NIELS THULSTRUP

Commentary on Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript

With a new introduction

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TRANSLATED BY
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"You are going on," I said to myself, "to become an old man, without being anything, and without really undertaking to do anything. On the other hand, wherever you look about you, in literature and in life, you see the celebrated names and figures, the precious and much heralded men who are coming into prominence and are much talked about, the many benefactors of the age who know how to benefit mankind by making life easier and easier. . . . And what are you doing?" Here my soliloquy was interrupted, for my cigar was smoked out and a new one had to be lit. So I smoked again, and then suddenly this thought flashed through my mind: "You must do something, but inasmuch as with your limited capacities it will be impossible to make anything easier than it has become, you must, with the same humanitarian enthusiasm as the others, undertake to make something harder." This notion pleased me immensely, and at the same time it flattered me to think that I, like the rest of them, would be loved and esteemed by the whole community.

Kierkegaard, *Postscript*

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PREFACE

The *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* is a major work in the history of the philosophy of religion. If we are to circumscribe the position held by Kierkegaard's work it will be necessary to know the origin and development of the chief currents of this history, for these theories form the premises on which it is based and thus constitute its greatest context.

It is in our time a well-known fact that the *Postscript* must be understood in yet another context: in its opposition to nineteenth-century German philosophical Idealism, or speculation, and to the spokesmen and adherents of speculation in the fields of both philosophy and theology. To understand the thrust of the attack the reader must also be familiar with the author's terminology, language, and special treatment of the religious, philosophical, and psychological problems of his time. Even more important, we must consider just what Kierkegaard intended with his work.

A third context emerges when we consider the *Postscript* from the standpoint of its unique position and function in relation to Kierkegaard's other works.

In the Introduction I have concentrated on the broader and more general backgrounds for the work as a whole and on its position in the history of religion. The more specific connections and relationships to other sources, works, and so forth, are presented in the Commentary.

The various philosophical and theological disciplines have grown and developed from a process of differentiation that took centuries.[1] Our modern classification of sciences differs from that of former ages. For example, philosophers of earlier ages did not find it natural to distinguish sharply among metaphysics, epistemology, and philosophy of religion, any more than theologians of that time made the present sharp distinction between metaphysics and dogmatics. Whenever they did make distinctions of this kind they did so merely for

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[1] See, among other works, Søren Holm, *Religionsfilosofi* (Copenhagen, 1955), especially pp. 11–85; Hans Joachim Störig, *Kleine Weltgeschichte der Wissenschaft*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart, 1957); A.W.H. Adkins, *From the Many to the One* (London, 1960), and Jørgen Jørgensen, *Filosofiske Forelæsninger som Indledning til videnskabelige Studier*, 3rd ed. (Copenhagen, 1962).

the purpose of again combining philosophy and theology. Thus any
attempt to understand this earlier thinking will require a study of the
changing views and metaphysical systems from which it issued, along
with studies of the particular premises and aims of the thinkers in-
volved.

Today, philosophy of religion covers a wide range of thinking. It
is possible to treat traditional and current problems in philosophy of
religion with a purely philosophical outlook, for example, along Neo-
Thomistic, Neo-Kantian, Neo-Marxist, or analytical lines. If we take
this approach we will be able to regard philosophy of religion as a
purely philosophical discipline that differs from other philosophical
studies in its subject matter rather than in its methods and standards
of judgment. It is of course also possible to take the reverse tack and,
along with Barth, Bultmann, and others, proceed from a basic theo-
logical position, treating philosophy of religion as a purely theo-
logical discipline, even though the theologian will in all likelihood
encounter philosophical problems en route. In general, however, such
modern categories and distinctions prove to be more deceptive than
illuminating in connection with an understanding of Kierkegaard and
especially his contemporaries.

In Kierkegaard's time it was characteristic that philosophers theo-
logized while theologians philosophized. What thinkers of our time
would consider mutually exclusive worlds of thought a German Ide-
alist would have regarded as inseparable: for example, the purely
philosophical view according to which only experience and reason
may be recognized as legitimate sources of knowledge on the one
hand, and on the other the theological view that presupposes reve-
lation as a special source. Sharing a common background and work-
ing with the same concepts of science (*Videnskab*), which at the time
meant metaphysics, the philosophers and theologians of that era had
the same end in view.

It is well known that all of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works
are predominantly devoted to a criticism of one particular tradition
in religious-philosophical thought: the idealistic and speculative tra-
dition. From this tradition Kierkegaard borrowed a terminology and
conceptual technique that he then turned to his own ends. The basis
of that tradition must be sought in a definite point of departure and
in specific aims, and within its limits thinkers developed a method-
ology adapted to attain those aims. Kierkegaard, too, had a definite
point of departure and aim, and consequently he developed a way of
thinking that was uniquely his own. My purpose in the following
introduction is to give an account of these differences in philosophical

approach. Emphasis must necessarily be placed on the store of knowledge that Kierkegaard could assume to be available to his readers. Since the author himself is his own best spokesman, a presentation of his ideas and motives can be made all the more briefly. In the conclusion I will deal with some questions concerning the *Postscript* as a whole.

The present work has been composed on much the same principles as those applied in my edition of *Philosophical Fragments* (Princeton, 1962). The information and commentaries presented in the current edition have as far as possible been brought up to date after personal studies based on the latest and most comprehensive Kierkegaard research available to me. Useful supplementary data will be found in my *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel* (Princeton, 1980).

It is my pleasant duty to express my gratitude to the many scholars whose investigations have often proved of vital help and support to me. I wish especially to thank Robert J. Widenmann for his painstaking efforts in giving my text English dress and for contributing several valuable items of information. Last but not least, I owe a debt of gratitude both to Director Herbert S. Bailey, Jr., Princeton University Press, and to the expert collaborators at the same Press for their great patience and for their understanding of the difficult nature of this work.

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Niels Thulstrup
August 1983

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ABBREVIATIONS

ASKB (with item numbers): *Auktionsprotokol over Søren Kierkegaards Bogsamling* ("Auction Catalog of Søren Kierkegaard's Book Collection"), ed. H. P. Rohde (Copenhagen, 1967). The item numbers also correspond to those in my edition: *Søren Kierkegaards Bibliotek* (Copenhagen, 1957).

Breve (with volume and entry number or page number): *Breve og Aktstykker vedrørende Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Niels Thulstrup, I–II (Copenhagen, 1953–1954).

Enc.: *Encyclopaedia of The Philosophical Sciences*. This work comprises *Logic* (§1–244), with the explanatory notes, or *Zusätze*, supplied by Leopold von Henning; *The Philosophy of Nature* (§245–376) with *Zusätze* by Philipp Michelet; and *The Philosophy of Mind [Spirit]* (§377–577) with *Zusätze* by Ludwig Boumann.

Fragments: *Philosophical Fragments or a Fragment of Philosophy*, my edition; see below.

JP (with volume and entry numbers): *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, I–VII (Bloomington, 1967–1978). Quotations reprinted by permission from Indiana University Press.

Jub. Ausg. (with volume and page numbers): Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Sämtliche Werke*, Jubiläumsausgabe, ed. Hermann Glockner, I–XX (Stuttgart, 1958–1959).

KW (with volume and page numbers): *Kierkegaard's Writings*, I–XXV (Princeton, 1978—). The English title of the specific work is also given.

ODS (with volume and column numbers): *Ordbog over det danske Sprog*, ed. H. Juul-Jensen et al., I–XXVIII (Copenhagen, 1919–1956; reprint, Copenhagen, 1966–1974).

Pap. (with volume and entry numbers): *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, ed. P. A. Heiberg, V. Kuhr, and E. Torsting, I–XI^3 (Copenhagen, 1909–1948), and 2nd ed., photo-offset reprint with two supplemental volumes, XII–XIII, ed. Niels Thulstrup (Copenhagen, 1968–1970), and with index, XIV–XVI (1975–1978).

