

HUMAN THINKING AND THE ACTIVE INTELLECT IN ARISTOTLE

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AND
THE ACTIVE INTELLECT
IN
ARISTOTLE

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ABSTRACT

In Book III, Chapter 5 of his *De Anima*, in the midst of his account of the faculty of thought, Aristotle concludes that there are, in some sense, two minds required for thinking, one which 'becomes all things', and another which 'makes all things'. The second of these -- commonly called the "active intellect" -- has always been a source of puzzlement for interpreters, on two fronts: (1) How does this entity 'make' things, i.e. what does it do, in relation to the potential or "passive" intellect, by way of producing the ideas in the latter?; and (2) What is the metaphysical status of the active intellect? In particular, can Aristotle's description of this mind as "eternal and immortal" be reconciled with his accounts, elsewhere, of the nature and function of eternal beings?

In this dissertation, with the help of related passages in other works, I unravel the details and implications of Aristotle's remarkably terse and economical discussion of the active intellect. Further, I show how we can, and why we must, re-interpret the most important aspect of Aristotle's metaphysics -- his theory of the divine beings, the "unmoved movers" -- in light of what we learn from *De Anima* III.5. Aristotle is seen to have solved an essential epistemological problem, namely how we initially form the ideas or 'concepts' about which we think, in a manner which brings his psychology into direct contact with his theory of being. In the process, he implies a view of the power of human reason that is both ennobling and humbling.

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Thanks, finally, to Shannon, whose relation to the motion of the outermost sphere is the theme of everything to which this dissertation serves as a rough draft of a preface.

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Introduction

In this dissertation, I interpret Aristotle's account of the so-called 'active', or 'agent', or 'productive' intellect, in De Anima III.5. My approach assumes a fundamental consistency between this chapter's description of an intellect which "makes all things" and the other important Aristotelian discussions of the nature of thinking in general, as well as of the role of the divine in human thought. By comparing the wording of III.5 with that of the other passages, and by taking seriously the few hints that Aristotle gives us as to the nature of the relationship between the active and passive intellects, I offer new support for the long-standing branch of the interpretive tradition which sees in III.5 an allusion to the divine beings of Metaphysics XII.

The great pitfall, in a project of this sort, is the temptation to draw connections between texts without sufficient justification, and hence to give to one's conclusions the appearance of arbitrary assertions. Therefore, if one's purpose is to make explicit a relationship that is merely *implied* by Aristotle's own words, then one must take the preliminary step of establishing reasonable grounds for the belief that such an implication actually exists. I say this in part as an apology for certain arguments in the

dissertation which may be exhausting to the reader, or which may seem to be flogging dead horses. Drawing a coherent and consistent doctrine out of Aristotle's terse and contextually varied remarks about the relationship between the divine and human minds is a tricky business. Thus it behoves us to carve each stone in the structure as meticulously as possible, though hopefully never at the expense of the larger aim which these details are meant to serve, namely a clarification of some of Aristotle's most important insights into human thought.

Further, projects of this nature -- those, that is, which attempt to follow a thinker's train of thought beyond the limits of his words -- inevitably lead us to a challenging crossroads. For if we can show that there is indeed an intimate connection between theoretical positions which, as commonly interpreted, might not appear to be more than superficially related, then we are faced with the task of addressing the implications of this new-found connection for our understanding of the *explicitly* stated aspects of the works in question. In the present case, this will mean, for example, speculating on how our inherited understanding of Aristotle's account of the astronomical function of the divine beings must be expanded or supplemented in light of the relation which I hope to establish between the active intellect and the unmoved movers.

My primary concern in this dissertation is to

establish the interrelations among the various passages at issue. This, however, does not give me license to evade the subsequent, and more speculative, step that I have just described. I will therefore introduce, at various stages of the discussion, certain tentative answers to the questions which naturally arise from the considerations I present. These answers, though by no means offered without careful consideration, are of course matters for further investigation and debate. My purpose in offering them is in part to promote such debate by attempting to clarify the nature of the issues at stake, i.e. to show what kinds of questions we must be prepared to try to answer. To put this another way, if the main line of argument in this dissertation is at all convincing, then certain extraordinarily complex questions arise with regard to some of the most profound areas of Aristotle's thought. In the present context, it is more important to me that the reader fully comprehend and acknowledge these complexities, and the importance of addressing them, than that he or she accede to my particular suggested solutions. I do hope -- to state this more positively -- that the reader will not feel free to adopt solutions to these difficulties which cannot account for the full complexity of the issues that I have delineated, or which have only the advantage of being more orthodox.

The dissertation is divided into two parts. The first, comprised of four chapters, establishes the divinity of

the active intellect and outlines the structure of the relationship that must obtain between this intellect and human thinking. The second is comprised of three chapters, and proceeds, by means of an account of the relationship between Aristotle's and Plato's respective terminologies of human thought, toward the suggestion that the active intellect performs its function of producing ideas by standing to the human intellect as a desired end to desiring matter.

In Chapter 1, I outline the nature of the issues at stake in De Anima III.5, and, beginning with a particularly difficult statement from the end of the chapter, introduce some of the main lines of interpretation which have been taken by both ancient and modern commentators. The purpose of this chapter is primarily to focus the reader's attention on those few details in III.5 which can and ought to be examined for clues as to the place of the active intellect within Aristotle's metaphysical scheme.

Chapter 2 examines one particularly central detail in III.5, namely the analogy between the active intellect and light. Arguing first of all for the importance of this analogy, against the views of some interpreters who have downplayed its significance, I then embark upon an extensive analysis of the analogy itself, drawing on material from De Anima II.7, in which Aristotle explains the nature of light, and also on related material from other works, especially the Metaphysics and the Nicomachean Ethics. Here it will be shown

that we must take seriously the possibility that the active intellect is indeed an Aristotelian divinity, and not merely analogous to such a being, as some have contended.

In Chapter 3, the connection between the active intellect and the Prime Mover is pursued further, through the examination of some of the other important terms used in III.5 to describe the nature of this intellect, particularly its portrayal as an essentially active being. Through an extended discussion of a similar passage in the Eudemian Ethics, we will be able to clear up many of the outstanding concerns from Chapter 1 regarding whether the active intellect thinks the objects of human knowledge, what weight can be placed on Aristotle's claim that the active intellect is "in the soul", and what might be entailed by identifying the active intellect with the "divine element" of human beings to which Aristotle sometimes refers.

Chapter 4 concludes Part I of the dissertation by marshalling the evidence gathered through the earlier chapters to address the question with which the thesis began, namely how to interpret the vexing final statement of III.5, "We do not remember...", where it is unclear whether the subject of the statement is the active intellect after separation from the individual or the individual composite humans themselves. The meaning of this statement, and of the brief argument to establish its truth, will help us to gain some insight into a fundamental division between the capacities of the human mind

strictly speaking, and the activity of our divine spark.

Part II begins, in Chapter 5, with a return to an issue first raised in Chapter 2, namely the relation between Aristotle's light analogy and Plato's sun image from Republic VI. A careful comparison between the two passages will serve as the introduction to a general defence of the hermeneutical methods I employ in the thesis, which will, in turn, serve as an important prefatory statement for Chapter 6, in which I compare in detail the respective terminologies of Aristotle and Plato in their discussions of the nature of human thought. From this comparison the specific nature of thought will be clarified in those respects which are especially relevant to the issue of our ability to think about the divine.

In the seventh and final chapter, relying on the textual analysis of the previous six, I offer a speculative account of the most hidden and recalcitrant aspects of Aristotle's epistemology, namely how the active intellect 'actualizes' ideas in the passive intellect, and what implications this relationship might have for our understanding of Aristotle's metaphysics. That is, I offer some new possibilities for a broader interpretation of Aristotle's beliefs about the relationship between mind and cosmos. In the process, Aristotle's method of expanding on the views of his predecessors will be seen to have crucial -- and generally overlooked -- implications for our understanding of his most profound insights.

Charles Kahn, in the context of arguing that the active intellect is the lynchpin of Aristotle's position that the true friend is 'another self', defends such an effort in a statement which is appropriate to the present project:

Now there is nothing in the brief account of DA III.5 to show that the doctrine of the active intellect was designed to complete and tie together Aristotle's views in epistemology, philosophy of mind, ethics, and theology.... But it does in fact tie them together, as Alexander and the medievals realized. And it is still the commentator's job not only to elucidate the letter of the text but also to bring to the surface the latent systematic unity that has not been fully expressed in the text, and hence may be overlooked.*

* Kahn, C., "Aristotle and Altruism", in Mind 90, p. 40.

Part I: Identifying the Active Intellect: De Anima III.5

1. Finding the Right Questions

It is well known that Book III, Chapter 5 of Aristotle's *De Anima*¹ is one of the most influential brief passages in all of ancient philosophical literature. It is equally well known that few passages have been the source of greater controversy, or have elicited such a vast array of completely irreconcilable interpretations. Is this chapter's active, or agent, or productive intellect a peculiar alternative way of describing Aristotle's Prime Mover (i.e. God)? Or is it merely a theoretically distinct aspect of ordinary human thinking? Or is its proper sense to be found somewhere between these extremes? All of these positions have been proposed, each with its own subtle variations, and all have among their proponents some of the most notable Aristotle commentators of ancient and modern times. This apparent stalemate can easily lead one to conclude -- as indeed some have -- that the chapter, and Aristotle's notion of a mind that 'makes' all things, are simply recalcitrant to coherent interpretation. Others have suggested jettisoning sections of

¹ Aristotle, *De Anima* (J.A. Smith, tr.), in McKeon, R. (ed.), *The Basic Works of Aristotle*. I will refer to a variety of other translations of this work as well, but all unspecified quotations are from Smith's version.

the chapter which do not 'seem to belong' in this context.

The great danger, with material such as this, is that its ambiguity and lack of detail invites one to take the easiest interpretive route, namely that of squeezing out of the words that meaning which is most consistent with what one already believes about Aristotle's 'system', whether the passage seems to lend itself to such a reading or not. Of course, it is impossible (and undesirable) to approach III.5 without any preconceptions about Aristotle, unless you happen to have had the dubious fortune of reading III.5 before anything else. It is proper, though, to allow such preconceptions to remain receptive to any new information derived from a careful reading of the passage at hand, i.e. to remain malleable. The risk with III.5 is the temptation to interpret it without allowing it to make its own contribution to one's overall understanding of Aristotle, that is, to take the position, 'It could mean just about anything, so let us assume that it means what it should mean, i.e. what my reading of Aristotle requires it to mean.' The danger lies in the fact that an interpretation of Aristotle which is not open to input from De Anima III.5 -- that is to say, which cannot comfortably accomodate this chapter -- may simply be a false interpretation. Thus, in spite of (or perhaps because of) the confusing nature of III.5, some intrepidity is demanded of us.

But how do we overcome this overemphasis on what we think we know from elsewhere, in order to achieve an

interpretation of Aristotle's philosophy that is not merely internally reasonable, but also consistent with everything that Aristotle says. One possible method, which I intend to test in this dissertation, is to redress the usual interpretive imbalance in favour of relying on Aristotle's other writings as the means to understanding this one, by taking the words of III.5 at face value, as far as is possible, and seeing whether Aristotle's related other writings can be reconciled to these. This cannot, of course, completely free our reading from the problem of preconceptions -- I am not pretending to be without them -- but it may help us to avoid the inclination to force meanings out of Aristotle's words.

And yet even if we proceed directly to III.5 itself, any number of assumptions lie in wait for us. After all, the initial claim of the chapter, as we shall see, is that there is an intellect that is productive; we are not told how to interpret this fact in light of Aristotle's other works, so we are invited to begin extrapolating from this bare statement any number of identities for this productive mind. In the interest of the greatest possible detachment from such slippery slopes, then, I propose to begin our analysis at the end of III.5, where, after claiming that only the active intellect is immortal and eternal, Aristotle concludes, at 430a24, with the strange statement that "We do not remember...." (*ou mnēmoneuomen*). The statement is the

subject of much debate, including among translators, whose various renderings suggest vastly different meanings. The debate concerns not only why Aristotle claims that we do not remember (i.e. what is the argument for this claim?), but also what is not remembered, since the text is not explicit on this point. Perhaps by beginning our investigation with this, the concluding observation of Aristotle's brief discussion of the relation between the active intellect and (the rest of) human thought, we can avoid some of the tenuous readings that follow when one begins with a prematurely clear picture within which all subsequent description of the active intellect must be confined.

Here is the chapter's conclusion, as translated by Ross:²

When it has been separated it is that only which it is essentially, and this alone is immortal and eternal (we do not remember, however, because this is impassible and the passive reason is perishable); and without this nothing knows.

To begin with the difficulty of determining Aristotle's argument, we should note that by placing the parentheses where he does, Ross excludes the sentence's final clause from the argument for our not remembering. If we accept this punctuation, then the entire argument is that while the active intellect is "impassible", the passive

² Ross, W.D., Aristotle, p. 149. [Hereafter cited as Ross(1959).]

intellect is perishable. The conjunction of these two claims is thus the explanation of our not remembering 'x', whatever 'x' turns out to be.

Ross's unpacking of the argument follows Themistius³, who relies for his reading on a remark at De Anima I.4:

reasoning [*dianoëisthai*], and loving or hating, are affections not of reason [*nous*] but of its possessor, in so far as he possesses it. Hence when he perishes there is neither memory nor love; for these belonged not to reason but to the composite being which has perished; reason is doubtless... impassible.⁴ (408b24-30)

Ross and Themistius take the argument in III.5 to be a mere reiteration of this earlier point, namely that, as Ross explains, "memory does not survive death".⁵ In other words, since that 'part of us' which survives death is unaffected by our individuating characteristics and circumstances, these latter do not continue to exist after the 'part of us' to which they belong -- of which the passive intellect is a faculty -- has perished. As Themistius bluntly states the core claim of this reading, with *ou mnēmoneuomen*, Aristotle "makes us the productive intellect", and argues that "we cannot remember the activities that we shared with the mortal

³ Themistius, Paraphrase of De Anima 3.4-8 (R.B. Todd, tr.), in Schroeder, F.M./Todd, R.B. (eds.), Two Greek Aristotelian Commentators on the Intellect, p. 99. [Hereafter cited as Themistius.]

⁴ Following the translation in Ross(1959), p. 149.

⁵ ibid., p. 149.

intellect."⁶ On the face of it, this account of the passage seems plausible, and it appears to be consistent with the earlier remark to which Ross and Themistius compare it. To the question as to what is not remembered, then, the answer must be 'us, as individuals'. And the "we" who are not remembering can only mean 'we as active intellects', i.e. 'we having survived death'.

But is it not precisely the point of the statement from 408b, as both Ross and Themistius interpret it, that 'we' -- that is, individuated thinking beings -- do not survive death? As Ross himself argues,⁷ Aristotle seems to be suggesting that the active intellect is "identical in all individuals". Might this not mean, given that this intellect is without matter, that there is in fact only one active intellect, thus making the claim that Aristotle refers to it in the first person plural highly doubtful? Ross does not pursue this possibility. In any case, it is strange to identify ourselves, as individuals, with that 'part of us' which is separated from us at death, and by which, according to this reading, we are in no way remembered. And it is particularly strange when the passage used to justify this reading is unambiguous in stressing that the "impassible reason" -- which Ross and Themistius identify with the agent

⁶ Themistius, p. 99.

⁷ Ross(1959), p. 149.

mind of III.5 -- is not to be identified with an individual human, but rather is only a 'possession' of that human, which remains unaffected by being so possessed. If, upon ascribing immortality and eternity to the active intellect, Aristotle had said "we are not remembered", then this interpretation might be unproblematic. This thing we possess, but which is untouched by our possession of it, retains, upon being separated from us, no trace of its possessors. But he does not say "we are not remembered". He says "we do not remember", implying that it is the composite being, the individual human, who does not remember, rather than unindividuated reason. If the Ross/Themistius reading is correct, then Aristotle's wording of the statement in question is extremely unfortunate, even sloppy, since from the perspective of the active intellect, "we" -- i.e. individuated 'selves' -- do not exist; so how can "we", as individuals, share in that perspective (and that by not remembering... ourselves!)?

Rist,⁸ in his early work on III.5, recognizing the difficulty that we have just described, tried to salvage the essence of Ross' problematic interpretation by glossing the relevant passage as follows:

We do not remember after death because "we"
do not survive; our Active Intellects, which

⁸ Rist, J., "Notes on Aristotle De anima 3.5", in Anton, J.P./Kustas, G.L. (eds.), Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy [Hereafter cited as Rist(1971).]

do survive, are impassive and thus obviously have no memory.⁹

Though sympathetic, at the time, to Ross's reading, he found it necessary to modify the passage with qualifications and additions in order to make it seem plausible. His insertion of the phrase "after death", along with the final re-stating of *ou mnēmoneuomen* in terms more consistent with the impersonal phrasing of the statement at 408b ("our Active Intellects... have no memory"), are required if we are to accept "we do not remember" as an alternative way of saying 'there is no memory after death'. Indeed, Rist went so far as to interpret *ou mnēmoneuomen* as a jesting remark ("... because 'we' do not survive"). Yet, in Rist's defense, this assumed jest -- in conjunction with the additions noted above -- is the only way to make sense of Aristotle's statement as a reiteration of the point from 408b24-30, unless we follow Ross/Themistius and simply interpret the "we" as 'we active intellects', which, as we have seen, implies considerable carelessness on Aristotle's part.¹⁰

To interpret him as writing so incautiously, we must have (a) examined any other possible interpretations, and found them all even more wanting than this one, and/or (b)

⁹ ibid., p. 515.

¹⁰ Rist has since altered his understanding of III.5 profoundly, and has given up his worthy attempt to save Ross' position on *ou mnēmoneuomen*. Cf. Rist, The Mind of Aristotle, p. 180. [Hereafter cited as Rist(1989)]

noticed a precedent, in the discussion of the active intellect, for identifying it with individuals, thus justifying the use of "we". As for (b), not only is there no such precedent in III.5 (or in the remark at 408b), but in the lines immediately preceding (and following) the claim that "we do not remember", this intellect is denoted only by the word "this" (*touto*), and its activity is attributed to it in the third person singular (as in *noei*, "it thinks", at 430a22). If it were correct to identify the relevant "we" with the active intellect, then one would almost have to think, given the surrounding depiction of it, that Aristotle was hoping to conceal his meaning by confusing us with the sudden depiction of this mind as a collection of individuals. That he might wish to conceal a meaning or two, I will not deny. But what would be concealed by such a phrasing? The fact that the active intellect is not individuated? But if the Ross/Themistius reading is correct, this fact is stated explicitly at 408b. And it is at least strongly implied by his account of it here.

No, it would appear that the wording of the whole discussion in III.5 is evidence against taking the "we" here to refer to the active intellect at all. It might be argued, in defence of Ross/Themistius, that the passive reason is not described in the plural in III.5, any more than is the active; so why is taking this "we" to represent the active intellect any more problematic than the alternative? In response to

this, I might point out that at 429a23, the passive intellect's function is said to involve *dianoia*, which at 408b13-15 and 408b25-29 is clearly linked to the individual. So the passive intellect's individuated nature is implied by its very function. That the same cannot be said of the active intellect is partly manifest in the preceding discussion, although there is much more to say about it.

This leaves us with the task of examining other possible interpretations of "we do not remember", in search of one that is more in line with the text than is that of Ross et al. In other words, we must discard the assumption that "we do not remember" means 'there is no memory after death', and return to what, given the problems inherent in that assumption, seems to be a more natural reading, namely that Aristotle is noting some specific thing which "we <here and now, during our lives> do not remember". Let us, then, examine another common reading, as exemplified by the J.A. Smith translation:

... this alone is immortal and eternal (we do not, however, remember its former activity because, while mind in this sense is impassible, mind as passive is destructible), and without this nothing thinks.¹¹ [emphasis added]

There is nothing in the Greek text, of course, which directly corresponds to the phrase "its former activity".

¹¹ Indeed, Hett, in his translation, offers this same interpretation in a footnote. (On the Soul (W.S. Hett, tr.), p. 170)

This is Smith's interpretive insertion of a direct object corresponding to the "we" who do not remember. Interestingly, he delimits the argument with the same parentheses that Ross uses, and yet he takes *ou mnēmoneuomen* to mean exactly the opposite of Ross's reading. Smith reads the "we" as, in effect, 'we passive intellects'. And yet the parentheses determine that Smith's version of the claim, namely that individual human beings do not remember the eternal activity of the active intellect from before their births, must be grounded in the same conjunction -- the active intellect's impassibility and the passive intellect's perishability -- that Ross takes as establishing the opposite conclusion.

Unlike Ross's reading, which determines the passage's meaning largely in isolation from the argument of III.5 -- except as an aside to the effect that when we leave our bodies, we cannot take ourselves with us -- Smith's insertion of the phrase "its former activity", being an elaboration on the Greek text, is justified only if the context seems to demand that *ou mnēmoneuomen* be understood in this way. The passage in which the phrase occurs is that in which Aristotle posits the eternal activity of the intellect, a view which may only spell out the implication of the preceding claim that:

Mind is not at one time knowing [*noei*] and at another not.¹² (430a22)

¹² At this stage, we are assuming, as is usually done, that this sentence means that the active intellect is always thinking. In Chapter 4, we shall argue for this reading.

That is, having said this, Aristotle merely goes the rest of the way, noting that if mind is always thinking, then there can never be a time when it is not thinking, so it must be "immortal and eternal". What is especially interesting about the claim that mind is always thinking is that, at first blush, it appears to contradict a remark from the end of the previous chapter, namely, "Why mind is not always thinking we must consider later." (430a6-7) But surely the III.4 statement refers to the passive intellect, which, until III.5, is the only intellect that is discussed explicitly; whereas the 'contradiction' of this statement in III.5 is in fact a claim regarding the active intellect. That the latter statement refers to the active, and not the passive, mind (and not both), seems likely given the fact that the mind that is said always to be thinking is apparently the same one that is said to be eternal and immortal, and is contrasted with the passive intellect, in the next sentence.

The passive intellect, then, does not always think, whereas the active intellect does always think. But this might lead one to ask why, if the relationship between the two intellects is as Aristotle describes it, the passive does not share in the eternal thought of the active. I take it that Smith has interpreted the "we do not remember" passage as Aristotle's answer to this question. He believes that Aristotle's promise to consider why the passive intellect is not always thinking is fulfilled in III.5. The active

intellect is indeed always thinking, but the other intellect does not remember the thinking of this one from the time before its (the passive intellect's) own generation, i.e. before the birth of the individual human being whose passive intellect is in question. The argument for this, given where Smith has placed the parentheses, must be simply that the passive intellect is destructible. That is, it has, or is, matter (potential), and is therefore neither eternal nor immortal. So it can perhaps share in the activity of the active intellect in some sense, but it cannot do so eternally, i.e. it can think, but it cannot always think. Therefore, since the passive intellect does not co-exist eternally with the active, but is generated anew in each of us as individuals, it comes without any 'pre-actualized' potential. In this sense, then, one can say that "we [as passive intellects] do not remember" the "former activity" of the active intellect: since the intellect which can be associated with us as individuals does not pre-exist our births, we do not "remember", in the sense of recollecting our own pre-existent knowledge, when we think, because, *qua* passive minds, we have no pre-existent knowledge. On this reading, the passage might be considered an implicit rejection of the Platonic notion of learning as recollection.¹³ This

¹³ Aquinas, too, takes De Anima's account of the intellect as entailing a rejection of the Platonic *anamnēsis*. cf. Aquinas, Aristotle's De Anima (K. Foster/S. Humphries, trs.), #723 (p. 423).

interpretation strikes me as somewhat more plausible than the Ross/Themistius reading, not only for the reasons I stated when criticizing the latter, but also because it seems to address the difficulty which III.4 had promised to consider, namely why the passive intellect is not always actively thinking.

Interestingly, Apostle¹⁴ also claims that the answer to this last question is likely to be found in III.5. And yet he does not interpret the chapter in a way that suggests a solution. In fact, he vaguely adopts Ross's reading of the disputed passage, rejecting the Smith-like interpretation as follows:

... assuming that a man neither remembers nor is aware of any prior thinking of his active intellect while he is alive, then if that intellect thinks at all, it is unlikely that Aristotle would make reference to any thinking of that intellect in a pre-existent life.¹⁵

To which I can only respond: why is it "unlikely"? Apostle seems merely to have assumed that there is no reason why one might wish to emphasize this point, whereas our reading of Smith's translation supplies ample reason. Or is Apostle asserting that the view that we are not "aware of any prior thinking" would logically preclude any reference to it, since we are not "aware" of it? But the remark that we do not

¹⁴ Apostle, H., Aristotle's On the Soul, p. 156. [Hereafter cited as Apostle.]

¹⁵ ibid., p. 166.

remember 'x' -- Aristotle's claim -- does not entail the stronger claim that we cannot be "aware" of 'x' at all; hence, in Apostle's paraphrase, "...a man neither remembers nor is aware of any prior thinking", the phrase "nor is aware" would be an unwarranted extension of Aristotle's meaning. Therefore, it is untrue that *ou mnēmoneuomen*, if interpreted as Smith would have it, would logically preclude any reference to the active intellect's "prior thinking", if this is indeed Apostle's argument.

While this is not the place for a detailed study of Apostle's reasons for siding with Ross, one such reason is suggested by his use of the phrase "his active intellect". Apostle is one of those who believe that active intellects must, in some peculiar fashion, be individuated, such that the active intellect is to be regarded as, in effect, the eternal activity of a particular human's thoughts. If this were true, then it might be acceptable to refer to the active intellects as "we", eliminating one of the difficulties with Ross's view.

I think that Apostle's arguments against the view that there is only one active intellect, although unsuccessful, are extremely informative, in as much as they typify a general trend in the recent scholarship, as well as raising the major issues underlying the whole matter of the relationship between the active intellect and the passive intellect. By analyzing these arguments, we can begin to work towards an even more compelling interpretation of the phrase *ou mnēmoneuomen*.

Apostle sets out what he takes to be an exhaustive list of alternatives pertaining to the "existence, nature, and number" of the active intellects:

If this intellect is impassible, and if each man has such an intellect, it seems to follow that either (a) there are as many intellects as there are men, or (b) there are more intellects than there are men, or (c) there is just one intellect -- whether this be God or something else -- in which all men share.¹⁶

Without going into the details of his case, what is worth noting is that Apostle offers several convincing arguments against both (a) and (b), and yet it is alternative (c) that he rejects outright. In other words, he argues against the first two, and in particular (b), as though he is criticizing Aristotle's own position, while only (c) is criticized as being an incorrect reading of the text. That is, having dismissed the possibility that Aristotle thinks that there is only one active intellect, Apostle is unable to find an alternative that is free of serious difficulty, and is thus forced to see these difficulties as bespeaking inconsistencies, or incoherencies, in Aristotle's own depiction of the active intellect. Given this result, one would have to assume that Apostle is prepared to give a knock-down argument against the interpretive plausibility of

¹⁶ Apostle, p. 167. I might note in passing that although Apostle neglects to mention it, there is a fourth alternative: namely that there is a plurality of active intellects, but that they are fewer than the number of men.

alternative (c). In fact, he offers several brief but distinct arguments against it, each of which will be examined in turn.

His first reason for denying that there is only one, shared, active intellect, is that "Aristotle would have said something about it."¹⁷ Consider that Aristotle's only known explicit discussion of the active intellect as such comprises, in its entirety, the shortest section (according to the standard chapter divisions) of the work in which it appears; and further, that all interpreters agree that III.5 has provoked such diverse interpretations precisely on account of its terseness and lack of explanatory detail. Finally, consider the implications, on any interpretation, of this notion for Aristotle's philosophy as a whole. How certain can we really be that in *De Anima* III.5, he explicitly tells us everything there is to know about his conception of the active intellect? If this response to Apostle seems to be based on too much unprovable speculation, consider whether Apostle's argument is any more solidly grounded. After all, the assumption that a 'great philosopher' must, by definition, lay all of his cards on the table all of the time is no more objectively demonstrable than the opposite assumption; it depends in part on one's understanding of the term 'great philosopher'.

¹⁷ ibid., p. 167.

To elaborate briefly on this point, consider Wedin,¹⁸ who, in defence of the claim that the active intellect is merely an aspect or feature of the individual mind, offers a variation on Apostle's first argument, directed specifically against the claim that the active intellect is God.

Where explicit analysis of individual mind is not undertaken, no point would be served by mention of productive mind. On the other hand, were *nous poiētikos* god or divine reason, one would expect the notion to occur in other contexts. But it is notoriously absent.¹⁹

In other words, the view that the active intellect is nothing grander than a way of explaining how individual thinking works is supported by the fact that it is discussed only in the context of this "analysis of individual mind." In responding to this, we must certainly grant Wedin's point that *nous poiētikos* is not mentioned in any other known work of Aristotle. It is no small counterpoint, however, to note that the name *nous poiētikos*, while absent from other writings, is also absent from this one. In fact, Aristotle does not give any precise name or definition to the new *nous* introduced in III.5; the term *nous poiētikos* is, by general consensus, Alexander's coinage.²⁰ Wedin uses it -- along with the

¹⁸ Wedin, M., Mind and Imagination in Aristotle. [Hereafter cited as Wedin.]

¹⁹ ibid., p. 181.

²⁰ Alexander of Aphrodisias, De Anima (A.P. Fotinis, tr.), p.116. Interestingly, Alexander himself sees no difficulty with making the association in question. And is

translation "productive mind", which he takes pains to establish as the best possible rendering of the term -- without acknowledging that it is not Aristotle's term.

To begin with, then, we can state that by using the Greek phrase *nous poiētikos* so consistently, and without the required disclaimer regarding its tenuous status as Aristotelian terminology, Wedin rhetorically loads the dice in favour of his interpretation. For the fact that nothing called "productive mind" appears in other works seems to be fairly persuasive evidence against the association or identification of this mind with God, as long as we allow that productivity is its defining feature, as the use of the name "productive mind" implies. In fact, however, and as we shall see in detail below, the productivity of this mind, while certainly its relevant function or feature in relation to the passive intellect -- and hence the reason for its inclusion in this context -- is by no means the only characteristic ascribed to it in III.5. By treating productivity as its defining feature, we achieve a somewhat forced and artificial distinction between this *nous* and any *nous* discussed in other contexts. For if we were to isolate one of the other features ascribed to it in III.5 -- say, immortality or continuous activity -- and treat that one as definitive, we might find less plausibility in the claim that it appears only here.

not the Prime Mover in an important sense a productive *nous*?

What may be unique to III.5 is the account of how this *nous* may be called productive. And this account is unique (or at least rare) for exactly the reason that we have seen Wedin give, namely that the issue, in this context, is how the intellect, *qua* part of the individual human soul, is able to think, an issue rarely broached in the extant Aristotelian corpus, and obviously peculiar to the study of the soul. What may legitimately be inferred from this is that an intellect, which may or may not be identical to an intellect discussed in other contexts, is discussed here, as perhaps nowhere else, in terms of its role in individual human thinking. Wedin, however, infers invalidly from the peculiarity of this discussion of a "productive mind", that the intellect which is said to be productive in this unusual context is not discussed in different terms elsewhere. In other words, if Wedin is correct in claiming that it is only in the context of an analysis of individual mind that a productive capacity of *nous* would be addressed, then the paucity of references to this capacity is explicable simply by the fact that Aristotle rarely engages in the relevant type of analysis. It need not follow that the *nous* that is treated of as productive in this rare context is any other than a *nous* treated of with regard to some other 'feature(s)', in another context.

The inference from the uniqueness of this discussion of a productive function of the mind to the doctrinal uniqueness of the type of mind here discussed, is given the

appearance of validity by the implicit assumption that *nous poiētikos* designates an entity distinct from the *nou energeia* ("activity of mind") that is identified with God at Metaphysics XII.7, 1072b26. And this assumption, once again, is grounded in the very use of the term *nous poiētikos*, which necessarily implies the existence of a definable item, one of which "mind" is the genus, and "productive" the differentia. Having noted the fatal flaw in any assumptions about III.5 which derive their force from the phrase *nous poiētikos*, Wedin's argument can easily be reduced to no more than the 'flip-side' of Apostle's first argument against the unity of the active intellect, namely that "Aristotle would have said something about it." For if its productivity is no more evidently definitive of this *nous* than are any of the other features associated with it in III.5, then Wedin's argument amounts to saying that since the feature of productivity is not attributed to any intellect referred to in other works, those other accounts of intellect must not be referring to the intellect described here as productive, since if they were, Aristotle would have ascribed the relevant type of productivity explicitly to those 'other' intellects. To this, we can again respond with one of Wedin's own premises, and say that the issue of productivity, as it is raised in III.5, is relevant only in the context of an account of the nature of human thought *per se*. Hence, there is no particular reason for this feature to be raised in other contexts, even when (or

if) the productive item in question should happen to be discussed, as long as it admits of being discussed in ways other than *qua* producer of human thought, as presumably it would if it were God, to mention only the identification that Wedin is attempting to refute.

One last observation concerning Wedin's argument. As he is hoping to establish that the active intellect cannot be God, and as his argument turns on the judgment that it is only in the context of an analysis of individual human thought that this intellect is, or would be, mentioned, it is interesting that the argument is embellished with the following footnote:

And if productive mind is elsewhere mentioned, it would appear to be in explicit discussions of thinking, such as *Ethica Eudemia* 1248a18-29 and, perhaps, *Metaphysica* XII.7, 1072b19-22. In any case, these passages agree nicely with our interpretation....²¹

In short, Wedin suggests that "productive mind" may appear in these two other places, but that since both of these passages are concerned with the nature of human thought, they serve only to strengthen his argument. It is true that both passages deal with subject matter related, if not identical, to that of *De Anima* III.4-5. But it is also true, as we shall see, that both deal explicitly with the Prime Mover, and specifically with the relationship between God as productive on the one hand, and human thought on the other. Once again,

²¹ Wedin, p.181.

Wedin is guilty of omitting pertinent information that would cast his position in a more ambiguous light.²²

The attempt, then, to deny the unity of the active intellect -- or any other view of the active intellect, for that matter -- solely on the basis of what is not stated in III.5 or elsewhere, is untenable. Still, there is another response that we might offer to Apostle's basic claim that the active intellect cannot be one because Aristotle does not say so; namely, he also never says that there are many of them. He refers to it only in the singular, unless one assumes that the "we do not remember" passage is an exception, which, as we have seen, is at best uncertain. This is not to commit the inversion of Apostle's error by inferring that there cannot be a plurality of individual active intellects from the fact that Aristotle does not say so. Rather, my point is that there is no more positive grammatical evidence to support the plurality of the active intellect than there is to support its unity. Perhaps Apostle would say that, Aristotle not having stated his opinion clearly one way or the other, the burden of proof is on those who take him to be denying a plurality of active intellects. The only justification for placing the burden thus would be that something about the content or context of the discussion of the active intellect is suggestive of its plurality. In this case, that 'something' would have to

²² For more on Wedin's reading of the relevant passage from Eudemian Ethics, see Chapter 3, below.

suggest that a distinct active intellect is identifiable with each soul which is acted on (although not in a way that would contradict 408b). On my reading of III.5, the only remark that might be so suggestive is the opening claim that as in all things there is both matter and a producing cause, so these different elements must be found "in the soul" [*en te psūchē*]. (430a13)²³

It is possible that "in the soul" here means only that such a principle must 'be found in the case of the soul', and need not be taken to mean that an agent must be 'part of each soul', so as to imply a different agent for each. The distinction being made is between the matter of any class of things, which is potentially each of the things in that class, and "something else which, by producing those things, is the cause and agent...." (430a11-3) But even if this passage, properly interpreted, means that in each soul there lies an agent, the conclusion that Aristotle draws from this need not follow. As Ross points out, the phrase "in the soul", even so interpreted, does not disprove the identification of God with the active intellect, if God is immanent.²⁴ Ross himself

²³ Rist(1971) argued for a remarkable similarity between God and the active intellect, (p. 515) but rejected the identification of the two on the grounds that the latter is said, at 430a13, to be "in the soul", and hence there must be one for each soul. (p. 505-6) Notably, Rist has since rejected this position in favour of the view that there is but one active intellect, and that this is the Prime Mover. Cf. Rist(1989), pp. 180-182.

²⁴ Ross(1959), p. 146.

rejects such immanence on the basis of Metaphysics XII, but the issue, at this point, is whether the phrase "in the soul", taken on its own, is convincing evidence for positing a plurality of active intellects. Clearly it is not.

We shall return to the passage at 430a11-13 presently. For now, let us reiterate that all it establishes with clarity is that everything that the intellect which receives ideas can become is produced either by 'another intellect', or at least by a different aspect of that same intellect. This is no mean claim, as we shall see, but it appears to be silent on the question of whether this 'other' intellect is one for all individuals, or different for each. On the contrary, to pick up a point made during our earlier discussion of Ross and Themistius, the active intellect is directly contrasted with matter, both in this opening passage and again at 430a18, and it is not affected by the individuating characteristics of its 'possessors'. So, if it is 'individuated' at all -- i.e. if there is any sense in which the active intellect is identifiable as a plurality of distinct units -- then presumably it is because what it is in itself, or what it produces, varies from person to person. There is no evidence of either of these possibilities in III.5. What it is in itself is never addressed explicitly, except in as much as it is said to be the producer of "all things" (430a15) and to be thinking eternally and immortally; while what it produces is said only to be "all things". If anyone wishes to argue that

the category of "all things" can vary from individual to individual (as a way of distinguishing one immaterial active intellect from another), he or she may do so. But that this point (with the resulting plurality of active intellects) can simply be assumed is highly questionable. It follows that Apostle has no grounds for assuming that if the active intellect were one and shared by all, then Aristotle would have said so.

Let us now turn to the remainder of Apostle's arguments against a single active intellect:

Further, [2] the object of God's thinking is Himself, whereas the object of man's thinking is not just God. Moreover, [3] if that intellect is something else [besides God] and is always thinking, how is it possible for it to be in different men at the same time, and [4] how can such intellect, being impassible, be thinking simultaneously different things in different men or be changing its thinking as men do?²⁵ [Numbering added]

Argument [2] is a point that Ross also makes. He says that describing God "as having all our knowledge before we have it, and imparting it to us," would contradict the Metaphysics XII claim that God thinks only itself.²⁶ This strikes me as a better presentation of the argument, because the phrase "man's thinking", in Apostle's version, leaves the point of the argument unclear. The fact that men think many things does not contradict the claim that Aristotle's God is

²⁵ Apostle, p. 167.

²⁶ Ross(1959), p. 150.

the active intellect, unless by "man's thinking" we mean 'man's active intellect'. In other words, this argument works as a *reductio ad absurdum*, as follows: If God is the active intellect, and He thinks only Himself, while the active intellect thinks many things, then God thinks many things while thinking only Himself.

If this is, in fact, the argument, then it frustrates the identification of the active intellect with God, as long as it is true both that (1) Aristotle's God thinks only itself, and (2) the active intellect thinks many things. That (1) is the case is undeniable. But what about (2)? That the active intellect is in some way responsible for the thoughts of the passive intellect -- for what it "becomes" -- is stated clearly enough in the text. But that the being of the active intellect is as the things thought by the passive intellect, i.e. that the active is, at least in part, the actuality of all those things (thoughts) to which the passive is potential, is another matter entirely. And yet it is this relationship between the two that is assumed by Apostle and Ross when they offer argument [2], above.²⁷

²⁷ For the view that God's self-thought consists in the thinking of 'abstract' intelligibles, cf. Hartman, E., Substance, Body, and Soul, p. 268, and R. Norman, "Aristotle's Philosopher-God", in Phronesis 14, pp. 63-74. This view offers a simpler response to the Apostle/Ross *reductio* -- to the effect that God's thought is identical, at least in its nature, to human theoretical reasoning, and hence the content of God's mind might be one and the same as the content of the active intellect, as Ross and Apostle understand the latter -- but as I am unsympathetic to the view, I will not address it

What does Aristotle actually say in III.5 about the relationship between the two intellects? He does not say, in his introduction of the active intellect, that it is all things, just as the passive intellect becomes all things. He says that it makes all things, and explains this claim

in this context. (If, however, as I hope to show, the active intellect does not think the objects of theoretical reasoning, then the identification of God with the activity of such reasoning would make the Prime Mover inferior to the active intellect, according to 430a18-19.)

What might be worth noting, however, is that this view of the Divine Mind derives whatever force it has from the *De Anima* III.4 claim that once it has become its possible objects, the mind is then able to "think itself". (429b6-10) This ability of the human mind, having achieved a certain state, to think itself in an incidental way, certainly indicates an important similarity between human and divine thought, and is a source of the Aristotelian/Platonic view of the philosophic pursuit as the most self-sufficient way of life. But that this similarity can be turned into an identity is a tenuous proposition, resting as it does on the claim that the content of God's contemplative activity is the same as that of human contemplation. Strangely, Norman defends this latter claim, in part, by saying that it is the only interpretation of divine 'self-thought' "which can make sense of Aristotle's assertion, in bk. X of the Nicomachean Ethics, that the activity of the Prime Mover is the summum bonum of human life. To suppose that in making this the ideal Aristotle is urging men to rapturous self-admiration is as false as it is ludicrous." (Norman, p. 72) That Aristotle never suggests that the divine activity itself is the goal of human life is only the least of this argument's shortcomings. More puzzling is Norman's caricature of the notion of self-contemplation as "rapturous self-admiration", which reduces the traditional interpretation of the Prime Mover's activity to the image of a vain teenager admiring herself in the mirror. Aside from the fact that admiration of any kind is an odd psychological state to ascribe to pure mind, is not self-contemplation an act of self-knowledge, and hence an act entirely consistent with so much of what we take as essential to Greek thought? And if we disregard Norman's caricature, what is so "ludicrous" about the suggestion that a Greek philosopher describes the highest being as the ultimate self-knower?

primarily by way of analogy. The reference to the relationship between art [*technē*] and its matter, at 430a13, is often examined independently, as the first such analogy. I believe that this is a mistake, one which nips Aristotle's account of the active intellect in the bud.

De Anima III.5 opens with the claim that in all of nature, similarly to the realm of art, all things are observed to have a matter appropriate to them which comes into being -- is 'given form' -- through the agency of something which is already in act. It is, of course, basic to Aristotle's theory of change that a potency cannot bring itself into actuality. So, he now implies, if we are to use the language of 'becoming' to explain the workings of the intellect, as he has done in III.4, then we must also account for that which, in the realms of nature and art, makes 'becoming' possible, namely an agent. That is, if the depiction of the passive intellect in III.4 is accurate, then there must be an agent intellect. The existence of such an intellect is an inference from (i) his theory of potentiality in general, and (ii) his conclusions about the passive intellect.

This interpretation of III.5's opening lines is essentially consistent with those of Alexander, Aquinas, and Alfarabi.²⁸ More recently, however, scholars have been

²⁸ cf. Alexander, De Anima, 88, 17-24 (p. 116); Aquinas, Aristotle's De Anima, #728; and Alfarabi, The Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle (M. Mahdi, tr.), 128.4-129.6 (p. 127-128).

treating the so-called 'art analogy' as a separate point, namely as a depiction of a peculiar feature of the agency of the active intellect. And this has led them to find more -- and in an important sense less -- meaning in the art reference than seems to be intended. We need not, for example, conclude that if we are to place any weight on the art reference at all, then it must be taken to mean that the active intellect makes its products in the same way that art forms its matter, such that there must be a particular agency at work in each particular soul. Rather, we may understand Aristotle to be mentioning art here for a more obvious reason, that being his wish to note that in all instances of becoming, whether natural or artificial, an agent is required. This universality is necessary if he is to draw the inference that there must be an agent mind, as explained above. This mind's method of production has not yet been explained.

It might be objected here that in treating nature and art as two halves of a whole with which the soul is being compared, I am overlooking the fact that nature and art are not named in the same clause, and that the reference to art, at 430a13, begins with the word *hoion*, suggesting that it is being introduced as some sort of likeness or analogue, precisely what I might appear to be denying. On the contrary, all that is being denied here is that it is the intellect that is being likened to the relationship between art and its matter as such. It is understandable that a reader of this

oddly worded passage at 430a10-13 might be tempted to view 430a13 in that way, since no other meaning is so obvious as to discount the possibility outright, and since, in trying to unravel the mysterious III.5, it is hard to resist any interpretive decision that might afford us some explanatory detail. Unfortunately, however, given that the clause noting a likeness to art occurs before there is any reference, in this passage, to the intellect, it seems a more natural reading to take it that art is being compared directly, not with the intellect, but with nature. A close paraphrase of 430a10-13, then, would read: 'In every instance of natural change, there must not only be matter which is potential to the change in question, but also something else, which stands to that matter in a relation similar to that between art and its raw material; thus, there must also be something of this sort involved in the soul's changes.' Notice that this reading takes full account of the 'art analogy' implied by the word *hoion*, without recommending that we explain the workings of the mind by reference to the precise nature of artistic production, as we have seen Rist demand. Rather, art is being used to explain efficient causality in nature. This, of course, raises a significant exegetical question, namely: why would Aristotle use such an analogy in this context?

