DAVID BRADSHAW

# Aristotle East and West

## Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom

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# ARISTOTLE EAST AND WEST

Historians of philosophy have tended to limit the study of Christian philosophy during the Middle Ages to the medieval West. This book presents the thought of the Greek Fathers as a significant and substantial alternative. Focusing on the central issue of the nature of God and the relationship between God's being and activity, David Bradshaw traces the history of *energeia* and related concepts from their starting-point in Aristotle, through the pagan Neoplatonists, to thinkers such as Augustine, Boethius, and Aquinas (in the West) and Dionysius the Areopagite, Maximus the Confessor, and Gregory Palamas (in the East). The result is a powerful comparative history of philosophical thought in the two halves of Christendom, providing a philosophical backdrop to the schism between the eastern and western churches. It will be of wide interest to readers in philosophy, theology, and medieval history.

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*Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom*

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οὐ μόνον μαθὼν ἀλλὰ καὶ παθὼν τὰ θεῖα

St. Dionysius the Areopagite

*Contents*


*Preface* *page* ix

1 The Aristotelian beginnings 1
2 The Prime Mover 24
3 Between Aristotle and Plotinus 45
4 Plotinus and the theory of two acts 73
5 The Plotinian heritage in the West 97
6 Gods, demons, and theurgy 119
7 The formation of the eastern tradition 153
8 The flowering of the eastern tradition 187
9 Palamas and Aquinas 221
10 Epilogue 263

*Bibliography* 278
*Index* 292

# *Preface*

What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? That is a question that no student of western culture can avoid. Tertullian, who first posed it, did so in the course of accusing philosophy of engendering heresy. The implication behind his question was that Athens and Jerusalem are two different worlds, and therefore categories deriving from Greek thought should have no place within the Christian faith. Yet even Tertullian found it impossible in practice to maintain such a strict division. The Church as a whole tended instead to follow the lead of the Greek apologists, who had drawn freely on Greek philosophy in interpreting the Christian message. Ultimately the many forms of Christian thought that vied for pre-eminence throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and into the early modern era, almost invariably owed much to both of Tertullian's opposing worlds. The result is that Athens and Jerusalem have been deeply and inextricably intertwined in the formation of western culture.

This fusion gives to Tertullian's question a different and more alarming meaning. Viewed in light of the intervening history, the question is not simply whether Christian theology should make use of Greek philosophy; it is whether the two great sources of our civilization are compatible. To hold that they are not is necessarily to put into question, not only at least one of them (and perhaps both), but also the civilization that grew out of their union. Whatever one's own views on this question, it is all too clear that our culture as a whole has given it a negative answer. No conflict is more familiar, or recurs in more varied forms, than that between the apostles of reason and enlightenment and those of moral authority and revealed truth. In the ongoing culture wars, and the alleged conflict of science and religion, it is as if Athens and Jerusalem were at war before our eyes. The very existence of these conflicts reflects a pervasive sense that reason and revelation are at odds. Some of us respond to this situation gladly, welcoming the chance to choose decisively one or the other. Others face it with more ambivalence,

and even with a sense that something precious has been lost. Whether one chooses gladly or reluctantly, however, the inescapable fact is that our culture demands that we choose.

It was not always so. The history of western philosophy is, among other things, the long story of the attempt to bring Athens and Jerusalem into harmony. If today our culture operates under the working assumption that they are not in harmony, then the reason must lie ultimately in the shipwreck of those endeavors. That is where the historian of philosophy, and especially of philosophy in its relation to Christian thought, faces an important and even an urgent task. When and how did this shipwreck occur? Was it inevitable? Was there perhaps a wrong turn taken along the way – one that, had it been taken differently, might have led to a different result? And, if so, is that possibility still open to us? Or has history now effectively foreclosed all reconsideration, so that the divorce of Athens and Jerusalem is a fact to which we can respond in different ways, but which cannot itself be placed into question?

Such is the line of thought that has prompted this study. I propose to consider these questions particularly in light of the split between the two halves of Christendom, the Greek-speaking East and the Latin-speaking West. It is surely important that, viewed from a historical standpoint, the shipwreck of faith and reason was strictly a western phenomenon. In the Christian East there occurred no such result. The importance of this fact has been obscured because, up until recently, the Christians of the East were widely regarded in the West as heretics. Only in recent years has it become clear how grossly misplaced was this longstanding prejudice. The more that eastern Christianity begins to take on legitimacy, however, the more the reaction against western Christianity that has shaped so much of our cultural and intellectual history begins to seem like merely a local squabble. Eastern Christendom had from the beginning a fundamentally different way of understanding the whole range of issues pertaining to the relationship of faith and reason. It may be that whatever shipwreck occurred in the West leaves this eastern tradition untouched. At a minimum, if we are to understand the long story of western philosophy properly, then we must take account of the eastern alternative.

This work is the beginning of an attempt to do so. Its focus is on the formation of the two traditions, eastern and western, in parallel to one another. I have carried the story only to the point where each had achieved a relatively definitive form – that is, to Thomas Aquinas in the West and Gregory Palamas in the East. In the case of neither tradition do I attempt

a full history even of its philosophical formation, much less of all the other factors that contributed to its distinctive character. My focus is strictly on the fundamental metaphysical themes that helped determine their differences and that are most relevant for assessing their continuing viability. I have attempted to treat the historical material impartially with the aim of arriving at a sympathetic understanding of both traditions within their own context. My conclusions about the meaning of this history, and about the viability of the two traditions, will be found in the Epilogue.

Even to tell such a limited comparative history requires a connecting thread that can be traced up to the point of divergence and down each of the parallel branches. The thread that I have chosen is *energeia*. This is a Greek term that is variously translated as "activity," "actuality," "operation," or "energy," depending on the author and the context. Its suitability for our purpose arises from a number of converging reasons. In the East it became a key term of Christian theology beginning with the Cappadocian Fathers in the fourth century and continuing through the work of Palamas in the fourteenth. The distinction of *ousia* and *energeia*, essence and energy, has long been recognized as the most important philosophical tenet distinguishing eastern Christian thought from its western counterpart. (See particularly the works of Vladimir Lossky and John Meyendorff cited in the Bibliography.) Yet virtually everything else about this distinction is subject to dispute, including its meaning, its history, and its legitimacy. The only way to resolve these disputes is to give a comprehensive history of the distinction from its Biblical and philosophical roots up through Palamas. That history, in turn, can best be approached through the history of *energeia*.

In the West the term most nearly comparable to *energeia* in its importance for our topic is *esse*, the Latin infinitive "to be." It is well known that Augustine identified God with being itself, *ipsum esse*, and that Aquinas made this identification the keystone of a carefully reasoned natural theology. What is less well known is that the term *esse* – particularly in the meaning given it by Aquinas, that of the "act of being" – has a history connecting it to *energeia*. The earliest Latin authors to use *esse* in this sense were Boethius and Marius Victorinus. They in turn were simply translating into Latin the philosophical idiom of Greek Neoplatonists such as Porphyry. In particular, *esse* as the act of being is the direct equivalent of the Greek *energein katharon*, the "pure act" which Porphyry or someone in his circle (the author of the Anonymous Commentary on the *Parmenides*) identified with the One. This means that *esse* in its philosophical usage can be understood as deriving from *energeia*. Of course one must bear in mind

that *esse* did not originate in this way, but only acquired certain additional resonances, and that not all of these resonances remained operative in its later usage. Nonetheless, as a rough preliminary framework one can think of a common stem, *energeia* as it appears within Neoplatonism, developing into two branches, "energies" in the East and *esse* in the West.

That is only a first approximation. Part of what it leaves out is that *energeia* also had a non-philosophical usage that was at least as important for the development of eastern thought as was the influence of Neoplatonism. This non-philosophical usage can be found in historical and scientific writings, the Greek magical papyri, the Hermetica, and above all in the New Testament and early Church Fathers. To understand the essence–energies distinction requires seeing it in light of that prior history. Another reason for beginning earlier than Neoplatonism is that Neoplatonism itself is virtually impossible to understand without some appreciation of its origins. Theses such as that the One is beyond intellect, or that intellect is identical with its objects, or that the effect pre-exists in the cause, are likely to strike most modern readers as hopelessly obscure until they are understood in relation to the arguments that justify them. For the most part these arguments were either formulated first by Plato and Aristotle, or make use of concepts and terminology deriving from them. Fortunately, since our topic is *energeia* it is sufficient to begin with Aristotle, who coined this term.

More broadly, there is a sense in which to focus exclusively on the Christian tradition, viewing earlier developments solely as a preamble to it, would be to distort history. Both pagan and Christian authors were dealing with the same fundamental issues, often drawing on a shared stock of conceptual tools and vocabulary. No one can compare the Anonymous Commentary and Victorinus, or Iamblichus and the Cappadocians, or Proclus and Dionysius – or, for that matter, Aristotle and Aquinas – without recognizing that what they have in common is at least as important as that which separates them. It is only by seeing both the eastern and western traditions as developments out of a shared heritage in classical metaphysics that they can be properly understood. Doing so also has the benefit of shifting the focus of comparison from questions of dogma and ecclesiology to questions of fundamental metaphysics. If this book accomplishes nothing else, I hope it will show that this is the right focus to take, and that by missing it we have misconstrued the entire question of the relationship between the two traditions.

All of this will help to explain the structure of the book. It begins by tracing the common stem of both traditions, from Aristotle through Plotinus

(Chapters 1–4); then looks at preliminary developments in the West (Chapter 5) and the East (Chapter 6); then traces the growth of the eastern tradition (Chapters 7–8); and finally completes both traditions by a systematic comparison of Augustine, Aquinas, and Palamas (Chapter 9). The Epilogue picks up where this Preface leaves off, asking what light the comparison of the two traditions can shed on our current situation.

A few matters of housekeeping will be helpful to bear in mind. Readers not familiar with patristic texts should be alerted that they often have two numbering systems that run in parallel. Thus, whereas *Enneads* 1.6.9 means section 9 of tract 6 of *Enneads* 1, *De Trinitate* x.8.11 means section 11 *or* chapter 8 of *De Trinitate*, depending on which system is in use. (Most editions give both.) In regard to translations, I have used existing translations where possible but have freely altered them to maintain terminological and stylistic consistency. This is particularly true of the older translations of patristic works. One point on which I have abandoned all hope of consistency is in the choice of Latin or English titles; I have used both indiscriminately, as determined by common usage. I have generally cited editions and translations in abbreviated form in the notes, reserving full information for the Bibliography.

Chapters 1 through 5 were originally written as a dissertation in the ancient philosophy program at the University of Texas at Austin. I would like to thank the members of my committee (R. J. Hankinson, Alexander Mourelatos, Stephen White, Robert Kane, and Cory Juhl) for their guidance in that project. I also wish to thank John Bussanich, John Finamore, Harold Weatherby, Ward Allen, and John Jones for comments on various portions of the later chapters. Chapter 2 was originally published in the *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, part of Chapter 5 in the *Review of Metaphysics*, and parts of Chapters 6 and 7 in the *Journal of Neoplatonic Studies*. I thank the editors of these journals for permission to reprint the relevant portions.

Last, I should like to acknowledge a debt of a different sort. The greatest difficulty in understanding the eastern tradition has always been that it is so deeply embedded in a lived practice. Even to speak of the "philosophical aspects" of the tradition is to risk serious distortion. In the East there were never the same divisions between philosophy and theology, or theology and mysticism, as in the West, partly because these divisions presuppose a concept of natural reason that is itself a product of the western tradition. For the historian of philosophy, this means that in studying the East one encounters a great deal that is not normally part of one's professional territory:

detailed discussions of Trinitarian theology, of prayer, of ascetic practice, of charity toward the poor, and of Scriptural exegesis, often expressed in a baroquely complex vocabulary. One's task is to disentangle the recognizably philosophical elements from their context without distorting them or evacuating them of their meaning. I do not know whether I have succeeded, but I am certain that I would not have begun, and would not have had an inkling of how to proceed, without those who have taught me something of what this tradition means as a lived practice. First among them is my wife. To say that this book is dedicated to her hardly seems enough; in my own mind, her name is written on every page.

CHAPTER 1

# *The Aristotelian beginnings*

Although Aristotle never takes credit for coining the word *energeia*, there can be little doubt that it was his own invention. It appears nowhere in extant Greek literature prior to Aristotle, and even for some decades after his death it is restricted mainly to philosophical writers, particularly those of Aristotle's own school. By contrast, it occurs 671 times in Aristotle's works, about once for every other page of the Berlin edition. Unfortunately Aristotle discusses its etymology only once, remarking briefly that *energeia* is derived from "deed" or "thing done" (τὸ ἔργον) (*Met.* IX.8 1050a22). Although this gives us the ultimate source of the term, the combination of *en* with *ergon* already had precedents in Greek, and it is likely that one of these was the more proximate source. The two available candidates are *energos*, an adjective meaning "active, effective," and *energein*, a verb meaning "to be active or effective, to operate." In either case the root sense of *energeia* is something like "activity, operation, or effectiveness." To say more than this based on etymology would be rash.

One way to proceed at this point would be to list its various meanings in dictionary fashion, illustrating each by representative texts.[1] Such a procedure would not explain what united the various meanings in Aristotle's mind and why he believed it appropriate to use the same term for them all. It would thus risk missing the term's more subtle nuances. It would also fail to illuminate the very aspect of *energeia* that concerns us most, its capacity for development in multiple directions. Among the questions we must eventually ask is that of what Aristotle left unsaid – what further developments the concept as he employs it suggests or invites, but does not receive at his hands. The best preparation for addressing this question will be to trace the development of *energeia* within his own works.

[1] See Chung-Hwan Chen, "Different Meanings of the Term *Energeia* in the Philosophy of Aristotle," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 17 (1956), 56–65, for an example of this approach.

Such an approach inevitably raises the vexed question of the chronology of Aristotle's development. Although many fine scholars have attempted to work out such a chronology since Werner Jaeger first popularized a developmental approach to Aristotelian studies in the 1920s, it cannot be said that the tremendous obstacles facing the enterprise have been overcome. Not only is there a dearth of relevant evidence, both internal and external; the greatest difficulty is that Aristotle seems to have revised and retouched his works throughout his career, so that any one of them may contain strata from several different periods. This creates a dismaying amount of leeway in the construction of possible scenarios. It is true that certain facts can be known with reasonable confidence – for instance, that the bulk of the Organon is earlier than the bulk of the *Metaphysics*. But it is a long stretch from such piecemeal facts to the creation of a single coherent chronology.[2]

My own approach will be to rely on only relative chronological estimates of this sort, particularly those that have received wide agreement. What makes this possible is that the type of development that concerns us here is conceptual rather than chronological. Nothing would have prevented Aristotle from developing a new application of the term while continuing to use it in its older senses, or from introducing a new application in a casual way, only to give it a systematic justification much later. Rather than speculating on the precise order of discovery and exposition, it is more profitable to focus on the arguments by which Aristotle moved from one characteristic application of the term to the next, or, where there are no explicit arguments, on the assumptions that might have made such a step seem natural. Although the resulting account will remain susceptible to revision in light of ongoing research, since its chronological claims are modest it should possess a fair amount of resiliency.[3]

## *ENERGEIA* AS THE EXERCISE OF A CAPACITY

The origins of the concept of *energeia* are to be found in a simple distinction that Aristotle takes over from Plato. In the *Euthydemus* Plato

[2] See Jonathan Barnes, "Life and Work," *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge, 1995), 1–26, for a general discussion, and Charlotte Witt, "On the Corruption and Generation of Aristotle's Thought," *Apeiron* 24 (1991), 129–45, for a critical comparison of recent developmental accounts.

[3] The most controversial assumptions I will make are that the *Eudemian Ethics* preceded the *Nicomachean Ethics* and that *Metaphysics* XII is relatively late. On the former see Michael Pakaluk, Review of *Aristotle on the Perfect Life* by Anthony Kenny, *Ancient Philosophy* 15 (1995), 233–45; on the latter, Günther Patzig, "Theology and Ontology in Aristotle's Metaphysics," *Articles on Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Malcolm Schofield, and Richard Sorabji (London, 1979), vol. 3, 33–49. The connections I will discuss between *Metaphysics* IX and XII also tend to show the lateness of XII.

distinguishes between the possession (κτῆσις) and the use (χρῆσις) of good things such as food, drink, and wealth (280b–e). The *Cleitophon* applies a similar distinction, urging that one who does not know how to use (χρῆσθαι) something should refrain from exercising command over it and seek direction from another. The examples given range from material objects such as a lyre to one's own eyes, ears, or soul (407e–408b).[4] Finally, the *Theaetetus* distinguishes between the possession (κτῆσις) of knowledge and the active "holding" (ἕξις) of it, likening the difference to that between possessing a bird in an aviary and grasping it in the hand (197a–199b).

A similar distinction appears frequently in Aristotle's early works. Unlike Plato, Aristotle applies it almost exclusively to knowledge, sight, and other cases of perception. The result is that it becomes in his hands, not a distinction between possession and use in general, but one specifically between the possession and use of an ability or faculty of the soul. Aristotle also differs from Plato in preferring the terms *hexis* or *to echein* to indicate possession. Finally, and most importantly, he often replaces *chrēsthai* by *energein* as one term of the opposition. A typically Aristotelian statement of the distinction is this from the *Topics*: "the opposite of failing to possess (ἔχειν) the power of sight is to possess it, while the opposite of failing to use (ἐνεργεῖν) the power of sight is to use it" (i.15 106b19–20). Elsewhere Aristotle contrasts possession (ἕξις) and *energeia* in much the way that Plato contrasts possession (κτῆσις) and *chrēsis*.[5] Not surprisingly, Aristotle frequently uses *chrēsis* and *energeia* more or less as synonyms.[6] The *Nicomachean Ethics* places the Platonic and Aristotelian oppositions side-by-side as rough equivalents: "it makes no small difference whether we place the chief good in possession or use (κτήσει ἢ χρήσει), in state or activity (ἕξει ἢ ἐνεργείᾳ)" (i.8 1098b31–33).

So the simplest meaning of *energeia* in the Aristotelian corpus, that of activity, turns out not to be the earliest meaning. The earliest meaning is activity considered specifically as the exercise of a capacity in contrast to its mere possession. This conclusion is confirmed by another early passage with Platonic ancestry, *Protrepticus* b63–65.[7] The passage begins by laying down

[4] Whether the *Cleitophon* is an authentic work of Plato is disputed, but it at least represents discussion in the early Academy.

[5] For example, *Topics* iv.5 125b15–17.

[6] *Eud. Eth.* ii.1 passim, *Top.* 124a31–4, *Physics* 247b7–9, *Rhetoric* 1361a23–24, *Magna Moralia* 1184b10–17, 1208a35–b2.

[7] The *Protrepticus* is generally dated in the late 350s, contemporary with or shortly after the first version of the Organon. For a defense of the authenticity of the fragments see the introduction to Düring's edition.

that "that which is composite and divisible into parts has several different activities (ἐνέργειαι), but that which is by nature simple and whose being does not consist in relation to something else must have only one excellence, in the full sense of the word." The correlation here between number of parts and number of *energeiai* would be odd if *energeia* meant no more than what we mean by "activity." The passage continues by correlating *energeia* directly to the possession of a faculty (δύναμις). It argues that if man is a simple being, man's sole proper work is to attain truth; on the other hand, if man is composed of several faculties, his proper work is that of the highest among them, as health is the proper work of a doctor or safety that of a sea-captain. Since the highest human faculty is reason, on either alternative man's proper work is to attain truth. The entire argument appears to be an application of a procedure recommended in the *Phaedrus*. In seeking to understand something, Socrates tells us, one must first determine whether it is simple or complex, then ascertain its capacities to act and be acted upon, which will correspondingly be simple or complex (270c–d). Aristotle adds two assumptions to this framework. The first is that each faculty has a corresponding *energeia* (or *ergon*); the second is that where there is more than one faculty, the *ergon* of that which is highest among them is that of the thing as a whole.

This passage in the *Protrepticus* is the first known occurrence of the correlation between *dunamis* and *energeia*. This is a correlation (and contrast) that will eventually be given other applications far removed from its origins in the distinction between possessing and exercising a faculty. The beginnings of the process are already apparent in the *Protrepticus*, for Aristotle goes on to argue:

The word 'live' seems to be used in two senses, one in the sense of an ability (κατὰ δύναμιν) and the other in the sense of an exercise (κατ' ἐνέργειαν); for we describe as seeing both those animals which have sight and are born capable of seeing, even if they happen to have their eyes shut, and those which are using this faculty and looking at something. Similarly with knowing and cognition; we sometimes mean by it the use of the faculty and actual thinking (τὸ χρῆσθαι καὶ θεωρεῖν), sometimes the possession of the faculty and having knowledge . . . [Hence] a waking man must be said to live in the true and proper sense, a sleeping man because he is capable of passing into that movement in virtue of which we say that a man is waking and perceiving something; it is for this reason and with reference to this that we describe him as living. (B79–80)[8]

[8] I have rendered the first sentence as suggested by Stephen Menn in his discussion of this passage: "The Origins of Aristotle's Conception of 'Ενέργεια: 'Ενέργεια and εύναμις," *Ancient Philosophy* 14 (1994), 95.

There are several points to notice here. First are the adverbial phrases *kata dunamin* and *kat' energeian*. The addition of the preposition *kata*, "in accordance with" or "according to," transforms the *dunamis–energeia* distinction into a tool for distinguishing different meanings of a word. The two meanings thus distinguished are not independent; as Aristotle explains, that which is said *kat' energeian* is the "true and proper" sense, that which is said *kata dunamin* is derivative from it.

Given this semantic distinction, only a short step is required to distinguish corresponding levels of actuality. Aristotle goes on to do precisely that – although without using the term *energeia* – in the continuation of the passage. First, he observes that "we say 'more' not only respecting the excess of that which has one definition, but also according to priority [i.e., the semantic priority just identified] . . . Thus we say that a waking man 'lives more' than a sleeping man, and that a man who is exercising his mental capacity 'lives more' than a man who merely possesses it" (B82–83). He then recalls the conclusion already discussed, that "thinking and reasoning are, either alone or above everything else, the proper work of the soul." Since to exercise the soul is to live, it follows that "the man who thinks rightly lives more (ζῇ μᾶλλον), and he who reaches truth in the highest degree lives most of all." There follows a remarkable statement:

> Now if living is, alike for every animal, its true being, it is clear that the one who will *be* in the highest degree and the most proper sense (κἂν εἴη γε μάλιστα καὶ κυριώτατα) is the thinker, and most of all when he is in action (ἐνεργῇ) and contemplating the most knowable of all things. (B86)

Evidently Aristotle is already prepared to subscribe to some form of distinction among grades of reality. His reasoning is that living constitutes the "true being" (ὅπερ εἶναι) of a living thing; to live is to exercise the soul, and in a rational being such exercise is rational thought; consequently, one who is actively thinking both lives and exists more than one who is not. Although the highest grade of reality is not described as actuality (ἐνέργεια), a person at the highest grade is said to be active (ἐνεργῇ). This already suggests how *energeia* as activity will lead naturally to its more technical sense as actuality.[9]

So far, then, we have seen that there are two senses of verbs such as "live," "perceive" and "know" and that the two senses correspond to two distinct

[9] See Donald Morrison, "The Evidence for Degrees of Being in Aristotle," *Classical Quarterly* 37 (1987), 382–401, for further discussion of grades of reality in Aristotle. I have followed Morrison's translation of the first sentence of B82 rather than that of Düring, which takes Aristotle to be distinguishing different senses of the word 'more' (μᾶλλον) rather than different grounds for asserting that something is "more."

grades of reality. In *De Anima* II.5 Aristotle extends this scheme in light of his mature hylomorphism. He recognizes that even to call a man potentially (δυνάμει) a knower is ambiguous, for it can be taken in two ways. In one sense a man is potentially a knower simply in virtue of his matter and the kind of thing that he is; in another sense he is potentially a knower only when he is educated so that he can actually think whenever he pleases, provided that nothing interferes. To be potentially a knower in the second sense implies that one is potentially a knower in the first sense, but not vice versa, so that the two grades of potentiality are sequential. As before, only one who is actually thinking is a knower "in full reality (ἐντελεχείᾳ) and in the proper sense" (417a28).[10] Aristotle goes on to apply the same analysis to perception verbs and to the case of someone who is said to be potentially a general, and he seems to assume that a similar ambiguity can be found in any case where a thing is said to possess some predicate potentially.

The three grades of actuality thus distinguished are conventionally referred to as first potentiality, second potentiality (or first actuality), and second actuality. Although this terminology is useful, it is worth bearing in mind that Aristotle at this point sees himself as distinguishing, not types of potentiality or actuality, but ways of possessing potentially or actually some predicate.[11] The chapter goes on to observe that transitions from the first level to the second and from the second to the third differ in type. For a man who is in the weakest sense potentially a knower to become in the stronger sense potentially a knower requires that he undergo an alteration brought about by repeated changes from the opposite state – that is, by the process of learning. The alteration is initiated by an external agent already possessing the property that the object undergoing change possesses only potentially. The transition from first to second actuality, by contrast, can occur without any alteration or the action of any external agent: one who already potentially knows in the strong sense can become an actual knower at will, simply by recalling the latent knowledge to mind. Despite such differences, both types of change are alike fulfillments of the thing's nature and steps toward fuller reality. Aristotle describes the first as a change toward the object's "proper states and nature" (ἐπὶ τὰς ἕξεις καὶ τὴν φύσιν) (417b16), the second as "a development into itself and into full reality" (εἰς αὑτὸ γὰρ ἡ ἐπίδοσις καὶ εἰς ἐντελέχειαν) (417b6–7).[12]

One of the most interesting features of this scheme is the fact that the transition from first to second actuality does not require an external agent,

[10] The word *entelecheia* will be discussed below.
[11] See Menn, "The Origins of Aristotle's Conception of Ἐνέργεια," 88–92.
[12] See also the extended discussion of change from first to second potentiality at *Physics* VII.3.

but proceeds of itself if nothing prevents it. In *Physics* VIII.4 Aristotle takes advantage of this feature to solve a problem in his theory of motion. He wishes to explain how the motion of the elements can be natural without being self-caused, which would require the elements to be alive. After repeating the observations of the *De Anima* about ways of potentially knowing, he states that "the same holds in the case of the heavy and the light: for the light is generated from the heavy, as, for instance, air from water . . . ; it is already light, and will at once act (ἐνεργήσει) as such unless something prevents it. The activity (ἐνέργεια) of the light consists in the light being in a certain situation, namely high up; when it is in the contrary situation it is being prevented from rising" (255b8–12).[13]

In the final sentence I have followed the Oxford translation in rendering *energeia* as "activity." But the sentence has an awkward ring; we do not normally think of simply being somewhere as an activity. The same problem arises for another example Aristotle gives a few lines further down, that of something of a certain quantity extending itself over a certain space. Again, we do not think of being extended over a certain space as an activity. This awkwardness illustrates the fact that *energeia* is beginning to shift in meaning toward a broader notion of actuality, one capable of encompassing static conditions. Yet Aristotle is justified in continuing to use the same term, for *energeia* remains a kind of exercise of a capacity, even if it is no longer an *active* exercise. In effect he has chosen to give primacy to the term's correlation with *dunamis* over its etymological associations with activity. Later we will continue to trace the development of *energeia* as actuality. First we must examine how Aristotle systematically separated *energeia* from its early associations with motion and change.

## THE *ENERGEIA–KINĒSIS* DISTINCTION

There is only one occasion where we find Aristotle reflecting on the evolutions of meaning undergone by *energeia*: the statement of *Metaphysics* IX.3 that "the word *energeia* has gone forth . . . from motions to other things, for *energeia* seems above all to be motion" (1047a30–32). We have already seen that *energeia* originally meant, not motion, but the exercise of a capacity. Nonetheless, since such an exercise usually involves motion or at least change, the two concepts were closely intertwined. We turn now to how and why Aristotle separated them.

[13] See also *De Caelo* IV.1 307b32–33, IV.3 311a1–12. The *De Caelo* calls even the movement of a body to its proper place a "motion toward its own form" (IV.3 310a34).

The first step toward the distinction appears in *Eudemian Ethics* II.1.[14] There Aristotle notes that in general the proper work (ἔργον) of a thing is its end (τέλος) (1219a8). But, he adds, there are two types of case to consider. In the first type the *ergon* of the thing is distinct from its use, as a house is distinct from the act of housebuilding and health is distinct from the act of healing. (Here *ergon* might best be translated as "product.") In the second type of case they are not distinct. His examples are seeing, which is both the use and proper work of the sense of vision, and active thinking, which is both the use and proper work of mathematical knowledge (1219a13–17). It is a ready inference – though one Aristotle does not draw – that since in cases of the latter type the use is identical to the *ergon*, it is also identical to the thing's end. Applying the identity between use (χρήσις) and *energeia* (which is evident throughout the chapter), we could add that in such cases the *energeia* of the thing is identical to its end.

Aristotle draws precisely this conclusion in the famous passage of *Metaphysics* IX.6 stating the distinction between *energeia* and motion or change (κίνησις) (1048b18–34). He repeats the examples of the *Eudemian Ethics* and adds some new ones: on the one hand are housebuilding, becoming healthy, walking, making thin, and learning; on the other are seeing, thinking, understanding, living well, and flourishing. Actions of the first type are motions because each has a termination (πέρας) and so is not itself an end, but is ordered toward an end. Those of the second type are *energeiai* because each is an end, or, alternatively, because the end resides within it (ἐνυπάρχει τὸ τέλος, 1048b22). Because of this fundamental difference, the two classes also differ in a way revealed by a grammatical test. It is necessary to cease performing an action of the first type before one may be said to have performed it – e.g., one must cease building a house before one may be said to have built the house. By contrast, one at the same time sees and has seen, thinks and has thought, lives well and has lived well.

Precisely how to interpret this test has been a subject of much discussion. We shall return to that question, but first it will be helpful to examine the other major text bearing on the *energeia–kinēsis* distinction, *Nicomachean Ethics* X.3–4. Although this text is ostensibly about pleasure rather than *energeia*, there are a number of reasons why it has generally been regarded as elaborating the *energeia–kinēsis* distinction. The contrast it draws between

[14] John Rist, *The Mind of Aristotle* (Toronto, 1989), 107–13, gives a different and more complex genealogy based on the development of Aristotle's theory of pleasure. That offered here has the advantage of simplicity, but the two are not incompatible.

pleasure and motion is in several ways like that of *Metaphysics* IX.6; the contrast is illustrated by likening pleasure to sight, a paradigm case of *energeia*; and although it denies that pleasure is an activity, it does say that pleasure "completes the activity" (1174b23), so that pleasure and *energeia* are linked in an intimate way. Aristotle had held earlier that pleasure is an *energeia*, and it seems reasonable to view the theory of *Ethics* X as a refinement of that earlier account.[15]

In chapter X.3 Aristotle rejects the theory that pleasure is a motion based on what is sometimes called the "quickly-slowly test." Every motion may be said to occur at some rate, whether quickly or slowly, but not so in the case of pleasure:

For while we may *become* pleased quickly as we may become angry quickly, we cannot *be* pleased quickly, not even in relation to someone else, while we can walk, or grow, or the like, quickly. While, then, we can change quickly or slowly into a state of pleasure, we cannot quickly be in the actual state of pleasure (ἐνεργεῖν κατ᾽ αὐτήν), i.e., be pleased. (1173a34–b4)

The point hinges on a contrast of verbal aspects. The aorist passive infinitive ἡσθῆναι (here translated "become pleased") indicates the change from non-pleasure to pleasure, whereas the corresponding present infinitive ἥδεσθαι indicates, not a change, but simple continuance in the state of being pleased. The present infinitives for walking and growing, however, do indicate a change: the change intrinsic to the activity itself. One may be said to walk or grow quickly or slowly based on the temporal relations among the discrete stages recognizable within the process. For "being pleased" there are no such stages, and consequently no question of relative speed.

In the next chapter this distinction becomes the basis for a more general contrast between motion and pleasure. The chapter begins by remarking that pleasure is like sight in that it "seems to be at any moment complete, for it does not lack anything which coming into being later will complete its form" (1174a14–16). Clearly this assertion is closely related to the statement in *Metaphysics* IX.6 that whereas motions are incomplete, each *energeia* is an end or contains an end. The passage continues:

[15] For pleasure as an *energeia* see *Top*. VI.8 146b13–19, *Nic. Eth*. VII.12–13; cf. *Protr*. B87 and *Mag. Mor*. II.7 1204b20–36. I believe that a progression can be traced from the early view that pleasure is a motion in the soul (*Rhet*. I.11 1369b33–35, cf. *Rep*. 583e, *De An*. I.4 408b1–18), through the view of the *Magna Moralia* that it is a motion and activity of the part of the soul in which one is pleased, to the view of *Nicomachean Ethics* VII that it is an activity of one's unimpaired "state and nature" (with as yet no explicit denial that it is also a motion), and finally to the polemic of *Nicomachean Ethics* X against the view that it is a motion, with the further assertion that it is not an activity but completes activity. Nothing hinges on that hypothesis here, however.

For it [pleasure] is a whole, and at no time can one find a pleasure whose form will be completed if the pleasure lasts longer. For this reason, too, it is not a movement. For every movement (e.g., that of building) takes time and is for the sake of an end and is complete when it has made what it aims at. It is complete, therefore, only in the whole time or at the final moment. In their parts and during the time they occupy, all movements are incomplete, and are different in kind from the whole movement and from each other. (1174a17–23)

To illustrate how the parts of a movement are different in kind from the whole and from one another, Aristotle cites the examples of temple-building (the putting together of the stones differs from the fluting of the columns) and going for a walk (the various portions of the walk differ). He states of such partial movements that "the whence and the whither give them their form" (1174b5). He concludes by offering another and rather cryptic argument for his thesis that pleasure is not a movement: "It is not possible to move otherwise than in time, but it is possible to be pleased; for that which takes place in a moment is a whole (τὸ γὰρ ἐν τῷ νῦν ὅλον τι)" (1174b8–9).

Combining these observations from the *Ethics* with those in *Metaphysics* ix.6, we arrive at the following table.

| *Kinēsis* | *Energeia* |
|---|---|
| 1. Has a termination. | 1. Has no termination. |
| 2. Is not an end, but is for the sake of an end. | 2. Is an end or has end within it. |
| 3. Complete when it achieves what it aims at, i.e., during whole time or at final moment. | 3. Complete at any moment because it does not lack anything which coming into being later will complete its form. |
| 4. Must cease before perfect tense can apply. | 4. Present and perfect tense apply simultaneously. |
| 5. Has parts which are different in kind from one another and from the whole; the "whence" and the "whither" give them their form. | 5. Homogeneous. |
| 6. Occurs quickly or slowly. | 6. Does not occur quickly or slowly. |
| 7. In time. | 7. In "the now." |

Although there is much here that deserves comment, the most puzzling item is surely the last. For illumination we can turn to the discussion of time in the *Physics*. *Physics* iv.12 explains that for a movement to be "in time" means that it is measured by time (221a4–7). This is a stricter requirement than that of coexisting with time, as does even an eternal truth such as the incommensurability of the diagonal of a square. (Aristotle remarks that if

"to be in something" is to mean coexisting with it, "then all things will be in anything, and the heaven will be in a grain; for when the grain is, then also is the heaven.") What it means to be measured by time he explains in the previous chapter: "we apprehend time only when we have marked motion, marking it by before and after; and it is only when we have perceived before and after *in the motion* that we say that time has elapsed" (219a22–25). In other words, we perceive time elapsing in a motion, and so measure the motion, by internal differences within the motion itself. This is the crucial feature of motion which allows Aristotle to go on to define time as the "number of motion in respect of before and after" (219b2).

The contrast drawn by item 7 on our list thus turns out to be dependent on that drawn by item 5. A movement is "in time" because it exhibits temporal inhomogeneity; hence, as Aristotle remarks, the very existence of something that is "in time" implies that time exists (221a24–25). The force of saying that pleasure occurs in "the now" must therefore be to deny that it similarly involves temporal inhomogeneity or implies the existence of time. (The "now" for Aristotle is not a part of time at all, any more than a point is part of a line.) No doubt pleasure as the human mind experiences it does have temporal duration, but Aristotle's claim is that there is nothing about the nature of pleasure as such that requires it to do so. And, if we are right in reading the *Metaphysics* discussion in light of that in the *Ethics*, then he would say the same about thinking, seeing, living well, and the other paradigmatic instances of *energeia*.

We can now return to the tense test of *Metaphysics* IX.6 (item 4 in the chart). Three interpretations of this test have been offered. The first is that the statement made in the perfect tense ("has seen") refers to a period of time preceding that referred to by the statement made in the present tense ("sees").[16] The second is that the two statements refer to the same period of time, but nonetheless the perfect tense applies in virtue of a past event – for instance, one presently has seen in virtue of a past act of having spotted something.[17] The third is that not only do the present and perfect refer

[16] John Ackrill, "Aristotle's Distinction Between *Energeia* and *Kinesis*," *New Essays on Plato and Aristotle*, ed. R. Bambrough (New York, 1965), 121–41.

[17] Daniel Graham, "States and Performances: Aristotle's Test," *Philosophical Quarterly* 30 (1980), 126–27. Graham also argues that the *energeiai* of *Metaphysics* IX.6 are what modern philosophers would classify as states rather than activities. The activity–state distinction is based on whether the corresponding verb has a present progressive tense – e.g., "run" and "enjoy" are activity verbs, "love" and "understand" are state verbs. Since Greek generally lacks the present progressive, it is questionable whether much is to be gained by importing this distinction to the study of Aristotle. More generally, the entire history traced so far in this chapter, including the early identification between *energeia* and *chrēsis* (in opposition to *hexis*) and the etymological associations of *energeia* with being at work or busy, argue against such a view.

to the same moment, but the perfect is also true in virtue of the present moment.[18] The first view is inconsistent with Aristotle's statement that pleasure (and, presumably, other *energeiai*) can be had "in the now." It can also be ruled out based on linguistic considerations, for it assumes that Aristotle is using the perfect tense as what grammarians call the experiential perfect – that is, to indicate a past action without implying the presence of some continuing state resulting from that action. The Greek perfect differs from the English in that it does not normally allow this use.[19] That leaves the latter two interpretations. The second has in its favor the fact that the most common use of the perfect in Greek (the "resultative perfect") does apply in virtue of some past event. On the other hand, the tense test is clearly supposed to illustrate or be derived from the fact that motions have a termination whereas *energeiai* do not, and it must be interpreted in that light. That points us in the direction of item 3: the fact that an *energeia* "seems to be at any moment complete, for it does not lack anything which coming into being later will complete its form."

The point of saying that an *energeia* is "at any moment complete" is surely to indicate that its completion does not require a temporal process, even in the minimal way suggested by the second interpretation. Thus, despite the prima facie evidence of grammar, we must take Aristotle to be using the contrast of tenses to make a stronger point than the second interpretation allows. At any moment when one sees x, there exists also a complete seeing-by-one-of-x; at any moment when one thinks of x, there exists also a complete thinking-by-one-of-x.[20] The essential feature of *energeiai* thus turns out to be not solely that they are temporally homogeneous. It is that they have a form (εἶδος) given by some internal teleological structure, a structure that does not require time for its completion. Motions also have a form given by an internal teleological structure, but in their case the structure can only be completed through a temporal unfolding. In later sections we will see how these two crucial features of *energeia*, its intrinsic atemporality and its teleological self-closure, enable it to play a decisive role in Aristotle's metaphysics.[21]

[18] Terrence Penner, "Verbs and the Identity of Actions," *Ryle: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. O. P. Wood and G. Pitcher (London, 1970), 407–08 and 444–45; F. R. Pickering, "Aristotle on Walking," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 59 (1979), 40–41; Mark Stone, "Aristotle's Distinction Between Motion and Activity," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 2 (1985), 18.

[19] Graham, "States and Performances," 124–25. Examples of the experiential perfect are "I have already walked today," "I have seen John." In Greek these would take the aorist tense.

[20] I borrow this way of putting matters from Pickering, "Aristotle on Walking," 41.

[21] The interpretation offered here also has the advantage that it undercuts a criticism of the *energeia–kinēsis* distinction made by Plotinus. Plotinus observes that a motion is incomplete at a given moment only with respect to a certain end: "If one had to complete a lap, and had not yet arrived at the

## *ENERGEIA* AS ACTUALITY

We can now resume tracing the development of *energeia* as actuality. It will be well at the beginning to say something about a word Aristotle often uses as a synonym for *energeia* in this sense, *entelecheia*. Although *entelecheia* too was coined by Aristotle, he tells us nothing about its etymology save for a brief remark relating it to the word *telos*.[22] Various etymologies have been conjectured on this basis, but on any account it seems clear that the word's root sense is that of "having completeness" or "being fully real." We have already noticed one passage that illustrates what seems to be the original sense of the word: the statement of *De Anima* II.5 that transition from first to second actuality is "a development into itself and into full reality (εἰς ἐντελέχειαν)." Another such illustration is the statement of *Metaphysics* VII.10 that it is unclear whether circles still exist when they are no longer being thought, for they have "passed out of full reality (ἀπελθόντες ἐκ τῆς ἐντελεχείας)" (1036a6–7).

As noted earlier, there are places in the *Protrepticus*, *De Anima*, and *Physics* where the function of *energeia* seems to be to mark off a distinct and higher grade of reality. But these passages do not attempt to isolate the concept of actuality and subject it to distinct investigation. What was probably the first attempt to do so, the following passage from *Metaphysics* V.7, uses the term *entelecheia* rather than *energeia*.

> Again, "being" (τὸ εἶναι) and "that which is" (τὸ ὄν) . . . sometimes mean being potentially (δυνάμει) and sometimes being actually (ἐντελεχείᾳ). For we say both of that which sees potentially and of that which sees actually, that it is seeing, and both of that which can use knowledge and of that which is using it, that it knows, and both of that to which rest is already present and of that which can rest, that it rests. (1017a35–b6)

Just as in the *Protrepticus*, Aristotle uses the distinction between possession and use to mark off two senses of a term. The difference is that in this case the term is not one of fairly limited scope, such as 'seeing' or 'knowing,' but 'being' itself. He does appeal to the more familiar cases as illustrations, but he also adds a third example that marks a new departure: resting versus

point of having completed it, what was lacking would not belong to walking or movement, but to walking a certain distance; but it was already walking, however short the walk was, and movement: for certainly the man who is in motion has already moved, and the man who is cutting, cut already" (*Enneads* VI.1.16.10–14). There is a similar criticism in Ackrill, "Aristotle's Distinction," although Ackrill does not mention Plotinus. The reply is that Aristotle is using the perfect tense to indicate, not past achievement, but completeness at any moment.

[22] "For the *ergon* is the *telos*, and the *energeia* is the *ergon*; therefore the word *energeia* derives from *ergon*, and points toward complete reality (συντείνει πρὸς τὴν ἐντελέχειαν)" (*Met.* IX.8 1050a21–23).

being able to rest. To be at rest is not the exercise of a capacity, and in fact Aristotle elsewhere mentions inactivity (ἀργία) precisely as a contrast to *energeia*.[23] Perhaps that is the reason why he here prefers the term *entelecheia*. At any rate, it is clear that the distinction among senses of 'being' applies in cases having nothing to do with capacities or their exercise, for the passage continues: "Similarly in the case of substances we say that Hermes is [potentially] in the stone, and the half of the line is in the line, and we say of that which is not yet ripe that it is corn" (1017b6–8). Aristotle here shifts from speaking of different meanings of the phrase τὸ εἶναι to speaking of that which the different meanings indicate – potential or actual existence. His brief remark about the line is elaborated a few chapters later: "in potentiality (κατὰ δύναμιν) the half-line is prior to the whole line and the part to the whole and the matter to the substance, but in actuality (κατ' ἐντελέχειαν) they are posterior, for it is only when the whole is dissolved that they will exist in actuality (ἐντελεχείᾳ)" (v.11 1019a7–11).

It takes an effort to view this distinction as if for the first time. The distinction comes naturally to us because we have at hand the words 'actuality' and 'potentiality' – words derived from the Latin *actualitas* and *potentialitas*, which were themselves invented by the scholastics in the course of translating Greek philosophy. To indicate what we call actuality Aristotle has had to invent a neologism, *entelecheia*, and for potentiality he has expanded by analogy upon the basis provided by *dunamis* in its ordinary sense of "faculty" or "capacity."

We can see the same process taking place, this time in terms of *energeia*, and explicitly in terms of kinds of existence, in the following passage from *Metaphysics* ix.6.

> Actuality (ἐνέργεια) is the existence of a thing not in the way we call 'potentially' (δυνάμει). For instance, we say that a statue of Hermes exists potentially in the block of wood and the half-line exists potentially in the whole, because it might be separated out, and even the man who is not actively thinking we call someone who knows if he is capable of actively thinking. In the opposite sort of case we say that the thing exists actually (ἐνεργείᾳ). Our meaning can be seen in the particular cases by induction. We must not seek a definition of everything, but must be content to grasp the analogy – that it is as that which is building to that which is capable of building, and the waking to the sleeping, and that which is seeing to that which has its eyes shut but possesses sight, and that which is formed out of the matter to the matter, and that which has been wrought to the unwrought. Let actuality be defined by one member of this antithesis, and the potential by the other. (1048a30–b6)

[23] *De An.* 416b3, *De Insom.* 461a4, *Eud. Eth.* 1219b19.

Before attempting to sort out this passage, we should reflect for a moment on what the term 'actuality' means in English. One use of the term is to indicate a distinct kind of existence. If asked to explain precisely what kind of existence this is, most English speakers would probably do as Aristotle does here – explain that it is the kind opposed to potential existence, and offer examples. Aristotle seems to regard this as all that can be done, for he admonishes us not to seek a definition but to rely on induction, the type of reasoning that "exhibits the universal as implicit in the clearly known particular."[24] In another use of the word, one might speak of a given situation or event as an actuality, or as becoming an actuality in contrast to its earlier status as merely anticipated. In this use 'actuality' is much like 'thing' or 'quality': it is a count noun (for one can sensibly speak of one or many actualities) but not a sortal (one cannot count how many actualities are in the room). Both senses of the word are recognized in the *American Heritage Dictionary*: "1. The state or fact of being actual; reality. 2. (Plural) Actual conditions or facts."[25]

*Energeia* also has both senses, although Aristotle uses it in the second sense far more often than we use 'actuality' that way in English. The passage quoted in effect advises us to survey its various uses in the second sense as a way of understanding its first and more abstract sense. We will follow that strategy here. I will include, however, all the major cases where Aristotle speaks of *energeia* in opposition to *dunamis*, including some not mentioned in *Metaphysics* IX.6. After this survey we will return to the central passage from IX.6 in order to see what conclusions can be drawn about *energeia* in its more abstract sense.

First are cases like that of building versus having the capacity to build. Building is one of Aristotle's favorite examples of motion – indeed, the only concrete example accompanying his definition of motion in *Physics* III.1. As we should expect from his use of the example in the passage from the *Metaphysics*, the definition states that motion is a kind of actuality, "the actuality of the potential *qua* potential" (201a10–11).[26] But Aristotle goes on to qualify this definition by observing that motion is an incomplete (ἀτελής) actuality, in that the thing of which it is the actuality is incomplete (201b31–33, cf. *Met.* XI.9 1066a20–22). It may seem paradoxical to speak of an incomplete actuality, particularly in light of the etymological sense

[24] *Post. An.* I.1 71a8–9.

[25] I see no reason, however, to think that the word in its second sense occurs exclusively or even predominately in the plural.

[26] ἡ τοῦ δυνάμει ὄντος ἐντελέχεια ᾗ τοιοῦτον. This chapter of the *Physics* is largely repeated, with some variations, in *Metaphysics* XI.9; the parallel passage there has *energeia* instead of *entelecheia*.

of *entelecheia*. As we saw in the previous section, however, motions are incomplete in that they are directed toward an as yet unrealized end. That does not prevent them from qualifying as actualities, for each motion is still something real that can be recognized as such in contrast to the capacity from which it emerges.

Alongside the capacity to move something is an answering capacity in the thing acted upon to be moved. Hence, besides the actuality which is the process of building, there must also be an actuality which is the process of being built. Does this mean that we must add a second kind of actuality to our list? No, for *Physics* III.3 argues that the two actualities are one and the same. They are the same in the way that the road from Thebes to Athens and from Athens to Thebes are the same – one item in the world, so to speak, though they differ in definition (λόγος) and in being (τὸ εἶναι). As such they have a single location, which is "in" the patient.[27] This point is further elaborated in *Metaphysics* IX.8, where Aristotle contrasts processes having an external product (such as building) and those without such a product. It will be remembered that this is the contrast drawn earlier in *Eudemian Ethics* II.1. Aristotle now describes it explicitly in terms of the location of the resulting *energeia*: "Where the result is something apart from the exercise, the actuality (ἐνέργεια) is in the thing being made, e.g., the act of building is in the thing being built . . . and in general the movement is in the thing that is being moved; but when there is no product apart from the actuality, the actuality is in the agents, e.g., the act of seeing is in the seeing subject, and that of theorizing is in the theorizing subject, and life is in the soul" (*Met.* IX.8 1050a30–b1).

This passage presents us with a further item to add to our list. Besides the actuality of moving and being moved, both located in the thing acted upon, there are also those in which "there is no product apart from the actuality." These are located in the thing that acts – as, for instance, the act of vision is in the thing that sees, not that which is seen. Such activities are sometimes called "immanent," whereas those of the first kind are called "transitive." Both kinds would count as second actualities in the scheme of *De Anima* II.5. Furthermore, the capacities from which such second actualities arise can also be called actualities, since they in turn arise from a prior potentiality. So we now have three items in our list: transitive activities (or motions) such as building, immanent activities such as seeing, and the first actualities of which they are the exercise.

[27] See also *De An.* III.2, where the same doctrine is applied to perception.

Another important addition is that of substantial form. *De Anima* II.1 famously defines soul as "the first grade of actuality of a natural body having life potentially" (412a27–28). This definition, and the distinction between first and second actuality on which it relies, is clearly akin to that in II.5 between capacities and their exercise. The soul is partly constituted by such capacities, so it is not surprising that Aristotle cites the distinction between possessing knowledge and using it in order to explain his definition of soul (412a22ff.).[28] Nonetheless, the explicit rationale for the definition is simply that the soul is the form of the body, and that whereas matter is potentiality, form is actuality. This reasoning points in the direction of the more comprehensive discussions of form as substance and actuality in *Metaphysics* VII.17 and VIII.2.

Strictly speaking, form is the substance (οὐσία) *of* a matter–form composite. The reason is that the form of a thing is what makes its matter to be that particular thing and not something else; it is thus responsible for the thing's being (*Met.* VII.17 1041b4ff., VIII.2 1043a2–4). To use the examples of *Metaphysics* VIII.2, a threshold is not just wood and stone, but wood and stone in a particular arrangement; ice is not just water, but water solidified in a particular way; harmony is a particular blending of the high and the low. In these examples the matter–form composites are not substances, so their forms are not *energeia* in a strict sense, but merely that which is analogous to it (1043a4–7). Nonetheless, the examples illustrate the point that the matter considered apart from the form is only potentially whatever it is actually when considered with the form.

We should note in passing that there are two distinct ways in which Aristotle uses the pair of terms 'potentially' and 'actually' in this context. When he says that the statue of Hermes exists potentially in the block of wood, or the half-line exists potentially in the whole, he means that they do not now actually exist but could be made to do so. But the wood and stone of a threshold are already actually the threshold, just as the body mentioned in the definition of soul as "having life potentially" is already actually alive (as Aristotle observes at *De An.* II.1 412b25–26). The term 'potentially' applies to items of the latter sort simply in virtue of the fact that their being actually what they are requires the presence of the form; considered as abstracted from the form they are like the Hermes in the block of wood. Of course, everything that we encounter in the world already possesses form in one way or another; we never encounter anything

[28] I say *partly* constituted because the soul is more than a collection of capacities; it is also an efficient cause. Interpretations differ on whether and how these two theses can be reconciled.

that is merely potential. Hence Aristotle goes on to argue in *Metaphysics* VIII.6 that "the proximate matter and the form are one and the same thing, the one potentially, and the other actually" (1045b18–19). This is an obscure saying, but part of what it means is that the proximate matter is potentially the matter–form composite in the same synchronic sense that the wood and stone are potentially the threshold.

The last type of actuality is simply the matter–form composite itself. That this is an actuality seems clear enough from the central passages on the potentiality–actuality contrast, *Metaphysics* V.7 and IX.6. On the other hand, Aristotle never calls the composite an *energeia* and only rarely calls it an *entelecheia*, preferring to say that it exists in actuality (ἐνεργείᾳ, ἐντελεχείᾳ).[29] Why is this, when he has no similar compunction in the other cases? One reason is probably that there is no correlative *dunamis*. Each of the other types of actuality so far examined has an answering *dunamis*: motion (or being moved) is correlative to the capacity to move (or be moved), immanent acts to their corresponding potencies, first actuality to first potency, form to matter. It is true that these chapters correlate the form–matter composite with matter in various ways – the statue of Hermes to the block of stone from which it is made, ripened corn to the unripe, "the wrought to the unwrought." In such cases the matter is viewed as the antecedent stage in a temporal process of becoming. As we have seen, however, Aristotle does not wish to restrict the potentiality–actuality distinction to such temporal applications, and in any case, matter has already been paired off with form. Hence he does not speak of the form–matter composite as an *energeia*, although in English (Aristotelianized English!) one might call it an "actuality," meaning that it is something that actually exists.

So there are five types of actuality in the sense in which the word is an indefinite noun: motion (or transitive activity), immanent activity, first actuality, substantial form, and the matter–form composite. Let us now return to the general description of actuality in *Metaphysics* IX.6. The passage quoted earlier continues: "But all things are not said in the same sense to exist actually, but only by analogy . . . ; for some are as movement to potency, and the others as substance to some sort of matter" (1048b6–9). This indicates that the multiplicity of *energeia* when the word is used as an indefinite noun is mirrored by a similar multiplicity in its use as a

[29] For the composite as *entelecheia* see *Phys.* 213a6–8, *Met.* 1038b4–6, 1044a9. At *De An.* 412b9 the term probably includes both composites and immaterial substances.

name for a kind of existence. Movements, activities, capacities, forms, and composites are not only different sorts of thing; each also exhibits a different and unique manner of being fully real. This need not mean that *energeia* in its more abstract sense is purely equivocal. In each case there is some sort of passage – even if one that can be isolated only conceptually rather than in time – from potentiality to a fuller reality. Hence, although it would be a mistake to think that Aristotle means to identify some single, elusive kind of reality by the abstract sense of *energeia* he isolates in IX.6, what he identifies is at least a family of types of reality. What they all have in common is their opposition to some form of *dunamis*.[30]

There is another and more famous instance where Aristotle identifies a family of concepts all passing under a single name: the discussion of being and unity in *Metaphysics* IV.2. The position he develops there is that the being and unity of items in categories other than substance are "focally related" to those of substance. Does he make an analogous attempt to discover order among the various types of *energeia*, in the sense in which the word names a type of existence? The later parts of Book IX and the portions of Book XII devoted to the Prime Mover can plausibly be read as an attempt to do just that. It is to these that we now turn.

## THE PRIORITY OF ACTUALITY

*Metaphysics* IX.8 is devoted to arguing for the priority of actuality to potency in three different respects: in definition (λόγῳ), in time, and in substance. The arguments for its priority in the first two respects are relatively straightforward. Actuality is prior in definition simply because something is said to have a potency only in virtue of its admitting the relevant kind of actuality, so that a definition of the potency must incorporate some reference to the actuality (1049b12–17). This is an argument familiar from the *Protrepticus*. The assertion that actuality is prior in time is qualified by a recognition that in one sense it is not prior: any particular man is preceded by the matter from which he is formed, as is corn by its seed or that which sees by that which is capable of seeing (1049b19–23). Nonetheless, the matter, seed, and the like are in turn generated by other actually existing things of the

[30] Michael Frede, "Aristotle's Notion of Potentiality in *Metaphysics* Θ," *Unity, Identity, and Explanation in Aristotle's Metaphysics*, ed. T. Scaltsas, D. Charles, and M. L. Gill (Oxford, 1994), 173–93, makes a similar point in relation to the meanings of *dunamis*.

same type, in accordance with the general principle that "everything that is produced is produced from something and by something . . . the same in species as it" (1049b28–29).[31] Aristotle also adds the further argument that just as one who is learning must already possess in some degree the science being learned, so some part of everything that comes to be must already exist while it is coming to be (1049b29–50a3). This argument certainly has an air of paradox, but it is merely an application of the principle that there is no first moment of a change, which in turn is a consequence of the infinite divisibility of time.[32]

More important for our purposes are a pair of arguments given to show that actuality is prior to potency in substance. It is unfortunate that Aristotle does not define what he means by "prior in substance," for this phrase can have two quite different meanings. One is that a thing is prior in substance to another if it can exist without the other, whereas the other cannot exist without it.[33] Saying that actuality is prior in substance to potency would then mean that things which are in actuality can exist without those in potency, but not vice versa. The other definition is that a thing is prior in substance when it characterizes a more fully realized stage of natural development. Aristotle employs this meaning in his argument in the *Physics* that locomotion is prior in substance to growth and alteration: animals acquire the capacity for locomotion after that for the other kinds of motion, so locomotion is prior in substance and "the order of nature."[34] Similarly, in the *Generation of Animals* we find that organs which develop later are prior "in substance" and "by nature" to those which develop earlier but exist for their sake (II.6 742a16–22).

One must keep both meanings in mind while reading Aristotle's arguments for the priority in substance of actuality. The first argument (actually a pair of related arguments) is as follows:

[31] Strictly speaking, this principle applies only to three types of case: natural generation of substances, artificial production (whether of artifacts or of artificially induced states such as health), and qualitative interaction. See *Met.* VII.7–9 (esp. 1034b16–19), *Gen. Anim.* II.1 734a26ff., *Gen. et Corr.* I.5 320b18–22 and I.7 323b25–24a5, with discussion in A. C. Lloyd, "The Principle that the Cause is Greater than its Effect," *Phronesis* 21 (1976), 146–56, and Alexander Mourelatos, "Aristotle's Rationalist Account of Qualitative Interaction," *Phronesis* 29 (1984), 1–16. I differ from Mourelatos in taking *Metaphysics* VII.7 to imply that in artificial production the form of the product pre-exists *actually* in the agent. This point is important for Aristotle's theology and philosophy of mind, as we will see in the next chapter.

[32] See *Phys.* VI.6.

[33] *Met.* V.11 1019a3–4, XIII.2 1077b2–3.

[34] *Phys.* VIII.7 260b17–19, 261a13–20. Note that Aristotle here explicitly distinguishes this kind of priority from the capacity for independent existence which he elsewhere *identifies* with priority in substance.

> But it is also prior in substance; firstly, because the things that are posterior in becoming are prior in form and substance, e.g., man is prior to boy and human being to seed; for the one already has its form, and the other has not. Secondly, because everything that comes to be moves towards a principle, i.e., an end. For that for the sake of which a thing is, is its principle, and the becoming is for the sake of the end; and the actuality is the end, and it is for the sake of this that the potentiality is acquired. (1050a4–10)

This is clearly an allusion to the second of our two possible meanings. Aristotle is not saying that men could exist without boys, or human beings without seed, but that in each case the latter characterizes an earlier stage of development and exists for the sake of the former. He goes on to give several instances of how actuality is prior to potency in this sense, including motion, activity, and form, each relative to its appropriate *dunamis*.

Next he argues that actuality is also prior "in a stricter sense" (κυριωτέρως) (1050b6). The argument is terse: "eternal things are prior in substance to perishable things, and no eternal thing exists potentially" (1050b6–8). Here we seem to be dealing with the first meaning of priority in substance. Eternal things are not a later and more mature stage in the development of perishable things, but they are capable of existing without perishable things, whereas the converse is not the case. The question is why Aristotle thinks that the priority in substance of eternal things to perishable things has bearing on the general question about the priority in substance of actuality. An answer emerges as he explains in what sense "no eternal thing exists potentially." There is a trivial sense in which this is true – namely that the thing in question, being eternal, must exist at the time of speaking. What Aristotle means is rather that no eternal thing exists in virtue of a potency to exist that has been actualized. This becomes plain as he goes on to infer that if the thing had such a potency then it would also have a potency not to exist (1050b8–16). He does not here spell out why this would be unacceptable, but elsewhere he appeals to the principle that any potency persisting for infinite time must be actualized, so that a thing with a potency not to exist must at some time not exist and hence could not be eternal.[35] The denial that eternal things exist potentially thus turns out to mean that they exist actually (ἐνεργείᾳ, 1050b18) in quite a strong sense: they are actuality "through and through," at least with regard

[35] The principle that an eternally persisting potentiality must at some point become actual is sometimes known as the principle of plenitude. See *De Cael.* I.12 and *Gen. et Corr.* II.11. It has been widely discussed, e.g., Sarah Waterlow, *Passage and Possibility: A Study of Aristotle's Modal Concepts* (Oxford, 1982), 49–78.

to existence. The fact that eternal things are prior in substance to perishable things therefore means that actuality is prior in substance to potentiality in quite a general and sweeping way.

In making this argument Aristotle has isolated a stricter version of the actuality–potentiality distinction than any we have previously encountered. The actuality he now holds to be prior is not that of anything which happens at the moment to be real; it is exclusively that of necessary and eternal entities. As the remainder of the chapter makes plain, the eternal existents he has in mind include the sun, the stars, and the heaven, which are in potency in respect to motion, though not in respect to existence (1050b20ff.). Nonetheless, the way is now open for him to isolate a yet stricter kind of actuality, one that excludes potency altogether, and to give it a special place at the heart of his ontology.

Before leaving Book IX, we must take note of one further way in which actuality is prior to potency. Chapter IX.9 begins by promising to show that *energeia* is "better and more honorable" than even a good potency (1051a4–5). This is a significant addition, for it marks the first time that *energeia* as such is said to possess value.[36] The argument is a simple one: every potency is a potency for opposites, and of the opposites one must be good and the other bad. It follows that the good actuality is better than the potency, since the latter includes an element of both good and bad (1051a5–15). There are several objections one could raise here. Why must one of the opposites be good and the other bad? The answer is presumably that the argument is concerned solely with good potencies (such as that for health and sickness, or building and destroying), for only these present a challenge to the claim that actuality is intrinsically superior to potency. Apparently Aristotle assumes that such potencies are called good in virtue of one and only one of their possible realizations.[37] Another question is why merely showing that the good actuality is better than the potency should be thought tantamount to showing that actuality *as such* is better than potency. Perhaps the answer is that the bad actuality is in the proper sense not an actuality at all, for it moves the agent away from rather than toward its natural end. If so, the argument really shows not that actuality as such is better than potency, but that the actualities which are the development

[36] The ethical works explain pleasure and happiness in terms of *energeia*, but do not place value on *energeia* as such.

[37] See W. D. Ross, *Aristotle's Metaphysics: A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1924), ad loc. Actually even if it is so called in virtue of more than one, the "in virtue of" shows that the potency is less definitively good than the actualities for which it is named. So this does not appear to be a serious problem.

of a thing's nature are better than the potencies which constitute that nature.

Aristotle, at any rate, is satisfied that he has the conclusion he set out to show. He goes on to argue that there cannot be any evil in things that are eternal (1051a15–21). The argument can be paraphrased as follows: (1) an evil actuality is worse than the potency for evil; (2) therefore evil is by nature posterior to the potency for evil; (3) eternal things must be free of potency; (4) therefore, from (2) and (3), eternal things must be free of evil. Unfortunately this argument turns on an equivocation. Evil is by nature posterior to the potency for evil only in the sense that it is worse than the potency. This does not show that it is posterior in the sense that it can exist only *in virtue* of the potency, as would be required to derive the conclusion.[38] Perhaps one could give an independent argument that evil can exist only in virtue of the corresponding potency (say, by arguing that evil is a privation), but Aristotle does not do so here.

Although the arguments of *Metaphysics* IX.9 leave something to be desired, there can be little doubt that their conclusions are soundly Aristotelian. It is unthinkable that an ethical naturalist like Aristotle would refuse to affirm either that actuality as such is good or that the things existing eternally in actuality are supremely good. Aristotle will return to these themes in a more careful and far-ranging way in the theology of *Metaphysics* XII.

[38] Ross's note on the passage makes a similar criticism.

CHAPTER 2

# *The Prime Mover*

Up to this point we have traced two broad strands in the development of Aristotle's thought on *energeia*. Both take their beginning from his early use of the term to mean the active exercise of a capacity as distinct from mere possession of that capacity. In one strand we find Aristotle purifying *energeia* from its early associations with motion or change (κίνησις), distinguishing it as that type of activity that contains its own end and hence is not constrained to unfold through a temporal process. The other strand is rooted in the early distinction between *energeia* and *dunamis* in the sense of capacity. As Aristotle broadens *dunamis* to encompass all types of potency, he correspondingly broadens *energeia* to encompass all types of actuality. As we have seen, he goes on to argue that actuality is prior to potentiality in a number of respects, of which the most important is priority in substance. His argument for this latter claim hinges on the view that things existing eternally and of necessity, such as the stars and planets, are free of potency in respect to existence. There is thus an intimate link between eternity and necessity, on the one hand, and actuality on the other.

That link becomes a central theme of *Metaphysics* XII.6–10, Aristotle's only sustained discussion of the Prime Mover.[1] In these chapters Aristotle continues his effort to winnow away all potency from the first principles, isolating a kind of actuality more pure and exalted than even that of the stars and planets. Nor does he stop there. The *energeia* which is the Prime Mover is not only actuality without any residual potency, but also an activity of precisely the kind distinguished from *kinēsis* in *Metaphysics* IX.6. The difference, of course, is that it is an activity subsistent in its own right; that is what is added by the fusion with the concept of actuality. The discussion of the Prime Mover thus becomes the arena in which Aristotle unites the two strands in his thought about *energeia*. The result is a new and highly potent metaphysical conception – one that, more than anything else, was

[1] *Physics* VIII argues for the existence of such a being but says little about its character.

responsible for the fascination that *energeia* exercised over later thinkers such as Plotinus. It is for this reason that Aristotle's discussion of the Prime Mover deserves our closest attention.

## ACTIVITY AND ACTUALITY IN *METAPHYSICS* XII

*Metaphysics* XII.6 begins with an argument for the existence of the Prime Mover. The argument can be summarized as follows. (1) Time cannot come into being or pass away, for that would involve the paradox of a moment before time or a moment after time. (2) Given Aristotle's own definition of time as "the number of motion in respect of before and after," or any other definition linking time inseparably to motion, motion also cannot come into being or pass away, and so must be continuous. (3) There must be a mover to cause this continuous motion. (4) The mover cannot merely be something capable of causing the motion, but must actively do so (ἐνεργήσει, 1071b17). (5) Even for the mover to act continually is not sufficient if its substance includes potency or is potency (ἡ οὐσία αὐτῆς δύναμις, 1071b18), for then the mover could possibly not be, and so could not guarantee an eternal motion. (6) Therefore the very substance of the mover must be actuality (ἡ οὐσία ἐνέργεια, 1071b20). In the next sentence Aristotle goes on to speak as if there might be more than one mover, noting that "these substances must be without matter, for they must be eternal, if anything is eternal" (1071b20–22). After this nothing more is said about the possibility of more than one mover until chapter XII.8.

There is a fallacy in the step from (2) to (3), for the fact that motion is continuous (in the sense of eternal) does not imply that any one single motion is continuous. Aristotle is well aware of this problem and attempts to bridge the gap in *Physics* VIII.6. More to the point for our purposes is step (5). Why should the substance of the mover not include some potency, provided that the potency is not in respect to existence? Why should not its substance be, for example, like those of the stars and planets? The answer lies in the important assumption that the cause of the single continuous motion must itself be immovable (ἀκίνητος). Aristotle gives a brief and highly condensed argument for this assumption in the next chapter. There, after identifying the single continuous motion spoken of in (3) with the rotation of the first heaven, he argues that "since that which is moved and moves is intermediate, there is something which moves [the first heaven] without being moved" (1072a24–25). This is an appeal to the premise, argued at length in *Physics* VIII.5, that every motion must ultimately be traceable to an unmoved mover. The end of XII.7 adds what is in essence a second

and independent argument that the Prime Mover is unmoved, though the argument is not presented as such. It is that the mover responsible for the motion of the heaven cannot have magnitude, for to cause motion through infinite time requires infinite power, and infinite power cannot reside in a finite magnitude; nor, of course, can there be any infinite magnitude (1073a5–11). Aristotle draws from this the conclusion that the Mover is without parts and indivisible, but he could equally well have drawn the conclusion that it is unmoved, since nothing without magnitude can be moved.[2]

Since the Prime Mover is essentially immovable it has no capacity to undergo change of any sort, including even locomotion such as that undergone by the heavenly bodies. That is one sense in which its substance is actuality. Besides capacities to undergo change, however, there are also capacities to act. If we assume that the Mover's only capacity to act is that of moving the first heaven – along with that of thinking, as we shall see in a moment – then there is also a second sense in which its substance is actuality: all its capacities to act are fully realized at all times. There can be little doubt that this is Aristotle's view, for immediately after arguing for the existence of the Mover he goes on to contrast it with things that are able to act but do not do so (1071b23ff.). Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that neither in the *Physics* nor in the *Metaphysics* does he argue for the restriction of the Mover's capacities to act to just these two. What would he say if pressed for a reason? He might appeal to considerations of explanatory simplicity: the motion of the first heaven is the only thing that leads us to posit the existence of the Mover, so to attribute other activities to it would be an unwarranted complication. But on such grounds even Aristotle's own attribution to the Mover of contemplation must appear suspect. Perhaps a more important consideration was simply that additional activities would threaten the self-sufficiency and freedom from care which are for Aristotle, as for the Greek philosophical tradition generally, an essential aspect of the divine life. This is worth noting, for it indicates one way in which Aristotle's theory of the Prime Mover, grounded though it is in philosophical argument, also rests on unstated theological assumptions.

However that may be, in the following chapter even the activity of the Mover in causing the motion of the heaven seems to be forgotten. In order to explain how it is possible to move without being moved, Aristotle cites the

[2] The principle that nothing without magnitude is movable is stated twice in *Phys.* VIII (257a33–b1, 267a22–23) and argued in *Phys.* VI.4.

case of objects of thought and desire, which clearly do just that. He adds that the primary object of thought and the primary object of desire are the same: primary simple substance existing in actuality (ἡ οὐσία πρώτη ἡ ἁπλῆ καὶ κατ᾽ ἐνέργειαν, 1072a31–32). In this identification of simple substance existing in actuality with the primary object of desire there resurfaces a thread we noted in *Metaphysics* IX.9, the assumption that actuality as such is good and that pure actuality is supremely good. The argument Aristotle gives for this idea in the present chapter is based on an adaptation of the Pythagorean table of opposites. One column of the table contains the fundamental positive qualities such as being, unity, and rest, and the other the corresponding negative qualities such as non-being, multiplicity, and motion. Simple substance existing in actuality is the first element in the positive column, for as substance it exists *par excellence*, and being simple it possesses unity. Furthermore, since this column also represents that which is intelligible, such substance is the primary object of thought. The object of desire, meanwhile, is the beautiful (τὸ καλόν). Beauty also belongs in the positive column, so that the primary object of desire must be that which is first in this column – namely, simple substance, the primary object of thought (1072a27–b1).

This argument is noteworthy for the Platonism of its conclusion. Like the Beautiful of the *Symposium*, simple substance existing in actuality is not only supremely real; it is also supremely beautiful. For Aristotle, no less than for Plato, beauty, reality, and intelligibility converge in a single focus at the summit of reality. This is an important point to which I will return below.[3]

First I wish to draw attention to a fundamental shift that follows this point of the argument. The rest of XII.7 continues to argue that the Prime Mover is supremely desirable, but from a different point of view – from that, so to speak, of what it is like to be the Prime Mover. The emphasis accordingly shifts from viewing the Mover as an object of desire to viewing it as a pattern for imitation. The Mover's way of life "is such as the best

[3] Aristotle adds another argument for the goodness of the Mover, one more typical of his own characteristic outlook. The Mover "exists of necessity, and insofar as it exists of necessity it exists well (καλῶς)" (1072b10–11). This terse statement should be read in light of the claim in *Met.* V.5 that things necessary in the strictest sense, and so eternal and immovable, are not subject to anything compulsory or contrary to their nature (1015b9–15). Apparently Aristotle wishes us to understand that to completely fulfill one's own nature simply *is* to exist well. The argument could thus stand as an epitome of his ethical naturalism. Yet it scarcely provides independent grounds for that naturalism; after all, whether the Mover's nature is itself good – so that to fulfill it is good *simpliciter*, and not merely good for the Mover – is surely a question that can sensibly be asked.

which we enjoy, and enjoy for but a short time (for it is ever in this state, which we cannot be), since its activity is also pleasure (ἡδονὴ ἡ ἐνέργεια τούτου)" (1072b14–16). This is a remarkable turn. Nothing in the text up to this point has prepared us to think of the Mover as anything but a cause of motion, or perhaps, in its role as final cause, as some kind of abstract principle. Now we are told that it possesses life and exercises thought – for of course, as Aristotle goes on to explain, the reference to human life at its best is just a reference to "active thought" or contemplation (θεωρία, 1072b24). Only after asserting that the Mover lives and thinks, and that its life and thought are a kind of actuality and enjoyment, does Aristotle refer to it as God (1072b25ff.).

The shift to thinking of the Mover as a living and thinking being is accomplished by means of another and subtler shift. In the previous paragraph I rendered the phrase ἡδονὴ ἡ ἐνέργεια τούτου as "its activity is also pleasure." The Oxford translation renders the same phrase "its actuality is also pleasure," and in fact neither translation is really adequate. In this sentence Aristotle seems to be regarding the single undifferentiated actuality which is the Prime Mover specifically *as* activity.[4] That the Mover is active in some way has, after all, been taken as given ever since step (4) of the initial argument. The question is, what kind of activity is there that does not import some reference to potency? Aristotle's distinction between *energeia* and *kinēsis* points in the direction of activities such as thinking and sight, which are complete at every moment and so are not in potency with regard to some as yet unachieved end. But of course sight and other perceptual activities will not do, for they occur only in embodied organisms and require an external object. On the theory laid down in *De Anima* III.4–5, thought is free of these constraints. Hence it is natural that Aristotle turn to thought as a way of fleshing out his picture of the Prime Mover as perpetually active. This dovetails nicely with the assumption that the divine life is supremely blessed, because for Aristotle it is axiomatic that "the act of contemplation is most pleasant and best" (1072b24).

The question all of this leaves hanging is precisely what has become of the Mover's activity in moving the first heaven. Are this kinetic activity and the activity of contemplation supposed to be the same? If so, how? Or

[4] Hence, incidentally, this statement need not be taken (as is sometimes claimed) as a return to the theory of *Nic. Eth.* VII that pleasure is an activity. Aristotle could well have written it while holding that in general pleasure "completes" or "follows" activity (as he does in *Nic. Eth.* X.4–5); the Prime Mover is simply an exception to this formula, for one cannot distinguish within it separate stages of activity and completion.

has Aristotle merely arranged a forced marriage of his metaphysics and his theology, grafting onto his theory of the Prime Mover a set of attributes derived from more traditional conceptions of God?

## WHAT DOES THE PRIME MOVER DO?

The most common answer to these questions is as follows. Although in *Physics* VIII the Mover is an efficient cause of the motion of the first heaven, this is no longer true in *Metaphysics* XII. There Aristotle refined his theory to make the Mover solely a final cause. The reasons for the change are a matter of speculation: perhaps he recognized the oddity of positing an immaterial efficient cause, or perhaps he found it difficult to reconcile activity as an efficient cause with the Mover's existence as pure actuality. At any rate, in the *Metaphysics* the Mover moves the first heaven solely by existing as a paradigm of perfection which the heaven desires to imitate. Since the heaven is a material being, it naturally cannot achieve the perfect identity between intellect, act of thought, and object of thought which is the perpetual state of the divine mind. But by engaging in eternal circular motion it does the next best thing, for such motion is the nearest likeness to contemplation possible for a material body.[5]

This interpretation has much to recommend it. Aristotle clearly does regard the Mover as a final cause; not only, as we have seen, does he place it first among the objects of thought and desire, but he states explicitly that it "moves as an object of love" (κινεῖ ὡς ἐρώμενον, 1072b3). Chapter XII.8 extends this theory to the planetary movers, laying down as a general principle that "every substance which is immune to change and in virtue of itself has attained to the best must be considered an end (τέλος)," and that, as an end, every such substance produces motion (1074a19–23). It is also true that perpetual circular motion is the nearest approximation to contemplation possible for a material body. As Aristotle explains in *Physics* VIII.9, circular motion has the unique quality that "any one point as much as any other is alike starting-point, middle-point, and finishing-point" (265a34); circular motion thus resembles divine thought in its homogeneity and its ability to continue perpetually without tending toward a change in state. It is undoubtedly for this reason that *De Caelo* II.12 makes the circular

[5] For fuller statements of this view see Ross, *Aristotle's Metaphysics,* vol. 1, cxxxiiiff.; Joseph Owens, "The Relation of God to World in the *Metaphysics*," *Études sur la Métaphysique d'Aristote*, ed. Pierre Aubenque (Paris, 1979), 207–28; Lloyd Gerson, *God and Greek Philosophy* (London and New York, 1990), 120–41. There is an extensive survey of opinions in the introduction to Leo Elders, *Aristotle's Theology: A Commentary on Book Λ of the Metaphysics* (Assen, 1972).

motions of the stars and planets the means by which they attain to "the best" (292b10) or "the divine principle" (292b22).

Nonetheless, the standard view is subject to fatal objections. The most important are the following.[6]

(1) If the Prime Mover is not an efficient cause, why does Aristotle not say so? The problem is not simply that he fails to notify us that his views have changed since the *Physics*; such unremarked changes are common enough. It is that *Metaphysics* XII.6 itself leads the reader to expect that the being under discussion is the efficient cause of the motion responsible for time. Statements such as "if it does not act (ἐνεργήσει), there will not be motion" (1071b17) are surely most naturally interpreted as referring to an efficient cause. Much of the reasoning of XII.6 is repeated at the end of XII.10, where Aristotle criticizes the Platonists for giving no account of the origin of motion. There again he says that the first principle must be "productive and causative of motion" (ποιητικὸν καὶ κινητικόν, 1075b31); there is no hint that these words have anything other than their usual meaning.[7]

(2) The argument at the beginning of XII.6 requires that the Mover act, not in just any way, but specifically in a way that causes the motion of the first heaven. To take this requirement as being fulfilled by the Mover's noetic activity would require some explanation of how that activity results in perpetual circular motion. Now the standard view supplies such an explanation, but it must be emphasized that this explanation is an interpreter's construct. All Aristotle says is that the Mover moves as an object of thought and desire; he does not specify how its doing so results in the perpetual circular motion of the heaven. On the standard view we must assume that Aristotle left a crucial explanatory gap to be filled by the reader, although he elaborates on other points (such as the nature of divine thought) at great length.

(3) Furthermore, the explanation offered on this point by the standard view is problematic. Since Aristotle emphasizes that the Mover is the primary object of thought as well as of desire, it would seem that he thinks of

[6] Most of these objections are adapted from W. J. Verdenius, "Traditional and Personal Elements in Aristotle's Religion," *Phronesis* 5 (1960), 56–70; Thomas De Koninck, "La 'Pensée de la Pensée' chez Aristote," *La question de Dieu selon Aristote et Hegel*, ed. Thomas De Koninck (Paris, 1991), 69–151; Sarah Broadie, "Que fait le premier moteur d'Aristote?" *Revue philosophique* 183 (1993), 375–411. The organization and some of the detail are my own.

[7] It is worth noting that ποιητικόν and κινητικόν are here linked in a way suggesting that for present purposes they are nearly synonymous. This argues against the suggestion of André Laks that in XII.6 (and especially the phrase ποιητικὸν ἢ κινητικόν, 1071b12) they are meant as alternatives. See André Laks, "*Metaphysics* Λ 7," *Aristotle's Metaphysics Lambda: Symposium Aristotelicum*, ed. Michael Frede and David Charles (Oxford, 2000), 242.

the heaven as capable of intellectually apprehending the Mover.[8] If the heaven is capable of this then surely it is capable in some degree of contemplation. Why then does it not imitate the Mover in the most direct way possible, by contemplating that which the Mover contemplates? Granted that it cannot contemplate as fully or continually as the Mover, even imperfect contemplation would be a closer approximation to the perfection of the divine life than spatial movement of any kind. There is an analogous situation among human beings, who are also incapable of perfect contemplation but can imitate God imperfectly by contemplating to the best of their ability, as explained in *Nicomachean Ethics* x.7–8.

(4) Besides the beginning of xii.6 and the end of xii.10, two other passages in *Metaphysics* xii seem to treat the Mover as an efficient cause. The first is the argument at the end of xii.7 that since the Mover possesses infinite power it cannot have magnitude. This clearly requires that the Mover be an efficient cause, for a final cause need not possess power at all, save in a metaphorical sense irrelevant to the argument. The other is the beginning of xii.10, where Aristotle develops an analogy between the relation of the Mover to the cosmos and that of a general to his army. This analogy will be discussed further below, but taken at face value it surely suggests that the Mover acts directly and intentionally on the cosmos to produce order, just as a general acts upon his army.[9]

(5) Finally, on the standard view, Aristotle is not really entitled to infer that the Prime Mover exists. For if the Mover's only role is to serve as an ideal for the first heaven to imitate, why must it be real? Perhaps the heaven simply posits this ideal of its own accord, or perhaps it believes the ideal to be real but is mistaken. This difficulty could be avoided if the heaven's imitation of the Mover were anoetic, as is, for example, the elements' imitation of the heavenly bodies (*Met.* ix.8 1050b28–30). But that would fail to account for the emphasis in xii.7 on the Mover's being an object of thought as well as of desire, and it would reduce the talk of moving as an object of love to metaphor.

[8] This is affirmed by the major contemporary proponents of the standard view (e.g., Ross, Owens) as well as by the ancient commentators, although the latter were motivated largely by their desire to reconcile the *Metaphysics* with the *De Caelo*. See H. A. Wolfson, "The Problem of the Souls of the Spheres, from the Byzantine Commentaries on Aristotle through the Arabs and St. Thomas to Kepler," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 16 (1962), 67–93.

[9] *Gen. et Corr.* ii.10 336b32–35 is another passage asserting direct action by God on the cosmos, although it too is somewhat metaphorical. More generally, Aristotle often links God and nature in a way that seems to involve God in acting on the world (e.g., *De Cael.* 271a33, *Pol.* 1326a32); cf. Verdenius, "Traditional and Personal Elements," 61–62.

In light of these difficulties there can be little doubt that, other things being equal, an interpretation that takes the Mover as efficient as well as final cause is preferable to one that takes it as final cause alone. The challenge is to construct an interpretation along these lines that is faithful to the text and leaves Aristotle with a reasonably plausible and intelligent position.

## SELF-THINKING THOUGHT

In order to do so, let us return to the passage in XII.7 immediately after the assertion that the Mover's way of life is "such as the best which we enjoy, and enjoy for but a short time" (1072b14–15). This is the crucial point where Aristotle first ascribes thought to the Mover. After a brief digression on the superiority of the pleasure of activity to that of anticipation, the passage continues:

> Thinking in itself (ἡ νόησις ἡ καθ᾽ αὑτήν) deals with that which is best in itself, and that which is thinking in the fullest sense with that which is best in the fullest sense. And intellect thinks itself because it shares the nature of the object of thought (αὑτὸν δὲ νοεῖ ὁ νοῦς κατὰ μετάληψιν τοῦ νοητοῦ); for it becomes an object of thought in coming into contact with and thinking its objects, so that intellect and object of thought are the same. For that which is capable of receiving the object of thought, i.e. the substance, is intellect. But it is active (ἐνεργεῖ) when it possesses this object. Therefore the latter rather than the former is the divine element which intellect seems to contain, and the act of contemplation is what is most pleasant and best. (1072b18–24)[10]

The reference to "thinking in itself" is an indication that the passage is concerned with thought as abstracted from the limitations of human thought, such as the necessity for thinking in images stated in *De Anima* III.7–8. When thought exists in this purer mode, we are told, it necessarily "deals with that which is best in itself." Although this assertion is not supported by any argument, it is natural enough given the identification, implicitly made by the passage's location in the chapter, of "thinking in itself" with divine thought. To suppose that divine thought is anything other than blessed would be impious, and for it to be thus blessed requires that it concern itself exclusively with that which is best.[11]

What is important in this passage for our purposes is its assertion that intellect when it is active not only possesses its object but becomes identical

[10] I adopt the standard translation of *nous* as "intellect," rather than the idiosyncratic "thought" of the Oxford translation.

