these things, and another which is the cause and is productive, by making all things, as art stands in relation to matter, it is necessary that in the soul, too, there be these differences" (*De An*. Γ.5, 430a10–14). Hence the intellectual potentiality in us is actualized, comes to have actual intelligible content, only by being acted on by that which already actually has such content: "On the one hand intellect is such as to become all things, and on the other to make all things, as a certain condition, like light; for in a way light makes things that are potentially colors, colors in actuality. And this intellect is separable and impassible and unmixed in reality, being in actuality" (*De An*. Γ.5,

430a14–18).[24] With regard to intellect in its productive aspect Aristotle says, "Knowledge in actuality is the same as the thing [i.e., that which is known]; but [knowledge] in potentiality is prior in time in the individual, but in general it is not [prior] in time; it is not the case that it sometimes thinks, sometimes not" (*De An.* Γ.5, 430a22): that is, it must always already actually know, that is, be, the intelligibles, for otherwise we would have to posit a still higher actuality to actualize its potentiality. Intellect as productive is thus Aristotle's way of addressing the same problem that Plato addresses through the myth of recollection: How can we come to know intelligible realities, given that, in that they are pure ideas, they do not come into us by way of the senses? And Aristotle, like Plato, concludes that they must somehow be always already in us. The two accounts seem to be in opposition to each other only when Plato's myth is mistaken for a theory and taken literally. But when we take it to mean that, as Plato says, "the truth of beings is always in the soul" (*Men.* 86b1–2) and that intelligible reality "is ours" (*Phd.* 76e1), then Plato and Aristotle come very close together. It follows that intellect in its productive aspect, as always actually knowing, is distinct from the human individual as a potential knower. Thus 'I' as an intellectual knower am not wholly identical with 'me' as a mortal individual.[25] The productive aspect of intellect in the soul, like our 'prior knowledge' of the forms in Plato's myth, is our share in that which is immortal and divine, that is, actual intellect which is one with intelligible being. It is the presence in us of that which, by itself, is divine: "When separated it is only that which it is, and this alone is immortal and eternal" (*De An.* Γ.5, 430a23–24).

Aristotle rarely uses Plato's conjugal and erotic imagery to describe the relation of thought to being, except, indeed, in *Metaphysics* Λ.7, where

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[24] This suggests that we are considering not two intellects, one potential and one productive, but rather intellect in two aspects. Thus we should speak of 'intellect as productive' rather than 'the productive intellect.' Cf. Gerson, *Aristotle*, 154–156.

[25] Cf. Charles Kahn, "Aristotle on Thinking," in *Essays on Aristotle's* De Anima, ed. Martha C. Nussbaum and Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 375: "There seems to be no … notion of personal or individual subjectivity in the self-awareness of *nous* as such, no place for a noetic ego, no personal 'I' as the proper subject of *noēsis*. That is excluded by the formal, generic, and timeless content of *ta noēta*, the noetic forms with which every act of *noēsis* is identified. The 'I' of my experience is a hylomorphic animal. *Noēsis* is not an act which I perform but an act which takes place in me." Kahn's 'I' clearly corresponds to what I have termed "'me' as a mortal individual," and his non-personal *noēsis* to what I have termed "'I' as an intellectual knower." Cf. Gerson, *Aristotle*, 159: "It is undoubtedly true that Aristotle holds that human beings do not preexist their biological beginning. But the claim that a person or self or agent of intellection—a thinker—is extensionally equivalent to a human being is much more problematic." See also Gerson, *Aristotle*, 282–289.

he identifies the desirable with the intelligible and says that it "moves as loved [ἐρώμενον]" (*Met*. Λ.7, 1072b3–4). But the *Metaphysics* opens with the declaration, "All men by nature desire to know [εἰδέναι]," adding, "A sign [of this] is the delight in sensations" (*Met*. A.1, 980a22–23). Sense, indeed, as the reception of the sensible forms of things without matter, is a preliminary, rudimentary, incomplete coupling with being. The consummation of this natural desire is the intellectual union of the soul with intelligible, divine reality. Thus the desire set forth in *Metaphysics* A.1 is most fully satisfied by the life of contemplation described in *Nicomachean Ethics* K.7–8, which is our taking part, as far as is possible for us, in the divine activity of intellection that is one with reality itself: "The activity of God, excelling in blessedness, would be contemplative. And of human [activities], that which is most akin to this would be most happy" (*Eth. Nic*. K.8, 1178b21–23).

The greatest difference between Plato and Aristotle, then, does not lie in their answers to the question 'What is being?' For Aristotle no less than for Plato, being, τὸ ὄν, or reality, οὐσία, is form, εἶδος, and as such is divine.[26] The difference, rather, is that whereas Plato exalts the good beyond form, being, and intellect as the very source of reality, of intelligibility, Aristotle looks no further than pure form, pure being, pure intellect. For Aristotle, the hierarchical ordering of the different kinds of beings is based on the extent to which form predominates over matter in each. Non-living things have the lowest degree of form, of unifying selfhood, of activity that proceeds from themselves. Although they have some form, some nature, some behaviors of their own, without which they would be nothing at all, they come closer than all other things to being purely material, purely passive. A living thing, characterized by organic unity and the ability to nourish, maintain, and reproduce itself, is far more one, more active, exhibits a far higher degree of formal identity. A sentient living thing, an animal, exercises not only

[26] A truly anti-Platonic Aristotle would be an Aristotle without the identification of reality as form, without form as something divine in all things, without the unmoved mover as separate, immaterial reality, without all life-activities as striving for divinity, without the separable, immortal intellect, and without contemplation as man's share in divinity. Such an Aristotle, bowdlerized by the excision of all such Platonizing references to the divine (which is apparently what many 'Aristotelians' would like to see) is no longer Aristotle at all. Cf. Gerson, *Aristotle*, 3, "Many scholars have noticed and argued for a Platonic influence in one or another of the texts of Aristotle. Not infrequently these interpretations are rejected for no other reason than that they 'make Aristotle too much of a Platonist.' But when a large number of such texts are put alongside each other, such protestations begin to seem hollow. At *some* point one might well begin to wonder whether perhaps the reason Aristotle appears to be a Platonist is that in fact he is one" (italics in original).

these life-functions but also consciousness, which, as the capacity to receive forms without matter, is a still higher degree of formality, of immateriality. A human being, in turn, has not only life and sense but the capacity for the wholly immaterial activity of intellection, which has as its content, and thus is one with, purely immaterial ideas. And at the peak of the ascending ranks of beings we find the divine, which is nothing but form, nothing but intellection, and as such is life itself and being itself. Aristotle, not Plato, is the philosopher for whom οὐσία, that is, being-as-intelligible-form, reigns supreme.

CHAPTER FOUR

# PLOTINUS

## 1. *Being and Intellect*

Plotinus follows Plato, and, indeed, Aristotle, in identifying being, τὸ ὄν, that which is, as form. As in Plato, sensible things exist just insofar as they have and display intelligible forms. The forms themselves, therefore, as that which is intelligible and in virtue of which sensible things are at all, are reality (οὐσία). Sensible things thus are not reality itself and are not beings in the full and proper sense, but, in that they have some share of intelligibility, are images of true, intelligible reality. But Plotinus goes further than Plato and Aristotle in developing both Plato's συνουσία, the togetherness of intellectual apprehension and intelligible reality, and Aristotle's doctrines of pure form as one with the act of thinking and of intellect as one with the intelligible, into a far more thorough and explicit account of the coinciding, the unity-in-duality, of being-as-form and intellectual apprehension.

In treatise V.9, having described the cognitive ascent to the intelligible reality of which the sensible world is an image, Plotinus argues that intellect, νοῦς, as the apprehension of this reality, is one both with the act-of-intellection itself and with that which it apprehends.

> But it is necessary to understand intellect, if we are to use the name truly, not as that in potentiality, nor that which passes from thoughtlessness to intellect … but that which is in actuality and always intellect. But if it does not have thinking from without, if it thinks anything it thinks it from itself, and if it has anything, it has it from itself. But if it thinks from itself and out of itself, it is itself the things which it thinks. For if its reality were other [than thinking], and the things which it thinks were other than itself, its reality will be unintelligible; and, again, in potentiality not in actuality. The one, then, must not be separated from the other. (V.9.5.1–10)

Plotinus' first point here is that intellect in its purity is not merely a thing that exercises intellection as an activity distinct from itself, for in that case it would be potential in relation to that activity and so would not in and of itself be intellect. As actual intellect, it is the actual knowing or apprehension of the forms, and so, like the Aristotelian unmoved mover, is intellection, νόησις, itself. Similarly Plotinus argues in V.3, "Such intellection, being

both first and primarily, would be the first intellect; for this intellect is not potential, nor is it one thing and its intellection something else; for thus again what it really is [τὸ οὐσιῶδες αὐτοῦ] would be potential. If then it is activity [ἐνέργεια] and its reality is activity, it would be one and the same with its activity" (V.3.5.38–43). But from this, it follows that intellect must always already have or possess the intelligible beings of which it is the apprehension. If these realities were extrinsic to it, then it would, once again, be only potentially intellect, actualized *ab extra* by the intelligibles. In that it just is the apprehension of being, it has in itself the intelligible, or being, as that of which it is the apprehension: "The one, then, must not be separated from the other" (V.9.5.10): just as seeing would not be seeing without or apart from the seen, so intellect, that is, intellectual apprehension, would not be intellect without or apart from that which is thought, the forms. Plotinus' conclusion, therefore, is that, like Aristotle's unmoved mover, intellect "is itself the things that it thinks [αὐτός ἐστιν ἃ νοεῖ]" (V.9.5.7). Consequently, "It is clear that, being intellect, it really thinks and establishes the beings. It is, then, the beings [ἔστιν ἄρα ὄντα]" (V.9.5.13–14). Likewise he concludes in V.3, "All together will be one, intellect, intellection, the intelligible. If, then, its intellection is the intelligible, and the intelligible is itself, it will itself, then, think itself; for it will think by the intellection which it itself is, and it will think the intelligible, which it itself is. Either way, then, it will think itself, in that it itself is intellection, and in that it itself is the intelligible, which it thinks in intellection, which it itself is" (V.3.5.43–50).

Upon drawing this conclusion, Plotinus remarks, "Rightly, then, [it is said that] 'the same is for thinking and for being' and 'the knowledge of things without matter is the same as the things' … and the 'recollections'" (V.9.5.29–32). In view of the philosophical trajectory we have been considering, these references to Parmenides, Aristotle, and Plato are no mere incidental catalogue of testimonies, but an insightful recognition of the authentic background of his doctrine. Indeed, the all-important fragment B 3 of Parmenides is known to us principally from Plotinus, who refers to it many times in the *Enneads* (e.g., I.4.10.6; III.8.8.8; V.1.8.17; V.9.5.29). Here, too, he acknowledges the true meaning of Plato's myth of recollection, that intelligible reality is not apart from, but is the content of, intellectual apprehension.

In treatise V.5 Plotinus offers more extensive, original, and illuminating arguments for the same conclusion. Here he is contending with those philosophers who, conceiving of intellect on the model of sensation, think that intellect knows intelligible being as other than and outside of itself. Plotinus asks, "But since intellect knows, and knows the intelligible, if it knows beings which are other, how would it come upon them?" He con-

tinues, "But if they [i.e., his opponents] will say that that they are 'yoked together,' what is this being 'yoked?' And then the intellections will be impressions; but if so, they are from without and are impacts" (V.5.1.20–22, 24–26). Plotinus is here addressing what we may describe in modern terms as a 'causal' theory of knowledge, according to which reality is extrinsic to intellect and affects it from without. As a result, according to this theory, intellect comes to have an impression, an image, or in modern terminology a representation of reality. But in that case, Plotinus objects, what intellect actually apprehends, has as the content of thought, is not reality itself, but only this representation, the image, impression, or effect of reality on intellect. Intellect, therefore, would not know reality itself, or, more precisely, would not be the very knowledge of reality: "If one grants that these things [i.e., the intelligibles] are most outside [of intellect], and that intellect, having them, beholds them thus [i.e., as outside itself], it is necessary that it not have what is true of them and be deceived in all things which it beholds. For they would be the true things; and it will behold them, not possessing them but receiving images of them in such knowledge. But if it does not possess what is true, but takes into itself images of the true, it will possess falsehoods and nothing true" (V.5.1.51–58). There would always be a difference between what intellect has, on the one hand, and reality itself, on the other, and hence its thinking would not be true (cf. V.3.5.19–24). On this theory, then, intellect would not be the apprehension of reality itself, and so would not genuinely be intellect at all. "If then truth is not in intellect, such an intellect will not be truth, or truly intellect, nor will it be intellect at all" (V.5.1.66–68). In order to be knowledge, thinking must coincide with reality. A causal and, consequently, representationalist account of the relation between intellect and being inevitably leads to scepticism because intellect can actually know only its own content and can thus never attain to reality. The essence of Plotinus' argument here is that if being itself is not the very content of intellect, then intellect cannot know being.

Conversely, if being is apart from and outside of intellect, then the forms themselves must be conceived as lifeless 'objects' in the way that Plato ridicules in the *Sophist* (248e6–249a3). "But if intellection and the intelligible are the same—for the intelligible is an activity [ἐνέργεια]; for it is not a potentiality, and not unintelligible, nor apart from life, nor, again, do living and thinking come from without to another being, as if to a stone or something inanimate—then the intelligible is the primary reality" (V.3.5.32–36). But such a lifeless object is not what is meant by 'form.' The very word εἶδος, 'look,' means precisely that which is not cut off from but is given to awareness as its content. The seen apart from the seeing makes no more

sense that the seeing apart from the seen. We may express Plotinus' point in grammatical terms by observing that νοεῖν, like ἰδεῖn, is a transitive verb, taking a direct, not an indirect object. That which thinks does not think *about* being; it thinks, that is, apprehends, being. Intellect, therefore, must stand to being in the direct relation of intentionality, as an immediate apprehension of being itself. Likewise, if being is truly intelligible, it must be given to intellectual apprehension as its content, as that which is apprehended. If being were extrinsic to intellect, then being itself, as distinct from an image, impression, or representation of being, could not be that which is thought or known. Thus if intellect and the intelligibles were separate from each other, not only would intellect not be intellect, because it would not be the apprehension of being, but also the intelligibles would not be intelligibles, because they would not be what is apprehended by intellect. In order to be known, being must coincide with thinking. "One must not, then, seek the intelligible outside [of intellect], nor say that there are impressions of being in intellect, nor, depriving it of truth, produce ignorance and nonexistence of the intelligibles and, further, abolish intellect itself" (V.5.2.1–5). Plotinus concludes, therefore, that "since it is necessary to bring in knowledge and truth and to preserve the beings and knowledge of what each is," and that if we could not know beings themselves "we would have an image and trace of each, and would not have and be with [συνόντας] and be joined together with the things themselves," it follows that "all things must be given [δοτέον] to the true intellect" (V.5.2.5–9). Intellect and being, then, do not stand apart as 'subject' and 'object,' two separate spheres or realms having only an extrinsic, causal relation, but 'are together' (συνόντας) in the unity of act and content, apprehension and the apprehended. Intellect just is the apprehension of being and being just is what is apprehended by intellect.

In arguing that being *qua* intelligible is not apart from but is the content of intellectual apprehension, Plotinus is upholding what may be called an 'identity theory of truth,' an understanding of truth not as a mere extrinsic correspondence but as the sameness of thought and reality. The weakness of any correspondence theory of truth is that on such a theory thought can never reach outside itself to that with which it supposedly corresponds.[1] Thought can be 'adequate' (literally, 'equal-to') to reality only if it is one with, the same as, reality. In Aristotle's formulation, which as we have seen

[1] For this reason a correspondence theory of truth, unless supported by a deeper identity of thought and being, leads inevitably to subjectivism, scepticism, and nihilism.

Plotinus cites in support of his position, knowledge is the same as the known.[2] If thought and reality are not together in this way, then, as Plotinus argues, there is no truth, for truth just is the togetherness of being with thought. Plotinus' arguments against the separation of intellect and being thus resonate profoundly with the nihilistic predicament of modernity. If thought and reality are conceived in modern terms, as 'subject' and 'object,' extrinsic to and over against one another, and truth is conceived as a mere correspondence between them, then thought cannot get to reality at all, then there can be no knowledge, and in the end, since nothing is given to thought, no truth and no reality. We must rather understand thought in classical Platonic, Aristotelian, and Plotinian terms, as an openness to, an embracing of, a being-with reality, and of reality as not apart from but as, in Plotinus' phenomenological terms, "given" (V.5.2.9) to thought. This, again, is the very meaning of the identification of being as εἶδος or ἰδέα. Being means nothing if it is not given to thought; thought means nothing if it is not the apprehension of being. Hence at the pure and paradigmatic level of both, intellect as perfect apprehension and the forms as perfect being, they coincide. "We have here, then, one nature: intellect, all beings, truth" (V.5.3.1–2).

We must not fall into the error of supposing that this renders being 'subjective' by making it 'mind-dependent.'[3] The disjunctive presupposition that being must be either 'mind-dependent' and thus subjective, or 'mind-independent' and thus objective, is an oversimplification which reflects the modern subject-object dualism that Plotinus rejects. Being, for Plotinus, is not 'mind-dependent' in a subjectivist sense, as if thought were ontologically prior to being and produced being within itself. Plotinus is very clear about this: intellect "has not thought each thing in order to bring it into existence … Therefore to say that the forms are intellections, if this is taken to mean that since it thought, this [form] came to be or is this, is not correct"

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[2] Although Aristotle expresses a correspondence theory of the truth of propositions (*Met.* Γ.7, 1011b25–29), this correspondence must be grounded in the more fundamental identity of knower and known, or intellect and the intelligible.

[3] Cf. de Vogel, *Philosophia I*, 206: Plotinus "does not 'subjectivate' Being at all. On the contrary, he repeatedly posits with a certain emphasis, though Noûs= τὰ νοητά and τὰ ὄντα = τὰ νοητά, that the intelligible is *primarily* Being and that the identification of νοητά with Noûs does not at all imply that the intelligible 'objects' (as we are accustomed to say) were 'produced' by the divine Intellect in such a way that they would not have existed before. Of course, this makes no sense, since Being is *eternal* Being in which all things are ever present in an eternal NOW."

(V.9.7.14–16). But neither is being 'mind-independent,' as if it were prior to and could exist without, or in separation from, intellect. There is no thought without being, but neither is there any being without thought. In order to avoid subjectivism, it is necessary, as Plotinus says, "to think being prior to intellect" (V.9.8.11–12), but this is only because in our imperfect, discursive thinking they are "divided by us" (V.9.8.20–21), whereas in truth they are "one nature" (V.9.8.17). Neither thinking nor being is prior or posterior to the other, for, just in that thinking is the apprehension of being and being is what is apprehended by thought, they are ontologically simultaneous: "Each of them [i.e., each being] is intellect and being, and the all-together is all intellect and all being, intellect in thinking establishing being, and being in being thought giving to intellect thinking and existence … These are simultaneous [ἅμα] and exist together [συνυπάρχει] and do not abandon each other, but this one is two, at once [ὁμοῦ] intellect and being, that which thinks and that which is thought, intellect as thinking and being as that which is thought" (V.1.4.26–34).

As Plotinus here says, however, "this one is two:" the unity of being and intellect cannot be a simple or absolute identity. Within the "one nature" (V.5.3.1) which is at once intellect and being, Plotinus finds it necessary to distinguish between the 'seeing' and the 'seen,' between intellect as act and being as content. That which thinks itself "is not separated in reality [τῇ οὐσίᾳ] [from that which is thought], but being with [συνὸν] itself, sees itself. It becomes both, then, while being one" (V.6.1.5–8). Plotinus continues, "That which thinks must be one and two. For if it is not one, that which thinks will be one thing and that which is thought another … But if, on the other hand, it is one and will not also be two, it will not have anything which it thinks, so that it will not be thinking. It must therefore be simple and not simple" (V.6.1.7–9, 12–14). This again follows from Plotinus' recognition of the intentionality of intellect. Thinking is necessarily a thinking *of* something: it is directed toward, is the apprehension of, some content: "Every intellection is from something and of something" (VI.7.40.6). Hence there must be an otherness as well as a togetherness between intellect and that which it thinks, even if the latter is its own content and in that sense itself: "Its intellection about itself must be of something different, if it is to be able to think itself as anything at all" (VI.7.39.12–13). Without this otherness, there would be no intentional 'gaze,' no reaching out to and apprehending anything, and hence neither intellect nor the intelligible. "But if intellect, intellection, intelligible are the same, by becoming altogether one [πάντη ἓν] they will make themselves disappear in themselves" (VI.7.41.12–13). Plotinus is not denying that they are "the same," but only that they are "altogether

one," i.e. one in such a way as to exclude all otherness whatsoever. Apprehension is a single occurrence which, necessarily, can be analyzed into the apprehending and the apprehended, the knowing and the known. It takes two to 'be together.' Intellect as act-of-thinking and being as that-which-is-thought must coincide, but the terms 'intellect' and 'being' do not have the same meaning. The first signifies act and the second content, two inseparable moments (not parts) of a single reality. "That which thinks, then when it thinks, must be in two, either one outside the other or both in the same; and by necessity thinking is always in otherness and in sameness, and the things that are properly thought are both the same and different in relation to intellect" (V.3.10.24–27). Hence, "in that it thinks it is two and in that it thinks itself, one" (V.6.1.25).

Not only does this "one nature" (V.5.3.1) involve distinction as well as sameness between intellect and being, but its very content is also multiple and complex. Thus in V.3.10, immediately after presenting the sameness-and-otherness between being and intellect, Plotinus continues, "And again, each of the things that are thought brings out with itself this identity and difference" (V.3.10.28–29). Precisely as intelligible, forms are necessarily distinct from each other and therefore many. The Spinozan and Hegelian principle *omnis determinatio est negatio* is well known to Plotinus. Determination and therefore intelligibility depends on distinction: any being, any form, any thought-content, is this one definite being, this idea, only in virtue of its distinction from other forms, other ideas, other beings. Where there is no otherness and therefore no multiplicity, there can be neither thinking nor being: "Thus it understands itself by being a variegated eye or something of variegated colors … So it is necessary that that which thinks grasp one thing different from another [ἕτερον καὶ ἕτερον] and that that which is thought, in being thought, be something variegated" (V.3.10.30–32, 40–42). Being, or that-which-is, therefore, necessarily consists of a multiplicity of distinct beings, which are intelligible, and so are beings, in virtue of their distinctions from one another. Being as intelligible is thus intrinsically relational: each being is itself, and so is a being, only in relation to other beings. As we saw, Parmenides' denial of all differentation to being led to its collapse into unintelligibility and hence into nothing. Thus Plotinus, after citing Parmenides in support of the identification of thinking and being, finds himself compelled to correct Parmenides' account of being as altogether one: "But in saying, in his own writings, that it is one, he was at fault, since this 'one' was found to be many" (V.1.8.23–24). Otherness, and therefore multiplicity, is the very condition for intelligibility and hence for being.

But this does not mean that being is merely a collection of separate intelligible items. At this point visual imagery fails us. Bodies, indeed, cannot be distinct without being outside of or excluding one another. Forms, however, as intelligible contents or ideas, are distinct without being separate. Since they are defined in relation to one another, each form, as a content of thought, involves and thus includes the others. As Plotinus says, therefore, "'All things are together'[4] there, and nonetheless they are distinguished … Intellect is all things together and again not together, in that each is an individual power" (V.9.6.3–4, 8–9), and again, "Intellect as a whole is all the forms, but a particular form is a particular intellect, as knowledge as a whole is all the theorems, but each is a part of the whole, not as distinguished in place, but a particular power in the whole" (V.9.8.4–7). The comparison of the forms to theorems in a body of knowledge is illuminating. In Euclidean geometry, for example, the theorems are logically interrelated in such a way that it is not possible to omit or deny one while leaving the others intact. The theorems are really distinct in meaning, but each theorem both implies and is implied by all the others, so that each one is the whole science in its own distinct way. Likewise, each form, each intelligible being, implicitly contains and thus is the whole of being in its own way. "For each has all in itself, and again sees all in another, so that all are everywhere and all are all and each is all … In each something other stands out, but all are manifest … Each is at once both part and whole …" (V.8.4.7–8, 11–12, 23). Being as a whole, therefore, is neither simply one nor simply many, but is rather "one-many" (e.g., VI.7.14.12), a communion of living forms or thought-contents, each of which is one possible realization of thought itself and of reality as the intelligible. And this complex unity, at once being and intellect, is the divine reality that informs, is reflected in, and so lends a share of intelligibility and being to the sensible cosmos. "We have here, then, one nature: intellect, all the beings, truth. If so, it is a great God; or rather, not a [God], but these are worthy to be all that is God" (V.5.3.1–3).