Postscript: Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript; see below.

SV (with volume and page numbers): *Søren Kierkegaards Samlede Værker*, ed. A. B. Drachmann, J. L. Heiberg, and H. O. Lange,

2nd ed., I–XV (Copenhagen, 1920–1936). References in *JP* and *KW* are to the first edition of *Kierkegaards Samlede Værker* (Copenhagen, 1901–1906). H. Nyegaard, however, has published a parallel register in vol. XIV, Part Two, pp. 1–191, of the second edition, giving page and line correlations between these two standard editions. In *Kierkegaard Indices*, compiled by Alastair McKinnon, vol. I: *Kierkegaard in Translation* (Leiden, 1970), there is a composite page and line collation of the second and third Danish editions and the most widely available English, French, and German translations.

W.a.A. (Werke, alte Ausgabe; with volume and page numbers): *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegels Werke*. Vollständige Ausgabe durch einen Verein von Freunden des Verewigten, I–XVIII (Berlin, 1832–1840).

Logic: The Logic of Hegel; see below.

The Science of Logic: Johnston's and Struther's translation; see below.

The Phenomenology of Mind: Baillie's translation; see below.

ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF KIERKEGAARD

Armed Neutrality and An Open Letter, trans. and ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. New York, 1969.

Attack upon "Christendom", trans. Walter Lowrie. Princeton, 1968.

Christian Discourses, trans. Walter Lowrie. New York, 1962.

The Concept of Anxiety, ed. and trans. with introduction and notes by Reidar Thomte in collaboration with Albert B. Anderson. Princeton, 1980 (*KW* XIX).

The Concept of Irony, trans. Lee M. Capel. Bloomington, 1968.

Crisis in the Life of an Actress and Other Essays on Drama, trans. Stephen D. Crites. New York, 1967.

The Difficulty of Being a Christian, trans. Ralph M. McInery and Leo Turcotte. Notre Dame, 1969 (based on Jacques Collette's French translation).

Edifying Discourses, trans. David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson, I–IV. Minneapolis, 1943–1946.

Either/Or, vol. I trans. David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson; vol. II trans. Walter Lowrie, I–II. Princeton, 1971.

Fear and Trembling, trans. Walter Lowrie. Princeton, 1970.

For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourselves!, trans. Walter Lowrie. Princeton, 1968.

The Gospel of our Suffering, trans. A. S. Aldworth and W. S. Ferrie. Grand Rapids, 1964.

Johannes Climacus, or De omnibus dubitandum est, and A Sermon, trans. T. H. Croxall. Stanford, 1967.

The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard, ed. and trans. Alexander Dru. London and New York, 1938.

Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie. Princeton, 1941.

Kierkegaard's Writings, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, 1978—.

The Last Years. Journals of 1853–1855, trans. and ed. Ronald Gregor Smith. New York, 1965.

On Authority and Revelation, trans. Walter Lowrie. New York, 1966.

Philosophical Fragments, trans. David F. Swenson. 2nd rev. ed. with introduction and commentary by Niels Thulstrup. Introduction

and commentary trans. and 1st ed. rev. Howard V. Hong. Princeton, 1962.

The Point of View of My Work as An Author: A Report to History, trans. Walter Lowrie. New York, 1962.

Purity of Heart Is To Will One Thing, trans. Douglas V. Steere. New York, 1948.

Repetition, trans. Walter Lowrie. New York, 1964.

The Sickness unto Death, ed. and trans. with introduction and notes by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, 1980 (*KW* XIV).

Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, I–VII. Bloomington, 1967–1978. Quotations reprinted by permission from Indiana University Press.

Stages on Life's Way, trans. Walter Lowrie. New York, 1967.

Thoughts on Crucial Situations in Human Life. Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions, trans. David F. Swenson. Minneapolis, 1941.

Training in Christianity, trans. Walter Lowrie. Princeton, 1967.

Two Ages . . . A Literary Review, ed. and trans. with introduction and notes by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, 1978 (*KW* XIV).

Works of Love, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. New York, 1962.

ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF HEGEL

Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art, trans. T. M. Knox, I–II. Oxford, 1975.

The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy, trans. H. S. Harris and W. Cerf. Albany, 1977.

Early Theological Writings, trans. T. M. Knox. Philadelphia, 1971.

Faith and Knowledge, trans. H. S. Harris and W. Cerf. Albany, 1977.

Foreword to *Die Religion im inneren Verhältnisse zur Wissenschaft*, by H.W.F. Hinrichs, 1822, trans. A. V. Miller. In *Beyond Epistemology: New Studies in the Philosophy of Hegel*, ed. Frederick G. Weiss. The Hague, 1974.

Lectures on the History of Philosophy, trans. E. S. Haldane and F. H. Simson, I–III. New York, 1968.

Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion. Together with a work on the proofs of the existence of God, trans. E. B. Speirs and J. B. Sanderson, I–III. New York, 1968.

The Logic of Hegel (Part I of the *Encyclopaedia*), trans. W. Wallace. New York, 1968.

Natural Law, trans. T. M. Knox. Philadelphia, 1975.

The Phenomenology of Mind, trans. J. B. Baillie. London, 1949.

The Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. A. V. Miller. New York, 1977.

The Philosophy of Fine Art, trans. F.P.B. Osmaston, I–IV. New York, 1975.

The Philosophy of History, trans. J. Sibree. New York, 1956.

The Philosophy of Mind (Part III of the *Encyclopaedia*), trans. W. Wallace and A. V. Miller. New York, 1971.

The Philosophy of Nature, trans. A. V. Miller. New York, 1970.

The Philosophy of Nature, trans. M. J. Petry, I–III. London, 1970.

The Philosophy of Right, trans. T. M. Knox. New York, 1967.

The Philosophy of Subjective Spirit, trans. M. J. Petry. Boston, 1978.

Political Writings, trans. T. M. Knox. Oxford, 1964.

The Science of Logic, trans. W. H. Johnston and L. G. Struthers, I–II. London, 1929.

The Science of Logic, trans. A. V. Miller. New York, 1969.

INTRODUCTION

Speculative Philosophy of Religion
in the Ancient World

From antiquity to the time of Hegel and on to the present, religious-philosophical thinking has been dominated, in whole or in part, by cosmology. This cosmology was developed from very different premises in the course of successive ages, so each age operated with its own particular cosmology.

The various mythological views of the universe arose from simple immediate sense perceptions of the environment and were interpreted by a creative imagination. The speculative cosmologies were fashioned in a similar manner, with the difference being that reason took the place of mythical explanations. The unknown was now explained by means of something known[1] instead of by something unknown, and this was subsequently called prime matter or the principle of being (for example, fire, water, or motion). The point of departure for empirical scientific cosmologies remained the same for ages, though later generations added verifiable experience as a means of controlling imagination and reason.

