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THE BLINDNESS OF CONTEMPLATION *
ON THINKING ACCORDING TO ARISTOTLE

BEN SCHOMAKERS
(Amsterdam, Holland)

Denn weil

*Die Seligsten nichts fühlen von selbst,
Muß wohl wenn solches zu sagen
Erlaubt ist, in der Götter Namen
Teilnehmend fühlen ein andrer,
Den brauchen sie.*

For since

*The most blessed themselves are unfeeling
Must, if it is allowed to
Say so, in the name of the gods
Partakingly feel another,
And him do they need.*

Hölderlin, DER RHEIN

Infertile philosophy

Philosophy - and this holds true too for the engaged study of the history of philosophy - is not an activity that you can suspend until the hours of leisure arrive (or of course the other way round, when you have the luck to earn your living as a philosopher), and it is impossible to keep the thoughts that you conquered through serious efforts isolated from the gestures and the utterances that you display outside your philosophical anchorage; thoughts are able to mix up with your blood and thus they will

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influence your behaviour within the community where you are supposed to live your life with other people; putting it in words that are somewhat more pathetic, they determine your view on reality. And, of course, that can be wholesome, because philosophy can be a means to reopen the eyes for reality as it is, it can be useful to keep hope and expectations alive, and it is, I think, of vital importance for example in the situation of the countries in Western Europe, where it might help to realize that other people are really different and that there is no reason to adapt them to the widespread but poor solitary ideal of the economic man. Etcetera. Philosophy can exert a sound and fruitful influence on your confrontation with reality. But philosophy can be dangerous too.

The following example might make this clear. There are many circumstances that can persuade you to undertake the often laborious approach to a certain philosopher; sometimes your interest will have been aroused by your environment, because teachers were devoted fans of let's say Parmenides or Plotinus or even Derrida, or because you were rooted in a continuous tradition or because you are unable to resist what is *en vogue*; in other cases you'll be a victim of sheer coincidence. But the most sincere and most promising grounds for a fertile meeting are procured by something like an initial, many times intuitive recognition; the rhythm of a sentence strikes you, or a quotation or perhaps only a table of contents, and you get the impression that a philosopher has something very valuable to say to you which might be worthwhile to discover.

In my case it was an expression that appears in many handbooks and that dominates the renewal of the interest in Aristotle in the continental part of Western Europe, that appealed and convinced me that it was necessary to turn to Aristotle. Because the theme of his first philosophy was the study of 'being as being' $\delta\upsilon\ \xi\eta\ \delta\upsilon\upsilon$ as he called it himself, and for me the message contained in these words seemed to be clear before any serious interpretation; Aristotle wanted, to put it as vague as my initial recognition was, to do fully justice to reality and consider everything as it really is; and you probably don't call a certain branch of knowledge your '*first philosophy*' when you do not attach the highest value to it; Aristotle seemed to protest against a superficial and perspective glance at reality and instead of it pleaded an attitude that expressed the willingness or even the necessity to pay due attention to all things. That was what I thought.

But while I studied Aristotle, and I might even say: while I devoted myself to him, something strange and unexpected happened; the life of reality as it struck my eyes didn't become more intense, although that was what I had hoped, but it weakened and waned. Of course, I had developed a great ability in describing reality in abstract and structural terms, but



on the other hand I had become infertile and wasn't able to respond to the detailed and concrete reality any more. And by and by I even lost the inclination to live my life in general concepts and when nevertheless some obligation forced me to do so I started to entangle myself sometimes without any conviction, but sometimes after a while with a certain passion too, in endless networks of abstract subtleties. Later I was able to interpret these infertilities as the result of a silent inner protest against the dissociation of thought and reality, or perhaps better: of thought and reality as it is of importance to the life of a human being. You might say that in my attempts to do in the aristotelian fashion justice to being as being, I locked myself up in the ivory tower of a structure-spinning philosopher and lost the sense for the reality of reality. And as I see it now, that dissociation of thought and reality is an inevitable consequence of Aristotle's highest approach to reality. It will be the purpose of this article to provide a proof or a plausible argument for this, I'm aware of it, rather rude statement.

One might of course object in advance that it is unjust to blame Aristotle for the disturbance of the relation between my inner life and reality; it is more likely that it simply is the result of every exaggerated cultivation of a certain occupation or of a hobby, however innocent they may be in themselves. That may be true, but as I will try to show I don't think Aristotle's philosophical attitude can be considered innocent, and in any case it is evident that he doesn't esteem the study of being as being purely a recreational activity. It is the aim of his *first*, and that also means his most important philosophy; but it is even more revealing that he explicitly adduced that study as man's vocation. In spite of the beautiful words dedicated to man as a political animal (that means a living being within a society) and to human friendship, he arrives in the last pages of his *Nicomachean ethics* at a more profound confession. His words become elevated and rhetorical and thus betray a sincere involvement. He is speaking about the highest form of happiness that can be attained by a human being and suggests that it must be found in the contemplative, philosophical activity; and then he rounds off his discussion with a sentence that sums up the kernel of his anthropology; I quote, from the seventh section of the tenth chapter:

what is most proper to something is by nature what is the best and the most pleasant for it; for a man that is the life led according to his power of thought, because then he is in the most real sense of the word 'man'; and that life thus will be the happiest. (1178^a5-8)

If the use of the faculty of thought is equivalent to the keenness of eyes set on being as being (and that's what really is the case), and the desire to do so produces the damaged relation of inner life and reality at which I hinted, then it seems inevitable to assume that Aristotle didn't commit a marginal mistake but defended and proclaimed a philosophical man on the basis of an unsound anthropology; and that means: on the basis of a dangerous view on reality.

But that is what I only realized after I had dared to ponder on the sentence I just quoted. The expression 'being as being' is sufficiently unclear to safeguard for a long time hidden behind its enticing shield an obnoxious character. It appears only three or four times in the *Metaphysics* (to wit in Γ.1-2, E.1 and K.7) and the fact that it provoked a totally inconclusive debate among the scholars, occupying even radically opposed positions, can be reckoned an indication that in these instances Aristotle's words are not unambiguous: is he talking about individual things - beings - that disclose their meaning and nature within the context of reality (and that was what I hoped for), or, in general, about the abstract categories and relations that must be valid for all beings, or is he even focussing upon the universal and perhaps divine trait of a being?

The passages in the *Metaphysics* in which the phrase appeared resisted a convincing interpretation, and thus I had to remain in the vague until I chose the anthropological confession as a point of departure for the reflections on my feelings of uneasiness and my eventual inner reluctance to practise the study of being as being. That confession contained an important clue which permitted a grip on the problem, even though it was the theme of a notorious dispute itself. A philosophical life ought to be led according to 'the power of thought'.

It is true that with respect to the power of thought and to thinking Aristotle is rather economical too and what is left are in fact only two enigmatical sections in the *Metaphysics* (namely the seventh and the ninth of the twelfth chapter), the very difficult fourth and fifth section of the third chapter of his treatise *On the soul* and some two or three hands full of scattered utterances, a couple of which are really tantalizing. What is, for example, the object of thinking and what aspects of reality are liable to be thought? And if the power of thought is, as Aristotle emphasizes again and again, impassible, that means unable to receive passions or influences - *πάθη* - and is thus locked up in itself, how is the trap of an intellectual solipsism to be avoided and what might guarantee an agreement of what is thought innerly and the external reality? And many times Aristotle alludes in intentionally ambiguous words to a relation of god or something divine to the power of thought and some interpreters iden-

tified the actuality of the power of thought with the actuality of the divine intellect that they thought to discover in Aristotle's treatment of thinking; the more sceptical refused to admit the identity but then invented a construction in which the god anyhow exerts an actualizing influence on human thought. After many attempts and even more doubts I arrived at the conviction that after all it turned out to be possible to give a satisfactory, or anyhow plausible reconstruction of Aristotle's theory of thought that does justice to all his statements and even to his hesitations.

That reconstruction taught me the real objective of the attention paid to reality in the guise of being as being and it laid bare the roots of my resistance. The main features of it will be presented in this article.

But that does not mean that I'll restrict myself to the discussion of some epistemological themes. Let me put it in paradox terms: thought according to Aristotle indeed has a theological aspect and as that became clear to me, I realized what the anthropological purport of his theory of thought was. A human being is only able to think because there is something divine in him; I'll give a warning which I'll probably repeat still one or two times because it concerns an important discrimination that can easily be overlooked. What is 'divine' carries in some aspect a close similarity to a god, but the *similarity* at the same time condemns the divine to be not a god. The human power of thought shelters something divine. I'll talk about it. And as you probably know, it is this circumstance which Aristotle invokes in the *Nicomachean ethics* to justify his claim that the best human life is the life of thought; the reasoning contains the same paradox as the one I just hinted at; for the best in us is the divine, and that divine shares in continuous thought or contemplation, and a human being becomes in the most proper sense of the word a human being when he concentrates upon his divine essence (X 7 1177^b33-78^a7); the best life for man is a godlike life or an assimilation to the god, an ὁμοίωσις θεῶν. The gathering of this insight caused a shock to me and it helped me to explain my uncomfortable feelings and my infertility, and it incited me to liberate myself; man ought to live a mortal life. And thus while unfolding Aristotle's theory of thought I'll hint every now and then at the consequences that it implies for the human attitude to reality, and eventually I'll determine the view on reality that is implied by the aristotelian ὁμοίωσις θεῶν.

Let's recapitulate. What I will try to accomplish is, in the most general terms, to convince you of the fact that Aristotle's study of being as being and his life according to the power of thought hide the risk of a dissociation of the inner life and the reality of reality; and in order to achieve this I'll play the historian of philosophy (the empathic historian)

and give, you could say, an exegesis of the sentence from the *Nicomachean ethics* which summed up his anthropology as the preference for a life led according to thought.

Thus the main question that will engage me is that of the status and the procedure, the object and the possibilities of aristotelian thought. And its answer will in a natural manner coalesce with the description of the life of thought.