## 2. *The One beyond Being*

Plotinus thus follows both Plato and Aristotle in the threefold equation of being, form, and intellect. But he differs from Aristotle in arguing that since this is not a simple identity but a unity-in-duality, and involves multiplic-

[4] Anaxagoras, B 1.

ity of content, it cannot be the first principle. For Plato, reality as intelligible form depends on and is thus subordinate to the good, or unity-as-integration, which is therefore "not reality" (οὐκ οὐσίας), but "beyond reality" (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας) (*Rep*. 509b9). But whereas Plato makes this remarkable claim only once, almost, as it were, in jest, and with scarcely any explanation, Plotinus elaborates this insight so that it becomes the dominant theme of his entire philosophy. For Plotinus, the "one nature" which is both being and intellect is "God" (V.5.3.1–3) in the sense that it is the eternal, intelligible, divine reality of which the sensible cosmos is an image, but it is not God in the absolute sense, the supreme first principle of all things. "And this nature is God, and the second God, revealing himself before one sees That, which is seated above and established above in beauty as on a foundation which depends on it" (V.5.3.3–6).[5] Being which is one with intellect, and with it the sensible cosmos of which it is the paradigm, depends for its existence on a still higher principle, the One or Good, which is therefore neither intellect nor being, but the source of being itself. Being or intellect, therefore, is the "second God," but the One or Good is the "First," the absolute God before whom the soul falls down in adoration precisely because he is not any being, nothing in the whole world of sense or even the whole world of thought. "As in processions before a Great King the lesser ranks go first, and then the greater and more dignified ones after these, and then those around the king who are more royal, then those honored next after him—after all these the Great King himself suddenly appears, and they pray and make prostrations …" (V.5.3.9–14).

In the tradition of both Plato and Aristotle, Plotinus argues that to be is to be one: the existence of anything consists in the integration of its various components into a coherent whole. "All beings are beings by the one,[6] both those that are primarily beings, and those that are in any way said to be among beings. For what would something be, if it were not one? If they are deprived of the one which is said [of them], they are not those things. For neither does an army exist if it will not be one, nor a chorus nor a herd if they

[5] In Plotinus, ed. and tr. A.H. Armstrong, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966–1988; London: William Heinemann, 1966–1988), vol. 5, 164, Armstrong points out how Plotinus carefully corrects the image of a foundation or pedestal to make it clear that the "foundation," that is, being or intellect, does not support but rather depends on that which is "above" it.

[6] The word 'one' here is not capitalized because there is an ambiguity as to whether it refers to the unity of each being or to 'the One itself' as the principle of all beings. See Pierre Hadot, *Plotin Traité 9* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1994), 69 n. 1.

are not one" (VI.9.1.1–5). The Aristotelian example of an army is a powerful one, for an army manifestly consists of a great many individual soldiers and yet depends utterly on its integral unity for its existence as an army. If it loses its unity—as, for example, in a rout, when the soldiers flee in different directions—the army as such ceases to exist. Each of the individual soldiers may still exist, but only insofar as he still possesses his unity, constituting him as a living human being. Plotinus continues by applying the same reasoning not merely to groups, such as an army or a flock, but to artifacts, such as a ship or a house, continuous magnitudes, living things, souls, forms themselves, and being as a whole (VI.9.1.5–2.27) Anything whatsoever is itself, and so is at all, just insofar as it is one integral whole. Wherever there is some share of unity, there is some being; where there is no unity whatsoever, there is nothing. Unity-as-integration, therefore, makes the difference, or rather is the difference, between being and non-being, between 'something there' and nothing at all.

Being as intelligible form, therefore, cannot be the first principle, for it is subject to a condition and is therefore secondary and subordinate. Since to be, that is, to be a being, is to be an integral whole, one determinate 'this,' every being is a being in virtue of its unifying determination. This is true not merely of sensible things, which are beings only imperfectly, in that they have some share of form, but of the forms themselves. "This is why these are realities; for they are already determinate and each has as it were a shape. Being must not as it were float in the indeterminate, but be fixed by limit and stability; and stability for the intelligibles is determination and shape, by which also it receives existence" (V.1.7.23–27). All beings, just insofar as they are beings, depend, in order to be, on unifying determination itself, which is not any one determinate 'this,' and so not a being, but rather that in virtue of which every being is one, is determinate, is a being. And this is what Plotinus means by the One: "the measure of all things" (VI.8.18.3), "measure and not measured," (V.5.4.14) not any being but, as Plotinus frequently says, the "power of all things" (e.g., III.8.10.1; V.1.7.10; V.3.15.33; V.4.1.36; V.4.2.39; VI.7.32.31), the enabling condition by which beings are beings.[7] Since each being is a being in virtue of its determining identity or selfhood, its proper integrity, the universal principle of being is determination,

[7] On the One as condition, see Reiner Schürmann, "L'hénologie comme dépassement de la métaphysique," *Les études philosophiques* 3 (1982), 335; Cristina D'Ancona, "Determinazione e indeterminazione nel sovrasensibile secondo Plotino," *Rivista di storia della filosofia* 3 (1990), 448–451.

identity, or integration itself. The One is not something which is one, some being, but "one without the 'something;' for if it were some one [τὶ ἕν], it would not be the One itself [αὐτοέν]" (V.3.12.51–53). "The One itself" thus represents integration or identity as such as the condition for all being whatsoever. It is in this sense that the One is the source, or cause, of reality itself, that in virtue of which there are any beings, anything to be apprehended by thought.

By insisting, in opposition to Aristotle, that the first principle cannot be form, intellect, or reality, Plotinus expresses the insight that being (τὸ ὄν), or reality (οὐσία), does not account for itself. Precisely as intelligible, and, therefore, determinate, being reveals itself as conditioned, as dependent and derivative.[8] At this point, then, Plotinus goes beyond the Platonic and Aristotelian understanding of the dependence of the sensible on the intelligible to argue for the dependence of all reality as such, not only sensibles as partially real but intelligibles as completely real, on integrity, or unifying determination, as the condition for intelligibility, and therefore for being. He thus goes beyond the age-old question formulated by Aristotle, "What is that which is, that is, what is reality?" (*Met*. Z.1, 1023b3–4), to ask the further question, 'Why are there beings, rather than nothing? How is it that there is anything for thought to apprehend, any reality at all?' And Plotinus sees clearly that however such a question might be addressed, the answer cannot be another being, another member of reality, for such an answer would not only be erroneous but would reveal a failure to understand what is being asked.

Thus Plotinus argues that since to be is to be one, determinate, and therefore dependent, the One, as the enabling condition for beings, cannot itself be another being, one of the beings. "It [i.e., the One] is not intellect, but prior to intellect; for intellect is something of beings, but that is not something [οὔ τι], but prior to each thing, nor is it a being [ὄν]; for being [τὸ ὄν] has as it were a shape of being, but that has no shape, even intelligible shape. For since the nature of the One is generative of all things, it is none of them [οὐδέν … αὐτῶν]" (VI.9.3.36–41). If the One were any being (ὄν), or were something (τι), it could not be "generative" of all beings. The One cannot be included within the totality of that-which-is as any member of it, even the 'first' or 'highest,' precisely because the One is that in virtue of which there is such a totality at all. Thus the common expression 'supreme being' would

[8] Cf. Schurmann, "L'hénologie," 332: "Le caractère dérivé de l'étant résulte de sa qualité principale, l'intelligibilité."

be, for Plotinus, a contradiction in terms: no being can be supreme, because to be a being is to be something, to be one determinate 'this,' and therefore to be not supreme but dependent. No being can be the first principle, and the first principle cannot be any being. Plotinus explains this with the utmost clarity:

> Since the reality which is generated is form … and the form not of something but of everything, so that there is nothing else left out, it is necessary that that [i.e., the One] be formless [ἀνείδεον]. But if it is formless, it is not a reality; for a reality must be some 'this,' that is, something determinate; but that is not understood as a 'this;' for then it would not be the principle, but only that 'this' which you said it was. If therefore all things are in what is generated, which of the things in that will you say it is? Since it is none of these, it can only be said to be beyond these. But these are the beings, and being;[9] therefore, 'beyond being.' This 'beyond being' does not mean a 'this'—for it does not affirm—and it does not say its name, but it conveys only 'not this' [οὐ τοῦτο]. (V.5.6.2–14)

As Plotinus here indicates, the expression 'beyond being,' as applied to the One, is purely negative in meaning. It does not mean, absurdly, that the One is something else, 'above' or 'outside' of being. If the One were something else, it would not be beyond but rather included in being. Rather, 'beyond being' simply means that the One, as the principle, source, or 'generator' of all that is, is *not* any being, *not* one of the beings, *not* included within the whole of reality as any member of it. Thus Plotinus explains that the One is not, properly speaking, even a cause, for to think of it as a cause would be to think of it as a being and as having the attribute of causality. "Even to say 'cause' is not to predicate some accident of it, but of us, in that we have something from it, while that is in itself; but speaking precisely, one must not say 'that' or 'is' …" (VI.9.3.49–53). In calling the One the 'cause' of all things, then, we are actually saying something not about the One but about ourselves and indeed all things, expressing the dependent, derivative nature of beings as such. The causation or generation of all things by the One is therefore nothing but the dependence of all things: in that they depend on integration in order to be, their existence, their status as beings, does not come from themselves, but is received in them.[10]

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[9] I.e., they are the things-that-are, and, taken all together as a whole, they are that-which-is.

[10] This should be compared to Aquinas' doctrine that creation is nothing but the existential dependence of all things on God: see below, 160–161. For a good exposition of this point in Aquinas see Lawrence Dewan, "What Does Createdness Look Like?" in *Divine Creation in Ancient, Medieval, and Early Modern Thought: Essays Presented to the Rev'd Dr Robert D. Crouse*, ed. Michael Treschow, Willemien Otten, and Walter Hannam (Leiden and Boston:

The One or Good, then, is not a 'first' being which causes all other beings, but is rather the source of reality itself, and as such not included within the whole of reality, in that it is the "king of truth," (V.5.3.19), that is, the enabling condition of the unity-in-duality of thought and being and therefore at once of being and intellect: "For this reason he [i.e., the Good or One] is said [i.e., by Plato] to be the cause not only of reality but of its being seen. Just as the sun, since it is cause for sensibles of being seen and of coming to be and in some way of sight, is therefore neither sight nor the things which have come to be, so the nature of the Good, since it is cause of reality and intellect, and is light, according to our analogy, to the things seen there and to the seer, is neither the beings nor intellect but cause of these, providing by its light both thinking and being thought to the beings and to intellect" (VI.7.16.23–32). The doctrine of the One beyond being as the first principle thus follows from the Parmenidean, Platonic, and Aristotelian togetherness of thought and being. "What then [is the One]? Intellect alone? But with every intellect the intelligible is yoked [συνέζευκται]; if, then, the intelligible must not be yoked with it, it will not be intellect either. If, then, it is not intellect, but will get out beyond the two, that which is prior to these two must be beyond intellect. What then prevents it from being the intelligible? That the intelligible also is yoked with intellect. If then it is neither intellect nor intelligible, what can it be? From which [ἐξ οὗ] intellect and with it the intelligible, we shall say" (III.8.9.7–13). Here, after adopting Plato's image of 'yoking' to describe the unity-in-duality of being and intellect, Plotinus refers to the ground of this togetherness simply as "from which," without any substantive or verb, thus avoiding the representation of the One as an entitative cause, a being which acts. The One is rather the principle of being *qua* condition at once of intelligibility and intellectual apprehension.

As the One is not any being, so neither is it, properly speaking, either one or simple. The One is not even one; if it were, it would be a being with the attribute of unity. "But perhaps this name 'One' expresses a denial with regard to many … But if 'the One,' the name and what is expressed, were some affirmation, it would become less clear than not saying any name of it; for perhaps this [i.e., the name 'One'] was said so that he who seeks, beginning from this which is wholly indicative of simplicity, may finally negate even this …" (V.5.6.26–34).[11] The One, therefore, is not an absolutely

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Brill, 2007), 335–361, esp. 336–338, 354–358. This principle is well recognized in Aquinas, but it is seldom if ever noted that the same idea is expressly found in Plotinus.

[11] Such passages suggest that if Plotinus were writing today he would write 'the One' *sous rature*: ~~the One~~.

simple, undifferentiated monad: "Thus we do not, when we call it 'one' and 'indivisible,' mean as a point or a monad" (VI.9.5.42). For the same reason, neither is the One simple in any positive sense. If it were, it would, in a self-contradictory way, be complex, for it would have the attribute of simplicity, and to have an attribute is to be complex. The One is therefore not only "outside all multiplicity" in that, unlike all beings, it is not a complex, integrated whole, but also "outside any simplicity whatsoever" (V.3.16.15).

As the One is not intelligible, not anything, not any being, absolutely nothing whatsoever can be thought or said of 'it.' "Therefore it is in truth ineffable. For whatever you may say, you will be saying 'something' [τὶ]. But 'beyond all things and beyond the most majestic intellect' alone among all these is true; it is not its name, but says that it is not any of all things [οὔτε τι τῶν πάντων] and there is no name of it …" (V.3.13.1–5). We may, if we like, call this 'negative theology' (or 'negative henology') but not if we mean by this merely that affirmative propositions about the One are false or inappropriate while negative ones are true or express it properly. For any negation is still an intellectual determination, and is meaningful only relative to a contrary affirmation. To think the One as 'not this' is to impose limitation on it and implicitly to think it as something other than 'this.' Thus, as we have seen, Plotinus explains that even the name 'One' is purely negative in meaning, signifying only 'not many,' and then that we must negate even this negation. Genuine 'negative theology,' then, consists not in negative thoughts or propositions, but in absolute silence of the mind: "If you should wish to grasp the 'isolated and alone,'[12] you will not think [οὐ νοήσεις]" (V.3.13.32–33). Thinking, νόησις, is always the apprehension of some being, some definite intelligible content, and therefore never of the One. Far from violating the Parmenidean equation of being and intelligibility, Plotinus' doctrine of the One depends on and reaffirms that equation: precisely as not anything, not any being, the One is not intelligible, and precisely as not intelligible, not any definite 'this,' the One is not any being. The One, then, is not something 'out there' or 'up there' beyond the reach of thought, for it is not something at all. The entire doctrine of the One is thus at bottom an expression of the secondary, derivative nature of being as intelligible. It does not, incoherently, say that being is secondary *to something else*, for any such 'something else' would necessarily be another being. Since no being can answer the question 'Why are there beings rather than nothing?' the only alternative to the

[12] This phrase is a decontextualized tag from Plato, *Phil.* 63b7–8.

apophatic silence of Plotinus is to ignore or dismiss the question altogether, and thus to disregard what is most fundamental about beings: not what they are, but that they are.

Perhaps the most illuminating way in which Plotinus presents what he means by the One is through the analogy of light. Not merely adopting but rather transforming Plato's comparison of the good to the sun, Plotinus repeatedly compares the One not to the sun, as a source of light, but rather to pure light itself, the ambient light playing over all things in virtue of which they are visible. "It is to be likened, then, to light, and the next [i.e., intellect or being, "next" after the One] to the sun …" (V.6.4.14–15). Since the sun is not just light but a body, a determinate thing that gives off light, the image of the sun risks representing the One as a being, an entitative cause. By comparing the One rather to just light, Plotinus removes this danger. "For even the light of the sun in itself would perhaps escape sensation, if a more solid mass did not underlie it. But if one should say that the sun is all light, one might take this to clarify what is meant" (V.5.7.12–14). With regard to sight and visible things, light itself is none of these things, nothing but the power or condition by which seeing can occur and things can be seen. We can never see light itself, but only ever something which is reflecting or giving off light. As the condition of vision and visibility, light is necessarily present and involved in all seeing and being seen, and is not itself one of the visible things. It is thus closely analogous to the One, which is not any being, not anything intelligible, not given to any mode of apprehension, but rather the condition of all being and all apprehension, "greater than reason and intellect and sense, providing these, but not himself being these" (V.3.14.19–20). To 'see' the One, therefore, is not to apprehend anything intelligible, any being, but to attend to the 'light,' the condition by which all things are intelligible and are beings. "One must believe one has seen, when the soul suddenly takes light [φῶς λάβῃ]; for this, this light, is from him and is he … And this is the true end for the soul, to touch that light and to behold it by itself, not by another light, but that by which also it sees. For that by which it is illumined, it is this that it must behold" (V.3.17.27–30, 34–38). In deploying the analogy of light Plotinus repeatedly uses the expression 'by which' to articulate the distinction between all that can be known and the One as the enabling condition of knowability. The distinction between illuminated things and light itself thus represents not the 'ontic' difference of one being from another, nor even the 'metaphysical' difference of one level of reality from another, but rather the difference between any and all levels of being, and the One as the condition for any degree of intelligibility and hence of being.

The passage from any and all beings to the One is thus comparable to the passage from illuminated and therefore visible things to light itself as the condition by which they are visible. It is not a turning from one set of objects to another object apart from these, but rather a shift of attention, within the apprehension of beings, from the intelligible beings themselves to the condition of intelligibility and being: "Seeing in actuality is double, as with the eye: for on the one hand there is for it what is seen, the form of the sensible thing, and on the other hand that by which it sees the thing's form, which is also itself sensible to it, being different from the form, but the cause to the form of being seen, seen together in and with the form" (V.5.7.1–6). "That by which" the eye sees is of course light itself, which is a "cause" only in the sense of being responsible for the visible form's visibility, and, rather than being seen as another object, is seen together with the visible form but otherwise than it. Plotinus then sets out the difference between the sun and pure light, and remarks that if the sun were all light, rather than a body that gives off light, "it will then be light in no form of the other things that are seen, and perhaps visible alone; for the other visible things are not light alone" (V.5.7.14–16). Here he characterizes light itself as "visible alone," rather than as invisible, presumably because in such 'seeing' there is no darkness, nothing other than light itself, not any illuminated thing but only that by which seeing is possible. Only pure light is not merely 'transparent,' i.e., manifest to vision, but sheer 'transparency' itself, and in that sense "visible alone," nothing but visibility. He continues, "Such, then, is the seeing of intellect: this also sees by another light the things illuminated by that first nature, and sees [that light] in them; inclining toward the nature of the illuminated things, it sees that less; but if it dismisses the things seen and looks toward that by which it sees, it looks at light and the source of light" (V.5.7.16–21). Attending to the One is thus comparable to 'seeing' sheer light rather than any illuminated thing: "The vision [of the Good] fills the eyes with light, not making one see something else by it, but the light itself is what is seen" (VI.7.36.20–22). Such a 'seeing' is absolutely other than perceiving any visible thing, for anything visible is not light alone, not the condition of visibility but a conditioned, that is, an illuminated thing. And as Plotinus well knows, to have one's eyes filled with pure, undifferentiated light is to see nothing, to be blinded. Thus, as he says, to 'see' the One, the 'light' by which the soul in all its cognitive powers is illumined, we must "take away all things" (V.3.17.39), and to turn from beings in their intelligibility to the One is to "unknow all things" (VI.9.7.17). This 'unknowing' or 'not thinking' ("you will not think [οὐ νοήσεις]," V.3.13.32–33) is identical with the 'vision' of pure light. Like

the ascent of the soul in Plato, therefore, Plotinus' ascent from beings to the One is not a transition to another being but rather a transformation of the self. "We become, not reality, but 'beyond reality' by this consorting" (VI.9.11.43). Through the comparison of the One not to any visible thing but to light itself, therefore, Plotinus expresses not mere continuity, as if the One were merely a 'supreme being,' but rather radical, absolute transcendence, the 'invisibility' of the One as not any being but the enabling condition for beings.

## 3. *The Production of Being*

The production of all things by the One, and the subordinate production of the sensible by the intelligible, is customarily termed 'emanation.' This word, however, does not correspond precisely to any definite thought of Plotinus but serves rather as a summary term for a variety of metaphors that he uses to express this production. Taken by itself, therefore, 'emanation' explains and clarifies nothing. Indeed, to treat it as a technical term and assume, in doing so, that we already know what it means, is to mistake a metaphor for a theory and thus to impede understanding. Instead of attributing to Plotinus a 'theory of emanation' or an 'emanationist metaphysics,' therefore, we must rather endeavor to understand what he means by this metaphor in terms of his philosophical argumentation and explanation. Rather than using this vague metaphor, let us follow Plotinus in saying that the One 'causes,' 'generates,' or 'makes' all things and then inquire into the nature of this 'causing,' 'generating,' or 'making.'

We have already seen that to call the One 'cause' in fact means *only* that all things depend on the One in order to be. It follows that the One's 'generating' or 'producing' all things is nothing but the existential dependence of all things on the One. The One 'causes,' 'generates,' or 'makes' all things only in the sense that all things depend on the One as the condition of integrating determination by which all beings are beings. This 'making,' therefore, must not be conceived as a change or a beginning, as if beings first did not exist and then are made to exist by the One: intelligible reality, as in Plato, is eternal in the strict sense that it is not temporally extended, and even the sensible cosmos, as in Aristotle, has no temporal beginning. Being is, eternally; and it eternally depends for its existence on the One. Nor is the One's generation of being an action or an event, as if the One first is and is itself and then, additionally, acts to produce all things. To think in these terms is both to regard the One as a being and to misunderstand the sense

in which it generates all things. The making of all things by the One is not an event but a relation, the relation of dependence of all things on the One as the condition for being.

Consequently, there can be no distinction between the One itself and its productive activity. This is the point of Plotinus' insistence that being is not made through any 'choice,' 'wish,' or 'motion' on the part of the One. "It is necessary that without [the One] being moved, if something is second after it, without [the One] inclining or willing or in any way moving, it is established" (V.1.6.25–27). Not only would such a 'motion' reduce the One to a being and introduce distinction, and hence complexity, within it, but it would mean that this choice or motion, rather than simply the One itself, would be the true cause of beings. "For it did not so to speak will intellect to come to be, so that intellect came to be with the will between [the One] and the generated intellect …" (V.3.12.28–30; cf. V.1.6.23–25). But as we have seen, the One signifies simply unity, in the sense of wholeness or integration, as the condition by which beings are beings. As such, the One itself just is the 'making' of all things: not a thing-which-makes, which would imply a distinction between the One and its act of making and thus treat the One as a being and as having activities distinct from itself, but simply 'making' itself, not an ontic producer but rather the *production of* all things. As Plotinus so often says, the One is not any thing but rather the "power of all things" (e.g., III.8.10.1; V.1.7.10; V.3.15.33; V.4.1.36; V.4.2.39; VI.7.32.31), the enabling condition in virtue of which they are beings. Thus if we are to speak of the generation of being in terms of 'will' or 'activity' at all, we must allow no distinction between the One and its will or activity but say that this will or activity just is the One itself: "His, as it were, existence is his, as it were, activity" (VI.8.7.47), and again, "If we were to grant activities to him … and the activities [are] his, as it were, reality, his will and his reality will be the same" (VI.8.13.5–8).[13]

From this understanding of the One not as a producer but as the production of all things, it follows that beings are not additional to the One. If they were, then they would be distinguished from the One as beings from another being, thus reducing the One to a first being which produces other beings. Rather, being is the "trace," "image," and "expression" of the One (V.5.5.14; V.5.5.23; V.1.6.45–46). That is to say, all being, all that is, is the appearance or showing forth of the One, the apprehension of the One in differentiated

[13] "As it were" translates οἷον, which Plotinus uses in a manner comparable to our 'scare quotes.' Properly speaking, of course, the One does not have existence, reality, or activity.

multiplicity. To be a being is to be one, to be an integral whole, in some distinct, determinate way. Each and every being, therefore, is not integrity, or the One, itself, but is a distinct, differentiated presentation of integrity, as the universal condition for being. It is a presentation, that is, is given to awareness, just in that it is differentiated, for determination and therefore mutual differentiation is what renders beings intelligible and makes them beings. Every being, then, in that it is a being, is a delimited presence of "the power of all things," not the One itself but a differentiated presentation, a showing forth, of the One. All reality, therefore, as a multiplicity of mutually differentiated beings, is the manifestation and apprehension of the One. *Qua* manifestation, as that which is given to and thus is the content of thought, it is the forms, or being; *qua* apprehension, as the taking in or possessing of this content, it is intellect. Neither manifestation nor apprehension is prior to the other. There can be no manifestation without a 'dative of appearance,' the awareness or apprehension to and in which the appearance occurs, and there can be no apprehension without something apprehended, some content, something apparent or manifest. Thus Plotinus explains that being, as the multiplicity of dfferentiated and therefore intelligible forms, is constituted in intellect's taking in of the One: "Wherefore this multiple intellect, when it wished to think the beyond, that One itself, but, wishing to intend it as simple, always comes out receiving something else, multiplied in itself … This intellect, then, intended that, but in receiving became intellect, always in need and having become intellect and reality and intellection when it thought" (V.3.11.1–4, 13–15). But as Plotinus here makes clear, this does not mean that intellect exists or is itself prior to receiving this content. Rather, intellect, as the apprehension of being, is constituted only in receiving or being "filled" with the forms as appearances of the One: "It came to be, then, by being filled, and having been filled it was, and at once was completed and saw" (VI.7.16.32–33). Thus being and intellect are established together, in ontological simultaneity, as the manifestation and apprehension of the One in intelligible multiplicity.