Expressed in modern philosophical terminology, this point of departure was always a complex situation, at least some elements of which were known. For instance, philosophers may have thought of the place where one lives and works, or they referred to the cultivated land supporting small or large human societies that build cities and regulate human affairs. In short, they began with a scheme in which everything was assigned its proper place. Beyond this generally limited horizon the world was in disorder, Chaos instead of Cosmos. As an explanation of this state of affairs it was supposed that good forces reigned over Cosmos and evil ones over a Chaos that constantly threatened to devour Cosmos, just as the oceans threaten to burst dikes or as primeval forests threaten to spread over cleared

[1] See especially Wilhelm Nestle, *Griechische Geistesgeschichte von Homer bis Lukian in ihrer Entfaltung vom mythischen zum rationalen Denken dargestellt*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart, 1944); G van der Leeuw, *Phänomenologie der Religion*, 2nd ed (Tübingen, 1956); Friedrich Heiler, *Erscheinungsformen und Wesen der Religion* (Stuttgart, 1961); and Georg Widengren, *Religionsphänomenologie*, 3rd ed. (Berlin, 1969).

areas and cultivated fields. It quite naturally followed that man's duty did not consist in a mere passive contemplation of the world as it is but in an active contribution aimed at maintaining and expanding Cosmos, and thus in remaining on the side of the good powers. So too, by emphasizing the theoretical rather than the predominantly practical aspects, philosophers sought within a speculative cosmology to widen their horizons and attain a mastery of the world through thought that would reflect man's self-understanding. This view was analogous to the usual mythological view of the universe as horizontally or vertically stratified, with the earth or human world in the center, heaven above, and the kingdom of the dead or hell below. It was accordingly held that beyond this terrestrial existence man has a form of being before birth and after death. Essentially, speculative cosmologies are distinguishable from mythological views of the universe merely by their explanations, not by their formal structures.

The Greek philosophers began to develop their cosmologies by rejecting the mythological explanations in favor of speculative cosmologies, only to end up with the fantastic syntheses proposed by Posidonius and Proclus. These theories were in turn handed down to the Middle Ages.[2]

The first questions the Greek philosophers raised and tried to answer by applying reason and experience instead of resorting to myths

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[2] An extensive bibliography of works relevant to the philosophers and problems mentioned in the Introduction is available in my Danish work *Fra Platon til Hegel og fra Sokrates til Kierkegaard*, 2nd ed., I–III (Copenhagen, 1980), I, 38–113. There exists no modern collected presentation of the history of religious-philosophical thought. The following brief outline is aimed only at giving the new reader of the *Postscript* the most necessary facts; supplemental information must be sought in the works and treatises mentioned in the text. For surveys covering greater periods of time, see for example the historical sections in Fritz Heinemann, *Die Philosophie im XX. Jahrhundert, eine enzyklopädische Darstellung ihrer Geschichte, Disziplinen und Aufgaben* (Stuttgart, 1959); Nicola Abbagnano, *Storia della Filosofia*, 2nd ed., I–III (Turin, 1963); Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, I–IX (London, 1946–1975); Émile Bréhier, *Histoire de la philosophie*, I–III (Paris, 1948); Jacques Chevalier, *Histoire de la pensée*, I–IV (Paris, 1955–1956); and Richard Kroner, *Speculation and Revelation in the History of Philosophy*, I–III (Philadelphia, 1956–1961) To these modern and comprehensive presentations of the history of philosophy must be added Ueberweg's work mentioned in the following note (a new edition is now in preparation). Monographs and special articles are mentioned in the following notes in connection with the relevant individual points But since this presentation is written in accordance with the principle of selection rather than that of comprehensiveness (which would require several volumes), bibliographical references have been limited to the extent possible. Additional references will be found in Ueberweg and in the encyclopedias mentioned in the Guide to the Commentary.

was how to explain change, coming into being, and passing away in nature.

Thales of Miletus tried to solve this problem by imagining one prime matter, water, as the bearer of life and thus the cause of change. Making a bold generalization from simple observations, he theorized that water was the prime matter and life-giving principle of all being.[3] This solution did not satisfy Anaximander, who inquired how such a diversity of materials with totally different characteristics could emerge from one basic substance. He came to the conclusion that we must assume that this prime matter is a yet undivided unity of opposite qualities; he thereupon defined his prime substance as the "boundless" (apeiron). His disciple Anaximenes, believing that such a synthesis was realized in the air, accordingly assumed air to be the one and only prime matter.

Unlike his predecessors, Pythagoras fixed upon two principles, the Unlimited and the Limited (peras). He held that the latter was the more important because it qualified and thus determined the identity of every being. It was Pythagoras' theory that these determinations must accord with a law of numbers. Apparently he arrived at this result by observing that musical intervals such as the fourth, fifth, octave, and so forth, depend on definite numerical ratios. According to Pythagoras, the contrasts observable everywhere in nature, from the emergence of things to their passing away, synthesize in a beautiful harmony like that of music and depend on the same numerical ratios. With this observation Pythagoras took a big step, advancing from the assumption of a corporeal basic substance to the abstract

[3] The following works are especially recommended in connection with this and the succeeding passages, for example, Hermann Diels, Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker, ed. W. Kranz, 7th ed., I–III (Berlin, 1954). The fifth edition of this work has been translated by Kathleen Freeman under the title of Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers (Oxford, 1946). Many of the pre-Socratic fragments are translated and supplied with interpretations in Wilhelm Capelle, Die Vorsokratiker, 4th ed. (Stuttgart, 1953) and in G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, The Presocratic Philosophers (Cambridge, 1960). Other good works on this subject are Eduard Zeller's older major work, Die Philosophie der Griechen, 2nd ed., I–V (Leipzig, 1879–1892), which is the last edition attended to by the author himself; and Karl Praechter, Die Philosophie des Altertums, 13th ed. (Basel, 1953); this is the same as vol. I of Friedrich Ueberweg's Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie, ed. T. Konstantin Oesterreich, 13th ed. (Basel, 1951). See also N. M. Caminero, Historia philosophiae, vol. I: Philosophia antiqua, I–II (Rome, 1960). As to special literature on the pre-Socratic philosophers, see especially Werner Jaeger, The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers, trans. Edward S. Robinson (London, Oxford, and New York, 1967). The most comprehensive modern standard work is W.E.C. Guthrie, A History of Greek Philosophy, I–V (Cambridge, 1967–1978). See also Adkins, From the Many to the One.

theory of regularity as a principle of being. Since he regarded unity as a principle of numbers, he was now able to posit it as a symbol of rest, immovability, truth, and justice.

Philolaus, a disciple of Protagoras, assumed that there was a globe or counter-earth corresponding to the earth but always in a position opposite to it and thus always invisible He also held that in the center of the universe there is a fire around which ten bodies revolve: the counter-earth, then the earth, the moon, the sun, the five planets known at the time, and finally the sphere of the fixed stars. Since all bodies in rapid motion produce a tone, he conjectured that the same must hold true of revolving spheres, and since a tone's pitch was thought to depend on its distance from the fire in the center of the universe, he accordingly believed that there arose a harmony of the spheres. Like other theories of the pre-Socratic philosophers, this one, too, provided a source of inspiration centuries later for romantic poets and idealistic philosophers.

Heraclitus took a different approach. His thinking consistently focused on the problems connected with coming-into-existence, change, and motion. Noting that fire appeared to be in a constant state of flux, he thus posited fire as the basic principle of being. This perpetual motion was not in his opinion a mere fortuitous phenomenon. On the contrary, he held that although only the external phenomena of change are revealed to us through sense perception, there is in all change an intrinsic regularity and tense harmony (as symbolized by the lyre) that we are able to grasp through reason. Heraclitus therefore regarded perpetual motion as the profoundest secret of being and the mind of the world, and he attached not only cosmological but even ethical importance to this concept. It thus came to be Heraclitus' divinity.[4]

Xenophanes, realizing that the mythological conceptions of the gods bear obvious anthropomorphic traits, developed instead a philosophical and pantheistic monism in which the divinity is one and everything. His disciple Parmenides thereupon came to the conclusion that since only the One exists and it is immutable and immovable, all coming-into-being, change, and motion must be illusory; and inasmuch as our senses merely perceive what is illusory, only reason can yield knowledge of being and hence of truth. Thus being, which Parmenides regarded as something corporeal, can be grasped only by thought. It also follows that a primitive mind incapable of reflection

[4] Concerning the theories of Heraclitus and the Eleatics, see also below, note to p. 336 in the *Postscript*

would have a world view different from Parmenides'. The plain man is compelled to assume that plurality is possible because things are separated by space. Parmenides' notion excluded such an explanation, for he operated on the premise that empty space did not exist and that instead of many things there existed only one being that is a complete spherical whole. On the basis of this argument motion and change are inconceivable and thus impossible.

