The Problem of Existence in Western Philosophy

Aristotle - Thomas Aquinas

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written by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis consists in the presentation of Thomas Aquinas' ontology in relation to Aristotle's account of the nature of being. In the first chapter an account of Presocratic thought is presented, beginning from Thales and ending with Parmenides, who is often characterized as the founder of metaphysics or ontology. The second chapter consists in a brief presentation of Aristotle's account of the nature of being. Finally Aquinas' ontology is presented in the third chapter, which closes with a brief discussion of the connection between his approach and modern philosophy.

Thomas Aquinas was an immensely influential philosopher and theologian in the tradition of scholasticism. In *De Ente et Essentia*, which is thought to be his most personal work, Aquinas gives his own answer to one of the most fundamental problems of Western philosophy, which was formulated by Aristotle as the question "What is *being?*". As we will see, Thomas' answer leads to a reformulation of the problem of being which becomes the problem of existence (or the question "what is existence?").

Étienne Gilson[1], in his work *L'être et l'essence,* presents the solutions offered to this problem by Aquinas' predecessors, as well as those who succeeded him, and concludes that only Thomas managed to face the paradoxes born from it, and succeeded in building a coherent system. In other words, Gilson claims that Thomas' solution is the most complete. The examination of this claim is a very difficult endeavor, as it requires the critical examination of the answers of all great Western thinkers to the question of being, or existence, since the beginning of philosophy. The much more feasible objective of this thesis is to offer a better understanding of Thomas' answer, by examining it in relation to the Aristotelean one, on which it is heavily based.

[1]Étienne Gilson (1884-1978) is widely acknowledged as the greatest historian of medieval philosophy in the twentieth century, while *L'être et l'essence* constitutes his most important work. Gilson analyzed Thomism from a historical perspective, and did not consider him to be a part of scholasticism, but rather a revolt against it [23].

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1. The Origins of Ontology

1.1. Western Thought Before Parmenides

1.1.1. A Myth of Creation

> "First of all Chaos came into being. But then
> wide-bosomed Earth, the ever-sure foundation
> of all the deathless ones who hold the peaks of snowy Olympus,
> and dim Tartarus in the depth of the wide-pathed Earth,
> and Eros, fairest among the deathless gods,
> who unnerves the limbs and subdues the mind and wise counsel
> of all gods and all men within them.
> From Chaos were born Erebus and black Night;
> but from Night were born Aether and Day, whom she
> conceived and bore from union in love with Erebus. "
>
> Hesiod , *Theogony 116-125 [14]*

There was a time, before philosophy and science came to be, when myths were the only way for humans to explain the world. Hesiod's *Theogony* is merely one such myth: an account of the origins of the natural world and the Greek gods, coming from the mouth of a poet. Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days*, together with Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*[1], are the oldest known Greek literary sources. Greek mythology is usually divided into three distinct periods: theogony, the age of gods and mortals, and the age of heroes. The epic poems of *Iliad* and *Odyssey* describe the age of heroes - both focusing on events surrounding the Trojan War[2] -, while Hesiod's *Theogony* refers to the era of gods, and is thought to have been the most widely accepted myth of creation at the time.

In the first part of the poem, Hesiod invokes the Muses, goddesses of inspiration. With their help, he goes on to narrate a myth of creation, according to which at the beginning there was only chaos, out of which everything else came to be. What an uninformative account, one might remark; and that is exactly what it was: even under the divine guidance of the Muses, Hesiod portrays humans as unable to understand the nature of reality.

[1] Most modern researches hold that both Hesiod and Homer lived around the seventh or eighth century BCE

[2] Whether there is any historical reality behind the Trojan War is still a matter of great controversy. Those who believe that the relevant stories are derived from a specific historical conflict usually date it to the 12th or 11th centuries BCE, often preferring the dates given by Eratosthenes, namely, 1194–1184 BCE.

For what is chaos? The ancient Greek word χάος was used to refer either to a disordered set of parts, or the abyss, the gap in between two other things[3]. Now a gap is essentially unfilled space, that is, space in which there is nothing. In any case, the very notion of chaos is completely unintelligible; be it something which lacks any kind of order, or something about which nothing can be affirmed or denied - since it has no content -, it constitutes an illegal concept, philosophically speaking. From this chaos, about which nothing can be said or thought, for reasons that are not explained, and in a way that is not adequately accounted for, came Earth, Tartarus and Eros, the first and fairest among the deathless gods.

Thus behind the awe-invoking images of *Theogony,* lies the human incapability of understanding the nature of reality. And although man has never ceased to be fascinated by similar stories, as far as the history of Western thought is concerned, Hesiod's *Theogony* lies at the end of its mythological period.

1.1.2. The Milesian School

The first attempt at giving a rational explanation of reality is commonly attributed to Thales, who claimed that the *principle*[4] of all things is water. Thales was born in the seventh century BCE, and was renowned for his wisdom[5]. As an empirical thinker, he must have observed that water endures, although it goes through various transformations, and it is also a vital constituent of all living things. Such observations must have led him to think that water is the foundation, or basic element, of all real things, in other words, the building block of reality.

The thought of Thales usually marks the beginning of Western philosophy, because - from what is known - he was the first Western thinker to suggest that the underlying structure of reality was not impenetrable to the human mind, by attempting to explain it on the basis of a material principle. Breaking free from the enchanting creation myths of the past, he tried to explain the world around him on the basis of reason. For Hesiod, everything was created from chaos, or nothingness. But Thales' account of reality was radically different: underneath the enormous variety, the multiplicity, the diversity of the world of experience, he saw unity, by conceiving of the many as being unified by the one. He was the one who introduced the concept of the *principle*, or *first cause*, of all real things as a means for providing a rational explanation of reality, and this is his major contribution to the development of Western thought.

[3]The word has traditionally been connected to the verb χαίνω (khainō) which translates to "I gape, yawn" [15].

[4]αρχή: beginning, origin, first cause, foundation [15]

[5]Thales was characterized, by many of his successors, as one of the Seven Sages of Greece. The oldest explicit mention on record of a standard list of seven sages is in Plato's *Protagoras 342e-343b*, where Socrates mentions them in the following order: Thales of Miletus, Pittacus of Mytilene, Bias of Priene, Solon, Cleobulus of Lindus , Myson of Chenae. They all lived in the seventh and early sixth century BCE, excelled as lawgivers, rulers, or statesmen, and were renowned for their wisdom. There are, nevertheless, many other lists, like the one we have from Diogenes Laertius, on which Periander of Corinth appears instead of Myson [16].

After Thales came Anaximander, who argued that the *first cause* cannot be an ordinary, limited, determinate substance like water, but it must rather be the *Boundless (*ἄπειρον). Anaximander pointed out what seemed as a contradiction in Thales' account, namely, that the fundamental origin of all things could not be a thing itself. And since it cannot be a thing, it cannot have definite limits, thus it must be the *Boundless.* But the latter is an object of thought suspiciously similar to Hesiod's chaos, in terms of intelligibility. Since we cannot really conceive of the unlimited, this account seems to be no different from Hesiod's, according to which everything originates in nothingness. Nevertheless, there is a big difference between the two; Anaximander was led to the notion of the *Boundless* through pure reasoning, while Hesiod's chaos is a product of pure imagination. More specifically, Anaximander reached his conclusion by defining the concept of the *principle* of all things negatively (as that which is not a thing), based on his understanding of it as used by Thales.

Unfortunately, Anaximander's negative definition of the principle of all real things offered no information about its nature. This was pointed out by Anaximenes who, in his turn, declared that the first cause is air, probably based on a set of more careful empirical observations. Thus Anaximenes, just as Thales, considered the unifying principle of everything to be a material substance. In summary, it seems that the human quest for understanding the underlying structure of reality begun with the introduction of a new concept *(*that of the *first cause)* by Thales, and the attempts of his immediate successors to redefine it (in order to better understand it), and thus render it more useful as a means of providing a rational explanation of reality.

1.1.3. The Pythagoreans

We have seen that Thales identified the principle of all things with water. Anaximander, who found his account contradictory, concluded that the principle of all things is the *Boundless.* Finally Anaximenes, who found Anaximander's account unacceptable - since it practically explained nothing -, returned to Thales' empirical approach and suggested that the principle of all things is air. But this view , too, could not adequately explain the world of experience. More than a century later, the Pythagorean doctrine must have seemed, for a while, and to those who had the privilege of studying it, as the answer to the ultimate question about life, the universe, and everything. But it wasn't.

According to Aristotle, the "so-called Pythagoreans" "assumed that the elements[6] of numbers are the elements of all existing things"; "the elements of a number are the even and the odd, the latter limited and the former unlimited. The unit is composed of both of these. And the number springs from the unit"[7]. Thus, for the Pythagoreans, the principle of all things was the *Unit,* because they believed that all things are composed of the same elements as numbers, and that all numbers are composed of units[8]. The

[6] The *elements* (στοιχεῖα) of a thing, in this context, are the components into which it is ultimately divisible.

[7] *Meta Ta Physika A.5: 985b25-8, 986a17-24*

[8] Just imagine the impact that the discovery of incommensurability must have had to those who actually believed that the unit is the building block of reality!

Pythagorean principle could be justified by the fact that no matter what object we look at in the world of experience, we are able to analyze it arithmetically, that is, to count it. The unit was thought to be, at the time, the source of all numbers, and thus their common measure. It seemed that the Pythagoreans had in their hands the best candidate for the unifying principle the first philosophers were looking for.

Thus it seems that the *Unit* was conceived by the Pythagoreans as the building block of reality, with an existential status probably similar to the one that Plato, who was significantly influenced by their doctrine, later attributed to ideas. They believed that numbers (integers) are the basic constituents of all things, that the governing principle of everything is commensurability, and that the common measure is the *Unit*. And although it was mathematics and the use of ratios in the study of music that inspired this doctrine, it was again mathematics and the discovery of the irrational numbers which led to its collapse. The unit was not, after all, the common measure of all numbers, let alone the common measure of everything.

1.1.4. Xenophanes

> "Naturally, the difficulty in formulating any principle that purports to be universal, is that it has to gain everyone's acceptance; it has to be "all things to all people". And this is best achieved if it is internally consistent. It must also be adaptive but stable, meaning compatible, without losing its identity or distinction. And it must be very simple, but able to take part in the most complex structures imaginable. Only then will it gain the widest acceptance, because it can be used by anyone to explain anything. Incidentally, this may be why the premise of God has worked so well, for so many, for such a long time."
>
> Arnold Hermann [9]

Both the Milesians and the Pythagoreans attempted to explain the world they perceived with their senses using a stable, enduring, primordial object of experience or thought as an explanatory principle (water, *Boundless*, air, *Unit*). Xenophanes of Colophon (570 – 475 BCE), claimed that the first cause of all things is *God*. In his work, Xenohanes criticized Greek polytheism and argued that *God* is one, and of a radically different nature than humans: "God is One. Greatest among Gods and men, not at all as mortals in body or thought"[9]. But although Xenophanes claimed that his God is "not at all as mortals in body or thought", it seems that, in some sense, he also is like mortals, since he has - after all - both a body and a mind. Where Anaximander defined the *Boundless* as that which is not a thing, *God* was defined by Xenophanes as that which, at the same time, is and is not like mortals.

We could think of these two approaches as two routes, each leading to a different first cause. Let us call Anaximander's approach the "is-not" route, and Xenophanes' the "is

[9] Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies*: 5. 109

and is-not" route. We have seen that the former leads to an unintelligible principle, but what about the latter? Xenophanes' *God* has a body and a mind, just like mortals. Furthermore "All of him sees, all of him thinks, all of him hears"[10]; "But without effort. He shakes all things by the thought of his mind. He always remains in the same place, moving not at all"[11]. But how can one conclude anything specific about the nature of this *God*, from the sole premise that he has a body and a mind different than ours? The answer is , of course, that one cannot, because the possibilities are endless. Thus it appears that Xenophanes described God's nature based on no more than his personal taste and imagination. From this we can conclude that the "is and is-not" route also leads to an unintelligible - and thus practically useless - principle, but not as quickly as the "is-not" route does. *God* is not defined negatively, as in the case of the *Boundless*, but his "is and is-not" definition also offers no specific information about his nature.

Xenophanes, apart from the idea of God as the principle of all things, he also formulated what is known as "the problem of human knowledge":

> "No man has seen nor will anyone know
> the truth about the gods and all the things i speak of
> For even if a person should in fact say what is absolutely the case,
> nevertheless he himself does not know, but belief is fashioned over all things"
>
> Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians:* 7.49.110

According to Xenophanes, no mortal will ever know the real nature of the world and the gods, because even if one does utter the truth about these matters, he will still not be aware of the fact, because everything is fashioned by belief. The above thoughts reveal that Xenophanes somehow became conscious of a crucial weakness, common to all the accounts of his predecessors, contemporaries, as well as his own: they were all ultimately based on nothing but belief. According to McKirahan "Xenophanes introduces concerns about method and the theoretical limits of human knowledge, which altered the course of pre-socratic thought from speculating about nature to theorizing about the basis for such speculation. In this change of direction we have, in an important sense, the birth of Western Philosophy" [17].