The relation of beings to the One, therefore, is not that of one set of beings to another being, but rather that of multiple, differentiated appearances to that of which they are appearances. To see, to think, to apprehend anything at all is, as it were, to see a reflection of the One. All reality consists of nothing but such 'reflections,' or determinate presentations, so that, as Plotinus says, reality is the "trace," the "image," the articulated expression or λόγος, of the One (V.5.5.14; V.5.5.23; V.1.6.45–46). As we observed in discussing Plato, to see an appearance, or reflection, of a thing is not to see something other than the thing, but neither is it to see the thing 'itself by itself.' For Plotinus,

this applies not merely to the relation of sensibles to intelligibles but, more profoundly, to the relation of all things to the One. To apprehend any being is both to see the One, as presented, and not to see the One itself at all. In just this sense, therefore, every being, as a delimited presence of "the power of all things," both is and is not the One. "The One: all things and not even one" (V.2.1.1), and again, "All these things, he and not he: he, because from him; not he, because he gives, remaining in himself" (V.2.2.25–27). Here again the analogy of light is most helpful. In one sense, we never see light itself, but only ever some illuminated thing. In another sense, we never see anything but light, for whatever enters our visual awareness is some determinate mode, some 'crystallization,' some delimited presentation, of light.

Thus Plotinus' radical apophaticism, his insistence that the One is no thing whatsoever and is absolutely unknowable, is only half the story. Taken by itself it would mean that the One is simply nothing in a privative sense. But the One is also all things and totally available, for all that is there to be seen and known in all things, all form, all that is given to apprehension, is some determinate mode of unity-as-integration. As the enabling condition for beings, "the power of all things," the One is not any being, absolutely inaccessible, not given to any mode of apprehension whatsoever. And as the enabling condition for beings, "the power of all things," the One is absolutely accessible, given to all apprehension, seen and known in all things. Wherever we turn our gaze, which is always to some being, we find nothing but the One, as presented; and wherever we turn our gaze, we do not find the One at all, as any one of the beings.

As manifestations, beings are not additional to the One. Rather, just as all that is there to be seen in the reflections of a thing is present in the thing itself, so too, since all reality is the manifestation of the One, all things are pre-contained in the One. "How is it the principle of all things? Thus, in that it preserves them, making each one of them be; and in that it established them. How then? By possessing them beforehand" (V.3.15.27–30). But this must not be taken to mean that the One contains all things as a multiplicity of different contents within itself, for that would identify the One as the totality of all beings rather than as the principle of that totality. Rather, since being is the manifestation of the One *qua* differentiated into a multiplicity of distinct beings, all things are contained in the One without differentiation, and hence not as their distinct selves, as beings. Thus Plotinus continues, "But it has been said that thus it will be a multiplicity. But it possessed [them], therefore, in such a way that they are not distinguished [ὡς μὴ διακεκριμένα]; they are distinguished in what is second, in the expression (τῷ λόγῳ)" (V.3.15.27–32). The One thus "encompasses all things" (V.5.9.10),

or, more precisely, is the "encompassment of all things" (VI.8.18.3), that is, not another thing but the undifferentiated containment of all things. The 'ascent' from beings to the One, therefore, is not a turning from one 'world,' one set of objects, to another, but is rather an in-gathering, an apprehension of the same content in ever greater concentration. Because intelligibility and being depends on determination and therefore on differentiation, when we attain absolute concentration, surpassing all differentiation whatsoever, we pass beyond thinking, beyond intellectual apprehension, and hence beyond being. To attain this concentration is to "unknow all things" (VI.9.7.19), to "take away all things" (V.3.17.39), that is, all things in their multiplicity and distinction, and hence as beings. "The principle of each group of things is simpler than they. Therefore … that which is prior to [the intelligible cosmos] and generates it is neither intellect nor an intelligible cosmos, but simpler than intellect and simpler than an intelligible cosmos … It must then be concentrated (συστῆναι) into a really one, outside all multiplicity and any simplicity whatsoever, if it is really simple" (V.3.16.8–12, 14–16). The One is thus "beyond being," neither any one thing nor all things as a multiplicity, just as the undifferentiated containment of all things. Following Plotinus (e.g., V.1.11.8–13), we may think of all things in their multiple, distinct identities as the many different points on the circumference of a circle. If we imagine all the points moving toward the center, each along its own radius, the circle will become progressively smaller. When all the points meet at the center, the circle will disappear altogether. This is the One: not any thing, that is, not any one distinct thing among and alongside other things, nor yet all things as a multiplicity of distinct beings, but the undifferentiated concentration of all things. To say that the One is the undifferentiated containment, the "encompassment" (VI.8.18.3), of all things, is simply the converse side of saying that all beings are the "trace" (V.5.5.14) or "expression" (V.1.6.45–46), the differentiated presentations of the One.

It is not enough, therefore, to say merely that the One is not anything, no being, none of beings. Taken by themselves, such expressions would imply that the One is simply nothing, that is, nothing by the privation of all intelligible content. Rather, the One is none of beings, that is, not any one thing, not by privation but by concentration, not any thing just as the undifferentiated containment of all things. Hence we must say, with Plotinus, not merely that the One is no thing, but that it is all things and no thing: "The One: all things and not even one; principle of all things, not all things, but all things transcendently [ἐκείνως]; for they so to speak occur there; or rather, they are not yet, but will be" (V.2.1.1–3). To say that the One is "all things transcendently" (literally, "therely," that is, in the mode

of the One) means that it is all things without distinction, and thus not *as* the multiplicity of distinct, determinate beings. The phrase "not yet, but will be" refers again to the absence of differentiation, such that *qua* in, or as, the One, all things are "not yet" themselves, "not yet" all things. The One, then, is not a mysterious 'no-thing' incoherently posited apart from or outside of all things. Rather, the One is not any thing just as the enfolding, the undifferentiated containment, of all things, and all things, all beings, in their determination, their intelligible distinction and multiplicity, are the unfolding, the differentiated presentation and manifestation of the One.

Hence we must say that all things are other than the One, but the One is not other than all things. If the One were other, it would be distinct, determinate, and thus merely another being. The One, therefore, "has no otherness" (VI.9.8.35). The otherness of beings from the One consists not in the One's being defined over against them as another being, but in the otherness, within being, of one being from another. Beings are other than the One, and thus are beings, in virtue of their mutual differentiation, their distinctness from each other. Only through the conception of 'unfolding' and 'enfolding,' of all things as manifestations of the One and of the One as the undifferentiated containment of all things, can we say on the one hand that all things, *qua* distinct and intelligible, which is to say *qua* beings, are not the One, and on the other hand that the One is not another thing, not included within the whole of reality as any member of it.

Indeed, far from thinking of the One as a 'monad,' a simple, unitary being which produces other beings, we can now see that the One must be regarded as differentiation itself, the very differentiation in virtue of which beings are distinct, are intelligible, and so are beings. We saw earlier that the One can be understood as 'identity' or 'selfhood,' as the condition by which each being is itself and so is a being. But the identity of a being, in virtue of which it is a being, is at once its own unity or integrity and its otherness from other beings. Thus, in discussing the internal differentiation of intellect which constitutes it as the multiplicity of forms, Plotinus remarks, "If they [the intellects, i.e., the forms, or beings] are many, there must be difference. Again, then, how did each have difference? It had difference in becoming wholly one [εἷς ὅλως]" (VI.7.17.29–30). Unity-as-integrity and difference are mutually implicit: each being is itself in being different from others and is different from others in being itself. Mutual differentiation and therefore multiplicity is itself the very condition for intelligibility and being. Thus, after describing the One as all things and no thing, and as not being just in that it is 'generative' of all being, Plotinus continues, "And the first gen-

eration, as it were, is this: for being complete, in neither seeking nor having nor needing anything, [the One], so to speak, overflows, and its overfullness makes an other" (V.2.1.7–10). This must not be taken to mean that the One is a thing which overflows, which would contradict Plotinus' entire philosophy by regarding the One as a being and attributing to it an activity distinct from itself, but rather that the One is, as it were, Overflow itself, that is, the very differentiation or articulation whereby beings are distinct from each other and so are beings. Since to be is to be determinate and distinct, differentiation or alterity itself, the otherness of beings from one another, is the condition by which beings are themselves, are intelligible, and so are beings. Identity as the principle of being implies at once the integrity or selfhood of each being and its otherness from other beings. The One, as identity, must thus also be regarded as sheer alterity, or better, 'alterification' (not an other) no less than as sheer unity, or better, unification (not a one): it is not a principle of unity at the expense of multiplicity but rather of the integrating differentiation or differentiating integrity whereby all beings are themselves, are other than each other, and so are beings.

### 4. *Transcendence and Immanence*

As "the power of all things," the enabling condition by which beings are beings, the One is infinitely and absolutely at once transcendent to and immanent in all things. It is transcendent in that it is not any being, not any member of the totality of things that are, and immanent in that wherever there is any being, there is the One, as the "power" or condition by which it is a being. Far from contradicting each other, transcendence and immanence are mutually implicative and indeed identical: "It is a wonder how, without having come, he is present, and how, not being anywhere, there is nowhere where he is not. This is, indeed, immediately to be wondered at; but for one who knows, the opposite, if it should be, would be wondered at; or rather, it could not even be so that anyone should wonder at it" (V.5.8.23–27). In other words, as soon as we understand what is and what is not meant by 'the One,' we see at once that just as the condition for being, the One is universally present or immanent throughout all beings—"there is nowhere where he is not"—and that precisely as this universally present condition, the One is "nowhere," that is, not any being, and thus transcendent. Conversely, precisely as transcendent, the One must be universally present. All too often, transcendence is interpreted as 'otherness' or 'separation,' and hence as opposed to immanence. But if the One were separate from or other

than beings, then it would be *another being*, defined and limited by its otherness in relation to other beings. Hence it would be included as one distinct member within the totality of beings, and so would not transcend that totality. In order to be truly transcendent, the One must be 'otherwise other,' that is, 'other' precisely in that, unlike all beings in relation to each other, it is *not* marked off over against them as another being. Every being, as we have seen, is defined, and so is a being, by its otherness from other beings. But the One, as Plotinus says, "not having otherness, is always present" (VI.9.8.34–35). Just because the One is the condition for being, and so not marked off by otherness as another being, it follows that all being is the presence of the One. Thus, just as absolutely transcendent, the One is absolutely present, or immanent, to all things.[14]

Plotinus articulates just this line of reasoning in V.5.9:

> It is there and not there; the latter in that it is not contained, the former in that, being free from everything, it is not prevented from being anywhere. For if, conversely, it were prevented, it would be limited by an other, and the next things would be without a share in it, and God would go just so far [μέχρι τούτου ὁ θεός] and would no longer be in himself, but enslaved to the things after him … Whatever is not somewhere has nowhere where it is not [ὅσα δὲ μὴ ποῦ, οὐκ ἔστιν ὅπου μὴ] For if it is 'not here,' it is clear that another place contains it, and it is 'here' in something else, so that the 'not somewhere' is false. If then the 'not somewhere' is true and the 'somewhere' is false, so that it may not be in something else, it will not stand apart from anything. But if it does not stand apart from anything and is not somewhere, it will be everywhere in itself. (V.5.9.13–24)

Throughout this passage, Plotinus uses spatial imagery—"somewhere," "nowhere," "everywhere"—to express the One's simultaneous immanence and transcendence. But this, of course, is metaphorical: neither the One's non-inclusion among beings, nor its presence to them, is literally spatial. To be "somewhere" means to be something, to be determinate, to be this and not that, to be a being; and to be "not somewhere," or "nowhere," means to be not determinate, not anything, not a being. If, therefore, we replace the spatial metaphors with ontological terms, the central statement becomes even stronger: "Whatever is not something has nothing which it is not," which in

[14] Cf. A.H. Armstrong, "The Hidden and the Open in Hellenic Thought," in *Eranos 54* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1987), 103: "That which is utterly beyond us and cannot be expressed or thought is by its very transcendence of distance and difference most intimately present. The Neoplatonists express this with particular force: it was from them that Christianity and Islam learnt their understanding of the unity of transcendence and immanence."

effect restates the understanding of the One as all things and not any thing. Thus the One is *infinitely* immanent in that it is not merely 'present in' or 'to' all things, which, taken strictly, would imply that it is present as one thing in or to another thing (like, say, water in a glass), and thus marked off from this other and so not absolutely present (as the water and the glass remain extrinsic to each other). Rather, the One is, so to speak, present 'through and through' all things, so that all things are nothing but the presence of the One. Conversely, the One is *infinitely* transcendent in that it is not any being at all.

The distinction between the sensible and the intelligible is thus relativized vis-à-vis the One, which is infinitely transcendent and infinitely immanent to both. That distinction, as articulated by Plato and understood by Plotinus, is in the end a difference of degree: sensible things have some share of intelligibility, and so of reality, in that they have and display intelligible identities or forms, but are not themselves these forms; the forms themselves are purely intelligible, pure idea, and are therefore reality or being itself. The One, on the other hand, is not anything intelligible, any reality at all, as the ground of all intelligibility, all degrees of reality whatsoever. Consequently, the fundamental distinction in Plotinus' metaphysics does not lie between the sensible cosmos and a vaguely conceived 'spiritual' or 'divine' world, the latter then being subdivided into soul, intellect, and the One, as if, once we have transcended the physical or sensible world, any further distinctions are of only secondary importance. Rather, it lies between the sensible, soul, and intellect, on the one hand, all of which are lower and higher levels or degrees of intelligibility and being, and the One, on the other hand, as the condition of all levels of intelligibility and being.

Consequently, both the One's transcendence, its 'distance' from all things, and its immanence, its 'intimacy' to all things, are infinitely greater than the transcendence and immanence of forms to sensibles. For the One is not any thing at any level, and the immediate ground of all things at all levels. It is thus misleading to suggest that the One immediately generates being or intellect, which in turn generates soul, which in turn produces the sensible cosmos, so that the latter is not produced immediately by the One but stands at several removes from it. Rather, all reality at all levels depends immediately on unity-as-integrity, which transcends the distinction between the sensible and the intelligible. "All beings are beings by the one, *both* those which are primarily beings *and* those which are in any way said to be among beings" (VI.9.1.1–2). The latter phrase can and should be interpreted both in a Platonic and in an Aristotelian sense. Taken Platonically, it means both

intelligibles, which are fully and perfectly beings, and sensibles, which are beings only in a partial and secondary way, to the extent that they have some form. Taken in an Aristotelian manner, it can, as we have seen, mean this, but it can also mean both 'substances' in the sense of the *Categories*, as the things that underlie or have various attributes, and 'accidents,' which do not exist by themselves or "primarily" but only insofar as they inhere in a substance. Even an accident in this sense exists just insofar as it is this one accident, and is thus an immediate and direct expression of the One. Thus all things at all levels, sensible or intelligible, image or reality, substance or accident, are nothing but the presence and manifestation of the One. The One, therefore, does not stand at the peak of the hierarchy of levels of reality, as if it were merely a 'first and highest being,' but rather transcends and permeates the entire hierarchy, transcending it in that it is not any member of that hierarchy, even the highest, and permeating it in that wherever there is any least shred of being, however slight, there is the One, as the enabling condition of being, "the power of all things."

## 5. *Being as Beauty*

Plotinus argues that just as manifestation, as form, as that which is given to cognitive apprehension, being is pleasing and attractive to behold, and is thus identical with beauty. Plotinus' doctrine of beauty, therefore, is not an 'aesthetics' in the modern sense, that is, a separate philosophical topic distinct from and alongside of his metaphysics, but is rather an intrinsic dimension of his understanding of being as form and as the manifestation of the One in intelligible multiplicity. Indeed, the identification of being as beauty is an elaboration of the fundamental Parmenidean principle that to be is to be intelligible.

Plotinus begins his inquiry into the beauty of bodies by reformulating the question of what beauty is in terms of the beautiful body's effect on the person who perceives it. "What then is this [i.e., beauty] which is present in bodies? We ought to inquire first about this. What then is it, which moves the visions of the beholders and turns and draws them to itself and makes them enjoy the sight?" (I.6.1.17–19). The question 'What is the beauty of bodies?' thus becomes the question, 'What is it about a sensible thing such that, when perceived, it arouses delight and attraction in the perceiver?' From the outset, then, Plotinus interprets beauty as a feature of bodies in their relation to consciousness. This, indeed, reflects common sense: to say that a thing is beautiful is to say something about how it is experienced, how

it affects a perceiver. We may speak, with Plotinus, of "invisible beauties" (ἀφανεῖς, I.6.3.29; μὴ ὁρώμενα, I.6.4.19), in the sense of beauties that are given to thought rather than to the senses, but it would be meaningless to speak of a beauty which is invisible absolutely, not given to awareness in any mode at all. This is not to say that beauty is 'subjective' in the sense that it is 'in the eye of the beholder' rather than in the thing beheld, but only that it is a feature of things as they stand in relation to awareness, as pleasing and attractive to the gaze.

Plotinus then presents and criticizes the conventional definition of beauty as "proportion of the parts to each other and to the whole, with the addition of good color" (I.6.1.21–22). He does not reject the idea that proportional structure can contribute to a body's being beautiful, but rather points out this account of beauty is insufficiently universal: it does not cover the beauty of simple things, such as light, color, and tone. "For them [i.e., those who define beauty thus], beautiful colors, as well as the light of the sun, since they are simple and do not possess beauty from proportion, will be outside of being beautiful. And how will gold be beautiful? And lightning at night or stars beautiful to be seen? And in sounds likewise the simple will be gone, although often each sound in a beautiful whole is itself beautiful" (I.6.1.31–37). If we point out that the conventional definition, as given by Plotinus, does in fact include color as well as proportion, it follows that the definition itself is lacking in unity: it merely juxtaposes proportion and color without explaining what they have in common such that both contribute to rendering a body pleasing to awareness, and thus fails to identify what beauty is in universal terms.

When Plotinus addresses the latter question and begins to present his own account of beauty, he does so, once again, by referring to the effect of the beautiful body on the soul of the perceiver. "Taking it up again, let us say what indeed is the first beauty in bodies. For it is something that becomes sensible even at the first glance [βολῇ] and the soul speaks as understanding and recognizing it, and accepts and as it were is fitted to it. But striking upon the ugly it shrinks back and rejects it and turns away from it, being out of harmony and alienated" (I.6.2.1–8). Plotinus then explains this 'recognizing and accepting' in terms of the 'kinship' between the soul and what it finds in the sensible thing: "We say, that being in nature what it is and coming from the better reality among beings, when it sees [ἴδῃ] something akin or a trace of what is akin, it rejoices and is excited and is borne back toward itself and recalls itself and the things that are its own" (I.6.2.8–11). The "better reality" from which the soul, *qua* intellectual, comes, is the forms or intelligibles, and the "trace" of this in the sensible body is the form that it has and displays. The

'kinship' in question, then, is the togetherness of the soul's 'seeing,' (ἰδεῖν), the intentional gaze (βολῇ) of consciousness, with the 'look' (εἶδος), or form, that is given to it. The soul is pleased by the sensible thing to the extent that it finds in it some 'look,' something there to see, to apprehend, some cognizable content, rather than finding itself at a loss, in the dark, gazing into the abyss, apprehending nothing and so not apprehending at all. The beauty of bodies, therefore, is their share in form: "But how are both those things [i.e., intelligibles] and these things [i.e., sensibles] beautiful? We say that these things [are beautiful] by participation in form" (I.6.2.12–13). Just as 'look,' as that which is given to the gaze of awareness, form is pleasing to behold and is therefore beauty.

Plotinus' understanding of beauty as form is thus an aspect of the belonging-together, or as he puts it the 'kinship,' of thought and being. As form, being is never merely neutral: as what is given to apprehension, it is intrinsically satisfying, and thus pleasing, to consciousness in its intentionality, its need to be the apprehension of something. And this is what it means to be beautiful. Being is pleasing to awareness, and awareness is pleased by being, just in that being is what is given to awareness and awareness is the apprehension of being. Thus Plotinus says of purely intelligible being itself, "What first comes forth into beholding [θέαν] by being form and what is beheld [θέαμα] by intellect, this is also delightful to be seen [ἀγαστὸν ὀφθῆναι]" (V.8.8.6–8). In the case of sensible things, therefore, "It is also an indication [that beauty is form] that we do not yet see [εἴδομεν] what is outside ourselves, but when it comes to be within, it affects us. But it comes in through the eyes, being form alone" (V.8.2.24–27). Adopting Aristotle's doctrine of sensation as the immaterial reception of form, Plotinus here points out that what is pleasing in a sensible thing is precisely the form in it, as that which enters into awareness. The soul is satisfied, or pleased, by having something given to it, some formal content, without which there can be no awareness because there is nothing for it to be awareness of. Conversely, the soul is repulsed and alienated by the lack or absence of form. Such emptiness, such lack of content, is ugliness, in that it offers no satisfaction to the demand of consciousness as intentionality for some content, something to be the apprehension of, and hence is distressing, alienating, and repellent to the gaze. "For all that is shapeless [ἄμορφον], whose nature is to receive shape and form, when it is without a share of reason and form is ugly and outside of divine reason; and this is the altogether ugly" (I.6.2.14–17). This "altogether ugly" is matter, which as we shall see Plotinus interprets as that aspect of sensible things which is not form, not 'look,' nothing for awareness to intend, and therefore as non-being: "And since matter itself does not

remain shapeless but is shaped in things, the soul too straightway applies the form of the things to it, being distressed by the indefinite, as it were in fear of being outside of beings and not enduring to stay for long in non-being" (II.4.10.32–36). A sensible thing is beautiful, that is, delightful and attractive to behold, then, just insofar as it has some 'look,' some intelligible character, and to that extent is something rather than nothing and is not alienated from but given to awareness. In short, the beauty of sensible things is the aspect of form in them, and beauty in universal terms is form. This is not to say that beauty is *a* form, one of the forms, but rather that beauty is form as such, any and all form, the share of intelligibility and so of reality that is found in sensible things.

In short, since to be is to be intelligible, and to be intelligible is to be given and therefore satisfying to apprehension, it follows that to be is to be beautiful. Anything is beautiful just insofar as it has some form, that is to say, just insofar as it is anything at all. Although some things are less beautiful than others, and thus relatively ugly, nothing can be absolutely ugly. Anything at all must have some form, some intelligible content, and is thus more satisfying to the gaze than total non-being. Beauty, therefore, is not merely a feature that some beings, or even all beings, happen to have. Rather, being itself, precisely as form, just is the beautiful, that which is pleasing and attractive to the gaze: "Wherefore being [τὸ εἶναι][15] is longed for because it is the same as the beautiful, and the beautiful is lovable because it is being. What need is there to inquire which is the cause of the other, when it is one nature? For the false reality here [i.e., the sensible, which is not true reality itself] needs an image of the beautiful from without so that it appears beautiful and is at all, and it is such insofar as it shares in beauty according to form, and by receiving [this], insofar as it receives is more complete; for it is more reality insofar as it is beautiful" (V.8.9.41–48). As in Plato and Aristotle, therefore, the soul has an intrinsically erotic comportment toward being, as that which is intelligible and hence satisfying, delightful and attractive to intellectual apprehension.