Zeno sought to substantiate these Eleatic theories of unity and the impossibility of motion by a series of demonstrations designed to show that opposite hypotheses would lead to absurdity. He reasoned that if there is a plurality of existing objects, each of them obviously must not only have a certain magnitude but also be separated by a certain distance. A part of each object, however, is preceded by another part, which in turn may be divided into parts having a magnitude and preceding each other, so one is finally compelled to admit that each object is infinite in size. If on the other hand what exists has no size, it would not even be, for if we added it to something that also lacked size, the result would clearly be nothing, and no matter how much we add we arrive at the same result: nothing. With these two arguments Zeno sought to prove that plurality was impossible, for things would be both so small as to have no magnitude at all and so large as to be infinite in size.

Zeno attacked theories of motion in a similar way. To move means to traverse a given route between two points, and a route is divisible into an infinite number of sections, so a body must pass through an infinite number of sections to move from one point to the other; but this is impossible in a limited period of time. Zeno illustrated his reasoning by the story of the race between Achilles and a turtle. Achilles, whose greatest asset was his speed, gave the turtle a head start of ten paces—and could not catch up with it. While Achilles was taking the first ten steps the turtle took one, and while Achilles was covering this step his adversary covered one one-hundredth of a step. Thus the distance between them steadily decreased but was never completely eliminated. Zeno also tried to prove that motion of any kind is illusory and that its very concept is rooted in the deceptive perceptions of the senses. He used as an example an arrow in flight. An object, Zeno maintained, is at rest when it occupies a space equal to its own dimensions. Now an arrow in flight occupies such a definite point in space at any given moment, and so it is at rest. We cannot regard motion as a series of states of rest (which would give a cinematographic effect), so to acknowledge motion is to succumb

to the absurd thought that the arrow does not occupy a definite space at every given moment. Therefore, there is no such thing as motion.

The problems connected with the obvious contrasts between change and immutability and between unity and plurality remained unsolved, but thinkers persisted in their efforts to do justice to both sides and bring about a conciliation. It was for example clear to Empedocles that being cannot arise from nothing; but since it is plural, it must arise from something with the same characteristic, or at least something composed of elements capable of entering into various combinations and assuming different forms. He consequently assumed the existence of four basic elements: fire, air, water, and earth. Empedocles thereupon maintained that what appears to us as emergence or passing away is in fact merely a mixing or separation of these basic elements, and that the underlying cause of these changes is to be found in two forces or powers: love and hate. Once adopted as basic causal agents, these two forces were deified, thus making a theory of ethics possible. Furthermore, he now developed the epistemological theory that only likes can comprehend each other; or, to use a more modern locution, the subject and object of cognition must conform to each other. This theory was to have a profound effect on later philosophy. Indeed, Plotinus and the German Idealists, especially Goethe and Hegel, transformed Empedocles' theory of conformity into an assertion of identity. Another pre-Socratic philosopher, Anaxagoras, in place of these two powers of love and hate posited Mind (*nous*), a single spiritual force that he saw present in all living things.

In contrast to Parmenides, the Atomists, especially Democritus, accepted the idea of a nothing or a void. Whereas Parmenides held that being was an indivisible unity, the Atomists thought being to consist of an infinite number of very small and indivisible units or atoms that differ in quantity but not in quality. The Atomists were now in a position to explain both the variety of materials and change (or motion) by assigning their cause to various combinations of these atoms in accordance with purely mechanical laws. Democritus too developed an ethics, conformable to his philosophy of nature and metaphysical views.

These speculations in natural philosophy led to divergent and incompatible views (for example, those of Parmenides and Heraclitus), and in practice they resulted in relativism and radical skepticism. It did not seem possible, through either experience or thought, to arrive either at a hypothesis that could be proved beyond doubt or at a universally valid system of ethics. The prospects of achieving an un-

ambiguous cosmology and outlook on life looked dim indeed to those who thought that man was capable of attaining these goals through his own efforts. A beginning had been made by taking a critical attitude to traditional religious interpretations of the external world, but now man himself was turning out to be a problem. Obviously man was unable to master the situation by means of conviction or belief alone; he needed persuasion, and this is where the Sophists came on the scene:

> [They] not only turned against previous and contemporary philosophical efforts to establish what being really is, but doubted man's ability to perceive any universally valid truth whatever. Knowledge could never acquire more than purely subjective validity, and this led to the conclusion that the subjective result of knowledge was valid only for the man who had attained it.[5]

Since the truth was regarded as relative, a harmony between men on matters of faith and ethics could not be based on truth. Men would as a result have to rely on convention or a consensus of opinion or, failing that, on force to persuade others.

Faced with this situation, Socrates (469–399 B.C.) proceeded along a new path. Turning his back on both the speculative thinking in the philosophy of nature and the pragmatically oriented relativism of the Sophists, he aimed his efforts at a reestablishment of ethics.[6] He held that a sound basis for ethics must be sought in true knowledge. He also felt, however, that the greatest obstacle to the acquisition of true knowledge was not acknowledged ignorance but the self-sufficiency and illusion that apparent knowledge causes. He therefore adopted the procedure of making ignorance serve as a point of departure and allowing his apparently knowledgeable victim to disclose his own emptiness. Although our knowledge of Socrates has come to us only indirectly, it would seem safe to assume that he considered it possible to arrive at conceptual definitions by means of induction, for example, the concept of the good. To realize the good one must first have

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[5] Johannes Sløk, *Platon* (Copenhagen, 1953), p. 15.

[6] See W. Norvin, *Sokrates* (Copenhagen, 1934); A. Simonsen, *Sokrates* (Copenhagen, 1961); and Povl Johannes Jensen, *Sokrates* (Copenhagen, 1969). Of these three Danish monographs the third is especially remarkable, for it accepts and develops Kierkegaard's positive view of Aristophanes as an important contributor to our knowledge of Socrates as a historical figure. This view has often been criticized and rejected. As to the problems surrounding Socrates, reference is made to V. de Magalhães-Vilhena, *Le problème de Socrate* (Paris, 1952). The subtitle of this work, "Le Socrate historique et le Socrate de Plato," discloses the author's viewpoint. See also Werner Jaeger, *Paideia*, I–III (Berlin, 1954), II, 49–130, and Guthrie, *Greek Philosophy*, III, 323–489.

a knowledge of it, and Socrates maintained that each individual has
the potential to accomplish both; the truth is within man, and self-
knowledge and knowledge of the truth are identical. This theory
became an axiom for all subsequent philosophical idealism from Plato
to Hegel. As we know, Kierkegaard proposed an alternative to this
theory in the *Fragments*.

There are three distinctive Socratic schools, and with all three of
them ethical questions and epistemological problems stand in the
foreground. This applies as much to Aristippus as to Antisthenes and
Euclid. But it is first and foremost Plato who gives us an appreciation
of the scope of what Socrates taught by means of his indirect method
and clarification of concepts and what he meant to his disciples per-
sonally.