1.1.5. Conclusion

The Milesians, Xenophanes, and the Pythagoreans understood each in his own way the concept of the *principle* of all things introduced by Thales. But their accounts have one thing in common: they are all ultimately based on belief. In fact, this also holds for the concept of the *first cause* itself. Perhaps the idea that there is one single principle capable of explaining all that exists was, and still is, almost naturally accepted by most people, because of the nature of reason itself. Understanding the world in terms of

[10] Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians:* 9.144
[11] Simplicus, *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics:* 23.19

causes and consequences makes the conception of a first cause of everything, understood as an object of experience or though, very tempting. Nevertheless, Heraclitus, already in the fifth century BCE, essentially rejected this idea, and maintained that all real things undergo constant change ultimately governed by *logos*[12].

1.2. Parmenides of Elea

Parmenides was born in Elea, a Greek city on the southern coast of Italy, in the late sixth century BCE. According to Speusippus[13], he established the laws for the citizens of his native Elea, and according to some other sources he was a pupil of Xenophanes; Diogenes Laërtius also describes him as a disciple of Ameinias the Pythagorean. But no matter who was his teacher, Parmenides must have been influenced by both Xenophanes and Pythagoras, growing up at a place where - at the time - their philosophical views were prevailing.

According to Laertius, Parmenides composed only one work: a poem, written in the traditional epic medium of hexameter verse. This poem, conventionally called *On Nature* - although this was probably not its original title -, has only survived in fragmentary form. The original text had perhaps eight hundred verses, from which almost one hundred and sixty remain today. That any portion of this poem survives is due entirely to the fact that later ancient authors, beginning with Plato, for one reason or another, felt the need to quote some part of it in the course of their own writings.

Parmenides is thought to be the most significant and challenging thinker of early Greek philosophy. And he has won this title for two main reasons: because his poem constitutes - for many - the birth of ontology, and because its interpretation has proven to be largely controversial. But probably the most accurate explanation of the reason why his work is so important, was given by Bertrand Russell in the following passage:

> What makes Parmenides historically important is that he invented a form of metaphysical argument that, in one form or another, is to be found in most subsequent metaphysicians down to and including Hegel. He is often said to have invented logic, but what he really invented was metaphysics based on logic.
>
> Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy,* p.67

1.2.1. The Poem

Fragment 1

> The mares that carry me as far as my mind can reach,
> walked to bring me to the famous route of the goddess [*daimonos]*,

[12] *λόγος*: (a) the word, or that by which the inward thought is expressed, (b) the inward thought itself, Lat. ratio [15]. The term essentially refers to verbal thought, which is the cornerstone of reason.

[13] Speusippus, who was Plato's successor as head of the Academy, is said to have reported this in his work *On Philosophers*

who enlightens, in all cities, those who know things well;
there i was being carried; there the wise mares were bringing me,
straining the chariot, while maidens were leading the way.
And the axle in the naves, incandescent, shrilled like a panpipe
(for it was urged on by two whirling wheels pressing it on both sides)
as Heliades hurried - abandoning the houses of the Night -
to bring me to the light, having pulled with their hands the veils from their heads.
There are the gates of the routes of Night and Day, having
above them a lintel and below them a threshold of stone;
high in the air, closed by mighty doors;
and avenging Dike keeps the keys that open them.
It was her that the maidens entreated with fair words,
and skillfully persuaded to unfasten the bolted bar
from the gates; when the doors were thrown back
a wide opening was created, the bronze doorposts turning back
and forth in their sockets, fastened with bolts and rivets;
passing straight through them at once, the maidens kept
the chariot and the horses on the high-road.
And the goddess received me graciously, taking my right hand in hers,
and addressed me in the following words of counsel:
"Young man, accompanied by immortal charioteers,
and having competent enough chariot-horses to carry you to my abode,
welcome, for it is not an ill fate which has sent you forth to travel
this route (which hasn't been walked by humans),
but *themis* and *dike*. And it is necessary that you learn all things,
both the stable core of well-rounded Aletheia,
and the *doxes* of mortals, among which there is no true belief.
But , nevertheless , these you shall learn as well, since all opinions
must be tested once and for all by passing through everything.

Fragment 2

Come now, i will tell you - and convey the word that you will hear-
which are the only routes of mental inquiry;
the one that it is, and that *mi einai*[14] is not
is the route of Peitho (for it follows Aletheia)
the other that it is not, and that *mi einai* ought to be,
this, i tell you, is a completely untrustworthy route;

[14] εἶναι: infinitive of the verb εἰμί; εἰμί is both the base form of the verb to be, and the first person of the present tense (i am) .To the contrary, the infinitive is the only verb form, in ancient Greek, that does not disclose the person of the subject, or the number of the persons. Thus, εἶναι should be understood here as *to be,* and μὴ εἶναι as *not to be.*

because you can neither come to know *mi eon*[15]
(because this is impossible), nor can you express it.

Fragment 3

... for the same thing is thinking and *einai*.

Fragment 4

But behold things which, although absent, are yet firmly present in the mind;
for *eon* cannot be cut off from itself
neither by orderly dispersing it in every way, and everywhere,
nor by coming together.

Fragment 5

And it is the same to me
whence i will begin, for there i shall come back again.

Fragment 6

What is spoken and thought of as *eon* must be;
because *einai* is, but naught is not;
this I advise you to consider .
Into this first route of inquiry i confine you,
and i prevent you from the one, which mortals who know nothing
wander vacillating; for impotence in their
breasts guides their unsteady mind; they are borne along,
deaf as well as blind, astonished, hordes without judgment,
who think that to be and not to be are the same and
not the same, and they all follow a route that turns back.

Fragment 7

Because *mi eonta*[16] will never be proven to be;
but keep your thought away from this route of inquiry,
and do not let habit [derived] from much experience constrain you in it,
leaving your sight and hearing to wander idly
and your tongue to roar, but judge by reason the much-contested disproof
expounded by me.

[15] μὴ ἐὸν: *that which is not*
[16] μὴ ἐόντα: those which are not

Fragment 8

... Yet the only route that remains to be discussed
is the route that is; on it there are many signs
that *eon* is without birth and indestructible,
whole[17], stable and without purpose;
nor was it ever, nor will it be, for it is now, all at the same place,
one, continuous. For what kind of birth would you seek for it?
How and whence did it grow to be? I will not permit you to say
or to think from *mi eon*; because that which is not can neither be said
nor thought. And if it arose from naught, what necessity
would have impelled it to grow later rather than earlier?
Thus, it must either be altogether, or not at all.
Nor will the power of faith ever permit something to come into being
from *mi eon,* alongside it. For this reason, Dike has not allowed [*eon*]
neither to come into being, nor to perish, by easing her bonds,
but holds it firm; and the decision about these matters consists in this:
is or is not. So it has been decided, just as is necessary,
that we are to set aside one route as unconceivable and without name
(for it is not a true route), and that the other is real and true.
How could *eon* be destroyed? How could it come into being?
Because if it came into being, [then] it is not, nor [is it] if it is going to be.
In this way birth is extinguished and destruction unheard of.
Nor is *eon* divisible, for it is all the same;
nor is there more or less of it in one place than in another,
which would hinder its continuity, but everything is quite full of *eon.*
This is why everything is continuous; because *eon* draws near to *eon.*
Immovable, in the limits of great bonds, it is
without beginning and unceasing, because birth and destruction
have been driven far off by true belief.
Remaining the same, in the same place, it lies in itself
and stable as this it will remain; for mighty Ananke
holds it bounded all around,
wherefore it is not legitimate to say that *eon* is incomplete;
because it does not need anything; *mi eon* must miss everything.
Thinking and that on account of which there is thought are the same.
Because you will not find thinking without an *eon* in which it is expressed;
Nor was there, is, or will be anything other than *eon*
since *Moira* has bound it to remain whole and immovable;
for this reason, all that mortals have established, persuaded that they are true,
are merely names, that *eo*n comes into being and perishes,
is and is not, and that it changes its position and its bright color.

[17] οὐλομελές: without parts

But since it has an ultimate limit, it is complete from every side,
similar to the volume of a perfectly round sphere, extending from
the center towards every direction equally; because neither more
nor less can be here or there, for there *is* no *mi eon,*
to keep it from reaching its like
nor is it more *eon* here and less there, because it is whole;
thus equal in all directions, it is equally confined within limits.
Here i close my trustworthy word and though about truth;
Henceforward [you shall] learn the *doxes* of mortals
by listening the deceptive order of my words
for they have been accustomed to naming two tokens forms;
one of them they should not - it is here that they are mislead -,
and they judged them as having opposite bodies, and
assigned different signs to them, on the one hand the heavenly flame
of fire, gentle, light, in every way the same as itself
but not the same as the other; and the other, opposite to it,
dark night, a dense and heavy body.
Of these i tell you the whole arrangement as it seems to men,
so that no mortal opinion may ever mislead you.

Fragment 9

But because everything has been named light and night
and what corresponds to their powers was given to each thing
all is full at once of light and obscure night
which are both equal, since naught
has a share in neither of them.

Fragment 10

You shall also know the nature of the sky and all of its signs
and the unseen deeds of the glowing sun's pure torch,
and whence they arose, and the wandering deeds of the
round-faced moon and its nature, and you shall also know
the sky that surrounds us whence it grew and how Ananke
guided and bound it to hold the limits of the stars.

Fragment 11

how earth and sun and moon
and the common to all sky and the galaxy and the outermost olympus
and the hot might of the starts violently came to being.

Fragment 12

> The narrower rings are filled with unmixed fire,
> and those next to them with night, with a few flames bouncing.
> And in the center stands the goddess that governs everything;
> for she rules over terrible birth and mixing of all things
> sending the female to mix with the male and in reverse,
> the male to mix with the female.

Fragment 13

> First of all gods she contrived Eros...

Fragment 14

Shining in the night with a light not of its own, wandering around the earth

Fragment 15

> Always gazing at the rays of the sun

Fragment 16

> For as is at any given moment the mixture of the much-wandering
> limbs, so also is the mind present in humans; for that which thinks is the same
> for each and every human, namely, the nature of their limbs; and thought is an adjunct to it.

Fragment 17

> On the right boys, and on the left girls

Fragment 18

This is how, according to human *doxes,* these things have come to be
and now are, and after they have grown they will cease to be;
and to each humans have assigned a distinctive name.

1.2.2. The Poem's Interpretation

Interpreting Parmenides' poem means understanding his thought. But in order to do so, one must not only be familiar with the language in which it was expressed, but also with the socio-cultural conditions that affected it. The partial and imperfect preservation of the poem is another factor that greatly complicates this task. So many are the different interpretations that have been given to this poem in the course of history, that it would

constitute a huge project in itself just to critically present the most important among them. But this does not necessarily mean that we are helpless; it can as well be taken as an indication that looking for a unique commonly accepted coherent interpretation that will disclose the true content of Parmenides' thought is just the wrong way to go.

Parmenides' poem is divided into three parts conventionally called: the proem, the route of truth, and the route of *doxa* (opinion). The first describes his journey to the route of the goddess, whose gate is guarded by avenging Dike. This is the most artistic part of the poem, devised to create images that arise a feeling of awe to the reader, or hearer, thus preparing the ground for the more philosophical part that is to follow. In the second part the goddess reveals to Parmenides the two only routes of theoretical inquiry: the route of Peitho - characterized as the only true route -, and the route that mortals who know nothing follow, which is not named. The former is discussed in this part, and the latter in the third one, conventionally called the route of *doxa*. Let us now briefly present four of the most popular interpretations, just to get an idea of the different ways in which this famous poem was historically understood.

1.2.2.1. Plato

Plato was the first to quote Parmenides' poem in his writings. His respect and admiration is obvious in the dialogue he dedicated to him [13], in which Parmenides plays a similar role to the one that Socrates plays in most of the Platonic dialogues. More specifically, in it, Parmenides is presented as explaining to Socrates the correct way of practicing philosophy, namely, by examining not only the consequences of the hypothesis that an idea exists, but also of the hypothesis that it does not exist. In order to demonstrate this method of theoretical investigation to Socrates with an example, Parmenides examines the consequences of two hypothesis: that the One[18] exists, and that the One does not exist. Plato's understanding of Parmenides is best reflected in this dialogue, and especially where the One is shown to have a number of properties that reflect those that Parmenides himself attributed to *eon* in the course of fragment 8: that it is in itself and the same as itself, that it is at rest, that it is like itself, in contact with itself etc. All these properties are shown to belong to the One in virtue of its own nature and in relation to itself. But the One is shown to also have contrary attributes, which belong to it in other aspects (that is, not in virtue of its own nature, or in relation to itself).