When Plotinus refers to sensible reality as "false," he does not mean that sensible things have no reality or are not beautiful at all, but only that their reality, that is, their beauty, their form, their intelligibility, is a 'trace' or 'image,' that is, the appearance in them of beauty itself, which is pure form

[15] At V.5.5.14–15, Plotinus explains that in his usage τὸ εἶναι signifies οὐσία, that is, being-as-intelligible-form.

as that which is purely intelligible. Real beauty, therefore, is being itself, the complex of mutually differentiated forms as that which is perfectly given to and thus one with intellect. "But," Plotinus reminds us, "we must not remain forever in this multiple beauty, but proceed still darting upward, leaving behind even this, not out of this [sensible] universe, but out of that [i.e., the intelligible], wondering who made it and how" (VI.7.16.1–4). As the source of being in its intelligibility, the One is the source of beauty. For as we have seen, being is given to apprehension, and so is beauty, only in virtue of the One. Every form is a determinate, intelligible content, and so is a beauty, just as a mode, a distinct manifestation, of unity-as-integration. "The form, then, coming to that which, out of many parts, is to be one by composition, coordinates and draws it together into one completion and makes it one by agreement; since it [i.e., the form] is itself one, that which is shaped must be one as far as possible for it, being made out of many. So beauty is established on it [i.e., on the composite thing] when it has been gathered together into one …" (I.6.2.18–24). Since being as form, as what is given to apprehension, is beauty, and the One is not any being, not any form, not so given, it follows that the One is not beauty, but, as Plotinus says, "too great to be beauty" (V.8.13.11–12). Indeed, Plotinus describes the soul's fear in approaching the One in terms remarkably similar to those in which he describes its fear of matter, or the ugly: "Insofar as the soul goes toward the formless [i.e., the One], since it is utterly unable to apprehend [it] since it is not defined and as it were stamped by a variegated stamp, slips away and is afraid that it may have nothing" (VI.9.3.4–7). The soul undergoes this fear because the One, like matter, is not any form, any 'look,' nothing for the gaze of consciousness. Here again, therefore, the soul faces an abyss, the passing beyond any definite, intelligible content. The ascent to the One is *unheimlich* to the soul because it means that consciousness is going outside of what is proper to it, the place where it belongs, where it is at home: being, as form, as what is given. To turn from beholding clearly visible, illuminated things to the blinding 'vision' of light itself is terrifying to the soul. At the same time, however, the One may also be called beauty, not, like form or being, in the sense of that-which-is-beautiful, but in the sense of the principle or condition by which being is intelligible and therefore beautiful. "Therefore the power of all is the flower of beauty, a beautifying beauty [κάλλος καλλοποιόν]. For it generates it and makes it more beautiful by the excess of beauty, so that it is the principle of beauty and the limit of beauty. For being the principle of beauty it makes beautiful that of which it is the principle …" (VI.7.32.31–35). Since the beautiful is being as form, the erotic pursuit of beauty leads the soul ultimately to direct its

gaze, in fear and trembling but also in adoration and love,[16] beyond being, beyond what is given to thought, to "the power of all things," the One as the condition of intelligibility and therefore at once of being and of being beautiful.

## 6. *The Sensible and the Intelligible*

As we have seen, the sensible is and is beautiful just insofar as it has and displays forms, but it is not genuine being, or genuinely beautiful, to the extent that it is not itself pure form. Thus, the forms seen in sensible things, which are their share of being and beauty, are images, or appearances given to the senses, of the purely intelligible forms themselves which are given to and are the content of intellect and so are true reality. Hence, as in Plato, the sensible cosmos is analogous to a work of art in that it is and is beautiful just insofar as it is a sensible image of intelligible contents, or ideas.

Thus Plotinus more than once begins the ascent from the sensible to the intelligible with a discussion of human art (e.g., V.9.3; III.8.4; V.8.1). "Let there be, if you will, two lumps of stone set near each other, one unshaped [ἀρρυθμίστου] and without a share in art, the other already mastered by art into a statue of a God or some man … The one which has been brought by art to beauty of form will appear beautiful not by being stone—for then the other would be beautiful likewise—but by the form which art has put in" (V.8.1.7–15). This is not to say, of course, that the raw lump has no beauty at all: it must have some form, and hence some beauty, or it would be nothing at all (see I.6.2.27). The real question is, why is the sculpted stone more beautiful? "The matter did not have this form, but it was in the one who thought, and before it came to the stone; but it was in the craftsman, not insofar as he had eyes or hands, but in that he shared in art" (V.8.1.16–19). If the sculpted stone is more beautiful than the lump, this is because thought, or idea, is more evident in it. The distinctive beauty of the sculpture, as opposed to the lump, is the form that it has received through the artist's work, which is an image of the form existing as pure thought-content, or idea, in the artist's mind. Consequently, the form, that is, the beauty, that renders the sculpture pleasing to behold is first and more truly in the artist's mind, as the paradigm of which the sculpture's beauty is an image. "This beauty, then, was far better in the art; for that which was

[16] Cf above, 115.

in the art did not come to the stone, but that remained, while another, lesser than that, came from it" (V.8.1.19–22).

The form or beauty in the artwork is lesser than that in the artist's mind because it is less concentrated, more extended: "If art makes [its product] such as what it is and has … it is more and more truly beautiful, having the beauty of art, greater and more beautiful than whatever is in the external. For insofar as it is extended by going into matter, so far it is weaker than that which remains in unity" (V.8.1.23–27). The form, the intelligible content, that in the artist's thought is held in unity, in the sensible product is spread out over space and time. Consider, for instance, the example of music: "Every primary maker must be in itself greater than that which is made; for it is not lack of music [that makes anything] musical, but music, and [what makes] sensible [music] is that which is prior to this" (V.8.1.30–33). In other words, mere sound is made into music by the intelligible content that is grasped by the composer's mind. This is a particularly powerful example because of the inescapable temporality of sensible music. A truly noble piece cannot be composed merely sequentially, for the beginning must be conditioned by the end and indeed each part by every other part. Hence the composer must grasp or know, all at once, the 'shape' of the complex whole.[17] But that whole, which the composer knows all at once, the audience must hear part by part, in a temporally extended sequence. So too, the form or beauty of a statue, which the sculptor apprehends in thought as a single whole, is spatially and temporally extended in the viewer's experience. In general, then, the beauty, the form, in a sensible artwork is an image, an outward, extended expression, of what the artist knows as idea. It is the same formal content at a lower, less concentrated, more diffuse level of presentation and apprehension: it is less one, less pure, less itself, less the real thing.

The theory of art set out here, however, is incidental to Plotinus' real aim, which is to use the analogy of art to express the relation of the sensible world to intelligible reality. "But let us leave the arts, and let us contemplate the things which the works [of art] are said to imitate,[18] beauties which

[17] At III.8.6.1–7 Plotinus discusses an inferior kind of art in which the artist is unable fully to grasp intellectually the form that he is producing in the material: "What they cannot grasp directly they seek to get by wandering about. For, again, when they get what they want, what they wished to come to be, not so that they should not know, but so that they should know and see it present in the soul, it is clear that it is established as something to be contemplated." We may imagine the kind of composer who does not know the whole all at once beforehand but experiments on the instrument until it 'sounds right.'

[18] Immediately before, at V.8.1.33–39, Plotinus has rejected the view that works of art are merely imitations of nature.

come about and are said to be by nature, all rational and irrational living things … What then is the beauty in these? … Is not this everywhere form, coming to that which has come to be from the maker, as in the arts it was said to come to the artworks from the arts?" (V.8.2.1–4, 7, 14–17). Beauty is form, and a sensible thing is beautiful in virtue of the form it displays, but is not itself that form. Hence, as an artwork is to the thought of the artist, so the sensible cosmos is to intellect or being: an outward, sensible expression, extended in space and time, of that same intelligible content. It is in this sense, in that sensible things exist and are beautiful by having form, that "some wisdom makes all the things that have come to be, whether artworks or natural things, and everywhere a wisdom directs the making" (V.8.5.1–3). And since this wisdom is intellect itself, that is, the intelligible paradigm by reflecting which sensible things have any share of being, it is reality: "The true wisdom, then, is reality, and the true reality is wisdom … Wherefore those realities that do not have wisdom, in that they have become reality through some wisdom but do not have wisdom in themselves, are not true realities … Wherefore the ancients said that the ideas are beings and realities" (V.8.5.15–16, 18–20, 24–25).

Although the sensible cosmos is thus analogous to a work of art, the analogy of course is not complete. The first difference between the way a human artist makes his product and the way intellect 'makes' the cosmos is that in the latter case there is no planning, no process of coming up with a design for the world. Intellect's apprehension of the forms as its own content is not a sequential or discursive process but an immediate intellectual intuition or 'vision,' a knowing of the whole all at once. Consequently, Plotinus explains, intellect does not, like a human artist, develop a 'plan' for the cosmos: "This all [i.e., the sensible cosmos], if we agree that it is and is such from another, shall we then think that its maker planned in himself earth, and that it must stand in the center, then water, and this upon earth, and the other things in order up to the sky, then all living things and such shapes as they have … and then, all these things having been arranged in himself, undertook the work accordingly? But such planning is impossible …" (V.8.7.1–9). As we have seen, intellect is not prior to the forms and does not make them as its thoughts, but rather simply coincides or is one with them. Rather than 'planning' the cosmos, therefore, intellect eternally knows and eternally is the 'plan,' that is, the paradigm or pattern of the cosmos. Plotinus' understanding of how the world reflects an intelligible paradigm is thus quite different from the crude, anthropomorphic versions of the 'argument from design' or 'intelligent design' that occur in modern and contemporary thought. If we are to speak of 'design' at all, we must think of intellect not as a designer

but as design itself, in the sense that it just is the paradigm that the cosmos reflects. Simply because the forms, the contents of intellect, are as they are, the sensible cosmos comes about in all its beauty and coherence, as a direct expression of intellect, or being, itself: the order of the world is "not from sequence or from planning, but prior to sequence and prior to planning … For since [the intelligible] is a principle, all these things [i.e., sensibles] come thence and just as they do" (V.8.7.42–45).

The second major difference between the cosmos and a human artwork is that the 'making' of the cosmos by intellect is not a process of construction, or what in Aristotelian terms would be called efficient causality. Intellect makes all sensible things simply in that, *qua* form, it enables sensible things to have intelligible identities and so to be anything at all. The cosmos "is made without noise, because that which makes is all reality and form" (V.8.7.24–25). This is why, for Plotinus, such making is contemplation: intelligible whatness, which is the content of and thus one with the thinking that apprehends it, makes things what they are and so lets them be. What he says of nature, as the formative principle in sensible things, applies *a fortiori* to intellect itself: "To make, for it, is to be what it is, and insofar as it is this, it is that which makes. And it is contemplation and what is contemplated, for it is rational principle. So by being contemplation and what is contemplated and rational principle, it makes in that it is these" (III.8.3.18–21). Hence we must sharply distinguish 'making' in this sense, which may be described as 'vertical causation' in that it is the dependence of a lower level of reality on a higher, from the 'horizontal causation' of one thing by another within the sensible order. These two kinds of causality are therefore not alternative to or in competition with one another, but are two fundamentally different modes of explanation. Thus Plotinus does not deny efficient or horizontal causality within the world, but regards it as merely ancillary to the causation of all sensible things by form, that is, their dependence on form to be what they are and so to be at all. "One might indeed say that the powers of fire and of the other bodies are great; but then it is by inexperience of true power that they are imagined burning and destroying and pressing and serving for the generation of living things. But these destroy because they are destroyed, and contribute to generation because that are themselves generated; but the power there [i.e., in the intelligible] has only to be and only to be beautiful" (V.8.9.32–38). Thus, for example, in one sense a fire is caused or generated by a previous fire, but in another and more fundamental sense it is caused or generated by the form of fire, as the intelligible whatness by which it is what it is and so has any reality (see III.8.2.25–26).

Given these differences, however, the cosmos is to intellect as an artwork is to the artist's thought: an outward, extended, sensible expression of the same formal content. Consequently, to 'ascend' from the sensible to the intelligible is not to turn from one 'world' or set of objects to another, but to apprehend the same content in greater concentration, without the dilution of spatio-temporal extension in which it is given at the level of sense: "Let us then grasp in thought this cosmos, each of the parts remaining what it is and not confused, all together in one as far as possible … Let there be then in the soul a luminous imagination of a sphere having all things in it … Keeping this, grasp in yourself another, taking away the mass; take away also the places, and the image of matter in yourself …" (V.8.9.1–3, 8–9, 11–13). As Plotinus says elsewhere, "There [i.e., in the intelligible] are harmonizing qualities and quantities, numbers and sizes and shapes, actions and affections which are according to nature, motions and rests both universal and in parts of the things there; but instead of time, eternity, and place is there intellectually, one thing in another" (V.9.10.7–10). Here again, therefore, as in Plato, what we find is not two worlds, a world of sensible things or bodies and a world of intelligible things or forms, but rather the same content, the same reality, at lower and higher levels of presentation and apprehension.[19] Plotinus' spatial metaphors, like Plato's, must be interpreted in these terms: when Plotinus uses 'here' and 'there' to refer to the sensible and the intelligible respectively, as he frequently does, 'here' means 'given to sense' and 'there' means 'given to intellect.' What we lose or leave behind in ascending from sense to intellect as our mode of apprehending reality is precisely nothing, for all that is 'here' is more truly found 'there:'

> For since we say that this all is according to the, as it were, paradigm of that, all that is living must be there first, and if its being is complete, it must be all things. And sky there is living, and so not barren of stars, as they are called with regard to this sky here, and this is being for sky. And clearly there is earth there, not barren, but much more enlivened, and all living things in it, as many as walk and are called terrestrial here, and clearly plants established in life; and sea is there, and all water in flow and abiding life, and all the living

[19] Cf. J.N. Deck, *Nature, Contemplation, and the One*, 2nd ed. (Burdett, NY: Larson, 1991), 110: "Plotinus does not have two worlds, but only one. His world of true being is not, except metaphorically, a world above the everyday world. It is the everyday world, not as experienced by sense, by opinion, or by discursive reasoning, but as known by intellect, the Nous, the Knower." See also Armstrong, in Plotinus, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 7, 79: "In the end we are left with the very strong impression that for Plotinus there are not two worlds but one real world apprehended in different ways on different levels."

> things in water; and the nature of air is a part of the all there, and the aerial living things in it just as the air itself … There is no poverty or lack of resource there, but all things filled and as it were boiling with life. There is as it were a flow of them from one spring … as if there were some one quality having and preserving all qualities in itself, of sweetness with fragrance, and at once winelike quality and the powers of all tastes and the sights of colors and the things that touches know; and there stand the things that hearings hear, all tunes and every rhythm. (VI.7.12.1–13, 22–30)

Here Plotinus emphasizes the sameness of content between the sensible and the intelligible by describing the latter in radically sensuous terms. All the beauty, all the form, all the being that is given to sense little by little, here a glimpse and there a glimpse—the scent of flowers, the sound of music, the sight of the stars—is given to intellect all together at once in a single complex apprehension of the whole. Thus, as Plotinus explains, "These sensations are dim intellections, but the intellections there are clear sensations" (VI.7.7.30–32). Sense and intellect, then, are not two different faculties directed toward two different 'worlds' or sets of objects, but are rather lower and higher, 'dimmer' and 'clearer' modes of apprehending the same thing, that is, being, or form.

So too, Plotinus remarks that "all these things together [i.e., all that is sensible] are from there, and are more beautifully there; for here they are diluted [μέμικται] and those are not diluted. But then it [i.e., the sensible cosmos] is held fast by forms from beginning to end, matter first by the forms of the elements, then other forms upon forms, then others again; so that it is difficult to find the matter hidden by many forms. And since even this is a certain last form, this [i.e., the sensible] is all form, and all things are forms; for the paradigm is form" (V.8.7.17–24). As in Plato's divided line, the levels of reality, sensible and intelligible, are not opposed to each other but are distinguished in terms of the degrees of clarity and dimness in which they are given and apprehended. Hence there is no opposition between intelligible forms and sensible bodies, but rather simply higher and lower levels of form. For whatever is given to awareness at any level is by definition a 'look' of some kind. As intellect and sense are higher and lower modes of apprehension, so intelligibles and sensibles are 'clearer' and 'dimmer' forms, that is, form, or being, *qua* given more or less clearly. Sensible things, and thus the entire content of the sensible cosmos, are forms 'dimly' given and apprehended, reality 'diluted' by spatio-temporal extension; intelligibles are forms 'clearly' given and apprehended are so are pure reality itself.

## 7. *The Two Matters*

If, for Plotinus, the sensible cosmos "is all form, and all things are forms," so that even matter is "a certain last form" (V.8.7.22–24), how are we to understand his usual, more Aristotelian account of matter as that aspect of sensible things which is not form? We must begin by observing that purely intelligible reality itself, according to Plotinus, involves a kind of 'matter' analogous to the matter of sensible things. Plotinus offers two principal arguments for this. One of these is that since everything 'here' has its paradigm 'there,' and matter occurs in the sensible, it must occur paradigmatically in the intelligible. "If there is an intelligible cosmos there, and this [sensible cosmos] is an imitation of it, since this is composite and made out of matter, there must be matter there too" (II.4.4.8–10). This indicates not an identity but an analogical relation of image to archetype between matter 'here' and matter 'there.' Plotinus' other argument proceeds from the differentiation among the forms. Since they are all forms, but are different from one another, there must be a common substratum which receives the determinations or definitions in virtue of which they are distinct: "If, then, there are many forms, it is necessary that there be something common in them, and also something proper [to each], by which one differs from another," (II.4.4.2–4), and again, "If, being many, it is indivisible, the many which are in one are in matter which is that one, while they are the shapes of it" (II.4.4.14–16). The matter of intelligibles, then, is a substratum of differentiation but, unlike the matter of sensibles, not a substratum of change: "The matter of things that come to be always has now one form now another, but that of eternal things is always the same" (II.4.3.9–11).

Taken together, these two arguments provide a sufficient explanation of what Plotinus means by the matter 'there,' the matter of intelligibles. As the matter of sensibles is their need for and receptivity to form, without which they would have no identity, no intelligibility, and so would not be anything at all, the matter of intelligibles is their need for and receptivity to the One. As we have seen, the differentiation of the forms from one another is what distinguishes the forms, or being, from the One. The forms are beings in virtue of unifying determination, of integration-as-differentiation or differentiation-as-integration, and are thus dependent and receptive in relation to this determination. The matter of intelligibles is thus not really something other than the forms, but just is the forms, or being, considered *qua* dependent or receptive. As Plotinus explains elsewhere, the matter that is present in intellect thus represents the potentiality of intellect in relation to the One: "For since intellect is a sight, and a seeing sight, it will

be a potentiality which has come into actuality. So there will be on the one hand matter and on the other form for it—the matter in intelligibles … The Good fills the sight of intellect" (III.8.11.1–5, 8–9). This is not, of course, a temporal distinction, as if intellect were first potential and then became actual. Rather, it means that being or intellect involves potentiality in that it is eternally actualized *ab extra*, not accounting for its own existence but depending on, and in that sense made to be, filled, or actualized by, the One.

Here again, therefore, we encounter the most profound difference between Plotinus and Aristotle. For Aristotle, the first principle is pure form and pure reality (οὐσία) just in that it is pure actuality, and hence involves no matter. For Plotinus, on the other hand, pure form or reality (οὐσία) is not pure actuality and therefore cannot be the first principle because, *qua* intelligible, it is determinate and therefore dependent. Intelligible reality, that is, being itself, thus involves a 'material' aspect in that it depends on the One in order to be. Just in that being is potential in relation to the first principle, it is analogous to the matter of sensible things and in this respect can therefore be described as "matter there" (II.4.8.10). Plotinus' doctrine of the matter of intelligibles is thus no more than another expression of the secondariness of being.

Turning now to the matter of sensibles, we must in the first place be careful never to refer to it as 'sensible matter.' This locution, although convenient, is profoundly misleading. For matter itself, according to Plotinus, is precisely *not* sensible. It is not a body, cannot be perceived, is not anything sensible at all, but always falls below the threshold of sensibility. Thus, for example, when Plotinus refers to the matter of the sensible cosmos as "a decorated corpse [νεκρὸν κεκοσμημένον]" (II.4.5.18), he could all too easily be taken to mean that the sensible cosmos *itself* is a "decorated corpse," something only superficially living and beautiful but in truth dead and ugly. But this is not what he means. Rather, the sensible cosmos, all that is given to the senses, all that is actually perceived, is the *decorations*, and as such is good and beautiful: the cosmos "is all form, and all things are forms" (V.8.7.23), albeit at a low level. Likewise at the conclusion of I.8, Plotinus says that "evil," i.e., the imperfection of sensible things that he has identified with their matter, "by being contained in certain beautiful chains, as some people are chained in gold, is hidden by these …" (I.8.15.14–16).[20] Matter itself, the 'corpse' or the

[20] Matter for Plotinus is 'evil' not in any positive sense but only as the deficiency of being of sensible things relative to pure forms.

'prisoner' which underlies these visible adornments, these forms or beauties, is never seen and thus is not any part of the sensible cosmos, the totality of all that is given to the senses.

Plotinus arrives at the matter of sensibles, conceptually, through the Aristotelian argument from change, specifically "the changing of the elements into one another" (II.4.6.2–4), which itself is based on the argument to the receptacle in Plato's *Timaeus* (49b7–50b5). "For the destruction of that which changes is not complete; otherwise, some reality will be abolished into non-being; nor, again, has that which comes to be come into being from complete non-being, but there is a change from one form to another" (II.4.6.4–7). Plotinus concludes that the elements are composed "out of matter and form … the former with regard to the underlying indeterminate, in that it is not form [μὴ εἶδος]" (II.4.6.18–20). As in Aristotle, therefore, matter is that which 'underlies' and can gain and lose various forms, and hence is that aspect of changeable things which is "not form." From this Plotinus argues that matter itself is not a body, because even such basic characteristics as size, shape, and therefore corporeality itself are forms of some kind. "Let us not ascribe to its own nature any of what are seen in sensible things … not shape, nor size either … For to be size is one thing, to be sized [i.e., to have some size, as a body does] another, to be shape is one thing, to be shaped another" (II.4.8.7–9, 11–13). Since every characteristic is some form, matter as such, as that which underlies all forms whatsoever, can have no characteristics at all and so can be neither sensed nor thought. Matter, therefore, has in itself and provides to the bodies in which it occurs no positive features whatever. "So the form comes to it [i.e., to matter] bringing everything with it; the form has everything, size and whatever may be with and by the rational principle" (II.4.8.23–26).

Thus, any sensible thing has some form, some share of intelligibility, and matter, as "not form" (II.4.6.20), not look, is absolutely unintelligible and therefore is not anything at all. Hence it can be arrived at in thought only negatively, by the removal, the progressive stripping away, of all form, all intelligible content. But as we thus approach the thought of matter, thought itself, by being deprived of content, fades out into non-thought: "If each thing is known by reason and intellection, but here reason says what it does say about it [i.e., about matter], that which wants to be intellection is not intellection but as it were non-intellect [οὐ νόησις ἀλλ᾽ οἷον ἄνοια]" (II.4.10.7–9). Where there is no formal content whatsoever, nothing to apprehend, there can be no apprehension, no thinking. "That which [the soul] grasps in the composite whole with the things upon it, when it has analyzed out and separated the latter, what reason leaves is what it thinks, a dim thing

dimly and a dark thing darkly, and it thinks by not thinking [νοεῖ οὐ νοοῦσα]" (II.4.10.28–32). Matter, therefore, can be 'seen,' that is, apprehended, only in the sense in which we may speak of 'seeing' darkness: "And as by the eye [we see] darkness … so, then, the soul, having taken away the things that are as light to sensibles, no longer able to define what is left, is made like sight in darkness, having become in a way the same as what it then, as it were, sees" (II.4.10.14–18). And just as to 'see darkness' is in fact not to see, so to 'think matter' is not to think: "Completely taking away form, every form, that in which these are not present we say is matter, grasping shapelessness in ourselves in the taking away of all form, if we are going to behold matter … as an eye withdraws itself from light so that it may see darkness and not see …" (I.8.9.15–21). Precisely as "not form" (II.4.6.20), matter is not anything and thus is not, or is non-being (I.8.5.10–13). Whereas the One is nothing by concentration, and to 'see' it is analogous to having one's eyes filled with light, matter is nothing by privation and to 'see' it is comparable to having the eyes emptied of light, finding nothing to see and so not seeing.

