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Chapter III. Thought As Sight

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III. Thought as sight

By the time of Plotinus it has become clear that Neoplatonism will portray thought as a process of becoming what one contemplates. The intellectual process is indistinguishable from the objects it is involved with. Thought is not a separate register, requiring translation from the world of objects: a common modern view would see the intellectual process in such terms, separating thought and being as entirely different genres. On such a view thought somehow runs parallel to reality, responding to it in its own entirely separate way, following its own path, but somehow mimeographing reality in its own terms. Thought is seen as reality in code. For Plotinus, however, the true way is "to be, our very selves, that we are to see" (VI.7.15.30–2). Intellect and its objects are therefore held to merge in some way.

Further, the philosophy of late antiquity seems to emphasise the holistic aspect of thought. The intellect is able to grasp things immediately, in a flash, and in their whole structure. This is a separate issue in that it focusses on two other aspects of thought, namely its ability to grasp some thing (i) suddenly, and (ii) as a whole. This higher exercise of νοῦς is distinguished from its lower form, which involves the separating of things into lists of items: the lower form of thought is ultimately destructive of any attempt to grasp the unity of things, or things in their wholeness.

The classical Greek view of the thinking process is therefore an issue of importance. Reason is one matter, but thinking and the intellect are another. It will be the intention in this chapter and the next to dwell on the meaning of νοῦς (mind, or understanding) and its derivatives, since little has been done to isolate the particularly Greek understanding of thinking. In many ways nous has a similar career to logos, in that it begins as a capacity, and ends as a cosmic principle. Snell omitted it from discussion in The Discovery of Mind, but it is an important issue: what is the understanding of thought in the classical period? How does intellect grasp its objects?

Any consideration of this issue must begin with a review of the work of von Fritz, who wrote two papers on intellect in early Greek thought, one on the Homeric poems and the other on the Presocratic philosophers. He points to the famous third line of the Odyssey (1943:81), where it is said of Ulysses that "he knew the mind (νοῦς) of many people". Where we should more naturally say in English that one knows the "ways" of many peoples, the Greek here makes the mind the cultural variant. As von Fritz points out, the discovery of Odysseus is not that the different peoples had different grades of intelligence, but that they had different ways of looking at things and different actions. The word nous here stands for a mode of thought which issues in action. He further notes (84) that many of the Homeric passages associate
thinking with violent emotion, and the thinking process is seen as the source of the latter.

An important ingredient in the meaning of the word is the notion of becoming aware, of "realising". The "noetic" capacity does not involve planning, to be followed by the realisation of the project: rather the awareness experienced may lead to planning and its results. The awareness gained in the noetic experience may lead to some emotion, despite the fact that later Greek philosophy, in particular Stoicism, contrasted mind and emotion. Von Fritz, partly agreeing with Boehme (Die Seele...), notes that even in the Homeric poems there is some trace of this later tendency to contrast νοος with emotion, and refers us for references to one of Boehme's notes (53, n. 2).

However, Boehme's evidence is of a slightly different character: he in fact refers to Iliad 24 (358) which speaks of Priam's mind (νοος) being confounded, and his great fear; to Iliad 12 (255) where thunderloving Zeus weakens the νοος of the Achaeans by producing a storm; and to Iliad 9 (554), where anger is said to swell the minds of the people. These passages show both the tendency to contrast mind and emotion, and to allow for some interaction between them. It is clear, as von Fritz notes, that a sudden emotional experience may set in train the noetic understanding or awareness which will then result in thought and planning of various kinds (1943:87). Seeing (iδεῖν) is also brought into relation with thinking, so that perception and thought have a close relationship, and it is argued that thinking (νοεῖν) is often conceived as a kind of "mental perception" (1943:90), whereby one apprehends not as the result of a chain of reasoning, but of an intellectual sighting of the issue involved. The seeing of the essence of a situation is the most important aspect of the noetic process, and we shall return to this theme in connection with the allegory of the cave, at the end of this chapter.

Among philosophers Xenophanes was the first to use the verb noeин: in Fragment 24 (DK) he says of God that "he sees as a whole, he apprehends (νοεῖν) as a whole, he hears as a whole". Not much can be drawn from this, in the absence of a context, but it can be said that Xenophanes is attributing special modes of perception to God, who is exceptional in that his modes of perception are holistic. His seeing, thinking and hearing does not focus on individual items, but on aggregations of items. Further, in Fragment 25 God is said to shake all things by the thought of his mind. (Guthrie [1.374] suggests a Homeric parallel drawn from Iliad 1.53, where the whole of Olympus is said to have shaken when Zeus nodded his head.) Xenophanes' method foreshadows the negative theology of later antiquity, since he takes a standard predicate about God, and negates it in some fundamental way. In the above fragments, descriptions which could have been applied to human beings are modified in order to be able to be applied to a higher being: God does not see things separately, partially or sequentially, as we do, but as a whole. The human mind is incapable of affecting its environment except by
translating thought into action and motion, that is, deeds: God “shakes” reality by his mind alone.