According to the Platonic theory, real existence is possessed only by Ideas; these are the only true beings. But all ideas spring from the One, and the latter is shown to possess the properties of the Parmenidean *eon,* which indicates that Plato probably understood *eon* as "that which *exists".* The Platonic One seems to be a refinement of the Pythagorean Unit; it entails the opposites and can thus constitute the sole principle of a reality described in terms of contrary concepts, and in addition it is a real being, since it has a similar nature to the Parmenidean *eon*, understood as "that which *exists*". Thus, it appears that Plato viewed the two major phases of Parmenides' poem as dual accounts of the same entity in different aspects; for him both the idea of Light and the

[18]that is, the concept, or idea, of one

idea of Dark exist, although for Parmenides only one of the two represents a form, as it is explicitly stated in 8.51-57.

1.2.2.2. Theophrastus

Skipping Aristotle's interpretation, which will be discussed in the following chapter, let us see how his successor Theophrastus understood Parmenides' poem. Alexander of Aphrodisias quotes him as having written the following in the first book of his work *On the Natural Philosophers*:

> Coming after this man [Xenophanes], Parmenides of Elea, son of Pyres, went along both paths. For he both declares that the universe is eternal and also attempts to explain the generation of the things that are, though without taking the same view of them both, but supposing that in accordance with truth the universe is one and ungenerated and spherical in shape, while in accordance with the view of the multitude, and with a view to explaining the generation of things as they appear to us, making the principles two, fire and earth, the one as matter and the other as cause and agent.
>
> Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Metaphysics*, 31.7-16

The above passage suggests that for Theophrastus the Parmenidean *eon* is the universe, and that just like Plato, he too understood Parmenides as furnishing dual accounts of the universe, first in its intelligible, and then in its phenomenal aspects.

1.2.2.3. The Strict Monist Interpretation

In more recent history, a good many interpreters have taken the poem's second part as an argument for strict monism, or the paradoxical view that there exists exactly one thing, *eon*, whose essential properties are given in fragment 8. According to this view the world of our ordinary experience, which gives rise to our normal beliefs in the existence of change and plurality, is a mere illusion. Although less common than it once was, this view still has its adherents and is probably familiar to many who have only a superficial acquaintance with Presocratic philosophy.

1.2.2.4. The Dialectical-Logical Interpretation

The interpretations discussed so far seem to contradict certain parts of the original text. On the one hand it is explicitly stated in the poem that there is only one true route of theoretical inquiry, which contradicts the aspectual interpretation prevailing in antiquity. On the other hand, the strict monist interpretation is obviously far-fetched. Among the various other approaches, Russell's dialectical-logical interpretation stands out. In his view, the essence of Parmenides' argument in the first major part of the poem is the following:

> When you think, you think *of* something; when you use a name, it must be the name *of* something. Therefore, both thought and language require

> objects outside themselves. And since you can think of a thing or speak of it at one time as well as at another, whatever can be thought of or spoken of must exist at all times. Consequently there can be no change, since change consists in things coming into being or ceasing to be.
>
> Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Thought*, p.68

Fragment 6 of the poem begins with the phrase: "What is spoken and thought of as *eon* must be". Russell interprets the term "be" here to mean exist and concludes that, according to Parmenides, anything that can be thought or spoken of must exist. But his further conclusion that whatever can be thought or spoken of must exist at all times, and thus there can be no change, is already quite puzzling. And it only becomes even more so, as he attempts to better explain it.

1.2.2.5. Conclusion

Thus it appears that the philosophical study of the nature of being, existence, or reality - which we call ontology - begins with Parmenides. Contrary to the Milesians, Pythagoras, and Xenophanes, who sought to explain reality on the basis of a unifying principle (that took the form of a physical substance, or an abstract idea), Parmenides attempted to understand it by analyzing the concept of *eon*. The fact that the interpretation of his thought has historically proven to be largely controversial, earned him the title of the most challenging Presocratic philosopher. Nevertheless, there seems to be a different explanation of the reasons why a commonly accepted coherent interpretation of his poem has proven to be impossible. This explanation, which is based on Aristotle's view of Presocratic thought as expressed in *Meta ta Physika*, and which shall be discussed in the next chapter, can be summarized in the following statement: what is not clearly expressed, has not been clearly understood.

2. Aristotle and the Nature of Real Beings

2.1. Preliminary Considerations

2.1.1. Experience, Theory and Knowledge

Aristotle's treatise *Meta Ta Physika*, where he discusses the question of being, begins with an account of the connection between experience, theory, and knowledge, which lies at the foundation of his thought. All animals, according Aristotle, possess sense-perception as a biological given, but only in some of them does sense-perception give rise to memory[1]. Memory marks the presence of imagination (the power by which an object is presented to the mind [15]), but only the animals that possess both memory and the sense of hearing exhibit the capacity for learning, or experience. Finally, humans are unique among all animals, because they use experience as their principal way of survival[2].

In Aristotle's view, man acquires both practical and theoretical knowledge through experience, which is born from memory in such a way that a number of memories of the same type of actions eventually acquire the meaning of obtained experience[3]. Practical knowledge occurs whenever from many concepts moulded in experience, a general opinion regarding the same thing is formed. For example, the opinion that for Kallias, who suffered from a specific kind of disease, some specific medicine proved to be helpful, as in the case of Socrates, and many other cases taken separately, is a matter of experience; but the view that this medicine is helpful for many, determined by type and suffering from specific diseases, is a matter of theory[4]. In other words, according to Aristotle, practical (or experiential) knowledge is knowledge of the particular, while theoretical knowledge is knowledge of the universal[5].

Most importantly, because every action and creation aims at the particular, someone who possesses knowledge of the universal, but is completely ignorant of the particular contained in it, will often be unable to correctly apply theory in practice[6]. Nevertheless, Aristotle remarks, we think of knowledge and understanding as belonging to theory rather than to practice (πράξις: action), and we take theoreticians to be wiser than practitioners, presupposing that the measure of knowledge is also a universal measure of wisdom. In his view, the reason why we make this presupposition is because theoreticians know the

[1] *Meta Ta Physika* A.1: 980a29-30
[2] *Meta Ta Physika* A.1: 980b25-8
[3] *Meta Ta Physika* A1: 980b30-981a3
[4] *Meta Ta Physika* A.1: 981a5-13
[5] *Meta Ta Physika* A.1: 981a16-8
[6] *Meta Ta Physica* A.1: 981a23-6

cause of things, while practitioners ignore it. In other words, theoretical knowledge is valued more than experiential knowledge because it is concerned with the *why*, while experience only with the *that* of things [7].

2.1.2. First Philosophy and Science

2.1.2.1. The Science of Wisdom or First Philosophy

Apart from distinguishing between experiential (or practical) and theoretical (or scientific) knowledge in general, Aristotle also distinguished between practical and theoretical science, on the basis of a fundamental difference, namely, that the objective of the latter is truth and the objective of the former is ἔργον (work, deed, or action)[8] Theoretical sciences do not aim at practical benefit or pleasure, but at truth, which is why they are thought to be superior to practical sciences, as well as why their historical development succeeded the development of the latter[9]. Thus, just as theoreticians are considered to be wiser than practitioners, and the architect wiser than the craftsman, theoretical sciences are considered to be superior to practical sciences. Finally wisdom is identified by Aristotle with the science of the first principles and causes of all things that are, which is the most theoretical of all [10].

Where each science takes into account only an aspect of *being*, and studies its accidental properties, this special science studies *being* in its entirety - or *being* as such -, that is, the most intrinsic characteristics of *being* shared by all things that are (ὄντα)[11]. In other words, this particular theoretical science studies the first principles - what we would call the axioms, from a mathematical point of view - and causes of all things that are, and is concerned with questions like: τί ἐστὶ τὸ ὄν (what is *being*), which are the initial occasions and causes that make things be, what is οὐσία [12], what is ἀρχή (beginning, origin or principle), αἰτία (cause), φύσις (nature), ἕν (one), ποιὸν (quality), ποσὸν (quantity) etc. Aristotle named this most general, universal science - which in the course of time developed into what we nowadays know as metaphysics - first philosophy.

Thus it seems that, for Aristotle, first philosophy is not practically necessary or useful by itself, but it allows us to understand the fundamental presuppositions of all sciences, each of which studies only an aspect of reality. Arithmetic, for example, studies quantities, geometry space, and physics natural phenomena, but questions such as what is quantity, space, or natural phenomenon lie at their foundation and thus outside of their scope. These fundamental questions are the subject matter of first philosophy.

[7] *Meta Ta Physica* A.1: 981a26-33
[8] *Meta Ta Physika* A. ἔλ.1: 993b20-2
[9] *Meta Ta Physika* A.1: 981b22-5
[10] *Meta Ta Physika* A.1: 981b30-2, 982a36-7
[11] *Meta Ta Physika* Γ.1: 1003a20-5
[12] Since Aristotle was Plato's disciple, it makes sense to interpret his use of the term οὐσία before its explicit definition in book Δ of Meta Ta Physika, in terms of Plato's use of it, in whose work it denotes *being* (τὸ εἶναι, τὸ ὄν), existence, or the nature of a thing [15].

2.1.2.2. The term "Metaphysics"

The well-known term *metaphysics*, which is popularly thought to be the title of Aristotle's treatise on first philosophy, constitutes a wonderful example of the historical development of meaning. The word derives from the Greek words μετά (beyond, or after) and φυσικά (all that has to do with nature), but in the English language it was introduced by way of the Medieval Latin *metaphysica*, from the Medieval Greek *μεταφυσικὰ*. Aristotle discusses what he calls 'the science of the first principles and causes', or first philosophy, in a treatise known to us today as "Metaphysics" or "Meta ta Physika", but these terms are nowhere to be found in the fourteen books that the treatise comprises. The basis of Aristotle's texts which survive today is formed by an edition of his works published by Andronicus of Rhodes, who lived around 60 BCE, and was the head of the Peripatetic school at the time. It is thought that Andronicus has placed Aristotle's books on first philosophy right after another work entitled Physika (which comprises eight books), and called them "the books that come after the [books on] physics". Seemingly, this was misread by Latin scholiasts, who understood it to mean "the science of what is beyond the physical". However, once the name was given, the commentators naturally sought to find intrinsic reasons for its appropriateness. For instance, it was understood to mean "the science of the world beyond nature (φύσις)" that is, the science of the immaterial. Again, it was understood to refer to the chronological or pedagogical order among our philosophical studies, so that the "metaphysical sciences would mean, those that we study after having mastered the sciences that deal with the physical world" (St. Thomas Aquinas, "In Lib, Boeth. de Trin.", V, 1) [19].

2.1.3. Methodology

Natural philosophy, which begun as soon as the so-called first philosophers attempted to explain external reality on the basis of reason, can be viewed as the precursor of science. In their attempts, each of these thinkers posited one single principle which they claimed was enough to explain the multiplicity of things observed in the world. But apart from the multiplicity of things, it soon became obvious that their everlasting change and movement was also in need of a logical explanation, and thus subsequent thinkers found themselves in need of more than one single principle. Nevertheless, it was't until Aristotle that a specific method for pursuing theoretical knowledge was made explicit, and in this sense, we could say that Aristotle is the father of modern science.

2.1.3.1. The Scientific Method

Our knowledge of Aristotle's logic derives from six treatises that have been preserved by his hand, namely, the *Categories*, *On Interpretation*, *Prior Analytics*, *Posterior Analytics*, *Topics*, and *Sophistical Refutations*. These works were grouped together by the Peripatetics under the name *Organon*, meaning instrument or tool, which hints at an understanding of Aristotle's logic as the tool par excellence for the pursuit of scientific knowledge. Thus, we can think of *Organon* as providing a first formalization of the scientific method.

The *Organon*, treated as a single work, begins with the examination of the single terms which constitute categorical sentences. Then comes the study of the constitution of assertive sentences and the investigation of the relevant concept of contradiction. The next step is the presentation of the system through which assertive sentences can be combined with each other to form syllogisms, whose validity guarantees the deduction of conclusions from given premises salva veritate. This type of reasoning, that is, syllogistic reasoning, is then used for the establishment of a method of scientific proof which sets the conditions and determines the structure that ought to characterize any scientific project. Finally, some other forms of reasoning, which do not satisfy the strict specifications of the scientific demonstrative process, are also examined in Organon as useful for the formulation of convincing, or simply plausible, arguments, as well as for the diagnosis of sophisms or other factors which are likely to lead to absurdities and other forms of error[13].

