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Chapter IV. Thought As Self-Thought

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IV. Thought as self-thought

Aristotle refines and develops the idea of the identity of thought and being, giving it its definitive form for the remainder of the history of Greek philosophy. In this chapter the posterity of the Aristotelian view will be expounded, through to the revisionist theories of the Gnostics.

How does Aristotle see the identity of thought and being? We may begin by recalling that the logos of a thing, for Aristotle, is not an external intellectual replica of it, but a rational element within it. Here, as we have already seen, is something reason-like in objects.

An example of the deployment of this principle may be found in the discussion of unity at the beginning of Book 10 of the Metaphysics. He distinguishes between that which is one by virtue of some continuity within itself, and that which is one because its logos is one. Here is a clue as to how thought may be seen to be in its objects, and it will be explained thus:

Aristotle concludes his discussion of the various types of unity as follows:

All these are one because they are indivisible; some in motion, and others in concept (noesis) or logos. (Met. 1052b1)

The question of how to translate logos without being misleading is very difficult, but it does not suggest a subjective rational state. We have seen elsewhere (p. 29) that in Aristotle, logos can signify the basis of an entity's reality, and that it is identified with the final cause: it is not simply that logos is the plan for the construction of an entity, since it is part of the thing itself. Accordingly, the passage quoted above does not seek to make a distinction between a thing's being one in thought, and one in reality. A superficial reading might yield such a conclusion; one must however resist the temptation to distinguish between thought and reality in Aristotle. The logos of an object, that is, its "formula" or "plan", is present within it, but it is also an intellectual reality. The logos of reality is therefore both a matter of thought, and a matter of being. The distinction drawn by Aristotle here is not between unity which is real, as opposed to that which is "only" in thought: the conditions for the one in thought to be possessed of its unity are laid down.

Elsewhere we are told that things are one in the highest degree "if the thinking of their essence is indivisible" (Met. 1016b1). One presumes that this means that there are ways of thinking of things which do not maintain their unity, such as when we focus on part of an entity. In this way, again, characteristics of being are made to be contingent on thought and its characteristics; thinking and being are considered to be part of each other. The interrelationship of thought and its objects is a major theme, and it will be raised
again in discussion of the On the Soul and its expression of views on the nature of thought.

What then are the characteristics of thinking? The Metaphysics (1032b15) distinguishes between "thinking" and "making", and thinking is defined as coming from the first principle (arche), or the form (eidos), whereas making or production comes from the end of thought. Thought is therefore the result of that which defines the meaning of an object, in terms of its purpose, structure and origin. Thinking is distinguished from imagination (phantasia) in that animals possess only the latter, whereas human beings possess both (On the Soul 433a10). Together with appetite, it causes action. "Thinking and being intelligent (phronein) is the business of the most divine" (Parts of Animals 686b28), and man is the only animal which is upright: this is because in essence, he is divine. Beasts live by appetite, spirit and desire, but man lives mostly by intelligence (though he is inclined to think one thing, and do another: Problems 956b33).

Thought (tò voëtv) is said (On the Soul 427b29) to comprise both imagination and judgment, and this is the beginning of a long passage on imagination, feeling and mind. It is again noted that animals have imagination but no reasoning power (427b14): at this point, the capacity to assess the products of imagination is added to the capacity to imagine, and both are said to be parts of reasoning. Reasoning on this definition, then, would consist of the capacity to conjure up images, and assess their truth-value.

How does thinking come about, asks Aristotle in 429a12. What follows is a most important passage on the nature of thinking, in which it is stated, among other things, the historic Aristotelian position that mind thinks itself:

The mind (nous) is then capable of thinking itself. (On the Soul 429b9)

Equally importantly, it is stated that the thinking is a process in which the soul is acted upon by that which is thinkable. It must therefore be receptive, and in fact it has no characteristic other than its ability to receive. In order to receive, it must be the same as its object (429a15). These two principles are of the utmost importance because they give an insight into an understanding of thought which is so different from our own. Thinking here is really a means of allowing being to be what is, in the soul. It is not a process which registers reality in its own way and in its own code: mind is not a machine for dealing with matter foreign to it, according to its own mechanism and means of organization. It is the same as that which it apprehends, and receiving its ontological kin is the necessary and sufficient condition of thinking.