But if all characteristics are forms and matter is therefore simply nothing, we might be inclined to wonder why we should include matter in the account of bodies at all. "And why is there any need of anything for the composition of bodies besides size and all qualities?" (II.4.11.1–3). If as Plotinus says form "brings everything" (II.4.8.24), then "what would [matter] contribute" (II.4.11.5)? Plotinus replies that matter "contributes what is most important to bodies" (II.4.12.1). For without matter, bodies would simply be forms or ideas, purely intelligible, and so would not be sensible things, or bodies, at all. "These could not come to be in size, but rather in that which is sized; for if in size, … they would be only rational principles … and would not be bodies" (II.4.12.2–7). Just in that sensible things are 'lesser,' or 'dimmer,' than purely intelligible forms, they can and must be said to include an aspect of unintelligibility and hence of non-being. The 'contribution' of matter is thus purely negative, like the addition of a negative number which is actually a subtraction. Sensible things 'include matter' not as an ingredient other than form, but just in that, *qua* sensible, they are deficient in comparison with forms at the purely intelligible level. Matter thus represents nothing positive but only the deficiency of sensible things relative to forms in the full and primary sense. It 'is' just in the sense in which a deficiency or lack, which is nothing positive, may be said to be, in that sensible things are only imperfectly intelligible and so are less real, less beings, than intelligible forms.

This lets us see how we may interpret Plotinus' isolated statement that matter is "a certain last form [εἶδός τι ἔσχατον]" (V.8.7.23) in relation to his

usual account of matter as "not form [μὴ εἶδος]" (II.4.6.20). In V.8, Plotinus is discussing the actual contents of the sensible world and explaining that there is nothing in it which is not form. After all, it is impossible to think pure matter, and whatever we think as matter is in fact, as Aristotle had argued, only matter relative to some higher form and hence, insofar as it is thought at all, is actually some form. Thus, just insofar as matter is considered as being anything at all, it is form. Conversely, just insofar as matter, taken in the absolute sense, is not form, it is not anything. The crucial point expressed by both of these apparently contradictory formulations is that matter is *not anything other than form*. It is not another component of things which is something else additional to form. This is impossible, because being is form and form is being. There cannot be something other than form, something which is but is not given to any apprehension. Matter, *qua* not form, is therefore nothing but deficiency of form. Sensible things are not composites of form and something else other than form, for there cannot be anything other than form. Rather, sensible things are simply lesser or 'dimmer' forms, and to say that they 'include matter' is merely another way of saying this.

Plotinus thus radicalizes Aristotle's doctrine of matter as the residue of unintelligibility in sensible things into an account of matter as nothing but deficiency of intelligibility and therefore of being. In doing so he is forced to argue, against Aristotle, that matter is "the same as privation" (II.4.16.4). Since being is form, when all form is removed we are left with simply nothing. Hence matter cannot be anything itself, but must only be privation of form. Aristotle had argued that matter cannot be privation because privation is destroyed by the presence of form, whereas matter survives, and indeed is able to exist at all, only through this presence. Plotinus replies that, on the contrary, privation is not destroyed but is enabled to be at all, as privation, only by the presence of form. "If it were unlimited in quantity, [limit] would do away with [the unlimited, i.e., matter]; but in fact it does not do so, but on the contrary preserves it in being" (II.4.16.11–13). For privation presupposes and depends on the presence of some positive reality, some form, like a hole which is nothing in itself but exists only in virtue of the surrounding solid in which there is a hole. Likewise, Aristotle had remarked that matter, unlike privation, "desires form as the female desires the male" (*Phys*. A.9, 192a2). But as Plotinus points out, the unlimited is preserved by limit, or matter by form, "as … when the female [is sown] by the male and the female is not destroyed, but is made more female [μᾶλλον θηλύνεται], that is, becomes more what it is" (II.4.16.14–16). The female does not cease to be female in receiving the male, but rather is fulfilled as female. So

too, matter, just as privation, is enabled to be only by the presence of form. Plotinus also observes that the analogy of matter to the female depends on the theory, which he himself rejects, that in procreation the female is purely receptive and contributes nothing to the offspring (III.6.19.19–26), thus once again assimilating matter to pure neediness or receptivity rather than to any positive component of sensible things.

Universally speaking, therefore, matter, both that of sensibles and that of intelligibles, is a necessary 'by-product' of the One as the productive power of all things. For production implies a product, which is receptive and potential in relation to its being-produced. The matter of intelligibles represents their receptivity and potentiality relative to the One, and therefore is not a deficiency of being but rather an aspect of their very status as beings. The matter of sensibles, in turn, represents their receptivity and potentiality relative to pure forms, and hence pertains to their status as less than beings in the full and proper sense. It thus expresses the imperfection, the partial deficiency, of their intelligibility and hence their being. Thus Plotinus concludes his fullest treatment of matter, "The matter there [i.e., in the intelligible] is being; for that which is prior to it is beyond being. But here [i.e., in the case of the matter of sensibles], that which is prior to it is being. Therefore it is not being, but is different, beside the beauty of being" (II.4.16.25–28).

From top to bottom, then, from the One to the matter of sensible things, Plotinus' metaphysics unfolds from the togetherness of thought and being, from the Parmenidean dictum "The same is for thinking and for being" (B 3) and the resultant Platonic and Aristotelian identification of being as form, as 'look,' as that which is given to awareness. Thus matter, as the imperfection of this givenness at the level of sense, is a deficiency of being in sensible things. Sensible things, insofar as they are given, there to be be seen at all, however 'dimly' or inadequately, are forms. Sense-perception is dim intellection and intellection is clear sense-perception, lower and higher modes of the apprehension of being. At the highest level of thought and reality, being as pure form coincides fully with intellect as perfect apprehension: "As contemplation ascends from nature to soul and from that to intellect, and the contemplations become ever more appropriated and united to those who contemplate, and in the soul of the good man the things known, which are pressing on toward intellect, go toward being the same with the underlying [i.e., the contemplating], it is clear that in this [i.e., in intellect] both are already one, not by appropriation, as in the best soul, but by reality, and in that the same is for being and for thinking [ταὐτὸν τὸ

εἶναι καὶ τὸ νοεῖν εἶναι]" (III.8.8.1–9).[21] As that which is given to apprehension, being is satisfying or pleasing to the soul and thus is beauty. And the One is the 'cause' both of being and of thought just as the enabling condition of their togetherness, and just as this condition is beyond both thought and being.

[21] Here Plotinus is paraphrasing rather than precisely quoting Parmenides B 3.

CHAPTER FIVE

# THOMAS AQUINAS

## 1. *Aquinas and the Philosophical Tradition*

In passing from Plotinus to Thomas Aquinas, we come to a break in the historical continuity of the philosophical tradition: not only is Aquinas a Christian, and writing in Latin, but also, whereas Plato was familiar with Parmenides, Aristotle with Plato and Parmenides, and Plotinus with all three, Aquinas has virtually no direct access to the work of Parmenides, Plato, and Plotinus. His chief philosophical sources, apart from Aristotle, are Augustine, Boethius, Pseudo-Dionysius, the *Liber de Causis*, Avicenna, and Averroes, and his familiarity with the Platonic tradition is mediated by these and other texts and figures. A history of philosophy would have to discuss all of these sources before coming to Aquinas. Our concern, however, is not primarily textual or historical in nature, e.g., to discuss the influence of the Dionysian corpus and the *Liber de Causis* on Aquinas' philosophy, or to trace his doctrine of God as *esse*, via Boethius and Avicenna, to the Anonymous Commentary on the *Parmenides*.[1] It is, rather, to articulate the strictly philosophical continuity and community between Aquinas' metaphysics and that of Plotinus. For this reason, we may pass immediately from Plotinus to Aquinas and institute a direct comparison between them.

Such a comparison reveals that not merely isolated or peripheral ideas, but the fundamental features of Aquinas' understanding of being in relation to God as its transcendent principle and source, although often expressed in very different ways, are continuous with the classical tradition as we have seen it developed through Plotinus.[2] Consequently, our discussion of

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[1] On the latter point see Wayne J. Hankey, *God in Himself: Aquinas' Doctrine of God as Expounded in the* Summa Theologiae (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 5–6.

[2] For readings of Aquinas that emphasize the Neoplatonic dimensions of his metaphysics see, *inter alia*, Hankey, *God in Himself*; Jean-Luc Marion, "Saint Thomas d'Aquin et l'onto-théo-logie," *Revue thomiste* 95 (1995), 31–66; Philipp W. Rosemann, *Omne ens est aliquid: Introduction à la lecture du 'système' philosophique de saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Louvain-Paris: Peeters, 1996). Even an anti-Platonic Thomist like Stephen L. Brock, "On Whether Aquinas's *Ipsum Esse* is 'Platonism,'" *The Review of Metaphysics* 60 (2006), 269–270, referring to the

Aquinas is organized in terms of well-recognized central themes in his metaphysics: the essence-existence distinction; God as *ipsum esse*; created beings as similitudes of God; analogy of being; the transcendentals. The aim is to show how, precisely with regard to these most characteristically 'Thomist' aspects of his thought, Aquinas' metaphysics reflects a Neoplatonic vision of reality, which itself unfolded, primarily through Plato and Aristotle, from the Parmenidean principle of the togetherness of thought and being. Such a vision thus constitutes the mainstream of the western philosophical tradition, not only in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, but through the high medieval period in which Aquinas is the principal figure.

## 2. *Essence and Existence*

The distinction and composition, within beings, between essence and existence, and the absence of any such distinction or composition in God, is widely recognized as one of the fundamental themes of Aquinas' metaphysics. Both of these terms, 'essence' and 'existence,' call for explanation. Aquinas' use of the term 'essence' (*essentia*) differs slightly from the use of this term as a translation of Aristotle's phrase τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι. In Aristotle, as we saw, this phrase signifies in effect 'whatness' and thus refers to the form of a thing considered without its matter.[3] In Aquinas' usage, the essence of a thing is the answer to the question 'What is it?' and therefore includes the matter as well as the form. A sensible thing is neither form alone nor matter alone, but both together, and therefore its essence, or what it is, includes both. "In composite substances[4] form and matter is known … But it cannot be said that either of these alone is said to be the essence … For essence is that which is signified by the definition of a thing. But the definition of natural substances contains not only the form but also the matter … It is clear, therefore, that essence includes matter and form" (*De ente* 1). Matter, consid-

charge of "an infection of 'platonism'" in Aquinas, remarks, "The complaint, of course, is not simply that (neo)platonic thought is an important source of Thomas's doctrine of being. For some time now, followers of Thomas have been stressing this very fact. They often use it to help explain why Thomas was able, as they say, to 'go beyond' the ontology of Aristotle." But despite the increasing prevalence of this view in recent decades, Aquinas' metaphysics is rarely presented as *fundamentally* Neoplatonic in its most important features.

[3] See above, 87.

[4] The term 'substance' here, translating Latin *substantia*, is used to refer to a being that 'subsists,' that is, exists as a complete being rather than merely as inhering in or as part of some substantial being.

ered in itself, is purely potential and is nothing in actuality, whereas form is that in virtue of which a thing is what it is, or has some degree of intelligibility. "For by form, which is the act of matter, matter is made a being in act and some this" (*De ente* 1). In this sense, as Aquinas says, "form gives existence to matter [*forma dat esse materiae*]" (*De ente* 3). For this reason, Aquinas, unlike some of his fellow scholastics, will not indulge in absurd suggestions that matter could exist without form or that God could create formless matter. Such speculations merely reflect a failure to understand what was meant by 'matter' and 'form' in the first place. But this does not mean that sensible things are pure forms, or do not include matter as part of their essence, of what they are. When Aquinas refers to the essence of a thing as its form, therefore, this means not its 'substantial form,' i.e., its 'whatness,' which is distinct from and does not include matter, but rather what Aquinas calls the 'form of the whole,' which is simply equivalent to essence or quiddity.[5] Thus, in the case of a 'separate' or immaterial being, which as a pure form with no matter is a pure intelligence,[6] comparable in this respect to an Aristotelian 'separate reality' or unmoved mover, its essence, or what it is, is nothing but form; but in the case of a material thing, its essence, or what it is, is form and matter together.

'Existence' is the word chosen here to translate *esse*. This term, as the infinitive of the verb 'to be,' is often translated as 'being.' But this is endlessly confusing, because the word 'being' also serves, inevitably, to translate *ens*. Throughout this study, 'being' has been employed as the equivalent of Greek ὄν and Latin *ens*, the present participle of the verb 'to be,' used as a substantive to mean either, according to context, 'a being, a thing that is,' or 'that which is' taken as a whole. *Esse*, however, means not 'a thing that is' or 'that which is,' but rather the act in virtue of which a thing is a being (*ens*). Thus Aquinas, distinguishing between the existential and the copulative usages of the term *esse*, says that in its existential usage this word "signifies the act of existing [*actus essendi*]" (*ST* I, 3, 4, ad 2). He painstakingly lays out the terminological distinction between *ens* and *esse* in his commentary on Boethius:

> First, he [i.e., Boethius] posits the difference of that which is *esse* from that which is [*id quod est*] … Therefore he says first, that *esse* is diverse from that which is [*id quod est*]. This diversity is not here to be referred to the things, about which he is not here speaking, but to their concepts or meanings. But

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[5] See Lawrence Dewan, *Form and Being: Studies in Thomistic Metaphysics* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 154–159.

[6] Drawing primarily on Dionysius and the *Liber de causis*, Aquinas interprets the angels of Christian tradition as beings of this kind.

> we mean one thing by saying *esse*, and another by saying 'that which is,' as also we mean one thing when we say 'to run' [*currere*] and another by saying 'a runner' [*currens*]. For 'to run' and *esse* signify in the abstract, like 'whiteness;' but 'something which is,' that is 'a being' and 'a runner' [*ens et currens*], signify in the concrete, like 'a white thing' … *Esse* itself does not signify the subject of existing [*essendi*], just as 'to run' does not signify the subject of running [*currendi*]. Next, just as we cannot say that to run itself [*ipsum currere*] runs, so we cannot say that *esse* itself is [*ipsum esse sit*]; but as 'that which is' signifies the subject of existing, so 'that which runs' signifies the subject of running; and thus just as we can say of that which runs, or of a runner, that it runs, insofar as it is subjected to running [*cursui*] and participates in it, so we can say that a being [*ens*], or that which is, is, insofar as it participates in the act of existing [*actum essendi*]. (*In de ebd.*, lect. 2)

This meaning of *esse* can best be conveyed in English by the word 'existence:' a thing that exists, that is, a being, is something which is the subject of, has, or participates in existence This translation is imperfect, in that 'being' and 'existence' are not two forms of the same word, as are *ens* and *esse*, and in that 'existence' does not carry the note of activity as clearly as does the verbal infinitive *esse*. In using the term 'existence,' therefore, we must bear in mind that it represents the infinitive 'to be' and that it therefore signifies activity. Despite these drawbacks, this is less misleading than using the same word, 'being,' to translate both *ens* and *esse*.

To say that the essence of a thing is distinct from its existence, then, is to say that what the thing is (matter and form together, or, in the case of intelligences, form alone) is distinct from its act of existing. *What* a thing is does not include or explain *that* it is. Such an account of the essence-existence distinction is sometimes reproached for confusing the act-of-existing, which for Aquinas is the supreme actuality of all that is, with the 'mere fact' that a thing exists.[7] But that very fact is precisely what is left unexplained even by a full account of what the thing is, that is, its essence. This does not mean that a thing's existence is merely another feature of a thing, additional to its essence, in the manner of an accident, that is, a feature or characteristic of a thing additional to the substantial form whereby it is the kind of

[7] E.g., John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 141, and 407: "In what sense is Thomas using the term *esse* in this argumentation [in *On Being and Essence* 3]? Does it simply signify a thing's facticity, the mere fact that it exists? Or does it signify the thing's intrinsic act of being (*actus essendi*)?" Wippel later (588) remarks that Aquinas' argument here "moves too quickly from understanding *esse* as the fact that things exist … to taking it as signifying the act of being." If Aquinas seems to move "too quickly" here, it is because he does not in fact recognize such a distinction.

thing it is. "No form is, except by existence. And thus I say that the substantial existence of a thing is not an accident, but the actuality of any existent form whatsoever … And thus properly speaking, it [i.e., existence] is not an accident." Aquinas then explains the more general, improper sense in which existence has sometimes been called an accident: "And I say that anything which is not part of the essence is broadly called an accident, and such is existence in created things" (*Quodlibet* 12, 5, 1). A thing's existence is not properly an accident because existence is always already presupposed in any essence or accident, in there being anything there at all, and is for that very reason easily neglected in giving an account of a thing. That a thing is, is the (often unstated) precondition for saying anything at all about it. Existence is thus not merely an additional actuality, alongside of or superadded to the forms (substantial and accidental) of the thing, for the entire thing, including whatever actualities it has, would not be without or apart from existence. Consequently, existence itself is, as Aquinas says, "the actuality of all things, and even of forms themselves" (*ST* I, 4, 1, ad 3), "the actuality of all acts [*actualitas omnium actuum*]" (*De pot*. 7, 2, ad 9). Existence, just as the very fact *that beings are*—let us remember that the word 'fact' means, etymologically, deed—is what is most fundamental about all things, more fundamental than *what* they are, because without existence there is no whatness, no actuality, no being at all. To recognize the fact that something exists just is to recognize that thing, including all its content, all that may be predicated of it, every feature, character, or attribute whatsoever, as exercising the act of existing.

Aquinas articulates the distinction within a thing between essence and existence in a variety of ways. In *De ente et essentia*, he explains that understanding what a thing is, is distinct from understanding that it is: "Every essence or quiddity can be understood without anything being understood about its existence. For I can understand what a man or a phoenix is, and nonetheless not know whether it has existence in the nature of things. Therefore it is clear that existence is other than essence or quiddity …" (*De ente* 3). The phoenix example may be misleading, because the argument does not in fact turn on the non-existence of the phoenix. If it did, Aquinas would be arguing that since there can be an essence that does not exist, therefore essence is distinct from existence. But this is manifest nonsense: without existence, there is no essence.[8] The argument proceeds equally well

[8] Cf. Brian Davies, "Kenny on Aquinas on Being," *The Modern Schoolman* 82 (2005), 118: "Kenny's reading of Aquinas at this point requires that Aquinas could make sense of

from the example of 'man,' and in any case there is no reason to believe that Aquinas knew the phoenix to be mythical.[9] His point is not the absurdity that some essences have existence and others do not, that there *are* essences which *are not*. It is rather that understanding what something is and understanding that it is are two different acts of understanding, and as such have two distinct objects, the thing's essence and its existence. Elsewhere, and without any reference either to how we know things or to things that may not exist, he explains that a being is something that "has" or "participates in" existence and therefore is not existence itself, just as, to use one of Aquinas' favorite parallels, a white thing (*album*) is something that has whiteness (*albedo*), but is not just whiteness itself (e.g., *ST* I, 44, 1, resp.). Thus within any thing there is a distinction between the thing, as that which has existence, and the existence that it has.[10] Or again, as we have seen, he explains that there is a distinction between a being and the act-of-being that it exercises, just as there is a distinction between a runner and the act-of-running that he exercises, and in virtue of which he is a runner. This leads to perhaps the best formulation of all: the essence of a thing is *what is* (*quod est*), while its existence is *that by which it is* (*quo est*) (e.g., *De ente* 3; *ST* I, 50, 2, ad 3).

This last formulation at once reminds us of Plotinus. Just as, for Plotinus, "all beings are beings by the one" (VI.9.1.1), in that unity is the condition *sine qua non*, without which they would not be at all, so, for Aquinas, all beings are beings by existence. If we consider beings simply with regard to *what* they are, that is, as determinate intelligible contents, intelligible in virtue of their forms, then essence constitutes a full and sufficient account of them. But if we consider them *as beings*, with regard not merely to what they are but to the fact *that* they are, then essence alone is insufficient. *What* beings are does not explain *that* they are. In articulating the distinction between essence and existence, therefore, Aquinas, like Plotinus, is pointing

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the notion of unreal essences, which he cannot. For Aquinas, essences are not fictional or mythological things. They are what actually existing things (or things existing at various times) have (or are)."

[9] See Davies, "Kenny on Aquinas," 118.

[10] The inescapable oddity of saying that the essence-existence distinction is a distinction *within* the thing *between the thing itself* and its existence, rather than, like other distinctions, between two 'parts' of the thing (e.g., between form and matter, or between substantial form and accidental forms), or that, in Aquinas' own words, a thing "is composed of itself and something else" (*Quodlibet* 2, 2, 1, ad 1) shows clearly that existence for Aquinas is not a predicate, one predicate among others, but rather, so to speak, 'saturates' any and every being as a whole, since the entire being, including each and every one of its predicates, is something which is.

beyond Aristotle's question, "What is being?" (*Met*. Z.1, 1028b3–4), to which essence, intelligible in virtue of form or whatness, provides a sufficient answer, to the further question, 'Why are there beings, rather than nothing?' To observe that in any being there is a composition of essence, or what it is, and existence, by which it is, is to direct our attention to the primary and fundamental fact there are any essences, any 'whats,' anything to see, grasp, know at all.

Like Plotinus, therefore, Aquinas argues that all beings, in that they are not and do not account for their own existence, are in that sense caused to be. Plotinus argues from the recognition that any being is a being in virtue of its unifying integration, and so is not just integration itself, to integration itself, or the One, which is not the distinct integration of any being, as the universal principle of all beings as such. Similarly, Aquinas argues directly from the recognition that any being is a being in virtue of its existence, and is not just existence itself, to existence itself, which is not the distinct existence of any being, as the first principle of all beings: "All that belongs to anything either is caused by the principles of its own nature, as 'risible' in man, or comes from some extrinsic principle, as light in air from the influence of the sun." It follows from what man is, a rational animal, that man is risible. But it does not follow from what air is, that air is illuminated. If, therefore, some air is illuminated, it must be caused to be so by something other than itself. In the parallel argument in *ST* I, 3, 4, Aquinas uses a different example: it does not follow from water's being water that it is hot. If some water is hot, therefore, it is caused to be hot by something else, viz. fire. He continues in the *De ente*: "But it cannot be that existence itself is caused by the very form or quiddity of a thing … because some thing would thus be its own cause and some thing would bring itself into existence, which is impossible. Hence it follows that every such thing, whose existence is other than its nature, has existence from another. And since all that is through another is reduced to that which is through itself as to the first cause, it follows that there is some thing which is cause of existing [*causa essendi*] to all things,[11] in that itself is just existence [*esse tantum*] … And this is the first cause, which is God" (*De ente* 3). As the universal cause of existing to all things, God is neither a thing that has existence, nor the existence of anything, but rather just existence

[11] Significantly, Aquinas here says that God is the cause of existing to *all things*, not merely to all *other* things. Hence God himself is not any thing, and the phrase *aliqua res*, "some thing," in the preceding clause must not be taken strictly as including the first cause or God in the class of things.

itself.[12] In *ST* I, 3, 4, Aquinas concludes similarly that since all things in which existence is distinct from essence are caused to exist, but God cannot be caused to exist, "it is impossible therefore that in God existence is one thing and his essence another." Like Plotinus' argument from beings to the One as their principle, this is an argument from beings *qua* beings, in that they are not their own existence but are dependent on existence in order to be, to existence itself as the condition or principle in virtue of which there are any beings at all.

### 3. *God as Existence Itself*

Like Plotinus, Aquinas sees that the question 'Why are there beings at all?' cannot be answered by reference to another being (*ens*), another member of the totality of things that are, for this question is wondering that there is such a totality at all.[13] Precisely because existence (*esse*) is presupposed by, runs through, and undergirds all beings (*entia*) whatsoever, existence itself cannot be one of them. To be sure, Aquinas rarely adopts Neoplatonic formulations such as 'God is beyond being,' 'God is not a being,' 'God is not,' 'God is nothing,' which as we saw mean that the One or God, as the condition for all beings, is not any being, not included within the whole of reality as any member of it. Occasionally, however, Aquinas expresses himself to this effect. Thus we have seen him explaining that just as 'to run' (*currere*) is not a runner, a thing that runs (*currens*), so 'to be' (*esse*, that is,

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[12] Brock, "Aquinas's *Ipsum Esse*," 292, suggests that in view of the absence of articles in Latin, such expressions should be taken to mean that God is 'an existence' rather than simply 'existence.' But in order for such a distinction to be meaningful, the existence which is God would have to be determined as '*this* existence' by an essence distinct from itself, which is exactly what Aquinas is ruling out. Precisely as existence undetermined by any limiting essence, God is not merely 'an existence,' but rather just existence itself. Similarly Brock remarks that "[t]he *esse* of God is 'qualified' in some way, a way unknown to us" (292). But this is impossible, for any qualification would be a limiting determination and hence would mean that God is not *esse tantum*. What takes the place of qualification in the divine existence is precisely that, unlike the existence of any and every being, it is *not* in any way qualified. See below, 227.