The notion of syllogism is defined by Aristotle as follows:

> "A syllogism is speech (λόγος) in which, certain things having been supposed, something different from those supposed results of necessity because of their being so. "
>
> Aristotle, *Prior Analytics* I.2: 24b18-20

But deductions, which are arguments from the universal to the particular, are not the only species of argument recognized by Aristotle. Induction (or something very much like it), which is an argument from the particular to the universal, is also discussed in the *Posterior Analytics*. In fact, it is induction, or at any rate a cognitive process that moves from particulars to their generalizations, that is the basis of knowledge of the indemonstrable first principles of all sciences [4]. If we think of Aristotle's conception of knowledge in terms of a route whose ends are experience and theory, then induction leads from experience to theory, and deduction from theory to experience.

2.1.3.2. Dialectics

According to V.F. Asmus, an eminent Russian philosopher and historian whose area of expertise was Ancient Greek philosophy, Aristotle believed that the objective of knowledge is the faithful reflection of reality. But, at the same time, he recognized that this is not possible always and for all matters, and when it is, it cannot be immediately achieved. In a number of cases and issues we cannot acquire certain knowledge , that is, we cannot achieve undeniable possession of truth, but only *possible* knowledge, which requires its own special method. The latter cannot be the scientific method, but one that approximates, or prepares the ground for it. And, according to Asmus, Aristotle believed that this method is *dialectics*[14].

The Aristotelean notion of *dialectics* deviates from the Socratic and the Platonic ones. Asmus argues that, for Socrates, *dialectics* was the way to reliable knowledge, and consisted in the analysis of contradictions in the popular and philosophical understanding

[13] [2] Introduction pp.15-6
[14] [4]pp.96-97

of the issue under examination. For Plato, it was the way to know true *being,* and was identified with the practice of the mind in theorizing about incorporeal *ideas*, a theorizing that was based on the senses. To the contrary, Asmus claims that for Aristotle, *dialectics* was merely an enquiry, and not a dogmatic presentation of undeniable truths. The objective of Aristotelean *dialectics* was not truth - the correspondence of knowledge to its object -, but merely the absence of formal contradictions between the terms engaged in the issue under discussion, as well as between the positions articulated by the interlocutors. In this view, the value of *dialectics* lied in its ability to show the appropriate method of investigation of each particular matter. To this end, syllogisms were developed that could lead to an answer to the question that has been posed (not a reliable answer, but merely a possible one), and which were devoid of contradictions. At the same time, *dialectics* provided a method of investigation into the shortcomings of the answers given to the question under discussion[15].

As for the actual practice of dialectics, it appears that it took the form of an institutionalized contest in λόγος [16], which was systematically exercised during the classical era, especially in philosophical schools like the Academy and the Lyceum, and mainly for educational purposes[17]. The technical aspects of dialectics are treated by Aristotle in *Topics* and in *Sophistical Refutations*[18]. In general, a dialectical contest was performed between two contestants in a strictly determined framework of rules and restrictions. Usually the event took place in front of an audience, and in the presence of a referee.

One of the two interlocutors undertook the role of the replier (ἀποκρινόμενος). The latter was initially given a specific problem - which consisted in a disjunctive pair of contradictory assertive sentences of more or less the same force, or power- and had to choose one of its two parts. Then he had to defend the corresponding proposition, by replying to the questions of the other contestant, who undertook the role of the questioner (ἐρωτῶν). The latter asked 'yes' or 'no' questions, without having the right to express his own positions. The questioner won if he managed to compel his interlocutor to contradict himself (usually regarding his initial position), or if he managed to silence him by making him unable to answer, before the end of the game. Otherwise, the replier won.

2.1.3.3. The Aporetic Method

We have seen that, according to Asmus, the role of Aristotle's *dialectics* was to show the appropriate method of investigation of each specific issue. As for the questions pertaining to first philosophy, it appears that the method was shown to be the examination of the contradictions and the difficulties that can arise during their treatment. Aristotle called

[15] [4]p.97

[16] Λόγος meaning both reason and speech, or discourse

[17] *Topics* A.2: 101a27

[18] For a reconstruction of the history of dialectics before Aristotle see [**?**]pp. 44-55. For the view that Aristotle was the proponent par excellence of dialectics in the platonic Academy see [21]: passim. Finally, for the technical characteristics of the dialectical match see [22]: 277-283. On the other hand, Isocrates did not miss the chance to express his contempt for the educational value of such practices; see *Antidosis* 258-269, *Against the Sophists* 1-8, *Panathenaicus* 26-26, Helen 1-5, *Letters - To Alexander* 3.

this method of inquiry the *aporetic* (απορητική) method. The word *aporetic* derives from ἀπορία (difficulty, or perplexity), and signifies - in this case - the investigation of equivalent contradictions in the solution of a problem. According to Asmus, these contradictions, or ἀπορίες, can - in some cases - be contradictions that arose in the historical treatment of the issue under investigation. Aristotle discusses such ἀπορίες in the first book of *Meta Ta Physika*, as well as elsewhere (like in the first book of both *Physika* and *On the Soul*, where he traces the historical development of the issues under discussion [19]).

Furthermore, Asmus claims that Aristotle was led to prescribe the aporetic method as the method of first philosophy, due to his understanding of demonstrative knowledge. More specifically, according to Asmus, Aristotle believed that demonstrative science cannot prove the foundations, or principles, in which it is itself grounded, and that these principles are instead discovered by induction. Nevertheless, it is the aporetic method that is suggested and described in the *Topics,* while the inductive method of discovery of the principles is not discussed at all there. Asmus concludes, that the aporetic method is essentially an exercise of the mind that leads to the immediate contemplation - due to this preparation - of the fundamental presuppositions of science about the object of study. Finally, he remarks that at this point Aristotle's thought approaches the theories of Socrates and especially Plato regarding the heuristic and pedagogical importance of the *dialectics* of contradictions, as a means of preparation for acquiring knowledge of some truth that is not easily accessible [20].

2.2. The Nature of Real Beings

We have seen that, according to Asmus, the method of investigation that Aristotle prescribed for first philosophy was the aporetic method. Indeed, in the first book of his treatise on first philosophy, Aristotle examines the answers given by his predecessors to the question of the first principles and causes of everything, and points out the various contradictions that they entail. What follows is a brief, selective overview of this examination.

2.2.1. Pre-Aristotelean Thought and the Question of Being

2.2.1.1. Thales and Anaximenes

As we have already seen in the first chapter, the so-called first philosophers attempted to explain the world by assuming that everything in it is composed of a basic element, which remains permanent and stable, and is only transformed in relation to its properties[21]. For Thales, this basic element was water, and for Anaximenes air. In other words, they both attempted to explain reality on the basis of a material principle, namely, by assuming that there is an ultimate matter out of which everything in the world is composed.

[19] [4]pp.100-101
[20] [4]p.101
[21] *Meta Ta Physika* A.2: 983a8-22

But, as it turned out, a material principle could not - by itself - explain generation and decay, that is, the constant movement and change observed in the world of experience. A basic element like water, or air, can be seen as the base of this change, but it cannot explain it, because - by definition - it cannot transform itself[22]. According to Aristotle, this problem led some thinkers to suggest that everything is one and motionless, and that in reality, there is no change and movement in nature[23], while others, who were less willing to ignore the testimony of the senses, included in their explanations a principle of movement.

2.2.1.2. Anaxagoras and Empedocles

Contrary to Thales and Anaximenes, Anaxagoras and Empedocles both included in their accounts of reality a principle of movement. Anaxagoras believed that originally all things existed in infinitesimally small fragments of themselves, endless in number and inextricably combined in a chaotic mass. According to him, the world as we know it arose when the Mind brought order to this chaos by causing motion. For Anaxagoras, there exists a Mind of the whole of nature, in a way similar to the one in which a mind exists in particular creatures, and this Mind is the ultimate cause of the constant movement and change which characterizes the world of experience. But, according to Aristotle, Anaxagoras' principle of movement explains the birth of the world as a deus ex machina, and thus it cannot explain why the existence of anything is necessary[24].

Empedocles, on the other hand, believed that there are four material principles of beings, namely, four basic elements out of which everything in the world is composed: fire, water, earth, and air[25]. As for the principle of movement, he pointed out that in nature there seems to exist not only order and beauty, but also disorder and ugliness. Therefore, he suggested two principles of movement: friendship and ἔρις (discord, strife), of which the former would be the cause of the good, and the latter the cause of the bad. In fact, according to Aristotle, Empedocles was the first to hold as first principles the good and the bad[26]. But, again according to Aristotle, he also contradicted his own teachings, by stating, many times, that friendship divides, and discord connects, while according to their definition it should always be the other way round[27].

2.2.1.3. The Pythagoreans

Aristotle explains that some of the Pythagoreans believed that the principles of mathematics are also the principles of beings[28], and some others identified the latter with the following ten principles, each of which represents a basic antithesis: finite and infinite, one and many, right and left, male and female, static and moving, straight and curvy,

[22] *Meta Ta Physika* A.3: 984a21-4]
[23] Meta Ta *Physika* A.3: 984a32-984b1
[24] *Meta Ta Physika* A.4: 985a21-5
[25] *Meta Ta Physika* A.3: 984a8-11
[26] *Meta Ta Physika* A.4: 985a4-12
[27] *Meta Ta Physika* A.4: 985a25-9
[28] *Meta Ta Physika* A.4: 985b5-28

light and darkness, good and bad, equilateral and non-equilateral, and even and odd[29]. In their view, antitheses are the first principles of all things. Aristotle further argues that in both accounts the exact way in which all things are connected to the principles is not explained, but it seems that the latter are understood as the basic elements out of which everything is composed, with the difference that these basic elements are - for the Pythagoreans - many and incorporeal[30]. Thus, just as Thales and Anaximenes, it appears that the Pythagoreans essentially spoke only of the material principles of things.

2.2.1.4. Xenophanes and Parmenides

Xenophanes was, in Aristotle's view, the first who conceived of the universe as one, although he did not clarify anything about it; he ignored completely the issue of the two principles - material principle, and principle of movement - , but aiming at the whole of the universe, he pronounced that the one is God [31]. This is as much as Aristotle has to say about Xenophanes, whose opinion he excludes from his examination, because he considers him to be one of the most uncultivated philosophers [32].

Parmenides, on the other hand, is recognized as the only thinker among those who conceived of everything as one, who realized the need for a principle of movement, since he essentially accepted two principles[33]. By saying that "nor will the power of faith ever permit something to come into being from *mi eon*"[34], that is, "nor was there, is, or will be anything other than eon"[35], he essentially accepted that *that which is* is necessarily one, but - being unable to ignore the testimony of the senses - he judged that the concept of one corresponds to λόγος (which , in this case, seems to denote conceptual thought), and the concept of many to sense-perception (namely, to the way in which we experience *that which is*)[36]. Thus, it appears that he essentially admitted two principles, one that referred to pure reason, and one that referred to experience.

2.2.1.5. Plato

According to Aristotle, the Platonic theory of Ideas is influenced - to a great extent - by the Pythagorean doctrine, but also by the teachings of Heraclitus and Socrates. On the one hand, Heraclitus has observed that all the objects we perceive with our senses are constantly changing, and thus that there can be no science of such objects. On the other hand, Socrates sought knowledge of the universal in ethics - giving up the study of nature -, and was the first to focus exclusively on the specification of concepts. These views led Plato to the conclusion that the only things which can be conceptually described are ideas, because objects of experience undergo constant change and thus cannot be theoretically

[29] *Meta Ta Physika* A.5: 986a25-30
[30] *Meta Ta Physika* A.5: 986b5-9
[31] *Meta Ta Physika* A.5: 986b24-8
[32] *Meta Ta Physika* A.5: 986b29-31
[33] *Meta Ta Physika* A.3: 984b1-5
[34] Parmenides' poem Fr 8.12-3
[35] Parmenides' poem Fr 8.36
[36] *Meta Ta Physika A*.5: 986b.32-9

represented by concepts, which he thought to be stable and permanent in nature. This conclusion, in its turn, led him to conceive of ideas as being the only real things[37].

In Aristotle's view, Plato essentially accepted two first principles: one that referred to the mind, which he called οὐσία (or "what is" , or nature) of a thing, and a material one. In particular, he believed that the nature of any idea is the One, and its material principles are the ideas of Big and Small, because all ideas exist - as the only real things that they are - by virtue of the basic ideas of Big and Small, and according to their participation in the idea of One. As for the world of experience, Platonic ideas are the cause of the nature (οὐσία) of all things[38]. And although they could also be thought to constitute the material principles of all objects of experience - just as in the case of the Pythagorean first principles -, they could in no way be conceived as principles of movement. Plato's eternal and unchanging ideas were rather the principles of stillness and calmness.