Heraclitus has several important usages:

Those who speak with intelligence (νος) must rely on what is common (κοινός) to all, as a city on its law, and much more so... (B114)

There is a play on words, between “intelligence” (νος) and “common” (κοινός) which undoubtedly reflects an etymology of some significance in Heraclitus’ mind. The notion of some common fund of intelligence available to all men, and to be relied upon, brings us very close to the Heraclitean logos. On page 16 this fragment was used to illuminate Fragment 2 where the logos is referred to as being “in common”. There is a certain comparability with law, which is universally respected, and which governs all men. The canonical material on which intelligence relies has a universality like that of the law, and this is as far as the analogy can be pressed. Von Fritz (loc. cit.) does press it further however, and is thus able to identify that which is “in common” with the “divine law which governs everything”, since this is said to lie behind the law of the city-state. This leads von Fritz to the exaggerated conclusion:

What Heraclitus claims is merely that it is not possible to ‘understand’ anything of this kind properly unless the divine law which governs everything is part of the picture. (1945:233)

He is thus enabled to see κοινός as the faculty of perceiving the essence of the divine law. This is a conclusion which is not permitted by the evidence, which merely supplies us with the notion that the intelligence has access to something which is universal. Fragment B 113 tells us what is universal, or “in common” (κοινός): it is thought. It is as if thought is identical from person to person, and race to race.

Parmenides establishes an important direction for the meaning of κοινός and its derivatives, just as he had done for logos. The famous Fragment 8 (line 34) refers to thought, and Fragment 3 links being and thought. There are few more crucial lines in Greek philosophy than Parmenides’ famous seeming identification of being and thought in the third Fragment:

τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστὶν τε καὶ εἶναι.

How can this be translated? The most natural translation is as follows: “thinking and being are the same thing”. Yet two weighty authorities, Guthrie and Tarán, translate differently from this, Guthrie’s version being as follows:
... for it is the same thing that can be thought and can be. (A History of Greek Philosophy II.14)

Guthrie is making this Fragment follow immediately on Fragment 2, and he interprets it in the light of this supposed context. Fragment 2 concerns the impossibility of knowing that which is not, or of stating it, and Fragment 3, if taken as a rejoinder to these observations, would have the force of asserting that it is one and the same thing which is, and which is the object of thought. Yet it does not seem clear that such an observation fits entirely well with the content of Fragment 2, though many have thought so, including Diels himself. As Tarán observes (42), this assumption probably derives from the feeling that the claim that not-Being is inconceivable, would need some sort of demonstration. Parmenides would not simply assert the unknowability of not-Being without some supporting assertion. Now of course this is not a good reason for joining one fragment to another. Simply that they look as if they are about the same thing should not lure us into imagining that they necessarily fit together, convenient though this may be. There is no compelling argument for linking 2 and 3, since the third is not quite an explanation of the end of the second. There is no reason for introducing the concept of “the same thing”: (τὸ ... αὐτὸ), as an addendum to the contents of Fragment 2. There seems then to be no reason for translating in any other than the simplest way:

“Thought and Being are the same thing”.

Fragment 6.1 similarly links thought and being, and is similarly difficult to translate:

Χρὴ τὸ λέγειν τε νοεῖν τ' ἐόν ἐμεναι
“It is necessary to say and to think Being” (Tarán 54).
“What can be spoken and thought of must be (i.e. exist)” (Guthrie II.17).

These two hermeneutic efforts are quite different, and Mourelatos (The Route of Parmenides 15) concludes very scrupulously that syntactic ambiguity makes “gratuitous any attempt to obtain from these lines positive information regarding Parmenides’ philosophical doctrine.” This concern for method is altogether laudable, but it is in the gambling spirit that I would suggest the following translation: “It is necessary that the saying and thinking of being must stand”, i.e. the view that being is the object of speech and thought must be preserved at all costs. A third passage on the two ideas may be found in Fragment 8.34:

ταύτων δ' ἕστι νοεῖν τε καὶ οὖσκεν ἕστι νόημα
“It is the same to think and the thought that (the object of thought) exists…” (Tarán 86)
"What can be thought (apprehended) and the thought that ‘it is’ are the same…”
(Guthrie II.39)

Again, the curiously divergent translations render it difficult to make statements about the philosophy of Parmenides, and much turns on the meaning of o'ōvekev, as von Fritz’ discussion indicates (1945:238). This question should be argued out in another place, and we shall simply note here that it is difficult to translate the line. Mourelatos' effort, however, seems the most careful and the most lucid:

“And the same is to think of and wherefore is the thinking”. (The Route… 170)

The thinking and its source are the same, and this seems to be a claim that thought and its objects are identical, if we take it that the objects are the substance of thought. Despite the fact that this is a latensounding sentiment, it seems that Parmenides advocated it in some form. He is not claiming that to speak of something implies its existence, as Guthrie suggests (II.17), but more that the existence of an object and its being thought are inter-dependent (see below, p.75). The meaning of the word voētv is crucial here: it does not mean to “think” in the sense of deploying rational, syllogistic reasoning, but to “see” intellectually. Becoming aware of, or “sighting” an event or fact is closer to the meaning of the word. It is therefore understandable that it should be claimed that the existence of thought must spring from the existence of an object. Why then is it not claimed that seeing and existence are the same thing, or hearing and existence? These two faculties are equally object-related, but voōç and its objects are singled out for specific treatment. This is a great problem, and paucity of evidence will ultimately defeat us. The problem is nevertheless crucial, because the three fragments discussed above have an Idealist ring, and seem to take Parmenides into the same company as Berkeley, Kant and Hegel. Scholars have readily seen here the first formulation of Idealism, or the claim that physical objects have no existence independent of a mind which is conscious of them. Parmenides is rather saying that thinking and being are the same process, or the same mode.

The third Fragment is the most striking, since it says clearly that thinking and being are the same. The Fragment is preserved by two later Platonists, Clement of Alexandria and Plotinus, both of whom may have their own purposes in doing so. How do they understand it? In the first place, Plotinus includes the fragment in his discussion of the three hypostases: in Ennead V.1.8 his concern is to claim that the doctrine he is enunciating is simply a development of anciently held views. Plato is cited as declaring the intelligence (voōç) to be descended from the Good, which is also “beyond being”, this being virtually a slogan of later Greek philosophy (see J. Whittaker, EIPEKEINA…). Being and Nous are on the same ontological level, and Pla-
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to is alleged to have identified them with “the idea”: as Bréhier notes (Plotin V.26 n. 3), Plotinus is very vague about where Plato actually says this. Parmenides’ Fragment is then cited as showing that being resides not in sensible things, since Parmenides identified being and intelligence. Plotinus does not seek to interpret further than this, and his main interest devolves on the validity or otherwise of Parmenides’ concept of the One. Clement of Alexandria also preserves the Fragment (Stromateis VI.2.23.3), but it forms part of a barrage of classical quotations, cited merely as examples of Greek plagiarism from Jewish wisdom. No particular interpretation of the fragment is offered.

It is important to note that “speaking” crops up in two out of the three fragments cited. In 6.1 the thinking and speaking of being are coupled, and in 8.35–6 it is claimed that “you will not find thought without being, in which it has been spoken... (περιττισμένον).” Probably this last word agrees with the νώμα of the previous line, and I would construe thus, from line 34: thinking and that which the thought stems from are identical, for without being, in which it is given utterance, you will not find thought. The idea that one can speak being, or that being is the basis of utterance, is included in both these passages. The issue which is thrust upon us is this: what, for Parmenides, is the relationship between being and thinking? The answer is, in my view, that he sees being as the stuff of thinking, or its substance; or, the medium in which it takes place. Statements, both uttered and unuttered, as well as thoughts, are things which have being, and which subsist through this medium. Thought is the same as being, says Parmenides, and he means that thought is simply the intellectual expression of what is. By the same token, language rides on the back of the verb “to be”, which gives it its vital force.

Guthrie (II.17) provides a good example to those who have misunderstood Parmenides to be making a simple idealist fallacy, partly because of his own inexplicable translation of Fragment 6.1, which he gives in such a way as to yield the idealist mistake:

“What can be spoken and thought of must be (i.e. exist).”

External reality would thus become mind-dependent, but this translation bears very little relation to the Greek: it is so far removed from it, that to describe it as a translation is rather optimistic. Guthrie goes on (II.17): “As translated the statements seem simply mistaken. It is obviously possible to speak and think of objects that do not exist, like the unicorns, centaurs and the present King of France beloved of the twentieth-century philosopher.” Philosophy, we are told, has advanced on this point; Guthrie notes, in an analysis which is remarkably close to that of von Fritz, that the verb noēin means to “think of”, and that it was used of the grasping of something exist-
ent. The idealist mistake he considers therefore to be built into the verb “to think”, since this verb seems to require objects to function.