But then I'll give up the scholarly impartiality and return to my personal story. Not of course because I want to annoy you with some more of my private musings, but because I suspect that other more or less exclusive aristotelians or students of Aristotle may fall a victim to the same enticement and with the same result. I will try to strike the balance, and enter into a critical discussion; does a life of godlike thinking justice to reality? What, if any, is it blindness? And in what sense, if any, is it liveable? Let me confess: It seems to me that the struggle or the quarrel with Aristotle of which I'm going to deliver you a report is not a personal correction of a detail in the history of philosophy, but puts, you might say, a question-mark behind a philosophical attitude to reality; but perhaps in the end something can be saved.

Noetic thought

Before I venture upon the discussion of Aristotle's specific theory of thought, I have to make some remarks on thinking - on Greek thinking - in general. For the English terms might raise some misunderstandings and it is anyhow the obligation of a scholar to define his vocabulary.

First then. If my introductory words induced the idea that I'm preparing to rekindle the criticism of that form of thinking which is called by a (by now almost stigmatizing) expression 'rationality', then they have been misleading. My uneasiness with Aristotle's thought cannot have been caused by the insight that it happens that the predominance of words, words that fit into a discursive structure and into some kind of justifying paradigm weakens or represses the emotional openness for reality. I know that it happens and I will not abate my protests against this alienation. But I may not direct these protests against Aristotle, because when he deals with thinking he carefully and consistently employs words of one and the same family; he talks about νοῦς, νοεῖν, νόησις, and I think it is since Kurt von Fritz published his famous articles on νοεῖν and its derivatives in early Greek, more or less a commonplace that neither νοεῖν nor any other member of the family has something to do with 'discursive' thought.

But then, secondly, what does νοεῖν (and νοῦς and νόησις) mean? In this case too von Fritz established an opinion which is a modern commonplace - but which I am not prepared to share. According to his interpretation νοεῖν is equivalent to something you could perhaps call 'intuitive thinking'. And even though the term 'intuitive thinking' is not completely clear, this interpretation seems quite well founded. At first sight. An argument in favour of this explanation is that νοεῖν always expresses a kind of thinking in which a number of facts or aspects of a thing or a situation are gathered and combined into an unity and a coherent structure. When it is characteristic for intuitive thinking to reach a unity out of disparate elements, νοεῖν and intuition do have something in common.

Another property of 'intuition' seems to be its suddenness and its spontaneity; and there are many passages in ancient Greek literature that reveal this same trait for νοεῖν; the experience of the unified plurality is not, let's say, the conclusion of a process of reasoning nor is it a kind of knowledge that just repeats an already established truth, as if it could be looked up in a book and be repeated. It is produced, out of nothing, as an instantaneous awareness; and that holds true for intuition too I guess.

But there is a circumstance that was overlooked by von Fritz and that must give pause for a quick reflection on the identification of intuition and noetic thinking. Because (and as far as I was able to check: this is valid for all cases) the sudden character of νοεῖν always appears when the verb is dressed in an aoristic mood, and you will probably know that that mood is more or less defined by its possibility to express the instantaneity of an action, and thus is distinguished from the mood of the present and the imperfect of a verb with their durative associations.

And this suggests that νοῦσις, the aoristic infinite form, is related to νοεῖν, the present infinitive, as a single and sudden performance of an activity to its less explosive and more steadfast root-meaning. In less cryptical terms: so-called intuitive νοεῖν corresponds to the sudden or aoristic exertion of an activity that is in itself rather gradual. Νοῦσις is synthesizing a unity and becoming aware of it, νοεῖν is being aware of that unity or keeping it in mind. It is important to stress this difference because it will turn out that Aristotle analyses his power of thought, his νοῦς into a mutable and an immutable component, and while he wouldn't hesitate to affirm that the immutable νοῦς is in a permanent state of thinking, present νοεῖν, he could never accept the interpretation that it realized again and again a new and sudden synthesis; it exists as the continuous awareness of the synthesis.

Another important preliminary observation must be made because it might help to explain some of the movements Aristotle makes when he is articulating the nature of thought. Noetic thinking is not free and has nothing to do with phantasy or imagination and in principle it is always true, and when it sometimes appears to be erroneous, that is only because it produces a correct synthesis on the basis of facts and clues that by some malicious man or god have been distributed in an intentionally misleading way. Of course, the normal usage of the word doesn't display something like a reflection on or a justification of this unfallible character of thinking; but it is interesting that some of the first philosophers did reflect on the noetic activity and looked for an objective correlate that could serve as a vindication of its unerring behaviour. I guess you'll know that Parmenides considered νοεῖν as the most appropriate approach to being; somebody who's thinking, in the real sense of the word, thinks what is and as a consequence he reaches an uncommon survey of reality. And Heraclitus in his usual cryptical and punning and beckoning manner identified the object of νοεῖν, that is: of knowledge attained by means of the power of thought, ξὺν νόῳ, as what is common to all, that means the ξυμβόν, something which he doesn't identify explicitly but probably must be interpreted as the universal structure or a coherence of reality that is valid for everything and everybody (DK 22 B113 and B2).

This feature of course confronted Aristotle with a problem; for as I already mentioned he stressed the 'impassible' character of the power of thought and certainly its immutable part doesn't leave the inner citadel; but at the same time as a power of thought and as the divine kernel of man it must be unerring too; but where must Aristotle look for the objective correlate for a faculty that doesn't have the possibility to proceed to the external reality? For the time being: it seems that he tried to solve his problem by describing the thinking awareness of the power of thought as an awareness of which the god above or beyond reality is the object; but then that awareness is not the result of a chronological process, but of an ontological relation; Aristotle defines his power of thought as an awareness of the god.

Thus let me present, in the guise of a summary, a small noetic vocabulary which I will respect in the course of this article; first 'to think' will be employed as a translation for the Greek word νοεῖν, and that stands for the being aware of a synthesis and thus of a unity of disparate elements.

Next, the awkward phrase 'power of thought' is my translation of νοῦς which I preferred above 'intellect' because there is no normal verb related to intellect in the same way as νοεῖν is to νοῦς, and moreover

because 'intellect' in my estimation has too much of an intuitive value. A disadvantage is that talk in the terms of 'powers' (or if you prefer in terms of 'faculties') shifts the emphasis from an actualized, that means factual thinking power to a power that has the possibility to think but which probably is not thinking at the moment you speak about it; while *voũç* bears that first accent. But an accent is only an accent and a power of thought can be considered as actually thinking.

And thirdly, the noun 'thought' will be my equivalent for the Greek *nomen actionis* *νόησις*, with which it shares the same ambiguity. Because a thought is on the one hand the activity that consists in the thinking of something else, while it indicates the result of that activity and thus becomes what is thought on the other hand.

Thought thought thought

Who is in pursuit of Aristotle's theory of thought might take his bearings on the estimation of the role that thought plays in the aristotelian epistemology as a whole and that reveals how Aristotle, in a tremendous achievement, anticipated the kantian dichotomy of passive and sensual knowledge and impassible and active knowledge; Aristotle was, I think, the first to underline the epistemological necessity of an *a priori* function of the power of thought.

As you know in his treatise *On the soul* Aristotle determined in a very neat way the mechanisms of all the separate forms of perception (II.7-11); all senses receive different kinds of information of the sensible reality and they transmit or report this information to the one consciousness or the common sense of the soul (II.12; III.2); but colours impress themselves on the eyes, sounds on the eardrum, tactile qualities on the flesh etcetera, and the consequence of this analysis of things in reality as multiple sources of information that all reach in the end a common receptacle but only through separate channels, is of course, the need for a reintegration or a synthesis. The recognition that sound and colour and so on belong to one and the same thing presupposes the presence in the soul, somehow or other, of a unity that must guide the recognition.

In fact the same problem appears within the domain of each separate sense; because you can be aware of blue and green and brown and pink but when you want to recognize, let's say, a tree, there must be some leading notion that separates the blue of the sky and the brown of the mud from the green leaves, the pink blossom, the brown bark of the tree. Here again the recognition of the material that the senses produce and transmit to the faculty of knowledge and that is in itself indifferent and doesn't tell our consciousness whether it represents the sky or the surface of a

lake etcetera requires the application of a certain ordering principle. And Aristotle realized the necessity of such a principle and identified it as the thought that is *a priori* present in the soul.

Thought, according to Aristotle, is the concept of a thing that enables us to recognize the unity in the material that we receive from the external world. Aristotle's technical usage of the term 'thought' indicates always what might be called the purely intellectual momentum that is implicitly present in the recognition of a sensible thing.

But if a thought is *a priori* present in the soul or in the power of thought, it can not any longer be maintained (and I think that is what is done in a more common-sense conception of thought and thinking) that the thought gleans and internalizes an aspect of the external reality of which it becomes aware. And this creates a problematic situation, not only because it now appears that the pretensions of a thinker, namely to have knowledge of *reality* are under pressure (for the thinker thinks what is in himself and not what is in reality), but moreover because it is evident that we are not continuously thinking the things - the thoughts - that we apparently must bear in ourselves. When the analysis of the *a priori* presence of thought is to be defended, it is inevitable to discriminate between thoughts that are present while we are unaware of it and thoughts that somehow pierce through to our consciousness. It seems that the pure thought implied in the recognition of reality must be understood as a relation of thought to itself.

That Aristotle undertook the same analysis and as a matter of fact arrived at this conclusion is the first aspect of his theory of thought that I want to demonstrate by commenting upon one of the very difficult passages consecrated to thought. It is, I think, the purport of the paragraphs in the ninth section of the twelfth chapter (also known as 'book *Lambda*') of his *Metaphysics*, which terminate in the famous, or better: the notorious, formula that describes thought as thought of thought, $\nu\acute{o}\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma \nu\acute{o}\eta\sigma\epsilon\omega\varsigma \nu\acute{o}\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$. This formula ought to be considered, I suppose, a perfect expression of that relation of thought to itself.