2.2.1.6. Conclusions

At the end of this analysis, Aristotle concludes that his predecessors did not speak of any different causes than the ones discussed in his *Physika*[39], which should convince us of their completeness and correctness[40]. These causes are: οὐσία, matter, a principle of movement, and the principle of οὗ ἕνεκα, or *the good (ἀγαθόν),* that is, the purpose of every generation and decay, which is antithetical to the principle of movement[41] (and which is not discussed here). Regarding all thinkers up to Empedocles, who spoke only of (one or more) material principles, and (one or more) principles of movement, Aristotle states the following:

> "These men ... speak ambiguously and not clearly, behaving just like the untrained in battle. Because as the latter often achieve brave wounds, but not by skill, in a similar way they also seem not to be conscious of that of which they are speaking, given that they make little or no use of their principles. "
>
> Aristotle, *Meta Ta Physika* A.4: 985a16-21

Thus , in Aristotle's view, these men had not realized what it was that they were speaking of. In other words, the problem they were tackling was not clear to them, and thus both their reasoning and its outcome were bound to be at least equally unclear. As unexpected as this may seem, there is a science fiction story which expresses in a wonderful way Aristotle's point. Douglas Adam's comic science fiction series The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy begins with a group of hyper-intelligent pan-dimensional beings who decide to build a supercomputer, Deep Thought, designed to compute the Answer to the Ultimate Question of Life, The Universe, and Everything. After seven and a half million years,

[37] *Meta Ta Physika* A.6: 987a34-987b8
[38] *Meta Ta Physika* A.6: 988a8-15
[39] *Meta Ta Physika* A.7: 988a19-25
[40] *Meta Ta Physika* A.7: 988b17-20
[41] *Meta Ta Physika* A.3: 983a29-36

Deep Thought's computations finally produced an answer, and the answer was 42! But what was the ultimate question?

As a general conclusion, Aristotle states that all major thinkers up to Plato who tackled the problem of the first principles and causes, spoke about them vaguely; in some sense they did speak about them, but in some other they did not. Most importantly, none of them spoke clearly about οὐσία, and less than anyone the followers of the Platonic theory of ideas [42], [43]. But, for Aristotle, this is not at all surprising, because - as he says - first philosophy was back then in its cradle, and it could not speak properly, because it was still young[44].

2.2.2. The Philosophical Terms *Ὄν* and *Οὐσία*

2.2.2.1. Ὄν

It seems that Aristotle's examination of the opinions of his predecessors regarding the first principles and causes of everything, led him to conclude that at the heart of the problem lied the concept of *being* (ὄν). Because of the ambiguity of this term, the question of the first principles of all *beings* must have been - for pre-Aristotelean thinkers - as elusive as the ultimate question in Adams' novel. Indeed, how could they give a comprehensive and informative answer, if it was not clear to them what they meant by the term *being*? Which brings us to what Aristotle considers to be the fundamental question of first philosophy, that is, the question: "what is *being*?"[45]. This formulation of the problem seems to imply that to determine the first principles and causes of everything that is, we must first specify what we mean when we say that something is.

In book Δ of *Meta Ta Physica,* Aristotle examines the various ways in which the term ὄν is used, and concludes that it generally has three distinct meanings. Its primary meaning is that of real existence, namely, it is equivalent to the expression "that which exists in external reality". But such existence is possessed only by individual material things, and thus the latter are the only real beings. Nevertheless, the term ὄν is also used to denote things which refer, or belong, to real beings, although they are not such themselves. In the *Categories*, Aristotle classifies all things that can function as the subject, or the predicate, of an assertive proposition in ten categories[46]. According to him, they are all referred to as *beings* because the categories correspond to the different ways of expressing real *beings* : the category of οὐσία expresses what a thing is, while the rest of the categories express its quality, quantity, action, affection, place, time, etc. Furthermore, because real *beings* are also expressed in negative terms, things like the non-white are also said to be, because they refer, or belong, to something real. The third meaning of the term ὄν is that of truth and falsehood; in this sense, that which is is what

[42] *Meta Ta Physika* A.7: 988a37-9

[43] This negligence explains, according to Aristotle, why none of them considered *the good* to be a first cause, because it led them to think of it as an accident (*Meta Ta Physika* A.7: 988b15-6)

[44] [1]993a15-18

[45] *Meta Ta Physika* Z.1: 1028b3-4

[46] *Categories* Introduction p.18

is true, and that which is not what is false. [47]

2.2.2.2. Οὐσία

Apart from the concept of ὄν, another primary notion that required specification was that of οὐσία. Remember that, according to Aristotle's analysis, Parmenides and Plato both spoke of a principle of οὐσία, but in a very unclear way. In the fourth book of *Meta Ta Physika*, the use of the term οὐσία is also examined, and the conclusion is that it has two distinct meanings.

Οὐσία is primarily called, according to Aristotle, the simple bodies, namely, earth, fire, water , and air, and in general the (material) bodies and the living beings that have them as parts. This use of the term is characterized by the fact that whatever is called οὐσία in this way cannot be predicated of some subject, but is itself an ultimate subject. But the term is also used to denote that which, being inherent in something that is not an ultimate subject , is the cause of its being (εἶναι), like for example the soul in the animal. Aristotle points out that, in this sense, we call οὐσία the inherent parts of a thing that constrain and determine it, and which if they were to disappear, would make the whole disappear, just like the body would disappear if the surface disappeared (and the surface would disappear if the line disappeared). This is why, according to him, some claimed that the number is an οὐσία (Pythagoreans, Plato), thinking that if it were to disappear everything would cease to be, since they believed that everything is determined by numbers[48]. This second meaning of the term οὐσία is what Aristotle calls "τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι" (being what was it [to be]) of each thing, which is expressed through a definition (whose λόγος is a definition). Consequently, the term οὐσία, in its primary sense, denotes the ultimate subject, and in a secondary sense, the form of each being, conceived by verbal thought in terms of a definition[49].

2.2.2.3. Conclusion

In summary, Aristotle concludes the following, regarding the meaning of the philosophical terms ὄν and οὐσία: a thing is called ὄν in the primary sense, if it is a material individual thing, like a particular man, or a particular horse, or rock. When we say, in this sense, that something is, we mean that it is a real thing (it possesses real existence). In a secondary sense, everything that refers, or belongs, to something real is also called ὄν, although it does not itself have real existence. On the other hand, a thing is called οὐσία - in the primary sense - if it is an ultimate subject, namely, a thing that is what it is by itself and in itself, and not as a part of anything else. And because only material individual things have this property, οὐσία - in the primary sense - can only refer to real things. Thus, the primary meaning of οὐσία and the primary meaning of ὄν both depict real *beings*. But when we speak, or think, of any ὄν (real or not) we are confirming not

[47] *Meta Ta Physika* Δ.7: 1017a8-1017b10

[48] According to Aristotle, both the Pythagoreans and Plato claimed that the line is constituted of points, the surface of lines, and the body of surfaces. Thus, for them, points, lines and surfaces were all οὐσίες.

[49] *Meta Ta Physika* Δ.8: 1017b11-29

only that it is, but also that it is a particular something. The second meaning of οὐσία denotes exactly this, namely, the form of each being ("τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι") , whose λόγος is a definition.

2.2.3. *Οὐσία, Matter, and Form*

According to Aristotle, the primary meaning of οὐσία (ultimate subject) expresses in some sense matter, in some sense form, and in some third sense the composite of matter and form that is every material individual thing[50]. And the question rises: what is the connection between οὐσία, matter and form?

Let us first consider the possibility that οὐσία is matter, in the sense of the absolutely undetermined subject. Aristotle argues that this cannot be the case, because absolute matter - which is neither an individual object, nor a quantity, nor any other aspect of a real thing - lacks what seems to be the ultimate subject's fundamental characteristic, namely, self-existent individuality[51]. Let us now consider the possibility that οὐσία is "τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι", or form, of a real thing. Could we say that οὐσία is form? According to Aristotle we can't, because the form of each thing is in some sense the same as the thing itself, but in another sense it is not [52].

Thus, it seems that οὐσία can be neither absolute matter, nor absolute form. Instead, it depicts matter and form in the way in which they are presented in experience, namely, as constitutive parts of any real thing. In other words, the two meanings of οὐσία highlight the two components of any real thing, its matter and its form, and no matter if they are treated separately or together, they always hint at the composite of matter and form outside of which they possess no real existence. Finally, it seems that these results underlie Aristotle's claim that the fundamental question of first philosophy, namely, "what is *being*", is essentially equivalent to the question " what is οὐσία"[53].

2.2.3.1. Absolute Matter and Absolute Form

Aristotle points out that both absolute matter and absolute form are not subject to generation and decay, contrary to material individual things[54]. For him, this means that they do not possess real existence, like individual material things do. Absolute matter is absolutely undetermined, and thus there is nothing we can say, or think, about it; it exists only potentially, because although it is not a thing itself, it has the potential of becoming any particular, by realizing any form. Absolute form, on the other hand, is what determines matter, and it can be presented separately from it. Thus, it exists in a different way than absolute matter does, namely, it exists actually. This type of existence is much more difficult to grasp. Aristotle attempts to explain it by comparing the relation between existing actually and existing potentially to the relation between a builder who is currently building, and someone who is capable of building, or the relation

[50] *Meta Ta Physika* Z.3: 1028b43-1029a4
[51] *Meta Ta Physika* Z.3: 1029a23-4, 1029a30-3
[52] *Meta Ta Physika* Z.6: 1032a12-3
[53] *Meta Ta Physika* Z.1: 1028b3-5
[54] [1]H:1043b19-22

between someone who is seeing, and someone who has his eyes closed, but is still capable of seeing. In general, Aristotle concludes that absolute matter and absolute form have a status of existence which is different from that of real things, and different from each other. [55]

Thus, it appears that, for Aristotle, absolute matter and absolute form do not possess real existence; matter exists potentially, and form actually. To the contrary, real existence requires the combination of the potential existence of matter with the actual existence of form. Consequently, in order to understand real existence, we must explain the cause of unity, because every real thing constitutes a unity, and in some sense the potential and the actual also constitute a unity[56]. But, as Aristotle points out, matter and form are two aspects of one and the same thing, which means that their unity is necessary by definition[57].Therefore, only a principle of movement from the potential to the real could be thought of as a further cause of this unity, and thus as the ultimate cause of real existence[58].

2.2.3.2. Conclusion

The above analysis of the connection between οὐσία, matter, and form, leads us to the following conclusion regarding Aristotle's account of real existence: in his view, only material individual things are real, which - as is obvious from the form of our talk - we conceive as composites of matter and form (take , for example, the expression "a copper sphere"). Consequently, when the term οὐσία is used to characterize a real thing, it can refer either to its matter, being a particular thing because of the form it realizes, or to its form, which is also a particular thing because it is realized in matter, or to the composite of these two with which it is identified.

[55] *Meta Ta Physika* H.6: 1045a26-8
[56] *Meta Ta Physika* H.6: 1045b23-4
[57] *Meta Ta Physika* H.6: 1045b20-2
[58] *Meta Ta Physika* H.6: 1045b25-6

3. Thomas Aquinas and the Hierarchy of Real Beings

The Hellenistic era of ancient Greek history ends almost three hundred years after the death of Aristotle, with the annexation of Egypt around 30 BCE. The decline of the Roman Empire, and the emergence of christianity in the fifth century CE, mark the end of classical antiquity, and the beginning of the Middle Ages of European history. The Classical period (5th - 4th century BCE) contributed to the problem of explaining reality Aristotle's theory of matter and form. No less than sixteen centuries latter, during the twelfth century CE, after the East-West Schism of 1054 which formally separated the Christian church into Western Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, at a time when the crusades were raging, scholasticism contributed to the same problem Thomas Aquinas' theory of essence and existence.

Intellectual life in the High Middle Ages was dominated by scholasticism, the most famous representative of which is Thomas Aquinas. With his work, he supported the Roman Catholic doctrines through secular study, reason, and logic, leading the move of the Catholic Church away from Platonism and towards Aristotelianism. In his book *De Ente et Essentia,* which is thought to be his most personal work, Thomas defends the fundamental doctrine of the existence of God, on the basis of an analysis of the concept of *being* similar to the Aristotelean one. And although many times in his treatise Thomas invokes Aristotle -or the Philosopher, as he calls him - to support his ideas, his account of reality is - in fact - much more in line with the Platonic one. In particular, Thomas argues for a hierarchy of real beings; God is put at the top of this hierarchy, and is thought to be existence itself, in a rather literal way. Then come immaterial beings, which form a sub-hierarchy, and finally individual material things. Most importantly, God is thought to be the cause of his own existence, while all other real beings owe their existence to him.[1] Consequently, metaphysics is subsumed by theology, since its investigations into the nature of real existence reveal that its ultimate cause is none other than God-in-himself.