He further labours (II.2) a comparison between Descartes and Parmenides, finding that for the latter as for the former, the starting-point was thought. But for Parmenides, “the first inference was not cogito ergo sum, but cogito, ergo est quod cogito.” Parmenides is thus committed willy-nilly to having made the Idealist mistake of supposing, for example, that thinking about the present King of France must entail the actual existence of a present King of France, for him to be thought about.

There is a big leap from the fragments to this statement of the position, and whilst it is true that Parmenides is saying something about a special relationship between thinking and being, it is not at all clear that it is along these lines. We can begin by noting that Parmenides sees a very intimate relationship between thought and being. This is not like the relationship between hearing and being, or seeing and being, as noted below (p.74). Why is thinking identified with being, whereas seeing is not? There is an asymmetry here, which alerts us to the need to define thinking in a way which differentiates it entirely from the two modes of sense-perception used as examples. The answer appears to be that sense-perception deals with the area of opinion. Parmenides’ One Being does not contain fire, air, earth and water, is not visible or audible: the data of sense-perception belong to the way of seeming, and it is here that mortals go astray. In Fragment 8 (50) Parmenides dismisses the distinction between fire and night, and relegates it to the status of mistaken perception. It is as if mortals have brought them into a fictitious existence, and it is not clear how Parmenides sees the naming process. Are the names given by human beings allocated to some sort of appearances, or do these things come into existence along with the names. Where do the appearances come from? Cornford concludes (Plato and Parmenides 50) that Parmenides leaves this unexplained: “The problem was left for Plato to attempt, and he everywhere implies that no solution was to be found in Parmenides.”

The objects of sight and hearing therefore, have no real existence, and for Parmenides there is either Being or not-Being, with no intermediate area such as the world of Becoming envisaged by Plato. Thought, on the other hand, is applied to Being, and this puts it on a very different footing from the sensible faculties. One can say that thought is dependent on being for its existence: being is that in which it takes place, and is formed. Indeed thought is being, and if one is to be seen as dependent on the other, then it would be preferable to reverse Guthrie’s order, and regard thought as dependent on being. There is something in the way in which the Greek of this period uses the word νος which gives a special possibility to Parmenides: it is on the one hand the ability to pick out the essence of a situation, to see it as a whole, independently of its component parts. But it has also an objective existence.
Nous is not only a faculty, but is also an entity, and this aspect of its usage has not been properly examined in the attempt to elucidate the Parmenidean problem. Concentration has focussed on mind as a knowing, or apprehending faculty. To the question of how it functions, various answers have been given: von Fritz, for example, was principally concerned with promoting the importance of intuition in the Parmenidean understanding of the thinking process: “So for Parmenides himself, what, for lack of a better word, may be called the intuitional element in the νοῦς is still most important” (1945:243). Guthrie does more to stress the extra-noetic characteristics of νοῦς, noting that it is considered to be independent of, and over and above the other human faculties, “more than human” (II.18). He cites fragment 1018 (Nauck²) of Euripides, which states that “the nous in each of us is God”. A number of passages show nous as the essential element of the personality, in an equivalent for our term “heart”, or “soul” (see LSJ νοῦς 3).

This begins to sound like the nous of Anaxagoras, a slightly younger contemporary of Parmenides, and there is an important clue here. Anaxagoras was concerned with the discovery of a primary cause, as well as the usual quest for the essential substance, and his ultimate principle is Mind. His Nous is not unlike Parmenides’ Being in certain respects, though of course it has a much more active role in organizing the universe: but like Being, Mind is independent, infinite, unmixed, and is all alike, or homogeneous (DK B12). Anaxagoras’ work looks like an advance on that of Parmenides, since he overcomes the inert character of Being by making the ultimate essence the prime mover, though in certain respects it is more primitive since it simply projects onto the universe in general a characteristic belonging to individual human beings. The point here, however, is that if Anaxagoras could portray his Mind in a somewhat similar way to Parmenides’ Being, then we may suppose that for Parmenides it was not too difficult to assimilate being and mind. The individual nous may have been part of a general cosmic pool of being, in the Parmenidean picture. If one thus concentrates on nous as an ontological entity, rather than as a knowing process, one comes closer to what Parmenides is saying. The “stuff” of thought is Being: such a hermeneutic gives us a clear understanding of Fragment 8.34, for example:

ταύτον δ' ἦστι νοεῖν τε καὶ οἴνεκεν ἐστι νόημα
“Thinking is the same thing as the source of the thought.”