Recall that although we know a great deal of Aristotle's theory of change from other works, there is relatively little discussion of that theory in *De Anima*.

Accordingly, Aristotle cannot take for granted the full weight of his physics in this context. Yet he wishes to use one important physical principle in his account of the intellect, namely the view that no potency is actualized without the agency of something which is already actual. So he needs a brief but effective way of expressing this point, one which will avoid the appearance of an arbitrary assertion, without requiring a digression on efficient causality in general. He finds it in a typically Aristotelian appeal to common experience: since the principle of change in question can be affirmed without argument in the case of *technē* -- i.e. no one would demand an explanation of the claim that the products of art come into being only through the agency of something which already exists -- Aristotle sees this indubitable fact as a means of clarifying his belief about *phūsīs*.

Since art is thus used to make sense of a theoretical claim about nature, it is clear (1) that both nature and art exemplify the theoretical principle which will subsequently be applied to the intellect, namely the need for an active agency to bring about change; and (2) that the subsequent and corresponding statement regarding the intellect is based either upon a comparison with nature exclusively, or with nature in conjunction with art, but certainly not with art exclusively. (1) is true because all that Aristotle can be said to be ascribing to the intellect here is what he ascribes to nature, which consists in only two points -- matter is

given form, and an agent causes the change -- both of which are explained by their similarity to the realm of art. And (2) is true because, art having been introduced explicitly on the basis of its similarity to nature, and used precisely to explain something about nature, it is entirely untenable that this passage is designed to draw our attention to anything peculiar to the agency involved in art. This last point is important because it removes from III.5 any possible textual support for an account of the active intellect which demands that its specific means of production be closely analogous to the relation between art and its matter. On the contrary, as I have argued, this opening passage gives no indication of the precise manner of the active intellect's productivity.

The lines in question, read in the manner that I have outlined, comprise a clear, if elliptical, example of a dialectical induction, as this term is explained in Topics I.12, where Aristotle demonstrates the method with the following example:

If the skilled [*epistamēnos*] pilot is the best pilot and the skilled charioteer the best charioteer, then, in general [*holōs*], the skilled man is the best man in any particular sphere.²⁹

Likewise, if in every instance of natural and artificial becoming, an agent is required, then in general becoming requires an agent. From here it is easy to subsume

²⁹ Aristotle, Topics (E.S. Forster, tr.), 105a14-16.

the intellect under this universal principle.

This reading not only offers us Aristotle's sole argument for the existence of an active intellect -- an argument which is weakened, if not lost entirely, when we read the art reference as a mere description of this intellect's agency. It also avoids the confusion which results if we treat the passage as such a description -- rather than as an argument for the active intellect's existence -- and then try to match this description to Aristotle's next point, namely the light analogy.

The chapter's opening lines, then, offer nothing to suggest that the active intellect is thinking any of the objects that it 'makes', i.e. apparently all objects. Nothing, aside from the facts that it is productive and stands distinct from the intellect discussed in III.4, has thus far been said about either (i) its nature or (ii) its manner of production. This leaves the light analogy as Aristotle's lone explicit remark concerning the second issue, and therefore as an indispensable clue to the first. We must, in order satisfactorily to answer Apostle's reductio (argument [2] above), along with the subsequent arguments ([3] and [4]) which assume the reductio's success, embark upon a 'longer way' -- an in-depth analysis of Aristotle's all-too-brief comparison between the active intellect and light.

2. Light and Colour

Aristotle's argument to establish the existence of an agent intellect is followed immediately by this conclusion and elaboration:

And intellect is of one kind by virtue of becoming all things, and of another kind by virtue of making all things, as a sort of state [*hexis tis*] like light; for in a sense light makes potential colours into actual colours. (430a14-7)

Brentano³⁰ suggests that the phrase "in a sense" [*tropon tina*] is meant to warn us against assuming that it is the particular manner of light's agency that is relevant to this analogy. But if this were true, then why would Aristotle choose for the analogy -- for the one and only descriptive statement concerning the agent intellect's agency -- an item so peculiarly productive as light? Indeed, Brentano claims that light is not even active, "properly speaking",³¹ thus making Aristotle's choice even more suspect. The more reasonable reading is the contrary: the peculiarity of light's agency is the central point of the analogy. Notice that the fact that light makes colours actual "in a sense" is offered as the justification for comparing it with the active

³⁰ Brentano, F., The Psychology of Aristotle (Rolf George, tr.), p. 115. [Hereafter cited as Brentano.]

³¹ ibid., p. 115.

intellect. If Aristotle were merely looking for an analogue that would express the general notion of efficient causality, he could have chosen from an endless array of straightforward examples which would have required no explanation. And if this were his only intention, why would he invoke a specific example here at all, having already clearly established the active intellect's status as an efficient cause of some description by way of the comparison with all of nature and all of art? And under these conditions, why invoke the far from clear example of light, an example which requires the qualifying phrase "in a sense"? Surely, given the unusual causal relation between light as producer and colours as products, the phrase "in a sense" must be seen as drawing our attention to this very relation, saying, in effect, 'This is the kind of agency that we must ascribe to the active intellect.'

Furthermore, it hardly seems necessary to make note of the obvious similarity between this analogy and Plato's sun analogy at Republic VI, 507dff; particularly when the contexts in which the two analogies are drawn concern identical subject matter, namely the nature and source of ideas. Though by no means a logically valid proof of the centrality of the peculiar manner of light's productivity in Aristotle's account, this similarity, in both theme and content, to Plato's parallel account, is perhaps the most convincing evidence that can be adduced in favour of interpreting "in a

sense" as an arrow pointing the way, rather than as a stop sign.³² And it is obviously portentous that Aristotle uses this particular analogue in this work. For it is in this same treatise that he offers a detailed account of the nature of light, and of the manner in which it can be said to "make" colours actual. Indeed, given this fact, we might go even further, and acknowledge that his definition and explanation of light, at II.7, was composed in full awareness of the fact that it is to this account that his student (or reader) would turn for insight into an analogy drawn, in a later stage of the same work, between light and the productive aspect of the mind. Thus, a careful reading of this analogy must focus on De Anima's account of light's agency.

Whereas thought, for Aristotle, does not require a medium, as it is in the passive intellect itself that the objects of thought are actualized, the special objects of vision -- colours -- are actualized in a medium, namely the transparent. And since III.5 draws attention precisely to the 'making actual' of potential colours by light, the analogy appears not to be between the actualization of ideas in the mind and the production of sight in the eye, as is commonly assumed, but rather between the former and the actualization

³² In Chapter 5, we shall return to this comparison of Plato's sun analogy and Aristotle's light analogy. At that time, the subtle differences between the two images will be seen to hold a key to the essential debate between the two thinkers regarding some fundamental philosophic questions.

of colours in the transparent. In other words, in examining this analogy, we must assume that the passive intellect is to the active as the transparent is to light.³³ At De Anima II.7, Aristotle defines the transparent as that which is

³³ Among recent commentators, Jonathan Lear deserves special mention not only for having noticed this point, but for having attempted to make something (of a theoretical nature) out of it. (Aristotle: The Desire to Understand, pp. 138-141.) He is mistaken, however, in that he assumes that the allusion to the transparent, which stands between colours and the eye, forces us to seek something standing similarly between intelligible objects and the mind, in order to explicate the analogy. This search leads him away from the essence of the image -- that the passive intellect itself corresponds to the transparent -- and into a speculative extension of Aristotle's words that only serves to complicate matters. For Lear maintains that the transparent represents the soul in a heightened state of readiness to receive intelligible objects, "for example, the mind in a state of active inquiry." (p. 139) The active intellect, then, is in turn the state of this actively inquiring mind when it has successfully obtained intelligible objects -- a state, interestingly, that Lear identifies with God. (p. 137)

But air, for example, does not become (potentially) transparent by undergoing some change of state; it merely is (potentially) transparent by its nature. So Lear seems to be adding an unjustified and unnecessary term to the analogy when he proposes that the passive intellect itself is not even potentially 'transparent' until it has attained a state of "active inquiry". Furthermore, by having thus left the 'pre-heightened' passive mind out of the analogy altogether, his account begs the question as to what puts the passive intellect into the heightened state (the spirit of inquiry) in the first place. It cannot be the active intellect, which, according to this reading of the light analogy, is related only to the already-inquiring mind. So without an explanation of how the heightened state of readiness is itself activated, Lear seems to have left the analogy one step removed from the issue that III.5 as a whole is intended to address, namely how what is only potentially thinking -- the passive intellect as a pure potency -- is able to begin to receive objects of thought (i.e. to think). If the analogy is to serve its purpose on the terms of Lear's interpretation, then there must be something in it corresponding to that which 'makes' air, water, glass, etc., potentially transparent, assuming there were such a thing.

visible, "and yet not visible in itself, but rather owing its visibility to the colour of something else...." (418b5-6,) We do not see the transparent *per se*, but only the colours actualized in it. These colours constitute the motion of the transparent, in the sense that they are by their very nature what is movable (*kinētikon*) in it; but this motion is possible only in the transparency that is active. (418b1-2, 419a10-11) That is, the actualization of the transparent itself is the necessary condition of the actualization of colours, i.e. of their actual movement in the transparent. And Aristotle identifies light as "the actuality [*entelecheia*] of the transparent", and says that by being such, it makes the transparent "active" [*energeia*]. (419a10-2) It is in its role as the actuality of the transparent that light can be said to make "potential colours into actual colours" -- it does this merely by being 'present' within that which is thereby rendered active in accordance with its own peculiar type of movement, this movement consisting in the appearance of colours.

Light's presence in the transparent, however, is not to be understood physically, as light itself is not a body. (418b14-17) It is, rather, the state of the transparent in which fire, or something like it, appears. (418b18-21) By way of clarification, Aristotle says:

Light is thought to be the opposite of darkness. But darkness is the absence of such a state [*hexeōs*] from the transparent,

so it is clear that light is the presence of this <state>. (418b18-21)

There is a long-standing concern regarding Aristotle's depiction of the active intellect as a *hexis*, given that he will subsequently call it an activity. (430a18) Here, though, we see that light too is explicitly described as both an *energeia* (418b9-10) and a *hexis*. Insofar as this dual depiction is odd, then, we must consider that it is odd in a manner that is of some relevance to the analogy between light and the active intellect. That is, we must regard the oddity as deliberate -- as Aristotle's way of pointing out to us an unusual feature of the active intellect's agency -- since the item to which we are directed for analogical evidence of its agency also has the distinction of being described, almost simultaneously, as both "activity" and "state". Therefore, we must not merely accept without qualification Aquinas' simple answer to this dilemma, namely that:

[T]he term 'state' is used [in III.5] in the sense in which Aristotle often calls any form or nature a 'state', to distinguish it from a privation or a potency.³⁴

The danger in a solution that appeals in this way to a general tendency in Aristotle's writing, is found in St. Thomas' next exegetical step:

So he calls it a state, and compares it to light which 'in a way' [*tropon tina*] brings colours from potency to act;--'in a way' because... all that light does is to

³⁴ Aquinas, Aristotle's De Anima, #729 (pp. 427-8).

actualise a transparent medium.... The agent intellect, on the other hand, actualises the intelligible notions themselves, abstracting them from matter....³⁵

The last sentence is purely a matter of interpretive speculation, and can therefore be left aside for the moment, except to note that it is an interpretation that recommends itself much more readily to one who reads the light analogy as loosely as Aquinas does here. Notice how in these two passages he treats the reference to the active intellect as a *hexis* as a separate point, which he sets aside before introducing what he takes to be another separate point, the light analogy itself. He then, like Brentano, takes the qualification "in a way" [*tropon tina*] to be Aristotle's way of distinguishing between the respective types of agency of light and the active intellect. We have seen, above, how this reading calls into question the very usefulness of the light analogy, given the nebulous sense -- noted here by Aquinas, as by Brentano -- in which it is appropriate to call light an agent at all.

I contend that this virtual dismissal of the light analogy -- its reduction to a mere comparison of the active intellect to some other thing which happens to be an agent, where it is almost irrelevant which other thing was chosen -- opens the floodgates to virtually any interpretation of the active intellect that one prefers. This follows because, once

³⁵ ibid., #730 (p.428).

again, the light analogy is all the information that Aristotle gives us concerning the manner of its agency. Without it, or without its having any real descriptive force, we are left entirely to our own devices. But aside from this, and beyond the circumstantial evidence given earlier -- namely that the peculiarity of light's claim to agent status suggests that Aristotle chose it for this very reason -- there is now a simpler justification for seeking clues to the precise nature of the active intellect's agency in the light analogy: the wording of the text seems to demand it. In saying that the active intellect makes all things *hōs hexis tis, hoion to phōs*, Aristotle should be understood to mean that this intellect is something which can be thought of as a state in a similar sense to that in which light can be so described, and that it is precisely as such a peculiar kind of state (*hexis tis*) that the active intellect makes all things.

Returning, then, to II.7, we must ask: Exactly what sort of state is light? Clearly, as the *tis* at line a16 suggests, it is no ordinary one, since, to begin with, there is within it no potential for inactivity. In other words, a transparency which is in the 'state of light' is necessarily active with colour, as opposed to, e.g., a man in the state of courage or wisdom, who need not be acting courageously or contemplating at any given moment. This special case of "state" is what Aquinas has in mind when he says that the term is used, in III.5, to denote a "form or nature", rather than

a 'disposition' or 'having' in the ordinary sense.³⁶ And this goes some way to explaining how the active intellect can also be called an activity. We must, however, remember that Aristotle is not merely calling the active intellect a "state" in this special sense; he is also saying that it is *qua* state of this sort that it is productive. The key point of the analogy, then, which St. Thomas passes over when he dismisses as irrelevant the precise function of light, is that when light is 'in' the transparent, the latter is necessarily affected by the motion proper to it, namely the actualization of colours. That is, light is a state which, merely by obtaining, produces something that, in a significant sense, is something other than itself. This fact, keeping in mind that light is the actuality and activity of the transparent, clarifies the claim that the transparent is visible "not in itself, but by virtue of something else." The "something else", i.e. colour, is the product of light *qua* state of the transparent. To see the transparent "in itself" would be to see its actuality, light, directly. Indeed, Aristotle emphasizes this point when he goes so far as to describe light as the colour of the transparent. (418b12) That is -- given that colour is the visible as such (418a28-29) -- light is what we would see if we could see the transparent. As it is,

³⁶ Costas Georgiadis has suggested to me that On Generation and Corruption I.7, 324b14 provides a clear example of this use of *hexis*.

we see only colours made actual by the actuality of the medium, a medium which, as matter, is active [*energeian*] when it has present within it actual, as opposed to potential, colours.

Whatever else one may wish to say about it, then, Aristotle's depiction of the active intellect as both activity and state is no careless contradiction in terms. Nor is it merely -- although it is partly -- a use of *hexis* in the sense of "form or nature". Rather, the words "a sort of state", appearing in the light analogy, are meant to guide us toward an important and peculiar aspect of the active intellect's manner of 'production'. It is precisely due to its being a *hexis* of the transparent that light is its *entelecheia*, inasmuch as the transparent's realization of its potential as a receptor of colours -- i.e. its having actual colours in it -- is identical to its being in a specific state or condition, namely lighted.

Brentano argues,³⁷ pointedly, that its depiction as a state makes the identification of the active intellect with a purely actual spiritual substance, e.g. God, impossible, since such a substance must be truly separable, whereas a state -- even in the sense of "form or nature" -- is necessarily the state of something. That is, if it is by nature a state, then it cannot be by nature an independent

³⁷ Brentano, p. 112.

existent. As he says in a footnote, "Where there is a state [hexis], there must be a having [echein]."³⁸ I mention this now in order to defer the matter without appearing to be overlooking it. We shall see in what follows that Brentano's point can be dealt with satisfactorily -- indeed, that Aristotle answers it directly in III.5 -- but we must, before addressing it, lay out the interpretive context in which the solution to this problem becomes most clear.

Thus, to continue, we have Aristotle's light analogy: as light is to the transparent and the colours actualized in it, so the active intellect is to the passive intellect and the ideas actualized in it. It seems, then, that the content of the passive intellect -- what it 'becomes' -- is not identical to that of the active intellect. The active intellect seems to be the actuality of the mind itself, perhaps in the sense of an 'immaterial substance' causing motion, or rather something analogous to motion, in that which is potential to it, namely the passive intellect.³⁹ There is an important, and clarifying, subtlety to be observed here. In II.7, and in our preceding account of it, both light and colour are described, at different times, as the activity (*energeia*) of the transparent. How can both of these be so?

³⁸ *ibid.* p. 245n.

³⁹ This point is anticipated at *De Anima* III.2, 425b26-426a7, where Aristotle says that the *energeian* of the effect of any agency resides in the passive factor, so that the agent itself need not be in motion.

Colours are described as what is "movable" in the transparent. This is why I have described the appearance of actual colours as the activity of the transparent qua matter, that is, insofar as it is subject to a type of motion. This is in line with Aristotle's depiction of motion, in the Metaphysics⁴⁰ as "the actuality of that which exists potentially, when it is completely actual and active, not *qua* itself, but *qua* movable." (XI.9, 1065b21-23, Ross translation) Seen as a potency, then, the transparent's activity is colour. But seen in itself, rather than as movable, its activity is light. Aristotle expresses this point clearly: "Light is the activity of this transparency *qua* transparent." (418b9-10) In other words, he deliberately isolates the sense in which light is the *energeia* of the transparent, in order to distinguish it from the sense in which colour bears the same title. On these terms, to clarify the analogy, the active effect of the agency of the active intellect -- the content of our thought -- is not the activity of the passive intellect 'in itself' (i.e. the active intellect), but rather something related to this as actual colours are related to light. We do not think the active intellect directly, just as we do not see light directly. The 'material' element, as essentially potential, cannot become active without the activity of its corresponding

⁴⁰ When quoting from the Metaphysics in this work, I will be following either the Ross translation in The Basic Works of Aristotle, or H. Tredennick's translation in the Loeb Classical Library edition.

agent/actuality, but its activity (i.e. its actualization as ideas) cannot be identical to that of its agent/actuality, since the latter is essentially in act, as is said of the active intellect at 430a18.⁴¹

This last point both illuminates and is illuminated by the comparison of divine and human thought at the conclusion of Metaphysics XII.9, 1075a8-9. The final issue raised concerning the nature of the eternal self-thinking thought (God) *qua* thinker is whether the object of its thought (i.e. itself) is composite or simple. Aristotle's answer draws on an aspect of human thought, extending it into the divine realm. He says that the divine intellect is indivisible eternally, "just as the human intellect [*ho anthrōpinos nous*], or rather that of composite beings is over a certain time...." (1075a6-11) The reason that human thought is not an indivisible unit at any given moment, but rather only when taken as a temporally worked out 'whole', so to speak, is that:

it does not possess the good at this or at that moment, but over the course of a certain

⁴¹ It should be noted that the obscuring of the distinctions among formal, efficient, and final causality, in the relationship between the active intellect as cause, and the actualized passive intellect as effect (and between light and the 'colourized' transparency), is consistent with Aristotle's depictions of the relationship between God and the universe. (See, e.g. Physics VIII vs. Metaphysics XII. To elide the difficulty by refusing to attempt to identify the efficient cause of the Physics with the final cause of the Metaphysics, is tantamount to denying to Aristotle's thought any internal coherence.)

whole period it attains to the supreme good
[clearly meaning God⁴²], which is other than
itself.... (1075a9-10, Tredennick
translation)

This point follows immediately upon the claim that both the divine and human intellects (the latter in the case of theoretical knowing) are identical with their objects. (1074b36-75a5) Hence, the claim that human thought is "other than" God implies that we cannot have God as an object of thought -- our minds cannot be identical to God -- except in the indirect sense that we somehow think God over a period of time, presumably a lifetime. This is the meaning of the claim that the human intellect can have "the supreme good" (*to ariston*) only in a certain whole period of time, as opposed to 'all at once'.

To restate this in the terms of our discussion of *De Anima*, the passive intellect cannot directly apprehend the pure actuality of the active intellect, i.e. it cannot be identical to the eternal and immortal thought. Therefore, it knows the active intellect only through its products, just as

⁴² The term translated here as "the supreme good" is *to ariston*, which, of course, need not mean God in every context. Here, however, Aristotle has just argued that God is pure self-thinking, in part on the grounds that (1) if it were merely an essentially potential thinker, it would not be *hē aristē ousia*, (1074b18-21) and (2) if it could think the worst thoughts, it would not be *to ariston*. (1074b31-34) Further, immediately after the argument we are discussing from the end of Chapter 9, Aristotle begins Chapter 10, his concluding remarks on God's relation to the cosmos, by asking how the universe contains God, referred to here only as *to agathon kai to ariston*. (1075a12-13)

light is (ordinarily) visible only through the colours it actualizes in its matter, the transparent. The relationship between the divine and human intellects, as outlined in this passage from the Metaphysics, is reflected perfectly in Aristotle's claim, so central to the light analogy, that light is the visible, "and yet not visible in itself, but rather owing its visibility to the colour of something else." That which is most essentially visible is made manifest in its corresponding matter as a plurality of distinct visible things of which it is, *qua* state of the transparent, the producer. That which is most essentially intelligible -- the active intellect -- is made manifest in its corresponding matter as a plurality of distinct ideas, of which it is, *qua* state of the passive intellect, the producer.⁴³ A lifetime (a "certain whole period") spent in fruitful contemplation of these products (and their production) is as close to a direct apprehension of 'the intellect in itself', the active intellect, as the passive intellect is capable. This is the precise relationship between the human and divine minds, as outlined at the end of Metaphysics XII.9.

⁴³ Note that my reference to the passive intellect as the active intellect's "corresponding matter" does not contradict the view that God, pure activity, is the active intellect. God itself has no matter -- it is not a composite being -- but it stands to the human intellect as a form to its matter, with the stipulation that this particular form is separate in fact, and not merely in thought. This, once again, is the same stipulation made of the active intellect's relation to the passive intellect. We will have more to say on this point in the next chapter.

The emphasis on time in the Metaphysics account is consistent with Nicomachean Ethics⁴⁴ 1177b16-25, where, the supreme good having been identified with happiness, and happiness with contemplation, Aristotle concludes that such activity "will be the complete happiness of man, if it be allowed a complete term of life (for none of the attributes of happiness is *incomplete*).". The requirement that the happy man live a "complete term of life" certainly does not have anything to do with living long enough to 'find all the answers', i.e. with the completion of one's voyage of discovery. This sort of completion would seem to require rather longer than a human lifespan. And in fact Aristotle's phrasing here suggests that the activity identified with happiness can be engaged in without thereby making a person supremely happy, as is the case if it is not "allowed a complete term of life". That is, human happiness for Aristotle is not merely to be identified with contemplation, but with a contemplative life, where 'life' means a sufficient (though not precisely quantifiable) length of time in which to reap adequately the full rewards of one's virtuous -- and particularly, in this case, intellectually virtuous -- activity. 'Life', thus understood, is the "certain period of time" over which, according to Metaphysics XII.9, the human *nous* attains the supreme good, i.e. God, and in which it is

⁴⁴ Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics (W. D. Ross, tr.), in The Basic Works of Aristotle.

"indivisible", in the sense(s) intended in this context.

Thus, the supreme happiness and the supreme good are, as an Aristotle reader should expect, identical: they are different ways of referring to God, pure contemplative activity. In both passages, a distinction between God's happiness (or God as happiness) and human happiness is made, implicitly, on the basis of the former's eternal completion versus the latter's temporal completion. Human happiness, then, consists in a kind of temporal approximation of God's eternal activity, an attainment of God indirectly, through its 'products', and in the manner in which a composite being must attain anything, namely over a span of time. That it must be an indirect attainment of God is evidenced by its very temporality: Given that a theorizing intellect is identical with its object, a direct knowledge of God would constitute the realization of eternal life. Hicks,⁴⁵ in his commentary on De Anima, refers to this Metaphysics passage in a way that suggests that he has entirely overlooked this essential point, instead taking the reference to the human intellect's attainment of God over time to refer to the notion that

the particular man could on rare occasions become directly conscious, as we should now say, of the eternal life of the divine element within him....⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Hicks, R.D., Aristotle: De Anima, with translation, introduction and notes. [Hereafter cited as Hicks.]

⁴⁶ ibid., p. 507.

It is striking that a line which we are reading as, in part, a sobering reminder of the limitations of our thought, has been read by Hicks as entailing an Aristotelian theory of possible communion with 'the One'. Further, to re-emphasize a point, this temporal process of 'attainment' is not to be understood as a gaining of wisdom over time. Indeed, the activity of contemplation, which as we have seen can be engaged in for a time too short to constitute human happiness, actually presupposes wisdom. At Nicomachean Ethics 1177a25-28, Aristotle argues that contemplation is the highest activity on the grounds that the pursuit of wisdom -- philosophy in the Platonic sense -- is believed (rightly, he implies) to offer "marvellous" pleasures, so that "it is to be expected that those who know <and hence can contemplate this knowledge> will pass their time more pleasantly than those who <merely> inquire." Thus, human contemplation is regarded as the activity of one who has already achieved the wisdom sought by philosophers, and is not to be identified with the process of learning over time. Rather, the suggestion is that as we are composite beings, and hence necessarily confined to experience our being temporally, the fulfilment of our nature must reflect this.⁴⁷ This, significantly, is the precise

⁴⁷ Cf. Physics (Hardie, R.P./Gaye, R.K., trs.), in The Basic Works of Aristotle, IV.12, 221b27-30: "Those things... which are subject to perishing and becoming -- generally, those which at one time exist, at another do not -- are necessarily in time...." While in that context, Aristotle is not referring directly to the intellect, his use of the

point that Aquinas recognizes, and finds particularly troubling, when he ascribes to certain Aristotelians (clearly the Averroists) the view that:

the soul that forms the human body [is] not itself an intellect but some sort of echo of a separate single intellect shared in by all....⁴⁸

On this view, he claims, the "echo" intellect -- i.e. the human intellect -- attains only a temporal "imitation" of God's eternal bliss, which imitation results, according to Aquinas' account of the view, from humans perfecting themselves "in the goods firstly of contemplative and secondly of practical reason."⁴⁹ Notice that on this account, that with which humans contemplate -- our highest activity -- is not even an intellect, strictly speaking, but merely an imitation of an intellect, of one true intellect. Aquinas' reason for rejecting this view is that it does not allow individual humans to attain true happiness, which on his own view is possible only after death, and which he defines as 'seeing God'. This alone is real happiness, for in this act

language of becoming with regard to the latter, his statement that the passive intellect is sometimes active and sometimes not, and his use, in the Metaphysics, of the notion 'the intellect of "composite things"' as a clarification of the phrase "human nous", are ample justification for applying this Physics point to the passive intellect as well.

⁴⁸ Aquinas, Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard (T. McDermott, tr.), excerpted in Selected Philosophical Writings (McDermott, ed.), Distinction 49.1, Reply to Query 4 (p. 324-6).

⁴⁹ ibid., Reply to Query 4 (p. 326).

alone is our intellect identical to the divine and eternal activity that is God/happiness; and hence in this act alone is the human intellect outside of time.⁵⁰

All that Aquinas is willing to say in Aristotle's 'defence' here, by way of distinguishing him from those who hold the human intellect to be a mere "echo" of an intellect, is that the imitation of happiness consisting in human contemplation "is the happiness Aristotle discusses in his Ethics without either advocating or rejecting another bliss after this life."⁵¹ In other words, though admitting that Aristotle speaks exclusively of temporal contemplation as the highest human activity -- and hence subscribes, to that extent, to the "imitation" view -- he takes the Philosopher's complete silence on the question of the human intellect's possible access to any atemporal contemplation as grounds for granting him the benefit of the doubt regarding his consistency with Christian doctrine.⁵² Aristotle does not say that human intellects can know God directly at some point, but at least he does not explicitly reject the idea.

Throughout his light-stepping analysis, however,

⁵⁰ ibid., Reply to Query 4 (p. 332): "a human being partakes of God's own activity when he sees God, and in that way partakes of the eternity which measures that activity; and so his own activity is called eternal life."

⁵¹ ibid., Reply to Query 4 (p. 326).

⁵² To allay any doubts that it is atemporality, as opposed to an elongated temporality, that Aquinas is hoping to salvage, refer to n. 50, above.

Aquinas takes seriously the Aristotelian injunction that -- at least before death -- human contemplation (as opposed to divine self-thinking) is identical with 'happiness' only in conjunction with a "complete term of life". This stipulation carries the important implication that -- since the activity of contemplation = God = true happiness -- human contemplation, which is not identical with true happiness, is not true contemplation, but merely an imitation of this. At Nicomachean Ethics 1178b8-32, this "imitation" view of human happiness is made all but explicit. Aristotle argues, somewhat obliquely, that happiness is contemplative activity; that the gods exemplify such activity; and that anything which cannot engage in such activity can "have no share in happiness." This is ostensibly an argument to establish, in part, that humans do have a share in happiness. And yet human contemplation is not, in this passage, even referred to directly as contemplation, but only as "some likeness" of the gods' activity (1178b26), and as that which, among human activities, is "most akin" to it. Hence, it seems to follow that human happiness is merely a "likeness" of happiness. From here, it is a short step for Aquinas to conclude that since the proper activity of an intellect -- its natural goal and highest good -- is atemporal contemplation (i.e. true happiness), the intellect which in principle is unable to achieve this, because it is 'trapped' in time, is not really an intellect at all, but rather only an "echo" of an

intellect, i.e. of a "separate single intellect" which can or does achieve the direct contemplation of the divine. By preserving individual life after death, Aquinas makes the human intellect a genuine intellect (i.e. capable of overcoming its dependence on time), one which can somehow know God directly without itself being God. And this is the view that he hopes to leave as a possibility in Aristotle by noting that Aristotle never addresses it, for or against.

It would appear, however, that our Metaphysics XII.9 passage implicitly rules out the possibility that Aristotle might allow for human intellects to engage in true contemplation after death. For he says unambiguously there that such intellects attain God over (and hence in) time, thereby seeming to disregard the possibility that they can attain God in any other way. This result could be avoided if one could show that the qualifying phrase "the intellect of composite things", in the relevant sentence, is meant to suggest that it is only as long as it is 'attached' to a body -- and hence the mind of a composite being -- that a human *nous* is constrained to temporal contemplation, but that it can be separated from the body in order to know God directly, at death, and is therefore (if judged according to its ultimate destiny) a true intellect. Indeed, if one cannot show this, then Aquinas has no grounds for distinguishing between Aristotle's own view and that of those who regard the human intellect as an "echo" intellect, since he himself says,

correctly, that Aristotle's explicit discussion of the topic is consistent with the latter view. And this explains why Aquinas stands almost alone among interpreters in taking De Anima 430a23 as ascribing immortality not to the active intellect alone, but to the union of active and passive intellects.⁵³ His sympathetic use of the Stagirite requires that he be able to defend him as a pagan who nevertheless was on the right track. So he must interpret Aristotle's only definitive statement concerning which part of the soul survives death as including, rather than excluding, the part with which we contemplate (passive intellect), that is, the part which Aristotle compares with God at the end of Metaphysics XII.9 under the name *ho anthrōpinos nous*.

What, then, are we to make of the phrase "the human intellect, or rather that of composite things"? Aquinas himself eludes the difficulty entirely, by reading the line as 'the human intellect, or rather that which "knows composite things,"'⁵⁴ and by reading the entire passage as a contrast between the human and divine minds on the basis of their respective objects. But given the obvious structure of the passage as an analogy between the two minds (introduced by *hōsper*); the fact that the analogy is in part an explanation

⁵³ Aquinas, Aristotle's De Anima, sections #742-743 (p.431).

⁵⁴ Aquinas, Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle Vol. II (J.P. Rowan, tr.), section #2625 (p. 916).

of the claim that "everything which contains no matter is indivisible" (1075a7-8); and the fact -- clear from De Anima III.4-5 -- that the passive intellect is immaterial except in a metaphorical sense, it is certain that Aristotle means to explain the indivisibility of the divine intellect by way of a comparison with something else that is indivisible for the same reason, namely that (in thinking itself) it has no magnitude, though it must engage in this 'immaterial' activity for a period of time in order to achieve its closest approximation to the good achieved atemporally by the divine intellect. The phrase "or rather <the intellect> of composite things" is not, as Aquinas reads it, a reference to the type of objects thought by the human intellect, with the implication that this intellect's objects are divisible, in contrast to the object of the divine thought. Again, this passage follows immediately upon Aristotle's use of human reasoning to explain how God's thinking is identical to its object of thought, an explanation that concludes with the claim, referring to both human and divine intellects, that "thought and the object of thought are not different in the case of things which contain no matter." (1075a4-5) The claim that human reason and its theoretical objects are immaterial clearly makes them indivisible, according to the terms of the passage we are examining. So Aquinas' reading of "the intellect of composite things" is implausible. More reasonably, it should be read as we have read it, namely as,

in effect, 'the intellect belonging to composite beings, such as humans are.'⁵⁵

It is worth asking, however, just what purpose this phrase serves. Why qualify the seemingly straightforward term "the human intellect" in such a peculiar manner? Why, in other words, draw special attention to the composite nature of human beings in connection with this intellect? Is this nature not to be assumed as implicit in the phrase "the human intellect"? Only one satisfying answer presents itself: Aristotle qualifies the term "the human intellect" with the phrase "or rather that of composite things" because there is something else that might also, in some sense, be called "the human intellect", and he wishes to exclude this something else from his present use of the term. We have seen that on the basis of both this passage and related statements from the Ethics, "the human intellect", in this context, must mean the passive intellect, i.e. that which becomes and possesses ideas, the locus of human wisdom, etc. And we know from the light analogy that the passive intellect knows its own actuality, the active intellect, only indirectly, through the thoughts produced by the 'presence' in it of the latter. Put

⁵⁵ Aquinas is not alone in reading the passage as he does. The issue is whether the phrase "of composite things" is naming the objects of human thinking, or is an alternative way of referring to the subjects of such thinking. Joseph Owens, among others, reads the passage as Aquinas does, while Alexander of Aphrodisias, Ross, and Wedin agree with our view that the phrase refers to the subject of human thought.

more positively, what the passive intellect attains is a manifestation, appropriate to its nature as a kind of potency (albeit not a material one, in the literal sense of matter) -- a manifestation of the purely actual active intellect. And yet at Metaphysics XII.9, the passive mind (under the title "human intellect") and its thought are depicted as standing in this very same relation to God. In short, God (the eternal being) is not directly intelligible to human *nous*, but is attainable only through human contemplation and over a certain period of time. Indeed, this very difference seems to be at the heart of this analogy between human and divine minds, as we have seen. Having drawn together all of the strands and implications of this passage's meaning, we can conclude that the analogy achieves its purpose -- the conclusion that the object of the divine thought is indivisible -- by comparing God's thought of itself with the human means of thinking God (*to ariston*), namely the contemplative life spoken of in Book X of Nicomachean Ethics. The point of the comparison seems to be that this lifetime of contemplation taken as a whole -- which is how it must be understood *qua* human happiness, i.e. *qua* human attainment of God -- is an indivisible unit, in the sense, perhaps, in which a time and a length can be understood as indivisible, according to De Anima III.6 430b7-14.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ This topic would require a treatise of its own, but it appears that the human mind, as immaterial, is indivisible, and yet as metaphorical matter, is temporal, and hence can also be spoken of as indivisible in the sense applicable to a

Likewise, the direct contemplation of God -- thinking it 'in itself' and immediately, rather than through its products and over time -- must also be indivisible. And if the thinking is indivisible, then so is the object of thought -- that object, on both sides of this analogy, being God. Is the active intellect God? It might be objected that God, on our account, is described as "other than" the human intellect (passive intellect), whereas the active intellect is depicted -- via the light analogy -- as being in a certain sense the actuality of the passive intellect. Recall, however, that in context the term "other than" clearly designates the negation of the relation of identity between an intellect and an object of thought. Since the passive intellect cannot think the active directly, the latter must be "other than" the former in the relevant sense, just as light is not an actually visible colour in spite of its being, in a sense, the colour *par excellence*, and just as -- according to this analogy from Metaphysics XII.9 -- God is never a direct object of human thinking (and thus identical with it), but is only the 'object' of such thinking taken as a temporally completed whole. The phrase "or rather that of composite things" is intended to exclude from the current meaning of "the human intellect" that aspect of mind which is in no way identifiable

length taken as a whole. For a brief introduction to Aristotle on the thinking of indivisibles, see Berti, E., "The Intellection of Indivisibles", in Lloyd/Owen (eds.), Aristotle on Mind and the Senses, pp. 141-163.

with an individual human being as such, i.e. with a composite being. The passive intellect is so identifiable, and as such is almost the exclusive focus of Aristotle's discussion of intellect in *De Anima*. The active intellect, which is described as being "in the soul", and hence is in some manner definable as (part of) the human intellect -- thus explaining the need for the qualifying phrase -- is apparently what is being excluded with the words "or rather that of composite things". There simply seems to be no other reasonable candidate.

Notice, however, that if we omit the parenthetical elaboration at lines 1075a9-10, the analogy we have been discussing reads thus:

as human intellect, or rather the intellect of composite beings, is in a certain period of time... so is the thought [noēsis] which thinks itself for all eternity.⁵⁷

Unless Aristotle is assuming the existence of other types of intellect beyond those he is discussing -- an

⁵⁷ Ross translates the last part of the comparison as: "so throughout eternity is the thought which has itself for its object." By highlighting "itself", he perhaps places too much emphasis on the sense in which the passage is comparing an intellect which thinks something other to one which thinks itself. This emphasis weakens the analogy. For Aristotle, by way of proving that God can truly think itself, has just shown that the human intellect is identical with its theoretical objects, and hence that in thinking these, it thinks itself. And now, by way of proving that God's thought is indivisible, he compares God's thinking to the self-thinking (i.e. contemplation) of the human intellect, saying that as the one is indivisible within the limits of temporality, the other is so according to its essential nature, namely eternally. In a sense, our self-thought is our thought of God.

assumption of which there is no indication -- this comparison seems to lend itself to the following synopsis:

'There are two related types or aspects of intellect, one that is essentially connected to composite substances (i.e. humans), and one that is not and is eternal. The first thinks the second only indirectly, through other things, and is thus, though immaterial, incapable of eternal life. The second thinks itself directly, and thus is eternal life.'

At Metaphysics XII.7 1072b26-27, as we have noted earlier, God is expressly identified as "the activity of intellect". Of what intellect is it the activity? Either it is the same one of which the active intellect is said to be the activity and actuality, or it is not. The active intellect has been shown to be the actuality of the passive intellect, of what is called "the human intellect" at Metaphysics XII.9. And it is in the context of a comparison between precisely this human intellect and God, that God is referred to as "the activity of intellect". It seems that in our passage from XII.9, the qualifying phrase "or rather that of composite things" is meant to exclude God, which, as the activity of the human intellect, might, in that sense, fall under the general (i.e. unqualified) rubric of "the human intellect".

Metaphysics XII.7 & 9 and Ethics X.7-8, carefully read, present a consistent picture of the human intellect, and its relation to the divine intellect. And this picture, in turn, is entirely consistent with De Anima's distinction

between the passive and active intellects. It could be maintained that these two relationships need not in fact be one and the same, as I am arguing, but may only be analogous. To which, at this stage, I can only respond with this query: If the God/human *nous* relationship is not the active/passive intellect relationship, then to which part(s) of the soul is Aristotle referring when he uses the phrase "the human intellect, or rather that of composite beings," at Metaphysics 1075a8-9?

Returning to our immediate concern, one major implication of this reading of the light analogy is that, contrary to Apostle *et al*, producing the objects of the passive intellect's thought need not involve possessing them. The active intellect makes "all things" simply by being what it is -- not by being "all things".

Not only is this implication likely to represent Aristotle's actual position, but indeed it would be difficult to see any special significance, or reason for the inclusion, of the light analogy, if this implication did not hold. I say this, to reiterate, because (1) he has already used the nature/art argument to establish that there is an intellect which is productive, and yet he apparently thinks he needs to offer the light analogy in order to clarify the precise nature of its agency, suggesting that the types of agency found in nature and art are inadequate analogues; and (2) his brief explanation of the light analogy's meaning points directly to

this implication by noting that light, which is neither a colour nor that in which colours are actualized, nevertheless makes colours actual, thus highlighting this peculiar sense of 'making' as the relevant point of comparison between light and the active intellect.

This is enough to answer any suggestion that the active intellect, qua maker of "all things", must be thinking all things. In fact, it gives reason to believe that Aristotle is actively ruling out this possibility. And if this is so, then the Apostle/Ross implicit *reductio* (argument [2], above) against identifying the active intellect with God has a false premise, namely the contention that this intellect thinks many things.

As for Apostle's argument [4] -- namely that one active intellect could not account for the simultaneous but different thoughts of various men -- it depends entirely on this same premise, and hence can be dismissed. Argument [3] -- addressing the possibility that it is one but not God -- can be set aside because it is introduced as an alternative to an option which Apostle thinks he has refuted. As his argument against this option fails, we need not be led into any blind hypothetical alleys in search of undefined alternatives.

Thus, we are left with the distinct possibility that the active intellect is one and shared by all. And it actualizes the potential of the intelligibles merely by disposing the passive intellect to become them.

3. "There are gods even here"
(Parts of Animals, 645a20-21)

Interestingly, Aristotle follows the light analogy by depicting the active intellect as "separable [*chōristos*], impassive and unmixed, being in essence [*ousía*] actuality". (430a17-18) Excepting the claim, discussed above, that it is essentially actual, these same qualities are also assigned to the passive intellect. (429a15, 429a18, 429b6) Note, however, that its essential actuality -- a trait clearly not shared by the passive intellect -- is offered as the reason for attributing the first three qualities to the active intellect. This suggests that these qualities -- separability, impassivity, and isolated existence -- are being attributed to the active intellect here, not in relation to the body, as was the case with the passive intellect, but in relation to the passive mind itself.⁵⁸ That this is the case is implied by Aristotle's ensuing justification of the claim that its being essentially actual is a sufficient condition for attributing these three qualities to the active intellect:

For that which acts [*poioun*] is always more honourable than that which is acted upon, and the principle more honourable than the [or "its"] matter. (430a18-9)

⁵⁸ See Rist(1971), pp. 512-513 for a related but slightly different argument for this conclusion.

Given the context, the active and passive factors to which he refers are clearly the active and passive intellects, respectively. Aquinas, wishing, as we have seen, to preserve the possibility of atemporal contemplation for the human intellect, must avoid the suggestion that the active intellect can and does subsist separately from the passive, with its implication that it is the former alone which survives the death of the individual. It is not surprising then that he reads 430a17-19 as the weakest claim possible, namely that the active intellect is separable, etc., in union with the passive -- separable that is, from the body -- and that lines a18-19 merely serve to establish this.⁵⁹ That is, he takes the claim that the active is more honourable than the passive to show only that if "the potential intellect be... free from matter and impassible and pure, a *fortiori* the agent intellect,"⁶⁰ since any mark of distinction afforded the less noble intellect must also be true of the nobler. The strongest possible interpretation of these lines, by contrast, is consistent with the view that only the active intellect survives death -- or at the very least, that it does not remain united with the passive intellect, as Aquinas requires. On this reading, Aristotle, in employing this political metaphor (perhaps one chosen for its rhetorical appeal with

⁵⁹ Aquinas, Aristotle's De Anima #732-3 (p.428).