But before I quote the passage in full I have to make one or two introductory remarks which are, you might say, dictated by a scholarly conscience. For my interpretation will differ in a very essential respect of the, I think, unanimously defended version which discovers, rightly, a contradiction of Aristotle's description of thought with a common-sense notion of thought, but solves this contradiction by supposing Aristotle not to speak about the human power of thought but about a divine power; and now 'divine' seems to have the meaning of 'belonging to the god'. Aristotle was held to be describing the intellect of the god. And that

intellect of course disposed of qualities that the human intellect or the human power of thought could only faintly imitate. But this interpretation destroys, as I will show, the whole structure of Aristotle's epistemology which can very roughly be outlined as the theory that a particular thought is a partial consciousness of a divine kernel in the human power of thought; and it does no justice to the real transcendence of the god; intellect, νοῦς, is not an attribute of the god by which we can know him, more or less, but is the highest presence of the god in mortal reality.

I was not able to catch an undeniable whisper of a thinking god in Aristotle's writings (nor in those of his pupil Theophrastus) whereas all his utterances seemed to be compatible with the words of Simplicius, the sixth-century commentator of Aristotle, who expressed in a paraphrase of a by now lost aristotelian dialogue 'on prayer', περὶ εὐχῆς, that according to Aristotle god was something above or beyond the power of thought (ἐπέκεινα τοῦ νοῦ ; see *fragment 46Rose*² = *fragment 1Ross*). But an hesitation of Simplicius just before these words reveals that the human power of thought and the god are tightly allied and are akin, probably (according to the interpretation that I want to develop in the run of this article) as an image or reflection and its example.

This will fully agree with the introductory words of the passage that I want to quote; for Aristotle announces to discuss some problems related to the power of thought, the most divine of all phenomena. For 'divine', as I stressed before, is in fact equivalent to 'godlike' and thus this property separates something from the god but at the same time confers the loftiest character upon it. And the power of thought is called a phenomenon, which means that it is part of the apparent world, the universe that stretches from the center of the earth to the utmost sphere of the heaven, and thus contains all living things, all elements, all planets and stars, all hidden powers, but not the god itself; for he is outside this mutable world.

Now I am allowed to quote:

The remarks concerning the power of thought imply some problems; for it seems to be the most divine of all phenomena, but how it can be such implies some problems.

For if it does not think, in what consists its loftiness (must you compare it to somebody who is asleep)? Or it thinks, but there is something else that is responsible for its thinking (namely when what it is, its being, is not thought but potency), and then it couldn't be the best being; for it is on behalf of its thinking that it possesses its dignity.

Another difficulty (and in this case it doesn't make any difference whether its being is power of thought or thought) is what it thinks; for does it think itself or something else? And suppose it thinks something else; will that be always the same or always something different?

Well then. Does it make any difference (or doesn't it) whether it thinks something beautiful or any chance thing? Aren't there some things about which it is ridiculous to think? Hence it is evident that it thinks the most divine and most dignified and that it doesn't change (because a change would imply a change for the worse and that would already be a movement).

And that implies firstly that it is plausible, when it is not thought but potency, that the continuity of its thought is toilsome.

And secondly it is evident that there must be something else that is the most dignified unless the power of thought is that what is thought. For thinking and thought will also belong to somebody who is thinking the worst things, and if that is to be avoided (for it happens too that is better not to see something than to see it) the thought couldn't be the best. Hence the power of thought must think itself (if it really is what is the best) and the thought is thought of thought. (1074^b15-35)

Let's thus assume that Aristotle discusses in these lines the human power of thought, and that it seems safe to choose as a point of departure for an exegesis the presumption that he was fully aware of the contradiction between his description of $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ and the prevailing everyday notion of it. And that he made a playful and, as I consider it, very effective use of it.

A meaningful paradox can function under circumstances as a stimulating guide to insight, usually to a profound insight. You may for example have a superficial notion of what wisdom means; but somebody might suggest that the wisest is perhaps the one who is prepared to admit that he doesn't know anything, and then that contradiction will probably trigger off a reflective activity and deepen your insight; wisdom means, let's say, an openness that doesn't accept an ultimate measure or an ultimate truth etcetera.

I think Aristotle pursues the same policy in the paragraphs just quoted. He starts to talk about the human power of thought as we know it in its superficial appearance and thus poses the rather stupid questions whether the power of thought is always thinking and whether it does think always the same object; and he provokes answers that are clearly in the negative. But then he begins to reason and formulates some shocking conclu-

sions: thought, if it thinks, always thinks the same object; and even more strange: it continuously thinks that object; and even worse: the power of thought thinks continuously the same object that it contains in itself. And thus Aristotle provokes an attempt to discover, if any, the compatibility of the two concepts of thought and guides his readers or listeners to the hidden foundation of thought as it is familiar to us.

It is, I think, wise to give at this place only a kind of survey of the structure of his argumentation, to present some observations on one or two details, and then proceed to a couple of more general remarks. It is impossible within the limited compass of this article to do justice to all the details of the text.

His two problems will be clear; Aristotle expects you to focus your attention upon the common notion of νοῦς and then almost suggests a negative answer to the question whether the νοῦς is always thinking and whether the object of thinking can always be the same; it happens that you are involved only in sensory activity and that your power of thought is asleep, and a thought of a tree is of course different from a thought of a line or a cat.

But as soon as he has seduced you to undertake these primitive reflections, he starts to mock and without raising his voice he presents a small reasoning which identifies the object of thought as the best and the most divine and moreover as the same for every thought. The possible objections are evident; for there are crooked and bare trees and trees that blossom and even though you can think both, the latter seem to be better; and a tree and a bee and a cat are different and thus thoughts of them must be different. These contradictions might be solved within the context of the familiar activity of thought by making its notion a bit more precise, for it seems to be acceptable that in thinking a tree what we are thinking in fact is a concept which is valid for all trees and can thus be regarded as an 'ideal' tree and thus as the best); and although this is already further removed from the reality that we experience, it is even imaginable that all concepts exist together, somewhere, in a kind of *plenitudo* or πλήρωμα, which could be designated as the one and only object for all thoughts.

But in the immediate sequel Aristotle draws two inferences of his identification of the object of thought which on the one hand solve the two problems, but on the other hand irresistibly introduce an other kind of thought, which of course in some way must be linked to familiar human thought.

For, firstly, he stresses that the power of thought, when it always thinks the same object, must not be taken as thinking again and again that

same object, but as thinking it continuously. It is not the case, as was to be expected from a superficial point of view, that the νοῦς thinks a tree in the πλήρωμα, gives it up and falls asleep, and then in other, suitable circumstances, thinks the thought of a bee that forms part of the same πλήρωμα, but it is thinking the same thing without interruption, and thus it is never potency but always thought.

And hence it is clear that the relation of the power of thought to its object - and that relation *is* its thought - is not incidental, but must be more profound and permanent; and as we are not aware of that permanency it must be hidden and probably more fundamental. It seems that our mutable mortal thought ought to be considered a kind of shifting consciousness of the permanent and primary thought of the power of thought.

And in the second inference Aristotle assigns to that object of thought that is continuously thought its proper place and at the same time makes explicit how temporary and permanent thought are connected. The object of permanent thought cannot be above the power of thought, because that power of thought was assumed to be the highest and most divine phenomenon; nor can it be inferior, because if that were the case thinking would, in some cases anyhow, be equivalent to a descent while in fact it is thinking that bestows upon the νοῦς its loftiness. And thus the object of its permanent thought must be *in* the νοῦς, and then it is plausible that it ought to be termed 'thought' itself; as anything within the power of thought the ultimate object exists as thought.

But then the provoking conclusion that in a certain sense recapitulates the paradox of the mutable familiar thought and the permanent and hidden thought without any further ado reveals its meaning; it indicates the structure and condition of thought. For the thought that is thought of thought can now easily be explained as an enigmatic expression that links the particular thought of a tree, a bird, a line, a bee to a permanent πλήρωμα which exists in the soul and in the νοῦς and must be called 'thought' itself, be it in a more fundamental sense and probably without the determination of self-consciousness.

And thus Aristotle arrives at the unexpected solution of the second problem; for it might appear that we think things that are in the external world and when they change, our thoughts change and we think something different. But in fact the one object of our mortal thought is the same for all thoughts and moreover it exists within the power of thought. Our awareness of the external reality thus is analysed as an awareness of what we are in ourselves, in the immutable kernel of our power of thought.

Let's summarize. Aristotle's paradoxical procedure forced us to combine our face-value considerations of thought with a more profound and a rather uncommon analysis of thought. He started, anyhow apparently, to talk about everyday thought, sometimes active and sometimes asleep, again and again thinking different objects, and thus, when he proceeded to the immutable thought in us that never seems to be potency but is always active and moreover always and without interruption thinks the same, these remarks must be understood as comments upon that familiar thought, of which they laid bare the real and hidden structure. Mutable thought is thought or awareness of continuous thought. And that revelation must imply immediately a more precise definition of our concept of changing particular thought; for when human thought is really thinking one and the same inner and intellectual object, our thought must be pure and separate from the awareness of the particular sensible qualities of a tree, a bird, a bee; thought is the pure, and probably in some sense universal thought of a tree etcetera.

But the analysis of the structure of thought imposes of course a kind of dichotomy within the human power of thought; for there appears to be at one side our conscious thought which is always particular and even when it is accomplished innerly, within the power of thought, it is at the same time directed towards the external world; but at the other side there is the fundamental and permanent thought which I described, I think not unfittingly, as a *πλήρωμα*, a 'fullness', in which all the universal concepts must have a place, probably in a unity that shows no plurality in itself but only when something else - the other aspect of the power of thought - becomes aware of it. Probably one must conclude (although Aristotle is silent on this point) that the first thought, the *πλήρωμα*, has no awareness of itself (because intellectual awareness is a particular or finite thought of the thought, and that latter thought, as the object of thought cannot approach itself in a particular way).

Thus the probably cryptical clue I mentioned at the outset of this discussion of *Metaphysics* Λ.9 discloses its meaning; thought is a relation of the power of thought to itself; in every thought of the external world there is present a pure, conceptual thought, which can be interpreted as a thought of the thought object that is inner to the power of thought.