Parmenides’ claim is that thinking and being are identical states or activities, and therefore that mind and being are one. Mind is not seen so much as an epistemological process, as a mode of existence. Our tendency to recognise a disjunction between thinking and its objects causes us to limit unjustifiably the range of alternatives open in the interpretation of Parmenides’ Fragments.
One further point is crucial. Being is not only the stuff of thought, it is also the ground of speech. Fragment 6.1 (see below, p.64) is difficult of interpretation, but we can at least say that it involves both the thinking and the saying of being. B8.35–6 (see p.66) claims that “you will not find thought without being, in which it has been spoken...”. Being is not only the stuff of thought, but also of speech (presumably of true speech): thought, one notes, is something spoken, and it is spoken in being. No doubt the reason for this lies in the understanding of the “is” in a standard predicative sentence as having an ontological import. “The King is dead” is a statement which Parmenides would see as made out of Being: its underlying substance is Being. Modern Anglosaxon philosophy in its presumed wisdom distinguishes between the predicative and ontological uses of the verb to “be”, and Parmenides did not do so. A statement like the above is simply an example of Being at work, of existence existing. Speech is Being being what it is.

Another approach to the thinking process is associated with the old Greek principle that like is known by like, which runs throughout the classical tradition, but it is chiefly associated with Empedocles. Combining fragments 109 and 107 we read:

With earth we see earth, with water water, with air the divine air, but with fire destructive fire, with love love and with strife we see dismal strife; for out of these are all things formed and harmonised, and with these they think and feel pleasure and pain.

Perception is explained by the idea of the merging of the perceiver and the perceived: physical objects give off emanations which fit into the pores of each sense organ (see Theophrastus, De Sensu 7). Because they radiate parts of themselves, sense objects are able to come into physical contact with the sense receptors of the human perceivers, and it is important that these effluences make contact with the pores into which they pass. An object giving off an emanation which is too small or too large for the pores it encounters will have no effect, and sensation will not result. It is difficult to reconstitute Empedocles’ views on the mechanisms whereby the five senses operate, though it is clear enough that cognition results from physical bodies touching each other. As for thought, there is little enough evidence to go on. Fragment 105 tells us that thought takes place in the blood, “... for the blood around the heart is thought.” We are told by Theophrastus (De Sensu 10) that Empedocles considered thought and sensation to be much the same in character. The principle that ignorance results from the interaction of dissimilars, and knowledge from the interaction of similars must therefore apply in some way. One is at a loss to see where blood comes into external physical reality, to provide the merging required by Empedocles’ general principles. We cannot go further on this point, but Fragment 108 should be noted:
To the extent that men change, they think different thoughts.

If Aristotle, to whom we owe this Fragment, is interpreting it correctly, then the above means that thought is materially based, and the change envisaged is of the bodily type. Thought then is a function of the body, but it does come into being when the blood coalesces with the outside object, or its products.

Anaxagoras has been referred to above: a little older than Empedocles, and a little younger than Parmenides, he made thought the apex of his cosmology. “Mind”, the essential force of the cosmos, was somewhat like a combination of Parmenides’ Being and a slightly embellished portrait of the workings and efficacy of the ordinary human mind. Mind sets reality in order (D.L. II.6): it is infinite, independent, unmixed, and alone. Its function is as follows:

Mind sets everything in order, what was to be, what was but is not now, and all that now is and shall be, and this revolution in which revolve the stars, sun, moon, air and fire (aether) that are being separated off. This revolution made the separating off: the dense is separated from the rare, the hot from the cold, the bright from the dark, the dry from the wet. There are many portions of many things, and no one thing is completely separated or divided from another, except Mind. (Fr. 12, DK 38, 10–39, 4)

Anaxagoras’ view of cosmic mind is based, no doubt, on an analogy with the human mind in its creative and initiating aspects. The functions of planning for the future, and of executing such plans by moving objects, are made into the defining characteristics of cosmic Mind, and some of the limitations which ordinarily weigh on the human conceiving of plans, and on their execution, are removed for the sake of aggrandising the cosmic principle. We might, somewhat unfairly, extrapolate from Anaxagoras’ cosmic Mind to a definition of what he thought mind to be in ordinary experience. The characteristics of mind would, on this analysis emerge as the capacity to conceive of the future, to draw up plans for it, to impose order, and above all to initiate motion.

To what extent do men possess Mind? Fragment 13 tells us that “after Mind began motion, it began to separate off from all that was moved”. (This translation follows that of Guthrie: for his account of others, and the difficulties, see II.274, n. 2.) The thrust of Anaxagoras’ position seems to be the distinguishing between motion and its cause, and there is therefore a prima facie case for seeing cosmic Mind and human mind as quite distinct. In fact he was attacked by Plato and Aristotle for having Mind withdraw so decisively from the material world, and for giving explanations based on material causes (Plato, Phaeds 97; Aristotle, Metaph. 985a18). However, prior to his criticism, Aristotle praises Anaxagoras for his achievement, and credits him
with the idea that living creatures have *nous*. And Aristotle tells us elsewhere *(De anima 494a2)* that Anaxagoras held mind to be in all things that have life, of whatever status. But his interest here seems to lie in the controlling and moving function of mind, rather than the epistemological questions of knowledge and reasoning. We can do little else than identify it with the life-principle in animate beings, but we can note that it is a *shared* phenomenon. Human mind is part of a larger pool of cosmic mind: it is part of the essence of reality, comparable with Parmenides’ identity of being and thought.