⁶⁰ ibid., #733 (p.428).

his aristocratic students), says that the essentially actual intellect must be separable from, unaffected by, and unmixed with the passive intellect, because -- as essentially actual -- it is nobler in nature, and hence (the argument implies) must stand aloof in relation to its inferior. The full significance of this relation is manifest in my account of the light analogy. And indeed this would be the correct moment in his discussion for Aristotle to make this stronger point. For having just compared the active intellect to light, with everything this entails, he immediately shows us the limit of the analogy by adding something to his depiction of this intellect's relation to the passive one that cannot be said of light's relation to the transparent, namely that it is actually, and not merely conceptually, separable, the reason being that it is essentially actual. That is, this sentence is a supplement to the light analogy. It does not retract or contradict any of the latter's implications; rather, it adds a salient point which could not be encompassed within the analogy, presumably for the straightforward reason that it is a point that cannot be made of many, if any, entities outside of the active intellect itself. And this is the answer to Brentano's claim, noted earlier (p. 46), that the active intellect cannot be a separate substance because it is a "state". The supplement addresses this very point, saying, in effect, 'While a *hexis*, even an unusual one like light, cannot exist separately from that of which it is a state, the active

intellect, which is not only a sort of state (*hexis tis*), but is essentially actual, can have independent existence.' In other words, Aristotle explicitly identifies the active intellect as the exception to the rule regarding the 'metaphysical' status of states. Recall the passage from 408b19-32: "Thinking, loving, and hating are not then qualities of the intellect, but rather of the individual who possesses [*echontos*] it, in so far as he possesses [*echei*] it." Intellect, at that early stage of the treatise, is depicted as a possession of the individual. And yet immediately prior to that, Aristotle had said that "Intellect seems to be an independent substance [*ousia*], and not to perish." (408b19-20) In his later analysis of this issue, it becomes clear that the intellect which is imperishable is the 'active' one. It is the active intellect that is a "possession" of the individual. And we have seen what sort of possession it is. It is the "having" which, as Brentano says, is implied by the existence of a "state". Even at the early 'aporetic' stage of this work, Aristotle was willing to speak of the intellect both as a necessary condition of the functioning of the individual *qua* thinking being, and as a separate substance. The argument at 430a17-19 merely makes the precise meaning of this hypothesis more explicit. The active intellect is a sort of state of that in which it is present, but as an essentially actual substance, it subsists unto itself upon parting from that in relation to which it can

be described as a state.

Setting this issue aside, I wish to return to lines a18-9, in order to focus some attention on the word "principle", *archē*, in this metaphorical argument. The principle is said to be more honourable than the matter. The "matter" here, once again, refers to the passive intellect. And since the two claims in this sentence are merely different expressions of the same claim, i.e. they merely emphasize different aspects of one point, the "principle" must be "that which acts", and which is like light.

I take the precise meaning of this sentence to be of great significance for understanding both the preceding and subsequent lines. If I am correct in claiming that the active intellect does not think all the intelligibles, but only makes them, then presumably it is only the passive intellect that ever thinks these. The former, then, is not more honourable than the latter because it has in actuality what the latter has only potentially. Rather, the active intellect never has what the passive intellect has. These things are actual in the passive mind alone. Recall that the greater honour of the active intellect is due, not to its being actual, but to its being essentially actual. The contrast between the two minds is not that between potency and activity *per se*. The passive intellect, as a special case of potency, is essentially nothing, i.e. inactive, but it becomes active by receiving ideas. The active intellect is active by definition, as it

were. It is important, then, to notice that by isolating this difference as the active intellect's mark of superiority over the passive, and as proof of its separability, etc., in relation to the latter, Aristotle is not merely saying that the active intellect is nobler than the passive intellect *qua* potency. Rather, he is saying that the active is nobler because its activity is not generated from an underlying potentiality, as must be said of the passive's activity. In other words, he is implicitly ranking the two types of intellect with regard to their respective activities. This means that the active intellect, in being more honourable than the passive, is by that fact also more honourable than the (humanly) intelligible world -- literally, more honourable than all of the things which the passive intellect is capable of becoming.

We shall see presently how lines 430a17-19, thus interpreted, are linked to the immediately subsequent reference to actual and potential knowledge. But first, to help clarify what has been uncovered so far, and to see what the above conclusion -- that the active intellect is more honourable than the intelligible world -- suggests about the active intellect, let us examine a passage from Eudemian Ethics⁶¹ VIII.2, which addresses the possibility that chance

⁶¹ Aristotle, Eudemian Ethics (H. Rackham, tr.). (All quotations from Eudemian Ethics, with minor modifications, are from this translation.)

is responsible for our desiring the right thing at the time when it is necessary. I will quote the response to this suggestion at length:

[O]n that showing, will not fortune be the cause of everything -- even of thought [noēsai] and deliberation? since it is not the case that one only deliberates when one has deliberated even previously to that deliberation, nor does one only think when one has previously thought before thinking, and so on to infinity, but there is some principle (or starting-point) [archē]; therefore thought [nous] is not the principle of thinking, nor deliberation of deliberating. Then what else is, save fortune? It will follow that everything originates from fortune. Or shall we say that there is a certain principle outside which there is no other, and that this, merely owing to its being of such and such a nature, can produce [poiein] a result of such and such a nature? But this is what we are investigating -- what is the principle of motion in the soul? The answer then is clear: as in general [holōs], so there, everything is moved by God; for in a sense the divine in us is the cause of all our motions. And the principle of reason [logos] is not reason but something superior to reason. What, then, could be superior even to knowledge and to intellect, except God. (1248a16-29)

So thought, *nous*, is here said to be made (produced) by God. Lest we take this to suggest that it is the active *nous* that is so made, it should be noted immediately that this is said to be eternal, i.e. to have no beginning, and hence a debate about what starts its thought would be absurd. Even if we were to take this 'production' of the motions of *nous* by God to express a logical rather than a temporal priority, there is nothing in this passage to suggest that God merely

produces that which makes all things (as the active intellect is said to do). Aristotle is saying that God produces everything, including all thoughts. And we have already established that the active intellect does not think all things, but only makes them. Thus, it seems that either God and the active intellect are identical, or else both God and the active intellect produce all things, independently of one another.

This Eudemian Ethics discussion is concerned, among other things, with individual humans' thoughts, which, as we have seen, exist only in the passive intellect. God, which to avoid contradiction seems to be the active intellect, must therefore produce the thoughts of the passive intellect without thinking them. Further still, this passage's elaboration on God's production of thought is that "the divine in us is the cause of all our <psychic> motions." This seems to offer yet another answer to the terminological problem, discussed earlier, with seeing the active mind in the way that I have interpreted it, namely the suggestion that the words "in the soul", in the opening statement of De Anima III.5,⁶² are "fatal to any interpretation which identifies the active reason with a divine reason falling entirely outside the

⁶² i.e. the statement at 430a10-14 that the general distinction between a material component which becomes things and a producing cause must be applicable to the intellect, such that the active intellect is "in the soul".

individual human being."⁶³ The current passage refers explicitly to God as "the divine in us", apparently thwarting any attempt to drive a wedge between the active intellect and the divine on the grounds that the former is said to be "in the soul", and hence cannot be God.

Brentano, recognizing (and disapproving of) this result, disputes the point by once again forcing a square peg into a round hole, interpreting the phrase "the divine element in us" to refer, not to God, as the straightforward reading of the passage implies, but to "actual knowledge".⁶⁴ This in spite of the fact that the argument offered as to why this "divine element" must be the *archē* of thought is that knowledge is a part of that thought, while the only thing of higher rank than knowledge is God. Or by "actual knowledge" here, does Brentano mean to distinguish active thinking from the mere 'first actuality' possession of knowledge, and to claim that it is the former that is meant by "the divine in us", while the latter is the "knowledge" that Aristotle says is inferior to the divine element? If so, then he has lost even the tenuous support that he hopes to garner from similar references in other works, which typically portray the capacity for, or the possession of, knowledge, and not its activity, as our "divine element". Given the difficulty of

⁶³ Ross(1959), p. 146.

⁶⁴ Brentano, pp. 153-4.

this passage for the standard view that the active intellect cannot be God because it is "in the soul", we should, at the risk of appearing to flog a dead horse, pursue Brentano's interpretive attempt to defuse the problem one step further. As his argument for "actual knowledge" as the "divine element" from the Eudemian Ethics relies on this identification's consistency with standard Aristotelian doctrine, it is noteworthy that the key supporting text he cites (but neither quotes nor discusses) is the following, from Metaphysics XII.7:

The mind [nous] thinks itself through participation in the object of thought... so that mind and the object of thought are the same, because that which is receptive of the object of thought, and the essence, is mind [nous]. It is active [energei] when it possesses [echōn] the object. So this rather than that is held to be [dokei] the divine possession of the mind, and contemplation [theōria] most pleasant and best. (1072b22-5)

There is some debate among manuscript editors as to whether the phrase "this rather than that" should instead read "that rather than this". In either case, it is far from self-evident which terms in the preceding argument are indicated by the words "this" and "that", making the whole interpretive issue difficult to solve with any certainty, at least by reference to the phrase "this rather than that". Often, it is assumed that in this sentence the type of activity consisting in the habitual possession of intelligible objects is being contrasted with the 'inactivity' of pure potency or

receptivity, with the contrast being made on the basis of the former's apparent divinity (due, possibly, to its now being able to think itself⁶⁵); although exactly the opposite reading, while less likely, is also possible. Further, it might be argued that the contrast is between the mind *qua* subject and the mind *qua* object of self-knowledge, with the former being depicted as the "divine possession" of the mind.⁶⁶ In any event, whichever of these three candidates -- intellect in state of 'first actuality', intellect as receptive of intelligibles, and intellect *qua* self-knower -- is the one Aristotle designates here as the "divine possession" of *nous*, it appears necessary that one of these, and not the active thinking of the intelligibles (what Brentano calls "actual knowledge"), be the "divine" aspect of human thought, since the intellect's active self-thinking (*theōria*) is mentioned only after something else has been described as the "divine possession". Clearly *theōria* is introduced as the activity or highest function of this divine aspect, implying that it is not itself the divine aspect as such, and that this aspect need not be active in the sense of

⁶⁵ The intellect in habitual possession of its objects is distinguished from the intellect as pure capacity to receive objects at De Anima III.4, 429b6-10, on the grounds that the former is able to think itself.

⁶⁶ Cf. Joseph Owens, The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics [hereafter cited as DOB], p.444: "...the knowing rather than the knowableness is the divine feature, because the 'knowing' denotes the act."

being engaged in (active) self-thought. And it is only in this light that Aristotle's next words are meaningful. For he goes on to say: "If, then, the happiness which God always enjoys is as great as that which we enjoy sometimes, this is marvellous...." (1072b25-6) This is Aristotle's first explicit mention of God in XII.7, and his first point about God's nature is that its divinity -- consisting, like ours, in existing as a (self-)thinking thing -- is, unlike ours, always (i.e. essentially) active.

Hence, although we must address this Metaphysics passage again in the appropriate place, it can be stated at this point that the claim that it is the active contemplation of one's knowledge -- the so-called 'second actuality' -- that Aristotle regards as the "divine element in us", finds no support in one of the few, and most auspicious, passages in which the topic of a divine element of our nature is mentioned, a passage that Brentano himself cites to illustrate this claim. And since Brentano's argument for this reading derives all of its strength from the circumstantial evidence of the alleged typicalness of the Eudemian Ethics passage, so understood, it can thus be dismissed.

One might ask, however, whether this argument against Brentano does not subvert our own reading of the Eudemian Ethics passage, since we have shown that, according to Metaphysics 1072b20-25, it is neither God nor the active intellect, but one or another aspect of the passive intellect,

that is identified as our "divine possession". It should be noted, first of all, that an interpretation of the Eudemian Ethics which, unlike Brentano's, does not rely on independent corroboration from other works, need not be susceptible to the above criticism. On the contrary, I would argue that the "divine element" of the Eudemian Ethics is a different item entirely from the 'divine' aspects referred to in certain other contexts, but that the key to preserving the consistency of Aristotle's theory in this issue lies in paying close attention to the natures and contexts of the relevant passages. For instance, in the passage cited from Metaphysics XII.7, the reference to the "divine possession" of human thought is preceded by the word *dokei*, a common Aristotelian method of indicating that the view in question is no more than a typical, or often held, opinion, or a plausible but unproven 'working hypothesis', rather than being Aristotle's own rationally argued belief. Hence, no doctrinal inconsistency is entailed by any claim regarding a divine aspect of humanity which conflicts with this one.

Further, a careful look at the wording of the Eudemian Ethics sentence in question is instructive as to the difference between the two 'conflicting' claims. Aristotle's argument has led to the conclusion that there must be a first principle of the soul's motions, and all that remains is to identify this principle. Notice that he says immediately that its identity is "clear" (*dēlon*); there is, in other words, no

need to search any further. But why not? How can Aristotle assume that the claim which he now makes, that God is the principle of our thoughts, should be accepted with little or no explanation? He gives us the answer: the principle we seek is clearly God, "for in a sense the divine in us is the cause of all our motions," while -- as he points out in the following sentence -- only God has a position 'high' enough to be responsible for the motions of the intellect.⁶⁷ The argument, stated more succinctly, is: The divine in us is the cause of our thought/God is the divine in us/Therefore, God is the cause of our thought. The first premise here is explicitly offered as the reason that this discovery is obvious, "clear". This implies that the reason itself -- namely, the fact that our divine element is the cause of our motions -- is not a matter of dispute (Aristotle offers no argument for it), but can be taken as self-evident. Though the soundness of the argument may be dubitable, it has rhetorical force for a listener or reader who is already inclined to believe the first premise. To such a person, this argument really does make the identification of God as the principle of thought seem "clear", i.e. obvious, as opposed to requiring an inordinate amount of explanation.

And such an audience -- one with an inclination to believe this premise -- is indeed presumed by Aristotle. That

⁶⁷ Eudemian Ethics, 1248a27-29. For more on this passage, see below.

this is so is apparent when one reflects on the number of passages in which he alludes, without recourse to any supporting argument, to the possible or seeming divinity of some highest part of the soul.⁶⁸ Aristotle's writing is cast against a Platonic background, and his theories are offered as alternative solutions to Platonic problems. In this light, it is unsurprising that he, as well as his students, would take for granted that the soul is in some way, or through some one of its faculties, connected to the divine. And so, in seeking the starting-point of all thought, he says that it is God, and attempts to palliate any concerns about this conclusion by reminding his students that they already grant that something divine in us is the ultimate cause of our motions. All that he has added to a premise that is generally accepted -- at least among young philosophers studying under the fourth century's foremost 'Platonist' -- is the precise identity of the divine element in question. The initial premise itself, that something divine rules in us, is entirely in line with Metaphysics 1072b20-25, and with equally noncommittal references to a divine element elsewhere. His reason for mentioning this unproven assumption in Eudemian Ethics, once again, is that he is in the process of attempting to give it some theoretical content, of making a philosophical claim regarding the nature of this divine element and the manner of

⁶⁸ e.g. De Anima 408b29-30, Metaphysics 1070a25-8, Nicomachean Ethics 1177a15-16, 1177b26-31.

its 'rule' within the individual soul. Hence, not only is it incorrect to regard the identification of God with our divine element as being inconsistent with related passages elsewhere; on the contrary, the view implied in these related passages is used, in the current context, as 'evidence' for this identification.⁶⁹

Having said this, we can reiterate the small but significant point with which this digression began: Aristotle is clearly identifying God as being "in us", somehow;

⁶⁹ Some believe that shortly after the passage we are discussing, Aristotle uses the word "God" to identify human theoretical reason, which could obviously be problematic for my position. Explaining the aim of the good life, he says:

It is proper to live with reference to the ruling factor.... And since man consists by nature of a ruling part and a subject part... (and this is two-fold, for medical science is a ruling principle in one way and health is in another, and the former is a means to the latter), this is therefore the case in regard to the faculty of contemplation. For God is not a ruler in the sense of issuing commands, but is the End as a means to which wisdom [*phronēsis*] gives commands; since clearly God is in need of nothing. Therefore whatever mode of choosing and of acquiring things good by nature... will best promote the contemplation of God, that is the best mode; and any mode... that... hinders us from serving and contemplating God -- that is a bad one. (1249b7-21)

For details of the controversy, see Woods' commentary in Eudemian Ethics (M. Woods, tr.), pp. 193-198. Whatever ambiguity there may be in Aristotle's first use of "God" in this passage, the explicit citing of the contemplation of God -- obviously a function of theoretical reason -- as the activity towards the pursuit of which *phronēsis* must legislate, makes it very clear that "God" is not theoretical reason, but reason's proper object. Notice that this latter point is Aristotle's explanation of the sense in which God can be said, at 1249b14-15, to be the good man's "ruler", thus removing any ambiguity even from that earlier remark.

Thus this passage, far from creating a problem for my interpretation, actually supports it very nicely.

therefore, those interpreters who deny that the active intellect is God on the basis of Aristotle's remark, in De Anima III.5, that this is "in the soul", must concede that no such inference can, with any firmness, be drawn from this phrase. And I note once again that this phrase is typically the sole piece of textual evidence cited against the Alexandrian thesis, and that it is cited by virtually all noteworthy interpreters who deny this thesis. Further, it is likely -- nay, all but certain -- that those who make this unsound inference, believing it to prove that the active intellect cannot be God, construct their own interpretations of III.5 with a view to avoiding a conclusion that they (wrongly) believe has been disavowed by Aristotle himself. That is, their readings are skewed by the fact that one possible line of interpretation has unnecessarily been dismissed out of hand, thus artificially delimiting -- for themselves, most importantly -- the range of plausible meaning to be derived from this difficult, even cryptic, discussion. This, of course, does not prove that any or all of their respective interpretations are wrong. It does, however, suggest a considerable exegetical advantage -- particularly in the area of openness to possible meanings and relevant doctrinal correspondences or associations -- on the side of those who do not feel the same vested interest in avoiding a particular conclusion, or brace of conclusions. It is not simply that the former interpreters decide, after considering

a given line of III.5, in favour of a reading that runs counter to a conclusion to which they are unwilling, for reasons of consistency or internal logic, to accede. Rather, since they believe that Aristotle himself has explicitly denied this conclusion, they cannot help but prejudge every line in such a way as to see as not merely unlikely, but impossible, any interpretation which agrees with it. Hence these readers do not feel, in all contexts, the need to proceed as slowly and assiduously as they would if they had remained open-minded toward all possible meanings, including (and especially) the ones which disagree most thoroughly with their own preconceptions. As Descartes's Eudoxus tells the self-effacing Polyander in The Search for Truth:

...it will be far easier for me to set on the right track someone who is neutral than to guide Epistemon, who will often take up the opposite position.⁷⁰

Stated differently, wearing blinders allows a horse to race faster by removing distractions, particularly those caused by the proximity of other horses. But crossing the finish line first is not the goal of a responsible exegete.

One final note on the segment of Eudemian Ethics discussed thus far: The principle of *nous* is said, at 1248a23-4, to be able to produce thought "merely owing to its being of such and such a nature", i.e. its nature is such as

⁷⁰ Descartes, The Search for Truth, in J. Cottingham/R. Stoothoff/D. Murdoch (eds. and trs.), The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, vol. II, p. 403 (AT x, 502).

to set other things into "motion", not by any ordinary sort of efficient causality, but simply by the fact of its presence as the sort of thing that it is. Is this not precisely the point of analogy between the active intellect and light, according to *De Anima* III.5? Wedin, however, while granting this, also wishes to avoid the identification of this principle with God. To this end, he draws our attention to the word *dūnatai*, "able", in the relevant sentence, arguing that:

...because the *archē* must be capable of initiating thought by itself, it cannot always be doing so. Hence, it cannot be the same thing as the eternal unmoved mover.⁷¹

In other words, the unmoved mover is said to be eternally active, and thus to be without *dūnamis*, potential. Therefore the principle sought in this passage from *Eudemian Ethics*, which is said to have the capacity to do something, cannot be God. Even leaving aside the argument offered above to establish that God is indeed the principle in question, we must ask how great an interpretive edifice Wedin can hold up with this appearance of the word *dūnatai*. Recall the context: The discussion concerning the cause of our desiring the right thing at the right time arises in the course of a consideration of good fortune in general. (1246b37-1248a16) The question is raised as to whether it is merely a matter of good fortune, or indeed perhaps definitive of good fortune, that we desire what is best under any given circumstances.

⁷¹ *Wedin*, p.219.

(1248a17-18) It is here that Aristotle observes, as quoted above, that if this is the nature of good fortune, then fortune is the cause -- the principle -- of everything, including thought and deliberation. And, he continues, since thought and deliberation cannot cause themselves, fortune must play this role -- unless there is something else besides fortune which can do it. It is this consideration which gives meaning to the question on which this dialectic turns, as on a pivot:

Or is there a certain principle [*ē esti tis archē*] outside which there is no other, and which, merely owing to its being of such and such a nature, is able [*dūnatai*] to produce a result of such and such a nature?

The entire passage proceeds in this form: 'Does A alone perform task 'x'? If so, then since 'x' alone implies 'y', A alone must also perform task 'y'. So it appears that A performs task 'y'. Or is there something else, B, which alone is such as to be able to perform task 'y'? In this formulation, 'y' is the origination of thought and deliberation, and it is precisely this 'task' that constitutes the "result of such and such a nature" at line 1248a24. And it is in this connection that the *dūnatai* appears. Again, the question is, 'Is there anything else which is able (*dūnatai*) to perform this task, a task which would otherwise have to be left to fortune?' And it is two sentences later that Aristotle answers this question in the affirmative, and identifies alternative B as God. Read properly, this passage

offers no support for Wedin's attempt to distinguish the active intellect from God, since it is a severe distortion of meaning to take the sentence in question as stipulating that the principle of thought and deliberation -- which Wedin correctly identifies with the active intellect -- must be a potency of some sort. To isolate *dūnatai*, and treat it as central to Aristotle's depiction of the principle he is seeking, is to ignore the context in which the word appears. The relevant sentence merely states a broad alternative, in the form of a question, to a solution already proposed. No attempt has yet been made to explain the nature of alternative principle B -- its very existence has yet to be posited. At this point, B is strictly an empty category. All that is said about its nature is what follows self-evidently from the problem to which it is a hypothetical solution, namely that it produces the motions of thought and deliberation without itself being a part of the process of motion (so as to avoid an infinite regress -- 1248a19-21), "merely owing to its being of such and such a nature."

Aristotle is not claiming here that the principle he is seeking must be essentially potential, any more than he is claiming that it must be essentially active. He is merely asking whether there exists any alternative to fortune as source of everything, and in particular of thought and deliberation. That the answer to this question is God, and that God happens to be without potential, in no way

contradicts anything stipulated in the original question, unless we regard *dūnatai*, in this question, as carrying the full metaphysical weight of Aristotle's potential/actual distinction, and as being a necessary feature of the principle being sought. In other words, since the question as to whether anything other than fortune is able to stand as the principle of thought is asked before God is ever mentioned in this connection, it is likely that the phrase 'is able' simply reflects the natural manner of framing such a question -- prior to the introduction of an item so peculiar in nature as the unmoved mover -- rather than a precise characterization of the essential nature of the item being sought. Recall that, literally, the question Aristotle is asking is whether anything is powerful enough (*dūnatai*) to cause all things. That the only item so powerful turns out, under metaphysical examination, not to be 'powerful' at all, in the ordinary (i.e. literal) sense, is a peculiarity of the Aristotelian theology which is hardly to be presumed without explanation in a 'non-metaphysical' context.⁷² Further, consider

⁷² Lest it be denied that Aristotle would speak inexactly about the divine nature in a context in which he is using God as part of a philosophical argument, or indeed in which he is making a claim about God's own role in the universe, consider Nicomachean Ethics X.8 1178b7ff. In attempting to establish contemplation as the highest activity, it is argued that moral action is beneath the gods, and yet: nevertheless they have always been conceived as... living, and therefore living actively, for we cannot suppose they are always asleep like Endymion. But for a living being, if we eliminate action... what remains save

Metaphysics XII.7 1073a7-8: God is without magnitude and indivisible "for it produces movement through infinite time, but nothing finite has infinite power [*dūnamin apeiron*]". (Ross translation) Even in the most precise discussion of God that Aristotle left us, God is depicted as having a kind of 'potency', namely one which defies the fundamental law of potency by being inexhaustible. This, we might say, is an example of Aristotle engaging in what later came to be called negative theology.

And finally, as there is nothing in the preceding or subsequent discussion in the Eudemian Ethics to suggest any reason that the principle must be essentially a potency (in the proper sense), it seems highly implausible that the relevant phrase should be read in this way. That is, if Aristotle were indeed specifying, at line 24, that the alternative to fortune be a *dūnamis* and not an *energeia*, then it would be reasonable to assume that he would offer some hint, at least indirectly, as to why this must be so. The

contemplation? (1178b18-22)

Notice that all he says about the gods here is what he says about humans, namely that they must be active to be happy. Saying that they are not "always asleep" is far from saying that they are eternally active. And yet it is the latter that is Aristotle's precise claim about the unmoved movers. Again, in contexts in which the essential nature of God (or the gods) is not immediately at issue, he shows himself more than willing to speak imprecisely about those aspects of the divine nature which are not pertinent to the matter at hand. Similarly, the word *nous* is used in its ordinary sense even in the middle books of the Ethics, wherein it is given its strict definition.

fact that he offers no such hint, in conjunction with our reading of the passage in which the principle of thought is identified as God, offers further grounds for dismissing Wedin's isolation of the word *dūnatai* as evidence against this identification. And so the unmistakable resemblance, on all points, between this principle and the active intellect, as noted by Wedin himself, must also stand as a resemblance between God and the active intellect.

Wedin, however, offers one other argument to subvert the identification of God with this passage's "divine element". Translating 1248a26-27 (which we read as "as in general, so there, everything is moved by God") as "as God <is the starting point of movement> in the universe so it is in the soul," he says:

...the *hōsper* (as god...) construction indicates nothing more than analogy, especially in light of the fact that the analogy is introduced on the strength of the claim that the divine element in us makes everything.⁷³

The last part of this argument can be dismissed on the basis of our earlier critique of Brentano's reading. But what of the claim that God is introduced as "nothing more" than an analogue? On this view, the sentence would mean: 'The divine element in the soul serves the same function in the psychic realm that God serves in the universe as a whole.' To start with, this reading leaves "the divine element" as a

⁷³ Wedin, p. 219.

conceptually empty phrase, since if God is not this element, then the text gives no indication as to what (part of the soul) this element might be. And so the passage would stand as an evasive and unsatisfying answer to the question at hand, namely "what is the principle of motion in the soul?" (1248a25-26); whereas our interpretation gives the phrase "the divine element" real theoretical content, and hence gives the entire passage serious philosophic import.

To elaborate: notice that in most of the contexts in which Aristotle refers to a "divine" aspect of the soul, this aspect is left only tentatively identified, typically with a qualifying *dokei* to indicate a certain distance between Aristotle and the identification proposed. In these contexts, however, the discussion always concerns something other than the divine element itself, and the latter is mentioned merely by way of illustrating some other point (e.g. Metaphysics 1072b23-26), or as a hypothesis to be examined later (De Anima 408b29), or as rhetorical support for a claim that stands on other, independent, grounds (Nicomachean Ethics 1177a12-18). In Eudemian Ethics, unlike these other instances, the function of this divine element itself, and its relation to other aspects or functions of the soul, is precisely the issue at hand. Therefore it is in this context in particular that we should expect Aristotle to say something more definitive about the identity and nature of this element. By distinguishing "God" from the "divine element" in this passage, Wedin and

Brentano leave Aristotle's one extant explicit discussion of our divine element as such without useful content. In effect, the "divine element", on this reading, is little more than an imaginary super-concept, drawn in without doctrinal justification to solve a problem for which there was an alternative answer (fortune), but one of which the author simply did not approve. Indeed, if the divine principle in question is not God, then this passage does not even offer a tentative suggestion as to its identity, as do all the other passages in which Aristotle alludes to such an item. By quickly identifying it with the active intellect, or with active thinking, Wedin and Brentano, respectively, obscure the striking assumption underlying, and necessitated by, their readings, namely that this passage alludes to something -- a "divine element in us" -- which the author believes need not be identified any further in order for the reader or student to understand exactly what is meant. That is, they assume that the term "the divine element in us" was deemed sufficiently clear as not to need any elaboration in this context, as indeed, on their readings, it receives none. This assumption is not surprising from Brentano, whose (unsuccessful) argument for actual knowledge as the divine element is based on the alleged consistency of this passage with a 'standard' Aristotelian position, and hence a position which would not require explanation on every occasion. It is indeed surprising from Wedin, whose own claim is that the

active intellect -- his candidate for "divine element" -- is almost never alluded to in the entire corpus. On what grounds can he assume that Aristotle would advance this notion -- and as the solution to a major theoretical problem, no less -- without considering it worthwhile to identify it clearly? On the contrary, the dearth of explanation regarding the manner in which this divine element serves as principle of the soul's motions is understandable, in this context, only on the terms of our interpretation, according to which Aristotle bluntly tells us that God is this principle. This is his shorthand way of achieving his immediate philosophic purpose, which is to refute the suggestion that fortune is the principle of all things by showing us that something else plays this role. It is effective shorthand because it stands in, doctrinally, for the theoretical detail that would be required if the principle of thought were to be elucidated without being named "God". In *De Anima* III.5, by way of contrast, this principle is explained in some detail, and with considerable preparatory context; hence the simplifying term "God" need not be applied.⁷⁴

Further, Wedin's interpretation requires that the analogy be between God and "the divine element". And yet, as

⁷⁴ That Aristotle may have had other, less straightforward reasons for actively avoiding -- rather than merely regarding as unnecessary -- the meeting of the name "God" and the theoretical account of the active intellect in one and the same context, is a matter for future consideration.

we have seen, the latter is introduced as part of an explanation of the claim that God causes our soul's motions. Wedin must, and wishes to, take "God" as being used in two senses simultaneously, with the first sense corresponding to "the universe" (his rendering of *holōs*), and the second sense corresponding to the soul, and meaning the active intellect. This requires that the second sense be distinguished from the first by being governed by the phrase "the divine element", in the next sentence, such that the passage can be explicated as follows: 'As God produces the motions of the universe, so something relatively god-like in us produces the motions of the soul.' Consider that on this interpretation, the word "God" is being used literally and metaphorically at the same time. For Aristotle does not merely say 'God (metaphorical sense, meaning the god-like divine element) is the cause of the soul's motions.' He says, according to Wedin's reading, 'God (literal sense) is the cause of the universe's motions, and (metaphorical sense) of the soul's motions.'⁷⁵ A

⁷⁵ Any metaphor, of course, requires an awareness of the literal meaning of the metaphorically-used term. It is this awareness that gives the metaphor its descriptive force. It is also necessary, however, that we be aware that the term is not currently being used in its literal sense. We misunderstand the claim that the lion is 'king of the jungle' if we do not know what a real king is; we also misunderstand it if we take the word "king" literally in this context. The problem with Wedin's (implicit) rendering of the sentence at 1248a26-27 is that it has the same form as the following example: 'The king has absolute authority over his citizens, and is the strongest beast in the jungle.' The term "king" appears once, but is given two predicates which are not predicable of one and the same subject. The author of such a

confused formulation which is made absurd by the necessity -- to which Wedin submits⁷⁶ -- that the next appearance of the word "God", at 1248a29, also be governed by "divine element" in the same way, so that Aristotle's statement that "God" alone is superior to knowledge and intellect must be read as 'God (metaphorical sense) alone -- if we do not include God (literal sense), which is of course superior to everything -- is superior to knowledge and intellect.'

Clearly, the likeness indicated by the word *hōsper* is not between God and "the divine in us", but rather between what is generally true (*en tō holō*) and what is true of the soul, namely that "in a manner" God (literal sense) produces all motions. If this is not the case, then Aristotle has, in this passage, made God the principle or source of all things except the motions of the soul, a highly untenable thesis given the sense in which the Prime Mover is said to be the principle of all things, namely indirectly, via the first motion. That is, if the divine element to which Aristotle is referring is a peculiarly human feature, the highest aspect of our species' nature, then God, which is not this kind of

sentence is trying to communicate too many meanings at once, to tell us something about two very different subjects while designating the subjects by the single use of one term. Wedin, in his eagerness to avoid the straightforward meaning of the sentence in question, ascribes to Aristotle a meaning that the actual wording of the sentence cannot sustain without being reduced to incoherence -- to bad writing.

⁷⁶ Wedin, p. 219.

mover, is not an appropriate analogue; instead we should expect to see the divine element compared with 'the natural impulse or *telos* of each thing', or some such notion. Are we to believe that the soul's 'motions', however peculiar in nature these may be, are not the results, at least indirectly, of the first principle of all motion, but rather of some (unspecified) "divine element" which is somehow independent of the Prime Mover? And if Wedin's claim is more moderate, i.e. that the "divine element" has a function similar in some way to that of God, but is still ultimately dependent, like everything else, upon God as its principle, then it is unclear why Aristotle would introduce it here at all. Recall that the question he is trying to answer is whether fortune is the principle of all things, "outside which there is no other." If in fact there is something more fundamental beyond the "divine element" -- if it is, in effect, a kind of intermediary principle -- then it is not a satisfactory answer to the question at hand. For Aristotle's dialectical opponent could still argue that fortune is ultimately responsible for one's allegedly "divine" element being of such a nature as to cause the soul's motions, especially given the fact that, were this a correct interpretation of the passage, Aristotle would have said nothing about the nature of this element that would preclude such a possibility.

A final, most serious problem with Wedin's reading should be noted here, not so much because it is a problem for

Wedin, as because it points up an aspect of this Eudemian Ethics passage which is of the greatest relevance to those who agree -- correctly, I believe -- with Wedin's view that the "divine element" of this passage bears all the earmarks of the active intellect, as depicted in De Anima III.5. The problem is that Wedin explains the active intellect as nothing more than the activity of all acts of thinking *qua* activity, without regard to the content of any given act of thinking. It follows from this view that it is active if and only if the individual mind is engaged in an act of thinking, i.e. that the active intellect is part and parcel of the ordinary functioning of human reason itself. And yet the upshot of Aristotle's introduction of the "divine element" -- indeed the reason for its introduction -- is an explanation of what it means to be what we call a 'fortunate' person, an explanation which culminates in the following observation:

... those are called fortunate who although irrational [*alogoi*] succeed in whatever they start on. And it does not pay them to deliberate, for they have within them a principle of a kind that is better than mind [*nou*] and deliberation (whereas the others have reason [*logon*] but have not this): they have inspiration [*enthousiasmon*], but they cannot deliberate. For although irrational they attain even what belongs to the prudent and wise -- swiftness of divination....
(1248a30-36)

It is difficult, if not impossible, to see how the "principle" depicted here (the divine element itself) can be identified as the pure contentless activity of any 'second

actuality' thinking. The clear implication of this passage is that the fortunate person is not (or need not be) doing any active thinking. That is, as a member of the *alogoi*, such a person has (i.e. is affected by) the "divine element" without using human reason at all. Furthermore, Aristotle also notes here that there are other people, presumably among the unfortunate ones, who do have the benefit of *logos*, but who do not have this divine principle. If this principle were the activity of thought *per se*, as Wedin claims, then any rational person who thinks would 'have' it for the duration of that thinking. So either Wedin is wrong in identifying this principle with the active intellect, or his interpretation of the active intellect must be rejected on the basis of this passage. And it is my belief that Wedin's instincts were correct when he found in the language used to describe this principle an overwhelming similarity to that used in *De Anima* III.5.⁷⁷

We are left -- as with the Ross/Themistius reading of the *ou mnēmoneuomen* passage, and Apostle's rejection of the unity of the active intellect -- with the option of accepting an interpretation that would unnecessarily force us to the

⁷⁷ We might also ask how, on Wedin's interpretation of the active intellect/divine element, this principle could be of any help to one who 'attains' it in the absence of reasoning, with regard to choosing the right course of action. After all, it is difficult to see how a contentless 'light' of activity could be of any assistance in deciding between options x and y.

conclusion that Aristotle's discussion of an item of great importance to him was written with little concern for internal logic or doctrinal consistency. An option we must, I believe, reject as long as defensible alternatives are available to us. We have seen how the passage in question can easily be read in such an alternative fashion. In fact, we have seen that the text is fairly clear on the point at issue, but that certain commentators, in order to avoid any contradictions of their own preferred understandings of Aristotle,⁷⁸ have tried to squeeze meanings out of his words which would, if correct, do considerable damage to his thought as a whole.

The Eudemean Ethics, having invoked this "divine" principle, follows, to repeat, with this:

[T]he principle of reason [*logos*] is not reason but something superior to reason. What, then, could be superior even to knowledge [*epistēmē*] and to intellect [*nous*], except God? (1248a27-9)

This is an argument the conclusion of which establishes the minor premise of the syllogism, discussed above (p. 82), establishing God as the cause of our thought. The wording here makes it clear that *logos*, *epistēmē*, and *nous* are all aspects of the same thing. To clarify by way of a

⁷⁸ Notice that Wedin's argument that God, in this passage, is merely an analogue, is advanced on only one explicit basis: the words "divine element in us". He too falls prey to the mistake made by those who make certain assumptions about the implication of those words "in us" which blind them, if not to the obvious, at least to the more easily apparent.

paraphrase: 'We are seeking something superior to *logos*. But the only thing superior to *epistēmē* and *nous* is God. Therefore the principle of *logos* must be God.' If *epistēmē* and *nous* are themselves superior to *logos*, then God (which is then only one of three things superior to *logos*) need not be the principle (since the only criterion given for being this principle is that it be superior to *logos*). But Aristotle, in this passage, says that nothing but God could be the principle in question. Therefore *epistēmē* and *nous* are not superior to *logos*. If, on the other hand, *logos* is superior to these other two, then it is not true to say, as the passage does, that only God is superior to them. It seems, then, that *epistēmē* and *nous* are aspects of *logos*. Given that it is depicted as 'inferior' to "the divine in us", *logos* must belong to the merely human element. But the reason, according to *De Anima* 408b, that *nous* does not decay with the individual who possesses it is that it is divine, and not acted upon. So Aristotle is not, at 408b, referring to the same *nous* that is here said to be inferior to the divine, and moved by it. And yet, according to *Eudemian Ethics*, the only thing "superior" to this *nous*, qua aspect of *logos*, is God.

It should be observed that the identification of *logos* with the conjunction of *epistēmē* and *nous* strongly suggests that *nous* has at this point, at least, taken on its strict 'technical' meaning -- used most explicitly in the ethical works, as well as in the final chapter of *Posterior Analytics*

-- as the apprehension of the first principles of demonstration, which, in conjunction with *epistēmē*, constitutes *sophia*.⁷⁹ Thus, as we have seen in an earlier context, the highest human virtue, theoretical wisdom, the fulfilment of *logos*, is 'beneath' the divine.

All of this brings us back to *De Anima* 430a18-9: "For acting is always more honourable than being acted upon, and the principle more honourable than the matter." If "the matter" is a reference to the passive intellect, and if "more honourable" is synonymous with "superior", then the "principle" -- the active intellect -- should be God, unless Aristotle is assumed, unnecessarily, to be inconsistent.

⁷⁹ Eudemian Ethics V.6-7, Nicomachean Ethics VI.6-7, Posterior Analytics II.19.

4. Perishability

Let us now continue, in light of these observations, with our analysis of the depiction of the active intellect in III.5, and our search for the meaning of *ou mnēmoneuomen*.

If the main claim of the preceding interpretation is true -- that the active intellect does not think the things that the passive intellect 'becomes', but only 'makes them' in a manner analogous to light's making of colour -- then both of the standard readings of "we do not remember" which we have examined thus far are wrong. Not only does the passage not mean that the (our) active intellect does not remember our individuating circumstances; it also cannot mean that we do not recollect the active intellect's prenatal knowledge (i.e. that the Platonic 'theory of *anamnēsis*' is false), since the active intellect does not even possess the things that we would, on that reading, be unable to remember. The latter interpretation might have seemed acceptable if Aristotle had offered, as the reason for our not remembering, the fact that the active intellect does not have anything for us to remember; but this is not the reasoning he offers in support of the claim.

Having claimed that the active is more honourable than the passive, Aristotle goes on to say that:

Actual *epistēmē* is identical with its object; potential *epistēmē* is prior in time in the individual, though in general it is not prior in time. But it does not at one time think and at another time not think. (430a19-22)⁸⁰

As noted earlier, the "it" in question in the last

⁸⁰ Ross (Aristotle: De Anima [hereafter cited as Ross(1961)], p. 296) claims that these lines should be omitted, on the grounds that: (1) with the exception of the final line, the passage recurs in Ch. 7, and it "cannot have been meant to stand in both places; one early editor must have placed them in Ch. 5 while another placed them in Ch. 7, and a third included them in both places." (2) the lines "seriously interfere with the course of the thought, which without them would be continuous".

To (1), we must ask how Ross accounts for line 22, which does not recur in Ch. 7, and why he nevertheless chooses to omit this line along with lines 19-21, which do recur. Even Hamlyn (Aristotle: De Anima Books II and III, p. 141), who claims that the repeated lines are evidence of corruption, sees no reason to excise the unrepeated line. Further, given that, as we shall see later in this chapter, line 22 concludes the passage much differently than does its corresponding line in Ch. 7, might we not just as plausibly speculate that the "early editor" who decided to include the same wording in both chapters was Aristotle himself, having two different points to make about the same issue? (And why would Ross's hypothetical third editor, having noticed the oddity of this passage appearing in two different chapters in two previous editions, then compound the problem by placing the lines in both chapters?)

To (2), consider how many passages in Aristotle, or in almost any other philosophical writer, for that matter, might be made to seem more "continuous" by omitting all asides, parenthetical remarks, and so on. More to the point, "continuous", in such a case, may be merely a euphemism for "more accessible".

At any rate, I will show, in what follows, that the entire passage is in fact part of a "continuous" line of reasoning, as Ross himself had been willing to grant two years earlier, when he published Ross(1959), and that there is therefore no reason to excise these four lines. (Indeed, it is due to the weakness of his arguments for making so radical a textual alteration that I have consigned my analysis of the proposal to this footnote. Any further mention of Ross with regard to lines 19-22 will be in reference to his earlier position.)

sentence must be the active intellect, for the claim that it is always thinking directly contradicts the view of the passive intellect offered in III.4. But how is this statement linked with the claim regarding actual and potential *epistēmē*? Since the passive intellect is that which is receptive of forms, *epistēmē* must refer, in part, to the received forms 'qua received', as it were. This is implied in a remark from III.4:

Whenever the intellect has become everything,
as is said of the actually knowledgeable man
[*epistēmōn*].... (429b6-7)

Epistēmē is the actualized state of the passive intellect, in the same sense that colour is the actualized state of the transparent. But there is a problem here, noted by Apostle, who wonders why only actual *epistēmē* is at issue, and not also actual intuitive thinking, i.e. *nous* in the technical or strict sense, which can also, presumably, be depicted as "identical with its object".⁸¹ Most other commentators ignore the issue, and do not attempt to explain the apparent exclusion of the knowledge of simple essences, etc., from the discussion. The question is this: Does Aristotle speak only of active *epistēmē* here because he wishes to exclude *nous* from the range of human thought proper (i.e. the passive intellect)? And yet *epistēmē* in the strict sense is only knowledge if the demonstration of which it is

⁸¹ Apostle, p. 163n8.

constituted is grounded in pre-demonstrative principles which are also known. That is, if there is actual demonstrative knowledge, then there is actual pre-demonstrative knowledge as well. So this latter is either 'in' the passive intellect, or it is 'somewhere else'. Is the active intellect itself the knowledge of the first principles of demonstration? Aside from the fact that this would contradict the light analogy, Aristotle goes on, in Chapter 6, to differentiate between the thinking (*noēsis*) of indivisibles and synthetic thinking, treating both as functions of human thought (as indeed the active intellect is addressed only in III.5). (430a26-b6, 430b26-32) Perhaps, then, actual *epistēmē* is used here merely as exemplary of 'human' knowing, rather than as exhaustive of it.