Like Socrates, Plato too inquired into the nature of the good. He
defined it as being primarily expediency, as that which can serve as
a means to a higher end. The great number of means and ends that
it is possible to tabulate, however, will amount to nonsense if we are
unable to point out a supreme end that is both inherently good and
a supreme good; and it must serve as an idea of goodness in general.
It is also possible to comprehend and view truth and beauty in this
way.[7]

Under the influence of Heraclitus, Plato became convinced that
everything knowable by means of sense perception is subject to change
and therefore cannot be a proper object of cognition, for that object
must be stable. True rational cognition does not focus on the change-
able world known to our senses but on the immutable world of ideas.
If we call a certain figure a triangle we do so because we had a con-
cept of what a triangle is beforehand; or, in Plato's terminology, we
were familiar with the *idea* of a triangle. Plato solved the old problem
of the relationship between knowledge acquired by means of the senses
and knowledge gained through reason by assuming that the senses
and reason are directed toward different objects, and that objects per-
ceived by the senses are in turn reflections of real existing ideas. The
famous metaphor of the cave in *The Republic* (515A ff.) portrays var-

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[7] In addition to Werner Jaeger's *Paideia*, II–III, the following may be recommended:
A. E. Taylor, *Plato*, 6th ed. (New York, 1957), and Paul Friedländer, *Platon*, 2nd ed.,
I–III (Berlin, 1954–1960). An important work is Heinrich Barth, *Philosophie der Erschei-
nung*, I: *Altertum und Mittelalter* (Basel, 1947; 2nd ed. 1966), and II: *Neuzeit* (Basel,
1959). See also David Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas* (Oxford, 1951); J. E. Raven, *Plato's
Thought in the Making* (Cambridge, 1965), and J. N. Findlay's Gifford lectures, *The
Discipline of the Cave* (London and New York, 1966) and *The Transcendence of the Cave*
(London and New York, 1967).

ious kinds of cognition ranging from knowledge of what is only apparently real to knowledge of true reality. The same metaphor also illustrates Plato's metaphysics, according to which the world of ideas constitutes true reality and existence. Our material world is merely an image of the ideal world, to which it owes its very existence. Since man is also corporeal, Plato saw him as a prisoner in the material world while his soul or mind is a prisoner of his body. When the soul sees the reflections of the ideal, however, it is able to recollect true reality by drawing on a previous existence in a higher world, and it now aspires to this reality.

In Plato's view true rational cognition concentrates on the ideal world and grasps it as an organized totality or cosmos, using dialectics to achieve this insight. Such an intellect will aspire to ever higher and more comprehensive concepts and will not cease its efforts until it has attained a concept of the one being. The composition of true being corresponds to this conceptual pyramid, and the idea of the good constitutes both the highest concept and supreme being. Dialectics, however, is also capable of leading us back down the scale to concepts of species and finally to individual specimens, so the path taken by cognition may be said to lead from the particular to the universal and then back to the particular. Besides this structural theory, in the dialogue *Timaeus* Plato also urged space as a principle that is indeterminate and without material characteristics, but which nevertheless is necessary for anything to have physical presence.

To explain the emergence of the empirical world, Plato assumed that there must be a master builder, a creative reasoning power or divine being who used the ideal world as a pattern, thereby creating a material world with limitations. Although this world is thus also imperfect in respect of ethics, it is nevertheless a world in which there is a recollection of perfection and consequently also an appetite and eternal longing for this good. This theory is accompanied by another according to which the soul through a fall has sunk to the material world, which like an evil place imprisons it and prevents it from rising again. There is evidence of an unexplained monism and dualism in Plato's idealistic speculation, as indeed there is in any philosophical idealism. A conception of the world as a hierarchic cosmos in which man occupies a definite position is apparent even here.

Aristotle sought to solve the problem of how to explain change, which in his time had already become a traditional dilemma, by distinguishing between form and matter and between potentiality and actuality (*dynamis* and *energeia* or *entelekeia*). Using a rather complicated argument, he arrived at the conclusion that substance owes its

origin to undifferentiated matter that has realized a definite end by receiving a definite form. The means needed to attain this end he called acting or moving causes, and he then went on to postulate four kinds of causes, for any given change: material, efficient (or moving), formal, and final. Thus in the case of a house, the builder and his skill would constitute the moving or efficient cause; the earth and stones the material cause; the concept or plan of the house the formal cause; and the completed work the final cause. Aristotle now applied this method of explanation to all phenomena in the worlds of nature, man, and the divine.[8]

According to Aristotle, every transition from potentiality to actuality must be caused by something actually existing; in other words, a form must combine with real matter. He argued that every substance, God alone excluded, is composed of both form and matter and may assume the role of either cause, depending on its designated function in a specific context or series of changes. Thus a seed is matter when a tree is considered as form, the tree in turn becomes matter in relation to a plank conceived as form, and the plank becomes matter when a house is regarded as form. In the case of a living being, the form and end (or final cause) are identical and in combination constitute the moving or efficient cause, so the soul, which is the essence or form of the body, is also the inherent efficient cause of the living being.

Aristotle included spatial locomotion among the various possible kinds of change. According to his theories in this connection, everything seeks a natural level, with heavy bodies tending toward the center of the earth and lighter bodies away from it; barring obstacles, both proceed in a direct line. The celestial bodies, on the other hand, execute eternal "perfect" movements, which to Aristotle was yet another proof of the eternity of time. This, however, gave rise to another question: How was the potentiality of these circular movements transformed into actuality?

Aristotle solved this problem by arguing that what produces a change

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[8] On the subject of Aristotle, whose theories concerning the doctrines of potentiality, actuality, and motion in particular Kierkegaard studied in preparation for his critique of Hegel, reference is made to Werner Jaeger, *Aristotle Fundamentals of the History of His Development*, trans. Richard Robinson, 2nd ed. (London, Oxford, and New York, 1967); the first German edition of this work appeared in Berlin in 1923. W. D. Ross gives a systematic presentation in *Aristotle*, 5th ed. (London, 1949). The chief work on this subject is now Ingemar Düring, *Aristoteles, Darstellung und Interpretation seines Denkens* (Heidelberg, 1966). See also G.R.G. Mure, *Aristotle*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1964), especially chap XI, pp. 233–52, "The History and Influence of Aristotelianism."

cannot itself undergo change when functioning as a cause; therefore a prime mover or first cause must itself be unmoved. Now all motion presupposes a prime mover; Aristotle called this first cause God, who is an active being that sustains the eternal perfect movements of the celestial bodies. God is pure form and pure actuality, and because of God's perfection the prime mover is a focal point of attraction; as such, God is both the point of departure and end or final cause of all existence and thus constitutes its supreme reality.

A new cosmology emerged on the basis of Platonism and Aristotelianism and under the influence of the mystery religions and Gnosticism. Let us use a pyramid to illustrate this cosmology. The different levels of the pyramid will represent successively higher degrees of perfection in which everything, man included, is assigned a definite place and specific goals. Inanimate nature will now occupy the bottom level while the next level, which will also be stratified, is reserved for animate matter. Man is relegated to the third level; above him we will find beings occupying an intermediate position between man and the divine; the apex of the pyramid will represent the divine itself, the source and goal of all that is. It was this hierarchically oriented cosmology that so strongly influenced religious and philosophical thinking in antiquity and the Middle Ages.[9]

The Stoic Posidonius (135–51 B.C.) developed this conception into a total view of being that was rigidly deterministic.[10] He held that man's reason participates in divine reason and is capable of comprehending the universe in its entirety. Like Aristotle, Posidonius also maintained that living beings are assigned positions in a sort of ladder arrangement. The bottom step here on earth belongs to men, but once men's souls have been released from their bodies they are able to ascend the ladder and reach the top step, which is occupied by celestial deities. According to Posidonius' theory, heaven consists of a plurality of spheres, each of which is inhabited by a different celestial deity. Thus each sphere has its own spiritual significance, exercises a particular influence, and is capable of conferring a specific trait. For example, Saturn imparts sloth, Jupiter furnishes ambition, and Mars gives bellicosity; the sun contributes intellectual powers, Venus is responsible for erotic desire, Mercury for avarice, and the moon bestows the elementary energy of life. Now all souls owe their origin to the divine heaven, but they leave this heaven and descend

[9] See, among others, Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 2nd ed., I–II (London, 1937–1939), especially I.