[13] Cf. Davies, "Kenny on Aquinas," 113: "For [Aquinas], God the Creator accounts for the fact that there is any world or universe at all. He makes the difference between there being something rather than nothing … [I]n a serious sense, [Aquinas] does not believe that God is 'something.' … [O]ne of the things that strikes Aquinas is that [the universe's] mere existence can be thought of as an effect—but not the effect of anything within it, and, in this sense, not the effect of 'something.'"

existence) is not a being, a thing that is (*ens*).[14] Elsewhere he remarks that the divine will (which is not really distinct from God himself), as the source of beings, "must be understood as standing[15] outside the order of beings, as a certain cause pouring forth all that is and all its differences [*extra ordinem entium existens, velut causa quaedam profundens totum ens et omnes eius differentias*]" (*In de int.*, 1, 14, 22). Again, in his commentary on the *Liber de causis*, he explains that "the first cause is above being [*supra ens*], insofar as it is infinite existence itself" (*In de caus.* 6). As a rule, however, Aquinas prefers to say that God is (*est*), or is a being (*ens*) and then to explain how this should, and should not, be understood.[16] But his explanations make it clear that for Aquinas God is not a being in that sense that there is an all-embracing totality, 'beings' (*entia*), of which God is one member, the first or chief, and creatures are other members.[17] Rather, God, as 'just existence' (*esse tantum*) or 'existence itself,' (*ipsum esse*) is the principle by which there is such a totality, by which there are any beings at all, and as such is not any member of the totality of beings. As Aquinas says in *De ente* 3, God as just existence is the cause of existing to *all things*.

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[14] The affinity between Aquinas and Plotinus here is often obscured by the translation of *esse* as 'being,' leading to the claim that whereas as the One of Plotinus is *not* being but *beyond* being, the God of Aquinas *is* being (e.g., most famously, Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, tr. L.K. Shook [New York: Random House, 1956], 136–141). But this is merely a terminological confusion. As we have seen, Plotinus explains that 'beyond being' means that the One, as the source of all being, all that is, is not itself *a being* (ὄν, Latin *ens*), not one of the beings (ὄντα, *entia*), not included within the whole of that-which-is as any member of it. Aquinas' God is not (an) *ens* but rather *esse* (see, e.g., Armand Maurer, in Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, tr. Armand Maurer, 2nd rev. ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1968), 57 n. 17); and *esse* does not mean 'a being' or 'that-which-is.'

[15] 'Standing' here translates *existens* according to its etymological meaning of 'standing out.' Since we have appropriated the term 'existence' to translate *esse*, it would be highly misleading to translate *existens* as 'existing.' It may be worth noting that Aquinas here avoids using a word from the 'being' family (e.g., *est* or *ens*) with regard to God, no doubt in order to avoid the obvious self-contradiction of saying that God *is* (*est*) outside the order of *beings* (*entia*).

[16] See the treatment of analogy below, 174–177.

[17] Kenney, *Aquinas on Being*, 105, remarks, "[W]hat can be meant by saying that the divine substance is pure *esse*? It cannot mean that it is pure existence …" Kenney's refusal to admit that Aquinas could possibly mean what he says stems from his persistent refusal to recognize that Aquinas' God is *not a being*, as is acknowledged even by an analytic Thomist like Davies (above, 158 n. 13) and a Gilsonian Thomist like Maurer (above, 159 n. 14). To be sure, no being can be pure existence and pure existence cannot be any being, since a being (*ens*), as Aquinas points out, is something that *has* existence (*esse*). And it is in precisely this sense that Aquinas' God is not a being.

Since Aquinas reaches this conclusion by observing that beings, as finite, intelligible 'whats,' do not account for their own existence, this conclusion is therefore, like Plotinus' doctrine of the One as cause of all things, an expression of the secondary or derivative status of beings as beings. We saw in Plotinus that to call the One the 'cause' of all things is not to predicate anything of the One but only to express the dependent, derivative nature of beings as such, so that the generation of all things by the One is in fact nothing but the dependence of all things.[18] Conversely, the One, as the principle of beings, had to be regarded not as a producer, a being-that-produces, but rather as the production of all things. Similarly, Aquinas argues that creation is nothing but the existential dependence of all things on God. In arguing that even prime matter is created by God, he expressly distinguishes between 'making' or 'becoming' in the Aristotelian sense, on the one hand, and creation on the other. Here the first objection runs, "Whatever is made is composed of a subject and of something else, as is said in *Physics* I. But prime matter has no subject. Therefore prime matter cannot be created by God" (*ST* I, 44, 2, obj. 1). Aquinas replies, "The Philosopher speaks of particular being made [*fieri*], which is from form to form, whether accidental or substantial, but now we are speaking of things according to their emanation from the universal principle of existing; from which emanation matter is not excluded, while from the former mode of making it is excluded" (*ST* I, 44, 2, ad 1). Creation, then, is not a case of change or 'becoming' in the Aristotelian sense, which always implies a pre-existent substratum which gains or loses some form. What matters is not that Aquinas here freely uses the term 'emanation' (*emanatio*), which itself is merely a metaphor, but that the meaning of this metaphor, in Aquinas as in Plotinus, is simply total existential dependence. Thus Aquinas explains that when change, motion, or becoming is removed from the idea of creation, activity (on the part of God) and passivity (on the part of the creature) "remain nothing but diverse conditions [*habitudines*] in that which creates and that which is created" (*ST* I, 45, 3, ad 2). Consequently, "Creation in the creature"—that is, its createdness, the attribute of being created—"is not anything except a certain relation to the creator as to the principle of its existence,"[19] and conversely, "creation signified actively"—i.e., creation attributed to God as an activity—"signifies the

[18] See above, 118, 123–124.

[19] When Aquinas adds that the word 'creation' expresses "the relation of creature to Creator with a certain newness or beginning" (*ST* I, 45, 3, ad 3), he is not making a metaphysical point but merely articulating the connotations of the word *creatio*. Cf. *ST* I, 46, 2, ad 2.

divine action, which is his essence, with a relation to the creature. But relation in God to the creature is not real, but only according to reason" (*ST* I, 45, 3, resp. and ad 1). The act-of-creating, then, is not distinct from God himself, but just is God, that is, existence itself, considered as the principle of beings. To say that God creates all things and that all things are created by God, therefore, means only that beings, in that they are beings by existence and are not existence itself, depend on existence itself in order to be.

Aquinas' doctrine of God as 'just existence' or 'existence itself,' *esse tantum* or *ipsum esse*, is thus apophatic in the same way as Plotinus' doctrine of the One as beyond being.[20] Since this doctrine is reached by observing that beings do not account for their own existence, it is therefore, like Plotinus' doctrine of the One as first principle, not a positive statement of what God is, but rather an expression of the secondary, derivative, non-self-explanatory, and in that sense dependent nature of beings as beings. As we saw, Plotinus explains that the phrase 'beyond being' signifies only that the One, as the principle of all that is, is not any being, not included within the whole of reality as any member of it, but rather the enabling condition by which there is such a totality, by which there are any beings. And this is exactly what Aquinas means when he argues that the cause of existing to all things is not anything that has existence, but is rather just existence or existence itself. On the basis of this argument, 'just existence' or 'existence itself' can mean only 'whatever it takes such that there are beings'[21]—except that this is already saying too much, since the word 'what' in 'whatever' implies a distinct, definite essence. Since the only meaning for these expressions that is justified by his argument is 'the principle or condition such that there are beings,' these expressions therefore coincide in meaning with Plotinus' name 'the One,' and do not say *what* this principle is any more than does the latter name. Indeed, Aquinas regularly insists that we cannot infer or know, from creatures, what God is. As he says, "Since we cannot know of God what he is, but what he is not, we cannot consider of God how he is, but rather how he is not" (*ST* I, 3, proem.), and again, "In consideration of the divine substance the way of remotion is especially to be used" (*ScG* I.14). "Remotion," meaning 'taking away,' corresponds to Plotinus' ἀφαίρεσις,

[20] Cf. Davies, "Kenney on Aquinas," 126–127.

[21] Cf. Marion, "Saint Thomas d'Aquin," 48: "The cause appears less as that which produces than as that which is found required by the thing in order to be … That which requires has therefore less the status of an effect than that of a *causatum*, of a caused keeping the entire mark of the *Causa* in itself, according to a relation less transitive than immanent."

the taking away of all things, all intelligible contents, in order to reach the One. Aquinas continues, "For the divine substance by its measurelessness [*immensitate*][22] exceeds every form which our intellect attains; and thus we cannot apprehend it by knowing what it is. Yet we have some knowledge of it by knowing what it is not. We approach knowledge of it insofar as we are able to remove more things from it by our intellect … And then there will be proper consideration of his substance when he is known as distinct from all things [*ut ab omnibus distinctus*]" (*ScG* I.14). We 'know God' only by knowing what he is not; but what he is not includes anything and everything whatsoever. As in Plotinian apophasis, therefore, "remotion" here means not merely negative predication, but rather the removal of all the intelligible contents found among beings. Since, as Aquinas here says, the more we remove the closer we approach to knowledge of God, and God is properly known only as distinct from *all things* (not merely all *other* things), God is most adequately known when *everything* is removed in thought. This knowledge by remotion would therefore be what the Neoplatonic tradition calls "knowledge by unknowing,"[23] meaning not mere conceptual negation, which always implies a corresponding affirmation, but rather the silence of the mind. It is thus closely comparable to Plotinus' injunction to "take away all things" (V.3.17.39) or to "unknow all things" (VI.9.7.19) in order to attain to the One.

Thus Aquinas departs from Aristotle and instead follows Plato and Plotinus in arguing that the first principle cannot, like Aristotle's unmoved mover, be pure form or idea, what both Plato and Aristotle call οὐσία, that is, being-as-intelligible-form, but must rather be higher than and prior to form. Throughout this tradition 'form' in the strict and proper sense indicates 'whatness.' If, therefore, like Aristotle, we confine ourselves to asking "What is being?" (*Met.* Z.1, 1028b3–4), we need look no further than form as the ultimate explanatory principle. But as soon as, like Plotinus and Aquinas, we ask not merely what beings are but why there are beings, we find ourselves compelled to look beyond form, to a principle not merely of whatness but of existence. Form, as intelligible whatness, gives existence to matter, and

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[22] Translating this word as 'immensity' obscures the fact that it is a negative term: *immensitas*, thus corresponding to Plotinus' "measure and not measured [οὐ μετρούμενον]" (V.5.4.14).

[23] See Pseudo-Dionysius, *On Divine Names*, in *Corpus dionysiacum I*, ed. Beate Regina Suchla (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990), VII.3, 872A; cf. Pseudo-Dionysius, *On Mystical Theology*, in *Corpus dionysiacum II*, ed. Günter Heil and Adolf Martin Ritter (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991), I.3, 1001A; II.1, 1025A.

in that sense form is the principle of a thing's existence (e.g., *De ente* 1). But forms themselves are included in being, in what is, and so do not account for their own existence. Hence we must look beyond form to address the fact that there are any forms, any intelligible whatnesses, and so any beings at all. Aquinas expresses this by explaining that although form is actuality in relation to matter, both matter and form are potential in relation to existence, as the "actuality of all acts" (*De pot*. 7, 2, ad 9). For Aristotle, since form is actuality in a matter-form composite, pure form is pure actuality and is therefore the first principle, the unmoved mover or God. Aquinas, on the other hand, agrees that within such a composite the form is actuality relative to the matter, but then argues that even pure form is not pure actuality but is potential in relation to its existence (e.g., *De ente* 3). Plotinus, we will recall, argues that even pure forms themselves, which are at once being and intellect, involve something which may be called 'matter' by analogy with the matter of sensible things, which as we saw is simply a way of expressing the secondariness, the dependence, receptivity, or potentiality of the forms in relation to the One, as the principle of their existence. Aquinas' position is expressed differently, since he denies that pure intelligences involve matter of any kind (e.g., *ST* I, 50, 2), but his position is parallel to that of Plotinus since he argues that even intelligences, although they are pure forms without matter, are not pure actuality but involve potentiality in relation to existence, which is received in them (e.g., *ST* I, 50, 2, ad 3).[24] Any essence, whether it be a form-matter composite or a pure, immaterial form, is potential in relation to the existence that renders it actual and which, as the actuality of that essence, is contracted to it. Consequently, even pure form, at once intelligible and intelligence, cannot be first. The first principle, therefore, precisely as "cause of existing to all things" (*De ente* 3) is beyond form.

Thus, when Aquinas says that "existence is the most formal of all things," (*ST* I, 7, 1, resp.), he means this in an analogous sense: existence is to everything, including both matter and form, as form is to matter, and is thus, so to speak, more 'formal' than form itself. "Existence itself is the most perfect of all things, for it is related to all things as act. For nothing has actuality except insofar as it is, wherefore existence is the actuality of all things, and even of forms themselves. Wherefore it is not related to other things as recipient to

[24] In *De spiritualibus creaturis*, 1, resp., Aquinas remarks that "if any two things which are related to each other as potency and act may be called 'matter' and 'form,' nothing prevents saying (so that there may not be a dispute about words) that in spiritual substances there is matter and form." This is precisely the sense in which Plotinus attributes 'matter' to the pure forms.

received, but rather as received to recipient. For when I say 'the existence of a man,' or 'of a horse,' or 'of anything else,' existence itself is considered as formal and received, not as that to which existence belongs" (*ST* I, 4, 1, ad 3).[25] To be sure, in arguing that in God there is no composition of matter and form, he concludes that God is "by his essence form" (*ST* I, 3, 2, resp.). But the context makes it clear that he is using the term 'form' loosely to signify actuality. The point of his argument here is that in God there is nothing receptive, as matter is receptive in relation to form or potentiality in relation to actuality, and nothing received, as form is received in matter or actuality in potentiality. The term 'form' is here used in an analogous, not merely univocal, way.[26] His references to God as form are to a large extent a case of adopting the language of Aristotelian and Augustinian thought, in which the first principle or God is pure form, into what is fundamentally a Plotinian, Procline, and Dionysian framework, in which the first principle is beyond form.[27] Thus shortly after arguing that in God there is no composition of matter and form and concluding that God is "by his essence form" (*ST* I, 3, 2, resp.), Aquinas explicitly clarifies his meaning: "Since God is form itself, *or rather* existence itself [*ipsa forma, vel potius ipsum esse*], he can be in no way composite" (*ST* I, 3, 7, resp.). As existence itself, God may be called 'form' in the sense of actuality, since existence is "the actuality of all things, and even of forms themselves" (*ST* I, 4, 1, ad 3), "the actuality of all acts" (*De pot*. 7, 2, ad 9). But this does not mean that the first principle is form in the proper and original sense of 'whatness, intelligible content,' the sense in which Aristotle's first principle is form or οὐσία.

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[25] We may note that even Proclus, who most clearly insists that the One is not form, allows this analogous use of the term ἰδέα: "[W]hen we postulate that those things which participate in unity are like the One, we will not declare in return that it is also like what participates in it, but if one may properly so say, it is like a paradigm to them … If certain authorities called the One an 'idea' on the head of this, they were not far wrong, only provided they spoke of it with caution and were not by means of the use of the terms 'idea' and 'paradigm' either to make it a multiplicity or to count it in with the forms, but call it an idea only by analogy, even as Socrates called the Good the idea of the Good, since it bore that relation to all beings which each of the intelligible forms bears to its own chain …" *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, tr. Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 1200 (emended translation).

[26] On the analogical use of the term 'form' in Aquinas, see Dewan, *Form and Being*, 183 n. 30. Although the work Dewan quotes for this point is of dubious authenticity, he rightly refers to "the prevalence, in St. Thomas's thinking, of a view … that 'form' and 'act' are among the things predicated analogically of diverse things."

[27] Citing such references, Brock, "Aquinas's *Ipsum Esse*," 292, remarks that "Thomas is very far from denying that God has—or rather is—a form" and that "God is a subsistent form." This fails to recognize the elasticity in Aquinas' use of the term *forma*.

Thus Aquinas, again like Plotinus and unlike Aristotle, argues that the first principle, or God, is infinite. This term is purely negative in meaning; it does not ascribe 'infinity' to God as a positive attribute, but signifies only that he is not in any way limited or defined: "A thing is called infinite because it is not finite." (*ST* I, 7, 1, resp.). The existence *of* anything, received in and belonging to that thing, is the principle within that thing in virtue of which it exists. Hence it is limited, or, as Aquinas sometimes says, 'contracted,' by that to which it belongs. Unlike God, it is not just existence itself, but rather that being's existence, existence as the actuality of, as exercised by, as found in, that thing, and as such is finite, limited to and by that thing. It is not just existence, but *this* existence, marked off as 'this' by the thing whose existence it is. This is precisely why God, as existence itself, cannot be identified with the 'formal existence' (*esse formale*) of all things or of each thing (*ScG* I.26): the latter is contracted or limited to each of the things to which it belongs, and so is not just subsistent existence itself. Nor is God what Aquinas calls *esse commune* or *universale*, which is simply the existence of things considered in abstraction from the things to which it belongs (e.g., *De ente* 4). God, as just existence, is not the existence *of* anything, just as, for Plotinus, the One is not the unity of anything, but rather "one without the 'something'" (V.3.12.52), just unity itself. This is indeed the very meaning of the term 'subsistent' in the phrase "existence itself subsistent by itself [*ipsum esse per se subsistens*]" (*ST* I, 4, 2, resp.): just as a form which cannot exist by itself but only in some matter, as the form *of* that matter, is not subsistent, whereas a form that can exist by itself without any matter, such as an angelic intelligence or a human soul *qua* intellectual, is a subsistent form (e.g., *ST* I, 75, 2), so an existence which is the existence or act-of-being *of* something, is not subsistent, whereas existence by itself, *qua* not the existence *of* anything, is subsistent. The term 'subsistent,' with reference to the divine existence, therefore, means only that God, as just existence, is not the existence *of* any existing thing, any being. As subsistent existence in this sense, God is not contracted to or limited by anything, and so is infinite: "Form is limited by matter, in that form considered in itself, is common to many things, but by this, that it is received in matter, becomes determinately the form of this thing … Form is not perfected by matter, but rather its amplitude is contracted by it … But that which is most formal of all things, is existence itself. Since therefore the divine existence is not existence received in anything, but he is his own subsistent existence … it is clear that God is infinite …" (*ST* I, 7, 1, resp.) The infinity of God, like that of the One in Plotinus, thus expresses once again his transcendence of beings as determinate, existing, intelligible contents.

## 4. *Creatures and God*

In Plotinus, we saw that since the One is the "power of all things," the enabling condition such that there are beings, it follows that all beings are differentiated presentations or manifestations of the One, and, conversely, that the One, just as this condition, is the undifferentiated containment of all things. Likewise, we saw that the One, as the condition for beings, is itself not any being and is present throughout all that is, and is thus at once and identically transcendent to and immanent in all things. Because Aquinas' doctrine of God as existence itself has much the same meaning as Plotinus' doctrine of the One, parallel consequences follow in Aquinas' thought, with far-reaching implications for his understanding of creatures in their relation to God.

First, Aquinas explains that to say that God is "just existence" means not that he lacks any or every other perfection, but, on the contrary, that he possesses all perfections without distinction. "Although God is just existence, it does not follow that the remaining perfections and excellences are lacking to him; rather, he has all perfections which are in all genera … but he has them in a more excellent way than all things, because in him they are one, but in others they have diversity" (*De ente* 4.). Since every feature, character, attribute of anything is a 'perfection' or 'completion' in that it contributes to the thing's being the one distinct thing that it is, this means that all the content of all things, and hence all that is, the whole of reality, is found without distinction in God. Aquinas argues, "Whatever perfection is in an effect must be found in the effective cause, either according to the same notion, if it is a univocal agent, as a man generates a man, or in a more eminent mode, if it is an equivocal agent … Since therefore God is the first effective cause of things, it follows that the perfections of all things pre-exist in God in a more eminent mode. Dionysius touches on this argument, saying of God, 'It is not that he is this and not that, but he is all things, as cause of all things'"[28] (*ST* I, 4, 2, resp.). We have already seen that the creation of all things by God is not a case of Aristotelian making or efficient causation in the ordinary sense, in which the cause gives to a pre-existing substratum some perfection which it did not previously have. It is rather a case of Platonic 'vertical' causation, in which, since the entire effect comes from the cause, all that is in the effect is 'pre-contained' in the cause. Thus Aquinas

[28] Pseudo-Dionysius, *On Divine Names* V.8, 824AB.

explains that as existence itself, that is, the absolute cause of everything whatsoever, God includes all perfections in himself.

> God is existence itself subsisting by itself, from which it follows that he contains in himself the whole perfection of existing [*essendi*] … Thus since God is subsistent existence itself, nothing of the perfection of existing can be absent from him. For the perfections of all things pertain to the perfection of existing, in that any things are perfect, in that they have existence in some way. Wherefore it follows that the perfection of no thing is absent from God. This argument too is touched on by Dionysius, saying that "God is not existent in a certain way, but simply and without circumscription uniformly contains all existence in himself."[29] (*ST* I, 4, 2, resp.)

As the quotation from Dionysius shows, the 'eminent way' in which all perfections are found in God corresponds to what Plotinus means by saying that the One is "all things trancendently" (V.2.1.2) and to what Proclus and Dionysius call 'according to cause' (κατ᾽ αἰτίαν), referring to the undifferentiated precontainment of effects, that is, a lower level of reality, in their cause, that is, a higher level: the cause is, without differentiation, the character that the effects, in differentiated, determinate ways, have.[30] To say that God 'has' all perfections 'in an eminent way' is just to say that since every perfection of every thing is not just existence, but is some determinate, limited mode of existence, some way of existing, it follows that existence itself, or God, just is all perfections of all things, that is, the whole content of reality, without distinction. Since this is Plotinus' doctrine of the first principle as the undifferentiated containment or enfolding of all things, it is no accident that in this article Aquinas cites Dionysius, the source of so much of his Neoplatonism, no less than five times.

The converse of this conclusion, as Aquinas argues in the next article, is that all perfections of all things, and hence the whole of reality, are likenesses of God. Since to be anything at all is to exist in some distinct way, it follows that any being is 'like' existence itself in the sense that it is not just existence but is a limited, differentiated presentation of existence.

> For since every agent enacts what is like itself insofar as it is an agent, and each thing acts according to its form, it is necessary that in the effect there be a likeness to the form of the agent … If … there is some agent which is not

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[29] Pseudo-Dionyius, *On Divine Names* V.4, 817D.

[30] See, e.g., Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, ed. and tr. E.R. Dodds, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), props. 65, 103, and 18: "Everything which by its existence provides to others itself primally is that which it imparts to the recipients" (emended translation); Pseudo-Dionysius, *On Divine Names* IV.7, 704A; VI.3, 857B; VII.2, 869B.

> contained in a genus, its effects will attain still more distantly to the likeness of the form of the agent, not, however, so that they participate in a likeness to the form of the agent according to some notion of species or genus, but according to some analogy, as existence itself is common to all things … And in this way those things that are from God are assimilated to him insofar as they are beings [*inquantum sunt entia*], as to the first and universal principle of all existence. (*ST* I, 4, 3, resp.)

The phrase "insofar as they are beings" is all-important here. Since it is just in that they are beings that all things are like God, and the creature as a whole and everything in it is some being, something that is, it follows that the whole of all things, through and through, is nothing but likeness of God. It is not the case that creatures are, so to speak, first themselves and then, also, like God in some way. In that case, they would not be like God just insofar as they are beings. Rather, Aquinas is here saying that to be, to be a being, just is to be a likeness of God. "Anything has so much of existence [*unumquodque habet de esse*] insofar as it approximates God" (*ST* I, 3, 5, ad 2), and again, "All things have existence in this, that they are assimilated to God, who is subsistent existence itself: since all things are only as participants in existence" (*ScG* 3.19). In that 'existence itself' just means the condition such that there are beings, it follows that all beings, the whole of reality, are nothing but many different likenesses, or finite presentations, of existence itself, or God. Wherever we turn our gaze, we are seeing God as it were in a mirror, for this is all there is to see, this is what all being is. As Aquinas emphasizes repeatedly, this does not mean that creatures and God resemble each other in the sense of having something in common, even existence. "The likeness of the creature to God is not said on account of sharing in form according to the same notion of genus and species, but only according to analogy …" (*ST* I, 4, 3, ad 3), and "while it may be admitted in some way that the creature is like God, it is nonetheless in no way to be admitted that God is like the creature, as Dionysius says … For we say that an image is like a man, but not conversely …" (*ST* I, 4, 3, ad 4). As the reference to Dionysius suggests, the likeness in question is the Platonic likeness of many images or presentations, e.g., reflections, to their common original, not the mutual likeness of things that have something in common.[31] Thus Aquinas' thought here coincides with Plotinus' understanding of reality as consisting of many different finite presentations, or 'reflections,' of the first principle, the One or God.