[11] See also *Met.* XII.9 1074b23–26. The assumption that to be fully blessed thought must be about that which is best is one that Aristotle does not justify and does not even explicitly recognize that he is making. It is another instance of an unstated theological assumption.

with its object, so that it "thinks itself." We may compare this assertion to a similar claim made during the description of human thinking in *De Anima* III.4:

When the intellect has become each thing in the way in which one who is said to be an actual man of science (ὁ ἐπιστήμων λέγεται ὁ κατ' ἐνέργειαν) does so – this happens when he is able to act on his own initiative – its condition is still one of potentiality, but in a different sense from the potentiality which preceded the acquisition of knowledge by learning or discovery; the intellect is then able to think itself (αὐτὸς δὲ αὑτὸν τότε δύναται νοεῖν). (429b5–9)[12]

This passage differs from that in the *Metaphysics* in that it contrasts intellect in first potency and in second potency, whereas the *Metaphysics* appears to be concerned with intellect in second potency and in second act. (The *De Anima* is willing to call even the intellect in second potency identical with its objects, although no doubt this identity is parasitic upon that between intellect and its objects in second act.[13]) The real lesson of the passage, however, is that the *De Anima* no less than the *Metaphysics* takes the identity of intellect and object to imply that the intellect in actively thinking "thinks itself." This is important for the interpretation of the passage we have been examining from chapter XII.7. The statement there that the divine intellect "thinks itself" has often been taken as a definitive description of divine thinking, with the result that Aristotle's God has been thought to be engaged in a kind of narcissistic self-contemplation, or (in a more sophisticated version) in "purely reflexive formal thinking."[14] Such accounts are hard to reconcile with the statement that the Prime Mover's life is "such as the best which we enjoy, and enjoy for but a short time." The passage from the *De Anima* shows the way out of this difficulty. To speak of the divine intellect as "thinking itself" cannot be a definitive description of what it does, for even human intellect "thinks itself" when it is active; this is no more than an inevitable consequence of the identity between active intellect and its object.[15]

[12] In the final clause I follow the manuscript reading, as does the Oxford translation. The O.C.T. emends δὲ αὑτὸν to δι' αὑτοῦ, but this is clearly unwarranted in light of 430a2–9 (to be discussed below), not to mention αὑτὸν δὲ νοεῖ ὁ νοῦς in the passage from *Met.* XII.7.

[13] The several allusions to the identity later in the *De Anima* are to the intellect in second act (430a4, 431b17; cf. 430a20, 431a1).

[14] The phrase is from Michael Wedin, *Mind and Imagination in Aristotle* (New Haven and London, 1988), 243. Remarkably, although it plays an important role in Wedin's interpretation he does not explain it further.

[15] See also Richard Norman, "Aristotle's Philosopher-God," *Phronesis* 14 (1969), 63–74. There is a detailed critique of Norman in Wedin, *Mind and Imagination*, 229–45. One of my aims here is to put the case for an interpretation similar to Norman's in a way that circumvents Wedin's objections.

It is important to be clear about the nature of this identity. Aristotle was of course aware that in one sense the intellect does not become identical with its object. When one thinks of a stone, what comes to be present in the soul is not the stone itself, but its form (*De An.* III.8 431b26–29). This is not an obstacle to the identity of intellect and its object, for strictly speaking the object of thought (τὸ νοητόν or τὸ νοούμενον) is the form. That is the thrust of a large part of *De Anima* III.4, including particularly the end of the chapter, where Aristotle returns to the subject of the identity of intellect with its object and the capacity of intellect to think itself.

Intellect is itself thinkable in the same way as its objects. For in the case of objects which involve no matter, what thinks and what is thought are identical, for speculative knowledge and its object are identical . . . But in the case of things containing matter each is potentially an object of thought. It follows that while intellect will not belong to them (for intellect is a potentiality of being such things without their matter), to intellect it will belong to be thinkable. (430a2–9)

The statement that each of the things containing matter is potentially an object of thought is an allusion to Aristotle's doctrine that the intelligible content of a thing resides in its form, matter *qua* matter being unintelligible.[16] The fact that before being thought the material object is only potentially an object of thought indicates clearly enough that the object of thought is not the matter–form composite in its entirety, but only the form, which requires an act of thought to be brought from potency to full reality.

This passage introduces the important restriction of the identity between intellect and its object to the case of things without matter. The same restriction is repeated in *Metaphysics* XII.9. The first half of the chapter argues that since intellect is "the most divine of phenomena" (1074b16) it must "think itself," since otherwise there would be something more honorable than it – namely, that which it thinks. This argument culminates in the famous pronouncement that "its thought is a thinking on thinking" (ἔστιν ἡ νόησις νοήσεως νόησις, 1075b34). Aristotle then raises a difficulty: is not knowledge always of something other than itself, and is not there a great difference between an act of thinking (ἡ νόησις) and an object of thought (τὸ νοούμενον)? He replies:

We answer that in some cases the knowledge is the object. In the productive sciences (if we abstract from the matter) the substance in the sense of essence, and in the theoretical sciences the formula or the act of thinking, *is* the object. As,

[16] See, e.g., *Met.* VII.10 1036a8–9, VII.11 1036a28–29, 1037a27, VII.15 1039b27–1040a2.

then, intellect and the object of thought are not different in the case of things that have not matter, they will be the same, i.e., the act of thinking will be one with the object of thought. (1074b38–1075a5)

Here again intellect and the object of thought are said to be identical in the case of things without matter; in addition, the identity is broadened to include the act of thinking. This further step is an important one. The point of the restriction to things without matter is to isolate those objects of thought which do not exist independently of intellect, but simply are the intellect's own acts of thinking. These are the forms which are the objects of the productive and theoretical sciences. In a sense (as just explained) they are the only objects of thought, but Aristotle is willing to bow to popular usage and regard them as a subset of the class of *noēta* as that term is generally used. Given this restriction, it is not difficult to understand the identity between object of thought and act of thought. We have already seen that an object of thought requires an act of thought to pass from potency to full reality. But of course in this process it undergoes no physical change, so the explanation for why it is potential in the one state and actual in the other can only be that in its actualized state it is identical to the act in which it is thought. In essence, Aristotle extends to the relationship between *noēton* and *noēsis* the claim argued in *De Anima* III.2 for that between *aisthēton* and *aisthēsis*, that "the actuality of the sensible object and that of the act of sensation is one and the same" (425b26–27).[17]

Slightly more difficult is the identity between active intellect and its own acts of thinking. Here the restriction to *active* intellect is crucial. Aristotle is not a Humean; he would not hold that the mind simply is a particular grouping of thoughts, for intellect in first or second potency is an enduring power of the soul. But he would agree with Hume that when one introspects and observes the mind in action, one finds nothing other than a series of thoughts. Intellect in second act simply is its own acts of thinking; what else could it be?

Since the intellect when active is its own acts of thinking, and its acts of thinking are the objects of its thought, it follows that the intellect when active is its own object. This result is paradoxical enough, but the paradox is compounded when we notice that the objects of thought are also the forms. Does it not follow that when two persons think the same forms their intellects become identical? We touch here upon one of the ways in

[17] That *aisthēsis* here means act of sensation rather than faculty of sensation is shown by the subsequent examples. The doctrine of *De An.* III.2 is itself simply an application of the general point made in *Phys.* III.3 about the identity of the actuality of agent and patient.

which Aristotle's preconceptions diverge from our own. Intellect (νοῦς) is a word that in the Greek of Aristotle's day virtually never occurs in the plural.[18] Two persons have two souls, or even two rational parts of the soul, but they do not have two intellects. That is why it is natural for Aristotle to write near the end of *De Anima* III.5:

> Actual knowledge (ἡ κατ' ἐνέργειαν ἐπιστήμη) is identical with its object. In the individual, potential knowledge is in time prior to actual knowledge, but absolutely it is not prior even in time. It does not sometimes think and sometimes not think. When separated it is alone just what it is, and this alone is immortal and eternal; but we do not remember, because this is impassive, whereas intellect as passive is perishable. (430a19–25)

It is not necessary to untangle all the knots in this passage to recognize that Aristotle regards actual knowledge as immortal and imperishable. Yet "we do not remember"; intellect is not individually immortal, as are, say, souls in the *Phaedo*.[19] All that is immortal is simply intellect in act. In this connection it is important to recognize that *Metaphysics* XII.9 is not solely a discussion of the divine intellect. Of course it is that, but only because it is also a discussion of intellect in second act, wherever and in whatever form that might be found.[20] It is true that God, being wholly in act, is identical with intellect thus active, but so is human intellect when and to the extent that it achieves perfect realization. So the answer to the question whether the intellects of two persons who think the same forms become identical must be affirmative. But of course there is a catch, namely that two persons never (or rarely?) think wholly and just the same forms, owing to the discursive nature of human thought. And even were they to do so, the potential aspect of their intellects would remain, waiting to reestablish plurality when the moment of convergence has passed.

What can we conclude about the Prime Mover's noetic activity? The Mover "thinks itself" only in the sense that all active intellect thinks itself. The direct objects of its contemplation are the forms, the objects of the

[18] According to Stephen Menn, "Aristotle and Plato on God as Nous and as the Good," *Review of Metaphysics* 45 (1992), 554, a computer search shows that the first author to use the plural regularly was Plotinus.

[19] I assume the standard way of punctuating and translating the passage. An intriguing alternative has been proposed by Victor Caston, "Aristotle's Two Intellects: A Modest Proposal," *Phronesis* 44 (1999), 199–227. Even on Caston's reading actual knowledge remains immortal and eternal, whereas there is no individual immortality at all.

[20] The Oxford translation begins XII.9, "the nature of the divine thought involves certain problems." Not only is the Greek *nous*, not *noēsis*, but the word "divine" (θεῖος) is not in the sentence. It is true that the next sentence calls intellect "the most divine of phenomena," but that by no means implies that only the divine intellect is under consideration. Only at the end of the chapter is divine thinking singled out for attention.

productive and theoretical sciences. That is why the Mover enjoys a way of life "such as the best which we enjoy, and enjoy for but a short time," this being a clear allusion to human apprehension of the forms.[21] Yet because of the identity of intellect and its object, the Prime Mover also simply *is* the forms, which thus exist eternally in actuality. It is the forms as self-subsistent, as "primary simple substance existing in actuality."

This account raises a difficulty. Surely if the divine mind thinks many forms it must do so either sequentially, in which case it is not impassible, or all at once, in which case (owing to the identity of intellect and its object) it is not simple. Aristotle puzzles over this difficulty at the end of XII.9.

> A further question is left – whether the object of thought is composite (εἰ σύνθετον τὸ νοούμενον); for if it were there would be change in passing from part to part of the whole. We answer that everything which has not matter is indivisible. As human intellect, or rather that of composite beings, is in a certain period of time (for it does not possess the good at this moment or at that, but its best, being something different from it, is attained only in a certain whole), so throughout eternity is the thought which has itself for its object. (1075a5–10)

The argument would seem to be as follows. Everything that lacks matter is indivisible, but not everything that lacks matter is incomposite. Human intellect is a case in point: it is indivisible as lacking matter, yet because it requires a period of time to attain its good it may be regarded as a composite of its states or activities over many different moments. The divine intellect, however, is its own good, for it has no aim other than to think itself. It is therefore incomposite in the sense of being at any moment fully that which it is at any other moment, or at all other moments put together; there is no need to sum its states over time, so to speak, in order to arrive at a full description of what it is.

This argument rejects the first horn of the dilemma by denying that there is temporal sequence in divine thinking. It has nothing to say about the second horn, however, and so leaves open the possibility that the divine intellect is composite in the sense of thinking simultaneously (and therefore being) multiple forms. Although Aristotle does not address this issue in *Metaphysics* XII, there are the ingredients of a solution in *De Anima* III.6. There Aristotle distinguishes between actual and potential indivisibility: a line, he says, is actually indivisible when it is being thought by a mind that considers the line as a whole (430b6–10). This is puzzling, for one

[21] See *Nic. Eth.* X.7–8, where human life is said to be blessed insofar as it possesses a likeness (ὁμοίωμά τι, 1178b27) of the divine contemplative activity; also *Met.* I.2 983a5–983a10, where wisdom, the knowledge of the causes and first principles, is said to be possessed by God "either alone or above all others."

would think that a line is always actually *divisible*, so that the predicate "indivisible" simply does not apply. But it is important to remember that the act of thinking brings the form resident in the line to a level of actuality higher than that it possesses in the line alone. Apparently Aristotle wishes us to understand that, in being thought as a unity, the form of the line actually possesses unity, so *that at this level of actuality* the line is actually indivisible.

It is easy to see how such a distinction could be used to resolve the problem of the multiplicity of the objects of divine thought. The many forms contemplated by the divine mind are apprehended by that mind as a unity. They therefore exist at that level as a unity, despite the fact that our own minds necessarily apprehend them as a plurality. As I have already noted, Aristotle does not draw this conclusion explicitly, but there seems to be no reason why he should not have drawn it, and doing so provides a plausible way of extracting him from the difficulty about the apparent plurality of the objects of divine thought.[22]

## THE PRIME MOVER AS EFFICIENT CAUSE

Now let us see whether this way of understanding the Prime Mover's noetic activity sheds any light on its kinetic activity. We have already noted that Aristotle describes the Mover as the primary object of thought, the primary object of desire, and the primarily real existent. Whether the divine intellect could deserve these appellations if it were nothing other than "purely reflexive formal thinking" is certainly doubtful. A major advantage of the present interpretation is that it renders the exalted status Aristotle assigns to the Prime Mover a straightforward consequence of his account of divine thinking. Form is of course the principle of intelligibility, so insofar as the divine intellect thinks the forms and *is* the forms it must be supremely intelligible. Form is also intrinsically desirable, a principle of fulfillment which natural objects have an internal drive to seek; as Aristotle remarks in *Physics* I.9, matter desires form the way that the female desires the male and the ugly desires the beautiful (192a22–23). Finally, form is substance, a hard-won discovery that is a major theme of *Metaphysics* VII. Indeed, in *Metaphysics* VII form is "primary substance," an anticipation of the description of the Mover as "primary simple substance existing in actuality."[23]

[22] Here I follow Jonathan Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand* (Cambridge, 1988), 303–06.

[23] See *Met.* VII.7 1032b2, VII.11 1037a5, 1037a28–b4. More generally, the fact that form is substance "as actuality" shows that it takes primacy over matter and the matter–form composite.

In a sense, then, the Prime Mover moves not only the first heaven but all things as an object of love, insofar as all things aspire to realize their proper form. That is the main point of the analogy between the Mover and a general in chapter XII.10.

> We must consider in which of two ways the nature of the universe contains the good or the highest good, whether as something separate and by itself, or as the order of the parts. Probably in both ways, as an army does. For its good is found both in its order and in its leader, but more in the latter; for he does not depend on the order but it depends on him. And all things are ordered together somehow, but not all alike – both fishes and fowls and plants; and the world is not such that one thing has nothing to do with another, but they are connected. For all are ordered together to one end, but it is as in a house, where the freemen are least at liberty to act at random, but all things or most things are already ordained for them, while the slaves and beasts do little for the common good, and for the most part live at random; for this is the sort of principle that constitutes the nature of each. I mean, for instance, that all must at least come to be dissolved into their elements, and there are other functions similarly in which all share for the good of the whole. (1075a11–25)

The analogy with a household is a way of recognizing that each thing pursues its own individual form, but that at the same time "all are ordered together to one end," this end being "the good or the highest good" which imparts order to the whole. How can all things pursue their own form while at the same time being ordered toward a single good? The answer must surely be that "the good or the highest good" is the divine intellect, which embraces all the forms in a single unitary whole.[24]

So there are solid grounds for attributing to Aristotle the view that the divine intellect is the final and formal cause, not only of the motion of the first heaven, but of all natural processes.[25] This does not yet resolve

[24] It might be thought that, in positing a single good towards which all things are ordered, Aristotle runs afoul of his own strictures in *Eud. Eth.* I.8 and *Nic. Eth.* I.6 against a separately existing Idea of the Good. A careful reading of those chapters shows that there is no conflict. The *Eudemian Ethics* explicitly asserts that there is a good-itself (αὐτὸ τὸ ἀγαθόν), the final cause, which is the first of all goods and the cause of the goods below it (1218b7–11). All it denies is that this good-itself is the Idea of the Good. Indeed, the end of that work ultimately identifies the good-itself as God, the final cause for the sake of which wisdom issues its commands (VIII.3 1249b13–23, cf. I.8 1217b31). The *Nicomachean Ethics* contains no similar affirmation, but even there Aristotle allows that there may be some one good capable of separate and independent existence; he merely denies that the knowledge of it would be helpful for ethical study.

[25] This point could be elaborated extensively from Aristotle's scientific works. See *Gen. et Corr.* II.10 336b27–337a15, *De Cael.* II.12 passim, *De An.* II.4 415a26–b2, *Gen. Anim.* II.1 731b20–732a9, *Phys.* II.6 198a11–13. Charles Kahn, "The Place of the Prime Mover in Aristotle's Teleology," *Aristotle on Nature and Living Things*, ed. Allan Gotthelf (Pittsburgh, 1985), 183–205, is a useful discussion of this theme as it appears throughout Aristotle's works.

the question of how it is an efficient cause. That Aristotle still thinks of it as such emerges from the remainder of XII.10, where he recapitulates his own account of the first principles by contrasting it with those of his predecessors. Although much of this material only indirectly illuminates his own views, there is one point which speaks directly to the activity of the Prime Mover as an efficient cause.

Anaxagoras makes the good a motive principle, for his "intellect" (νοῦς) moves things. But it moves them for the sake of something, which must be something other than it, except according to our way of stating the case; for the medical art is in a sense health. (1075b8–10)

Here Aristotle clearly implies that on his own theory, like that of Anaxagoras, *nous* "moves things" (κινεῖ); the difference is that on Aristotle's theory it does so only for the sake of itself. How this is possible is supposed to be explained by the remark that "the medical art is in a sense health." Now although Aristotle frequently identifies the efficient cause of health in a patient as the doctor, in a stricter sense it is the form of health residing in the doctor – that is, the medical art. The reason is that the doctor produces health in accordance with the form of health resident within him, so that his actions may from one point of view be seen as instruments used by the form in reproducing itself. Thus we find in *Metaphysics* VII.7:

The healthy subject is produced as a result of the following train of thought: since *this* is health, if the subject is to be healthy *this* must first be present, e.g., a uniform state of body, and if this is to be present, there must be heat; and the physician goes on thinking thus until he brings the matter to a final step which he himself can take . . . Therefore it follows that in a sense health comes from health and house from house, that with matter from that without matter; for the medical art and the building art are the form of health and of the house. (1032b6–14)

Aristotle's vague formulation, "that with matter from that without matter," does not explicitly identify the form as the efficient cause, but that is clearly the intent of the passage as a whole. There is more here than a mere synecdoche. A cause, in order to qualify as a cause, must be intelligible, so that picking out the form which makes the efficient cause act as it does and calling that form alone "the" efficient cause reflects an important truth. This is precisely what Aristotle says in his discussion of the four types of cause in the *Physics*: "In investigating the cause of each thing it is always necessary to seek what is most precise (as also in other things): thus man builds because he is a builder, and a builder builds in virtue of his art of building. This last cause then is prior: and so generally" (II.3 195b22–24).

The remark in *Metaphysics* XII.10 that "the medical art is in a sense health" would appear to be an allusion to this idea of the efficient causality of the formal and final cause, where the latter are now viewed as constituting the divine intellect. Otherwise the remark makes no sense in its context, where it must explain how *nous* acts but does so with only itself as its end.[26]

The efficient causality of the formal and final cause is the key point that most interpretations of the Prime Mover have tended to overlook.[27] Once it is firmly in view, we can recognize the error of claiming (as did one prominent scholar in a short but influential article) that since the only activity of the Prime Mover is νόησις νοήσεως the Mover cannot be an efficient cause.[28] The Mover is an efficient cause precisely *because* of its contemplative activity, for the latter constitutes it as the formal cause of all natural processes, and hence as their efficient cause in the sense explained above. Another error is that of supposing that the Mover cannot be an efficient cause because if it were it would have to be actualized in that upon which it acts, thereby compromising its self-sufficiency.[29] The two-fold conception of efficient causation outlined above offers a way out of this difficulty. The principle that the efficient cause is actualized in the patient holds only for proximate causes – the teacher who teaches, the doctor who heals, the medicine the doctor uses – but not for the cause that ultimately originates the movement, such as the medical art residing in the doctor's

[26] Other texts on the efficient causality of the formal cause include *Phys.* II.3 195a6–8, III.2 202a9, *Met.* V.2 1013b6–9, VII.9 1034a23–24, IX.2 1046b15–24, XII.4 1070b30–34, XII.6 1071b30, *De An.* III.5 430a12, *Gen. et Corr.* I.5 320b18–22, I.7 324a30–b6, *Gen. Anim.* I.21 729b20, I.22 730b16–18. Note that in these passages it is always the formal cause that Aristotle speaks of as efficient, and indeed at *Gen. et Corr.* I.7 324b15 he denies that the final cause is active except in a metaphorical sense. In the text I speak of the efficient causality of the formal *and* final cause because they are identical in the Prime Mover. The most interesting of these texts from our point of view is *Metaphysics* XII.4 1070b30–34, which directly asserts that the Prime Mover moves all things in the same way that the medical art is health. There is a careful discussion of this passage in Rolf George, "An Argument for Divine Omniscience in Aristotle," *Apeiron* 22 (1989), 61–74, showing that it supports an interpretation of the sort offered here. A different and more deflationary reading of the sense in which the formal cause is productive has been offered by Caston, "Aristotle's Two Intellects," 219–24. Although it is adequate to the interpretation of the active intellect – Caston's main concern – I do not believe that it can do justice to the full range of relevant texts.

[27] Exceptions include Lindsay Judson, "Heavenly Motion and the Unmoved Mover," *Self-Motion: From Aristotle to Newton*, ed. Mary Louise Gill and James Lennox (Princeton, 1994), 164–67, and Michael Frede, "Introduction," *Aristotle's Metaphysics Lambda: Symposium Aristotelicum*, ed. Michael Frede and David Charles (Oxford, 2000), 43–47. Neither article, however, connects it with the Prime Mover's noetic activity.

[28] Gregory Vlastos, "A Note on the Unmoved Mover," *Philosophical Quarterly* 13 (1963), 246–47.

[29] This objection is regarded as decisive by Gerson, *God and Greek Philosophy* (e.g., 119, 126, 134); cf. Gerson, "Causality, Univocity, and First Philosophy in *Metaphysics* II," *Ancient Philosophy* 11 (1991), 331–49.

soul.[30] *A fortiori* it does not hold for the Prime Mover, who embraces all such originating causes as a single unified whole.

If this interpretation is correct, then the traditional view of the Prime Mover as transcendent rather than immanent must be revised. Aristotle's God is both transcendent and immanent: transcendent as existing eternally in full actuality, but immanent as constituting the formal and final cause – and thereby also the efficient cause – of natural change. It is interesting to return to the fundamental discussion of the convergence of the three types of cause, *Physics* II.7, with this thought in mind. A superficial reading of that chapter might leave the impression that the formal and efficient cause are identical only in that the efficient cause must already possess the form that it imparts to its product ("man begets man"). Yet Aristotle explicitly limits this understanding of the identity to things that cause motion by being moved, leaving open a different interpretation in the case of unmoved movers (198a24–29). In the conclusion of the chapter, he writes:

> The principles which cause motion in a natural way are two, of which one is not natural, as it has no principle of motion in itself. Of this kind is whatever causes motion while itself being unmoved, like that which is completely unmoved and first of all things, the essence and the form (τό τε παντελῶς ἀκίνητον καὶ πάντων πρῶτον καὶ τὸ τί ἐστιν καὶ ἡ μορφή): for this is the end or that for the sake of which. Hence since nature is for the sake of something, we must know this cause also. (198a35–b5)

This passage is normally read as a description of immanent form. It is that, to be sure – but note that Aristotle calls such form "completely unmoved" and "the first of all things," and says that it causes motion in a natural way but is itself "not natural" (οὐ φυσική). How can immanent form, the very principle constituting a thing's nature, not be natural? These expressions are fully intelligible only in light of the theology of *Metaphysics* XII, which bestows on immanent form a transcendent reality. As the passage shows, there is no conflict between such a theology and Aristotle's scientific practice; the task of the physicist remains to search out immanent form and so learn the secrets of nature.

This leads us to a second point, that of how a proper understanding of the Prime Mover can shed light on the relation between physics and metaphysics. In *Metaphysics* VI.1 Aristotle raises the question of whether physics is the first science. His answer is notoriously terse: "We answer that if there is no substance other than those which are formed by nature, natural

[30] Aristotle makes a closely related point in *Gen. et Corr.* I.7 324a30–b6, where he points out that whereas proximate causes are moved, ultimate causes need not be.

science will be the first science; but if there is an immovable substance, the science of this must be prior and must be first philosophy, and universal in this way, because it is first" (1026a27–31). Commentators have long puzzled over how theology, the science of a particular kind of substance (i.e., immovable substance), can also be "first philosophy," the science of being *qua* being. If the distinctive attribute of the subject studied by theology were solely its immovability, the puzzle would indeed be irresolvable. But on Aristotle's account immovable substance turns out to be *nous* in its highest state of actuality. Considered in this light, there is little surprise that the study of it should be first philosophy, for *nous* in its highest state of actuality is the single reality that embraces all natural form. There is, in fact, a chain of dependencies: as the being of items in the other categories is dependent on that of natural substances, that of natural substances is dependent on that of form; and as the being of natural substances is dependent on that of form, that of form is dependent on that of the Prime Mover. Just as form is the principle that makes natural substance intelligible, *nous* in full actuality is, as it were, the principle of intelligibility for form. That is why in the *Physics* Aristotle remarks that the task of the primary science is to study "the first principle in respect of form," ἡ κατὰ τὸ εἶδος ἀρχή (1.9 192a34).[31]

What does this interpretation imply about *energeia*? The standard view of the Prime Mover turns out to be correct in supposing there to be only one divine activity, that of self-thinking thought. But it seriously underestimates the content of this thought and its significance within Aristotle's system. The divine intellect, being identical with its object of thought, thinks itself in thinking the forms and thinks the forms in thinking itself. By its single perpetual *energeia* it *constitutes* the forms, both in the sense of causing them to be (though without any temporal priority) and in that of making up the content of their being. It thus imparts order to the cosmos and renders itself the final cause of all natural change. Yet, as the passage about Anaxagoras indicates, it does so with no other end than itself. The statement in *Metaphysics* XII.7 that it moves the first heaven "as an object of love" thus takes on a dual significance. The divine intellect is loved by the first heaven in at least the same sense in which it is loved by even inanimate things; it is also loved by itself in a sharper and less metaphorical sense, because in this case the love is accompanied by a full understanding and judgment of

[31] See further Patzig, "Theology and Ontology," and Michael Frede, "The Unity of Special and General Metaphysics," *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* (Minneapolis, 1987), 81–95. Frede distinguishes the mode of being of immovable substance from that of natural substance and argues that the latter is dependent on the former.

worth.[32] Such thought involves no labor or discursive movement. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle holds it up as the highest ideal of pleasure: "If the nature of anything were simple, the same action would always be most pleasant to it. This is why God always enjoys a single and simple pleasure; for there is not only an activity of movement but an activity of immobility (ἐνέργεια ἀκινησίας), and pleasure is found more in rest than in movement" (VII.14 1154b25–28).

What makes all of this possible is the theory of *energeia* explicated in Chapter 1. By distinguishing *energeia* from *kinēsis* Aristotle isolates *energeia* specifically as that kind of activity which is its own end and cannot exist save in a state of fulfillment. The theory of *energeia* as actuality brings in a different set of considerations, identifying *energeia* as both the cause of the being of substance and as full and complete reality, in whatever guise that may be found. These various strains of thought are united in the theology of *Metaphysics* XII. The Prime Mover is the activity of self-thinking thought; it is also actuality in the fullest sense, as both the cause of being for all things and as an existent altogether free of potency, and therefore fully and completely real. And of course it is each of these things in virtue of being the others. For all of these reasons Aristotle finds *energeia* worthy of the highest appellation he can give it, that of divinity.

[32] I do not wish to deny that the first heaven has a soul, or rather that the stars do. (The most natural way to read *De Cael.* II.12 is that there is one soul per star.) But these souls are not mentioned in *Metaphysics* XII and are not necessary for the theory there enunciated.

CHAPTER 3

# *Between Aristotle and Plotinus*

The story of the diffusion of Aristotelianism during the centuries after Aristotle's death is a long and tangled one. The works making up the Corpus Aristotelicum as we know it seem to have originated as notes written for lectures to students in the Lyceum. Aristotle also wrote a number of more popular works, the so-called "exoteric" writings which today survive only in fragments. Among these is the *Protrepticus*, whose treatment of *energeia* was discussed in Chapter 1. There is general agreement that the exoteric works were in circulation during the Hellenistic period, and that as late as the second century A.D. they still formed the main basis for the educated public's understanding of Aristotle.[1] The fate of the school treatises is more obscure. According to a story told by Strabo and Plutarch, "Aristotle's books" passed at his death into the hands of Theophrastus, Aristotle's student and colleague, and the second head of the Lyceum. Theophrastus in turn bequeathed them to Neleus of Skepsis, who removed them to his hometown. There they languished in obscurity until they were recovered toward the end of the second century B.C. by Apellicon, a bibliophile who brought them to Athens. He published a faulty and apparently little noticed edition. Finally, about the middle of the first century B.C., a corrected edition was published by a professional Aristotelian scholar named Andronicus of Rhodes. All subsequent manuscripts of the school treatises ultimately rely on this Andronican edition.[2]

So far there is not much to find suspicious in this account. But both Strabo and Plutarch draw the conclusion that, because Neleus had taken the school treatises to Skepsis, Peripatetics after Theophrastus knew virtually nothing of Aristotle's more technical works. Surely, one would think, other copies must have been available. Be that as it may, there is little direct evidence to contradict any of the story, including the suggestion that the

[1] See W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. 6 (Cambridge, 1981), 49–59.
[2] Strabo, *Geography* XIII.1.54; Plutarch, *Sulla* 26.

school treatises passed for a lengthy period into oblivion.[3] It is therefore reasonable to expect that most of the diffusion of the concept of *energeia* during the Hellenistic age took place through the channel of the *Protrepticus*. This *may* be true even among professional philosophers. A story has reached us that Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, recalled in later years seeing his own teacher, Crates the Cynic, reading the *Protrepticus* while sitting in a cobbler's workshop.[4] Although the details of this story may be apocryphal, its supposition that Zeno and Crates knew the *Protrepticus* is a reasonable one. There is no comparable direct evidence that the Stoics or other non-Peripatetics read Aristotle's school treatises, although indirect evidence, in the form of apparent borrowings and critical engagement, is more suggestive. But not much that is relevant to our inquiry can be made out from such circumstantial evidence. It is far more profitable to look directly to the surviving literature to see precisely where and how *energeia* appears.

## *ENERGEIA* IN THE HELLENISTIC SCHOOLS

The first place to look for some reaction to Aristotle's thoughts on *energeia* is naturally to the philosophers of his own generation and those immediately following. For the most part such a search turns up little. The word does not occur among the fragments of Speussipus or Xenocrates, nor among the various pseudo-Platonic works which are thought to emanate from the early Academy, nor among the spuria which have come down under Aristotle's own name, such as the *Problems*, *Economics*, *Rhetoric to Alexander*, and others.[5] There is only slightly more to be said of the great Hellenistic schools – Epicureans, Stoics, and Skeptics – and we will treat them briefly before turning to Theophrastus and his successors.

The first appearance of the word outside the Lyceum is in a fragment of Nausiphanes of Teos preserved by Philodemus.[6] Nausiphanes was a student of Democritus and teacher of Epicurus, and as the link between the two great atomists played a strategic role in the formation of Epicureanism. The statement in which *energeia* occurs could well have been lifted straight

[3] See Guthrie, *History*, vol. 6, 59–65, and H. B. Gottschalk, "Aristotelian Philosophy in the Roman World from the Time of Cicero to the End of the Second Century A.D.," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II. 36.2 (1987), 1083–88.

[4] Stobaeus, *Anthology* IV.32.21.

[5] The sole exception is *Problems* XIX.29 920a6, which states that "activity (ἐνέργεια) has an ethical nature and molds character."

[6] Philodemus, *Rhetoric* ch. 34 (= *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, ed. H. Diels and W. Kranz, 75B1).

from Aristotle's *Protrepticus*: "we attribute the builder's art not only to one acting (ἐνεργοῦντα), nor looking to the activity (ἐνέργειαν) itself, but rather to the ability to take up wood and the appropriate tools, and to fashion a work in accordance with the builder's art." Although this contrast between *energeia* and ability (τὸ δύνασθαι) is a commonplace in Aristotle, the *Protrepticus* is clearly the likeliest source of direct influence.

Another early occurrence is in a fragmentary statement of Epicurus distinguishing different kinds of pleasure: "freedom from disturbance and absence of pain are static pleasures, but joy and delight are regarded as kinetic activities (κατὰ κίνησιν ἐνεργείᾳ βλέπονται)" (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* x.136).[7] Epicurus is concerned here to distinguish between static (or "katastematic") pleasures and those involving motion or change. As he makes clear elsewhere, katastematic pleasures are not merely those which do not consist in or require change; they also do not depend on external stimulus, having their source in the constitution of the organism itself. It is interesting that Epicurus associates this kind of pleasure with privative states such as freedom from disturbance and absence of pain, rather than with activity. In this he differs from Aristotle, who associates pleasure with completed activity. It thus seems fair to say that, although Epicurus adopts Aristotelian terminology, he does so in the service of an un-Aristotelian conclusion.[8]

When one turns to the Stoics one finds many occurrences of the term within ancient testimonia, but none that can be identified with certainty as deriving from the Stoics themselves.[9] The most likely candidates are various definitions attributed to the Stoics by Diogenes Laertius and Sextus Empiricus.[10] Even these could well derive from some doxographic handbook, however, and they are in any case of little philosophical interest. The more prominent Hellenistic schools thus provide only meager results for a study of *energeia*. The paucity is not solely in the number of occurrences, but also in the resonances of the term. There is no hint of the Aristotelian use of *energeia* to mean actuality, nor of the contrast with

[7] This statement is slightly puzzling, for ἐνεργείᾳ does not seem to add anything not already said by κατὰ κίνησιν. The redundancy led H. Ritter to suggest emendation to ἐναργείᾳ, "distinctly, manifestly." Although the emendation has not been accepted by Epicurus' editors, it is true that ἐνέργεια and ἐνάργεια are frequently confused in the manuscripts. One need look no further than elsewhere in Diogenes' life of Epicurus (x.48, 52) for instances of this phenomenon.

[8] This is not to deny that Epicurus may have been inspired by Aristotle's conclusion that "pleasure is found more in rest than in movement" (*Nic. Eth*. vii.14 1154b28). But even here Aristotle associates such pleasure with the divine *energeia akinēsias*, so that there is no separation between *energeia* and enduring, self-dependent pleasure.

[9] See the index to *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*.

[10] Diogenes, *Lives* vii.52, 98, 112; Sextus, *Pyr*. iii.169, *Adv. Math*. xi.23.

*kinēsis*. Even the contrast with *dunamis* in the sense of capacity, which ought to have been available through the *Protrepticus*, seems to have made no impression after Nausiphanes. In the next section I will discuss this general ignorance or neglect within the context of the term's occurrence in other types of Hellenistic literature. For now let us turn to Theophrastus, who more than anyone else represents the direct continuation of the Aristotelian tradition.

There can be no doubt that Theophrastus read and absorbed carefully the material on *energeia* in Aristotle's school treatises. He repeats Aristotle's definition of motion from *Physics* III.1, including versions with both *energeia* and *entelecheia*, although he insists against Aristotle that motion is to be found in all ten of the categories.[11] It would appear that he discussed the doctrine of *Metaphysics* VIII.2 that substance in the sense of form is *energeia*, although what he said on the subject is lost.[12] From the *Paraphrase of Theophrastus's Discourse "On the Soul"* by Priscian of Lydia we learn that Theophrastus had a good deal to say about topics bearing on *energeia* from the *De Anima*. Alas, proximity to the source does not seem to have given him any special insight into the knottier aspects of Aristotle's teaching. He recognizes that the potential intellect must be affected somehow if it is to become actual (εἰς ἐνέργειαν ἥξει), but he is puzzled by how one incorporeal thing can affect another and by why intellect does not always think (Fr. 307, 320A). His exposition of the doctrine that intellect in act becomes identical with its object is confident and enthusiastic, but does not add much to Aristotle's own statements (Fr. 317–19).

The most interesting aspect of *energeia* in Theophrastus is his groping toward a criticism of Aristotle's theory of the Prime Mover. The work in which these criticisms occur, Theophrastus' *Metaphysics*, is clearly intended more to raise questions than to answer them. Nonetheless, there is a definite tendency motivating Theophrastus' questions, and this tendency can give some insight into his position. The two most important passages are as follows:

In the case of the first principles . . . one might reasonably raise a question regarding their rest as well: for if rest is assigned to them as something better, one might well attach it to the first principles; but if it is assigned as inactivity (ἀργία) and a privation of movement, one will not do so. Indeed, one should substitute activity (ἐνέργειαν) as being prior and more valuable, and locate movement in perceptible

[11] Fr. 153A–C Fortenbaugh.

[12] Fr. 152; cf. Theophrastus, *Metaphysics* 8a11, where form (μορφή) is described as "heading for actuality" (ἀγόμενον εἰς ἐνέργειαν).

objects . . . Sense perception, too, seems in some manner to second the suggestion that what imparts movement need not always be different from what is moved by it, simply because of its acting and being acted upon. And the same is true if one takes the question further to mind itself, and to God. (7b9–22)

It is precisely being in movement which without qualification belongs to nature in general, and most of all to the heaven. So if activity (ἐνέργεια) belongs to the essence of each object and if the individual when it acts (ἐνεργῇ) is also in movement, as in the case of animals and plants (for otherwise they would be such in name only), obviously the heaven too will be in rotation by its essence, and when separated from it and at rest would be a heaven in name only. For the rotation of the universe is like a kind of life. Surely, then, if in the case of animals the life involved requires no explanation except in some particular way, in the case of the heaven and the heavenly bodies the motion involved does not require explanation either, except in some special way? The present problem somehow connects with the movement effected by the unmoved entity, too. (10a9–21)[13]

Despite the offer hinted at in the final sentence, Theophrastus' surviving works have no more to say about the unmoved mover, so these two passages are all we have to go on in interpreting his views. Fortunately they are consistent and present a reasonably coherent position. In the first passage Theophrastus is willing to attribute rest to the first principles only on the understanding that rest does not imply inactivity or the absence of motion, and he offers *energeia* as the best term for the kind of restful motion he has in mind. Interestingly, although he explicitly distinguishes this *energeia* from the *kinēsis* to be found among perceptible objects, he does not make use of Aristotle's *energeia–kinēsis* distinction. The *energeia* he has in mind is self-caused rotational motion; this is suggested by the defense of self-motion in the first passage, and made explicit by the assertion in the second that the *energeia* of the heaven is "rotation in accordance with its essence." Indeed, in the second passage there is no hint that *energeia* is distinct from *kinēsis* at all, for even plants and animals are said to possess their own proper *energeia*.

Theophrastus thus seems ready to return to the position characterizing much of Aristotle's *De Caelo*, according to which the heaven is simply a material entity whose nature it is to rotate. Whether this represents a considered rejection of Aristotle's mature views or merely a position to be explored as part of a dialectical give-and-take is hard to say. Theophrastus is well aware of the notion that God moves the heaven as an object of desire. In fact, he initially praises this account as "both establishing one

[13] Trans. van Raalte, adapted.

principle for all things and assigning the activity and being that are involved" (meaning, presumably, those of God) (5a6–8). On the other hand, he never mentions Aristotle's attribution of thought to the Prime Mover, neglecting entirely the role that this is supposed to play in explicating the nature of divine *energeia* and establishing God as primary object of desire. Nor is it easy to believe that his casual defense of the possibility of self-motion was written in full knowledge of Aristotle's painstaking arguments to the contrary. Evidence from a comparison of the *Metaphysics* with Aristotle's biological works also points to a fairly early date, sometime before the *Parts of Animals* and *Generation of Animals*.[14] Regardless of its date, Theophrastus' *Metaphysics* is interesting from our point of view simply because it represents a step back from the heady metaphysical associations which Aristotle's own works invest in *energeia*. What motivates this caution seems to be, in the first instance, a lack of confidence that sound arguments can be given against the possibility of self-motion. Lurking in the background may also be Theophrastus' puzzlement (expressed, as we saw, in connection with Aristotle's theory of intellect) regarding how an immaterial entity can be a causal agent. Although he does not explicitly mention this difficulty in the passages quoted, it must surely be significant that the first passage cites the mind as an instance of a self-mover.

After Theophrastus, *energeia* rapidly passed into neglect among the Peripatetics.[15] This silence is in keeping with what seems to have been a general lack of interest in Aristotle's school treatises. As mentioned earlier, Strabo and Plutarch attempt to account for this neglect by maintaining that at the death of Theophrastus Aristotle's more technical works were lost to the school. Be that as it may, even after the appearance of Andronicus' edition there is no evidence of any particular interest in *energeia*. The word occurs frequently in Aspasius' commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, as should be expected, but only in ways that are well within the bounds of ordinary Aristotelian usage. Even the passage at the end of *Nicomachean Ethics* vii.14 on the divine *energeia akinēsias* does not prompt Aspasius to any particularly innovative reflection. He makes a natural extrapolation from Aristotle's remarks to the conclusion that *daimons* and stars, having bodies composed of a single element, must also find pleasure in a single constant activity; but he does not attempt to describe this activity, nor to

[14] See Glenn Most, "The Relative Date of Theophrastus' *Metaphysics*," *Theophrastean Studies: On Natural Science, Physics and Metaphysics, Ethics, Religion, and Rhetoric*, ed. William Fortenbaugh and Robert Sharples (New Brunswick, 1988), 233–37; but cf. van Raalte's introduction to the *Metaphysics*, which favors a later date.

[15] For a few minor appearances see *Die Schule des Aristoteles*, vol. 5, Fr. 74, 134; vol. 8, Fr. 37a.

ask how it might differ from that of "the first god," who is presumably immaterial.[16]

As it turns out, the most interesting uses of *energeia* among philosophers of the first two centuries A.D. are among the Middle Platonists. Before turning to them, let us first take notice of the growing importance of the term in popular usage.

## SOME NOTES ON NON-PHILOSOPHICAL USAGE

In light of the paucity of references to *energeia* among philosophers, it is not surprising that the word was slow in entering the popular language. It does not occur in any of the most important authors of the third and early second centuries B.C. – Menander, Callimachus, Aratus, Apollonius of Rhodes – nor in the Septuagint, nor in a host of lesser figures, including Aristotle's own nephew, the historian Callisthenes of Olynthus. I have found only a single exception, and it turns out to prove the rule: a brief report by Antigonus Carystius of the activity (ἐνέργεια) of a certain gem, as he has read of it in Theophrastus.[17]

The first breakthrough into popular language occurs with the *Histories* of Polybius, the earlier parts of which were published c. 150 B.C. There we find *energeia* appearing fairly frequently in the commonest and simplest of its Aristotelian senses, that of activity. Alongside this sense is another closely related to it, which can best be translated as "force" or "vividness." For example, Polybius remarks that a certain supply of artillery and ammunition was "admirable both as regards quantity and force (κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν)" (VIII.7.2), meaning that it was admirable in what it could accomplish. A slightly different nuance appears in his description of the people of Rome during the triumphal entry of Scipio: "they were reminded even more of their former peril by the vividness of the contents of the procession (διὰ τῆς τῶν εἰσαγομένων ἐνεργείας)" (XVI.23.5). What the word conveys here is a sense of live, felt presence, a capacity to seize the attention of anyone within range to see or hear. This sense naturally lends itself to literary or artistic criticism. Alluding to a technique of sketching animals using stuffed bags as models, Polybius remarks that it adequately preserves their outlines but that "the clarity and vividness (ἐνεργείας) of the real animals is not present" (XII.25h.3). Later, describing the various types of writing to

[16] *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, 23 vols. (Berlin, 1882–1909), vol. 19.1, 157.10–12. Aspasius' commentary ends with Book VIII, so we do not know what he made of the treatment of pleasure in X.3–4.

[17] *Paradoxographorum Graecorum Reliquae*, ed. Alexander Giannini (Milan, 1965), 104.

be found in Homer, he lays down as a rule: "Now the end aimed at by history is truth . . . , the end aimed at by rhetorical composition is vividness (ἐνέργειαν), as when he introduces men fighting, while the aim of myth is to please or astonish" (xxxiv.4.2–4).

This use of the word in an aesthetic context can be paralleled from Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Chapter iii.10 of that work states as its purpose to describe "the way to devise lively and taking sayings." After a brief discussion of metaphor and antithesis, it adds: "The words, too, ought to set the scene before our eyes; for events ought to be seen in progress rather than in prospect. So we must aim at these three points: antithesis, metaphor, and activity (ἐνέργεια)" (1410b33–36). The remainder of the chapter is devoted to metaphor, but iii.11 provides a further explanation of *energeia* as a literary quality. In the following selection I have placed in brackets the words added by the Oxford translation in order to highlight a certain ambiguity.

> By "making them see things" I mean using expressions that represent things as in a state of activity (ἐνεργοῦντα). Thus, to say that a good man is four-square is certainly a metaphor; both the good man and the square are perfect; but the metaphor does not suggest activity (σημαίνει ἐνέργειαν). On the other hand, [in] the expression "with his vigor in full bloom" [there is a notion of] activity; and so in "But you must roam as free as a sacred victim"; and in "Thereat up sprang the Hellenes to their feet," where "up sprang" [gives us] activity as well as metaphor, for it at once suggests swiftness. (1411b24–31)

Is *energeia* something depicted *by* the phrases in question, in which case the proper translation is "activity"? Or is it a quality *of* the phrases in question, in which case the proper translation is "vividness" or "vigor"? The reference to suggesting activity (σημαίνει ἐνέργειαν) supports the former reading; the statement in iii.10 placing *energeia* on a footing with metaphor and antithesis as qualities to be aimed at in writing supports the latter. It is certainly possible that Aristotle failed to distinguish the two and slipped unconsciously from one to the other.

The ambiguity is significant, for it shows how readily this passage in the *Rhetoric* (or some other derived from it) might have encouraged the kind of development we find in Polybius. It cannot be inferred that Polybius arrived at his extensions of the term by reading such a passage, for they are natural enough in their context. But the possibility is worth considering. Other authors besides Polybius, such as Pseudo-Aristeas and Aristobulus (both cited below), are to be found using the term about this time. Given that

the works of Aristotle and Theophrastus still languished in obscurity, this roughly simultaneous rediscovery was probably not due to direct Peripatetic influence. Is it possible that some handbook of rhetoric including or based upon *Rhetoric* III.10–11 had lately entered into circulation? That would fit the facts better than postulating an influence from the *Protrepticus* or one of the school treatises other than the *Rhetoric*, for they all include some form of the contrast between *energeia* and *dunamis* (and often more sophisticated doctrines as well), of which there is no trace in Polybius or any other late Hellenistic writer.

For our purposes not much hinges on this hypothesis. But another aspect of the developments to be seen in Polybius – developments somewhat anticipated, as I have argued, in the *Rhetoric* – possesses greater moment. Once *energeia* comes to mean force or vigor, whether of an object or of an expression, it very naturally acquires the further sense of "energy." Here it may be useful to pause to recall what this word means in English. The following is from the *American Heritage Dictionary*:

> 1. a. Vigor or power in action. b. Vitality and intensity of expression. 2. The capacity for action or accomplishment: *lacked energy to finish the job*. 3. (Usually plural) Power exercised with vigor and determination: *devote one's energies to a worthy cause*. 4. (Physics) The work that a physical system is capable of doing in changing from its actual state to a specified reference state.

If we add a prior definition, "0. Action, activity," then the progression from senses 0 through 3 would be a fair summary of the evolution of *energeia* in its popular senses during the Hellenistic period. Sense 4 is of course not one that *energeia* acquired in antiquity, but the fact that the English term possessed sufficient flexibility to take on this sense in the nineteenth century owes much to the multiplicity of meanings established in that earlier age.

The developments in the meaning of *energeia* occurred more or less simultaneously in four areas – in literary criticism, in historical writing, in religious thought, and in science. The literary developments have already been foreshadowed by Polybius' statement that the aim of rhetorical composition is *energeia*. Strabo gave further currency to this statement by quoting it verbatim in his *Geography* (1.2.17), and soon *energeia* had a minor but established place as a technical term of literary criticism. This development was undoubtedly spurred by the Andronican edition of the *Rhetoric*. The passages cited above from chapters III.10–11 seem to have been read in light of post-Aristotelian developments, so that the use of *energeia* to mean vigor or vividness came to be attributed to Aristotle himself. Thus in *On Style*

by a certain Demetrius (probably Demetrius of Tarsus, c. A.D. 50–100) we find the following:[18]

In Aristotle's judgement the so-called "active" metaphor (ἡ κατὰ ἐνέργειαν καλουμένη) is best, wherein inanimate things are introduced in a state of activity (ἐνεργοῦντα) as though they were animate, as in the passage describing the shaft: "Sharp-shot flies at the crowd from the angry shaft," and in the words, "high-arched, foam-crested." All such expressions as "foam-crested" and "angry" suggest the activities (ἐνεργείαις) of living creatures. (II.81)

Although "activity" remains the best translation, there is a tendency here, as in Aristotle himself, to shift from using *energeia* as a name for what a vivid expression signifies to using it as a name for the quality possessed by that expression. The shift is complete in two other writers of the late first century A.D., Plutarch and Quintilian. Plutarch reports that "Aristotle used to say that Homer is the only poet who wrote words possessing movement because of their vigor (ἐνέργειαν)" (*Moralia* 398A). Quintilian concludes a series of definitions of Greek rhetorical terms: "ἐνέργεια, a near relative to all these, which derives its name from action (*est ab agendo dicta*) and whose peculiar function is securing that nothing that we say is tame" (VIII.3.89). This occurrence in Quintilian is significant, for it ensured that *energeia* in the sense of vividness or energy of expression found a place in the Latin tradition.[19]

In historical writing the most important work for our purposes is the *Bibliotheca* of Diodorus Siculus, written c. 60–30 B.C. Many of its uses of the term are similar to those in Polybius. What is new in Diodorus is a tendency to use *energeia* to refer, not only to a particular activity or action, or the force associated with it, but to the *characteristic* activity of a person, society, or thing considered across a relatively lengthy span of time. For a person the appropriate translation is generally "vigor" or "energy"; for a society, "practice" or "custom"; for a thing, "operation" or "working." Thus the Persian king is said to have hunted for a competent general while keeping "the energy of Alexander" (τὴν ἐνέργειαν τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρου) constantly before his eyes (XVII.30.7). Diodorus refers several

[18] For the attribution to Demetrius of Tarsus see the introduction to the Loeb edition by W. Rhys Roberts.

[19] I have not attempted to trace this later history, save to note a few instances in the Renaissance. Scaliger writes that "Efficaciam Graeci ἐνέργειαν vocant. Ea est orationis repraesentantis rem excellenti modo" (*Poetices libri septem* [Lyon, 1561; repr. 1964], 116). Sir Philip Sidney refers to "that same forcibleness or *energia* (as the Greeks call it) of the writer" (*Apology for Poetry* [1581; repr. Oxford, 1966], 70). Others who discuss the term include Joachim Du Bellay, Torquato Tasso, and George Puttenham. According to the O.E.D. it was through the literary usage that the term 'energy' entered English; the passage from Sidney is the earliest cited.

times to Alexander's swiftness and "vigor in action" (ἡ διὰ τῶν πράξεων ἐνέργεια) (xvii.4.5, xvii.7.2, cf. xvi.86.1). Certain captives are said to have been portrayed in a mural as lacking hands because they "had no hands when it came to the dread practice (κατὰ τὰς ἐν τοῖς δεινοῖς ἐνεργείας) [sc. of warfare]" (i.48.2; cf. v.74.4). Regarding the natural world, Diodorus tells us that men who have learned to hatch eggs artificially are unsurpassed even by "the operations of nature" (τῆς φυσικῆς ἐνεργείας) (i.74.5) and that "the arts of mortal men, imitating the natural working (τὴν φυσικὴν ἐνέργειαν) of the sun, impart coloring and varied hues to every object" (ii.52.7).

A special case is presented by the gods, who are conceived by Diodorus as both impersonal forces and quasi-personal agents. In the last passage cited the sun is also described as creator (δημιουργός) of the varied colors in the world; that does not prevent it from possessing a natural or physical *energeia*. Diodorus' more explicit references to the *energeia* of the gods associate it with natural disasters. The destruction of some towns in the Peloponnese by earthquakes and tidal waves he describes as due to "some divine force (θείας τινὸς ἐνεργείας) wreaking destruction and ruin on mankind" (xv.48.1). The translation "force" is appropriate here because the fact that the *energeia* is divine does not impart to it a personal character; there is no hint, for instance, that the destruction was a punishment for past sins. Rather different is a case where Persian soldiers sent to ransack the oracle at Delphi are turned back by a tremendous thunderstorm. Diodorus describes them as fleeing the *energeia* of the gods (xi.14.4). *Energeia* in this passage cannot be simply a force, for it is the deliberate response of the gods to an act of impiety; "onslaught" or even "wrath" might be a better translation.

The earliest references to the divine *energeia* outside the Peripatetic tradition, however, are in the literature of Alexandrian Judaism. The *Letter to Philocrates* of Pseudo-Aristeas piously attributes the success of human oratory to the working of God (θεοῦ ἐνεργείᾳ).[20] A fragment of Aristobulus preserved by Eusebius describes the descent of God upon Mount Sinai as a manifestation of the divine *energeia*: "there was a descent of God upon the mountain when He gave the Law, in order that all might behold the operation of God (τὴν ἐνέργειαν τοῦ θεοῦ)."[21] The most interesting of these early occurrences is in ii Maccabees, a deutero-canonical work written in 124 b.c. It tells of the entry into the Temple of an emissary sent by Seleucus iv

[20] Sect. 266, ed. Hadas. Several other occurrences of *energeia* in the work all refer to human activity. On the dating of the treatise see Hadas' introduction, which argues for about 130 b.c.

[21] Eusebius, *Praep. Evang.* viii.10.12. As with Ps.-Aristeas, the dates of Aristobulus are uncertain; Clement and Eusebius place him in the reign of Ptolemy Philopator (170–150), but most scholars regard this as too early. See Hadas, *Aristeas to Philocrates*, 26–27.

to rob the Temple treasury. A rider appears on horseback accompanied by two men, and together they scourge the emissary so that he is cast to the ground speechless: διὰ τὴν θείαν ἐνέργειαν ἄφωνος ἔρριπτο (3:29). The fact that this intervention is accomplished by angels (although they are not named as such) shows even more clearly than in Diodorus' story of the Persians that *energeia* here is not simply an impersonal force, but the activity of an agent. Yet it is *also* a force, an irresistible agency capable of acting apart from any particular bodily means, such as the angels. There is no English word that captures both sides of this dichotomy; "energy" or "power" perhaps comes closest.[22]

More could be said about the growing religious significance of the divine *energeia* during the Hellenistic and Imperial ages, but for the present these examples will suffice. Let us turn now to the fourth of the areas mentioned earlier, that of scientific writing. In this area *energeia* was slower to make its mark than in the others. There is no trace of it among the great Hellenistic mathematicians and geographers, nor in the fragments of the medical researchers Herophilus and Erasistratus, nor in those of Posidonius, nor in the *Geography* of Strabo.[23] The first scientific occurrence I have found is in the *De Virtutibus Herbarum* of Thessalus, a tract of the first century B.C. dealing with the healing powers of plants. This work is only marginally scientific; Thessalus presents it as containing the revelations given to him by the god Asclepius, and he shifts unself-consciously from speaking of the *energeia* of plants to speaking of that of magical rites.[24] In the first century A.D. the term enters the scientific mainstream. Hero of Alexandria uses it occasionally to refer to the characteristic action of a piece of machinery.[25] It is frequent in the *Materia Medica* of Dioscorides, where it generally refers, as in Thessalus, to the action or efficacy of a herb or mineral.[26] Soranus' *Gynaecology* speaks of the operation or "proper working" (τὴν οἰκείαν ἐνέργειαν) of the uterus.[27] In a medical context like that of Soranus, where the emphasis is on *proper* working, it is often natural to translate the term by "function." Yet Soranus recognizes explicitly that there are *energeiai* of the uterus contrary to nature, such as retention of

[22] Translations of the phrase in the Bible vary widely: "by the power of God" (Douay-Rheims), "by the hand of God" (A.V.), "through divine action" (Anchor), "under the divine visitation" (Jerusalem). For other miracles attributed to the divine *energeia* see III Macc. 4:21, 5:12, and 5:28.

[23] An exception is Strabo's quotation from Polybius noted above.

[24] See I.proem.31, I.2.2, I.2.6, I.4.3, I.8.2, II.proem.1, II.2.8 (ed. Friedrich). For discussion of the magical aspects of this work see Chapter 6 below.

[25] *Pneumatica* I. proem, I.3, I.7, *De Automatis* I.7, i.8, *Mechanicorum Fragmenta* II, Fr. 4 (ed. Schmidt, vol. 1, pp. 2, 40, 56, 340, 342; vol. 2, p. 280).

[26] I.30.2, I.59.3, I.123.2, IV.64.6, IV.166.2, V.79.8, V.111.1.

[27] I.25, 31, 33, 38, 43; cf. II.27–28.

the seed when the orifice closes due to coldness (1.43); this shows that the term's basic meaning is still that of activity or operation.[28]

The most important innovations in a scientific context are those of Galen, who wrote toward the end of the second century. Like Soranus, Galen typically uses the term to refer to the activities of a part or organ, often with an implicit restriction to appropriate or healthy activities. Where Galen goes beyond earlier writers is in clarifying the sense of the term and assigning it a place within a theoretical context. On several occasions he defines *energeia* as "active motion" (κίνησις δραστική). The force of *drastikē* is to limit the term to cases where the motion arises from within the thing itself. Thus walking is an *energeia* of things that walk, and flying of things that fly, but to be transported by another is not an *energeia* but a case of being affected.[29] In what is perhaps a conscious deviation from Aristotle, Galen observes that "the separation made by the cutter in the object cut is one and the same thing, but it is an activity (ἐνέργεια) of the cutter, an affection (πάθος) of the object cut."[30] This echoes the observation in *Physics* III.3 that the *energeiai* of teacher and pupil are one and the same. Unlike Aristotle, however, Galen refuses to regard both as *energeiai*, but calls one an *energeia* and the other a *pathos*. In light of the history we have traced so far, this restriction of the scope of the term is unsurprising. The popular meaning of *energeia* was still "activity," as it had been ever since Polybius; Galen merely sharpens this meaning in order to make it suitable for technical purposes. That is why he defines *energeia* as a kind of *kinēsis*, whereas Aristotle had defined *kinēsis* as a kind of *energeia*.

Galen goes on to place *energeia*, thus defined, into a network of concepts governed by explicit methodological principles. Besides *energeia* itself, the most important of these concepts are faculty (δύναμις), effect or thing done (ἔργον), and substance or essence (οὐσία). Galen describes the relations among them as follows:

The blood-making faculty in the veins, as well as all the other faculties, fall within the category of relative concepts; primarily because the faculty is the cause of the activity (ἐνεργείας), but also, accidentally, because it is the cause of the effect. But,

[28] S. Sambursky, *The Physical World of Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 1962), 110, claims to find the meaning "function" in Hero. The case for this meaning seems stronger to me in Soranus than in Hero, but even in Soranus *energeia* does not really *mean* function, as shown by the reference to an *energeia* contrary to nature.

[29] Galen, *De Methodo Medendi* 1.6.1 (Kuhn vol. 10, 46); cf. *ibid.* II.3.3, *De Naturalibus Facultatibus* 1.2; *De Usu Partium* XVII.1; *De Placitis* VI.1. The last of these passages also includes a variant definition, that an *energeia* is "a motion in accordance with nature." Galen carefully distinguishes these two possible meanings and observes that something can be an *energeia* in the first sense but not the second (e.g., a palpitation of the heart). His normal usage follows the sense of "active motion."

[30] *De Placitis* VI.1 (De Lacy vol. 2, 360).

if the cause is relative to something – for it is the cause of what results from it, and of nothing else – it is obvious that the faculty also falls into the category of the relative; and so long as we are ignorant of the essence of the cause which is operating, we call it a faculty. Thus we say that there exists in the veins a blood-making faculty, as also a digestive faculty in the stomach, a pulsatile faculty in the heart, and in each of the other parts a special faculty corresponding to the activity of that part. If, therefore, we are to investigate methodically the numbers and kinds of faculties, we must begin with the effects; for each of these effects comes from a certain activity, and each of these again is preceded by a cause.[31]

This passage is remarkably frank about the limits of scientific knowledge. One begins with a set of observed effects, and infers on that basis the activities of the organs involved. Being ignorant of the essence of the operative cause, one then postulates the cause of the *energeia* to be a *dunamis* resident in the organ. As Galen recognizes, however, the *dunamis* thus postulated is not an object of direct knowledge; it is a "relative concept" defined by its relation to something falling more directly within experience.

The nearest precedent to this passage in Aristotle is the discussion of the faculties of the soul – the intellective, perceptive, nutritive, and so on – in *De Anima* II.4. There Aristotle observes that in order to define each faculty one must first give an account of its corresponding activity, for "activities (ἐνέργειαι) and actions are prior in the order of definition to faculties (δυνάμεων)" (415a18–20). For Aristotle the epistemological order (from activity to faculty) is a consequence of the definitional order (from act to potency). Although he acknowledges this epistemological rule, however, he does not emphasize it or draw from it the somewhat skeptical conclusion drawn by Galen, that we speak of faculties primarily when "we are ignorant of the essence of the cause." Galen may be more influenced at this point by Book V of the *Republic*. There Socrates, prior to distinguishing the objects of knowledge from those of opinion, explains that a faculty cannot be observed directly but must be defined by its effects (477c–d). In effect Galen restates this point using the Aristotelian distinction of *dunamis* and *energeia*.

Galen's agnosticism is most fully developed in relation to the most important of the faculties falling within the province of the physician, the soul itself. That there is a soul he has no doubt, and he is even confident of the number of its parts and the organs in which they are seated. But he disclaims any knowledge of the soul's *ousia*, including whether the soul is corporeal or incorporeal, mortal or immortal. As with the faculties of the

[31] *Nat. Fac.* I.4 (tr. Brock, adapted).

organs, he grounds his agnosticism on a general view of the limitations of the evidence: "Everyone knows that we possess souls, for all see plainly the many things that are performed (ἐνεργούμενα) through the body – walking, running, wrestling, and the many varieties of perception . . . But because they do not know exactly what is the cause of these things, they assign it a name on the basis of its capacity to do what it does."[32]

Galen thus recognizes a general distinction between the *energeiai* of bodily faculties or the soul, which we are in a position to know, and their *ousiai*, which we are not in a position to know. The triad consisting of a *dunamis* with its knowable *energeia* and unknowable *ousia* is one that will later find wide application among the Neoplatonists and Church Fathers. As the next section will demonstrate, the theological application of the triad had already been anticipated long before Galen by Philo of Alexandria.

## PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA

We ended our discussion of the Hellenistic schools with Aspasius, the last Peripatetic before Alexander of Aphrodisias whose works survive in any measure. We now turn to philosophers not claiming allegiance to any of the schools. A figure who stands somewhat apart from the established traditions, although he drew on all of them, is Philo of Alexandria (c. 30 B.C. – 45 A.D.). Philo is often characterized as a Middle Platonist, and it is true that the philosopher to whom he is most indebted is Plato; but Philo would have said that this is merely because Plato, more than any other Greek, succeeded in echoing what had been said first and better by Moses. A description of Philo that nicely captures both the exegetical and philosophical strands in his work is that of David Runia, who calls him "an exegete of scripture who drew on the Greek philosophical tradition to unfold and expound the hidden wisdom of Mosaic philosophy."[33]

Philo uses *energeia* frequently in the sense of "activity" or "characteristic activity, operation," particularly in regard to the operations of the mind, the senses, or the bodily parts. Most of these instances are in keeping with what we have observed in Polybius and Diodorus Siculus, but a few show signs of more direct Aristotelian influence. An example is Philo's interpretation of the creation of man and woman in Genesis as referring, respectively, to the creation of mind (νοῦς) and active sense perception (ἡ αἴσθησις κατ'

[32] *Subst. Nat. Fac.* (Kuhn vol. 4, 760); see also R. J. Hankinson, "Galen's Anatomy of the Soul," *Phronesis* 36 (1991), 201–08.

[33] David Runia, *Philo and the Church Fathers: A Collection of Essays* (Leiden, 1995), 189.

ἐνέργειαν). In the Genesis story God leads the newly created Eve to Adam, and Adam exclaims, "This is now bone out of my bones and flesh out of my flesh." Philo takes this story as an allegory indicating that active perception is the development of a potency intrinsic to the mind.

> God leads active perception to the mind, knowing that its movement and apprehensive power must revert to the mind as their starting-point. The mind, on beholding that which it had before as a potency (δύναμιν) and a dormant state now become a finished product and elicited activity (ἐνέργειαν κινουμένην), marvels at it, and cries aloud declaring that it is not foreign to it, but in the fullest sense its own. (*Leg. All.* II.40)

This quaint interpretation of Adam's love for Eve is the first appearance since the Lyceum of the characteristic Aristotelian contrast between *energeia* and *dunamis*. It is tempting to take *energeia* in this passage in its full Aristotelian sense of actuality, but activity is the term's normal meaning in Philo, and if he meant anything more than that he would probably have so indicated.[34]

Philo's most important innovations in regard to *energeia* are theological. We have seen that for both Aristotle and Theophrastus God is perpetually active, although they specify this activity in different ways – Aristotle as self-thinking thought, Theophrastus as self-caused rotational motion. Philo provides yet a further variation on this theme, identifying God's perpetual activity as that of making or creating. The subject arises as he attempts to explain in what sense God may be said to rest and how the divine Sabbath differs from that of man.

> In truth there is but one thing in the universe which rests, and that is God. But Moses does not give the name of rest to mere inactivity. The cause of all things is by its nature active (δραστήριον); it never ceases to make all that is best and most beautiful. God's rest is rather a working (ἐνέργειαν) with absolute ease, without toil and without suffering . . . A being that is free from weakness, even though he be making (ποιῇ) all things, will not cease through all eternity to be at rest, and thus rest belongs in the fullest sense to God and to Him alone. (*Cher.* 87–90)

Like Aristotle and Theophrastus, Philo insists that the perpetual activity of the first principle is restful rather than laborious. It is not entirely clear from the passage quoted how Philo envisages this activity, since the verb *poiein*, here translated "to make," can bear a variety of meanings. Elsewhere Philo makes it clear that he has in mind the activity of creating. In another

[34] On the rare occasions where Philo wishes to speak of actuality as such rather than of something existing in actuality he uses the term *entelecheia* (*Op.* 47, *Leg. All.* I.100, II.73). (Abbreviations for the titles of Philo's works are as given in vol. 10 of the Loeb edition.)

passage discussing God's rest on the seventh day, he writes: "on the seventh day the Creator, having brought to an end the formation of mortal things, begins the shaping of others more divine. For God never ceases making (ποιῶν), but even as it is the property of fire to burn and of snow to chill, so it is the property of God to make; in fact, more so by far, inasmuch as He is to all the source of action (ἀρχὴ τοῦ δρᾶν)" (*Leg. All.* 1.5–6, cf. 16–18). More explicit still is the following from *De Providentia*:

> God is continuously ordering matter by His thought. His thinking was not anterior to His creating, and there never was a time when He did not create, the Ideas themselves having been with Him from the beginning. For God's will is not posterior to Him, but is always with Him, for natural motions never give out. Thus ever thinking He creates, and furnishes to sensible things the principle of their existence, so that both should exist together: the ever-creating Divine Mind and the sense-perceptible things to which beginning of existence is given. (*Prov.* 1.7)[35]

God eternally creates by eternally thinking the Ideas which give form to matter. Although the *De Providentia* does not specifically call God's eternal creative thinking His *energeia*, all the ingredients are present to make such an identification. As we shall see in a moment, this further step will be taken explicitly by Alcinous.

Like other aspects of his theology, Philo's notion that God eternally creates by eternally thinking the Ideas must be seen against the background of the radical distinction he draws between the mode of existence of God and that of creatures. He takes this distinction to be implied by the statement of God to Moses from out of the burning bush: ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὤν, I am He Who Is.

> Among the virtues that of God truly is actually existing (κατὰ τὸ εἶναι συνεστῶσα), since God alone is established in existence (ἐν τῷ εἶναι ὑφέστηκεν). This is why Moses will say of Him as best he may in human speech, "I am He Who Is" (Ex. 3:14), implying that others lesser than He have not being as being indeed is (οὐκ ὄντων κατὰ τὸ εἶναι) but exist in semblance only (δόξῃ δὲ μόνον ὑφεστάναι), and are conventionally said to exist. (*Det.* 160)[36]

In light of this radical dichotomy, it would not be surprising if Philo's conception of God as perpetually active led him to deny that, in the truest sense, creatures are active at all. And that is in fact what we find. Philo writes:

[35] This passage survives only in an Armenian translation; I use the English of David Winston, *Philo of Alexandria* (New York, 1981), 15.

[36] For related passages see *Quod Deus* 55, *Mut.* 11–12, and *Mos.* 1.75, with discussion in Runia, *Philo and the Church Fathers*, chapters 1 and 11.

"What deadlier foe to the soul can there be than he who in his vainglory claims to himself that which belongs to God alone? For it belongs to God to act (ποιεῖν), and this we may not ascribe to any created being. What belongs to the created is to suffer, and he who accepts this from the first, as a necessity inseparable from his lot, will bear with patience what befalls him, however grievous it may be" (*Cher*. 77–78).[37] Later Philo criticizes Joseph in the Genesis story for saying that the right interpretation of dreams may be found through (διά) God rather than by Him as cause: "For we are the instruments, wielded in varying degrees of force, through which distinct activities (ἐνέργειαι) are produced; the Craftsman it is who contrives the impact of the forces of body and soul, even He by whom all things are made" (*Cher*. 128). Taken in isolation these passages might seem to assert that only God is a causal agent. Philo would probably not wish to go that far, no more than in the passage on Exodus 3:14 he really means to deny that creatures exist after their own fashion. What can safely be inferred is that, for Philo, in the strictest sense *energeia* belongs to God alone. It follows that the divine *energeia* must extend beyond just thinking the Ideas – or, perhaps, that in thinking the Ideas God somehow brings about temporal processes as well. A thorough examination of this question would require a discussion of the divine Powers by which God rules the world, and of the relation of the Powers to the divine Logos.[38] For our purposes it will suffice to note that Philo clearly does not wish to restrict God's activity in the world to a relation of Aristotelian self-thinking thought, but also sees God as active in the more direct and personal fashion described in the Pentateuch.[39]

Philo, of course, is not the first to hold that God uniquely exhibits *energeia*; Aristotle had already done so in the *Metaphysics*. The difference is that Aristotle has in mind primarily *energeia* as actuality, whereas Philo has in mind *energeia* as activity. This opens up an interesting new possibility: that of conceiving the divine *energeia* as an avenue by which God may be known. Although it is Iamblichus, Proclus, and the Church Fathers who

[37] The context shows that *poiein* here is "act," not "make."

[38] See John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (London, 1977), 158–70; Winston, *Philo of Alexandria*, 23–24. The issue is complicated by the fact that Philo on different occasions identifies the Ideas with both the Logos (*Op*. 24) and the Powers (*Spec. Leg*. I.47–48, 329).

[39] For other passages emphasizing the difference between God as active and creatures as passive see *Quis Her*. 107–08, 119, *Leg. All*. I.48–49, 82, II.46–47, and the fragment from Book IV in Winston, *Philo of Alexandria*, 33. There is also an interesting passage at *De Sacrificiis* 68 where Philo uses the Stoic concept of tensional motion (τονικὴ κίνησις) to describe God's omnipresence. Nonetheless, he nowhere develops a consistent theory of the difference between the mode of action of God and that of creatures.

will explore this train of thought most thoroughly, Philo says enough to suggest the possibilities inherent in the idea. In general, he draws a strict distinction between the divine essence (οὐσία), which is wholly unknown to man, and the fact of God's existence, which can be apprehended through the divine Powers. The following passage is representative of many.[40]

It is quite enough for a man's reasoning faculty to advance as far as to learn that the cause of the universe is and subsists. To be anxious to continue his course yet further, and inquire about essence (οὐσίας) or quality in God, is a folly fit for the world's childhood. Not even to Moses, the all-wise, did God accord this, albeit he had made countless requests, but a divine communication was issued to him, "Thou shalt behold that which is behind Me, but my face thou shalt not see" (Ex. 33:23). This meant that all that follows in the wake of God is within the good man's apprehension, while He Himself alone is beyond it, beyond, that is, in the line of straight and direct approach, a mode of approach by which (had it been possible) His quality would have been made known; but brought within ken by the Powers that follow and attend Him; for these make evident not his essence but His subsistence (ὕπαρξιν) from the things which He accomplishes. (*Post*. 168–69)

One might suppose, reading this passage, that at least the Powers themselves are directly accessible to the human mind. But elsewhere Philo denies even that. He pictures Moses, denied a direct vision of God, asking to behold the Powers. God replies that the Powers too are beyond human comprehension. Then He adds:

But while in their essence (κατὰ τὴν οὐσίαν) they are beyond your apprehension, they nevertheless present to your sight a sort of impress and copy of their activity (ἐνεργείας). You men have for your use seals which when brought into contact with wax or similar material stamp on them any number of impressions while they themselves are not docked in any part thereby, but remain as they were. Such you must conceive my Powers to be, supplying quality and shape to things which lack either and yet changing or lessening nothing of their eternal nature. Some among you call them not inaptly Forms or Ideas, since they bring form into everything that is, giving order to the disordered, limit to the unlimited, bounds to the unbounded, shape to the shapeless, and in general changing the worse to something better. Do not, then, hope ever to be able to apprehend Me or any of my Powers in our essence. But I readily and with goodwill admit you to a share of what is attainable. (*Spec. Leg*. 1.47–49)

Here we see Philo contrasting the knowable *energeia* of the divine Powers with their unknowable *ousia*. This is a triad of *energeia–dunamis–ousia*

[40] See also *Post*. 19–20, *Quod Deus* 62, *Fug*. 164–65, *Mut*. 7–9, *Spec. Leg*. 1.32–50, *Praem*. 39–40.

similar to the one that will be used 150 years later by Galen.[41] It is striking that Philo introduces the contrast in order to insist that the Forms (which he here equates with the divine Powers) are unknowable in their essence. Plato, of course, had posited the Forms precisely as principles of knowability, and this is one aspect of the theory of Forms on which he never wavered. Philo differs from Plato in regarding the Forms as active powers in the service of an intelligence. This makes it natural for him to distinguish their essence from their activity, and to hold that the one can be known whereas the other cannot.

Although this passage is the only one in which Philo explicitly contrasts *ousia* and *energeia*, in a larger sense the contrast runs throughout his statements on the knowledge of God. The purpose of distinguishing the divine essence from the Powers, holding that God can be known only through the latter, is much like that which will later be served by the distinction between *ousia* and *energeia* in the Greek Fathers: to safeguard the divine transcendence, while at the same time affirming that the transcendent God has condescended to be known by man. This is not to deny that there are important differences. One is that Philo regards the knowledge of God gained through the Powers as inferential, quite unlike what the Fathers will later hold about the knowledge gained through the divine *energeiai*. Even this difference is not quite what it seems, however, for besides such inferential knowledge Philo also allows that there can be a direct vision of the divine Logos, and the relationship between the Logos and the Powers is an intimate one.[42] What we find in Philo, then, is not a direct anticipation of later developments, but a suggestive and highly original mélange of ideas, many of which will later find a home in other contexts.

## NUMENIUS AND ALCINOUS

The notion of a divine activity that is at once restful and profoundly creative continued to fascinate philosophers in the period leading up to Plotinus. Variations on this theme may be found in Numenius, Alcinous, and Alexander of Aphrodisias, who together will occupy the remainder of this chapter. The first two of these authors are conventionally regarded as Middle Platonists, although Numenius might equally well be described as a

[41] I do not wish to suggest that Galen was influenced by Philo; the triad was natural enough given the way its terms had come to be understood.

[42] On the vision of the Logos see *Leg. All.* III.100–02; *Abr.* 122–23; *Praem.* 37–40, 45–46. I have discussed these passages in "The Vision of God in Philo of Alexandria," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (1998), 483–500.

Neopythagorean influenced by Plato.[43] None of the surviving fragments of Numenius' work contains the word *energeia*, but that is merely an incidental difference in terminology, as will be apparent from our discussion.

There is a puzzling statement in the so-called Second Epistle of Plato: "It is in relation to the King of all and on his account that everything exists, and that fact is the cause of all that is beautiful. In relation to the second, a second class of things exists, and in relation to a third, the third class" (312e). Whatever may have been intended by the author of this statement, its effect was to promote a tendency among later Platonists to think in terms of a series of three hierarchically ordered divinities.[44] Numenius is an example of that tendency. He speaks of a Third God who appears to be the World Soul (although he never quite calls it that) and a Second God who is roughly the Demiurge of the *Timaeus*. He also insists that there is a First God higher than both of these. In his lost work *On the Good* he writes:

> Since Plato recognized that the Demiurge alone is known among men, but that the First Intellect, who is called Being in itself (αὐτοόν), is wholly unknown to them, therefore he spoke in this way to them, as if to say: "O men, what you conceive to be intellect is not the first, but there is another Intellect before this, more ancient and more divine." (Fr. 17)[45]

Although we do not know which text of Plato Numenius has in mind, his meaning is clear enough: he wishes to assert the existence of a primal Intellect higher than the Demiurge. Other fragments further elaborate the contrast between the First, Second, and Third gods. The Second and Third, Numenius tells us, are in fact one, but they are divided by contact with matter. The result is that this unitary deity becomes heedless of himself and "seizes upon the sense realm and ministers to it, and draws it up to his own character because of his yearning toward matter" (Fr. 11). The First God, by contrast, remains simple and undivided. We also learn that the First God is "free from all kinds of work and reigns as king, but the demiurgic God governs, traveling throughout the heaven" (Fr. 12). The Second God is seated above matter like a helmsman above a ship on the sea, directing it by the Ideas, looking to the First God instead of to the sky (Fr. 18). This

[43] See Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 361–79 (Numenius) and 267–306 (Alcinous). There is an insightful account of how the "nondemiurgic theology" of Numenius and Alcinous sets them apart from other Middle Platonists in John Peter Kenney, "Theism and Divine Production in Ancient Realist Theology," *God and Creation: An Ecumenical Symposium*, ed. David Burrell and Bernard McGinn (Notre Dame, 1990), 57–80.

[44] On the Second Epistle see John Rist, "Neopythagoreanism and 'Plato's' Second Letter," *Phronesis* 10 (1965), 78–81, which argues for an origin among the Neopythagoreans of the first century B.C.

[45] Ed. Des Places; translations are my own.

would seem to imply that the First God is the Ideas – and indeed, according to Proclus, Numenius identified the First God with the Living Creature of the *Timaeus*, the archetype of the cosmos (Fr. 22). Two other fragments state that the First God is the Idea of the Good, the Second God being good only by participation in Him (Frs. 19, 20). There is no hint as to how the descriptions of the First God as all the Ideas and as solely the Idea of the Good are to be reconciled. Perhaps Numenius thought of the Good as somehow embracing all the Ideas.

Yet the First God is also an intellect – indeed, the First Intellect (as Fr. 17 indicates). It is clear that in equating intellect with idea (whether all the Ideas, or solely that of the Good) Numenius is drawing on the Aristotelian conception of self-thinking thought. Hence he declares that the First God, despite being simple, undivided, and free from all labor, is also intrinsically active.

> These are the ways of life, respectively, of the First and Second God. Clearly the First God will be at rest, while the Second is in motion; the First is concerned with the intelligibles, the Second with both intelligibles and sensibles . . . Instead of the motion inherent in the Second, I declare that the rest inherent in the First is an innate motion (κίνησιν σύμφυτον), from which both the order of the world and its eternal stability and its preservation (or salvation, σωτηρία) are poured forth upon the whole. (Fr. 15)

Although Numenius does not further describe the innate motion of the First God, there can be little doubt that this "motion" is the activity of thought. That is required by his identification of the First God as both intellect and idea, and it also explains how the inherent motion of the First God can be the source of cosmic order and stability. Numenius' *kinēsis sumphutos* is in fact a reworking of the Aristotelian *energeia akinēsias*. This is a fact of some significance. As we have seen, Philo also maintains that God's rest is a kind of activity. There is little evidence that Philo was read by the Neoplatonists, however, whereas they held Numenius in high regard. Numenius was thus an important channel through which the Aristotelian idea of *energeia* (if not the actual term) found its way into Neoplatonism.

Turning now to Alcinous, we find a somewhat similar theology articulated explicitly in Aristotelian terminology. The sole surviving work of Alcinous is the *Didaskalikos*, an introductory handbook of Platonic doctrine.[46] In chapter 10 of that work we find the following:

[46] Scholars long believed that "Alcinous" was an error in the manuscripts for "Albinus," the name of a Platonist otherwise familiar as a teacher of Galen. This theory has now been discarded, leaving us with virtually no information about the author of the *Didaskalikos* save his name. A date in the second century A.D. still seems likely based on the work's content.

Although without motion Himself, the primal God acts (ἐνεργεῖ) upon the cosmos as the sun does on the sight of one looking at it or as the object of desire arouses desire while remaining motionless itself. Thus also will this Intellect set in motion the intellect of the whole heaven. Since the First Intellect is supremely beautiful, the object of its knowledge must also be supremely beautiful; but there is nothing more beautiful than God. God must, therefore, eternally think Himself and His own thoughts (νοήματα), and this activity of His is Idea (αὕτη ἡ ἐνέργεια αὐτοῦ ἰδέα ὑπάρχει)... In accordance with His will He has filled all things with Himself, quickening the World Soul and turning it towards Himself since He is the cause of its Intelligence. It is this Intelligence which, after being set in order by the Father, orders the whole of nature in this world. (*Didask.* 10)[47]

One can almost imagine Alcinous writing this with the *Metaphysics* open at his elbow. The first sentence recapitulates the odd shift in thought between *Metaphysics* XII.6 and XII.7, asserting first that the primal God acts (ἐνεργεῖ) but then explaining that He does so simply as an object of desire. (The analogy with the sun is not in Aristotle, deriving instead from Plato's *Republic*.) The argument that the First Intellect must think that which is best – namely Himself – is straight from *Metaphysics* XII.9. Finally, the assertion that "this activity of His is Idea" is also perfectly Aristotelian, at least on the interpretation of Aristotle argued in Chapter 2, although Aristotle does not use the word ἰδέα in this connection.

Alcinous, of course, wishes to combine these Aristotelian themes with the Platonic conception of the World Soul. He therefore invests the World Soul with intellect and presents the primal God as turning this subordinate Intellect towards Himself. (Note that if one counts the World Soul and its Intellect as separate gods one arrives at a triadic system of deities, just as in Numenius.) How the primal God does this is explained in a later chapter: "God did not make the World Soul, which is eternal, but He brings order to it. He could be said to make it in this sense only, that by arousing it from lethargy and deep sleep, and turning its mind and itself towards Himself in order that it may gaze upon the intelligibles, it receives the Ideas and Forms as it strives after His thoughts" (*Didask.* 14). In other words, the intellect of the World Soul desires the First Intellect; in seeking to fulfill this desire it thinks the thoughts of the First Intellect after it, and so comes to an ordered state which in turn enables it to give order to the world.