That part of the soul, then, which is called mind (I mean by mind that by which the soul thinks and assesses), is not actually (èvepyelq) existent until it thinks. (429a22)
Aristotle on the identity of being and thought

The contact between mind and its objects is referred to as a *pathema* in the On Interpretation (16*5), and Aristotle here refers us to his discussion in the On the Soul. In the former work he is concerned to stress that, whereas men speak different languages, their mental experiences are referred to as "like-nesses" of their objects. The interaction between mind and the intelligible produces a *tertium quid*, apparently separate from both mind and its objects, and which has the status of a "likeness" (όμοιωμα). It must be remembered that in the On the Soul (429*15) Aristotle describes the thinking process as being "receptive of the form of an object, that is, potentially of the same nature (τοιούτος), though not identical with it (τοῦτο)". If we wish to harmonize the two works, the affection described as being a likeness in the On Interpretation would be construed as being fashioned of a material like that of the object perceived. The representation of being which is in the mind, is grounded in mind, which is like the being it apprehends. Now similarity is not identity, so that Aristotle seems to diverge from Parmenides, who claimed that thinking and being were the same thing. It was argued above (p.64, 66) that for Parmenides, Being was the stuff of both thought and speech, the material out of which they were made. Is Aristotle deliberately refining the Parmenidian position here? It is possible that the understanding of similarity and identity had progressed in such a way as to allow Aristotle to rework Parmenides' claim. The Greek words τοιούτος (of such a kind) and οὗτος (this) provide the conceptual structure for Aristotle to make the distinction he is here drawing, and the way to use these terms was clearly illustrated by Plato in the Timaeus. (In a Heraclitean reference [49D], Plato endeavours to hold down the material flux of the Presocratic thinker to certain identifiable recurrences, so that reality can be said to have some permanence and stability. The demonstrative *tou to* and the qualitative *toiouton* play a large part in this discussion, and yield for Plato a notion of the similarity of recurrent phases in the flux, and a means of avoiding the claim that such recurrent phases are identical with each other.)

Aristotle here uses the same distinction: thought is *such* as its objects are. Mind has the same relation to its objects as perception to the perceived (429*17): yet this statement does not tell the whole story. Aristotle proceeds almost immediately to write as if they were identical:

... when the mind has become its several objects (429b6)

... mind is potentially the things apprehended by mind... (429b31)

... speculative science (*episteme*) is identical with its object... (430*5)

... actual (κατ' ενεργειαν) science is identical with its object... (430*20)

Science when actively operative is identical with its object (431*1)

... in a sense, soul is all existing things... (431b20)
These repeated affirmations of the identity of thought with being make it clear that some nuance has to be found, in order for us to be able to distinguish between the first claim, namely that thought is not identical with its objects, but only similar to them, and the second view reiterated above viz. that they are identical. That nuance lies in the expression *kat' energeian* ("in act") and this brings us to the knotty problem of the distinction between the intellect in potential (*kata dunamin*) and the intellect in act. It is clear that the mind is identical with its objects only when in activity. While passive and receptive it is like its objects: when operating it becomes them. The passages listed immediately above illustrate perfectly that this is the case, and this is the refinement which Aristotle brings to the Parmenidean position. The distinction between the two phases of intellect allows Aristotle to resolve the problem of how the mind can be said to exist when not engaged in apprehending its usual objects.

The precise meaning of the distinction between the potential and active intellect is an historic problem of Aristotelian scholarship, but it does not affect our general intention of giving the portrait of the Greek idea of thinking. We shall return to the issue of the identity of mind and its objects, but there are other observations made by Aristotle on the nature of thought, which are worthy of mention. In the first place, he notes that the thinking part of the mind is receptive of the forms of objects (429a15, 28), this aspect of them being presumably that in them which is the intellectual part, and therefore conceivable by mind. Aristotle later returns to this quotation, and points out that the "objects of thought lie in the sensible forms" (432a5). In this way the forms of the objects known enter thought, and not of course their physical qualities, which cannot do so, and for this reason Aristotle seems led in the direction of comparing thought to the possession of "mental pictures" (*phantasmata*). He sees thought as being full of object outlines, linking up together to form a kind of intellectual landscape, like a collection of hieroglyphic ideograms.

It is further noted that a difference between sense perception and thinking lies in the fact that a violent sense-experience dulls the senses (for example, a strong taste renders it difficult to taste anything immediately subsequently), whereas the highly intelligible renders the mind more acutely attuned to the objects of its understanding (429b1). Mind itself is an object of thought, and it therefore has some element in common with the objects of thought. In a way, however, the mind is nothing until it actually thinks, like the empty tablet awaiting the engraving of some letters (430a1).

Mind is activity: it causes (430a15). Following its passive phase, it simply becomes all things. Yet in 431a21 questions are raised about this. The initial statement is made, that the soul is all existing things, but qualifications follow. Thinking cannot be identical with its objects; stones do not exist in the soul (431b30). The form of the stone, however, is in the soul.
The soul then is like a hand: for the hand is an instrument which uses other instruments...

What Aristotle appears to be suggesting here is that the hand is like the instruments it uses, since it is itself an instrument. It is therefore comparable to these instruments. The likeness of mind to its objects is being dealt with in this analogy, and the similitude in question in this case lies in the fact that the mind receives forms, and the objects of mind themselves possess forms (τὰ εἶδῶν: 432a3). It is this in the object that the mind apprehends: that which lies in the realm of the form.