Or perhaps the term is being used more loosely in this context. It is consistent with the use of *nous* in its ordinary sense of 'the faculty of thought' in De Anima III.4-5, that *epistēmē* be treated as comprehending the highest contents of the human intellect, in spite of the precise technical definitions that *nous* and *epistēmē* receive elsewhere. Three brief comments in support of this: (1) At Posterior Analytics I.3, in defending the possibility of demonstrative science against the difficulty that it cannot demonstrate its own first principles, Aristotle repeatedly uses the word *epistēmē* and its derivatives to refer to the non-demonstrative knowledge of those principles, explicitly

asserting that "not all knowledge [*epistēmē*] is demonstrative". (72b19-20) (2) In *De Anima* III.4, the passive mind is said to be "the place of forms", i.e. of ideas, a direct allusion to the Platonists. (429a30) These are, first and foremost, what the passive mind becomes. And yet this means that this intellect is assigned the function which Plato (and, following him, Aristotle) explicitly classifies as 'noetic intuition'. Aristotle's frequent use of the word *epistēmē* in III.4-5 should not cause us to forget this. (3) When this same wording regarding actual knowledge and its object reappears at the beginning of Chapter 7 (431a1-3), it serves as one half of a pair of doctrinal book-ends for that chapter, the second half of which -- at the conclusion of the chapter -- recasts the claim as "In general, the mind [*nous*] when actively thinking is identical with its objects." (431b17-18) The *nous* in question here, once again, is clearly the human or passive intellect. And this rendering of the claim is echoed, and in fact strengthened, in the passage which we have already seen from *Metaphysics* XII.7, wherein he says that "thought [*nous*] and object of thought [*noēton*] are the same. For that which is capable of receiving the object of thought, i.e. the essence [*ousia*] is thought." (1072b22-23, Ross translation) This echoes Aristotle's initial depiction of the (passive) intellect at *De Anima* III.4 429a15-16 as "receptive of form" (*dektikon tou eidous*).

It seems quite plausible, then, that Aristotle uses

the term "actual *epistēmē*", in III.5, not to narrow the scope of the passive intellect, nor that of the principle of the identity of thought and object, but simply because he has not yet discussed the thinking of indivisibles *per se*. And therefore this wording should either be taken as a non-technical use of *epistēmē*, or as standing as a model of a principle more generally applicable to the passive intellect than the terms used might suggest.

So, to return to the issue at hand, at 430a20, the "actual *epistēmē*" which is identical with its object must refer to the activity of the passive intellect; while the "potential *epistēmē*" which is temporally prior in the individual must refer to the passive intellect prior to its becoming something. Thus, this part of the comparison of actual and potential knowledge can be re-stated as follows: 'The passive intellect, having become something, is thus identical with it. A given individual's passive intellect, since it must become things, is merely potential to them prior to having become them.'

The conclusion of the sentence may seem more problematic: "though in general it [potential *epistēmē*] is not prior in time." Ross takes this, in conjunction with the subsequent assertion that the active intellect is always thinking, to mean that while each of us begins life with only potential knowledge, the active intellect pre-exists each individual, and therefore actual knowledge is, in general,

prior.⁸² This reading, however, requires that we take "actual knowledge" to be a possession of the active intellect -- a view which we have rejected, having seen the reasons for associating *epistēmē*, both potential and actual, with the passive intellect alone.⁸³

If, then, our interpretation of the preceding lines is correct, it appears that this line must mean 'in general the actualized passive intellect is prior in time to the unactualized.' That is, while any individual's passive intellect must begin with no content, there must be prior actual knowledge in some such intellect. This is consistent with Aristotle's belief, outlined at Metaphysics IX.8, that a formally identical actuality is temporally prior to the generation of any potential existent. (1049b18-9) Thus, he notes that although in individual cases of learning, the potential to know precedes the fulfilment of that potential, still there was never a time that was absolutely prior to the

⁸² Ross(1959), p. 149.

⁸³ Furthermore, if Ross's treatment of this line were adequate, this would be problematic for his own assumption that *ou mnēmoneuomen* means 'we active intellects do not remember', since this assumption, in conjunction with the view that the active intellect knows all the intelligibles, implies that individuals do possess actual *epistēmē* at birth, in some sense. At the very least, it would leave Aristotle without an explanation of what would, on such an interpretation, be the most important issue at hand, namely how an individual can both have and not have actual knowledge at the same time. Meno's paradox would arise here, and would be left unmet. Smith's reading, though unsatisfying for its own reasons, at least recognizes this problem, and interprets *ou mnēmoneuomen* so as to address it.

existence of actual *epistēmē*. Perhaps this is the ultimate meaning of the claim that the passive intellect "becomes" all of the things which the active intellect makes: the active intellect eternally makes thoughts of a sort which, when received in that which is potential to them, constitute knowledge; they must therefore, since actuality is in general temporally prior to potentiality, be possessed eternally (there being no beginning of time, for Aristotle) by that the activity of which constitutes knowledge; that which thinks in this way is the passive intellect; therefore the passive intellect eternally knows the products of the active.

The first apparent difficulty with this suggested reading is that the conclusion might seem to imply that the passive intellect is always thinking, precisely what was denied in III.4. We may bear in mind, however, that what was being denied there is only that any particular person's passive intellect, and specifically insofar as it possesses knowledge, in the sense outlined at 429b6-9, is always thinking what it knows. Aristotle's explanation for this is that an essentially potential thing cannot remain active indefinitely. (Metaphysics 1050b23-28) This is certainly consistent with, though not especially relevant to, the present claim that potential knowledge is prior in the

individual.⁸⁴ Again, this comparison of potential and actual knowledge with respect to time corresponds to the comparison of potentiality and actuality in general, from Metaphysics IX.8, and in particular the discussion at 1049b19-26. In that context, Aristotle uses the example of "the seeing subject" (obviously analogous to the 'thinking subject') as having its potential prior to its actuality in the individual, but not in the more general sense. Thus, this reading in no way contradicts the claim from III.4, regarding the passive intellect's intermittent thinking.

The second possible difficulty with our reading of the claim that actual knowledge is, in general, temporally prior to potential knowledge, is that it may seem to imply that everything must actually be known, in general, prior to being known potentially. That is, if actual knowledge is prior, then this presumably means that all actual knowledge is prior, and not merely some of it. For example, if previous individuals, as a matter of fact, knew only 9 of the 10 objects of thought made by the active intellect, then would not the discovery of object number 10 constitute an instance of potential knowledge preceding the actual in the general sense, and not merely in the particular individual who discovered it? Apostle raises this problem from the other

⁸⁴ For further clarification of the two senses of 'potential knowledge', see De Anima 417a22-b2. Clearly, it is the sense pertaining to the mind that does not yet possess its objects that is most relevant to the sentence under analysis.

direction:

... some commentators mention as an example the priority in time of a teacher's knowledge to that of a student who learns from the teacher. But if this were always the case with knowledge, everything known now has been known before, and the discovery of new truths would be impossible; but this is contrary to fact.⁸⁵

To the final and crucial point: The view that the discovery of "new truths" is impossible may be "contrary to fact" according to Apostle, but is it "contrary to fact" according to Aristotle? In a sense, of course, Aristotle thinks he knows things that his predecessors have failed to understand. And yet he also says, at Metaphysics XII.8, that "probably each *technē* and each *philosophia* has often been developed as far as possible and has again perished." (1074b11-2) Aside from its other implications, does this statement not suggest -- or rather, declare -- that no knowledge is absolutely new, that literally everything humanly knowable has been thought before, although it is repeatedly lost? The notion of cyclical cosmic (and intellectual) development is so far removed from the modern mind that most commentators (including many of the best ones) have simply passed over this statement in silence. And yet, this notion (a) is entirely consistent with, and, as we shall see, central to, Aristotle's account of eternal substances in Metaphysics XII, and (b) has an obvious philosophical precedent in

⁸⁵ Apostle, p. 164n10.

Empedocles' evolutionary cycle. Given that Aristotle makes this claim about the cyclical generation of knowledge in a most explicit way, and in a most auspicious context, one must grant that, however obscurely justified, it represents a genuine Aristotelian position. Hence, Apostle's fundamental argument against the 'teacher-model' account of the claim that actual knowledge is, in general, prior in time, namely his claim that this would not allow for the possibility of "new truths", must be rejected. There is textual evidence suggesting that for Aristotle, there are, ultimately, no such new, i.e. previously undiscovered, truths.⁸⁶

Still, the first part of Apostle's point stands as a genuine problem, namely the fact that a given student's knowledge (in the relevant sense of knowledge) may go beyond that of his teacher. Clearly, Aristotle cannot be claiming that all knowledge must exist in at least one passive intellect at all times, since indeed this would not allow for anyone knowing today what no one knew yesterday. But all that is required for his statement to stand is that there is no case of anything being potentially known in the sense of never

⁸⁶ In a later chapter, we will return to the issue of Aristotle's position on intellectual progress. We might simply note in passing, at this point, that the problem cannot be solved -- if it is to be solved at all -- in isolation from an account of the nature and necessary conditions of thought in general. By no means can one dismiss it as a non-problem, as Apostle does when he asserts -- on the clear assumption that Aristotle would have to agree -- that the implication that there can be no new knowledge runs "contrary to fact."

having been known before -- a situation which, if the claim quoted from the end of Metaphysics XII.8 is true, seems impossible.

None of this contradicts our use of the discussion of temporal priority in Metaphysics IX.8 as a response to the first objection to our reading. After all, in that passage, Aristotle, in addition to his example of "the seeing subject", also uses that of the musical man being, as it were, 'begotten' by another musical man; surely he could not think that no one is ever more musical than his own personal teacher. Rather, he means simply that there must be some degree of actualized musicality prior to the development of the potential musicality of this or that given individual. The same, presumably, would apply in the case of the knower. In the phrase "in general it is not prior in time", the "in general" should be taken as an unexplicated noting of the fact that actual knowledge is prior (a) in the sense that some things are known prior to your knowing anything, and (b) in the sense that all that you will ever come to know has been known before.

And I emphasize that this claim is unexplicated. By no means does it follow self-evidently from the preceding claim that the principle is superior to the matter. And, contrary to Ross, as noted above, it is not really explained by the next statement, namely that the active intellect is always thinking. This latter claim, again, would serve as an

explanation of the 'general' priority of actual knowledge only if the intellect which is always thinking is thinking the objects of "actual knowledge", which is not the case. More to the point, when this same statement regarding actual and potential knowledge is repeated at the beginning of III.7 (431a1-3), it is followed immediately by a direct explanation of the claim that the actual is generally prior in time: "...for all things which come into being come from an actuality [*entelecheia*]." Granted, this explanation is far from comprehensive. For one thing, it leaves aside the broader concerns for which point (b), in my preceding paragraph, is an answer. Indeed, Aristotle's purposes in Chapter 7 are limited in such a way that the complete and comprehensive argument for the general priority of actual knowledge might have drawn attention away from a narrower concern. Nevertheless, he does offer this brief account of his view in that context, one which plainly corresponds to point (a), above, echoing the discussion of this issue at Metaphysics IX.8, and which does not constitute a mere reiteration of the III.5 claim that the active intellect always thinks. So either he has, from III.5 to III.7, changed his mind about why actual knowledge is generally prior in time, or else one of the two statements -- (1) that the active intellect is always thinking, or (2) that things come to be from what is actual -- is not intended as an explanation of the point in the first place. Given that the first side of

this either/or is implausible in the extreme, we must observe, regarding the second side, that in addition to the preceding considerations, statement (2), from III.7, begins with the word "for" (*gar*), clearly indicating that it is an explanation of the point in question. Thus, it seems most unlikely that statement (1), from III.5, is meant as an explanation of the preceding line at all.

And indeed, the Greek does not read in a way that demands that the fact that the active intellect always thinks be related to the general priority of actual knowledge as an argument to its conclusion. The claim that the active intellect always thinks, at line 430a22, begins with an emphatic "But" (*alla*), suggesting that it is being contrasted with some previous point. But which point? Ross and others have taken the *alla* to mean, in effect, "but rather", such that this line, taken together with its immediate antecedent, should read: '...in general potentiality is not prior in time, but rather the active intellect is always thinking.' This is of course a plausible translation of the phrase, and it would certainly seem to follow from this that actuality is (in general) prior in time because the active intellect is always thinking the objects of *epistēmē*. We have seen, however, that this reading is unlikely in light of Aristotle's different, and more doctrinally consistent, explanation of the same point two chapters later. And *alla* need not be taken to mean "but rather". It may be meant here to introduce a direct

contrast between a preceding point or item and some new one, in the following form: 'x is like this, but (*alla*) y is not.' After noting that actual knowledge is identical with its object, Aristotle immediately says that there is one sense in which potential knowledge is temporally prior to actual knowledge, namely in the sense that *epistēmē* is not all actualized all of the time in each individual passive intellect. He then qualifies this, parenthetically, by noting that this is the only sense in which potentiality is temporally prior, since "in general, it is not prior in time." That is, what the entire passage, through this point, is designed to establish is that passive intellects are at one time only potential knowers, although they can later become actual knowers. And then he says, "But the active intellect is not at one time thinking and at another time not thinking." Whatever it thinks, it thinks this all of the time.⁸⁷ The contrast is between the temporally limited actualization of the passive intellect and the constant actualization of the active. This meaning is lost as long as "actual knowledge" is taken to refer to the active intellect. The mistake is to take the claim that the active intellect is always thinking to be an explanation of the fact that potentiality is not, in

⁸⁷ In saying that the active intellect 'always' thinks, as in much else that we -- and Aristotle -- say on this subject, it is necessary to bear in mind the standard difficulties inherent in speaking of pure actualities, which presumably are not, strictly speaking, in time at all.

general, prior in time. On the contrary, no explanation of this point is offered until III.7. It is mentioned here, not as a point of peculiar relevance to the discussion at hand -- hence the lack of immediate explanation -- but only as an aside, a qualification of the claim that potentiality is prior. In III.7, he repeats the entire passage, this time with the emphasis on the hitherto unexplained general priority of the actual. But the first time the passage appears, the key point being made is that the potency of knowledge is temporally prior in each individual. And therefore it is with this fact that the active intellect is being compared at 430a22.⁸⁸

Before moving on, we must make two important observations regarding line a22. The first stems from the fact that if this line means what it clearly seems to say,

⁸⁸ That this passage on knowledge recurs in III.7 without the related statement regarding the active intellect's thinking (a22), is a point of some significance for our understanding of *De Anima*'s account of intellect in general. Since the question of actual and potential knowledge concerns the passive intellect exclusively, and since the III.7 recurrence of this sentence is followed by the standard Aristotelian explanation of the sense in which activity is temporally prior -- a sense which requires no direct recourse to any 'separate' entities -- it seems that III.7 deals exclusively with the passive intellect. The productive mind is not discussed, even as an explanation of anything said about the passive mind, outside of III.5. Questions are raised for which it is the solution, but its existence is neither used nor explicitly referred to anywhere else in *De Anima*. Aristotle continues, after III.5, to discuss the intellect exclusively in terms of its being affected (albeit only metaphorically) by 'the world', without reference to "another kind" of intellect. We fail to glean the full significance of III.5 if we disregard this fact.

namely that the active intellect's thinking is eternal, then, as we have suggested, this either makes the active intellect one of the divine beings discussed in Metaphysics XII, or else Aristotle is introducing a new eternally active substance not accounted for in that other work. Some commentators, recognizing this difficulty, but wishing to avoid either of these conclusions, have argued, with some ingenuity, that the phrase "...does not at one time think and at another time not think" means only that the item in question is always active when it exists, but not that it always exists (and hence always thinks). On this interpretation, the active intellect is merely like light, which, although it clearly does not always exist, is always active when it does exist, i.e. there is never a light that is only potentially making colours visible -- it is either making things visible or else it simply does not exist at all.

Wedin defends this reading with the confident remark that, given a desire to avoid the implication that the active intellect is sometimes only potential to thinking, "[t]his is exactly what Aristotle needs to say at this point."⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Wedin, p. 190. To clarify Wedin's position: The discussion of actual and potential knowledge which immediately precedes line a22 might lead one to believe that the active intellect -- which for Wedin is essentially just the activity of any act of thinking *qua* activity -- exists through stages of potential and actual thinking, hence contradicting the claim that it is essentially active. On the other hand, the claim that it is essentially active might appear to contradict the non-continuous nature of human thought, as per the closing remark of III.4. Wedin's solution is the interpretation of

Perhaps, but surely this is not the way he needs to say it, as Wedin unwittingly reveals when he says that a22:

... need yield nothing more than what it literally says, namely, that *it is not the case that there is something that at one time thinks and at another time does not think.*⁹⁰
(Wedin's own italics)

Line a22 "literally says" no such thing. The phrase "there is something" in Wedin's italicized paraphrase has no equivalent in the Greek. And yet this phrase makes all the difference in the world, as Wedin no doubt realized when he wrote it. For the words "it is not the case that there is something" are equivalent to the words "there is nothing". But the statement that 'there is nothing that at one time thinks and at another time does not think' is very different from the statement that 'x does not at one time think and at another time not think.' The latter is Aristotle's claim about the active intellect, and seems to imply (even if only due to bad writing) that there is an 'x' which remains constant over time with regard to its status as a thinker. The former is Wedin's reworking of Aristotle's claim in a manner that suits the sense that he wishes to glean from the line, namely that it "simply denies the existential proposition that there exists a special entity for thinking [i.e. the active intellect] such that it sometimes thinks and

a22 that we are currently assessing.

⁹⁰ ibid., p. 189.

sometimes does not."⁹¹ One might wish to argue that Aristotle's actual claim could still be understood as Wedin would like, but it should give one pause that, in order to make his reading understandable, let alone plausible, he has had to engage in some fairly imaginative paraphrasing. That is, he apparently judged that he had to make substantial alterations to the literal wording of the line in question even to show us how it could mean what he wishes it to mean.

But might we nevertheless consider this reading feasible, and merely regard line a22 as an example of awkward wording on Aristotle's part? Consider that, as we have shown, the preceding passage on actual and potential knowledge deals with the passive intellect, and that its basic lesson is that the passive intellect, being essentially potential, has to become actual (i.e. knowledgeable) over time. And then Aristotle says, at line a22, "*all' ouk hote men noei hote d' ou noei.*" Compare this wording to Physics IV.12, where he says that:

Accordingly, whatever is destructible or generable, or (more broadly) sometimes existing and sometimes not [*hote men onta hote de mē*], must be embraced by time.⁹²

In this passage, Aristotle uses a phrase to define the general category of things which come to be and pass away that

⁹¹ ibid., p. 189.

⁹² Physics (P.H. Wicksteed/F.M. Cornford, trs.), 221b28-30.

is identical in its structure to the phrase at line a22, except for the "ouk" preceding the latter. Recall that the passive intellect, as described in the lines immediately preceding a22, is one of these things which, being essentially potential, comes into being and passes away. Indeed, keeping in mind that the passive intellect "is nothing until it thinks",⁹³ the discussion of actual and potential knowledge is in part an account of the generability of the passive intellect. That is, the point of these lines, as we have shown, is precisely to encompass the human *nous* under the broad category of those things which, in the terms of the Physics, "*hote men onta hote de mē*". And since in this context Aristotle is describing an item that, as it were, exists in so far as it thinks, we can infer that the phrase "*hote men noei hote d' ou noei*" would be an acceptable and contextually suitable way of saying exactly what the Physics phrase says generically. Hence when Aristotle follows his comment that the passive intellect must come to be actual with a comparison to the active intellect, which is not "*hote men noei hote d' ou noei*", it is reasonable to assume that he is denying to the latter mind the very properties that this phrase -- like its equivalent in the Physics -- is meant to delineate, namely generability, perishability, and their corollary, temporality. All of this by way of establishing

⁹³ De Anima, 429a24.

that 430a22 says exactly what it appears to say: the active intellect, unlike the passive, is not subject to the limitations, and in particular the temporal limitations, of potency.

Our second observation concerning the wording of line 430a22 is this: we have hitherto rendered this line, "But the active intellect is not at one time thinking and at another time not thinking." And yet the line does not literally say this. It says only "But it is not...." That is, no subject is named. That the "it" is the active intellect is initially apparent only from the theoretical context and content of the statement. This lack of an explicitly identified subject, in conjunction with the fact that the statement itself contradicts a III.4 remark about the passive intellect, helps to explain the frequent association of the active intellect with the "actual knowledge" of the preceding sentence. Readers, observing that line a22 cannot refer to the passive mind, therefore seek textual grounds for taking it to refer to the active, finding such grounds in the assumption that the claim, "...in general <potential knowledge> is not prior even in time," contains an allusion to the eternal active intellect. For if this were true, then the unnamed subject of *noei* in the following line could plausibly be identified as the active intellect, as the content of the statement itself seems to dictate.

Given, however, (1) that, as we have seen, this

immediately preceding statement, along with the entire passage on *epistēmē*, concerns the passive intellect alone, and (2) that the statement that "it" always thinks does indeed demand to be read as a reference to the active intellect, it seems that the latter claim must be part of a continuing, uninterrupted, train of thought focusing on the active intellect, of which the discussion of actual and potential *epistēmē* -- that is, of the passive intellect -- was a part.⁹⁴ This, if it could be established, would explain why

⁹⁴ I note in passing Brentano's attempt to avoid the conclusion that line a22 refers to the active intellect, with its implication that this is eternal. (p. 122ff) He reads the line as a sudden introduction of the divine intellect, translating *holos de ou chrono; all' ouch hote men noei hote d' ou noei*, as "but, speaking generally, potential knowledge is not prior even in time; but the knowing that precedes all potential knowledge [i.e. God] is not one that sometimes thinks and sometimes does not think." (p. 122) He defends his claim that Aristotle has introduced (without naming) God on the grounds that for Aristotle, knowledge, like anything else, can only be generated from something sharing the same name, and therefore that human knowledge -- specifically, the agency of the (unknowing) active intellect upon the passive intellect -- depends ultimately on the 'knowledge' God has of the first principle of all things. We have shown how this 'metaphysical' requirement can be more than adequately met by a combination of the 'teacher/student' model and the cyclical nature of intellectual development -- views that Aristotle is known to have expressed -- and therefore that it does not demand such textually ungrounded (and theoreticallyunaristotelian) conjecture. In fact, Brentano seeks to buttress his speculation by citing the restatement, at the beginning of Chapter 7, of this reference to *episteme*, with its explanatory remark that "all things that come into being arise from something that actually is" (431a3-4) -- as though this line did not point directly to the Metaphysics IX.8 account of becoming, discussed above.

I conclude this note with the clarification that I am not objecting to Brentano's reading because it introduces God into III.5 without Aristotle's having used the word -- indeed, my reading does this -- but rather because it introduces this

Aristotle simply uses the verb *noei* rather than specifying which intellect he is talking about, without requiring that we associate "actual knowledge" with the active intellect, thereby dismissing the light analogy.⁹⁵

Recall that immediately prior to raising the issue of knowledge, Aristotle had claimed that an active principle is more honourable than passive matter; and that this, in turn, was his explanation of the claim that the active intellect's essential actuality is sufficient grounds for declaring it separable, etc., in relation to the passive intellect. As we have seen, these lines were a contrast of the active and passive intellects, not primarily as examples of form and matter, but rather with regard to their respective activities. The key point of the passage, then, was shown to be that the activity of the essentially actual active intellect is more honourable than the activity of the essentially potential

unnamed God as an alternative to the active intellect as subject of line 430a22, and does so without any contextual justification. As a matter of fact, I somewhat like the fact that a thinker so noteworthy has found in this passage such compelling evidence of a contrast between temporal and eternal thinking that he has had to resort to such an untenable solution in order to escape the conclusion that the active intellect is the eternal thinker in question.

⁹⁵ Even Aquinas, who wishes to downplay the significance of the light analogy, refuses to associate actual knowledge with the active intellect, on the implied grounds that if the comparison with light carries only one important observation regarding the nature of the active intellect, it must surely be that the latter does not contain its own products as such, "like light which, without containing particular colours, actually brings colours into act." (Aquinas, Aristotle's De Anima, #739, p. 430)

passive intellect, with this being the grounds for claiming that the active intellect exists (i.e. is active) independently of the passive intellect (but, the political metaphor of 'nobility' suggests, not vice versa). Aristotle immediately follows this point by saying -- to paraphrase -- that knowledge (the activity of the passive intellect *qua* "matter") is only potential prior (in time) to becoming actual, "but it [the unnamed subject] does not at one time think and at another time not think." If the "it" in this sentence is the active intellect, then it must be governed by the last direct reference to this intellect, which is found in the claim that it is separable, etc. Since the sentence following this reference is plainly an argument for the claim that the active intellect is separable ("For that which acts..."), all that is needed to allow us to trace the relevant "it" back to this earlier statement is an account of the *epistēmē* discussion which shows it not to constitute a change of topic. That is, if Aristotle had left the active intellect aside, even briefly, one would expect him to name it again when he returned to it, especially given that the item discussed in the interim is also a subject of which the verb *noei* can be predicated. We must, then, establish that the brief interlude concerning knowledge actual and potential, is not such a leaving-aside of the active intellect.

Having drawn together the context, this can now be established with ease. Aristotle has just argued, in defence

of the separability, etc., of the active intellect, that "that which acts is more honourable than that which is acted upon...." The subsequent contrast of passive intellect (the locus of *epistēmē*, broadly conceived) and active intellect (which always thinks) fits the argument perfectly. Having declared the separability of the active intellect, and defended it with a general observation regarding the relationship between agents and patients, Aristotle now clarifies this latter point -- that is, he explains the force of his general observation -- by applying it directly to the issue at hand, namely the relationship between active and passive intellects. The latter (patient), he says, achieves its activity *qua* "matter" (i.e. knowledge) only after a period of potency, whereas "it", the subject of the entire passage, the active intellect (agent), is always (i.e. inherently) active, and hence superior in nature. All of this is directly related to the claim that the active intellect (the "other" *nous*, which is like light) is "separable, impassive, and unmixed, being in essence an activity," as *explanans* to *explanandum*.⁹⁶ Hence there is no difficulty in regarding the

⁹⁶ Why is the passive intellect not explicitly so named in connection with knowledge at a20-22? Presumably because (a) the fact that III.4 is an extended discussion of the intellect *qua* knower, (b) the fact that the III.4 intellect (the knowing intellect) is clearly contrasted with the active intellect in III.5, by means of the phrase "Intellect is of one kind by virtue of its becoming everything," and (c) the reference, in this passage, to knowledge as the achievement of an essentially potential intellect, make it sufficiently clear that this item is meant to correspond to the words "acted

noei, "it thinks", at line a22, as being governed by the "this intellect" (*houtos ho nous*) at a18.

That the preceding is the only entirely satisfactory way to account for all of the peculiarities of the passage is especially interesting for its necessary implication: everything that Aristotle has said in lines 430a18-22 is his elaboration and clarification of a single point, the claim that the active intellect, as essentially actual, exists independently of the passive intellect. And as we have seen, this single point is offered as a supplement to the light analogy, as one significant difference between the active/passive intellect relationship and that between light and the transparent. This means that -- contrary to those (e.g. Ross and Apostle) who try to draw more from the *epistēmē* discussion than is warranted -- the light analogy is Aristotle's sole depiction of the manner of the active intellect's production of "all things". This in itself is circumstantial evidence in favour of examining the II.7 account of light as carefully as we have done. Further, the main fruit of that examination, namely the discovery that the passive mind's activity -- insofar as this mind is understood as metaphorical matter in metaphorical motion -- is not identical to the active intellect itself, is ripened, if you will, by this passage's overt alignment of knowledge,

upon" and "matter" in the previous sentence.

potential and actual, with that which stands in a direct and elaborate contrast to the active intellect.

Following this contrast of the two intellects, Aristotle's next point leads us back towards the "we do not remember" passage:

Separated, it is only what it is, and this alone is immortal and eternal. (430a23-4)

The return to the notion of separation is in itself unsurprising, given that everything since the light analogy has been an argument to establish exactly this point. Continuing the description from the point where his brief elaboration and proof of the claim of separability began, he says that when not 'attached' to the passive intellect, and hence to the individual human being, the active intellect "is only what it is." This implies that nothing of the individual stays with it. This, as we have seen, is the meaning that some try to tie to the phrase "we do not remember." It belongs here. This statement can be understood in light of the preceding contrast of the two intellects. The type of intellect that becomes all things is potential to these things prior to becoming them (except in the "general" sense, as Aristotle notes without further ado, since it is not particularly relevant in this context, other than for the sake of doctrinal consistency). The type of intellect that makes all things is always actual. This latter intellect, when separated from the former, is "only" that -- i.e. the maker of

all things -- and not anything or everything else. The passive intellect, having become things, is thus identical with them. It simply is each thing that it has become.⁹⁷ But the passive intellect can, of course, be identical with many things (namely, anything that the productive intellect makes). The intellect that makes all things, on the other hand, does not become various things. Nor is it always all of these things. Rather, "it is only what it is", namely that which, by its mere existence, produces all of the objects of the passive intellect's knowledge. If *epistēmē* were always actual, that is to say, if the passive intellect were always knowing, then no sense could be made of the notions of learning or discovering. Experience itself tells us that *epistēmē* is not always actual, but is sometimes only potential. That is, the thinking which is actualized by all the things made by the active intellect is not "immortal and eternal". The word "immortal" is important here, because it underlines the fact that the item in question never ceases to be actual, whereas "eternal" leaves open the possibility that the item merely goes through a never-ending cycle of becomings and perishings, that is, that it is the cycle itself that is 'eternal'. The active intellect, on the other hand, is "immortal and eternal". The claim that "it is only what it

⁹⁷ This is the meaning of the claim, in III.4, that the passive intellect is "the place of ideas", in that, until it thinks, it is potentially everything, but actually nothing. (429a30)

is" -- that it is not its products, i.e. the objects of *epistēmē* -- seems intended, in part, to establish that Aristotle is not implying that *epistēmē* is immortal and eternal, and thereby contradicting himself. Rather, *epistēmē* is actual only in *logos*, human thought, as seen in Eudemian Ethics. It follows that as it is the activity of only the human type of *nous*, rather than the divine, it cannot be active always. This means, once again, that "all things", *qua* known, are not eternal, in the sense applicable to the active intellect, the sense which includes immortality. The eternal activity of the active intellect is as "only what it is" in itself, and does not include the things that it makes. To use the familiar terms, it is as though light could exist independently of the transparent.

With this point, the supplement to the light analogy - - consisting in the attribution of separability, etc., to the active mind -- reaches its conclusion. To offer an exegetical paraphrase of the entire passage from 430a18-24:

'The active intellect, which is like light, is separable, etc., in relation to the passive, because it is essentially active. This is consistent with the fact that an agent is always nobler in nature than that upon which it acts, a principle of motion than the moved matter. In this instance, the distinction is between that which has (human) knowledge -- a type of thinking developed from an underlying potency -- and that which thinks always and without interruption. So, to say that the latter, the active intellect, is separable, is to say that it exists independently of the individual human being (i.e. that it neither comes to be nor passes

away with the individual). Further, it follows from the fact that knowledge is the possession of the passive intellect, that the active intellect taken on its own -- including, of course, when the individual thinker is dead -- will not have human knowledge, but will exist strictly as whatever it is (i.e. whatever it thinks) independently of the human knowing faculty.'

Having established all of this, Aristotle's next words are:

We do not remember because this [the active intellect] cannot be acted upon, while the passive intellect is perishable....

I have deliberately excluded the final clause of the sentence for now, since the readings of this claim that we have assessed thus far have excluded it from the argument as to why we do not remember.

We have already seen how the wording of the Greek text, as well as the general depiction of the active intellect, make the Ross/Themistius reading of this sentence highly unlikely. The passage cannot mean that the active intellect does not remember the individuating characteristics of its (former) possessor. We have also cast some doubt on the possibility that it is a refutation of the Platonic *anamnēsis*. We can now dismiss this possibility more confidently. For one thing, it has been established that this mind does not contain the *epistēmē* that constitutes human knowledge. So, the claim cannot mean that we, as individuals, are not simply recalling the pre-existent knowledge of the eternal active intellect when we learn. The basis for this

reading, as noted earlier, would be that the passive intellect -- which is identifiable with the individual -- is perishable, and hence we do not, as individual thinkers, pre-exist our births in a state of complete knowledge which is lost at birth. But such a claim, in this context, is unlikely, given that the preceding lines have made it abundantly clear that the 'part of us' which can be said to pre-exist our births has no *epistēmē*. And if Aristotle were to say this, why would his argument for it emphasize a previously undiscussed point, the perishability of the passive intellect, rather than simply reiterate this simple knock-down argument against it, namely that the part of the soul that exists before we are born does not even contain the objects of human knowledge? And the conclusion that we do not remember the active intellect's "former activity" makes a very awkward fit with the premise that "we" (passive intellects) are "perishable", since this premise draws attention to our coming to an end, not to our having a beginning (at which we might recall the pre-birth knowledge of the active intellect). It seems more likely, then, that this newly raised point, the human intellect's perishability, is meant to help Aristotle establish a significant new claim, one the essence of which is not among his previous observations, but which is suggested by them.

But what is that claim? Given that its verb is in the first person plural, it can be asserted that it is not a claim about the nature of the active intellect, but rather one about

individuals. And given that Aristotle is making the claim, it must not concern a fact that cannot be known at all, but merely one that is not ordinarily known. That is, his claim that we do not remember implies that something is the case, in addition to the plainly stated fact that it is not remembered, i.e. there must be an 'it' that is not remembered. Yet he does not say that it is not 'usually' remembered, or that 'most people' do not remember. He says "we do not remember". The suggestion, then, is that this fact can only come to be known independently of memory, through speculation, or some such means.⁹⁸ And yet this thing that is not remembered must have made some 'impression' on us -- that is, we must have come into some previous contact with it -- or else there would seem to be no reason even to note that we do not remember it, since it goes without saying that we do not remember that with which we have never come into contact.

So we are seeking something pertinent to the discussion in III.5, about which one might claim that we can perhaps 'know' it, in some sense, but that it cannot be remembered, although we have had some previous contact with it.

Consider that III.5 is a discussion -- the first (and last) in Aristotle's only comprehensive work on the human

⁹⁸ This is different from remembering something once we have learned it; cf. Aristotle, On Memory and Recollection (W.S. Hett, tr.), 451a26-9.

thinking faculty as such -- of an intellect that makes all of the things that the human mind becomes. Consider further that the active intellect is described, not merely as some force from without that creates the world which we come to know with our human intellect, but rather as a force from within. It is a part of us, in some sense (the "divine element in us"). And it is to the acquisition of knowledge what light is to visibility -- it makes intelligible what otherwise would be only potentially intelligible. To remove some of the obscuring veil of abstract terminology from this last statement, we can say that the active intellect makes the ideas of all things, the ideas which the passive intellect becomes, just as light makes potential colours into actual ones. It does not, however, do this by actively shaping any matter. Nor does it seem to perform any abstraction of form from matter. Rather, it makes ideas merely by being as it is in itself, i.e. without itself undergoing any change.

In III.4, despite allusions to an active element, the intellect is described entirely in terms of its capacity to "receive" ideas. And indeed, this aspect must come first, dialectically, because it represents the way that we actually experience our thinking. We never see our knowledge as anything but an understanding of some aspect of the world, an 'abstraction' of the intelligible from the world, to use a catchword common in discussions of Aristotle's epistemology. Even those who might wish to deny that this is what is really

happening when we know, cannot experience that knowledge in any other way. This, in other words, is what seems to be happening. But III.5 turns the tables on all of this, by positing another element in our souls, one which makes the things that we appear to be abstracting from the world. It is not part of human thought, if by human thought we mean receptiveness to ideas, the capacity for demonstrative reasoning, and so on. And yet it causes human thought, *qua* 'matter' (potential), to become all of the things that it becomes.

Notice that up to this point, if we strip away all of the argumentation and illustration, Aristotle has made only four points in III.5: (1) There is an intellect that makes all things, (2) this intellect's making is significantly similar to light's making of colours, (3) it exists independently of, unaffected by, and unmixed with, the passive intellect, and (4) it is essentially actual. Now, at the end of this brief and unique account, before returning to more 'human' issues concerning the intellect, he says "We do not remember..." without naming the object of the assertion. Presumably, that object is one of the four claims that he has made about the active intellect. Clearly, point (2), the light analogy, is not a candidate. And option (4) would be difficult to render as a coherent, or philosophically meaningful, claim. So we are left with (1) and (3). But (3), the independence of the active intellect from the passive, is

adduced as grounds for the claim that we do not remember ("because this is impassive").

We are left with option (1), such that the 'it' that we do not remember is the making of all things by the active intellect. And indeed, this is the most satisfying possibility, since it is the most fundamental claim of III.5, of which all the others are an explanation. Here at the end of the chapter, he makes one important final remark about this newly introduced intellect, before leaving the topic behind. The active intellect makes all of our thoughts. We have obviously had continuous contact with this fact throughout our lives, but, as individual passive intellects, we cannot "remember" this ever having happened. That is, we can 'know', in some sense, that it is the case, but we can never actually be aware of the active intellect making our thoughts. And hence we cannot recall it. We can never 'catch' the active intellect actualizing an idea, although we can theorize that this is what is happening. This is, in part, a justification for his having introduced a cause of our thinking of which we have no experience.

In order to justify this reading, of course, we must show that Aristotle's argument for our not remembering can be reconciled with the meaning that I have ascribed to the claim. Although Ross and Smith use parentheses to exclude the chapter's final words from the argument, I think that we should consider them a part of that argument, unless they show

themselves to be unrelated under examination. Having contrasted the impassibility of the active intellect with the perishability of the passive intellect, the chapter concludes with "... *kai aneu toutou outhen noei*." The line has always presented problems for interpreters, for it is not explicitly clear to which intellect *toutou* ("this") refers, what is the subject of *noei* ("it thinks"), or even whether *outhen* ("nothing") is the subject or object of the claim. Our first task, then, is to determine the proper translation of the claim by judging its possible renderings against our interpretation of III.5, seeking the meaning that is consistent with the substance of what has preceded it. Only then can we determine whether the claim contributes to the argument for our not remembering the active mind's production of all our thoughts. As Ross points out,⁹⁹ the statement admits of four possible renderings, as follows:

(1) "...and without the passive intellect the active intellect thinks nothing."

(2) "...and without the active intellect the passive intellect thinks nothing."

(3) "...and without the passive intellect nothing thinks."

(4) "...and without the active intellect nothing thinks."

Given that the active intellect is a separable and eternal thinking being, options (1) and (3) must be dismissed.

⁹⁹ Ross(1959), pp. 149-150.

The active intellect does think without the passive intellect, at least in the sense that its conjunction with the passive intellect is not required for its thinking to 'occur'. We are left, then, with options (2) and (4). Perhaps we can never eliminate either alternative with complete certainty, and indeed for practical purposes -- i.e. given that we are examining the nature of human thought alone -- either one yields more or less the same information. As an aside, it might be pointed out that if the phrase says only that the passive mind cannot think without the active, then this leaves open the possibility that there are other types of (non-human) thinking which do not require an active intellect, clearly a desirable result for those who do not wish to identify the active intellect as a divine mind. On the other hand, if it says that nothing can think without the agency of the active intellect, as is suggested by what we have seen thus far, then this carries very different implications.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ For what it is worth, there is a phrase earlier in *De Anima* which, in its structure, very closely parallels this one. I.5 ends with a discussion of the manner in which the soul and the soul-body complex can be described as consisting of separate parts, a discussion which concludes as follows:

The first principle in plants, then, seems to be a kind of soul; for this alone is shared by animals and plants; and this is separate from the perceptive first principle, but nothing has perception without it. [411b28-31]

The last clause is *aísthēsin d' outhen aneu tautēs echei*. From the context it is evident that the claim is that nothing (*outhen*) can feel or perceive which does not have the 'nutritive principle', although it is not this principle itself that does the feeling or perceiving. The virtually

At any rate here, once more, with this final line re-introduced, is the closing argument of III.5:

We do not remember because this [the active intellect] cannot be acted upon, while the intellect that can be acted upon is perishable, and without this [the active intellect] nothing thinks.

The final words, again, could also be translated "without this it [passive intellect] thinks nothing," which, for our purposes, is close enough in meaning to our preferred translation that it is not worth further debate. How does this passage explain our not remembering the productive activity of the active intellect? The first part of the argument states that (1) the active intellect cannot be acted upon. To be acted upon, in the sense that is relevant to III.5, means to be actualized as knowledge. This is the significance of Aristotle's reiteration, in this connection, of the active intellect's impassivity in relation to the passive intellect. On the other hand, (2) the intellect that can be actualized in this way is perishable. Further, (3) the agency of the active intellect is a necessary condition of all human knowing.

identical wording of this phrase to that at 430a25 is not a knock-down argument in favour of translation (4) -- "without the active intellect nothing thinks" --but it is suggestive. One might reasonably object that the I.5 passage is claiming that a lower aspect of soul must exist in order for a higher one to exist, whereas the line from III.5 is, according to option (4), making the reverse claim, and hence that these two statements have nothing in common, other than coincidentally similar wording.

So, to elaborate on this elliptical argument, we do not remember this making of all things (all thoughts) because:

(1) The part of us that does the making does not think (i.e. know) its products. Hence, we cannot be aware of their existence within us prior to their being made in the passive intellect. In other words, since *epistēmē* (again, understood generically) is precisely the nature of the thinking of which we, as individual human beings, are capable, it could be argued that if the active intellect contained *epistēmē* in advance of our seeming to apprehend such ideas 'in the world', we, as passive intellects, would know it (given that these are exactly what we are capable of knowing), and thus observe ourselves holding these ideas within us prior to 'enforming' matter with them. Since the active intellect has no *epistēmē*, no such memorable observation can be made. Further,

(2) The part of us that does "become" the ideas made by the active intellect is perishable, which is to say that it does not share in the immortality and eternity of the maker. The preceding sentence, as we have seen, says "this alone is immortal and eternal." Aristotle is saying that only the active intellect, and not any of its products, is immortal and eternal. We have seen why its products cannot be immortal, and how they can only be said to be eternal in the sense of being involved in a never-ending cycle. But these products constitute "all things" -- in other words, all things *qua* known. But if "all things" are not immortal and eternal, then

what can be, except something that can be depicted as 'above' them all, as would be their maker. And indeed, this was implied in the earlier claim that the principle is superior to the matter. The word "immortal" offers yet another important shading here, easily overlooked if we get bogged down in the active mind's existence as a 'part' of the soul; namely, as immortal, it is thus necessarily alive in itself, and not merely as a part of us, since we, as possessors of this mind, are not immortal. The active intellect is an eternal life, and the only one. This fact makes its similarity to the divinities of the Metaphysics overwhelming. Further, if it is not to be identified as such, then this passage from De Anima explicitly and completely contradicts the most important conclusion of the other work on this subject, namely that the Prime Mover, and apparently also the other unmoved movers, are the ultimate substances, as they alone are eternal life, in exactly the sense that is here being attributed to the active intellect.¹⁰¹

Here, it seems that the perishability of the passive

¹⁰¹ The complex issue of the multiple unmoved movers depicted at Metaphysics XII.8 is, in light of what we have shown, an issue of some relevance for the complete understanding of Aristotle's account of the nature of human thinking. I have, for the most part, ignored this issue thus far, for essentially the same reason that Aristotle establishes the existence of an eternal unmoved mover in Metaphysics XII.6-7, before moving on to the question of a possible plurality of such movers. I will note, at this point, only that XII.8 seems to have a status similar to De Anima III.5, with respect to its relation to the surrounding discussion.

intellect is introduced as a direct contrast to the just-mentioned immortality of the active intellect. That is, the part of us that actually has *epistēmē* cannot share in the immortality of the part that makes it. Sharing in that immortality, however, would mean having within us (as passive intellects) the unceasing thought of the active intellect. But this unceasing thought is what makes all things, merely by being what it is. So, if we could share in this (i.e. if the human element of our thinking could contain this thought), then, again, we (as human thinkers) could presumably directly observe our making of all things, and hence would be able to remember it, i.e. we would not generally be unaware of it.

Thus far, Aristotle has said that we do not remember the active intellect's making of all things because (1) the things made do not exist within the active intellect, and (2) the eternal and producing thought does not exist within the passive intellect. That is, in neither the divine nor the human element of thought are both the 'maker' and the 'made' present, such that we, as human knowers, might directly apprehend their relationship to one another. An alternative way of phrasing this is that the element in us that does the making has no traces in it of us, as knowers; while the element that is identifiable with us -- with the "we" who do not remember -- has none of the 'maker' in it.