For Alcinous, then, it is only by virtue of its beauty that the *energeia* of the primal God passes beyond itself into the world. Considered in itself this *energeia* is purely self-thinking thought, but the beauty of such thought cannot be hid, and in manifesting itself it gives order to the world.

47 Trans. Jeremiah Reedy, adapted.

## ALEXANDER OF APHRODISIAS

We turn finally to Alexander of Aphrodisias, perhaps the greatest philosopher of the early Imperial age, and certainly the greatest Peripatetic. Little is known of his life save that he received an imperial appointment as professor of Aristotelian philosophy sometime between A.D. 198 and 209.[48] Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* includes him among the authors read in Plotinus' seminar, and there can be little doubt that Alexander had a significant influence on Plotinus, as also on the Aristotelian commentators of late antiquity. Unfortunately, many of Alexander's works which would be most illuminating from our standpoint survive only in fragments, including his commentaries on the *Physics*, *De Anima*, and Books VI through XIV of the *Metaphysics*. The most important of his surviving works is his own *De Anima*, a comprehensive treatment of the soul that is based upon Aristotelian materials but develops them in an original way.

The most renowned feature of Alexander's *De Anima* is its interpretation of Aristotle's doctrine of the intellect. Much has been said about that doctrine in Chapter 2, but a few key points need to be added to make Alexander's work intelligible. At the beginning of *De Anima* III.4 Aristotle lays down as a premise that the intellect in thinking takes on the form of the object thought. Since the intellect thinks all things, he infers that it must have no intrinsic characteristics which could block the reception of form. This immediately leads to a rather paradoxical conclusion: "it can have no nature of its own, other than that of having a certain capacity; thus that in the soul which is called intellect . . . is, before it thinks, not actually any real thing (οὐθέν ἐστιν ἐνεργείᾳ τῶν ὄντων)" (429a21–24). The word "before" here is meant conceptually, not temporally; one could equally well say of matter that "before" it takes on form it "has no nature of its own" and is "not actually any real thing."

Even so understood, the passage raises a profound difficulty. If intellect has no nature of its own other than its capacity to think, how does it come to *actually* think? A similar question can be raised in the case of matter, and for that question Aristotle has an answer: the presence of a specific form in a specific piece of matter can always be explained by the action of an efficient cause already possessing that form. In *De Anima* III.5 Aristotle extends this solution to the case of intellect. The passage in which he does so is remarkably compressed and obscure, even by Aristotelian standards, but its importance for the subsequent history of philosophy was immense.

[48] See R. W. Sharples, "Alexander of Aphrodisias: Scholasticism and Innovation," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II. 36.2 (1987), 1177–78.

> Since in every class of things, as in nature as a whole, there are two factors involved, a matter which is potentially all the particulars included in the class and a cause which is productive in the sense that it makes them all . . . these distinct elements must likewise be found within the soul. And in fact intellect of that sort [i.e., as discussed in the previous chapter] is what it is by virtue of becoming all things, while there is another which is what it is by virtue of making all things. This is a sort of positive state like light, for in a sense light makes potential colors into actual colors. This intellect is separable, impassible, unmixed, since it is in its essential nature activity (τῇ οὐσίᾳ ὢν ἐνέργεια). (430a10–18)

As in *Metaphysics* XII, *energeia* here straddles the two senses of "activity" and "actuality." The intellect which is separable, impassible, and unmixed "makes all things," and is thus active; it is also already in actuality that which the intellect "becoming all things" is only potentially, and as such it is essentially actuality.

Alexander, in reworking this chapter, gives to the first intellect spoken of by Aristotle, the one that becomes all things, the name "material intellect." He opposes to it the intellect in a developed state (ὁ κατὰ ἕξιν νοῦς). The latter, he says, is like "a man of science, who stands midway between one who is said to have the capacity to acquire knowledge and another who is in fact performing acts of understanding (κατ᾽ ἐπιστήμην ἐνεργοῦντος)."[49] Alexander thus adapts to the distinction drawn in *De Anima* III.4–5 the quite different distinction drawn earlier in the same work between first and second potentiality. In so doing he makes what for Aristotle had been a conceptual distinction into a temporal one. As Alexander explains, each human being is born with sensory powers, and soon acquires memory as well. The step from material intellect to intellect in its developed state comes when, "starting from memory and continuous sensory activity, and aided by experience, [a person] takes a kind of step upward from the 'this particular something' to the 'something of this general kind' – as when, from a number of perceptions that this particular thing is white, he perceives that a color of this kind is white" (83.5–10). The process may equally well be described as that of apprehending the universal or as that of separating forms from their matter (85.12–20).

The next level beyond second potentiality is, of course, second act. Alexander accordingly observes that there is also intellect in act (κατ᾽ ἐνέργειαν), which is analogous to one actually performing acts of understanding (86.4–5). At this level intellect is identical to its object and thus thinks itself as well (86.14–23). This is straightforward Aristotelianism.

[49] *De Anima* 86.1–3 (trans. Fotinis, adapted). References are to page and line number in the Bruns edition.

Having completed his description of the three phases of intellect, Alexander next abruptly paraphrases the passage from *De Anima* III.5. He concludes that "since there exists one intellect that is material, there should also be an intellect that is productive (ποιητικός), which will be the cause of the developed state of the material intellect" (88.23–24). Alexander thus interprets Aristotle's argument and its conclusion within the context of his three-fold distinction among the levels of intellect: the role of the productive intellect, as he sees it, is to raise material intellect to the level of intellect in its developed state. Alexander does not explain how this assertion is to be reconciled with his earlier, more naturalistic account of how material intellect passes into its developed state by repeatedly generalizing from sense experience.

Be that as it may, Alexander's argument next takes an interesting and novel turn.

> This [i.e., productive intellect] will also be the form which is supremely and in the strictest sense intelligible (τὸ κυρίως τε καὶ μάλιστα νοητὸν εἶδος), the sort that is separate from matter. For in all cases that which supremely and in the strictest sense possesses a property is the cause of that property in others. That which is supremely visible, such as light, is the cause to other things of their being visible; likewise that which is supremely and primarily good is the cause to other good things of their being good . . . That which is supremely and in its own nature intelligible is the cause of thought in other things, and since it is of this sort it is the "productive" intellect. (88.24–89.6)

Here it emerges that the productive intellect is productive, not only of the developed state in material intellect, but also of the intelligibility of all that is thought, and that it plays this role in virtue of itself being supremely intelligible. As has often been pointed out, the principle that whatever is most *x* is the cause of *x*-ness in other things is neither plausible nor Aristotelian.[50] But Alexander is clearly concerned with more than just the degree of instantiation of a property. In the passage quoted, the productive intellect is supremely and *in its own nature* intelligible, and Alexander goes on to summarize the argument with the remark that "if there were not something intelligible by nature, neither would anything else be intelligible" (89.6–7). For something to be *x* "by nature" means that it does not require an external cause to make it *x*; it is *x* in full actuality, in the particular sense of being fully actual distinguished in the discussion of eternal and perishable beings in *Metaphysics* IX.8. Alexander's principle might therefore

[50] See Sharples, "Alexander of Aphrodisias," 1206–07, and the references there cited.

be restated as that whatever is *x* in full actuality is the cause of *x*-ness in other things.

This principle is both plausible and Aristotelian. For Aristotle, the presence of a form can always be explained by the action of an efficient cause already possessing that form. *De Anima* III.5 extends this analysis to intelligibility, in effect asserting that for the purposes of causal analysis intelligibility itself may be regarded as a form. Things that are not intrinsically intelligible must therefore derive their intelligibility from something that is intelligible in full actuality. Assuming that intelligibility may be regarded as a form, it is easy to construct at least two different (and typically Aristotelian) arguments for such a conclusion. One is a regress argument: the alternative would be to say that each intelligible item receives its intelligibility from something else, which receives it from something else, and so on *ad infinitum* – an infinite regress that would leave the fundamental question of the origin of intelligibility unresolved. The other is an argument from the principle of plenitude: if everything were intelligible merely by the realization of a potency, then at some point (given the eternity of the world) nothing at all would be intelligible – a situation from which nothing could *come* to be intelligible. Hence there must be something that is intelligible in its own nature, and other intelligible beings must in some sense owe their intelligibility to it.[51]

Alexander goes on to repeat the attributes Aristotle had assigned to productive intellect – that it is separable, impassible, and unmixed – and to add that it is "*energeia* and form, separate from potentiality and matter" (89.17). As the opposition to potentiality and matter shows, *energeia* here is actuality. Taken jointly these epithets cannot help but bring to mind the Prime Mover. Alexander regards the connection as almost too obvious to require elaboration, for he continues: "Since it [productive intellect] is of this sort" – that is, separable, impassible, unmixed, actuality, and form – "it has been shown by Aristotle to be the First Cause, which is also in the strictest sense intellect" (89.17–18). For Alexander, then, the productive intellect and the Prime Mover are one and the same. The point of the epithet "First Cause" would seem to be to underscore that the productive intellect, being the cause of intelligibility in other things, is also the cause of the being (τὸ εἶναι) of things that are thought (89.9–11).

[51] The "in some sense" makes the conclusion of this argument weaker than that of the regress argument, where the relation must be one of efficient causality.

Alexander's identification of the active intellect with the Prime Mover has always been controversial.[52] Without attempting to settle the exegetical issue, it is clear how such an identification constitutes one way of elaborating and applying the Aristotelian theology presented in Chapter 2. Just as for Numenius and Alcinous, the divine activity is for Alexander at once both complete and self-contained, and profoundly creative. As an intellect the First Cause thinks only itself; yet in so doing it reveals itself as supremely intelligible, and thereby also as the cause of intelligibility in others. Intelligibility thus turns out to play much the same role in Alexander's account of the divine that beauty had played in that of Alcinous. This is no accident; each author is picking up a strand in Aristotle's account of the Prime Mover, where both attributes receive equal emphasis. Even more than had Alcinous, Alexander articulates this theory specifically in terms of *energeia*, a term he uses to mean both activity and actuality. He thereby brings *energeia* again into the center of philosophical reflection.

[52] Recent advocates include Guthrie, *History*, vol. 6, 322–30; Charles Kahn, "The Role of *nous* in the Cognition of First Principles in *Posterior Analytics* II.19," *Aristotle on Science: The Posterior Analytics*, ed. Enrico Berti (Padua, 1981), 385–414; Rist, *Mind of Aristotle*, 180–82. For criticism see Wedin, *Mind and Imagination in Aristotle*, 220–29.

CHAPTER 4

# *Plotinus and the theory of two acts*

With Plotinus (c. 205–270) we are again in the presence of a philosophical mind of the first rank. Plotinus is conventionally regarded as the founder of Neoplatonism, and it is certainly true that he looks to Plato for inspiration more than to any other philosopher. But scholars have long recognized that in many ways he is as much indebted to Aristotle as to Plato. Something of Plotinus' attitude to Aristotle emerges in the following passage of the *Life of Plotinus* by Porphyry, who was Plotinus' student and an important philosopher in his own right.

> In writing he is concise and full of thought. He puts things shortly and abounds more in ideas than in words; he generally expresses himself in a tone of rapt inspiration, and states what he himself really feels about the matter and not what has been handed down by tradition. His writings, however, are full of concealed Stoic and Peripatetic doctrines. Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, in particular, is concentrated in them . . . In the meetings of the school he used to have the commentaries read, perhaps of Severus, perhaps of Cronius or Numenius or Gaius or Atticus, and among the Peripatetics of Aspasius, Alexander, Adrastus, and others that were available. (14)[1]

As A. H. Armstrong remarks in a note on this passage, it "shows clearly how scholarly and professional a philosopher Plotinus was and how he worked, though with great originality, on the basis of an extensive school tradition." The names of Numenius, Aspasius, and Alexander are familiar to us from the previous chapter; regrettably, the works of most of the others mentioned by Porphyry are now lost.

In light of his openness to the schools and his sense of command over his materials, it is not surprising that Plotinus was willing to take a key Aristotelian technical term like *energeia* and make it distinctively his own. In this chapter we will focus on his most interesting and original use of

[1] Translation by Armstrong in vol. 1 of the Loeb edition of the *Enneads*.

the concept, the theory of two acts introduced in *Enneads* v.4 and elaborated frequently thereafter. As we shall see, this theory has ramifications that reach to virtually every corner of Plotinus' philosophy. It provides a striking illustration of the flexibility of the concept of *energeia*, and of how that concept, as developed by Aristotle, lends itself to some strikingly un-Aristotelian applications.

## THE THEORY OF TWO ACTS IN *ENNEADS* V.4

*Enneads* v.4[7] is a short treatise entitled "How That Which Is after the First Comes from the First, and on the One."[2] Although earlier treatises contain allusions to the first principle of Plotinus' system, the One, and a subordinate principle called Intellect (νοῦς), this is the first in which Plotinus attempts to explain how Intellect comes to be from the One. The problem is made particularly acute by the fact that the One is perfect and in need of nothing. Plotinus' answer begins with the assertion that the very notion of perfection requires production. To establish this he cites examples from the natural world:

> Now when anything else comes to perfection we see that it produces, and does not endure to remain by itself, but makes something else. This is true not only of things which have choice, but of things which grow and produce without choosing to do so, and even lifeless things, which impart themselves to others as far as they can: as fire warms, snow cools, and drugs act on something else in a way corresponding to their own nature – all imitating the First Principle as far as they are able by tending to everlastingness and generosity. How then could the most perfect, the first Good, remain in itself as if it grudged (φθονῆσαν) to give of itself or was impotent, when it is the productive power of all things? (v.4.1.26–36)[3]

This argument neatly synthesizes themes from Aristotle's natural philosophy with the theology of the *Timaeus*. Aristotle states in the *De Anima* that "for any living thing that has reached its normal development . . . the most natural act is the production of another like itself, an animal producing an animal, a plant a plant, in order that, as far as its nature allows, it may partake in the eternal and divine. That is the goal towards which all things strive, that for the sake of which they do whatsoever their nature renders possible" (ii.4 415a26–b2). Aristotle is echoing a famous passage of the *Symposium* in which Plato, in the voice of Diotima, explains that all living

[2] The number in brackets indicates the place of the treatise in the chronological order given by Porphyry (*Life of Plotinus* 4–6). I will include this information only where it is relevant.

[3] Translation and text are those of Armstrong in the Loeb edition. I have occasionally slightly altered the translation.

things reproduce as a way of partaking in the divine (207c–208b). What is most interesting in Aristotle's formulation is the ambiguity of the phrase "all things" (πάντα). On a narrow reading this refers only to all plants and animals, the immediate reference of the preceding sentence. But the phrase might also be taken to refer to all things without qualification, and in light of what Aristotle says elsewhere the latter reading is certainly plausible.[4] That would bring us close to the argument quoted from Plotinus; its first two sentences, in fact, would be little more than a paraphrase of this passage in the *De Anima*. Of course the difference remains that Aristotle never attributes to his own deity, the Prime Mover, an impulse to "give of itself." In order to motivate divine production Plotinus therefore appeals to the *Timaeus*, and specifically to the statement at 29e that God creates because He is good and free from all envy (φθόνος).

The conclusion of this argument is simply that the first Good must engender something which, though not identical to it, is in some way an image or extension of its being. Many of Plotinus' readers, schooled as they were in the traditions of Middle Platonism, would have found this conclusion unexceptionable. In Middle Platonism the first Good is typically *nous*, the divine Mind. That is the point at which Plotinus issues his challenge, for the next step in the argument attempts to show that *nous* cannot be the source of all things. To do so Plotinus invokes two further Aristotelian principles. The first is the analogy between cognition and perception: "Thinking . . . is itself indefinite like seeing, but is defined by the intelligible" (v.4.2.4–7, cf. *De An.* iii.4 429a13–18). The second is the identity of *nous* with its activity of thinking.[5] Since *nous* is identical with its activity of thinking, and thinking is defined by the intelligible object, *nous* must also be defined by the intelligible object. Hence *nous* cannot be the source of all things, but must be preceded in existence by its object. (The order at issue, of course, is conceptual, not temporal.) In the case of the divine Mind that object is the One. This account has the important consequence that the One engenders Intellect just as an object of thought engenders thought, without itself undergoing change. Plotinus expresses this in another dictum borrowed from the *Timaeus*, that the One produces while abiding "in its own proper way of life" (v.4.2.22, cf. *Timaeus* 42e).

But now the first question, how anything can arise from the One, resurfaces in a more acute form: how can anything arise from the One if the One

[4] See Kahn, "The Place of the Prime Mover in Aristotle's Teleology."
[5] This is only implicit in v.4.2, but is enunciated frequently elsewhere (e.g., v.9.5, v.5.1–2, v.3.5).

itself remains utterly unchanged? To answer this question Plotinus appeals to the concept of *energeia*.[6]

In each and every thing there is an activity which belongs to substance (ἐνέργεια τῆς οὐσίας) and one which goes out from substance (ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας); and that which belongs to substance is the active actuality which is each particular thing (ἡ μὲν τῆς οὐσίας αὐτό ἐστιν ἐνέργεια ἕκαστον), and the other activity derives from that first one, and must in everything be a consequence of it, different from the thing itself: as in fire there is a heat which is the content of its substance, and another which comes into being from that primary heat when fire exercises the activity which is native to its substance in abiding unchanged as fire. So it is also in the higher world; and much more so there, while the Principle abides "in its own proper way of life," the activity generated from the perfection in it and its coexistent activity (συνούσης ἐνεργείας) acquires substantial existence (ὑπόστασιν λαβοῦσα), since it comes from a great power, the greatest indeed of all, and arrives at being and substance: for that Principle is "beyond being." That is the productive power of all things (δύναμις πάντων), and its product is already all things. (v.4.2.27–39)

The best way to understand this passage is in light of that quoted earlier from v.4.1. There it was asserted that things when they have come to perfection "impart themselves to others as far as they can." What they impart, then, must bear a peculiarly intimate relationship to their own being. Plotinus now attempts to spell this out by identifying that which is imparted and that which imparts it as two different modes of *energeia*, one internal (τῆς οὐσίας) and the other external (ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας). The assertion that the *energeia tēs ousias* "is each particular thing" is a restatement, within the terms of this distinction, of the familiar Aristotelian principle that the substance of a thing in the sense of form is *energeia*.[7] Aristotle means by this assertion to pick out what he calls "substance as actuality" in contrast to matter, substance existing potentially (*Met.* viii.2 1042b10). But whereas for Aristotle *energeia* in this context simply means actuality, Plotinus clearly intends the word to mean more than that. He envisions the *energeia tēs ousias*

[6] Several earlier treatises refer to *energeia*, but not in ways that go beyond Aristotelian usage. See iv.7[2].8[3], iii.1[3].1, v.9[5].4, 8, and iv.8[6].5.

[7] *Met.* viii.2, *De An.* ii.1. Some editors emend the ἐνέργεια in line 28 to ἐνεργείᾳ, making the clause read "and the activity belonging to substance is each thing in actuality." This seems unnecessary; even John Bussanich, who accepts it, notes that the MSS reading is "by no means impossible for [Plotinus'] often idiosyncratic syntax" (*The One and Its Relation to Intellect in Plotinus: A Commentary on Selected Texts* [Leiden, 1990], 28). In any case, the identification of the internal *energeia* with Aristotelian form does not rest on this passage alone. See particularly iv.5.7.36, where internal *energeia* is described as οὐσία ἡ κατὰ τὸ εἶδος. More generally, Plotinus subscribes to the Aristotelian thesis that form is a kind of *energeia* (ii.6.3, ii.5.2–3), and since it is not external the only alternative is that it be internal.

as intrinsically productive – hence the awkward but suggestive translation used by Armstrong, "active actuality." There is some precedent for this in the *energeia* of the Prime Mover, which is both supreme actuality and the activity of self-thinking thought. As we shall see in the next section, the precedent is a surprisingly close one, for the *energeia tēs ousias* of all things turns out to be a form of contemplation. But the difference remains that Aristotle makes the fusion of activity and actuality only in the case of the Prime Mover, whereas Plotinus asserts that the *energeia tēs ousias* of *all* things is intrinsically productive.

His argument for this claim would seem to consist in no more than a single example, that of fire. Even if we were to concede that naturally diffusive substances such as fire (and snow and perfume, which Plotinus cites elsewhere) fit the two act model, substances of this type are surely no more than a small subset of all that are to be found in the world. If Plotinus were advancing his claim as an empirical generalization, then, his evidence would be woefully inadequate. Fortunately the passage from v.4.1 suggests another interpretation. There, in addition to the examples of fire and snow, Plotinus offers that of drugs, which "act on something else in a way corresponding to their own nature." Drugs are not self-diffusive like fire and snow; their effects do not resemble them in any non-trivial way. Yet they do act in a way that is fixed by their natures, and in that sense they fit the general rule that all things "impart themselves to others as far as they can." We learn in v.4.2 that this self-imparting is simply the production of an external act. It follows that the external act need not resemble the internal act by virtue of any (non-trivial) common qualities, however much it may do so in Plotinus' preferred examples. Rather, the external act is simply the thing's nature or internal structure replicated in the way that is appropriate to that thing. Since Plotinus' primary interest is in the intelligible realm, he naturally picks examples like fire and snow, which act continually and spontaneously in much the same way as do entities in the intelligible realm.[8] But if we were to ask him why he believes that all substances without exception give forth an external act, he could reasonably appeal to more than just this handful of examples. He could appeal to the fundamental premise shared by all causal realists that a cause

[8] Another example Plotinus might have cited at this point is that of light. According to iv.5[29], the light given off by intrinsically luminous bodies is their external activity (ἐνέργεια πρὸς τὸ ἔξω, iv.5.7.35), but they also possess within themselves another *energeia*, itself a kind of light, which is their substance in the sense of form (οὐσία ἡ κατὰ τὸ εἶδος, iv.5.7.36) and the source of the external activity. See also ii.1[40].7.20–31. Despite the relatively late date of these treatises, there are reasons to believe that it was a consideration of light which led Plotinus to some important aspects of the theory of two acts, as I will show below.

acts in accordance with its nature, and in doing so reveals that nature, propagating it outward into the world.[9]

More could be said about the Aristotelian background to this passage, but for the moment we postpone a consideration of sources to register only one more comment. This is that there is an inconsistency in what Plotinus says regarding the *ousia* of the One. Clearly the purpose of the passage is to assert that the One, like all else, has an *energeia tēs ousias* and an *energeia ek tēs ousias*. But at the end Plotinus reverts to the famous statement of the *Republic* that the Good (which he identifies with the One) is "beyond being," *epeikena ousias*. Only its external *energeia*, he tells us, "arrives at" *ousia*. This undercuts the very application of the theory of two acts to the One which it is the purpose of the passage to make. If the One has no *ousia* (or is not *ousia*), then how could it have either type of *energeia*? Indeed, how could any extension to the One of principles found to be applicable to *ousiai* possibly be appropriate? We shall find that Plotinus later recognized this difficulty, and that the attempt to confront it led to some of his most significant innovations.

## THE THEORY OF TWO ACTS: *ENNEADS* V.1 AND RELATED TEXTS

The second of the two *loci classici* for the theory of two acts is V.1[10]. In the sixth chapter of this treatise Plotinus again takes up the question of how Intellect can come to be from the One. Just as before (although not explicitly citing the *Timaeus*), he insists that the One generates without undergoing change.

When we are discussing eternal realities we must not let coming into being in time be an obstacle to our thought; in the discussion we apply the word 'becoming' to them in attributing to them causal connection and order, and must therefore state that what comes into being from the One does so without the One being moved (κινηθέντος): for if anything came into being as a result of the One's being moved, it would be the third starting from the One, not the second, since it would come after the movement. So if there is a second after the One it must have come to be without the One moving at all, without any inclination or act of will or any sort of movement on its part. (V.1.6.19–28)

9 Lloyd, "The Principle that the Cause is Greater than its Effect," 147, asserts that Plotinus followed Aristotle in subscribing to the "transmission theory of the cause," according to which causation is a matter of transmitting a property from cause to effect. The example of the drugs shows that Plotinus holds to this theory in only a qualified way. He believes that the effect must in some sense be an image of the cause, but not that this requires a qualitative resemblance between them.

Just as before, however, this raises the question of what kind of generation there can be that does not require some movement on the part of the generator. Plotinus first avails himself of the obvious answer, given the physical theory of the day: Intellect comes from the One leaving the One unchanged, just as light comes from the sun leaving the sun unchanged. He then generalizes this claim into a universal theory.

All things which exist, as long as they remain in being, necessarily produce from their own substances, out of their present power, a dependent surrounding reality (ὑπόστασιν) directed to what is outside them, a kind of image of the archetypes from which it was produced: fire produces the heat which comes from it; snow does not only keep its cold inside itself. Perfumed things show this particularly clearly . . . And all things when they come to perfection produce; the One is always perfect and therefore produces everlastingly; and its product is less than itself. What then must we say about the most perfect? Nothing can come from it except that which is next greatest after it. Intellect is next to it in greatness and second to it: for Intellect sees it and needs it alone; but it has no need of Intellect; and that which derives from something greater than Intellect is Intellect, which is greater than all things, because the other things come after it: as Soul is an expression and a kind of activity of Intellect, just as Intellect is of the One. But Soul's expression is obscure – for it is a "ghost" (or image, εἴδωλον) of Intellect – and for this reason it has to look to Intellect; but Intellect in the same way has to look to that god, in order to be Intellect. (v.1.6.31–48)

First we must comment upon a couple of minor confusions. Plotinus would not in general hold that the product of a physical entity, such as the heat radiated by fire, forms a separate hypostasis from its source. After all, in v.4.2 he differentiates generation in the physical realm from that in the "higher world" precisely in this respect: only in the higher world does the external act "acquire substantial existence" (ὑπόστασιν λαβοῦσα) and "arrive at being and substance." Plotinus is notorious for his inconsistent terminology, and the present passage seems to be a case in point.[10] We also note that Plotinus here states his causal principle in two forms, "all things which exist . . . necessarily produce" and "all things *when they come to perfection* produce." Both forms are already to be found in passages we have examined from v.4, the first at v.4.2.27 and the second at v.4.1.27. Plotinus seems not to have distinguished them clearly, so it is hard to tell whether he truly wishes to embrace the more general form or merely uses

[10] For the various uses of ὑπόστασις in Plotinus see Michael Atkinson, *Plotinus: Ennead V.1, A Commentary with Translation* (Oxford, 1983), 55–56.

it as an abbreviated way of stating the restrictive form. Perhaps for Plotinus "real" existence simply is existence in a state of full maturity.[11]

Aside from confirming and elaborating the thought of v.4, the passage quoted takes a further step in applying the two-act model to explain the generation of Soul from Intellect. This is natural in view of the generality of the model. An earlier passage in the same treatise makes the same point more fully:

> Just as a thought in its utterance is an image of the thought in soul, so Soul itself is the expressed thought of Intellect, and its whole activity (ἡ πᾶσα ἐνέργεια), and the life which it sends out to establish another reality; as fire has the heat which remains with it and the heat which it gives. But one must understand that the activity on the level of Intellect does not flow out from it, but the external activity comes into existence as something distinct. (v.1.3.8–12)

It is interesting to find a term that Plotinus elsewhere uses to describe the derivation of one hypostasis from another, ῥέω (flow), here explicitly denied of the relation of Soul to Intellect. Apparently he felt that it did not sufficiently convey the distinct reality of the two hypostases. In spite of the distinctness of the hypostases, however, he also emphasizes their likeness and the ontological dependence of the lower upon the higher. Soul stands to Intellect as image (εἰκών) to prototype, or as expressed thought (λόγος ἐν προφορᾷ) to thought in the soul. In v.1.6, as we have seen, it is a "ghost" (εἴδωλον) of Intellect. The term *eidōlon* was the name given in the atomists' theory of vision to the visible image thrown off by an object and received in the eye. Although Plotinus had little use for atomism, this atomist use of the term does underscore two of its most important connotations: first, that the *eidōlon* furnishes knowledge of its source, and second, that although distinct from that source it depends upon it for existence. But Plotinus differs from the atomists in conceiving the dependence as ongoing, such that were the original to cease to exist the *eidōlon* would cease along with it.[12] Several texts later in the *Enneads* return to the subject of the generation of Soul from Intellect, using the two-act theory, as here, to achieve a balanced emphasis on likeness, distinctness, and ongoing dependence.[13]

[11] There is precedent for the restrictive form in the passage mentioned earlier from the *De Anima*: "for all living things that are complete (τελεία) and not mutilated, and whose mode of generation is not spontaneous, the most natural act is the production of another like itself" (ii.4 415a26–28). It may be that Aristotle has in mind not so much biological maturity as being the kind of animal that *does* reproduce (as opposed, for instance, to mules).

[12] This is implicit in Plotinus' use of the analogy of fire and heat, and is made explicit at iv.5.7.44–52 and vi.4.10.1–16. (I take ἄλλης προτέρας in the former passage to be a reference to another prior *energeia* – i.e., Intellect – and not to another prior soul, as it is taken by Armstrong.)

[13] See v.2[11].1.14–17, ii.9[33].8.22–27, vi.2[43].22.26–28, iii.5[50].3.3–6.

Yet what is important about the relationship of a lower to a higher hypostasis is not merely that the former comes forth as a kind of image from the latter; it is also that, for this very reason, the lower must "look to" the higher in order to attain being. As Plotinus puts it in v.1.6, Soul's "expression is obscure" and so it must look to Intellect, just as Intellect looks to the One. Chapter 3 of the same treatise gives a fuller explanation.

Since then its existence derives from Intellect, Soul is intellectual, and its intellect is in discursive reasonings, and its perfection comes from Intellect, like a father who brings to maturity a son whom he begat imperfect in comparison with himself. Soul's establishment in reality (ὑπόστασις), then, comes from Intellect and its thought becomes actual in its seeing of Intellect. For when it looks into Intellect, it has within it and as its own what it thinks in its active actuality (ἃ νοεῖ καὶ ἐνεργεῖ). And we should call these alone activities (ἐνεργείας) of Soul, all it does intellectually and which spring from its own home. (v.1.3.13–19)

The *energeiai* of Soul referred to at the end of this passage – i.e., its contemplation of Intellect – are simply Soul's internal act. Only this is consistent with Plotinus' insistence that the very being (ὑπόστασις) of Soul consists in its return to Intellect. What licenses the plural is presumably the fact that Soul's thought, though directed toward Intellect, remains discursive rather than intuitive. It is a succession of thoughts and in that sense a plurality.[14]

So we find in v.1 two important additions to what is stated in v.4: first, that the two-act model can be used to describe the generation of Soul from Intellect as well as that of Intellect from the One; second, that the internal *energeia* of each lower hypostasis consists in its contemplative return to that which is above it. Both points are reiterated in the next treatise, v.2[11]. There the two-act model is further extended to describe the generation of natural order from Soul. In this case, however, Plotinus notes a difference: Soul does not abide unchanged in the act of generation.

Since [Intellect] halts and turns toward the One that it may see, it becomes at once Intellect and Being. Resembling the One thus, Intellect produces things that are like it, pouring forth a multiple power – this is a likeness of it – just as that which was before it poured it forth. This activity springing from the substance of Intellect is Soul, which comes to be this while Intellect abides unchanged: for Intellect too comes into being while that which is before it abides unchanged. But Soul does not abide unchanged when it produces: it is moved (κινηθεῖσα) and so brings forth an image. It looks to its source and is filled, and going forth to another opposed movement generates its own image, which is sensation and the principle of growth (φύσιν) in plants. (v.2.1.13–22)

[14] See v.9.7, iii.7.11.36–40; but cf. iv.3.18.

Plotinus does not explain why Soul is moved in generating, but a statement later in the chapter gives a clue. "Higher soul," he tells us, "has come to be in plants in the sense that it has extended itself down to their level and produced another degree of being by that extension, in desire of its inferior" (v.2.1.25–28).[15] Here there enters a new element in the explanation of the generation of nature: the generation is due not only to Soul's contemplation of Intellect, but also to its desire for its inferior, body. Since desire is a type of movement, Soul naturally undergoes movement in the process. Indeed, what is generated is not strictly speaking a separate hypostasis, as Intellect is separate from the One and Soul from Intellect, but rather an aspect of Soul, "lower" as distinct from "higher" Soul. In that respect the generation of nature is a change within the being of Soul, and so certainly requires that Soul undergo motion.[16]

There is one further stage in the Plotinian generation of the cosmos, that of matter from nature. Plotinus has relatively little to say about this stage, and conspicuously refrains from describing it in terms of internal and external act. One reason he does so is probably that nature, being merely an aspect of Soul, cannot properly be said to have its own *ousia* with the two corresponding types of act. Even more important is that matter is "absolute indefiniteness" (ἀοριστία παντελής, III.4.1.12) and so can scarcely be an *energeia* of any kind. Yet in other respects this stage is much like those preceding it. Although matter is produced by nature as absolute indefiniteness, it becomes a body in "receiving the form appropriate to its potentiality, being a receptacle for the principle which produced it and brought it to maturity" (III.4.1.15–16). Thus even matter, like the earlier stages of reality, returns to its source and in so doing attains whatever fixed reality it may be said to possess. The difference is that its return is not a kind of vision or contemplation, but merely a passive reception of form. This reception must not be thought of as a static condition, however, for the ways in which Soul imparts form to matter embrace all the immense variety of natural processes; even what we would regard as inanimate matter is, in Plotinus' view, under the governance of the World Soul. That is presumably why,

[15] "Higher soul" refers to the reasoning part of the soul, including both intellect and discursive reason; cf. II.9.2, IV.3.27.1–10, IV.8.8.1–6, V.1.10.11–19.

[16] Plotinus also describes the aspect of Soul which comes to be present in body as "rational principle," *logos*, although he cautions that this *logos* is only an image of that within Soul itself (IV.3.10.38–40). He adds elsewhere that the *logoi* present in bodies are the *energeiai* of Soul, and Soul itself is "*logos* and the sum (κεφάλαιον) of the *logoi*" (VI.2.5.13). See further John Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Cambridge, 1967), 84–102. Plotinus' teaching on the *logoi* is one strand of influence leading to the doctrine of the divine *logoi* in St. Maximus the Confessor, to be discussed in Chapter 8.

besides ascribing the creation of matter to nature, Plotinus can also say that the World Soul creates the cosmos (iv.3.6, 9).[17]

Before closing this summary of the applications of the two-act model, one more which should be noted is its use in the allegorical account of the generation of Eros from Soul in iii.5. (The account is allegorical in that Plotinus clearly does not conceive of Eros as a distinct reality comparable to the One, Intellect, and Soul.) What is most interesting in this account is the emphasis that Plotinus places on Soul's intensity and passion in its gaze upon Intellect.

> [Soul] looks towards that which was the first substance [i.e., Intellect], and looks towards it with great intensity. This was its first vision, and it looked toward it as to its own good, and rejoiced in its looking, and the vision was of a kind which made it impossible for the visionary to make its gaze merely an added work; so that Soul by a kind of delight and intense concentration on the vision and by the passion of its gazing generates something from itself which is worthy of itself and of the vision. (iii.5.3.5–11)

This passage should caution us against any tendency to think of the process of return through vision or contemplation as occurring in a state of detachment. Despite the intellectualist imagery, Plotinus wishes us to think of it as a state of total engagement and concentration, much like rapturous love. That is also why he repeatedly associates the return with a kind of filling (πλήρωσις) which overflows into a new form of being. As he remarks in the passage on the generation of Love, Love is like an eye "filled with what it beholds" (iii.5.3.13), ready to bring forth new beings.

So each stage in the unfolding of reality from the One, with the exception of that of matter from nature, is explained by Plotinus in terms of internal and external act.[18] The complementary idea, that each level of *energeia* consists in return to that which is above it, also reappears frequently. It is expressed in various ways. We have already seen in v.1.3 that Soul "receives its hypostasis" in its vision of Intellect, just as Intellect does in its vision of

[17] See further Kevin Corrigan, "Is There More than One Generation of Matter in the *Enneads*?" *Phronesis* 31 (1986), 167–81.

[18] Eyjólfur Emilsson has proposed that there is a further application of the two-act model in Plotinus, one intermediate, as it were, between the generation of nature from Soul and that of matter from nature. According to Emilsson, "formative principles [i.e., the *logoi* of sensible objects] produce sensible qualities and shapes (outer activity) as a result of reverting to and contemplating their immediate cause (inner activity)" ("Cognition and Its Object," *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. Lloyd Gerson [Cambridge, 1996], 224). There is some truth to this. Plotinus does hold that the qualities of sensible objects are produced by and are images of the objects' *logoi* (*ibid.*, 222–27). As *Enneads* iii.8 makes plain, he also believes that the *logoi* contemplate their cause, Soul, and that this contemplation is productive. Nonetheless, he nowhere ties these elements together using the two-act model.

the One. *Enneads* III.8 extends a similar account to nature. What nature contemplates is not Soul, strictly speaking, but rather Intellect as mediated to it by Soul. Although the term *energeia* does not figure prominently in this account, Plotinus clearly regards contemplation as itself a kind of *energeia* (cf. III.8.5.18–21). Hence, if we may speak somewhat loosely of nature possessing an internal act, that act consists in the contemplative vision of Intellect as mediated by higher Soul.

But alongside this hierarchical conception of return, in which nature and Soul contemplate Intellect and Intellect contemplates the One, Plotinus also speaks of the direct return in contemplation of all things to the One. The same treatise that describes nature's contemplation of Intellect states roundly that "[all] things have their activity about the Good and because of the Good (περὶ τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ διὰ τὸ ἀγαθόν)" (III.8.11.11). Similar statements occur at V.6.5.19, "the *energeia* of all things is directed to the Good"; at V.5.9.36–38, where all things "have their being directed towards [the Good] and depend upon it, each in a different way"; and at VI.2.11.26, where "all things originate from the One and strive toward the One." The most elaborate development of this theme is in I.7.1, which quotes the definition of the Good at the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics* as "that to which everything aspires." Unlike Aristotle, Plotinus assumes that this definition has a single referent. He infers that the Good "must stay still, and all things turn back to it, as a circle does to the centre from which the radii come" (I.7.1.23–25).

So Plotinus describes the return in two ways, as hierarchically mediated and as direct. The two are not really contradictory, for the internal act which constitutes the being of Intellect is nothing but the vision of the One. Intellect thus "contains" or "expresses" the One, but in a multiple, fragmented form. It follows that those levels of reality whose good resides in the vision of Intellect also behold the One, though in a mediated fashion. This rule – that vision of Intellect is also vision of the One – applies even to Intellect's self-knowledge: in knowing the Good Intellect knows itself as well, so that in a sense its *energeia* is directed toward itself (V.3.7). Plotinus expresses the ordering of all things to the One through Intellect in one of his favorite images, that of the dance. "The Good stays still in himself; but Intellect moves about him in its activity (ἐνεργεῖ περὶ ἐκεῖνον), as also it lives around him. And Soul dances round Intellect outside, and looks to it, and in contemplating its interior sees God through it" (I.8.2.22–25).[19]

[19] See also VI.9.8 for another description of the dance of souls around the One.

### PLOTINUS' SECOND THOUGHTS

Teleology, the directedness of all activity to the One, is thus at the core of Plotinus' conception of *energeia*. That presents him with a difficulty. If all *energeia* is directed to the One, how can the One itself have (or be) *energeia*? Would not this introduce duality into the One – the duality of an activity and its object? Plotinus wrestles with this question in a number of texts. The earliest is v.6[24].6, a chapter that follows immediately upon one of the statements of universal teleology just quoted.[20] He writes:

> If this [i.e., that all thinking and activity is directed toward the Good] is correctly said, the Good would certainly not have any place for thinking: for the Good for the thinking principle must be something different [from itself]. So the Good is without activity (ἀνενέργητον). And why should actuality be active? For in general no active actuality has yet another active actuality. But even if some philosophers are able to attribute yet another activity to the other active actualities which are directed to something else, yet the first one of all, on which the others depend, we must let be what it is, adding nothing further to it. So an active actuality of this kind is not thinking; for it has nothing to think: it is itself the first. (v.6.6.1–9)

As this passage indicates, Plotinus regularly associates the question of whether the One is "without activity" with the question of whether it thinks. This should warn us that his view may ultimately suffer from some ambivalence, for despite the confident tone adopted here, he does sometimes allow a kind of thought to the One.[21] In the passage quoted, at least, his solution is straightforward. The One is simply an exception to the rule. It is the first *energeia*, but unlike all other *energeiai* it has no other "added to it." In terms of the two-act model, this amounts to the assertion that the One is (or has) an internal act, but has no external act. Needless to say, the explanation of the origin of Intellect from the One can hardly stand if this is to be Plotinus' final position.

The next treatise to consider the difficulty, vi.7[38], adopts a different solution. It regards Intellect as unproblematically an *energeia* of the One, and indeed as the *prōtē energeia* which has "neither *energeia* nor thinking (νόησις) before it" (vi.7.40.19–24). That would suggest that the One is not itself an *energeia* – a conclusion confirmed a few lines later, where Plotinus

[20] *Enneads* iii.9.9 is also relevant, but (as Armstrong remarks in the Loeb edition) the treatise to which it belongs is a collection of scattered notes and cannot be assigned a certain place in the chronological order. Its position on the question we are examining is similar to that of vi.7, described below.

[21] See v.3.10.40–44, v.4.2.15–19, vi.7.39.1–4, vi.8.16.11–29, 18.18–44. (Some of these texts are quoted below.) For discussion see Rist, *Plotinus*, 38–52; John Bussanich, "Plotinus on the Inner Life of the One," *Ancient Philosophy* 7 (1987), 163–89.

states that the One "did not act (ἐνεργήσας) before it generated activity; for then activity would have been there before it [i.e., activity, which in this context is Intellect] came to be" (VI.7.40.30–31). In terms of the two-act model, the One has an external act but not any preceding internal act. This again would leave the generation of Intellect from the One wholly unexplained, for if the One has no internal act, the two-act model does not apply.[22]

A more extended discussion of the problem occurs in VI.8[39], "On Free Will and the Will of the One." Chapter 12 of this treatise further underscores Plotinus' ambivalence. It distinguishes two possibilities: either there is *energeia* in the One and we may "locate" (θησόμεθα) him in *energeia*, or there is no *energeia* in the One, but other things have their existence by being active around him (περὶ αὐτὸν ἐνεργοῦντα). Plotinus does not at this point attempt to choose between these possibilities, contenting himself with the observation that in either case there is no duality in the One of the sort which could make it subject to mastery. As the treatise progresses, however, he gradually abandons this noncommittal stance. An important passage in chapter 16 asserts that the One is "self-directed activity."

[The One] is, if we may say so, borne to his own interior, as it were well pleased with himself, the "pure radiance," being himself this with which he is well pleased; but this means that he gives himself existence (ὑποστήσας αὑτόν), supposing him to be an abiding active actuality and the most pleasing of things in a way rather like Intellect. But Intellect is an actualisation (ἐνέργημα); so that he is an actualisation. But not of anything else; he is then an actualisation of himself. He is not therefore as he happens to be, but as he acts (ἐνεργεῖ). And then, further, if he *is* supremely because he so to speak holds to himself and so to speak looks to himself, and this so-called being of his is his looking to himself, he as it were makes himself (οἷον ποιοῖ ἂν αὑτόν) and is not as he chanced to be but as he wills, and his willing is not random but as it happened; for since it is willing of the best it is not random. But that an inclination of this kind to himself, being in a kind of way his activity and abiding in himself, makes him be what he is, is evident if one posits the opposite; because, if he is inclined to what is outside him, he would put an end to his being what he is; so then his being what he is is his self-directed activity (ἡ ἐνέργεια ἡ πρὸς αὑτόν); but these are one thing and himself. He therefore brought himself into existence (ὑπέστησεν αὑτὸν), since his activity was brought out into existence along with himself. If then he did not come into being, but his activity has always been, and is something like being awake, when the wakener is not someone else, a wakefulness and a thought transcending thought which exists always, then he is as he woke himself to be. (VI.8.16.13–33)

[22] See particularly V.3[49].7.22–25, where the existence of an internal *energeia* is made a precondition for that of an external *energeia*. (The reference in this case is to Intellect's generation of Soul, but the principle is general.)

There can be no doubt that Plotinus here embraces the notion that the One is *energeia* – indeed, supreme *energeia*. The only question is at what cost. In accordance with his principle that all *energeia* is directed toward the One, the *energeia* which is the One must be self-directed, having no end other than itself. This in itself is not a radical innovation. Aristotle's Prime Mover might fairly be described as self-directed *energeia*; that would be a reasonable inference from the description of it as pure *energeia*, an *energeia* which turns out to be self-thinking thought. But that way out is closed to Plotinus, for he consistently criticizes the Aristotelian conception of the Prime Mover on the grounds that it ascribes to the first principle the duality of thinker and that which it thinks.[23] Groping in this passage to describe the internal *energeia* of the One, however, Plotinus can do little more than recast Aristotle's solution in his own language. In doing so he merely lays himself open to his own criticisms. What sense can be given to the One's "holding to himself," "looking to himself," and waking himself which does not import at least that minimal duality that Plotinus elsewhere finds so objectionable? Plotinus is certainly aware of the difficulty; that is why he repeatedly adds the disclaimer οἷον, "as it were."

In seeking an answer we must keep firmly in mind the assumptions from which Plotinus is operating. His position is grounded on the principle that an image reveals its archetype. Given that Intellect exists and is as he understands it, there must be something like intellect in the One, however much it may transcend human comprehension. This is made explicit by an analogy Plotinus puts forward soon after the passage just quoted. The One, he says, stands to Intellect as the center of a circle to the radii issuing from it.

> What that center is like is revealed through the lines; it is as if it was spread out without having been spread out – it is like this that we must apprehend that Intellect-Being, coming to be from that Good and as if poured out and spread out and hanging from it, is, by its own intelligent nature, evidence of something like Intellect in the One which is not Intellect; for it is one . . . For something like what is in Intellect, in many ways greater, is in that One. (VI.8.18.17–34)

The origination of Intellect from the One, Plotinus claims, is simply unintelligible if we do not suppose that something like Intellect pre-exists in the One, yet does so without compromising the One's simplicity. No doubt when we try to imagine what that "something" is we are in a position much like that of Flatlanders trying to imagine three-dimensional objects.[24] This

[23] See III.9.9, V.3.10,13, V.6 passim, VI.7.37,41, VI.9.6.
[24] See Edwin Abbott's classic, *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* (New York, 1952).

does not show that the "something" does not exist. It does not even show that we cannot have good reason for thinking it to exist, no more than the Flatlanders cannot have good reason for thinking there to be three-dimensional objects.[25]

Even granting the logic of this position, however, we still need to know more of what the One's "holding to himself" is like if we are to turn back the charge of duality. Although Plotinus does not confront this issue directly, a possible answer emerges from a number of passages where he distinguishes two types of activity in Intellect. The first is the self-intellection we normally associate with Intellect; the second is a higher kind of intuitive grasp by which Intellect directly apprehends the One, in the process losing its own self-awareness. Plotinus appeals to a number of images to try to give a sense of what this direct awareness is like. Among them is the state of being drunk and in love:

> Intellect also, then, has one power of thinking, by which it looks at the things in itself, and one by which it looks at what transcends it by a direct awareness (ἐπιβολῇ) and reception, by which also before it saw only, and by seeing acquired intellect and is one. And that first is the contemplation of Intellect in its right mind, and the other is Intellect in love, when it goes out of its mind "drunk with the nectar"; then it falls in love, simplified into happiness by having its fill; and it is better for it to be drunk with a drunkenness like this than to be more respectably sober. (vi.7.35.20–28)[26]

Elsewhere Plotinus describes the higher state as a vision of light, in distinction to the vision of things made visible by light. The analogy is complicated by the fact that the light is not perceived by Intellect as something external, like a normal light, but as somehow its own. Plotinus likens it to the light that was then widely believed to be internal to the eye – light that can be seen when the eyelid is closed and the eye is pressed by its possessor.

> For then in not seeing it [the eye] sees, and sees then most of all: for it sees light; but the other things which it saw had the form of light but were not light. Just so Intellect, veiling itself from other things and drawing itself inward, when it is not looking at anything will see a light, not a distinct light in something different from itself, but suddenly appearing, alone by itself in independent purity, so that Intellect is at a loss to know whence it has appeared, whether it has come from outside or within, and after it has gone away will say, "It was within, and yet it was not within." (v.5.7.16–36)

[25] See also v.3[49].16.42–43, where *nous* in Intellect is called a copy, μίμημα, of what is in the One, "whatever this may be."

[26] The phrase "drunk with nectar" is an allusion to *Symposium* 203b, where Poros in his drunkenness begets Eros.

Finally there is an intriguing passage in which Plotinus likens the presence of this "inner intellect" within us to a state of divine possession.

> Just as those who have a god within them and are in the grip of divine possession may know this much, that they have something greater within them, even if they do not know what, and from the ways in which they are moved and the things they say get a certain awareness of the god who moves them, though these are not the same as the mover; so we seem to be disposed to the One, divining, when we have our intellect pure, that this is the inner intellect (ὁ ἔνδον νοῦς). (V.3.14.8–15)

All of these passages describe the state of higher awareness as one in which the duality of thought and its object is somehow overcome in a way even more direct and immediate than that of Intellect's normal self-intellection. As John Bussanich writes in regard to the vision of light, "Intellect is enveloped by a light whose pervasiveness symbolizes the obliteration of Intellect's self-determining categories: inner–outer, subject–object, original–image."[27] Of course all of these texts apply to Intellect; what is denied in the higher state is not the ontological duality of Intellect and the One, but only Intellect's awareness of that duality. Nonetheless it seems reasonable to suppose that we ought to understand the "looking to himself" and "holding to himself" of the One along similar lines. In the One there is the same utter absence of experiential duality, but accompanied by the absence of ontological duality. Although it is true that we may not be able really to imagine what such a state is like, Plotinus has at least provided sufficient analogies to allow the assertion of its existence to be intelligible. That is all he really needs to do, for his argument for its existence in the One does not rest on the analogies but on the general metaphysical principle of likeness between cause and effect.

Thus it seems that Plotinus can give an answer to the charge that identifying the One with its "self-directed activity" smuggles in an implicit duality. It is all the more surprising, then, to find that in later treatises he retreats from the position of VI.8 back to that of VI.7. At least he seems to do so, for he reserves the title *prōtē energeia* for Intellect and apparently denies that the One has an internal act. This tendency first appears (or reappears) in V.3[49].10. There, after repeating the familiar argument that vision requires a distinct object of vision, he continues:

> For what is absolutely one has nothing to which to direct its activity but since it is "alone isolated" will remain absolutely immobile. For in so far as it is active (ἐνεργεῖ), there is one thing after another: but if there is not one thing and then

[27] Bussanich, "The Inner Life of the One," 171.

another, what will it make, or where will it proceed? Therefore that which is active must either be acting on something else, or must itself be a multiple thing, if it is going to be active within itself. (v.3.10.17–22)

The implications of this argument for the One are obvious: the One can have no internal act. Chapter 12 draws that very conclusion.

In order that anything else may exist, it is necessary that the One should keep absolutely quiet by itself: otherwise, it will move before there is movement, and think before there is thinking, or its first activity will be incomplete, since it will be only an [objectless] drive. For at what is it to aim, as if it were missing something? If we are to make a rational statement, we shall state that the first activity, which, so to speak, flows from it like a light from the sun, is Intellect, and the whole intelligible nature, but that he himself, staying still at the summit of the intelligible, rules over it; he does not thrust the outshining away from himself – or we shall make another light before light – but he irradiates forever, abiding unchanged over the intelligible. (v.3.12.35–45)[28]

A similar and even more definite passage occurs in the last treatise Plotinus ever wrote, i.7[54]:

If the aspiration and activity towards the best is good, the Good must not look or aspire to something else, but must stay quiet and be the "spring and origin" of natural activities (ἐνεργειῶν), and give other things the form of good, not by its activity directed to them – for they are directed to it, their source. It must not be the Good by activity or thought, but by reason of its very abiding. For because it is "beyond being" (ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας), it transcends activity (ἐπέκεινα καὶ ἐνεργείας) and transcends mind and thought. (i.7.1.14–21)

Should we take these passages as a repudiation of the views expressed in vi.8? There are several reasons why the answer is no. First is the merely negative point that Plotinus does not mention his earlier views or attempt to refute them; this suggests that the difference is one of emphasis rather than settled opinion. Second is the description in v.3.12 of Intellect as light from the sun. Plotinus uses the same image frequently elsewhere to make the point that, just as the sun *is* light, but without dispersion or dependence, so the One is whatever Intellect is, but in a superior mode of being. Since nothing here suggests that he wishes to repudiate that implication, the point of the analogy would seem to be that the One is *energeia*, but in some superior mode. Finally, the statement that the One is *epekeina energeias* is evidently meant to be governed by the more familiar claim that it is *epekeina ousias*.

[28] For further references to Intellect as *prōtē energeia*, see iii.9[13].9.8; iv.4[28].16.19; vi.7[38].18.12–13, 40.19; v.3[49].5.37; i.8[51].2.21. The same term is applied to the One at v.6[24].6.7 and vi.8[39].20.15–16.

As has long been recognized, what is crucial to the latter claim is the idea that *ousia* implies form or limit.[29] The One's being *epekeina ousias* does not rule out that it is supreme *ousia*, in the more exalted sense that it exists in full actuality and is the source of *ousia* in other things. Likewise the statement that the One is *epekeina energeias* does not rule out that it is or has *energeia* in a way transcending the *prōtē energeia*.

## PLOTINUS, ARISTOTLE, AND ALEXANDER

We have already noted several points where Plotinus' argument shows the influence of Aristotle. Let us now try to assess that influence more systematically. One premise which is fundamental to Plotinus is that the external act of one level of reality can also be the internal act – and hence the substance, the *ousia* in the sense of form – of that below it. On its surface this is rather puzzling. How can the activity (or actuality) of anything simultaneously be the activity (or actuality) of something else? Do not we normally individuate activities precisely by the agents involved? Merely adding the qualifiers "internal" and "external" does not, by itself, give sense to this paradoxical notion.

Aristotle faced a similar question in the development of his own concept of *energeia*. Take the case of teacher instructing a pupil. The teacher has a potentiality to teach and the pupil has a potentiality to learn. When instruction takes place, is there then one actuality or two? And where is this actuality located – in the teacher, the student, or both? Aristotle's answer is that there is one actuality and it is "in" the student, for otherwise there would be no difference between the teacher as agent and the student as patient. But, significantly, this one actuality can be described in two ways: as the actualization of the teacher's potential to teach and as that of the student's potential to learn. It is numerically one but two in definition, like the road from Thebes to Athens and from Athens to Thebes. As noted in Chapter 1, Aristotle adopts this solution in *Physics* III.3 and substantially repeats it in *De Anima* III.2, where he applies it to the case of perception.

Here, then, is a precedent which might have suggested to Plotinus that there can be an external act (the teacher's teaching) and an internal act (the pupil's learning) which are in a sense two and in a sense one, and further that the actualization of one thing can be "in" another. Plotinus apparently even borrowed from the *Physics* one of his favorite descriptions of the relationship of the external act to its source. Aristotle says that the

[29] See V.1.7 and V.5.6, with the valuable discussion in Rist, *Plotinus*, 21–37.

actuality of the teacher, though residing in the pupil, is "not cut off" from the teacher (οὐκ ἀποτετμημένη, III.3 202b6–7). Plotinus uses the same phrase repeatedly to describe the relation of light to its source, or that of the activity of Soul to Soul, or that of all things to the One.[30]

The importance of this doctrine from the *Physics* for Plotinus was first observed by Christian Rutten.[31] More recently A. C. Lloyd has pointed to the Aristotelian distinction of first potency, second potency (or first act), and second act as another important source.[32] Although there is not a straightforward correlation between Aristotelian first and second act and Plotinian internal and external act, the two distinctions have much in common. The transition from first to second act occurs naturally unless something intervenes to prevent it, and is in that sense necessary, although no external agent forces it to occur. This is much like the spontaneous necessity with which a given internal act produces its external act. Another similarity is that the transition from first to second act is not an alteration, but "a development [of a thing] into itself and into full reality" (*De An*. II.5 417b6–7). For Plotinus it is axiomatic that the external act is an expression of what the internal act already truly is, and therefore can come forth without requiring any alteration to the internal act. The parallel is not exact, however, for Aristotelian first act is after all a kind of potency brought to realization in its second act, whereas Plotinus denies that the internal–external relationship is one of a potency to its realization. His descriptions of the external act as an "image" or "trace" of internal act are meant to make this point; the internal act is not brought to realization in its external act any more than an object is brought to realization in its mirror reflection.

As I have already suggested, the hunt for Aristotelian precedents can be taken further by turning to *Metaphysics* XII. Plotinus' conception of internal act fuses the notions of activity and actuality in a way that clearly owes much to Aristotle's account of the Prime Mover. The internal acts constituting Intellect, Soul, and nature are each both the form constituting that level of reality and the activity of contemplating the One in the way that is appropriate to that level of reality. Even the One may be said to have or to be a kind of self-apprehension, although Plotinus denies that this apprehension is intellection (νόησις) of the sort that Aristotle ascribes to the Prime Mover. Finally, Plotinus, like Aristotle, makes the single

[30] Examples include I.7.1.28, IV.9.5.7, V.2.1.22, V.3.12.45, VI.2.22.34, VI.4.3.9, 9.16, and VI.9.9.8.

[31] "La doctrine des deux actes dans la philosophie de Plotin," *Revue philosophique* 146 (1956), 104–05.

[32] A. C. Lloyd, "Plotinus on the Genesis of Thought and Existence," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 5 (1987), 167–68; *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism* (Oxford, 1990), 99–100.

self-directed activity which is his highest divinity the goal of all natural activities, even those that are wholly unconscious.

The observation that the One is the *telos* of the internal act of all things provides the answer to a question raised by Lloyd Gerson.[33] Is the One the cause of the being of all things directly or only in a mediated fashion? Gerson addresses this question using the scholastic distinction between a *per se* and a *per accidens* causal sequence. In a *per se* sequence the first member is directly the cause of each that follows, whereas in a *per accidens* sequence the first member causes only the second, which in turn causes the third, and so on. (An example of a *per se* causal series is a motorist causing a traffic accident with his car; an example of a *per accidens* series is that of a father begetting a son, who in turn begets a grandson.) In Gerson's view, the One is the *per se* cause of the existence of each thing, whereas Intellect is the cause of each thing's possessing a determinate essence and Soul is the cause of temporal life in things possessing such life. Insofar as a determinate essence and life are necessary for the existence of things that possess them, Intellect and Soul may be said to be instrumental causes by which the One produces existence. Strictly speaking, however, it is the external act of the One which is "the being of everything that can possess being, from νοῦς down to and including matter."[34]

This last statement should give us pause. Nothing in the many texts so far examined indicates that the external act of the One is anything other than Intellect. More generally, it is hard to see why Plotinus would so carefully liken the production of Soul by Intellect and of nature by Soul to that of Intellect by the One if his view is as Gerson describes it.[35] What are we to do, then, with the many texts describing the One as the cause of the being of all things? The most important of these are as follows. The One is that "from which all depends and to which all look and are and live and think: for it is cause of life and mind and being" (I.6.7.10–12); it is "the source of being and the why of being (τοῦ εἶναι καὶ τοῦ διὰ τί εἶναι)" (VI.8.14.31–32); it (or rather, he) is "the cause of the being [of all things] and they, we may say, strive after him" (VI.7.42.12–13).[36] These all emphasize the role of the

[33] Lloyd Gerson, "Plotinus's Metaphysics: Emanation or Creation?" *Review of Metaphysics* 46 (1993), 559–74; *Plotinus* (London and New York, 1994), 29–32, 34–35, 58–59.

[34] Gerson, "Plotinus's Metaphysics," 570.

[35] Gerson takes V.2.1, which asserts a similarity between the production of Soul by Intellect and that of Intellect by the One, as the main obstacle to his interpretation. He attempts to neutralize it by rendering τὰ ὅμοια ποιεῖ in line 14 as "produces likenesses" rather than "produces in the same way [as the One]." But the presumption of similarity scarcely rests on this line alone; it is built into the very notion that a single model can be used to describe all the various cases of production.

[36] These texts are cited in Gerson, *Plotinus*, 31 n. 53; the others there listed pertain solely to the One as cause of Intellect.

One as final cause and describe it as a cause of being only within that context. That is fully in keeping with the other texts we have examined. What makes the One the cause of the being of all things is not that it generates them directly, or even by the use of instruments, but that it is the *telos* of the internal act which is the substance of each. So if we are to use the distinction between *per se* and *per accidens* causation – and we should do so cautiously, for it is not in Plotinus – we must allow that the series of generators is *per accidens*. The example of father, son, and grandson is misleading because it leads one to think that *per accidens* causation requires the causal agents to be temporally separated. A better example would be that of a series of mirrors reflecting sequentially a single object – and even then we must disregard what we know (but Plotinus did not) about light taking time to pass from one mirror to the next.[37] The point of calling the sequence *per accidens* is solely that there is sequential causal dependence, not that there is action sequential in time.

To return now to the question of sources, there remains one final way in which Plotinus' conception of *energeia* is indebted to the Aristotelian tradition. It is important to note that none of the precedents so far cited gives any grounds for thinking of the *energeia* put forth by an object as something which, though remaining continually dependent upon its source for existence, can take on substantial reality of its own. This is indeed a surprising idea, and the search for precedents has ranged as far afield as the Stoic theory of the emanation of *pneuma* from the sun.[38] Although it is not impossible that this idea had some influence on Plotinus, a precedent actually using the word *energeia* would be far more convincing. As it happens, such a precedent is available in a work we can be almost certain that Plotinus read, the *De Anima* of Alexander of Aphrodisias.

Before describing this precedent it will be necessary to say a word about Aristotle's theory of light. In *De Anima* II.7 Aristotle defines light as "the actuality of the transparent *qua* transparent" (ἐνέργεια τοῦ διαφανοῦς ᾗ διαφανές, 418b9–10). "The transparent" here refers to the medium of vision, typically water or air. In Aristotle's view such a medium is only potentially transparent. For it to become actually transparent requires the presence of an agent capable of bringing it from potency to act, such as fire or aether. Light is itself just the state of actuality in the medium; it is emphatically not a body or efflux of bodies, as had been held by Democritus and Empedocles. Hence it does not travel or take time to propagate from one

[37] Plotinus uses this image for the generation of the lower powers of soul from higher soul (I.1.8.15–24).
[38] A. H. Armstrong, "Emanation in Plotinus," *Mind* 46 (1937), 62–63.

point to another (418b20–26). Aristotle rounds out his theory by defining color as that which is capable of setting in motion the actually transparent (418a31–b1). Vision occurs when a colored object introduces a motion into the actually transparent medium, and the medium in turn transmits that motion to the organ of vision.

This theory underwent a slight but significant modification at the hands of Alexander. Aristotle never speaks of light itself becoming colored; given that light is an *energeia*, this would seem to make little sense. Alexander, on the other hand, regards it as obvious that light becomes colored and even points to this fact as evidence in favor of Aristotle's theory.[39] He does not explain how light, which he follows Aristotle in regarding as an *energeia*, can become colored. But his subsequent exposition makes the answer plain. Although Alexander retains the Aristotelian terminology and follows Aristotle in denying that light is a body or takes time to propagate, he clearly regards it as much more akin to a substance than does Aristotle. For Alexander, the transparent medium receives its "perfection and proper form" *from* light, rather than that perfected state itself *being* light (43.6–7). Of course the fact that light can act as an efficient cause need not by itself imply that light is a quasi-substantial entity, for Aristotle can sometimes think of form (including even accidental form) as an efficient cause. But Alexander goes on to describe light as "the most visible of all objects and the cause responsible for other visible objects' being seen" (44.13–14; cf. 89.1–2). Furthermore, his account of vision assigns to light the role that the medium had played for Aristotle:

> Light takes on color from each visible object, and is directed in a straight line to the eyes that exist to receive it. It transmits to them the same affection as it received from the colored objects . . . The act of seeing consists, then, in the sense organ's reception of a color, and in its thereby taking on a likeness to that color. (43.18–44.3)

Oddly enough, this passage follows one in which Alexander correctly summarizes the true Aristotelian account (43.12–15). He does not seem to notice the difference. Surely, however, just as it makes no sense to think of an Aristotelian actuality as becoming colored, so it makes no sense to think of such an actuality as "directed in a straight line." Spatial imagery of this sort is out of place for describing the actualization of a potentiality present equally throughout the entire medium.

So I take it that there is in Alexander at least the beginnings of a tendency to hypostasize *energeia*. It is not difficult to see why this took place.

[39] Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Anima* 42.11–19 (further references in the text).

The temptation to think of light as some kind of efflux or emission is a strong one, even for Aristotelians who are officially committed to thinking otherwise. Given the identification of light with *energeia*, the temptation to think of *energeia* as also an efflux or emission will be equally strong. Alexander seems to have been drawn in this direction despite his commitment to orthodox Aristotelianism. Plotinus had no such allegiance, and in his own theory of light he makes a fundamental break with both Aristotle and Alexander by identifying light as the *energeia* of the luminous body rather than the medium. Nonetheless, it is from Alexander that Plotinus derives the conception of *energeia* as something which can take on a kind of existence of its own, despite its continuing dependence on its source.[40]

[40] The tendency to hypostasize light continued to gain strength in later writers. See Sambursky, *Physical World of Late Antiquity*, 110–17, which points to the influence in this regard of geometrical optics.

CHAPTER 5

# *The Plotinian heritage in the West*

After the death of Plotinus the mantle of leadership among Platonists passed to his former student, Porphyry (232–c. 305). It has long been recognized that Porphyry played a major role in the formation of Neoplatonism in the western half of the Empire. Augustine, for example, discusses his views at length in Book x of *The City of God*, and Boethius relies on him heavily in the interpretation of Aristotle's logic.[1] One of Porphyry's most influential acts was to write a commentary on the *Chaldaean Oracles*, an obscure piece of religio-philosophical verse dating from the middle of the second century. By doing so he brought into the orbit of Neoplatonism the system of ritualized interaction with the gods known as theurgy. Porphyry himself had strong doubts about theurgy; he regarded it as at best a useful way of cleansing the soul, one merely preparatory for the only true salvation, which is achieved through philosophy. But his student Iamblichus rose to its defense, and this quarrel between Porphyry and Iamblichus marked a major parting of the ways in the early history of the school. Iamblichus' writings ultimately became definitive for Neoplatonism in the eastern half of the Empire, whereas they remained virtually unknown in the West.[2]

In this chapter we will examine Porphyry and other Neoplatonists of the West. Part of our story will be that of how *energeia* as it is found in Plotinus and Porphyry was transformed into the medieval (and especially Thomistic) concept of *esse*, the "act of being." Tracing this history will reveal a major and relatively little noticed source of medieval thought. At the same time it will be important to notice what the developments we are tracing leave behind. At each stage there is a kind of sloughing off of unwanted metaphysics. This is usually done silently, so that a reader not familiar with the earlier texts will be unaware of how key concepts have been removed from their original setting and radically simplified. That is

[1] See Pierre Courcelle, *Late Latin Writers and Their Greek Sources* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969).
[2] See R. T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, Second Edition (Indianapolis, 1995), 105–10, 120–23.

one way in which our story is one of "leaving behind." Another is that there were important possibilities inherent in the concept of *energeia* as it existed in the early centuries A.D. that were not noticed or explored by western authors. These will become clear in subsequent chapters. To fully understand the story told in this chapter, therefore, we must see it against a dual background: on the one hand the earlier tradition culminating in Plotinus, and on the other hand contemporaneous developments in the East.

## PORPHYRY

It is unfortunate that the majority of Porphyry's works touching on *energeia* have been lost. These include commentaries on most of Plato's major dialogues, on the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Physics*, and on the *Enneads* themselves, as well as several polemical treatises on the soul and intellect. Porphyry's only surviving complete work of metaphysics is the *Sententiae*, a digest of Plotinian doctrine relating to the distinction between the sensible and intelligible realms and the means of ascending from one to the other. Because of its practical orientation this work does not discuss the theory of two acts or the derivation of the three hypostases. It does use the term *energeia* in various other ways mostly drawn from Plotinus, but they are relatively incidental and need not detain us here.

For Porphyry's most interesting contributions we must turn to works that survive only in fragments. In a fragment of his *Concerning the Soul Against Boethus* Porphyry develops an idea we have noted in Philo and Galen, that of *energeia* as revelatory of *ousia*. The issue arises as he is defending the argument of the *Phaedo* that the soul must survive death because it is more like the invisible and divine than the visible and mortal. Porphyry argues that the *energeiai* of the soul provide evidence for the character of its *ousia*, at least to the extent of establishing that the *ousia* is divine rather than mortal. He concludes his argument with the general principle that "it is because the *ousia* is of a certain quality that the *energeiai* are also of a certain quality, since they flow from it and are offshoots of it."[3] The argument is meant to establish, not an unqualified identity of essence (as in Christian arguments for the *homoousion*), but only a similarity. Nonetheless the precedent is significant, particularly since these fragments were included in Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica* and would have been well known in Christian circles. As often in Porphyry, one does not have to look far to see Plotinus in the

[3] Fr. 242 Smith; references in the text are to this edition.

background. In the theory of two acts the external act is an overflowing or an image of the internal act, which is identified with the *ousia*. Plotinus does not propose as a general rule that one can infer from *energeia* to *ousia*, however, as does Porphyry.

There may have been more on this subject in Porphyry's lost writings. In an account of his teaching by the twelfth-century Arab doxographer al-Shahrastani we find the following:

> Everything that is one and simple, has an action that is one and simple; and what is many and composite, has actions that are many and composite; and everything has an action which is like its nature – so that the action of God in His nature is one action, simple, but those of His actions that He does through a mediator are composite. (Fr. 465)

It will be noted that the order of inference is here reversed, passing from the character of the essence to that of the activity. This passage is in fact an application to God of a pattern of reasoning to be found as early as Aristotle's *Protrepticus*.[4] Al-Shahrastani tells us no more about the actions God performs through mediators, but he identifies "the action of God in His nature" with God's bringing things into existence – or in other words, says al-Shahrastani, into likeness to Himself. That in turn leads to an important distinction between substance and existence.

> He [Porphyry] said: everything that exists has an action corresponding to its nature, and since the Creator, may He be exalted, exists, His characteristic action is that of bringing into existence; and so He made one action and one movement, namely that of bringing to His likeness, that is, to existence. Then if it be said: the thing done is non-existent, it is possible that it should exist, and that is the nature of primordial matter itself, then it is necessary that existence be prior to the nature of what can accept existence . . . And the first thing that He made was substance, but its being substance occurs with movement, and so it is necessary that its continued existence as substance be also by movement. And that is because substance cannot be of itself in the degree of first existence, but only in imitation of that first. (Fr. 462)

If we can assume that this passage is a reliable account of Porphyry's views, then it is important for two reasons. First, it shows that a distinction between unqualified existence and the circumscribed, derivative existence of substance is to be found in Porphyry, even apart from the attribution to him of the *Parmenides* commentary to be discussed in the following section. Admittedly, this distinction is not far below the surface of the traditional

[4] Fr. B64 (above, pp. 3–4).

teaching that the One is "beyond being," but to make it explicit by insisting that that which is beyond *ousia* is still existence, in some more original sense, seems to have been a step taken first by Porphyry.[5] Second, the passage shows that this step was prompted partly by reflection on the question of how God, being simple, can act in what seems to be a complex fashion. There is certainly much in al-Shahrastani's account that one would like to see elaborated: what it is that makes an action simple rather than complex, for example, and how God can act both "in His nature" and through mediators without these two modes together constituting complexity. The *Parmenides* Commentator will wrestle with some similar questions. It is worth noting, though, that the issue had arisen already for Porphyry, however little we can make out of his answer to it.

## THE ANONYMOUS *PARMENIDES* COMMENTARY

Before discussing the commentary on the *Parmenides* which will be our main topic in this section, it is necessary to say a word about an important feature of post-Plotinian Neoplatonism known at the Intelligible Triad. When one considers the Plotinian system as a whole, it is natural to wonder why only the One, Intellect, and Soul are accorded the status of distinct hypostases. Is not Being itself the first reality that follows upon the One? And between the genus of beings and that of intellectual beings is there not that of *living* beings, so that Life can be seen as a further specification of Being, and Intellect of Life? Plotinus frequently refers to Intellect as Being (τὸ ὄν) and to the intelligibles as real beings (τὰ ὄντα), and he also insists that the intelligible realm is not static and lifeless, but "boiling with life" (*Enn.* VI.7.12.24). All that such statements imply, however, is that being, life, and intellect are coextensive attributes of the second hypostasis. Later Neoplatonists took the further step of distinguishing them as successive conceptual moments in the emanation of the second hypostasis from the One. Accordingly (and somewhat paradoxically) they also tended to view each of the three as itself, at least for many purposes, a distinct hypostasis. But the word 'distinct' must be used with care, because a further element of their view was that Life and Intellect pre-exist (προϋπάρχει) in Being as in their cause, whereas Being is present in Life as in its effect, Intellect is present in Life as in its cause, and so on. Since each member of the

[5] See Gerson, *Plotinus*, 6–9 for discussion of the extent to which such a distinction is already implicit in Plotinus.

Triad contains in the appropriate mode each of the others, the entire Triad is also a system of three times three, or an ennead. This view may be found fully articulated in Proclus, and there are fragments indicating that Iamblichus, though perhaps not recognizing the entire enneadic system, already regarded Being, Life, and Intellect as separate hypostases.[6]

The Triad figures in an important way in the scholarly dispute over the authorship of the Anonymous Commentary on the *Parmenides*. The Commentary was discovered in 1873 on a palimpsest in the library of Turin. Its first editor, Wilhelm Kroll, attributed it to an unknown Platonist writing sometime between Iamblichus and Syrianus, that is, in the latter half of the fourth century. This attribution stood until 1961, when Pierre Hadot argued that the author was Porphyry.[7] Kroll's main reason for favoring a date later than Iamblichus was that the Commentary makes reference to the Intelligible Triad (although it refers to existence, ὕπαρξις, instead of being, ὄν) and he took the Triad to be peculiarly a feature of Iamblichean Neoplatonism. Hadot argued that a careful reading of testimonia relating to Porphyry shows that Porphyry had already arrived at the notion of the Triad, and indeed at that of an ennead as described above. Hadot's argument on this point is speculative and complex.[8] His attribution of the Commentary to Porphyry has been widely, but not universally, accepted, and I am among those who think that it should be viewed with caution. One obvious point against it is that the idea that each of the three terms contains the others is not found in the Commentary. If this notion is indeed Porphyry's, as Hadot maintains, then its absence from the Commentary must count against Porphyrian authorship. Another unanswered question is why the complex enneadic theology Hadot attributes to Porphyry left no trace in Porphyry's surviving works or fragments, but only in testimonia. Hadot's reconstruction of Porphyry's lost theology is too speculative to overcome the doubts to which this fact must give rise. Finally, even if Hadot's account of Porphyry's theology is correct, it does not follow that Porphyry wrote the Commentary, for it might equally well have been written by one of his numerous disciples. On balance it seems that the best that can be said for

[6] See Propositions 101–03 of Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, with the commentary by Dodds; also David Bell, "Esse, Vivere, Intelligere: The Noetic Triad and the Image of God," *Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale* 52 (1985), 6–43; Ruth Majercik, "The Existence–Life–Intellect Triad in Gnosticism and Neoplatonism," *Classical Quarterly* 42 (1992), 475–88.

[7] P. Hadot, "Fragments d'un commentaire de Porphyre sur le Parménide," *Revue des études grecques* 74 (1961), 410–38. See also Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1968), vol. 1, 103–13, 260–72.

[8] See P. Hadot, "La métaphysique de Porphyre," *Entretiens Hardt 12: Porphyre* (Vandoeuvres–Geneva, 1966), 127–63.

the attribution of the Commentary to Porphyry is that it is possible, but not proven.[9]

We turn now to the work itself. It falls into six fragments divided unevenly among fourteen folio pages, covering (with large gaps) *Parmenides* 137b to 143a. The first four fragments comment on the First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides*, a notoriously obscure portion of that dialogue devoted to investigating the consequences of assuming that "one is" (εἰ ἕν ἐστιν, 137c). The emphasis of this portion of the dialogue is strictly upon the unity of the "one" under discussion. Any other attribute – parts, beginning, end, limit, place, motion, and ultimately even being itself – is held to be incompatible with such perfect unity. Plotinus read this portion of the dialogue as a manifesto of negative theology anticipating his own doctrine of the One.[10] The Anonymous Commentary follows suit. In some respects it goes beyond even the negative theology of Plotinus – for example, in the statement (reminiscent of Philo) that all other things are nothing in relation to the One, which alone truly is (τὸ μόνον ὄντως ὄν) (IV.24–27).[11] Since these early parts of the Commentary insist on the unknowability of the One and its absolute unrelatedness to all other things, it is not surprising that there is little in them pertaining to *energeia*. The term occurs only once, and that in the negative: the One is "accompanied by neither plurality, nor activity (ἐνεργείας), nor thought, nor simplicity, nor any other of the conceptions which are posterior to it, since it is superior to all of them" (I.33–II.2).

The last two fragments tell a different story. They are devoted to the Second Hypothesis of the *Parmenides*, which assumes that "one *is*" (ἕν εἰ ἔστιν, 142b) and proceeds on that basis to attribute to the "one" under discussion all the attributes denied of it in the First Hypothesis. The Second Hypothesis refers to this second "one" as "the one which is all things," or, more briefly, the "One-Many" (ἕν πολλά, 144e). Plotinus had taken this description as anticipating his own doctrine of Intellect.[12] The Anonymous Commentary again follows his lead, but with some important differences. Fragment 5 comments on the question raised at the beginning of the Second Hypothesis: "If the One is, can it exist without participating in substance (οὐσίας)?" In Plotinian terms this question is essentially that of the relation

[9] See further M. J. Edwards, "Porphyry and the Intelligible Triad," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 110 (1990), 14–25. Hadot adduces a number of other arguments based on similarities of thought and diction, but they are effectively countered by Edwards.

[10] *Enn.* V.1.8.

[11] References are to the folio page. The text of the Commentary is in Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus*, vol. 2; translations are my own.

[12] *Enn.* V.1.8, V.3.15.

between Intellect and being (or substance, οὐσία). In answer the Commentator puts forward two ways in which the One can be understood as participating in substance. The first conceives of the participation as like that of "animal" in "rational" resulting in man. Such a merger would be not merely a juxtaposition of disparate elements, each of them remaining unchanged in the process, but a condition in which being and unity are jointly altered by one another. The result would be no longer the first One, the One alone and unsubstantial (ἀνούσιον), but "the One which is all things."[13] What seems to trouble the Commentator in this account is that it does not give due weight to what he assumes to be the fact (which of course is nowhere in the *Parmenides*) that the One-Many *proceeds* from the One. He therefore offers a second account, although without clearly distinguishing it from the first. Plato, he observes, does not say that One-Being (that is, the One-Many) participates in the One, but that the One participates in substance – "not because the first was substance, but because difference from the One converted the One into this whole, the One-Being" (XII.17–20).[14] Then he adds:

> Behold whether Plato does not seem to speak in riddles, because the One [i.e., the first One], which is "beyond substance" and beyond being (ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας καὶ ὄντος), on the one hand is neither being nor substance nor activity (ἐνέργεια), but on the other hand acts and is itself pure act (τὸ ἐνεργεῖν καθαρόν), so that it is also the being before being (τὸ εἶναι τὸ πρὸ τοῦ ὄντος). By participating in it the other One receives a derivative being, which indeed is to participate in being. Thus, being is double (διττὸν τὸ εἶναι): the one exists prior to being, the other is brought forth from the One which is beyond, the absolute being (τοῦ εἶναι τὸ ἀπόλυτον) and as it were "idea" of being. (XII.22–33)

This is a fascinating passage, rich with ideas that will find prominence in later Neoplatonism. There is much in it that is unPlotinian, such as the description of the One as the "idea of being" participated in by One-Being. Hadot notes that Numenius conceived of a similar participation relation between his First and Second Gods, the Second God being good only in virtue of participating in the First.[15] But the parallel is far from exact, for Numenius does not ground the participation relation in a prior act of

[13] As Hadot observes, this is essentially an attempt to understand the mixing of Forms along lines suggested by the Stoic theory of blending. See *Porphyre et Victorinus*, vol. I, 109–10, 129–32.

[14] This is reminiscent of Plotinus' account of the two stages in the procession of Intellect from the One: first a coming forth as an unspecified potentiality, then a "halt and turning towards the One" which constitutes being. See *Enn.* V.2.1 and V.3.11.

[15] *Porphyre et Victorinus*, vol. I, 132.

procession, nor does he speak of goodness as double or of the First God as a "goodness before goodness."

Our own special concern is with the statement that the One "is neither substance nor activity, but acts (ἐνεργεῖ) and is itself pure act (τὸ ἐνεργεῖν καθαρόν)." For this there is also some parallel in Numenius, whose First God is at rest with a rest which is "innate motion" (κίνησιν σύμφυτον, Fr. 15). But again the parallel is inexact. What the Commentator means by calling the One *to energein katharon* is that it is *to einai* prior to all being (ὄν) – prior, that is, to the differentiation and multiplicity characteristic of One-Being. It is important to note that the Commentator does not choose *to einai* as the name for absolute being unadvisedly, but with a clear philosophical intent. The fact that the first One is "the being (τὸ εἶναι) before being (τοῦ ὄντος)" is said to follow from the fact that it is pure act, *to energein katharon*. Apparently the Commentator chooses the term *to einai* precisely to indicate that being is itself a kind of activity, so that the One's status as absolute being is a consequence of its status as pure act. To make this point the Commentator relies on the distinct connotations of the infinitive. Unlike the participle, the infinitive is unspecified as to the person or number of its subject, and indeed does not imply that there is a particular subject performing the activity at all. Hence it well conveys what Hadot has called "l'idée verbale nue," the pure notion of activity not constrained within the categories of subject and attribute.[16] Of course, to speak of the first One as *to energein katharon* has more than one meaning; it indicates not only that the One acts without exhibiting any passivity, but also that it is fully actual and has no unrealized potentialities. In effect the Commentator trades on the two senses of *energein*, "to act" and "to be actual," to make a direct connection between activity, actuality, and existence.

Fragment 6 develops these themes further. Its text is the passage of the Second Hypothesis which reads: "This One itself, which we say participates in substance, if we take it in thought by itself alone without that in which we say it participates, will we find that it itself is one alone or also many?" (143a6–9). The Commentator takes this as a question about the difference between the One and One-Being. We find him referring to these, without explanation, as "the Intellect which cannot return to itself" (or simply, "that which cannot return to itself") and "the Intellect which can return to

[16] Hadot, "Dieu comme acte d'être dans le néoplatonisme: A propos des théories d'É. Gilson sur la métaphysique de l'Exode," *Dieu et l'être: exégèses d'Exode 3,14 et de Coran 20,11–14* (Paris, 1978), 61. As Hadot observes, the Greek term for the infinitive is ἡ ἀπαρέμφατος, an alpha-privative meaning "not determinative or indicative."

itself." Apparently he has developed further in the interim the theory of the procession of One-Being from the One that emerged in Fragment 5. The identification of One-Being with Intellect is not surprising. Far more so is the identification of the first One with a more stable form of Intellect, one that does not proceed or return. This is presumably a manifestation of the theory that whatever proceeds from the One must pre-exist in the One in a higher mode.[17]

The fragment opens with a perplexing series of rhetorical questions: "By whom does that which cannot return to itself see itself, if not by the One? And by whom is it itself, to which it cannot return? Who is it that touches both in an identical manner in their division? Who is it that says that the thinker (τὸ νοοῦν) and that which is thought (τὸ νοούμενον) are different? Who is it that sees when the thinker is united to that which is thought, and when it cannot be united?" (xiii.1–9). The author at once answers:

> Clearly this is the act (ἐνέργεια) which is beyond those, which transcends all and uses them all as instruments, which touches all in an identical manner, though it is in none of them. So then each of the others is fixed in relation to something, and is completely ordered toward that thing both in form and in name, but this one is "of" nothing. Hence it has neither form, nor name, nor substance. For it is dominated by nothing and given shape by nothing, since it is truly impassive and inseparable from itself, being neither thought (νόησις) nor intelligible nor substance, but beyond all and the incoordinate cause of all. (xiii.9–23)

This passage is a further description of the pure act of Fragment 5. Unlike the other acts with which it is here contrasted, pure act has neither form nor name nor substance, not being "fixed" by anything toward which it is ordered as to an end. The other acts, which it "touches in an identical manner," are presumably the "thinker" and "that which is thought" of the preceding rhetorical questions. This is confirmed by the immediately succeeding passage (xiii.23–xiv.4), which likens the relationship between the single transcendent act and those which it uses as instruments to that between the common sense and the special senses. The common sense apprehends the differences and similarities among the objects of the special senses, being in contact with them all (πασῶν ἐφάπτεσθαι, an echo of the third rhetorical question) and using them as instruments. In the same way, the power by which "the Intellect which cannot return to itself" sees

[17] See Fr. 2 (v.7–vi.12), where the One is described as possessing a transcendent form of knowledge. The way this knowledge is described is clearly dependent on Plotinus, particularly his distinction between the vision of external light and that of light internal to the eye. Even so, strictly speaking "Intellect which cannot return to itself" is not the One but the One considered under a particular aspect, as the source of One-Being; cf. on this point Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus*, vol. 1, 133.

is superior to the distinction between thought and that which is thought, being beyond them "in majesty and power" (xiv.4, quoting *Republic* 509b).