And thus the ambiguities in this description reveal the place of the thinker in the world and the meaning of his view on reality; for what he pretends to think is the particular reality itself, but a close scrutiny of the structure of thought unveils that in fact he doesn't think this cat or this tree but a cat and a tree, because the pure thought must be the best and the ideal, and that is the concept of a cat or a tree; and even this pure

thought doesn't pay attention to the perhaps in some way general reality that is external to the thinker; it discovers the concept in the power of thought itself. This of course does not necessarily imply a blindness for reality, for it cannot be precluded that there exists a tight and theoretically justifiable relation or even a congruity between what is thought innerly and what is in the external world.

Divine thought

In the preliminary observation on this passage I discarded the divinity of the power of thought, perhaps a bit rashly, by stressing that what is divine must exist in reality and does not belong to the sphere of the god; but that is of course only one part of the story; for what is divine is similar to the god too. There are many other passages, especially in Aristotle's ethical works, which corroborate that the divinity of the $\nu\omicron\upsilon\zeta$ was not the result of a slip of his pen, but expresses a sincere conviction; for there Aristotle stresses that what thinks in us is 'god', or as he consistently corrects baffled by the boldness of his own assertion, anyhow the 'divine' or probably even better 'the divine, or the most divine, that is in us'. These remarks enticed for example Alexander of Aphrodisias to identify the god or the godlike that thinks in us and the god that is outside or beyond reality. When we are thinking consciously we are only susceptible for the thought of the god, the one real thinker. And even though the introduction of $\nu\omicron\upsilon\zeta$ as the most divine *phenomenon* and of course the above-mentioned words of Simplicius that assign the god a place beyond the power of thought, rob this interpretation of its likeliness, there seems to be a need for a theological consideration of the human power of thought; for in what sense must it be held to be divine?

As a matter of fact I know of only one passage in the corpus of the aristotelian writings in which he tries to establish the nature of the similarity of our human divine thought and the god; the treatises in which the epistemological perspective prevails (as for example the *De anima*, *On the soul*) discuss the permanent thought usually as a factor in the process of knowledge (for example in III.5). In the ethical writings Aristotle often claims that it is the divine in us that thinks but at these spots he uses the divinity more or less as a rhetorical device that might be fit for persuading his listeners of the importance of thought or a life led according to thought, but he doesn't spend any serious theological reflection on that circumstance, and of course he remains silent about the technical structure of fundamental thought and the thought of it. It is in the chapters brought together as the *Metaphysics* that we have to look for a description

of the divine kernel of the power of thought from both an epistemological and a theological point of view. Once again it is the twelfth chapter, book *Lambda*, that provides the clue, be it this time its seventh section.

Before quoting the two paragraphs that concern me, I want to call back to your mind firstly that this section too is very cryptical and does its utmost to resist a decisive interpretation; and in the second place what their context is. For Aristotle is defining the manner in which the one really immutable being, the god, or the prime mover, finds its ways to reality. The secret of the moving activity of the god consists in his being loved; he moves $\acute{\omega}\varsigma \acute{\epsilon}\rho\acute{\omega}\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\nu$ ($\Lambda.7$ 1072^b3). But that in a certain sense is a general denomination that in fact can be specified. There are, according to Aristotle, for the god two ways of being loved. Firstly the god functions as the object of desire, $\acute{\omega}\varsigma \acute{\omicron}\rho\epsilon\kappa\tau\acute{\omicron}\nu$ (1072^a26). Thus isolated this expression can easily be misunderstood; for Aristotle does not mean that things in reality are allured by the divine magnet to leave reality as soon as possible in order to get deified themselves, but their desire takes on the form of their being itself, to use the neoplatonic term, it is $\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\omega\delta\tilde{\omega}\varsigma$; things in reality by their desire show to be, in some sense, aware of the god and they want to be (everything in its proper manner) like he is - they imitate the god - while remaining at the unbridgeable distance that is characterized by the difference between reality and the transcendent; their desire gives things their general structure and identity that they have to realize in the sequence of time.

After a short discussion of this way of god's being loved - being desired - as a real prime mover of reality, Aristotle shifts his attention to the other, that he had already quickly announced. For god is moving too as an object of thought, $\acute{\omega}\varsigma \nu\omicron\eta\tau\acute{\omicron}\nu$ (1072^a26). The god draws upon him the attention of that part of reality which has the potency to think (and that is exclusively the human race); the policy he pursues seems to be contained in the following rather opaque lines which form the core of his treatment of the second theme; I quote from *Metaphysics* $\Lambda.7$:

The thought at itself is of the best at itself, thought in the most proper sense is of the best in the most proper sense. The power of thought thinks itself by taking part in what is thought, for it becomes something that is thought by touching it and thinking it, and that implies that the power of thought and what is thought are identical. For what is recipient for what is thought and for being is the power of thought and it is active when it actually possesses them, and that implies that it is rather the former than the latter that is the divine that the power of thought seems to possess, and the contemplation is the best and the most pleasant. (1072^b18-24)

And this epistemological description is continued with a theological consideration that seeks to explain the origin of what is called the 'divine' in the power of thought; I cite again:

When the god for ever possesses the goodness that we possess only for a while, that would be wonderful; when he possesses that goodness even more, it would be even more wonderful. And such is the case. Indeed life belongs to him. For the realization of the power of thought is life and he is that realization. Its realization at itself is life, the best and everlasting life. Hence we can call the god a living being that is everlasting, the best, and that implies that life and continuous and everlasting eternity belong to the god. For that is what the god is. (1072^b24-30)

Let us throw a glance at the first paragraph, peruse it quickly and see if the divine that in its last lines seems to be possessed by the power of thought can be identified with the primary thought which I circumscribed in my exegetical observations on the thought-thought-thought passage. The first words are clearly intended to focus the attention of the listeners upon thought as pure thought, that means thought as the conceptual and thus universal awareness that is implicit in the recognition of particular things in reality but usually disappears behind the obtrusive presence of the sensible and particular details of reality; *thought at itself*, says Aristotle, *is of the best at itself*; thought at itself is the intellectual moment that has been abstracted or isolated from consciousness of reality, and the 'best' at itself is the ideal concept of a thing, considered independently from its embodiment, and valid for all members of the same species. The effect of this purification of thought of course is the revelation of the purely intellectual character of the object of thought which doesn't exist in the external reality but is itself thought (or the content of a thought), and this result enables Aristotle to discuss in the immediate sequel the power of thought -the mutable part of it - as a faculty that attains to awareness of an intellectual reality, that must exist in the whole of the complex of the power of thought itself.

And its existence must in a certain sense be a pre-existence; thus Aristotle writes that *the power of thought thinks itself by taking part in what is thought, for it becomes something that is thought itself by touching and thinking it*: the mutable consciousness of the $\nu\omicron\delta\varsigma$ thinks the permanent thought that is in the $\nu\omicron\delta\varsigma$ and thus the power of thought thinks itself, and it takes part in the thought in itself that encompasses all things that can be thought (and thus: are thought); the pure thought involved in a recognition of reality is a relation of the power of thought to itself, the

consciousness is a touch and thus a thought of the primary thought and thought can be considered an identification of the thinking consciousness with that primary thought. And that implies that both in the chronological and in the logical sense of the word the immutable thought must be 'prior' to the conscious thought. There can be no thinking without the actual presence - the pre-presence - of the fundamental thought.

Thus it is clear what Aristotle means when he proceeds with a kind of summary and typifies the power of thought as *recipient for what is thought* and emphasizes the actual possession of that thought as a condition for the activity of the conscious νοῦς; the thought that is permanent is not aware in itself and it can - and ought to - be received by the conscious part of the νοῦς, anyhow partially; and this reception is equivalent to the conscious activity of the power of thought.

And then in an awkward and imprecisely formulated implication the divine turns up; for *it is rather the former than the latter that is the divine that the power of thought seems to possess*. The exact reference of these 'former' and 'latter' remains sufficiently vague; but because the adjacent preceding defined the origin of the consciousness of a thought, it is plausible that the 'latter', that means what is not or at least less divine, has the mutable consciousness of the νοῦς that is able to touch and think the primary thought as an antecedent. And thus for the 'former' remains, though it cannot be neatly identified with a word or a clause in the preceding but is present in the train of thought and underlies it, the object of the conscious thought which makes the power of thought actual. It is the condition for thought and thus it must be as a thought actually present before any particular thought. That actual object or the primary thought is what is divine in the power of thought.

But the divinity of that object doesn't enforce itself and begs for an elucidation; for even though the reader of this section of the *Metaphysics*, consecrated to the two ways of the prime mover to reality, might be prepared for words that express a relation between the god and the νοῦς, it is not clear at all how the claim of the divinity of the permanent thought of the νοῦς can be vindicated, and in what manner, if any, the god touches or visits or influences the νοῦς. And thus Aristotle attempts to give in the second of the two paragraphs just quoted, be it in elated words, a serious philosophical or better theological justification of his sincere and deep conviction, that, to echo Euripides,

ὁ νοῦς γὰρ ἡμῶν ἐστὶν ἐν ἐκάστῳ θεός ,
in all of us the νοῦς is god (fragment 1018N2).

Or, a bit more modest, our νοῦς is the divine.

Let's focus upon the phrase that seems to constitute the essence of the argument; Aristotle started his theological description at a sudden and hazardously with the assignation to the god of a wonderful character and more specific 'life'; and the illustration he gives to make this depiction plausible leads him almost casually to his purpose, that is the linkage of the god to the power of thought. For *the realization of the power of thought is life and he* (that is to say: the god) *is that realization*. God is defined, or perhaps better: one of his workings is defined, as the realization of the power of thought. And that of course is a very limpid expression and makes immediately clear how god and the νοῦς are related. I wish it were true.

But it isn't. For what is a 'realization' of a power of thought? Must it really be the process in which it realizes itself? Or is there an interpretation possible that perhaps (and preferably) prevents the strange implications of the one suggested namely that god in some way or the other visits the power of thought when it is operative? Let's first draw attention to the fact that *realization* is a translation of the Greek, or better: the aristotelian word ἐνέργεια, which seems to have been coined by Aristotle himself and plays a role that is not quite unambiguous in his technical vocabulary.