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[31] Cf. the passage from Proclus cited above, 164 n. 25.

Thus, on the one hand, no being is God and God is not any being, and, on the other hand, since all beings are differentiated presentations of God, God is all things without distinction. Taken together, these two articles, on God as possessing all perfections and on all beings as likenesses of God, express the Neoplatonic understanding of the relation of being in its totality to the first principle as *complicatio-explicatio*, not a relation between two things determined over against one another but rather enfolding and unfolding, the principle as the undifferentiated containment of all things and all things as the differentiated manifestions of the principle.

Hence, as Aquinas takes care to explain, "the aforesaid likeness [of all beings to God] does not do away with the infinite distance of the creature to God" (*De ver*. 2, 11, ad 4). Every being, precisely in that it is *a being*, that is, a finite, differentiated presentation or "likeness" of existence, therefore absolutely is not just existence itself, just as any reflection of a thing, in that it is a reflection, that is, an appearance or presentation, is not the thing itself. And for exactly the same reason, i.e., that existence is the principle of all beings and that every being is not just existence, God, as existence itself, is present to and throughout all things. In this sense, "nothing is distant from him, as if it did not have God in itself" (*ST* I, 8, 1, ad 3). Aquinas argues, "God is in all things, not indeed as a part of their essence, nor as an accident, but as an agent is present to that on which it acts … Since God is existence itself by his essence, it follows that created existence is his proper effect, as to ignite is the proper effect of fire. But God causes this effect in things … as long as they are preserved in being, as light is caused in the air by the sun as long as the air remains illuminated. Therefore, as long as a thing has existence, so long must God be present to it … But existence is that which is innermost to anything and what is most deeply in all things … Wherefore it follows that God is in all things, and innermostly [*intime*]" (*ST* I, 8, 1, resp.). Wherever there is any being whatosever—form or matter, substance or accident, subsistent or inhering—there is God, as the universal condition of existence for all things. This is an infinitely more 'intimate' presence than if God were merely a 'part' or metaphysical component of things. In that case, he would not be the principle of existence to the entire being and all that it includes. Indeed, it follows from this argument that all being, all that is, just is nothing but the presence of God, or existence itself. Otherwise, we would have to think of God as present to something else which existed apart from him. Since existence is the total cause, not of this or that feature of a thing, but of the whole thing including all its features, the whole being is nothing but a finite presentation of existence. Wherever we turn our gaze, there is existence itself, or God, as the enabling condition of beings; and

wherever we turn our gaze, none of the things seen, none of the beings, ever is just existence itself, or God.

Consequently, as in Plotinus, to say that "God is in all things, and innermostly" (*ST* I, 8, 1, resp.), or even that all beings are nothing but the presence of God, does not deny, but on the contrary reaffirms, God's absolute transcendence, "the infinite distance of the creature to God" (*De ver*. 2, 11, ad 4). Every being, just in that it is a being, that is, a determinate presentation of existence, *is not* existence itself. Hence Aquinas replies to the objection that since God is "above all things" he cannot be "in all things" (*ST* I, 8, 1, obj. 1) thus: "God is above all things by the excellence of his nature, and nonetheless is in all things, as causing their existence" (*ST* I, 8, 1, ad 1). To say that God is "above all things by the excellence of his nature" is just to say that, precisely as existence itself, the principle in virtue of which all things exist, and hence present throughout all things, God is not any of those things and each of those things is not God. Aquinas' God, like the One of Plotinus, is 'otherwise other,' 'other' than all things just in that he is *not* 'marked off' as another being, not distinguished from them, as they are from one another, by mutually differentiating determinations, and as such present throughout all things.[32] Thus, as Aquinas explains in commenting on the *Liber de causis*, "the very infinity of the divine existence, insofar, that is, as it is not limited by any recipient, takes in the first cause the place that *yliatim* [i.e., individual distinction] has in other things … Thus the divine goodness and existence is individuated by its very purity, by this, that is, that it is not received in anything; and from this, that it is thus individuated by its purity, it has that it can 'infuse [*influere*] goodnesses upon intelligence and other things'" (*In de caus*. 9; cf. the references to the same passage from the *De causis* in *De ente* 4 and *ScG* 1.26). As in Plotinus, transcendence and immanence coincide: "Whatever is not somewhere has nowhere where it is not" (V.5.9.19), which, translated from spatial into ontological terms, becomes "Whatever is not something has nothing which it is not."[33] Just as the principle of all beings, and so neither any being nor the existence of any being, i.e., transcendent, God, or existence itself, contains all things without differentiation and is present throughout all things, or immanent; and just as containing and present throughout all things as the principle of their existence, i.e., immanent, God, or existence itself, is neither any being nor the existence of any being, that is, transcendent.

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[32] Cf. Rosemann, *Omne ens*, 90–91, 105.

[33] Above, 130.

These conclusions—that God contains all perfections without distinction, that all things are likenesses of God, and that God is infinitely transcendent and infinitely present to all things—are all inferred from the understanding of the first principle, or God, as existence itself, which in turn is inferred from the existential dependence of beings, or indeed simply from the primary and fundamental fact that beings are. Hence these are not really additional truths, but are rather various restatements of this fact. Since every perfection is some mode of existence, it follows *analytically* that God, as existence itself, is all perfections without differentiation; and since existence means nothing but the principle in virtue of which there are beings, it follows *analytically* that all beings are likenesses and presentations of God, as existence itself. Since 'existence itself' just means the condition such that there are beings, it is immediately obvious that it is everywhere and nowhere, that all things are presences of it and that no thing is it. If we wish to express this in spatial metaphors, we may say with Aquinas that God is infinitely 'distant,' which is to say that he disappears, as it were, altogether: he is not any being, not any one of the things that are, never found anywhere as anything at all; and that God is infinitely 'intimate,' found or seen everywhere as all things in all things.[34] To say that such conclusions follow analytically from the meaning of 'existence' is not to say that they are trivial or insignificant: they are diverse articulations of the wonder of wonders, that there are beings. Thus Aquinas explains that it is only when we consider beings, not merely with regard to what they are, but *as beings*, as existing, that they point beyond themselves to God. "The earliest philosophers," he observes, considered and assigned causes to beings insofar as they are "such," by accidental forms, or "these," by substantial forms. But then "others raised themselves to considering being insofar as it is being [*ens inquantum est ens*] and considered the cause of things, not only according as they are these or such, but in that they are beings. This, therefore, which is the cause of things insofar as they are beings, must be the cause of things … according to all that pertains to their existence in any mode," and is therefore "the universal cause of beings" (*ST* I, 44, 2, resp.). Aquinas' consistent point throughout all his discussions of essence and existence, of God as just existence and of creatures in their relation to God, is that it is only when

[34] The phrase "all things in all things" is taken from Dionysius (*On Divine* Names VII.3, 872B), but serves well to express Aquinas' account of beings as nothing but likenesses, that is, finite presentations, of existence, or God. As we have seen, Aquinas (*ST* I, 4, 2, resp.) quotes with full approval Dionysius' statement that God "is all things, as cause of all things" (*On Divine Names* V.8, 824B).

we consider beings not merely with regard to *what* they are, as essences, but rather simply *as beings*, as existing, that we realize that we are as it were looking in a mirror, always seeing reflections and never seeing what they are reflections of. To recognize all things as beings, as existing, however differently, is to recognize them as all the same in this respect, since "existence itself is common to all things" (*ST* I, 4, 3, resp.), and thus to see them as presences or manifestations; but not presences or manifestations of another being. This observation thus points back not only to Plotinus and Plato but even to Parmenides, who first recognized all things as the same just in that they are. To say that the first principle is 'existence itself' and to call this 'God' is not to say what the 'universal cause' or God is, or to posit God as another being, but rather to express the wonder or mystery that beings are at all.

This conclusion may seem like an excessively 'minimalist' reading of Aquinas' doctrine of God as *ipsum esse*, and indeed of the entire Neoplatonic doctrine of the One beyond being, reducing God or the One to nothing but that fact that beings exist.[35] But where else, indeed, should we fall prostrate in silenced adoration,[36] if not at this very fact, which at once demands recognition and defies explanation? The question 'Why are there beings, rather than nothing?' cannot be answered, but must be understood as a way of expressing the necessarily unquenchable wonder that there are beings; and this is all that can properly be meant by positing the One or God as the first principle of beings as beings. As Wittgenstein famously remarked, "Not *how* the world is, is the mystical, but *that* it is."[37] A divinity that does not at once disappear into infinite distance and fill all things with itself, that is not no thing and all things but merely something, is no divinity worthy of the name. The passage from creatures to God, therefore, like the ascent of the soul in Plato or the ascent from sense to intellect to the One in Plotinus, is

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[35] Cf. the putative objection raised by Reiner Schürmann, "L'hénologie comme dépassement de la métaphysique," *Les études philosophiques* 3 (1982), 349, to his own account of Plotinus: "But is it not to give a minimalist reading of the *Enneads* to interpret the One as simply event of unification? Is it not functionalism to de-substantialize the One so radically that it is better designated by a verb than by a noun? Do not the the best known and perhaps the most disconcerting texts bear witness to a very personal, datable, experience of the One?" Aquinas, of course, expressly designates God by a verb (*esse*) rather than a noun, and Schürmann's reply could perhaps be applied to Aquinas as well: "The deconstruction that I have outlined does not in any way allow us to conclude to functionalism. Plotinus speaks here of those rare moments when it has been given him to 'let be' all things in the manner in which the One itself lets them be."

[36] Cf. Plotinus, V.5.3.14, cited above, 115.

[37] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Kegan Paul, 1922), 6.44.

not a mere passage from one set of objects to another object, but is rather a transformation of the self. It is a turning of our attention, in the thinking of beings, from the beings themselves to the condition such that they are beings. To turn from beings to God is to see things differently, not to see a different thing.

What then are we to make of Aquinas' insistence that we can positively and truly say that God is, that he is good, living, wise, and so on? We might reply that such a question belongs, strictly speaking, to 'philosophy of God' or 'natural theology' rather than to metaphysics proper, which treats God only as the principle of beings;[38] and that the conclusions we have reached regarding 'existence itself' are all that can be justified by the metaphysical argument to God from the existence of beings. But further, as we shall see in discussing Aquinas' account of analogical predication, all positive attributions of perfections to God reduce to restatements that all beings are likenesses of existence itself and that existence itself contains all perfections without differentiation. Thus, for example, 'God is good' means that all the perfections of beings, which are their ways at once of being and of being good, are contained in God. "Anything desires its own perfection. But the perfection and form of an effect is a certain likeness of the agent, since every agent enacts what is like itself … Since therefore God is the effective first cause of all things, it is clear that the meaning of 'good' and 'desirable' belongs to him. Wherefore Dionysius … attributes good to God as to the first efficient cause, saying that God is called 'good,' as by which all things subsist … All things, in desiring their proper perfections, desire God himself, in that the perfections of all things are certain likenesses of the divine existence" (*ST* I, 6, 1, resp. and ad 2). Thus, when we recognize beings, *qua* beings, as good, and thus recognize existence as goodness, we may say that God is good. Likewise, when we say that God has knowledge, this means that God is not, like a material thing, limited to one determinate form, but possesses the forms of all things, which comes back to saying that God, as existence itself, is altogether uncontracted and contains without differentiation all perfections of all things (see *ST* I, 14, 1).[39] Aquinas' doctrine of God as just existence, like Plotinus' doctrine of the One beyond being, is thus at once 'minimalist' and 'maximalist:' minimalist, in that it does indeed reduce

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[38] Cf. Marion, "Saint Thomas d'Aquin," 38–39.

[39] Cf. Davies, "Thomas Aquinas," in *A Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jorge J.E. Gracia and Timothy B. Noone (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 648: "[Aquinas] claims that there is knowledge in God. But he does so by contending that God is *not* something material."

to nothing but the fact of existence, the fact that there are beings; maximalist, in that this is not one fact among others but the supreme and primary fact, embracing within itself all facts whatsoever, the fact that there are any facts.

## 5. *Analogical Predication*

As we have seen, Aquinas only occasionally follows the Neoplatonic tradition in saying that God is not a being, or is 'above' or 'beyond' being, but prefers to say that 'God is' and 'is a being' perfectly or unlimitedly (e.g., *ST* I, 44, 1, resp.). In Plotinus' terms, this would be self-contradictory: since to be is to be intelligible, and to be intelligible is to be determinate, to be is to be determinate, or finite. Aquinas, however, qualifies his references to God as a being by explaining that whatever is said of God, including that he is, is said not univocally but analogically. When we understand just what Aquinas means by this, we find that his position is not fundamentally different in meaning from that of Plotinus, however differently it is expressed.

What Aquinas means by 'analogical predication' is what Aristotle describes as πρὸς ἕν predication.[40] This is the kind of non-univocal predication in which a term—the canonical example is 'healthy'—is predicated of different things with different meanings, but all in relation to one primary or 'focal' meaning: a living thing is healthy in the primary sense; medicine is healthy as causing health, urine is healthy as a sign of health, and so on.[41] Analogical predication, therefore, is one kind of equivocity,[42] in that it does not indicate that the multiple things of which the same term is predicated have some feature in common or are members of the same species or genus. Medicine, for example, although it may truly and meaningfully be called 'healthy' in that it contributes to health, is not an additional member of the class of healthy things, alongside flourishing plants and animals. Analogy, therefore, as a species of equivocity, always involves a moment of negation. To say that all creatures are beings, and then to call God a being analogically, is to say that God is *not* another being, not a member of a larger totality that includes both God and creatures.

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[40] See Ralph McInerny, *Aquinas and Analogy* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 40, 46.

[41] See above, 88.

[42] McInerny, *Aquinas and Analogy*, 93: "[F]or St. Thomas, analogy is a kind of equivocation."

Aquinas further explains that the kind of analogy by which both creatures and God may be called 'beings' is not the analogy of many-to-one, but rather that of one-to-another. Analogy "pertains to names in two ways, either because many have a proportion[43] to one, as 'healthy' is said of medicine and urine, insofar as each has a relation and proportion to the health of an animal … or from this, that one has a proportion to another, as 'healthy' is said of medicine and of an animal, insofar as medicine is the cause of health which is in an animal. And in this way things are said of God and of a creature analogically" (*ST* I, 13, 5, resp.). Thus it is not the case that creatures and God stand in different relations to a common third term, being, or that creatures are beings in one way, finitely, whereas God is a being in a different way, infinitely. Such 'analogy' is indeed what Scotus calls univocity, in which the term 'being' (*ens*) has the same meaning in both cases but is predicated in different 'modes' of creatures and of God.[44] This would still imply a common term between creatures and God, a more comprehensive term under which both are included.[45] The analogy of one-to-another, on the other hand, expresses only the relation of the creature to God as its principle, with no common term. Thus Aquinas continues, "Whatever is said of God and creatures is said according as there is some order of the creature to God, as to its principle and cause, in which all the perfections of things exist excellently" (*ST* I, 13, 5, resp). To be sure, Aquinas rejects the theory that names of creatures can be predicated of God only in the sense that he is the cause of creatures, that "in the words 'God is good' we mean, God is the cause of goodness in things; and that the same rule applies to other names." (*ST* I, 13, 2, resp.). But this is because such a statement, taken by itself, fails to say that whatever is in the effect is precontained in the cause and that the effect is a likeness of the cause. When, however, the relation of effect to cause is

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[43] 'Proportion' here means simply 'relation:' see Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought*, 552.

[44] All too often, this is called 'analogy of being.' Consider, for instance, Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 203: "Greek philosophy … had not yet discovered the transcendent or universal and analogical value of Being, i.e. that as a *concept unrestricted in itself*, 'being' adequately expresses the reality both of creatures and of God while yet allowing their radical distinction" (italics added). Here we have, under the guise of Thomistic analogy, a precise expression of the purest Scotism. As Marion remarks, "Saint Thomas d'Aquin," 43 n. 26, "As soon as the term [i.e., 'analogy of being'] is established, the thing has already disappeared."

[45] For a good account and rejection of this interpretation of analogy in Aquinas, see Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought*, 571–572. He concludes, "There is no common *tertium quid* or absolute perfection in itself which might serve as a bridge between the two." See also Marion, "Saint Thomas d'Aquin," 45.

understood in this way, that is, not as an extrinsic relation of one being to another but rather in terms of *complicatio-explicatio*, then it explains the sense in which 'being' and other terms are predicated of God.

To say that God is, or to call God a being, in this sense, therefore, is simply to repeat that God, as the principle of beings *qua* beings, includes all perfections, and that all beings are likenesses of God, as the principle of beings *qua* beings. It does not mean that both God and the creature are beings, however 'differently,' any more than a man and his reflection are two men. Yes, we can point at each of them and say, truly and meaningfully, "This is a man" and "That is a man." But it is not the case that they are both men, only in different ways. The reflection is not a man, not a member of the species 'human,' at all. The man and his reflection are both called 'man' only in that one is an expression or presentation, an appearance, of the other. So, too, it is not the case that God and the creature are both beings, but in different ways. Rather, if creatures are, or are beings, then God can be said to be, or to be a being, only as the principle of which all beings are limited, differentiated presentations. As we have seen, Aquinas repeatedly insists that there is no specific or generic community whatsoever between creatures and God (see esp. *ST* I, 3, 5; *ST* I, 4, 4, ad 3). God and creatures are not in any way at all different members of a common class, even the class 'beings,' precisely because creatures are nothing but finite presentations of God, or existence. But this, again, is neither more nor less than what Plotinus means when he says that the One, as the principle by which beings are beings, is itself beyond being.

Aquinas' account of analogy thus reiterates the understanding of the infinite transcendence-and-immanence, or 'distance' and 'intimacy,' of God to all things, that he shares with Plotinus.[46] As the principle of all that is, God, or existence, is all things, in that all things are undifferentiatedly contained in and are differentiated presentations of God; and as the principle of all that is, God, or existence, is no thing, in that he is not any of the things that are. In this way, and only in this way, we may say "in an analogous sense" (*ST* I,13,

[46] Bernard Montagnes, *The Doctrine of the Analogy of Being according to Thomas Aquinas*, tr. E.M. Macierowski (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2004), 66, presents the case for analogy thus: "Too close, God ceases to be transcendent; too far, He vanishes into an inaccessible transcendence." But God cannot be "too close" or "too far;" he must be both *infinitely* close ("in all things, and innermostly," *ST* I, 8, 1, resp.) and *infinitely* far ("the infinite distance of the creature to God," *De ver*. 2, 11, ad 4). Otherwise he would be merely another being, rather than the principle of beings *qua* beings and as such not any being (infinitely far) and present throughout all beings (infinitely close).

5, resp.) that God is, or is a being. Hence analogical predication, understood as Aquinas explains it, does not mitigate but rather reinforces the infinite mystery of God, or existence itself.

## 6. *The Transcendentals*

In scholastic terminology, the transcendentals are those characters, such as one, good, and true, that pertain to all beings just in that they are beings. Such characters, since they are co-extensive and convertible with 'being,' are not attributes alongside of and additional to the other attributes that a thing has, but rather permeate the whole of any thing, in that the whole thing and every feature or attribute that it possesses is something that is, some being. Thus, for example, we cannot isolate a thing's goodness as another feature, alongside of its genus, species, size, shape, color, and so on. Rather, every feature of a thing is some mode of goodness, some way of being good. To be anything at all—large or small, round or straight, hard or soft, a bee or a shuttle—is to be good in some way. Likewise, every feature of any thing is a way of being one and a way of being true. Aquinas' treatment of the transcendentals, therefore, constitutes an articulation of all that is involved in being anything at all, in being a being. Hence it recapitulates the central themes of the classical tradition and may thus serve as a conclusion not merely to the present chapter but to our entire presentation of that tradition.

The three principal terms that Aquinas regularly includes in his accounts of the transcendentals are those just mentioned, 'one' (*unum*), 'good' (*bonum*), and 'true' (*verum*). In the explication of the transcendentals that opens his *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, aimed at isolating the meaning of 'true,' he adds to these 'thing' (*res*) and 'something distinct' (*aliquid*): every being, in that it is a being, is a thing, is one, is something distinct (from other beings), is good, and is true. Finally, it is often suggested, though by no means universally agreed, that 'beautiful' (*pulchrum*) is another transcendental: every being, in that it is a being, is beautiful.[47] For our purposes, what matters is not to determine a precise list of the transcendentals, but to show how each of these terms sets into relief one or more aspects of the classical tradition in metaphysics.

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[47] For a survey and critique of accounts of beauty as a transcendental in Aquinas see Jan A. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 335–359. Aertsen's own position is that "the view that [beauty] is a distinctive transcendental finds no support in Thomas's work" (337).

a. *Being and Thing*

In the *De veritate* 1, Aquinas begins his discussion with 'being' and 'thing.' "That which the intellect first conceives, as most known, and into which it resolves all conceptions, is being [*ens*]" (*De ver*. 1). Here at once we return to our seemingly tautological Parmenidean starting-point: whatever is, is; being is being. And as in Parmenides, the reason for taking this as the starting point is that whatever may be thought, whatever "falls into the conception of intellect," must necessarily be thought as some being. We thus find at the very outset the fundamental belonging-together of thinking and being from which the entire tradition unfolds. Aquinas proceeds by observing, again in the manner of Parmenides, that no content can be added to being "as from outside [*quasi extranea*]," because whatever could be added would itself be something which is, some being. However, further conceptions may be added to that of being "insofar as they express a mode of being itself which is not expressed by the term 'being'" (*De ver*. 1) that is, insofar as they express some distinct meaning that is not conveyed by the word 'being.' The first such term, Aquinas explains, is 'thing' (*res*), which "differs from 'being' in this," that it "expresses the quiddity or essence of a being" (*De ver*. 1) 'Thing,' then, signifies a being as some 'what,' or essence. It thus indicates that every being, in that it is a being, is some intelligible content. Thus we remain firmly within the Parmenidean framework in which to be is to be intelligible, but now with the Platonic and Aristotelian understanding of intelligibility in terms of whatness: to be is to be a 'what,' to be identifiable in terms of some whatness.

b. *One*

The next transcendental to which Aquinas turns is 'one,' which, he explains, is negative in meaning in that it signifies 'undivided.' "The negation that pertains to every being absolutely, is indivision; and the term 'one' expresses this, for a one thing is nothing other than an undivided being" (*De ver*. 1). We have seen how, for Plato, anything has an intelligible identity, is a 'what,' and so is a being, in virtue of its wholeness or integrity, the unification of all its component parts into a coherent whole. Hence, as Aristotle says, "being and one are the same" (*Met*. Γ.2, 1003b23). Likewise Aquinas explains, "'One' does not add anything above 'being,' but only negation of division, for 'one' signifies nothing other than an undivided being. And from this itself it is clear that 'one' is convertible with 'a being.' … But that which is composite does not have existence as long as its parts are divided, but after they constitute and compose the composite itself. Wherefore it is clear

that the existence of any thing consists in indivision. And hence it is that anything, just as it guards its existence, so also guards its unity" (*ST* I, 11, 1, resp.) Thus even what is only "undivided accidentally," such as even a mere collection of things, must be one collection, or it would not be, as a collection, at all: "For a multitude itself is not contained under 'being,' unless it is contained in some way under 'one.' For Dionysius says, that there is no multitude that does not participate in one …" (*ST* I, 11, 1, ad 2).

This very recognition of unity, that is, wholeness or integration, as the universal condition by which all beings are beings, led Plotinus to refer to the principle of all reality whatsoever as "the One." And as Plotinus explains, the One is not one, that is, not a one thing. If it were, it would merely be a being, conditioned by and dependent on its unity in order to be, rather than the principle of all beings. How then are we to interpret Aquinas' insistence, in apparent contradiction to this, that God, as subsistent existence itself, is one and indeed "maximally one" (*ST* I, 11, 4)?