The author then explains how the One in one way (κατὰ ἄλλο) is simple, but in another way differs from itself. Here at last we meet the Intelligible Triad and the explanation of the identities of "the thinker" and "that which is thought."

It [the One] is one and simple in its first form, "it itself" taken in itself, a power or rather to name it properly an unspeakable and inconceivable grace. But it is neither one nor simple in existence (ὕπαρξιν) and life and thought. The thinker and that which is thought are the same in existence, but the thinker, when Intellect comes forth from Existence to become the thinker, so that it may return to the intelligible and behold itself, is Life. Hence it is infinite in life. All are acts: as Existence the act is immobile (κατὰ μὲν τὴν ὕπαρξιν ἑστῶσα ἂν εἴη ἡ ἐνέργεια), as Thought the act has turned toward itself (εἰς αὑτὴν στραφεῖσα), as Life it has come forth from Existence (ἐκ τῆς ὑπάρξεως ἐκνεύσασα). (xiv.10–26)

The reference here to the One as a kind of grace echoes Plotinus (*Enn.* vi.7.22) and shows that the Commentator is not insensible to the religious concerns of his predecessor. But the main point of the passage is its theory of triadic procession. This is certainly obscure, but perhaps the following summary will not do it injustice. Initially there is simple undifferentiated existence, indistinguishable from the One taken "in itself." Intellect (or One-Being) issues forth from this to behold itself. In the act of procession it is Life; in the act of return, Thought. (Presumably this return counts as "beholding itself" because of the familiar Aristotelian identity of thought and its object.) Intellect as a whole may therefore be seen as a triadic unity of which the first term, Existence, is simply the One. That, at least, is how things seem from one point of view (κατὰ ἄλλο). From the point of view of the One considered in itself, "in its first form" (κατὰ τὴν πρώτην ἰδέαν), the latter processional acts are mere instruments transcended by the One.

There the Commentary ends. The last-quoted passage shows that, for the Commentator, the distinction between the One and One-Being is not nearly as sharp as that between the One and Intellect in Plotinus. It is hard to know quite what to make of the statement that the One is one and simple "in its first form" but not "in existence and life and thought"; the Commentator seems to be struggling to express some form of dual-aspect theory. Another point of difficulty is whether Existence, Life, and Thought are three *energeiai* or three moments in a single *energeia*. The last sentence seems to say both. This ambiguity is certainly excusable, for activities in general do not have clear-cut criteria of individuation.

Despite such obscurities, the Commentary is important for its attempt to isolate the notion of existence as such in distinction from that of existence *qua* some particular type of thing. The importance of this distinction can scarcely be exaggerated. As we noted in Chapter 1, for Aristotle form is the cause of a thing's being only in that it causes the thing to exist *qua* object of that type. Aristotle does not raise the question of whether a thing's existence *simpliciter* also has a cause; this way of looking at existence appears to have been foreign to him, as it was to classical antiquity in general.[18] It is striking that the Commentator, in attempting to explain his innovative distinction between pure being (τὸ εἶναι) and derivative being (τὸ ὄν), appeals to Aristotle's notion of *energeia*. Or rather, he appeals to *energeia* in its verbal form: the One is *to energein katharon*, an act not "fixed in relation to something" as are all others. Obviously this description of the One as pure act owes much to Plotinus' description of it as a kind of self-directed *energeia*. The Commentator introduces two important changes. He equates the One's *energein* with *to einai*, thereby making the Plotinian account of the One's self-directed activity into an account of pure, unqualified being. He also reduces the Plotinian distinction between the One and Intellect into a distinction between two ways of considering the One, either "in itself" or "in existence, life, and thought." Although considered in the first way the One is nothing but pure and unqualified activity, in the second it is a series of three acts – Existence, Life, and Thought – by which it comes forth to know itself.

The first of these changes introduces the notion of being as a kind of activity, a notion that (in a very different form) will prove immensely important for Thomistic metaphysics. The second is in some ways a return to the theme we examined earlier in Numenius, Alcinous, and Alexander, that of how the self-knowledge of the first principle gives rise to the being and intelligibility of the world. The Commentator, however, regards intellective self-knowing as a later and subordinate stage that leads the One into the plurality of Existence, Life, and Thought. Prior to it is the *energein katharon* of the One, the Commentator's version of the "looking to Himself" and "holding to Himself" of the One in Plotinus.

A Christian author, confronting this scheme, naturally must notice the similarity of the Intelligible Triad to the Christian Trinity. The Commentator presents us with three coequal hypostases that are jointly the One itself, taken in its full expansion into intellective self-knowledge. Is this an

[18] See Charles Kahn, "Why Existence Does Not Emerge as a Distinct Concept in Ancient Greek Philosophy," *Philosophies of Existence Ancient and Medieval*, ed. Parviz Morewedge (New York, 1982), 7–17.

acceptable model for the Trinity? And can the Commentator's distinction between pure and derivative being (equated, respectively, with the One "in itself" and the One as self-knowing) be adapted into a Christian context? These are difficult and stimulating questions. The author who rose to confront them was Marius Victorinus.

## MARIUS VICTORINUS

Marius Victorinus was a professor of rhetoric at Rome who was moved by his reading of Scripture to convert to Christianity. Augustine tells the story of his conversion in *Confessions* VIII.2, where we also learn that Victorinus was the translator of "certain books of the Platonists" Augustine read before his own conversion. The identity of these books is unknown, but to judge from the early Augustine's knowledge of Neoplatonism the most likely candidates are *Enneads* I.6 ("On Beauty") and Porphyry's *De Regressu Animae*.[19] We may at least be certain that Victorinus translated Porphyry's *Isagoge*, since Boethius' commentary on his translation is still extant. Victorinus also translated Plato and Aristotle – how much we do not know – and wrote commentaries on Cicero's *Topics* and *De Inventione*, and a work of his own entitled *Ars Grammatica*; all save the last two of these are lost.

For our purposes his most important works are two polemical treatises written against the Arians, *Ad Candidum* (A.D. 359) and *Adversus Arium* (359–62). Although large portions of these works are devoted to exegesis, in their philosophical passages they are strikingly similar to the Anonymous Commentary. Pierre Hadot has argued on this basis that Victorinus was deeply influenced by Porphyry.[20] The arguments given in the previous section against Porphyrian authorship of the Commentary must place this conclusion in doubt; indeed, even whether the Commentary antedates the relevant works of Victorinus is an open question. The similarities observed by Hadot are real enough, however, and do point to some form of Neoplatonic influence, whether it be from Porphyry himself, or from the author of the Commentary (assuming these to be different persons), or from some other person who was a common source for both Victorinus and the Commentary.

Much of Victorinus' thought can be understood as an elaboration of two central passages of the New Testament. The first is Colossians 1:16–17,

[19] See Courcelle, *Late Latin Writers*, 173–82.

[20] Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus*, vol. 1; see also John Dillon, "Logos and Trinity: Patterns of Platonist Influence on Early Christianity," *The Philosophy in Christianity*, ed. Godfrey Vesey (Cambridge, 1989), 1–13.

which states in reference to Christ that "all things were created by him, and for him, and he is before all things, and by him all things consist."[21] For Victorinus these words indicate that Christ as the Logos is both the cause of the existence of all things and the receptacle (*receptaculum*) in which they exist. The Logos is therefore τὸ ὄν, the truly existent containing "the seed of all things," much like Plotinian Intellect. Thus Victorinus interprets Genesis 1:1, *in principio fecit deum caelum et terram*, by taking *principium* to refer to the Logos: "He created all things in Christ, for Christ, as the seed of all things, is the Logos" (*Ad Cand.* 27). But of course the Logos differs from Intellect in serving as the agent as well as the paradigm of creation. Drawing on the traditional Parmenidean conviction that being implies intelligibility, Victorinus describes its role as follows.

This Logos is the universal power of things, "through whom all has been made," containing in itself in a universal mode the substances of all things, and providing for the existence of each that which belongs to it and is proper to it . . . By imposing a limit on the infinite in things, it forms each thing into its own existence, and, having removed infinity, it subjects the thing to the understanding. It is, therefore, as the power of things and in view of its begetting and bringing about existences, the Logos. Insofar as it defines and encloses, providing form to each, it is the ὄν, the already existing, since [thanks to it] there has come to be a particular form of *esse*. (*Adv. Arium* IV.19.26–37)[22]

This passage turns upon a contrast between *esse*, existence which is unqualified and in that sense "infinite," and the circumscribed, intelligible existence of substance. Just as Victorinus identifies τὸ ὄν with the Son, so he identifies *esse* in its original, uncircumscribed form with the Father.

Before ὄν and before Logos there is that force and that power of being that is designated by the word *esse*, in Greek τὸ εἶναι. This very *esse* must be taken under two modes, one that is universal and originally original (*principaliter principale*), and from it comes *esse* for all others; and according to another mode, all others have *esse*, that is, the *esse* of all later things, genera or species and other things of that kind. But the first *esse* is so unparticipated that it cannot even be called one or alone, but rather, by preeminence, before the One, before the alone, beyond simplicity, preexistence rather than existence, universal of all universals, infinite, unlimited – at least for all others, but not for itself – and therefore without form . . . Whence it is not ὄν, for ὄν is something determined, knowable, intelligible. (*Adv. Arium* IV.19.4–21)

Here Victorinus contrasts τὸ εἶναι and τὸ ὄν in much the same way as the Commentary, although he develops the contrast in greater detail,

[21] *Omnia per ipsum et in ipso constituta sunt et ipse est ante omnia et omnia in ipso consistunt* (as quoted by Victorinus, *Adv. Arium* I.24.23–24).

[22] The translation is that of Clark, frequently modified.

particularly by associating τὸ ὄν with form and intelligibility. It is interesting that he denies there to be any participation of ὄν in *esse*; this is directly contrary to the view expressed in the Commentary. He also gives no indication that *esse* and τὸ ὄν are somehow the same reality viewed under different aspects, like the One and One-Being of the Commentary. In light of their respective identifications with the Father and the Son, such a suggestion would be tantamount to the heresy of modalism.

What then is the relationship between the *esse* which is the Father and the ὄν which is the Son? The answer lies in the second of the passages from the New Testament, the opening words of the Gospel of John: *in principio erat verbum, et verbum erat apud deum*. For Victorinus the *verbum* is of course the Son; more surprisingly, the *principium* is the Father, the beginning of all things. In saying that the *verbum* was *in principio* and *apud deum* ("in the bosom of the Father," verse 18), St. John asserts that "initially" – that is, in the order of ontological priority – the Son is present in potentiality in the Father. This potential ὄν comes forth as actual ὄν, and in so doing becomes the Logos. To say that the Logos is τὸ ὄν does not mean that the source of the Logos is not-being (τὸ μὴ ὄν) in any absolute sense, but only that it exists in a way other than that characteristic of τὸ ὄν.

> [God the Father] is known neither as ὄν nor as μὴ ὄν, but as knowable in ignorance since He is simultaneously ὄν and not ὄν, who by His own power has produced and led τὸ ὄν into manifestation . . . For that which is above ὄν is the hidden ὄν. Indeed the manifestation of the hidden is begetting, if indeed the ὄν in potentiality (*potentia*) begets the ὄν in actuality (*operatione*). For nothing is begotten without cause. And if God is cause of all, He is cause also of the begetting of the ὄντος, since He is certainly above τὸ ὄν although He is in contact with τῷ ὄντι as both His father and begetter. Indeed, the one who is pregnant has hidden within what will be begotten . . . What therefore was within, in God? Nothing other than τὸ ὄν, the truly ὄν, or rather the προόν [preexistent], which is above the universally existent genus, which is above the ὄντως ὄντα, the ὄν in potentiality now in actuality. (*Ad Cand*. 14)

Much like Plotinus, Victorinus insists that what is present in the effect must be present implicitly or in a hidden manner in the cause. By understanding begetting as "the manifestation of the hidden," he identifies the relationship between Father and Son, *esse* and ὄν, as an instance of that between potency and act.[23]

[23] Compare Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, Second Edition (Toronto, 1952), 31–33, and Rist, *Plotinus*, 34–36, both of which take Victorinus' assertions that the Father is τὸ μὴ ὄν in too literal and unguarded a fashion. (It is also not correct that Victorinus equates ὕπαρξις and τὸ εἶναι, as stated by Rist; see *Adv. Arium* II.4).

To call the Logos being (ὄν) may be misleading insofar as it invites us to think of the Logos as something fixed or static. Victorinus insists that the Logos or τὸ ὄν is intrinsically active. It is "a certain active paternal power (*patrica activa quaedam potentia*) which so moves itself and disposes itself that it is in act (*in actu*), not in potentiality"; it is "the active power which puts itself in motion so that what was potentiality might be actuality" (*Ad Cand.* 17). Since what exists in the Son preexists in the Father, it follows that *esse* itself must also be intrinsically active. The difference is that the action of the Father is directed inward, being a kind of active repose, whereas the action of the Son is directed outward, consisting in both its own movement toward existence and its creative act. (Victorinus scarcely distinguishes these two, for the Son as τὸ ὄν already contains "the seed of all things.") Attempting to explain the statement of Christ that "the Father is greater than I" (John 14:28) – always a difficult text for the orthodox – Victorinus writes:

The Father is greater [than the Son] because He gave all to the Son and is the cause of the Son's being and mode of being. But He is also greater because He is inactive action (*actio inactuosa*). Such act is more blessed because it is without effort and unchanging, the source of all things that are, dwelling in repose, perfect in itself and needing nothing. The Son, however, received being, and proceeding from action to act (*in quod est agere ab actione procedens*) comes into perfection. He is realized as a plenitude by motion, having made all things that are. (*Adv. Arium* 1.13.9–16)

In another text elaborating on the distinction between the Father as internal act and the Son as external act, we see more clearly its Biblical rationale.

Potency, which preexists all things, is both a "preprinciple" and exists prior to the truly ὄν . . . Scripture and common knowledge affirm that this [preprinciple] is God and *esse* and that there is nothing before Him (*ante ipsum nihil esse*), He who is at once *esse* and *operari*. We confess and adore this God as the principle of all that is, for by act (*actione*) are those things which are; for before action they do not yet exist. For we believe in a God who acts, as for example: "In the beginning God made heaven and earth". . . Therefore He is the true God and the only God, because He is God both in power and in activity (*potentia et actione*), but internal (*interna*), whereas Christ is both in power and in activity, but now external and manifest (*foris et aperta*). God the Father is therefore first act and first existence and first substance, the original τὸ ὄν, who by His own action begets Himself. (*Adv. Arium* 1.33.8–25)

Ultimately both Father and Son are *esse* and *operari* (or *agere*). The difference is that the Father is originally and purely *esse*, and *agere* in only a hidden or inward manner; the Son is *esse* in a secondary and derivative way, and

principally and manifestly *agere*. Victorinus makes this commonality the basis for his central contention that the Father and Son are consubstantial, although distinct. "Father and Son are *homoousioi*, the Father existing as *esse* and also as *agere*, the Son existing as *agere* and also as *esse*. Each of the two has individuality according to what He especially is . . . The Father is *esse* and above all that *esse* in which activity is potentially present (*inest actio potentialiter*). The Son, as a later existent, has *agere* as something later from that which is *esse*, possessing His being as Son, in that He is *agere*, from the first *esse*" (*Adv. Arium* I.20.12–20).

The distinction between the Father as internal activity and the Son as external activity is Victorinus' adaptation of the two acts of Plotinus.[24] Obviously the two theories differ in several ways. Victorinus does not present the distinction as universally applicable, for he does not discuss activity or generation in the sensible realm, and even within the Godhead he does not use it in discussing the procession of the Holy Spirit (as we shall see in a moment). He also downplays the notion that the external act is inferior in reality to the internal act, for although he does acknowledge a certain inferiority of the Son to the Father he places much greater stress on their consubstantiality. But despite these differences, the key Plotinian themes of distinctness, likeness, and continuing ontological dependence are all present. There is also a striking resemblance between the inward activity Victorinus ascribes to the Father and the "looking to Himself" and "holding to Himself" of the One. The inward activity of the Father turns out to be a kind of non-intellective self-apprehension, much like that of the One. Where Victorinus goes beyond Plotinus is in using the specific nature of this activity (rather than the allegedly general applicability of the two-act model) to explain the generation of the second hypostasis. In a particularly tangled passage he explains:

> This same movement [of the Father], when it looks to the exterior – to look to the exterior is to be movement or motion, which is precisely to will to see oneself, to think of and to know oneself; but the one who sees himself exists and is understood as double, both as seeing and as that which is seen, the one who sees being himself the one seen, because he sees himself; this turning toward the exterior is, therefore, coming to be or existing toward the exterior (*foris genitus vel exsistens*) in order to know what one is – therefore, if this movement is toward the exterior, it is begotten, and if begotten, this is the Son. (*Adv. Arium* III.2.44–51)

Victorinus is at one with Plotinus in understanding self-intellection as implying a kind of duality. Nonetheless, the Father does possess such

[24] See particularly the labelling of the two types of activity as *intus* and *foris* at *Ad Cand*. 21.9 and *Adv. Arium* I.4.8.

self-intellection. What enables Him to do so while remaining simple is that He possesses it not inwardly or "in Himself," but in the Son. Precisely in viewing Himself and understanding Himself the Father becomes two, Father and Son. It would seem to follow – although Victorinus does not draw this conclusion explicitly – that since the Son is an image of the Father, the inward movement which is the Father must also be a kind of self-apprehension. But it must be one that transcends the duality of subject and object, just as does the "holding to Himself" of the One.

If this interpretation is correct, then it provides an important clue to what Victorinus means by *esse*. The Father is *esse*, and He is also a kind of inward activity; evidently, then, *esse* is a kind of activity. It would now appear that this activity is specifically that of non-intellective self-knowing, an activity having latent within it the fully intellective self-knowing achieved in the Son. Confirmation of this view can be found in the use Victorinus makes of the Intelligible Triad. The account given above of the generation of the Son would seem to suggest that the Son is the Father's self-intellection, His *intellegere*. Victorinus' more considered view is that the self-intellection of the Father has a kind of triadic structure involving life as well as intelligence, and that properly speaking it is the Holy Spirit who is *intellegere* while the Son is *vivere*. Commenting on John 16:14, where Christ says of the Spirit, "He shall glorify me, for He shall receive of me and shall announce it unto you," Victorinus writes:

> He says "He shall receive of me" because Christ and the Holy Spirit are one movement, that is, act which acts (*actio agens*). First there is *vivere* and from that which is *vivere* there is also *intellegere*; indeed, Christ is *vivere* and the Spirit is *intellegere*. Therefore the Spirit receives from Christ, Christ Himself from the Father. (*Adv. Arium* 1.13.36–41)

This is the first appearance of the identification of the Son with *vivere* and the Spirit with *intellegere*. For the moment Victorinus does not explain further, but the full import of the identification emerges when he appeals to the triadic structure of the Father's self-intellection to explain the procession of the Holy Spirit.

> By the self-movement of the Spirit itself, that is, by the going forth of perfect life existing in motion, wishing to see itself – that is, its potency (*potentia*), the Father – there is achieved its self-manifestation, which is and is called a begetting, and through this it exists externally. For all knowledge, insofar as it is knowledge, is outside of what it desires to know . . . Then in this time without a sense of time, going forth, as it were, from that which was *esse*, to perceive what it was, and because there all movement is substance, the otherness that is born returns quickly into identity . . . Then, with no diminishment, the whole has remained always one, its internal unity brought to its highest power by the paternal power. The

Holy Spirit is then the first interior movement, which is the paternal thought, that is, His self-knowledge. For pre-knowledge precedes knowledge. Therefore through this natural mode of knowledge understanding was externalized (*foris effectam intellegentiam*), the Son was born and became Life; not that there had not been life, but because life externalized is most truly life, for life is in movement. (*Adv. Arium* 1.57.9–33)[25]

We can paraphrase this account as follows. *Esse* possesses an impulse for self-knowledge, which precisely in that it is a kind of movement comes forth as Life, that is, the Son. This impulse then returns to its source: "the otherness that is born returns quickly into identity." In so doing it knows that source, becoming Knowledge, that is, the Holy Spirit. Plainly there are close affinities between this account and that of the procession of One-Being from the One in the Anonymous Commentary. What is most significant for present purposes is that, since *esse* gives rise to *vivere* and *intellegere*, it must (on Victorinus' principles) contain them already in a latent mode. This again indicates that Victorinus conceives the *esse* which is the Father as a kind of life and self-apprehension, but one that is "inward" rather than outward and manifest.

In effect we find in Victorinus a further specification of the *energein katharon* of the Anonymous Commentary. This *energein* now turns out to be *esse*, the unlimited and uncircumscribed being of the Father, from which is derived all the limited and circumscribed being (ὄν) found in the Son. Such *esse* is anything but "being" conceived as a static condition of existence; it is a kind of inwardly directed activity, containing implicitly life and intelligence as well as existence. In thinking itself it manifests itself as what it is, giving rise to the triad of *esse*, *vivere*, and *intellegere* – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Oddly enough, then, despite all the accretions of Neoplatonism, we are not too far from the self-thinking thought of Aristotle's Prime Mover. The divine self-intellection remains the activity *par excellence*, the one that precedes all others, giving rise by virtue of its necessary intrinsic structure to the intelligible order and plurality of the world.

## THE TRANSITION TO SCHOLASTICISM

Victorinus had little direct influence on subsequent philosophers. The reaction of Jerome was typical: he remarks that Victorinus wrote "some extremely obscure books against Arius in the dialectical manner, which are

[25] The difficult first sentence reads: *Spiritu enim moto a semet ipso, hoc est vitae perfectae in motione exsistentis, volentis videre semet ipsam, hoc est potentiam suam, patrem scilicet, facta est ipsa manifestatio sui, quae generatio est et dicitur, et iuxta hoc foris exsistens.*

not understood save by the learned."[26] Certainly Augustine read Victorinus, and if we should expect to find Victorinus' influence anywhere it would be in Augustine's *De Trinitate*. But that work eschews the approach to the Trinity based on the Intelligible Triad in favor of a quasi-Aristotelian theory of subsistent relations. The closest point of contact is in the analogies to the Trinity Augustine finds in the human soul, for Victorinus too had likened the Trinity to the structure of the soul (*Adv. Arium* 1.61–64). Augustine's analogies are quite different, however, and do not make use of the Neoplatonic conception of act. As for medieval authors, Victorinus seems to have been known, but was little read. His analogy between the Trinity and the triad of *esse*, *vivere*, and *intellegere* in the soul was repeated in an influential work by Alcuin entitled *Dicta Albini*, but even so it made little impression.[27]

The most important channel for Victorinus' influence was through Boethius. Boethius is known to have read Victorinus' translation of the *Isagoge* and his commentary on the *Topics*, and, in view of his interest in theology, he is likely to have read the anti-Arian works as well.[28] The third of Boethius' theological tractates, known traditionally as *De Hebdomadibus*, makes a terse but highly influential distinction between *esse* and "that which is" (*id quod est*). Boethius presents the distinction through a series of axioms, of which the most important are the following.

2. *Esse* and *id quod est* are different; for simple being (*ipsum esse*) is "not yet" (*nondum est*), but *id quod est* is and comes to a stand (*consistit*) when it has received the form that gives it being (*forma essendi*).
3. *Quod est* can participate in something, but simple being does not participate in any way in anything. For participation takes place when something already is; but something is, when it has acquired *esse*.
4. *Id quod est* can possess something besides what it is itself, but simple being has no admixture of anything besides itself.
6. Everything that is (*omne quod est*) participates in that which is *esse* in order to exist; but it participates in something else in order to be something. Hence *id quod est* participates in that which is *esse* in order to exist, but it exists in order to participate in something else.
7. Every simple thing possesses as a unity its *esse* and *id quod est*.
8. In every composite thing *esse* is one thing, its particular being (*ipsum est*) another.[29]

[26] *De Viris Illustribus*, ch. 101.
[27] See Bell, "Esse, Vivere, Intelligere" for these later developments.
[28] See Courcelle, *Late Latin Writers*, 280–81.
[29] The translation is adapted from that of Stewart, Rand, and Tester in the Loeb edition. The numbering of the axioms is also that of the Loeb, which repeats that of the received text. Boethius himself may have numbered them differently; see the introduction to Aquinas' commentary on the *De Hebdomadibus* by Schultz and Synan, xxix–xxxii.

Can there be any doubt that this is the distinction between *esse* and ὄν of Victorinus? Recall that for Victorinus "*esse* must be taken under two modes, one that is universal and originally original, and from it comes *esse* for all others" (*Adv. Arium* IV.19) – and that this later *esse* turns out to be just the ὄν of particular things, as well as of genera and species. For Victorinus, "ὄν is *esse* determined by a certain form . . . That which is formed is *esse*, the form is that which makes known the *esse*" (*Adv. Arium* II.4.14–19). This parallels precisely the statement of Boethius that "*ipsum esse* is 'not yet,' but *id quod est* is and comes to a stand when it has received the *forma essendi*" (axiom 2). The *forma essendi* here is not a general "form of being," but rather the particular form that, in any given entity, furnishes its specific characteristics. The precedent of Victorinus also allows us to make sense of Boethius' statements that "simple being has no admixture of anything besides itself" and that "every simple thing possesses as a unity its *esse* and *id quod est*." The point is that the particular being of a simple thing is the same as universal being; there is no form to limit the *esse* and so make it something other than universal *esse*.[30]

Where Boethius differs from Victorinus is, first of all, in allowing that *id quod est* participates in *esse* (axiom 6). Since Boethius offers no account of the procession of *id quod est* from *esse*, it is not surprising that he would conceive their relationship on the static model of participation rather than the more dynamic model of a potentiality coming to act. Another difference is that, unlike Victorinus, Boethius does not view *id quod est* as a hypostasis distinct from *esse*. (This is of course the reason why he does not offer an account of procession.) For Boethius *id quod est* is the being of particular substances taken distributively rather than collectively; it corresponds, as Hadot remarks, "au concept général d'étant, commun à tous les étants."[31] This second difference is natural enough given that Boethius is writing a tract in general ontology rather than Trinitarian theology. Its result is to bring Victorinus' speculations down to earth, so to speak, incorporating the distinction between *esse* and ὄν into the metaphysical analysis of sensible substance.

The importance of Victorinus as a source for Boethius was first recognized by Pierre Hadot in a pioneering article of 1963.[32] Prior to that time

[30] Presumably, then, there can be only one simple thing. Boethius does not draw this conclusion, but neither does he say anything that would contradict it.

[31] P. Hadot, "*Forma Essendi*: interprétation philologique et interprétation philosophique d'une formule de Boèce," *Les études classiques* 38 (1970), 152.

[32] P. Hadot, "La distinction de l'être et de l'étant dans le *De Hebdomadibus* de Boèce," *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 2 (1963), 147–53.

the dominant interpretation had taken *esse* in the *De Hebdomadibus* to be essence or form and *id quod est* to be a particular substance. The great exception was Aquinas; remarkably, without any knowledge of Victorinus or the other Neoplatonic antecedents, he had already adopted an interpretation much like that offered here.[33] Hadot pays him what seems just tribute in the remark that "son génie philosophique le guide et lui fait approfondir par intuition les formules de Boèce."[34] As a footnote to the researches of Hadot, we may note one other way in which Boethius serves as a bridge between the Neoplatonism of Victorinus and medieval scholasticism. Near the end of *De Hebdomadibus* he states that "in Him [God] *esse* and *agere* are the same . . . But for us *esse* and *agere* are not the same, for we are not simple." Although the simplicity of God was by the time of Boethius a firmly established point of Christian theology, Boethius seems to have been the first to explain that simplicity in terms of the identity in God of being and activity. In doing so he was merely extending to the Godhead a point Victorinus had established in relation to the Father and the Son. The identity of *esse* and *agere* in God became an integral aspect of the doctrine of divine simplicity in the Middle Ages.[35]

Boethius was by no means the only channel through which Neoplatonism reached the scholastics. We will examine Proclus and Dionysius the Areopagite in later chapters; for the present we may observe that neither shows any influence from Victorinus or the Anonymous Commentary, or picks up the major themes we have examined in this and the previous chapter. Another channel of great importance was the mediation of the Arabs. It is here, if anywhere, that one should look for a relatively direct influence of Plotinus in the Middle Ages, for although the Arabs did not possess the *Enneads* they did possess a lengthy paraphrase of portions of *Enneads* IV–VI under the name of the *Theology of Aristotle*. This work was translated from a Greek original (now lost) into Arabic about the middle of the ninth century, and exercised thereafter a tremendous influence

[33] See Aquinas' *Exposition of the "On the Hebdomads" of Boethius*, ed. and trans. Janice Schultz and Edward Synan (Washington, D.C., 2001). For surveys of the interpretive tradition see Ralph McInerny, *Boethius and Aquinas* (Washington, D.C., 1990), 161–98, and John Rosheger, "Boethius and the Paradoxical Mode of Theological Discourse," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 75 (2001), 331–33. Rosheger's account is particularly interesting because of its reconciliation of the *De Hebdomadibus* (interpreted along the lines suggested here) with Boethius' *De Trinitate*. Schultz and Synan defend the older interpretation in their introduction; unfortunately, they do not discuss Victorinus or the researches of Hadot.

[34] Hadot, "*Forma Essendi*," 154–55.

[35] E.g., Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.4.1, *Summa Contra Gentiles* II.9.4 (*suum agere est suum esse*).

upon Islamic and Jewish philosophy.[36] Somewhat surprisingly, it was not translated into Latin until 1519, some twenty-seven years after the *Enneads* themselves. From our point of view it is rather disappointing. It does speak of God as pure actuality (*al-fi'lu al-mahd*), who "when He acts does but look at Himself and perform His activity simultaneously" (III.47). It also follows Plotinus in describing nature as an activity and image of Soul, generated while Soul is moved in beholding her source (X.13–16). But these are relatively isolated statements; it does not similarly describe Soul as an activity of Intellect or Intellect as an activity of the One, nor does it distinguish between an external act and the internal act from which it originates.[37] Readers of Arabic might have learned more of the theory of two acts from another paraphrase of portions of the *Enneads*, the *Epistle on Divine Science*, which gives a reasonably close paraphrase of *Enneads* V.4. But this work never enjoyed the popularity of the *Theology of Aristotle*, and indeed its existence was unknown to modern scholars until it was discovered in a manuscript in Cairo in 1941.[38]

All told, only Boethius was an important link between the developments we have traced and the later flowering of scholasticism. Much of what was most interesting and original in the transformation of *energeia* wrought by Plotinus and his successors appears simply to have been lost. When *esse* again took an important place on the philosophical stage, in the work of Aquinas, it was in a way determined by the influences and concerns of a new era. We will examine those in Chapter 9. For now let us turn to the eastern tradition, where *energeia* was developing in a direction very different from that which leads to *esse*.

[36] See Abdurrahman Badawi, *La transmission de la philosophie grecque au monde arabe*, Second Edition (Paris, 1987), 46–59.

[37] See the translation in vol. 2 of *Plotini Opera*, where portions of the *Theology* are printed opposite the portions of the *Enneads* they paraphrase. The discussion of God as pure act is printed alongside *Enn*. IV.7.8[3] and that of nature as the activity of Soul alongside *Enn*. V.2.1. It has recently been argued that the former may indicate influence from the Anonymous Commentary; see Richard Taylor, "Aquinas, the *Plotiniana Arabica*, and the Metaphysics of Being and Actuality," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 59 (1998), 235–36. This seems to me unlikely. As Cristina D'Ancona Costa has observed, the *Plotiniana* lack the Commentary's central distinction between τὸ εἶναι and τὸ ὄν, and there is little in their ontology that cannot be explained by reference to Plotinus and Proclus. See Cristina D'Ancona Costa, *Recherches sur le Liber de Causis* (Paris, 1995), 138–47.

[38] See Badawi, *La transmission de la philosophie grecque*, 52–54. It is translated in vol. 2 of *Plotini Opera*.

CHAPTER 6

# *Gods, demons, and theurgy*

One feature the philosophies we have examined so far have in common is that for them the *energeia* of God has no specifically religious importance. It is philosophically important, of course, because the existence and character of the world are to be understood in light of it. Yet it plays no role in the religious quest to know God. The nearest to an exception is Aristotle, for whom we must strive to "make ourselves immortal so far as we can" by sharing in the divine activity of contemplation (*Nic. Eth.* x.7–8). Aristotle does not conceive of this as a way of coming into communion with God, however, but only as a way of achieving well-being by living in accordance with the best element in ourselves. He also does not make much use in this connection of the concept of *energeia*. Contemplation is also important for the Neoplatonists, but they too do not associate it with the divine *energeia*, and indeed for them the divine *energeia* in the highest sense is non-intellective.

We must look elsewhere for the role of *energeia* in religious thought. When we do, we find that it begins to play a minor but intriguing part in the first century A.D., one that grows as the centuries progress. By about the fourth century both pagans and Christians can be found understanding their religious life as a way of participating in the divine *energeia*. They have in mind by this not primarily contemplation, but some form of practical activity, whether it be magic, theurgy, or faith and obedience – or perhaps some combination of all four. Obviously these developments must accompany a different understanding of the divine *energeia* than those we have traced so far. Among religious writers the term acquires a new sense of "active power" or "cosmic force," and eventually "energy," conceived not just as a characteristic of action (as in Hellenistic authors) but as a reservoir of power that can be shared by another. Initially these developments occur at a more or less popular level, independently of metaphysics, but in the works of Iamblichus and Proclus they are brought within the philosophical orbit, with far-reaching consequences.

## EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITINGS

We noted in Chapter 3 a passage in the *Letter to Philocrates*, a Jewish work of the second century B.C., attributing the success of human oratory to the *energeia* of God. Although this is only a passing remark, it would appear to be the earliest instance in which the divine *energeia* is conceived as operating not only in the world at large but specifically within human souls. The same tendency appears in a later work of Hellenistic Judaism, the Wisdom of Solomon. There we find this description of divine Wisdom:

> She is the breath of the power of God, and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty: therefore can no defiled thing fall into her. For she is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God (τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ ἐνεργείας), and the image of his goodness. And being but one, she can do all things: and remaining in herself, she maketh all things new: and in all ages entering into holy souls, she maketh them into friends of God, and prophets. (7:25–27)[1]

Wisdom has the dual role of "making all things new" (though without herself suffering any disturbance) and of entering into holy souls, making them "friends of God, and prophets." Although she is not here identified with the divine *energeia*, she is its "unspotted mirror." Precisely what this means is hard to say. Origen identifies Wisdom in this passage with the divine Logos, and takes it that she is a mirror of God's activity in that God the Father and His Word jointly perform all their actions.[2] This interpretation can be retained even if Wisdom is not conceived as a separate hypostasis; the point would simply be that since all of God's acts evince wisdom, the divine Wisdom or Logos is a kind of mirror of what God does.

When we turn to Christian writings we find that St. Paul is the only New Testament author to speak of *energeia*, but that he does so with some frequency.[3] In fact the two roles which this passage attributes to divine Wisdom – cosmic and personal – are in Paul attributed to the divine *energeia*. At the cosmic level, Paul refers to the working (ἐνέργεια)

[1] Biblical quotations are from the Authorized Version, which I prefer for its combination of literalness and beauty. On the dating of Wisdom see David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Garden City, N.Y., 1979), 20–25, which argues for a date during the reign of Caligula (A.D. 37–41).

[2] *De Principiis* 1.2.12.

[3] I shall assume that all the works traditionally attributed to St. Paul are in fact by him. For present purposes not much hinges on this assumption; what matters is that these writings were taken as authoritative by the Church.

whereby God is able to "subdue all things to himself" (Phil. 3:21) and to that by which he raised Christ from the dead (Eph. 1:19). The passages referring to operations that take place within human souls are more complex. In the book of Ephesians Paul describes the Church as a body whose head is Christ. It is Christ, he says, "from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working (ἐνέργειαν) in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Eph. 4:16). Here "each part" is each individual member of the Church, yet the activity of each is not that of the individual alone; it is also the working of an organ in a body, the whole of which is subject to the direction of Christ. Thus the activity of each person, insofar as it contributes to the growth of the whole, is also a divine activity; God works within and through the human agent to direct the Church as it "edifies itself in love."

Another description of the divine *energeia* at work within a human person refers to Paul himself. He speaks of himself as "striving according to his [Christ's] working, which worketh in me mightily (ἀγωνιζόμενος κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν ἀυτοῦ τὴν ἐνεργουμένην ἐν ἐμοὶ ἐν δυνάμει)" (Col. 1:29). Here the divine *energeia* serves two distinct functions. It is at work within Paul, transforming him, so that from this standpoint he is the object of God's activity; at the same time it finds expression in Paul's struggle to promote the Gospel, so that he may also be seen as the agent or conduit through whom God is working. It is important to recognize that nothing in such external direction prevents his actions from remaining his own. One could fill out in detail the events in Paul's life that this passage alludes to, for he has left us some vivid descriptions of his various trials and exertions.[4] Not only do they exhibit full engagement and self-control, they do so more fully than his actions prior to his conversion. As the story is told in Acts, only at his conversion did Paul cease to "kick against the pricks" (Acts 9:5). This means that the divine *energeia* at work in him now is also his own *energeia*, and indeed that only in their union has Paul achieved freedom from self-deception.

These passages illustrate Paul's understanding of the presence of the divine in human life through synergy, the cooperation of God and man. Similar evidence can be found throughout his works. Writing to the Thessalonians, he gives thanks that they received his word "not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh (ἐνεργεῖται)

[4] For example, Rom. 7, II Cor. 11–12, Gal. 1–2, Phil. 3.

also in you that believe" (I Thess. 2:13). This passage underscores that it is human words (and deeds) which God makes His own: the word that Paul spoke is also the word of God, and as such it is active in those who receive it in faith. The paradox that human acts can also be divine acts is also brought out in a passage of Philippians: "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you (ὁ ἐνεργῶν ἐν ὑμῖν) both to will and to do (ἐνεργεῖν) of his good pleasure" (2:12–13). Here the exhortation to act is coupled with a reminder that it is God who is acting. Neither negates the other; the Philippians are both the objects of God's working and the conduit by which He works, at least when they obey "with fear and trembling." Paul also uses the terms *sunergein* and *sunergos* to describe himself and his fellow apostles as co-workers with God: "we are laborers together (συνεργοῦντες) with God" (I Cor. 3:9); "we then, as workers together (συνεργοῦντες) with him" (II Cor. 6:1); "Timothy, our brother and co-worker of God (συνεργὸν τοῦ θεοῦ)" (I Thess. 3:2).[5]

The belief that God is active in human beings is, of course, deeply rooted in the Old Testament. There it is usually God's word or spirit that is the vehicle of divine indwelling. These ways of speaking tend to suggest a kind of control from without – most obviously in cases of prophetic inspiration, but also even in cases where the Spirit is present continually and in ordinary actions, as with Kings Saul and David.[6] Paul's use of *energeia* and related terms shifts the emphasis from one of external control to one of cooperation. This is true even where Paul himself speaks of the Spirit. A passage that would prove particularly important for later Christian teaching about synergy is Paul's description in I Corinthians of the gifts of the Spirit.

Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are diversities of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operation (ἐνεργημάτων), but it is the same God which worketh (ὁ ἐνεργῶν) all in all . . . For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another

[5] The translation of I Thess. 3:2 is my own, based on the United Bible Societies text. Another verse that belongs in this group is Rom. 8:28, if one adopts the reading συνεργεῖ ὁ θεός found in Origen and some ancient manuscripts.

[6] See the way that the Spirit departs from Saul and comes to rest upon David at I Samuel 16:13–14. On the other hand, elsewhere in the same book the Spirit seems to be with Saul only intermittently (10:10, 11:6, 19:23).

prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues; but all these worketh (ἐνεργεῖ) that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. (12:3–11)

This passage begins by asserting that even such an ordinary and voluntary action as calling Jesus lord requires the cooperation of the Spirit. It goes on to list a variety of spiritual gifts, each one an *energēma* (something performed) of the Spirit. They include not only extraordinary gifts like the working of miracles, but also more ordinary qualities such as faith and the "word of wisdom." Again there is no dividing line between the natural and the supernatural. Any believer is called to a life of continual cooperation with the Spirit, a cooperation that can manifest itself in any number of ways both exceptional and mundane.

There is implicit in these passages a belief in the possibility of a personal union with God that is complete and unreserved, yet also free and self-aware. St. Paul thus takes a large step toward articulating a goal that will become increasingly prominent among both pagans and Christians in late antiquity: that of participating in the divine *energeiai*. In recognizing this, it is important also to recognize what he does not do. He does not speak of *energeia* in a theoretical way, as he might, for instance, by relating it systematically to the divine *ousia* or by correlating different kinds of *energeiai* with different orders of spiritual being. His allusions to it are casual and untheoretical, born out of a need to articulate the working of God in the life of Christ, in the Church, and in his own experience.

Christian authors of the next two centuries continue to speak of divine indwelling in terms of a coalescence of human and divine *energeiai*. Unlike St. Paul, however, they tend to limit their use of the term to miraculous cases such as prophecy and speaking in tongues, and they are equally concerned with the possibility of such indwelling in the case of demons as in that of God.[7] The *Shepherd of Hermas*, written between A.D. 100 and 150, presents human character traits as *energeiai* of the angel of righteousness and the angel of wickedness that accompany every man. The *energeiai* of the first angel are purity, holiness, contentment, and "every good deed"; those of the second, anger, bitterness, gluttony, lust, and pride.[8] Justin Martyr speaks similarly of the *energeiai* of evil demons which lead people into foul deeds.[9] In the *Legatio* of Athenagoras (c. 177) the focus is on the *energeiai* of the

[7] The nearest Pauline precedents are II Thess. 2:9, referring to one (the Antichrist?) "whose coming is after the working (κατ' ἐνέργειαν) of Satan," and 2:11, where God is said to send "the operation of error" (ἐνέργειαν πλάνης) to those who do not receive the love of truth.

[8] *Shepherd of Hermas*, Mandate 6.2.

[9] *I Apology* 44.40, *II Apology* 7.17.

demons who have usurped the place of the gods whom pagans believe they are worshipping. Athenagoras remarks of such gods: "that it is the demons who act under their names is proved by the nature of their operation (ἐνέργεια)," and he goes on to instance how the devotees of Rhea castrate themselves, those of Artemis among the Taurians slaughter strangers, and so on.[10] He argues that, insofar as it depends on the Creator, each man is a well-ordered creature who possesses a rational nature; nonetheless, "according to the character peculiar to himself and the operation (ἐνέργεια) of the ruling prince and of the demons his followers, he is impelled and moved in this direction or in that."[11]

This picture of people as moved by demonic powers is not easily reconcilable with the Christian belief in free will and moral responsibility. It provoked a strong reaction from Clement of Alexandria. Writing in the *Stromata* (c. 200), he allows that the *energeiai* of the devil and unclean spirits "sow into the sinner's soul," but denies that the spirits themselves dwell in the soul of the unbeliever (II.20). Later it becomes clear that his real concern is moral responsibility: "Let them [heretics] not then say that he who does wrong and sins transgresses through the agency of demons (κατ' ἐνέργειαν δαιμόνων), for then he would be guiltless. But by choosing the same things as demons, by sinning, being unstable, and light, and fickle in his desires, he becomes a demoniac man."[12] Yet even Clement finds old habits hard to break. At one point he corrects himself, speaking of sin as that which is caused through folly and "the operation of the devil, or rather co-operation" (ἐνέργειαν, μᾶλλον δὲ συνέργειαν, VI.11). His strictures seem to have had the desired effect. The *Apostolic Constitutions* (based on materials of A.D. 200–20, though compiled later) and Origen's *Contra Celsum* (230–50) speak freely of demonic *energeiai* invoked by magic, but do not attribute other sorts of evil to the working of demons.[13] In the *De Principiis* Origen gives a clear statement of what seems to have become the standard view:

The soul of man, while in the body, can admit different energies (*energias*), that is, controlling influences of spirits either good or bad. Now the bad spirits work in two ways; that is, they either take whole and entire possession of the mind . . . or they deprave the soul, while it still thinks and understands, through harmful

[10] *Legatio* 26.2 (*PG* 6 952A; *ANF* 2, 143). For quotations from patristic works I will generally cite Migne's *Patrologia Graeca* [*PG*] and the translations in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* [*ANF*] or *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* [*NPNF*], though with frequent modifications. Where there is a significant difference between the text in Migne and that in more recent editions, I cite the latter.

[11] *Legatio* 25.4 (*PG* 6 949C–D; *ANF* 2, 143).

[12] *Stromata* VI.12 (*PG* 9 320A–B; *ANF* 2, 502).

[13] *Apost. Const.* VI.9.2; *Contra Celsum* I.22, 60, IV.32, VII.6, 67, VIII.54.

suggestion by means of different kinds of thoughts and evil inducements . . . On the other hand a man admits the energy (*energiam*) and control of a good spirit when he is moved and incited to what is good and inspired to strive towards things heavenly and divine. (III.3.4)[14]

This passage survives only in the Latin of Rufinus. It will be noted that the English translator (Butterworth) renders *energia* as "energy." This is a natural choice given that the demonic and angelic *energeiai* are here conceived as sources of power that can come to be present in the soul. It is interesting that Rufinus chose to transliterate ἐνέργεια rather than find a Latin equivalent; apparently he felt that no Latin term would capture this particular shade of meaning.

The early Church Fathers also use *energeia* much as does St. Paul to refer to the operations of God, or the Holy Spirit, both general and particular. Justin Martyr remarks that Moses lifted up the bronze serpent in the wilderness "in accord with the intention and influence (ἐνέργειαν) of God" (I *Apol.* 60.9). For Athenagoras, the Holy Spirit is that which is active in the prophets (τὸ ἐνεργοῦν, *Legatio* 10.4). Clement attributes prophecy to the *energeia* of Christ (*Stromata* VI.7). He also speaks more broadly of the *energeia* of God which may be seen in creatures, through which the wise man comes to adore the divine will (VII.14). In the *Apostolic Constitutions* we find the phenomenon of speaking in tongues attributed to divine operation: writing in the name of the Apostles, the author states that on Pentecost "the Lord Jesus sent us the gift of the Holy Spirit, and we were filled with His energy (ἐνεργείας) and spoke with new tongues."[15] Origen attributes the miracles of Jesus and similar acts performed in the Church, as well as the unity of the Church itself, to the divine *energeia*.[16]

The Christians of the second and third centuries thus use *energeia* as a regular term for the working of God, both in the world at large and in particular miraculous acts. Like St. Paul, they tend to reserve it for supernatural operations, whether of God or of demons. Given these associations, it is not surprising that on a few occasions they attempt to correlate the divine *energeia* with the divine Logos, and thus in effect to give it an existence distinct from that of the Father. Athenagoras states that "the Son of God is the Word of the Father in idea and in operation (ἐνεργείᾳ), for in His likeness and through Him all things came into existence." A little later he adds that the Son "came forth to serve as idea and actuality for everything

[14] *PG* 11 317B–C; tr. Butterworth, 226–27.
[15] *Apost. Const.* V.20.49 (*PG* 1 896C; *ANF* 7, 448).
[16] *Contra Celsum* II.51, III.14, III.46, VII.35.

material (ἐπ᾽ αὐτοις ἰδέα καὶ ἐνέργεια εἶναι)."[17] The theory expressed here is one that is common to the Greek Apologists. It distinguishes two stages of manifestation of the divine Word: the implicit or pre-existent Word (*logos endiathetos*) present from all eternity within the Father, and the uttered Word (*logos prophorikos*) set forth in creation.[18] Athenagoras' distinction between the Word "in idea" and "in operation" is another way of naming these two stages. It is interesting that Athenagoras passes immediately from this Aristotelian use of ἐνεργείᾳ as a modifier indicating the manner of existence of the Word to speaking more directly of the Word coming forth *as* ἐνέργεια. This brings him close to some of the other passages we have examined, such as that in which the *Apostolic Constitutions* speaks of being filled with divine energy. It illustrates the danger of limiting *energeia* in any given context to just one of its possible meanings, whether activity, actuality, or energy. At least among theological writers, there is always in the background the thought that the divine activity is not only more efficacious than any human activity, but also more real, much as the divine Word is more real than any human speech.

A further step toward identifying the divine *energeia* and Logos is taken by Clement. Speaking of Christ as the Lord of creation, he states that "every activity (ἐνέργεια) of the Lord has reference to the Almighty [i.e., the Father], and the Son is, so to speak, a certain paternal energy (πατρική τις ἐνέργεια)."[19] Apparently Clement here moves from the premise that the activities of the Son are identical to those of the Father to the conclusion that the Son is himself, in some sense, an *energeia* of the Father. Yet he appears uneasy with such language, for he soon reverts to the more traditional descriptions of the Son as the "power of God" or "paternal power" (VII.2), expressions for which there is Biblical precedent (I Cor. 1:24).

Did anything come of these hesitant steps toward hypostasizing the divine *energeia*? Much later, in the Arian debates of the fourth century, several parties attempted to follow up these leads or develop similar ideas of their own. Athanasius uses the term *energeia* rather casually: he once speaks of the Son as the "substantial energy" (ἐνούσιος ἐνέργεια) of the Father, and twice refers to the Holy Spirit as the *energeia* of the Son.[20] However, he does not seem to place much weight on the term or to think it more important than others he uses in the same way. It is given more prominence by Marcellus of Ancyra, a zealous adherent of Nicaea, who

[17] Athenagoras, *Legatio* 10.2, 3 (*PG* 9 908B, 909A; *ANF* 2, 133).
[18] See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, Revised Edition (San Francisco, 1978), 95–101.
[19] *Stromata* VII.2 (*PG* 9 412B; *ANF* 2, 525).
[20] Athanasius, *Orationes contra Arianos* II.2 (*PG* 26 152A), *Epistulae ad Serapionem* I.20, 30 (*PG* 26 580A, 600B). I will return to these expressions in Chapter 8.

taught that the Son is the "active energy" (ἐνέργεια δραστική) of the Father. Although he intended this as a defense of Nicene orthodoxy other Nicaeans found it unacceptable, and it was ultimately rejected at the Council of Constantinople.[21] Eunomius, the leader of the neo-Arians in the 360s and 370s, advanced the view that the Son comes forth *by* the *energeia* of the Father and the Holy Spirit *by* the *energeia* of the Son. The orthodox also found this unacceptable, not only because Eunomius went on to add that the Son and Holy Spirit are creatures, but because the entire theory seemed to posit *energeiai* as intermediaries between the three persons.[22] Finally there is a view held by unnamed persons identifying the Holy Spirit as an *energeia* of the Father, though without denying the Spirit's divinity. This too was soon rejected by the orthodox.[23]

So the train of thought initiated hesitantly by Athenagoras and Clement ultimately found no place within Christian doctrine. Yet it may not have been without issue. Plotinus studied philosophy at Alexandria in the 230s, at a time when Clement's works would have been well known among the city's Christian scholars. Plotinus' famous teacher, Ammonius Saccas, was either a Christian throughout his life (as believed by Eusebius) or had been raised a Christian and converted to paganism (as claimed by Porphyry).[24] It thus is not unlikely that Plotinus encountered the *Stromata* in his studies. If so, could it have been from Clement that he derived the idea of using *energeia* as the key to his own theory of emanation?

## MAGIC

We have noted that in early Christian writings one of the primary uses of *energeia* is in referring to the activity of demons, particularly when this

[21] See Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 240–42; T. Evan Pollard, "Marcellus of Ancyra: A Neglected Father," *Épektasis: mélanges patristiques offerts au cardinal Jean Daniélou* (Beauchesne, 1972), 190; Council of Constantinople, Canon I. St. John Chrysostom gives a vigorous argument against Marcellus at *Homilies on Philippians* VI.1.

[22] Eunomius, *Apology* 17, 25–26; *Confessio* 3; *Second Apology* quoted in Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* I.13, 17, 20, 24, 27. See below, pp. 156–59.

[23] For a description of the view see Eunomius, *Apology* 25, and for its rejection see Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration* 31.6.

[24] Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* VI.19. An objection sometimes raised against Eusebius is that a pagan like Plotinus would not have studied under a known Christian. Note, however, that Origen in a letter in this same chapter mentions that his own early lectures were attended by pagans as well as Christians, so apparently there was considerable interchange between the two groups. See Garth Fowden, "The Platonist Philosopher and His Circle in Late Antiquity," *Philosophia* 7 (1977), 367–68; Frederic Schroeder, "Ammonius Saccas," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II.36.1 (1987), 496, 504–08. It is also worth noting that Clement was probably not the head of a catechetical school (as traditionally believed) but of an independent school open to all comers; this would further increase the probability that his works were known outside Christian circles. See I. G. Bardy, "Aux origines de l'école d'Alexandrie," *Recherches de science religieuse* 27 (1935), 65–90.

activity is conceived as operative within human beings. In the Christian view such a penetration of human activity by the demonic could take place either unwittingly, when a person succumbs to temptation or engages in pagan religious rites, or intentionally, through the operation of magic. When we turn to pagan writings of the same era we find a similar acknowledgment of the possibility of penetration by demonic *energeiai*. But pagan authors regard this possibility in a decidedly more favorable light. The *daimones* themselves are for pagans not necessarily evil; they are intermediaries between the gods and mankind, or even, in the view of some, impersonal manifestations of the gods themselves.[25] To share in the *energeiai* of the demons is thus a way of accessing the power of the gods.

The earliest evidence for these developments is in the autobiographical account by one Thessalus of his search for magical powers, written in the first century B.C. and included as a preface to his treatise on the healing properties of plants.[26] Arriving at the city of Thebes in Egypt, long renowned as a center of both magic and religion, Thessalus inquires of the priests "whether any of the *energeia* of magic still exists."[27] Although the priests are shocked by his boldness, one claims to possess the *energeia* of dish-divination and offers to help Thessalus in his quest.[28] In these passages *energeia* seems to mean something like "active power," a meaning that will grow increasingly frequent in magical and religious contexts. Nonetheless, the link between *energeia* and magic is still rudimentary; there is no mention of demonic *energeiai*, much less any suggestion that magic is a way of hijacking, as it were, the *energeiai* of the gods.

No such reticence marks the Greek magical papyri, handbooks containing the actual spells used by practising magicians. Although the papyri mentioning *energeia* are relatively late (third to fourth centuries A.D.), they may well incorporate material that is substantially earlier.[29] One spell directs:

[25] The classic description of the place of *daimones* within the pagan cosmos is Plato, *Symposium* 202e–203a. (I shall hereafter use 'demon' rather than *daimōn*, trusting the reader to lay aside the negative connotations of the English word.) On the demonologies of later authors see Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, passim, and Frederick Brenk, "In the Light of the Moon: Demonology in the Early Imperial Period," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II.16.3 (1986), 2068–145.

[26] This is the *De Virtutibus Herbarum* mentioned in Chapter 3. It has been edited with Latin translation by Hans-Veit Friedrich; see also the paraphrase and discussion in Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Temple and the Magician," *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religion* (Leiden, 1978), 172–89.

[27] εἴ τι τῆς μαγικῆς ἐνεργείας σῴζεται, 1.proem.13 (Friedrich, 49).

[28] 1.proem.14 (Friedrich, 51).

[29] Since magicians were widely persecuted and their works burned, it is likely that the manuscripts surviving are only a small fraction of those once in circulation. Note that references in Christian sources to demonic *energeiai* begin about the mid-second century.

> Take a silver tablet and engrave it after the god [i.e., the sun] sets. Take cow's milk and pour it. Put down a clean vessel and place the tablet under [it]; add barley meal, mix and form bread: twelve rolls in the shape of female figures. Say [the formula] three times, eat [the rolls] on an empty stomach, and you will know the *energeia*.[30]

What is the *energeia* the magician will know? Presumably that mentioned in the accompanying incantation: "enter, master, into my mind, and grant me memory" (III.415–16). The spell is thus designed to draw down the divine *energeia* into the magician's mind, enhancing his mental faculties. The identity of the deity invoked is vague; one scarcely knows whether it is a god or demon. What matters is the power that is sought and the steps that will attain it.

Much the same can be said about another spell mentioning *energeia*, one designed to conjure a demon who will answer the magician's questions. The spell begins by directing the magician to inscribe certain characters onto a seven-leafed sprig of laurel. The laurel is thus converted into a charm "by which all are made subject, and seas and rocks tremble, and demons [avoid] the characters' divine *energeia* which you are about to have" (I.273–75). Next the magician is told to offer an elaborate burnt offering. What is striking about the instructions is that the magician is to refrain "from all unclean things and from all eating of fish and from all sexual intercourse, so that you may bring the god into the greatest desire toward you" (I.290–92). Apparently the magician is to present himself in virginal purity so as to arouse the god's passion. Finally the magician invokes the god with a chant:

> O lord Apollo, come with Paian.
> Give answer to my questions, lord. O master
> Leave Mount Parnassus and the Delphic Pytho
> Whene'er my priestly lips voice secret words,
> First angel of [the god], great Zeus. IAO
> And you, MICHAEL, who rule heaven's realm,
> I call, and you, archangel GABRIEL.
> Down from Olympus, ABRASAX, delighting
> In dawns, come gracious who view sunset from
> The dawn, ADONAI. Father of the world,
> All nature quakes in fear of you, PAKERBETH.
>
> . . .
>
> Hear blessed one, I call you who rule heav'n
> And earth and Chaos and Hades where dwell
> [Daimons of men who once gazed on the light].

[30] *Papyri Graecae Magicae* III.410–13 (ed. Preisendanz). References in the text are to this work; translations are those of Betz, slightly modified.

> Send me this daimon at my sacred chants,
> Who moves by night to orders 'neath your force,
> From whose own tent this comes, and let him tell me
> In total truth all that my mind designs . . .
>
> (I.297–321)

Who precisely is the god invoked? The spell is entitled "Apollonian invocation," and initially the god appears to be Apollo; but we soon find that he has a host of other names and that he is ruler of heaven and earth, a role not traditionally assigned to Apollo. It is also not clear what relationship the spell establishes between the god and the magician. Although at the outset the magician comes to possess the *energeia* of the magical amulet, this would also seem to be a form of the activity or presence of the god himself – for why else would the magician try to make himself sexually appealing to the god? Finally, it is far from clear whether the demon conjured near the end of the passage is an entity separate from the god or simply another form in which the god manifests himself.

Spells such as these presuppose a fluidity of identity in which the *energeiai* of one agent can flow into another, transforming him and in some respects deifying him. One of the most famous spells, the so-called Mithras liturgy, has as its explicit aim to deify (ἀθανατιζεῖν) its practitioner.[31] Although it does not mention *energeia*, in a general sense all the spells may be said to aim at capturing a divine *energeia*. Even when the *energeia* appears relatively commonplace there may be more than meets the eye. One spell begins by promising the "holy power" (ἱερὰν ἐνέργειαν) of bowl divination, something that seems modest enough (IV.160). As the spell proceeds it emerges that this power is to be acquired through encountering the god Tryphon, "night-flasher, breather-forth of hot and cold, shaker of rocks, wall-trembler, boiler of the waves, disturber of the sea's great depth" (IV.182–84). The sign of the encounter is that a sea falcon will strike the magician with its wings. When this occurs the magician is to chant:

> I have been attached to your holy form.
> I have been given power by your holy name.
> I have acquired your emanation of the goods,
> Lord, god of gods, master, daimon.
>
> (IV.216–18)

The instructions continue: "Having done this, return as lord of a godlike nature (ἰσοθεοῦ φύσεως κυριεύσας) which is accomplished through this

[31] *PGM* IV.475–829, especially lines 477, 501, 648, 741, 747; cf. III.599–600.

divine encounter" (IV.220–22). Despite the modest beginnings of the spell, in encountering Tryphon the magician does not merely acquire the power of bowl divination but undergoes a transformation of nature.

This being said, it remains that *energeia* occupies only a subordinate place in the magical papyri. It is a relatively infrequent term and does not acquire technical status. A more highly developed body of evidence can be found in the Hermetica.

## THE HERMETICA

The Hermetica are an assortment of writings purporting to have been written by Hermes Trismegistus, an Egyptian sage and god. They are generally thought to date from the third and fourth centuries A.D., although, like the magical papyri, they may contain elements that are substantially earlier. Those from which we will draw are the *Corpus Hermeticum*, a group of eighteen treatises bound together in Byzantine manuscripts; the *Stobaei Hermetica*, excerpts from treatises otherwise lost given by the fifth-century anthologist, Stobaeus; and the Latin *Asclepius*, a separate treatise that survives only in Latin.[32]

At first glance the religious position of the Hermetica appears to be that of Middle Platonism, with its characteristic blend of Platonic and Aristotelian elements. God is identified with the Beautiful and the Good, whereas His relation to the cosmos is articulated largely through the concept of *energeia*. We have seen variations of this approach in Numenius and Alcinous, for whom God creates through the motionless activity of self-thinking thought. The Hermetica pursue a different direction, closer in some respects to that of Philo of Alexandria. Like Philo, they tend to conceive the divine creative activity more on the model of making or doing than that of thinking, while insisting that this activity is not laborious. Unlike Philo, however, they give the divine *energeia* a distinctly emanationist cast. For the Hermetica all creatures are *energeiai* actualized or performed by God. This in turn opens the door to the same fluidity of identity and possibility of deification as in the magical papyri.

Let us begin with the Hermetic doctrine of God. The Hermetica most frequently identify the divine essence or substance (οὐσία) with the Good

[32] These are edited with French translation and commentary in Nock and Festugière, *Corpus Hermeticum*. Translations of the *Corpus Hermeticum* (= *Corp. Herm.*) are those of Copenhaver, slightly modified; those of the *Stobaei Hermetica* (= *Stob. Herm.*) are my own.

and the Beautiful, and occasionally also with Happiness and Wisdom.[33] Strictly speaking, however, God is unknowable and has no name.[34] Some passages therefore express doubts whether God can be said to have or be *ousia* at all, so tight is the link between *ousia* and intelligibility.[35] On the whole, however, the Hermetic authors are willing to speak of the divine *ousia*, particularly for the purpose of distinguishing it from the divine *energeia*. Thus we read that "around" (περί) the divine *ousia* there is "a fixed activity (στατικὴν ἐνέργειαν) that has no lack and no excess, that is perfectly complete, a source of supply, present in the beginning of all things" (*C.H.* VI.1). Elsewhere, after identifying the *ousia* of God with the Good, the Beautiful, Happiness, and Wisdom, the author identifies the divine *energeia* with mind and soul (XI.2).

Alongside this careful distinction between God's being and activity, one also finds passages virtually identifying God with what He does. The last treatise mentioned goes on, however inconsistently, to identify God with the existence of things conceived as a kind of dynamic state of continually coming to be. "This universe is God acting (ἐνεργῶν)" (XI.5); God is an "energetic power" (δύναμις ἐνεργής) present in all things, though "firmly fixed" in none (XI.6); "if God is idle, He is no longer God" (XI.12). Elsewhere we read that "God's *energeia* is will, and his *ousia* is to will all things to be. For what are God the Father and the Good but the being (τὸ εἶναι) of all things" (X.2).[36] To identify God's *ousia* with his willing things into existence certainly seems opposed to the identification of the divine *ousia* with the Good and the Beautiful. Although the Hermetist does not explicitly reconcile these two doctrines, in at least one place he explicates what it means for God to be the Good precisely in terms of creation: "God the Father is the Good in that He wills all things to be" (X.3).

Thus it emerges that the position of the Hermetica is not Middle Platonism after all, for in Platonism it is not the relation of the Good or the Beautiful to subordinate entities that constitutes them as what they are. In general the Hermetica tend to reinterpret Platonic language in a

[33] *Corp. Herm.* VI.1, 4, X.2, 5–6, XI.2–3.

[34] *Corp. Herm.* V.10, XII.1; *Stob. Herm.* I.1; *Asclep.* 20.

[35] *Corp. Herm.* II.5, VI.4, XII.1. *Corp. Herm.* II.5–6 draws an interesting distinction: God is an object of thought for us but not for Himself, since "what is intelligible (τὸ νοητόν) falls within the awareness of one who thinks of it; thus, for Himself God is not intelligible because He is not something distinct from the object of His thought (τοῦ νοουμενοῦ)." As Nock and Festugière point out, this is a striking anticipation of the Plotinian exclusion of *noēsis* from the One. Apparently it is intended to explain how God both does and does not have *ousia*: He does from our standpoint, but not from His own.

[36] The text of the second sentence is in doubt; see the notes of Nock–Festugière and Copenhaver.

direction that is emanationist, and sometimes even pantheistic. Treatise XI, from which we have already drawn extensively, goes so far as to say that God "is what He makes" (XI.14). This tendency is carried to its conclusion near the end of the *Corpus*: "Through them [gods and demons] God makes everything for Himself, and all things are parts of God. But if all things are parts of God, then all things are God, and He makes Himself in making all things" (XVI.19).

How literally one should take such language is hard to say; it is, after all, counter-balanced by other statements emphasizing divine transcendence. What is clear is that the notion that "the universe is God acting" is central to Hermetic thought. Thus gods, demons, and human beings are *energeiai* actualized or "performed" (ἐνεργοῦνται) by God (XII.21, cf. XVI.13). Nor is this identification limited to rational beings: "whether you say matter or body or essence, know that these also are *energeiai* of God" (XII.22). One suggestive passage likens the divine *energeiai* to rays permeating the cosmos:

> The *energeiai* are like rays from God, natural forces (lit. natures, φύσεις) like rays from the cosmos, arts and learning like rays from mankind. The *energeiai* work through the cosmos and upon mankind through the natural rays of the cosmos, but natural forces work through the elements, and humans work through the arts and through learning. (X.22)

The comparison with arts and learning as "rays" from mankind is particularly suggestive. Arts and learning do not simply reveal mankind, where the human essence is conceived as already real and complete. They are themselves completions of the human essence, in the same way that any developed potency is a completion, and thereby an expression, of the corresponding potentiality. Whether the Hermetist was thinking along these lines is hard to say, but the comparison at least suggests one way, short of the full step to pantheism, of giving sense to the idea that God "makes Himself" through His creative activity.

The conception of God's *energeiai* as like rays permeating the cosmos becomes a prominent theme in the excerpts from Stobaeus. There it is combined with a cosmic hierarchy largely inspired by astrology, the successive layers each having a role in distributing or enacting the appropriate *energeia*. One excerpt describes the thirty-six Decans, stars that move freely between the celestial sphere and the circle of the Zodiac. They act upon individual human beings and upon whole cities or nations; no political uprising, plague, famine, or ebb and flow of the sea occurs apart from their *energeia* (*Stob. Herm.* VI.7–8). Those beings whom the vulgar call demons are in fact simply *energeiai* of the Decans (VI.10). The Decans also engender other

stars that serve them as ministers and soldiers; these have their own proper *energeia* that is responsible for effects such as the swarming of creatures that spoils the crops (vi.12). Another treatise gives a somewhat different breakdown, although the stars again play a central role. Here *energeiai* proceed from the bodies of the gods (i.e., stars) to mortals, acting upon both the body and the soul when it is in the body (vi.9). They also act upon soulless bodies like wood and stones, causing them to undergo natural processes such as growth and ripening (vi.12). Throughout both discussions *energeia* clearly means not activity or actuality, but "active power" or "cosmic force." As the author of the second treatise concludes, "all things are full of *energeiai*" (iv.16).

Thus in the Hermetic vision the universe is full of gods and demons, each exercising its appropriate *energeia*, yet all being manifestations of the single divine *energeia*. Just as in the magical papyri, this leads to the possibility that the *energeia* of one agent can enter into another, transforming him and even absorbing him into a distinct level of reality. Unlike the papyri, the Hermetica usually distinguish sharply between the possibility of such union with demons and with God.[37] To be filled with the *energeia* of demons is an assault by a hostile power: "They reshape our souls to their own ends, and rouse them, lying in ambush in our muscle and marrow, in veins and arteries, in the brain itself, reaching to the very guts . . . Those that enter through the body into the two [lower] parts of the soul [i.e., passion and appetite] twist the soul about, each toward his own *energeia*" (*Corp. Herm.* xvi.14–15). The only persons who are immune to such attack are those enlightened in the rational part of their soul by God; "all others the demons carry off as spoils, both souls and bodies, since they are fond of the demons' *energeiai* and acquiesce in them" (xvi.16). Another treatise similarly warns that for those not illumined by God, "no part of the cosmos is without a demon who steals into the mind to sow the seeds of his own *energeia*" (ix.3).

*Energeia* is much less prominent in the counter-balancing discussions of deification or union with God. The fullest depiction of deification in the *Corpus* is that of the first treatise, also known as the *Poimandres*. It describes how at death the soul of one who has shunned evil reascends to God through the seven planetary spheres. Along the way "the body's senses rise up and flow back toward their particular sources, becoming separate parts and mingling again with the *energeiai*" (i.24). Here the author seems

[37] A partial exception is *Stob. Herm.* vi.10, alluded to above, which makes the demons themselves *energeiai* of the stellar gods.

to have in mind the celestial *energeiai* responsible for natural processes.[38] Perhaps because *energeia* is too closely associated with natural processes, however, the final description of deification is in terms of power (δύναμις): the blessed "rise up to the Father in order and surrender themselves to the powers, and, having become powers, they enter into God" (1.26). There are several other passages on deification in the Hermetica, but they make little reference to *energeia*.[39]

So, despite the prominence of *energeia* in the Hermetica, it is not a concept that lies at the heart of Hermetic religious aspirations. Its importance lies in its role in articulating the nature of divine activity and the relationship between God and the world. As in the early Christian writings and magical papyri, it provides a way of conceptualizing how supernatural agents can act, not only within the natural world, but also within the human soul. Yet there is little attempt to understand this porous boundary in relation to actual human psychology. The Hermetica are starkly dualistic: a person is either subject to demonic *energeiai*, having acquiesced in them because he finds them pleasant, or he is rationally enlightened and subject to the beneficent direction of God. Later writers, both Christian and pagan, will develop a more nuanced view.

## IAMBLICHUS

As Porphyry dominated Neoplatonism in the West after the death of Plotinus, Iamblichus (c. 240–325) dominated that in the East. Later authors such as Proclus refer to him as "divine," an honorific they bestowed on only a few others such as Plato and Pythagoras. Although many of his works no longer survive, one that does, the *De Mysteriis*, is of signal importance. It is a reply to an open letter written by Porphyry to Anebo, an Egyptian priest, questioning the legitimacy of a variety of rites and divinatory practices known collectively as theurgy. Iamblichus' reply purports to be by an Egyptian priest named Abammon, Anebo's teacher, and to do no more than explain the ancient wisdom the Egyptians received from Hermes. Despite this facade, the *De Mysteriis* is a profoundly original work. It constitutes the most striking attempt by a philosopher to articulate and defend the religious practices of late paganism. Although there is no evidence that Iamblichus had an explicitly anti-Christian purpose in mind, the edifice he

[38] See also *Corp. Herm.* 1.14, where the archetypal man prior to his fall is said to have possessed "in himself all the *energeiai* of the governors," the governors being the seven planets.

[39] *Corp. Herm.* IV.7; X.6–7, 16–19, 24–25; XIII.7, 10–11; *Asclep.* 11–12.

created later proved essential to pagans such as the Emperor Julian in their efforts to turn back the rising new religion.[40]

One of the questions raised by Porphyry is that of how a demon differs from a hero, demigod, or ordinary human soul: "is it in essence (οὐσία), power (δύναμις), or activity (ἐνέργεια)?"[41] This is a trio of terms that we have already observed in Philo and Galen. Iamblichus adopts it and uses it to expound an elaborate hierarchy of supernatural beings. The most fundamental distinction is that between the gods, who are good by essence, and human souls, which are good by participation (I.4.15). Between these are two intermediate races: heroes or demigods, who are like human souls but superior in power and virtue, and demons, who are closer to the gods but inferior to them as their servants. The demons "show forth into act" the goodness of the gods, which would otherwise remain invisible (I.5.16). All four races differ in respect to all three of the terms mentioned by Porphyry. The powers of demons, for example, pertain to the oversight of natural processes and the binding of souls to bodies, whereas those of heroes are more specifically concerned with human well-being; likewise, the *energeiai* of demons are distributed around the cosmos, whereas those of heroes are less widely extended, being primarily concerned with the orderly arrangement of souls (II.1.67–2.68). Here the *energeia* is that which actualizes and manifests the *dunamis*, the *dunamis* in turn being that which follows upon and manifests the *ousia*.[42] Because the *energeia* is thus ultimately tied to the *ousia*, each of the four types of being can be recognized by its *energeia* (II.3.70). On the other hand, in a stricter sense the *ousia* is not known (γνωρίζεται) through the *energeiai*, for it is not constituted by them but rather generates them and determines their differences (I.4.13).

Since Iamblichus relegates all specific acts of cosmic governance to the demons and other lesser beings, it is far from clear what role is left for the

[40] For further information on Iamblichus see John Dillon, "Iamblichus of Chalcis (c. 240–325 A.D.)," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II.36.2 (1987), 862–909, and for a comprehensive discussion of Iamblichean theurgy see Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park, Penn., 1995). Dillon places the *De Mysteriis* c. A.D. 280, although a substantially later (or slightly earlier) date is not impossible.

[41] *De Mysteriis* II.1.67. Further references to this work are in the text; translations are my own.

[42] See also Fr. 4 of Iamblichus' commentary on the *Alcibiades*: "To perceive and make clear the *dunameis* of demons is easy enough. We attain to a perception of them through their *energeiai*, of which the *dunameis* are the immediate mothers; for a *dunamis* is median between an *ousia* and an *energeia*, put forth from the *ousia* on the one hand, and itself generating the *energeia* on the other" (Dillon, *Iamblichi Chalcidensis*, 75). As Dillon observes, the fragments of Iamblichus' *De Anima* preserved by Stobaeus also follow this distinction, discussing first the soul's *ousia*, then its *dunameis*, then its *energeiai*.

*energeiai* of the gods. In fact he generally describes the divine *energeiai* only in negative or superlative terms. He cautions that the concepts of activity and passivity do not apply to them, for they are absolute, unchangeable, and without relation to an opposite (I.4.12). They shine forth more swiftly than the intellect, although in themselves they are steadfast and immovable, whereas as one descends the spiritual hierarchy the *energeiai* of each lower type of being become progressively more like ordinary motions (II.4.74). The closest he comes to a positive description is in explaining why it is appropriate that some gods (the stars and planets) possess bodies. The reason is that the *energeiai* of the gods are uniform, so that the eternal and unchanging motion of the heavenly bodies is a fitting form of imitation (I.17.51). Later he adds that even the embodied gods "have their principles in the intelligible, and in contemplating their own divine Forms direct the whole heaven by their one infinite *energeia*" (I.19.57). These statements suggest something like the Plotinian distinction of internal and external act: "in themselves" the gods are engaged solely in the act of contemplation, but this internal act also gives rise by its nature to an externally directed act of governance.

If we wish to find a Plotinian parallel for the gods of Iamblichus, the best candidate would be the individual intellects which perpetually contemplate and are embraced within the unity-in-multiplicity of Intellect.[43] But there is an important difference. Unlike Plotinus, Iamblichus readily speaks of a divine will (βούλησις) or even love (ἔρως) for the cosmos. In some passages it would seem that the divine will is not distinct from the gods' contemplation of the Forms: the demons, for example, execute whatever the gods "contemplate, will, and ordain" (I.20.64).[44] At other points he seems to think of it in more personal and anthropomorphic terms. The gods selectively withhold knowledge of the future in cases where it would be harmful for the soul (X.4.289), and they sometimes give aid to certain nations or cities but not others (V.10.211). It is hard to see how such finely adjusted differences could result purely from contemplation of the Forms. To the extent that they do not, Iamblichus recognizes a kind of divine activity that is not simply a by-product of contemplation but is directed

[43] See *Enn.* IV.3.5, IV.8.3, V.5.1, V.8.4, and V.9.8.

[44] Most other explicit references to the divine will can be understood in this way, e.g., I.12.41, I.14.44 (ἔρως), II.2.69, III.16.138. See especially III.17.141, which emphasizes the simplicity and uniformity of the divine purpose (ἐπιβολή) and will (βούλησις). The precedents in Plato and the Chaldaean Oracles for divine *philia* or *erōs* as a unifying force also present them as impersonal; see Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 123–25.

consciously and purposefully toward the good of creatures. Yet it must be admitted that how far he truly wishes to go in this direction is unclear.[45]

This question has bearing upon how we interpret Iamblichus' teaching about theurgy. Much like the authors of the magical papyri, Iamblichus holds that the *energeiai* of the gods can be shared through the proper forms of ritual and prayer. The comparison can be misleading, however, for Iamblichean theurgy is not (as Porphyry seems to have suspected) a kind of magic. Iamblichus places the initiative firmly on the side of the gods, not that of the human agent. The divine *energeia*, he says, "is not drawn down or turned toward us, but, remaining separate, directs and gives itself to those who partake of it; it does not depart from itself or become less or serve those who partake of it, but on the contrary uses all as its servants" (iii.17.139–40). The theurgic rites are instituted by the gods, not men, in order to draw human beings to themselves (II.11). Nor do they place the gods under compulsion, for God and all that accompany Him are "mightier than necessity" (III.18.145). It is also plain that Iamblichus, unlike the magicians, is much less interested in any special powers accruing through theurgy than in the fundamentally religious goal of fellowship with the gods – of becoming, as he puts it, their "familiar companion" (V.26.239).

Let us look more closely at the passages describing the role of *energeia* in theurgy. One occurs in the course of a discussion of "blessed spectacles" (μακάρια θεάματα) that the theurgist summons through prayer. These are presumably luminous apparitions of a god, witnessed perhaps in an ecstatic or trancelike state.[46] Here as elsewhere, Iamblichus is at pains to emphasize that the theurgic rite does not operate upon the gods but rather is the means by which the gods execute their own will.

> The gods, being gracious and propitious, willingly and ungrudgingly shine forth their light upon the theurgists, calling their souls to themselves and offering union with themselves, accustoming them while still in the body to detach themselves from their bodies and turn toward their eternal and intelligible first principle. The deeds themselves make plain what we hold to be the salvation of the soul: in beholding blessed spectacles the soul acquires another life and operates (ἐνεργεῖ) by another *energeia*, regarding itself as no longer even human, and rightly so; often indeed, when it has put aside its own life it receives in exchange the most blessed *energeia* of the gods. (I.12.41).

[45] Compare the remarks of Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, 121 (the differences between Iamblichus and Plotinus on the divine will are largely terminological) and Andrew Smith, *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition* (The Hague, 1974), 109 (Iamblichus tends "to see the divine presence in the world frequently as a sort of personal intervention").

[46] See E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley, 1951), 298–99; Ruth Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles* (Leiden, 1989), 28–29.

The phrase "blessed spectacles" recalls the Myth of the Charioteer in the *Phaedrus*, in which preincarnate souls behold the "blessed and divine vision" of the Forms and thereby share in the life of the gods.[47] It is within this context that we can understand the dramatic effect that Iamblichus attributes to what might otherwise be thought merely a transitory experience. Just as in the *Phaedrus*, to behold divine reality – here identified with the gods themselves, rather than the Forms – is not merely adventitious but has a transforming and deifying effect. The most striking difference is that in the *Phaedrus* the vision is a consequence of intense moral struggle, expressed allegorically as the charioteer's attempt to master his unruly steed, whereas Iamblichus ascribes it solely to the performance of the proper ritual. No doubt we would be justified in assuming that the theurgist must lead a virtuous life if his rites are to be efficacious; the need for moral purification prior to contemplation was so deeply engrained in the Platonic tradition that Iamblichus probably saw no need to mention it. Nonetheless, the fact remains that for Iamblichus it is the rite itself that primarily brings about the vision, not the intellectual or moral efforts of the theurgist. He views this as a necessary consequence of the impassivity of the gods. As he later remarks, the virtues and philosophical attainments of the theurgist are only subordinate causes (συναιτίαι) of union with the gods, for properly speaking the gods are moved only by themselves (II.II.97).

Another passage on participation in the divine *energeiai* makes clearer precisely what effects Iamblichus believes it to entail. Those who invoke the gods receive, at the gods' manifestation, "an *energeia* that is removed from the passions and is greater than they, one that is perfect and in all respects more powerful; they share in divine love and immense joy . . . In addition the manifestation of the gods imparts truth and power, rectitude of action and gifts of the greatest goods" (III.9.87–88). The passage goes on to contrast these benefits to those imparted through the appearance of lesser beings. That of archangels, for example, imparts truth "not absolutely in regard to all things, but in a determinate way concerning some things . . . and in the same way not power collectively over all things always and everywhere without distinction, but at certain times and places" (III.9.89). It would seem from this contrast that the transformation effected by the vision of the gods imparts power and knowledge over all things. What does the theurgist do with such gifts? Apparently very little. Or rather, he does no more than the gods themselves; since the transformed state includes liberation from the passions and a sharing in divine love, the theurgist has no longer any

[47] *Phaedrus* 250b.

base or self-interested motives on which to act. Instead he shares in the gods' contemplation and governance of the cosmos.

Besides his description of "blessed spectacles," the other main context in which Iamblichus speaks of participation in the divine *energeiai* is in discussing mantic divination, i.e., that involving possession by a god.[48] He distinguishes three forms of such possession: the possessed "either subject their whole life as a vehicle or instrument to the inspiring gods, or exchange human life for divine life, or live out their own life (ἐνεργοῦσι τὴν οἰκείαν ζωήν) in the presence of God" (III.4.109). He soon restates this distinction explicitly in terms of *energeia*: "Either God possesses us, or we as a whole become things of God, or we exercise our activity (ποιούμεθα τὴν ἐνέργειαν) in common with Him" (III.5.111). Although these distinctions are not as clear as one might wish, I take it that in the first sort of state the possessed is overtaken from the outside, as it were, so that God simply uses him as an instrument, whereas in the second he is more fully enraptured and shares consciously in the divine life. (This would presumably be much like the condition of those who behold the "blessed spectacles.") The third state differs from the first two in being an ongoing and established condition – one in which the possessed neither serves as an instrument nor comes to be present at a different level as something foreign to it, but enacts the divine *energeiai* as his own. Hence Iamblichus goes on to say that whereas the first state is a simple participation (μετουσία ψιλή) and the second is a communion (κοινωνία), the third is union (ἕνωσις).[49] The three can thus be understood as ascending steps toward deification.[50]

At least one passage, however, offers evidence of a different and somewhat cruder conception. One of Porphyry's questions is, "why do those who are invoked [i.e., the gods] expect the worshipper to be just, although they themselves when entreated consent to perform unjust acts?" (IV.4.186). Although Iamblichus indignantly denies that the gods perform unjust acts, he is willing to concede that evil men can employ what appear to be theurgic

[48] For the distinction of mantic from artificial divination see Plato, *Phaedrus* 244c–d and *Republic* 516d.

[49] It must be admitted that there are obscurities in this passage which make a definitive interpretation difficult. One is that Iamblichus does not state whether he intends these various three-fold distinctions to be equivalent. Another is that, immediately after the last one mentioned, he goes on to give another that seems clearly not parallel to the others: "Again, either the soul alone enjoys the inspiration, or it partakes with the body, or the whole living creature partakes as a whole" (III.5.111). All one can say is that if he does not intend these various distinctions to be parallel, their meaning becomes virtually undecidable.