3.1. Preliminary Considerations

3.1.1. Life and Works

Thomas Aquinas was born in 1225, and at the age of five he entered at a Benedictine abbey, from where he was later sent in the University of Naples. There he became a

[1] Remember that Plato attributes the existence of material individual things to their participation in Ideas.

Dominican - to the disappointment of his family - and eventually went north to study (first briefly at Paris, and then at Cologne), where his interest for Aristotle was fostered. He completed his studies in Paris, and for three years he occupied one of the Dominican chairs in the Faculty of Theology. After that, he spent ten years in Italy with the mobile papal court at various Dominican houses, and eventually in Rome. Then he was called back to Paris, and finally he was assigned to Naples. In 1274, on his way to the Council of Lyon, he fell ill and died on March 7 in the Cistercian abbey at Fossanova.

Thomas wrote many works, the most famous of which are probably the *Summa Theologica* and the *Summa contra Gentiles. De Ente et Essentia* dates from his first stay at Paris, and is considered to be his most personal work. His writing continued until 1273, when he had a mystical experience after which he appears to have said "All that I have written seems like straw compared to what has now been revealed to me", and never wrote another line. It is widely known that Thomas was canonized by the Catholic Church, but fewer are familiar with the fact that in 1277 several tenets of Aquinas were included in an aggregate of 219 propositions which were condemned by a commission appointed by the Bishop of Paris [5].

3.1.2. Philosophy and Science

Like Aristotle, Thomas distinguishes between theoretical and practical knowledge, as well as between theoretical and practical sciences. For him ethics, economics and politics are the practical sciences, while physics, mathematics and metaphysics are the theoretical sciences. The purpose of the former is the guidance of an activity other than thinking - e.g. choosing in the case of moral action, or some product in the case of art -, while the purpose of the later is truth. According to him , just as for Aristotle, theoretical sciences seek not to change, but to understand the world by explaining the *why* of things.

Nevertheless, contrary to Aristotle, Thomas identifies first philosophy, or metaphysics, with theology, based on his view that God is the first cause of everything, which he establishes in his work *De Ente et Essentia*. And since the objective of first philosophy, according to Aristotle, is to determine and describe the first principles and causes of all things, and Thomas concludes that ultimately there is only one cause, and this is God, first philosophy is reduced to an extended effort to examine reality in order to come to knowledge of the first cause. And given the principle that we name things as we know them[2], this can be regarded as a prolonged effort to develop the language with which we speak of God[5].

3.2. Substance, Essence, and Existence

We have mentioned above that Thomas' work led the move of the Catholic Church away from Platonism and towards Aristotelianism. But this move did not consist in a change of ideology; what actually changed was the mode of presentation of the same indispensable doctrines. *De Ente et Essentia,* for example, seems to have a profound goal: to combine

[2] *Summa theologiae* Ia.13.1

the Aristotelean conception of reality in terms of matter and form with a conception of God as the source and the cause of all there is, namely, with the idea of a creator God. But we can also approach this work as a treatise on metaphysics, which offers an explanation of reality in some ways similar, and in some ways very different, from the Aristotelean one. The key philosophical terms in Thomas' account are *substance, essence, existence, potentiality* and *actuality,* just as *ὅν, οὐσία, real existence, potential existence* and *actual existence* are the key philosophical terms in Aristotle's account. But where Aristotle specifies the meaning of these notions by a systematic analysis of the different uses of the terms *ὅν* and *ουσία* , Aquinas bases his account on a carefully selected set of premises taken mainly from Aristotle, Avicenna, Alexander of Aphrodisias, and Boethius.

3.2.1. Thomas' Conception of Real Existence

In the beginning of *De Ente et Essentia*, Thomas presents Aristotle as having said that whatever is expressed through the category of *οὐσία* possesses real existence. In particular, he claims that Aristotle discerns two distinct meanings of the term being : "In one way, it is used à propos of what is divided into the ten genera; in another way, it is used to signify the truth of propositions. ... In the first way, however, only what posits something in reality can be called a being"[3]. And according to Thomas, only what is expressed though the category of οὐσία posits something in reality. Thus, he concludes, ideas and material individual things are both real beings[4].

Nevertheless, we have seen that Aristotle discerns three distinct meanings of the term being, and argues that the term is used to denote everything that is expressed through the categories, only in a secondary sense. To the contrary, according to him, the term *being* is primarily used to denote material individual things, which indicates that they are the only real beings. Additionally, by examining the different uses of the term *οὐσία*, Aristotle concludes that each material individual thing is said to be an *οὐσία,* in the sense of the ultimate subject , and have an ουσία, in the sense of a definition that depicts it as a composite of matter and form. Thus it appears that, contrary to what Thomas claims, for Aristotle, what is called or thought to be an *οὐσία* - in the sense of (absolute) form - does not possess real existence.

In this way, by seemingly invoking Aristotle, Thomas argues that everything that is expressed through the category of *οὐσία* posits something in reality. In other words, he argues that both material and immaterial things possess real existence. But this view of reality is, in fact, contrary to the interpretation of the corresponding Aristotelean view followed here, according to which only individual material things are real. Thus, it is obvious already from the beginning of *De Ente et Essentia*, that Thomas' account of reality is fundamentally different from the Aristotelean one.

[3] *De Ente Et Essentia* 4
[4] *De Ente Et Essentia* 5

3.2.2. Substance, Essence, and Existence

Thomas' view that reality consists of both material and immaterial beings, is further expressed in the fact that he collectively calls them *substances*[5]. A *substance* is, in this sense, a thing that subsists in reality, or has real existence. Thus, material things are said to be composed substances, and immaterial things - God, intelligences , and souls[6] - are said to be separated substances. These expressions essentially reflect the view that although they are both real things, they differ in terms of *essence*; "the *essence* of a composed substance is not form alone, but includes form and matter", while "the *essence* of a simple substance is form alone"[7]. Hence, although material and immaterial things are thought to share the same reality, they are also thought to be different, in what seems to be an equally fundamental way[8].

The notion of *essence*, introduced by Thomas, can be seen as in some sense similar to, and in some other sense different from, the Aristotelean notion of *οὐσία*. In fact, it seems that Thomas' *substance* and *essence* correspond to the primary and secondary meanings of the Aristotelean *οὐσία* respectively. According to Thomas, any real thing is a *substance,* while *essence* "is what is signified by the definition of a real thing"[9] (which brings to mind Aristotle's *τί ἦν εἶναι*, whose λόγος is a definition). And since - in his view - both material and immaterial things possess real existence, they are all *substances*. To the contrary, for Aristotle, all things have an *οὐσία* - in the sense of *essence* -, but only (individual) material things are *οὐσίες* - in the sense of *substance* - (that is, only they possess real existence). Thus in his view, any (individual) material thing both is a *substance* and has an *essence*, while immaterial things only have an *essence*. For Thomas, on the other hand, both material and immaterial things are *substances* and have *essences*, but only immaterial substances can be identified with their *essence*[10]. The reason for this is that "the essence of a simple thing, which is its form, cannot be signified except as a whole, since nothing is there besides the form as receiving the form. ... the quiddity of a simple thing is the simple thing itself, because there is nothing other receiving the quiddity..."[11] Thus, for Thomas, the ways in which the *essence* of a real thing can be predicated of it reveal if it is a composed , or a simple , substance (that is, it reveals its *essence*), in a similar way as for Aristotle, the ways in which a thing's *οὐσία* can be predicated of it reveals if it exists really or actually (that is, it reveals its type of existence).

Because Thomas accepts that material and immaterial beings are both real, he cannot derive existence from *essence* as Aristotle does, when he argues that only the things whose *essence* includes both matter and form are real. Instead, he must explain how it is possible for material and immaterial things, which are fundamentally different in terms of essence, to possess the same type of existence. Evidently, such an account would have to

[5] *De Ente Et Essentia* 13
[6] *De Ente Et Essentia* 66
[7] *De Ente Et Essentia* 73
[8] Remember that, for Aristotle, this difference indicates that they do not share the same reality.
[9] *De Ente Et Essentia* 16
[10] *De Ente Et Essentia* 74
[11] *De Ente Et Essentia* 74

explain *essence* and existence in such a way as to allow for things which are *essentially* different to exist in the same way. And as we will see, this is exactly what Thomas' masterly account does: it shows that a thing's *essence,* or nature*,* is really - and not just conceptually - other than its *existence*, which justifies his conception of reality as consisting of both material and immaterial beings.

3.2.3. Essence and Existence

Thomas considers separated substances to be immaterial beings, further distinguished into intellectual substances - souls and intelligences -, and God[12]. Contrary to composed substances, whose essence includes both matter and form[13], intellectual substances only have form [14]. But, according to Thomas, their form cannot also be the cause of their existence, because then something would be its own cause, which he considers to be impossible[15]. Thus, each substance (either intellectual or composed) must owe its existence to some other thing. This , of course, creates an infinite regress, unless we accept that there is one single thing that exists by virtue of itself. Thomas concludes that there must be some thing which is the cause of existence of all other substances, and that this thing must itself be the cause of its own existence[16].

According to Thomas, existence is other that essence because every essence can be understood without anything being understood about its existence[17]. It seems that the latter observation led Thomas to conclude that a thing's characterization in terms of essence contains no information regarding its existence. Based on this idea, and his previously mentioned conviction according to which it is impossible for a thing to be the cause of its own existence, Thomas argues that essence and existence are not just conceptually, but really distinct. In particular, he argues that a thing is a substance, or subsists in reality, not in virtue of its nature, or essence, but because its essence receives existence from some other thing. Which means that real beings are not composites of *matter* and *form*, as Aristotle thought, but composites of *essence* and *existence*. And because attributing each thing's existence to some other thing would otherwise lead to an infinite regress, Thomas has no choice but to accept that there is one single thing that is itself the cause of its own existence. In other words, he has no choice but to accept the existence of God, as the creator of all things[18].

By distinguishing in this way between essence and existence, Thomas shows that although material and immaterial beings are *essentially* different, they all possess real existence, because it is not in their nature to subsist in reality. Instead, they are real because they have received - in their essence - existence from God[19]. Thus, according to Thomas, all real beings, or substances -except God-, are composites of essence and

[12] *De Ente Et Essentia* 66
[13] *De Ente Et Essentia* 14
[14] *De Ente Et Essentia* 68
[15] *De Ente Et Essentia* 80
[16] *De Ente Et Essentia* 80
[17] *De Ente Et Essentia* 77
[18] *De Ente Et Essentia* 80
[19] *De Ente Et Essentia* 83

existence, in a similar way as for Aristotle all real things are composites of matter and form. This distinction between essence and existence is , according to Gilson, what makes Thomas' account superior to the Aristotelean one [7]. More specifically, Gilson argues that Aristotle failed to understand the true nature of reality because he remained confined to the conception of beings in terms of matter and form. But as Thomas showed, this way of conceiving of beings does not reflect their existential status but merely their essence (or nature), because essence and existence are not just conceptually, but really, distinct.

3.3. The Hierarchy of Real Beings

3.3.1. The Pure Actuality of God

According to Thomas, God is the only substance whose essence is his existence[20]. This, of course, means that God, as a real being, cannot be characterized in terms of matter and form. For Aristotle, the only thing that is absolutely indeterminate is absolute matter. And since real beings are -for him - composites of matter and form, and not composites of *essence* and existence, he draws the conclusion that absolute matter is not real. For Thomas, on the other hand, God possesses the highest grade of real existence, because - in his framework - the fact that he is absolutely indeterminate means that he is himself the cause of his own existence. Think of it in this way: all separated substances are forms which have received existence from without. God has no form but he exists, which means that there is nothing there to receive his existence. Thus, he is the cause of his own existence.

Although Thomas' God resembles closely Aristotle's absolute matter, Thomas uses the expression *pure actuality* to characterize his existence[21]. But in order to understand the meaning of this expression, we must first become familiar with the way in which Thomas uses the notions of potency and act. Remember that, in his view, all substances are composites of essence and existence. This is further explained as follows: the form of a substance initially receives in it a godly act of existence. In the case of intellectual substances, this is how they come into existence. In the case of composed substances, the composite of form and existence is further received in matter. And the fact that both kinds are composites of essence and existence shows that they are both created real beings.