For sometimes the intransitive and passive sense prevails; a realization of something then indicates the fact that it has been realized; colours for example exist *a priori* or as a potency in the soul, but if there appears a coloured object that transmits its colours as impressions to the eyes and hence to the soul, and we experience a colour, Aristotle describes this process as the movement from potency to realization; the colours have been realized and thus are in the state of realization. But it happens too that Aristotle uses the word in the transitive and active sense; then the realization is the effect or the influence that something exerts on itself or on another thing; of course, in order to be able to exert that influence it must be real, that means: it must have been realized and is thus realization in the first sense too; but it possesses an additional quality. To put it succinctly ἐνέργεια in the first sense is realized realization and thus is completely internal to the thing which is said to be in realization, while ἐνέργεια in the second sense is realizing realization and in principle extends to something else.

This distinction enables us to decide between two alternative interpretations of the god as realization of the νοῦς. But if the god should be the realized realization of the νοῦς, this would be more or less equivalent to the assertion that it is god himself who is thinking in us; for the realization of the νοῦς is its thought. This version, however attractive,

seems to be unlikely. Of course I could adduce my conviction that such a god doesn't fit in the structure of his metaphysical universe, but that would in a certain sense be begging the question. Let it suffice to point out that Aristotle again and again carefully calls what thinks in us not 'god' but 'divine', or better 'what is most godlike in us'. And let's call to remembrance again the words of Simplicius's paraphrase of the dialogue on prayer; the god is not $\nu\omicron\upsilon\delta\varsigma$ but beyond $\nu\omicron\upsilon\delta\varsigma$.

And thus remains the second alternative, that the god is a realization that directly gives to the power of thought, and that means above all to the primary thought, its reality. But the situation of that permanent thought is different from that of, let's say, a colour; a certain colour can be present in the soul as a potency and thus its realization is equivalent to a shift from potential to actual or real existence. But the fundamental thought was to be the condition for all particular thought and recognition and thus could never be held to be asleep or 'as a potency'; as Aristotle indicates in the famous section on the so-called *intellectus agens* that appears in his treatise *On the soul*, the immutable condition for every thought exists as a realization on behalf of its very being (III.5 430^a18). And thus the realizing influence of the god on the permanent thought cannot be deemed responsible for a temporal transition of potential to actual being (at no time the thought is slumbering and potential), but its efforts, if any, produce the being of thought out of its not being. God as the realization of the $\nu\omicron\upsilon\delta\varsigma$ doesn't come across a $\nu\omicron\upsilon\delta\varsigma$ that is already there and waits for a kiss of the prince in order to return to life and lose its pallor, but he creates the $\nu\omicron\upsilon\delta\varsigma$ or anyhow the permanent thought that is the condition for all thinking.

Of course this calls for a short musing; for how are we supposed to understand this term 'creation'? Is the $\nu\omicron\upsilon\delta\varsigma$ just a thing, material or analogical to something material, that is parcelled out by the god or even produced out of nothing? It is I think important to take care not to distort the ontological status of the Greek $\nu\omicron\upsilon\delta\varsigma$; it just is not a separate thing, but, in the words of Plato in his *Philebus*, the $\nu\omicron\upsilon\delta\varsigma$ can never come into being without a soul being present (30C); it needs the soul as a basis for its existence, in the same manner as the human heat needs a body; the heat and the $\nu\omicron\upsilon\delta\varsigma$ are at the same time irreducible entities. If Aristotle is loyal to this meaning of the word (as I think he is), the thought of the $\nu\omicron\upsilon\delta\varsigma$ is likely to be described as the presence of the god in the soul; all kind of terms that attempt to characterize this presence turn up, ranging from the blossom of the soul or its apex to the *funcklein* or the spark; I'll stick to a more neutral one and term the presence the 'reflection' of the god in the soul; the permanent thought is the image of the god.

But something more can be said. For Aristotle discusses in this seventh section of the twelfth chapter of his *Metaphysics* the ways of god, as the prime mover, to reality; the clue to the paradox of a moving cause which is not liable to motion itself was provided by the possibility to exert moving efficiency by being loved; things in reality derive their identity and thus their spatial motion from their desire for the god. And the other way to reality the god paved, was expected to attain to the νοῦς, or better the other way round, the god catches the eye of the νοῦς and thus produces it; the thought as the reflection of the god in the soul exists as desire or love for the god; the love assumes the existential form of permanent thought; it is the way the human soul is linked to the god, in a manner as direct as possible.

Thought at itself, said Aristotle at the outset of these epistemo-theological considerations, *is of the best at itself*, and these words could be explained easily; the pure thought was related, as awareness of it, to a particular universal, that means to an ideal concept underlying a species of real things. But he continued with words of which I postponed the discussion because it would have been wearisome at that moment; but now their meaning is clear; for *the best thought at itself is of the best best at itself*. That best thought is the permanent thought which serves all other thoughts as a basis and a reservoir, and the best best of course is the god; the primary and structural, the lasting thought of the νοῦς has as its object the god and brings by its very existence the god into the human soul.

The divine thought in us is the immediate reflection of the god; the establishment of this insight has another important consequence; for Aristotle alludes at many places in his writings to the necessary presence of a god, but he never typifies the god as he could be supposed to be in himself; at the best Aristotle defined the god, for example as the prime mover, by tracing his activity and influence back to their origin; he described his functions but about the inner nature of the god, if any, he remained perfectly silent. But if the god really reflects a more or less undistorted image in the human power of thought, and if it is possible for man, however gradually and only by collecting and combining particular perspectives, namely by again and again thinking the one and same thought, to have knowledge of that image, it permits us a kind of knowledge of the god or at least an approach to him. He is the one source of all the ideal concepts of reality that pre-exist in the power of thought and we can probably get an inkling of a part of his nature by trying to realize a comprehensive thought of the πλήρωμα; to put it in Aristotle's own terms, the nature of the god is the realization of the νοῦς taken by itself, that means considered as the independent source of our one thought.

But unfortunately Aristotle doesn't indicate the exact similarity of the god and divine thought; the following remark I only dare to present as an empathic suggestion that does not lean on solid proof-material. But probably the main difference between the god and its image, the thought, consists in the lack of causal potency that pertains to the image, while the god is the fullness of ideal examples of all things that naturally exist in reality and functions as an object of desire for these things and allures them to itself; and thus it bestows upon the things in reality their form, their identity and their movement, which of course cannot be said of the image of the god in the soul, even if it is likely that that image can be a magnet for the process of particular thinking that takes place within the soul. Thus the god is the one, unified and powerful *πλήρωμα* that organizes reality while the image really is a pure image and has (and I'm aware of the fact that this formula might sound strange) the same content but is powerless and remains lifeless and infertile with regard to reality.

The presence of the perfect image almost irresistibly leads to another theological or perhaps better to an anthropo-theological meditation. For it is not very likely that Aristotle wanted to establish the lucky presence of a divine influence in some aspect of man only to return to his daily affairs as soon as possible and as if the presence of that influence had no further consequences. The divine kernel will turn out to play a crucial role in the policy of the best life. For it is clear that it may entice mortal attention by means of a promise that it hides. The divine kernel, identical with the one thought that is the image of the god, will probably arouse a desire for knowledge of the god and serve it as a guide. For if pure human thought is on the one hand an ideal immutable concept that characterizes a certain species and is implicit in the recognition of things as they present themselves to us in the changing reality, but is on the other hand an awareness, be it from a perspective, of the one thought that is the divine reflection, then the separation of the pure thought from the material and individual knowledge of reality, must be equivalent to an experience of the one thought that is the image of the god. And the effort to think pure thoughts as continuously as is possible for a human being, is to be esteemed man's best and most appropriate approach to the god.

In this sense Aristotle seems to be the originator of what Hans Joachim Krämer has called the *Geistmetaphysik*, the philosophical attitude that can be defined as the conviction that knowledge of the god is to be attained by man's identification with the highest faculty of knowledge. It appeared in the writings of some of the neoplatonic philosophers as the theory of an *ἄνθος νοῦ*, a blossom of the νοῦς, which indicates

the point at which man and god touch and which can seize a man and can come over him; and then he experiences the god. But it is important to stress a crucial difference with most of the neoplatonic versions of the blossoming thought; for Aristotle's kernel offers only an image, however perfect, of the god and doesn't draw a man inside the god. Aristotle carefully respects the distance between the transcendent cause of all things and its influence in reality. The kernel doesn't promise a unification with the god, but a similarity, an ὁμολώσις θεῶ. And as you probably know, both Plato and Aristotle humbly added to this phrase the words κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν, in as far as possible (see Plato, *Theaetetus* 176B and Aristotle, *On the soul* II.4 415^a28, ^b5).

But this humility doesn't ward off the attraction of the divine kernel and it becomes rather evident what might be the effects, pushed to their extremes, of its presence for man's view on reality. For pure thought is a thought of the universal that is intricately present in our knowledge of the individual reality; and the divine kernel, which is in the terms of the *Eudemian ethics* the cause of movement within the soul (1248^a23-28), urges man to retreat, from the full and detailed reality, to the pure particular thought and hence to the one thought that promises similarity to the god. Reality seems to be of interest as an orchard in which you can pick pieces of fruit; but as soon as you've found a secure place you peel them and throw the garbage away and save the divine. Reality seems to be a instrument for the desired approach to god.

The other way to reality

In some respect this not very innocent analysis is unfair to Aristotle; for even though the thinker essentially desires a retreat into the inner citadel and thus only touches reality to make, let us say, finite the infinite that is in his divine kernel, it might be the case that this is the only possible manner to see a certain aspect of reality and that the discovery of the pure thought must be held to be identical with knowledge of that aspect. Aristotle may not be the common-sense realistic thinker which his portraits often show us, nor was he a sheer idealistic philosopher or even a solipsist who believed that reality was nowhere but inside. And thus there must be some link or a hyphen which guarantees the existence of a connection or a correspondence between the inner thought and external reality.