Anaxagoras was, however, favoured by the Sceptics, as indicated in chapter 1 (see p.36). Sextus Empiricus tells us that he cast doubt on the validity of the evidence of the senses, by using the example of vision. If one gradually mixes two colours, he said, one will be unable to pick out the stages of colour change. We know that these stages occur, yet we cannot see them. Sight, therefore, cannot be trusted to detect that which takes place in fact. He thus finds favour with the Sceptics, but we do not really know what alternative to the senses was offered by him. What was the efficacy of mind, in contrast to the senses? Presumably the mind obtains knowledge, but the evidence does not permit us to say anything at all about how it knows.

Democritus’ theory of knowledge was an attempt to meet the epistemological problems which were the legacy of Presocratic cosmological speculation. The senses were widely recognized to be inadequate, and the establishment of the authority of reason brought with it a series of attendant problems concerning the means whereby knowledge could be obtained. It had become clear what the tool of the intellect was to be, but not so clear how it was to function. According to Sextus Empiricus, Democritus rejected the evidence of the senses (*Against the Logicians* I.135–6), because he thought that the true picture of reality lay in the theory of the atomic vortex which he had advanced. The pictures available to one through sense perception must therefore be rejected as misleading. This he called a “bastard” form of cognition.

Now in these passages he practically rejects all apprehension, even though it is only the senses that he singles out for attack. But in his “Canons” he says that there are two kinds of knowledge, one obtained by the senses and the other by the intellect. Of these he calls that by the intellect “legitimate”, and attests its trustworthiness for the judgment of truth, and that through the senses “bastard”, denying its freedom from error in the discernment of truth. (*Against the Logicians* I.137)

Democritus did not however deny that truth existed, or that it could be apprehended. Fragment 117 tells us that “truth is in the depths”, and that it is hidden (*δόξα*) from us (Arist., *Metaph. 1009b2*). Precisely how the mind obtained its grasp of this imperceptible truth is not clear to us, and as Guthrie points out (II.462), it is probable that both Leucippus and Democritus were unsuccessful in relating mental processes to their materialist and at-
omist explanation of all reality. Thought occurred by the physical contact of atoms on the soul, itself a conglomerate of atoms, and mind took its raw material from the evidence of the senses, however faulty (Frag. 125, quoted by Guthrie II.460). These must have provided a means of apprehending the true nature of the atoms after their apparent nature had registered itself through the senses.

With Plato and Aristotle we move to the major attempts to define mind and thought, in response to the problem area established in the field of epistemology by their predecessors. Yet the problem it not only a problem of knowing, since *nous* in Plato resembles very much the cosmic principle of Anaxagoras. It has been noted earlier that there was a tendency to hypositalize logos late in the Hellenistic period, and it was argued that this was foreign to classical Greek philosophy. However the tendency to make of Mind a cosmic principle, resembling a hypostasis, reaches back to Anaxagoras and is maintained by Plato. Early in the Timaeus, he tells us that the cosmos is a living creature endowed with both soul and mind (*nous*). In this tale (29E) God is said to have come upon reality when it was in a discordant and disordered state. He brought it into order, and being able to perform only the "fairest" (καλλιστον) actions, and seeing that of visible creatures those with mind (*nous*) were fairer than those without, he placed mind within soul, and placed them within the body of the All. In this way the cosmos is possessed of mind and soul, and in this way ontology is introduced into epistemology since the exercise of reason will resemble not so much the application of a technique to objects, as the striving after self.

The real lover of knowledge will strive for true being; he will not devote his attention to particular instances, but will pursue things until he comes into contact with this essence. Through "mingling with genuine reality, he would beget intelligence and truth" (Republic 490B). Once this has been achieved, he will enjoy true life and growth: noteworthy here is the order of events envisaged by Plato. In the first place the individual has to discover the true nature of things, coming together with genuine reality: this change of state then leads to his capacity to "generate intelligence" (*nous*).

In a fragment of discussion from the sixth book of the Republic, the objects of knowledge are discussed (507B), and it is admitted that there is a class of things which can be seen, but not thought. There is also a class of things which can be thought (*noeisthai*), and not seen. The discussion does not terminate at this point, so that the piece of dialogue should not be taken as more than an intellectual incident, but it is fascinating to note how rigidly objects are allotted to their appropriate receptors. The objects of thought are for thinking, and those of vision are for seeing. The objects of thought are the ideas, and one presumes that thought cannot see, hear or perform the functions of any of the five senses.