This is Aristotle’s concluding attempt to give an analysis of the relationship which holds between mind and its objects. Whereas it has been confidently stated up until now that the mind-in-act is identical with its objects, it is now the case that this statement is subjected to a closer analysis which very much weakens it.

For the hand is an instrument which employs instruments, and in the same way the mind is a form which employs forms... (432a1).

The similarity between mind and its objects is much diminished by this comparison, which reduces it to a matter of one single function held in common within a multiplicity of characteristics. This tenuous comparability comes as a surprise following the confident nature of Aristotle’s previous and repeated claims of the identity of mind and its objects. However this in his position, and the failure to justify it in a compelling way should not mislead us into underestimating the historic influence of this Aristotelian theme.

There is a further development in the Metaphysics (1074b15) which must be noted. If mind is to be regarded as “the most divine of phenomena”, then in what does its excellence consist? When one recalls that it does have a passive and inert phase, during which it is merely waiting to receive, one is in some difficulty about conceding its lofty position. Aristotle seeks to give an answer which is tied to the objects of thought, and after an argument in which there appears to be a step missing (1074b24), it is concluded that the mind thinks that which is “most divine and estimable” (1074b26). What is this divine object? The emphasis must fall on the object if mind is considered in its inactive phase. When inactive it would appear to be lacking something, and the logic of Aristotle’s distinction between the potential (κατὰ δύναμιν) and the active (καθ’ ἐνεργείαν) requires that the latter precede the former. Metaphysics 1049b5 argues that actuality is prior to potentiality:

To every such potentiality, then, actuality is prior both in formula and in substance; and in one sense it is prior in time, but in another sense it is not. (1049b11)
The arguments in favour of this position need not detain us, since it already tells us enough about Aristotle’s handling of the primacy of mind: potential mind cannot be the supreme being envisaged, since the notion of potency implies a prior principle. This would necessarily be the object of thought, from which the actualisation of mind would arise. This solution will not work, since unworthy objects of thought would detract from its perfection. It is therefore concluded that mind thinks itself, and in this way its task does not diminish its nature:

“Therefore mind thinks itself, if it is that which is best, and its thinking is a thinking of thinking (ἡ νόησις νοῆσεως νόησις: 1074b35)”.

This famous phrase makes mind quite distinct from the other faculties, since they are concerned with that which is different from themselves. A tendency on Parmenides’ part to separate nous from the other faculties in the same way has been referred to on pp.65 and 67. Aristotle now observes, however, that it seems that knowledge is of something else, “and only incidentally of itself” (1074b37). But thought deals with that in the object which is like itself, namely that which contains no matter. In things which contain no matter, thought and the object of thought are not different.

The object of thought cannot be composite, since if it were, thought would be subject to change as it ranged from one part to the next. Such variation would permit change for the worse, and as we know from Greek philosophy in general, change and perfection are incompatible. Thought deals with the indivisible in an object, that which contains no matter; and self-thought itself is eternal, unlocated in time (1075a11).

Aristotle thus completes his claim that thought and its objects are identical, with the claim that thought thinks itself: its object is thought.

Since the work of Anaxagoras, Nous had been considered a directive and causative force. The Epicureans however did not accept the existence of a providential force in the organization of the cosmos, which was explained according to the general principles of their atomic physics. Mind, therefore, was relegated to a purely epistemological position, which saw the Epicureans distinguishing between thought and sense-perception. It seems to function in a way which is not unlike sense-perception, and thus represents a distinct break with the tradition of distinguishing sharply between the functioning of mind and that of the senses. The images (eidola) given off by bodies are apprehended by the senses, but the mind handles those which are accidental mixtures and which give rise to imaginings which have no basis in reality, such as dreams and visions of things like centaurs (Lucretius IV.732–776; V.148–149). Thought also plays the part of assessing and judging the images which are available to the mind. The eidola given off by physical objects come together to form mental pictures (phantasai) and nous forms these into pro-
lepseis, or general notions. The prolepsis was the result of recurrent observations, and formed a reliable basis for judgment. Of course, baldly stated, the only criterion of truth in Epicureanism is sensation (aisthesis), but the mind and its habitual concepts were also allowed some role in the process of the determination of truth. Lucretius described these general notions, which were akin to the Stoic katalipseis, by the term notitia (De rerum nat. IV.476). These standard mental notions render it possible to make judgments about individual sense occurrences: such judgments are hypolepseis (Diogenes Laertius X.34). The mind is also capable of ratiocination (logismos), and of apprehending realities not immediately accessible to the senses (op. cit. X.32) a prime case of the latter being of course the atoms which were fundamental to Epicurean physics. Clearly then, mind was indispensable for certain important epistemological tasks, and has the character in Epicureanism of a rather grudgingly admitted piece of knowing apparatus. The philosophy seems to have been devised with a view to making sense-perception the ultimate source of knowledge, and the ultimate guarantee of certainty: having been unable to do this to the extent desired, Epicurus was forced to bring in mind to assure some quite crucial functions.