[50] Compare the five types of divinely inspired dreams described in III.3, which can also be understood as an ascending hierarchy; see John Finamore, "Iamblichean Dream Theory," *Mediators of the Divine: Horizons of Prophecy, Divination, Dreams and Theurgy in Mediterranean Antiquity*, ed. Robert Berchman (Atlanta, 1998), 161–63.

rites and achieve evil results. "If some of those who make invocations employ the natural or bodily powers of the universe, the gift of *energeia* comes about without forethought or malice; it is the one using the gift who turns it to contrary and base purposes" (IV.10.193). Here the divine *energeia* is not so much shared or participated as it is appropriated – and abused – as a "gift." Oddly enough, the gods seem to be unaware that such abuse is taking place, for they make the gift automatically in response to the proper invocations.[51] For this reason *energeia* here cannot be translated as "activity" or "operation," but solely as "energy"; the picture is that of a reservoir of divine energy into which the unscrupulous can tap at will.

Thus Iamblichus recognizes a range of ways of partaking in the divine *energeiai*, ranging from ecstatic union to manipulation by the unscrupulous. It is important to recognize that in all of these cases the union takes place at the level of *energeia* but not that of substance or essence (*ousia*). We have already seen that at the outset of the work Iamblichus distinguishes these two terms, insisting that although *energeiai* may be indicative of *ousia* they do constitute or reveal it. Later he rejects a suggestion by Porphyry that one who is inspired forms a single hypostasis with the divinity inspiring him, precisely on the grounds that this would require them to be the same in essence (*homoousion*) (III.21.150). Finally, there is evidence from fragments of Iamblichus' *De Anima* preserved by Stobaeus that Iamblichus denied the possibility of a substantial union between the soul and God even after death.[52]

Does this mean that the effects imparted by theurgy are transitory, lasting no longer than the rites themselves? Not at all. Early in the *De Mysteriis* Iamblichus chides Porphyry for stating that "it must be granted that there are gods." For Iamblichus this statement is not strong enough. We have an innate knowledge of the gods, he says, that is "coexistent with our very being," existing prior to any decision or judgement (I.3.7). Strictly speaking it is not knowledge at all, for knowledge involves separation; it is rather contact (συναφή) and constitutes our very selfhood (αὐτὸ ὅπερ ἐσμέν) (I.3.8). The philosopher's task is not to demonstrate that the gods exist, much less to conjecture or suppose it, but rather to recover this knowledge as an active principle, entering once more into the union with the gods that is already the true ground of our being.

[51] Later in the passage Iamblichus attempts to soften this implication, stating that "it is not the gods who perform what appears to be wicked, but the natures and bodies that come down from them" (IV.10.194). Nonetheless it is the gods who give the "gift" of energy; otherwise how could any theurgy be more than a manipulation of these "natures and bodies"?

[52] Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 114–15.

That is the purpose of theurgy. Viewed in this light, theurgy is not a human act, but a divine act in which God reaches out to join himself to himself.

That which is divine and intellectual and one in us . . . is then actively aroused in prayers, and when it is aroused it seeks vehemently that which is like itself . . . The gods do not receive prayers through powers or organs, but embrace in themselves the *energeiai* of pious utterances, especially such utterances as have been established and unified with the gods through sacred rites. At such times the divine is without qualification present to itself, and does not partake of the conceptions in the prayers as one separate thing toward another. (I.15.46–47)

That is presumably why Iamblichus describes theurgy as not only a knowledge of the gods but also a "conversion to ourselves" (πρὸς ἑαυτοὺς ἐπιστροφή) and a form of self-knowledge (X.I.286). Much as do Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus, he equates the divine ground of being in each person with that person's true and proper self.[53]

The effects of theurgy are thus no more or less permanent than those of any act of Platonic recollection.[54] As with recollection generally, the aim is not to establish a wholly new condition but to consummate and make manifest a condition that is, at the deepest level, already real. Perhaps that is why Iamblichus never raises the question of whether the effects of theurgy are temporary or permanent, nor related questions such as how frequently the rites are to be performed. He assumes that the rites are part of a habitual and enduring way of life. Their role is to acclimate the soul to its new environs, simultaneously purifying it and reminding it of what it already is.

## PROCLUS

Iamblichus had many students, and his writings enjoyed a certain vogue during the attempted pagan revival under the Emperor Julian (361–64). Eventually they became a formative influence on Plutarch of Athens (d. 432). Plutarch was the founder of the so-called Athenian School, the center of the final creative developments of pagan Neoplatonism. Unlike their contemporaries in Alexandria, the Athenian Neoplatonists were zealous defenders of paganism and advocates of theurgy, and unabashed enthusiasts

[53] Plato, *Republic* X.588b–590a; Aristotle, *Nic. Eth.* X.7 1177b26–1178a8; Plotinus, *Enn.* I.I.7. See also the "one of the soul," discussed below.

[54] Iamblichus uses the language of recollection at III.9.120, where he speaks of the soul remembering (ἀναμιμνήσκεται) celestial harmonies through theurgy; cf. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 174–75.

for metaphysics.[55] Although little remains of the writings of Plutarch and the second head of the school, Syrianus, those of the third, Proclus (412–85), survive in abundance. They deserve our attention both for their intrinsic interest and because of their immense influence upon subsequent thought.

The best known of Proclus' works is the *Elements of Theology*. This is a systematic presentation of "theology" as it was understood by the Neoplatonists, that is, of the three divine hypostases (the One, Intellect, and Soul) along with related concepts such as procession and return. It follows a rigorously deductive format, consisting of propositions each of which is followed by a proof based on previous propositions or simple *a priori* considerations. Although the system it presents is largely that of Plotinus, there are some important differences. One is that Proclus extends the Plotinian idea of the unity-in-plurality of souls within Soul and of intellects within Intellect upward to the One. He posits within each of the major "orders" (Nature, Soul, Intellect, and the One) a monad that is its originative principle, from which the other members of the order proceed and to which they return.[56] Thus there is a horizontal procession and return in addition to the vertical relations among the various orders. There is also a tendency in Proclus to understand procession and return in less dynamic terms than had Plotinus. He makes little use of the Plotinian metaphors of superabundance and overflowing, and none at all of the theory of two acts; instead he normally describes the relation of the lower to the higher as one of participation (μέθεξις), a term that has no connotation of movement or activity.

It is certainly surprising to learn that the One ramifies itself into a series of lesser "ones," or henads. In explaining them, Proclus draws on the Plotinian identification of the One and the Good. Whereas the One is the Good without qualification, each henad is "a particular excellence" (τὶς ἀγαθότης, Prop. 133). Thus the relationship of the henads to the One is like that of particular modes to a more comprehensive attribute or way of being. To put matters this way, however, is only half the truth, for it overlooks that the One *qua* Good is active, making things good and drawing them to itself.[57] Each henad is therefore not simply an attribute, but an agent that acts to perfect things in regard to that attribute: "the several henads . . . are distinguished by their several divine functions, so that each

[55] See Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, 138–46. As Wallis explains, much of what appears to be original in Proclus was probably first worked out by Plutarch and Syrianus.

[56] *Elements of Theology*, Prop. 21. There is also a fifth order, Body, of which the monad is the cosmos as a whole; see Dodds' note to Props. 108–09.

[57] Props. 12–13.

in respect of some especial individuation of goodness renders all things good" (Prop. 133). This in turn points to an important further observation. Since the One is "that which is beyond all things and to which all things aspire," it can rightly be named God.[58] The henads share its transcendent and beneficent nature, and so they too are gods.[59] The significance of the henads is thus not simply that they add symmetry to Plotinus' system, but that they create a place for the pagan gods.

Some further details of the hierarchy will be helpful to understand before we turn to the role of *energeia*. One point worth clarifying is how the members of each transverse series are produced. Although they proceed from the monad of their series, this does not preclude that each also plays a role in causing the next in the series. There is a division of labor between the monad and its sequents, the monad producing what is common to the various members and each member producing what is unique in its successor.[60] There seems to be no similar relation of production between correlative members of vertically adjacent series. Although reversion is possible through the correlative member above, this is only because of its "analogous place in the procession," not because it is the cause of the lower member.[61]

That raises the question of how the members of adjacent strata are connected, if not because one produces the other. The answer is that each monad gives rise to two series, one consisting of substances that are self-complete and the other of "irradiations" (ἐλλάμψεις) that have their subsistence in something else.[62] The latter are, as it were, the presences of the former within the next lower stratum. Thus a given self-complete henad has also an irradiation within a self-complete intellect, this intellect has an irradiation within a self-complete soul, and so on. This progression can be traced all the way down to the bodies that participate in the gods, such as the heavenly bodies and the cosmos as a whole.[63] Yet not every member of a series possesses such an illumination from above, for there are more

[58] Prop. 113. [59] Prop. 114.

[60] Prop. 21. The proper term for production within a transverse series is derivation (ὑπόβασις) rather than procession (πρόοδος), although Proclus himself does not alway observe this distinction; see Dodds's note at Prop. 21, line 10.

[61] Prop. 108. Compare the statement of Plotinus that an individual soul is the "expression" (λόγος) of the corresponding intellect (*Enn.* IV.3.5.10); this certainly suggests a causal relationship, though without quite asserting it.

[62] Prop. 64.

[63] See Dodds's note to Prop. 184. There are also higher orders of bodiless gods, as explained in Props. 162–65.

members of each lower series than of that above.[64] This surplus is important, for without it the hierarchy would consist solely of gods and the intellects, souls, and bodies that participate in them (along with the monads). Intellects with no henadic illumination are those of the attendants on the gods, that is, angels, demons, and heroes; souls with no intellectual illumination are those of human beings; natures with no psychic illumination are those of plants and animals.[65] The lack of an illumination from the higher level does not mean that a being is unable to attain to that level, but only that it does not dwell there permanently. Human souls, for example, "enjoy intermittent intellection" and therefore "are intermittently in the company of the gods, being unable perpetually and without change to participate intelligence or perpetually to consort with the divine souls" (Prop. 185).

Much more could be said about Proclus' complex hierarchy, but we now have enough for our purposes. What does it mean in the Procline universe to participate in the divine *energeia*? The first point to note is that, despite the elaborate hierarchy just described, all that exists proceeds from the One as its "principle and first cause" (Prop. 12). This fact, combined with the hierarchical manner of procession, already implies that there is synergy between the One and subordinate causes. Clearly if the One is the cause of all that is, and things proceed hierarchically, then each subsequent cause must cooperate with the One or in some way be its agent. Proclus makes this quite explicit. His first proposition relating to the productive activity of entities other than the One presents such activity as an imitation of the divine prototype: "Whatever is complete proceeds to generate those things which it is capable of producing, imitating in its turn the one originative principle of the universe" (Prop. 25). Imitation is not the same as cooperation, of course, but this proposition does establish a close link between the activity of the One and that of its subordinates. The link is tightened when Proclus comes to one of his most famous propositions, that describing the relative causal efficacy of higher and lower causes. Whatever is produced by a secondary being is in a greater measure produced by the causes of that being.[66] The reason is the familiar Plotinian principle that whatever character exists in an effect must exist in a higher mode in the cause. In the present case, since the higher cause "has conferred on the secondary being the causality which enabled it to produce, it must itself have possessed

[64] Prop. 62.
[65] See Props. 110–11 and 181–85, with Dodds's commentary. Presumably bodies without an illumination from nature are inanimate; these are not mentioned in the *Elements*.
[66] Prop. 56.

this causality primitively" (Prop. 56).[67] The next proposition elaborates on this result, adding that "every cause both operates prior to its consequent (πρὸ τοῦ αἰτιατοῦ ἐνεργεῖ) and gives rise to a greater number of posterior terms" (Prop. 57). The reason is simply that the higher cause has greater causal power, and greater power produces more effects.[68]

The result of these two propositions is that the hierarchy is, so to speak, thickest in the middle. The causal power of the One reaches all the way from the top (Intellect) to the bottom (bare matter). That of Intellect reaches only from the second highest level (Soul) to the second lowest (inanimate bodies), and that of Soul reaches only from the third highest level (Nature) to the third lowest (animate bodies). Proclus describes this staggered arrangement in a corollary to the last proposition mentioned. For our purposes the details are less important than the principle (stated in the course of arguing for the proposition) that "the [higher] cause is cooperative in the production (συνυφίστησιν αὐτῷ) of all that the consequent is capable of producing." Later Proclus restates this result more explicitly in terms of *energeia*: "in the activity of the secondary the higher is cooperative (τοῦ δευτέρου ἐνεργοῦντος κἀκεῖνο συνεργεῖ), because all the effects of the secondary are concomitantly generated by the more determinative cause" (Prop. 70).

Thus for Proclus every higher (that is, more divine) cause cooperates in the productive activity of its subordinates. Indeed, the higher cause is more responsible for what the lower produces than is the lower itself. This principle is above all applicable to God or the One, who is intimately engaged in every productive act. One way to look at this result is that Proclus has taken the quest to participate in the divine *energeia*, which we have seen motivating magicians and theurgists, and guaranteed its fulfillment simply through the structure of the causal hierarchy. All things participate in the divine *energeia* by being what they are; they could not do otherwise, for the very principles of causality require it.

We can gauge the novelty of this position by comparing it to that of Plotinus. Plotinus also holds that the One is the cause of the being of all

[67] One might object that this pertains only to the *capacity* to produce, not the efficacy actually displayed; but since we are dealing here with the necessary and eternal structure of the intelligible world, all capacities are realized and the distinction is irrelevant.

[68] Again one suspects a non sequitur: could not this condition be satisfied simply in that the cause produces the effect plus the latter's own effects, without needing to produce anything more? (A produces B and C, whereas B produces only C; therefore A's causal power is greater.) The answer is implied in the remark in the argument for this proposition that "the powers which are in the consequent are present in a greater measure in the cause." A has not only the same power of C-making as B, but a greater such power; and this greater power must be exhibited, not only in making C, but in making the further beings which are themselves produced by C.

things, so one might expect that on the matter of cooperation between the One and inferior causes his view would anticipate that of Proclus. In fact it does not. As I argued earlier, when Plotinus says that the One is the cause of the being of all things he means that it is the *telos* of the internal act which is the substance of each. He does not mean that the One itself is as much engaged in the production of (say) Soul as is Soul's immediate generator, Intellect; otherwise his likening of Intellect's production of Soul to the One's own production of Intellect would be pointless. Such step-wise, mediated production makes sense given the Plotinian distinction of internal and external act and the replication of that distinction at each successive level of existence. Proclus makes no use of this distinction. The nearest he comes is in speaking of intellects and souls as capable of self-reversion (ἐπιστροφὴ ἑαυτῷ), for it turns out that such self-reversion is roughly equivalent to Plotinian internal act.[69] However, this important fact is not even mentioned in the *Elements*. Several other key elements of Plotinus' theory are also absent: the identification of internal act with substance; the appeal to the linkage of internal and external act to explain the causal activity of each hypostasis; and the application of these distinctions to the One. Unlike Plotinus, Proclus unequivocally denies *energeia* to the One.[70] At most, then, he offers a pale shadow of the Plotinian theory. The reason is that for him the One is the cause of the being of things in the quite different sense of an efficient cause, and he sees this causality as equally engaged throughout the causal chain.[71]

What is most original in Proclus is not just the notion that divine action permeates and underwrites that of other agents. The Hermetica express a similar view, and other sources examined in this chapter also anticipate it in various ways. Proclus' originality lies in his incorporating such a view within a carefully reasoned causal hierarchy. In doing so he creates a new way of conceiving hierarchy – a way that will bear fruit above all in the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite, and through him will exercise a profound influence in both the East and West.

[69] Props. 15–17 and 42–44. For the equivalence with Plotinian internal act see *Platonic Theology* v.18 and *Commentary on the Parmenides* iii.3, along with related texts discussed in Stephen Gersh, *KINESIS AKINETOS: A Study of Spiritual Motion in the Philosophy of Proclus* (Leiden, 1973), 130–35.

[70] See *Platonic Theology* ii.7; also *Commentary on the Parmenides* vii (ed. Cousin, 1167.15–1169.11), where he denies not only that the One has *energeia* but that even Intellect and Soul create through (δία) rather than merely in accompaniment with (μετά) cognitive activity. This is surely aimed at Plotinus.

[71] Statements to this effect are frequent in the *Platonic Theology*: the One is the "hypostatic and preserving cause" of all things (i.12; ed. Saffrey and Westerink, vol. 1, 58.20–21); from it all receive their coming to be (i.15; vol. 1, 71.5–6); it is generative of the whole of things and gives them subsistence (ii.7, vol. 2, 50.8–9; ii.10, vol. 2, 62.5).

## THE PROCLINE ASCENT

To focus solely on the causal hierarchy, however, would be to overlook some key features of Proclus' thought. The synergy so far described is limited to productive activity. There remains the question of whether it is possible to participate in the other *energeiai* of the gods. The *Elements* has little to say about this question, save to give a partial sketch of what these *energeiai* are. The most succinct description is Proposition 201, which attributes to divine souls a three-fold activity: "as gods they exercise providence towards the universe, in virtue of their intellectual life they know all things, and in virtue of the self-movement proper to their being they impart motion to bodies." Only the third of these activities is proper to them as souls; the other two, providence and intellection, are proper to henads and intellects respectively, although they may be attributed to divine souls insofar as such souls participate in these higher levels. The reason that providence is the activity most proper to the gods is that each god is, as explained earlier, a "particular excellence," and yet, like the Good itself, is intrinsically active. Proclus is careful to add that nothing in such providence requires even intellection, much less discursive thought or deliberation.[72]

The question of how lower beings can share in divine providence comes to the fore in Proclus' *Ten Doubts Concerning Providence*. There it is assumed that souls which are not divine (i.e., those of angels, demons, heroes, and human beings) can assist in exercising providence; the question is how this is possible, given that providence is characteristic of the gods. We have noted that in the *Elements* only divine intelligences possess an illumination of the One, whereas the souls of the attendants of the gods (angels, demons, and heroes) do not, and human souls possess not even an illumination of Intellect. This might seem to render the participation of such non-divine souls in providence quite impossible. Now, however, Proclus points out that there is a different way in which the One can be present. He recalls from the *Elements* that a characteristic can exist not only substantially but also by participation in its cause.[73] In this sense there is a "hidden trace of the One" in even non-divine souls. To the extent that the soul establishes and perfects itself by cultivating this trace of the One, it becomes divinely suffused and "lives the divine life, insofar as this is lawful for it."[74] When it does so "it acts in union with God (ἐνθέως ἐνεργοῦσι) and exercises providence with the gods and the superior races [i.e., the attendants of the gods]."[75] It does so not by discursive thought but in the same way as the

[72] Props. 120, 122. [73] *Ten Doubts* x.63 (ed. Isaac, 132); cf. *Elements*, Prop. 65.
[74] *Ten Doubts*. x.64.16 (134; Greek text, 219). [75] *Ibid*. x.65.14–16 (134–35; Greek text, 219).

superior races: "By the illuminating and unifying light of the gods they see temporal things atemporally, divided things indivisibly, and spatial things without place, and they are not their own but his who illuminates them."[76] The only difference is that whereas the attendants of the gods enjoy this state continually, human souls do so, at best, intermittently.

This description is much like that in Iamblichus of one who beholds the "blessed spectacles." The notion of the "one of the soul" is also to be found in Iamblichus, although its explication in terms of the metaphysics of participation may be due to Plutarch or someone else in the Athenian school.[77] The *Ten Doubts Concerning Providence* does not describe how the soul is to achieve such a state. Fortunately a fragment from Proclus' lost commentary on the *Chaldaean Oracles* offers some further insight. There Proclus invokes the Plotinian idea that there are two states of Intellect, one in which it acts as proper to it and one in which it is "drunk with nectar" and has a direct, non-intellective apprehension of the One. He restates this idea in terms of a duality of *energeiai*:

> As in other things that which is highest is not intellect but the cause which is beyond intellect, so in souls the first form of activity (ἐνεργείας) is not intellective, but more divine than intellect. Every soul and every intellect has two sorts of activity, some that are in the form of the One (ἑνοειδεῖς) and superior to intellection, and some that are intellective . . . For as we approach Intellect by taking on the form of Intellect, so taking on that of the One we run up toward union.[78]

What does it mean to "take on the form of the One"? Proclus' descriptions emphasize the achievement of silence: in making the ascent the soul "folds up all the multitude that is within itself" and "shuts its eyes to all other lives and powers." The reason is that the One itself is a kind of silence. After quoting a passage from the *Oracles* referring to the "First Power" (that is, for Proclus, the first moment of the Intelligible Triad) and the "Sacred Word" that manifests it, Proclus continues:

> And if that which manifests it [the First Power], being more unutterable, is called Word, there must be before the Word the silence that supports the Word [i.e., the One], and before everything that is sacred the deifying cause. Hence, just as the things that are after the intelligibles are "words" of the intelligibles (when the

[76] *Ibid.* x.65.20–24 (135; Greek text, 219–20). Compare the description of divine knowledge in the *Elements*, Prop. 124.

[77] See Iamblichus' discussion of the innate human knowledge of the gods mentioned above; also his Fr. 6 on the *Phaedrus* and Fr. 2a on the *Parmenides*, with the commentary by Dillon. As Dillon points out, the roots of the idea are to be found in Plotinus' doctrine that we know the One through its traces within us (*Enn.* iii.8.9.18–24).

[78] *Commentary on the Chaldaean Philosophy*, Fr. 4 (ed. des Places, 209.17–26).

intelligibles are united), so that which is in the intelligibles is a word arising from another more unutterable unity. It is a word of the silence before the intelligibles; but when the intelligibles are silenced, it is silence.[79]

From this it would appear that the aim of the soul is to "silence the intelligibles," thereby bringing itself into a state of primeval silence. It would be a mistake to think of such silence as an emptiness or void. The approach to simplicity is through multiplicity; the intelligibles must first be present before they can be silenced. The same is true of the multitude in the soul: it is not simply eliminated, but "folded up."

Proclus goes on to insist that not even the "flower of the intellect" – what he earlier called the one of the soul – is alone sufficient to achieve such union. Since the quest is for unity *through* plurality, union can come only by means of the "flower of the whole soul."

Perhaps the flower of the intellect and the flower of our whole soul are not the same. The first is that which most has the form of the One (τὸ ἑνοειδέστατον) in our intellective life, the other is the "one" of all our psychic powers, which are multiform. For we are not intellect alone, but also discursive reason and opinion and attention and decision, and prior to these powers a substance that is one and many, divisible and indivisible . . . The "one" toward which all the powers of the soul converge is alone fitted by nature to lead us to that which is beyond all beings, and it is that which unifies all that is in us.[80]

It has been observed that whereas the notion of the "flower of the intellect" is Plotinian (being simply a way of restating the Plotinian doctrine of the two states of Intellect), that of the "flower of the whole soul" is not.[81] I would suggest that this difference is related to that between the Plotinian and Procline accounts of emanation. For Plotinus all the lower levels of being trace their lineage back to Intellect, so in transcending Intellect one transcends the others as well. There is no need to carry along the lower levels of being, as it were, in the very act of ascent. For Proclus, however, Intellect no longer occupies a privileged position as mediator between the One and other beings. All derive directly from the One, and therefore all must be included in the return to the One if the union is to be complete. As Proclus says elsewhere, even matter is "stretched out" (τετάσθαι) toward the One.[82] It would also appear – although the evidence

[79] *Ibid.* (210.21–28). For Neoplatonic interpretation of the "First Power" and "Sacred Word" see Majercik's commentary on Fr. 175 in her *Chaldean Oracles*.
[80] *Ibid.* (210.28–211.12).
[81] See the note by des Places on this passage; also John Rist, "Mysticism and Transcendence in Later Neoplatonism," *Hermes* 92 (1964), 215–17.
[82] *Platonic Theology* I.22 (vol. 1, 102.10); cf. I.25 (vol. 1, 111.19–24), II.8 (vol. 2, 56.5–57.3).

is scattered and obscure – that he envisages even the highest stages of ascent as involving some form of theurgic ritual, albeit a ritual without words.[83]

In the first passage quoted from the commentary on the *Oracles*, Proclus speaks of the intellect as returning to the One by means of a *henoeidēs energeia*. Elsewhere he adopts different terms. He associates the rest and silence involved in the return to the One precisely with the absence of *energeia*: "Those who are zealous to be conjoined to the Good no longer have need of knowledge or activity (ἐνεργείας), but of establishment and stable foundation and quietude. What, then, will unite us to it? What will put an end to activity and movement?"[84] The answer is faith (πίστις). Even the gods, as it turns out, are united to the One by faith.

One must not seek the Good through knowledge (γνωστικῶς) or in an imperfect way, but by shutting one's eyes and abandoning oneself to the divine light, being established in the unknowable and secret henad of beings. For this sort of faith is more venerable than cognitive activity (γνωστικῆς ἐνεργείας), not in us alone, but even among the gods themselves. By it all the gods are united and they bring together all their powers and processions in a single form around one center.[85]

What does Proclus mean by faith? He goes on to contrast it with intellectual activity in much the same way as he had contrasted the *henoeidēs energeia* with the normal activity of intellect: "Let us not say that intellective activity is the same as this sort of faith, for it is multiform and separated by difference from the objects of thought, and in short it is an intellective motion about the intelligible; whereas divine faith must be one in form (ἑνοειδῆ) and at rest, for it is perfectly established in the haven of goodness."[86] As the metaphor of the haven suggests, for Proclus faith is primarily trust in the trustworthy. That is presumably why it is to be found even in the gods, for whom there can be no question of a lack of knowledge or a need to believe without seeing.

Faith is in fact the highest member of the so-called Chaldaean triad of love (ἔρως), truth, and faith. Just as love joins us to the divine *qua* beautiful, and truth to the divine *qua* wisdom, so faith joins us to the divine *qua* good.[87] It is perhaps not very significant whether this highest condition of the soul is called an *energeia*. The important point is that the means of rejoining the

[83] See Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles*, 40–43.
[84] *Platonic Theology* I.25 (109.24–110.2); cf. IV.9 (vol. 4, 31.11–16).
[85] *Ibid.* (110.9–16). [86] *Ibid.* (111.2–7).
[87] See, besides this chapter of the *Platonic Theology*, the passages cited and discussed in Rist, *Plotinus*, 241–45.

One – and thereby sharing in the divine *energeia* – is in Proclus no longer conceived as a magical or theurgical rite, save in a very broad sense, but as reaching out to God in love and silent trust. The resemblance on this point between Proclus and Christianity can hardly fail to be noticed. Is it any wonder that Christians would soon, through Dionysius, find a way of making the Procline ascent their own?

CHAPTER 7

# *The formation of the eastern tradition*

Most of the texts discussed in the previous chapter remained unknown to the West during the Middle Ages. It is not surprising that the magical papyri, Hermetica, and works of Iamblichus and Proclus went untranslated; rather more surprising is that the same is true of the works of Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Clement, Origen, and Athanasius, with the exception of Origen's *De Principiis* and some exegetical treatises.[1] All told, of the works we have discussed the only one that played a role in the formative stages of western thought was the New Testament, which of course was available in the Vulgate of Jerome. There we find *energeia* translated as *operatio* and *energein* as *operari*. Although these renderings were probably the best available, they do not possess the same fluidity of meaning as the original. To think of the divine *operationes* as forces or active powers that can be shared in by human activity would not normally occur to a Latin reader. This is not only because the major works in which the expansion of meaning took place were not translated into Latin; it is also because *operatio* does not share the association of *energeia* with actuality, much less with the fusion of activity and actuality that we have traced in earlier chapters. That is why, when the works of Aristotle were translated in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, *energeia* had to be rendered in different contexts by three different terms: *operatio*, *actus*, and *actualitas*.[2] Although this division was inescapable given the resources of Latin, it tended to obscure the

[1] The *Elements of Theology* of Proclus was translated in 1268, and the *Ten Doubts Concerning Providence* in 1280. See J. T. Muckle, "Greek Works Translated Directly into Latin before 1350," *Mediaeval Studies* 4 (1942), 33–42 and 5 (1943), 102–114, supplemented in some details by A. Malet, "Les voies d'accès des Latins à la théologie trinitaire grecque," *Personne et amour dans la théologie trinitaire de Saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris, 1956), 161–87.

[2] The first two terms are classical, whereas the third was coined by the scholastics. According to the *Mittellateinisches Wörterbuch* it first appears in the commentaries of Albert the Great on Dionysius. There was also the occasional transliteration as *energia*, which we have noticed in Rufinus' translation of *De Principiis*.

unity of the single concept (or family of concepts) underlying these diverse terms.

Because of these limitations, the notion of participation in the divine *energeia* made little impression on western thought. In the Greek-speaking East, however, it took on increasing importance. This becomes particularly clear when it is viewed in conjunction with more directly metaphysical uses of the concept of *energeia*. We have already seen examples of the interplay between metaphysical and religious conceptions in the Hermetica, Iamblichus, and Proclus. The parallel developments among Christian authors are even more complex. They begin during the Trinitarian debates of the fourth century. There we find *energeia* coming into prominence as a key term for understanding God's activity in the world, particularly in opposition to the divine *ousia*. At about the same time there is a renewed and more vigorous application of the Pauline teaching about participation in the divine *energeia*. Since this renewal occurs in a context established by the contrast between *energeia* and *ousia*, it takes on resonances not envisioned by St. Paul; in particular, to participate in the divine *energeia* comes to be understood as a kind of divinization. The union thus achieved between the more directly metaphysical (or Trinitarian) and religious (or Pauline) strands of thought ultimately becomes a distinguishing feature of the theology of the East. This is particularly true after the work of Dionysius the Areopagite, who incorporates these themes from the fourth century into a hierarchical vision of reality derived largely from Proclus.

## THE TRINITARIAN CONTROVERSY

We noted in the last chapter the minor role that *energeia* plays in early Christian discussions of the Trinity. Athenagoras, Clement, and Athanasius refer to the Son as the *energeia* of the Father, and Athanasius refers to the Holy Spirit as the *energeia* of the Son. None of these writers attaches particular significance to the term, however, and it was not a subject of doctrinal dispute or credal affirmation. All of this changes about A.D. 360, during the later stages of the Arian controversy. The reasons for the change are two-fold: the need to clarify the status of the Holy Spirit, and the challenge presented by the neo-Arianism of Eunomius.

In 359 or 360 Serapion, bishop of Thmuis in Egypt, wrote to Athanasius alerting him to the existence of a group that conceded the divinity of the Son but denied that of the Holy Spirit. Athanasius' response, the four *Letters to Serapion*, constitute the first work devoted specifically to the

Holy Spirit.[3] They are also an early statement of an argument that soon became a pillar of Trinitarian orthodoxy. Athanasius observes that whatever activity Scripture attributes to one person of the Trinity it attributes to the others as well. For example, although God the Father is the Creator, the Psalmist states that "By the Word of the Lord the heavens were established, and all their might by the Spirit of his mouth" (Psalm 33:6). Similarly, although prophetic inspiration is the indwelling of the divine Word (as in the formula, "the Word of the Lord came"), Scripture also attributes it to God the Father acting through his Spirit. Athanasius goes on to cite other texts showing that all three persons are involved in the bestowal of life, justification, sanctification, and the overshadowing of Mary which wrought the Incarnation.[4] He concludes:

> This consideration shows that the activity (ἐνέργεια) of the Trinity is one. The Apostle does not mean that the things which are given are given differently and separately by each person, but that what is given is given in the Trinity, and that all are from the one God. Him therefore who is no creature but is one with the Son as the Son is one with the Father, who is glorified with the Father and the Son, who is confessed as God with the Word, who is active (ἐνεργοῦν) in the works which the Father works through the Son – is not the man who calls him a creature guilty of a direct impiety against the Son himself? For there is nothing that is not originated and actuated (ἐνεργεῖται) through the Word in the Spirit.[5]

There are two points to note in this passage. One is that Athanasius infers from the unity of the *energeia* of the three persons to their equal divinity – that is (although he does not use the words here), to the identity of their essence or nature. To take *energeia* as revelatory of *ousia* is a pattern we have observed in Philo, Galen, Porphyry, and Iamblichus. Like these authors, Athanasius uses it in a guarded way: he does not claim actually to know the *ousia* of God, but only to be confident that three beings who share the divine *energeia* must also share the divine *ousia*, whatever it may be.

Second, although "the *energeia* of the Trinity is one," it nonetheless has a certain intrinsic structure. God the Father does all things "through the Word in the Spirit." What precisely is the force of the prepositions *through* and *in*? Indeed, how can one draw such distinctions, given that the *energeia* is one? Athanasius does not say. If pressed, he would presumably refer to his Scriptural examples. Earlier he had quoted II Corinthians 13:13, "The

[3] See Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 255–58. The translation of the *Letters* by C. R. B. Shapland also contains much useful information.

[4] *Ad Serapionem* I.19, 20, 24, and 31.

[5] *Ad Serapionem* I.31 (*PG* 26 600C–601A). Quotations are from the translation by Shapland.

grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." He remarks:

For this grace and gift that is given is given in the Trinity, from the Father, in the Son, through the Holy Spirit. As the grace given is from the Father through the Son, so we can have no communion in the gift except in the Holy Spirit. For it is when we partake of him that we have the love of the Father and the grace of the Son and the communion of the Spirit himself.[6]

One is reminded of the statement of St. Paul that no one can say Jesus is lord except by the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:3). The formula "through the Word in the Spirit" would seem to be a way of summarizing the whole structure of the Christian revelation: God the Father has acted by sending his Son, and to partake of this gift is ultimately, in light of the reality of the Church, to partake of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

The second cause drawing *energeia* into prominence was the neo-Arianism of Eunomius. Eunomius was a deacon and, for a short time, bishop of Cyzicus. Along with his mentor Aetius, he was the leader of a party attempting to revive Arianism after various setbacks around mid-century. His version of Arianism differs from that of Arius in several ways: its greater reliance on philosophy; its insistence that the essence of the Son is not even like that of the Father (hence the name sometimes given to his party, "Anomoeans"); and its bold claim that the essence of God can be known by man. In 361 Eunomius published an *Apology* setting forth the essentials of his position. He asserts that the term which best describes God is *agennētos*, unbegotten. Because God is simple, "the unbegotten" (τὸ ἀγέννητον) must be not merely a part of Him or an aspect of His being, but His very essence.[7] Obviously such an *ousia* cannot be shared with another through begetting; hence the Son, who is expressly referred to in Scripture as begotten, cannot be God.

*Energeia* enters into the *Apology* in two ways. The first is an attempt to stand the Athanasian argument from unity of *energeia* on its head. As Eunomius sees it, the *energeia* of the Unbegotten includes His begetting of the Only-begotten. Clearly such an *energeia* is not shared between the two, so if we are to reason from *energeia* to *ousia* we must conclude that the Son and the Father differ in *ousia*.[8]

The second way is more complex. It arises in the course of Eunomius' attempt to deal with 'Father' as a name for God. This name causes him

[6] *Ad Serapionem* 1.30 (*PG* 26 600c).
[7] *Apology* 8. Citations are to the edition and translation by Vaggione.
[8] *Apology* 20.

some difficulty, for earthly fathers and sons are the same in essence. In order to parry this line of thought Eunomius argues that 'Father' is not a name of the divine essence at all, but a name that manifests the divine *energeia* of begetting. This leads him to attack those who present the *energeia* as a necessary accompaniment to the *ousia*:

> We must understand that God's mode of action (τὸν τῆς ἐνεργείας τρόπον) is not human, but effortless and divine, and must by no means suppose that that *energeia* is some kind of division or motion of His essence. This is in fact what those who have been led away by pagan sophistries do have to suppose, because they have united the *energeia* to the essence and therefore present the world as coeval to God . . . We [however] recognize that the divine essence is without beginning, simple, and endless, but we also recognize that its *energeia* is neither without beginning nor without ending. It cannot be without beginning, for if it were, its effect would be without beginning as well. On the other hand, it cannot be without ending since, if the effects come to an end, the *energeia* which produced them cannot be unending either . . . There is no need, therefore, to accept the half-baked opinions of outsiders and unite the *energeia* to the essence.[9]

By "uniting the *energeia* to the essence" Eunomius does not mean identifying them, but conceiving of the *energeia* as something that necessarily follows the essence and is co-eternal with it. Although he does not specify which "pagan sophistries" he has in mind, one can readily think of examples, such as the Plotinian theory of two acts or the Hermetic teaching that God would not be God apart from His act of creating.[10] In his zeal to repudiate such necessitarianism, Eunomius argues that not only the *energeia* of creating and maintaining the world in existence, but also that of begetting, had a beginning and is subject to the divine will. The Son and the Father share a single *energeia* only in the sense that, once the Son has been brought forth, the Father creates all other things through Him.[11]

Eunomius brings to the fore two questions that are bound to arise in any attempt to apply the distinction of *ousia* and *energeia* to the Christian God. First is that of whether the divine *energeiai* include solely God's external acts in the world or also the acts internal to the Trinity, such as the begetting of the Son and procession of the Holy Spirit. Second is that of whether

[9] *Apology* 22–23.

[10] *Enn*. V.1 was well known to Christian authors of this period thanks to the inclusion of excerpts from it in Eusebius, *Preparatio Evangelica* XI.17. See John Rist, "Basil's 'Neoplatonism': Its Background and Nature," *Basil of Caesarea: Christian, Humanist, Ascetic*, ed. Paul Jonathan Fedwick (Toronto, 1981), vol. 1, 137–220, for a careful discussion of the knowledge of Neoplatonism among Christians of the fourth century. Evidence that Christians read the Hermetica can be found in Tertullian, Didymus the Blind, and Cyril of Alexandria, among others.

[11] *Apology* 26 (repeated at *Expositio Fidei* 3).

the use of this distinction, given its established implications, is compatible with God's freedom and independence from the world. Eunomius fears that the tendency to think of the *energeia* as a necessary accompaniment to the essence will reduce divine activity to "a kind of division or motion of the essence," thereby rendering the world as necessary as God Himself.

The task of responding to these challenges fell primarily to the Cappadocian Fathers – St. Basil of Caesarea, his younger brother St. Gregory of Nyssa, and St. Gregory Nazianzen. Basil replied to the *Apology* directly in his *Contra Eunomium* (c. 365) and indirectly in his *On the Holy Spirit* (375). Eunomius replied to Basil in his *Apologia Apologiae* (written about the time of Basil's death in 379); to this Gregory of Nyssa replied in his own *Contra Eunomium* (written in two installments, 380 and 383). Gregory also defended his Trinitarian theology in a number of short dogmatic works, most notably *On the Holy Spirit against the Macedonians*, *On the Holy Trinity to Eustathius*, and *On Not Three Gods to Ablabius*, written in the late 370s and early 380s.[12] Gregory Nazianzen's contribution is found primarily in his *Orations* 27 to 31, the five "Theological Orations," delivered in 380 while he was patriarch of Constantinople. Despite some minor differences all three authors share essentially the same outlook, and I will draw upon all three.

The core of Eunomius' argument is his insistence on 'unbegotten' as the most proper term for designating God. St. Basil in reply distinguishes between knowledge of what a thing is (τί ἐστί) and how it is (ὅπως ἐστί). Just as to say that one man is the son of another does not indicate what he is but only from whence he came, so to say that God is unbegotten does not indicate what He is but only that He is "from nowhere" (μηδαμόθεν).[13] Gregory of Nyssa illustrates the same point using the analogy of a tree: a husbandman who says that one tree has been planted whereas another grew by itself indicates only *how* the trees exist, but not their nature.[14] In the same way, each person of the Trinity has his own characteristic (ἰδιότης) or manner of existing (τρόπος ὑπάρξεως): the Father that He is unbegotten, the Son that He is begotten of the Father, the Holy Spirit that He proceeds from the Father through the Son. Yet each of these characteristics

[12] Most of *On the Holy Trinity* is also found in St. Basil's works as Epistle 189, but it is generally believed to be by Gregory.
[13] Basil, *Contra Eunomium* I.15 (*PG* 29 545B).
[14] Gregory of Nyssa, *On Not Three Gods* (*Gregorii Nysseni Opera* [=*GNO*] III.1, 56–57; *NPNF* vol. 5, 336).

indicates only what relation that person has to a cause, without describing His essence.[15]

With this distinction in hand, the way is clear for the Cappadocians to reject Eunomius' interpretation of 'Father' as indicating an activity of begetting. In their view this name (like 'Son' and 'Spirit') indicates neither an *energeia* nor an *ousia*, but a hypostasis that is distinguished by its mode of existence.[16] As they see it, part of the trouble with Eunomius' view is that it tends to reify the divine *energeia*, giving it a distinct name ('Father') and personal being that an *energeia* cannot properly bear. Citing Eunomius' description of the Father as an *energeia* that "accompanies" the Unbegotten, Gregory of Nyssa objects:

> Why do we go on talking of the Almighty as the Father, if it was not He, but an *energeia* belonging to the things which follow Him externally, that produced the Son: and how can the Son be a son any longer, when something else has given Him existence according to Eunomius, and He creeps like a bastard (may our Lord pardon the expression!) into relationship with the Father, and is to be honored in name only as a Son? How can Eunomius rank our Lord next after the Almighty at all, when He counts Him third only, with that mediating *energeia* placed in the second place?[17]

Gregory goes on to present Eunomius with a dilemma: either the *energeia* is something substantial in its own right, in which case the Son is not truly second after the Father, or it is not, in which case the Son owes His being to something non-substantial. Either alternative is plainly unacceptable.[18] Thus the answer to the first question raised by Eunomius, that of whether the divine *energeiai* include the acts internal to the Trinity, is decidedly negative. No *energeia* can be posited as an intermediary between the three persons, for to do so would open the door to a quasi-Gnostic reification of whatever acts or qualities are attributed to God.

[15] See, besides the two passages cited, Basil, *Contra Eunomium* II.28, *On the Holy Spirit* 46, Epistle 38.4–5 (now generally attributed to Gregory of Nyssa); Gregory Nazianzen, *Orations* 20.7, 31.9, 42.16, 43.30; Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* III.5.60, and the discussion in G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London, 1952), 243–49. As Prestige points out, the phrase τρόπος ὑπάρξεως means in this context not only "mode of existence" but also "mode of origination."

[16] Occasionally the Cappadocians also speak of these terms as names of the relations (σχέσεις) between the persons (Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration* 29.16; Gregory of Nyssa, *Refutatio Confessionis Eunomii* 16). This is merely a way of saying that the distinction of the persons consists solely in their relations. It does not amount to an assertion that the persons *are* relations, as in the Augustinian view.

[17] *Contra Eunomium* I.247–48 (*GNO* I.99; *NPNF* 5, 58). In citing Gregory's *Contra Eunomium* I follow the numbering in *GNO*. It correlates with that in Migne and *NPNF* as follows: Book I is the same; II (*GNO*) = XIIB (Migne) or "Answer to Eunomius' Second Book" (*NPNF*); III.1–10 (*GNO*) = III–XII (Migne, *NPNF*); *Refutatio Confessionis Eunomii* (*GNO*) = II (Migne, *NPNF*).

[18] *Contra Eunomium* I.251–53.

Since the acts of origination do not count as *energeiai*, there is no obstacle to reaffirming the Athanasian argument from unity of *energeia* to unity of *ousia*. This the Cappadocians do frequently and at length.[19] The most elaborate statement of the argument is that by Gregory of Nyssa in *On Not Three Gods*. Gregory is careful to distinguish the identity of works that holds in the case of the Trinity from looser kinds of identity. Whenever several men work together, he says, one can distinguish the separate parts or stages of the activity performed by each. In the case of the Trinity there is no such distinction: although Scripture teaches that life is a gift of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, "we do not consider that we have had bestowed upon us three lives, one from each person separately, but the same life is wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, and prepared by the Son, and depends on the will of the Father."[20] In other words, it is not simply a case of identifying similar works or even works that are generically identical (as when carpenters hammer identical nails into identical wood), but of a single work that is performed by three persons. The Cappadocians, like Athanasius, see no incompatibility between this unity of the divine *energeia* and its possessing a certain Trinitarian structure: "The same life is wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, and prepared by the Son, and depends on the will of the Father"; "The character of the superintending and beholding power is one . . . issuing from the Father as from a spring, brought into operation by the Son, and perfecting its grace by the power of the Spirit."[21]

Does it truly make sense to think of the activity of three persons in this way? One who has challenged the Cappadocians on this point is G. C. Stead.[22] Stead poses a dilemma: does each of the three persons *contribute* to the common activity or *complete* it? He sees the emphasis on the unity of their activity as suggesting the first answer, that on its Trinitarian structure as suggesting the second. Either way presents a difficulty, for in the former case their contributions would seem to be redundant, whereas in the latter it would seem that the contribution of each is incomplete without that of the others. In reply, I would suggest that we consider the analogy of a single act performed by two persons and in the name of both, as when a husband and wife jointly give a gift. The analogy is imperfect because the act can be

[19] Basil, *Contra Eunomium* III.4, *On the Holy Spirit* 19 and 37; Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* I.394–97, *On the Holy Spirit* (*GNO* III.1, 92–93), *On the Holy Trinity* (*GNO* III.1, 10–12), *On Not Three Gods* passim, *On the Lord's Prayer* 3 (*GNO* VII.2, 41).

[20] *On Not Three Gods* (*GNO* III.1, 48; *NPNF* 5, 334). I have corrected the *NPNF* translation, which reverses "Holy Spirit" and "Father."

[21] *On Not Three Gods* (*GNO* III.1, 48 and 50; *NPNF* 5, 334). See similar statements in Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* 37–38, and Gregory Nazianzen, *Orations* 38.9.

[22] G. C. Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1994), 185.

broken down into constituents performed by one of the two (buying the gift, wrapping it, and so on). Nonetheless, *qua* gift-giver the husband and wife constitute a unity. This is not incompatible with the act's possessing a certain intrinsic structure, insofar as it might "issue" from one member of the pair (who, let us suppose, decides to give the gift) and be executed by the other. One could similarly ask, in such a case, whether each of the persons contributes to the common activity or completes it. The answer would be that each does indeed complete it, but that this does not imply that it could not be done by each alone, but rather that it is done in the name of both and under their joint authority.

## THE DIVINE NAMES

Thus far the Cappadocians' position has differed from that of Athanasius primarily in its greater detail. There is also an important respect in which they go beyond Athanasius altogether. Gregory of Nyssa argues that terms applied to God, whether 'god' itself or descriptive terms such as 'good' and 'just,' are indicative not of the divine nature but of the divine *energeiai*. Gregory's word for such terms is "name" (ὄνομα). It is important to bear in mind that for Gregory, as for most ancient authors, a name is not an arbitrary label but conveys a positive impression of the thing named. Gregory's own version of this view seems to owe something to Aristotle. He writes that "he who mentions man or some animal at once by the mention of the name impresses upon the hearer the form (εἶδος) of the animal; and in the same way all other things, by means of the names imposed upon them, are depicted in the heart of him who by hearing receives the appellation imposed upon the thing."[23] One is reminded of Aristotle's theory in the *De Interpretatione* that words are symbols or signs of states of the soul, and the states of soul are likenesses of the things themselves.[24] This view, in turn, is rooted in the theory of cognition of the *De Anima*, in which the mind takes on the form of the object thought. Other accounts of the meaning of names were also current in antiquity, but few would have questioned that a name conveys some positive information about the object named.[25]

[23] *Refutatio Confessionis Eunomii* 473 (*GNO* II.318; *NPNF* 5, 103).

[24] Aristotle, *De Interpretatione* 1 16a3–9.

[25] See particularly Basil's *Contra Eunomium* II.4, which advances a version of what is today called the description theory of names. For discussion of this passage and its antecedents see Paul Kalligas, "Basil of Caesarea on the Semantics of Proper Names," *Byzantine Philosophy and Its Ancient Sources*, ed. Katerina Ierodiakonou (Oxford, 2002), 31–48.

The question of whether and how God can be named is thus tantamount to the question of what can be known about God. Philo of Alexandria had already reached the conclusion that because God is unknowable He has no proper name (κύριον ὄνομα), and a similar teaching may be found in the Hermetica.[26] It is an idea with both Biblical and philosophical roots. Biblically, it is grounded in the mysterious nature of the divine name revealed in Exodus 3:14, "He Who Is," as well as other passages that treat the divine name as a mystery.[27] Philosophically, it is grounded in the principle that God as the source of being for other things must Himself be "beyond being," and therefore has no form that would enable a name to gain descriptive purchase. Philo seems to have been particularly influenced by the statement of the *Parmenides* that the One which does not partake of being has no name.[28] He understands the name revealed from the burning bush to Moses, not as an obstacle to this view, but as conferming it: what this name indicates is that God alone has true (that is, underivative) being, and hence that He has no name.[29] Among Christians prior to the Cappadocians, a similar view can be found in Clement of Alexandria, who devotes a chapter of his *Stromata* to the unknowability of God. Among his arguments is that since God is indivisible, He is without dimensions (ἀδιάστατον) and has no limit (μὴ ἔχον πέρας), and is therefore "without form or name."[30]

On such a view, what is the meaning of terms applied to God? Philo regards them as names of God's creative and kingly Powers.[31] In so doing he draws upon a longstanding tradition that the gods are invisible but can be seen in their powers or works.[32] Christian authors, although not reifying the divine powers to the same extent as Philo, likewise regarded the divine names as properly naming only God's activity in the world. Justin Martyr writes, "To the Father of all, who is unbegotten, there is no name given . . . But these words 'Father,' and 'God,' and 'Creator,' and 'Lord,' and 'Master,' are not names, but appellations derived from His good deeds and works."[33] Theophilus of Antioch offers the striking metaphor that man can no more see God than a seed can see the rind that

[26] Philo, *De Vita Mosis* I.75; *De Mutatione Nominum* 11–15; *De Somniis* I.230; *Corp. Herm.* V.10, XII.1; *Stob. Herm.* I.1; *Asclepius* 20 (see above, pp. 63, 132).

[27] For example, Genesis 32:29, Judges 13:18, and Exodus 23:21.

[28] *Parmenides* 142a; cf. John Dillon, "The Transcendence of God in Philo: Some Possible Sources," *Colloquy 16, Center for Hermeneutical Studies* (Berkeley, 1975).

[29] *De Vita Mosis* I.75.

[30] *Stromata* V.12 (*PG* 9 121B; *ANF* 2, 464); cf. II.2 and V.11.

[31] Philo, *De Mutatione Nominum* 29; *De Abrahamo* 121; *De Confusione Linguarum* 137.

[32] E.g., Xenophon, *Memorabilia* IV.3.13; Ps.-Aristotle, *De Mundo* 6 399b19–23, 7 401a11–b24; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* VII.147.

[33] II *Apology* 6 (*PG* 6 453A; *ANF* 1, 190).

encompasses it. He holds that God is to be recognized only by His "works and mighty deeds"; accordingly he derives the preeminent divine name, *theos*, from God's having placed (τεθεικέναι) all things in stability and His running and being active (θέειν) through all creation.[34] Clement asserts that we do not name God properly (κυρίως) but that all the divine names taken together are indicative of the divine power.[35] Even Origen, who is less apophatically inclined than these authors, holds that the names of God are ways of summarizing divine activities such as providence and judgment.[36]

Gregory fully shares the traditional emphasis on divine unknowability. Like Clement, he argues that the divine nature has no extension (διάστημα) or limit (πέρας), and therefore cannot be named.[37] But rather than referring the names said of God to the divine works or powers, he refers them to the divine *energeiai*. He cites various passages in which Scripture refers to idols and demons as gods, along with the peculiar words of God to Moses, "I have given thee as a god to Pharaoh" (Exodus 7:10). From these he infers that 'god' and 'godhead' (θεότης) are names of operations God exercises.

> The force of the appellation [θεός] is the indication of some power, either of oversight or of operation (ἐνεργετικής). But the divine nature itself, as it is, remains unexpressed by all the names that are conceived for it, as our doctrine declares. For in learning that He is beneficent, and a judge, good and just, and all else of the same kind, we learn diversities of His operations (ἐνέργειαι), but we are no more able to learn by our knowledge of His operations the nature of Him who works (τοῦ ἐνεργοῦντος).[38]

This passage is not wholly clear as to whether the divine names are actually names of the *energeiai* or are merely derived from the *energeiai*. The difference is important, for a term can be derived in one way and yet mean something else. (Hydrogen is so called because it can be used to generate water, yet not anything that can generate water is hydrogen.) Fortunately Gregory elsewhere makes it clear that he means the former: "the term 'godhead' is significant of operation (ἐνέργειαν σημαίνειν) and not of nature."[39]

[34] *Ad Autolycum* I.4–5 (*PG* 6 1029A–1032B; *ANF* 2, 90). The derivation from θέειν goes back to Plato, *Cratylus* 397d.

[35] *Stromata* V.12.

[36] Origen, *On Prayer* 24.2–3; cf. *De Principiis* I.1.6.

[37] *Contra Eunomium* I.360–69, II.69–70; *Homilies on Ecclesiastes* VII (*GNO* V. 411–14); *Homilies on the Song of Songs* V (*GNO* VI.157–58); cf. *Life of Moses* I.7, II.236–38.

[38] *On the Holy Trinity* (*GNO* III.1, 14; *NPNF* 5, 329); cf. *Contra Eunomium* II.149, 298–99, 304, III.5.58; *On Not Three Gods* (*GNO* III.1, 42–44).

[39] *On Not Three Gods* (*GNO* III.1, 46; *NPNF* 5, 333). Gregory's *Ad Graecos* might seem to contradict this statement, for there he says repeatedly that the term 'god' is indicative of substance. He qualifies this admission, however, by saying that *theos* indicates the divine substance in the same way that the terms 'that which neighs' and 'that which laughs' indicate the natures of horse and man. Just as

Nor does he hold this only about *theos* and *theotēs*; citing a reference to God's compassion and long-suffering, he asks: "Do [these words] indicate His *energeiai* or His nature? No one will say that they indicate (ἔχειν τὴν σημασίαν) anything but His *energeia*."[40] In general, even leaving such statements aside, to deny that terms said of God signify the divine nature raises the question of what precisely they do signify. Gregory gives every indication of believing that he has answered that question by citing the divine *energeiai*.

Regarding the divine names as names of the *energeiai* enables Gregory to achieve a powerful synthesis. He unifies the Trinitarian argument of Athanasius with traditional reflections about the divine names, and more particularly with the apophaticism that these reflections have at their core. For Gregory, the traditional argument for the *homoousion* is less an inference from commonality of *energeia* to commonality of *ousia* than a simple explication of what it means to speak of a being as God. As he explains in one of the passages dealing with the etymology of *theotēs*,

> if our interpretation of the term 'godhead' (θεότης) is a true one, and the things which are seen are said to be beheld (θεατά), and that which beholds them is called God (θέος), no one of the persons in the Trinity could reasonably be excluded from such an appellation on the ground of the sense involved in the word. For Scripture attributes the act of seeing equally to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[41]

In other words, since *theos* is a name that indicates the divine activity of oversight, and all three persons share this activity, all three are God. Gregory thus couples to the Athanasian argument a general and systematic distinction between the divine *energeiai*, which are known and can be named, and the divine *ousia*, which has no name and is known only through the *energeiai* of which it is the source.

### *OUSIA* AND *ENERGEIA*

This raises the question of what precisely the *energeiai* are and how we are to understand the contrast between them and the *ousia*. If the divine *energeiai* are what we name when we speak of God, then clearly it is inadequate

neighing and laughing are characteristic of horses and men, so to oversee all things is characteristic of the divine nature (*GNO* III.1, 21–22; cf. the translation by Stramara). Although here Gregory speaks of characteristic features (*idiōmata*) rather than *energeiai*, he still grounds the referential force of *theos* in activity.

40 *Contra Eunomium* II.151 (*GNO* I.269; *NPNF* 5, 265), citing Psalm 103:8. See also τὴν ἔνδειξιν ἔχει at *Contra Eunomium* II.583.

41 *On Not Three Gods* (*GNO* III.1, 44–45; *NPNF* 5, 333).

to understand them simply as activities or operations. Nonetheless, this meaning is still widely assumed, and it has been explicitly defended by some Thomistically inclined scholars.[42] The advantage it offers from a Thomistic standpoint is that it brings the Cappadocians in line with the doctrine of divine simplicity. If, as Aquinas holds, "everything which is not the divine essence is a creature," then there is no room for the divine *energeiai* as realities that are neither identical to the divine essence nor ultimately due to the act of creation.[43]

Such a simple binary opposition fails to capture the subtlety of the Cappadocians' thought. As I have pointed out, for Gregory of Nyssa the divine names are not merely derived from the *energeiai* but are names *of* the *energeiai*. The natural conclusion to draw is that the *energeiai* are not merely activities but must in some sense be God Himself. There are also other reasons leading to the same conclusion. One is that Gregory does not hesitate to identify God with the Good and the Beautiful, as well as with other divine attributes such as Power and Wisdom. His reasoning anticipates that which will later be used by Augustine to justify divine simplicity: namely, that God cannot possess such attributes by participation, for then He would be dependent on something else for what He essentially is.[44] Yet how can Gregory say this, when he also holds that the divine nature has no name and that terms such as 'good' and 'wise' when applied to God indicate the divine *energeiai*? The only explanation is that the *energeiai* are not merely activities of God, but must be God Himself under some nameable aspect or form.

A third line of thought pointing to the same conclusion goes back to the argument from unity of *energeia* to that of *ousia*. Surely it is obvious that if the divine *energeiai* are merely God's activities in the world, then this argument is invalid. In such a case nothing would rule out the possibility that the Father acts in all things *through* the Son and the Holy Spirit, who yet were created by Him and remain subordinate to Him in essence. We have already noted that such was the view of Eunomius, at least as regards the Son. Eunomius was here following the Origenist tradition. Writing near the beginning of *De Principiis*, Origen states: "As regards the power of his works, the Son is in no way whatever separate or different from the Father, nor is his work anything other than the Father's work, but there

[42] For example, Jean-Philippe Houdret, "Palamas et les Cappadociens," *Istina* 19 (1974), 260–71.
[43] For this dictum see *Summa Theologiae* 1.28.2 sed contra, and for divine simplicity see *ibid*. 1. 3 passim.
[44] *Contra Eunomium* 1.235, 276, 285–87; *On the Holy Spirit* (*GNO* III.1, 92).

is one and the same movement, so to speak, in all they do."[45] Yet it is well known that Origen denied the full divinity of the Son. Another who held such a view was the fourth-century Origenist, Eusebius of Caesarea.[46] In light of these precedents, for the Cappadocians to have believed that establishing identity of activity in the created realm establishes identity of substance would have been a remarkable blunder. Perhaps that is why Gregory is so careful to explain that he is not *inferring* from identity of *energeia* to the equal divinity of the three persons, but is rather "translating," as it were, a statement about identity of *energeia* to one about equal divinity.

The question, then, is what it would mean to think of the *energeiai* as not merely divine operations, but as in some sense God Himself. We can shed some light on this question by widening our scope to passages other than those dealing with Trinitarian doctrine or the divine names. Perhaps the most famous statement of the distinction between *ousia* and *energeia* is a response by St. Basil to the taunt of the Eunomians that one who does not know the divine essence worships what he does not know. In his Epistle 234, Basil replies:

We say that we know the greatness of God, His power, His wisdom, His goodness, His providence over us, and the justness of His judgment, but not His very essence (οὐσία) . . . But God, he says, is simple, and whatever attribute of Him you have reckoned as knowable is of His essence. The absurdities involved in this sophism are innumerable. When all these high attributes have been enumerated, are they all names of one essence? And is there the same mutual force in His awfulness and His loving-kindness, His justice and His creative power, His providence and His foreknowledge, His bestowal of rewards and punishments, His majesty and His providence? In mentioning any of these, do we declare His essence? . . . The *energeiai* are various, and the essence simple, but we say that we know our God from His *energeiai*, but do not undertake to approach near to His essence. His *energeiai* come down to us, but His essence remains beyond our reach.[47]

The distinction between God as He "comes down to us" and as He "remains beyond our reach" reappears in many different forms throughout the writings of the Cappadocians. Besides speaking of God's power, wisdom, goodness, and providence as divine *energeiai*, Gregory of Nyssa also refers to them as "things around the divine nature," τὰ περὶ τὴν θείαν

[45] *De Principiis* I.2.12 (*PG* 11 143B), tr. Butterworth. Although this passage survives only in Latin, the quotation of Wisdom 7:25 immediately preceding makes it clear that the original text spoke of *energeia*.

[46] See Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 128–32 (Origen), 225–26 (Eusebius).

[47] Basil, Epistle 234.1 (*PG* 32 872C–873B; *NPNF* 8, 274).

φύσιν.[48] In an important passage, Gregory Nazianzen echoes this phrase in the course of his explication of the name revealed to Moses from the burning bush.

In Himself [God] sums up and contains all being, having neither beginning in the past nor end in the future; like some great sea of being, limitless and unbounded, transcending all conception of time and nature, only adumbrated by the mind, and that very dimly and scantily – not from the things directly concerning Him, but from the things around Him (οὐκ ἐκ τῶν κατ᾽ αὐτόν, ἀλλ᾽ ἐκ τῶν περὶ αὐτόν); one image being got from one source and another from another, and combined into some sort of presentation of the truth, which escapes us when we have caught it, and takes to flight when we have conceived it, blazing forth upon our master-part, even when that is cleansed, as the lightning flash which will not stay its course does upon our sight – in order as I conceive by that part of it which we can comprehend to draw us to itself . . . and by that part of it which we cannot comprehend to move our wonder, and as an object of wonder to become more an object of desire, and being desired to purify, and by purifying to make us like God.[49]

This passage brings out well the subtle dynamic unity of the unknowable *ousia* and the knowable *energeiai*. It is not as if one can latch onto the *energeiai* (or the "things around God") as a substitute for God. They *are* God as He is capable of being apprehended by us. The apprehension is necessarily accompanied by a sense of incompleteness, so that the more one knows the more one seeks to know. That is how "the great sea of being . . . draws us to itself," feeding our desire by increasing our wonder.[50]

The two Gregories also use Biblical imagery to drive home the same point. A particularly important passage in this connection is Exodus 33, where Moses beseeches God to be permitted to see the divine glory. Before examining the Cappadocians' exegesis, let us first recall the Biblical text.

And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and

[48] *Contra Eunomium* II.89, III.5.59; *On Not Three Gods* (*GNO* III.1, 43); *On the Holy Spirit* (*GNO* III.1, 114); *Great Catechism* 5. See also Gregory's frequent references to things "around" or "contemplated around" God, e.g., *Contra Eunomium* II.102, 582, III.1.103–04, III.5.60, III.6.3; *On the Beatitudes* 6 (*GNO* VII.2, 141). Many of these texts are quoted and discussed in Basil Krivocheine, "Simplicity of the Divine Nature and the Distinctions in God, According to St. Gregory of Nyssa," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 21 (1977), 76–104.

[49] *Orations* 38.7 (*PG* 36 317B–C; *NPNF* 7, 346–47), repeated verbatim at *Orations* 45.3. See also *Orations* 30.17: "For neither has anyone yet breathed the whole air, nor has any mind entirely comprehended or speech exhaustively contained the essence (οὐσία) of God. But we sketch the things directly concerning Him from the things around Him (ἐκ τῶν περὶ αὐτόν σκιαγραφοῦντες τὰ κατ᾽ αὐτόν), and so obtain a certain faint and feeble and sequential mental image" (*PG* 36 125B; *NPNF* 7, 316).

[50] Gregory may have been inspired by Philo's treatment of the same theme; see Bradshaw, "The Vision of God in Philo of Alexandria."

will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy. And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen. (33:19–23)

Aside from the repeated contrast between the divine "face" and "back parts," one also notices that the divine glory includes the divine goodness, and perhaps also divine freedom (as exhibited in the apparently arbitrary allotment of grace and mercy). Gregory Nazianzen draws on this passage in order to give a poignant description of his own experience.

What is this that has happened to me, O friends and initiates and fellow lovers of the truth? I was running up to lay hold on God, and thus I went up into the mount, and drew aside the curtain of the cloud, and entered away from matter and material things, and as far as I could I withdrew within myself. And then when I looked up I scarce saw the back parts of God, although I was sheltered by the rock, the Word that was made flesh for us. And when I looked a little closer I saw, not the first and unmingled nature, known to itself – to the Trinity, I mean; not that which abides within the first veil and is hidden by the Cherubim, but only that nature which at last even reaches to us. And that is, so far as I can tell, the majesty, or as holy David calls it, the glory which is manifested among the creatures, which it has produced and governs. For these [i.e., majesty and glory] are the back parts of God, which He leaves behind Him, as tokens of Himself like the shadows and reflections of the sun in the water, which show the sun to our weak eyes because we cannot look at the sun itself.[51]

The reference to "the nature which at last even reaches to us" indicates that we are dealing here with the same distinction as in Basil. Just as in the passage on the "things about" God, the distinction is not between God and something created by Him, but rather between God as He is known to Himself (His "face") and as He is known to us (His "back parts"). Gregory, following the passage in Exodus, equates the latter with the divine glory. This is significant, for it indicates that the distinction is not one that Gregory regards as his own innovation, but is merely his way of articulating a prominent Scriptural theme.[52] Presumably Gregory would regard all the Biblical theophanies involving the divine "majesty" or "glory" as appearances of "the nature which at last reaches even to us."

[51] *Orations* 28.3 (*PG* 36 29A–B; *NPNF* 7, 289).

[52] The divine glory appears frequently throughout the Old Testament, e.g., Ex. 16:10, 24:16–17, 40:34–35, Num. 14:21, Deut. 5:24, I Kings 8:11, II Chron. 5:14, 7:1–3, Ps. 19:1, 63:2, 72:19.

Another passage illustrating the same distinction is Gregory of Nyssa's explication of the burning bush. Gregory interprets the light shining from the bush as the truth that illuminates the soul of one who pursues virtue.

> This truth, which was then manifested by the ineffable and mysterious illumination which came to Moses, is God . . . For if truth is God and truth is light – the Gospel testifies by these sublime and divine names to the God who made Himself visible to us in the flesh – such guidance of virtue leads us to know that light which has reached down even to human nature.[53]

Here again there is a distinction between God as He is in Himself and as He "has reached down to human nature." Gregory equates God as He has reached down to us with the truth that illuminates the soul and the light that shined from the bush. These, he says, are not creatures nor even activities taking place among creatures; they are God.

One possibility these passages may suggest is that the distinction between the divine *ousia* and *energeia* is like that between Kantian noumena and phenomena. The noumena are the "things in themselves" considered as they are and not as they are known by us; the phenomena are the same objects considered according to categories imposed by human ways of knowing. This comparison is helpful in underscoring that for the Cappadocians the fact that the divine *ousia* is unknowable is not due to our current circumstances but is a necessary limitation of any created intellect.[54] But in other respects it misses the mark. Kantian phenomena present themselves automatically, as it were, simply in virtue of the existence of things-in-themselves and our own nature as knowing subjects. The distinction between noumena and phenomena is thus not distinctive to any particular noumenon, but is a universal condition imposed by the circumstances that make knowledge possible. By contrast, the *energeiai* of God are not "automatic" but are acts by which God reaches down to creatures and manifests Himself to them. It will be noted that in saying this I have slipped back into the language of activity. But there is nothing objectionable about such language *per se*. After all, "activity" was the normal meaning of the term, and Basil and Gregory clearly appeal to this meaning in their critique of Eunomius. What is objectionable is the implication that the *energeiai*, being acts of self-manifestation, must belong to the created realm. The Cappadocians' view is that God's acts of self-manifestation are not interventions of God *ad extra*, but God Himself appearing in a certain form.

[53] *Life of Moses* II.19–20 (*GNO* VII.1, 39; tr. Malherbe and Ferguson, 59).

[54] See Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* I.683, II.69–70; Gregory Nazianzen, *Orations* 28.3–4.

In some respects this is not new. The belief that God is intrinsically active, and that this activity in some way constitutes the divine being, is one we have seen in many forms – in Aristotle, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Numenius, Alcinous, and Plotinus, among others. These authors identify the divine activity with either contemplation of the forms or a higher, non-intellective kind of self-apprehension (as in Plotinus); either way, the emphasis is on the self-sufficiency and self-directed character of the divine life. On such a view the creation and ordering of the world are merely by-products of God's act of perfect self-knowing. Even Philo is not wholly free of this approach, although in him it coexists uneasily with a more Biblical view of God as acting for creatures' sake.

The Cappadocians accept from the philosophical tradition the proposition that God is intrinsically active, so that the divine *energeia* can in some sense be identified with God Himself. But they reject the identification of the divine *energeia* with self-knowing. For them the *energeiai* at issue are decidedly other-directed, consisting both in specific acts such as the creation and oversight of the world and in more generalized modes of acting (or, as we would say, characteristics displayed in acting) such as divine wisdom, power, and goodness. Because of this difference they can no longer accept the identification of God's *ousia* and *energeia*. This identification had been upheld in a modified form even by Plotinus, who managed to reconcile it with the unknowability of the One by insisting on the non-intellective character of the One's internal act. The Cappadocians instead safeguard the unknowability of God by dropping the identification of *ousia* with *energeia*. The *energeiai* manifest the *ousia*, making it present in an active and dynamic way, but they do not constitute it. This way of conceiving the relation between *ousia* and *energeia* also has Aristotelian roots, and had been developed more or less explicitly by many of the authors we have studied. In the Hermetica there are even some hesitant attempts to apply it to God. But the Cappadocians are the first to do so rigorously and consistently.

That is not to say that they have no interest in the internal life of God. Their comments on this point are brief, but worth noting for the light they shed on the comparison with the philosophical tradition. Gregory of Nyssa attributes to God a self-directed activity which he identifies with self-love, or, more properly, love of the Beautiful.

> The life of the Supreme Being is love (ἀγάπη), seeing that the Beautiful is necessarily lovable to those who recognize it . . . No satiety interrupting this continuous capacity to love the Beautiful, God's life will have its activity in love (δι' ἀγάπης

ἐνεργηθήσεται), which life is thus in itself beautiful, and is essentially of a loving disposition towards the Beautiful, and receives no check to this activity of love (τῆς κατὰ τὴν ἀγάπην ἐνεργείας).[55]

Gregory is no doubt inspired by the Biblical identification of God with love (I John 4:8, 16). Interestingly, his description is non-committal regarding whether the self-knowledge and self-love of God are noetic or hypernoetic; nor does he attempt, like Victorinus, to correlate this self-knowledge and self-love with the unfolding of the divine life into the Trinity. The Cappadocians are wary of claiming to know very much about the internal life of God.[56] In opposition to many of the authors in the philosophical tradition, they reject any attempt to understand the creation and ordering of the world as necessary by-products of God's internal activity. Basil denies that creation took place without deliberate choice (ἀπροαίρετος) or "as the flame is the cause of the brightness." Gregory of Nyssa likewise attributes creation to the will (θέλησις or βούλησις) of God.[57] It is true that Gregory also says that God necessarily wills the good, but this does not in itself exclude contingency, unless one adds (as Gregory does not) that in each case there is only one good.[58] Both Gregories also assert that it was fitting or appropriate (ἔδει) that God create, but this too falls short of an assertion of necessity.[59] On the whole, the drift of the Cappadocians' thought is clearly to allow that at least some of God's *energeiai* could have been otherwise. This is their answer to Eunomius' charge that to apply the distinction of *ousia* and *energeia* to God must lead to emanationism.

Looking at their view as a whole, it is perhaps at this point that difficulties are most apparent. How is it that the divine *energeiai* truly are God, if they are also willed by God? Does the fact that they could be different mean that God Himself could be different? There is also the question of what precisely it means to refer to divine attributes such as wisdom, power, and goodness as *energeiai*. I have suggested that they are "generalized modes of acting."

[55] *On the Soul and Resurrection* (*PG* 46 96c–97a; *NPNF* 5, 450).

[56] Note that Basil speaks of the *energeiai* of the Holy Spirit "before the creation," but only in order to challenge his readers rhetorically to identify what they were: *On the Holy Spirit* 49 (*PG* 32 156c; *NPNF* 8, 30).

[57] Basil, *Hexaemeron* 1.7 (*PG* 29 17b–c; *NPNF* 8, 56); Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection* (*PG* 46 121b, 124b; *NPNF* 5, 457–58).

[58] *Contra Eunomium* iii.6.18 (*GNO* ii. 192; *NPNF* 5, 202).

[59] Gregory Nazianzen, *Orations* 38.9 (repeated at 45.5); Gregory of Nyssa, *Great Catechism* 5. The latter text contrasts fittingness and necessity: "not urged to framing man by any necessity (ἀναγκῃ τινί), but in the superabundance of love operating the production of such a creature; for it was fitting (ἔδει) that neither His light should be unseen, nor His glory without witness, nor His goodness unenjoyed" (*GNO* iii.4, 17; *NPNF* 5, 478).

If so, could they be different? Could God act in such a way that goodness or power, for instance, would not be among His *energeiai*? These questions show that a blanket assertion of freedom is no more adequate than a blanket assertion of necessity. There must be some principled way of distinguishing the features that necessarily accompany any manifestation of God from those that result from choice; otherwise we shall have escaped emanationism only to land in voluntarism. It is hard to know how such issues could be addressed, other than by attempting to understand God's external activity as in some way a manifestation – albeit a free manifestation – of His internal life. If so, then one cannot avoid questions of the sort raised within the philosophical tradition, however much one may admire the Cappadocians' guarded and reverent silence.

Later authors in the eastern tradition will have more to say on these issues. For now let us take stock of what a powerful tool the distinction of *ousia* and *energeia* has turned out to be. It furnishes the Cappadocians with an important argument for the orthodox view of the Trinity; it enables them to unify this argument with their doctrine of divine names, including their apophaticism about the divine essence; and it gives them a framework (although not an unproblematic one) for understanding divine freedom. Nor is that all. In the next section I will show that it also plays an important role in their mysticism and their understanding of the Christian life.

## PARTICIPATION REVISITED

The previous chapter pointed out how the Pauline writings provide a rich variety of ways to conceive of the coalescing of human and divine activity. We also observed that for the most part these hints were left undeveloped during the ante-Nicene era; early Christian authors attributed phenomena such as prophecy and speaking in tongues to the divine *energeia*, but they had little to say about how the divine *energeia* could also be effective in ordinary human actions. The first real steps in this direction were taken by the Cappadocians. St. Basil in *On the Holy Spirit* makes it clear that participation in the divine *energeiai* results not only in particular miraculous acts, but also in enduring and habitual states of the soul.

> As is the power of seeing in the healthy eye, so is the *energeia* of the Spirit in the purified soul . . . And as the skill in him who has acquired it, so is the grace of the Spirit ever present in the recipient, though not continuously active (ἐνεργοῦσα). For as the skill is potentially in the artisan, but only in operation (ἐνεργείᾳ) when he is working in accordance with it, so also the Spirit is present

with those who are worthy, but works (ἐνεργεῖ) as need requires, in prophecies, or in healings, or in some other carrying into effect of His powers (τισὶ δυνάμεων ἐνεργήμασιν).[60]

Here the *energeiai* of the Spirit are not only individual acts but also the states of soul that make these acts possible. Since both are *energeiai*, Basil comes to the paradoxical conclusion that an *energeia* can be present both potentially and "in operation." This is verbally parallel to the Aristotelian thesis that both first and second actualities are *energeiai*. The difference is that Basil is using *energeia* to mean activity or operation; in effect, he reinterprets Aristotle's distinction to make the point that both first and second actualities can be (in the appropriate cases) divine operations. The entire passage underscores the immanence of the divine *energeia* within the soul and the extent to which, once acquired, it is an integral and enduring characteristic even when it is not openly manifested.

Basil also speaks of the divine *energeia* in a way that fits the sense of "energy." Drawing on I Corinthians 12, he speaks of the distribution of the gifts of the Spirit as that of a divine energy that is equally present to all, although received only in proportion to faith.

[The Spirit is] by nature unapproachable, apprehended by reason of its goodness, filling all things with its power, but communicated only to the worthy; not shared in one measure, but distributing its energy (διαροῦν τὴν ἐνέργειαν) according to the proportion of faith; in essence simple, in powers various, wholly present in each and being wholly present everywhere; impassively divided and shared without loss, after the likeness of the sunbeam, whose kindly light falls on him who enjoys it as though it shone for him alone, yet illumines land and sea and mingles with the air. So, too, is the Spirit to everyone who receives it, as though given to him alone, and yet it sends forth grace sufficient and full for all mankind, and is enjoyed by all who share it, according to the capacity, not of its power, but of their nature.[61]

One is reminded of Gregory Nazianzen's description of how Moses is able to perceive only the "back parts" of God. The limitation is not one in God Himself, but in Moses' ability to apprehend Him. In the same way, although the Spirit is wholly present in His energies, He is received only in proportion to the capacity – that is, the faith – of the recipient. Aside from its Scriptural inspiration, this understanding of the presence of the Spirit also bears a marked resemblance to that of the "integral omnipresence" of

[60] *On the Holy Spirit* 61 (*PG* 32 180C–D; *NPNF* 8, 38).
[61] *On the Holy Spirit* 22 (*PG* 32 108C–109A; *NPNF* 8, 15).

being in Plotinus, although whether there was any direct influence would be hard to say.[62]

The occurrence of the sense of *energeia* as "energy" reminds us that the divine *energeiai* are not merely operations, but God Himself as manifested within creation. It follows that the sort of participation Basil describes is not merely cooperation with God, but an actual participation in the divine being. Basil does not shy away from this conclusion. Immediately after the passage quoted, he asks how the Holy Spirit can be brought into such intimate association with a human soul. His answer is that the soul must be purified of the passions that alienate it from God, cleansing and restoring the image of God within man. This enables the soul both to see clearly its divine model and to reflect that model outward to the world. Basil describes the effects of this transformation:

> Just as when a sunbeam falls on bright and transparent bodies, they themselves become brilliant too, and shed forth a fresh brightness from themselves, so souls wherein the Spirit dwells, illuminated by the Spirit, themselves become spiritual, and send forth their grace to others. Hence comes foreknowledge of the future, understanding of mysteries, apprehension of what is hidden, distribution of good gifts, the heavenly citizenship, a place in the chorus of angels, joy without end, abiding in God, the being made like to God, and, highest of all, the being made God.[63]

The reference to "being made God" is an expression of the characteristically eastern Christian belief in *theōsis*, deification. This belief is most famously encapsulated in the dictum of Athanasius that Christ "was made man in order that we might be made God."[64] It is important to note that Basil's description is not limited to the afterlife, but is a description of the gifts of the Spirit available here and now. Nor is there any hint that "being made God" is a metaphor. Certainly the divine state that Basil describes is derivative, for it depends on the action of the Spirit and the presence of the divine image in man; nonetheless, one who is illuminated by the Spirit truly is deified, just as truly as the *energeia* in which he shares is God.

The connections between moral purification, the vision of God, and participation in the divine *energeia* are worked out more thoroughly in the sixth of Gregory of Nyssa's *Homilies on the Beatitudes*. Gregory's topic is

[62] See *Enn.* VI.4–5, especially VI.4.11.1–9. For the theme of integral omnipresence in other ancient authors see P. L. Reynolds, "The Essence, Power, and Presence of God: Fragments of the History of an Idea, from Neopythagoreanism to Peter Abelard," *From Athens to Chartres: Neoplatonism and Medieval Thought*, ed. Haijo Jan Westra (Leiden, 1992), 351–80.

[63] *On the Holy Spirit* 23 (*PG* 32 109B–C; *NPNF* 8, 15–16).

[64] Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 54.3 (*PG* 25 192B; *NPNF* 4, 65); cf. *Orations against the Arians* II.70 and the notes to these passages in *NPNF*.

the verse, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). He first explains that Scripture uses "to see" synonymously with "to have" or "to share in." It follows that "the man who sees God possesses in this act of seeing all there is of the things that are good."[65] The difficulty is that other passages in Scripture deny the very possibility of seeing God: St. John states that "No man hath seen God at any time" (John 1:18), and St. Paul describes God as He "whom no man hath seen, nor can see" (I Timothy 6:16). Speaking of these verses, Gregory asks: "Do you realize the vertigo of the soul that is drawn to the depths contemplated in these words? If God is life, then the man who does not see Him does not see life. On the other hand, the divinely inspired prophets and apostles testify that God cannot be seen. Is not the hope of man annihilated?"[66] Gregory's initial response is to suggest that God can be seen in creation the way that an artist is seen in his works. By examining creation one can come to know God's "power, purity, constancy, and freedom from contrariety," which jointly "engrave on the soul the impress of a divine and transcendent Mind."[67] Gregory summarizes this initial sort of knowledge in the statement that "He who is invisible by nature becomes visible in His *energeiai* when He is contemplated in the things that are around Him."[68]

So far the *energeiai* are simply God's operations within the created order. Clearly this cannot be all that the Beatitude has in view, however, for if "to see" means to participate in or possess, then God's being seen cannot consist merely in inferential knowledge. In the second part of the homily Gregory finds the key to a deeper understanding in the doctrine that man is made in the image of God. Citing the verse, "The Kingdom of God is within you," he explains:

> By this we should learn that if a man's heart has been purified from every creature and from all unruly affections, he will see the image of the divine nature in his own beauty . . . If a man who is pure of heart sees himself, he sees in himself what he desires; and thus he becomes blessed, because when he looks at his own purity, he sees the archetype in the image.[69]

What precisely is seen in such a vision? The answer brings us full circle:

> The Godhead is purity, freedom from passion, and separation from all evil. If therefore these things be in you, God is indeed in you . . . But what is this vision? It is purity, sanctity, simplicity, and other such luminous reflections of the divine nature, in which God is contemplated.[70]

[65] *Homilies on the Beatitudes* 6 (*GNO* vii.2, 138); translations are those of Graef.
[66] *Ibid.* (*GNO* vii.2, 137–38).
[67] *Ibid.* (*GNO* vii.2, 141).
[68] *Ibid.* (*GNO* vii.2, 141).
[69] *Ibid.* (*GNO* vii.2, 142–43).
[70] *Ibid.* (*GNO* vii.2, 144).

Although in this second portion of the homily Gregory does not use the term *energeia*, there is a straightforward connection between what he says here and the passages where he does so. In the first part the divine *energeiai* are the operations that manifest God's goodness, power, purity, constancy, and freedom from contrariety. Now we find a very similar list – purity, sanctity, simplicity, freedom from passion, separation from evil – as the qualities of the heart that constitute the purified divine image, "God in you." It seems clear that these qualities are also the outcome or manifestation of the divine *energeiai*, but with the difference that the latter are now conceived as operating specifically within the human heart.

There are two ways in which this working can be understood, and the difference between them is crucial. Do the divine *energeiai* operating in the heart require human cooperation? If the answer is no, then the difference between the second way in which God is known and the analogical knowledge described earlier is ultimately no more than one of scope or location. In the analogical case God works upon the created world, which remains passive with respect to Him as does a work of art with respect to its maker. If the human heart is also passive with respect to God, then it plays the role of a smaller version of creation, a sort of canvas on which God paints. On the other hand, if cooperation is necessary then the notion of participation acquires a much richer meaning. The human agent would then manifest these divine traits in virtue of his own action, the divine *energeia* working only in and through his own *energeia*. In that case it would be precisely in virtue of the coalescing of activities that the image which had been obscured becomes clear, enabling the human agent to see God within his own heart; the "vision" would be ultimately a form of shared activity, a way of seeing God by doing what He does and sharing in His life.

The remainder of the homily makes it clear that Gregory has in mind the second of these alternatives. To the question what one must do to become pure in the way he has described, his answer is simply "the whole teaching of the Gospel." Unlike the Mosaic Law, the Gospel "punishes not so much the evil deed itself, as guards against even the beginning of it; for to remove evil from the very choice of the will is to free life perfectly from bad works."[71] Purity is the extinction of the desire to do evil, and this in turn is the result of obedience to the Gospels, and particularly of the discipline over one's own thoughts that they enjoin. At the end of the homily Gregory returns to the role of free will in producing inner purity: "Hence, as we have learned what is an evil life and what is a good one – for we have it in the power

[71] *Ibid.* (*GNO* VII.2, 146).

of our free will (ἐξουσίας ἡμῖν κατὰ τὸ αὐτεξούσιον τῆς προαιρέσεως) to choose either of these . . . Let us become clean of heart, so that we may be blessed when the divine image is formed in us through purity of life."[72] Clearly for Gregory participation in the divine *energeia* is not something imposed from without, but must be actively sought through the exercise of one's free capacities.