A further limitation in the separation of the faculties is as follows. When
the soul focusses on the domain of truth and reality, it apprehends (ἐνόησε) these things, and "seems to possess intelligence" (nous: 508D). When, on the other hand, it focusses on the lower regions, it can achieve only opinion, and "seems not to possess intelligence (nous)". The power to know results not from the efforts of the individual, nor from the quality of his intellect, nor from some other internal ability, but from the external objects themselves.

"This thing which gives truth to the things which are known, and the power of knowing to the knower, must be said to be the idea of the good, it being the cause of science (episteme) and of truth to the extent that it is known". (Rep. 508E)

The efficacy of nous is not therefore a matter of sharpening the intellectual instruments, or of perfecting one's attack on problems of the intellect, but it springs from its objects. Reality is the cause of knowledge and truth, and it somehow activates the knowing faculties by its presence. Do they exist in its absence? The answer is not clear, but it is as if they are dependent on it for their own being. However one important reservation is stated at the end of the above quotation: reality is the cause of truth to the extent that it is known (... ὡς γνωσκομένης μὴν διανοοῦ... 508D). There is here an odd paradox, since on the one hand external reality is the cause of truth being apprehended, yet on the other it sometimes fails in its task since truth is not always known. Clearly cognition must depend in some degree on the knowing subject, whether on his intellectual ability or his attention to the reality in question.

Yet this passage, an important one for the Neoplatonic disciples, continues to insist on the truth-givingness as a characteristic of the object apprehended. An "inconceivable beauty" (ἄμετραν κάλλος) is mentioned, which is the source of science and truth, but it itself surpasses them in beauty (509A).

... the objects of knowledge, it will be said, not only receive from the presence of the good their being known, but their being and essence comes from it, though the good itself is not essence, but surpasses essence in dignity and power (ἐπέκεινα τῆς ὀυσίας πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει... 509B).

This last phrase is one of the most frequently cited expressions in Neoplatonic literature, which is coloured by key excerpts from Plato's dialogues, in much the same way as the English language owes much of its phrasing to the Authorised Version of the Bible. In Neoplatonism that which "surpasses essence in dignity and power" is the highest principle, the One or the Good, and Plato's treatment of the Form of the Good is usually held to presage the portrait of the Neoplatonic One.

The Good then furnishes being and knowability, but is itself beyond these two characteristics. Just as light and vision are obviously like the sun, but are
The discussion moves into an analysis of different types of reasoning, and in particular that pursued by geometers, who treat their hypotheses as a means of reaching the "unhypothetical" (ἀνυποθέτου: 511B), or that which is known to be true without the making of assumptions. From this principle other reasoning flows: we have here a fleeting reference to the mathematical technique of synthesis, which will be referred to later in connection with middle Platonism, and also with Origen. Plato wishes to label the reasoning technique of the geometers dianoia (understanding), and to place it as intermediate between reason (nous) and opinion (doxa). The knowing faculties of the soul are accordingly divided into four parts (511D–E): the first and highest capacity is that of reason (nous); the second, that of understanding (dianoia); the third, belief (pistis); and the last, conjecture (eikasia). An important principle is enunciated last, and concludes Book VI of the Republic, namely that these faculties possess clarity to the extent that their objects possess truth. This last claim is a most significant addition to the fourfold categorisation of human knowing capacities, since it attributes truth to the objects of knowledge, and not to the faculties, nor to discourse about reality which might emerge from them. Truth is not a characteristic of language, but of external reality (if Platonic reality can be characterised as external). What follows is the allegory of the cave, containing men who see only shadows of outside reality, and in the course of this discussion it is again implied that truth is characteristic of reality, rather than discourse. The vision of converted soul is towards "true things" (519B). That truth belongs to reality is significant, since it casts a different light on the process of thought. Our own natural assumptions direct us to the idea that truth is generated when a proposition of the requisite type is pieced together: a certain combination of subject and predicate might produce truth, whereas another might produce falsehood. Constructions in discourse are not what Plato has in mind when he discusses truth, which is defined ontologically: it is a characteristic of being.

The Phaedrus myth of the charioteer refers to the highest reality, only visible to mind, which is described as the "pilot of the soul" (247E). The "truly existing essence" (οὐσία ὀντος οὐσία) is the object of true science (episteme), and it is this which is the domain of mind. The understanding (whether divine or of the individual soul) "rejoices in seeing reality for a time, and is nourished and cheered by its contemplation of truth" (247D). The divine understanding (dianoia) is said to be nourished by mind and pure knowledge: the understanding of the soul receives that which is appropriate to it in varying degrees. The story proceeds to distinguish between that science which has a beginning, and varies according to the object of its attention, and that which "abides in the truly existing essence" (247E), the latter phrase being reiterated from the earlier passage, where it was established that only mind
could apprehend the truly real. And so the image of the “erotic” as applied to the seeker after knowledge is increasingly applicable.