The Stoic nous, on the other hand, preserved the causative role accorded to it by Anaxagoras and Plato; the Stoics also saw the mind of the individual as part of the cosmic pool of nous, which directed and guided reality. The term hegemonikon is applied to it, meaning “leading” or “authoritative”, and this notion applies to both the leading rational principle of the soul, and as well the cosmic authority of the universe. This constitutes a clear reminder of the causal aspect of mind, which is quite a separate matter from its epistemological capacity. This cosmic nous, also called logos, pervades all and directs all (Diogenes Laertius VII.138). The epistemological “leading principle” functions through katalipseis (apprehension). The mind is conceived of as waiting for the senses to register external reality, and the result is a mental response of acceptance or rejection. The mind gives assent (synkatathesis) to an impression, and it is thus apprehended. (Clement of Alexandria was later to use the Stoic notion of assent in an attempt to explain the Christian notion of faith: the idea of faith as a psychological act of assent to a truth seemed particularly appealing.) The “leading principle” matures over a period of time, reaching the point at which it can create its own concepts. The concept (ennoia) results from the sensible image being processed by mind: the Stoics felt that the full operation of the mind began at the age of seven, a fact they detected on the grounds of biological criteria rather than psychological. The first production of sperm seemed to be the appropriate moment for the first productions of concepts, and it is at this time that the notion of good and evil is formed (SVF II.764).

A description of Stoic views given by Sextus Empiricus (Against the Logicians I.303 ff.; SVF II.849) has them claiming that the intellect (dianoia) ap-
prehends bodily substance, the senses and itself. It is difficult to disentangle
the Stoic view from Sextus' anti-Stoic polemic, but it can be inferred from
304 that the Stoics had taken account of the Aristotelian view that mind can-
not deal with mere parts of what it apprehends: it must deal with the whole.
Sextus advances a Sceptical argument against the view that mind knows the
senses: if so, it would become them, this being the only way to know them.
But if this is the case, then there would be left no higher faculty to know the
senses: a Stoic argument is cited in reply which gives intellect (dianoia: nous
is used later) and perception (aisthesis) as two sides of one faculty:

Yes, they say, but intellect and perception are the same thing, but not in the same
way, it being in one mode intellect, and in another perception. (Against the Logicians
I. 307)

An image was offered to reinforce this statement of the oneness of intellect,
and perception: a drinking cup is both concave and convex, depending on
whether it is viewed from the outside or the inside. Sextus found this riposte
to the Sceptical arguments to be not a reply at all, but it is interesting to note
the Stoic attempt to bind together sense perception and thought. This must
partly be the result of the Stoic concern with material explanations of reality,
and the desire to avoid dualism in the constitution of reality. A consequence
of this is the attempt to avoid the postulation of a transcendent and over-
reaching mind, to which would be attributed thought, freedom of decision
and such other attributes as are attributed to mind in the Idealist tradition.
The uneasiness of the Stoic approach lies in the juxtaposition of this material
concept of mind with the concept of it as being the highest God of all, resi-
dent in the aither (SVF II.1027).

Sceptical arguments take the critical analysis of Greek philosophical tenets
to an acute level and the discussion of thought and mind is no exception.
Their fundamentally negative character means that in many histories of phil-
osophy they are neglected, but it is precisely their negative quality which
makes them important for this study. The arguments which are now de-
scribed attempt to expose as unsubstantiated the general Greek claim of the
primacy of mind, the reliability of its findings, and the privileged relationship
between mind and reality. The Sceptics are the first Greek revisionists, and
they are followed in this by the Gnostics.

The Aristotelian view of the self-knowledge of mind is subjected to a
searching scrutiny in Against the Logicians I.310. Against the dogmatic phil-
osophers is directed the following argument: if mind apprehends itself it does
so either as a whole, or by employing a part of itself for the purpose of self-
knowledge. Now it will be unable to apprehend itself as a whole, for if the
apprehending subject were whole, the apprehended would have no room for
existence; i.e., it would be nothing. It is however impossible that the appre-
The Sceptics 85

hending subject should exist whilst its object fails to exist. Secondly, the mind cannot employ a part of itself in order to obtain its own self-knowledge. If it resorts to knowledge of one of its own parts, it will have created an infinite regress. (The above constitutes a rephrasing of the Sceptical argument.) Further, if the mind knows itself, it will also know where it is located, whether in the head, the breast, or the liver: it clearly does not do so, for the question of its location is a matter of dispute amongst the “dogmatists” (313).

This very important theme is taken up again in the same book (348). If the intellect knows the truth, it ought then to know what it is made of, where it is located and how it operates: the architect knows the nature of his measure and his compasses, and this is essential for him to be able to make judgments of what is straight or crooked. Here it is simply asserted that the mind does not know such things about itself; the evidence being that there is disagreement among philosophers about where it is to be located in the body. If it really knew itself, then such matters would not be up for discussion.