In principle a contemplator who is convinced of the truth of the things he uncovers in his mind disposes of three different theoretical ways to

guarantee such an identity of what is thought and what is real. There can be no doubt that Aristotle declined a solution that could be given in the fashion of Kant; for while Aristotle accepted reality, be it implicitly, as something radically opposed to the knowing subject, Kant's copernican revolution proclaimed the presence of concepts and structures in reality on behalf of their presence in the mind; reality as we experience it is up to a certain level a construction that we produce out of ourselves in every glance we throw at reality; we forge reality.

Quite a lot interpreters have proposed a second solution which seems to be indefensible to me and must be considered, I guess, the result of a neoplatonic distortion of Aristotle's theory of νοῦς. It is based on the sections of the twelfth chapter of the *Metaphysics* consecrated to νοῦς and which are rendered as an attempt to describe a divine consciousness (and now 'divine' means what pertains to the god, as his property) - a divine consciousness that permeates the universe and thus imposes its structure upon the material reality. At the same time human thought, while thinking, is held to participate in or even to be identical with the divine thought; pure thought in that case would be the expression of the touch and the temporary identification of god and man. But as I tried to demonstrate there is as a matter of fact in these sections not a whisper of a thinking god.

And thus remains only a third solution, which does not accept an objective identity of the inner thought and that aspect of reality which is held to be thought, but does guarantee a perfect correspondence of content. There must be some secrete director who on the one hand puts thoughts in the human power of thought and on the other hand disseminates these thoughts, or better: their content, the universal, in the things of reality and thus organizes an harmony. The role of this τρίτον, this third factor, intermediate between reality and νοῦς can perhaps be compared to that of a prompter who tells a blind man about a dance and evokes in his mind the experience of a whirling movement, and at the same time instructs the dancers to perform a dance in reality. That τρίτον of course ought to be the god, who then accepts the responsibility for our potency to see (and now I quote the treatise of Aristotle or whoever may have been its author *De mundo, On the world: 391^a15-16*) *the divine things in reality by means of the divine eye of our soul*. And though Aristotle himself didn't describe the establishment of this harmony in very articulate terms, and his friend and collaborator Theophrastus sighed, pondering on Aristotle, and a bit at a loss, that it may be easy to assert the communion of thought and things, while it is difficult to prove it and to describe it exactly (*Metaphysics 4^b13-18*), this solution seems to be the one he opted for.

The god's way to the human mind I have already characterized. But the clear implication of this third solution is that there must exist another way to reality that is open for the god and which can transport him to the real things. And it is clear too where we ought to search that way; for in the same section *Λ.7* of the *Metaphysics* in which Aristotle discussed the god as a motionless prime mover who was loved by the power of thought and thus erected that power of thought and bestowed its existence upon it, he described, be it sketchily, the way the god was loved as an object of desire by all things in reality.

Usually the effect of this desire is exclusively explained as the locomotion of things in reality; the god's influence on reality seemed to have been limited to a kind of primeval push which set everything in motion. But I don't think it can be defended that this is the tenor of a passage which assigns to the god 'the for the sake of which' all things act and move; not all locomotion can be interpreted as a more or less desperate attempt to bridge the gap between the transcendence of the god and reality. The desire seems to express a more essential relation of the things to the god who apparently charms them by showing them their final purpose. And I would like to suggest that just as the love of the human power of thought assumes the form of the existence of the thought, in the case of reality's desire for the god the attachment manifests itself as the embodiment of the purpose in the reality of a thing; the desire constitutes the identity of things.

The first clue that might make this suggestion plausible can be found in sections of the *Metaphysics* (E.1 and K.7) where Aristotle distinguished three kinds of the high knowledge that he called 'theoretical', the *ἐπιστήμαι θεωρητικάι*. Physical knowledge was defined to deal with things that have the principle of motion within themselves and are not in any sense separate of matter, mathematical knowledge focussed upon things that are motionless and have no separate existence but are always embodied or imagined in matter; and thirdly the loftiest kind of theoretical knowledge studied objects which are motionless and separate, that means the relations and truths that are valid for all beings or for all members of a particular species of being, and which can be traced back to their principles, motionless and separate themselves.

And only in this case Aristotle proclaimed these principles to be something 'divine' or 'a certain divine nature' present in the beings of reality. This third branch of theoretical knowledge was praised as the 'first philosophy' and twice or thrice Aristotle baptized it 'theological' (see E.1 1026^a19 and K.7 1064^b3); it is the study of the presence of god in reality

that chooses as a point of departure the immutable divine principles in the beings. In other words, Aristotle undeniably points out that god descended not only to the power of thought but to reality too. Here again the warning is at its place: 'divine' is not equivalent to 'being god' but to 'being godlike'. The divine in reality is an immediate influence of the god. Beforehand it seems plausible that *if* it will turn out to be possible to establish a perfect correspondence between the inner thought and between reality, we'll have to look to the divine in reality that might be parallel to our divine thought.

And thus we have to check the second clue, that might inform us about the nature of these motionless divine natures present in the beings. Aristotle nowhere defines or identifies them and this negligence has proved a torture for his interpreters. But I think something can be said which is not arbitrary and recurs to an almost casual digression in the treatise *On the soul*. For in the section devoted to the soul's faculty of nutrition, that means II.4, Aristotle at a sudden and quite unexpectedly rephrases his explanation of the reproductive process in more or less theological terms. He borrows words uttered by Plato in the *Symposium* (208BC) to describe the motive of continuous self-reproduction; I quote:

... and that is because they want to participate in the divine as much as possible; for that is the aim of all desire and it is for the sake of the divine that all things act that act according to their nature ('for the sake of' is here ambiguous and indicates the end and the means). A continuous communion with the eternal and the divine is an impossibility because nothing that is perishable can remain one and the same numerically, and hence all perishable things have something in common with that eternal and divine only as much as is possible and they don't remain the same but they remain as they are, not one in a numerical sense but one as a structure. (415^a28-^b7)

In spite of many a vagueness in this rather rhetorical passage, it is beyond doubt that the eternal divine present in the things of nature is not, as the one thought was that somehow contained all particular thoughts, a perfect image of the god in his fullness, but is likely to be understood as a divine kernel or an ideal example for a species of things in nature; a particular tree, which is a composite of material and a divine kernel, desires to be as the kernel is, namely to be an ideal tree. But the material is refractory and goes its own way and thus prohibits the tree to be identical every moment it is; but what remains is the divine example which functions as an aim, as an horizon, and thus organizes the mate-

rial of the composite; it establishes its structure or, using the technical term from Aristotle's vocabulary, its εἶδος. The desire for the divine kernel or its eternal identity bestows upon the composite its individual identity in time.

I think the following inferences are justified. The desire for the god that things in nature cherish is not directed immediately to the god who would allure trees, flowers, birds, bees, man, but to an aspect of the god which is universally valid for a species, a divine kernel. Desire for the kernel is thus the desire for the god. But the kernel is only separate in the sense that it can be studied or known independently of matter; the first philosopher, according to the prologue of the treatise *On the soul*, studies the divine things as if they were separate (I.1 403^b14-16). And that apparently means that the divine doesn't exist in nature without there being a material nature, without there being things in which it can be present. And on the other hand things don't exist if there is no organizing divine structure. The existence of a thing and of the divine are reciprocally interdependent. And thus it seems safe to assume that the desire for the god is an existential desire (or as the neoplatonists put it, an οὐσιωδῶς desire, a desire that has the form of being), and that that desire brings god as the divine into nature.

This talk about the divine or the ideal example suggests a short comment on an notorious expression which forms part of Aristotle's technical idiom; and at the same time this remark might serve as an introduction for an exegesis of a sentence that explicitly asserts the correspondence of pure thought and the ideal, divine example. As far as it concerns me, it seems rather obvious that the expression is to be related to that ideal example; I think that the usual unwillingness to do so can be explained by its most common translation, or had I better say: paraphrase, which hides its construction and destroys its value. For it is of course much more awkward to translate τὸ τί ᾗν εἶναι literally as *the what was it to be?* of a thing, than just to call it 'essence'; but the Greek phrase is awkward too, and it is clear that the users of the common 'essence' pretend to have found a polished clue for words and a concept which are rather pregnant.

The most striking feature of the expression, the imperfect tense ᾗν, *was*, has disappeared completely even though it seems evident that 'what it is to be' cannot be held to be equivalent to 'what it was to be'. For *was* probably introduces a difference between what something is in reality and what it had to be if all real circumstances would have been under control; and at the same time the imperfect seems to assign to that in some sense preceding example the character of an authority or a command; it typifies a real thing that exists according to a certain *what was*

it to be? as directed towards and desiring that example, but at the same time as falling short of its, let's say, archetypal universal. And thus the expression is likely to turn out to be a depiction of the gap between what something is in its temporal and material embodiment, and at the other side its eternal example; and to make manifest the desire of the temporal to be as the eternal is. And I don't think 'essence' causes an interpreter to undertake the same metaphysical movement pointed to the ontological *prius* of things.

Thus far for this mere outward consideration of the expression. Let me underline that Aristotle in fact employs the words to indicate such a relation. Sometimes, but admittedly in an improper sense, *the what was it to be?* stands for the example of an artefact which exists in the mind of an artisan, and which of course never will be realized perfectly; the material obeys its own laws and is anyhow inevitably bound to desintegrate. But in the proper sense, Aristotle explicitly assures us, the words refer to what is without coming to be (Z.8 1033^{b6}) and thus eternal, in things that belong to a certain species in nature (Z.4 1030^{a11-13}). And, as was to be expected, it is responsible for the structure, the form and organization of things (H.3 1043^{b1}). The intention seems to be clear; there must exist, let's say, an ideal human being, and every specific man desires to be as his summoning example is, and this desire is the cause of the inner structure; but at the same time it is evident that it must be impossible, in our finitude, to do full justice to all aspects of the ideal humanity; we cannot develop our muscles and our mind at the same time, we are not able to avert all injuries from our limbs, some people are born with a defect etcetera. And we cannot be friends, sportsmen, individuals, artists, fathers and mothers at the same time. Material and environmental circumstances determine the way we realize the eternal kernel of humanity, that means what a man could and in a certain sense had to be.