Socrates’ description of the lover of knowledge in the Phaedo (82D) is quite well-known, and places emphasis on mind as the faculty for apprehending true reality. Philosophy assists the soul in escaping from the prison of fleshly reality. The classic separation of the classes of sense receptors and their objects is made here: that which is visible is apprehended by the senses, whereas the soul itself sees that which is apprehended by the mind (noetos). Philosophy encourages the same

... to trust nothing except itself and its own thinking (voetv) in itself of things which exist in themselves. (Phaedo 83B)

Thought and the genuinely existent belong to each other, and constitute the only relationship which is trustworthy. Reason (nous) is compared to the pilot of a ship in the Laws (961E), who secures the safety of the ship and the sailors when they are endangered. In company with the senses, the pilot reason guides them into safety. The issue arises from a discussion of political theory, and of what constitutes an anchor for the State (961C), and of what is the “saviour” of any particular organ. In an animal the soul and head are agreed to provide salvation. The combination of reason with the senses is what brings deliverance, and the image of the pilot intervenes at this point. Any State will need such an element if it is to survive, and reason may be embodied in the laws, or in the advice of men.

But if any State is devoid of such an element, it would not be surprising if, being mind-less (avouc) and sense-less, it were to act in a random way in each of actions. (962B)

The philosophy of mind is thus incorporated into political theory, and the role of reason in the microcosm of the individual is transposed to the macrocosm of the State. The law and men of wisdom constitute the pilot faculty on the level of society as a whole, and it is concluded that there is a need for a special system of education in order to enhance the intellectual leadership of society. The idea that all members of the State should be equal is expressly repudiated (965A), in favour of the view that special training is required, since the salvation of the state is all-important. The rulership of reason is emphasised in the Philebus (28D); Socrates asks whether the world is governed by chance, or by mind. Having established that the latter is the case, he argues that we derive soul from that of the universe (30A), and wisdom and mind (nous) come into existence on the basis of soul (30C). Mind is reasserted to be the ruler of the cosmos, and an effort to classify it is made. Socrates concludes that it is like a cause, and that it is part of that class (this is inciden-
III. Thought as sight

tal to the discussion of pleasure, which dominates the passage). Anaxagoros’ belief in Nous as primary cause is thus implicitly endorsed. The Timaeus, in fact, rejects solely materialist explanations of reality, distinguishing between material causes and those belonging to the Intelligent Nature. The former are things which are set in motion by other forces, and then move other things out of necessity. The lover of mind (nous) and science (episteme) must pursue the higher type of cause (46D). These auxiliary causes do not possess either reason (logos) or mind (nous) and the only thing which possesses mind (nous) is soul, an invisible entity. It must be emphasised that here mind is a cause rather than an epistemological process: the Loeb editor Bury endeavours on each occasion to translate nous by “thought”, but the intelligent action envisaged for mind here is not the process of thinking, but that of moving. This highest cause produces that which is fair and good, but the auxiliary causes produce accidental and unordered effects.

We have clearly seen here an early attempt to hypostatize a psychological characteristic. Mind is considered to be a causal principle, a real existent, and a transcendent entity. Logos did not achieve the status of an hypostasis until much later in the history of Greek thought, but Nous was enthroned from Anaxagoros onwards. Yet because this Nous has a causal status, we are sometimes misled into thinking of it as the locomotive factor only. Rather it should be emphasised that Intellect has thus been placed into the general pool of being, and that it thereby has a share in it. Individual intelligence, and the individual thinking process, is therefore part of a wider ontological state.

For this reason we can understand why there is such an emphasis on thought as coalescing with being. The kinship of thought and what is, is constantly present in the accounts that have been examined. Thought is rarely seen as an external mode, or a parallel but separate function. Its interaction with being is always stressed, and sometimes the identity of the two is argued for.

Truth, says Plato, is a characteristic of being rather than thought. Thought simply responds to being, and it is worth returning by way of conclusion to the allegory of the cave (Rep. VII). Throughout this extended metaphor, seeing is taken as the model for knowing. The prisoners take the dim flickering on the wall for reality, and he who is released sees the full picture of the outside world in all its complete detail. Human vision dominates the whole allegory, and the suggestion is that thought is seeing what is. Plato’s understanding of vision was based on the notion of interaction, followed by a change of state. On this analogy thought and being coalesce, until thought and its objects are indistinguishable. Thought is an intellectual seeing, in this specifically Greek understanding of seeing.