Therefore the intellect (dianoia) is not the criterion. (Against the Logicians I.350)

Both these passages on the impossibility of the mind’s self-knowledge arise out of a long discussion on the nature of man, and on whether man or any part of him constituted the kriterion or the measure by which things may be assessed as true or false. It is this issue which underlies both discussions, and the question at stake is whether the intellect can or cannot be regarded as the epistemological sheet-anchor.

The Sceptical position is of course a frontal attack on Aristotle’s twofold view of the identity of mind and its objects, and the self-knowledge of mind. Aristotle does not of course use the term kriterion in his discussion of this matter, and he does not explicitly claim to be in search of one, but it is clear enough that he is intent on establishing the primacy of mind among phenomena, and that the above views are adduced rather as a means of sustaining this, than for other epistemological reasons. The Sceptical position is a negative one: mind is not self-knowing, nor is it the arbiter of reality, truth and falsehood.

Further, in the course of a discussion of the five modes of suspending judgment, it is claimed that the intelligible objects (noeta) are relative in character: that an attempt to verify the existence of an intelligible object would involve either an infinite regress (since another would have to be adduced to confirm the first, and so on), or a circular argument (if a sensible object were used to confirm the intelligible, it would require confirmation itself: Pyrrhonism I.172; 177). Even intelligible objects therefore are relative (πρός τι), and “if they had really been such as they are claimed to be, there would have been no controversy about them” (177). We may thus draw the
implication that they are subject to opinion and variety of view, and are in no way absolute.

An understanding of the relative and the absolute in Sceptical thought may be gleaned from Against the Logicians II.37: truth is either "absolute" (κατὰ διαφορὰν καὶ φύσει) or "relative" (πρὸς τι). The absolute is "that which exists by difference or by nature", and (it is argued) truth has no such quality, since it does not affect all men in the same way. Heat, for example, affects all men in the same way, given that they are all in the same condition. This is not the case with truth, since people disagree about it. Its failure to assert itself unmistakeably to all men in the same condition indicates that it does not have the status of an absolute. If it belongs to the class of relatives, it will have their general characteristics: "relatives are only conceived (νοηταί), and do not exist" (Against the Logicians II.38). Another characteristic of relatives is that they can be both true and false at the same time, just as a thing can be both above and below an object, according to the perspective being used. The intelligible objects, then, are relative in character: they are merely matters of thought, and vary according to the observer.

The Sceptical notion of the relative reduces thought (νοεῖν) to a level far below the status it had enjoyed in the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions. Somewhat surprisingly, Sextus uses an objectivist view of the external world in his effort to distinguish the absolute from the relative. The absolute is that which is thought of (νοηταί: Against the Logicians II.161) as independent of other realities: the relative is that which can only be conceived in relation to some other thing. External reality dictates thought; thought and that which exists are quite different matters.

In quite a distinct step, the whole realm of meaning is consigned to the relative, and then to the intelligence (Against the Logicians II.206). Reversing completely the usual trend in Greek philosophy, the Sceptical argument advances sensibles as being absolute, and sensibles only. The sign (σημεῖον), however is a relative thing, since it is considered in relation to that which it signifies. The sign does not belong to the class of sensibles, though it may be in itself a sensible: as a sign, it is relational, and therefore belongs to thought. As was established earlier, all intelligibles are relatives, and the sign simply fits into this category. Since it is that which endows meaning, we may conclude that meaning is relative: truth has already been established to be relative, and so the intellect deals with the fluctuating and the uncertain. Scepticism strikes at the very basis of Greek philosophy, by undermining the claim that reasoning has access to the stable and absolute characteristics of reality.

Philo's thought reflects both the tradition that Mind is a causing, providential principle, in the manner of Anaxagoras, but it also forms part of the traditional discussion of thought and its characteristics, as formed by Aristotle and contested by the Sceptics. Mind as organising principle may be found
Philo continues the tradition of Nous

in the On the Creation (8), where Moses is said to have known that there were two basic parts in reality; the active, and the passive.

The active (drasterion) cause is the perfectly pure and unsullied Mind of the universe, transcending virtue and transcending knowledge (episteme) and transcending the Good and the Beautiful. The passive part (pathetikon) is itself without life and motion, but when set in motion, shaped and enlivened by Mind, it is transformed into the most perfect oeuvre, namely this world (8–9).