Thus the divine *energeiai* are for Gregory the operations of God in the world at large *and in the human heart* – operations which God calls upon each person to share and thereby make his own. In effect Gregory presents an understanding of participation as synergy, a way of knowing another by sharing in his activity.[73] The Biblical sources for this understanding were made clear in the previous chapter. Gregory performs a further synthesis by emphasizing that to participate in the divine life is not an adventitious achievement, but the proper fulfillment of man's nature as made in the image of God. His description of the restored image as "God in you" suggests that, like Basil, he also sees such participation as a means of deification. This raises the question of whether there was any influence on Gregory (or Basil) by Iamblichus, who also views participation in the divine *energeia* as a means of achieving a deifying knowledge of God. Although a direct influence cannot be ruled out, it is more likely that we face here a case where pagans and Christians were motivated by similar aspirations and found similar ways of articulating them.[74] The convergence between Iamblichus and Gregory is certainly striking, however, and before closing this section it will be worthwhile to compare their views.

One similarity is that both authors insist that there can be only a union of *energeia* between man and God, not of *ousia*. It is true that Gregory insists more strongly on the unknowability of the divine *ousia* than does Iamblichus, but this merely reflects the fact that he is a monotheist, whereas for Iamblichus the gods with whom union can be achieved are subordinate to other more fully unknowable deities.[75] As pointed out earlier, Iamblichus

[72] *Ibid.* (*GNO* vii.2, 148).

[73] The same theme is present in Gregory's *De Instituto Christiano*, which speaks extensively of *sunergia* between God and man. See Werner Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature: Gregory of Nyssa and Macarius* (Leiden, 1954), 85–106, and Donald Abel, "The Doctrine of Synergism in Gregory of Nyssa's *De Instituto Christiano*," *Thomist* 45 (1981), 430–48.

[74] Iamblichus was well known in the late fourth century because of the use made of his works by the Emperor Julian. Rist, "Basil's Neoplatonism," 184–85, observes that although Basil and Gregory Nazianzen could have studied Iamblichus when they were students at Athens in the 350s, they probably did not in view of his association with paganism. The same is true of Gregory, unless he did so on the principle of "know your enemy."

[75] See *De Mysteriis* viii.2–3; also Dillon, "Iamblichus of Chalcis," 880–90.

does hold that the *ousiai* of the gods are not known through their *energeiai*; this is quite close to the position of Gregory.

Another similarity is in the view each holds (although in different forms) that union with the divine *energeia* is a way of achieving self-knowledge and recovering one's true self. For Gregory the process is one of purifying and uncovering the divine image within the soul. It ends by making manifest what had in a sense been true all along, that "God is in you." For Iamblichus the knowledge of the gods is "co-existent with our very being," so that in theurgy we do not invoke the gods as beings foreign to us; the divine in us "seeks vehemently that which is like itself."[76] Both authors ultimately ground the possibility of union with the divine in the fact that the divine already constitutes the inmost reaches of our being.

Next is a point on which, although it would be too much to speak of similarity, there is at least some partial contact. We saw that among the several ways of sharing the divine *energeia* distinguished by Iamblichus, one is that in which "we exercise our activity" in common with God.[77] This would seem to be the highest of the various forms of union recognized by Iamblichus, and therefore, presumably, the goal of the others. Nonetheless Iamblichus does not give it much attention. In Gregory the possibility of such a coalescence of *energeia* is the focal point of discussion. In fact it is the only way of participating in the divine *energeia* that he recognizes, leaving aside (as "participation" in only a Pickwickian sense) the analogical knowledge he discusses early in the homily on the sixth Beatitude.

This difference is closely tied to another. For Iamblichus the way to achieve participation is by performing the rites instituted for this purpose by the gods. He seems to think of the state thus achieved as one in which the human agent's individual personality is submerged – or, as he might prefer to put it, transcended. Alternatively, he allows that the divine *energeiai* can be appropriated and misused in a way that the gods would abhor. In either case the relation between the *energeiai* and the human agent's personality remains external: either the *energeiai* control the human agent, or the human agent controls the *energeiai*. For Gregory, by contrast, the way to achieve participation is by attaining moral purity, and this purity comes only through voluntary obedience to the commands of the Gospel. The human agent's personality remains engaged throughout. Gregory's achievement is to have identified a way in which the divine can penetrate the human without suffocating the human.

[76] *De Mysteriis* I.15.46 (quoted above, p. 142). [77] *De Mysteriis* III.5.111 (quoted above, p. 140).

## DIONYSIUS: PROCESSION

After the Cappadocians *energeia* receded for a time from the center of theological interest. Both Greek and Latin authors frequently repeated the argument from unity of operation to unity of essence, but there was little attempt to carry the discussion beyond where the Cappadocians had left it.[78] In Latin the terms most frequently used as correlative to *energeia* were *opus* or *operatio*. This is one reason why the argument was not taken in the sense that I have given it here; to suggest that the divine *opera* are themselves God (although distinct from the divine *essentia*) would have provoked only bewilderment. Even Greek authors showed little interest in drawing together the various strands of the Cappadocians' thought or in developing on this basis a unified conception of the divine *energeia*. Their interests lay elsewhere, above all in the ongoing Christological debates.

The next important developments of our topic occur in the mysterious author known as St. Dionysius the Areopagite. It is today widely accepted that the author of the Dionysian corpus was a Syrian Christian writing in the late fifth or early sixth century.[79] During the period we are considering, however, his claim to be the Dionysius converted by St. Paul was accepted at face value. It is one of the puzzles of history that this claim, which today seems so obviously false, was not more widely questioned at the time. Georges Florovsky has remarked that "one must not try to explain the fact that the *corpus* was held in such high regard in antiquity merely by claiming that people were convinced it belonged to an authoritative writer of the apostolic era. Its great merits would sooner have led them to conclude it was ancient than the other way around."[80] Perhaps, far from the authority of the Corpus resting on the identification, it would be more fair to say that the acceptability of the identification rested on the authority of the Corpus. At any rate, the author of the Corpus, whatever his real name, is even today regarded as a saint and father of the Church by Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox.

[78] For references see Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 257–64, and Shapland, *Letters of Saint Athanasius*, 110 n. 11. An exception to the general lack of originality was St. Augustine, who developed his famous comparison between the Trinity and memory, intellect, and will precisely in order to illustrate how three things can be separate but have a single operation (Sermon 52.19–23).

[79] See Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London, 1989), 1–2, 14, 60, 64. The *terminus ante quem* is 528, the first datable appearance of a work by Severus of Antioch containing a quotation from Dionysius.

[80] Georges Florovsky, *The Byzantine Ascetic and Spiritual Fathers* (Postfach, 1987), 204–05. Florovsky goes on to contrast the reception of the Areopagitica to that of the *Apostolic Canons* and *Apostolic Constitutions*, which were recognized as forgeries.

The work of Dionysius that most clearly shows his affinity to the Cappadocians is *The Divine Names*. Its starting point is the familiar paradox that God, who is beyond every name, is given many names in Scripture. To what do the names refer? Dionysius' answer is that "the entire sacred hymn of the theologians" relates the names to "the beneficent processions of God" (τὰς ἀγαθουργοὺς τῆς θεαρχίας προόδους).[81] He then gives several examples. The first is particularly instructive: "God is praised as a monad and henad because of the simplicity and unity of His supernatural indivisibility. By it we are unified as by a unifying power and brought together into a deiform unity and godlike oneness, while our divisible heterogeneity is transcendently folded into one."[82] This example is striking because it is about a pair of names, 'monad' and 'henad,' that would seem to refer to God in isolation. For Dionysius even these names are a way of describing God's effect upon creatures. Yet they are not solely that, for God is Himself characterized by "supernatural indivisibility"; He has in a transcendent way the feature that He imparts to others.

This example illustrates the general principle that each divine name encapsulates a bipolar relation, one pole of which is the characteristic imparted by God and the other its correlative within God. Dionysius goes on to make this point explicit:

> the goodness that is beyond names is not just the cause of cohesion or life or perfection, so as to be named solely from this or some other act of providence; by the absolute goodness of its single all-creative providence it has embraced all things beforehand within itself, though in a way that is unbounded and without multiplicity.[83]

He is careful to point out that this relationship in no way diminishes the transcendence of God or suggests that He is like any creature, for "there is no exact likeness between the cause and the things that are caused, save that the things caused contain impressed images of their causes."[84] On the other hand, precisely because the effect is an image of the cause there is a sense in which the same term may rightly be said of both: "if someone were to say that Life itself (τὴν αὐτοζωὴν) lives or Light itself (τὸ αὐτοφῶς) is enlightened, he would not, I think, speak truly – unless he were to say that they do so in a different mode, since the things caused preexist more fully and essentially in their causes."[85]

[81] *Divine Names* [=*DN*] I.4 (*PG* 3 589D). I use the critical edition, *Corpus Dionysiacum* by Suchla, Heil, and Ritter, which conveniently includes the Migne numbers in the margin. Translations are my own.
[82] *Ibid.*: cf. the similar passages at II.11 649C and XIII.2 977C.
[83] *DN* I.7 596D–597A.
[84] *DN* II.8 645C.
[85] *DN* II.8 645D.

The bipolarity of the divine names explains a fact that would otherwise be rather puzzling: besides saying that the divine names refer to the beneficent processions, Dionysius also says that they refer to God *simpliciter*. "All the names befitting God . . . are ascribed to the entire fullness of the complete and entire divinity, absolutely and completely, without division or reservation."[86] In other words, since each of the characteristics imparted to creatures exists in a more complete and unified way in God Himself, in naming them one also names God. The *proodoi* both *are* God and *manifest* God, who remains beyond them as their source. As Dionysius later remarks, God is "a manifestation of Himself through Himself."[87] If this seems paradoxical, it is no more so than the statement of Gregory Nazianzen that God can be seen only in His "back parts." The back parts both *are* God and *manifest* God, inasmuch as they constitute the presence of that which no creature can apprehend in its entirety.

The presence of God within the created world is for Dionysius a kind of divine ecstasy, a state in which God "stands outside of Himself." The term *ekstasis* had long been traditional for describing the rapture of creatures who are caught up outside themselves into God. Dionysius turns this traditional usage on its head: not only are creatures caught up into God, but God is caught up into creatures.

> For the sake of truth one must dare to say that even He who is the cause of all, by the beautiful and good yearning (ἔρωτι) that He has for all and because of the excess of His yearning goodness, comes to be outside of Himself (ἔξω ἑαυτοῦ γίνεται) in the providential acts He bestows upon all. He is, as it were, bewitched by His goodness and yearning and charity (ἀγαπήσει). From His transcendence beyond all He is brought down to that which is in all, in accordance with His ecstatic and supersubstantial power of remaining.[88]

The idea of an "ecstatic power of remaining" is a paradox – the same paradox as that presented by the divine *proodoi* themselves. In stating it Dionysius clearly does not wish to suggest that God undergoes change or that the divine ecstasy is some form of extraordinary experience. Shortly before the passage quoted, he says that the divine *erōs* is ecstatic precisely in that "it does not allow the lovers to belong to themselves, but to the beloved," and he goes on to gloss this statement by the words of St. Paul, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). For St. Paul, to be fully possessed by God is not the abandonment of his own proper nature, but its fulfillment. Although there can be no question of "fulfillment" in God, it is true nonetheless that in coming

[86] *DN* II.1 636C. [87] ἔκφασιν ὄντα ἑαυτοῦ δἰ ἑαυτοῦ, *DN* IV.14 712C. [88] *DN* IV.13 712A–B.

to center His own life upon others He does not abandon that which He already is.

The bipolarity in the Dionysian conception of the divine names should look familiar, for it is the same as that which we encountered in the Cappadocians. For the Cappadocians, the *energeiai* of God are both acts of self-manifestation and God Himself appearing in a certain form. The same is true of the divine *proodoi* in Dionysius. As he puts it in chapter 5, on being, the various divine *proodoi* are acts of providence (προνοίας) that differ in their degree of universality.[89] Later Dionysius seems to use the terms *proodos* and *energeia* as equivalents.[90] The reason he generally prefers *proodos* is no doubt because of the associations given it by the Neoplatonists. In the Neoplatonic theory of emanation, any effect remains in its cause (the stage of μονή), proceeds from it (the stage of πρόοδος), and returns to it (the stage of ἐπιστροφή).[91] *Proodos* is thus an ideal term to convey the complex notion Dionysius wishes to express – that of a procession from God which manifests, at a lower level of being, that which also "remains" with God in His own nature.

## DIONYSIUS: RETURN

Given his adoption of this Neoplatonic framework, one would expect that Dionysius would also give some attention to the third stage, that of return. The expectation is not disappointed. He announces the transition to this stage at the beginning of *The Celestial Hierarchy*:

> "Every good and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights." But every illuminating procession (πρόοδος) put in motion by the Father, coming to us bearing good gifts, is also a unifying power that uplifts and enfolds us, returning us to the unity and deifying simplicity of the Father who draws us together; for as Scripture teaches, "from Him and to Him are all things."[92]

[89] *DN* v.2 816D–817A.

[90] God "is present to all by His uncontainable embracing of all and by the providential processions and activities (προόδοις καὶ ἐνεργείαις) He exercises upon all . . . The straight motion [attributed to Him] should be considered to be the undeviating procession of His activities (πρόοδον τῶν ἐνεργειῶν)" (*DN* ix.9 916C). The phrase *proodon tōn energeiōn* indicates that there is at least a distinction in nuance between the two terms. Alexander Golitzin, *Et Introibo ad Altare Dei: The Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita* (Thessalonica, 1994), 60, suggests that *dunamis* (which Dionysius also uses as roughly synonymous to *proodos*) can be included to form a triad *proodos–dunamis–energeia*, each term indicating something more concrete or realized than the one before.

[91] See Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, Prop. 35.

[92] *Celestial Hierarchy* [=*CH*] i.1 120B–121A, citing James 1:17 and Romans 11:36.

The theme of *The Celestial Hierarchy* and its sequel, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, is how the divinely ordained hierarchies of the angels and the Church lead those who are receptive back to God. In these treatises it soon becomes apparent that there is another reason why Dionysius made little reference to *energeia* in *The Divine Names*: he has been reserving it for a different role. The third chapter of *The Celestial Hierarchy* defines a hierarchy as follows.

A hierarchy is, in my view, a sacred order and knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) and activity (ἐνέργεια), the whole of which is assimilated as closely as possible to the divine, and uplifted to the imitation of God in proportion to the illuminations granted it by God.[93]

It is striking how this definition juxtaposes order and knowledge with *energeia*. Although a hierarchy is a fixed order, its whole purpose is an activity, that of imparting the knowledge of God and raising its participants up to Him. Dionysius continues:

The aim of a hierarchy is assimilation as nearly as possible to God and union with Him, having Him as the leader of every sacred knowledge and activity (ἐνεργείας) . . . Therefore one who speaks of a hierarchy indicates a certain arrangement all of which is sacred, an image of the comeliness of God. It celebrates the mysteries of its illumination in hierarchical orders and states of knowledge, being assimilated so far as is lawful to its source. Perfection for each allotted member of the hierarchy consists in being led upward, in his own proper degree, to the imitation of God. Even more marvellously, it is, as the Scriptures say, to become a "co-worker of God" (θεοῦ συνεργόν, I Cor. 3:9) and to exhibit in oneself the divine activity (ἐνέργειαν), which is thus made manifest so far as possible.[94]

We note that it is the entire hierarchy which is "an image of the comeliness of God" and is assimilated to its divine source. That is why the divinization that the hierarchy imparts is available to each member only insofar as he performs his allotted role. Nothing is done alone; all is done within the hierarchy, which *as a whole* is the divine image. By imitating God in the way appropriate to his station in the hierarchy, each member becomes a co-worker with God and shares in the divine *energeia*.

But why must there be a hierarchical structure? For Dionysius the reason is the structure intrinsic to the divine *energeia*. He goes on to explain that God acts to purify, illuminate, and perfect creatures, or rather is Himself purification, illumination, and perfection. What God does (and is) all at

[93] *CH* III.1 164D. Lampe's *Patristic Greek Lexicon* makes the interesting suggestion that *epistēmē* in this definition means discipline rather than knowledge (s.v. ἐπιστήμη). Although I follow conventional scholarship in taking it as knowledge, this possibility is worth bearing in mind.

[94] *CH* III.2 165A–B.

once, the hierarchy enacts in a serial manner: "since the order of the hierarchy is for some to purify and others to be purified, for some to illumine and others to be illuminated, for some to perfect and others to be perfected, each imitates God in the way that is appropriate to his own function."[95] Furthermore, the three divine *energeiai* – purification, illumination, and perfection – themselves follow a harmonious order, and it is for this reason that creatures who manifest them must be arranged in a hierarchical fashion.

> Since God first purifies the minds in whom He has come to be present, then illuminates them, and having illuminated them perfects them into a godlike completion, naturally the hierarchy, being an image of the divine, distributes itself into distinct orders and powers. It thereby manifests palpably the divine operations (ἐνεργείας), which are established firmly and without confusion in holy and pure ranks.[96]

Just as the whole hierarchy is an image of the divine beauty, the hierarchical distinctions are "images of the divine operations" (θείων ἐνεργειῶν εἰκόνες).[97] It is perhaps for this reason that the whole hierarchy is said not only to *perform* an *energeia*, but to *be* an *energeia*.

The triple function of purification, illumination, and perfection also determines the internal structure of the hierarchies. Each hierarchy is divided into three triads, each of which purifies, illuminates, and perfects the one below it. Sometimes there is also a further distinction, each of the three levels within the triad being correlated specifically to one of these functions. In the ecclesiastical hierarchy the lowest triad consists of catechumens and others temporarily outside the Church (who are being purified), the laity (who are being illuminated), and monks (who are being perfected); followed, in the second triad, by deacons (who purify), priests (who illuminate), and hierarchs (who perfect). The correlations grow somewhat looser in the highest triad, consisting of baptism (which purifies and illuminates), communion (which perfects), and anointing with oil (which also perfects).[98] In the celestial hierarchy the distinctions between the three functions become looser still, for purification among the angels is not the removal of a moral stain but rather the imparting of a proper understanding

[95] *CH* III.2 165B–C.
[96] *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* [=*EH*] V.1.7 508D–509A.
[97] *Ibid*. 508C. Eric Perl, in an otherwise excellent study of Dionysian hierarchy, takes this passage as referring to the hierarchy of divine perfections described in *Divine Names* V.1 – Goodness, Being, Life, and Wisdom. See Perl, "Symbol, Sacrament, and Hierarchy in Saint Dionysios the Areopagite," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 39 (1994), 348–49. The interpretation I have offered seems to me required by the context; besides, Dionysius does not generally refer to the perfections as *energeiai*.
[98] *EH* V.1.3 and VI.1.1–3.

of God. Nevertheless, the highest triad of angels (seraphim, cherubim, and thrones) is still the most fully purified, illuminated, and perfected. It transmits these perfections to the intermediate triad (authorities, powers, dominions), which in turn does the same for the third (principalities, archangels, and angels).[99] The special concern of the third, of course, is the human race.

The theme of synergy with God appears repeatedly throughout these works. Because of its special closeness to God, the highest triad of angels "is especially worthy of communion and cooperation (συνεργίας) with God and of sharing the beauty of His conditions and activities (ἐνεργειῶν)."[100] The activity of hierarchs is divinized by their leader, Christ, and the laying on of hands teaches clerics to perform their activities with God as their guide.[101] Such participation reaches even to the lowest rank, those being purified, for it is a general rule that every rank in a hierarchy is lifted up to synergy with God according to its proper degree.[102] The most extended discussion of synergy is in Chapter 13 of *The Celestial Hierarchy*. There Dionysius asks why Scripture says that Isaiah was visited and purified by a seraphim, whereas according to the order of the hierarchy the visitor ought to have been merely an angel. His answer is that the one who purified Isaiah actually was an angel, but that the angel properly and correctly attributed his work to "the highest rank of the hierarchy, since it is through the highest rank that the divine illumination is distributed to the lower."[103] Dionysius goes on to point out that there is a similar causal dependence within the ecclesiastical hierarchy, in which priests and deacons correctly ascribe their own sacred activity to their hierarch. The seraphim is, as it were, the "primary hierarch" of the angel who purified Isaiah.[104]

The principle that a priest acts only as the representative of his bishop had long been a well established point of ecclesiology. By generalizing it throughout the two hierarchies, Dionysius in effect provides a Christian version of the principle of hierarchic synergy that we observed in Proclus. In Proclus each higher cause is more responsible for the effects of its subordinates than are the subordinates themselves. Although Dionysius is not quite so systematic, he clearly thinks of God as the primary agent of all that

[99] See *CH* VI.2, VII.2–3; *EH* VI.3.6. Perhaps because the distinction of functions is so hard to make at higher levels, Dionysius also leaves unclear the order of angels within the two higher triads. He does say that each triad has an internal ranking, but he states it only for the lowest of the three (*CH* IX.2). The order given here best fits various details.

[100] *CH* VII.4 212A. [101] *EH* I.1 372B, V.3.3 512A.

[102] *CH* III.3 168A. See also the references to human synergy with the angels (*DN* XI.5 953A) and to that of the worshipping assembly with its hierarch (*EH* II.2.4 393C).

[103] *CH* XIII.3 301D–304B. [104] *CH* XIII.4 305C–D; cf. *EH* V.1.7 508C.

is done within the two hierarchies, and of those who are closest to God (the seraphim and hierarchs, respectively) as sharing in this primacy.

The agreement of Proclus and Dionysius on this point should not obscure their many differences. The hierarchy of Proclus, like its predecessor in Plotinus, is concerned with how things come into being. The synergy that occurs within it is strictly limited to the act of production; other forms of synergy are possible, but only through theurgy and prayer, not as an immediate consequence of the hierarchy. The Dionysian hierarchies, by contrast, are concerned not with how things come into being but with purification, illumination, and perfection. Since these are voluntary activities, voluntarily undergone, they can lead to that direct participation in the divine life that for Proclus has to be sought through other means.[105] It is also important to remember the pervasive influence upon Dionysius of the Cappadocians. We have seen how Dionysius' doctrine of divine names restates in more philosophical terms the teaching of the Cappadocians. Other elements of the Dionysian synthesis – the belief in an angelic hierarchy, for instance, and in the deifying power of the sacraments – were also drawn directly from Christian sources.[106]

The real significance of Dionysius is not as a Christianized Proclus, but as one who made a selective and guarded use of Procline metaphysics to achieve a newly unified Christian vision. By restating what the Cappadocians had said about the divine *energeiai* in terms of procession, Dionysius opens a natural space for unifying a host of other topics under the theme of return. He envisions the return as operating through a vast cosmic hierarchy, one stretching from the lowliest penitent to the highest seraphim. Each partakes of the divine *energeia* in the way appropriate to his station, entering thereby into communion with the others and with God. Indeed the entire unified structure, the whole coursing of divine energy in all its forms, is an image of the beauty of God. Dionysius thus finds a place for the most intensely felt aims of personal piety within the sacramental and hierarchical structure of the Church and the unseen world of angels.

[105] For affirmations of creaturely free will (or self–determination, *autexousia*) see *CH* IX.3 and *EH* II.3.3.

[106] For previous accounts of the angelic hierarchy see Louth, *Denys*, 36; for the deifying power of the sacraments, e.g., Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Ephesians* 20, *Epistle to the Romans* 7. Golitzin, *Et Introibo ad Altare Dei* is a thorough study of the relationship between Dionysius and his Christian sources.

CHAPTER 8

# *The flowering of the eastern tradition*

The history of Christian thought in the East after Dionysius is often presented as a series of controversies: the Christological controversies, the iconoclast controversy, the *filioque* controversy, the hesychast controversy.[1] Although this approach works well for describing the growth of Christian doctrine, it is less suited to uncovering the philosophical presuppositions that shaped the eastern Christian worldview. The question of where philosophy ends and theology begins within the eastern context is not one that has an easy answer, nor do we need to settle it here. It is sufficient to note that there are recognizable philosophical issues on which the authors of this period have a great deal to say: issues such as the status and meaning of nature; the relationship between body and soul, and the sensible and the intelligible; the way in which symbols and images represent their prototypes; the interconnection of theory and practice; person as a category irreducible to nature; and, above all, the nature of God and the possibility of human communion with the divine. On such topics the thought of the Christian East is best approached, not in terms of doctrinal history, but as the gradual working out of the fundamental revision of Neoplatonism begun by the Cappadocians and Dionysius.

In this chapter our aim is not to present a comprehensive history of eastern Christian thought even in its philosophical dimension. The thread we are tracing is *energeia*. Fortunately we will find that in tracing this thread we will uncover a great deal that bears on the larger issues just mentioned. We will begin by examining some prominent themes in St. Maximus the Confessor, the most philosophical of the Greek Fathers after Dionysius, and the one who most thoroughly assimilated his work. We will then turn to some additional themes which have ancient roots

[1] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition, Volume 2: The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600–1700)* (Chicago and London, 1974); John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, Second Edition (New York, 1983); Kallistos Ware, "Christian Theology in the East, 600–1453," *A History of Christian Theology*, ed. Hubert Cunliffe-Jones (Philadephia, 1978), 181–225.

but which came to fruition only in the centuries after Maximus. This will bring us to the end of the thirteenth century, just before the hesychast controversy crystallized the long tradition of Christian thought about *energeia* into doctrinal form.

## THE MOVEMENT BEYOND CONCEPTS

St. Maximus (580–662) was either the son of noble parents in Constantinople (according to the Greek *Life of St. Maximus*) or was an orphan raised in a Palestinian monastery (according to a somewhat hostile, but perhaps more authentic, biography composed in Syriac). In either case he seems to have served in the Imperial chancery in Constantinople before becoming a monk sometime in his thirties. His earliest works date from about 625 and are primarily works of spiritual direction. They include *The Ascetic Life*, *Centuries on Charity*, and several early epistles, including the important Epistle 2, on charity. In 626 he left his monastery near Constantinople in the face of the Persian invasion, arriving ultimately in Carthage. There, from about 628 to 635, he enjoyed a time of tremendous productivity. His works of this period include the *Commentary on the Lord's Prayer*, the *Mystagogy* (a commentary on the divine liturgy), the *Questions to Thalassius* (a work of Biblical exegesis), the *Centuries on Theology and Economy*, and the *Ambigua* (discussions of difficult points in theology).

Near the end of this period a controversy broke into the open that would consume his remaining years. Ever since the Council of Chalcedon in 451 there had been a split between the imperial church, which followed the Chalcedonian teaching of two natures in Christ, and various local churches which rejected it. Sergius, the patriarch of Constantinople, in the 620s began promoting a compromise known as monoenergism. This was the assertion that Christ, although of two natures as taught by Chalcedon, possessed only a single human–divine ("theandric") activity or energy. The opposition to monoenergism was led by St. Maximus' spiritual father, Sophronius, the patriarch of Jerusalem. Although Sophronius succeeded in persuading Sergius to abandon monoenergism, Sergius merely replaced it with another formula of virtually the same import: monotheletism, the assertion that Christ possessed a single human–divine will. Maximus, being only a monk, was at first reluctant to take a public stand on these matters. Eventually he broke his silence, and throughout the 640s he wrote a number of short works (collected as the *Opuscula Theologica et Polemica*) defending the doctrine of two energies and two wills. This brought him into conflict with the imperial government, which backed monotheletism. He was tried,

tortured, and exiled, his tongue and right hand being cut off so he could no longer speak or write. He died abandoned by all save two disciples, his cause seemingly lost. The subsequent years saw a remarkable reversal. At the Sixth Ecumenical Council (680–81) the doctrine of two energies and two wills was acclaimed as orthodox, and Maximus was widely recognized as its authoritative exponent.[2]

Maximus' thought is a complex web of ideas, any one of which can scarcely be understood in isolation from the others. Fortunately many of them will be familiar from the previous chapter. Maximus adopts from the Cappadocians the distinction between the divine *ousia* and the "things around God," *ta peri theon*. As with the Cappadocians, the distinction is not only epistemological and ontological, but one that the soul directly experiences as it seeks to know God. As Maximus writes in his *Centuries on Charity*:

> Once it [the purified mind] is in God, it is inflamed with desire and seeks first of all the principles of His being (οὐσία) but finds no satisfaction in what is proper to Him, for that is impossible and forbidden to every created nature alike. But it does receive encouragement from the things about Him (τῶν περὶ αὐτόν), that is, from what concerns His eternity, infinity, and immensity, as well as from the goodness, wisdom, and power by which He creates, governs, and judges beings. "And this alone is thoroughly understandable in Him, infinity"; and the very fact of knowing nothing about Him is to know beyond the mind's power, as the theologians Gregory and Dionysius have said somewhere.[3]

It is because the soul is "inflamed with desire" that it moves beyond the fruitless quest to know the divine *ousia* to "the things around Him." One is reminded of Gregory Nazianzen's description of how the divine nature draws us to itself by that part of it which we can comprehend, and by the part which we cannot comprehend moves our wonder.[4] Elsewhere Maximus emphasizes the distance between the divine *ousia* and the things around God by calling them His works (ἔργα) and referring to God as their creator (δημιουργός). They are distinguished from ordinary creatures by two key marks: they have no beginning in time, and ordinary creatures are what they are by participating in them. In a passage that will later prove central to the thought of St. Gregory Palamas, Maximus writes:

[2] For Maximus' life see the introduction to Andrew Louth's edition of Maximus, *Maximus the Confessor*, 3–18; for the monoenergist and monothelite controversies see Pelikan, *Spirit of Eastern Christendom*, 62–75; Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 35–39; Louth, *Maximus*, 48–62.

[3] *Centuries on Charity* 1.100 (*PG* 90 981D–984A), tr. Berthold. The quotation is from Gregory Nazianzen, *Orations* 38.7; the allusion to Dionysius is to chapter 3 of the *Mystical Theology*.

[4] *Orations* 38.7 (quoted above, p. 167).

The works of God which did not happen to begin in time are participated beings, in which participating beings share according to grace, for example, goodness and all that the term goodness implies, that is, all life, immortality, simplicity, immutability, infinity, and such things which are essentially contemplated around Him (περὶ αὐτόν); they are also God's works, and yet they did not begin in time.[5]

Maximus goes on to add that the things around God include even reality itself (αὐτὴ ἡ ὀντότης).[6] God infinitely transcends both sorts of works, those that did not begin in time and those that did, the participated and the participating.[7]

It should be clear from these passages that the "things around God" play much the same role as the divine *energeiai* in the Cappadocians and the divine processions in Dionysius. Not only is there a similar listing (of divine goodness, wisdom, and the like); the "things around God" are, like the *energeiai* and processions, divine perfections in which creatures participate and by which God makes Himself known. This explains how, despite the radical transcendence of God in relation to His works, the eternal works can also *be* God. Only a few chapters after that just quoted, Maximus adds that "God alone truly and properly both is and is said to be life."[8] In the *Mystagogy* he holds both that truth and goodness reveal God and that God *is* the Truth and *is* the Good, without seeming to feel any tension between these statements.[9] In the *Centuries on Charity* we learn that any rational creature, insofar as it possesses being, goodness, wisdom, and eternity, participates in God.[10] This is the same duality that we observed in relation to the *energeiai* of the Cappadocians and the *proodoi* of Dionysius. The conclusion to be drawn is the same: the "things around God" are self-revelatory acts in which God reveals Himself to creatures and gives Himself to be shared by them, while remaining transcendent in essence.

Nonetheless it is significant that Maximus prefers the term "things around God" for this purpose, rarely speaking of the divine perfections as *energeiai*.[11] In this he follows Dionysius. The reason for the difference is that Dionysius and Maximus have adopted the Procline language of participation, whereas the Cappadocians, writing long before Proclus, prefer the Biblical term *energeia*. It will also be noted that Maximus includes among the things around God not only paradigmatic *energeiai* such as goodness, wisdom, life, and power, but also infinity, simplicity, eternity, immutability,

[5] *Chapters on Theology and Economy* 1.48 (*PG* 90 1100D), translated by Berthold as "Chapters on Knowledge." For God as *demiourgos* see 1.50.
[6] *Ibid.* 1.50, 1101B. [7] *Ibid.* 1.49, 1101A. [8] *Ibid.* 1.54, 1104B.
[9] *Mystagogy* 5 (*PG* 91 673C, 677A, C). [10] *Centuries on Charity* III.24–25.
[11] There are some partial exceptions to be noted below.

and reality. The Cappadocians never mention these among the *energeiai* and only rarely among the "things around God," preferring for the most part to speak of the divine nature itself as simple, infinite, eternal, and so on.[12] The reason is presumably that it is difficult to think of such abstract concepts as acts, or even as qualities manifested in action.

This is another point at which Maximus follows Dionysius. For Dionysius it is axiomatic that any perfection of creatures is present transcendently in God as their source. God is both infinity-itself and beyond infinity, unity-itself and beyond unity, eternity-itself and beyond eternity. Whenever we speak of the perfection-itself as God we must remember that we speak of the divine *proodoi*, not *ousia*.[13] Maximus adopts this Dionysian principle most explicitly in dealing with 'being' as a divine name:

> Both the names 'being' (τὸ εἶναι) and 'non-being' (το μὴ εἶναι) are to be reverently applied to Him, although not at all properly. In one sense they are both proper to Him, one affirming the being of God as cause of beings, the other denying in Him the being which all beings have, based on His preeminence as cause. On the other hand, neither is proper to Him because neither sets forth the substantial, natural essence of the one under discussion.[14]

It is safe to assume that he would say the same of all the "things around God." In effect, Maximus has adopted a portion of the Cappadocians' terminology and extended it in a way inspired by Dionysius.

Since God is beyond being, He is also beyond *noēsis*. Here again Maximus draws upon both the Cappadocians and Dionysius. We have seen that Gregory of Nyssa distinguishes sharply between mere conceptual knowledge of God and the direct personal knowledge attained only by cleansing the divine image within.[15] In Dionysius the emphasis on transcending conceptual thought grows even stronger. Near the end of the *Divine Names* he observes that, although the divine names must be both affirmed and denied, the way of negation is superior because it "stands the soul outside of what is

[12] Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* I.231, 276, 361–69; *On the Holy Spirit* (*GNO* III. 1, 91); Gregory Nazianzen, *Orations* 38.7–8. Gregory of Nyssa does include infinity among the "things around God" at *Contra Eunomium* II .89 and III.1.103–04.

[13] See *DN* I.4 (unity), II.10 (eternity), II.11 (unity), V.10 (infinity, eternity), X.3 (eternity), XIII.2–3 (unity). Although Dionysius rarely speaks of simplicity (ἁπλότης) it is included by implication in his discussion of unity.

[14] *Mystagogy*, Introduction (*PG* 91 664B–C). See also *Ambigua* 10: "Being is derived from Him but He is not being. For He is beyond being itself, and beyond anything that is said or conceived of Him, whether simply or in a certain way" (*PG* 91 1180D), tr. Louth.

[15] Besides our discussion above, see also Gregory's interpretation of Moses' encounter with God on Mt. Sinai in *The Life of Moses* II.219–255. There Gregory emphasizes that God is not an object of knowledge (τῶν γινωσκομένων τι, II.234; *GNO* VII.1, 115) and that to see God's "backside," as does Moses, means to follow Him (II.251).

congenital to it."[16] This movement "outside" becomes the dominant theme of his short treatise, the *Mystical Theology*. There negation is not so much a conceptual act as a way of leading the soul beyond concepts into the darkness where God dwells. Dionysius presents this movement allegorically as the ascent of Moses up Mt. Sinai. First Moses must submit to purification and separate himself from all who are not purified; then, pressing ahead to the summit, he finds that "even the holiest and highest of things that are seen or thought are merely suppositional accounts of the things that are below the Transcendent One."[17] Finally he breaks free of them and plunges into the "darkness of unknowing," where "he is supremely united with the wholly Unknown by an inactivity of all knowledge (τῇ πάσης γνώσεως ἀνενεργησίᾳ), and knows beyond the mind by knowing nothing."[18]

Precisely how one is to make the ascent as Dionysius describes it is hard to say.[19] More to the point, for our purposes, is the interpretation given to the ascent by Maximus. Maximus excludes conceptual knowledge from the final union with God just as firmly as does Dionysius. His emphasis, however, is less upon the way of negation than on the direct experience and "perception" of God. In the *Questions to Thalassius* he writes:

> The scriptural Word knows of two kinds of knowledge of divine things. On the one hand there is relative knowledge, rooted only in reason and concepts (νοήμασιν), and lacking in the kind of experiential perception (αἴσθησιν) of what one knows through active engagement; such relative knowledge is what we use to order our affairs in our present life. On the other hand there is that truly authentic knowledge, gained only by actual experience, apart from reason or concepts, which provides a total perception of the known object through a participation by grace.[20]

One hears an echo of the negative way in the further statement that the knowledge by participation is destructive (ἀφαιρετικήν) of the knowledge that relies upon reason and concepts: "for the sages say that it is impossible for rational knowledge (λόγος) of God to coexist with the direct experience of God, or for conceptual knowledge (νόησιν) of God to coexist with the immediate perception of God."[21] Maximus finds Scriptural warrant for this mutual exclusion in I Corinthians 13:8, "whether there be prophecies,

16 *DN* XIII.3 981B. 17 *Mystical Theology* I.3 1000D.

18 *Ibid.* 1001A. There are many echoes here of Gregory's *Life of Moses*, particularly II.162–69.

19 There is an important clue at *DN.* I.4 592C–D, where Dionysius says that to achieve the inactivity of all knowledge requires the use of "symbols" and "analogies." Given the meaning of these terms in Dionysius, he probably has in mind the "return" described in the hierarchical treatises.

20 *Questions to Thalassius* 60 (*PG* 90 621C–D), tr. Blowers and Wilken, slightly modified (based on the text of Laga and Steel, vol. 2, 77).

21 *Ibid.* 624A.

they shall fail; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away." Taken in context this verse does not refer to a cessation of knowledge, of course, but to its fulfillment and perfection. In the same way, Maximus holds that the perception of God will be "a deification that is unceasingly active" and "the experience by participation of the goods beyond nature."[22] The plural "goods" is noteworthy; it reminds us that the experience Maximus envisions is not a direct perception of the divine essence, but a participation in the "things around God."

Maximus speaks of the final return of created beings to God as "the Sabbath of God," when God will cease from the natural activity by which He now moves all things. At that time, "each creature, partaking in due proportion of the divine *energeia*, will determine its proper and natural activity by reference to God Himself."[23] This will be the "eighth day," the day of the new creation, when the blessed will "share by deification in His *energeia*."[24] In the *Questions to Thalassius* Maximus gives a long series of equivalent descriptions for the final consummation of all things in God. Among them is that it will be "the return to their first principle of those who have believed . . . the ever-moving stability (ἀεικίνητος στάσις) of those who desire about the object of their desire . . . the deification of those who are worthy . . . the leaving behind of natural beings." He continues:

> and the leaving behind of the things that are circumscribed in beginning and end is the immediate, unlimited and infinite *energeia* of God, almighty and beyond power . . . and the immediate, unlimited and infinite *energeia* of God, almighty and beyond power, is the inexpressible and beyond inexpressible delight and joy of those in whom it is active (τῶν ἐνεργουμένων), in accordance with a unity that is unutterable and beyond conceptual thought, which absolutely no mind or reason or conceptual thought or speech in the nature of things is able to discover.[25]

Perhaps it is because the final union of creatures to God is itself an *energeia* of God, and therefore neither a motion nor a static condition, that Maximus describes it as an "ever-moving stability" (ἀεικίνητος στάσις). At any rate, it is clear that Maximus here describes deification as a state of participation in the divine *energeia* that transcends any form of conceptual knowledge.

Another text elaborating on this final union is *Ambigua* 15. There Maximus again explains that since God is not an object of thought the soul is not unified to God by intellectual activity. Such activity would require a finite object, whereas "the terminus of any sort of motion of beings about

[22] *Ibid.* 621D, 624A. [23] *Chapters on Theology and Economy* 1.47 (*PG* 90 1100C).
[24] *Ibid.* 1.60 (*PG* 90 1105A). The "eighth day" is a common patristic designation for the age to come.
[25] *Questions to Thalassius* 59 (*PG* 90 609B).

something is the infinity around God (τὴν περὶ θεὸν ἀπειρίαν), in which all things that are moved receive stability."[26] This infinity is one of the "things around God," a point that Maximus emphasizes in the next sentence: "the infinity is *around* God, but is not God, who incomparably transcends even this." Reading this text in the light of that from the *Questions to Thalassius*, the "infinity around God" can presumably be identified with the divine *energeia*, an ineffable and unbounded act by which God unifies creatures to Himself.

To share in another's *energeia*, of course, is not to become inactive oneself. Least of all is that so in this case, for since God is the final object of desire, in sharing His *energeia* creatures also fulfill their own. In *Ambigua* 7 Maximus cites the saying of St. Paul that Christ must reign "till he hath put all enemies under his feet" (I Cor. 15:25). This will not be an involuntary subjection, he explains, but one in which the wills of creatures are wholly in accord with that of God.

Do not let this saying disturb you. I do not say that there is a destruction of self-determination (αὐτεξουσίου), but rather a firm and unchangeable adoption according to nature, or at any rate a deliberate submission, so that we will yearn to receive motion from that from which we have being. We will be like an image ascending to its archetype, or a seal rightly adapted to its archetypal stamp, which no longer . . . is able to wish to be borne elsewhere, since it has taken hold of the divine *energeia*, or rather has become God by deification. It delights instead in standing apart from the things that are thought and exist around it by nature, through the grace of the Spirit that overcomes it and reveals it as having God alone active (ἐνεργοῦντα). There will then be one single *energeia* through all things, that of God and of those worthy of God, or rather that of God alone, that of a whole benignly interpenetrating the whole of the worthy.[27]

Here the harmony between the will of the creature and that of the Creator is explained in terms of the relation of an image to its archetype. Because of this relation the will of the creature is not an unbounded faculty of choice, but exists and finds fulfillment only in its Creator. Maximus goes on to explain that when "the ultimate desirable appears and is participated," all motion of creatures directed to any other end will cease. Just as the rising of the sun makes the stars seem to disappear, so the full manifestation of God will make lesser and derivative goods lose their power to entice creatures

[26] *Ambigua* 15 (*PG* 91 1220C).
[27] *Ambigua* 7 (*PG* 91 1076B–D), my translation. See also *Opuscula* 1 (*PG* 91 33A–36A) where Maximus comments on this passage, emphasizing that the single *energeia* he speaks of here belongs to God by nature and to the saints only by grace.

away from Him.[28] Thus it is the full manifestation of God as the Good that will ensure the final and eternal coalescence of divine and human *energeiai*.

## THE EXCHANGE OF IDENTITIES

How is such participation to be achieved? Although the passages just quoted describe the afterlife, it would be a mistake to think that the transcending of conceptual thought and participation in the divine *energeia* occur only upon death. On the contrary, they are a goal to be pursued here and now, through means that incorporate the body as well as the soul. For Maximus the Dionysian penetration into darkness is scarcely separable from the active Christian life, for the two are united in the practice of "unceasing prayer."

Maximus is in this matter the heir of a long tradition. Although our own concerns lie elsewhere, a brief glance at that tradition will help to place his teaching in context. One strand of it stems from Evagrius (345–99), a protégé of the Cappadocians who was the first theoretician of monasticism. His *On Prayer* begins by defining prayer as "continual intercourse of the intellect with God."[29] It goes on to explain that to dwell with God constantly and without intermediary requires a mind that is free of thoughts colored by passion. Like so many others, Evagrius takes Moses as his model: "If Moses, when he attempted to draw near the burning bush, was prohibited until he should remove the shoes from his feet, how should you not free yourself of every thought (νόημα) that is colored by passion, seeing that you wish to see and converse with the One who is beyond every conception (ἔννοιαν) and perception?"[30] Here Evagrius argues from the familiar Neoplatonic premise that God is beyond conceptual thought. Although his immediate target is the passions, his argument actually warrants the stronger conclusion that thoughts themselves are an impediment in prayer – for, however pure, they are still a kind of mediation. Later he draws this very conclusion: "Even if thoughts (ῥήματα) are pure, since they are considerations of objects they impress a certain form on the intellect and draw it far away from God."[31] As this statement makes clear, the trouble with thoughts is that they "impress a certain form on the intellect" and thereby make it unsuited for drawing near to God, who is infinite and formless.

[28] *Ambigua* 7 1076B, 1077A. This passage owes much to Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection* (*PG* 46, 89A–96C; *NPNF* 5, 449–50). See also Paul Plass, "Transcendent Time in Maximus the Confessor," *Thomist* 44 (1980), 259–77; Paul Blowers, "Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Concept of 'Perpetual Progress,'" *Vigiliae Christianae* 46 (1992), 151–71.

[29] Evagrius, *On Prayer* 3 (*PG* 79 1168C), tr. Bamberger. In *PG* this treatise is mistakenly attributed to St. Nilus of Ancyra.

[30] *Ibid.* 4 1168D.

[31] *Ibid.* 55–56 1177D–1180A.

Evagrius' solution to this difficulty is notoriously terse and obscure. He says that the mind must seek perfect formlessness (ἀμορφία) and insensibility (ἀναισθησία), becoming "naked" of concepts in order to know the naked divinity.[32] As to how this is to be done, other than by intense concentration and obedience to the monastic rule, he says little. It seems clear, at any rate, that he envisions prayer as an activity of special concentration set apart from the other activities of the day. This is in contrast to another strand of monastic teaching, one that emphasized the importance of the Pauline injunction to "pray without ceasing" (I Thess. 5:17). The ideal of unceasing prayer is exemplified in a story from the *Apophthegmata Patrum*:

> The abbot of the monastery wrote to Epiphanius, bishop of Cyprus, saying: "Thanks to your prayers we have been faithful to our canonical hours. We never omit the office of terce, sext, nones or vespers." But the bishop wrote back and reproached the monks in these terms: "Evidently you are neglecting the remaining hours of the day which you spend without prayer. The true monk should have prayer and psalmody in his heart at all times without interruption."[33]

As this story illustrates, among the Desert Fathers the emphasis was upon prayer as a continuing inward activity, one that spoken prayer verbalizes but that continues even in silence. The monastic ideal is summarized in an anonymous aphorism, "If a monk prays only when he is standing in formal prayer, he does not pray at all."[34]

Finally let us note one other strand in patristic teaching on prayer, one adumbrated already in the episode from the *Apophthegmata*: the importance of the heart as the locus of communion with God. This is a note strikingly alien to Greek philosophy. In the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions the faculty through which God is apprehended is *nous*. The heart is more prominent in Stoicism, but even the Stoics do not assign it any particular importance from a moral or spiritual standpoint. In the Bible, however, the heart plays a rich and multi-faceted role, and most patristic authors follow its lead. This is particularly the case for the *Spiritual Homilies* traditionally attributed to St. Macarius.[35] Macarius has a vivid sense of the depth of the heart and its capacity for good and evil:

[32] *Ibid.* 117 (formlessness), 120 (insensibility). For the "nakedness" of the intellect see Evagrius, *Gnostic Chapters* I.65, III.5, 15, 21, with further references and discussion in Nicholas Gendle, "Cappadocian Elements in the Mystical Theology of Evagrius Ponticus," *Studia Patristica* 16 (1985), 379–80. As Gendle observes, Evagrius is at this point probably drawing from Origen.

[33] *Apophthegmata Patrum*, Alphabetical Series, Epiphanius 3; quoted by Irénée Hausherr, *The Name of Jesus* (Kalamazoo, 1978), 132.

[34] Evergetinos, *Synagoge* IV; quoted by Hausherr, *Name of Jesus*, 133.

[35] They are today generally thought to be the work of an unknown Syrian monk writing in the mid- to late fourth century. (See the introduction to the translation by Maloney.) For convenience I shall refer to the author as Macarius.

> The heart itself is but a small vessel, yet dragons are there, and there are also lions; there are poisonous beasts and all the treasures of evil. There also are rough and uneven roads; there are precipices. But there too is God, the angels, the life and the Kingdom, the light and the apostles, the heavenly cities and the treasures of grace – all things are there.[36]

Following II Corinthians 3, he observes that it is on the heart that divine grace inscribes the laws of the Spirit: "Whenever grace fully possesses the pastures of the heart, it rules over all the members and thoughts; for there, in the heart, the intellect abides as well as all the thoughts of the soul and all its hopes, and from the heart grace penetrates throughout all the parts of the body."[37] Referring to the story of the three youths placed in the fire by Nebuchadnezzar, Macarius explains that they survived unharmed because "they had in their hearts the divine and heavenly fire," which stood in their midst and prevented the visible fire from harming them.[38] This emphasis upon the heart as the organ through which grace penetrates the body exemplifies Macarius' psychophysical holism. Such holism is evident in other aspects of his teaching as well, such as his belief that at the resurrection the glory now hidden within the souls of the righteous will shine from them bodily.[39]

Let us return now to St. Maximus. For Maximus there is an intimate connection between unceasing prayer, the withdrawal from conceptual thought, and the transformation of the bodily drives through ascetic practice. One place these connections appear is in *The Ascetic Life*, a dialogue between a monastic elder and a younger monk. When the monk asks about prayer, the elder instructs him:

> Thoughts (νοήματα) are directed to things. Now, of things some are sense-perceptible, some intelligible. The mind, then, tarrying with these things, carries about with itself thoughts of them; but the grace of prayer joins the mind to God, and joining to God withdraws it from all thoughts. Then the mind, naked and associating only with Him, becomes God-like . . . Therefore the Apostle commands to "pray without ceasing," that, unremittingly joining our mind to God, we may little by little break off our passionate clinging to material things.[40]

Here there is a fusion of the Evagrian goal of becoming naked of thoughts with the emphasis of the Desert Fathers on unceasing prayer. Maximus identifies the obstacle to such prayer, not with conceptual thought in general, but with the "passionate clinging to material things" that prevents the mind from being fully directed to God. As a model of true unceasing prayer he cites St. Paul:

[36] Macarius, *Homilies* 43.7, tr. Maloney. [37] *Ibid.* 15.20. [38] *Ibid.* 11.2.
[39] *Ibid.* 5.11, 15.38. [40] *Ascetic Life* 24 (*PG* 90 929C), tr. Sherwood.

Unceasing prayer is to keep the mind in great reverence and attached to God by desire, and to cling always to hope in Him, to be of good courage in Him in all things, alike in our deeds and in what befalls us. It was in such a disposition that the Apostle said: . . . “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh” (II Cor. 4:8–10). With such dispositions the Apostle prayed without ceasing. For in all his deeds, as we have said, and in all that befell him he clung to hope in God. For this reason all the saints always rejoiced in their tribulations, in order to come to the habit of divine charity.[41]

For Maximus the withdrawal from thoughts is not accomplished purely on a mental level, but is a complete redirection of the soul’s energy and affections. It cannot take place apart from vigorous and disciplined action, nor particularly apart from that rejoicing in tribulation which was a hallmark of St. Paul’s life. It is important to note the reason behind such rejoicing. St. Paul speaks of himself as “bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh”; that is, he views suffering that is in accordance with the will of God as bringing about a bodily communion in the life of Christ. Maximus takes this view as a model for his own understanding of the transformation that is brought about as the soul’s energies and affections are redirected to God. Unceasing prayer, as he understands it, is not only a private experience, but a bodily communion in the life of Christ, and thereby also a manifestation of the divine presence in the world.

Maximus draws again upon the example of St. Paul, and that of all the apostles, later in *The Ascetic Life*.

Those who truly believed Christ and, through the commandments, made Him to dwell wholly within themselves, spoke in this fashion: “I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). For that reason while they were suffering for Him for the salvation of all, as exact imitators of Him and as genuine keepers of His commandments, they said: “being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat” (I Cor. 4:12–13) . . . And by their words and deeds Christ, who works (ὁ ἐνεργῶν) in them, was made manifest.[42]

Here the emphasis is upon the keeping of the commandments, in consequence of which Christ dwells and acts in the one who is obedient. As in

[41] *Ibid.* 25–26 (29D–932B) [42] *Ibid.* 34 (940B–C).

the previous passage, such an indwelling or exchange is not merely a private experience, but a way in which Christ manifests himself to the world.

The same themes recur in the *Mystagogy*, where the emphasis is particularly upon charity toward the poor.

> Nothing is so conducive for justification or so fitted for divinization . . . and nearness to God as mercy offered with pleasure and joy to those who stand in need. For if the Word has shown that the one who is in need of having good done to him is God – "inasmuch as ye have done it," he says, "unto one of the least of these, ye have done it to me" (Matt. 25:40), and He who speaks is God – then He will much more show that the one who can do good and does it is truly God by grace and participation, because he has taken on in proper imitation the activity (ἐνέργειαν) and characteristic of His own beneficence.[43]

This passage recognizes a kind of reciprocal exchange of identities between God and man, one brought about by divine love for man and the human charity that imitates it. To participate in the divine *energeia* is here straightforwardly a matter of doing as God does. The initiative remains with God, however, for the exchange of identities is possible only because God actively and continually takes upon Himself the sufferings of humanity. The passage continues: "If the poor man is God, it is because of God's condescension in becoming poor for us and in taking upon Himself by His own suffering the sufferings of each one . . . All the more reason, then, will one be God who by loving men in imitation of God heals by himself in divine fashion the hurts of those who suffer."[44] The divine commandment to care for the poor is also an invitation to enter, as it were, into the reciprocity of God's action, loving the divine presence in man and thereby sharing in God's work. The one who does so becomes "God by grace and participation."

The coalescence of divine and human activities is thus, for Maximus, a way in which man is deified and God makes Himself present to the world. The root of this exchange is charity (ἀγάπη), and it is in charity that Maximus finds the real meaning of the Dionysian ascent into darkness. In his Epistle 2 (On Charity) Maximus infers the importance of charity from the principle that "like is known by like." Much like Gregory of Nyssa, he uses the principle that like is known by like to insist that to know God requires becoming godlike. The divine characteristic he has in mind is, in the first place, freedom from the passions that fragment the psyche; this in turn is acquired only through the kind of love that "joins inclination to nature," returning the soul to its natural and unified condition. It is precisely such love that manifests God to the world.

[43] *Mystagogy* 24 (*PG* 91 713A–B), tr. Berthold, modified. [44] *Ibid.* 713B.

God is thus manifest in those who possess [this grace], taking shape (μορφούμενος) through love for mankind according to the specific character of the virtue of each, and condescending to be named accordingly. For it is the most perfect work of love, and the goal of its activity, to contrive through the mutual exchange of what is related that the names and properties of those who have been united through love should be fitting to one another. So the human being is made God, and God is called and appears as human, because of the single undeviating wish (in accordance with the will) and movement of both, as we find in the case of Abraham and the other saints.[45]

Since God transcends form, in a sense He has no shape of His own. He takes shape in one who shares in His love for mankind and whose will is united to His own. In effect this is to recapitulate the Incarnation: "so the human being is made God, and God is called and appears as human." Elaborating the same theme in the *Ambigua*, Maximus even goes so far as to say that "God and man are paradigms one of another, for as much as God is humanized to man through love of mankind, so much is man able to be deified to God through charity."[46]

It is puzzling that Maximus (in the passage from Epistle 2) takes Abraham as a model for the exchange of identities. The allusion is explained in the *Ambigua*. In the Septuagint the new name given to Abram in Genesis 17 is Abraam, the change consisting in the addition of an alpha. Maximus interprets the addition as an alpha-privative. It indicates that Abraham (Abraam) has transcended the passionate part of the soul and attachment to earthly things, so as to be attached to God alone.

Thereupon the great man Abraham transcended these things [the passions] and completely rejected them, [symbolized] as Hagar and Ishmael, and anticipating Isaac had already stripped naked . . . By faith he was mystically joined to the Logos that is about the monad, through which he came to have the form of unity, or rather out of many was made one, magnificently and wholly drawn up alone to God alone, bearing on him no trace at all of knowledge of any of the scattered things. This shows, I think, the power of the One who granted him the addition to his name of the letter alpha. Therefore he has been given the name of father of all those who approach God in faith by depriving themselves of everything that is after God.[47]

Abraham achieves his perfect openness to God by "stripping naked," in faith depriving himself of "the things that are after God." The allusion

[45] Epistle 2 (*PG* 91 401A–B), tr. Louth. [46] *Ambigua* 10 (*PG* 91 1113B–C), tr. Louth, modified.

[47] *Ambigua* 10 (*PG* 91 1200A–B). Hagar and Ishmael here represent the material dyad, which Maximus identifies with the passionate part of the soul. I have translated *kata ton Isaak* as "anticipating Isaac" because at the time of Genesis 17 Isaac had not yet been conceived.

to Abraham in the Epistle on Charity is thus a reminder that the inner simplicity Maximus describes is achieved, not only through acts of charity, but through self-denial and ascetic struggle.

There are united in these passages the Dionysian and Evagrian movement beyond concepts, the ascetic struggle against the passions, and the active practice of love toward others. For Maximus these are a unity, so much so that any of them apart from the others would be futile and inauthentic. Dionysius had already made it clear that to know God in the darkness beyond concepts is not just a matter of mentally affirming certain negations, but of a lived practice. He left the nature of this practice obscure, however, except insofar as the "return" described in the treatises on hierarchy constitutes an answer. For Maximus, as the heir to centuries of monastic practice, the true meaning of Dionysian apophaticism is never in doubt. To pass beyond concepts means to be freed from the attachment to earthly things that distorts the affections and distracts the mind in prayer. More precisely, it is to be freed from the "irrational affection for the body" which Maximus identifies as the root of the passions.[48] This is impossible apart from repeated and habitual self-denial. The aim of such practice is not simply negative, but restorative; it is to "join inclination to nature" by restoring to the soul its proper and natural love for God. Such a love, in turn, finds expression in charity toward one's fellows, and especially toward the poor – not as a vague humanitarianism, but because it is in them that God is to be found.

## THE LOGOS AND THE *LOGOI*

The emphasis of Maximus on asceticism and the practice of charity are the practical dimension of a broader theme that runs throughout his works: that of the participation of the body, and indeed of all sensible creation, in divine realities. We have already noted the psychophysical holism that Maximus inherits from Macarius and his Biblical sources. Maximus states categorically that body and soul can be separated only notionally (ἐπινοίᾳ).[49] For him asceticism is not a matter of the soul rejecting the body, but rather of its

48 See *Centuries on Charity* II.8, 59–60, III.7–8, 57, with further references and discussion in Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor* (Lund, 1965), 244–62.

49 *Ambigua* 7 (*PG* 91 1100C). Later he qualifies this statement to allow that they can exist separately after death; even then, however, they retain a relation (σχέσις) to one another, so that each remains the body or soul of the individual constituted by their union (1101A–C).

cleaving to the body so as to "render it familiar to God as a fellow servant."[50] One of his more extensive treatments of this theme is *Ambigua* 21. There Maximus develops an elaborate correlation between the five senses and the five faculties of the soul: sight is an image of intellect, hearing of discursive reason, smell of spirit (θύμος), taste of desire, and touch of the vivifying faculty. The four cardinal virtues come about by the interweaving of the activities appropriate to each pair, so that self-control, for example, results from the interweaving of desire with taste, each being directed appropriately to its object.[51] These virtues in turn are interwoven to form wisdom and meekness, and from these there comes the most comprehensive virtue of all, charity. The cumulative effect of this process is that the senses are "rendered rational" (λογισθείσας). Ultimately the body and soul are deified together, each in the manner appropriate to it: "God embraces the whole of the soul, together with the body natural to it, and renders them like Him in due proportion."[52]

Elsewhere Maximus extends this holistic view of body and soul to the whole of creation. In the *Mystagogy* he develops a number of symbolic interpretations of the physical structure of a church. On the one hand the church can be likened to a man, with its nave the body, its sanctuary the soul, and its altar the intellect.[53] On the other hand it is like the entire cosmos, the nave representing the sensible world and the sanctuary the intelligible world. The two constitute an integral whole, the nave being the sanctuary in potency (κατὰ τὴν δύναμιν) and the sanctuary being the nave in act (κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν). They are not two parts divided from one another, but two manners in which the single created world exists and can be apprehended.

> The whole intelligible world seems mystically imprinted on the whole sensible world in symbolic forms (συμβολικοῖς εἴδεσι), for those who are capable of seeing this, and conversely the whole sensible world subsists within the whole intelligible world, being rendered simple, spiritually and in accordance with intellect, in its rational principles (λόγοις). The sensible is in the intelligible in rational principles, and the intelligible is in the sensible in types (τύποις). And their function is one, "a wheel within a wheel," as says the marvelous seer of extraordinary things, Ezekiel, in speaking, I think, of the two worlds.[54]

[50] *Ibid.* 1092B.

[51] *Ambigua* 21 (*PG* 91 1248D–1249A). There is a translation of this passage in Panayiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ: Orthodox Perspectives on the Nature of the Human Person* (Crestwood, N.Y., 1987), 216–18.

[52] *Ambigua* 21 1249C, tr. Nellas.

[53] *Mystagogy* 4.

[54] *Ibid.* 2 (*PG* 91 669B–C), tr. Berthold, modified. The reference is to Ezekiel 1:16 and 10:10.

The two "worlds" are not two worlds at all, but the same reality viewed in two different ways. To perceive them both is not something of which we are immediately capable, however; it requires (as Maximus goes on to say) "the symbolic contemplation of intelligible things by means of the visible."[55]

Maximus gives an extended meditation on this transformation of the senses in *Ambigua* 10. There he distinguishes three "natural" motions of the soul: that according to intellect, that according to reason, and that according to sense.[56] (It is important to note that "natural" here, as generally in Maximus, bears almost the opposite of its normal meaning in the West: it indicates the state that was intended in the creation and that can be restored only by charity, obedience, and ascetic discipline.) The intellectual motion is an immediate apprehension of God in a way that is not dependent on any being, but immediately due to His preeminence. The rational motion is the understanding of things through their causes, their rational formative principles (λόγους μορφωτικούς). The sensible motion also is directed toward these principles; in it the soul "takes on the rational principles (λόγους), being affected by things outside as by certain symbols of things unseen," and thus the whole sense faculty "ascends by means of reason up to the intellect."[57] In other words, sensation is not a distinct and isolated activity, but a means of ascending to the direct perception of God. It does so through the *logoi* which are the causes of things. This means that to apprehend the *logoi* is, in some form, to apprehend God.

This holistic understanding of perception is amplified in what follows, where Maximus goes on to give a series of typological interpretations of Scripture. Among them is an interpretation of the early life of Moses.[58] As Maximus reads the story, Moses is a model of one who overcomes the passions through ascetic struggle. Pharaoh is the devil; Pharaoh's daughter, to whom Moses was subject for a time, is the senses; the Egyptian whom Moses kills with "noble zeal" is the "Egyptian-like way of thinking that belongs to the flesh." When Moses leaves Egypt to become a shepherd in the wilderness, the sheep he guides are "the trains of thought that still consent to the earth and seek enjoyment from it." These he governs and directs with careful labor, leading them "through the desert which is a

[55] *Mystagogy* 4 669C–D.

[56] *PG* 91 1112D–1113A. See also the discussion of the soul's three motions (straight, circular, and spiral) in *DN* IV.9, a passage that Maximus is here probably following.

[57] The phrase I translate "symbols of things unseen" is printed in Migne as συμβόλων τῶν ὁρατῶν. I assume that ὁρατῶν must be an error for ἀορατῶν, since to speak of "symbols of visible objects" makes no sense in the context.

[58] *Ambigua* 10 (*PG* 91 1148A–D). Quotations are from the translation by Louth.

condition deprived of passions and material things and pleasures, to the mountain of the knowledge of God." Finally, at the end of his labors, Moses encounters the burning bush.

> [Moses] became worthy of conceptually beholding and hearing the ineffable, supernatural, and divine fire that is present, as in the bush, in the being of everything that exists, I mean God the Word, who in the last times shone forth from the Bush of the Holy Virgin and spoke to us in the flesh.

God the Word – the Logos – is present "in the being of everything that exists." In the latter days this Word has taken on flesh of the Virgin Mary. The same Word is present in the natural world, but to perceive it, to hear its message, requires ascetic struggle and the resulting freedom from the passions.

Maximus makes a similar point in his discussion of the Transfiguration.[59] He explains that it was not, properly speaking, Christ who was transfigured when he was seen in glory; it was the disciples, who were momentarily enabled to see him as he truly is. "They passed over from flesh to spirit before they had put aside this fleshly life, by the change in the activities of sense that the Spirit worked in them, lifting the veils of the passions from the intellectual power that was in them." Again it is the passions that must be overcome before true vision can occur – although in this case "the veils of the passions" are removed momentarily by a miraculous intervention of the Spirit. Of the several layers of meaning in the vision itself, the one that concerns us here relates to the luminous garment of Christ. Maximus finds in this a symbol "of creation itself, disclosing like a garment, by the removal of the apparent base presumption of those who are deceived and bound to sensation alone, and through the wise variety of the various forms that it contains, the worthy power of the generative Word who wears it."[60] The physical creation is the garment of the Word, from which the Word itself shines forth to those who are able to see.

Evidently to perceive the divine Logos in creation, and to perceive the *logoi* which are the formative causes of things, are one and the same. As Maximus states in the *Mystagogy*, "it is in Him [God the Word] that all the *logoi* of beings both are and subsist as one in an incomprehensible simplicity."[61] In *Ambigua* 7 he explains their relation in terms strikingly reminiscent of Plotinus and the Anonymous Commentary on the *Parmenides*.

[59] *Ibid.* 1125D–1128C.
[60] *Ibid.* 1128B–C, my translation. I leave untranslated the phrase τέως ἐμφαίνεσθαι αὐτῇ, which seems to indicate that the deceptive appearance will last only until the creation is fully manifested.
[61] *Mystagogy* 5 (*PG* 91 681B), tr. Berthold.

The highest, apophatic theology of the Logos being set aside (according to which He is neither spoken nor thought, nor in general is any of the things which are known along with another, since He is supersubstantial and is not participated by anything in any way), the one Logos is many *logoi*, and the many are one. The One is many by the goodly, creative, and sustaining procession of the One into beings; the many are One by the returning and directive uplifting and providence of the many to the One – as to an almighty principle, or a center which precontains the principles of the rays that go out from it, and as the gathering together of all things.[62]

There is the same duality here as in the pagan Neoplatonists: the Logos is wholly transcendent and unparticipated, yet becomes "many" by its procession into beings, and can even be said to be equivalent to the many *logoi*. Maximus illustrates the relation of the Logos to creatures by the familiar illustration of a center and its rays. Whereas the pagan Neoplatonists typically understand this relation in terms of an impersonal necessity, however, for Maximus the plurality of the *logoi* is due to the divine will. He draws at this point upon an important passage in Dionysius, who had identified the paradigms of creatures not only with *logoi* (the traditional term), but also with divine acts of will: "We say that paradigms are the rational principles (λόγους) which produce the substance of beings and preexist in a unified way in God. Theology calls them predeterminations (προορισμούς) and divine and good acts of will (θελήματα) which produce and define things, by which the supersubstantial one predetermined and led forth all beings."[63] Maximus cites this passage as his authority in holding that the *logoi* are "predeterminations and divine acts of will" by which God knows creatures before they come to be.[64]

In light of this voluntaristic aspect of the *logoi*, it would be a mistake to think of them simply as intelligible contents or individual essences. They are the purposes that God has in creating things, and, consequently, the meanings that these things have within the divine mind. That is why Maximus can hold that God knows creatures, not sensibly or intellectually, but "as His own acts of will," and why he also states that rational

[62] *Ambigua* 7 (*PG* 91 1081B–C), my translation.

[63] *DN* V.8 824C. For discussion of this passage and Maximus' other sources (primarily Origen and Evagrius), see Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 77–78; Golitzin, *Et Introibo ad Altare Dei*, 84–86, 271–73; and our own references to *logos* in Plotinus (Chapter 4 n. 16).

[64] *Ambigua* 7 1085A (cf. 1081A). Blowers and Wilken, in translating this passage, render *theia thelēmata* as "products of the divine will." This would make them creatures, whereas in fact they are the *principles* of creation, preexisting collectively in the Logos.

creatures are deified insofar as they move and act in accordance with their *logoi*.[65] Maximus here attempts to do justice both to the empirical reality of creatures in their fallen state and to his conviction that ultimately the will of the Creator cannot be thwarted. The mean term uniting these two poles is rational creatures' free choice, by which they move either toward the state of full being that is the Creator's intent or toward the non-being that is its denial. In a perceptive discussion of the *logoi*, Alexander Golitzin has seen in this movement a way in which rational creatures become, as it were, their own co-creators: "The λόγοι are therefore our personal and foreordained vocations to which we may or may not choose to become conformed, or better – since they remain transcendent by virtue of their source in God – to which we may choose to be ever in process of becoming conformed in order thus to share, as it were, in the eternal process of our own creation."[66]

It will be plain that the *logoi* in Maximus serve a role similar in many ways to that of the *energeiai* in the Cappadocians. They are the refracted presence of God in the world, that through which God manifests Himself in His creative act and by which He can be known. This functional similarity should not, however, lead us to identify the *logoi* with the *energeiai*. In places where Maximus uses both terms he clearly regards them as differing in reference.[67] It would be more faithful to his usage to say that he splits the Cappadocian conception of the divine *energeiai* into three: one part relating to creation (the *logoi*), another to God's eternal attributes (the "things around God"), and the third to the activity and energy of God that can be shared by creatures (for which he tends to reserve the term *energeia*). The point of using the term *logos* rather than *energeia* is to emphasize that God is present in creatures, not only as their creator and sustainer, but as their meaning and purpose. To understand them properly requires "hearing" them, as Moses heard the fire in the burning bush, as part of a discourse uttered by God. The full discourse – one that no creature can apprehend fully – is the Logos. To be attuned to it requires a transformation of perception through all the means that Maximus never tires of reiterating:

[65] *Ibid.* 1080B–C, 1084B–C, 1085B. Maximus' conception of divine knowledge is probably inspired by *DN* VII.2 869A–C, where God knows all things as their cause (although Dionysius does not specifically mention the divine will).

[66] Golitzin, *Et Introibo ad Altare Dei*, 86; cf. the similar interpretation in Jean-Claude Larchet, *La divinisation de l'homme selon saint Maxime le Confesseur* (Paris, 1996), 120.

[67] *Questions to Thalassius* 13 (*PG* 90 296A); *Ambigua* 22 (*PG* 91 1257A–B). I cannot agree with Lars Thunberg that in the latter passage Maximus "feels inclined to term the *logoi* energies" (*Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of St. Maximus the Confessor* [Crestwood, N.Y., 1985], 140). The passage says only that the energies are contemplated *in* the *logoi*.

prayer, asceticism, obedience to the commandments, and the active practice of charity.

So although Maximus divides the Cappadocian inheritance, he does so in order to enhance and enrich it. Many centuries would pass before what Maximus taught about the transformation of perception was fully absorbed within the subsequent tradition. When this occurred it was within a framework in which the governing metaphor was sight rather than hearing, and the governing philosophical concept was *energeia* rather than *logos*. The most important element still to be added to this further synthesis was the doctrine – and the experience – of the uncreated light.

## THE UNCREATED LIGHT

After St. Maximus the next of the Eastern Fathers whose works bear a marked philosophical stamp is St. John of Damascus (c. 674–749). He is best known as the author of *De Fide Orthodoxa*, a compendium of orthodox teaching on topics prominent in post-Nicene Greek theology, particularly the Trinity, Christ, and the sacraments. It was translated into Latin about 1150 and served as a model for the medieval *summae*. Here we are interested in its relation to the tradition of the Cappadocians, Dionysius, and Maximus. Although John's announced aim was merely to synthesize what had been received from the Fathers, from the standpoint of the history of *energeia* his work marks an important step forward. In particular, it is in John that the distinction of *ousia* and *energeia* begins to be understood in relation to the long tradition of Byzantine thought about the "uncreated light." We will examine his work with the aim of elucidating that connection.[68]

Like the Cappadocians, to whom he is clearly looking at this point, John insists on the unknowability of the divine *ousia*. Early in the *De Fide* he makes a rough division among divine names into those that are privative and those that indicate "the things concerning the divine nature," *ta peri tēn theian phusin*.[69] This is a distinction familiar from the Cappadocians.[70] Later John elaborates this rough division among divine attributes into five

[68] It has been known since early in the twentieth century that much of the *De Fide* is copied verbatim from the *De Trinitate* of Pseudo-Cyril of Alexandria; in particular, chapters 1.1–9 correspond to chapters 1–11 of *De Trinitate*, and chapter 1.11 to chapter 12. I focus on the *De Fide* because it was the channel through which these teachings attained widespread influence.

[69] *De Fide Orthodoxa* 1.4.

[70] There is a slight difference in that John even speaks of bodily accidents as *peri* the essence of a body (1.10), so in his case it seems better to translate *peri* as "concerning" or "relating to" rather than "around." Not much hinges on this difference, since "around" is in any case only metaphor.

distinct classes. The first and most proper name for God is ὁ ὢν, He Who Is, "for, like some limitless and boundless sea of essence He contains all being in Himself." The second is *theos*, for which John offers several alternative etymologies relating it to verbs for divine activity.[71] He then summarizes this distinction and adds three further classes.

> (1) The first name, then, is expressive of His existence but not of what He is (τοῦ εἶναι καὶ οὐ τοῦ τί εἶναι); (2) while the second is expressive of His *energeia*. (3) But the terms 'without beginning,' 'incorruptible,' 'unoriginate' or 'uncreated,' 'incorporeal,' 'invisible,' and the like all show what He is not, in other words, that He did not begin to be, is not corruptible, is not created, is not a body, and is not visible. (4) The terms 'good,' 'holy,' 'just,' and the like follow upon His nature and do not indicate the essence itself. (5) The terms 'lord,' 'king,' and the like indicate a relationship with things contrasted to Him.[72]

Some names are relative, some are privative, some "follow upon" the divine nature (that is, those of *ta peri tēn phusin*), some indicate *energeia*, and one ("He Who Is") indicates the distinctive manner of divine existence. The most surprising feature of this division is that John regards the names that follow upon the nature as different from those that indicate the divine *energeia*. If he were to hold to this distinction consistently then he would be driving a wedge between the divine *energeia* and the "things around God." This would be to restrict the scope of *energeia* from the broad sense used by the Cappadocians to the more narrow sense used by Maximus.

As it happens, however, John goes on to speak of the divine *energeia* as broadly as do the Cappadocians. Describing what it means to say that God is present in a place, he explains:

> God is said to be in a place where His *energeia* becomes manifest. For He pervades all things without mixture and gives all a share of His *energeia* in accordance with the fitness and receptivity of each – in accordance, that is, with its purity of nature and will . . . So a place is called the place of God when it participates in greater degree in His *energeia* and grace.[73]

[71] The verbs are *theein*, to run, *aisthein*, to burn, and *theasthai*, to oversee. For the first see Plato, *Cratylus* 397d; for the second, Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration* 30.18 (with notes on this passage at *NPNF* 7, 316); for the third, Gregory of Nyssa, *On Not Three Gods*.

[72] *De Fide Orthodoxa* 1.9 (Kotter, vol. 2, 32; *NPNF* 9, 12). (Here and in subsequent quotations I also make use of the translation by Chase.) The text given by Migne is seriously defective at this point, for it omits the οὐ in the first line, making the passage say that the first name *is* expressive of what God is. The translations of Chase and *NPNF* follow Migne, and the Latin edition of Burgundio propagates the same error (*primum quidem ipsius esse demonstrativum est*). This no doubt contributed to the systematic misreading of the Damascene by Aquinas which I discuss in the next chapter.

[73] *De Fide Orthodoxa* 1.13 (Kotter, vol. 2, 38; *NPNF* 9, 15).

Here the divine *energeiai* are probably (as in the Cappadocians) the divine perfections, such as goodness and being. John hastens to add that this manner of presence in no way implies any division in God, for God is both wholly present in all and wholly beyond all. What makes this possible is the unique manner of God's activity: "the Deity, being everywhere present and everywhere beyond all, acts (ἐνεργεῖ) at the same time in different ways with one simple *energeia*."[74] Although John's terminology owes much to the Cappadocians, the philosophical sophistication of his understanding of the *energeiai* clearly shows the influence of Dionysius. Dionysian language especially permeates the following:

> The divine irradiation (ἔλλαμψις) and *energeia* is one, simple, and undivided, beneficently diversified in divisible things, dispensing to all of them the components of their proper nature while remaining simple. It is indivisibly multiplied in divisible things, and, gathering them together, it returns them to its own simplicity. For toward it all things tend, and in it they have their existence, and to all things it communicates their being in accordance with the nature of each. It is the being of things that are, the life of the living, the reason of the rational, and the intellectual act of those possessing intelligence.[75]

This is perhaps the most Neoplatonic passage in all of John's writings. The last sentence is a paraphrase of the Dionysian description of the divine *proodoi*.[76] The language of procession and return is also drawn from Dionysius, with the important difference that here the one "toward whom all things tend" and who "returns them to its own simplicity" is the divine *energeia*. This makes it plain that for John the divine *energeia* is not simply the divine activity *ad extra*, but God Himself as He is participated by creatures.[77]

The main point of the passage, of course, is to describe how the divine *energeia* is "indivisibly multiplied." In this respect it is little more than a paraphrase of what Dionysius says about the divine *proodoi*.[78] But by substituting *energeia* for *proodos* the Damascene makes a fundamental change. He replaces – or rather, supplements – the picture of God as the first

74 *Ibid*. (Kotter, vol. 2, 39; *NPNF* 9, 16).

75 *Ibid*. I.14 (Kotter, vol. 2, 42–43; *NPNF* 9, 17). Chase seriously mistranslates by making the subject of the last two sentences God rather than *energeia*, although the pronouns are feminine.

76 See especially *DN* I.3 589C.

77 Lest there be any doubt on this point, note that the description of the divine *energeia* in the last sentence quoted is almost a verbatim repetition of that of God two chapters earlier. God is τῶν ὄντων οὐσία, τῶν ζώντων ζωή, τῶν λογικῶς ὄντων λόγος, τῶν νοερῶς ὄντων νοῦς (I.12; Kotter, vol. 2, 35). The divine *energeia* is τῶν ὄντων τὸ εἶναι καὶ τῶν ζώντων ἡ ζωὴ καὶ τῶν λογικῶς ὄντων ὁ λόγος καὶ τῶν νοερῶς ὄντων ἡ νόησις (I.14; Kotter, vol. 2, 43).

78 See *DN* II.5 641D–644A, II.10 649B.

principle in a process of procession and return with that of God as perpetually active in all things, calling them to Himself. In a sense this is not new; certainly Dionysius would not have denied anything that these passages assert. What is new are the associations John opens up by understanding God's universal presence specifically as a kind of activity, using the same term as that used in Scripture for the gifts of the Holy Spirit and God's active cooperation with man. In that respect the passage represents a return to the Cappadocians, although now with a more systematic and philosophical outlook.

The readiest metaphor for something that is present and active in all things, without division, is light. Hence it is not surprising that in the last passage John speaks of the divine *energeia* as an "irradiation" illuminating all creation. Earlier he had used the same metaphor: "the Deity is simple and has one simple *energeia* which is good and effects (ἐνεργοῦσα) all in all, like the rays of the sun."[79] Light has a dual action, not only illuminating other things, but also, by so doing, revealing and manifesting its source. John thinks of the divine *energeiai* as performing both functions. Perhaps deliberately echoing Basil's Epistle 234, he remarks: "from the organization and governance of the world we know that God who is invisible by nature becomes visible in His *energeiai*."[80]

Light in these passages is more than a useful metaphor. In the background is a long tradition that identifies God as the true light of whom physical light is merely a symbol. As far back as the Exodus, God appeared to the Israelites as a pillar of fire. Later the glory (*kabod*) of the Lord filled the Sanctuary and the Temple, dwelling particularly above the Ark of the Covenant, where it could destroy those who approached irreverently.[81] In the New Testament, Christ appears in dazzling glory at the Transfiguration, and Saul is temporarily blinded by the light out of which Christ speaks.[82] The Johannine writings carry this tendency further: the Gospel of John speaks of Christ as "the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world," and I John asserts directly that "God is light."[83] Although such statements clearly do not intend to identify God with physical light, they also are not merely metaphor. They suggest that God is a higher kind of light, one that illuminates things not only physically but spiritually and intelligibly.

79 *De Fide Orthodoxa* 1.10 (Kotter, vol. 2, 33; *NPNF* 9, 12).
80 *Ibid*. 1.13 (Kotter, vol. 2, 40; *NPNF* 9, 15).
81 Exodus 16:10, 29:43, 40:34–38; Leviticus 9:23–24, 16:2; I Kings 8:10–11; Isaiah 6:1–5.
82 Matthew 17:1–8 (and parallels); Acts 9:3.
83 John 1:9; I John 1:5; cf. John 3:19–21; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35–36, 46.

The identification of God with light is also prominent in the monastic tradition. Evagrius, with his characteristically intellectual emphasis, says that God is a light that can be perceived only by the eyes of the intellect. He speaks frequently of how the intellect (which has its own proper light) can "mingle" with this divine light.[84] For Macarius the divine light is visible not only to the eyes of the intellect but also to the "eyes of the heart" and the "eyes of the soul."[85] The vision is not simply a passing spectacle, but something that transforms the beholder; one to whom it is granted becomes "all light, all face, all eye . . . made so by Christ who drives, guides, carries, and supports the soul about and adorns and decorates it with his spiritual beauty."[86] Although the Desert Fathers were generally wary of visions and apparitions, several stories speak of a vision of divine light or (more frequently) of a monk himself coming to glow with such light. Perhaps the most striking is a story told of Abba Joseph:

> Abba Lot went to see Abba Joseph and said to him, "Abba, as far as I can I say my little office, I fast a little, I pray and meditate, I live in peace and, as far as I can, I purify my thoughts. What else can I do?" Then the old man stood up and stretched his hands towards heaven. His fingers became like ten lamps of fire and he said to him, "If you will, you can become all flame."[87]

Later monastic authors, such as St. John Climacus and St. Isaac of Syria, also speak frequently of a divine light illuminating both the intellect and the body.[88]

Admittedly, in such writings it is not always clear precisely how to understand the status of the divine light. There are at least two important questions. Does it exist in the external world, or is it simply an impression that God imparts to the mind? And, if the former, is it created or uncreated? The first explicit discussions of such questions occur not in regard to the vision of light as a personal experience, but in the exegesis of the theophanies of Scripture. We have already seen some hints of these developments. For Gregory Nazianzen the divine glory seen by Moses is God Himself as His nature "reaches even to us." The same is true for Gregory of Nyssa of the light that shined from the burning bush.[89] Maximus holds that the shining of Christ's garment at the Transfiguration represents that of the

84 See Hilarion Alfeyev, "The Patristic Background of St. Symeon the New Theologian's Doctrine of the Divine Light," *Studia Patristica* 32 (1997), 229–31.
85 The "eyes of the heart" is a Pauline phrase (Ephesians 1:18).
86 *Homilies* 1.2, tr. Maloney; see also Alfeyev, "The Patristic Background," 231.
87 *Apophthegmata Patrum*, Alphabetical Series, Joseph of Panephysis 7 (*PG* 65 229C–D), tr. Ward.
88 Alfeyev, "The Patristic Background," 232–33.
89 See above, pp. 168–69.

Logos from amidst the created world, and that that of his face is a "symbol" (σύμβολον) of Christ's divinity.[90]

St. John of Damascus, in his own writing on the Transfiguration, underscores that the light seen by the disciples was not a created reality, but the eternal glory of God. This light was present physically within the body of Christ from the moment of its creation: "the flesh [of Christ] indeed is glorified at the same time that it comes out of non-being into being, and the glory of the Godhead becomes as well the glory of the body."[91] Like Maximus, John observes that in reality it was not Christ who was transformed, but the disciples, who were suddenly enabled to see what he had always been. Yet such a theophany in no way negates the transcendent ineffability of the Godhead. John illustrates the point by drawing upon the analogy of the sun: "just as the sun is one thing – for it is a fountain of light which it is impossible to look upon directly – and the light which comes from it to earth is another, so God is seen and discerned in the operation (ἐνεργείᾳ) of His wisdom and charity."[92] Although he does not develop the thought further, there is here clearly a parallel between the divine light seen at the Transfiguration and the *energeia* of God at work within the cosmos.