Intellectual substances are distinguished by their grades of potency and act[22]. More specifically, Thomas argues that even intellectual substances are not so utterly simple as to be pure act, like God[23]. Thus God, who is the only simple substance, is said to be pure act. To the contrary, intellectual substances, which are composed of form and an act of existence, contain both potency and act in them. Their potency is essentially

[20] *De Ente Et Essentia* 89
[21] *De Ente Et Essentia* 96
[22] *De Ente Et Essentia* 84
[23] *De Ente Et Essentia* 76

the result of the addition of form to an act of existence[24]. Furthermore, they do not all contain the same amounts of potency and act; the more act and less potency there is in them, the more their existence resembles God's existence[25]. Composed substances, on the other hand, contain even more potency, because of the addition of matter to the composite of form and existence[26].

In this way, Thomas portrays real existence in terms of a scale, ranging from potentiality to pure actuality. According to this view, pure actuality is the highest form of real existence, because it is understood as self-existence. The only thing that exists in this way is shown to be God, who is described as existence alone, or pure act, or uncreated cause. But it seems that, in essence, God is understood in this framework as the only thing which exists without having either form, or matter.

3.3.2. Intellectual and Composed Substances

All substances, except God, are thought to be mixtures of potency and act, because they are not self-existent. To the contrary, they acquire their existence from God, and thus they are said to be created substances. This is reflected in the fact that they are not existence alone, but composites of essence and existence. Finally, created substances are divided into intellectual and composed. Intellectual substances stand closer to God in the existential scale because they lack matter, and thus they contain less potency than composed substances. But they also differ among them in terms of the potency and act that they contain; the more act and less potency there is in them, the highest they stand in the existential scale. This grading has its termination in the human soul, which holds the lowest grade among intellectual substances[27].

Because the human soul has, according to Thomas, more potency than any other intelligible substance, it is so close to material things, that a material thing is drawn to it to share its existence. This union of soul and body gives rise to a composed substance which exist as a material individual thing, but whose existence is essentially the soul's existence[28], because it is form that receives existence, and not matter. In a similar way, each composed substance is a composite of form and a godly act of existence, which has further been composed with a material body. Matter adds even more potency, and thus composed substances lie at the bottom of the hierarchy of real beings. Among the forms of composed substances there also exists an order and a grading, down to the first forms of the elements, which are the closest to matter. According to Thomas, the latter are so close to matter that they operate only according to the active and passive qualities, and the other sorts of things, which are required as the means by which matter is disposed for the receiving of form[29].

[24] *De Ente Et Essentia* 81
[25] *De Ente Et Essentia* 84
[26] *De Ente Et Essentia* 87
[27] *De Ente Et Essentia* 85
[28] *De Ente Et Essentia* 86
[29] *De Ente Et Essentia* 87

3.3.3. Conclusion

In the second chapter, we have seen that - for Aristotle -only material individual things are real, while everything else possess either actual, or potential existence. But in Thomas' account, both material and immaterial beings are thought to possess real existence, which ranges from potentiality to pure actuality. In other words, Thomas portrays reality as consisting in a hierarchy of real beings. God, intellectual substances, and composed substances are all real - in the sense that they all subsist in reality. But they do not all possess the same grade of real existence. God is thought to be *pure actuality,* and thus lies at the top of the hierarchy. Immediately afterwards come intellectual substances, which constitute mixtures of potency and act; the more act and less potency there is in them, the closer they are to the top of the hierarchy. Finally come composed substances, which have even more potency and are thus closer to the bottom of the hierarchy.

In conclusion, it seems that Thomas' notion of pure actuality is , in some sense , similar to the Aristotelean notion of potential existence, and in some other sense, similar to the Aristotelean notion of actual existence. More specifically, in terms of appearance, it resembles the latter. But in terms of meaning, pure actuality depicts the existence of God, who has neither matter nor form. And, for Aristotle, what has neither matter nor form -absolute matter - is thought to possess potential existence. Thus, it appears that where Aristotle conceives of the absolutely indeterminate not as a real thing, but as that which has the potential of becoming any real thing by realizing any determination, Thomas conceives of it as the most real thing, because he conceives of it as that which cannot, and does not need to, accept any determination (and thus is existence alone).

3.4. Essence, Existence, and Modern Philosophy

Hitherto, we have presented in some detail Aristotle's and Aquinas' ontologies, and we have seen that although the latter is heavily based on the former, it nevertheless suggests a radically different account of reality. Aquinas made God the cornerstone of his world system, based on what seems to be an interpretation of Aristotle devised to fit this task. To this end, he first substituted the two meanings of οὐσία discerned by Aristotle with the notions of substance and essence, and then separated essence from existence; in this way he managed to present God as the creator of everything, while at the same time keeping Aristotle's analysis of being in terms of matter and form intact.

If we abstract away from the technical details of his account, we will see that what Aquinas essentially did was to partially deny Aristotle's implicit assumption that the existence, or reality, of things can be derived from their nature (or essence, or οὐσία). This assumption is of great significance, because it creates a link between reason and reality which is indispensable to any attempt at explaining the world on the basis of reason. The Aristotelean οὐσία has to do with the way in which we think and speak of beings. To the contrary, the existence - or reality - of things is independent of reason. Thus, if the essence of things can tell us nothing about their existence, then there is no way for man to understand reality on the basis of reason.

Nevertheless, Thomas did not fully separate essence from existence, and thus he did

not destroy this crucial link between reason and reality. If he had done so, he would not be able to provide rational arguments for the existence of God, and his whole endeavor would have collapsed. By considering God to be the only being whose essence is his existence, Thomas maintained the view that reality could be understood on the basis of reason, by allowing the latter to permeate the reality of God. God's existence can be derived from his nature, because he is the only being whose essence is his existence. But since essence and existence are , in the case of all other beings, separate, reality is not anymore to be understood in the context of metaphysics, but in the context of theology.

Consequently, in Aquinas' framework theology acquires the status of first philosophy. Most importantly, the fundamental question of first philosophy is not - any more - the question of being, but the question of existence. The question of being ceases to refer to the existence of things; instead, it is understood as a mere inquiry into their nature, or essence, which remains the task of metaphysics, and - subsequently - the sciences. In this way, the question of existence emerges, and since the only being whose existence can be grasped by reason is God (because his essence is his existence) , the question of existence becomes the fundamental question of theology.

According to Hannah Arendt [8], the *raison d'être* of modern philosophy, namely, existential philosophy, is the complete separation of essence and existence that was the consequence of the work of Kant. In her view, Kant was the one who completely destroyed the link between reason and reality that, as we have seen, Thomas managed to retain by assuming God to be the only being whose essence is his existence: "By his analysis of synthetic propositions, Kant proved that in any proposition that makes a statement about reality, we reach beyond the concept (the essentia) of any given thing." ([8] p.168) In other words, Kant showed that what something is cannot explain that it is, or that "the what will never be able to explain the That..." ([8] p.167). This realization marks, in Arendt's view, the end of traditional ontology, and the beginning of modern existential philosophy.

All the so-called schools of modern philosophy attempted, according to Arendt, to somehow re-establish the ancient unity between essence and existence that was destroyed by Kant. Heidegger , in particular, attempted to do so by claiming that he had found a being in whom essence and existence are identical, just as Aquinas has done. Only that in Heidegger's case this being was not God, but man, and when he claimed that his essence is his existence, he meant that man consists in the fact that he is[30]. This is what, according to Arendt, Heidegger calls "the ontical ontological pre-eminent rank of Dasein", but the obscure formulation should not prevent us from realizing that its acceptance puts man in the exact same place that God had occupied in Aquinas' ontology.

In conclusion, it seems that Aquinas' ontology is far from irrelevant to modern philosophy and its concerns. Arendt's analysis of existential philosophy suggests that the connection between essence and existence - which underlies Aristotle's ontology and which Aquinas could not fully dispense with - establishes a link between reason and reality without which philosophy, in the traditional sense, is impossible. What is at stake here

[30]In other words, man's only essential property is his existence.

is not the belief in a creator God, but the belief in the possibility of understanding reality on the basis of reason. The complete separation of essence and existence - performed by Kant - marks the end of this belief, and the beginning of modern philosophy which has been trying to somehow restore it ever since. But this does not mean that philosophy is essentially back to where it started, namely, before Thales' bold claim that reality can be understood on the basis of reason. To the contrary, it appears that philosophy has made so much progress, that it has finally realized the heart of the problem that is the connection between reason and reality. Where initially it only implicitly assumed that there is such a connection, modern philosophy must now explicitly establish it.

Appendices

A. Parmenides' Poem - Greek Text

Fragment 1

ἵπποι ταί με φέρουσιν, ὅσον τ᾽επὶ θυμὸς ἱκάνοι,
πέμπον, ἐπεί μ᾽ἐς ὁδὸν βῆσαν πολύφημον ἄγουσαι
δαίμονος, ἥ κατὰ πάντ᾽ἄστη φέρει εἰδότα φῶτα·
τῇ φερόμην· τῇ γάρ με πολύφραστοι φέρον ἵπποι
ἅρμα τιταίνουσαι κοῦραι δ᾽ὁδὸν ἡγεμόνευον.
ἄξων δ᾽ἐν χνοίῃσιν ἴει σύριγγος αὐτήν
αἰθόμενος (δοιοῖς γάρ ἐπείγετο δινωτοῖσιν
κύκλοις ἀμφοτέρωθεν), ὅτε σπερχοίατο πέμπειν
Ἡλιάδες κοῦραι, προλιποῦσαι δώματα Νυκτός,
εἰς φάος, ὠσάμεναι κράτων ἄπο χερσί καλύπτρας.
ἔνθα πύλαι Νυκτός τε καὶ Ἤματος εἰσι κελεύθων,
καί σφας ὑπέρυθρον ἀμφὶς ἔχει καὶ λάινος οὐδός·
αὐταί δ᾽αἰθέριαι πλῆνται μεγάλοισι θυρέτροις·
τῶν δέ Δίκη πολύποινος ἔχει κληῖδας ἀμοιβούς
τὴν δή παρφάμεναι κοῦραι μαλακοῖσι λόγοισιν
πεῖσαν ἐπιφραδέως, ὥς σφιν βαλανωτόν ὀχῆα
ἀπτερέως ὤσειε πυλέων ἄπό· ταὶ δὲ θυρέτρων
χάσμ᾽ἀχανὲς ποίησαν ἀναπτάμεναι πολυχάλκους
ἄξονας ἐν σύριγξιν ἀμοιβαδὸν εἰλίξασαι
γόμφοις καὶ περόνῃσιν ἀρηρότε· τῇ ῥα δι᾽αὐτέων
ἰθὺς ἔχον κοῦραι κατ᾽ἁμαξιτὸν ἅρμα καί ἵππους.
καί με θεὰ πρόφρων ὑπεδέξατο χεῖρα δὲ χειρί
δεξιτερὴν ἕλεν, ὧδε δ᾽ἔπος φάτο καί με προσηύδα·
ὦ κοῦρ᾽ἀθανάτοισι συνάορος ἡνιόχοισιν,
ἵπποις ταί σε φέρουσιω ἱκάνων ἡμέτερον δῶ,
χαῖρ᾽ἐπεὶ οὔτι σε μοῖρα κακή προὔπεμπε νέεσθαι
την δ᾽ὁδόν (ἦ γάρ ἀπ᾽ἀνθρώπων ἐκτὸς πάτου ἐστίν),
ἀλλά θέμις τε δίκη τε. χρεὼ δὲ σε πάντα πυθέσθαι
ἠμὲν Ἀληθείης εὐκυκλέος ἀτρεμὲς ἦτορ
ἠδὲ βροτῶν δόξας ταῖς οὐκ ἔνι πίστις ἀληθής.
ἀλλ᾽ἔμπης καὶ ταῦτα μαθήσεαι, ὡς τὰ δοκοῦντα
χρῆν δοκίμως εἶναι διὰ παντός πάντα περῶντα.

Fragment 2

εἰ δ᾽ἄγ᾽ἐγὼν ἐρέω, κόμισαι δὲ σὺ μῦθον ἀκούσας,

αἵπερ ὁδοὶ μοῦναι διζήσιος εἰσι νοῆσαι·
ἡ μὲν ὅπως ἔστιν τε καὶ ὡς οὐκ ἔστι μὴ εἶναι,
Πειθοῦς ἐστι κέλευθος (Ἀληθείῃ γὰρ ὀπηδεῖ),
ἡ δ᾽ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν τε καὶ ὡς χρεὼν ἐστι μὴ εἶναι,
τὴν δή τοι φράζω παναπευθέα ἔμμεν ἀταρπόν·
οὔτε γὰρ ἂν γνοίης τό γε μὴ ἐὸν (οὐ γὰρ ἀνυστόν)
οὔτε φράσαις.

Fragment 3

... τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι.