Mind contributes motion, shape and life to the inert mass, and so the cosmos takes its existence. The function of mind on the macrocosmic level is reduplicated in the microcosm (as is so often the case with Philo), and the human mind guides, directs and oversees the realm of the senses. The allegorical interpretation yields a picture in which mind and the senses are in combat (Allegorical Interp. III.15); mind should be able to control the passions, but if unable it should disentangle itself from them. Thus Jacob flees the passions, and this is the better way since

continued recollection engraves (on the mind) distinct outlines, which injure the intelligence, distracting and perverting it. (III.16)

Mind has therefore the freedom to dissociate itself from the sensual pressures upon it, but it can be altered by their impact. Remembering causes the tablet to have engravings made upon it, and it is better that the slate remain clean, by attention being directed elsewhere. Philo compares the mind to an untamed animal, which rushes off and makes its escape from the consideration of objects which could detract from its sway. The mind can in fact influence towards evil; theft, adultery, murder or sacrilege are all within the realm of possible mental promptings. Yet they must be resisted, and it is therefore clear that mind can arise above the forces which seek to dominate it. In the manner, thus, of an ancient Karl Jaspers Philo claims the transcendence of mind over matter: whilst he recognises the possibility of matter’s exercising an effect on mind, he also establishes the primacy of mind by attributing to it the ability to dissociate itself from such effects (The Confusion of Tongues 163).

What of the thought process? The Maker has two distinct powers of thought: the concept (ennoia) and the thinking (dianoesis). The latter constitutes the bringing to issue of the latent thought (The Unchangeableness of God 34). Thought (noesis) is the outgrowth of the properly cultivated dominant faculty (to hegemonikon: Noah’s Work 31), and the study of grammar is said to help produce it (Preliminary Studies 15). Thought is really the correlate of mind, being the highest epistemological faculty, and the one which apprehends the highest realities: so the garb of the priest is replete with symbo-
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ism, presenting to the eye a rich visual experience, but also providing philosophical thought (*noesis*) about its meaning (Special Laws I.95). Intelligible reality is open only to the intellect; moreover it is numbers which lead us from the contemplation of the intelligible to the perception of the visible (On the Creation 49).

Philo considers that there were archetypes of mind and sense-perception, and that before the intelligible objects came into existence, there was the intelligible itself (*to noeton*: Allegorical Interp. I.22). This is generic in character, and existed prior to the existence of sensible objects. Philo clearly endorses the old principle that the mind knows mental things, and that sense-perception knows physical objects.

... prior to the emergence of individual intelligible objects, there was in existence the generically intelligible, by participation (*μετόχη*) in which the other things receive their name. (loc. cit.)

An extraordinarily interesting passage may be found in Allegorical Interpretations I.92, where Adam is identified with Mind, and where it is noted that Adam gives no name to himself, though he does undertake the task of providing nomenclature to other things. This then is Philo’s account of the origin of language: Adam apprehends (*καταλαμβάνων*) and names objects other than himself. Of his own self he is ignorant, and therefore he is incapable of self-naming. (One presumes that he is known and named by a prior entity, such as God.) Associated with Adam’s strange synthesis of knowledge and ignorance is the most important claim that mind does not know itself (I.91). Mind and Adam are identified, but it is directly stated that mind does not know itself. Comparing it to the senses, Philo notes that the eye sees other things, but not itself; using what looks to be the Sceptical argument discussed above (151–2), Philo asks:

Can it say what it is, and of what kind, breath or blood or fire on air or anything else? (I.91)

And so, Philo along with the Sceptics directly refuses the Aristotelian claim that thought thinks itself. He does however conceive of a higher mind (I.90), and one surmises that self-knowledge is one of its characteristics. Adam represents the earthly mind, and self-thought is considered an ability which it lacks. The conception of levels of mind is of course quite remote from the approach of the Sceptics to the problem, but they and Philo do share an anti-Aristotelian posture on the question of the self-thought of human thought. In Philo’s case, the intention is to portray man as intellectually debilitated: he is capable of naming all that lies outside himself. He apprehends all but himself, and is capable of discourse about all objects except his own being: tragi-
cally, Adam, after carrying out his task of giving language to the world, falls silent when he turns to himself.

The Gnostics have similar preoccupations. Of particular interest is a passage which is very close in substance and development to Philo's discussion of Adam's inability to name himself. The Gospel of Truth (38) has a good deal to say about naming, including the statement: "Now the name of the Father is the Son." The text continues to explain this, referring to the visibility of the Son, but claiming the invisibility of the name, "because it alone is the mystery of the invisible which comes to ears that are completely filled with it."

Who will be able to name the Father, it is asked, and it is replied that only those who rested in the name of the Father, and in whom the name rested. This is clearly an allusion to a filial relationship with Christ. Observations which follow bear a clear relationship to the line of thought which prompted Philo's notion of a mind which does not think itself: the Gospel of Truth argues that only the Father could beget a name for himself, since he is the only being which is unengendered.