Here again, the difference between Aquinas and Plotinus is more terminological than conceptual and more apparent than real. Like Plotinus (V.5.6.26–35), Aquinas explains that the term 'one' as applied to God is negative in meaning, signifying only 'not divided' and therefore 'not in any way many.' His demonstration that there cannot be many Gods turns fundamentally on the observation that subsistent existence, as such, is not contracted by or to anything. "For it was shown above that God comprehends in himself the whole perfection of existing. If therefore there were many Gods, it would follow that they differ from each other. Something therefore would belong to one and not to another. And if this were a privation, he would not be simply perfect, but if this were a perfection, it would be lacking to one of them. It is therefore impossible that there be many Gods" (*ST* I, 11, 3, resp.) Similarly in *Summa contra Gentiles* he argues,

> If there are two Gods … [and 'God' is predicated univocally of both], it follows that the name 'God' is said of both with the same meaning. And thus it follows that in both there is one nature according to this meaning. Therefore this nature is in both either according to one existence, or according to a different existence in each. If according to one, they will therefore not be two but one only; for there is not one existence of two things if they are substantially distinct. But if there is a different existence in each, therefore the quiddity of neither will be its own existence … Therefore neither of these two is what we understand by the name of God. Thus it is impossible to posit two Gods.
> (*ScG* I.42)

Aquinas' arguments are thus parallel to Plotinus' insistence that the One is not something that is one, but rather "one without the something," for if it

were some one it would not be "the One itself" (V.3.12.51–53).[48] That is to say, the One is not *a* one, nor is it the unity *of* anything, but is rather just unity, integrity, indivision itself, as the condition of being. Likewise, in Aquinas, subsistent existence itself, in that it is neither *a* being, nor the existence *of* any being, is uncontracted and therefore cannot be many.

But for the same reason, neither is Aquinas' God one in any positive or numerical sense. For if God were numerically one, he would be a being, this one being, not subsistent existence itself.[49] Numerical singularity would imply a determining limitation on God. Thus, in discussing the sense in which God is one, Aquinas carefully distinguishes numerical unicity, "one which is the principle of number," from transcendental unicity, "one which is convertible with being." (*ST* I, 11, 3, ad 2). The latter is purely negative in meaning, signifying only undividedness (*ST* I, 11, 1, resp). And it is only in this negative sense that 'one' can be predicated of God. In article three of this question, "Whether God is one?", the second objection runs, "'One' which is the principle of number cannot be predicated of God, since no quantity is predicated of God" (*ST* I, 11, 3, obj. 2). In replying to this objection, Aquinas grants the premise: "One which is the principle of number is not predicated of God." Aquinas' God, then, is not numerically one, not a unit, any more than is the One of Plotinus. He then explains that the 'one' predicated of God is rather the "'one' which is convertible with being." Since this signifies only "negation of division," it follows that God is said to be one only by way of remotion, as a denial of any division, contraction, or multiplicity: "According to the mode of our apprehension, [God] is not known by us except by way of privation and remotion. And thus nothing prohibits that some things said of God be predicated privatively; as that he is incorporeal, infinite. And likewise it is said of God that he is one" (*ST* I, 11, 3, ad 2). 'God is one,' then, means only that subsistent existence as such is in no way contracted, differentiated, or multiplied. It implies no quantitative or numerical limitation on God, and thus does not contradict but rather reaffirms Plotinus' insistence that the One, as the absolute principle of all beings, is not one, in the sense that it is neither any one being nor the unity of any being. Both numerical unicity and numerical plurality are quantitative determinations which are true of beings, *qua* finite, but not of God, as just infinite existence.

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[48] See above, 117.

[49] For this reason, again, the statement that God is *esse tantum* or *ipsum esse* cannot be taken to mean that God is just *an* existence rather than just existence, for in that case God would have to be distinguished as *this one existence* by something other than existence itself. Cf. above, 158 n. 12.

c. *Something Distinct*

Aquinas turns next to the transcendental characters that pertain to every being considered in relation to others. The first of these is *aliquid*, which means not merely 'something,' but rather 'something other,' "for *aliquid* is said as *aliud quid*" (*De ver*. 1) that is, distinct from other beings.[50] As we saw in considering Parmenides, in the absence of distinction, all intelligibility and all being are lost. Each being is itself, and so is a being, only by being distinct from other beings. Plotinus, above all, developed this point to show that being as a totality is necessarily complex in that it is constituted by the distinctions of beings from one another, and so cannot be the first principle. Hence he argued that the One, as not being but the principle of being, is constitutive of the distinctions of beings from one another no less than of the unity of each being, and characterized the production of all things, which is not distinct from the One itself, as "overflow" (V.2.1.9). Every way of being one, that is, every way of being a being, is equally a way of being distinct. Consequently, just as the condition for beings, the One is differentiation or 'alterification' no less than it is unity or integration. So too, in Aquinas, not merely the unity of each being and of reality as a whole, but also "the multitude and distinction of things is from God." (*ST* I, 47, 1). As we have seen, God "stands outside the order of beings, as a certain source pouring forth all that is *and all its differences*" (*In de int*. 1, 14, 22). Without these differences, being, "all that is," would not be being. Since every way of existing is a way of being distinct from others as well as a way of being one, or undivided, existence itself is the principle of the distinctions no less than of the unities of all things.

Here again, therefore, we encounter the fundamental difference between Aristotle, on the one hand, and Plotinus and Aquinas, on the other. Aristotle's first principle is οὐσία, that is, pure intelligible form or whatness, which always implies specific or generic identity rather than individual uniqueness. Aristotle's first principle therefore does not adequately account for the latter. For Aquinas as for Plotinus, however, the first principle, existence or the One, is not οὐσία or form but beyond οὐσία or form, precisely as the principle not merely of whatness but of all that is in any way whatsoever, and hence of the individual identity or uniqueness of each being no less than of its specific and generic identity. Uniqueness, no less than specific whatness, is a mode of unity or existence. For Aquinas, all the members of the

[50] Rosemann, *Omne ens est aliquid*, as a whole, offers an exposition of Aquinas' entire philosophy from the standpoint of *aliquid* as a transcendental.

same species are distinct from one another not in virtue of form, but rather in virtue of their matter. But as Aquinas points out, "the active power of God extends itself not only to forms, from which is received universal character [*ratio*], but also even to matter" (*ST* I, 14, 11, resp.), and again, "matter itself is created by God. Hence it follows that even the distinction which comes from matter is reduced to a higher cause" (*ST* I, 47, 1, resp.). All that is in any thing, its individual uniqueness no less than its specific and generic identity, is some mode of existence, and the latter therefore transcends the distinction between universality and particularity. Hence existence itself, or God, like the One of Plotinus, is the principle of all distinction whatsoever: not only of formal, that is, specific or generic difference, but also of individual uniqueness.

Thus Aquinas expressly aligns himself with the Platonists and against the Peripatetics[51] in arguing that God's knowledge and providence include singular things, because his causality extends to this singularity: "But the causality of God … extends to all beings, not only as to the principles of species, but also as to the principles of individuals … Hence … it is necessary that all things, insofar as they participate in existence, so far are subject to divine providence." (*ST* I, 22, 2, resp; cf. *ST* I, 14, 11, resp.). This doctrine necessarily accompanies Aquinas' understanding of God as existence itself, the principle of being as such, as distinct from Aristotle's understanding of God as form, the principle not of being as such but only of generic and specific 'whatness.' And as we have seen, God, as existence itself, is not distinct from creatures as one being from other beings. Rather, the distinction of all things from God consists in their being distinct from one another, and, conversely, God's unique 'individuation,' unlike that of creatures, consists not in his being 'contracted' or distinguished from others, but rather precisely in his not being thus contracted and distinguished.

### d. *Good, True, and Beautiful*

Aquinas introduces the transcendentals 'good' and 'true' by explaining that one thing may be related to another not only according to 'division,' or distinction, as is expressed by *aliquid*, but also "according to the coming together [*convenientiam*] of one being to another; and this indeed cannot be unless something is accepted whose nature is to come together [*con-*

[51] On particular providence as a Platonic theme in Aquinas see Wayne J. Hankey, "Neoplatonist Surprises: The Doctrine of Providence of Plotinus and his Followers both Conscious and Unconscious," *Dionysius* 27 (2009), 119.

*venire*] with every being; but this is the soul, which 'is in a way all things,' as is said in *On the Soul* III" (*De ver*. 1). As the reference to Aristotle indicates, it is specifically soul *qua* cognitive, that is, sensitive or intellectual, that Aquinas has in mind here, for as Aristotle explains in the passage cited it is by way of sense or intellect that soul comes together with or "is in a way all things" (*De An*. Γ.8, 431b21–24). The reference to Aristotle also shows that this *convenientia* is not a mere extrinsic 'fittingness,' like that of, say, two puzzle pieces that 'fit together,' but rather a coinciding or, as the word literally says, coming together, comparable to Plato's συνουσία, Aristotle's sameness of knowing and the known, or Plotinus' unity-in-duality of intellect and the intelligible. At this point, then, we commence a return to where we began, both in our study as a whole and in Aquinas' account of the transcendentals: the spousal togetherness, involving both knowledge and love, between thought and being. Being and thought are not and cannot be related in a merely extrinsic way, but rather meet, coincide, or 'come together:' being is what is given to awareness and awareness is the apprehension of being, and it is precisely in its coming together with soul that every being is true, good, and beautiful.

In that any being is something, is a 'what,' it is knowable and in that sense true. Following Aristotle, Aquinas defines truth as "adequation of intellect and thing." (e.g., *ST* I, 16, 1, resp.). For this reason, truth is "primarily" attributed to intellect: a thought is true insofar as it is adequate to, or in conformity with, the thing. Truth is a sameness of formal content between thought and reality. But Aquinas explains, "Since the true is in the intellect insofar as it is conformed to the thing thought, it is necessary that the meaning of 'true' is derived from the intellect to the thing thought, in that it has some order to the intellect." He continues, "But a thing can have some order to the intellect either by itself, or by accident. By itself, indeed, it has an order to the intellect on which it depends according to its existence, but by accident to the intellect by which it is knowable." The relation of beings to the created intellect, as knowable by it, is thus accidental to them, and therefore does not suffice to explain in what sense all beings, just as beings, are true not merely accidentally but in themselves, that is, independent of their merely accidental relation to a human mind. Hence Aquinas continues: "Thus we may say that a house is compared to the intellect of the artificer in itself, but compared by accident to the intellect on which it does not depend … And hence it is that artificial things are called true through an order to our intellect, for a house is called true which follows the likeness of the form which is in the mind of the artificer … And likewise natural things are called true in that they follow the likeness

of the species which are in the divine mind; for a stone is called true, which follows the proper nature of stone, according to the preconception of the divine intellect" (*ST* I, 16, 1, resp.) As Aquinas argues elsewhere, the "species in the divine mind," or "divine ideas," just are God himself, considered as the exemplar or original of which this or that being is a likeness (*ST* I, 15, 1, ad 2; *ST* I, 15, 2, ad 1; *ST* I, 44, 3, resp.). This explanation of how all things are true, therefore, simply re-articulates the understanding of all beings, insofar as they are beings, as likenesses, that is, contracted, differentiated presentations, of existence itself, or God. Precisely as such presentations, beings are finite, are 'whats,' and so are intelligible, knowable, or true.

If 'true' expresses a relation of being as such to intellect, as knowable, 'good' expresses a relation of being to appetite, as desirable: "The meaning of 'good' consists in this, that something is desirable [*appetibile*]" (*ST* I, 5, 1, resp.) Aquinas then explains why every being, as a being, is good: "Every being, insofar as it is a being, is good. For every being, insofar as it is a being, is in act, and in some way perfect, since every act is some perfection. But 'perfect' has the meaning of desirable and good … Wherefore it follows that every being, insofar as it is such [i.e., is a being], is good" (*ST* I, 5, 3, resp.). To be a being is to have some actuality, and to have some actuality is to be perfect in some way. Existence is actuality and actuality is perfection. As we saw in Plato, a thing has an intelligible identity only by being in some way good, that is, integrated or whole. Consequently, anything that has such an identity, and thus is anything at all, must be good. Likewise, in Aristotle, the form in anything is "divine and good and desirable" (*Phys*. A.9, 192a17): the good of anything, its end (τέλος) or fulfilment (ἐντελέχεια), is its form, so that anything is good just in that it has some form, that is, any actuality at all. So too, for Aquinas, to have any intelligible character, any perfection, and hence to be at all, is to have some fulfilment, some actuality, and therefore to be good in some way.

Hence goodness, like unity, distinctness, and truth, is identical in reality with existence. Thus Aquinas' treatment of the question, "Whether all things are good by the divine goodness?" follows the same pattern as his treatment of the question whether all things are beings, or exist, by the divine existence. "All things are good insofar as they are. But all things are called 'beings,' not by the divine existence, but by their own existence. Therefore all things are good, not by the divine goodness, but by their own goodness" (*ST* I, 6, 4, sed contra). The goodness of anything, just in that it is of, or contracted to, that thing, is *ipso facto* not uncontracted goodness itself, just as the existence of anything, *qua* contracted to that thing, is not subsistent existence

itself. As God is not *esse formale*, the existence of anything or everything, precisely because the existence of anything is limited to that thing and so is not just existence itself, the principle for the existence of all beings whatsoever, so God is not the goodness of anything or everything, goodness as it is found in and limited to this or that good thing, or being. But Aquinas continues by rehearsing Aristotle's report of Plato's supposed 'separate' forms by participation in which things are what they are, and then remarks that

> although this opinion may seem irrational … as Aristotle shows in many ways, nonetheless this is absolutely true, that there is something one by its essence good, which we call God … Therefore from the first, by its essence being and good, anything can be called good and a being, insofar as it participates in it by way of a certain assimilation, however remotely and deficiently … Thus therefore anything is called good by the divine goodness, as the first exemplary, efficient, and final principle of all goodness. Nonetheless, however, anything is called good by the likeness of the divine goodness inhering in it, which is formally its own goodness. (ST I, 6, 4, resp.)

The formal goodness of each thing, its perfection, actuality, or existence, then, is a likeness, that is, a contracted and in that sense "deficient" presentation of goodness itself, that is, God. As with existence, so with goodness, these likenesses are not 'copies,' additional to the original, but are rather comparable to reflections, or limited presentations. Thus Aquinas concludes, in a deeply Platonic vein, "And so of all things there is one goodness, and yet many goodnesses" (*ST* I, 6, 4, resp.): there is one goodness, God, because the formal goodnesses of creatures are not additional to the divine goodness but are contracted presentations of it, and only the original is seen in all its reflections. And there are many goodnesses, because all the presentations or 'reflections' are distinct from one another and each of them is not the original, uncontracted goodness itself. In this respect Aquinas' treatment of 'good' as a transcendental, like his treatment of 'true,' reiterates the understanding of all beings as likenesses, in the sense of differentiated presentations, of God, as the principle or condition for being as such.

As it stands, however, Aquinas' argument that every being, as a being, is desirable and in that sense good, appears unconvincing, for it seems to depend on an equivocation on the term 'perfect,' passing from this word's original and primary meaning of 'complete, finished' to its secondary and derivative meaning of 'good' in the sense of 'desirable.' To be anything at all is to be 'in some way perfect' in the first sense. But unless we already recognize that to be anything at all is to be desirable in some way, the transition to the second sense of 'perfect' is unjustified. Hence the argument, as presented, is either circular or incomplete. The argument can be completed, however, by

a consideration of Aquinas' discussions of beauty, which are regularly found within or in close connection with his treatments of goodness.

Precisely because Aquinas does not discuss beauty on its own, apart from goodness, and nowhere presents it as a distinct transcendental in its own right, its inclusion as one of the transcendentals is controversial. There is no question that for Aquinas as for Plotinus, 'beautiful' is convertible with 'being,' that to be is to be beautiful. The controversy, rather, concerns whether or not 'beautiful' expresses any meaning, any distinct conceptual content, that is not expressed by the other transcendentals, in particular 'true' and 'good,' and hence whether it merits inclusion among them as a distinct character. But if beauty is not a distinct transcendental in its own right, this is because it is more, not less, fundamental than either 'good' or 'true.' For to say that every being, in that it is a being, is beautiful, is to express the belonging-together, the *convenientia*, of being as such with soul as such, rather than with either the appetitive or the cognitive faculty considered apart from the other, and hence is to express the συνουσία, the erotic and conjugal togetherness of soul and being which is the abiding principle of metaphysics itself.

Plotinus, we will recall, understood the beautiful as that which is pleasing and attractive to the gaze. Hence he concluded that the beauty of bodies is their share in form, which, just as that which is given to awareness, is pleasing or satisfying to behold and is therefore beauty. For Plotinus, a thing is beautiful in that it has some form, some intelligible content that it displays to awareness, and thus satisfies the demand of apprehension for something to apprehend. And since anything can be only by having some form, to be is to be beautiful. Aquinas' accounts of beauty are strikingly similar. He explains that "beautiful and good in a subject are the same, for they are based on the same thing, that is, on form" (*ST* I, 5, 4, ad 1). In that any being has some form, some intelligible character, it is at once good and beautiful. Aquinas continues, in the same Plotinian vein, by explaining that 'good' and 'beautiful' "differ in meaning" in that while 'good' expresses a relation to appetite, "'beautiful' however has regard to a cognitive power, for things are called beautiful which please when seen [*quae visa placent*]." "Seen," here, must be taken to refer to any mode of cognitive apprehension, as when we say, "See how this feels" or "I see," meaning "I understand."[52] The

[52] Like Plotinus (I.6.1.1–2), Aquinas remarks that beauty relates primarily to sight and hearing, explaining that this is because these are the most 'cognitive' of the senses (*ST* I–II, 27, 1, ad 3).

difference in meaning between 'beautiful' and 'good,' then, is that 'beautiful' means not merely desirable or satisfying, but, more precisely, satisfying in being given to cognitive apprehension, that is, intelligible: "The beautiful is the same as the good, differing in meaning only. For since good is what all things desire, it belongs to the meaning of 'good' that in it the appetite is brought to rest, but it belongs to the meaning of 'beautiful' that the appetite is brought to rest in the sight or cognition (*aspectu seu cognitione*) of it … And thus it is clear that 'beautiful' adds, beyond 'good,' some order to a cognitive power, so that what simply satisfies appetite is called good, but that, the very apprehension of which pleases, is called beautiful" (*ST* I–II, 27, 1, ad 3). Hence the meaning expressed by 'beautiful' that is not expressed by 'good' is, like that of 'true,' a relation to a cognitive power. Conversely, the meaning expressed by 'beautiful' that is not expressed by 'true' is, like that of 'good,' a relation to an appetitive power. Unlike either 'true' or 'good,' then, 'beautiful' expresses a relation to both a cognitive and an appetitive power, together. 'Beautiful' carries at once the note of intelligibility, which 'good' *per se* does not, and the note of desirability, which 'true' *per se* does not.[53]

This explains why every being, just in that it has any perfection, i.e., in that it is anything at all, is desirable, that is, good. For only that which is in some way known or apprehended can be desired. "A good thing is the cause of love as its object [*per modum obiecti*]. But a good thing is not an object of appetite, except insofar as it is apprehended. And therefore love requires some apprehension of the good that is loved. And on this account the Philosopher says (*Ethics* IX),[54] that bodily vision is the principle of sensitive love. And likewise the contemplation of spiritual beauty or goodness is the principle of spiritual love. Thus therefore knowledge is the cause of love for the same reason as the good, which cannot be loved unless known" (*ST* I–II, 27, 2, resp.).[55] Any being, insofar as it has some form,

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[53] Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy*, 356, remarks, "According to Thomas the beautiful adds to the good a relation to the cognitive power," but then adds, "What is new in medieval thought on beauty, compared with Greek thought, is this emphasis on the relation of the beautiful to knowledge (*cognitio, apprehensio*)." In fact, however, this emphasis is nothing "new in medieval thought." It goes back not only to Plotinus' identification of beauty with intelligibility, but to Plato, who calls beauty "radiant to behold [ἰδεῖν λαμπρόν]" compared to the other forms and the "most manifest [εκφανέστατον]" of them (*Phdr*. 250b5–6, d7), and repeatedly links beauty to knowledge and truth, e.g., *Rep*. 508e4–509a7 and *Phil*. 64e4–65a5, cited above, 56.

[54] Aristotle, *Eth. Nic*. I.12, 1171b31.

[55] Aquinas explains that even 'natural' or non-cognitive beings tend toward and in that

that is, insofar as it is anything at all, satisfies the cognitive soul's demand for something to apprehend, and this is what it means for a thing to be beautiful: not merely satisfying, that is, good, or merely intelligible, that is, true, but satisfying-in-its-intelligibility. It is as beautiful that being first stands in relation to awareness, or 'comes together' with the cognitive soul. In the order of experience, therefore, that is, in relation to the cognitive soul, beauty is prior to both truth and goodness. 'Beautiful' means 'pleasing when seen' or 'satisfying to apprehend.' But we do not arrive at the idea of 'beautiful' by adding the specification 'when seen' to 'pleasing,' i.e., good, or by adding the specification 'satisfying' to 'to apprehend,' i.e., true. 'Beautiful' does not merely repeat or even combine the meanings of 'good' or 'true.' Rather, we arrive at the ideas of 'good' and 'true' by analyzing the moment of satisfaction or desirability, 'pleasing,' and the moment of knowability, 'when seen,' out of the primordial relation of being to soul as satisfying to apprehend, that is, beautiful. A being is good in the sense of perfect simply in that it has some actuality, some intelligible character. But it is good in the sense of desirable in that, having such a character, it is satisfying to the cognitive soul. Every being, in that it has some perfection, that is, in that it is a being, is satisfying to apprehend (beautiful), and as such at once intelligible (true) and pleasing or desirable to the cognitive soul (good). In this way, Aquinas' account of every being as 'pleasing when seen,' or beautiful, in that it has some form, fills the gap in the argument from perfection in the sense of actuality to perfection in the sense of desirability.

If beauty is not another transcendental, then, this is because it does not express one or another aspect of being, or being in relation to one or another psychic power, but rather being as such in its *convenientia*, its coming together, with soul as such.[56] Being, precisely as "what intellect first conceives as most known, and into which it resolves all conceptions" (*De ver.* 1) is satisfying to apprehend, that is, beautiful, and, as beautiful, at once good

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sense 'desire' their own perfections, but that even this desire in grounded in knowledge, albeit not their own knowledge but that of "the establisher of nature": *ST* I–II, 26, 1, resp; cf. *ST* I–II, 27, 2, ad 3; *ST* I, 6, 1, ad 2.

[56] Cf. Mark D. Jordan, "The Grammar of *Esse*: Re-reading Thomas on the Transcendentals," *The Thomist* 44 (1980), 19–21. Jordan argues that the terms into which Aquinas analyzes beauty, viz. *integritas*, *consonantia*, and *claritas*, correspond respectively to unity, goodness, and truth. Hence he concludes (20–21), "So far as the beautiful is concerned, the present analysis suggests that it should not be considered a fourth irreducible transcendental. Nor is it a species of the good, or some combination of the good and the true. If one were going to include it in the scheme of *De Veritate*, it would fall not at the level of *unum, bonum, verum*, but at the level of *ens* itself."

and true. Aquinas' understanding of beauty, therefore, as an expression of συνουσία or *convenientia*, the erotic and conjugal belonging-together of soul and being, brings us full circle to the Parmenidean foundational principle of the entire metaphysical tradition: "The same is for thinking and for being" (B 3).

> The mares that carry me as far as my spirit aspires escorted me …
> (Parmenides, B 1.1–2)

> It is natural that the true lover of learning strives toward that which is, and does not remain with each of the many things that are opined to be, but proceeds and does not dull or cease from love until he grasps the nature of each thing which is by that in the soul to which it is proper to lay hold of this—proper, as akin; having approached and coupled with that which really is, having begotten intellect and truth, he knows and truly lives and is nourished … (Plato, *Rep*. VI, 490a8–b6)

> All men by nature desire to know. (Aristotle, *Met*. A.1, 980a22)
> There is a mover which, not being moved, moves, being eternal and reality and actuality. The desirable and the intelligible move without being moved. The primaries of these are the same … It moves as loved.
> (Aristotle, *Met*. Λ.7, 1072a26–27, b3–4)

> Being is longed for because it is the same as the beautiful, and the beautiful is lovable because it is being. What need is there to inquire which is the cause of the other, when it is one nature? (Plotinus, V.8.9.41–43)

> And thus nothing is desirable except being, and consequently nothing is good except being. (Thomas Aquinas, *ST* I, 5, 2, ad 2)

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