And thus it seems to be defensible to regard the formula *the what was it to be?* of a thing as a functional and one might perhaps say an 'ontological' expression of what in the passage with the platonic ring and from a theological point of view was called the longed for divine of things perishable.

I indulged in this a bit provocative comment on the τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι of things because it might serve as a probably necessary introductory remark for a quick and tentative clarification of a sentence in which Aristotle pertinently suggests that the object of pure thought is exactly that τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι ; or better: that thought thinks innerly what exists in reality as the ideal example a thing ought to be. And thus Aristotle would manifestly maintain a parallelism of thought of the universal and

of the real existence of the universal, which both are to be understood as a divine presence. The sentence appears in *Metaphysics* Λ.9, in the sequel of the vindication of thought as thought of thought and proposes implicitly the answer to the question whether it might happen that knowledge and its object are the same; I quote:

Isn't true that in some cases knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) is the object? At the side of things that are productive and exist independently of matter we have 'being' (οὐσία) and the what was it to be? (τὸ τί ᾗν εἶναι), but at the side of theoretical things the concept (λόγος) and the thought (νόησις) are the object. (1074^b38-75^a3)

I will attempt a quick and unjust, for selective interpretation. At first there seem to be two different immaterial things in reality that are productive - that are causes; the most universal cause is the divine that is valid in the same way for all members of a certain species and is described as *the what is it to be?* of a thing; but in an individual member of the species this cause is responsible for an organization that is on the one hand in accordance with what the thing was or ought to be, but on the other hand is the realization of this universal in a particular being; it organizes the individual in the particular way which his material and environment allow for; and this cause is termed the 'being', the οὐσία, or the structure, the εἶδος, of the particular being. *The what it was to be?* thus seems to be related to the being as a universally valid cause to its particular instance.

And secondly we hit upon the thought, that means the pure thought of which I already provisionally suggested that it must be aware of the universal that it finds in the power of thought and thus innerly; and upon the 'concept' or perhaps better and more faithful to the meaning of the Greek word λόγος, the 'coherence' that can be grasped and articulated as a concept; but as a coherence it must be present in some particular thing; and thus the mutual relation of the theoretical objects 'thought' and 'concept' is implied to be analogous to that of the causes that organize reality.

But what is Aristotle's aim in comparing the mutual relations of causes and intellectual objects? For sure, he doesn't identify the causes and the objects of intellectual knowledge in the sense that what we think is one and the same with a cause; causes exist in the outward reality and thought is impassible and thus sighs under the doom (or enjoys its freedom) that it cannot leave the inner citadel to grasp the real external object and draw it inside. Aristotle just wants to clarify that knowledge in some cases can exist without any material or sensory associations; but

this might appear to be a strange assertion; for aren't the concepts of horses etcetera related to the image of an horse and so on? To make his claim plausible he adduces a circumstance which he expects to be more widely recognized, namely that in reality too there exist things, causes, which operate in a certain sense independently of matter, even though it is matter on which they bestow their causal efficiency by organizing it. In the same manner as these causes are, however concealed, implied in reality, in our normal knowledge of a horse the concept and the thought are silently present as the organizing factors of particular sensory impressions.

But of course Aristotle strongly suggests, be it without raising his voice, that the analogy extends still somewhat further; because the concept is like the particular being in reality; both represent the structure in particular material, the being in the real material, and the concept in the impressions of the material that our senses transmit to us. The continuation of this reasoning then seems to be obvious; the awareness of the concept we discover in our mind that is locked up within its own confines is parallel to or represents perfectly the being that is in reality. And thus the pure and most universal thought which can be understood as the limited human consciousness of the one permanent thought, our divine kernel, must be equivalent to the most universal principle in reality, *the what was it to be* for a species and thus for a thing. There is no numerical and complete identity, for a cause in reality exerts a causative influence which can not be assigned to what we think; but cause and thought share, to put it in these odd terms, the same content, and thus are parallel, harmonized by the one god which attracted both of them and thus created them divine. This intended parallelism might be taken as a corroboration for my rather undemonstrated assertions that the object of pure thought consists in the universal concept of a natural species; for it views *the what was it to be?* that is the universal principle of such a species.

The gist of this attempt to establish the parallelism of inner thought and outward reality is of course to temper the feelings of uneasiness that probably have been aroused by my analysis of human thought as a retreat from reality into its own inner citadel where it meets the divine thought. You might blame Aristotle for using reality, anyhow in a certain sense; for the thinker touches reality that abounds in details and individuals, leaves it as soon as possible and purifies the knowledge he acquired in order to attain at the one and best thought; but that does not mean that he sees nothing but himself; the retreat to the divine kernel seems to be the most proper way to reach awareness of the highest principles of reality itself.

The contemplation and its blindness

I think it is time to strike a balance. The circumstances seem to be suitable for a return to my initial problems and for an attempt to solve them. For I desired to know what the pretensions of a life led with the power of thought as a guide might be. The movements in which such a life was to be accomplished were revealed as short visits to reality that were more or less propelled by the need of the inner and permanent thought for a mirror. The one divine thought is ungraspable in itself and can only be reached from particular perspectives, that means through separate pure thoughts, through universals, which all point to the same origin. And these pure thoughts are realized by the confrontation with reality; they appear, concealed and muddled by the material of reality that the senses transmit, implicitly in our recognition of individual reality; it seems to be the task of the best thinker to purify his thoughts as soon as possible in order to become aware of the relation of the thinking power of thought to itself and thus of the divine kernel of his being; the thinker throws a glance at reality in order to become an actual thinker and to retreat thence with the precious thought that is the be chiseled until nothing but the pure consciousness of the permanent inner thought remains.

These movements of course don't shape a life. But on the other hand they are not innocent affairs that we merely taste of in our leisure, or better: if they are such affairs they must determine the rest of our life that precedes the saturnalia of leisure; some lines before he ominously summed up his anthropology, Aristotle defined the purpose of all our occupations as the creation of leisure; and that leisure naturally and irresistibly entices us to think. For we possess a magnetic divine kernel which causes a kind of *μάνια* and attracts us; and the only approach possible is that of thought. And thus this so called human perfection stretches its influence to all domains and all details of our lives. For our activities, that range from our daily work to our dearest friendships, must be considered means that provide us the necessary livelihood and the peace and the rest which eventually will permit us to think and realize in as far as possible the similarity to the god, the *ὁμοίωσις θεῶν*.

It is clear that a desire as fundamental as this must determine our attitude towards reality. For all activities that man undertakes as a member of a community, or, in Aristotle's words, as a political living being, are directed to the horizon of the inner life of thought; and what seems to be tolerable in the case of for example the craft of war or of medicine, that these activities are not pursued in their own rights, but essentially serve as a preparation for the philosophical thinker who needs lei-

sure and an opportunity for undisturbed concentration - is repellent when it concerns, let's say the arts, friendship, not to mention love. And yet this seems to be the consequence. And even the most able actor will in the long run not manage to perform his role perfectly and he will show in some gesture, in some slip of the tongue his impatience. For it is not reality as such that concerns him.

It is perhaps even worse. For imagine the asylum of leisure attained and the philosopher in possession of the opportunity to think freely. He will be able to see reality without being distracted by personal cares and all kinds of specific interest; he seems to be in the best situation to do fully justice to reality. But what are his eyes looking for? The shortest way to the divine kernel that is within us leads us in an apparent detour first to reality, crammed up with details and individual beings, and what we meet there pokes up our awareness of the kernel; it forms the intellectual and universal principle of the synthesis by means of which we order the material that we have received from our senses. And thus we leave (Aristotle expects) reality as soon as possible; we retreat inwardly carrying the smouldering thought into the atelier of our thought and thus commence the labour of the purification and we are not satisfied before we can set our eyes upon the pure thought, the universal, our perspective on the divine thought that is in us. Guided by an inner desire we leave reality because we expect to find a more real reality. But the bitter consequence of this, to put it a bit ironically, 'thoughtful' attitude towards reality is that our eyes pierce through reality, adverse against the particulars and covetous of the awareness of the universal.

This attitude of the thinker, of man in the most proper sense of the word according to Aristotle's definition, can be summarized and rephrased in such a way that it becomes manifest that by and by I'm approaching the point that enables me to articulate my fundamental delusion with Aristotle. For the sense of the formula by means of which he confessed to be interested in the study of 'being as being' and which attracted me to Aristotle, is, I guess, sufficiently clear by now. The formula appears in the same sections of the *Metaphysics* that describe the aim of the first philosophy or theological knowledge; I already mentioned as its principles the divine that is present in the beings and functions as *the what was it to be?* of things; and I indicated too that this branch of theoretical knowledge dealt with the immutable and in some sense separate properties of the beings; but I didn't disclose that the discovery of these properties formed the scrutiny of beings as beings. The study of being as being thus firstly implies the search for the universal, the inner echo or parallel of the universal cause in reality; and that means that one who pursues that study and desires to know being as being neglects the

details of beings, remains ignorant of their mutual relations, if any, penetrates to the universal kernel and deduces the necessary properties of things which are implicitly contained in these kernels.

Let me rephrase Aristotle's ideal of the philosophic man once more; for it turns out to be the ideal of perfect *contemplation*; and now I appeal to a word that was a favourite of Aristotle himself. For physics, mathematics and theology formed together the branches of 'theoretical' knowledge, and the proper Latin and English and so on translation of this term of course is 'contemplative'; and the highest form of contemplation is that of the first philosopher. And thus Aristotle praises in the section of the *Nicomachean ethics* which is consecrated to the defense of man as a thinker, explicitly the theoretical or contemplative life (X.7 1177^a13-18; and see X.8 1178^b20-32). But this is a revealing expression. I'll remain silent about its treacherous character; for the first philosopher doesn't see or contemplate reality at all; his eyes pierce through the mutable screen, desirous for the eternal, but even then they find nothing but the thought that was already owned by the thinker before he pretended to set his eyes on reality; he contemplates himself, to put it a bit maliciously.