[10] Max Pohlenz, *Die Stoa*, I–II (Göttingen, 1948–1949), I, 208ff., and II, 103ff

through the different spheres to inhabit bodies, only to aspire once more to their heavenly source. In their descent the souls forget their original purity and are contaminated by increasingly base and more worldly material traits and inclinations. Conversely, they divest themselves of these imperfections in the course of their resurrection and ascent after death, though only the noblest souls are able to complete the journey and return to their original purity and bliss in the eighth heaven. The motivating and life-giving principle in this process is the *Logos*, or divine reason.

> Posidonius' system turns out to be a living pantheism with sufficient room to accommodate the whole of creation, a splendid system comparable to those of Schelling and Hegel. As Hegel used the development of the "Notion" in all its manifestations to make nature emerge from spirit, so Posidonius regards all being as an image of eternal ideas. These ideas are no longer an immutable and supra-sensuous realm, as in Plato, but are God's own thoughts and the content of His consciousness of Himself.[11]

To counter this monistic system the Gnostics developed various dualistic systems. They regarded corporeal and worldly conditions not only as the lowest and most imperfect in the universe but also as an evil state caused by a malevolent power.[12] To the Gnostics, therefore, the task assigned to man consisted of a cultic and ethical process of purification that would emancipate the soul and enable it to return to its exalted origin. They frequently appealed to doctrines of metempsychosis, and one sect, the Carpocratians, whom Kierkegaard mentions in a couple of journal entries,[13] developed a theory to the effect that man ought literally to experience everything evil and sinful, for this sect regarded debasement as a purification process by which man could elevate himself. This theory is a precursor of Hegel's doctrine of the negative.

Plotinus (A.D. 205–270), on the contrary, developed a thoroughly monistic philosophy that was intended as a trenchant polemic against the Gnostics.[14] The following stanza from Heiberg's university song,

[11] Poul Helms, *Fra Tanke til Mystik* (Copenhagen, 1934), p. 107.

[12] See H. Leisegang, *Die Gnosis*, 4th ed (Stuttgart, 1955) An important work covering this whole period is K Prümm, *Religionsgeschichtliches Handbuch für den Raum der altchristlichen Umwelt*, 2nd ed. (Rome, 1954).

[13] *Pap.* II A 127 and 599—*JP* I 219 and V 5227, respectively

[14] See Povl Johannes Jensen, *Plotin* (Copenhagen, 1948), and Émile Bréhier, *La philosophie de Plotin* (Paris, 1968)

which is well known in Denmark, applies to Plotinus as well as to Hegel:

> And thought was to itself made clear,
> And God to thought became apparent;
> So, to a synthesis they tend
> Like the brook with its torrential source;
> For thought on high did thus ascend
> As in itself it took its course.[15]

In Plotinus' philosophy the One occupies a supreme position above any being or existing entity. It is noncomposite and embodies the fullness of all being, but strictly speaking nothing can be said about it because it transcends our world and human language. As the fullness of being it necessarily issues forth from itself in a timeless emanation that first of all produces reason (*nous*). This emanation gives rise to a duality, partly because reason actively acquires knowledge and partly because it is a receptacle for that knowledge. A world soul emanates from reason, dividing and portioning itself out as particular souls in individual animate bodies. The path from the One leads downward from humans to animals, plants, and lifeless nature in a continuous loss of perfection regarding both being and ethics. One may consider as a simile light that appears to be weaker as one withdraws from its source. In Plotinus' cosmos man stands midway between the sheer light of the One and the total darkness represented by matter in its plurality; the task lies in returning to the One along the same path. The means necessary to attain this end consist of self-knowledge, which can teach the soul to turn toward the light, and the exercise of virtue, which will enable man to reach the goal of reuniting with the One and resting in contemplation of it. This means that in Plotinus' view, knowledge of God is fundamentally self-knowledge:

> There is no need to go anywhere to partake of real life. One need merely rise up to spirit, which is part of oneself. In other words,

[15] From "Cantata ved Universitetets Fest [1839]" in Johan Ludvig Heiberg, *Poetiske Skrifter*, ed. Carl S. Petersen, I–III (Copenhagen, 1931–1932), III The original text reads:

> Og Tanken for sig selv blev klar,
> Og Gud for Tanken aabenbar;
> De monne sig til Eenhed føie,
> Lig Bækken med sit Udsprings Elv,
> Thi Tanken opsteg til det Høie,
> Dengang den nedsteg i sig selv.

one has only to go within oneself and remain completely alone with one's inmost being.[16]

Along with Spinoza, Plotinus must be regarded as a background and presupposition for German Idealism.[17] Kierkegaard, on the basis of his own premises, was later to deliver a sharp attack against both thinkers.

[16] Jensen, *Plotin*, p. 72.
[17] See, among other works, Carl Roos, *Goethe* (Copenhagen, 1949), and Karl Viëtor, *Goethe* (Bonn, 1949). These two works were published during an anniversary year.

CHAPTER 2

The Ancient Church and the

Middle Ages

The advent of Christianity constituted a further complication of the religious-philosophical issues, so determining the relationship between philosophical knowledge and Christian faith has since been a major problem. Attempts to solve it have been numerous, and of course the means employed to this end have varied in accordance with the philosophy and personal interpretation of Christianity adopted. Even in the time of the Ancient Church there was a clear tendency to regard this relationship as completely lacking in harmony, a view that also prevailed in late Scholasticism and toward the end of the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, the dominant opinion up to the Renaissance and Reformation was that there did not exist any conflict between true philosophy and true faith. In other words, it was felt that there was no conflict between the truth to which man can attain through experience, reason, or mystical insight and the truth revealed through a communication from God. Various arguments were offered in support of this view.[1]

[1] The patristic and medieval religious-philosophical thinking discussed here is presented in its proper context in the histories of philosophy mentioned in chap. 1. Following are some works on these two intimately related periods: A. H. Armstrong, ed., *The Cambridge History of later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1967); Émile Bréhier, *La philosophie du Moyen Âge*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1949); and Étienne Gilson, *La philosophie au Moyen Âge*, 3rd ed. (Paris, 1947). Important material is also available in works on the history of dogmatics, such as Adolf Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 4th ed., I–III (Tübingen, 1909–1920); Friedrich Loofs, *Leitfaden zum Studium der Dogmengeschichte*, 4th ed. (Halle, 1906); Reinhold Seeberg, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 3rd ed. (1920–1922), 4th ed., reprint, I–IV [1-2] (Graz, 1953); J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London, 1958); and Alfred Adam, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, I–II (Gütersloh, 1965–1968). Other recommended works are Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 2nd ed., I–II (London, 1937–1939); Gustaf Aulén, *Den kristna gudsbilden*, 2nd ed. (Stockholm, 1941); and Johannes Hessen, *Platonismus und Prophetismus, die antike und die biblische Geisteswelt in strukturvergleichender Betrachtung*, 2nd ed. (Munich, 1955). The articles on "Aristotelismus" and "Augustinismus" in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vols. III and IV (Berlin, 1978–1979), are also valuable. Kierkegaard's relation to these traditions is treated by various authors in *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana*, VI: *Kierkegaard and Great Traditions* (Copenhagen, 1981)

Augustine mentions in his *Confessions* that he had obtained some works of the Platonists in Latin translation from a man "bloated with the most outrageous pride." On reading them, he came to this conclusion:

> In them I read—not, of course, word for word, though the sense was the same and it was supported by all kinds of different arguments—that "at the beginning of time the Word already was; and God had the Word abiding with him, and the Word was God. He abode, at the beginning of time, with God. It was through him that all things came into being, and without him came nothing that has come to be. In him there was life, and that life was the light of men. And the light shines in darkness, a darkness which was not able to master it." I read too that the soul of man, although it "bears witness of the light, is not the Light." But the Word [*verbum*; that is, *logos*] who is himself God, "is the true Light, which enlightens every soul born into the world. He, through whom the world was made, was in the world, and the world treated him as a stranger." But I did not find it written in those books [by the Platonists] that "he [the Word, *verbum, logos*; that is, Christ] came to what was his own, and they who were his own gave him no welcome. But all those who did welcome him he empowered to become the children of God, all those who believe in his name."
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> In the same books I also read of the Word, God, that his "birth came not from human stock, not from nature's will or man's, but from God." But I did not read in them that "the Word was made flesh and came to dwell among us."
>
> Though the words were different and the meaning was expressed in various ways, I also learned from these books that God the Son, being himself, like the Father, of divine nature, "did not see, in the rank of Godhead, a prize to be coveted." But they do not say that he "dispossessed himself, and took the nature of a slave, fashioned in the likeness of men, and presented himself to us in human form; and then he lowered his own dignity, accepted an obedience which brought him to death, death on the cross; and that is why God has raised him from the dead, given him that name which is greater than any other name; so that everything in heaven and on earth and under the earth must bend the knee before the name of Jesus, and every tongue must confess Jesus Christ as the Lord, dwelling in the glory of God the Father."
>
> The books also tell us that your only-begotten Son abides for ever in eternity with you; that before all time began, he was; that

he is above all time and suffers no change; that of his plenty our souls receive their part and hence derive their blessings; and that by partaking of the Wisdom which abides in them they are renewed, and this is the source of their wisdom. But there is no word in those books to say that "in his own appointed time he underwent death for us sinners, and that you did not even spare your own Son, but gave him up for us all.[2]

By "Platonists" Augustine meant first and foremost Plotinus. Clearly, he was able to discern the decisive point of difference between Christianity and an idealistic speculative philosophy such as that of Plotinus. But it is also evident that he did not deny the validity of Plotinus' thinking within certain limits. To Augustine it contained the truth, but not the whole truth. Plotinus had developed a consistently monistic system of philosophy comprising a wholly transcendental concept of God; a doctrine of emanation; a conception of evil as merely a deficiency; and an optimistic theory that man can work out his own salvation. Christianity, on the other hand, insists that God is the Lord of history; man is created; evil is sin or a repudiation of God, and not just an imperfection; and that man cannot save himself. Plotinus not only perceived but also insisted on the incompatibility of these two outlooks. Augustine, on the contrary, although also perfectly aware that these positions were irreconcilable, nevertheless sought to unite them in a synthesis. With the exception of Kierkegaard, philosophers have wandered in Augustine's tracks to this day.

As early as the second century the Apologists[3] endeavored to assert Christianity's equal, or even superior, status in relation to contemporary philosophies. At the same time they felt compelled to struggle for doctrinal purity among their own ranks in order to prepare themselves to contend with various forms of Gnosticism. The most important of the earliest Fathers of the Church were Irenaeus[4] and Tertullian. It was Tertullian who clearly emphasized the impossibility of

[2] *Confessions*, VI, 9:13–14; trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin, *Penguin Classics* (London, 1961), pp. 144ff. Augustine quotes rather freely from John 1.1–16, Philipp. 2:6–11, and Rom. 5:6. Whereas Pine-Coffin puts all quotations in italics, ordinary quotation marks have been used here to indicate Augustine's citations from the Bible Material in square brackets has been inserted by the present author.

[3] The most important texts are collected in E. J. Goodspeed, ed., *Die ältesten Apologeten* (Göttingen, 1914).

[4] Concerning Irenaeus, reference is made to G. Wingren, *Människan och inkarnationen enligt Irenaeus* (Lund, 1947).

becoming a Christian or even preparing oneself for it by means of human wisdom, for the content of Christianity is diametrically opposed to human thinking corrupted by sin. Quite understandably, the expression *credo quia absurdum* has thus often been attributed to Tertullian. A somewhat later thinker, Lactantius, assumed a conciliatory standpoint in his outlook on the relationship between Christianity and Greek philosophy.

An important part in this conflict was played by the Alexandrian school, whose greatest writers were Clement and Origen,[5] pupils of the thinker Ammonius Sakkas, who also taught Plotinus. Obviously stimulated by both Christian thinking and the religious conceptions prevalent among his contemporaries, Origen constructed a theological system that exerted considerable influence. He based his system on a concept of God as a perfect nature followed, in decreasing degrees of perfection, by Christ, the Holy Spirit, and a world of angels populated by incorporeal rational beings. He assumed that the spirits—especially evil spirits—were alienated from God as the result of a fall in the world of angels, and that a visible material world was created for their purification. The angels occupy the uppermost position in this visible world, man occupies the center, and the demons the bottom level. According to Origen, Christ was not only instrumental in bringing about creation, but he also made salvation possible through his teachings about God and God's will and by imparting to the fallen world a higher knowledge that is necessary for salvation. Origen maintained that the process of salvation advances through a sequence of worlds in which the souls are assigned consecutively higher positions according to merit. Ultimately, everything is restored to its original order: Satan himself and his demons are converted, corporeal existence ceases, and God becomes all in all.

Whereas Origen felt that he had to defend Christianity against philosophical attacks, primarily against those of Celsus the Platonist, Eusebius sought to defend it against both paganism (in *Praeparatio evangelica*) and Judaism (*Demonstratio evangelica*). He clearly perceived that there is a difference between the Platonic and Christian dualisms and that the Neoplatonic doctrine of emanation is incompatible with the Christian belief in creation; nevertheless, he held that the Platonic philosophy contained elements of the truth. Another thinker, Gregory of Nyssa, proceeded to stress an intimate connection between philosophical knowledge and Christian belief, strongly emphasizing

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[5] On the subject of Origen, reference is made especially to Hal Koch, *Pronoia und Paideusis* (Berlin, 1932).

philosophical clarification of concepts by means of dialectics as a necessary expedient in formulating the truths of faith. Believing it possible to advance from faith to a profounder insight, Gregory proposed to furnish proofs of the truths of faith not only by resorting to authoritative sources but also by means of reason. Like Philo, he described a series of stages in the soul's mystical union with God.[6] The Arian Eunomius tried to go even further than Gregory by interpreting all religious truths as rational truths.[7]

Most of the thinkers whom we have considered thus far were strongly motivated by the Platonic and Stoic traditions and belong both in the history of philosophy and in the history of Christian doctrine. At the same time, however, Aristotelian influence was beginning to make itself felt in the school of Antioch, from which it spread to the Monophysites and Nestorians in Syria in the fifth century. Aristotle's works were translated into Syriac and then in the ninth century from that language into Arabic, so when the Arabs invaded Spain in the twelfth century his works came within the sphere of the Latin language.[8]

Two of the Latin Fathers of the Church in the fourth century deserve special mention: Ambrosius, chiefly because of his work in the fields of ethics, which he patterned on Cicero's *De officiis*; and Marius Victorinus who, besides translating Plotinus and Aristotle into Latin, attempted to combine Aristotelian logic and epistemology with Neoplatonic ontology. The most important and historically most influential thinker, however, was undoubtedly Augustine, whose views of the relationship between Neoplatonism and Christianity were outlined at the beginning of this chapter.