He gave a name to himself since he sees himself, he alone having the power to give himself a name. For he who does not exist has no name. (Trans. George W. MacRae, ed. J. M. Robinson)

The ability of the Father to see himself is that which enables him to create a Name for himself, and in this rather loose way the Aristotelian notion of thought's self-thought is broached. Granted, there is no identification of the Father with Nous, or Mind, as there is in Philo, but the connection between self-perception and self-naming is undeniably present. The text provides us with an example of Gnostic deployment of traditional Greek themes in an untraditional Greek manner, and in a somewhat untutored manner. Existence and self-perception are the preconditions for self-naming: the Son exists and this existence constitutes the naming of the Father. In this way the Gnostic author gives his view of the meaning of the revelation given by the making manifest of the Son: the breakthrough lies in the naming of the Father, and in a sense the Son is not more than a naming. This interesting notion is illustrative of the Gnostic dilemma over predication, and the Gnostic preference for negatives in descriptions of the Father: to this we shall return, but it can be noted that christology here simplifies itself down to the single issue of language. The Christ-being breaks the silence, not by giving a name to the Father, but by constituting that name. (See also my article on this, together with Tardieu's comments on it, in Gnosticism and Neoplatonism.)

There is also involved here a simple consideration of the ordinary experience of name-giving: in the first place the person giving the name is prior to the named, and in the second place the parent usually gives the name to the
child. Thus the Father is prior, and therefore through the Son-name is placed in a clearly different category to other named beings.

First, then, it is fitting for us to reflect on this matter: what is the name? It is the name in truth; it is not therefore the name from the father, for it is the one which is the proper name. Therefore he did not receive the name on loan as (do) others, according to the form in which each one is to be produced. But this is the proper name. There is no one else who gave it to him. (Gospel of Truth 4Q)

The name “Christ” is not an ordinary name, since it did not originate from bestowal by a parent. Such names are “on loan”: presumably they are contingent and arbitrary, capable of being changed without effect on the things of which they are labels. This name is proper, in that it belongs to its object: moreover it is its object. It is not therefore given as at a christening, the label/object distinction being inapplicable. There is no real distinction between the Father and the Son, since they are one (38).

It is also noted that the name is invisible, despite the visibility of the Son (38); it “comes to ears that are completely filled with it”. The Father’s name is “apparent”, but “not spoken”, like Wittgenstein’s category of that which is manifest, but cannot be spoken; the mystical. This is an interesting feature of the Gospel of Truth account, but it is difficult to discern consistency. It is later claimed:

But he is unnameable, indescribable, until the time when he who is perfect spoke of himself. And it is he who has the power to speak his name and see it. (40, ed. J. M. Robinson)

At first sight it would appear that the name is now spoken, but it seems that the author is attempting to place the speaking of God on a different footing. His utterance is in fact the generation of a being, and it differs from human utterance in this respect, since the latter engenders nothing but disappearing sounds. Perhaps Philo may again be called in to play an elucidatory role: he too shows a desire to distinguish between divine and human speech, and does so by declaring God’s words to be acts: “his word is his deed” (The Sacrifices of Abel and Cain 65). Philo’s view was discussed in detail on p.43, and it is quite probable that material of this kind lies behind the present document, and the Gospel itself does identify the Father’s words as “works” (37). The basic concern is to draw a categorial distinction between human speaking and divine speaking, and the basic result is the emphasis on the being of Christ rather than on his own vocalisation. The passage demonstrates yet again the Gnostic preoccupation with the origin of discourse. One of the fundamental questions of Gnosticism, and perhaps the fundamental question, is the matter of how the silence is broken.

The above material from Philo and the Gospel of Truth constitutes there-
fore a by-product and mutation of Aristotle’s famous claim that thought
thinks itself. God only is capable of this feat, and it follows that human intel-
lection is defective in various ways. Humans can only name things other than
themselves, because of their inability to self-think: they receive their names
from others. This lacuna in human intellectual capacity is a unique develop-
ment of Hellenistic religious philosophy, and constitutes the Philonic/Gnos-
tic insight into the tragedy of man: ignorance is the human condition, and its
legacy of anxiety, doubt and fear is enhanced by the fact that the primary in-
tellectual flaw lies at the very core of human rational endeavour. It is the
ability to perceive oneself which is missing. The apprehension of oneself is
therefore beyond one’s own abilities, and one is dependent on the powers for
thought of oneself to occur. The depreciation of human rational faculties
which is so clear in Gnosticism means that there is little emphasis on the
characteristics of human thought: The Aristotelian analysis of human
thought is not lost, but is spread over the variety of hypostases postulated by
the Gnostics. In the Gospel of Truth, for example, thought is the property of
the Father, and constitutes the internal deliberations which precede and par-
et the subsequent word-acts (37). In the Tripartite Tractate (105), Mind oc-
curs on the level of the “exalted aeons”, and gives life to that which was at
first dead. Mind compensates for the work of the logos, which carried out its
defective work in ignorance. A Hermetic tractate entitled The Discourse on
the Eighth and Ninth has Hermes Trismegistus instructing a pupil:

I see another mind, the one that (moves) the soul! I see the one that moves me from
pure forgetfulness. You give me power! I see myself! I want to speak! Fear restrains
me. I have found the beginning of the power that is above all powers, the one that has
no beginning. I see a fountain bubbling with life. I have said, O my son, that I am
Mind. I have seen! Language is not able to reveal this. For the entire eighth, O my
son, and the souls that are in it, and the angels, sing a hymn in silence. (58, trans.
Brasher, Dirkse, Parrott)

The minds perceived by the mystagogue infuse him with power, and he is
then enabled to see himself. He becomes Mind: language is outstripped, in-
adequate; the angels sing in silence. Mind cannot be “interpreted”, since it is
self-contained or self-sufficient (58). Clearly it is the case here that mind
only can see itself, and that it is a principle which exists on a level beyond
ordinary human experience.