There might, however, still be a way that we could directly apprehend -- rather than merely speculate on 'after

the fact', so to speak -- this relationship between the maker and the knower of all things. Perhaps there is another element of our thinking besides these two, one that could somehow contain them both, and thus allow us to observe the process of making 'as it happens', and therefore to remember it, in the sense of no longer experiencing our acquisition of knowledge as coming from without, rather than being produced (at least in part) from within. Speaking to this possibility, there is the final part of Aristotle's argument:

(3) Without the active intellect there is no thinking at all. The active intellect itself is eternal and immortal thought (i.e. substance in the strictest sense). All other thinking is made possible only by the existence of this intellect, which sheds intelligibility upon that which is otherwise only potentially intelligible. No thinking is independent of the active intellect, so there is for us no God's-eye perspective, as it were, on the relationship between the two minds; for this would require that we be able to have thoughts which are not actualized (either directly or ultimately) by the existence of the active intellect, thoughts which represent what is 'really out there' (or 'in here'), apart from any influence of another element of the soul. But it is precisely Aristotle's contention that this is how we 'experience' our thinking, but how it can never actually be.

So, we cannot directly apprehend, and hence cannot directly remember, the fact that all actual *epistēmē* is

produced by the active intellect, because there is nowhere in thought for the products and the 'productivity' ever to co-exist. Each of the three claims that follow the statement that we do not remember can thus be interpreted as an aspect of this single point. We can only arrive at the conclusion that the active intellect makes our knowledge if we theorize about the nature of that knowledge -- if we think about thinking, as it were. We can never, even after such speculation, 'see' this happening -- whether this includes during, and with respect to, the theorizing itself, one must wonder.

After a brief exposition of his belief that all of our thinking, all of *logos*, is in fact 'made' by the "divine element in us", Aristotle concludes by anticipating and answering the obvious question of the student or reader who, having had no previous warning of such a development, either in De Anima or in experience, might ask: "If this is what really happens when we think, why do we never remember its having happened?"

Part II: The Nature of Human Thinking

5. The Importance of Language

What we have seen to this point has established grounds for granting at least the distinct possibility that each of the following statements accurately represents Aristotle's view:

(1) The active intellect of *De Anima* III.5 is a genuine Aristotelian divinity, and not merely similar to such a being;

(2) The phrase 'the activity of the human intellect' has at least two distinct meanings, one in which it refers to the thoughts which are present in the quasi-material human mind (i.e. passive intellect) as colours are present in a transparency, and another in which it refers to the active intellect itself;

(3) The human intellect, at least in its ordinary functioning, is unable to think the active intellect directly, in the sense of being one with the latter's essence, i.e. the sense denoted by the statement "Actual knowledge is identical with its object."

Each of these statements has been derived from our analysis of III.5, and in particular from the comparison of III.5 with related passages elsewhere. What is stated

explicitly in III.5, on the other hand, is that the active intellect 'makes all things'. Our next task is to uncover at least some of the meaning of this claim, in light of the three statements above, and their implications. We must answer the question, "How does human thinking arise?" And answering this will involve delving into the related question, "What is the relation between human thought and so-called external reality?" The relevance of this last issue is seen if one asks oneself how figuratively or literally Aristotle means for us to understand the notion of the active intellect 'making' all things.

The most fruitful means of examining the difficult question of how the active intellect makes what it makes, is to ask the preliminary question, "What is human thought?", i.e. "Of what does it consist?" In trying to answer this question, I mean to do nothing more grandiose than to draw attention to the actual language -- the terminology -- by which Aristotle refers to human thought, in contradistinction to divine thinking.

In Chapter 2, I noted that the strongest common sense evidence in favour of taking the light analogy seriously is the similarity of the analogy, in its context, to Plato's analogy between the Good and sun. I did not examine the similarity any further at that stage, in part because I did not wish to appear to be loading the dice in favour of seeing the active intellect as a substitute for the Good (and hence

as necessarily a divine being), but mainly because my goal then was the narrow one of delineating the relationship between the active and passive minds in a somewhat abstract, schematic way, with as little emphasis as possible on the mechanics of the relationship between them. Indeed, this approach was in keeping with Aristotle's own mode of presentation in *De Anima* III.5, wherein the active intellect is proposed as the solution to a (the?) fundamental epistemological puzzle, and yet this solution is articulated only by means of one undeveloped analogy and some phraseology rich in implication. Having expanded on Aristotle's own outline of an explanation, we must now address the broader issue on which Aristotle, at least in terms of explicit expression, is remarkably silent, namely the issue of how the divine being actualizes human thought.¹⁰²

In a brief but worthwhile article, R. K. Sprague¹⁰³

¹⁰² Hartman, although favouring the view that the active intellect is the Prime Mover, nevertheless concludes from Aristotle's silence on the issue of the mechanism of 'thought-making' that the active intellect has no real explanatory significance. (Hartman, E., *Substance, Body, and Soul*, p.268.) This is an example of exactly the scholarly trend that I believe must be resisted if we are to begin to understand the most profound insights of the ancients: the trend toward assuming that when these writers leave unexplained a statement that any thoughtful person can see requires an explanation, they do this because they do not have an explanation. Circumspection now being considered an unphilosophical trait, we reflexively disregard it as a motive in any era of philosophy.

¹⁰³ Sprague, R.K., "A Parallel with *De Anima* III.5", in *Phronesis* 17, pp. 250-251.

notes and interprets the parallel between the light analogy and the sun analogy, laying out the two analogies in the following tables:

Plato's Sun Analogy:

Mode of Cognition:	Sight	Reason
Object:	Visible forms	Intelligible forms
Recipient:	Eye	Soul
Necessary Precondition:	Light	Light of Truth and reality
Source:	Sun	Form of the Good

Aristotle's Light Analogy:

Mode of Cognition:	Sight	Reasoning
Object:	Visible forms	Intelligible forms
Recipient:	Eye	Passive reason
Necessary Precondition:	Light	Active reason

Leaving aside the fact that, as we have shown, Aristotle's analogy is not, strictly, between the eye and the passive intellect, but between the transparent medium and the passive intellect, the conclusions Sprague draws are interesting. She claims that the differences revealed by this tabular comparison "are exactly what we should expect. Since Aristotle has no use for the Form of the Good, neither it, nor its counterpart, the Sun, have any explicit place in his scheme."¹⁰⁴ It might be felt here that the fact that Aristotle does not explicitly mention a source of light in III.5 does not mean that he regards a source of the 'intellectual light' (active intellect) as unnecessary. Perhaps, one might argue, Aristotle is merely trying to avoid

¹⁰⁴ ibid., pp. 250-251.

the 'transhuman' underpinnings of his account in the context of a psychological treatise. In fact, Themistius seems to use precisely this argument in rejecting the view that the 'light' is a divine being:

For while the sun is one, you could speak of light as in some way divided into cases of vision. That is why Aristotle makes his comparison not with the sun but with light, whereas Plato's is with the sun; i.e. he makes it analogous to the Good.¹⁰⁵

Sprague effectively responds to this attempt to distinguish the light of III.5 from an unnamed source of that light which would have an epistemological status corresponding to the Good, by simply pointing out that the active intellect is described as productive, as is the Good at Republic 509b, where Socrates says that "the sun... provides what is seen with the power of being seen,"¹⁰⁶ clearly the function assigned to light in Aristotle's account. Hence, she implies, if we grant that Aristotle does have the sun analogy itself in mind as he proposes his own explanation of the origin of human thought, it is only reasonable to assume that the item described as productive in his account must be the item corresponding to the sun itself.

To this point, then, Sprague's view is largely consistent with our own. One problem, however, is the suggestion that Aristotle "has no use for the Form of the

¹⁰⁵ Themistius, 103.32, p. 104.

¹⁰⁶ Plato, Republic (Allan Bloom, tr.), 509b.

Good." This claim, by which Sprague clearly means that Aristotle does not believe that human thought requires an agent which transcends the individual thinker in a sense comparable to the Good,¹⁰⁷ leads her to the following conclusion:

We might say, too, that since the eye cannot, for Aristotle, see the Sun as well as the Sun's light, it looks at light only. In epistemological terms, this means that the soul is basically self-regarding -- and this, again, is exactly what we should expect.¹⁰⁸

By assuming that the passive intellect's analogue is the eye, rather than the transparent, Sprague falls into a common error among interpreters who do not pay close enough attention to the details of Aristotle's account of the relationship between light and the transparent vis-a-vis visibility: the error of assuming that light is visible -- and hence, by analogy, that the active intellect is knowable. In fact, although fire, the source of light, is visible,¹⁰⁹ light itself is hidden behind the colours it actualizes. Indeed this, I suspect, is the reason why Aristotle alters Plato's analogy by making light, rather than its source, the productive principle. By making the sun -- the visible source

¹⁰⁷ Sprague, p. 251: "...the absence of the Sun explains the presence, in the Aristotelian soul, of an efficient cause. There is no efficient cause outside the soul, therefore there must be one inside."

¹⁰⁸ ibid., p. 251.

¹⁰⁹ De Anima II.7, 419a24.

of light -- the analogue for the maker of intelligible forms, Plato implies that the maker, i.e. the Good, is itself intelligible by the same thinking whereby the forms are known, just as we see the sun by the same faculty whereby we see colours, or what Sprague calls "visible forms". This may not be Plato's intention, as we shall see, but it may seem to follow necessarily from a close reading of the sun analogy. This is not to accuse Plato of sloppiness, but merely of choosing one side -- the more poetically apt side, perhaps -- of an analogical double-edged sword. Having the sun correspond to the Good makes the latter's 'metaphysical' status clearer, and is more straightforward as an analogy meant to explain a process of production, but at the price of the possibly misleading implication that we have just described.¹¹⁰ Aristotle, choosing the other edge of the analogical sword, sacrifices (or perhaps willingly forfeits) the clearer metaphysical implication in favour of the less ambiguous epistemological suggestion regarding the knowability of that which makes all things. By emphasizing the

¹¹⁰ I must emphasize that I am not at all accusing Plato of choosing an inaccurate analogy. My point is that the subject matter he is addressing may not be amenable to an account that is both adequate to the complexity of the issue and sufficiently accessible to a reader who has not experienced Plato's insight. The fact that we cannot stare at the sun for any length of time does, in a sense, account for the difference in intelligibility between the Good and the other forms; but it does so less emphatically, and therefore less clearly, than does Aristotle's choice of light as analogue for the productive principle.

'generative' power of light in II.7, while downplaying the role of the source of light, Aristotle effectively focuses our attention on the same basic feature that Plato wishes to highlight when he compares the Good to the sun. In doing so, however, he leaves his analogy open to the misinterpretation we have mentioned, namely the assumption that the active intellect, like light, must have a source. As we have shown by means of the comparable passages from Eudemian Ethics VIII.2 and Metaphysics XII.9, there is no room in the Aristotelian account for an originaive source of that which is itself beyond *logos* i.e. beyond human thought; beyond *logos* there are only gods.

In the end, neither the light analogy nor the sun analogy is perfectly suited to the purpose at hand, namely the accounting for a first principle of all human thought which is somehow beyond the reach of human thought. But it is not yet clear that the reason Aristotle chooses to modify the Platonic image is, as Sprague claims, that he "has no use for" the Good. Notably, Sprague concludes her interpretation by asking how the Unmoved Mover fits into Aristotle's account, since "[t]he Active Intellect seems clearly to play the part of Unmoved Mover in the individual soul."¹¹¹ In other words, since Aristotle has created something with the epistemological function of the Good, but without anything like its

¹¹¹ Sprague, p. 251.

metaphysical status, it is unclear how the Unmoved Mover is related to human thinking at all. And yet it is assumed that there must be some relation.

Here, yet again, we see the seemingly intractable problem into which one falls who attempts to deny the divinity of the active intellect, and to treat it as merely an element "in the [individual] soul". Sprague, having arrived at this impasse, concludes:

If Aristotle has made difficulties for himself, they are only the difficulties which accompany a rejection of the theory of Forms.¹¹²

That is, if, having rejected the possibility that the active intellect is divine, we are unable to find a place for the divine in Aristotle's epistemology, the difficulty is to be pinned on Aristotle, not on our interpretation. Since Sprague has argued, correctly, that the active intellect has taken over the productive function attributed to the Good in Plato's account, she cannot supplement Aristotle's picture by making the Unmoved Mover a prior step in the production of thought (as, say, that which 'produces' the active intellect) without striking a serious blow to her own reading: the reintroduction of something that would stand in the same relation to the active intellect as the sun to light, and hence a collapsing of Aristotle's analogy into Plato's. So, she can avoid this result in one of two ways: either make the

¹¹² ibid., p. 251.

Unmoved Mover itself the active intellect, or claim that Aristotle's theory is beset with the peculiar difficulty that an object described (in Metaphysics XII.7) as the activity of thought (i.e. of *nous*) has no apparent connection to thought. Wishing to escape the possibility that Aristotle's account is, in this fundamental respect, very similar to Plato's, Sprague chooses the latter solution.¹¹³

The confusion is rooted in Sprague's desire to draw a sharper distinction between Plato and Aristotle than perhaps needs to be drawn. On our reading, the light analogy is almost identical in its intended meaning to the sun analogy. This does not, however, mean that the difference between the two analogies is merely cosmetic. As I have suggested, Aristotle's version is designed for theoretical precision at the expense of poetry. If the maker of thought is like the sun, then it is knowable by the same means or faculty whereby other knowables are known. And yet Plato takes pains to rule out this possibility, stating both that the Good is not being

¹¹³ See Reale, G., A History of Ancient Philosophy II: Plato and Aristotle (J. R. Catan, ed. and tr.), p. 311. Reale ignores the entire difficulty, though he assumes that the light analogy ought to be understood in relation to Plato: "It is an analogy and it is the same analogy with which Plato presented the highest Idea of the Good; but, to explain the highest of the human powers, Aristotle could not present it except as an analogy, precisely because such a power is irreducible to something further and represents an impassible limiting point." Why, if it is "the same analogy", does it relate only to "human powers"?

(ousia) but beyond being,¹¹⁴ and that it surpasses knowledge (epistēmē).¹¹⁵ And it is here that Aristotle's disagreement with Plato's analogy can be seen. For Aristotle does not wish to make the principle of all things a non-being, but rather the highest and truest being. (Metaphysics XII.7 1072a26-36) On the other hand, he does agree with the unknowability of this principle. So, in the light analogy, he has found a way to describe his maker of thought as a being -- that is, one of the things that are in principle knowable -- and yet as unknowable. This is the portent of his remarkable description of light, in II.7, as "the colour of the transparent". One might say, in this spirit, that we cannot see light precisely because all we see is light. As the omnipresent precondition of all vision, it is indistinguishable (visually). The positive way to say this is, of course, that we do see light, but not as light. Or as we have seen Aristotle write elsewhere, we know the eternal principle of our thought over a certain period of time, i.e. temporally.

From this, and from our earlier arguments against the notion that the active intellect is an individualized quasi-Unmoved Mover, it is clear that Sprague has exaggerated the difference between the light and sun analogies. Still, I believe that the underlying assumption of Sprague's article --

¹¹⁴ Republic 509b.

¹¹⁵ ibid. 508e-509a.

that the light analogy is best understood against the backdrop of the sun analogy -- is sound. Indeed, the combined facts that (1) the light analogy can so clearly be explained as a modification of the sun analogy, and (2) these two analogies are almost the only substantive comments made by their respective creators explicitly with regard to how objects of knowledge are produced, form the basis of a strong circumstantial (i.e. common sense) case in favour of reading Aristotle's account as in part a direct critique of Plato's.

The significance of Sprague's insight on this point lies in what it suggests about Aristotle the writer, namely that he is artful in a manner that is typically overlooked by his interpreters. This artfulness has already been seen in our analysis of the light analogy itself -- an analogy which draws its explanatory power from the careful wording of an earlier chapter of the work in which it appears. It is seen in De Anima III.5 as a whole, in which the active intellect is introduced in a way that, as we have shown, must be understood in light of related passages elsewhere in order not to be subject to the charge of 'theoretical insignificance' levelled by Hartman, or to entirely ungrounded speculative accounts of this intellect's metaphysical status and method of production. In other words, it is the hypothesis of this dissertation -- one to be judged by taking the measure of the coherence and consistency of the interpretation it yields -- that Aristotle's writings on the most profound subjects (those

areas in which he tends to be most curt and metaphorical) are to be seen as constituting a kind of verbal geometry, requiring us to reproduce the complete shape of his thought on the subject by collecting the angles and curves that he has given us in various texts. Stated more plainly, because Aristotle nowhere gives a detailed explanation of his position on such matters, it is necessary to use different texts to supplement one another's omissions -- although naturally we must at the same time make every effort to ensure as far as possible that the contexts and viewpoints are compatible.

Lest one should ask why Aristotle would write (and perhaps even lecture) in this way, I shall offer, as a partial answer, his legendary pronouncement that he would not let Athens sin twice against philosophy.¹¹⁶ The charge of impiety that was in fact finally raised against him, as it had been against Socrates, and against Anaxagoras elsewhere, was always a real threat, the force of which is difficult to imagine in a society founded on an implicit or explicit separation of church and state, and in which religion has been reduced to a matter of personal sentiment, i.e. in which its political aspect has been largely erased. The claim that is sometimes made, to the effect that 'impiety' was a common

¹¹⁶ Another type of risk involved in writing about these subjects is the one implicit in our comparison between Plato's sun analogy and Aristotle's light analogy: the issues under discussion being so elusive and so rarely discussed, it may be all but impossible to find words with which to address them without falling into incomprehensibility or inaccuracy.

charge in fifth and fourth century Athens and used as a catch-all means of exacting legal penalties from one's enemies, rather than as a real safeguard of religious orthodoxy, does nothing to alter the threat of such a charge to philosophers who challenged orthodoxy. For if it is true that the charge was used in this way, then there is all the more reason to avoid saying anything that might leave one open to the charge. Why give a potential enemy anything to latch on to? Given this reasoning, along with Aristotle's real and peculiar historical circumstances as we know them, it should hardly seem surprising that he would not be entirely forthcoming in those riskiest areas of speculation, namely the nature of the divine, and its relation to human affairs.

One might wish to debate this point one step further, by arguing that if Aristotle had intended to protect himself against persecution by concealing his real views on the divine in the manner that I have suggested, then he would not have said as much as he does explicitly say, since even this must be considered a rejection of the conventional gods.

In the interest of brevity, we need not spend time analyzing the case of Nicomachean Ethics X.8, in which Aristotle argues in favour of the philosophic life by reference, in part, to highly anthropomorphized gods, who 'approve' of those humans who choose the best life. (Nicomachean Ethics X.8 1079a23-32) This claim, so perplexing to some because it appears inconsistent with the depiction of

the divine beings offered in other contexts, squares nicely with the model of Aristotle's style that we are outlining, and on the basis of which we have been operating throughout. Still, the sheer obviousness of the disagreement between this passage and Aristotle's developed discussions of the divine might seem to lend itself to a simpler explanation than the interpretive method that I am proposing here. Perhaps one might say that it is more to the point to turn to the clearest case of an explicit Aristotelian discussion of the divine which might be considered impious (and hence might give evidence against my claim that Aristotle conceals the most dangerous part of his thought by revealing only the minimum required in each context), namely Metaphysics XII.

When we do turn there, we find, of course, that Aristotle's account of the gods is vastly different from that of the Homeric tradition. It is most significant in this connection, however, that Aristotle directly addresses this difference in one brief passage towards the end of Chapter 8. Having introduced the Prime Mover, explained how it is responsible for the sensible universe, and then argued that there are in fact many unmoved movers -- one for each distinct motion of the stars -- he says:

Our forefathers in the most remote ages have handed down to their posterity a tradition, in the form of a myth, that these bodies are gods and that the divine encloses the whole of nature. The rest of the tradition has been added later in mythical form with a view to the persuasion of the multitude and to its

legal and utilitarian expediency; they say these gods are in the form of men or like some of the other animals, and they say other things consequent on and similar to these.... But if one were to separate the first point from these additions and take it alone -- that they thought the first substances to be gods, one must regard this as an inspired utterance, and reflect that while probably each art [*technē*] and each science [*philosophia*] has often been developed as far as possible and has again perished, these opinions, with others, have been preserved until the present like relics of the ancient treasure. (1074b1-14, Ross translation)

Roaming amidst all of the striking features of this sweeping statement, it is easy to overlook its central claim: the core of the Greek religious tradition is the core of Aristotle's theory, and where he differs from the popular myths, the reason is that these myths are the manifestations of a historical break from the real ancestral beliefs about the divine, the beliefs of which he is the heir and defender. In other words, Aristotle is attempting to drive a wedge between the poets' representations of the gods and an understanding of the divine which predates these representations, precisely in order that his theory will appear to disagree only with the poets, rather than with the Greek gods per se, i.e. so that he will not seem impious in disagreeing with the popular myths.¹¹⁷ Owens has recognized

¹¹⁷ This method of argument is used most famously by Plato at Republic II 377e-383c, where Socrates argues that the gods ought not to be depicted as the poets have done, but should be shown as purely good, unchanging, and so on -- traits more in line with the nature of the Platonic Ideas. By arguing that the gods -- implying the Greek gods -- have been

this subtlety, and in fact has used it as evidence against Ross' reading of the passage. In the first sentence of the passage we have cited above, Ross has "these bodies [i.e. the heavenly bodies] are gods", which might mean that the ancient seed of truth to which Aristotle is referring is the divinity of the stars *qua* moving bodies. Owens disagrees, maintaining that the items held by "our forefathers" to be gods are the unmoved movers -- the ends of the eternal motions -- and not the stars themselves. His argument for this claim includes the following:

There would be no special point in Aristotle's insisting that the Greek forefathers thought the stars were gods, even though tradition had covered up the kernel of truth with anthropomorphic additions. But he would have considerable motive for showing that his own theology was the original and divinely inspired tradition of the Greeks, even though now covered beyond recognition by added superstitions.¹¹⁸

I believe that Owens overstates his case. In fact there is clearly a "special point" in Aristotle's claiming that the stars themselves were once thought to be gods, that point being that, as he says, the ancients "thought the first substances to be gods". Owens assumes that "first substances" (*prōtas ousias*), in this context, has to mean Aristotle's

portrayed incorrectly, he wrests the whole topic of the nature of the divine away from the poets, without saying that the 'Homeric' gods do not exist.

¹¹⁸ Owens, DOB, p. 451.

first substances, i.e. the unmoved movers.¹¹⁹ But all it needs to mean, in order to be relevant, is that the Greek forefathers were more philosophical than the later additions to the tradition would indicate, in that they identified as their gods, not mythically enhanced earthly creatures (i.e. "men" or "some of the other animals"), but the objects in the observable universe which they regarded as the primary beings, namely the heavenly bodies. Their "inspired utterance" need not be their identification of the true "first substances", but may rather be found in the principle according to which they identified their divinities. In either case, however, Owens' explanation of Aristotle's reason for making this claim in this context remains essentially valid. For even if the statement means only that the Greek forefathers looked at the subject of the divine from the perspective of physicists, this would still constitute a remarkable assertion about the history of Greek thought, and it would clearly place the forefathers in the camp of the philosophers (and hence of Aristotle) as over against the popular religious mythologists.

So, while it is certainly true that the views expressed in Metaphysics XII are susceptible to the charge of heresy, it is equally important to recall that Aristotle attempts to anticipate that charge, and to meet it head-on, by claiming (convincingly or otherwise) that his divergence from

¹¹⁹ ibid. p. 451.

orthodox theology is in fact a return to the wellspring of Greek religion in its purest form -- or rather, that his account of the gods is the proper completion of the inspired beginnings set forth by the most ancient Greek founders. And the fact that he offers such an argument in the context of his only explicit examination of the divine nature serves to rebut the claim that he wrote without heed to the public perception of his position; indeed, it strongly suggests that he took the matter very seriously. Hence the apparent impiety of the doctrine of the unmoved movers cannot be adduced against my assertion that Aristotle has artfully concealed some fundamental aspect(s) of his theory, or that he reveals certain things only in a manner similar to that in which a box of puzzle pieces can be said to reveal a picture. If, in such a puzzle box, some groups of pieces are found to have been put together already, we are likely to use those groups as a starting-point for our own efforts. It is in this spirit, I suggest, that we must read those parts of the Aristotelian corpus that are manifestly incomplete, particularly with regard to the intellect and the divine (recalling that for Aristotle the divine beings are intellects). It is through an inquiry grounded in the assumption of this methodological necessity that we have arrived at our conclusion that the active intellect is an unmoved mover, in spite of the one phrase in *De Anima* III.5 -- "in the soul" -- which might seem

to contradict this.¹²⁰

With this digression on interpretive method serving as a background, let us now return to the specific item at hand, namely the correspondence between the light and sun analogies, and through this to the general issue to be addressed, that being the Aristotelian terminology regarding human thinking.

The fact that Aristotle uses the light analogy does not in itself prove that he means to be seen as responding to Plato. After all, the use of metaphors of light in metaphysical or epistemological contexts is by no means exclusive to Plato, nor was this so in the fourth century B.C. And yet Sprague feels justified in proposing that Aristotle was neither borrowing his light analogy from some non-Platonic source, nor creating it entirely from his own imagination. Her argument in support of this proposal relies on the similarity of the two analogies when analyzed in parallel, as we have seen. And yet, while this argument has force, largely due to the specificity regarding what is produced by light in the two analogies (intelligible forms), one could still wonder

¹²⁰ Recall that the rejection -- explicit or implicit - of this methodological assumption leads directly to the necessity of concluding that Aristotle is unable, not merely to explain the most fundamental claims of his theory, but even to recognize the need for such explanations. This conclusion follows not only in theory, but also in the practice of so many interpreters, some of whom we have already encountered.

Further, from what we have seen, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the active intellect could be described as "in the soul" in a similar sense to that in which the form "human" is found 'in' individual humans, while still being, in an important sense, independent.

whether any pair of metaphors of psychic illumination might not, if subjected to the same type of analysis, appear -- and only appear -- to be more similar than mere coincidence should allow.

I suggest that Sprague's intriguing proposal is made convincing by an unstated premise in her account: Aristotle could not have used a metaphor so close in context and meaning to Plato's sun analogy without having intended it to be some sort of comment on, or reply to, Plato. This is not, of course, to claim that no two people can speak in similar terms without the similarity being regarded as intentional. What I am calling Sprague's unstated premise has to do specifically with the relationship between Plato and the Aristotle who studied and taught at the Academy under Plato, and many if not most of whose extant writings were produced while teaching in the Athenian school which he founded as an alternative and rival to the post-Platonic Academy. The unstated premise acquires its weight from this background.

Consider what we mean when we say, for example, that Plato cannot properly be understood without some familiarity with Heraclitus, or that understanding Hegel requires some knowledge of Kant. These statements are designed to draw attention to more than the trivially true point that when the names Heraclitus and Kant appear in the writings of Plato and Hegel, it is useful to know to whom these names refer. (For instance, we might also say that knowing who Charmides was can

help us to understand certain Platonic writings, but this is a qualitatively different observation from the kind to which I am referring.) Rather, what we mean, at least in part, is that Plato and Hegel wrote their works at particular moments in what we might call 'conceptual history', so that when they broached certain subjects, they unavoidably did so, to some degree, in the terms -- often literally in the terminology -- of their respective predecessors.¹²¹ I am not reciting the old saw to the effect that the great thinkers are merely, or essentially, products of their historical epochs, in the sense that their thoughts are determined by cultural factors beyond their control, such that understanding Plato means understanding the spirit of his times. On the contrary, my point is that the new intellectual creations of the great thinkers must be expressed, to the extent that they are to be expressed, in the vocabulary that is available to them -- or, to be more precise, in the vocabulary that is accessible to everyone else. In the arena of ordinary speech, this means nothing more than using the language that one can reasonably expect will be understood by the audience one is addressing. But in those areas of speculation engaged by the minority in any given time and place, the situation is complicated by the

¹²¹ The issue I am addressing here is not one of 'intellectual debt'. (On this point, of course, Aristotle's relationship to Plato is much different than that between the other pairs of thinkers I have just named.) The concern here, as I shall explain, is rather one of what might be called 'socio-intellectual context'.

fact that the novelty and exclusivity of the ideas of this minority combine with the words and meanings of the general language to give birth to specialized or 'technical' word uses which -- while still bearing something of their ordinary meaning -- are peculiar to the subject matter, and to those who participate in its investigation. These new, nuanced word meanings (e.g. Being) typically remain the exclusive domain of those few who engage in that specialized study for the purposes of which the words were originally co-opted. And as a result, those who forge these new meanings in effect preside over the subject matter delineated by the peculiarly used words, or at least over that subject matter as so delineated. That is to say, for as long as the newly minted meanings remain exclusive to the specialists, it is impossible for anyone wishing to pursue the specialized inquiry, being familiar with these scientifically heightened word uses, to use these same words, in the same theoretical context, without this use constituting a direct reference, however translucent, to the theoretical position of those who are known to preside over the specialized use of these words.

It is instructive to recall that this same principle applies to ordinary language, although because what 'presides over the area' in that case is merely something like the phrase 'the English language', the principle applies too generally to be readily apparent. By this I mean that when we use an ordinary word in a non-specialized context, we are in

fact making a reference to the presiding language (or to the collective embodiment of that language, its users): a reference indicating acceptance of that language's use of that word, if we use it appropriately (i.e. in accordance with the dictionary); or indicating some sort of dissatisfaction with the limits of accepted meaning, if we knowingly use the word incorrectly (i.e. in a way which stretches its meaning, or adapts it to fill a perceived lacuna in the language's current catalogue of meanings). The former type of implicit reference to the language is just ordinary communication; the latter is typical of poetic language. And it is only in the much rarer latter type that the reference to previous or established usage as such is immediately noticeable, or especially relevant to our understanding of the particular language use in question, though such references are always present.

Because in the case of specialized language, on the other hand, the ever-present implicit reference is not to an enormous, anonymous collective, but to a certain previous writer, or school, it is particularly relevant to our understanding of the later writer's meaning. By using the technical words or concepts in either the inherited or an altered fashion (corresponding to 'appropriate' or 'incorrect' usage in the arena of ordinary language), a writer may be expressing acceptance of, or dissatisfaction with, the theory or conclusion which the terms were employed to express. By using the same terms in the same way, a writer can express

compliance with the relevant theories of a predecessor, either in detail (as a Freudian would use the word "id"), or in broad outline.¹²² By refusing to use the same terms in the same context at all, one runs the risk of failing to be understood, since it is possible -- and particularly when the precise area of speculation is relatively new -- that the existing terminology is, in a sense, the subject matter. When a thinker borrows and modifies words and phrases from the general language for a specialized purpose, this suggests that there is not already a set of words appropriate to the expression of that thinker's insight, which in turn implies that that particular insight, definition, or subtle distinction may never have been expressed before, at least in that thinker's language. Thus, the invention of a new thing to mean necessitates the invention of a corresponding new thing to say. And hence the new meaning and its corresponding word(s) are virtually inseparable in practice, at least until such time as that new meaning ceases to be the exclusive province of specialists and becomes an assimilated part of the mental life of a broader community (e.g. the community of intellectuals, or of academics) -- and can therefore be understood, albeit perhaps in a diluted or compounded form,

¹²² For example, the entire history of Western metaphysics through the nineteenth century is sometimes termed "substance philosophy", because each language's equivalent of the word "substance" was used to define the central issue of metaphysics throughout the centuries.

without much attention to its origins. This is because at that stage in the development of thought regarding the idea revealed by this new meaning, the idea is discussed only by the person who first isolated the terms with which to discuss it, by any disciples that person may have converted, and by those who, having been alerted as to the existence of a new distinction within an existing area of discourse, wish to pass comment or critique upon it. In all of these cases, the terms originally borrowed from the general language will almost certainly be used in any discourse concerning this new meaning, simply because there are no other words with which to refer to it. In ordinary language, we can say "I ran to the store", or "I raced to the store", and no one will fail to glean the same meaning from either statement. For the meaning betokened by the two verbs has been disseminated so widely, and for so long, through our experience and speech that we now have innumerable ways of expressing it. But when a technical term is newly coined, or remains narrowly disseminated, there may be no alternative way of expressing its meaning without ambiguity, or without appearing to be speaking a private language.

If the only possible responses to the introduction of a new philosophical word-meaning were the two outlined above - - acquiescence to the new term and to the theoretical solution it represents, or a refusal to acknowledge the authority of the term over its newly discovered area of meaning -- then

only accidental motion, and hence no temporal development worthy of the name 'history', could be ascribed to the activity of philosophizing. That is, the only theoretical change or evolution would result from misapplications of the new term, caused by misunderstandings of the new meaning, or from the theoretical equivalent of addressing a topic about which one is engaged in conversation without having noticed what one's interlocutor has just said on the topic, or at least without giving evidence of having noticed.

As it happens, there is a third way of responding to a new meaning, and to those who preside over it, a way which lends coherence to the history of ideas, and makes Hegel's perspective seem plausible. This third way is the one chosen by Aristotle in dealing with his predecessors. Its basic form is captured by J.D.G Evans, when he says:

...[T]ime and again Aristotle prefers to use, albeit with the refinement which only his own analysis can provide, a current philosophical term or expression rather than a technical term of his own coinage, since by this means he can show how his own analyses and ideas grew out of the general body of ideas already in currency.¹²³

The weakness in Evans' account is his depiction of the method outlined here as a 'preference', as though Aristotle was faced with other viable options. Of course, Aristotle is not utterly averse to the coining of a new "technical term",

¹²³ Evans, J.D.G., Aristotle's Concept of Dialectic, p. 25.

since, as we have seen, this is necessary if one hopes to find expression for notions which, to one's best knowledge, have yet to be broached by others. The issue here, however, is how one can contribute to the discussion of a subject that has been newly introduced into one's language, without simply using the only terms that are "in currency" to refer to that subject, and thereby implicitly adopting the theoretical position to which those terms correspond. The question, in other words, is how someone whose speculation has led him to a fundamentally new understanding of an established theoretical area can escape the trap of language, which by its nature tends to squeeze disparate meanings together, and to shave off subtle differences. This, of course, is the poet's problem, shifted to the arena of scientific discourse. And, naturally, its solution is also analogous to the poet's: one must use the prevailing theoretical language in a manner similar to that in which the poet uses those words and meanings in ordinary language which, to the rest of us, constitute a constraint on thought, or at least a filter through which our freest thoughts are strained. As a straightforward example consider Henry V Act IV, Scene iii, in which Shakespeare has King Henry, immediately before the Battle of Agincourt, describe his fighting force as follows:

Our gayness and our gilt are all besmirch'd
With rainy marching in the painful field

The rest of us, in the same dramatic context, might

have said, in place of the second line, "With painful marching in the rainy field". By transposing "rainy" and "painful", Shakespeare produces two phrases which, in literal terms, border on nonsense. (What, in ordinary English, does it mean to march rainily? How is a field inherently painful?) And yet, read in context, the line 'uses' its resemblance to the proper English line that the rest of us would have produced -- and thus uses its hint of ordinary meaning -- as a springboard to elevate a statement that, rendered our way, would merely have imparted factual information concerning physical hardship, into an account of the psychic struggle of the king's army in the face of a seemingly hostile natural world. Of course, the account I have just given is no more than an outline of the topic Shakespeare is addressing, and does not begin to capture the full meaning of his words. But it is enough to serve as a model of the sort of method the philosopher must use in order to bring new ideas to bear in an intellectual area with its own fixed, narrow, and specialized word meanings. Rather than feeling oppressed by these fixed meanings, the philosopher counts on their existence, perhaps even reinforces them, in order that he might utilize the intellectual space that they open for his own purposes. And this would be especially important for a thinker whose purposes included a desire to reveal surreptitiously, rather than openly state, his views on certain key matters.

Pascal captures much of what I have just said in an

aphorism:

Words differently arranged have a different meaning, and meanings differently arranged have different effects.¹²⁴

The simple communication of meaning is not the highest or final aim of language use. For meanings themselves may be used to convey something further -- something 'beyond meaning', an "effect". The latter is itself, perhaps, a meaning, but only in an attenuated sense, much like the sense in which something left unsaid -- or rather, the 'space' in which it is not said -- can be said to have a meaning.¹²⁵

Nothing of the above account of theoretical development appears in Sprague's article comparing the light and sun analogies, but I suggest that much of it is presupposed by anyone who uses an argument such as Sprague's, as well as by anyone who finds something inherently plausible in that argument. Reading her account, one can almost hear oneself saying, by way of offering support, that Aristotle obviously knew Plato's writings extraordinarily well -- a

¹²⁴ Pascal, Pensées (W.F. Trotter, tr.), Section 1, #23.

¹²⁵ The sort of person who believes that everything is, in principle, amenable to scientific knowledge might argue that what Pascal calls "effects" are not 'beyond meaning', as I have suggested, but beneath it, i.e. that such sub-meanings are necessary only as 'folk psychology', according to some, is necessary until our knowledge of neurobiology is complete. And there can be little doubt that these "effects", having found expression, will, in turn, be reduced to more straightforward renderings. The question is whether this reduction constitutes a brightening or a dimming of the original effect -- that is, of the original idea.

claim which, though undoubtedly true, carries very little weight as a defence of Sprague's position, even at the level of common sense, unless one consciously or unconsciously imports with it something resembling the notion of 'concept' evolution that I have just offered. (To be more precise, what I have offered is not so much an account of the evolution of concepts, as of the development of the language which, perhaps, stands in an isomorphic relation to the ideas of the major thinkers. And language use, as the Greeks taught, is less important, because less real, than thought. I have not presumed, here, to attempt to explain the evolution of ideas themselves, but only that of their means of expression.)

Granting, then, that the light analogy is intended as a careful emendation of Plato's sun analogy, we might consider how a closer comparison of these two depictions of the mind can further our understanding of Aristotle's position regarding what the active intellect makes, and how it does this. Sprague asserts that the objects produced by both the Good and the active intellect are "intelligible forms", and that the mode of cognition of these forms is, for Plato, "Reason", and for Aristotle, "Reasoning". The Platonic term which Sprague renders as "Reason" is, of course, *nous*, the operation of which is *noēsis*. It is this power in particular that cognizes the Forms. We know this, in part, because Plato immediately follows the sun analogy with a dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon in which various modes of cognition are

stipulatively named as corresponding to the various types of 'products', direct and indirect, of the Good -- the Divided Line passage.¹²⁶

Now it was Plato who first introduced the notion of "intelligible forms", or Ideas, into the vocabulary of philosophy, so it was also his obligation and prerogative to assign a name to the mental power whereby such entities might be apprehended. He did not, of course, create a new word, but simply, in the manner that we have described, stipulated a special, narrow meaning for an already existing term. He might, in principle, have chosen another word; but, as the term *nous* had been used by various previous thinkers to name a supreme intellectual principle, he preferred to adapt it to his own conception of a highest power of intellectual apprehension. Having done so, he tied the word -- at least in its technical sense -- not only to his new theory of Ideas, but thereby also to the notion of true separateness from matter. That is, *nous* became, for philosophic purposes, the faculty whereby one can, at least in principle, know (i.e. give an account of) the actually separate, immaterial Beings, the Ideas, in express contrast to *dianoia*, whereby (again in its strict, technical coinage) one can engage in reasoning based on the assumption of separate beings, but without being able to say anything about these, i.e. without the mind, *qua*

¹²⁶ Republic 509c-511e.

thinking dianoetically, ever quite rising to the level of complete freedom from matter. *Dianoia* is the intellectual faculty, then, which apprehends theoretical entities, universal truths, which may still fall under the general rubric of 'knowledge', but which cannot disentangle our souls entirely from the restraints of the sensible world, in part because these objects of knowledge can still be examined by means of (or with the aid of) particular instantiations, or "images".¹²⁷

In a footnote to his translation of the Republic, Shorey comments on Plato's specialized use of these terms as follows:

...[T]he word *dianoia* is given a technical meaning as a faculty inferior to *nous*, but, as Plato says, the terminology does not matter. The question has been much and often idly discussed.¹²⁸

I do not doubt that much discussion of any topic is idle, but Shorey's statement might suggest that there is little that can be said on the topic of Plato's choice of terminology that is not idle, which would be misleading. There can be little question that Plato was moved to use the exact words at issue by nothing more compelling than communicative convenience; in other words, they struck him, for reasons that we need not debate here, as the best way to

¹²⁷ Republic 510c-e.

¹²⁸ Plato, Republic (Paul Shorey, tr.), pp. 116-117n.

label his newly distinguished faculties of thought -- his new meanings -- with a view to making his insight communicable to others. It seems inherently worthwhile, then, for Plato's interpreters to wonder why he considered those two words especially helpful.¹²⁹ Shorey is correct to say that "the terminology does not matter" in the sense that Plato's unfiltered idea is not dependent on how it is expressed to others. But as it is not the unfiltered idea that we have before us, but only the means used to express it, those means -- the words chosen (and those not chosen) -- do matter; not to Plato, but to us.

Still, even if Plato's choice of words to denote the various faculties introduced through the Divided Line is absolutely arbitrary and inessential, those words, once chosen, become centrally important to our understanding of those who will follow in Plato's footsteps. For the reasons that we have outlined during our discussion of the development of theoretical terminology, it is impossible to speculate under the influence of Plato's new distinctions without feeling bound by the terminology with which he expressed them. How else can one make it apparent that one is addressing the same issue, than by adopting the linguistic key set out by Plato, i.e. by using the only terms "in currency"?

¹²⁹ We might, for example, examine both conventional and philosophical uses of these terms prior to Plato, searching for clues as to why *dianoia* seemed to him more apt than, say, *epistēmē*.

This is the problem facing Aristotle in his own discussion of the mind's powers, and their relations to the knowable world. And he solves it in a manner that is a remarkable example of how one can do, in the realm of technical language, what Shakespeare does with ordinary English in the phrase "rainy marching in the painful field". An examination of his adaptation of the key terms from the upper portion of the Divided Line will help to clarify Aristotle's position regarding the nature of human thought, as well as establishing a ground from which we can attempt to uncover some of the mystery of the active intellect's production of "all things".

6. *Nous*, *Dianoia*, and *Epistēmē*

In his account of the middle books of the Metaphysics, Owens treats of the distinction between the knowledge of incomposite beings and that of composites, explicating Aristotle's view as follows:

In the case of non-composites, truth is the simple contact of the mind with the thing. It is the mere expression or 'assertion' of the thing. Falsity in this case is not error, but just lack of contact -- ignorance. Though the mind can attain these non-composites, the intellect cannot exercise its operation of combining or separating in regard to them. About them there can be no truth in the intellect.¹³⁰

By way of clarification, Owens offers this footnote:

In spite of exceptions, mind (*nous*) in Aristotle refers to knowledge of simple things, intellect (*dianoia*) to knowledge of composites.¹³¹

The passage to which Owens is directly referring, and of which his explication appears to be a very faithful rendering, is Metaphysics IX.10 1051b22-26. Indeed the only notable difference between his words and Aristotle's seems to be his insertion of the terms "mind" and "intellect" -- his translations of *nous* and *dianoia* -- which do not appear in the original passage. Presumably his concern in discussing the

¹³⁰ Owens, DOB, pp. 412-413.

¹³¹ ibid. p. 412n.

passage is less with the ostensible topic of IX.10 -- the sense of 'being' and 'non-being' corresponding to the notions of truth and falsehood -- than with the faculties of thought whereby truth, viewed subjectively (i.e. knowledge), is attained. This emphasis is clear from the fact that he treats his analysis of lines 1051b22-26, including his introduction of the *nous/dianoia* distinction, as a kind of preface to a discussion of Aristotle's subsequent extension of the principle of intellectual "contact" with non-composites in general to the peculiar case of non-composite substances -- that is, pure actualities.¹³²

What Owens is concerned to establish, in other words, is that Aristotle uses the word *nous* primarily to designate the knowledge of separate substances, and *dianoia* to designate every lower mental act that can properly be called knowledge. He claims that although Aristotle never explains, in the extant works, what the direct apprehension of the divine beings would consist in, the passage under analysis does

¹³² Metaphysics 1051b26-32; Owens, DOB, p. 412-413. As my immediate interest is in Owens' reading of Aristotelian terminology, and not his interpretation of the details of this passage, I will grant his plausible claim that Aristotle's "*tas me sunthetas ousias*" is a reference to the absolutely separate substances, such that the contrast is between simple things such as the first principles of demonstration, and the simple first principles of the cosmos. It might, however, be argued here that the distinction is merely among first principles of demonstration, some of which are axioms or the 'definitions' of accidents, and some of which are the definitions of species-forms, i.e. ungenerable substances, according to Metaphysics VII.8 1033b5-20.

stipulate that this apprehension would be an instance of genuine noetic activity.¹³³ The suggestion that *nous* and *dianoia* are, "[i]n spite of exceptions", distinct (and hierarchically arranged) modes of knowing should immediately put us in mind of the Divided Line. Owens, sensitive to the profound terminological links between Aristotle and Plato,¹³⁴ all but takes it for granted that Aristotle has followed his teacher on this matter. And he does so not without textual grounds, although he barely mentions any of them explicitly (hence my claim that he takes the connection for granted, i.e. he does not feel the need to prove the point).