Augustine's attitude toward the complex philosophical tradition did not remain the same throughout his life. Initially, he tended to approve of philosophical knowledge as a means to achieve wisdom and a comprehension of God, and consequently as an aid and preparation for the acquisition of faith. In his later works, particularly in the curious *Retractationes*, written in A.D. 427, he assumed a more critical attitude toward philosophy. In this work he adopted the position that the value of knowledge, which is intrinsically neutral, depends on its application; if put in the service of faith, knowledge must be regarded as something positive. Augustine argued that knowledge

[6] See J. Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique* (Paris, 1954).

[7] See Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, I–III (Westminster, Md., 1950–1960), III, 306ff.

[8] See Paul Wilpert's article employed in the above, "Die Philosophie der patristischen Zeit," in Fritz Heinemann, ed., *Die Philosophie im XX. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1959), p. 144.

alone is worthless, just as it is inadequate merely to have faith as a subjective attitude. In his opinion man's task consists in elevating the content of faith to a cognitive level, but without losing sight of the fact that faith is more comprehensive than, and embodies, knowledge. In this context he defined faith as the acceptance of a thought, thereby interpreting faith as a volitional act and a factor that is necessary even regarding earthly affairs.

Augustine ranked Plato foremost among the philosophers. Clearly, his own concept of God reflects Plato's influence in that he considered God the supreme principle of existence and the source of truth. At the same time he interpreted the Neoplatonic theory of emanation as a theory of creation (creatio continua).

Moreover, he anticipated Descartes and modern forms of philosophical idealism by using methodic doubt as a point of departure in his epistemology and by firmly anchoring cognition of the truth in spiritual self-awareness. Augustine believed that there were two areas in which doubt is impossible. First of all, I cannot question the fact that I doubt and thus exist. Nor is doubt admissible in relation to the principle of duality as embodied in a statement like, "the world either exists or does not exist." Since there is no conceivable reason to deny such a statement, there is no reason to call the principle of contradiction into question either. Augustine thought that by embracing these principles he had, in opposition to absolute skepticism, succeeded in establishing the possibility of acquiring knowledge. He also believed, however, that knowledge was not only possible but even indispensable for achieving the aim of life. He reaffirmed the classical conception of eudaemonia as the goal of life, like Ambrosius interpreting happiness as eternal beatitude and participation in God as the supreme truth.[9]

The philosophical thinking of the Middle Ages, as in the patristic period, did not as a rule distinguish sharply between metaphysics and dogmatics. To be sure, distinctions did become increasingly perceptible in the course of time; but even toward the close of the period it was—with few exceptions—generally agreed that the difference between the two disciplines did not imply incommensurability. This assumption was based on adherence to a hierarchical cosmology divided into two main sections, a realm of nature and a realm of grace, with the first realm embracing the created and fallen world and the

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[9] See Nygren, Agape, II, passim, and especially R. Holte, Beatitudo och Sapientia (Stockholm, 1958)

second the redeemed and perfect world. In this scheme earthly exist-
ence was regarded as a pilgrimage beginning in the realm of nature
and passing through the realm of grace to reach the goal, the king-
dom of glory.

Structurally, this cosmology is of Greek provenance, owing its
origins chiefly to Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism. The explana-
tions of the world of nature advanced by Plato, Aristotle, Ptole-
maeus, Plotinus, and their disciples, and the descriptions of the world
of grace given in the Bible and by the Fathers of the Church (among
whom Augustine was considered the greatest),[10] were generally re-
garded as definitive and authoritative. The primary task facing reli-
gious-philosophical thinkers in the Middle Ages was therefore to de-
termine the relationship between these two realms. The thinkers of
this age accordingly felt that philosophy must belong to an inferior
sphere and thus be subordinate to theology, for whereas philosoph-
ical cognition is directed toward the realm of nature, theology con-
cerns the superior realm of grace. But if properly understood, phi-
losophy can nonetheless render man valuable, indeed indispensable,
assistance on the way to the heavenly fatherland. In fact, according
to this view it is impossible for man to reach the gates of this king-
dom by his own unaided efforts alone; only God's clemency toward
man, the *homo viator*, can lead him all the way to this heavenly goal.

The distinctive and formal character of medieval thinking resulted
from the schools and their curricula, the pedagogical methods then
in use, and the contents of the libraries. The medieval Roman Cath-
olic Church provided a successor to the Roman State school by means
of its monastic and cathedral schools,[11] in which Greek and Roman
culture continued as a living heritage. The universities, which were
founded toward the end of the twelfth and beginning of the thir-
teenth centuries, were extensions of these schools. Education in-
cluded the liberal arts (*artes liberales*) and church doctrine. As opposed
to professional or vocational skills, the liberal arts were considered

[10] See Jørgen Pedersen, "Opfattelsen og studiet af middelalderen," *Dansk teologisk Tidsskrift* (1954), pp. 193–241. An important work is Jean Leclercq, *L'Amour des Lettres et le Désire de Dieu* (Paris, 1957).

[11] Regarding the systems of education in the Middle Ages, the reader is referred to William Norvin, *Københavns Universitet i Middelalderen* (Copenhagen, 1929), and M. Grabmann's important work, *Die Geschichte der scholastischen Methode*, 2nd ed. (Basel, 1961), which is supplemented by the same author's *Die theologische Erkenntnis—und Einleitungslehre des hl. Thomas v. Aquin* (Freiburg [Switzerland], 1948). An important work is Olaf Pedersen, *Studium generale. De europæiske universiteters tilblivelse* (Copenhagen, 1979).

unnecessary for the pursuit of a natural life on earth, for they had a higher end: the guidance of man toward an appointed supernatural goal. They consisted partly of three formal arts (*trivium*), that is, grammar, dialectics, and rhetoric; and partly of the four real arts (*quadrivium*), encompassing geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and music. The Latin terms derive from *tres* and *quattuor viae*, meaning three and four ways—toward man's goal in life. The method of instruction, which was fundamentally quite simple, consisted of studying and explaining recognized authors, and it was this practice that gave rise to the many commentaries of the period.

Disputations, inspired by Peter Abelard and carried on in accordance with very strict rules, made their appearance in the twelfth century and in turn fostered two other literary forms, the so-called *quaestiones disputatae* and the more liberal *quodlibeta*. Owing to considerable difficulties, such as the problems of copying and translating, knowledge of classical literature and philosophy spread slowly. By way of example, Aristotle was primarily known only as a logician until well into the twelfth century while scholars kept to the Neoplatonic tradition as represented by Augustine, Boethius, and Pseudo-Dionysius. When, toward the close of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth centuries, scholars became familiar with Aristotle's theories of physics and metaphysics, they found themselves with theories that had been passed on by an Arabian philosophy that was heavily influenced by Neoplatonism.

There is no question but that significant beginnings were made during the first period of Scholasticism, that is, from the sixth to the tenth centuries; nevertheless, this long span must be regarded as essentially a time of preparation. There is only one thinker from this entire period who simply cannot be overlooked in even the sketchiest outline: John Scotus Erigena,[12] who draws on the much earlier Plotinus and prefigures the arrival of Spinoza and the most important thinker of German Idealism, Hegel. In *On the Division of Nature* (*De divisione naturae*) Erigena endeavored to form the first great synthesis of faith and reason to appear in the Middle Ages; what is more, he even proposed to demonstrate their identity.

[12] A summary of Erigena's world of thought is given in H Bett, *Johannes Scotus Erigena* (Cambridge, 1925), and the chief modern work is M. Cappuyns, *Jean Scot Erigène*, 2nd ed (Paris, 1964), in which the author energetically seeks to interpret him as an exegetic theologian. Of older literature on this speculative thinker, Peder Hjort's (1793–1871) monograph (published in German) is worthy of particular mention: *Johann Scotus Erigena, oder von dem Ursprung einer christlichen Philosophie und ihrem heiligen Beruf* (Copenhagen, 1823).