The mysticism of the divine light found in monastic authors, and the theophanic realism of the Cappadocians, Maximus, and John Damascene, converge in the writings of St. Symeon the New Theologian (949–1022). More than any earlier author, Symeon presents the vision of divine light as the culmination and goal of the Christian life. He also goes far beyond others in the vivid detail with which he recounts such experiences. He relates the following of an ardent young layman named George:

> One day, as he stood and recited, "God, have mercy upon me, a sinner," uttering it with his mind rather than his mouth, suddenly a flood of divine radiance appeared from above and filled all the room. As this happened the young man lost all awareness [of his surroundings] and forgot that he was in a house or under a roof. He saw nothing but light all around him and did not know if he was standing on the ground. He was not afraid of falling; he was not concerned with the world, nor did anything pertaining to men and corporeal beings enter into his mind. Instead he was wholly in the presence of immaterial light and seemed himself to have turned into light.[93]

[90] *Ambigua* 10 (*PG* 91 1128a, cf. 1160c). On the Dionysian background of the concept of *sumbolon* see Perl, "Symbol, Sacrament, and Hierarchy," 313–21.

[91] *Homily on the Transfiguration* 12 (Kotter, vol. 5, 449–50), tr. Weatherby.

[92] *Ibid.* 13 (Kotter, vol. 5, 452).

[93] *Catechetical Discourses* 22.88–98 (Krivochéine and Paramelle, vol. 2, 372), tr. deCatanzaro. The vividness of the detail suggests that the layman George may in fact have been Symeon himself.

This incident contains several features that could also be illustrated from earlier monastic authors: the suddenness, the rapture, the sense of identity with the light. Symeon is also in keeping with the earlier tradition in stating that the divine light can be seen only by the intellect or the "eyes of the heart." Nonetheless, much like John Damascene in discussing the Transfiguration, he emphasizes that the light comes to be physically present within the body. He writes in the *Hymns* that "after doing the things which Christ commanded and which He suffered on our behalf . . . your body will shine as your soul, and your soul, in turn, will be resplendent, like God."[94] Elsewhere he says of the "true servants of Christ": "First they are filled with ineffable joy because it is not the world or anything in the world which they have acquired, but the Maker of all things, and Lord, and Master. Then they are clothed with the light, with Christ God Himself, wholly, throughout their entire bodies."[95]

This "light of Christ" is his uncreated glory. Symeon is emphatic that the light he describes is "uncreated and beyond all creatures."[96] Like the Damascene, he does not think that for creatures to partake of such light in any way compromises divine transcendence. God is "apart from all light, transcending all light, all brilliance, unbearable to all creatures."[97] The paradox of saying both that God is light and that He is beyond all light is a familiar one, for it is the same as that which met us in the Cappadocian distinction of *ousia* and *energeia* and the Dionysian doctrine of divine names. Symeon does on one occasion identify the divine light with the *energeia* of the Holy Spirit.[98] More typically he thinks of God as "taking form" in the light while remaining beyond all form: "God does not show Himself in a particular pattern or likeness, but in simplicity, and takes the form of an incomprehensible, inaccessible, and formless light . . . [thus] He appears clearly and is consciously known and clearly seen, although He is invisible."[99] For Symeon, even more than for the Cappadocians and Dionysius, the paradox that God reveals Himself while remaining beyond conceptual thought is an immediate datum of experience.

[94] *Hymns* 50.236–46 (Koder et al., vol. 3, 174).

[95] *Ethical Discourses* 4.260–64 (Darrouzès, vol. 2, 26), tr. Golitzin. For other similar passages see Basil Krivochéine, *In the Light of Christ: Saint Symeon the New Theologian (949–1022)* (Crestwood, N.Y., 1986), 185–238; Alexander Golitzin, *On the Mystical Life: The Ethical Discourses, Vol. 3: Life, Times, and Theology* (Crestwood, N.Y., 1997), 81–94; Hilarion Alfeyev, *St. Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition* (Oxford, 2000), 233–40.

[96] *Hymns* 17.240–41 (Koder et al., vol. 2, 30).

[97] *Hymns* 38.70–72 (Koder et al., vol. 2, 472); cf. *Ethical Discourses* 11.167–86.

[98] *Ethical Discourses* 5.265–69.

[99] *Catechetical Discourses* 35.201–05 (Krivochéine, vol. 3, 322); cf. *ibid.* 36.202–22, *Ethical Discourses* 4.856–67.

## ETERNAL MANIFESTATION

The puzzling thing about the notion of the uncreated light is that it posits a manifestation of God that is independent of and prior to His relation to creatures. One immediately wishes to ask: manifestation to whom? Upon whom does the light shine? The same question could be asked about the identification of the divine *energeia* with light by John Damascene, and even about the Johannine statement that "God is light" if this is understood as referring to God in His eternal being. There can be no doubt that the notion of the uncreated light powerfully unifies the distinction of *ousia* and *energeia* (and its correlatives) with the theophanies of Scripture and experiences of the sort reported by St. Symeon. Until some content can be given to the idea of a "light" that shines even when there are no creatures to observe it, however, the assertion that there is such a light will remain obscure.

Admittedly, since the authors we have examined do not discuss this question we must assume that it did not strike them as important. The reason it did not is probably that they share with the philosophical tradition the assumption that God cannot be without *energeia*. For them this assumption is both philosophically grounded and implied by Scripture. (One thinks not only of the Scriptural teaching that God is light, but of those that He is life and love.) Any assumption so widely shared is unlikely to provoke much discussion. Nonetheless, it is important to observe that the question of *how* God is active raises a different set of issues for Christianity than it does for paganism. In the pagan philosophical tradition God's activity was generally conceived of as either Aristotelian self-thinking thought or Plotinian non-intellective self-apprehension. Either way the activity is fundamentally self-regarding. Thus for paganism the challenge is to understand how God can be responsible for the being of things without engaging in an intentional act of creation. Christianity holds that the divine *energeia* is not solely self-regarding (as implied by the notion that it is "light") and that God freely and intentionally creates. Christian thought therefore faces a different challenge: that of understanding God's eternal activity in such a way that it is *both* an outward act of manifestation *and* not dependent on the existence of creatures.

The point where the eastern tradition finally addressed this question was not in the doctrine of creation, but in that of the Trinity. This is not surprising, for it is in the doctrine of the Trinity that Christianity most fully distances itself from pagan thought. In the previous chapter we sketched some of the fundamentals of the Trinitarian doctrine of St. Athanasius

and the Cappadocians. One point we left unexplored was that of the relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit. Does the Holy Spirit proceed from the Father alone, or also from the Son? Either answer raises difficulties. If He proceeds from the Father alone, then one is left with the awkward question of precisely how the Son and the Spirit differ, given that they share the same origin and the same essence. Granted that one is generated and the other proceeds, how could this be more than a verbal difference without any real content? There is also the fact that Scripture speaks of the Holy Spirit as the "Spirit of Christ" and the "Spirit of the Son."[100] Such descriptions suggest that to think of the Son and the Spirit as two parallel and independent realities is to miss something important. On the other hand, to suppose that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son in unison would seem to demote Him to a subordinate status, in that He would be the only person of the Godhead not responsible for the existence of one of the others. It would also run foul of the principle of the "monarchy of the Father" – the belief (especially prominent in the East) that the sole origin of the Godhead is the person of the Father.

These are a few quick thoughts on a subject that during the Middle Ages became the subject of protracted debate. As is well known, one cause of the schism between the eastern and western churches was that the West teaches that the Spirit proceeds from the Father "and from the Son" (*filioque*) whereas the East teaches that He proceeds from the Father alone. The Cappadocians, of course, wrote long before this polarization occurred, and their own views were considerably more fluid. In at least one passage Gregory of Nyssa seems to come close to the *filioque*. He states that the Son is "immediately" from the Father whereas the Spirit is "by" (διά) the Son; in this way, he says, "the attribute of being only-begotten remains unequivocally with the Son, and it is also not in doubt that the Spirit is from the Father, since the mediation of the Son both preserves for the Son the attribute of being only-begotten and does not deprive the Spirit of His natural relation to the Father."[101] This passage is, on the face of it, rather puzzling, for one would think that mediation by the Son *would* deprive the Spirit of an immediate (or "natural") relation to the Father. For the answer we must look elsewhere in Gregory's works.

When we do so we find that the role Gregory allots to the Son is not precisely that of generating the Spirit, but rather that of making Him known. A letter attributed to Basil, but probably in fact by Gregory, states that the

[100] Romans 8:9, I Peter 1:11, Galatians 4:6.
[101] Gregory of Nyssa, *On Not Three Gods* (*GNO* III.1, 56; *NPNF* 5, 336).

Spirit "has this as the sign whereby His individual personhood is recognized, that He is known (γνωρίζεσθαι) after the Son and together with the Son, and that He has His subsistence (ὑφεστάναι) from the Father." The Son, conversely, is He "who through Himself and with Himself makes known the Spirit who proceeds from the Father."[102] Here the procession of the Spirit is from the Father alone, whereas the "making known" of the Spirit is through and with the Son. This simple distinction decisively excludes the *filioque* while doing justice to much of its underlying motivation.

The issue is complicated, however, by the fact that the Cappadocians also reverse the relationship, speaking of the Spirit as making known the Son. According to St. Basil, "the way of the knowledge of God lies from the one Spirit through the one Son to the one Father."[103] Gregory of Nyssa states that faith "glorifies the Son by means of the Spirit and the Father by means of the Son."[104] It might seem that to hold that the Son also makes known the Spirit creates a difficulty – for if each is known only through the other, how can either be known at all? In fact the problem only holds if we think of their relationship in an excessively wooden fashion. An analogy Gregory offers is helpful. He likens the Son to a king and the Spirit to the oil by which the king is anointed. There is a plain sense in which, although one can touch the king only through the oil, the king bears the oil and it is never known apart from him. In the same way, "whoever is to touch the Son by faith must first encounter the oil [the Spirit] in the very act of touching; there is no part of Him devoid of the Holy Spirit."[105] Presumably something like this is the way in which the Spirit "glorifies" the Son and the Son simultaneously "makes known" the Spirit.

It will be noted that in these passages the Son's making known the Spirit is not merely a temporal act, but part of what distinguishes Him as the Son. We now begin to see how the question of the relationship of the Son and the Spirit bears upon that of how there can be an eternal divine act of manifestation. Gregory's answer to both questions emerges most fully in his *Great Catechism*. This work begins by offering a quasi-philosophical rationale for the doctrine of the Trinity. Just as it would be impious to suppose that God exists without His Word, Gregory argues, so it would be impious to suppose that the Word exists without breath or spirit (πνεῦμα). And just as the Word is not transitory or insubstantial,

102 Basil, Epistle 38.4 (*PG* 32 329C; *NPNF* 8, 138).
103 *On the Holy Spirit* 47 (*PG* 32 153B; *NPNF* 8, 29).
104 *On the Holy Spirit* (*GNO* III.1, 115; *NPNF* 5, 324).
105 *Ibid.* (*GNO* III.1, 103; *NPNF* 5, 321).

so neither is the Spirit: "we regard it as that which accompanies the Word and manifests His energy (φανεροῦν αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐνέργειαν), and not as a mere effluence of the breath."[106] Plainly what the analogy implies is not that the Spirit proceeds *from* the Son but rather that He proceeds *with* the Son, as it were, in the very act in which the Son is generated. Yet the two are distinct; the Spirit is the vehicle of the Word, the Word is the content of the Spirit. This means that for the Spirit to "glorify" the Son and for the Son to "make known" the Spirit is not solely an aspect of their temporal mission, but part of what distinguishes each in His personal being.

The *Great Catechism* became the starting point for the exposition of Trinitarian doctrine in John Damascene's *De Fide Orthodoxa*. John recapitulates Gregory's thought and carries it a step further. In chapter 1.6–7 he repeats the argument that God is not without His Word and the Word is not without Spirit, concluding, in a phrase borrowed from Gregory, that the Spirit "accompanies the Word and manifests His energy." He then adds two points. One is that we must conceive of the Spirit as "proceeding from the Father and coming to rest (ἀναπαυομένην) in the Word and declaring Him."[107] Behind this cryptic statement, which John does not explain further, is a tradition of exegesis of Scriptural passages which speak of the Spirit as resting or abiding upon Christ.[108] Taken alone such passages might seem to refer only to a temporal sending of the Spirit. Taken in conjunction with a strong sense of the divinity of Christ and the substantial existence of the Spirit, however, they can be seen as a description of the Spirit's eternal procession.[109] Obviously such a reading is far from the *filioque* (which had at this time not yet become an issue), for if the Spirit proceeds eternally *to* the Son He cannot also proceed *from* the Son. Yet it is also far from any tendency to think of the Son and the Spirit as independent and unrelated. John envisions the procession of the Spirit as not solely forward into existence, but as having a personal aim and direction. That is what gives it its eternal revelatory content: in coming to rest upon the Son the Spirit "declares" the Son and manifests His energy.

[106] *Great Catechism* 2 (*GNO* III.4, 13; *NPNF* 5, 477).
[107] *On the Orthodox Faith* 1.7 (Kotter, vol. 2, 16; *NPNF* 9, 5).
[108] E.g., Isaiah 11:2, John 1:32–33.
[109] See José Grégoire, "La relation éternelle de l'Esprit au Fils d'après les écrits de Jean de Damas," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 64 (1969), 728 n. 2, which cites to this effect Origen, St. Didymus the Blind, St. Cyril of Alexandria, and Procopius of Gaza, along with related statements in St. Gregory Thaumaturgus, Didymus, and Pseudo-Chrysostom.

The other point at which John goes beyond Gregory is in introducing a new analogy to try to capture the combination of the Spirit's causal dependence upon the Father alone and His eternal manifestation by the Son. John writes:

> We do not speak of the Spirit as from the Son, but yet we call Him the Spirit of the Son . . . And we confess that He is manifested and imparted to us through the Son, for "He breathed," it says, "and he said to his disciples: Receive ye the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). It is just the same as in the case of the sun from which come both the ray and the radiance (for the sun itself is the source of both the ray and the radiance); it is through the ray that the radiance is imparted to us, and it is the radiance itself which enlightens us and in which we participate.[110]

Both the ray and the radiance derive their being from the sun, yet it is only the radiance in which we directly participate, while the ray is that which imparts the radiance and makes it known. John uses this analogy to support his point that the Son eternally manifests and imparts the Spirit, yet the Spirit derives His being only from the Father.

The final development of eastern patristic thought about the eternal manifestation of the Spirit is to be found in Gregory of Cyprus, patriarch of Constantinople from 1283 to 1289. Gregory presided over the Council of Blachernae in 1285, where the Byzantine Church gave its final and definitive response to the *filioque*. His works include the *Tome* stating the decisions of the Council and a series of short treatises written to defend the *Tome* from its critics, many of whom thought it yielded too much to the Latins.[111] Gregory concedes that the Spirit may be said to exist (ὑπάρχει) through the Son insofar as He eternally shines forth from the Son, but denies that the Spirit therefore has His existence (ἔχειν τὴν ὕπαρξιν) through the Son.[112] The distinction between "existing" and "having existence" is no more obvious in Greek than it is in English, and Gregory's critics professed to find it unintelligible. To substantiate it Gregory invoked the Damascene's analogy with light: radiance *exists through* the ray in that it shines forth from the

[110] *On the Orthodox Faith* 1.8 (Kotter, vol. 2, 30–31; *NPNF* 9, 11).

[111] The short treatises are the *Apology*, the *Confession*, and *On the Procession of the Holy Spirit*, written in that order from about 1286 to 1290. For Gregory's career and the controversies surrounding the Council see Aristeides Papadakis, *Crisis in Byzantium: The Filioque Controversy in the Patriarchate of Gregory II of Cyprus (1283–1289)* (New York, 1983). This work also includes a translation of the *Tome* (pp. 155–65). I have passed over certain middle Byzantine authors who in some ways anticipate Gregory's thought, such as Nicolas of Methone and Nicephorus Blemmydes. On these see Gabriel Patacsi, "Palamism Before Palamas," *Eastern Churches Review* 9 (1977), 64–71; Andrew Sopko, "Palamism Before Palamas and the Theology of Gregory of Cyprus," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 23 (1979), 139–47.

[112] Gregory of Cyprus, *Tome* 4 and 11 (*PG* 142 240B–C, 243C).

ray, but it *has its existence* directly from the sun.[113] Gregory also makes use of the analogy to emphasize, as had Gregory of Nyssa and John Damascene before him, the close connection between the Spirit's procession into existence and His shining forth from the Son. The manifestation of the Spirit through the Son is eternal; it accompanies His procession from the Father just as the manifestation of light through the ray accompanies the procession of the light from the sun.[114]

The most original feature of Gregory's thought is the close connection he draws between the eternal manifestation of the Spirit through the Son and the temporal mission of the Spirit within the world. The phrase "through the Son," he says, applies equally to the eternal manifestation of the Spirit and to His bestowal upon creatures.[115] In this context Gregory revives the teaching of St. Athanasius that the Spirit is the *energeia* of the Son.[116] All this means, he says, is that the benefits that come to men from God are *energeiai* and gifts of the Spirit, so in that sense the Spirit Himself may be called *energeia* and gift. The reason He is the *energeia* of the Son, in particular, is that it is the Son who performs (ἐνεργήσαντος) these gifts. Gregory then adds a point of particular significance: "it is because the Spirit proceeds from the Father and is inseparably joined to the Son, and is connatural and consubstantial with Him, that the Son bestows and gives and sends Him."[117] In other words, the Son's bestowal of the gifts and *energeiai* of the Spirit is the temporal consequence of the eternal procession of the Spirit from the Father "through the Son." For Gregory, of course, the involvement of the Son consists not in causing the existence of the Spirit but in the Spirit's being sent *to* the Son and manifested *by* the Son. The intratrinitarian communion of the three persons is thus the cause and foundation of the bestowal of the Spirit upon creatures.

Gregory gives particular clarity to the theology of eternal manifestation found in more incipient form in Gregory of Nyssa and John Damascene. Admittedly, throughout these discussions he has in mind a purely theological issue, the debate over the *filioque*. But it will not do violence to his thought to draw from it a philosophical conclusion. We can see now the answer to the question of how God can be eternally active in a way that is neither self-regarding nor defined by His relation to creatures. The life

113 *Confession* 251A–B (translated by Papadakis, *Crisis in Byzantium*, 92); cf. *Tome* 4 240B–C and *Apology* 267A.

114 *Apology* 262D, 266D (quoting Basil, Epistle 38.4); cf. *Confession* 250C.

115 *Tome* 4 240C; *Confession* 250B–C.

116 *On the Procession of the Holy Spirit* 288A–B, citing *Ad Serapionem* I.20; cf. above, p. 126.

117 *On the Procession of the Holy Spirit* 288D.

of the Trinity is a kind of movement: the Spirit proceeds from the Father to rest upon the Son, and in so doing both glorifies the Son, manifesting His energy, and is Himself made known through the Son. It is also true, of course, that the Son manifests the Father, as is implied in calling Him "Word." Thus each person of the Trinity is manifested eternally to the others. Gregory adds that the manifestation of the Spirit through the Son also enables creatures to partake of the divine life "through the Son in the Spirit" by participating in the divine *energeiai*. In this way, the intratrinitarian communion of persons is not limited to the Godhead, but is available to creatures through grace.

It would be a ready extrapolation to associate this intratrinitarian movement with the uncreated light. Surely it is natural to think of the manifestation of each Person to the others as a kind of radiance. The association gains further credence when we recall that the uncreated light, like the intratrinitarian communion of persons, is not jealously guarded within the Godhead but can be shared by creatures through grace. The uncreated light could thus be understood as the visible manifestation of the eternal self-giving of the Trinity. Indeed – in view of the association of the uncreated light with the divine *energeia* by John Damascene – perhaps all the divine *energeiai* could be understood along such lines. That would amount to something like the Plotinian theory of two acts, with the intratrinitarian movement of the three Persons serving as internal act and the divine *energeiai* as external act. The greatest difference from the Plotinian theory would be that only some of the *energeiai* are necessary, whereas others are contingent. Such a view would go a long way toward answering the question raised in the previous chapter about the relationship between God's internal activity and His creation and ordering of the world.

However plausible such a line of thought may be, it was not pursued by the Byzantines. As a rule the Byzantines did not make theological innovations unless prompted by some pressing need. The events which ultimately prompted them to clarify their thought about the uncreated light and its relationship to the divine *energeia* turned out to have little to do with Trinitarian doctrine, bearing instead upon the interpretation of the Biblical theophanies and the possibility of seeing God in this present life. To these events we now turn.

CHAPTER 9

# *Palamas and Aquinas*

The eastern tradition as we have presented it so far is rich but polyphonic. One finds terms as fundamental as *energeia* and "the things around God" being used differently by different authors, and concepts such as ceaseless prayer and the uncreated light achieving great importance without any attempt to incorporate them into a dogmatic synthesis. No doubt part of the reason was the strong sense of unanimity within the tradition as a whole. There was never any sudden loss of texts, or division into schools, or rise of a scholastic method – all factors that, had they occurred, would have encouraged authors to look for shortcomings within the tradition and to emphasize their own originality. The Byzantines took for granted that what had been said by the Fathers was correct and complete, and they saw their own task as that of applying this inherited wisdom to the issues at hand. Consequently, even a step of great originality was rarely heralded as such. Behind this conservatism there lay also a deeper cause, namely the apophaticism at the root of the entire tradition. What is the point of spinning out words about God when He can be known only through practice? On such a view theology, however complex it may become, is ultimately simply the enterprise of preserving "the faith once delivered to the saints." To claim (as does Aquinas, for instance) that it is a science in the Aristotelian sense – one that has God as its subject matter – would have struck the Byzantines as strangely pretentious.

These considerations will help explain why the eastern tradition never produced a theologian of the stature of Augustine or Aquinas. "Stature" is measured by breadth of thought, originality, and influence, and these were not qualities that the Byzantines valued. They valued fidelity to the existing tradition. What one finds in the East is not a series of towering geniuses, but a kind of symphonic movement, in which the role of a great thinker is to pull together and integrate what others before him had said in a more piecemeal way. Our task in this chapter will be to examine the last of these great syntheses, that of St. Gregory Palamas (1296–1359). In

juxtaposing Palamas and Aquinas I do not mean to suggest that they are comparable as systematic thinkers. Palamas cannot really compare with Aquinas on that score. The value of the comparison is not in setting one genius against another, but in highlighting the characteristic differences of their respective traditions.

Our comparison must begin with neither of these figures, however, but with St. Augustine. It was Augustine who established the premises that would govern western Christian thought throughout the Middle Ages. In particular, in order to understand the unique blend of innovation and traditionalism in Aquinas' treatment of *esse*, one must first take account of comparable themes in Augustine. That fact alone would justify his inclusion here. More surprising is that Palamas, too, is best understood in light of Augustine's legacy, for it turns out to have been a kind of Augustinianism by proxy merely that provoked him to produce his own theological works. We shall therefore treat first of Augustine, then trace certain Augustinian themes into our discussion of Palamas, and finally turn to Aquinas.

## THE INNOVATIONS OF AUGUSTINE

The most helpful way to approach Augustine's conception of *esse* is through the account of the development of his views that he gives in the *Confessions*. As a Manichean he had been taught to conceive of God as a body. Looking back upon this period of his life, he recalls: "I did not know that other reality which truly is (*vere quod est*)"; that is, he did not know "that God is a spirit, having no parts extended in length and breadth, to whose being bulk does not belong: for bulk is less in its part than in its whole . . . and so could not be wholly itself in every place, as a spirit is."[1] Here *to be* in the fullest sense means to be wholly oneself in each place, without any spatial division. Similar reasoning naturally leads to the conclusion that it also means to be wholly oneself at each time – that is, to be immutable and eternal. It was an intuition along these lines that began to move Augustine away from his Manichean conception of God as a mutable corporeal substance. Reasoning that to be free of change is better than to be subject to change, he concluded that whatever else God may be, He must be immutable (vii.1). At this point, however, Augustine still could not conceive of an immaterial substance. He therefore adopted the uneasy compromise of supposing God

[1] *Confessions* iii.7 (further references in the text), tr. F. J. Sheed.

to be an immutable and infinite body in which the finite creation rests as a sponge floats in the sea (VII.5).

The critical turning point came upon his reading "some books of the Platonists" (VII.9). Looking back upon this experience, he explains that what he learned was essentially that which is contained in the Prologue of John – minus, of course, the Incarnation. The new insight was apparently not only that there can be an immaterial substance; it was that wisdom is to be found by turning inward, examining the soul and its apprehension of truth. This is evident from the beginning of the subsequent chapter: "Being admonished by all this to return to myself, I entered into my own depths" (VII.10). This statement is followed by the account of an introspective journey in which Augustine finds his soul to be illumined by divine light. The theory of divine illumination (of which Augustine is here recounting his discovery) need not concern us, save insofar as it contributes to the climax of the passage. Having become aware of the truth as a kind of light illuminating the soul, Augustine asks: "Is truth then nothing at all, since it is not extended either through finite spaces or infinite?" The answer he receives from God is a cryptic one: "And thou didst cry to me from afar: 'I am who am' (*ego sum qui sum*)." This is, of course, the divine name revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14. Augustine takes it to be the climactic revelation of his inward journey.

Augustine's question, let us notice, is how truth can be anything at all when it has no spatial extension. How does the revelation of the divine name address this question? The answer lies in the conception of being adumbrated earlier. *To be* in the fullest sense is to be wholly and completely one thing, without division spatially or temporally. It follows that the eternal light of truth illuminating the mind – which is the form in which Augustine believes he has apprehended God – *is* in the fullest sense. The next chapter goes on to contrast the being of God with that of creatures on precisely these grounds.

> Then I thought upon those other things that are less than You, and I saw that they neither absolutely are nor yet totally are not: they are, in as much as they are from You: they are not, in as much as they are not what You are. For that truly is, which abides unchangeably. (*Confessions* VII.11)

The notion that derivative beings both "are and are not" is one familiar from Plato. The contrast between sensible objects and the Forms as it is developed by Plato certainly includes (although it is not limited to) the two points here emphasized by Augustine, the difference between the derivative and the underivative, and the mutable and the immutable. In effect Augustine

takes over the Platonic contrast and translates it into a contrast between God and creatures.

Indeed, the entire notion of an inward ascent that arrives at immutable being is of Platonic lineage. Later in Book VII, when Augustine again recounts such an inward journey, he does so in terms that could be drawn directly from Plato. He asks himself about the source of his moral and aesthetic judgments, such as his certainty that the immutable is better than the mutable. He realizes as he does so that he must have some knowledge of the immutable itself, for otherwise he could not even make such a judgment. One is reminded of Plato's very similar claim in the *Phaedo* about our innate knowledge of equality.[2] The conclusion of the argument, or rather of the journey, is again an epiphany of being: "Thus in the thrust of a trembling glance my mind arrived at That Which Is (*id quod est*)" (VII.17).

The most striking feature of Augustine's conception of being, from our standpoint, is its static character. For Augustine *esse* is not an act, but a condition – that of full and unqualified wholeness. He goes on to construct on this basis a tightly woven metaphysics of the divine nature. Its most succinct expression is *On the City of God* VIII.6, a chapter devoted to enumerating what is right in the theology of the Platonists. Augustine praises the Platonists for having understood three closely related points. One is that God is simple, in the sense that each of His perfections is identical to the others and to His being itself. He expresses this point with reference to the perfections of life, understanding, blessedness, and being:

> To Him it is not one thing to be, and another to live, as though He could be, not living; nor is it to Him one thing to live, and another thing to understand, as though He could live, not understanding; nor is it to Him one thing to understand, another thing to be blessed, as though He could understand and not be blessed. But to Him to live, to understand, and be blessed, are to be.[3]

This is the well-known doctrine of divine simplicity in its Augustinian form. It is a corollary of the Augustinian conception of being, for if God is to *be* in the fullest sense He must be free of any distinction from Himself, not only spatially and temporally, but also in respect to His attributes. As Augustine puts it later in the *City of God*, the divine nature is "the same as itself" and therefore "it is what it has" (XI.10).

[2] *Phaedo* 74a–e. Augustine could have read the *Phaedo* in the lost translation by Apuleius, although we know with certainty only of his reading of the *Timaeus* (in the translation by Cicero); see Courcelle, *Late Latin Writers*, 168–71.

[3] *Quod est illi vivere, intellegere, beatum esse, hoc est illi esse*. The translation is that of Marcus Dods, slightly modified.

This conception of simplicity is so important for what will follow that we should pause to clarify precisely its position within Augustine's thought. He gives another, and quite distinct, rationale for it in the *De Trinitate*. There he maintains that if God were not identical with His perfections He would have to possess them by participation, and so would be inferior to that in which He participates. The conclusion he draws is that God is nothing but "simple essence": "In the Godhead is absolutely simple essence (*summe simplex essentia*), and therefore to be is there the same as to be wise . . . And since in the divine simplicity to be wise is nothing else than to be, wisdom there is the same as essence."[4] It is important to recognize that the participation argument developed here does not alone require this conclusion. As we noted earlier, Gregory of Nyssa follows a very similar line of thought in arguing that God is identical with His own perfections, yet he locates the identity at the level of *energeia* rather than that of essence.[5] The reason that Augustine takes the participation argument as leading to his own conception of simplicity is that he brings to it his fundamentally Platonic understanding of being as undivided wholeness.

Returning now to the *City of God*, the second point Augustine praises in the Platonists is their recognition that all other things must derive their being from God. The Platonists had seen that "in every changeable thing, the form which makes it that which it is, whatever be its mode or nature, can only *be* through Him who truly *is*, because He is unchangeable" (VIII.6). Taken in isolation this statement is puzzling, for there is nothing about unchangeableness alone that implies a causal relation to other beings. The rest of the chapter makes it plain that Augustine is here using unchangeableness to signify the general simplicity and self-identity of God. We can fill in the gap in the argument by recalling that, in light of this simplicity, God does not simply *have* being, He *is* being. As Augustine puts it elsewhere, God is being itself, *ipsum esse*.[6] Hence all other things must derive their being from Him in some way. Augustine even goes so far as to credit the Platonists with recognizing God as the Creator: "they have understood, from this unchangeableness and simplicity, that all things must have been made by Him."

The third insight he attributes to the Platonists is that, since God is the formal cause of the perfections by which things are, He is Himself, in some sense, Form. Augustine calls Him the "first Form" (*prima species*) and credits this discovery to the Platonists:

[4] *De Trinitate* VII.1.2. For other passages on simplicity see V.10.11, VI.7.8, XV.5.7–8, 13.22, 17.29.

[5] See above, p. 165.

[6] *De Trinitate* V.2.3; *Commentary on the Psalms* 134.4; Sermon 7.7.

Since they [the Platonists] saw that body and mind might be more or less beautiful in form, and that if they lacked form they would not be at all, they saw that there is something in which is the first Form, unchangeable, and therefore not admitting of degrees of comparison, and in that they most rightly believed was the first principle of things which was not made and by which all things were made. (*City of God* VIII.6)

The description of the first Form as that "by which all things were made" is an allusion to John 1:3. Apparently Augustine here has in mind the divine Logos, the second person of the Trinity. Elsewhere he identifies the Logos with Truth and "the Form of all things that are."[7] On the other hand, he also speaks of the divine mind or wisdom as containing many Forms, namely the eternal Reasons (*rationes*) in accordance with which creatures are made.[8] Thus he seems to assume that a plurality of Forms can exist as a unified whole within the divine mind. This suggests that divine simplicity in Augustine is to be understood, not (as is sometimes suggested) as like that of the Plotinian One, but rather as like that of Plotinian Intellect. More generally, it is the Plotinian view of Intellect that Augustine seems to have in mind when he praises the theological acumen of the Platonists.[9]

An important consequence of this Augustinian appropriation of Neoplatonism is what it implies about divine intelligibility. Since God is the "first Form," and form is the principle of intelligibility, God is intrinsically suited to the intellect. Augustine proclaims this conclusion boldly: "God is for the mind to understand, as body is for the eye to see."[10] He qualifies it by only two provisos. One is that although the mind can understand (*intellegere*) God, it cannot comprehend (*comprehendere*) Him, in the sense that it cannot grasp Him all at once as a whole. Augustine's analogy is that of bodily vision: the eye likewise cannot comprehend a body, for it cannot see front and back at once.[11] This analogy probably understates his true intent, for a body can be taken in by a succession of views, whereas Augustine would surely deny the same of the divine essence.[12] The fundamental

7 *De Vera Religione* 36.66; cf. *ibid.* 18.35, *De Libero Arbitrio* II.16.44–17.46, Sermon 117.3.

8 *City of God* XI.10; *On Eighty-three Different Questions* 46. The latter text explicitly identifies these *rationes* with the Forms of Plato.

9 See also *City of God* X.23, which identifies the Intellect spoken of by Porphyry with God the Son. It may be that Augustine found in Porphyry a version of Neoplatonism more congenial to orthodox Trinitarianism than that of Plotinus.

10 Sermon 117.5, cited by Phillip Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (Oxford, 2000), 58. Cary gives an excellent discussion of the importance of divine intelligibility in Augustine (53–60).

11 *Ibid.*

12 See Deirdre Carabine, "Negative Theology in the Thought of Saint Augustine," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 59 (1992), 5–22.

point remains that the divine being as such is innately suited to the human intellect. The other proviso is that to achieve such understanding requires moral purification, and especially the elimination of the sensory images that cling to the soul and prevent it from being fully present to itself.[13] We find both the need for purification and the innate affinity of the intellect to God in Augustine's most sustained discussion of the divine *rationes*, the short essay *On Ideas*. After identifying the eternal Reasons with thoughts in the mind of God, Augustine adds:

> The rational soul stands out above all the things God has fashioned, and it is closest to God when it is pure, cleaving to Him in charity the more it perceives these Reasons (illuminated and saturated as it were by the intelligible light from Him) not with bodily eyes, but with that chief part of itself by which it is superior, that is, with its intelligence – a vision which makes it utterly happy.[14]

The emphasis upon the intellect as the supreme part of the soul, and the observation that the intellectual understanding of the divine *rationes* makes the soul "utterly happy," foreshadow the doctrine of the beatific vision. We shall return to this point below.

A final corollary that may be drawn from the Augustinian metaphysics of the divine essence pertains to the nature of revelation. It is clear from the foregoing that for Augustine a central mode of revelation (perhaps *the* central mode) is the vision of God as Truth enjoyed by the intellect. But there are also special manifestations of God in history – the burning bush, the pillar of fire that followed the Israelites in the wilderness, the dove that descended at Christ's baptism, the tongues of flame at Pentecost, and many others. What are we to make of these? The dominant interpretation before the Council of Nicaea had been that they were appearances of the Logos or the Holy Spirit.[15] This view was often accompanied by the assumption that the Son and the Spirit are more intrinsically knowable than the Father. Once Nicaea had asserted that the Father and Son are one in essence, however, to assert a difference of *intrinsic* knowability could no longer be allowed. The solution adopted in the East was relatively conservative. Eastern authors continued to speak of the Old Testament theophanies as appearances of the Logos; they made it clear, however, that the Logos took on this role not because of any intrinsic difference in visibility, but because

[13] *De Trinitate* VII.6.11–12, VIII.2.3, X.8.11 (a passage much indebted to *Enneads* I.6.9, and ultimately to the *Phaedo*).

[14] *On Ideas(=On Eighty-Three Different Questions*, Q.46), tr. Cary, *Augustine's Invention*, 150.

[15] See Edmund Hill, "Introduction," *Saint Augustine: The Trinity* (Brooklyn, 1991), 39–43, for discussion of this theme in Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Novatian.

the theophanies foreshadow the Incarnation, when the Logos became visible in the flesh.[16] There was also some tendency to draw upon the Biblical category of the "glory of God" as an uncreated manifestation of the divine presence. We noted in Chapter 7 the importance of this category for the Cappadocians.[17] Other exegetes followed a similar pattern, understanding the Biblical theophanies as appearances of the divine glory.[18] These two approaches seem to have existed side by side, each being applied in particular cases as best suited the context.

It is against this background that one can recognize the originality of Augustine. Treating this matter in the *De Trinitate*, he rejects the view that the Son and the Spirit are more intrinsically visible than the Father because of its subordinationist tendencies. However, it does not seem to occur to him to adopt either of the approaches favored in the East. Instead he proposes that the beings seen in the theophanies must have been creatures – either angels taking visible form, or temporary beings created specially for the purpose by God.[19] His operative assumption is that *either* they were creatures *or* they were direct appearances of the divine substance (which of course is inadmissible); there is no third alternative.

The *De Genesi ad Litteram* carries his discussion of this point further, dividing such created theophanies into two types, corporeal and spiritual.[20] The corporeal are those that are perceived through the bodily senses, such as the smoke and fire on Mt. Sinai, whereas the spiritual occur by a direct impression of images upon the soul, as in dreams and prophetic visions. Augustine also adds that there is a third type of theophany, one not mentioned in the *De Trinitate*: the intellectual, which occurs entirely without images. The primary examples are Moses' encounter with God on Mt. Sinai and the rapture into the "third heaven" of St. Paul. He concedes that in such extraordinary cases there is a vision of the divine substance itself, although only because the one undergoing the vision has so completely left behind the body as virtually to have departed from this present life.[21] Such intellectual vision is a foretaste of the beatific vision to be enjoyed by the blessed in

[16] See Steven Bingham, *The Image of God the Father in Orthodox Theology and Iconography and Other Studies* (Torrance, Calif., 1995), 43–49,.

[17] See above, p. 168.

[18] See Angela Christman, "'What Did Ezekiel See?' Patristic Exegesis of Ezekiel 1 and Debates about God's Incomprehensibility," *Pro Ecclesia* 8 (1999), 338–63, for examples from Eusebius, St. John Chrysostom, and Theodoret of Cyrus. A comprehensive history of the eastern interpretation of the Biblical theophanies is much to be desired.

[19] *De Trinitate* II.5.10–16.28, III.11.21–27. The point is frequently repeated elsewhere, e.g., *De Genesi ad Litteram* XI.33.43, XII.4.9; *City of God* X.13.

[20] *De Genesi ad Litteram* XII.6.15–7.17, 11.22–12.26.

[21] *Ibid.* XII.6.15, 26.54–28.56.

heaven.[22] Significantly, Augustine refers to its object as the divine substance (*substantia*) and glory (*claritas*), without distinguishing between them; for him these are apparently one and the same.[23]

Thus, although Augustine ultimately allows that besides created theophanies there can be a direct vision of God in this life, his governing assumption remains that the object of vision must be *either* a creature *or* the divine substance. This assumption was so deeply engrained that he seems to have felt no need to justify it. Its underlying rationale must surely lie in his view of divine simplicity. For Augustine, God simply *is* the divine essence (or substance); hence, if He is to be seen directly, it can only be in such a vision. Augustine arrives at his understanding of the beatific vision by taking the momentary direct vision that he ascribes to Moses and St. Paul and extrapolating it forward into eternity. This ultimate vision is purely a function of the intellect. Strikingly, and by an apparently fortuitous convergence, Augustine thus agrees with Aristotle in seeing intellectual contemplation as the final goal of human life. Later we shall see how Aquinas will make use of this convergence to integrate the Augustinian and Aristotelian views within his own account of the *summum bonum*.

## BARLAAM AND THE HESYCHASTS

Clearly the gulf separating Augustine from the eastern tradition is immense. It encompasses such basic issues as the nature of being, the simplicity of God, the intelligibility of God, and the final goal of human existence. What is perhaps most remarkable is that the Augustinian presuppositions we have sketched could come to dominate the thought of the West, while having virtually no influence in the East, and yet for almost a thousand years neither side recognized what had happened. Instead the controversy between them focused on relatively peripheral issues such as the *filioque* and the role of the Papacy. Recognition of the underlying philosophical differences, when it finally did occur, came only grudgingly. The process began with a local controversy among the Byzantines. That this controversy was in fact a confrontation between the Augustinian metaphysics of the divine essence

[22] *Ibid.* 34.67–36.69.

[23] Augustine's terminology is governed by Numbers 12:8, where God says of Moses, "with him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold" (A.V.). In the version read by Augustine this is *os ad os loquar ad illum in specie et non per aenigmata, et claritatem domini videt*. Augustine takes it to mean that Moses beheld the divine *substantia*, or, equivalently, the divine *claritas* (*De Genesi ad Litteram* XII.27.55–28.56; Epistle 147.31–32).

and the apophatic theology of the East has become clear only in recent years, as advances in scholarship have clarified the motivations of both sides.

The unwitting representative of the West in this encounter was Barlaam of Calabria, an Orthodox monk who had imbibed certain elements of Augustine's thought and incorporated them into his own idiosyncratic theology. It is unfortunate that we do not know more about Barlaam's education and background. He came from Calabria to Constantinople around 1330.[24] There he quickly acquired a reputation for learning and rose to prominence at the imperial court. From 1335 to 1337 he wrote a series of *Antilatin Treatises* attacking the *filioque* using various traditional arguments, as well as on the novel grounds that there can be no apodictic demonstration of any proposition related to the Trinity. This was a view that Barlaam derived from his reading of Dionysius the Areopagite. Despite their subject, these treatises do not evince much familiarity with contemporary Latin theology; it appears, for example, that Barlaam knew Aquinas' arguments for the *filioque* only at second-hand.[25] In 1339 he was sent by the emperor as an emissary to the papal court at Avignon, and there he undoubtedly learned more. Following the rejection of his views at Constantinople in 1341 he moved to France, where he eventually was received into Roman Catholicism.

The events that concern us began in 1337. That was when Barlaam initiated an attack on the methods of prayer practiced by the monks of Mt. Athos known as hesychasts (from *hesychia*, silence). The term 'hesychast' itself was not new; hermits had been known as hesychasts since the fourth century. What was new, and particularly aroused Barlaam's wrath, was the use of certain bodily methods in prayer. The hesychast method consisted of sitting with the head bowed so as to gaze upon the area of the heart, breathing slowly and with as little depth as possible. With his attention thus focused the monk would recite in synchrony with his breathing the Jesus Prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me."[26] The purpose of these exercises was to "lead the intellect (*nous*) back to the heart"

[24] For this and other historical information see John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, Second edition (New York, 1974). Although Meyendorff's work remains essential, his attempt to link Barlaam to "the spirit of the Italian Renaissance" (42) has not been widely accepted.

[25] The *Treatises* remain unpublished, but see the detailed account in Robert Sinkewicz, "The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God in the Early Writings of Barlaam the Calabrian," *Mediaeval Studies* 44 (1982), 181–242.

[26] See Kallistos Ware, "Praying with the Body: The Hesychast Method and Non-Christian Parallels," *Sobornost* 14 (1992), 6–35, for discussion of various minor variations, such as the precise verbal form of the prayer and whether the breathing is preparatory to the prayer or (as eventually became the norm) concurrent with it.

so that the prayer would be the act of the whole and undivided person. Nikiphoros the Hesychast, one of the earliest hesychast teachers, gives the following instruction:

> Put pressure on your intellect and compel it to descend with your inhaled breath into your heart . . . Just as a man, after being far away from home, on his return is overjoyed at being with his wife and children again, so the intellect, once it is united with the soul, is filled with indescribable delight . . . Moreover, when your intellect is firmly established in your heart, it must not remain there silent and idle; it should constantly repeat and meditate on the prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me," and should never stop doing this. For this prayer protects the intellect from distraction, renders it impregnable to diabolic attacks, and every day increases its love and desire for God.[27]

Another early teacher, St. Gregory of Sinai, writes: "Restrain your breathing, so as not to breathe unimpededly; for when you exhale, the air, rising from the heart, beclouds the intellect and ruffles your thinking, keeping the intellect away from the heart."[28] As these passages illustrate, for the hesychasts "drawing the intellect into the heart" was both a bodily and a mental process. Apparently the hesychasts did not even draw such a distinction. For them the intellect and heart are both unitary, integrated capacities, each encompassing features that we would distinguish as mental and physical.

When the hesychasts speak of drawing the intellect into the heart, then, they have in mind not only the achievement of a mental state of tranquility and concentration, but a transformation that affects a person's whole being. A sign of its depth is that the Jesus Prayer ultimately becomes so much a part of the one who prays that it no longer requires conscious attention. It becomes "self-acting," much like the heartbeat and the normal rhythm of breathing. Gregory of Sinai speaks of this change as the discovery of the energy (ἐνέργεια) of the Holy Spirit given at baptism.

> The energy of the Holy Spirit, which we have already mystically received in baptism, is discovered in two ways. First . . . this gift is revealed, as St. Mark tells us, through arduous and protracted practice of the commandments: to the degree to which we enact the commandments its radiance is increasingly manifested in us. Secondly, it is manifested under spiritual guidance through the continuous invocation of the Lord Jesus, repeated with conscious awareness, that is, through mindfulness of God . . . For prayer in beginners is the unceasing noetic activity (ἀεικίνητος ἐνέργεια νοερὰ) of the Holy Spirit.[29]

[27] *On Watchfulness and the Guarding of the Heart* (*PG* 147 963B–965A; tr. *Philokalia*, vol. 4, 205–06).
[28] *On Stillness* 2 (*PG* 150 1316B; tr. *Philokalia*, vol. 4, 264).
[29] *On the Signs of Grace and Delusion* 3 (*PG* 150 1308A–C; tr. *Philokalia*, vol. 4, 259, modified).

The idea that the grace given mystically (μυστικῶς) at baptism becomes real or effective (ἐνεργῶς) through obedience is prominent in St. Mark the Monk, a fifth-century author to whom Gregory here alludes.[30] Gregory adapts it into hesychasm by adding that the divine energy given at baptism is manifested, not only by obedience, but also in prayer.[31] Indeed, prayer *is* this *energeia*, the "unceasing noetic activity of the Holy Spirit." This statement gains added significance when we recall that in the eastern tradition the divine *energeia* is not simply God's activity *ad extra*, but God Himself made manifest. That is perhaps why Gregory elsewhere speaks of prayer, not only as the divine *energeia*, but as God Himself: "Prayer is . . . baptism made manifest . . . God's grace, God's wisdom, or, rather, the origin of true and absolute Wisdom; the revelation of God, the work of monks, the life of hesychasts, the source of stillness, and expression of the angelic state. Why say more? Prayer is God, who accomplishes all things in all."[32] Extravagant though such expressions may seem, they do no more than restate the fundamental tenet that in prayer, as in any good work, God reaches forth to God.[33]

Another point at which Gregory builds on the prior tradition is his belief in the uncreated light. Although he is reticent on the subject, and frequently cautions against seeking visions for their own sake, he says enough to show that the practice of hesychasm was accompanied by a special experience of light. The mind that is purified through obedience "plunges its thought into light and itself becomes light"; in prayer it "grows luminous and immaterial, becoming through ineffable union a single spirit with God"; its enjoys a "real spiritual contemplation of light," a light that can be known to be from God by its activity.[34] Although some of these passages could be taken metaphorically, the references to the light as active and as capable of bringing about union with God suggest a stronger reading, one more in keeping with the realist understanding of the divine light found in St. Symeon the New Theologian.

How much Barlaam understood of hesychasm is open to question. His knowledge was apparently limited to the works of Nikiphoros and to

[30] See Kallistos Ware, "The Sacrament of Baptism and the Ascetic Life in the Teaching of Mark the Monk," *Studia Patristica* 10 (1972), 441–52.

[31] Although in the passage quoted Gregory speaks of obedience and prayer as two distinct ways in which the divine energy can be realized, they are not really separate, since the hesychastic life is one of strict monastic obedience. See further Kallistos Ware, "The Jesus Prayer in St. Gregory of Sinai," *Eastern Churches Review* 4 (1972), 9–11.

[32] *On Commandments and Doctrines* 113 (*PG* 150 1277D–1280A; tr. *Philokalia*, vol. 4, 237–38).

[33] On prayer see particularly Romans 8:15–16, 26–27.

[34] *On Commandments and Doctrines* 23, 116, 118, *On Prayer* 8 (*PG* 150 1245D, 1281A, D, 1345A; tr. *Philokalia*, vol. 4, 216, 239, 240, 286); cf. Ware, "Jesus Prayer," 21.

conversations with monks in Thessalonica who claimed to be hesychasts. Precisely who these monks were and what they said remains unknown, but Barlaam reacted indignantly to what he took to be blasphemous nonsense.

They told me about their teachings concerning marvelous separations and reunions of the intellect with the soul, about the fusion of the demons with the soul, about the different sorts of red and white lights, about certain noetic exits and entries through the nostrils in conjunction with the respiration, about some kind of palpitations which occur around the navel, and finally about the union of our Lord with the soul which comes to pass within the navel in a manner perceived by the senses with full certitude of heart.[35]

Whatever misunderstandings there may be here, underlying Barlaam's indignation is a principled objection to the use of the body in prayer. For Barlaam, as for Evagrius and Dionysius, since God is beyond being He can only be approached by purifying the mind of concepts. Barlaam takes this to mean that, far from seeking to draw the mind into the heart, one should seek rather to transcend the senses and the body in a state of "pure unknowing."[36] He also rejects the monks' claims to a bodily awareness of the divine presence and a vision of the uncreated light. In his view the only thing that is uncreated is the divine essence.[37] He charges that the hesychasts, in claiming to see an uncreated light, are actually making the boastful and impious claim to have seen the divine essence.[38]

Barlaam's views are so far outside the mainstream of eastern thought that the question of their origin has provoked considerable discussion.[39] It is natural to suspect that, as a Calabrian, he had received a scholastic education. One cannot help but notice the western affinities of his insistence that only the divine essence is uncreated; it is also interesting that he visited the papal court at Avignon in 1339, just three years after Pope Benedict had issued a bull, *Benedictus Deus*, asserting that the blessed behold the divine

[35] Barlaam, Epistle 5 (ed. Schirò, 323–24; tr. Ware, "Praying with the Body," 12). The allusion to the red and white lights is explained in Epistle 3, where Barlaam says that the monks spoke of a light "that enters a man through the nostrils and penetrates to the navel; a light which when it has grown and has poured forth to the outside illuminates the entire room, even if it is night; a light which is demonic if it is reddish, but divine if it is white" (ed. Schirò, 292–93).

[36] Barlaam's intellectualist interpretation of Dionysian apophaticism is evident throughout his *Antilatin Treatises* as well as his early correspondence with Palamas and Ignatios the Hesychast. See the passages cited in Sinkewicz, "Doctrine," 191, 210–18, 234–36, and Barlaam's views as reported by Palamas in *Triads* I.2.6, II.2.11.

[37] See Palamas, *Triads* III.2.8 and 23, as well as his frequent references to Barlaam in later works.

[38] Barlaam, Epistle 3 (summarized in Sinkewicz, "Doctrine," 228–34); Palamas, *Triads* II.3.7, 12.

[39] See the survey and references in Robert Flogaus, "Palamas and Barlaam Revisited: A Reassessment of East and West in the Hesychast Controversy of Fourteenth Century Byzantium," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 42 (1998), 4–8.

essence immediately upon death. As I have mentioned, however, his *Antilatin Treatises* evince only a superficial knowledge of scholasticism, and the main lines of the debate had already been fixed before his visit to Avignon. A more probable source than contemporary western authors is Augustine's *De Trinitate*, which Barlaam had read in the Greek translation of Maximus Planudes.[40] We have seen the critical role for Augustine of the assumption that a theophany must be either an appearance of the divine essence or a creature. Precisely the same dichotomy informs Barlaam's reaction to the hesychasts. It seems likely that Barlaam also shared the philosophical rationale underlying Augustine's view, namely the Augustinian conception of divine simplicity. Certainly this conception would have been well known to him because of its prominence in the *De Trinitate*.

Barlaam thus became the first to recognize the fundamental antipathy between the Augustinian theology of the divine essence and the hesychasts' theology of the uncreated light. It is true that he probably would have rejected any characterization of himself as an Augustinian, preferring to justify his position, at least for public purposes, solely by reference to Dionysius. From the point of view of the underlying philosophical questions, however, this was merely a personal idiosyncracy. However he had stumbled onto it, the great issue had at last been raised.

## THE PALAMITE SYNTHESIS

The preeminent opponent of Barlaam, and the one who made the hesychast controversy into a decisive event for the eastern tradition as a whole, was St. Gregory Palamas. Palamas was a leader among the monks of Mt. Athos. He lived there as a hermit except for weekends and feast days, when he worshipped at the Great Lavra, the oldest of the Athonite monasteries. His literary career began in the mid-1330s with several works of monastic piety and two *Apodictic Treatises* in defense of the Orthodox position on the procession of the Holy Spirit. He and Barlaam initially became acquainted through a cordial correspondence on the question of whether apodictic demonstration is possible in regard to the *filioque*. When Barlaam attacked the hesychasts, however, Palamas decided he must rise to their defense. His most original and fundamental work is *In Defense of the*

[40] This can be shown from his references to Augustine in the *Antilatin Treatises*; see Flogaus, "Palamas and Barlaam," 10–13. In suggesting an influence of Augustine on Barlaam I follow John Romanides, "Notes on the Palamite Controversy and Related Topics," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 6 (1960), 193–202, and Alexander Golitzin, "Dionysius the Areopagite in the Works of Saint Gregory Palamas," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 46 (2002), 189–90.

*Holy Hesychasts*, usually known as the *Triads* (1338–41). He was temporarily victorious when Barlaam was condemned at Constantinople in 1341. He then had to face a further attack from one of his own former disciples, Gregory Akindynos, who objected not to hesychasm but to the distinction between the essence and energies of God that Palamas had employed in defending it.[41] From 1341 to 1347 Palamas wrote a number of works on this distinction, among them the *Dialogue between an Orthodox and a Barlaamite*, *On Union and Division*, and *On the Divine Energies*, as well as a final systematic work, *One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*. He was again victorious at Constantinople in 1347. Shortly thereafter he was appointed archbishop of Thessalonica, a position he held until his death. The final stage of the controversy occurred from 1347 to 1351, when his opponents regrouped under the leadership of the historian and philosopher, Nicephoras Gregoras.[42] In 1351 yet another council pronounced solemnly and conclusively in favor of the distinction as it had been articulated by Palamas. Thereafter hesychasm and its Palamite interpretation became the official theology of the Orthodox world, spreading not only through Byzantium but also to Russia and the Slavic lands.[43]

The *Triads* begins by addressing the issues regarding prayer and ascetic practice that had so provoked Barlaam. To "draw the mind into the heart," as Palamas sees it, is part of the vigilance over the thoughts that is essential to traditional asceticism. The mind has been "dissipated abroad by the senses" and so must be led back to the heart, the "controlling organ" and "throne of grace."[44] Here we recognize the holism of authors such as Macarius and Maximus. Palamas defends the psychosomatic methods of the hesychasts as useful (though not essential) in that they mirror at the external level this inner movement of return. To pray while gazing at the breast or navel "recalls into the interior of the heart a power which is ever flowing outward through the faculty of sight" (1.2.8). Such prayer recollects the mind, not only within the body and heart, but also within itself, returning it to its true and proper function as a conduit of the Spirit. The effect is a transformation of the whole person, body as well as soul:

[41] On Akindynos see *Letters of Gregory Akindynos*, ed. and trans. Angela Constantinides Hero (Washington, D.C., 1983); *Gregorii Acindyni Refutationes Duae*, ed. Juan Nadal Canellas (Turnhout, 1995).

[42] For the works of Gregoras see *PG* 151.

[43] See Dimitri Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe, 500–1453* (New York and Washington, 1971), 301–08, 336–43; John Meyendorff, *Saint Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality* (Crestwood, N.Y., 1974).

[44] *Triads* 1.2.3; further references in the text. Quotations are from the (incomplete) translation by Gendle, where possible, and otherwise are my own. The text may be found in the edition by Meyendorff or volume 1 of that by Chrestou.

For just as those who abandon themselves to sensual and corruptible pleasures fix all the desires of their soul upon the flesh, and indeed become entirely flesh . . . so too, in the case of those who have elevated their minds to God and exalted their souls with divine longing, their flesh also is being transformed and elevated, participating together with the soul in the divine communion and becoming itself a dwelling and possession of God. (*Triads* I.2.9)

That is the reason for the "mysterious energies brought about in the bodies of those who during their entire life have devoutly embraced holy hesychasm." Palamas likens these energies to the miraculous power of relics, or the transmission of the Spirit by the laying on of hands, or the shining of the face of St. Stephen at his martyrdom. As he writes in summary, "the grace of the Spirit, transmitted to the body through the soul, grants to the body also the experience of things divine" (II.2.12).

The light beheld by the hesychasts is identified by Palamas with the light that shone around Christ at the Transfiguration. It is not a created symbol, but the "garment of their deification" and a foretaste of the light that will eternally illuminate the blessed (*Triads* I.3.5, 26). It is "for us, yet beyond us," known by experience to exist although the experience is ineffable (I.3.4). The progress into it is infinite, for each illumination renders the recipient capable of receiving more (I.3.22, II.2.11). The light is in fact the eternal and uncreated glory of God: "God, while remaining entirely in Himself, dwells entirely in us by His superessential power, and communicates to us not His nature but His proper glory and splendour" (I.3.23). It is rightly called divinity and "thearchy" and God, although Palamas (quoting Dionysius) adds that God transcends even these. It is beheld, not by any sensory power, but by the intellect (νοῦς) through bodily eyes (I.3.27). However, to ascribe the vision to intellect is not to suggest that the light is an intelligible object; the intellect itself becomes like light, so that "with the light it clearly beholds the light, in a manner surpassing not only the bodily senses but everything that is knowable to us" (I.3.9).[45]

Drawing on a theme familiar from Dionysius and Maximus, Palamas adds that the light is perceived only in the "cessation of all intellectual activity" (I.3.17). He emphasizes that such cessation is not a result simply of the intellectual act of negation, for then it would be up to us rather than a gift of grace. Those who behold the light acquire the Spirit of

[45] Palamas distinguishes two capacities of *nous*: that of apprehending the *noēta*, and that of being joined to the realities beyond itself (I.3.45, citing Dionysius, *DN* VII.1 865C). Besides its Neoplatonic sources, this distinction is also suggested by the Biblical concept of the renewal of the *nous* (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23). Already in Clement of Alexandria, God is beyond *noēsis* and yet can be apprehended by *noēsis* when it is pure (*Stromata* V.11).

God in place of the intellect – something that comes about only by long obedience culminating in purity of heart, and prayer culminating in pure prayer (I.3.18). Adapting an idea from St. Isaac the Syrian, Palamas speaks of two "eyes" of the soul, one by which it beholds creatures and infers the goodness of God, and another by which it directly beholds the divine glory. Whereas the former eye sees by rational inference, the latter sees by faith and the keeping of the commandments (II.3.15–16).

Although he denies that the light is a created symbol of God, Palamas allows that it is a *natural* symbol. A natural symbol always accompanies that which it symbolizes and depends on it for existence, as dawn accompanies the rising sun and heat the burning power of fire (*Triads* III.1.14). Because of this innate association, the object symbolized may be said to "become" its natural symbol, although it remains one: "the capacity of fire to burn, which has as its symbol the heat accessible to the senses, becomes its own symbol, for it is always accompanied by this heat yet remains one and does not exist as double" (III.1.20).[46] Likewise the object can be known through its symbol while remaining itself beyond participation, just as the burning power of fire is known through its heat but is not itself participated. Palamas interprets not only the light seen by the hesychasts but also the "things around God" spoken of by Maximus as, in this sense, natural symbols of the divine (III.1.19).

It is in searching for a term suitable for referring both to the light of the Transfiguration and to the "things around God" that Palamas introduces the concept of *energeia*. After citing further texts supporting his view that the light is uncreated, he adds: "You might as well claim that God is a creature as declare that His essential energies are created; for no one who has sense would say that the essential goodness and life are the superessential essence of God" (*Triads* III.1.23). The choice is a natural one since both the light and the "things around God" are realities that can be known and participated by creatures. Palamas goes on to argue against Barlaam that deification is not a perfection of our rational nature, but an energy of God. He unites this Pauline theme with the Cappadocian doctrine that the divine names are names of the energies: "Since the deifying gift of the Spirit is an energy of God, and since the divine names derive from the energies (for the Superessential is nameless), God could not be called God if deification consisted only in virtue and wisdom" (III.1.31). He further elaborates by drawing upon the writings of St. Basil, observing that according to Basil

[46] Palamas' language here is inspired by the remark of Maximus that in the Incarnation God "became His own symbol," *Ambigua* 10 (*PG* 91 1165D).

the deifying energy is present in those who receive it as art in the artist or as the power of vision in the healthy eye (III.1.33).[47] This allows him to clarify what Dionysius means in speaking of the cessation of intellectual activity. Citing the example of St. Peter at Pentecost, who although filled with the Holy Spirit could see and converse with those around him, Palamas asserts that when the energies of the Spirit are present the normal cognitive powers are not lost but only "left behind" (III.1.36).

Palamas thus draws together under the single concept of *energeia* a number of themes that previously had existed more or less in isolation: the uncreated light, the "things around God," the Cappadocian teaching on the divine names, and the Pauline and Cappadocian understanding of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. All are to be understood in terms of the manifestation of God through His uncreated energies. The combination of the first and the last of these themes is particularly significant. Since Palamas understands the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as taking the form (at least among the hesychasts) of participation in the uncreated light, he must have in mind by *energeia* not only activity or operation, but a divine power and presence that is perceptible to the purified senses. That is why I translate his use of the word (at least in most occurrences) as "energy," although its other associations should certainly be kept in mind.

In light of his distinction between the divine essence and energies, Palamas rejects the assertion of Barlaam that only the divine essence is without beginning. No essence can be without its powers or "natural energies," so in the case of God these too are without beginning (*Triads* III.2.6). The same is true of the "things around God," or what Maximus had referred to as His uncreated works: His foreknowledge, will, providence, and self-contemplation, as well as reality (ὀντότης), infinity, immortality, life, holiness, virtue, and everything that "is contemplated as a real being around God" (III.2.7, cf. III.3.8). All are uncreated, yet none is the essence of God, for God transcends them all as cause. Indeed, although they are uncreated, at least one (foreknowledge) will have an end, and some, such as God's creative act, have both a beginning and an end.

In making this point Palamas notes a certain ambiguity in the terms involved: "there is a beginning and end, if not of the creative power itself, at least of its action (πράξεως), and clearly of the *energeia* relating to created things" (*Triads* III.2.8).[48] Here we cannot translate *energeia* as "energy"

[47] Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* 61 (above, pp. 172–73).
[48] See also *Chapters* 130. Both passages cite Genesis 2:3, "God rested from all the works which He had begun to make." The point that foreknowledge will have an end is drawn from Pseudo-Basil, *Contra Eunomium* IV.2 (*PG* 29 680B).

after all; Palamas means not that there is an end of the divine energy in relation to created things, but that there is an end of the divine *activity* of creating. The passage also shows that Palamas sometimes distinguishes a divine *energeia* from the corresponding *dunamis*, particularly when the *energeia* has temporal boundaries. Elsewhere he notes that properly speaking the *energeia* is the use (χρῆσις) of the *dunamis*.[49] Nonetheless, following traditional usage, and especially that of Dionysius, he generally treats the two terms as equivalent.

There is one other traditional notion that Palamas embraces under the concept of *energeia*: that of the divine *logoi*. Barlaam had claimed that there is no reality (ὀντότης) between the divine essence and creatures. Palamas objects that in this case creatures would have to exist by participating in the divine essence, so that the divine essence itself would be the reality of creatures – a suggestion he regards as tantamount to pantheism (*Triads* III.2.23). He concludes that there must indeed be something "between" the divine essence and creatures, namely the *logoi* of beings, which preexist in the divine mind and by which all things are made (III.2.24). Just as in Maximus, the *logoi* are both one and many, and indeed as many as there are participants; they are that by which the transcendent divine essence is "made many in accordance with its processions" (κατὰ τὰς προόδους πολυπλασιαζομένη, III.2.25). In opposition to Plato, who had regarded them as self-subsistent beings, Palamas insists that they are divine predeterminations (προορισμούς), foreknowings (προγνώσεις), and acts of will (θελήματα) – language again drawn from Dionysius and Maximus (III.2.26). He also adds that they are that by which God is known and perceived, the "paradigmatic and perfective power and energy of all things" (III.2.25). He thus conceives the *logoi* as energeies particularly related to God's creative act.

This identification enables Palamas to incorporate the descriptions given by Maximus of the vision of the divine *logoi* within his own understanding of the vision of the uncreated light. The light seen by the hesychasts, he says, is infinite, and one saint who was worthy "saw the whole universe contained in a single ray" (*Triads* I.3.22).[50] Later he quotes Maximus on how "he who has been found worthy to enter into God will see, in a simple and undivided act of knowing, all the *logoi* of beings preexisting in Him"

[49] *On the Divine Energies* 23.

[50] The saint is probably St. Benedict of Nursia, whose vision of the divine light is described by St. Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* II.35. This work was known to Palamas in the Greek translation by Pope St. Zachary. See Emmanuel Lanne, "L'interprétation Palamite de la vision de Saint Benoit," *Le Millēnaire du Mont Athos, 963–1963* (Belgium, 1963–64), vol. 2, 21–47.

(III.3.10). Putting these passages together, it would seem that the vision of the divine *logoi* and the vision of the uncreated light are roughly equivalent, or at least that the latter embraces the former. Interestingly, Palamas does not mention the teaching of Maximus that the *logoi* collectively are the one Logos (or at least are "in" the Logos).[51] The reason is presumably that once the *logoi* are understood as among the divine energies they can no longer be identified with any one of the divine persons.

Having posited the energies as "realities" between the divine essence and creatures, Palamas must face the objection from Barlaam and Akindynos that he has compromised divine simplicity. To address this charge becomes a major purpose of his later works. He echoes Dionysius in holding that God is "both one and not-one, and each of these in many different ways: for He is not-one both by superabundance, as being above the One, and as Himself defining the One."[52] Although God is simplicity itself, simplicity is not His essence, but rather a divine energy.[53] Palamas also deploys some familiar Neoplatonic analogies to illustrate the unity-in-multiplicity of God: God is no more multiple because of His powers than the soul is because of its powers, or than the center of a circle is because of its power to produce the points of the circle.[54]

The difficulty here is that in the case of the divine energies the multiplicity is not only one of powers, but of "realities" that can be participated by creatures. We face here a plurality that is not only potential, but fully actual. Fortunately Palamas offers two other analogies that address this point. One is that the divine essence is to its energies as the sun to its rays; the other is that the essence is to the energies as the mind to its distinct items of knowledge.[55] Here the relation of unity-in-multiplicity is not that of an entity to its powers, but that of an entity to its equally actual manifestations. As Palamas observes, it is through its rays that the sun is known and participated, and likewise the intellect is imparticipable in its essence but participable in what it knows (κατ' ἐπιστήμην). Of course the rays and the items of knowledge do not exist apart from the sun and the mind, but

[51] See above, pp. 204–05.

[52] *On the Divine Energies* 2–3; cf. Dionysius, *Divine Names* II.4 641A; *Mystical Theology* 5 1048A. Citations to Palamas' later works are to the edition of Chrestou, volumes 2 and 3, except for the *One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, for which I use the edition of Sinkewicz. Translations are those of Sinkewicz for the *Chapters* and Ferwerda for the *Dialogue between an Orthodox and a Barlaamite*, freely modified; others are my own.

[53] *Energies* 21; *Dialogue between an Orthodox and a Barlaamite* 36, 55.

[54] Soul: *Triads* III.2.5, *Dialogue* 54, *Chapters* 34; circle: *Triads* III.2.25.

[55] Sun: *Energies* 32, *On Union and Division* 28, 30; mind: *Energies* 5, *Union* 18, *Dialogue* 40, *Chapters* 81.

that is as it should be. Although the divine energies are "realities," they are not self-subsistent beings (ὑποστάσεις). They are instead "enhypostatic," in the dual sense that they are stably and permanently existent and that they exist only in the hypostasis of another.[56]

Palamas argues, in fact, that to possess a multitude of powers is not a sign of composition, but of simplicity. That is why the simplest of material things are the four elements, which contain the greatest diversity of powers, and incorporeal beings are simpler yet. The true sign of composition is liability to change: "it is not acting and energy (τὸ ἐνεργεῖν καὶ ἡ ἐνέργεια), but being acted upon and passivity, which constitute composition."[57] The rationale for this principle is that when something acquires a new quality by being acted upon the quality comes "from outside," as it were, and is therefore a new element in relation to the previous being.[58] Since God only acts and is not acted upon, He is simple in the highest degree.

In this way Palamas synthesizes under the general heading of the divine energies a number of ideas that had developed more or less independently in earlier patristic thought. Of the major topics we have examined, only two are notably missing. One is the Dionysian vision of the communication of the divine energies through the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies. Palamas accepts the authority of the Dionysian corpus, so for him it is not a question of whether there are such hierarchies but only of how they are to be understood. He insists that their role is merely that of announcing and interpreting the divine illumination, rather than themselves imparting it (*Triads* II.3.28, 30). He also adds that, now that the Incarnation has occurred, even that role is no longer necessary, for Christ "has made all things new" (II.3.29, citing Rev. 21:5). On the first point he probably reads Dionysius correctly, although it is easy to see how misunderstanding could have arisen.[59] The second point also does not directly contradict Dionysius, but it is certainly not to be found in his work, and signals a marked shift in emphasis. One suspects that it is because of his keener sense of the Incarnation as a historical event that Palamas, although he accepts the Dionysian hierarchies, gives them little prominence.

[56] *Triads* II.3.6, III.1.9, 18; *Energies* 10; *Dialogue* 26.

[57] *Chapters* 145. [58] *Dialogue* 54.

[59] Scholars who have held that Palamas misreads Dionysius include Meyendorff, *Gregory Palamas*, 189–92, and A. M. Ritter, "Gregor Palamas als Leser des Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagita," *Denys l'Aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient et en Occident*, ed. Y. de Andia (Paris, 1997), 565–79. See the reply in Golitzin, "Dionysius the Areopagite," as well as the careful discussion of Dionysian hierarchy (though without specific reference to Palamas) in Perl, "Hierarchy and Participation."

The other traditional element that is missing is the teaching of Gregory of Nyssa, John Damascene, and Gregory of Cyprus on the eternal manifestation of the Spirit. Palamas does affirm that the Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and rests in the Son.[60] He also adopts the common patristic idiom of referring to the gifts of the Spirit as energies, and notes (as had Gregory of Cyprus) that spirit may therefore be referred to as *energeia* – although, he is careful to add, not *the* Spirit, τὸ πνεῦμα (*Triads* III.1. 8–9). This too is in keeping with the teaching of Gregory of Cyprus, who had been careful to insist that *energeia* does not constitute the hypostasis of the Spirit.[61] What Palamas does not do is speak of the Spirit as manifesting the energy of the Son; indeed he does not in any way connect the eternal procession of the Spirit with the manifestation of the divine energies. For him the energies are generally simply "of God" or "of the divine nature," and their manifestation is to creatures. Thus, although he affirms both the traditional teaching about the inner life of the Trinity and the distinction between essence and energies, he does not relate them to one another.

One can hardly fault Palamas for failing to draw together all the diverse strands of the eastern tradition. I mention these unassimilated elements only because they will be helpful to remember when, in the Epilogue, we attempt a critical assessment of his thought. Before doing so, let us complete our historical survey by turning to Aquinas.

## AQUINAS: GOD AND *ESSE*

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), master of theology at the University of Paris, needs no introduction. It will suffice to mention those of his major works from which we will draw: *On Being and Essence* (c. 1252), the *Commentary on the Sentences* (1254–56), *De Veritate* (1256–59), the *Commentary on the Divine Names* (1261), the *Summa Contra Gentiles* (1259–64), *De Potentia* (1265–66), and the *Summa Theologiae* (1265–72). Although the *Summa Theologiae* is Aquinas' masterwork, the *Summa Contra Gentiles* provides a fuller exposition of his metaphysics. We will follow it here, drawing on the other works as necessary to fill in various details.[62]

Aquinas' thought about God stands, roughly speaking, at the intersection of three major influences: Aristotle's theology of the Prime Mover,

[60] *Apodictic Treatises* I.29, II.71–74; *Chapters* 36.
[61] Gregory of Cyprus, *On the Procession of the Holy Spirit* (*PG* 142 290A).
[62] For editions and translations, see the Bibliography. References in the text are to the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, with paragraphs numbered as in the Leonine edition.

Augustine's teaching about divine simplicity, and the different forms of Neoplatonism found in Boethius and Dionysius. Naturally these sources are not always in harmony, and it is largely in the attempt to synthesize them – or choose between them, as the case may be – that Aquinas' originality finds expression. One can see this process at work early in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Aquinas begins with a series of Aristotelian arguments for the existence of God, culminating in the conclusion that God is *actus purus*, pure act (*S.C.G.* 1.16). He next adds that, since God is pure act, He is free of all composition (1.18) and therefore is identical with His essence (1.21). At this point we are in terrain first scouted by Augustine.[63] Aquinas, however, places this Augustinian conclusion within a context determined by the Aristotelian theology of the Prime mover. This is evident from his arguments for simplicity. One is that anything in God that is "outside" the divine essence would have to be an accident, and of course in God there are no accidents; another is that since God is not a composite of matter and form He must be a self-subsisting form, and hence identical with His own essence (1.21.2–4).[64] The second argument is notable because Aquinas, unlike Augustine, believes that angels too are not composites of matter and form, so that they too must be identical with their own essences.[65] This means that the kind of simplicity so far identified is not unique to God alone. In fact it is no more than the simplicity shared, within the Aristotelian system, by the Prime Mover and planetary movers.

The crucial step occurs in the next chapter, where Aquinas identifies a further kind of simplicity characteristic of God alone: that the divine essence is identical with the divine *esse* (1.22). Here too he is following Augustine, who had held that God is His own *esse* and in fact is being itself, *ipsum esse*. But Aquinas gives these Augustinian formulations a new meaning. His first step is to guard against a possible misunderstanding. He explains that the identity of God with His *esse* does not mean that God is the common being (*esse commune*) that all existing things have in common. To identify God with common being would be tantamount to pantheism, for if God were the *esse* of all things then anything that has being would be

[63] The centrality of Augustine for medieval discussions of divine simplicity is clear from the relevant sections of the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, which consist largely of quotations from Augustine's *De Trinitate* (Book 1, Distinction 8, chapters 23–28). Aquinas' commentary on this portion of the *Sentences* accepts Augustine's teaching without demurral. For discussion of other possible influences, such as Avicenna and Maimonides, see Robert Burns, "The Divine Simplicity in St. Thomas," *Religious Studies* 25 (1989), 271–93.

[64] See also *Summa Theologiae* [*S.T.*] 1.3.3, which gives only the latter of these arguments.

[65] *S.C.G.* 11.50–51; *S.T.* 1.50.2; cf. *On Being and Essence* 4.

God (1.26.9). The divine *esse* is distinguished from that of others precisely by the fact that nothing can be added to it (1.26.11). This means that God possesses all perfections, for His *esse* is not received into something that could limit it in any way. God possesses the "whole power of being" (*tota virtus essendi*), just as a separately existing Form of White, if there were such a thing, would possess the whole power of whiteness (1.28.2).

These passages also make it clear that Aquinas does not think of *esse* simply as a state of perfect self-identity, as had Augustine. Instead he thinks of it as a kind of act. It is an act embracing all perfections, including life, goodness, power, and wisdom. As Aquinas states elsewhere, *esse* is the "actuality of all acts" and "perfection of all perfections," in that it is that which gives reality to any particular determinate form.[66] Aquinas frequently credits this conception of *esse* to the *Divine Names* of Dionysius.[67] It can in fact be found throughout the Neoplatonic tradition, and had already been articulated in Latin by Marius Victorinus and (in a muted way) Boethius. Since Aquinas recognizes the *De Hebdomadibus* of Boethius as in agreement with his own views, the *De Hebdomadibus* may have been another important inspiration.[68]

In light of his dependence on Dionysius, it is ironic that Aquinas also finds in Dionysius the most significant objection to his thesis that the divine *esse* is not *esse commune*. The *Divine Names* describes God as "the *esse* for things that are," and the *Celestial Hierarchy* similarly states that "the *esse* of all things is the superessential divinity."[69] Taken in their context these statements are simply an application to being of Dionysius' general thesis that God is unparticipated in His essence but participated in His processions. Aquinas, however, recognizes nothing in God other than the divine essence; on the other hand, he cannot reject the authority of Dionysius. He therefore takes Dionysius to mean only that in all things there is a created *likeness* to the divine being (*S.C.G.* 1.26.10). As he puts it elsewhere, "God

[66] *De Potentia* 7.2 ad 9. See also *S.T.* 1.4.1 ad 3: "nothing has actuality except insofar as it is, so that *esse* is the actuality of all things, even of forms themselves."

[67] *S.C.G.* 1.28.9; *S.T.* 1.4.2; *Comm. on Liber de Causis* Prop. 3, n. 74; *Comm. on Divine Names*, Chap. 5, Lect. 1, n. 629. All of these passages cite the statement, "God does not exist in a determinate way, but has gathered together and precontains all of Being in Himself simply and without circumscription" (*Divine Names* v. 5 817D).

[68] See the *Commentary on the De Hebdomadibus*, chapter 2.

[69] *DN* v.4 817D; *CH* IV.1 177D. The first passage is αὐτός ἐστι τὸ εἶναι τοῖς οὖσι, translated as *ipse est esse existentibus*; the second is τὸ γὰρ εἶναι πάντων ἐστὶν ἡ ὑπὲρ τὸ εἶναι θεότης, translated as *esse omnium est superessentialis divinitas*. Aquinas cites only the latter in considering the objection at *S.C.G.* 1.26.10, but cites both in his *Commentary on the Sentences* 1, Dist. 8, Q. 1, art. 2, obj. 1.

is the *esse* of all things not essentially, but causally."[70] More precisely, the kind of causation involved is that of an efficient cause that shares with its effects neither species nor genus. (An example of cause and effect sharing a species is when man reproduces man; they share a genus when the sun produces a living thing.) When there is no common species or genus, the effects share the likeness of the agent's form, not according to a specific or generic formality, but "only according to some sort of analogy."[71] Aquinas admits that we cannot say precisely what the likeness between God and creatures is, but he is certain that it holds because of the general principle that "the effect pre-exists virtually in the efficient cause."[72]

The role of God as efficient cause becomes, in turn, the basis for Aquinas' celebrated account of the divine names. Although the sun and growing things are only an imperfect analogy for the relation of God to creatures, they nonetheless illustrate sufficiently that God is both like and unlike His effects, much as the sun's power is both like and unlike the heat it produces (*S.C.G.* I.29.2). Just as the sun is said to be hot, but in a different way from the effects it produces, so God may be said to possess the perfections He causes, though in a different and higher mode (I.30.2). At this point Aquinas performs another startling reversal of Dionysius. He explains that in their "mode of signification" all names said of God are defective, for since our intellect derives its knowledge from the senses it cannot transcend the mode in which the perfections are present in sensible objects. Such names must therefore be affirmed as to their meaning but denied as to their mode of signification. According to Aquinas, the kataphatic and apophatic ways taught by Dionysius refer precisely to such simultaneous affirmation and denial (I.30.3).[73] Aquinas thus transforms what for Dionysius had been a means of ascent toward God into a semantic device for clarifying the limitations of theological language.

Aquinas is aware that Dionysius and John Damascene had given an account of the divine names very different from his own, namely that they are said of the divine processions (Dionysius) or operations (Damascene). In the question of the *Summa Theologiae* devoted to the divine names he cites texts from these authors as objections to his own account.[74] In reply he distinguishes the way in which we arrive at the names – by observing God's created effects – from that which they signify, the perfection as it is present

70 *Comm. on Sentences* I, Dist. 8, Q. I, art. 2.

71 *S.T.* I.4.3. I here follow the treatment of this point in the *Summa Theologiae*; cf. the slightly different treatments at *Comm. on Sentences* I, Dist. 8, Q. I, art. 2 and *S.C.G.* I.29.2.

72 *S.T.* I.4.2.

73 See also *De Potentia* VII.5 ad 2.

74 *S.T.* I.13.2 obj. 2, I.13.8 obj. I.

in God. After citing a passage in which the Damascene explains that God is so called from various verbs signifying operation, Aquinas remarks:

> Because God is not known to us in His nature, but is made known to us in His operations or effects, it is from these that we can name Him, as was said above; hence this name 'God' is a name of operation so far as relates to the source of its meaning . . . But though taken from this operation, this name 'God' is imposed to signify the divine nature.[75]

Apparently "operations or effects" (*operationibus vel effectibus*) are meant here as equivalent terms. Thus where Aquinas finds John stating that the divine names are names of *operationes* – ἐνέργειαι in the Greek original – he takes him to mean that they are names of created effects. The same misreading is evident in his response to Dionysius, which similarly treats the processions spoken of by Dionysius as if they belonged solely to the created order.[76]

Despite some aspects of Dionysian influence, then, it is clear that the distance separating Aquinas from Dionysius is substantial. The remainder of Book I of the *Summa Contra Gentiles* further develops the implications of divine simplicity in ways drawn from Aristotle and Augustine. God is His own act of understanding (I.45) and His own will (I.73). It follows that God's *esse* is His understanding and willing; each of these is simply a different way of describing the single self-contained activity that is God.[77] The activity is self-contained in the sense that, under each description, it has no other end than God Himself: what God "primarily and essentially knows" is the divine essence (I.48), and the divine essence is also the principal object of the divine will (I.74). However, in knowing and willing Himself, God also knows and wills His effects, and that is ultimately what makes creation possible. In the case of knowledge the account is relatively straightforward. When God understands a thing, what He actually understands is how it imitates the divine essence and how it falls short of perfect imitation. The exemplars of things in the divine intellect are thus "many and distinct only according as God knows that things can be made to resemble Him by many and diverse modes" (I.54.5).[78] This is a solution rooted in the Aristotelian description of divine thought, although Aquinas goes beyond Aristotle in

[75] *S.T.* I.13.8. [76] *S.T.* I.13.2 ad 2; cf. *De Potentia* VII.1 ad 7, VII.5 ad 3.

[77] This is an application of the general principle that our intellect is led by the diverse perfections of creatures to form diverse conceptions of God, although He remains simple (*S.C.G.* I.35; cf. II.14).

[78] Se also *S.T.* I.44.3: the exemplars are not "really distinct" from the divine essence, but are multiplied by their relations to creatures.

arguing that God knows even individuals inasmuch as He is their cause (1.65).

To attempt to understand the divine will along similar lines presents much greater difficulty. According to Aquinas, in willing and loving His own essence God also wills that it be "multiplied" in the only way possible – that is, through created likenesses – and hence that there be creatures (1.75.3). However, the connection is not a necessary one; since the divine goodness is already complete without other things, God wills to create not by necessity but by free choice, *liberum arbitrium* (1.81.2). More precisely, He exercises free choice regarding both whether to create and what to create, for clearly there are many things He could have made but has not (I.81.4). Thus God could will otherwise than He does. This conclusion immediately presents a difficulty. Is not the ability to do otherwise a kind of potency? If so, how could God possess such a potency and still be pure act?

Aquinas faces this issue squarely, asking whether his account of divine free choice implies that there is potency in the divine will (1.82.2). He replies that it does not. His argument is that to be "open to opposites" is not an imperfection when it occurs on the side of the agent; for example, an art that can use different instruments to perform a work is not thereby less perfect than one that is restricted to a single set of instruments (1.82.6). This argument, although it may be sound, is hardly relevant to the point at issue. The question was not whether God's ability to do otherwise is an imperfection, but whether it constitutes a potency. All Aquinas' reply shows is that, if it is a potency, it need not be an imperfection.

It is instructive to note that a difficulty would arise on this point even apart from the identification of God as pure act. The Augustinian conception of divine simplicity entails that God is identical to His own will. Does not this means that if God were to will something different, then He would *be* something different? Since among the things that God wills is the existence of creatures, such a result would be at odds with the insistence of both Augustine and Aquinas that God's essence does not depend on His act of creation. Nor will it do to say that God is identical with His will only in the sense of His *capacity* to will, not His will as actually realized. Divine simplicity rules out such distinctions. The problem that arises in attempting to combine divine simplicity with a belief in God's capacity to do otherwise is therefore quite general, although Aquinas' adoption of the description of God as pure act makes it even more apparent.