I believe that Owens' intuition of the link to Platonic terms is appropriate, but that, precisely because he leaves that link insufficiently examined, he falls into error, failing to notice the radical element in Aristotle's use of language. Naturally, he recognizes the essential difference between Plato's *dianoia* and its Aristotelian equivalent, namely that for Plato, the objects of dianoetic knowledge must also, in some sense, be truly separate from matter. The assumption he makes, however, is that this is the only difference between the two thinkers' uses of *dianoia*, an assumption for which, as I have said, there is textual support, though, as I will show, it is not decisive.

¹³³ Owens, DOB, p. 414.

¹³⁴ ibid., p. 204.

It is not surprising, given Owens' interpretation, that his account of the passage from Metaphysics IX.10 begins with an analysis of a passage from Book VI which he identifies as the point at which Aristotle first introduces the topic of the different modes of knowing for simples and composites; for it is in Book VI that *dianoia* is used most prominently in the Metaphysics, and in its most 'technical' manner. It is from Book VI, in particular, that one might arrive at the assumption that Aristotle's *dianoia* stands in relation to his *nous* as does Plato's to his.

As Owens observes, the issue explained in IX.10 is introduced in VI.4, in a discussion which concludes as follows:

...for "falsity" and "truth" are not in things -- the good, for example, being true, and the bad false -- but in thought [*dianoia*]; and with regard to simple things [*ta hapla*] and essences [*ta ti estin*] there is no truth or falsity even in thought; -- what points we must study in connexion with being and not-being in this sense, we must consider later.¹³⁵ (1027b26-30)

The most important point here, with regard to the question of types of knowledge, is at lines 27-28, "*peri de ta hapla kai ta ti estin oud' en tē dianoia*", the last phrase of which Tredennick renders "there is no truth or falsity even in thought." Ross translates this same phrase, "falsity and

¹³⁵ I am following the Tredennick translation, except at line 1027b28, where I have translated *ta hapla* as "simple things", as opposed to Tredennick's "simple concepts".

truth do not exist even in thought." Owens, though quoting from the Ross translation, offers his own amendment to these lines, reading them as follows: "while with regard to simple things and the *what-is*, falsity and truth are not even in the intellect."¹³⁶

Two related, seemingly minor changes make all the difference in the world for Owens' interpretation. First, with the word "while", he is reading the *de* as signalling a strong contrast between the statement concerning incomposites and the preceding claim about truth and falsity in composites. That is, while the other translations give lines 27-28 the sense of an extension, or a special case, of the general principle that truth and falsity are not to be found in the things themselves, Owens downplays the passage's 'metaphysical' message in favour of an epistemological distinction concerning simple versus composite objects of knowledge.

This difference is even more apparent in light of Owens' second minor alteration of this passage, namely: "falsity and truth are not even in the intellect [*dianoia*]." At a glance, the difference between Ross' "do not exist even in thought", and Owens' "are not even in the intellect", might seem negligible. We must ask, however, why Owens makes the change at all -- especially since he does not merely

¹³⁶ Owens, DOB, p. 411.

substitute "intellect" (his preferred translation of *dianoia*) for Ross' "thought", but also alters the verb -- if he did not think it would achieve a slight change in the line's meaning. Recall the context: Aristotle has claimed that being and not-being in the sense of truth and falsehood are not to be found in the objects known, but rather only in *dianoia*. It is here that he makes the claim to the effect that in the case of incomposite objects of knowledge, truth and falsehood are not in *dianoia*. The question is how we are to understand this claim.

Compare these two statements: (1) I have no friends even at work; and (2) My friends are not even at work. Both statements convey the point that I have no friends at work, but while statement (1) implies that I have no friends at all, statement (2) denies merely that I have any at work. Statement (1) corresponds to the suggestion of the Ross and Tredennick translations; Owens' modification weakens the claim to something resembling statement (2). According to the earlier translations, the passage is amenable to the following paraphrase: Truth and falsehood never exist in things, but, in the case of composite things, are to be found in *dianoia*; while in the case of incomposites, they are not to be found at all, neither in the things nor in *dianoia*. With Owens' wording of lines 27-28, the passage may now be read as denying only that truth and falsehood, in the case of incomposites, exist in *dianoia*, and as implying that they do exist somewhere

else, namely in *nous*, as Owens interprets IX.10. It is by interpreting this VI.4 passage in this way that Owens is able to sustain his position that Aristotle adopts something like the Platonic distinction between *nous* and *dianoia*.

But must not Owens' reading be correct, if Aristotle says, in IX.10, that truth and falsehood do exist in the case of incomposite beings? In other words, having claimed, in VI.4, that truth and falsehood in this case do not reside in *dianoia*, must we not infer that if they do exist at all, it must be in an intellectual faculty distinct from *dianoia*? Indeed we must -- if Aristotle says, in IX.10, what Owens has attributed to him.

At Metaphysics IX.10 1051b18-27, Aristotle says the following:

But with regard to incomposite things, what is being or not-being, and truth or falsity? Such a thing is not composite, so as to be when it is united and not to be when it is divided, like the proposition "the wood is white", or "the diagonal is incommensurable"; nor will truth and falsity apply in the same way to these cases as to the previous ones. In point of fact, just as truth is not the same in these cases, so neither is being. Truth and falsity are as follows: contact [*thigein*] and assertion [*phanai*] are truth... and ignorance [*agnoein*] is non-contact. I say ignorance, because it is impossible to be deceived with respect to what a thing is, except accidentally. (Tredennick translation)

Notice that although Aristotle says "Truth and falsity are as follows", the actual contrast that he describes is between truth and ignorance, rather than falsity. Ignorance

implies non-thought, as opposed to falsehood, which is a type of inaccurate thinking, and which therefore entails that something definable as thinking is involved. Later in the same chapter, Aristotle clarifies this point:

Truth means to think these objects, and there is no falsity [to *pseudos*] or deception, but only ignorance -- not however, ignorance such as blindness is; for blindness is like a total absence of the power of thinking [to *noētikon*]. (1052a1-4)

Owens, as we have seen, depicts Aristotle's view as being that, with regard to incomposites, "falsity in this case is not error, but just lack of contact -- ignorance." That is, he de-emphasizes the contrast, developed through the last half of Chapter 10, between "falsity", as the opposite of knowledge in the case of composite things, and ignorance, as falsity's counterpart in the case of incomposites, in favour of the view that ignorance is a kind of falsehood.¹³⁷ There is a vast difference between deceived thinking and a simple lack of thought; and it is this difference that Aristotle is attempting to explain in Metaphysics IX.10. He begins the chapter with the more straightforward case of falsehood -- the thinking-as-combined of things which are not actually combined, or vice versa -- and then uses this account as a

¹³⁷ Owens does eventually quote the later passage rejecting the existence of falsity in the case of incomposites. (DOB p. 414) But he passes no comment upon this statement, thus leaving his account of the earlier passage at 1051b18-27 to stand as his unqualified interpretation of Aristotle's view.

background against which to introduce the subtler instance of incomposite things, the elusiveness of which is evidenced by his reliance on the metaphor of "contact" and "non-contact". Dialectically, this involves using the simpler notions of truth and falsehood, which he has already explained, as a primitive means of describing the more complex notions of contact and non-contact -- as a working model, so to speak. This is why he introduces the latter notions by saying that with regard to simple things, "[t]ruth and falsity are as follows...." The contact and non-contact of the mind with the things are, in the arena of simple things, the equivalents of truth and falsity (i.e. correct or incorrect combination and separation) in the arena of composite things. Once this point is understood, Aristotle can move on, as he does, to clarify the issue by declaring that in fact there is no such thing as falsity, *per se*, in regard to incomposite things. And this clarified position is consistent with his account in De Anima III.6:

The thinking of indivisible objects of thought occurs among things concerning which there can be no falsehood; where truth and falsehood are possible there is implied a compounding of thoughts into a fresh unity, as Empedocles said, "where without necks the heads of many grew," and then were joined together by Love --, so also these separate entities [tauta kechōrismena] are combined, as for instance "incommensurable" and "diagonal". (III.6 430a26-32, Hett translation)

Although Aristotle does use the opposition of truth

and falsehood in the process of developing his view of the thinking of incomposites, it is certain that his developed (i.e. fully explained) position is that, in this case, falsehood, at least, does not exist.¹³⁸ By depicting non-contact (ignorance) as a kind of falsehood, Owens misinterprets Aristotle's view, treating a provisional or preliminary account of ignorance, which uses the already-explained notion of falsehood as a guidepost, as though it were Aristotle's actual belief.

The significance of this error -- or rather, this misplaced emphasis -- for our purposes, is in its implications for our understanding of the Metaphysics VI.4 passage in which this epistemological issue first arises. As we have seen, Owens, on the basis of his reading of IX.10, has judged it necessary to modify Ross' translation of 1027b27-28, in order to allow for the interpretation that with regard to simple things, truth and falsity do not exist in *dianoia*, but do exist elsewhere, namely in *nous*. In light of our examination of IX.10, however, it can be seen that the VI.4 passage should be more simply construed. Recall Aristotle's claim:

"falsity" and "truth" are not in things...
but in thought [*dianoia*]; and with regard to
simple things and essences there is no truth

¹³⁸ One might wonder whether "truth", in the strict sense (the thinking-as-combined of that which is combined), is applicable to the contact with simple things, any more than "falsehood" is to non-contact. Nevertheless, Aristotle does not explicitly reject the use of the term "truth" as he does the term "falsehood".

or falsity even in thought [*dianoia*]; -- what points we must study in connexion with being and not-being in this sense, we must consider later.

Tredennick appears to be guilty of an inapt looseness in his reading "there is no truth or falsity even in thought." This disjunction is unnecessary, since "truth" and "falsity" do not appear in this phrase in the Greek text, but rather are assumed from line 1027b26, where they are conjoined, "'falsity' and 'truth'" (*to pseudos kai to alēthes*). Ross' version is therefore more precise: "falsity and truth do not exist even in thought." And the statement means exactly what it appears, on its face, to mean: in the case of simple things, the conjunction of falsehood and truth -- that is, the opposition, taken as a whole pair, of falsehood and truth as comprising non-being and being *qua* objects of thought -- does not exist in *dianoia*. Owens wishes us to ask here, 'then where does this conjunction exist?', and to interpret IX.10 as answering, 'in *nous*'. But in order for such a question and answer to be an appropriate extension of Aristotle's meaning, it must be the case that the conjunction of truth and falsehood does exist in the thinking of simple things, which, as we have seen, is not so. By saying that truth and falsehood do not exist, with regard to incomposites, in *dianoia* any more than in the things themselves, Aristotle is not implying that they exist in a faculty beyond *dianoia*, but that they do not exist at all. Aquinas, taking a similar

view, interprets the entire passage as having been designed precisely to limit the range, not of *dianoia*, but of truth and falsity:

Hence as a result of this process of elimination it follows that since truth and falsity are neither in things nor in the mind when it apprehends simple concepts and the whatness of things, they must pertain primarily and principally to the combination and separation which the mind makes, and secondarily to that of words, which signify the mind's conception.¹³⁹

Understood along these lines, there is nothing in VI.4 to suggest that being and non-being as these terms apply to the thought of incomposites -- that is, contact and non-contact -- are not found in *dianoia*. The claim is only that such thought does not involve the opposition of truth and falsehood, strictly defined.

Thus far, then, we have seen no textual evidence to support Owens' attempt to separate *nous* and *dianoia* in Aristotle as they are separated by Plato. Is Owens resting his case entirely on the assumption that Aristotle could not have used these terms when he did, without accepting more or less the meanings assigned to them by his teacher? As a matter of fact, such an assumption is not, in my view, totally without force. It is not, however, all that Owens has in his favour. As noted earlier, Book VI of the Metaphysics, in which Aristotle introduces the contrast between the knowledge

¹³⁹ Aquinas, Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle #1233 (p. 481).

of composite and simple things, is extremely relevant on this issue.

Consider the following two passages, the first excerpted from Plato's Divided Line image, the second from Metaphysics VI.1:

I suppose you know that the men who work in geometry, calculation, and the like treat as known the odd and the even, the figures, three forms of angles, and other things akin to these in each kind of inquiry. These things they make hypotheses and don't think it worthwhile to give any further account of them to themselves or others.... Beginning from them, they go ahead with their exposition of what remains and end consistently at the object toward which their investigation was directed....

Don't you also know that they use visible forms besides and make their arguments about them, not thinking [*dianooumenoí*] about them but about those others that they are like? They make the arguments for the sake of the square itself and the diagonal itself, not for the sake of the diagonal they draw, and likewise with the rest. (Republic VI, 510c-e)

[I]n general every intellectual science [*epistēmē dianoētikē*] or science which involves intellect deals with causes and principles, more or less exactly or simply considered. But all these sciences single out some existent thing or class, and concern themselves with that; not with Being unqualified, nor *qua* Being, nor do they give any account of the essence [*ti estin*]; but starting from it, some making it clear to perception and others assuming it as a hypothesis, they demonstrate, more or less cogently, the essential attributes of the class with which they are dealing. (Metaphysics VI.1 1025b6-14)

Seeing these two passages together, it is clear that, aside from the difference between Plato's dramatic style and

Aristotle's 'academic' one, they are virtually identical. Both begin by limiting the discussion to those particular types of inquiry the results of which can be called scientific knowledge (*epistēmē*), and which deal with a particular class of beings to the exclusion of all others. Both proceed to the claim that each of these sciences takes for granted the existence of certain things which are fundamental to the inquiry. Socrates says that these sciences do not "give any further account" (*oudenā logon*) of these entities; Aristotle says "nor do they give any account" (*oudenā logon*) of the 'what-is' (*ti estin*), i.e. of the essence of the assumed beings. Beginning from these assumed things, both passages immediately go on to say, the scientists pursue their investigations to the appropriate conclusion, "consistently" (*homologoumenōs*), says Socrates, "more or less cogently" (*ē anankaioterōn ē malakōterōn*), says Aristotle. At the outset of his account, Socrates says that the assumed things are set down as "hypotheses"; at the conclusion he notes that these forms of inquiry also use "visible forms" as bases for study. Aristotle accounts for both of these in the phrase "some making it clear to perception and others assuming it as a hypothesis."

It could hardly be much clearer that Aristotle is describing the same type of thinking, and particularly of knowing, which Plato identified as corresponding to the lower segment of the upper portion of the Divided Line (the

intelligible portion), and which he bequeathed to us (and of course to Aristotle) under the name *dianoia*. This picture is completed by observing the introductory phrase whereby Aristotle names the type of thinking he has in mind: *pasa epistēmē dianoētikē ē metechousa ti dianoias* -- "all dianoetic knowledge or knowledge which somewhat involves *dianoia*."

In light of this comparison, it is difficult not to be sympathetic to a commentator who is inclined to see in Aristotle's *dianoia* an echo of Plato's. And yet our analysis must not end here. For it is not yet clear how we are to understand the term "dianoetic knowledge", hardly a common Aristotelian phrase.

In the Republic VI passage that we have cited, Socrates, to repeat, says the following concerning how the hypotheses are used: "Beginning from them, they go ahead with their exposition of what remains and end consistently at the object toward which their investigation was directed." The notion of 'ending consistently' is a key aspect of such thinking; dianoetic knowledge, as Plato has Socrates describe it, is the result of the scientists' making their arguments (*tous logous*)¹⁴⁰ in a way that ends "consistently", i.e. without the contradiction of anything following from the initial hypothesis. The conclusion of such a consistent argument is *epistēmē*, not the kind of *epistēmē* which results

¹⁴⁰ Republic 510d.

from dialectic activity -- that is noetic *epistēmē*¹⁴¹ -- but dianoetic *epistēmē*, i.e. the second-level knowing which Plato designates by the word *dianoia*.

It is certain that the thinking which leads to Plato's dianoetic knowledge is of the sort that Aristotle calls demonstration (*apodeixis*). And it is well known that Aristotle's usual technical term for the knowledge reached through demonstrative reasoning is *epistēmē*. Thus, Aristotle's *epistēmē* is Plato's *dianoia* -- with some modifications, as we shall see shortly. But what, we must ask, is the significance of his use, in Metaphysics VI.1, of the name *epistēmē dianoētikē* to designate this type of thinking, if not simply to allude to the equivalent notion, from the equivalent passage, in the Republic?

Recall Owens' basic claim: "In spite of exceptions, mind (*nous*) in Aristotle refers to knowledge of simple things, intellect (*dianoia*) to knowledge of composites." That is, *nous* apprehends both the first principles of demonstration and, on his reading of 1051b26-32, the first principles of the cosmos, while *dianoia* 'combines and separates', i.e. judges simples to be related or unrelated, and is thereby the type of thinking which engages in demonstrative reasoning. Owens stakes his general claim while acknowledging that there are "exceptions", instances in which Aristotle uses *nous* and

¹⁴¹ Republic 511b.

dianoia in a less clearly differentiated fashion. Let us consider a few such exceptions.

Though the ultimate subject of Metaphysics VI.1 is the differentiation of the various types of science, and particularly the isolation of a "first philosophy",¹⁴² the opening argument, which we have been discussing, is in my view a rendition of the distinction between the knowledge derived from first principles and that of such principles, a distinction made more precisely elsewhere. Having explained, in the passage already quoted, how the sciences assume the nature of those things from which their demonstrations derive, Aristotle immediately proceeds to the following observation:

It is obvious, therefore, that such an induction [*epagōgē*] yields no demonstration of substance or of the essence, but some other way of exhibiting it. And similarly the sciences omit the question whether the genus with which they deal exists or does not exist, because it belongs to the same kind of thinking [*dianoias*] to show what it is and that it is. (Metaphysics VI.1 1025b14-18, Ross translation)

The first sentence states only that science cannot demonstrate its own starting-points, but that they must be arrived at in some other manner, a claim derived entirely from the account just given of dianoetic *epistēmē*, as is indicated by its opening words, "It is obvious, therefore" (*dioper phaneron*). The second sentence points out that not only does science take the 'what-is' as given, but it must also take the

¹⁴² Metaphysics 1026a10-32.

same stance with regard to the 'if-it-is' (*ei estin*), the reason being that these two questions -- the first of which has already been shown to be beyond the reach of demonstrative science -- belong to the same *dianoia*. Thus interpreted, these lines imply that there is no demonstration of the first principles, but that these must be 'discovered' by some other type of thinking, one which must be pre-demonstrative (if its products are to serve as a basis for demonstration). And the type of thinking alluded to, or shown to be necessary, would seem to be intuitive reason, or *nous* in its technical sense, as outlined in Nicomachean Ethics VI.6 and Posterior Analytics II.19. If this were so, however, then *nous* would be a species of *dianoia*, according to the phrasing at 1025b18 -- "the same kind of thinking [*dianoias*]". If even here, in the heart of the context in which, according to Owens, *dianoia* is distinguished from *nous* as a different (and 'lower') species of knowing, Aristotle is treating *nous* as a type of *dianoia*, then Owens' reading is crippled. It is not surprising then that he does not interpret the passage in this way. Regarding the first sentence, lines b14-16, he says:

The particular sciences establish in some other manner the Entity [i.e. *ousia*] with which they deal. They do not demonstrate it. This difference in procedure is meant to distinguish the science of Being *qua* Being from the other sciences. A science that demonstrates Entity in regard to the things treated by the other sciences, seems clearly

indicated.¹⁴³

I am uncertain as to how the statement that the sciences cannot demonstrate their first principles, and that these must be arrived at in another way, is a 'clear indication' of the existence of a science that demonstrates substance. It becomes certain, however, what Owens gains by this interpretation, when we turn to his reading of our passage's second sentence, lines b16-18:

The same type of intellection [i.e. of *dianoia*] treats the 'what-it-is' and the 'if-it-is'. The science of Entity, which demonstrates the 'what-is' in regard to the things dealt with by the other sciences, must also treat the 'if' question in regard to them. The manner of showing the 'if-it-is' should, in the context, mean demonstration.¹⁴⁴

That the existence of the principles of the sciences is demonstrated by the metaphysician, then, is inferred from (1) Aristotle's claim that the 'if' question involves the same *dianoia* as the 'what-is' question, and (2) "the context", by which Owens obviously means his interpretation of the preceding sentence, according to which a science that demonstrates substance is "clearly indicated". If Owens is correct, then the *dianoias* at line 18 refers to a type of demonstrative reasoning, and this passage is not one of the exceptions to his claim that *nous* is differentiated from

¹⁴³ Owens, DOB, p. 288.

¹⁴⁴ ibid., p. 288.

dianoia on the grounds that it alone apprehends simple things. Owens' implied premise (1), above, is unassailable. Premise (2) is entirely dependent on our accepting that Aristotle has hinted, in this opening argument of VI.1, at the existence of a demonstrative science of first principles. As I have said, lines b14-16, on which Owens is directly commenting when he observes an indication of a science demonstrating the 'what-is', state only that the sciences demonstrate neither the *ousia* nor the *ti esti* -- a claim which, taken alone, is at best silent on the question of whether there is a demonstration of the 'what-is'. Indeed, these lines make no allusion to the 'science of Being' at all. A few lines earlier, however, Aristotle had implicitly differentiated the sciences from what he will subsequently call first philosophy. This is where, as we have seen, he stated that all dianoetic *epistēmē* deals with some particular being or some class of beings (*genos ti*), but "not with being unqualified, nor *qua* Being, nor do they give any account of the essence." [Metaphysics VI.1 1025b9-12] Here, three things are explicitly said not to be a part of any dianoetic knowledge: (a) such sciences, since they deal with one or another type of being, necessarily do not deal with all being ("with being unqualified"), (b) since they do not deal with all being (or with any being, without differentiation), they obviously do not address their special beings *qua* being (i.e. if these special sciences dealt with the existence as such of their

subjects, then their findings would be applicable to all types of being, and they would no longer be special sciences), and (c) they can say nothing about the 'what-is' from which they begin their demonstrations, beyond merely assuming it -- that is, they have it, and derive things from it, but they do not examine it, because it is indemonstrable, whereas these sciences simply are examples of demonstrative reasoning (or, as Owens would have it, the essence is indemonstrable by the particular sciences themselves, though not absolutely).

It is apparent that points (a) and (b) are intimately related, while (c), as the wording of the sentence would suggest, stands as quite a distinct observation. What do these three claims tell us about the science of being *qua* being? The first two make only the straightforward claim that the 'particular sciences' do not study their respective types of beings in so far as these are beings, but, as is implied, only in so far as they have essential properties. As an explanation of this, and indeed as an alternative way of expressing it, Aristotle goes on to describe these sciences as being demonstrative in character, that is, as having as their purpose and limit the demonstration of "essential attributes" (*ta kath' hauta hūparchonta*). Surely there is nothing here to contribute to the formation of the view that there is a

demonstrative science of being *qua* being.¹⁴⁵

And what about point (c), namely that the sciences do not "give any account of the essence"? Reale treats it as part and parcel of the thought expressed in (a) and (b), such that the entire passage addresses one issue -- the fact that the particular sciences do not treat of being *qua* being.¹⁴⁶ In order to read (c) in this way, we must understand *tou ti estin*, at line 1025b10-11, as a reference to 'essence' *per se*, rather than to a specific case of an essence. By this I mean that if (c) is another reference to the science of being *qua* being, then it must admit of being paraphrased as follows: the particular sciences do not study (i.e draw logical conclusions about) being or substance in the sense of the 'what-is' or essence; that is, they do not study 'what-isness' as such, or 'what-is being' *qua* being.

Is this what Aristotle is saying, in the statement

¹⁴⁵ I shall not, in this context, enter deeply into the question of what Aristotle means by a "science" of being *qua* being, if not a type of demonstration. Evans suggests that in Metaphysics IV.2, Aristotle implicitly rejects "the idea that it is a condition of any activity's being scientific that it conform to the model of demonstration...." (Aristotle's Concept of Dialectic, p. 16) As we have seen in our examination of De Anima, and will have occasion to observe again shortly, *epistēmē* is used in what can, at times, be an almost bewildering variety of ways -- which is why I routinely hesitate to use the standard translation, "science": its use, while suited to the narrow, strict sense of the word, necessarily predetermines, or artificially limits, one's interpretation of any discussion in which it appears.

¹⁴⁶ Reale, G., The Concept of First Philosophy and the Unity of the Metaphysics of Aristotle (J.R. Catan, tr.), p. 166.

that I have labelled point (c)? Recall, again, the preceding lines: "...all these sciences single out some existent thing or class, and concern themselves with that...." It is here that he offers points (a) and (b), which serve only to distinguish these sciences explicitly from a science which does not "single out" any particular type of being, but is applicable to all being. The contrast is clear and basic. He follows it by claiming that these sciences do not "give any account of", i.e. say anything about, the essence. Certainly, given that this claim too is meant to describe the sciences under discussion, the essence to which Aristotle refers is that of the "existent thing or class" which is singled out by each science -- an assumption verified by the fact that the very next words are "but starting from it [i.e. from the essence in question]... they demonstrate...." So the claim, though general in form (since Aristotle is describing no science in particular, but rather the particular sciences in general), is not referring to 'what-ness', to essence in so far as it is a way of defining substance -- which would be a part of the science of being *qua* being, as, perhaps, at Metaphysics VII.4-6 -- but to the particular essence the identity and existence of which are assumed by any given demonstrative science. Again, this entire argument must be understood against the backdrop of Plato's Divided Line. And point (c), using a phrase identical to Plato's (*oudena logon*) expresses the Platonic contention that the kind of thinking

which Plato calls *dianoia*, and Aristotle calls *epistēmē dianoētikē*, can give no account, according to the nature of its own method (demonstration), of the principles it must assume.¹⁴⁷

At lines b10-12, then, two observations are made concerning the particular sciences: (1) they differ in their subject matter from the science of being *qua* being, and (2) they cannot give an account of, or discover (which in this case means demonstrate) their own principles. Owens' case for an implied demonstrative science of substance turns, as we have seen, on Aristotle's claim that the 'if-it-is' question belongs to the same *dianoia* as the 'what-is' question, in conjunction with "the context" in which that claim occurs. This latter premise, in turn, was seen to depend on our ability to find, at lines b10-12, some support for, or indication of, the notion that first philosophy demonstrates substance. But observation (1), above, states only that the particular sciences treat of a different subject matter than does first philosophy -- a statement that suggests a demonstrative science of substance only if we are already inclined to believe that first philosophy is such a science.

¹⁴⁷ cf. Deslauriers, "Aristotle's Four Types of Definition," in *Apeiron* 23. She argues that:

When Aristotle says that we must accept that there are units and what units are before beginning to produce theorems of mathematics, he does not mean that we could not say anything to someone who did not know what a unit is; but only that we could not demonstrate what a unit is to that person. (p. 14)

Observation (2), strictly speaking, does not deal with first philosophy at all; instead, it alludes to the existence of a non-demonstrative faculty of understanding first principles, as is clear both from the similarity to Plato's Line, wherein that faculty is *nous*, operating by means of dialectic, as opposed to demonstration, and from those parallel accounts of the demonstrative sciences in Aristotle's own writings, wherein once again the faculty in question is *nous*, which, though differently understood, is nevertheless an expressly non-demonstrative (i.e. non-scientific, in the normal Aristotelian sense of science) means of knowing the principles.¹⁴⁸

Indeed, the context thus provided by observation (2) might serve to make Owens' position less plausible, not more so. For it is clear that lines b11-17 are an exposition that is introduced by, and is intended to explain, the claim that the sciences give no account of the what-is. So, if this claim is not directly related to the issue of a science of being *qua* being, then its subsequent explanation need not have any bearing on that issue either. Hence, when Aristotle concludes his account of the particular sciences -- the account which began with the observation that these sciences

¹⁴⁸ For a good general discussion of the problems with the notion of a demonstration of substance in Aristotle, and of the historical significance of such an interpretation, see Rosen, S., The Question of Being, particularly Chapter 1, "Platonism is Aristotelianism".

give no account of the what-is, but merely 'start from it' -- by stating that "such an induction yields no demonstration of substance or of the essence", i.e. these cannot be discovered by the demonstrative sciences, this conclusion should be understood as a 'clear indication' not of a higher form of demonstration, but of a higher form of thinking than demonstration. Therefore, when Aristotle immediately proposes to encompass the 'if-it-is' question within the "same kind of thinking" (*tēs autēs dianoias*) as the 'what-it-is' question, he seems not to imply a science that demonstrates essences, but a prescientific means of lighting upon them. And this means can properly be described as a type of *dianoia*. If, then, the means in question is *nous*, then this would constitute an exception to Owens' general rule that *nous* and *dianoia* are distinguished as the knowledge of simple and composite things, respectively.¹⁴⁹

Let us, however, grant for the moment that this Metaphysics VI.1 passage ought to be understood as Owens interprets it. Presumably the best place to look for a clear example of Aristotle's preferred use of the terms in question would be one in which those terms are themselves the subject of discussion. Happily, although *dianoia* is nowhere given an

¹⁴⁹ In a footnote to his discussion of this passage, Owens briefly cites the views of various scholars, including Ross, who takes the *dianoia* in question to be "immediate apprehension, not demonstration" -- a reading that elicits no direct response from Owens. (DOE, pp. 293-294n33)

explicit technical meaning, we do have two particularly noteworthy accounts of the strict, technical meaning of *nous*. It would be strange indeed if Aristotle, having chosen to stipulate distinct and complementary meanings for two words, should neglect to abide by his chosen meanings in precisely that context in which he is attempting to clarify the meanings themselves.

We may turn to Posterior Analytics II.19, wherein Aristotle, having explained in detail the methods of demonstrative science, or *epistēmē*, concludes with a brief, image-filled account of the manner whereby the first principles of demonstration are apprehended. The details of this account may be left to one side for the time being, although they will have relevance for us at a later stage of our investigation. At this point we can proceed directly to the final stage of the explanation, where the faculty which apprehends these principles is isolated:

Now of the intellectual [*dianoian*] faculties that we use in the pursuit of truth some (e.g. scientific knowledge and intuition [*nous*]) are always true, whereas others (e.g. opinion and calculation) admit falsity; and no other kind of knowledge except intuition is more accurate than scientific knowledge. (Posterior Analytics II.19 100b5-9, Tredennick translation)

To begin with the most obvious observation, we must note that here again *dianoia* is given a general meaning, under which fall various species of thinking, one of which is *nous* in its strict or narrow sense, i.e. the 'virtue' of

apprehending the first principles of demonstration. If by the *nous* that thinks non-composites Owens means something other than this *nous*, then he must show that Aristotle distinguishes the two relevant senses, or at least clarify his distinction concerning Aristotle's use of the two terms by stating explicitly that he is not suggesting that all *nous* is distinct from *dianoia*, but only that some *nous* falls beyond *dianoia*'s limits.

There could be a sense in which Owens' distinction has some merit, though from the expressly general nature of his claim (the instances in which it does not apply being "exceptions"), it is apparent that it is not in this sense that he means it. That is, it is possible, though Aristotle never addresses the point directly, that the *nous* that is a god (i.e. an unmoved mover) is beyond *dianoia*. In this case, *dianoia* -- including *nous* in both its broad and technical senses (as the faculty of thought and the faculty which apprehends the starting-points of *epistēmē*, respectively) -- would be human thinking in general, and *nous* in this special sense, what we may call the Metaphysics XII.9 sense, would be non-dianoetic thinking. This distinction within *nous* would have interesting implications for our examination of the relationship between the divine and human minds.

There is one other aspect of this account from Posterior Analytics that we should address before turning our attention fully to Book VI of Nicomachean Ethics, since this

pertains to the issue of Aristotle's use of Platonic language. In the passage cited, *epistēmē* is distinguished from *doxa* (opinion) on the grounds that the former, like *nous*, is always true, while the latter admits of falsity. If *epistēmē* involves discursive thought (i.e. is dianoetic, in the sense that Owens wishes to ascribe to Aristotle), and such thought involves the possibility of falsity -- as opposed to *nous*, which admits only of non-contact -- one might wonder how Aristotle can here align *epistēmē* with *nous* on the grounds of its not admitting falsity. At a theoretical level, the answer is that (scientific) *epistēmē* is, as it were by definition, the result of correct demonstrative reasoning, so that it cannot be anything but true, but that this is not to say that one cannot 'reason' falsely about those things which are the proper objects of such knowledge. Having explained at Posterior Analytics I.2 that demonstrative knowledge requires "premisses which are true, primary, immediate, better known than, prior to, and causative of the conclusion,"¹⁵⁰ Aristotle notes that:

Syllogism indeed will be possible without these conditions, but not demonstration; for the result will not be knowledge. (Posterior Analytics 71b24-25)

This is consistent with a remark he makes at Metaphysics IX.10, when describing the realm of composite

¹⁵⁰ Aristotle, Posterior Analytics (H. Tredennick, tr.), I.2 71b21-23.

things, in which truth and falsity are possible:

Therefore as regards the class of things which admit of both contrary states, the same opinion or the same statement [*logos*] comes to be false and true, and it is possible at one time to be right and at another wrong; but as regards things which cannot be otherwise the same opinion is not sometimes true and sometimes false, but the same opinions are always true or always false. (Metaphysics IX.10 1051b13-17)

There is falsehood in *dianoia* regarding scientifically knowable things, but only by non-demonstrative means. Demonstration yields only truth about these things, which is to say that it yields *epistēmē* in the strict sense outlined at Nicomachean Ethics VI.3. Truth in these cases is achievable by non-demonstrative means, but this will only be an opinion of the sort which happens to be "always true"; or as Aristotle says, "he will only possess the knowledge in question accidentally." (Nicomachean Ethics VI.3 1039b35) 'To possess knowledge accidentally' is a rather loose way of speaking of the mental state described more accurately in the Metaphysics IX.10 passage as true opinion -- true opinion, that is, regarding those things which "cannot be otherwise" (*ta adūnata allōs echein*), or in the words of Ethics VI.3, "do not admit of being otherwise" (*mē endechesthai allōs echein*). (1139b21)

Scientific knowledge then, is -- to use a redundancy for the sake of clarity -- demonstrated truth about necessary things. As such, it is always true, although there can also be falsehood about these things. This is the theoretical

explanation as to how Aristotle can speak of *epistēmē* as not admitting falsity. There is, however, a terminological corollary to this account. At Nicomachean Ethics VI.3, all of what we have just explained is summarized as follows:

... a man knows a thing scientifically when he possesses a conviction arrived at in a certain way, and when the first principles on which that conviction rests are known to him with certainty.... (1139b33-34)

The phrase "when he possesses a conviction arrived at in a certain way" is *hotan pōs pisteuē*. That is, *epistēmē* is a special kind of *pistis*.¹⁵¹ And *pistis*, as we know, is Plato's chosen word for designating our apprehension of the highest level of the lower portion (the visible realm) on the Divided Line.¹⁵² There is great precision in Aristotle's use of the Platonic term in this context, as it allows him to express, in the briefest possible way, the fundamental difference between his *epistēmē* and Plato's *dianoia*.

For Plato, demonstrative science (*dianoia*) is distinguished, by which I mean 'made superior', primarily by the nature of the objects that it studies. Deductive reasoning, though it is said to yield something worthy of the name 'knowledge', is not itself given pride of place in the

¹⁵¹ At De Anima III.3, opinion is distinguished from imagination on the grounds that "opinion implies belief [*pistis*] (for one cannot hold opinions in which one does not believe [*pisteuein*]); and no animal has belief, but many have imagination. (428a20-23, Hett translation)

¹⁵² Republic VI 511e.

Line analogy; in fact, the emphasis is on the inadequacies of this method in comparison with dialectic.¹⁵³ Indeed, Bloom goes so far as to see in the account of *dianoia* a warning against the temptation felt by those who

escape to a world of universality and are charmed by the competence of their reason to order and explain that world.... They tend to forget the questionableness of their own beginnings or principles and the natural heterogeneity of the different kinds of things; they are forgetful of qualitative differences and, hence, of the *ideas*.¹⁵⁴

Stated so starkly, these observations may seem difficult to square with Plato's position on the importance of mathematical education. And yet, in reading Plato's depiction of the intelligible portion of the Line, it is impossible not to see some truth in Bloom's interpretation, and specifically in his view that the mathematical sciences are a temptation away from *nous* and dialectic, i.e. away from the Ideas. The objects concerning which we reason dianoetically, however, are separate and immaterial, and herein lies the difference between *dianoia* and Aristotle's *epistēmē*: *dianoia*, in the sense of demonstrative reasoning, could never comfortably be described by Plato as *pistis* "arrived at in a certain way".¹⁵⁵ *Pistis* strictly speaking pertains to the thought of

¹⁵³ See Republic 510a, 511a-b.

¹⁵⁴ Bloom, A., The Republic of Plato, pp. 405-406.

¹⁵⁵ Indeed, it is more or less this view that is debated, and finally rejected, in the Theaetetus. (Theaetetus 201c-210a) Randall notes this resemblance, and opines that

visible, i.e. changeable, things, or more precisely, of things which are inseparable from matter. No method, however scientific, can emancipate materially-bound objects from that condition. Hence, there can be, at best, only pseudo-science about such things -- reasoning which appears to obey rules of consistency and universality, but can, as we might say, give no more than probability, likely opinion, and never knowledge. For this reason, I believe that Dorter is correct when he suggests that even physics and its related studies would, if Plato had had to address them in this context, be located below the intelligible realm, at the level of *pistis*.¹⁵⁶

As further evidence that the method of science does not, in itself, impress Plato, consider the discussion of dialectic in Book VII, during which Socrates explicitly rescinds his original position regarding *dianoia*, suggesting that although it is higher than *doxa*, it is actually beneath *epistēmē*. (Republic 533d-e) *Epistēmē*, as we have noted, is, in Book VI, Socrates' general term for knowledge of either the dianoetic or noetic sort. In Book VII, he says concerning the 'knowledge' of the mathematicians:

"Out of habit we called [the mathematical arts] kinds of *episteme* several times, but

Aristotle's account of demonstrative syllogism is intended precisely to solve the problems in which the discussion in the Theaetetus "had bogged down". (Randall, J.H., Aristotle, p. 34]

¹⁵⁶ Dorter, K., Plato's Phaedo: an Interpretation, pp. 90-91.

they require another name, one that is brighter than *doxa* but dimmer than *episteme*. *Dianoia* was, I believe, the word by which we previously distinguished it. But, in my opinion, there is no place for dispute about a name when a consideration is about things so great as those lying before us."

"No, there isn't," he said.

"Then it will be acceptable," I said, "just as before, to call the first part *epistēmē*, the second *dianoia*, the third *pistis*, and the fourth *eikasia*...." (Republic 533d-534a, following Bloom but substituting the Greek words for Bloom's English equivalents)

To Socrates' 'What's in a name?' comment, and Glaucon's agreement that the terms do not matter, Shorey comments that "[t]his unwillingness to dispute about names when they do not concern the argument is characteristic of Plato."¹⁵⁷ In other words, he takes Socrates' words at face value, in spite of the fact that Socrates immediately recites the four mental states of the Divided Line incorrectly, while claiming to be naming them "just as before". Obviously, Plato himself has not forgotten the terminology of the Line; so Socrates' slip is an authorial device. It is reasonable, then, to assume that Socrates' admonition against putting much stock in terminology is meant to put Glaucon off his guard in some way, so that Socrates can effect a subtle change in the ideas under re-examination.

Without concerning ourselves with the complexities of Plato's dramatic style, we must remark that by replacing *nous* or *noēsis* with *epistēmē*, Socrates removes the generality from

¹⁵⁷ Plato, Republic II (Shorey, tr.), p.205, note d.

the latter term, such that it is now a synonym for *noēsis*. To put this another way, *epistēmē*, strictly speaking, is dialectical in origin, and not demonstrative, whereas demonstration, the method of *dianoia*, does not yield knowledge at all. The reason why *dianoia* turns out to be entirely beneath knowledge is that although its subject matter is "being" (*ontos*),¹⁵⁸ it does not really know its assumptions because it can give no account (*logos*) of them.¹⁵⁹ Thus, the limitations of *dianoia*, which were originally expressed in the Line passage, are now seen to disqualify *dianoia*'s claims to the status of knowledge proper. It is only above *pistis*, and hence above opinion in general, on account of the immateriality, and therefore the separate existence, of its subject matter. And this is why only the mathematical sciences seem to qualify as dianoetic in character. If these did not study separable beings, then regardless of method, they would not, apparently, rise above the level of opinion at all. And *dianoia*, as a category of thinking distinct from all others, and beneath only *noēsis*, would not exist. The term, in other words, would apply equally well to the level of *pistis*, since the demonstrative method itself does not distinguish it.

Aristotle, however, denies the true separability of

¹⁵⁸ Republic 533b.

¹⁵⁹ Republic 533a.

mathematical objects.¹⁶⁰ And he accepts, as it were, the consequences of this denial for the Platonic term *dianoia*. *Pistis*, and indeed opinion in general, become a part of *dianoia*. And yet he wishes to salvage the notion of demonstrative science as a kind of knowledge. He cannot do so, as Plato had originally suggested, on the basis of separability; instead, he attempts to do it on the basis of the demonstrative method itself, which is why he can and must describe this knowledge as *pistis* "arrived at in a certain way". The "way" itself makes *pistis* into *epistēmē* -- the way, that is, in conjunction with the first principles of the instantiations of this way being "known... with certainty".

Plato rejects demonstration as a true means to *epistēmē* because the scientist does not know the principles of demonstration. This is noteworthy, in that it leaves the impression that the thinking which does 'give an account' of first principles does not do so in a way which can then be used as the starting-point of a demonstrative science. Such sciences are strictly preparatory for the dialectical inquiry into the first principles, or substances. There is no coming back to dianoetic science -- or not, at least, with known principles of demonstration in hand. The reason, perhaps, is that such principles would have to be Ideas, i.e. separate substances, and are not, therefore, amenable to the

¹⁶⁰ See, for example, *De Anima* III.7 431b16-17.

demonstrative analysis that we actually see in the sciences. For example, if, as might have been believed by some in the Academy, the essence or form of a line is the number two, then this might give us a profound understanding of one of the assumed principles of geometry; but when it comes time to offer geometrical proofs, it is not '2', but the line which can be drawn that is required. As Plato suggests in the Line passage, the hypothesis (in the sense of an assumed being) of *dianoia* is merely a stepping-stone in dialectic,¹⁶¹ a stepping-stone toward an object of the only sort that can, strictly speaking, be known (i.e. be an object of *epistēmē* proper). This may be why Plato, in Book VII, suggests that a science which has as its principles unchanging beings -- that is, things which are not essentially sensible in nature (as he views mathematical objects) -- can still fall short of knowledge. The triangle of the geometers, the one that they "treat as known",¹⁶² i.e. take for granted as understood by everyone, is the one that can be instantiated, drawn in the sand. If this is the 'Idea' of the triangle, then what it is is immediately apparent, and no further account is possible or necessary. If on the other hand there is an Idea of Triangle which stands above this one, and which resides in the highest portion of the Divided Line, then it is known by means of a

¹⁶¹ Republic 511b.

¹⁶² Republic 510c.

dialectical process that uses the first triangle as its initial hypothesis. In either case, nothing of which a rational 'account' has been given is serving as the principle of a science, and hence geometry, though dealing with non-sensible being, does not constitute knowledge in the fullest sense. And yet, as its proper object of study is a non-sensible assumed being, its conclusions have a status higher than *pistis* (higher, for example, than physics, which is founded on assumed sensible beings).

Perhaps this entire issue can best be stated by invoking a powerful image that Plato develops through Books VI and VII. In the Line passage, the "images", *eikonas*, at the lowest level of the Line are described as "shadows", "reflections", and so on. [510a] In his altered rendition of the Line in VII, *dianoia*, having already been demoted to its sub-epistemic status and called a "dream" of being (533b), is said to be analogous to *eikasía*. *Eikasía* gives reflections of the objects of *pistis*, i.e. mirror images, according to all of his examples. *Dianoia*, then, is similarly the mirror image -- the reverse -- of *noēsis* (or *epistēmē* proper). This is expressed in Plato's emphasis on the directional aspect of the two types of thinking: while *nous* leads up to a first principle, *dianoia* leads down to conclusions. (510b) They 'meet' at the level of hypotheses, just as, when one stands in the evening sun, one's shadow begins where one's foot touches the ground, and branches out in the 'wrong' direction.