But the expression is revealing too because it makes clear that the best philosopher will not be prepared to act and is in a certain sense necessarily detached from reality. The key-word is uttered again in the very frank sections of the *Ethics*; the contemplative life is the most 'autarkic' life (X.7 1177^a27- 77^b1). But autarky is something which is rather fragile and probably ought to be ramparted. It seems to be impossible to see and realize what happens in reality and to remain inert at the same time; when we recognize suffering or pleasure we irresistibly experience the inclination, I hope, to defend and to take care, or to participate, and even if we are not willing to reveal our involvement by means of actions, the consciousness of reality must be a serious hindrance for the continuation of philosophical thought. Contemplation is autarkical observation, and if reality attracts the attention of the contemplator and challenges him to partake, it will threaten the contemplative life.

And thus the contemplation that aims in principle at a perfect accomplishment and hence may not admit an urge for action, needs a defense which must on the one hand render reality harmless, that means keep it at distance; and is forced to find the contemplation an object, instead of reality, that is harmless and allows for a free feasting of the power of thought on the other hand; it must be indifferent. The universals seem to serve both aims; for they distract attention from the reality as it is, in its individual details, where things are desiring and in anguish etcetera. And these will not involve the contemplator as a feeling and empathic man,

but at the best allure him to deduce the necessary and thus general properties and relations out of them. And that seems to be the case for the inner universals and the necessary properties and relations that can be developed out of them.

The highest kind of knowledge and what Aristotle calls the best life for man thus seem to be justified at the expense of a neglect of a serious demand for attention that reality utters; or to put it in paradoxical terms: his contemplation implies a blindness.

A blindness? One is only entitled to speak about 'blindness' in relation to something that exists and that is ignored systematically, whatever the reason may be. Aristotle is quite unambiguous and probably wouldn't have cared a bit about my critical remarks. The object of the power of thought is the universal, he often underlines, the particular and individual fall within the domain of the senses; he is not to blame for that. And is there something else? Is there something to be imagined besides the universal concept and the sensory details? Is there something for which Aristotle thus remains blind?

I think so. For there is something besides the universal and the mere sensory details, and that is reality, or perhaps better the reality of reality. This of course cannot be an object above or behind or if you prefer beneath reality, but it is the objective life of reality which reveals itself to the eyes of one who is prepared to accept and prepared to undertake the sometimes toilsome approach towards its experience.

Let me recall my initial confession in which I told my story about the attraction the formula 'being as being' exerted on me; it seemed to promise an attitude towards the things or the beings, the individual things of reality, which was inspired by the sincere desire to understand their sense and meaning. During the years of my struggle with Aristotle I tried to develop an interpretation of reality which on the one hand rooted in a dissatisfaction with the reduction of a meaning to a universal with perhaps no existence at all, but on the other hand in advance fenced off the antimetaphysical thrusts, some of them justified, of many modern philosophers; I left the religious question undecided, up to a certain level, and wanted to discover sense and meaning within reality.

My point of departure was the experience that beings can be understood from many perspectives, which may all have legitimate rights; the behaviour of a man can be understood, for example, as the result of a personal history; or as the effect of a psychological distortion; or as an act of (or a reaction to) love or desire; or as determined by the environmental context; as an hereditary influence; or as an attempt to get in touch with the neighbour, with the future, or to do good without finding the

proper word or the best means; as a manifestation of anguish or if you insist of the subconscious etcetera. Man is embedded in a interminable number of structures, which relate him in a dense way to all things, be they removed or near, in space or in time. And it is possible to do justice to things by following these structures back to the point where they converge, and it is necessary to transcend these paths in a real intuition, which produces an understanding that can be termed 'empathy'.

This of course cannot be the whole story, for considering things, beings, merely as a nodal point of a plurality of structures reduces them to will-less coincidences, and honestly, when I would yearn for somebody's serious approach and desired that he did justice to me, I would feel annihilated when the result was an explanation or an understanding in terms of structures. Because, for instance, even in the case that these structures were really effective and caused me to behave in a certain way, it was I who allowed them to exercise their influence. I can admit the temperament I inherited from my father and that means that I might deny it too; it is possible to repress the linguistic, the social, the historical networks that try to entangle me etcetera.

The implication is clear: doing justice to things in reality consists in understanding how they are related to other things and to their past and their future, what they desire, what they fear and what might hinder or stimulate their development; but it is at the same time necessary to accept a thing or a man as the subject or the source of these structures. It is I who made the choice to resist or to comply.

And thus, it seems to me, can we do justice to a being as being; for that is what it means to be: to be a part of a whole that is dense and interconnected, and to be aware of it, be it wittingly or merely in our actions which take their bearings in other things or situations that form part of the same whole. Knowing real things as they are, as beings, demands an eventually empathic approach, which of course has the implication that it will not leave us undisturbed, for there is no empathy without a sharing of feelings, and thus it will destroy our autarky and involve us in the threatenings and the desires that befall the things that we consider in, I guess, the highest, and probably, the most human manner that can be imagined.

Beings have their senses and their meanings, and these can be gleaned. Let me venture a bold assertion. What happens when you open your eyes for reality in the way I suggested is that reality itself comes alive and shows its reality; what I mean can probably better be expressed in the German tongue; for the German word for reality, *Wirklichkeit*, overtly shows its etymologic origin in *wirken*, to be in action, to be effective; eyes thus opened experience the *Wirklichkeit der Wirklichkeit*, the

reality of reality. And suppose that Aristotle was blind for this reality; perhaps then you might suspect him of an attempt to deal with what is, I guess, a universal human orientation, the desire for reality; by imposing the universals that nobody has ever seen and which were apparently sometimes doubted by Aristotle too, he tried to extort from reality its life, and thus committed the common sin of deforming the desire for reality into a longing for the transcendent, fixed in structural relations and thus seemingly within reach. And meanwhile he averted his eyes from the region where reality could be found. You will know by now what region I mean.

These words might form an apt and even solemn conclusion if it weren't the case that I had promised at the outset to investigate whether the tension between and the eventual dissociation of inner life and reality that results from a study of being as being, undertaken in the aristotelian and in some sense paradigmatic philosophical fashion, might be relieved and whether some aspect of the thoughtful life might be saved.

It seems that the core of my quarrel with Aristotle's thought consists in its so called 'impassibility'. When thought doesn't admit for influences, changes, new things, it must necessarily be defined as the discovery of things that were already present in the mind, steadfast and immutable, before the first attentive glance was thrown at reality; we see what our eyes sought for because they were already familiar with it and thus we adapt our experience of reality to our pre-existing knowledge. This policy can poignantly be pictured as the search for a mirror, and it seems incompatible with a sincere interest in the character of the real things; we use or misuse reality by reflecting our inner thoughts in its mirroring surface in order to become aware of what we are; and thus we remain blind for the authentic character of things themselves.

But does there exist a kind of thinking that avoids the trap of the impassibility? To be honest, I guess there is, and I am even convinced that the Greek word $\nu\omicron\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$ forms a perfect expression for this kind of thought; probably you'll have kept in mind the rough outlines by means of which I tried to sketch the fundamental value of $\nu\omicron\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$ and $\nu\omicron\upsilon\zeta$ at the outset and determined their 'synthetic' character; $\nu\omicron\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$ comes about when disparate elements are brought together and turn out to combine into a coherent structure; noetic thinking is the establishment and the awareness of the synthetic unity which connects the multiplicity. Aristotle provided an interpretation of this scheme that displayed a specific twist; for thought, reigning in the remote and innerly isolated region of knowledge, turned out to be conscious of synthetic unities which had been guided by the universal and *a priori* principles presented by the one thought;

thinking of reality according to Aristotle is the recognition or the rediscovery of a synthesis that precedes reality.

But an acceptance of a certain passible character of the νοῦς might avoid the necessity of an inner, and thus universal and *a priori* object of thought; it opens the noetic eye for reality itself and for the synthetic unities to be harvested in reality. Let me return to my idea of sense or meaning; a thing is a unique and authentic, self-willing part of a whole with which it is intimately and intricately allied. And this meaning can be reconstructed by the nearly endless combination of all kinds of structures which entangle it and by the realization that a thing is the willing subject or origin of these structures; and what else could be the method of this reconstruction apart from the synthesis, which combines the perspectives and will in the end have to transcend them because it is impossible to survey an infinity. The moment of transcendence at once constitutes what might be called the unity of an original synthesis, produced out of nothing but as an attempt to do justice to the being of a being, and will at the same time arrive at an empathic experience; for a thing is the desire and the fear which the structures must reveal.

And thus it might be thought, noetic thought, that gathers all possible approaches to being, combines them and keeps them together in a transcendent grasp that must be held to be an original synthesis, a discovery of the meaning of a thing; in this thought being as being elicits an empathic, and that means too: an emotional response.

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ABSTRACT - The kernel of Aristotle's anthropology seems to be summed up in the sentence of the Nicomachean ethics in which he defines the life that is the best for man as a life that is led according to the power of thought (νοῦς); for then is man in the most proper sense of the word human (1178^a5-8). This confession, which is in fact equivalent to a praise of the contemplative life, both attracted and repelled me during a number of years.

In this article I investigate whether the definition can be justified. In order to achieve this it must, of course, be clear what a life led according to the power of thought might mean. And thus I focus upon the pretensions of the human power of thought: for what aspects of reality is it open, for what aspects remains it blind?

The bulk of the article consists in a totally fresh interpretation of the sections of Metaphysics A which deal with the power of thought. Having

refuted the common view that these sections concern the thought of god and not human thought (I tried to prove that there's not a whisper of a thinking god in Aristotle's remaining writings) I pointed out that Aristotle's thought ought to be understood as a relation of a shifting thinking consciousness to a permanent thought which is present in the human soul (Thought thought thought) and which can be identified as an influence or even an image of the god (Divine thought), but which necessarily only contains perfect universals. At the other hand these universals are, according to Aristotle, present in the external reality as the principles which bestow structure and identity upon the real beings (The other way to reality). Thus the power of thought sees the universals that organize reality.

Then I will return to my initial question and strike the balance: what is the value of a life led according to the power of thought as Aristotle defined it (The contemplation and its blindness)?

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