Fragment 4

λεῦσσε δ᾽ὅμως ἀπεόντα νόῳ παρεόντα βεβαίως·
οὐ γὰρ ἀποτμήξει τὸ ἐὸν τοῦ ἐόντος ἔχεσθαι
οὔτε σκιδνάμενον πάντῃ πάντως κατὰ κόσμον
οὔτε συνιστάμενον.

Fragment 5

ξυνόν δέ μοί ἐστιν,
ὁππόθεν ἄρξωμαι· τόθι γὰρ πάλιν ἵξομαι αὖθις.

Fragment 6

χρὴ τὸ λέγειν τε νοεῖν τ᾽ἐὸν ἔμμεναι· ἔστι γὰρ εἶναι,
μηδὲν δ᾽οὐκ ἔστιν τὰ σ᾽ἐγὼ φράζεσθαι ἄνωγα.
πρώτης γάρ σ᾽ἀφ᾽ὁδοῦ ταύτης διζήσιος <εἴργω>
αὐτὰρ ἔπειτ᾽ἀπὸ τῆς, ἣν δὴ βροτοί εἰδότες οὐδέν
πλάττονται, δίκρανοι· ἀμηχανίη γὰρ ἐν αὐτῶν
στήθεσιν ἰθύνει πλακτὸν νόον· οἱ δὲ φοροῦνται
κωφοὶ ὁμῶς τυφλοί τε, τεθηπότες, ἄκριτα φῦλα,
οἷς τὸ ᾽ελειν τε καὶ οὐκ εἶναι ταὐτὸν νενόμισται
κοὐ ταὐτόν, πάντων δὲ παλίντροπός ἐστι κέλευθος.

Fragment 7

οὐ γὰρ μήποτε τοῦτο δαμῇ εἶναι μὴ ἐόντα·
ἀλλὰ σὺ τῆσδ᾽ἀφ᾽ὁδοῦ διζήσιος εἶργε νόημα
μηδέ σ᾽ἔθος πολύπειρον ὁδὸν κατὰ τήνδε βιάσθω,
νωμᾶν ἄσκοπον ὄμμα καὶ ἠχήεσσαν ἀκουήν
καὶ γλῶσσαν, κρῖναι δὲ λόγῳ πολύδηριν ἔλεγχον
ἐξ᾽ἐμέθεν ῥηθέντα.

Fragment 8

λείπεται ὡς ἔστιν· ταύτῃ δ᾽ἐπὶ σήματ᾽ἔασι
πολλὰ μάλ᾽, ὡς ἀγένητον ἐὸν καὶ ἀνώλεθον ἐστιν
ἔστι γὰρ οὐλομελές τε καὶ ἀτρεμὲς ἠδ᾽ἀτέλεστον·
οὐδέ ποτ᾽ἦν οὐδ᾽ἔσται ἐπεὶ νῦν ἔστιν ὁμοῦ πᾶν,
ἕν, συνεχές· τίνα γὰρ γένναν διζήσεαι αὐτοῦ;
πῇ πόθεν αὐξηθέν; οὐδ᾽ἐκ μὴ ἐόντος ἐάσσω
φάσθαι σ᾽οὐδὲ νοεῖν· οὐ γὰρ φατὸν οὐδὲ νοητόν
ἔστιν ὅπως οὐκ ἔστι. τί δ᾽ἄν μιν καὶ χρέος ὦρσεν
ὕστερον ἢ πρόσθεν, τοῦ μηδενός ἀρξάμενον, φῦν;
οὕτως ἢ πάμπαν πελέναι χρεών ἐστιν ἢ οὐχί.
οὐδέ ποτ᾽ἐκ μὴ ἐόντος ἐφήσει πίστιος ἰσχύς
γίγνεσθαί τι παρ᾽αὐτό τοῦ εἵνεκεν οὔτε γενέσθαι
οὔτ᾽ὄλλυσθαι ἀνῆκε Δίκη χαλάσασα πέδῃσιν,
ἀλλ᾽ἔχει· ἡ δὲ κρίσις περὶ τούτων ἐν τῷδ᾽ἔστιν.
ἔστιν ἢ οὐκ ἔστινκέκριται δ᾽οὖν, ὥσπερ ἀνάγκη,
τὴν μὲν ἐᾶν ἀνόητον ἀνώνυμον (οὐ γὰρ ἀληθής
ἔστιν ὁδός), τὴν δ᾽ὥστε πέλειν καὶ ἐτήτυμον εἶναι.
πῶς δ᾽ἄν ἔπειτ᾽ἀπόλοιτο ἐόν; πῶς δ᾽ἄν κε γένοιτο;
εἰ γὰρ ἔγεντ᾽, οὐκ ἔστ(ι) οὐδ᾽ εἴ ποτε μέλλει ἔσεσθαι.
τὼς γένεσις μὲν ἀπέσβεσται καὶ ἄπυστος ὄλεθρος.

οὐδὲ διαιρετόν ἐστιν, ἐπεὶ πᾶν ἐστιν ὁμοῖον·
οὐδέ τι τῇ μᾶλλον, τό κεν εἴργοι μιν συνέχεσθαι,
οὐδέ τι χειρότερον, πᾶν δ᾽ἔμπλεον ἐστιν ἐόντος.
τῷ ξυνεχὲς πᾶν ἐστιν· ἐόν γὰρ ἐόντι πελάζει.

αὐτὰρ ἀκίνητον μεγάλων ἐν πείρασι δεσμῶν
ἔστιν ἄναρχον ἄπαυστον, ἐπεὶ γένεσις καί ὄλεθρος
τῆλε μάλ᾽ἀπλάχθησαν, ἀπῶσε δὲ πίστις ἀληθής.
ταὐτόν τ᾽ἐν ταὐτῷ τε μένον καθ᾽ ἑαυτό τε κεῖται
χοὕτως ἔμπεδον αὖθι μένει· κρατερή γὰρ Ἀνάγκη
πείρατος ἐν δεσμοῖσιν ἔχει, τό μιν ἀμφὶς ἐέργει,
οὕνεκεν οὐκ ἀτελεύτητον τὸ ἐὸν θέμις εἶναι·
ἔστι γὰρ οὐκ ἐπιδευές· μὴ ἐὸν δ᾽ἄν παντός ἐδεῖτο.

ταὐτὸν δ᾽ἐστι νοεῖν τε οὕνεκεν ἔστι νόημα.
οὐ γὰρ ἄνευ τοῦ ἐόντος ἐν ᾧ πεφατισμένον ἐστίν,
εὑρήσεις τὸ νοεῖν· οὐδὲν γάρ <ἢ> ἔστιν ἢ ἔσται
ἄλλο πάρεξ τοῦ ἐόντος ἐπεὶ τό γε Μοῖρ᾽ἐπέδησεν
οὖλον ἀκίνητον τ᾽ἔμεναι· τῷ πάντ᾽ ὄνομ(α) ἔσται,
ὅσσα βροτοί κατέθεντο πεποιθότες εἶναι ἀληθῆ,
γίγνεσθαι τε καὶ ὄλλυσθαι, εἶναι τε καὶ οὐχί,
καὶ τόπον ἀλλάσσειν διά τε χρόα φανόν ἀμείβειν.

αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ πεῖρας πύματον, τετελεσμένον ἐστί
πάντοθεν, εὐκύκλου σφαίρης ἐναλίγκιον ὄγκῳ
μεσσόθεν ἰσοπαλὲς πάντῃ· τὸ γὰρ οὔτε τι μεῖζον
οὔτε τι βαιότερον πελέναι χρεόν ἐστι τῇ ἤ τῇ
οὔτε γᾶρ οὐκ ἐὸν ἔστι, τό κεν παύοι μιν ἱκνεῖσθαι
εἰς ὁμὸν οὔτ᾽ ἐὸν ἔστιν ὅπως εἴη κεν ἐόντος
τῇ μᾶλλον τῇ δ᾽ ἧσσον, ἐπεὶ πᾶν ἐστι ἄσυλον·
οἵ γὰρ πάντοθεν ἶσον, ὁμῶς ἐν πείρασι κύρει.

ἐν τῷ σοι παύω πιστόν λόγον ἠδὲ νόημα
ἀμφὶς ἀληθείης· δόξας δ᾽ ἀπὸ τοῦδε βροτείας
μάνθανε κόσμον ἐμῶν ἐπέων ἀπατηλὸν ἀκούων
μορφάς γὰρ κατέθεντο δύο γνώμας ὀνομάζειν·
τῶν μίαν οὐ χρεών ἐστιν -ἐν ᾧ πεπλανημένοι εἰσιν-
τἀντία δ᾽ ἐκρίναντο δέμας καὶ σήματ᾽ ἔθεντο
χωρὶς ἀπ᾽ ἀλλήλων, τῇ μὲν φλογὸς αἰθέριον πῦρ,
ἤπιον ὄν, μέγ᾽ ἐλαφρόν ἐωυτῷ πάντοσε τὠυτόν,
τῷ δ᾽ ἑτέρῳ μὴ τὠυτόν· ἀτὰρ κἀκεῖνο κατ᾽ αὐτό
τἀντία νύκτ᾽ ἀδαῆ πυκινόν δέμας ἐμβριθές τε.
τόν σοι ἐγὼ διάκοσμον ἐοικότα πάντα φατίζω,
ὡς οὐ μή ποτέ τίς σε βροτῶν γνώμη παρελάσσῃ.

Fragment 9

αὐτὰρ ἐπειδὴ πάντα φάος καὶ νύξ ὀνόμασται
καὶ τὰ κατὰ σφετέρας δυνάμεις ἐπί τοῖσι τε καὶ τοῖς,
πᾶν πλέον ἐστὶν ὁμοῦ φάεος καὶ νυκτός ἀφάντου
ἴσων ἀμφοτέρων, ἐπεὶ οὐδετέρῳ μέτα μηδέν.

Fragment 10

εἴσῃ δ᾽ αἰθερίαν τε φύσιν τὰ τ᾽ ἐν αἰθέρι πάντα
σήματα καὶ καθαρᾶς εὐαγέος ἠελίοιο
λαμπάδος ἔργ᾽ ἀίδηλα καὶ ὁππόθεν ἐξεγένοντο,
ἔργα τε κύκλωπος πεύσῃ περίφοιτα σελήνης
καὶ φύσιν, εἰδήσεις δὲ καὶ οὐρανὸν ἀμφὶς ἔχοντα
ἔνθεν ἔφυ τε καὶ ὡς μιν ἄγουσ(α) ἐπῄδησεν Ἀνάγκη
πείρατ᾽ ἔχειν ἄστων.

Fragment 11

πῶς γαῖα καὶ ἥλιος ἠδὲ σελήνη
αἰθήρ τε ξυνὸς γάλα τ᾽ οὐράνιον καὶ ὄλυμπος
ἔσχατος ἠδ᾽ ἄστρων θερμὸν μένος ὡρμήθησαν
γίγνεσθαι.

Fragment 12

αἱ γὰρ στεινότεραι πλῆντο πυρὸς ἀχρήτοιο,
αἱ δ᾽ἐπὶ ταῖς νυκτός, μετὰ δὲ φλογὸς ἵεται αἶσα·
ἐν δέ μέσῳ τούτων δαίμων ἥ πάντα κυβερνᾷ·
πάντα γὰρ <ἥ> στυγεροῖο τόκου καὶ μίξιος ἄρχει
πέμπουσ᾽ἄρσενι θῆλυ μιγῆν ταὸ τ᾽ἐναντίον αὖτις
ἄρσεν θηλυτέρῳ.

Fragment 13

πρώτιστον μὲν Ἔρωτα θεῶν μητίσατο πάντων...

Fragment 14

νυκτιφαὲς περὶ γαῖαν ἀλώμενον ἀλλότριον φῶς

Fragment 15

αἰεὶ παπταίνουσα πρὸς αὐγάς ἠελίοιο.

Fragment 16

ὡς γὰρ ἕκαστοτ᾽ἔχει κρᾶσιν μελέων πολυπλάγκτων,
τὼς νόος ἀνθρώποισι παρίσταται· τὸ γὰρ αὐτό
ἔστιν ὅπερ φρονέει μελέων φύσις ἀνθρώποισιν
καὶ πᾶσιν καὶ παντί· τὸ γὰρ πλέον ἐστὶ νόημα.

Fragment 17

δεξιτεροῖσιν μὲν κούρους λαιοῖσι δὲ κούρας...

Fragment 18

οὕτω τοι κατὰ δόξαν ἔφυ τάδε καί νυν ἔασι
καὶ μετέπειτ᾽ἀπὸ τοῦδε τελευτήσουσο τραφέντα·
τοῖς δ᾽ ὄνομ᾽ ἄνθρωποι κατέθεντ᾽ ἐπίσημον ἑκάστῳ.

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