When Aristotle criticizes the Platonic Ideas as lacking causative power, it is clear that part of what he means is that they do not form the basis for any demonstrative science. They are not true principles. As we have seen, it is likely that Plato would have little objection to this, so that Aristotle's critique should be seen not so much as an assault on the specifics of the 'theory of Forms', as a disapproval of that theory's intentions or implications. He says, for example, that the Ideas "are no help towards the knowledge [*epistēmē*] of other things (for they are not the substance of things, otherwise they would be in things)...." (Metaphysics I.9 991a12-13) This is, in effect, Plato's own observation about the relation between the Ideas and the sciences, as we have seen. It is part of his denigration of all non-dialectical 'knowledge'. Aristotle, turning the tables on the Platonists, reverses Plato's terminological sleight of hand from Republic VII, when he designates precisely demonstrative knowledge as *epistēmē* in the strict sense.¹⁶³

¹⁶³ In the Philebus (R. Hackforth, tr., in Hamilton, E./Cairns, H., The Collected Dialogues of Plato), interestingly, Plato seems at times to use *epistēmē* in a manner similar to Aristotle's technical sense, and to Plato's own technical sense of *dianoia*, such as at 66b, where Socrates explicitly ranks it below *nous* (and *phronēsis*). Rather than regarding this as a contradiction of the usage established in the Republic, however, we should view the similarity to Aristotle as an accidental feature of the looseness with which *epistēmē* is used in that dialogue. After all, *epistēmē* is also used in the Philebus to refer to the knowledge of "justice" and "all else that is" in themselves, i.e. to the noetic knowledge of the Ideas (62a), and a person who knows these things is said to be existing in "divine knowledge" (*en*

This leads us to Nicomachean Ethics VI, in which Aristotle offers his most complete and precise distinctions among the various types or excellences of human thought. Here he announces the subject of inquiry as being the "intellectual virtues", the virtues of *dianoia*. (Nicomachean Ethics VI.1 1138b35-1139a1)

In the first two chapters of Book VI, *dianoia* and its derivative terms occur throughout the discussion; indeed, I count ten occurrences in the brief passage from 1139a1 (roughly the middle of Chapter 1, where the intellectual virtues are introduced into the discussion) to 1139b6. In dividing the mind's concerns into the practical and the theoretical, the terms used are *dianoia praktikē* and *theōrētikē dianoia*. (1139a27-28) Towards the end of Chapter

tais theiais epistēmais) at 62b. In other words, the term is used to designate everything from noetic intuition to the ability to count two cows. (56d) Further, the mathematical sciences are described, interchangeably, as cases of *technē* and *epistēmē*. (56c-57e) And *dianoia*, for its part, is left out of the discussion altogether. Plato is not, in this dialogue, elevating physics to the Aristotelian level, or lowering *dianoia*, to say the same thing another way. His more general way of using the terminology of thought, and in particular *epistēmē*, is related to the conciliatory stance that Socrates takes throughout the dialogue, as he argues against the superiority of the life of pleasure. The concern is not -- as in the Republic -- the precise depiction of the philosophic life and its goals, but merely the establishment of the superiority of the life of the mind in the broadest sense, as opposed to the life of 'mindless' gratification. And with Protarchus, who can only laugh at the very notion of the pure contemplative life (62b), this requires that Socrates compromise on the life of the mind, winning his point that the "divine knowledge" is best only by 'throwing in' every other kind of 'knowledge' as its adjuncts. (62b-d)

2, choice is said to be definable alternatively (i.e. without any difference in meaning) as *orektikos nous* or as *orexis dianoētikē*. And this latter observation, curiously, is the last time that the word *dianoia*, or any word derived from it, appears in Book VI -- although the remaining eleven chapters of this book deal exclusively with the virtues which, up to this point in the *Ethics*, have consistently been called dianoetic¹⁶⁴ -- with one peculiar exception.

At VI.9, Aristotle attempts to define deliberative excellence (*euboulia*) by a method used throughout Book VI, namely process of elimination. Having established that this virtue must be some sort of correctness -- since a bad deliberator is one who "makes mistakes" (1142b8) -- he wishes to establish what sort of correctness it is. It cannot, he says, be correctness of *epistēmē*, essentially because such a notion is redundant. (1142b10-11) And then, ruling out the possibility that it is correctness of opinion, he explains that "any matter about which one has an opinion has been settled already," (1142b11-12) followed by this:

But again deliberative excellence is not without *logos*. Therefore it remains that it is (correctness) of *dianoia*; for this is not yet assertion [*phasis*]. (1142b12-14, my own translation)

The point of the argument, as Aristotle goes on to explain, is that opinion is a kind of assertion, *phasis tis*

¹⁶⁴ See I.13 1103a5-6, where *sophia* and *phronēsis* are given as examples of dianoetic virtues.

(1142b14), and hence it is past the stage of investigation, whereas a deliberator is investigating something, and therefore good deliberation cannot be correctness of opinion. But the passage quoted above has been a source of some controversy. Rackham, in a footnote to his Loeb translation, suggests that it was inserted by someone else, partly on the grounds that, in his view, these lines "interrupt the argument", and partly due to what he regards as an un-Aristotelian use of *dianoia*.¹⁶⁵ As early as 1853, R.W. Browne alerts us to the existence of a long-standing debate concerning the lines. He translates the second sentence interpretively:

It remains, therefore, that it is the correctness of the intellect, moving onwards in the investigation of truth, i.e. *dianoia*, for it is not yet an assertion....¹⁶⁶

In a footnote, he says of this rendition: "Such I take to be the meaning of this difficult passage, which has been so misunderstood by the majority of commentators."¹⁶⁷

The passage is indeed difficult, largely because, on any reading, it seems to be a perfunctory statement of the very argument in the centre of which it appears. This would perhaps lend credence to Rackham's view, as the lines, in this

¹⁶⁵ Rackham in Nicomachean Ethics (Rackham tr.), p.354, note b.

¹⁶⁶ The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle (R.W. Browne, tr.).

¹⁶⁷ ibid. p. 166.

context, have the appearance of a later insertion designed to amplify or clarify an already-existing argument. And since the argument seems quite complete and clear without the questionable lines, one could almost imagine that they began their life as someone's margin note, intended to abbreviate Aristotle's account. However, as I feel an innate reticence on the matter of textual emendation, I believe that we should, as long as possible, assume that mysterious passages such as this one can be accounted for without such drastic measures. After all, as we have seen, it is exactly a hastiness in assuming the contrary that led Ross to excise some very important lines from De Anima III.5.

The issue at stake here, for our purposes, is what is meant by saying that deliberative excellence is correctness of *dianoia* because "this [*hautē*] is not yet assertion." If this means that *dianoia* is a kind of knowing that is beneath the *phasis* which, at Metaphysics IX.10, is the knowledge of simple things, then this passage supports Owens' view of how *nous* and *dianoia* are related. But the correctness of *dianoia* spoken of here is implicitly denied the status of truth. (1142b11) Clearly, then, the correctness in question is not the truth in *dianoia* that is opposed to "contact" or "assertion". Indeed, at Metaphysics IX.10, the truth that is in *dianoia* includes opinion, whereas in this Ethics passage the 'correctness of *dianoia*' is being contrasted with opinion, on the grounds that opinion is "a sort of assertion". Here, then, we have a

looser and non-technical use of "assertion". And this is consistent with an argument from earlier in Nicomachean Ethics Book VI:

What affirmation and negation [*kataphasis kai apophasis*] are in thinking [*dianoia*], pursuit and avoidance are in desire; so that since moral virtue is a state of character concerned with choice, and choice is deliberate desire, therefore both the reasoning [*ton logon*] must be true and the desire right, if the choice is to be good, and the latter must pursue just what the former asserts [*phanai*]. (1139a21-26, Ross translation)

In this argument, affirmation, *kataphasis*, is used virtually interchangeably with assertion, *phasis*, whereas in Metaphysics IX.10, having depicted the knowledge of non-composites as assertion, Aristotle states, by way of elucidation, that "assertion is not the same as affirmation." (Metaphysics 1051b24-25) So, if the "assertion" in these Nicomachean Ethics accounts is the "affirmation" which is distinguished from "assertion" proper at Metaphysics IX.10, then this so-called "assertion" (i.e. "affirmation" proper) is said to be in dianoia at Metaphysics VI.4. Therefore if it is *dianoia* that, at Nicomachean Ethics VI.9, is said to be "not yet assertion", and if the assertion in question is opinion, then this claim might indeed seem to contradict not only the Metaphysics accounts of dianoetic activity, but even that of Ethics VI.2, where *dianoia* is said to have the functions both of affirming and asserting.

If we are to make sense of this strange passage, then,

without recourse to the risky path of textual alteration, we must explain how this *dianoia* is not yet affirmation, while preserving those accounts of *dianoia* which unequivocally do involve affirmation -- as well as assertion in the technical sense of *nous*, on my reading of the relevant texts.

And I believe that the very old Browne translation, though misleading, gives us a place to start our search. As quoted above, where Aristotle says only that deliberative excellence must be correctness of *dianoia*, Browne inserts the phrase, "moving onwards in the investigation of truth". Combining this reading with what we have learned about *dianoia*, we can say that the point of the sentence is not that *dianoia* is inherently pre-affirmative, but that deliberation, specifically, is a pre-affirmative or pre-assertive type of *dianoia*. Recall the context in which this statement occurs: Aristotle has just shown that deliberative excellence must be a form of correctness, but that it can be correctness neither of *epistēmē* nor of *doxa*. Perhaps, then, it is not a correctness of any rational sort at all -- perhaps it is something akin to a lucky guess, if it is neither knowledge nor opinion, and yet is 'correct'. That the argument seems to be pointing in this direction is, I suggest, the reason for Aristotle's next words: "But [alla] again deliberative excellence is not without reason [*oud' aneu logou*]." That is, while it is neither knowledge nor opinion, we must, in our search for its nature, take account of the fact that it is

nevertheless a rational quality. Hence its form of correctness must still be one of *dianoia*, for it is, after all, still an "intellectual [i.e. dianoetic] virtue". When, at this point, he says "for this is not yet assertion", the "this" in question is not *dianoia per se* -- which would indeed be an unaristotelian usage of the term -- but *hē euboulia*, deliberative excellence itself, *qua* correct use of *dianoia*. This is consistent with two accounts of choice, given earlier in Book VI, which we have already encountered during this discussion. Early in Chapter 2, choice is called "deliberate desire", *orexis bouleutikē*. (1139a23-24) Then later in the same chapter, choice is said to admit of being called either *orektikos nous* or *orexis dianoētikē*. (1139b5-6) The first of these three phrases, *orexis bouleutikē*, clearly means desire in relation to the faculty of deliberation. Presumably, then, *orektikos nous* means intellect in relation to the faculty of desire, and *orexis dianoētikē* means desire in relation to the faculty of thought. The *nous* here is certainly not the strict sense of the word introduced later in Book VI. It is, rather, the intellect in general, the faculty of thought, that which is described in *De Anima* III.4 as that whereby the soul thinks and judges (*dianoētai kai hūpolambanei*), (*De Anima* 429a23-24) i.e. the so-called passive intellect. And *dianoia* is not being used interchangeably with *nous* in this passage, any more than at *De Anima* III.4. It is the functioning of *nous*, i.e. what *nous* does. To put this differently, *nous* in Aristotle is

(ordinarily) thought understood as a faculty or capacity; *dianoia* is thought understood as that collection of mental operations which we describe as rational. *Orexis bouleutikē* and *orexis dianoētikē* are the same thing, namely choice, expressed in more and less specific terms, respectively, because deliberation is a form of *dianoia*. And choice can also be called *orektikos nous* because one of the types of *dianoia* is involved in this desire. *Nous*, in its ordinary sense, is the faculty of dianoetic activity.

Here, at last, we arrive at a point of clarification regarding Aristotle's use, at Metaphysics VI.1, of the phrase *epistēmē dianoētikē* in reference to the demonstrative sciences. On the model of *orexis dianoētikē*, it should mean knowledge in relation to the faculty of thought. As for why Aristotle should need to specify that knowledge involves the faculty of thought, consider by way of comparison the opening words of the Nicomachean Ethics VI.3 account of *epistēmē*:

The nature of scientific knowledge (employing the term in its exact sense and disregarding its analogous uses) may be made clear as follows. (1139b18-20, Rackham translation)

We may be said, for example, to 'know' something by means of perception. But this is not knowing in the "exact sense", because knowing in the exact sense is a rational state or activity of the soul. Another way to say this is that such knowing is dianoetic. The phrase *epistēmē dianoētikē*, then, is intended to draw attention to *epistēmē* proper,

demonstrative knowledge, as opposed to any "analogous uses" of the term in which it designates non-rational 'knowing'. The significance of this point is seen when we compare the phrase to Plato's use of the relevant terms. For Plato, according to the Divided Line, *epistēmē* is a generic term for rational knowledge, and *dianoia* is demonstrative reason (with regard to beings) specifically. Hence dianoetic *epistēmē* is rational because it is *epistēmē*, and demonstrative because it is dianoetic. For Aristotle, on the contrary, in the phrase dianoetic *epistēmē*, it is *dianoia* that is the general term for rational thought, while *epistēmē* signifies demonstrative thought specifically. For Plato, in other words, *epistēmē* is, as it were, the genus, and *dianoia* the differentia; whereas for Aristotle, the roles are reversed.

And Aristotle carries this reversal of Plato's terminology one major step further. Plato's *epistēmē*, of course, extends only to those mental acts which can be called knowing. *Pistis*, as the highest or fullest sense of opinion (of which *eikasia* is merely a reflection), is clearly beneath the entire realm of *epistēmē*. Aristotle encompasses opinion within *dianoia*. The difference in the extension of the terms is not incidental, but is in fact consistent with, and determined by, the disagreement between the two thinkers concerning the nature of demonstrative knowledge. As we have seen, Plato's *dianoia* is superior to *pistis* not primarily because of its demonstrative character, but because of the

separated nature of its objects. Aristotle, denying the true separability from matter of the objects even of mathematical demonstration, views the superiority of the sciences as a function of the demonstrative method itself, which makes the distinction between *pistis* and Plato's *dianoia* (Aristotle's *epistēmē*) much less clearcut. This is why he can go so far as to describe *epistēmē* as simply *pistis* arrived at by means of a particular method.

One direct effect of this is that the non-mathematical sciences, which are relegated by Plato to the status of *pistis*, are now granted the status of knowledge in good standing. But this 'advance' for physics is gained at the price of an important concession to Plato -- one which leaves open the door to 'metaphysics' in the Platonic manner of an inquiry into, or search for, the first principles of all reality. In Republic VII, Plato returns to the Divided Line in order to remove from dianoetic science the mantle of true *epistēmē*, on the grounds that demonstrative reasoning, even regarding separate beings, is incapable of explaining its starting-points, the beings themselves. Aristotle defends the sciences on the basis of his belief that the starting-points can be known in a way that allows for *epistēmē* via demonstration. And the reason that he believes this has already been noted: whereas Plato's *nous* attains ideas or forms which are separate from things (i.e. from the things treated by the sciences) and therefore, in so far as they can

be known, are not causative in the sense required by demonstrative science, Aristotle's 'ideas' are 'in the things'. In other words, Aristotle's ideas are not separate substances, and it is the understanding of these non-separate substances, acquired by *nous*, which grounds the sciences. Alexandre Kojève expresses the general issue thus:

The entire difference between Plato and Aristotle rests on the discovery of de facto biological cycles...: (man begets man [and not dogs]). The cycle of biological species is eternal; hence it is knowable; hence there is no need of the ideas in order to ground knowledge.... Instead of the ideas, there are "forms" of biological cycles....¹⁶⁸

The nature of Aristotle's "forms" remains to be discussed further. At this point, our concern is with the significance of this difference from Plato for the Aristotelian terminology in connection with human thinking. Partly in order to bring the greatest possible clarity to the issue, and partly because, on my account of this issue, Republic VI is ever-present in Aristotle's treatment of the matter, I will lay out the implications of the preceding discussion with the help of an image, namely Plato's Line itself, as modified by Aristotle in the way that we have been explaining.

By denying true separability to the objects analyzed by the sciences, Aristotle breaks down the fundamental

¹⁶⁸ Kojève, A., in a letter to Leo Strauss, in Strauss, On Tyranny (Gourevitch, V./Roth M.S., eds. and trs.), p. 290.

distinction between the two 'halves' of the Divided Line, bringing *epistēmē* across the divide into the sensible realm. This does not, for Aristotle, entail collapsing *epistēmē* into opinion, although this is exactly what it would mean to Plato. Permanence, rather than separate existence, becomes a distinguishing mark of those subjects amenable to knowledge. Hence *dianoia* in Plato's sense moves to the lower half of the Line, if we understand the Line as essentially separating neither knowledge from opinion, nor the intelligible from the sensible, but the separable from the inseparable. (The first two sets of distinctions are also made, of course, but only as following from this third, essential, one.) As the lower half is now comprised of both knowledge (*epistēmē*) and opinion (*doxa*, or more precisely *pistis*), Aristotle needs a general term to encompass both. What is more, by denying the true separability from matter of the forms which are the principles of demonstration (not to mention the other, non-formal principles, such as the law of non-contradiction, derived noetically from instances, as are the forms), he has made demonstrative knowledge possible, but only by relegating *nous* as well to the lower half of the Line. All of these terms -- *nous*, *epistēmē*, *doxa*, etc. -- he subsumes under the general term *dianoia*. Mental activity in accordance with these powers is *dianoieisthai*, as at *De Anima* I.4 408b27, a passage discussed in the early chapters of this dissertation, and which we will have occasion to examine again. All of these

dianoetic capacities have as their proper objects things inseparable from matter.¹⁶⁹

At De Anima III.8, Aristotle, in summing up his account of *nous* as the faculty of dianoetic activity, says the following:

But since apparently nothing has a separate existence, except sensible magnitudes, the objects of thought -- both the so-called abstractions of mathematics and all states and affections of sensible things -- reside in sensible forms. And for this reason as no one could ever learn or understand anything without the exercise of perception, so even when we think speculatively, we must have some mental picture of which to think.... (De Anima 432a3-9)

The suggestion that nothing, "apparently" (*hōs dokei*), is truly separate from matter is obviously noteworthy in that, though representing a view that we assume is not Aristotle's genuine belief, it is offered at the conclusion of his account of theoretical reason. Notice that the very notion of an inquiry into separate substances is left out of the picture, and that the types of thinking mentioned are clearly limited to the demonstrative sciences and the apprehension of their first principles. Speaking within these same limitations, Aristotle had concluded the preceding chapter as follows:

In every case the mind which is actively thinking is the objects which it thinks.

¹⁶⁹ For a good account of Aristotle's relative respect for opinion, and one which in general supports the observations that I am making by means of my comparison with the Divided Line, see Pritzl, "Opinions as Appearances: *Endoxa* in Aristotle", in Ancient Philosophy 14, pp. 41-50.

Whether it is possible for it while not existing separate from spatial conditions to think anything that is separate, or not, we must consider later. (III.7 431b17-19, Smith translation)

Clearly, it is the implication of this statement that, whether or not there are in fact separate beings, the mind (*nous*), at least as it has been addressed in De Anima, is not such a being. Since we are speaking here of the *nous* which attains knowledge, the passive intellect, it must be surmised that, although this *nous*, as we know, is described as separate and unmixed in III.4, its separateness is confined somehow to being immaterial, while it is not unqualifiedly separate from spatial conditions in the sense of being able to function independently of such conditions. That is, the passive intellect is separate, but it needs to stand in some relation to the sensible in order to perform its proper operations. Thus, the question that Aristotle is asking at the conclusion of Chapter 7 is whether the passive intellect, though unable to function independently of its relationship to the body, can nevertheless think of things which are absolutely immaterial. And a direct answer to this question is not forthcoming.

We have seen, however, that De Anima III.5 is a discussion of just such a separate substance. Further, it has been shown, through our analyses of the light analogy in particular, that this substance, at least, is not directly knowable by the passive (or human) intellect. Here at the end of III.7, there is no allusion to the account of the active

intellect, as though the entire issue of III.5 had never been raised. A clue as to why he leaves the active intellect as quickly as he arrived at it may be found in Metaphysics VI.1, where, explaining the scope of physics, he makes these two remarks:

...it will theorize about such beings as admit of being moved, and about substance-as-defined [*ousian tēn kata ton logon*] for the most part only as not separable from matter. (Metaphysics 1025b26-28, Ross translation)

and

...it belongs to the student of nature to study even soul in a certain sense, i.e. so much of it as it not independent of matter [*mē aneu tēs hūlēs*]. (1026a5-6)

The reason that physics is said to study substance only as inseparable "for the most part", rather than absolutely, is that, as Aquinas observes, Aristotle needs to take account of *nous*, "which comes in a sense within the scope of the philosophy of nature, although its substance is separable from matter."¹⁷⁰ But then, in the second quotation, he says that physics studies only so much of soul as is not independent of matter. These two statements may appear contradictory, unless we apply the nuanced understanding of separability that we have learned from De Anima's account of *nous*: Passive *nous*, though separate from matter, is still, so to speak, dependent upon it; only active

¹⁷⁰ Aquinas, Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle, section #1155.

nous is truly independent in the broadest sense. The former falls within the study of the soul *qua* substance of a natural body; the latter does not. *De Anima* addresses the question of a 'maker' intellect because the argument related to the treatise's proper subject matter has inexorably led to this point. It is a kind of outer limit of the inquiry. Aristotle takes us to it, points in its direction, and then moves on with his discussion of the proper concerns of psychology. This accounts for the lack of any explanatory detail, or even of many unmetaphorical unexplained details, in III.5.

There is, however, something about this limit on the physicist's study of the soul which smells of arbitrariness. Why must psychology stop at naming the active intellect? Why not carry the discussion further, and explain how this intellect is productive? Part of the reason may be related to the final question of *De Anima* III.7 -- perhaps we simply cannot say anything substantial about this separate substance. (Interestingly, this reservation does not prevent Aristotle from trying to say something about such substances in *Metaphysics* XII.) I am inclined to think that another part of the reason is that the 'rules' limiting the various types of inquiry are designed precisely to prevent these inquiries from becoming too easily attached to one another.¹⁷¹ We arrive,

¹⁷¹ On this issue, consider this question: If the 'forms' at the beginning of scientific inquiry are themselves 'caused' or 'made' by a truly separate substance, then can we say with certainty that we know these forms -- and thus have

once again, at the issue of circumspection, and of the need to read Aristotle broadly, in the sense of refusing to assume that an enormously important observation left ill-explained betokens an inability to explain, as opposed to an unwillingness to do so -- at least in the given context (i.e. perhaps the answers are to be found elsewhere).

Returning now to our attempt to formulate an Aristotelian Divided Line, let us reiterate that Aristotle's *dianoia* is the operation of *nous*, and encompasses at least all of the types of thinking and knowing outlined in De Anima -- that is, all types 'up to' but not including the knowledge of the separate substances, if such be possible. It seems possible, then, that although it is not discussed in De Anima, the 'science of being *qua* being', as exemplified by the early and middle books of the Metaphysics, should also be included among the dianoetic inquiries, inasmuch as its inquiry is into the 'generalities' of being, i.e. the categories and their interrelations, the actuality/potentiality distinction, the requirements of rational explanation (including the critique of Plato's Ideas), and so on. This would certainly be the case if it were true that these books, confined to these questions, are first philosophy in its entirety, and that Book Lambda is merely an early Platonist writing, representing no view held by the mature Aristotle. If this were so, then the

true demonstrative science -- if it turns out that we cannot know the cause of the forms?

science of being *qua* being would be an account of the general nature of sensible things, and hence no separate substance in the manner of a Platonic Idea would be involved. As a result, by virtue of dealing exclusively with the universal nature of composite substance (including its incomposite formal principles), 'metaphysics' would seem to belong in the lower half of Plato's Line, in the realm of inseparability.

If, on the other hand, it is correct to detect hints of an underlying issue concerning truly separate substances throughout the early and middle books, then the status of first philosophy with respect to the Divided Line becomes less clear. Allow me, once again, to account for this point 'pictorially'. Aristotle has broadened *dianoia* to include all of the intellectual operations on the Line, including the noetic apprehension of the forms of natural beings, and has consigned all of these to Plato's realm of opinion, i.e. the realm of inseparable entities. But this is not the end of the story. As we have seen, Aristotle makes a special point of using *dianoia* in a conspicuously different manner than Plato in precisely those contexts in which matters of intellectual terminology are at hand, as well as in the opening argument of Metaphysics VI.1, which is in all other respects a virtual reproduction of the Republic VI account of *dianoia* itself. Given this fact, as well as our conclusions concerning the development and interpretive relevance of technical language, we must ask what Aristotle has gained by this 'misuse' of

Plato's term, i.e. by his direct switching of the roles between *epistēmē* and *dianoia*. We know, for one thing, that it affords him the rhetorical point of directly contradicting Plato's eventual rejection of the knowledge claims of his dianoetic thought (by calling such thought *epistēmē* in the strict sense). And it allows him to encompass *pistis* (i.e. non-knowledge) within the same broad class of psychical activity as knowledge, such that *epistēmē* can reasonably be termed demonstrative *pistis*, as at Nicomachean Ethics VI.3, thus effectively removing true separability from matter as a criterion of knowability.

So let us 'look again' at Plato's Line. *Dianoia* absorbs into itself the mental operations above and below it, and drops down below the centre line. And the objects corresponding to the 'knowing' half of Plato's version of the Line -- namely the ideas of natural things, and mathematical objects -- are similarly lowered in position. Aristotle gives us knowledge, but only in a humbling manner. But that is not all he does. He also replaces Plato's separate substances with his own, doing so explicitly at Metaphysics XII.8, where, prior to discussing the number of unmoved movers, he criticizes the views of the Platonists on the ground that they do not show convincingly how many separate substances there are, or why this number rather than that. [Metaphysics 1073a14-23] So there are objects in the upper portion of the Line, the separable or supersensible half. And of course the

active intellect is shown to be one of them. But is there a type of human thinking suited to the apprehension of these objects? On the account that Aristotle has offered us so far, human thinking is dianoetic, and *dianoia* is not able to "think anything separate"; or at least not directly. *Dianoia* requires images, and hence fails the basic test of a mode of thought's capacity to think (or 'give an account of') absolutely separate beings, on Plato's view.¹⁷² Indeed Aristotle, by comprehending all human modes of thought -- including noetic intuition -- under the Platonic name *dianoia*, forces us to conceive of human thought as limited in precisely this way. And this, I suggest, is why he uses (or 'misuses') the term in this manner.¹⁷³

A passing observation concerning Plato's own use of his terminology may be helpful here. For what I have said could be taken to mean that whereas for Aristotle human knowledge is possible only with regard to the sensible realm, for Plato -- having finally balked at calling even

¹⁷² Republic VI 511b-c.

¹⁷³ This, incidentally, allows for an interpretation of Aristotle's theory of the types of thinking which vaguely resembles the kind of distinction that Owens identifies (falsely) as being between *nous* and *dianoia*. (Or rather, his view is false at least as long as he identifies the *nous* in question with the faculty of "contact" with simple things from Metaphysics IX.10, as we have seen him do -- unless we further distinguish between the *nous* which 'contacts' ordinary simples, and another which 'contacts' divine simples, clearly not Owens' claim, since he identifies the sense of *nous* he has in mind only as Aristotle's usual sense.)

mathematical reasoning *epistēmē* -- the very opposite is true, since his *nous* is said to have the function of grasping the supersensible. This result may ring false or naive to those who understand Plato to be teaching not that knowledge in the sense of certainty about the Ideas is necessarily humanly achievable, but rather that the existence of these beings gives purpose to human life by revealing the defining human activity, namely philosophy, i.e. the quest for a full understanding of the Ideas. In fact, I am sympathetic to this interpretation of Plato's teaching. And if it is accurate, then Plato may be saying something similar to Aristotle on the subject of the knowability of separate beings. And if this, in turn, is true, then it lends credence to a suspicion I have, but on which I shall not dwell here, namely that much -- though not all -- of Aristotle's dispute with Plato (as distinct from the Academic Platonists) concerns the terminology, the language, of philosophy itself. More precisely, Aristotle takes issue with Plato's way of expressing certain thoughts, with the way these thoughts are made public, rather than with the thoughts themselves. That is, Aristotle, obsessed as he is with consistency and reasonableness -- i.e. with plausibility and common sense -- is unsatisfied with the outward appearance of Plato's depiction of the highest things. As I suggested in the previous chapter, one of the major effects of his light analogy is that it finds a way to depict the first principle

of all things as a being, though unknowable -- and therefore as capable of having causative power relative to other beings -- whereas Plato's sun image, in order to achieve unknowability, describes the Good as beyond being, and yet as a cause of being. What is being debated in this instance is not so much belief, but 'doctrine', i.e. not thought, but expression. Perhaps the same is true with regard to the separate beings in general.

In any case, Aristotle's alteration of Plato's 'epistemological' terminology, combined with the account of knowing *qua* requiring images in De Anima III.8, as well as the light analogy and the remainder of III.5, casts some doubt on our ability to know Aristotle's replacement for the Ideas, the unmoved movers. *Nous* and *epistēmē* are clearly subsumed under the category of *dianoia*, and involve the apprehension of the intelligible 'aspects' of the sensible world. Is it humanly possible, then, to know God? Jaeger takes it for granted that the answer is 'yes', but through mysticism.¹⁷⁴ Aquinas, as we have seen, believes that Aristotle's words say no, but that they apply only to our time on Earth, i.e. that knowing God after death -- but still having such knowledge constitute a personal experience -- is not discounted by anything that Aristotle says.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Jaeger, W., Aristotle, 165-166.

¹⁷⁵ Aquinas, Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard, Question 1, Article 1, reply to Query 4.

From what we have seen, human thought, in its entirety, is *dianoia*. This thought is the content and operation of the human *nous*, the intellect that 'becomes all things', according to *De Anima* III.5. And all *dianoia* is 'produced by' the active intellect, the only separate substance discussed in *De Anima*, a work that is remarkably silent on the subject of the existence, let alone the knowability, of separate substances. The question posed at the conclusion of III.7, then, as to whether such entities can be known by us, is in part the question "Can human thought know its own producer, i.e. the maker of all things (that is, of all things *qua* humanly knowable)? Or can this only be known through its products?" An answer to this may be suggested by Aristotle's defence of the possibility of knowledge with regard to sensible things, and by his lifelong devotion to the study of the minutiae of natural life. These features of his writings, so opposed to the views of his teacher, indicate that he invested the investigation of the products of the active intellect with an importance that might seem unwarranted if we were capable of knowing the higher being, the producer, directly. This emphasis on nature, in conjunction with the view that happiness requires a full lifespan of theoretical activity, gives the impression that Aristotle is offering a kind of consolation for the philosophic life which Plato is not willing to offer, some hope of an achievement to answer the natural human concerns

about a way of life which -- to the non-philosopher -- seems to offer only futility.

Having rejected Plato's attempt to designate a particular mode of human thought as having the apprehension of absolutely incomposite substances as its defining purpose, and having substituted for this ideal of direct knowledge a less exalted, but more 'reasonable' model of indirect apprehension, Aristotle leaves us with a troubling question: How does knowing the products of a divine being constitute knowing that being indirectly 'over a certain period of time', as Metaphysics XII.9 would have it? Another, equally Aristotelian, way of phrasing this question would be: How can the active intellect be described as 'the intelligibility of the passive intellect', analogous to the description of light as "the colour of the transparent", such that thinking the content of the passive intellect constitutes thinking the active intellect indirectly? What is the relationship between the active intellect and the contents of the passive intellect that makes the light analogy viable? That is, the explanation that the active intellect makes all things by shedding intelligibility upon them is merely a re-phrasing of Aristotle's own metaphor, and does not tell us in what, exactly, such an intellectual 'emanation' consists. These questions are fundamental because if they cannot be answered, then Aristotle's account of the relationship between the divine and the human -- i.e. the supersensible and the

sensible -- is susceptible to the same criticism that Aristotle himself raises against Plato's account of the relationship between the Ideas and objects of sense, namely that Plato's language of "participation" is not a doctrine, but an evasion of the need for explanation. (Metaphysics I.6 987b7-15) This is a pertinent comparison, because -- given that Aristotle has removed the Ideas to the 'sensible realm', and replaced them with the unmoved movers -- his explanatory shortcoming, if it exists, relates to the very same matter as Plato's, but merely stated in the terms peculiar to Aristotle's depiction of thought and its objects. The issue, once again, is this: In what manner, or by what mechanism, are the separate substances (or is any one separate substance) responsible for our ability to think about -- whether this thinking can be called knowing or merely opining -- the sensible world? Answering this question is our only means to a fuller understanding of Aristotle's notion of indirect knowledge of separate substance. By putting the ideas 'in' things, Aristotle deftly avoids the 'participation' problem, *per se*. But there is still (at least) one separate substance, the active intellect, which stands in relation to the substances of sensible things (his 'ideas') as cause to effect. And this is the relation that seems to be portrayed only metaphorically, or by means of the vague notion of 'production'.

Once again, we find that the appearance of a

fundamental difference between Plato and Aristotle, actively promoted by the latter, serves to conceal a similarity; a similarity, in this instance, specifically to do with a dearth of detail regarding the manner in which the separate substances are 'responsible' for the inseparable ones. Two basic questions thus remain for us. The first is: What, beyond the level of suggestive imagery, can be gleaned from Aristotle's writings concerning how the active intellect makes the objects of *dianoia*, i.e. how it makes the world, *qua* thinkable? And the second question, which perhaps can never be answered in full, but which will, in part, answer itself in the process of our examination of the first, is why Aristotle deals only surreptitiously with this most fundamental issue.

7. Making All Things

This dissertation began with the question of what Aristotle means, at the conclusion of *De Anima* III.5, by the phrase "we do not remember". And the first prospective answer that we examined -- one of the most popular -- was that the phrase harkens back to I.4 408b19-32, wherein Aristotle first addresses the possibility that the intellect is a separate substance. At that time, we granted the general interpretation of that passage which is championed most notably by Themistius in ancient times, and by Ross among recent commentators. This was the view that Aristotle's objective in that context is to establish that 'discursive thought' (*dianoeisthai*), memory and love do not carry on beyond the death of the individual, so that the phrase "we do not remember" at III.5 could similarly mean that the part of us which survives death, i.e. the active intellect, has no memory. We have seen how awkward a fit these two passages make, in spite of the superficial similarity noted by those who advance this reading. Since that early stage of our discussion, we have also seen reason to question the traditional identification of *dianoeisthai* with 'discursive thought' (as opposed to noetic thought) alone. Furthermore, if this reading were correct, then it would lead to the

conclusion that the *noein* and *theōrein* at 408b25, which are assumed to be contrasted with this *dianoeisthai*, pertain to the truly separable intellect itself -- which would contradict evidence we have offered in favour of the view that it is the passive (i.e. perishable) intellect that engages even in these higher forms of thinking. Leaving aside, then, the questions which we have already answered concerning this passage's relation to De Anima III.5, let us examine it on its own; for I believe that a clarification of its meaning will be of great assistance in our effort to uncover some of that mystery which remains for us, namely: How does the active intellect produce human thought?

In the middle of De Anima I.4, having criticized the theory that the soul is a harmony, Aristotle returns, with fresh arguments, to his critique of the position that the soul moves (essentially). He begins by noting that various passions, as well as perceiving and thinking (*dianoeisthai*), are commonly thought to be motions of some sort (408b1ff), but that it need not follow that these are motions of the soul itself, since, for example, "to say that it is the soul which is angry is as inexact as it would be to say that it is the soul that weaves or builds houses." (408b12-13, Smith's translation cosmetically altered) In brief, then, the argument is that it is the individual living thing *qua* possessing soul which moves in these various ways, and not the soul as such.

Although thinking is among the 'motions' named in this opening stage of the argument, the particular part of the soul whereby this peculiar type of motion occurs is subsequently singled out for comment, as follows:

The case of mind [*nous*] is different; it seems to be an independent substance [*ousia tis*] implanted within the soul and to be incapable of being destroyed [*ou phtheiresthai*]. If it could be destroyed at all, it would be under the blunting influence of old age. What really happens in respect of mind in old age is, however, exactly parallel to what happens in the case of the sense organs; if the old man could recover the proper kind of eye, he would see just as well as the young man. The incapacity of old age is due to an affection not of the soul but of its vehicle, as occurs in drunkenness or disease. Thus it is that in old age the activity of mind or intellectual apprehension [*to noein kai to theōrein*] declines only through the decay of some other inward part; mind itself is impassible. Thinking, loving, and hating [*to dianoieisthai kai philein ē misein*] are affections not of mind, but of that which has mind, so far as it has it. That is why, when this vehicle decays, memory and love cease; they were activities not of mind but of the composite [*tou koinou*] which has perished; mind is, no doubt, something more divine and impassible. (408b19-29)

Themistius takes this passage to mean that discursive reasoning fails with the body, just as do memory and love. Simplicius¹⁷⁶ takes it to mean that mental functioning in general does not fail in old age, since this entire discussion is based on the assumption -- which is Aristotle's view -- that there is no bodily organ for thinking equivalent to the

¹⁷⁶ Simplicius, On Aristotle's On the Soul 1.1-2.4 (J.O. Urmson, tr.).

eye,¹⁷⁷ a reading with which Alexander basically agrees.¹⁷⁸ Noting that Aristotle has already granted, for the sake of the argument, that thinking does involve some bodily movement (408b5-9), Aquinas assumes that the argument is intended not to establish Aristotle's own view, but merely to defeat the claim that the soul moves because thinking involves motion, on its own terms, i.e. from its own assumptions. And this, according to Aquinas, is why the passage concludes with the observation that "mind is, perhaps [*isōs*], something more divine and impassible"; i.e. Aristotle wishes to distinguish his own view, which will be explained later in the treatise, from the one which he has granted provisionally here.¹⁷⁹ Aquinas also seems to treat *dianoēisthai* as referring to more or less the same activities as are captured in the preceding conjunction of *noein* and *theōrein*, whereas most other commentators assume that the former is being contrasted with the latter. If we do assume that such a contrast is implied, then it is easy to see how one could interpret the passage as foreshadowing the distinction between the perishable passive intellect and the imperishable active intellect, with the former engaging in *dianoēisthai* and the latter in *noein* and *theōrein*. Hicks is among those who assume that the terms in

¹⁷⁷ ibid., 59,24-61,16, pp. 84-86.

¹⁷⁸ Alexander, The De Anima of Alexander of Aphrodisias, 22,23-23,5, p. 33.

¹⁷⁹ Aquinas, Aristotle's De Anima, I.4 164-166.

question are being contrasted, but observes that one of the difficulties of the these lines is:

the assumed distinction between *dianoeisthai* and *noein*... which appears to me quite arbitrary, since either verb may stand for the act of thinking in the individual....¹⁸⁰

Hicks further cites as perplexing "the mention of functions not intellectual, memory and love, apparently in connection with the intellect...."¹⁸¹ Ross(1961) also notes these oddities, though, as we have seen, he assumes that *noein* and *dianoeisthai* represent intuitive and discursive thought, respectively.¹⁸²

As I believe that this passage, though introductory in its treatment of the separability of intellect, has more to offer us than is generally acknowledged, let us begin afresh, and attempt to answer some of the questions opened up by the interpretations of earlier commentators.

To begin with, it must be stated that the attempt to explain away the references to love, hate and memory, in this context, as merely calling our attention to things which, like thinking, are 'motions' of the composite individual, amounts to an exegetical throwing up of the hands. For, in the opening stage of this argument, *dianoeisthai* had already been mentioned along with emotions and sensations as examples of

¹⁸⁰ Hicks, p. 276.

¹⁸¹ ibid., p. 276.

¹⁸² Ross(1961), p. 199

motions which are mistakenly thought to be evidence that the soul moves. The current sub-argument, beginning at 408b19, explicitly involves the peculiarities of the intellect alone, i.e. those respects in which it seems to differ from other cases of apparent psychic motion. So why are loving, hating and remembering introduced into the argument, especially given that there is no wording indicating that they are introduced merely as likenesses to *dianoesthai*? Particularly notable is the fact that the apparent 'conclusion' of the argument, at 408b27-29, mentions only the cessation of "memory and love" (and hence, by implication, also of hate), excluding thinking altogether, leaving one to wonder how this conclusion has any bearing on the question of the intellect's imperishability at all.

Recall the analogy that forms the heart of Aristotle's argument: If *nous* is destructible, it would be due to the effects of old age, but "[w]hat really happens... is... parallel to what happens in the case of the sense organs; if the old man could recover the proper kind of eye, he would see just as well as the young man." The clear implication here is that the deterioration of our thinking is due to the deterioration of some part or function of the body. This is the implication which leads Aquinas to claim that Aristotle is simply granting the position of his opponents, contrary to his own belief. It is here that Aristotle claims that *noein* and *theōrein* decline (*marainetai*) due to this alleged physical

deterioration, though the mind itself does not deteriorate. And immediately he says: "Thinking (*dianoeisthai*), loving, and hating are affections not of mind, but of that which has mind...." And then: "That is why [*dio*], when this vehicle decays, memory and love cease", since these are activities of the composite human being, who is perishable. Notice, again, that Aristotle does not explicitly say that "thinking" ceases as the body perishes, although it is, of course, one of those activities that are affections of the composite whole. Rather, having excluded *dianoeisthai* from his statement about what ceases upon physical decay, he says that the intellect is, perhaps, "more divine" and impassible. Contrary, then, to the interpretation of Themistius, Aristotle appears to be expressing reservations on precisely the question of whether *dianoeisthai* truly perishes. That is, he seems to be leaving open the possibility that while thinking declines due to its association with the body, that association is not permanent, perhaps due to the fact, emphasized by both Aquinas and Simplicius, that for Aristotle there is no 'organ' for thinking. In other words, perhaps there is some aspect of the soul's physical "vehicle" which is required in order for humans to think, but perhaps this aspect is required not due to the nature of the soul, but rather to the nature of the body, such that, having separated (if possible) from the body, the mind can continue to think 'on its own'. If this interpretation seems un-Aristotelian, consider Aristotle's own

repeated use of terms expressing tentativeness in this passage. The intellect seems (*eoiken*) to be an "independent substance". (408b19) And perhaps (*isōs*) it is more divine and impassible.

We must not neglect to ask, with reference to this last point: 'More divine than what?' It goes without saying that the soul in general is more divine than the body. Presumably, then, the point is that perhaps the intellect is more divine than the rest of the soul. And it is not more divine simply because the human functioning for which it is responsible deteriorates only due to the decay of the body, since the same is said to be true of the part of the soul whereby we perceive, in the course of this very argument. The most likely candidate, then, for the explanation as to how the intellect is more divine than the rest of the soul, seems to be something along the lines of our suggestion, above, namely that the functioning of thought, though weakened by the decay of the body for as long as it is associated with a body, is somehow independent enough in its nature to function beyond the dissolution of the body.

That Aristotle might leave room for such a possibility, without explaining how such an independent functioning might work, is understandable in light of the Platonic backdrop against which he is theorizing. And this would help to explain the strange turn in the argument wherein, having claimed that thinking is an activity of the

composite individual, he concludes only that loving and remembering do not carry on. The reason why most commentators ignore this implication of Aristotle's wording is, I suggest, a product of their assumption of an intended contrast between *noein* and *theōrein* on the one hand, and *dianoeisthai* on the other, such that the latter, like love, hate and memory, is an activity of the individual (and hence perishes), whereas the first two are not (and hence do not perish). And yet *dianoeisthai* is not said to perish with the death of the individual, anymore than are *noein* and *theōrein*; likewise, these latter are explicitly said to decline as the body deteriorates, which clearly indicates that their functioning, at least as human psychic processes, depends somehow on the body. We have seen nothing here, thus far, that requires us to take these three mental terms as anything other than three ways of referring to the intellectual activity of the composite human being, which weakens with old age, but may perhaps survive death. At *De Anima* III.5, Aristotle attempts to clear up this issue, concluding that the active intellect alone is immortal, but in this introductory discussion, not yet having hinted at any distinction between an active and a passive mind, he simply leaves the matter of mind's immortality on the table for future assessment.