Much of the rest of the *Summa Contra Gentiles* can be seen as Aquinas' oscillation between the two conceptions of God as perfectly simple and as

possessing the capacity to do otherwise. Book II begins by distinguishing two kinds of operation: one that "remains in the agent and is a perfection of it," such as sensing, understanding, and willing, and another that "passes over into an external thing and is a perfection of the thing made," such as heating, cutting, and building (II.1.2). This is the familiar distinction between immanent and transitive act. It can be applied to God in that His understanding, willing, and love belong to the first type, whereas His creating, preserving, and governing creatures belong to the second (II.1.3). Clearly such a distinction is well suited to support divine free choice, for those of God's actions that could be otherwise are precisely His creating, preserving, and governing creatures. If they can be relegated to the second type of act, then they need not constitute the divine being in the same way as those of the first type. The question is how any such distinction can apply to a perfectly simple God. Must not it in fact be merely relative to our understanding, *quoad nos*, much as is that between God's thinking and willing?

The rest of Book II makes it clear that the answer is yes. Aquinas first observes that, since God is pure act, His power is His substance and both are the same as His action (II.8–9). It follows that "the multifarious actions attributed to God, such as understanding, willing, producing things, and the like, are not diverse realities (*res*), since each of these actions in God is His very being, which is one and the same" (II.10.2). God's creating, then, is the same reality (*res*) as His understanding and willing. Later Aquinas explicitly concludes that "God's action cannot belong to the class of actions which are not immanent in the agent, because His action is His substance" (II.23.5). In other words, despite the confidence with which the distinction between immanent and transitive act was initially applied to God, it turns out to have been only a convenient *façon de parler*.[79]

A special case of the general difficulty regarding God's free choice is that of whether He is free regarding what to create. Various contradictory strands in Aquinas' thought on this subject emerge throughout Books II and III. Aquinas initially reaffirms the strong commitment made in Book I to God's free choice. He again observes that there are many things that God could have created but has not or could have made differently than He has (II.23.3). A few chapters later the same point is argued from divine

[79] Nonetheless Aquinas continues to use it, generally without mentioning that it has no foundation in the divine being (e.g., *S.T.* I.14 proemium). The inconsistency is particularly evident in *De Potentia* III.15, where he first denies that the distinction between immanent and transitive act applies to God and then goes on to speak of actions God performs "outside Himself."

omniscience: since God knows even those things that never have been or will be, and any good grasped by the intellect can be an object of will, God's will is not subject to necessity as regards the production of certain determinate effects (II.27.2). Yet as Book II unfolds Aquinas repeatedly draws conclusions *a priori* regarding what God must create. The first instance is that of created necessary beings, such as the separate substances and heavenly bodies; such beings, he says, must exist "that the order of things be complete" (30.6). There are similar arguments regarding the existence of a gradation among creatures (45.3), of intellectual creatures (46.2, 5), of morally fallible beings (III.71.3), and of contingent beings (III.72.3). Ultimately Aquinas does not shy away from asserting that "all possible natures are found in the order of things; otherwise the universe would be imperfect" (II.91.6). All of this raises the question of in what sense God could have done otherwise, given that we are able to know based solely on *a priori* considerations, without empirical investigation, that He has not done so.

This ambivalence regarding whether God could have created a world that is less than perfect is mirrored in his treatment of the object of the divine will. The reason why God must create the universe perfect is that, since the only thing that moves Him to create is His desire to communicate His own goodness, He could have no motive for doing otherwise (II.46.6).[80] This is a development of the view stated in Book I that God wills the existence of creatures in willing and loving His own essence. The difference is that there Aquinas asserted that the link is not necessary because of divine free choice, whereas in Book II he seems prepared to lay aside this reservation, at least insofar as he thinks that it is possible to know *a priori* what God must choose to do. Accordingly, when in Book III he again describes the object of the divine will, he seems to forget his earlier insistence that the principal object of God's will is God Himself. Instead he identifies it as the communication of the divine goodness to creatures: "there can be no other ultimate end for His understanding and will than His own goodness, that is, to communicate it to things . . . So, the good of the order of things caused by God is what is chiefly willed and caused by God" (III.64.9). The same apparent inconsistency recurs in the *Summa Theologiae*. There we first learn that whereas God necessarily wills His own goodness, He wills the existence of creatures only as a dispensable means to this end.[81] Later, however, we find that the willing of His own goodness implies the existence

[80] The argument at this point concerns God's necessary creation of intellectual creatures, but it can readily be generalized.

[81] *S.T.* I.19.3.

of creatures after all, so that one can know *a priori* that God has created the universe perfect and complete.[82]

Thus there is a strong *prima facie* case that divine simplicity as Aquinas understands it is incompatible with divine free choice. It must be emphasized that so far the case is only *prima facie*. Aquinas touches on this issue in at least two other works, the *De Potentia* and *Summa Theologiae*, and in fairness we should look at what he says there before drawing any final conclusions. We shall reserve that task until the final section of this chapter. First let us complete our examination of the *Summa Contra Gentiles* by examining his teaching on another subject that lends itself to comparison with the eastern tradition: that of the manner in which creatures can share in the divine life.

## AQUINAS: PARTICIPATION AND BEATITUDE

Book I of the *Summa Contra Gentiles* argues that creatures possess a created likeness to the divine being, but it provides scarcely any information regarding the nature of this likeness. An important step toward further understanding occurs in Book II. It arises in the course of Aquinas' argument that God is the cause of *esse* to all other things (II.15). Of the several arguments he presents for this conclusion, one in particular sheds light on our question. It runs as follows: only God is His own *esse*, since differentiation would require the addition of some distinguishing factor, and nothing can be added to the divine *esse*; hence all other beings are not their own *esse*, and so must possess *esse* by participation; hence, since "the cause of everything that is such and such by way of participation is that which is so by virtue of its essence," they must possess *esse* by participation in God (II.15.5). What is striking about this argument is the role it gives to participation. Whereas Book I had presented God as the efficient cause of the *esse* of creatures, this passage opens up a much more intimate relationship by presenting Him as also the formal cause.[83] Despite the denial that God is universal *esse*, then, one can say that He is that supreme *esse* in which other entities participate and thereby are. Only after presenting this argument does Aquinas go beyond the statement that God is His own *esse* to

[82] *S.T.* I.22.4.

[83] There is an earlier version of the same argument in *On Being and Essence* 4, but it does not mention participation. The participation of creatures in the divine *esse* is also implied, but not mentioned directly, in the Fourth Way (*S.C.G.* II.15.3; *S.T.* I.2.3).

make frequent use of the Augustinian name for God of "being itself," *ipsum esse*.[84]

The main question to which this argument gives rise is that of how we are to understand the relevant kind of participation. Is it like that spoken of by Plato, the participation of individuals in the corresponding Form? The answer is almost certainly no. Such a view would leave God's efficient and formal causality unrelated, as if God first creates beings and then separately causes them to participate in His *esse* – whereas, properly speaking, to participate in the divine *esse* precisely *is* to receive existence. But if the kind of participation involved is not like that of particulars in a Form, what is it? One possible answer would lie in remembering that *esse* is an activity. We have seen repeatedly throughout the eastern tradition variations on the notion that creatures can participate in the divine activity. Such participation is not the static relation envisioned by Plato, but a dynamic cooperation or synergy. One way to understand the participation of creatures in the divine *esse* would be precisely as a form of synergy. This would amount to a fusion of efficient and formal causality, in that God would cause the being of creatures by Himself enacting their *esse*. Is this not, after all, precisely what Dionysius means when he says that God is "the 'to be' for beings," *to einai tois ousi*?[85]

When we turn to the texts of Aquinas with this question in mind, we find some suggestive hints, but nothing amounting to a systematic affirmation. It is clear that Aquinas does think of the *esse* of creatures as a kind of activity. He describes creatures as participating in *esse* "vigorously or feebly" and as possessing a power or "intensity" of being that is determined by their form.[86] He also sees the *esse* of creatures as in ongoing and continual dependence upon that of God. Since creation is not a change from some prior state, he argues, it is not a motion but a relation of continual dependence, like that of the light in the air upon the sun.[87] It is also complete at each moment that it occurs: "a thing simultaneously is being created and is created, even as a thing at the same moment is being illuminated and is illuminated" (*S.C.G.* II.19.6). Finally, and in the same vein, Aquinas describes God as acting continually to maintain the *esse* of things just as a corporeal mover

[84] The name occurs occasionally in Book I (e.g., I.23.2, 25.3), but there Aquinas generally prefers to say that God is *suum esse*.

[85] See above n. 69.

[86] *De Veritate* 2.5, 3.5 ad 1, 29.3; *De Potentia* 5.4 ad 1; *S.T.* I.42.1 ad 1. See also Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Leiden, 1992), 156–80.

[87] *S.C.G.* II.17–18; cf. *S.T.* I.104.1.

acts continually to maintain the motion of the thing moved (III.65.5). All of this *could* be taken to mean that the *esse* of creatures is an ongoing activity of God. At no point, however, does Aquinas actually say that it is.

For the reason that he does not, we have only to recall divine simplicity. Divine simplicity entails that the divine activity is the divine essence. For creatures to participate in the *esse* of God synergistically would therefore be for them to participate in the divine essence. And of course that is inadmissible. Hence, despite the hints above, in the few places where Aquinas spells out what it means for creatures to participate in the divine *esse* he limits it to their possessing a created *similitude* of God. Remarkably, in his commentary on the *Divine Names* Aquinas attributes such a view to Dionysius: "created being itself is a certain participation in God and similitude of Him; and this is what [Dionysius] means in saying that common being 'possesses Him,' that is God, namely that it participates in a similitude of Him."[88] Earlier he had explained the statement of Dionysius that divinity is multiplied and proceeds in creatures as meaning only that it does so "by similitude, not by essence."[89] In effect Aquinas ignores (within this context) the active dimension of *esse*, treating *esse* instead as a kind of quality that is possessed by God and replicated in creatures.

Besides the participation of all creatures in the divine *esse*, there is also that of rational creatures in the divine life through grace. When we turn to Aquinas' teaching on this point we again find a sharply narrowed sense of possibilities. Aquinas describes grace as "a gratuitous strength superadded to natural strength," the purpose of which is to enable man both to will and to do that which surpasses his nature.[90] Grace is "infused" into the soul by God as a kind of supernatural quality:

> He [God] so provides for natural creatures that not merely does He move them to their natural acts, but He bestows upon them certain forms and powers which are the principles of acts, in order that they may of themselves be inclined to

[88] *Comm. on Divine Names*, Chap. 5, Lect. 2, n. 660, commenting on *DN* V.8 824A: "ipsum esse creatum est quaedam participatio Dei et similitudo Ipsius; et hoc est quod dicit quod *esse* commune *habet Ipsum* scilicet Deum, ut participans similitudinem Eius." The italicized words are those quoted from Dionysius. It is plain how much Aquinas must put into the mouth of the Areopagite in order to attribute this idea to him!

[89] *Comm. on Divine Names* Chap. 2, Lect. 3, n. 158; cf. Chap. 2, Lect. 4, n. 178. See also the thorough review of texts bearing on this subject in John Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C., 2000), 114–21. Wippel's conclusion is that for creatures to participate in the divine *esse* means that "in every finite substantial entity there is a participated likeness or similitude of the divine *esse*, that is, an intrinsic act of being (*esse*) which is efficiently caused in it by God" (121).

[90] *S.T.* I–II.109.2.

these movements . . . Much more therefore does He infuse into such as He moves towards the acquisition of supernatural good certain forms or supernatural qualities whereby they may be moved by Him sweetly and promptly to acquire eternal good.[91]

As this passage indicates, the initiative in the bestowal of grace lies entirely with God. Aquinas adheres to this principle strictly, arguing that even the movement of free choice that prepares someone to receive grace is itself caused by God.[92] The nearest he comes to a recognition of synergy is his discussion of cooperating grace, the kind that is active when the mind "both moves and is moved." He limits its role to exterior acts, insisting that the interior act of the will toward good is caused by God alone.[93] In all of this Aquinas closely follows Augustine, whose teaching on the relationship of grace and free will, hammered out in the Pelagian controversy, had long been authoritative in the West.

What does Aquinas mean by "infusion"? The term itself suggests an extrinsic relationship, one in which God as efficient cause bestows something distinct from Himself upon the creature. This impression is confirmed by Aquinas' emphasis on the passivity of the creature. His reasoning is perhaps best exhibited in a passage from the *De Veritate*:

From his own nature man is not worthy of so great a good [i.e., eternal life], since it is supernatural. Consequently, by the very fact that someone is affirmed to be pleasing to God with reference to this good, it is affirmed that there is in him something by which he is worthy of such a good above his natural endowments. This does not, to be sure, move the divine will to destine the man for that good, but rather the other way about: by the very fact that by His will God destines someone for eternal life, He supplies him with something by which he is worthy of eternal life . . . And the reason for this is that, just as God's knowledge is the cause of things and is not, like ours, caused by them, in the same way the act of His will is productive of good and not, like ours, caused by good. Man is accordingly said to have the grace of God not only from his being loved by God with a view to eternal life but also from his being given some gift [i.e., grace] by which he is worthy of eternal life.[94]

Aquinas insists that grace can in no way be a response to the creature's initiative. Although the Augustinian teaching on predestination is perhaps already enough to necessitate such a view, Aquinas artfully weaves it into his own metaphysics by deriving it from the principle that the divine will "is productive of good and not caused by good." This principle is in turn a corollary of divine simplicity. The connection emerges

[91] *S.T.* I–II.110.2. [92] *S.T.* I-II.112.2; cf. the discussions of prevenient grace at 109.6 and 111.3.
[93] *S.T.* I–II.111.2; cf. *De Veritate* 27.5 ad 1. [94] *De Veritate* 27.1.

in the *Summa Theologiae*, where Aquinas argues that since God wills all that He wills in a single act – one that is identical to the divine essence – there can be no cause of His willing as He does.[95] Divine simplicity is thus the ultimate reason why creatures can contribute nothing to their own salvation. The situation is much like that which confronted us in regard to the participation of creatures in *esse*: since there can be no true synergy, all that remains is that the relationship of grace be an extrinsic one founded on efficient causality.

The highest form of grace is, of course, the bestowal of the beatific vision. Here at last Aquinas steps beyond the bounds of efficient causality, although the manner in which he does so reaffirms the fundamentally Augustinian character of his theology. He follows Augustine in affirming that God is intrinsically intelligible. For Aquinas this is not a consequence of a Platonic conception of being, however, but of the principle that God is pure act, together with the Aristotelian equation of actuality with intelligibility.[96] Book III of the *Summa Contra Gentiles* develops the consequences of this view for human beatitude. The argument again draws upon Aristotle, and specifically upon the principle (argued in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.7) that the proper operation of something defines its end. In light of this principle, the end of any rational substance must be an act of understanding. Since there can be no higher act of understanding than to understand God, "the most perfect intelligible object," it follows that to do so is the end of every intellectual creature (III.25.3). However, since no created form can represent the divine essence, the only way the divine essence can be understood is when it itself serves as a kind of intelligible species present in the intellect (III.51.4). This means that the vision of the divine essence cannot be attained by any creature of its own natural power. The creature must be "elevated to a higher operation . . . by the imposition of a new form," much as a diaphanous object becomes luminous by being filled with light (III.53.5).

The disposition granted to the intellect to raise it to such a vision is what Aquinas calls the "light of glory" (III.53.6). As something received in a created intellect, the light is itself a creature. Accordingly, no created intellect, even when illuminated by the light of glory, can understand God as He understands Himself; the divine essence remains "seen, yet not comprehended." Although Aquinas adopts this distinction from Augustine,

[95] *S.T.* I.19.5.

[96] "Everything is knowable so far as it is in act, and not so far as it is in potentiality . . . therefore the essence of God, the pure and perfect act, is absolutely and perfectly in itself intelligible" (*S.T.* I.87.1). The same point is frequently made elsewhere, e.g., *S.C.G.* I.47.4.

he explains it in a somewhat different way. It does not mean that the divine essence is partly seen and partly unseen, but that the essence is known in the way that someone who accepts a demonstrative conclusion on authority may be said to know the conclusion without comprehending it (III.55.6). Despite such limitations, each of the blessed "sees Him so perfectly that its whole natural capacity is fulfilled" (III.59.4). Since the fulfillment of its natural capacity also requires the understanding of created things, each creature in knowing the divine essence also understands creatures to the extent that its capacity allows. There is, however, no succession in such a vision, for since creatures are seen in the divine essence they are seen all at once as a whole (III.60.1). This means that to share in such a vision is to participate in eternity, and that one who enjoys it becomes a partaker of eternal life (III.61.2).

Aquinas' teaching on the beatific vision exhibits with particular clarity the differences separating him from the eastern tradition. The most immediately obvious is that, whereas for the East God is beyond knowing, Aquinas regards Him as the highest intelligible object. Aquinas is aware of this disagreement. In the *De Veritate* he cites a long string of objections to the possibility of seeing God through His essence, and among them are several drawn from Dionysius and John of Damascus. The most fundamental, which Aquinas attributes to Dionysius, is that "all cognition is of things that are; God, however, is not a being, but is above being; therefore, He cannot be known except by transcendent knowledge, which is divine knowledge."[97] Aquinas' reply is worth quoting in full:

> Dionysius' argument proceeds from the knowledge had while in this life. This is had from forms in existing creatures, and, consequently, it cannot attain to what is transcendent. Such is not the case, however, of the vision had in heaven. His argument, therefore, is not pertinent to the problem at hand.[98]

What for Dionysius had been a limitation inherent to the relation between creature and Creator becomes for Aquinas one imposed solely by our current ways of knowing. It is worth noting that Aquinas' position had been considered and rejected by St. Gregory of Nyssa. In his *Contra Eunomium* Gregory denies that the *ousia* of God is known even to the angels, precisely in order to insist that this limitation is not due solely to human ways of

[97] *De Veritate* 8.1 obj. 10. This paraphrase could be based on any number of passages of the *Divine Names*, e.g., 1.1 588A, 1.4 593A, 1.5 593C.

[98] *De Veritate* 8.1 ad 10.

knowing but is an intrinsic limitation of the creature.[99] Gregory's writings were not available to Aquinas, however, and even if they had been it is unlikely that Aquinas would have changed his mind. He notes at the beginning of this article of the *De Veritate* that the denial that God can be seen through His essence had already been judged heretical. This judgment occurred at the University of Paris in 1241, in the rejection of the proposition that "the divine essence will be seen in itself neither by man nor by angel." In his *Commentary on Hebrews* Aquinas attributes the rejected view to Eriugena, who in turn (unknown to Aquinas) depended for this point on St. Maximus the Confessor.[100] One could hardly find a more striking example of the misunderstanding between the two halves of Christendom: a view that Aquinas regards as heretical had, unknown to him, been orthodox in the East since at least the fourth century.

It is also striking that the entire discussion of the beatific vision in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* makes no reference to the body, save in the observation that human felicity does not consist in bodily goods or pleasure. This is in sharp contrast to the teaching of the Greek Fathers about the ongoing deification of the body through participation in the divine energies. The *Summa Theologiae* does devote an article to the question "whether the body is necessary for man's happiness."[101] The answer is no. The one concession Aquinas makes is that after the soul is rejoined to the body its happiness increases in "extent," although not in intensity, because its enjoyment "overflows" into the body.[102] Aquinas is here even more thoroughly intellectualist than Augustine, who had taught that the soul's vision of the divine essence remains imperfect without the body.[103] The difference is probably due to the placement of Aquinas' discussion within a framework deriving from the *Nicomachean Ethics*. It is this framework that leads him to insist that the human *telos* consists strictly and solely in an intellectual act.

A third difference – one also already present in Augustine, but underscored by Aquinas' Aristotelianism – is the absence of a concept of perpetual progress. For Aquinas it is essential that the human end be precisely an *end*, a state of "unmoving stability" where all natural desire is at rest.[104] This emphasis on completion is primarily due to his Aristotelian conviction that

[99] *Contra Eunomium* I.683, II.69–70; cf. Chapter 7 n. 54.
[100] See Dominic J. O'Meara, "Eriugena and Aquinas on the Beatific Vision," *Eriugena Redivivus*, ed. Werner Beierwaltes (Heidelberg, 1987), 224–36.
[101] *S.T.* I–II.4.5.
[102] *S.T.* I–II.4.5 ad 4 and 5; cf. art. 6.
[103] *De Genesi ad Litteram* XII.35.68; cf. *City of God* XXII.29. For Aquinas' treatment of these texts see *S.T.* I.12.3 ad 2, I–II.4.5 ad 4.
[104] *S.C.G.* III.48.3; cf. the comparison with the movement of a body toward its natural place at III.25.13.

any natural desire must have some corresponding terminal fulfillment.[105] It stands in sharp contrast to the descriptions in Maximus of the state of the blessed as an "ever-moving stability," or those in Palamas of an infinite progress into the uncreated light. For these authors the notion of rest must be balanced by that of movement, the notion of fulfillment by that of ever-increasing desire. Such apparently paradoxical descriptions are made possible by their belief in the divine *energeia* as a reality that is fully divine, and therefore infinite, and yet can be participated. The theology of Aquinas offers no such category.

## AQUINAS: OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

So far I have presented two major criticisms of Aquinas, both of which position him in sharp contrast to the East. One is that his view of divine simplicity is inconsistent with his position on divine free choice. The other is that his account of the participation of creatures in God – through the sharing of all creatures in *esse* and the sharing of rational creatures in grace – relies too heavily on the category of efficient causality, thereby leaving the relationship between God and creatures merely extrinsic. It is true that the latter need not be construed as a criticism; one might think that the relationship between God and creatures really *is* extrinsic, and that Aquinas has described it correctly. As I have pointed out, however, Aquinas himself does not seem to have viewed matters in this way, for there are signs that he wished to assert a more intimate kind of relationship. If so, this is clearly a deficiency of some kind, even if only one of unfulfilled aspirations.

Contemporary scholarship has dealt extensively with two of these issues, the relationship between divine simplicity and freedom and the nature of grace. (The literature on the participation of creatures in *esse* is also large, but primarily exegetical.) Here we are concerned only with that which might tend to exonerate Aquinas from the criticisms I have presented. Let us first look briefly at what has been said about grace. Much of the contemporary discussion takes its lead from an essay by Karl Rahner, "Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace."[106] Rahner draws on Aquinas to suggest that the relationship of God to creatures through grace should be understood along the lines of the beatific vision. The idea is plausible because the beatific vision itself takes place by grace:

[105] E.g., *S.C.G.* III.51.1; *S.T.* I.12.1.

[106] Karl Rahner, "Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace," *Theological Investigations* (London, 1961), vol. 1, 319–46.

the light of glory, which is in effect a kind of created grace, prepares the soul for the reception of uncreated grace, the divine essence. More precisely, the divine essence comes to be present to the intellect "as an intelligible species by which it understands" (*S.C.G.* III.51.4). This is not formal causality in the normal sense; the divine essence does not become the *natural* form of the intellect, for then the intellect would be consubstantial with God. Rahner calls it "quasi-formal causality" to indicate that the divine essence takes on the role of a form without compromising its transcendence.[107] His central suggestion is that this sort of causality is operative in any instance of divine indwelling through grace. Just as with the beatific vision, there is a created, supernatural disposition that prepares the soul to receive God. Once it is present, God then serves the soul "as if" a form, although not as a natural form. One objection which might be made is that such quasi-formal causality exists in the natural order only in the relationship of intellect to its object, whereas divine indwelling by grace is not primarily an intellectual relationship, but the active presence of the Holy Spirit. Rahner is not troubled by this difference. It merely indicates, he says, that "such a formal causality of God . . . is not known to us in the realm of nature (i.e., in knowledge which proceeds from the creature and consequently attains God only as *efficient* cause), and so cannot be ascertained as regards its actual realization (and hence also as regards its possibility) without Revelation."[108]

This is certainly an ingenious development of Aquinas' views. It draws together two elements that Aquinas tends to treat separately, the indwelling of the divine Persons within the soul and grace as the presence within the soul of created "forms and powers."[109] It surely goes as far as one can go, within a scholastic framework, toward meeting the objection that the relationship that obtains in virtue of grace is merely extrinsic. The real question is whether it amounts to anything more than arbitrary stipulation. We are told that by a created, supernatural *habitus* or disposition God truly gives Himself to the creature and comes to serve the soul "as if" a form. But how can this be, when the divine essence cannot be participated, and only the divine essence is God? We can understand how it is possible in the case of the beatific vision, for that is an intellectual relationship, and the divine essence can (like any other essence) serve as an intelligible species. The indwelling of God through grace, however, is not a matter of the divine essence serving as an intelligible species. Certainly one can *assert* that the same kind of causality is involved in both cases. One can even assert that the

[107] *Ibid.* 330. [108] *Ibid.*
[109] See *S.T.* I.43 for the former and I–II.109–14 for the latter.

existence of such causality in the case of grace is a revealed truth. But that is hardly legitimate; what is a revealed truth is the fact of divine indwelling, not the particular philosophical categories in terms of which it is to be understood. Rahner's theory is a noble but futile effort to stretch scholastic categories in a way that they simply do not admit. Surely the lesson to be learned is that such categories are inadequate to state what Christians have traditionally believed about grace.

The other objection is the incompatibility of divine simplicity and divine free choice. In addition to the discussion of this issue in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, there is a rather different line of defense in *De Potentia* III.15. There, arguing that God creates not by natural necessity but by "decree of His will," Aquinas replies to a number of objections. Among them are the following:

6. In God nature and will are the same: and consequently if He produces things willingly it would seem that He produces them naturally.
8. God's operation is His essence: and His essence is natural to Him. Therefore whatever He does He does naturally.
18. The effect proceeds from its cause in action: wherefore a cause is not related to its effect except as related to its action or operation. Now the relation of God's action or operation to Himself is natural, since God's action is His essence. Therefore the relation of God to His effect is also natural so that He produces it naturally.

These are all versions of our own objection, at least as regards the identity of God's will with His essence or activity (as opposed to the incompatibility of free choice with His being pure act). Here is the full text of Aquinas' replies:

6. Although will and nature are identically the same in God, they differ conceptually (*ratione*), insofar as they express respect to creatures in different ways; thus nature denotes a respect to some one thing determinately, whereas will does not.
8. Although God's operation belongs to Him naturally seeing that it is His very nature or essence, the created effect follows the operation of His nature which, in our [human] way of understanding, is considered as the principle of His will, even as the effect that is heating follows according to the mode of heat.
18. The effect follows from the action according to the mode of the principle of the action: wherefore since the divine will which has no necessary connection with creatures is considered, in our [human] way of thinking, to be the principle of the divine action in regard to creatures, it does not follow that the creature proceeds from God by natural necessity, although the action itself is God's essence or nature.

Aquinas' strategy in these replies is to seek to make room for free choice by invoking the logical distinctions that the human intellect introduces in apprehending God. The particular distinctions he invokes are those of nature versus will (replies to objections 6 and 8) and of the will "which has no necessary connection with creatures" versus the action of creating (reply to objection 18). His claim is that since in each case we apprehend the former member of the pair as the "principle" of the latter, the fact that the former is necessary need not imply that the latter is as well. The obvious reply, however, is that all of this relates only to our apprehension of God, not to God as He truly is. Given that in reality "will and nature are identically the same in God," and "the action itself is God's essence or nature," surely nature, will, and action are *in reality* equally necessary, however much our apprehension of them may differ. If not, one could well ask what precisely is the point of the doctrine of divine simplicity, after all.

A text that might suggest yet another approach to the problem appears in the *Summa Theologiae*. There, in discussing the question "whether whatever God wills He wills necessarily," Aquinas argues that God necessarily wills "the being of His own goodness" but only contingently wills the being of creatures, since they are not necessary for realizing His goodness. He recognizes, however, that for God to will creatures may be *conditionally* necessary, "for supposing that He wills a thing, then He is unable not to will it, since His will cannot change."[110] He then applies this distinction to the issue raised by divine simplicity. Replying to the objection that "it belongs to [God's] nature to will whatever He wills, since in God there can be nothing over and above His nature," Aquinas states that for God to will the being of creatures is not absolutely necessary, and therefore is voluntary.[111] Although in Aquinas this application of the absolute versus conditional distinction to divine simplicity is little more than a passing remark, it has been developed at length by Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann.[112] They write:

> God's willing to create is necessary, but only conditionally, given the fact that he does create. And nothing in this sort of necessity impugns the freedom of his will, because which logical possibility is actualized and which logical possibility is left unactualized depends on nothing other than God's will. And yet his willing is necessitated since *as things are* it is not possible that not willing to create ever be correctly ascribed to him.[113]

[110] *S.T.* 1.19.3. [111] *S.T.* 1.19.3 ad 3.
[112] "Absolute Simplicity," *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985), 353–81. [113] *Ibid.* 369.

They go on to note that the greatest question mark hanging over such a view is not whether it preserves divine freedom, but whether it preserves divine simplicity. The difficulty is that it seems to ascribe two sorts of characteristics to God: those that apply in all possible worlds, such as willing His own goodness, and those that apply only in some, such as willing to create. Surely, one would think, this is a violation of perfect simplicity. In reply they argue that the difference between the two sorts of characteristics is a mere "logical distinction" and not a true "metaphysical difference" within the divine will or activity. As an analogy they offer the act of looking into a mirror: assuming that the glance is straight-on, one necessarily sees oneself but only contingently sees, say, the picture in the background. Yet the act of looking is a single act.[114]

The cogency of this argument hinges on what is meant by a "metaphysical distinction." Stump and Kretzmann do not define the term, but surely one plausible definition is that two things are metaphysically distinct if one could exist without the other. (This is what Aquinas would call a "real distinction.") Since on Aquinas' account God's act of willing His own goodness could exist without His act of creating, it would seem that there are metaphysical distinctions within the single divine act after all. For that matter there are metaphysical distinctions within the act of looking into a mirror, since the act of seeing oneself could exist without that of seeing the picture in the background. What this shows is that a *single* act need not be a *simple* one. Upon closer examination it turns out that Stump and Kretzmann's conception of simplicity is in fact much less stringent than that of Aquinas, and it is only this that enables them to mount their defense. The difference emerges when they write:

> When Thomas maintains that there is only necessity in God, and that whatever is true of him is essentially true of him, we take him to mean the following: Within any initial-state set of possible worlds God's nature is fully and immutably determinate, and is so as a consequence of the single, timeless act of will in which God wills goodness (himself) and whatever else (if anything) he wills for the sake of goodness in that initial-state set.[115]

This is simply not Aquinas' view. Aquinas nowhere relativizes the determinate content of God's nature to a subset of possible worlds. One suspects that he would have recoiled at the thought of doing so.

[114] *Ibid.* 372. [115] *Ibid.* 369.

A final attempt to reconcile divine simplicity and free choice has been made by John F. X. Knasas.[116] Knasas argues from two premises. One is that acts are defined by their objects, a venerable principle that goes back to Plato. The other is that "God wills creatures in and through willing himself," so that, regardless of whether God does or does not create, the principal object of His will is solely the divine goodness. It follows from these premises that God's act is the same regardless of whether He does or does not create, and thus there is no conflict with divine simplicity.[117]

To this one might reply, in the first place, that to suggest that creating the world makes no difference at all to the activity God performs is wildly counter-intuitive. Supposing that the argument is valid, surely the proper conclusion is that it is a *reductio* of one of its two premises – i.e., either the axiom that acts are defined by their objects or the notion that God wills creatures only in willing Himself. Yet although this reply may be correct, it is not conclusive, for it leaves the issue at the level of a mere conflict of intuitions. The Thomist is free to maintain that such counter-intuitive results are merely what one should expect when dealing with a matter that is so far beyond our ordinary ways of thinking. A more decisive point is that, if Knasas is correct, then there could be no reason for God to create, since the object of His will would be the same in either case. Yet Aquinas clearly does believe that there is a reason for God's creating, namely, to communicate His own goodness.[118] That is what distinguishes Aquinas' position from voluntarism. In other words, there is a difference between saying that the *principal* object of God's will is His own goodness and that the *only* object of God's will is His own goodness. Aquinas clearly asserts the former, but not the latter. There is a good reason he does not: to do so would be to undo the linkage he so carefully constructs between divine goodness and the decision to create.

[116] "Contra Spinoza: Aquinas on God's Free Will," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 76 (2002), 417–29. Knasas is responding to a version of the objection given (though without reference to Aquinas) in Spinoza, *Ethics* I, Prop. 33, n. 2.

[117] *Ibid*. 427.

[118] See *S.C.G.* I.75.3, II.35.7, II.38.15, II.46.6, III.64.9; *S.T.* I.22.4.

# CHAPTER 10

## *Epilogue*

We have killed him – you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun?

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

If the *ousia* does not possess an *energeia* distinct from itself, it will be completely without actual subsistence and will be only a concept in the mind.

Gregory Palamas, *One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*

We have now completed our historical survey. It would be possible to carry the story further, for the decades after the hesychast controversy saw a substantial interest in Aquinas among the Byzantines. The *Summa Contra Gentiles* was translated into Greek in 1355, and other works, including the *Summa Theologiae*, soon followed. They provoked a lively controversy, with a small but vigorous minority (led by the translators, Demetrius and Prochorus Cydones) seeking to persuade their countrymen of the merits of Thomism.[1] This sudden expansion of horizons contributed to the turbulence of Byzantine intellectual life in its final days, helping make possible the originality of men like Gemisto Plethon and Cardinal Bessarion, who initiated the revival of Platonism in the Renaissance. No doubt it was the Byzantines' growing sense of desperation that opened their minds to the possibility that they might have something to learn from the West. Western theologians showed no comparable curiosity, either then or for some

[1] See M. Jugie, "Démétrius Cydonès et la théologie latine à Byzance," *Échos d'Orient* 27 (1928), 385–402; Stylianos Papadopulos, "Thomas in Byzanz," *Theologie und Philosophie* 49 (1974), 274–304; Thomas Tyn, "Prochoros und Demetrios Kydones," *Thomas von Aquino: Interpretation und Rezeption*, ed. Willehad Paul Eckert (Mainz, 1974), 837–912; F. Kianka, "Demetrius Cydones and Thomas Aquinas," *Byzantion* 52 (1982), 264–86. See also the compromise attempted by George Scholarios, the first patriarch of Constantinople after the Turkish conquest: S. Guichardan, *Le problème de la simplicité divine en orient et en occident aux XIVe et XVe siècles* (Lyon, 1933); V. Grumel, "Grégoire Palamas, Duns Scot et Georges Scholarios devant le problème de la simplicité divine," *Échos d'Orient* 34 (1935), 84–96.

centuries thereafter. R. W. Southern, the eminent medieval historian, has described the prevailing attitude:

> It is one of the curious limitations of the West [at this time] that, with all its intellectual vigour and curiosity and despite its vast debt to Greek science, it had no interest in the modern Greek world. The men who were enthusiasts for Greek science looked right through the Byzantine Greeks without noticing their existence. They inspired neither emulation nor fear in western minds; hence there was no incentive – as to some extent there was with Islam – to understand them. The superficial and often erroneous impressions of Greek religion which reached the West discouraged any closer acquaintance. As Humbert de Romanis, the adviser of Pope Gregory X on reunion, told the pope, the great sin of the Latins in this matter was that they did not care.[2]

An episode typifying the continuing inability to understand the East in its own terms occurred among the Thomistic commentators of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Gabriel Vasquez, in one of his disputations on the *Summa Theologiae*, maintained that Aquinas had been mistaken in claiming that the views of the Greek Fathers could be reconciled with his own doctrine of the beatific vision. Vasquez proclaimed that "we can prove with evidence that the doctrine of the Fathers [against the knowability of the divine essence] must not be understood in the sense of vision which the scholastics call comprehension, but in fact in the sense of a full, clear, and intuitive idea of God as He is."[3] The conclusion Vasquez came to was that a great many of the Fathers, Latin as well as Greek, had lapsed into heresy. Other commentators found this answer unacceptable, and a scramble ensued in search of texts that would exonerate the Fathers. Throughout the controversy all parties assumed that any vision of God must be either *per essentiam* or *per similitudinem* – the similitude in question, of course, being created. No one thought to ask whether the limitation to these categories might itself be the source of the problem.

A clearer understanding of the Greek Fathers has been achieved only gradually, thanks in part to the pioneering researches of Roman Catholic scholars such as Jean Cardinal Daniélou and Hans Urs von Balthasar. My own work rests upon theirs, as well as upon that of historians of philosophy such as Hadot and Eastern Orthodox scholars such as Lossky and Meyendorff. Looking back upon the history here recounted, what conclusions can we draw? If one were to summarize the differences between the eastern

[2] R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (London, 1970), 82.

[3] Quoted by Vladimir Lossky, *The Vision of God* (Crestwood, N.Y., 1973), 16; for the entire controversy see pp. 11–24. There is an earlier version containing some additional material in Lossky, "Le problème de la 'vision face à face' et la tradition patristique de Byzance," *Studia Patristica* 2 (1957), 512–37.

and western traditions in a single word, that word would be 'synergy.' For the East the highest form of communion with the divine is not primarily an intellectual act, but a sharing of life and activity. This seems to have been true among both pagans and Christians during the formative period of late antiquity, stretching back to the magical papyri and Hermetica, as well as to the New Testament and early Church Fathers. It led to a tendency to think of earthly, bodily existence as capable of being taken up and subsumed within the life of God. Emphasis was placed, not on any sudden transformation at death, but on the ongoing and active appropriation of those aspects of the divine life that are open to participation. Naturally this aspiration took on different forms in different authors, and there were marked differences between its pagan and Christian forms. But the underlying belief in synergy as a form of communion with God remains as clear in Gregory Palamas as it is in St. Paul. It influences the entirety of the eastern outlook, not only in the explicitly religious and philosophical areas we have discussed, but in others we have scarcely touched upon.

In the West synergy played remarkably little role. Although various reasons might be conjectured for this difference, its immediate cause was the happenstance way in which Greek learning was transmitted to the West. Most of the works in which the ideal of synergy had been developed were not translated into Latin; furthermore, even if they had been, Latin offered no terms as suitable as *energeia* and its cognates for situating the notion of synergy within a broad metaphysical context. In place of the synergistic ideal and its accompanying metaphysics, Augustine impressed upon western thought a number of interlocking assumptions: that God is simple; that He is intrinsically intelligible; that He can be known in only two ways, through created intermediaries or a direct intellectual apprehension of the divine essence; and that the highest goal of human existence is such direct intellectual apprehension. It is true that Augustine's theory of illumination (which I have not attempted to discuss) leaves open a certain sense in which the intellect can perceive God directly in this life without a created intermediary. This theory suffers from many obscurities, however, and Aquinas, under Aristotelian influence, quietly laid it aside.[4]

Despite such differences, the West remained almost unanimous in its acceptance of the Augustinian assumptions. The results were far-reaching and profound. One I have emphasized was that the presence of God within creatures, whether through participation in the divine perfections or through the special indwelling of grace, had to be understood in terms

[4] See *S.T.* 1.84.5 and 7.

of efficient causality. This created a certain sense of distance between God and creatures – one that readily enough developed into a sense, not only of distance, but of autonomy. It is surely no accident that during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as the western church was disengaging itself from its eastern counterpart, western culture as a whole developed a sharply more naturalistic stance in areas such as art, science, law, and government, as well as in various forms of religious devotion.[5] This naturalism found expression in philosophy in the widespread assumption that there is a sphere of "natural reason" independent of revelation.[6] Prayer and asceticism likewise came to be understood differently than in the East – not as contributing to the ongoing deification of body and soul, but as a way of disciplining the body while focusing and elevating the mind. The Augustinian elevation of the intellect thus placed at the heart of western spiritual practice a kind of practical dualism. By the high Middle Ages, naturalism, rationalism, and dualism formed a pervasive and tightly interlocking set of stances toward the world. Each supported the others, and all drew sustenance from their common root in the Augustinian metaphysics of the divine essence.

It may be useful to summarize here our account of how these differences originated. The eastern conception of synergy depends on understanding *energeia* simultaneously in two distinct ways: as an activity that can be shared, and as the natural accompaniment and manifestation of the inner personal being (*ousia*) of the one who acts. The germs of both aspects of this understanding are present in Aristotle. *Energeia* as activity is of course one of the regular Aristotelian meanings of the term, and Aristotle also presents the *energeiai* of the faculties of the soul as the only route to understanding its *ousia*. But these were only the barest seeds of the later developments. What was lacking was, in the first place, the notion of synergy as shared activity, and in the second, that of *energeia* as constituting an essential dimension, the outward and manifest reality, of personal being. The first step was taken by St. Paul and other authors of the first few centuries

[5] See M. D. Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century* (Chicago, 1968); Lynn White, Jr., *Medieval Religion and Technology: Collected Essays* (Berkeley, 1978), especially "Natural Science and Naturalistic Art in the Middle Ages"; Peter Brown, "Society and the Supernatural: A Medieval Change," *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, (London, 1982), 302–32; Harold Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983); R. W. Southern, *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1995). Such attitudes were evident already in the western reaction to the iconoclast controversy; see John Romanides, *Franks, Romans, Feudalism, and Doctrine: An Interplay between Theology and Society* (Brookline, Mass., 1981).

[6] I have discussed an early form of this view in "Faith and Reason in St. Anselm's *Monologion*," *Philosophia Christi* 4 (2002), 509–17.

A.D. The groundwork for the second was laid in the Plotinian theory of two acts, where the external *energeia* is precisely the natural accompaniment and manifestation of the one who acts. The Plotinian hypostases are not persons, however, so that the external *energeia* is not yet a truly personal act. Further steps in this direction, as well as a more systematic development of the notion of synergy, were taken by Iamblichus and Proclus. Yet even with them the personal status of the gods remains ambiguous. One finds both elements accompanying belief in a personal deity only with Christian authors who wrote in the wake of Plotinus – that is, the Cappadocians and Dionysius the Areopagite. Thereafter it was a matter simply of clarifying and applying to various questions this fundamentally synergistic view of reality.

What the West took from classical metaphysics was very different. Another strand in Aristotle's thought was the identification of *ousia* and *energeia* in the special case of the Prime Mover. This identification was made possible by Aristotle's understanding of the Prime Mover as both "primary simple substance existing in actuality" and the self-subsistent activity of thought. It served as a model for a succession of thinkers, such as Numenius, Alcinous, and Alexander of Aphrodisias. The succession culminated in Plotinus, for whom the identification of *ousia* and *energeia* in the Prime Mover is a model for that of each hypostasis with its internal act. Neoplatonists in the West after Plotinus – the anonymous commentator on the *Parmenides*, Marius Victorinus, and Boethius – developed the Plotinian theory into a conception of *esse* as activity. This approach arguably left room for its own kind of synergy, in that it sees the being of creatures as a limited share (a partial enactment, so to speak) in the single act that is God.

Where such an approach might have led is an open question. The future of the West belonged to Augustine. Whatever his debts to Neoplatonism in other areas, Augustine's metaphysics is essentially that of Plato's middle dialogues, with God playing the role that Plato assigns to the Forms. The Platonic conception of being as wholeness led Augustine to his doctrine of divine simplicity, and thereby to the other assumptions that I have mentioned. After Augustine, divine simplicity took on a life of its own, remaining firmly entrenched even when the conception of being to which it owed its origin had been discarded. This was especially the case in Aquinas. Aquinas revived the understanding of *esse* as activity, drawing not only on Neoplatonism but on the Aristotelian theology of the Prime Mover. For him God's *essentia*, *esse*, and *operatio* are one and the same. The difficulty facing such a view is that of reconciling it with God's capacity for free

choice. I have argued that Aquinas failed to resolve this difficulty. I have also argued that he failed to find a way beyond the limits that Augustine had placed on the manner in which God can be present to creatures, despite clear indications that he wished to do so. If I am right, then Aquinas, far from presenting a grand synthesis of the kind alleged by modern Thomists, presents instead a medley of incompatible arguments and intuitions. He is continually reaching toward possibilities that his Augustinian commitments prevent him from realizing.

The question we must now ask is whether the eastern view is subject to any similar debilitating weakness. This is a large question, one that calls for careful, focused work from critics as well as advocates. Criticisms to date have tended to focus on Gregory Palamas, whose thought has frequently been viewed as an idiosyncratic development of the late Byzantine church.[7] I hope that the history presented here will put that view to rest. I also hope that it will encourage close analytical work by philosophers on the eastern tradition as a whole. In the meantime, as a first effort in that direction, it will be worthwhile to take a look at the existing criticisms of Palamas. I will focus for this purpose on an article by Rowan Williams that nicely summarizes the misgivings of many critics.[8]

Williams begins by offering a genealogy of the essence–energies distinction that is intended to highlight its illegitimacy. He sees Palamas as a Neoplatonist who, like all Neoplatonists, is guilty of reifying what are properly merely logical distinctions. In Neoplatonism "attributes are conceived as having a kind of substantiality," and hence as capable both of being participated and of existing separately from their participants. This fundamental error leads to the triadic scheme of Proclus, in which each reality exists as unparticipated (ἀμέθεκτον), participated (μετεχόμενον), and participating

[7] For example, E. von Ivánka, "Palamismus und Vätertradition" in *1054–1954: L'Église et les eglises* (Chevetogne, 1955), 29–46, and "Hellenisches im Hesychasmus: Das Antinomische der Energienlehre," *Epektasis: mélanges patristiques offerts au Cardinal Jean Danielou* (Beauchesne, 1972), 491–500, along with articles by a number of authors in *Istina*, vol. 19, no. 3 (1974). For replies see André de Halleux, "Palamisme et Scolastique," *Revue théologique de Louvain* 4 (1973), 409–42, and "Palamisme et Tradition," *Irénikon* 48 (1975), 479–93; Georges Barrois, "Palamism Revisited" and Christos Yannaras, "The Distinction between Essence and Energies and Its Importance for Theology," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 19 (1975), 211–31, 232–45; Kallistos Ware, "God Hidden and Revealed: The Apophatic Way and the Essence–Energies Distinction," *Eastern Churches Review* 7 (1975), 125–36.

[8] Rowan Williams, "The Philosophical Structures of Palamism," *Eastern Churches Review* 9 (1977), 27–44. For discussion of more strictly theological objections to Palamas see Duncan Reid, *Energies of the Spirit: Trinitarian Models in Eastern Orthodox and Western Theology* (Atlanta, 1997) and A. N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (Oxford, 1999), both with extensive bibliographies.

(μετέχον).[9] The unparticipated is in general the level of *ousia*, whereas the participated is that of procession (πρόοδος). In the case of the One the processions are the divine henads, which "embody or hypostasize divine qualities and mediate them to finite subsistents." The henads are thus "an intermediate order of multiple 'divinities' prior to the world, yet necessarily *connected* to this lower order (since their 'purpose' is solely *mediation* between the One and finite being)."[10] According to Williams, when this scheme is transferred into Christian thought by Dionysius, the One *qua* unparticipated becomes the divine *ousia*, whereas the henads become the divine *proodoi* or *dunameis*. Palamas takes the further step of rechristening the divine *proodoi* as *energeiai* and emphasizing that they are a real plurality, thus making clear that they are really distinct from the *ousia*.[11]

Williams has two objections to what he sees as the attempt by Palamas (and, to a lesser extent, Dionysius) to impose a Neoplatonic ontology upon Christianity. One is that in conceiving the divine *ousia* along the lines of the One *qua* unparticipated, as "the perfectly simple, indivisible, imparticipable interiority of God," Palamas effectively privileges the *ousia* above the persons of the Trinity. As evidence Williams cites the assertion of Palamas that the divine *energeia* is distinct from the *ousia* "in the same way as is hypostasis."[12]

Williams also alleges that, since the *energeiai* (like the henads of Proclus) are "eternally engaged, by their very nature, in *communicating* the divine perfections to some second term or order of being," for Palamas "God and the world appear to be bound up in a kind of organic unity."[13] In other words, since the energies are intrinsically relational, and yet are truly God, they implicate Palamas in pantheism. Williams considers the possible rejoinder, offered by Meyendorff, that "while God eternally possesses the power to create, it is not eternally actualized." He replies:

> But this is gross: it involves us in supposing that God is subject to some form of temporal succession, that his 'decision' to create is comparable to human choice, that he has unfulfilled or unrealized potencies – in short, that he is mutable. What Meyendorff apparently does not understand is that it is no answer to say that God's *ousia* is immutable and His *energeiai* mutable, as this drives a very considerable wedge between the two terms: what is true of one 'mode' or aspect of God is *not* true of another. The unity of God is far more gravely imperilled by this than any

[9] Williams, "Philosophical Structures," 35; cf. Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, Props. 23–24. As Dodds explains in his commentary, the distinction is roughly that between transcendent Form, immanent form, and participant.
[10] Williams, "Philosophical Structures," 36. [11] *Ibid*. 36–37.
[12] Palamas, *Theophanes* 12; cited by Williams, "Philosophical Structures," 53. [13] *Ibid*. 37.

Palamite or neo-Palamite seems to have grasped; it is the purest Neoplatonism, an affirmation of two *wholly* distinct orders of reality in God.[14]

The conclusion Williams draws is that Palamas leaves us with "two eternal realities, God *in se* and God as participated by creatures," and no way to unify them.

I hope the alternative genealogy offered here will be sufficient to show the errors of that sketched out by Williams. The errors fall into two groups, those related to Dionysius and to Palamas. The notion that the henads of Proclus are the immediate source of the *proodoi* of Dionysius can only be made good by ignoring the Cappadocian elements in Dionysius' thought, which I emphasized in Chapter 7. It also rests on a misreading of Proclus. Williams overlooks that the henads are not simply reified divine attributes, but quasi-personal agents possessing intellects, souls, and bodies. They mediate the divine perfections to lower beings, not merely as principles of participation, but out of active beneficence. Even the apparent terminological link of the henads to the *proodoi* disappears on examination, since the henads come about not by procession but by "derivation" (ὑπόβασις) within the transverse series of which the One is the monad.[15]

Turning to Palamas, the notion that the essence–energies distinction derives from the unparticipated–participated distinction might seem to present firmer ground, and has been affirmed by other critics.[16] But although it is certainly true that Palamas makes use of the unparticipated–participated distinction to *explicate* that of essence and energies, that is far from proving that it is his source. To think that it is requires overlooking the entire history of the essence–energies distinction prior to Proclus, including the fundamental point that the *energeiai* are acts. (Williams, like most other critics, pays hardly any attention to the history and associations of the term *energeia*.) The comparison to Proclus also does not hold at the other end, in the attempt to equate the divine *ousia* with the One *qua* unparticipated. The divine *ousia* is not "the perfectly simple, indivisible, imparticipable interiority of God," but God as He is in Himself, considered independently of His self-manifestation. Nothing in such a distinction privileges the *ousia* over the persons of the Trinity. Certainly the mere statement that the divine *energeia* is distinct from the *ousia* "in the same way as is hypostasis" does not do so, for Palamas says only that there are these two distinctions, not that they are equivalent.

[14] *Ibid.* 38. [15] See Chapter 6 n. 60.
[16] For example, Ivánka, "Hellenisches," 493–94. As Ivánka mentions, the charge goes back to Nicephoras Gregoras.

The most interesting issue raised by Williams is that of the relationship between the divine energies and the act of creation. Williams's accusation that for Palamas God and world are "bound up in a kind of organic unity" finds a surprising echo in one of Palamas' most vigorous defenders, Eric Perl.[17] Perl argues that the divine *energeiai* are nothing other than God's single, eternal creative act. He comes to this conclusion by considering the manner in which they are differentiated. Palamas states that each *energeia* is "relative" and "indicative not of the essence but of a relation to another."[18] He also says that the *energeiai* are "multiplied by the difference of [creatures'] receptive power."[19] Perl takes such texts to imply that the *energeiai* are differentiated solely by their relation to creatures. Yet the *energeiai* are also eternal and uncreated, and thus are subsequent to creatures neither temporally nor ontologically. The only way both sides of this equation could be true, according to Perl, is if the *energeiai* are themselves God's act of creation, an act that is a unity in God but differentiated in relation to creatures. What about the fact, which Palamas states so clearly, that some *energeiai* have a beginning or end? Perl takes this to mean that they do so "only according to the effect, not in God."

> For example, the divine activity according to which I am created, my paradigm or λόγος, takes effect, is revealed, and in that sense 'acts,' only when, at a particular moment in history, I come into being. But this does not mean that God, at that point in time, exercises a new activity. Rather, that activity is pre-contained in the one eternal act of creation by which God, in his eternal present, creates the entire expanse of time and all things in it.[20]

Perl cites approvingly Williams's statement that it would be "gross" to suppose that God exercises a decision to create or that God has unrealized potencies. He also agrees that for Palamas God and world are an "organic unity," although he insists that creation is not necessary to God because "it pertains not to the divine essence but to the eternal yet gratuitous causal activity."[21]

The exegetical foundations of this interpretation are rather slim. None of the texts cited by Perl actually says that the *energeiai* are differentiated solely by their relation to creatures, much less that they are identical with God's creative act. Palamas does identify the divine *logoi* with God's creative *energeia*, but that is a different and much more limited statement.[22] After

[17] Eric Perl, "St. Gregory Palamas and the Metaphysics of Creation," *Dionysius* 14 (1990), 105–30.
[18] *Chapters* 127. [19] *Triads* III.2.13.
[20] Perl, "St. Gregory Palamas," 122. [21] *Ibid.* 125; cf. 121.
[22] *On Union and Division* 13 (cited by Perl, 119).

all, the *energeiai* also include the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the uncreated light, and the "things around God." Perl ignores these other categories, apparently simply assuming that the *energeiai* are equivalent to the *logoi*. There is also nothing to support the attribution to Palamas of the Thomistic view that there is "one eternal act of creation by which God, in his eternal present, creates the entire expanse of time and all things in it." Palamas says specifically that God's creative act has both a beginning and an end.[23] In this he is typical of the Greek Fathers, who generally think of creation as a specific act taking place at the beginning of time, not as the relation between an eternal Creator and a (possibly beginningless) temporal world.[24] At no point does he attempt to minimize or explain away the temporality of such *energeiai* by identifying them as temporal effects of a single eternal act.

Perl is correct, however, in observing that for Palamas creation is not necessary because "it pertains not to the divine essence but to the eternal yet gratuitous causal activity." What he apparently does not see is that the same answer defuses the charge that Palamas holds a view of creation that is "gross" in allowing that God chooses to create and has unrealized potencies. Just as some divine *energeiai* are fully temporal, some could be different than they are. This is true not only of the act of creation, but also of the *energeiai* manifest in other divine acts within history, as well as the gifts of the Spirit. None of these is inseparable from God in the same way as, say, His reality and infinity. Presumably, in charging that such a view is "gross," Williams and Perl are motivated by the familiar Thomistic assumption that to possess an unrealized potency is an imperfection. I have argued that Aquinas himself provides reasons which should lead us to reject this assumption.[25] It is also important to recognize that the unrealized potencies are present at the level of the divine *energeiai*, not the divine *ousia*. This distinction enables Palamas to say what Aquinas so much wanted to say, but could not: that God can *do* otherwise without *being* otherwise.

Perhaps, however, the very diversity of the *energeiai* might in itself constitute an objection. The trouble is not only that some are temporal and others eternal, and some contingent and others necessary. It is that some are more readily conceived as "realities" or "energies," others as activities or operations, and yet others as attributes. The first description would seem to fit best the uncreated light, the gifts of the Spirit, and the divine *logoi*;

[23] *Triads* III.2.8, *Chapters* 130; cf. Chap 9 n.48.

[24] E.g., Basil, *Hexaemeron* 1.3, 6; Maximus, *Centuries on Charity* IV.3–5, *Chapters on Theology and Economy* 1.5; contrast Aquinas, *S.C.G.* II.17–19.

[25] Above, p. 247.

the second, the act of creating and some of the "things around God," such as providence and foreknowledge; the third, others of the "things around God," such as reality, infinity, immortality, life, holiness, and virtue. Such extreme heterogeneity must surely create a suspicion that Palamas trades on ambiguity. He speaks of the *energeiai* as "realities" when it is convenient, yet when pressed on divine simplicity he retreats to thinking of them as activities or powers, as in his analogies to the soul and its powers or the mind and its distinct items of knowledge. The same ambiguity gives teeth to the question raised by Perl about what is implied in saying that each *energeia* is "relative." Perl infers that the *energeiai* are ultimately just the single act of creation that is differentiated in relation to creatures. Although this answer is untenable, the question itself is an important one. How, after all, can *energeiai* such as the uncreated light or the divine reality and infinity be "indicative of relation to another"?

In answer I would point to the doctrine of eternal manifestation discussed in Chapter 8. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and rests on the Son, and in so doing both manifests the energy of the Son and is Himself manifested through the Son. It is hard to know what else the uncreated light could be than this eternal, reciprocal glorification of the persons of the Godhead. If we can legitimately make this identification, then the uncreated light is indeed relative. It exists already as a kind of mutual revelation and glorification within the Godhead, prior to the creative act. Furthermore, according to Gregory of Cyprus, it is precisely because of this mutual glorification that the gifts of the Spirit are bestowed "through the Son in the Spirit." The mutual glorification can thus be seen as a kind of internal act that is imaged and replicated in the bestowal of the divine energies upon creatures. It is true that Palamas does not himself draw these connections, but they are consistent with what he does say, and I see no other way to understand how the divine energies can be "indicative of relation to another" and yet not wholly determined by their relation to creatures.

We can generalize upon this line of thought to understand the unity of the *energeiai* as a class. Some are contingent, some necessary; some are temporal, some eternal; some are realities or energies, others are activities, operations, or attributes. What could such a disparate group have in common? Simply that they are *acts of self-manifestation*. Although any comparison drawn from creatures is inadequate, we can gain some insight into this notion by considering the self-manifestation of a human being. Through what acts is one person known to another? We naturally tend to think first of acts that are short-lived, such as a smile or a gesture. But these take place

against a background of others that are more enduring and, for that reason, ultimately more revelatory, such as the act of remaining faithful to one's spouse or of loving one's children. Behind these are yet other acts that we do not choose and that are permanent fixtures of our being. A human being gives off warmth, grows, breathes, and emits the small but perceptible sound of a heartbeat. These acts are not chosen and (given that the one acting is a human being) could not be otherwise. Some of the more enduring acts we might even speak of as "realities," precisely because they are reliable and manifest personal character; for example, one might speak of a father's love for his children in this way. What all this illustrates is that the range of what counts as an act of self-manifestation is extraordinarily broad. The fact that one can draw distinctions within this class, such as necessary versus contingent, or activity versus energy, does not detract from its underlying unity.

One way to look at Palamas is as inviting us to reconceive what have traditionally been regarded as distinct categories – the eternal, necessary divine attributes and contingent, temporal divine activities – as species within a broader genus, that of acts of self-manifestation. It is interesting in this connection that at least some divine attributes, such as truth and righteousness, are spoken of in Scripture as activities to be performed.[26] We have also seen that in the philosophical tradition being is often regarded as a divine activity. More broadly, the Plotinian theory of Intellect regards all the Forms as arising in the attempt of proto-Intellect to apprehend the One, so that any particular intelligible content is for Plotinus an act of *noēsis*.[27] Palamas, of course, speaks of *energeia* rather than *noēsis*, and he shows no interest in the Neoplatonic account of the origin of the Forms. On the other hand, he does include self-contemplation (αὐτοψία) among the divine *energeiai*, thereby echoing the description of the divine self-love in Gregory of Nyssa.[28] There is also the intriguing statement in Maximus' *Chapters on Knowledge and Economy* 1.48 (frequently cited by Palamas) that the "things around God" include "goodness and all that the term 'goodness' implies," such as life, immortality, simplicity, immutability, and infinity. This passage suggests that the divine attributes are not arbitrary self-assertions by God, but specific modalities of the divine act of self-knowing.[29] At any rate, it seems safe to say that in calling such attributes *energeiai* Palamas is not

[26] Truth: John 3:21, I John 1:6; righteousness, judgment: Isaiah 64:5, Jeremiah 9:24, 22:3; Psalm 103:6, Acts 10:35, James 1:20; I John 2:29, 3:7, 10.
[27] *Enn*. V.2.1, V.3.11; cf. Chap. 5 n. 14.
[28] *Triads* III.2.6–7; cf. above, pp. 170–71.
[29] Note also the ambivalence implied in saying both that God is their begetter (1.48) and creator (1.50).

arbitrarily extending the term, but seeing them specifically as divine acts in which God manifests what He truly is.

These objections are, so far as I know, the strongest that can be urged against Palamas. If I am right that they can be met, then there is reason to conclude that the eastern tradition is fundamentally sound. If so – and if I am also right that the western tradition was already unsound as far back as Augustine – then our entire view of history will have to change. Most significantly, the long movement of the West toward unbelief must come to appear in a very different light. To do justice to this subject would require a book of its own. Here I would like to offer just a word by way of initiating discussion. What were the major reasons urged against traditional religious belief by the Enlightenment? It was said that the history of western religion was one of endless persecution and religious war; that believers had arrogantly attempted to declare the will of God, and even to define what God is; that religious morality, and especially asceticism, had caused the human mind to relinquish its natural powers in favor of blind obedience, while denying the body and earthly life their rightful pleasures. Most interestingly, these failings were traced to an idea of God that was said to be incomprehensible and self-contradictory. It is no wonder, the charge ran, that the various sects are perpetually at one another's throats, since each has laid hold in an arbitrary way upon a single aspect of an idea that is fundamentally incoherent. Voltaire dismissed all such controversies with the simple remark, "a long dispute means that both parties are wrong."[30]

Other charges could be added, but these will be enough to illustrate how differently such matters must appear from the point of view of the history we have recounted. The East has no concept of God. It views God not as an essence to be grasped intellectually, but as a personal reality known through His acts, and above all by oneself sharing in those acts. I have pointed out how this understanding leads to a distinctive view of the role of asceticism and other spiritual practices. For the East these are viewed, not as a way of disciplining the body, but as contributing to an ongoing deification of the whole person, body as well as soul. A similar difference can be observed in regard to religious morality as a whole. For the East morality is not primarily a matter of conformance to law, nor (in a more Aristotelian vein) of achieving human excellence by acquiring the virtues. It is a matter of coming to know God by sharing in His acts and manifesting

[30] Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, in *The Enlightenment Reader*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (New York, 1995), 127. For the other criticisms I have mentioned see the selections in this volume from Kant, d'Holbach, and Gibbon.

His image. It is striking, in this connection, that the long western tradition of lay resistance to the clerical enforcement of morals had no real analogue in the East. One finds nothing like the goliardic poetry or the courtly love movement of the Middle Ages, much less the studied worldliness of authors such as Boccaccio. No doubt there were many reasons for this difference, but among them was surely the varying extent to which East and West had succeeded in incorporating the whole person within their conception of the human good.

As for persecution and religious war, it is also striking that the major institutions and movements that embodied them in the West, such as the Crusades, the military orders, and the Inquisition, all arose after the schism. The bafflement and revulsion felt by the Byzantines toward the Crusaders is well known.[31] Persecutions certainly did occur in the East, but they tended to be initiated by the imperial government and to follow the old Roman pattern of attempts by the government to maintain its own supremacy.[32] Often those later judged orthodox were among the victims, as during the monothelite and Iconoclast controversies, and even for a time with Palamas. The long train of saints and martyrs who had been persecuted by the imperial government naturally tended to curb enthusiasm for such proceedings. Perhaps the *philosophes* were right in thinking that real persecuting zeal requires a conviction of the rational superiority of one's own conception of God. Perhaps, too, they were right in seeing a link between such zeal and the institutionalization of religious controversy brought about by the scholasticism. From an eastern perspective, it appears as no accident that the institutionalized strife of Thomist, Scotist, and Ockhamist during the late Middle Ages was followed by the open breach of the Reformation. The East certainly experienced its controversies, but they were always viewed as something temporary to be overcome, not something to be fostered and celebrated by permanent institutions.

None of this is to say that the Enlightenment was a success even on its own terms. Voltaire's dictum – that in a long dispute all parties are wrong – cuts with equal force against the secular philosophies engendered by the

[31] Anna Comnena remarks on a Latin priest who had joined the Crusaders: "The Latin customs with regard to priests differ from ours. We are bidden by canon law and the teaching of the Gospel, 'Touch not, grumble not, attack not – for thou art consecrated.' But your Latin barbarian will at the same time handle sacred objects, fasten a shield to his left arm and grasp a spear in his right. He will communicate the Body and Blood of the Deity and meanwhile gaze on bloodshed and become himself 'a man of blood' (as David says in the Psalm). Thus the race is no less devoted to religion than to war." *The Alexiad of Anna Comnena*, tr. E. R. A. Sewter (New York, 1969), 317.

[32] See Paul Alexander, "Religious Persecution and Resistance in the Byzantine Empire of the Eighth and Ninth Centuries: Methods and Justifications," *Speculum* 52 (1977), 238–64.

Enlightenment, for none has come anywhere near to achieving universal assent. Nor did war and persecution come to an end once the Enlightenment had pulled God from His throne. Two centuries later, we know only too well how effective the progeny of the Enlightenment proved at killing on a massive scale. I leave it to the reader to recall all the bloody wars and revolutions, the hatred, arrogance, and philosophical despair, of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. From the standpoint of the East the whole story falls sadly into place. The Enlightenment attacked scholasticism, but left untouched rationalist ideology; it attacked oppressive morality, but left untouched the alienation of body from soul; it attacked sectarian strife, but left untouched the deeper wellsprings of hatred.

We children of the Enlightenment pride ourselves on our willingness to question anything. Let us now ask whether the God who has been the subject of so much strife and contention throughout western history was ever anything more than an idol. We may find that Nietzsche was wrong – that the sun still rises, the horizon still stretches before us, and we have not yet managed to drink up the sea.

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# *Index*


Abbott, Edwin 87
Ackrill, John 11, 13
act of being, see *esse*
active intellect 68–72
*actualitas* 14, 153
*actus* 153
Aetius 156
Akindynos, Gregory 235
Albert the Great 153
Alcinous 66–68, 72, 107, 131, 135
Alcuin 115
Alexander of Aphrodisias 68–72, 73, 95–96, 107
Alexander, Paul 276
Alfeyev, Hilarion 211, 213
al-Shahrastani 99
Ammonius Saccas 127
Anaxagoras 40, 43
Anonymous Commentary on the *Parmenides* 101–108, 109–110, 114, 118, 204
*Apophthegmata Patrum*, see Desert Fathers
*Apostolic Constitutions* 124, 125
Aquinas, St. Thomas 117, 165, 242, 265, 267–268
Arianism 126, 156–158
Aristobulus 52, 55
Aristotle 1, 46, 62, 73, 91–93, 266–267
  chronology of works 2
  *De Anima*
    ii.1 17
    ii.4 58, 74
    ii.5 6, 92
    ii.7 94–95
    iii.2 16, 35, 91
    iii.4 33–34, 68
    iii.5 36, 69, 71
    iii.6 37
  *De Caelo* 7, 29, 31, 44, 49
  *De Interpretatione* 1 161
  *Economics* 46
  *Eudemian Ethics* 8, 39
  *Generation of Animals* 20
  *Metaphysics*
    iv.2 19
    v.5 27
    v.7 13–14
    vi.1 42–43
    vii 38
    vii.7 40
    vii.10 13
    vii.12 17
    viii.2 17, 48, 50, 76
    viii.6 18
    ix.3 7
    ix.6 8, 14, 18–19
    ix.8 16, 19–22, 71
    ix.9 22–23
    xii.6 25–26, 67
    xii.7 25–28, 32
    xii.8 29
    xii.9 34–35, 36, 37, 67
    xii.10 39–40
  *Nicomachean Ethics*
    i.6 39
    i.7 254
    i.8 3
    vii 9, 28
    vii.14 44, 47, 48, 50
    x.3–4 8–10
    x.7–8 31, 119
  *Physics*
    i.9 38, 43
    ii.3 40
    ii.7 42
    iii.1 15, 48, 50–51
    iii.3 16, 57, 91
    iv.12 10–11
    viii 29
    viii.4 7
    viii.5 25
    viii.6 25
    viii.7 20
    viii.9 29

*Problems* 46
*Protrepticus* 3–5, 45, 46, 47, 53, 99
*Rhetoric* 52, 53
*Rhetoric to Alexander* 46
*Topics* 3
see also Prime Mover
Arius 156
Armstrong, A. H. 73, 77, 92, 94
Aspasius 50–51, 73
Athanasius, St. 126, 154–156, 161, 164, 174, 219
Athenagoras, St. 123–124, 125–126
Atkinson, Michael 79
Augustine, St. 97, 108, 179, 222–229, 265, 267
and Aquinas 243, 253
and Barlaam 234
and Victorinus 115
Avicenna 243

Badawi, Abdurrahman 118
Bardy, I. G. 127
Barlaam of Calabria 230–234
Barnes, Jonathan 2
Barrois, Georges 268
Basil, St. 158, 166, 171, 172–174, 237, 238
beatific vision 227, 228–229, 233, 254–257
being, see *esse*; *to einai*
Bell, David 101, 115
Benedict of Nursia, St. 239
Benedict XII, Pope 233
Berman, Harold 266
Bessarion, Cardinal 263
Bible
Genesis 2:3 238; 32:29 162
Exodus 3:14 61, 162, 223; 7:10 163; 33:12–23 63, 167–168, 172
Numbers 12:8 229
Judges 13:18 162
I Samuel 16:13–14 122
Psalm 33:6 155
Wisdom 7:25–27 120
II Maccabees 3:29 55–56
Matthew 25:40 199
John 1:1 110; 1:3 226; 1:9 210; 1:18 175; 14:28 111; 16:14 113, 114
Acts 9:5 121
Romans 8:15-16 232; 8:28 122; 12:2 236
I Corinthians 3:9 122, 183; 4:12–13 198; 12:3–11 122–123, 173; 13:8 192; 15:25 194
II Corinthians 3 197; 4:8–10 198; 6:1 122; 13:13 155
Galatians 2:20 181, 198
Ephesians 1:18 211; 1:19–20 121; 4:16 121; 4:23 236
Philippians 2:12–13 122; 3:21 121
Colossians 1:16–17 108; 1:29 121
I Thessalonians 2:13 121–122; 3:2 122; 5:17 196
II Thessalonians 2:9 4–5, 123
I Timothy 6:16 175
I John 1:5 210; 4:8,16 171
Bingham, Steven 228
Blowers, Paul 195
Boccaccio 276
Boethius 97, 108, 115–117, 244
Bradshaw, David 64, 167, 266
Brenk, Frederick 128
Broadie, Sarah 30
Brown, Peter 266
Burns, Robert 243
Bussanich, John 76, 85, 89

Callisthenes of Olynthus 51
Carabine, Deirdre 226
Cary, Philip 226
Caston, Victor 36, 41
causal realism 77
*Chaldaean Oracles* 97, 149
Chaldaean triad 151
Chen, Chung-Hwan 1
Chenu, M. D. 266
Christman, Angela 228
Chrysostom, St. John 127, 228
Cicero 108
Clement of Alexandria 124, 125, 126, 127, 162, 163, 236
Comnena, Anna 276
Corrigan, Kevin 83
Costa, Cristina D'Ancona 118
Courcelle, Pierre 97, 108, 115, 224
Cyril of Alexandria, St. 126

Daniélou, Jean Cardinal 264
deification 130–131, 134–135, 137, 174, 177, 193–195, 199–200
*De Mundo* (Ps.-Aristotle) 162
Demetrius of Tarsus 54
Desert Fathers 196, 211
Dillon, John 62, 65, 108, 128, 136, 149, 162, 177
Diodorus Siculus 54–55
Diogenes Laertius 47
Dionysius the Areopagite, St. 179–186, 190–192, 201, 205, 209–210, 238, 241, 269–270
and Aquinas 244, 245–246, 252, 255
Dioscorides 56
divine freedom 172, 247–250, 259–262
divine glory 168, 169, 210, 228, 229
divine grace 252–254, 257
divine illumination 223, 265

divine simplicity 117, 165, 224–225, 234, 240–241, 243, 246–250, 252, 254, 259–262, 265, 273
Dodds, E. R. 138
*dunamis* 18, 19, 60, 182
as faculty 4–5, 57–59
as potency 24
as power 63, 132–136, 137–138

Edwards, M. J. 102
*eidōlon* 80
Elders, Leo 29
Emilsson, Eyjólfur 83
*energeia*
as active power 119, 128, 134, 137
as activity 7–8, 51, 57, 165, 168, 169
as actuality 5–7, 13–23, 26
as energy (history & rhetoric) 53, 54, 56
as energy (theology) 119, 125, 126, 141, 173–174, 206, 237, 238, 272
as exercise of a capacity 2–4
as force or vividness 51–52, 53–55
as function 56–57
as operation 54–55, 57, 153, 165, 272
*energeia-dunamis-ousia* triad 57–59, 63, 131, 136
*energeia-kinēsis* distinction 8–12, 28, 44, 49–51
etymology 1
Latin equivalents 125, 153, 179, 245–246
see also pure act; *ousia*
*energia* (Latin) 125
*entelecheia* 13–14, 18, 60
Epicurus 46–47
*Epistle on Divine Science* 118
Eriugena 256
*esse*
in Aquinas 243–245, 250–252
in Boethius 115–116
in Victorinus 109–114
essence, see *ousia*
eternal manifestation 214–220, 242, 273
Eunomius 127, 156–158, 159, 165
Eusebius 98, 127, 157, 166, 228, 270
Evagrius 195–196, 211

faith 151–152
Festugière, A. J. 132
*filioque* 215–220, 230
Finamore, John 140
first philosophy 43
first vs. second actuality 6, 16, 66, 70, 91, 92, 173
*Flatland* 87–88
Flogaus, Robert 233, 234
Florovsky, Georges 179
Fowden, Garth 127
Frede, Michael 19, 41, 43
free will 177, 186, 194–195
see also divine freedom

Galen 57–59, 64
Gendle, Nicholas 196
George, Rolf 41
Gersh, Stephen 147
Gerson, Lloyd 29, 41, 93, 100
Gilson, Etienne 110
Golitzin, Alexander 182, 186, 205, 206, 213, 234, 241
Gottschalk, H. B. 46
Graham, Daniel 11, 12
Grégoire, José 217
Gregory Nazianzen, St. 158, 167–168, 171
Gregory of Cyprus 218–220, 242
Gregory of Nyssa, St. 158–160, 161, 163, 169, 170–171, 174, 191, 215–217, 225, 255
Gregory of Sinai, St. 231–232
Gregory Palamas, see Palamas
Gregory the Great, St. 239
Grumel, V. 263
Guichardan, S. 263
Guthrie, W. K. C. 45, 46, 72

Hadas, Moses 55
Hadot, Pierre 101–102, 103, 104, 105, 108, 116–117, 264
Halleux, André de 268
Hankinson, R. J. 59
henads 143–144, 269–270
Hermetica 131–135, 157, 162, 170
Hero of Alexandria 56
hesychasm 230–236
hierarchy 84, 144–145, 147, 183–186, 241
Hill, Edmund 227
Houdret, Jean-Philippe 165
Hume, David 35
hypostasis 79, 81

Iamblichus 97, 101, 135–142, 177–178
Ignatius of Antioch, St. 186
Ignatius the Hesychast 233
integral omnipresence 173
Intelligible Triad 100–101, 106, 113–114
Isaac of Syria, St. 211, 237

Jaeger, Werner 2–3, 177
Jerome, St. 114
Jesus Prayer 230, 232
John Climacus, St. 211
John of Damascus, St. 207–212, 217–218
and Aquinas 208, 245–246, 255

Judson, Lindsay 41
Jugie, M. 263
Julian, Emperor 142, 177
Justin Martyr, St. 123, 125, 162

Kahn, Charles 39, 72, 75, 107
Kalligas, Paul 161
Kant, Immanuel 168, 169
Kelly, J. N. D. 127, 155, 166
Kenney, John Peter 65
Kianka, F. 263
*kinēsis* 8–12, 15–16, 57
  see also *energeia* (*energeia-kinēsis* distinction)
Knasas, John F. X. 262
Koninck, Thomas De 30
Kretzmann, Norman 260–261
Krivocheine, Basil 167, 213
Kroll, Wilhelm 101
Kydones, Demetrius and Prochorus 263

Laks, André 30
Lampe, G. W. H. 183
Lanne, Emmanuel 239
Larchet, Jean-Claude 206
Lear, Jonathan 38
light 77, 94–96; see also uncreated light
Lloyd, A. C. 20, 77, 78, 92
*logos*
  in Athenagoras and Clement 125–126
  in Augustine 226
  in Maximus 203–206
  in Palamas 239–240
  in Plotinus 82, 83
  in Victorinus 109, 110–111
Lombard, Peter 243
Lossky, Vladimir 264
Louth, Andrew 179, 186, 189

Macarius, St. (pseudo) 196–197, 211
magic 127–131, 138
Maimonides 243
Majercik, Ruth 101, 138
Malet, A. 153
Marcellus of Ancyra 126–127
Marius Victorinus, see Victorinus
Mark the Monk, St. 230, 232
Maximus the Confessor, St. 188–207, 239–240, 256, 274
McInerny, Ralph 117
Menn, Stephen 4, 6, 36
Meyendorff, John 187, 189, 230, 235, 241, 264, 269
Mithras liturgy 130
monoenergism 188–189
monotheletism 188–189
Morrison, Donald 5
Most, Glenn 50
motion, see *kinēsis*
Mourelatos, Alexander 20
Muckle, J. T. 153

name, see *onoma*
natural reason 266
Nausiphanes of Teos 46
Nellas, Panyiotis 202
Nicephoras Gregoras 235, 270
Nicephorus Blemmydes 218
Nicolas of Methone 218
Nietzsche, Friedrich 263
Nikiphoros the Hesychast 231
Nock, A. D. 132
Norman, Richard 33
Numenius 64–66, 72, 73, 103–104, 107, 131

Obolensky, Dimitri 235
O'Meara, Dominic J. 256
one of the soul 148–149, 150
*onoma* 161
*operatio* 153, 179, 245–246
Origen 120, 124, 125, 163, 165
O'Rourke, Fran 251
*ousia* 17, 57–59, 63–64, 76, 91, 100
  and *energeia* 25, 98, 131–132, 136, 141, 164–172, 269–270
Owens, Joseph 29, 31

Pakaluk, Michael 2
Palamas, St. Gregory 234–242, 268–275
Papadakis, Aristeides 218
Papadopulos, Stylianos 263
Patacsi, Gabriel 218
Patzig, Günter 2, 43
Paul, St. 120–123, 266
  see also Bible
Pelikan, Jaroslav 187, 189
Penner, Terence 12
*per se* vs. *per accidens* sequence 93
Perl, Eric 184, 241, 271–272
Philo of Alexandria 59–64, 66, 131, 136, 162, 170
Pickering, F. R. 12
Plass, Paul 195
Plato 2–3, 27, 57–59, 64, 103, 142, 223–224, 267
  *Cleitophon* 3
  *Cratylus* 163
  *Euthydemus* 2
  *Parmenides* 102, 104, 162
  *Phaedo* 36, 224
  *Phaedrus* 4, 139
  *Republic* 58, 67, 106

Plato (*cont.*)
  Second Epistle 65
  *Symposium* 27, 74, 88, 128
  *Theaetetus* 3
  *Timaeus* 65, 66, 74, 75
Plethon, Gemisto 263
Plotinus 73–96
  and Aristotle 12, 25, 73, 74–75, 84, 91–93, 96
  and Cappadocians 170, 174
  and Clement 127
  and Iamblichus 134–135, 137
  and Palamas 274
  and Proclus 143, 146–147, 150
  *Enneads*
    i.7 84, 90
    i.8 84
    iii.4 82
    iii.5 83
    iii.8 84
    iv.3 83
    iv.5 77
    v.1 78–81, 157
    v.2 81–82
    v.3 89–90
    v.4 74–78, 79
    v.5 88
    v.6 85
    vi.4-5 174
    vi.7 85–86, 88
    vi.8 86–87
  influence 100, 102, 107, 117, 157, 174, 226
  see also theory of two acts
Plutarch of Athens 142
Plutarch of Chaeronea 45, 54
Pollard, T. Evan 127
Polybius 51–52, 53
Porphyry 97–100, 108, 135–136
  and Anonymous Commentary 101–102
  and Augustine 226
  *Life of Plotinus* 68
predestination 253
Prestige, G. L. 159, 179
Prime Mover 24–44
  criticism by Plotinus 87
  criticism by Theophrastus 48–50, 51
  influence 66, 67, 71–72, 77, 92–93, 114, 242–243, 246, 267
principle of plenitude 21
priority of actuality 19–23
procession, see *proodos*
Proclus 101, 142–152, 153
  and Dionysius 185–186, 268–270
*proodos* 180, 182, 269, 270
Pseudo-Aristeas 52, 55
Pseudo-Basil 238
Pseudo-Cyril of Alexandria 207
pure act (*energein katharon*) 104–106, 107, 114
Pythagorean table of opposites 27

Quintilian 54

Rahner, Karl 257–259
Reid, Duncan 268
Reynolds, P. L. 174
Rist, John 8, 65, 72, 82, 85, 91, 110, 150, 151, 157, 177
Ritter, A. M. 241
Roberts, W. Rhys 54
Romanides, John 234, 266
Rosheger, John 117
Ross, W. D. 22, 23, 29, 31
Runia, David 59, 61
Rutten, Christian 92

Sambursky, S. 57, 96
Scaliger, Julius Caesar 54
Schroeder, Frederic 127
Schultz, Janice 117
Septuagint 51
  see also Bible
Severus of Antioch 179
Sextus Empiricus 47
Shapland, C. R. B. 155, 179
Sharples, R. W. 68, 70
Shaw, Gregory 136, 137, 141, 142
*Shepherd of Hermas* 123
Sidney, Philip 54
silence 149–150; see also hesychasm
Sinkewicz, Robert 230
Smith, Andrew 138
Smith, Jonathan Z. 128
Sopko, Andrew 218
Soranus 56
Southern, R. W. 264, 266
Speusippus 46
Spinoza 262
Stead, G. C. 160
Stoicism 47, 94, 196
Stone, Mark 12
Strabo 45, 53, 56
Stump, Eleonore 260–261
substance, see *ousia*
*sunergein* 122
*sunergos* 122
Symeon the New Theologian, St. 212–213, 232
Synan, Edward 117

synergy 121–125, 145–146, 148, 177, 185–186, 251, 265, 266–267
Syrianus 143

Taylor, Richard 118
tense test 11–12
*Theology of Aristotle* 117–118
Theophilus of Antioch 162
Theophrastus 45, 48–50, 51, 60
theory of two acts 76–84, 85, 86, 91–93, 99, 112, 137, 143, 157, 267
*theos* (etymology) 163, 164, 208
Thessalus 56, 128
theurgy 97, 135, 138–142, 151
things around God (*ta peri theon*) 132–136, 167, 189–191, 207, 237–238, 273
Thomas Aquinas, see Aquinas
Thunberg, Lars 201, 205, 206
time 10–11, 25
*to einai* 104, 109, 244
Transfiguration 204, 210, 211, 236
Trinity, doctrine of
  in Athanasius 154–156
  in Cappadocians 158–161, 211, 215–217
  in Eunomius 156–158
  in John of Damascus 217–218
  in Palamas 242
  in Victorinus 108–114
  see also Arianism; *filioque*; eternal manifestation
two states of Intellect 88–89, 149, 236
Tyn, Thomas 263

uncreated light 210–213, 220, 232, 236–237, 239–240, 272–273

Vasquez, Gabriel 264
Verdenius, W. J. 30, 31
Victorinus, Marius 108–117
Vlastos, Gregory 41
Voltaire 275
Von Balthasar, Hans Urs 264
Von Ivánka, E. 268, 270
Vulgate 153

Wallis, R. T. 97, 138, 143
Ware, Kallistos 187, 230, 232, 268
Waterlow, Sarah 21
Wedin, Michael 33, 72
White, Lynn 266
Williams, A. N. 268
Williams, Rowan 268–271
Winston, David 61, 62, 120
Wippel, John 252
Witt, Charlotte 2
Wolfson, H. A. 31

Xenocrates 46
Xenophon 162

Yannaras, Christos 268

Zachary, St. 239
Zeno of Citium 46

Historians of philosophy have tended to limit the study of Christian philosophy during the Middle Ages to the medieval West. This book presents the thought of the Greek Fathers as a significant and substantial alternative. Focusing on the central issue of the nature of God and the relationship between God's being and activity, David Bradshaw traces the history of *energeia* and related concepts from their starting-point in Aristotle, through the pagan Neoplatonists, and into thinkers such as Augustine, Boethius, and Aquinas (in the West) and Dionysius the Areopagite, Maximus the Confessor, and Gregory Palamas (in the East). The result is a powerful comparative history of philosophical thought in the two halves of Christendom, providing a philosophical backdrop to the schism between the eastern and western churches. It will be of wide interest to readers in philosophy, theology, and medieval history.

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