Basilides has Nous originating as the first product from the unbegotten Fa-
ther (Irenaeus, Adv. Haer. I.24.3). From Mind follows a series of lower
principles, including Logos, Sophia and Dynamis. There follows the creation
of innumerable intermediate ontological levels, including 365 heavens, before
man is finally brought into existence. Clearly then, mind is far removed from
man’s capacities, since so much has intervened along the great chain of being,
and consequently steps are taken:
The unengendered and ineffable Father, seeing their disastrous plight, sent his first-born *Nous*—he who is called the Christ—to liberate those who believe in him from the power of those who made the world. (Irenaeus 1.24.4)

Christ and *Nous* are thus identified, and Christ's gift to man is the intellectual processes. Other systems, such as that of Ptolemaeus, place Intellect a little lower down the scale than does Basilides, but the function is constant. Irenaeus says of Ptolemaeus' *Nous* that he “alone comprehended the greatness of his Father” (Adv. Haer. 1.1.1). Gnosticism recognises Mind and thought in the ordinary Greek sense, but it is considered to lie elsewhere. Consequently the emphasis is not so much on the analysis of human thinking in the manner of Aristotle, the Stoics and the Sceptics, but simply on the provision of *gnosis*, knowledge, to the intellectually impotent. There would be as much interest for a Gnostic in the logic of human thought as there would be for Aristotle in the logic of canine thought.

Now the end is receiving knowledge about the one who is hidden, and this is the Father, from whom the beginning came forth... (Gospel of Truth 46)

Knowledge is the human preoccupation, rather than thought, and it is received rather than obtained.

Overall, what may be said? Early characterisations of *nous* present it as a holistic mode of apprehension, which enables one to grasp a complete situation or state of affairs in one action. Efforts to emphasise the intuitive function ought to be played down in favour of the holistic functioning of the intellect, and its capacity for complete apprehension. With Parmenides begins the long Western tradition of identifying being and knowledge, and though the relationship between Parmenides' views and the subsequent development of Idealism is clear enough, it is not also clear that Parmenides is an idealist, or that he commits the idealist “fallacies”. Being for Parmenides is like a cooking ingredient which disappears in the course of the production of the dish, though basic and essential: for example, egg-white. Being is the medium of speech and thought, or more strongly, the stuff of speaking and thinking. The tendency here to establish a close relationship between thought and being is continued through the work of Aristotle who, like Parmenides, is absolutely unmoved by the common-sense distinction between thought and apparently external objects. Aristotle strives to locate that in “external” objects which is in common with mind, and it is their intelligible aspect. Objects have an aspect to them which is not material, but which transcends the material. Aristotle considers that there is a non-material element in physical reality, which is intellectual in character. The shape of a thing yields to a notion of a thing's format, the design or formula which gives it its rational aspect: objects have their own logos. It is clearly this rationally accessible aspect of the
physical world, as seen by Aristotle, which is known by mind. Is mind in fact anything different from these objects? It clearly is very like that part of them which is to do with shape, form (eidos) and order. To understand the conception of mind which is at stake here, it is necessary to eradicate models which may be dominant in our thinking, such as the view of mind as a radio receiver, which takes signals which are different from itself, and reforms them into sounds which are then available to the senses. This concept of mind as an apparatus for dealing with alien material is quite foreign to a large part of the Greek tradition, which sees mind as akin to that which it receives. The old idea that like is known by like stands behind the development of such a view, and it is well known that in Plato knowledge and opinion are distinguished on the basis of their objects: knowledge is of transcendent Reality, while opinion deals with the transient and the material. In this way there is established the view that certain things are appropriate to knowledge. Aristotle's advance lies in his attempt to define the kinship between knowledge and the realities it knows. Mind is said to be the same as its objects, and thought consequently thinks itself. These views were to be enormously influential in the development of Platonism, though immediately contested by the Sceptics. Accordingly, both Philo and the Gnostics recognise a category of mind which can self-think, and a category which cannot. The Gnostic strives after the self-thinking mind, since his own is ignorant of that crucial entity which stands in a causal relationship with all the transcendent principles. For the Gnostic, thinking and its mechanics are scarcely a concern, given the defective nature of the human faculties: he does not think, he awaits knowledge. In both Philo and the Gnostics, thought and naming are closely related, and he who cannot self-think cannot name himself. It is to the question of naming reality that we now turn.