Further support for this reading of these terms, and of the argument in which they are found, can be gleaned from the opening pages of *De Anima* II. In II.2, Aristotle

introduces a "fresh starting-point" for the inquiry into the nature of soul, one based on the fact that ensouled beings alone are alive. Noting that life has more than one sense, he states that it can mean "thinking [*nous*] or perception or local movement and rest, or movement in the sense of nutrition, decay and growth." (413a20-25) He then goes on to a cursory discussion of the sensitive and nutritive souls, at the conclusion of which he says:

At present we must confine ourselves to saying that soul is the source of these phenomena and is characterized by them, viz. by the powers of self-nutrition, sensation, thinking [*dianoētikōi*], and motivity. (413b10-13)

Turning immediately to the question of whether each of these characteristics is "a soul or a part of a soul" (413b13-14), Aristotle first addresses sensation, self-nutrition, and locomotion, after which he observes:

We have no evidence as yet about mind [*tou nou*] or the power to think [*tēs theōrētikēs dūnameōs*]; it seems [*eoike*] to be a widely different kind of soul, differing as what is eternal from what is perishable; it alone is capable of existence in isolation from all other psychic powers. (413b24-27)

From the progression of the discussion, it is clear that the *nous* at 413a24 corresponds to the *dianoētikōi* at 413b12, and that the latter, in turn, corresponds to the *nou* and *theōrētikēs dūnameōs* at 413b25-26. In order to remain consistent with the view that *dianoeisthai* is being distinguished from *noein* and *theōrein* in I.4, one would have

to assume that whereas *nous* is the faculty whereby we think dianoetically, and *dianoia* is an activity of the composite individual, nevertheless the "power to think", or perhaps more precisely the 'speculative faculty' (*theōrētikēs dūnameōs*) at 413b25-26 is a reference to something beyond the dianoetic faculty, the *dianoētikōi*, at 413b12. And yet, as noted above, *dianoētikōi* is left out of the brief discussion which takes place between the naming of the four characteristics of living things at 413b10-13, and the introduction of the case of *nous* at 413b24-27, while the other three characteristics -- sensation, locomotion, and nutrition -- are all mentioned. There can be little doubt, then, that the term *dianoētikōi* means essentially the same thing as the phrase *tou nou kai tēs theōrētikēs dūnameōs*, and hence that *to noein kai to theōrein*, at De Anima I.4, are subsumed under the term *to dianoeisthai*. Thus it is possible that the *nou* at 413b25 is a reference to the passive intellect. More likely, this passage, along with the argument at 408b, is merely a general statement about the intellect, long before any distinction among types of intellect has been revealed under examination. Or rather, these passages comprise not so much a 'statement' as an *aporia*, one which is answered, at least in part, at III.4-5.

Having analyzed the relevant terminology, we should now return to the discussion of the possible imperishability of the intellect, at 408b. Recall that Aristotle's observation that if intellect is perishable, it must be due to

the effects of aging, is followed by the account of the manner in which thinking is, in this regard, like sensing, in which it is the decay of the sense organ, rather than of the sense faculty, that is responsible for, e.g. the loss of sight. It is to this point that both Simplicius and Aquinas are reacting when they interpret this passage, Simplicius reading it as an argument against the deterioration of thought, in spite of Aristotle's explicit claim to the contrary at 408b24-25, and Aquinas assuming that Aristotle is only granting the existence of an organ of thought in order to show that even on this (un-Aristotelian) view, the intellect itself need not be affected.

In fact, both of these readings are unnecessary, since Aristotle does not say, in this passage, that there is, or might be, a bodily organ for thinking; nor do I believe that the existence of such an organ is implied by the parallel drawn to the case of vision and the eye. All he says is that the decay of something bodily brings about a decline in *noein* and *theōrein*, since, *qua* human activities, these are operations of the composite being, and not merely of the soul alone. What it is, precisely, that decays, is initially said only to be "some other inward part" (*allou tinos esō*). From this, Aquinas and Simplicius infer that he means an 'organ', presumably because, on their readings, no other candidate for this "other inward part" is named. But let us look again at the remainder of the argument:

Thinking, loving, and hating are affections

not of mind [*ekeinou*], but of that which has mind, so far as it has it. That is why, when this vehicle decays, memory and love cease; they were activities not of mind, but of the composite which has perished....

As I have noted, there is much confusion (and silence) among commentators as to why love, hate, and memory are mentioned in this context at all; and no one attempts to explain how it comes to pass that memory and love are singled out as ceasing with the decay of the body, to the apparent exclusion of thinking. It seems to be generally taken for granted that thinking is assumed in that concluding line, though it is not named. It is, at the least, striking that in a discussion of the mind's activities, the key observation would be made by means of wording that omits thought altogether, though naming two other items 'in its place', one of which -- memory -- is making its first appearance in the discussion.

We have seen how these lines can be read differently, such that their point is that thinking, though weakened in the individual, might somehow carry on after the death of the composite. That Aristotle will, in the end, qualify this notion quite severely, does not contradict his leaving the possibility open at the outset of the treatise. If we read the passage this way, and thus reject the position that love and memory appear, at lines 408b27-28, as, in effect, surrogates for thinking in Aristotle's train of thought, then the mystery surrounding the inclusion of love, hate, and

memory recedes, and the entire argument about the independence of mind begins to take shape as something much more than a vague analogy with sensation. There is, of course, no organ of thinking, but this does not mean that there are no physical structures and functions required in order for humans to think. The latter half of the argument is, I suggest, meant to offer a hint as to what 'physical states' stand in relation to thought as the sense organs stand to sensation.

Consider the following account, from On Memory and Recollection:¹⁸³

The process of movement [sensory stimulation] involved in the act of perception stamps in, as it were, a sort of impression of the percept, just as persons do who make an impression with a seal. This explains why, in those who are strongly moved owing to passion, or time of life, no mnemonic impression is formed; just as no impression would be formed if the movement of the seal were to impinge on running water; while there are others in whom, owing to the receiving surface being frayed, as happens to [the stucco on] old [chamber] walls, or owing to the hardness of the receiving surface, the requisite impression is not implanted at all. Hence both very young and very old persons are defective in memory; they are in a state of flux, the former because of their growth, the latter, owing to their decay. (450a30-b8)

Recall, now, Aristotle's explanation of the origins of thought, at Posterior Analytics II.19, and in particular the role of memory therein:

Thus sense-perception gives rise to memory...

¹⁸³ Aristotle, On Memory and Reminiscence (J.I. Beare, tr.), in The Basis Works of Aristotle.

and repeated memories of the same thing give rise to experience; because the memories, though numerically many, constitute a single experience. And experience, that is the universal when established as a whole in the soul -- the One that corresponds to the Many, the unity that is identically present in them all -- provides the starting-point of art and science....¹⁸⁴ (100a3-8)

Without memory, no experience, and hence no knowledge of any kind, is possible. And memory deteriorates in old age, due to physical decay -- due, that is, to a 'fraying' or 'hardening' of that in which perceptions would be retained by leaving an 'impression'. So memory is mentioned, at De Anima 408b27-28, not merely as an off-hand example of something which ceases as the body perishes, nor as a stand-in for thinking in the argument. It is, rather, one product of physical deterioration which is directly responsible for the decline of *noein* and *theōrein*, i.e. of *dianoēisthai*. It is part of the answer to the question as to what has a function relative to thought which is similar to that of a bodily organ. The fact that there is no such organ for thought is part of the reason that Aristotle can hypothesize that thinking somehow survives the individual. Nevertheless, the observable weakening of thought in the very old cannot be denied, and it is this very fact that Aristotle is attempting to explain, without implying that the intellect's activities are essentially damaged, when he names memory as that which

¹⁸⁴ More or less the same argument is, of course, offered at Metaphysics I.1.

ceases due to old age, thus weakening the ability of the composite individual to form experiences, in the technical sense of that word.

The apprehension of universals -- the primary stage of rational thought -- is impossible without memory. The decline of this function, caused by a 'damaged' bodily state, necessarily causes the decline in human thought of which Aristotle speaks. This, however, is not the only symptom of the decay of the body which Aristotle associates, at 408b, with the decline of the capacity for rational thought. Barnes,¹⁸⁵ assessing the Posterior Analytics account of the relationship between memory and the attainment of universals, says:

Man, then, is not directly implanted in our mind by the senses, as Aristotle's words in B 19 suggest; but in that case we need an account, which Aristotle nowhere gives, of how such concepts as man are derived from the data of perception.¹⁸⁶

It should be obvious at this point that the issue Barnes is raising is, though in a different guise, the question as to how the active intellect makes all things. Simply having the capacity for sense-perception, or even for memory, is not enough to explain how sense-data, even repeatedly remembered sense-data, becomes "man", the

¹⁸⁵ Barnes, J., Aristotle's Posterior Analytics (translated with notes).

¹⁸⁶ ibid. p. 255.

universal, "the One that corresponds to the Many", such that I can see this patch of colour and motion (as opposed to that one) and think "man". It is this question that Barnes is claiming finds no answer in Aristotle, just as we have seen others declare.¹⁸⁷ And in discussing the manner in which, for Aristotle, one rises from the initial universals to higher levels of generality, Barnes, taking this view again, can say only that "[p]resumably some process of abstraction is required to move from the several primitives [e.g. man, horse, lion] to the single secondary universal [e.g. land animal]".¹⁸⁸

It is certain that this is, indeed, the mystery at the heart of Aristotle's philosophy of mind. It is equally certain that nowhere is there an explicit statement of the solution, i.e. a statement identified as such. And yet, if we remain true to the interpretive principles which we have espoused throughout this investigation, we must shrug off any temptation to postulate a solution to this mystery which, while perhaps being superficially consistent with much of what

¹⁸⁷ Deborah Modrak deserves mention for having observed the relevance of III.5 to this issue: "The problem is to explain how the sensible instance of a universal displayed in a *phantasma* is transformed into the universal that is the object of the thought. In the *Posterior Analytics*, Aristotle appeals to induction (*epagōgē*) and *nous* to explain the articulation of the universal. In the *De Anima*, Aristotle posits a state of continuous noetic activity [the active intellect] as a necessary condition for the actualization of the *noēton*." (Aristotle: The Power of Perception, p. 126)

¹⁸⁸ ibid., p. 255.

Aristotle says, is also without direct support in anything that he says. We must, in other words, cling to what little Aristotle has given us, confident in the assumption that he wrote with a purpose, and this purpose includes his testimony, however oblique, concerning the most fundamental issue in his doctrine, namely the sense in which the divine is responsible for the cosmos -- that is, for the ordered, thinkable world.

The decay of our matter leads to the loss of the power of memory, which in turn leads to the decline of thought. But memory is only one item that Aristotle mentions, at 408b, as part of his account of how thought is dulled by the deterioration of the composite. The other item he names here is love, *philia*. To be precise, he says that "the composite perishing, there is neither remembering nor loving." (408b27-28) We have seen how memory is relevant. But what about love?

Immediately upon having introduced the active intellect, Aristotle begins III.6, in a passage which we have already seen, as follows:

The thinking then of the simple objects of thought is found in those cases where falsehood is impossible: where the alternative of true or false applies, there we always find a putting together of objects of thought in a quasi-unity. As Empedocles said that 'where heads of many a creature sprouted without necks' they afterwards by Love's power were combined, so here too objects of thought which were given separate are combined.... (430a26-31)

The "Love" in Empedocles' theory is, of course,

philia. It is generally taken for granted that the use of Empedocles' words here is intended only to convey, loosely, the notion of isolated items being combined, and that the Empedoclean account of how this combination happens is irrelevant to Aristotle's discussion. One might ask whether, if that is all Aristotle has in mind, the example is particularly useful, since the notion of isolated heads and necks being conjoined, though colourful, is not really on point in this context, as separate parts are not, presumably, what Aristotle means by "simple objects of thought". If, however, we take seriously the inclusion of love, at 408b, as an 'operation' the decay of which weakens our ability to think, then it is easy to see the pertinence of the reference to Empedocles in the opening lines of III.6. Having gone on to explain how the consciousness of time is merely a further step in the process of synthesis (430b1-5), Aristotle concludes this summary statement with these words:

In each and every case that which unifies is mind. (*to de hen poioun, touto ho nous hekaston.*) (430b5)

In each case, literally, the intellect "makes one", either by uniting sense-data into experience, via memory, and thereby achieving simple objects of thought, or by bringing simples together into new unities. An ambiguity is apparent in this statement. Which intellect, active or passive, is that which 'makes one', *to hen poioun*? The use of the term *poioun*, immediately following III.5, might seem to imply that

it is the active intellect (which is compared to the passive as agent (*to poioun*) to patient at 430a19) that Aristotle refers to here as making things 'one'. On the other hand, the active intellect should not, on the terms of our reading, be given to loving anything; and if it is by love that the *nous* in question brings things together, then that which makes one in this sense should be the passive intellect. This second possibility might help to explain how Aristotle intends the Empedocles reference to be understood. After all, Aristotle certainly does not approve of the Empedoclean use of love as an efficient cause of motion unto itself. And yet, in his typical fashion, he wishes to adapt the notion to his own theory. This means treating love less as a cosmic force than as a motive within the individual composite being, a force which, perhaps, reaches its zenith in the supremely human function of thinking, i.e. ordering matter into coherent unities. In this way, the passive intellect, *qua* motivated by love, can be said to be itself a 'maker' of unities, though only in a dependent sense -- dependent, that is, upon the active intellect as its proper object of love.

And here we arrive at the crux of the matter. If it is the active intellect which 'makes one', then it seems to do so, according to this passage, by means of love -- that is, by being an object of love. If it is the passive mind to which this account refers, then apparently it unites things precisely in so far as it loves. In either case -- and for

our purposes it matters little which is the correct interpretation -- the implication of this opening statement of De Anima III.6 is that objects of thought, simple and composite, are the products of the relationship between the passive intellect as lover, and the active intellect as beloved.¹⁸⁹ This is consistent with a passing remark from Posterior Analytics I.2, where Aristotle, attempting to

¹⁸⁹ One might be troubled, in this connection, and given my endorsement of the Alexandrian thesis concerning the active intellect's identity, by the fact that Aristotle is speaking here of *philia*, whereas at Metaphysics XII.7, he says that the prime mover causes motion as an object of *erōs*. (1072b4) Without exhausting the complexities of this point, we can observe that *erōs* is a word which, in a philosophical context, has obvious Platonic overtones, while *philia* has clear connotations of a rational component, and is thus more suited to Aristotle's doctrinal temperament. This need not force us to the conclusion, reached by some, that Book Lambda is an early work, written during Aristotle's 'Platonic' period. Instead, we may suppose that in Lambda, where Aristotle is explicitly proposing a set of immaterial beings to replace Plato's Forms, and in particular a highest being to replace the Good, it is reasonable for him, pedagogically, to use a term more in keeping with the spirit of the theory which he is expressly trying to repair. That is, what is unsatisfying to him about the Platonic account of the cosmos is not the erotic relationship between the first principle and the intelligible world, but Plato's failure (in his eyes) to account adequately for the elements of that relationship.

In a context in which he is clearly trying to avoid saying anything about the connection between human thought and the divine -- i.e. in which he is happy to leave the impression that these are two separate matters -- the avoidance of the language of eroticism is prudent. Further, in De Anima he is using Empedocles (and, as we shall see, Anaxagoras) as a theoretical buffer between his own account and any explicit statement of the true nature of the active intellect. Thus he must borrow Empedoclean terminology, as he does. The essence of the relationship between the human and the divine remains unscathed, as both *erōs* and *philia* carry the suggestion of an impulse away from isolation, and towards unity, i.e. toward the transcendence of separateness.

explain why the primary premises must be better known than the conclusions of which they are causative, says:

For that which causes an attribute to apply to a subject always possesses that attribute in a still greater degree; e.g., that which causes us to love something is itself still dearer to us. (72a29-31)

The word "something" may obscure the point somewhat. The Greek phrase is simply *hoion di' ho philoumen, ekeino philon mallon* -- "as that because of which we love is still dearer to us." That is -- and this is a thoroughly Platonic observation -- the ultimate or 'highest' cause of our being lovers at all is itself the highest object of our love. It is equally valid to view this principle narrowly, as applicable to specific cases of loving, or in the broadest sense, as applying to any and all loving. The same is true of the analogous principle, the one with which Aristotle is primarily concerned in this Posterior Analytics passage, namely that the cause of a conclusion's knowability is more intelligible than that conclusion.

Before proceeding with an investigation of the viability and meaning of this quasi-Empedoclean interpretation of Aristotle, let us first note its implications for the argument at 408b. In the previous chapter, we observed the concluding question of De Anima III.7, namely whether the intellect can think a truly separate thing without being itself separate from matter. At that time I concluded that the mind not separated from matter is clearly the passive

intellect, and yet with the qualification -- necessary due to the depiction of this intellect in III.4 -- that its 'unseparated' nature is an allusion not to a need for any bodily organ, but to its ability to function as a separate faculty, in the sense in which it is separate, only so long as the composite individual to which it belongs continues to exist. That is, the passive intellect seems to be given an intermediary status between the complete interdependence on matter typical of the rest of the soul's powers, and the complete independence of the active intellect. We have already seen how the operation of the passive mind is 'dependent', even if only indirectly, on the bodily-bound function of memory. Now we see the other, perhaps more fundamental, requirement of human thought which has a material element. The deterioration in old age of the capacity for love precipitates a weakening of thought, because love is, somehow, the 'mechanism' whereby disparate data is made one, i.e. it is the impetus toward unity which, in the arena of the intellect, brings things (or rather, potential things) into focus, or puts them into order.

Let us delve a little deeper into the obscurities of this issue. In III.4, Aristotle depicts the mind in a manner that is explicitly borrowed from Anaxagoras.¹⁹⁰ The key

¹⁹⁰ This fact is well-noted by Kosman, who interprets the argument of III.4 as Aristotle's modifying of Anaxagoras' view to suit his own purposes. ("What does the Maker Mind Make?", in Nussbaum, M./Rorty, A. (eds.), Essays on

feature of the intellect that he derives from that source is the aspect of being unmixed with anything else, which Aristotle, paraphrasing Anaxagoras, identifies as the feature required in order for the intellect "to rule", which he regards as an alternative way of saying "to know". (429a19-20, 429b23-26) Fortunately, we have Anaxagoras' own version of this point, which is as follows:

For if it [nous] was not by itself, but was mixed with anything else, it would have a share of all things if it were mixed with any... and the things that were mingled with it would hinder it so that it could control nothing in the same way as it does now being alone by itself.¹⁹¹

In this same fragment, preserved for us by Simplicius, Anaxagoras describes how the intellect rules:

Mind controlled the whole rotation, so that it began to rotate in the beginning. And it began to rotate first from a small area, but it now rotates over a wider and will rotate over a wider area still. And the things that are mingled and separated and divided off, all are known by Mind. And all things that were to be -- those that were and those that are now and those that shall be -- Mind arranged them all, including this rotation in which are now rotating the stars, the sun and moon, the air and the aither that are being separated off. And this rotation caused the separating off.¹⁹²

This remarkable creation story is relevant to the

Aristotle's *De Anima*, pp. 352-355.)

¹⁹¹ Anaxagoras, Fr. 12, in Kirk, G.S./Raven, J.E./Schofield, M., The Presocratic Philosophers, p. 363.

¹⁹² ibid., p. 363.

issue at hand because Aristotle has alluded to it in his account of the intellect, and has done so in a way that suggests some sympathy with the account, namely by appealing to Anaxagoras as an authority, as a partial substitute for much detailed theorizing of his own.

In a nutshell, Anaxagoras' account of the relationship between the mind and the universe can be explained as follows. Mind directly caused the first motion, a circular or vortex motion the force of which draws things out of the amorphous 'mixture' that is the world prior to the intervention of Mind. The 'things' thus drawn out, or "separated off", are only now things in the proper sense, i.e. existents or 'actualities'. The rotation of the outermost circle initially encompasses a small area, but as more things are brought into existence out of the state of (what Aristotle will call) potentiality, the circle -- the cosmos -- literally expands to encompass them. The greater the number of things dragged into the vortex, i.e. into the cosmos -- the wider the circle -- the greater is the force and hence an ever increasing number of things are drawn out of the primordial mixture, which is why the cosmos must continue to expand.

It must be kept firmly in mind that *nous* itself is the cause of this separating off, that is, of this distinguishing or bringing into unique existence of the various kinds of things of which the cosmos is composed. And this intellect knows all of the things which are separated off. Indeed, as

it is the intellect separating them off, it is reasonable to suppose that it brings them into existence as known; or to put it more plainly, the Mind thinks these things into being. That is, what *nous* brings into existence is precisely the intelligible world, such that the vortex action is literally a process of thought. A cosmos, a thinkable order, is the product of the rotation, a rotation the motor of which is Mind itself. In 'human terms', this account means that the more we (as a species) understand, the more there is in the cosmos. New knowledge brings about -- or is, in fact, identical with -- the addition of something new to the thinkable order (and hence, perhaps, a re-ordering). To say that a new object of knowledge existed prior to its being thought is, on Anaxagorean principles, untenable. Or we might say that it existed only as part of the primordial seed mixture, i.e. as nothing -- although this 'nothing' has everything in it, in the form of seeds, this being Anaxagoras' attempted solution to the Parmenidean dilemma. Mind, then, is insinuated into the process of creation at each step, in spite of the mechanical emphasis of the account, as witness Fragment 14:

But Mind, which ever is, is assuredly even now where everything else is too, in the surrounding mass and in the things that have been either aggregated or separated.¹⁹³

The obvious question here -- or rather, the one which Plato and Aristotle took pains to make obvious -- is why the

¹⁹³ ibid., p. 364.

intellect should cause this process. That is, why does Mind draw these particular items out of the mixture, and order them in this particular way? Why, in other words, this cosmos rather than some other? The best statement of this issue is that of Socrates in the Phaedo:¹⁹⁴

It seemed to me that he [Anaxagoras] was just about as inconsistent as if someone were to say, The cause of everything that Socrates does is mind -- and then, in trying to account for my several actions, said first that the reason why I am lying here now is that my body is composed of bones and sinews, and that the bones are rigid and separated at the joints, but the sinews are capable of contraction and relaxation, and form an envelope for the bones with the help of the flesh and skin, the latter holding all together... and that this is the cause of my sitting here in a bent position.¹⁹⁵

The precise problem, as Socrates says, is that Anaxagoras does not explain why the world Mind creates is best, i.e. desirable.¹⁹⁶ What motivates Mind to order the unintelligible matter in any particular way? Aristotle, having tentatively endorsed an Anaxagorean position, needs to solve this problem for the sake of his own theory. He does this by means of the introduction of the active intellect, as we have interpreted the latter.

De Anima III.5 claims that there is an intellect

¹⁹⁴ Plato, Phaedo (H. Tredennick, tr.), in The Collected Dialogues of Plato.

¹⁹⁵ ibid., 98c-d.

¹⁹⁶ ibid., 98a-b.

which, contrary to the evidence of experience, makes all things, although the nature of this mind's relationship to the one with which we think makes it impossible for us to recognize this making as it happens, and hence makes us incapable of remembering it. The human intellect in the strict sense (i.e. the passive intellect) can thus be said, in a certain manner, to think the world into existence, that is, to make it actual by means of this intellect's own activity. But this does not mean that human thought simply controls the world outright, in the sense of being able to bring out of the matter it confronts whatever it pleases. Or rather, we might say that it can only bring about the world that it 'pleases' - the one that it is motivated to 'separate off', i.e. to become through thinking. The motivation in question is the love of the passive intellect for the active intellect, a love which, in the manner of Plato's 'erotic ascent' in the Symposium, inspires an ordered hierarchy of lower manifestations. These lower manifestations are, on Aristotle's account, the world itself, as constituted out of the passive intellect's (unsuccessful) attempts to become united with the active. For, as we have learned, the active intellect is the actuality of the passive, i.e. its form; and as Aristotle says in the Physics:

[T]he form cannot desire itself, for it is not defective; nor can the contrary desire it, for contraries are mutually destructive. The truth is that what desires the form is matter, as the female desires the male and

the ugly the beautiful -- only the ugly or
 the female not *per se* but *per accidens*. (I.9
 192a20-24, Hardie and Gaye translation)

Matter is inherently desirous of form, which means of order and intelligibility; that is, of the activity of the human intellect. The human intellect itself then, as the highest, albeit the most metaphorical, kind of matter, is, by extension, also desirous of form, specifically of the active intellect. As separate and impassible in relation to the body, the passive intellect does not decay with the decay of the body. Its functioning, however, does deteriorate with the body, as the passage at De Anima 408b suggests, and specifically as a result of the decay of the physical conditions required of memory and love. In the case of the latter, then, we can now say that as the individual human being's matter, i.e. the individual's impulse toward form, exhausts itself during what we call old age, the passive intellect, which *qua* thinking capacity of the composite is somehow dependent on the body's inherent form-seeking impulse for its own activity, is less able to draw encountered matter together into ordered intellectual perception (ideas). Old age is the irreversible or irrecoverable version of the impulse-exhaustion to which Aristotle alludes when he adduces as grounds for our inability to think all the time the fact that we are composite (enmattered) beings. Sleep is the rejuvenatory cessation of the natural striving toward completion (i.e. toward actuality, form) of that living matter

which has temporarily spent itself. This, ultimately, is why Aristotle concludes that "waking, sensation and thinking are most pleasant, and hopes and memories are pleasant because of them. (Metaphysics XII.7 1072b17-18)

It appears, then, that the answer to the question as to how the active intellect makes all things, is that it does so as an object of love. Although there are issues and implications arising from this conclusion which simply cannot be worked through in this context, there are a few questions which can and must be given at least cursory attention here.

The most straightforward of these questions is how this reading of the active intellect's productivity can be expressed in the terms with which we are familiar from our analysis of De Anima III.5 and related material. Certainly the light analogy makes a relatively easy fit with our account. In the Republic VI analogy from which Aristotle's is derived, the 'producer' of ideas -- and ultimately of all things -- is the Good, i.e. the highest object of desire. Aristotle expresses some ambivalence about this Platonic formulation, objecting to it most bluntly in Magna Moralia¹⁹⁷ on the grounds that:

[H]e confused the treatment of Virtue with that of Ideal Good. This was wrong, because inappropriate. The subject of <moral> Virtue should have been excluded from the discussion of Being and Truth; for the two subjects have nothing in common. (Magna Moralia I.1

¹⁹⁷ Aristotle, Magna Moralia (G.C. Armstrong, tr.).

1182a27-29)

Aristotle's difficulty is with the fluidity with which Plato treats of ethical and 'metaphysical' matters as though they were simply extensions of one another. In the name of scientific rigour, he objects to the pedagogical sophistication -- the dialectical maneuvering -- with which Plato treats the two areas of discourse, though this sophistication is clearly part of Plato's attempt to convert young non-philosophers to the pursuit of wisdom by means of their own best inclinations toward virtue and 'the good'.¹⁹⁸ His quarrel is not, as such, with the notion that some highest good -- some ultimate object of desire -- is the cause of ideas, though, as we have seen, he is unsatisfied with some of the details of the account. It is untroubling that the intellectual item corresponding to light in his analogy should be an object of desire. If light is the colour of the transparent, that is, its actuality or form, then the transparent, *qua* matter, must in a sense desire light. And yet this 'desire' never results in the light itself being made visible, but only other colours, colours which must be regarded as lesser, or incomplete, in comparison with light which is the colour *par excellence*, 'visibility in itself'.

¹⁹⁸ It is interesting to note that Aristotle could be accused of committing this same 'mistake' in the Nicomachean Ethics, though he covers it with a patina of rigour by couching his manipulative sleight of hand in the terminology of 'moral' versus 'intellectual' virtue.

The colours made visible in the transparent are 'everything visible', understood as a plurality of discrete items; light is everything visible understood 'singularly', as it were. That is, light is not a general category, a universal, and yet it stands in a relation to visible colours which is vaguely similar to that in which the genus "colour" stands to them. This type of similarity is an issue of great relevance to our understanding of the relationship between divine and human thought (i.e. between the active and passive intellects).

We have already discussed the significance and meaning of the view that the passive intellect cannot think the active directly, as light itself does not become visible in the transparent directly, but only through its products. We have seen, in particular, that the passive intellect, as essentially potential -- and therefore perishable -- cannot think the active intellect directly because this would entail becoming eternally active (since the intellect is identical with its object). And this helps to explain why the science of being qua being is first philosophy, or why wisdom is a knowledge of the whole in general, though not in detail. Knowledge of the whole means knowledge of the broadest categories -- indeed of 'The Categories', and in particular of the category of substance, which is Being in the fullest sense -- and this is as close to a knowledge of the active intellect as the merely human intellect can attain. Our love of the hidden God manifests itself at the highest level, not

surprisingly, in the most general type of knowledge, i.e. in the closest approximation which our potentiality can achieve to union with our natural beloved.

The next question we must address arises immediately out of this last point: Why, if the passive intellect loves the active, do we have to progress through stages of increasing generality in order to attain the most God-like objects of knowledge? That is, why must we begin by bringing together -- through love's uniting impulse -- the most basic universals, and only through these reach towards an increasingly comprehensive knowledge, culminating (and even then only rarely) in the wisdom of the 'first philosopher'? Why, very simply, must we proceed, as Aristotle famously says, from what is most knowable to us to what is most knowable in itself, if the latter is literally all that we want to know? It is not sufficient simply to cite our dependence on sense perception, experience, and so on. These are merely the mechanisms whereby we do in fact make this progress, or rather, they are the steps in the process. The problem is to explain why there must be steps at all, at least beyond the level of sense perception, and why the intellect's power to 'make one' must work only gradually. Another way to phrase this question is: why do we know distinct beings, i.e. different species of being, if our ultimate achievable goal is the knowledge of being *qua* being, without specific differentiation?

Here again I believe that our passage from *De Anima* 408b can be of some assistance. If it is true, as we have attempted to show, that love and memory are mentioned not merely as other operations of the composite which deteriorate with age, but as the specific operations the deterioration of which suggests an answer to the question as to why thinking declines, then there is one more element to that passage which cannot be overlooked. That is the fact that hating, though not explicitly named along with loving and remembering as ceasing with the decay of the body, is expressly cited in the preceding sentence in conjunction with loving. (408b27) It too, then, must be accounted for in our explanation of the passage, if the assumption of arbitrariness is to be avoided. Indeed, if love has the connotations that we have suggested, then hate would almost certainly have to be accounted for as another aspect of Aristotle's theory of thinking.

We have seen Aristotle partially endorse the Anaxagorean theory that it is the intellect which 'rules' the cosmos, by its separating matter from the undifferentiated mixture and giving it form, i.e. by producing an ordered world of differentiated things. We have also seen him use the Empedoclean principle that love, *philia*, is the force which brings things together into unities, i.e. into intelligible wholes. In both cases, the shortcoming is the lack of a motive for the productivity of either mind or love; a shortcoming which Aristotle overcomes by claiming that the

(human) mind 'makes' a world by loving another mind, the active mind. That is, it is really the active mind which makes the world, not by knowing it -- as on Anaxagoras' account -- but by causing us to know it in our attempt to know that active mind itself.

Our love for the active intellect cannot take us immediately to this object, however, for our minds are a kind of matter. Matter is, of course, in large part a potentiality for contraries. In keeping with this principle, the matter that is the human mind generally knows things (makes unities out of them) precisely as distinguished from their contraries, as Aristotle argues at De Anima III.6. (430b22-23) That is, mental objects in general are delineated -- given form and intelligibility -- by their limits, i.e. by the sense in which they stand opposed to their contraries, and ultimately stand apart from everything else.

Empedocles tries to account for differentiation by stating that as love inevitably brings things together, so love's opposite, strife, inevitably tends to pull them apart, ultimately -- on Empedocles' cosmic scheme -- back to undifferentiated (or rather, hyper-differentiated) nothingness.¹⁹⁹ In between these two extreme cosmic states, a world of differentiated unities exists, as a balance of the two opposing forces is temporarily achieved. Although

¹⁹⁹ Empedocles, Fr. 17, 1-13, in The Presocratic Philosophers, p. 287.

Aristotle cites hate (*misos*) as the opposite of *philia*, rather than strife (*neikos*), the functions of these two principles in 'world-production' seem to be similar. An intelligible entity which stands apart from others is a product of our innate impulse toward form -- meaning, ultimately, toward the active intellect -- in combination with the divisive or separating impulse of hatred. To put it another way, if love is the drive toward form, then presumably hate, its opposite, is the drive toward matter, which means toward disintegration, formlessness, unintelligibility. This might help to explain why at the outset of life, when we are, so to speak, more matter than form (i.e. more potentiality than actuality), we have an extremely limited ability to understand, and only gradually acquire greater understanding. At that stage, hatred -- as a cosmic or quasi-cosmic principle -- is the more dominant force, so that love (again in its non-ethical sense) must struggle to make any headway against the overwhelming impulse toward disarray. These intellectual baby steps must be taken in order to achieve higher levels of form, just as our bodies and bodily functions must become increasingly defined and advanced with our growth from unactualized to actualized matter. As knowledge progresses, love reaching ever more broadly (i.e. universally) in its scope, hate repeatedly acts as a limiting force, preventing the thought from expanding any further, and hence -- as, so to speak, a by-product of its destructive force -- limiting, which is to

say defining, an object or arena of thought.

As the increasingly general -- that is, all-encompassing -- forms of understanding can thus be explained as increasingly complete manifestations of our love for the active intellect, and hence as objects of thought can thus be understood in terms of their relative comprehensiveness, Aristotle can say, in 'answer' to Socrates' critique of Anaxagoras, that the existence of active mind *qua* object of love ensures that the world is ordered in the way that is best, i.e. in a way that is oriented toward the supreme good. And this entire account seems to go quite far toward clarifying Aristotle's elegant metaphor from the beginning of Metaphysics XII.10:

We must consider also in which of two ways the nature of the universe contains the good and the highest good, whether as something separate and by itself, or as the order of the parts. Probably in both ways, as an army does; for its good is found both in its order and in its leader, and more in the latter; for he does not depend on the order but it depends on him. (1075a12-16)

Notice that on this reading of Aristotle's theory of intellect, our ability to know the world, from the lowest level of existence to the highest one which the human mind can attain, is rooted firmly in our material nature, indeed in the 'nature' of matter itself as a principle of unintelligibility against which the intelligible, thus delimited, comes into focus, into actuality, and also as the impulse towards actuality. This rootedness in matter -- in our composite

nature -- is very much what we should expect from Aristotle.

There is, however, another strain at work here as well, one which, like the rootedness in matter, is thoroughly Aristotelian, but which is also more explicitly Platonic. If the impulse toward matter restrains our thinking -- our intellectual groping after the active intellect -- such that only limited beings can be achieved, and hence (taken as a plurality) a cosmos formed, then it is precisely this limiting pull of matter from which we are trying to escape when we advance in the direction of increasingly universal knowledge, that is, toward the outermost limits of thought.

And this leads us to a final, provisional, observation -- or to an open question stated in the form of an observation. The passive intellect's love for the active causes it to strain itself in the direction of the latter, which means to strive for eternity. This is the thought captured by Aristotle in his uncharacteristically poetic urging of the philosophic life in Nicomachean Ethics X.7:

But we must not follow those who advise us, being men, to think of human things, and, being mortal, of mortal things, but must, so far as we can, make ourselves immortal, and strain every nerve to live in accordance with the best thing in us; for even if it be small in bulk, much more does it in power and worth surpass everything. (1177b31-1178a2)

The more technical meaning of this, again, is that the natural impulse of matter, properly understood, is to transcend itself -- to extinguish itself in pure actuality, as

it were. (Hence, in a nutshell, the Socratic dictum that philosophizing is a rehearsal for death.) The goal, in other words, is to overcome that kind of thinking -- the ordinary human kind -- which allows us to understand things as over against what they are not. Simply put, the goal of human thought is to overcome that thinking which requires, and in fact is derived from, the interplay between love and hate, and to see, so to speak, only what unimpeded love would show us. This issue is eminently clear in a passing remark that Aristotle makes in De Anima III.6, immediately upon having described the fact that the intellect 'makes one' through love, the general nature of such unities, and the way in which thinking requires the opposition of contraries:

But if there is anything that has no contrary, then it knows itself and is actually and possesses independent existence.
(430b24-26)

It is widely and correctly assumed that the item to which Aristotle is hypothetically referring is the divine mind, which, as we have seen, is the active intellect. This sentence describes the nature of the existence toward which we are directed, though which, presumably, we can never fully achieve. On this last point, consider this remark from Metaphysics XII.10:

And all other thinkers are confronted by the necessary consequence that there is something contrary to Wisdom, i.e. to the highest knowledge; but we are not. For there is nothing contrary to that which is primary; for all contraries have matter, and things

that have matter exist only potentially....
(1075b20-23)

This statement should be considered, not only in the light of what we have been explaining about Aristotle's account of human thought, but also in conjunction with the following words, from Metaphysics I.2:

For the divine science is also most honourable; and this science alone [i.e. that which investigates first principles] must be, in two ways, most divine. For the science which it would be most meet for God to have is a divine science, and so is any science that deals with divine objects; and this science alone has both these qualities; for (1) God is thought to be among the causes of all things and to be a first principle, and (2) such a science either God alone can have, or God above all others. (983a6-10)

Wisdom, which necessarily involves no matter, is attainable only by God, or by humans only to a lesser extent, i.e. in a lesser form. The nearest that we as possessors of passive intellects can come to such absolute immateriality is, of course, through the science of substance, first philosophy. This is our approximation of the direct (self-)knowledge of the purely actual divine intellect, just as though we could make all colours visible to ourselves simultaneously as a way of approximating the sight of light in itself. And this relationship, expressed in so many different ways -- all of them indirect -- by Aristotle, is the ultimate ground of the comparison that we have examined from the conclusion of Metaphysics XII.9, between the "intellect of composite beings" and that intellect which "thinks itself for all eternity".

Our intellect's self-thinking, though a sign of our highest aim, is nevertheless 'only' a manifestation of our ability to think God indirectly. The human intellect escapes matter to its fullest extent in the act of clinging relentlessly to the elusive immaterial first principle, in the life spent filing down that thought which might, we hope, poke at least a pinhole in the outer membrane of the intelligible world -- that is, in the life and thought of the 'first philosopher'.

All of this by way of a prefatory remark for the following problem: Anaxagoras, in the view to which Aristotle seems to be sympathetic, portrays *nous* as the direct cause of the initial rotation which, in turn, draws into being all of the intelligible world. Aristotle himself, of course, holds the first unmoved mover to be responsible directly for the motion of the outermost sphere of the cosmos. (Metaphysics XII.7 1072b8-10, 1073a27-30) And yet we have argued that this unmoved mover is the active intellect, which is said to make all things. Can these two depictions of Aristotle's god be reconciled?

Recall that the universal science of substance is human wisdom in the highest sense. It is, within our purview, that which is most knowable in itself, as opposed to being most (i.e. initially, or most easily) apparent to us. It is our approximation of God, within the limitations of a being that is still, though to the least possible extent, material, which is to say potential. It is the ultimate manifestation

or product of our love for the active intellect. But there are, of course, lesser products which are still at the level of intellect: the other arts and sciences, most obviously.

At Metaphysics XII.8, Aristotle addresses the question of whether there are multiple unmoved movers, concluding, of course, that there must be a separate eternal mover responsible for each motion of the stars. (And although he does not address the issue, each of these must, perforce, be an intellect.) Having offered his best guess -- and it is interesting that here, as almost nowhere else, he eschews even the appearance of certainty (1074a14-16) -- as to how many such motions and movers there are; having alluded to the relationship between all motion and these heavenly motions; and having argued that these motions comprise one heaven²⁰⁰ (1074a32-39), Aristotle concludes Chapter 8 with the striking passage that we have encountered more than once at earlier stages of our inquiry. (1074b1-14) This is where he aligns his theory with the Greek religious tradition, on account of the Greek forefathers' having apparently held that the first substances are gods. The chapter's final words, before Aristotle returns, in XII.9, to some broad speculation

²⁰⁰ I will not, in this context, dwell on the controversy over the authenticity, dating, or logical appropriateness of the argument for one heaven, except to note that I see no reason why a hierarchy of different movers, such as this chapter describes, poses a problem for the notion that this variety of motion constitutes 'one heaven', i.e. one cosmos. cf. Owens, DOB, pp. 447-450.

concerning the notion of a divine intellect, are these:

[O]ne must regard this [the view that the first substances are gods] as an inspired utterance, and reflect that, while probably each *technē* and each *philosophia* has often been developed as far as possible and has again perished, these opinions, with others, have been preserved until the present like relics of the ancient treasure. Only thus far, then, is the opinion of our ancestors and of our earliest predecessors clear to us. (1074b10-14)

Very few commentators offer any speculation as to why each art and philosophy should repeatedly develop and perish. Aquinas suggests that Aristotle is alluding to "wars, which prevent study, or... floods or other catastrophes of this kind."²⁰¹ He further points out, reasonably, that this belief is necessary on Aristotle's view that the world is eternal,

For it was evident that at one time men began to philosophize and to discover the arts; and it would seem absurd that the human race should be without these for an infinite period of time [i.e. the period up to their recent discovery].²⁰²

In other words, the various types of knowledge have repeatedly been born, grown, and perished. Of course, the reason Aquinas offers as to why Aristotle declares this, applies to any previous process of intellectual growth and not just to the current one. For, surely, it would be absurd to

²⁰¹ Aquinas, Commentary on the Metaphysics XII L.10: C 2597, p. 909.

²⁰² ibid., C 2598, p. 909.

imagine that any given process of growth was the first after an infinite time of human 'ignorance' (which, as we have seen, would mean an infinite time without an intelligible world). So it would be reasonable to suppose -- or rather, unreasonable not to suppose -- that our current voyage of discovery is not merely 'not the first', but is in fact part of an unending (and in that sense an eternal) cycle.

Curiously, no one attempts to explain why Aristotle should be noting this point here at all, that is, why it is relevant to the topic at hand. It is true, as we have seen, that this topic affords him an opportunity to align himself with pre-Homeric Greeks, as against the myths of the poets. But why the specific emphasis on the cyclical nature of each (*hekastēs*) art and philosophy? That is, why -- if this point is merely an explanation of how the current myths came to hold sway despite the temporal priority of a truer outlook -- does Aristotle speak of every kind of knowledge, rather than of the specific kind in question (i.e. knowledge of the first principles)?

I suggest that this final point of XII.8 is not merely an aside, and not merely an addendum to his praise of the alleged opinions of the ancients. Rather, the cycles of the heavenly bodies are, I believe, to be identified, in some mysterious manner, with the cycles of the arts and philosophies. By this I do not mean to deny the astronomical function of the unmoved movers, nor to suggest that the cycles

of knowledge are caused by the heavenly motions in what might today be called an 'astrological' way. Again, I am proposing that Aristotle's theory of mind's place in the cosmos is a subtler recasting of the Anaxagorean position. In De Anima I.3, during his account of previous views on the soul, Aristotle addresses at length Plato's description of the nature of the soul's power over the body, noting that "Plato identifies the movements of the soul with the spatial movements of the heavenly bodies." (407a1-2) Explaining that by "soul", in this context, Plato must mean *nous*, because the motions of the other parts of the soul are not circular (407a4-6), Aristotle goes on to raise a number of increasingly 'metaphysical' questions regarding this view, which he presents not as entirely false, but as insufficiently clear. Having finally raised the question of why the heavenly/psychic motions should be circular, he abruptly stops himself:

But since this inquiry belongs more properly to another subject, let us leave it for the present. (407b13-14, Hett translation)

As I have argued, De Anima III.5 seems to present the active intellect only to the extent required to fill out an account of the human mind, as though it represented this same type of outer limit of the proper subject matter of psychology. I am simply suggesting that in both of these instances, the 'other subject' to which the issues at hand belong is first philosophy, and specifically the theory of eternal substances. In De Anima he wishes to discuss the

intellect only *qua* related to individuals. In the Metaphysics, he discusses its relation to the cosmos. By bringing the two doctrines together in the way that we have done, we seem to arrive at a position that might today, perhaps somewhat misleadingly, be termed idealism. The eternal circular motions of the heavens are 'caused', in a sense, by the desire of the passive intellect(s) for the active. They are the sensible, i.e. phenomenal, manifestation of matter's eternal striving toward God.

The details of the relation between the human mind's desire for the divine mind and the astronomical motions described in Metaphysics XII must be left for further research. But we can offer the following suggestions. The highest kind of human knowledge -- subordinate, as Aristotle frequently declares, only to God's (the unmoved mover's) own knowledge -- is that upon which all other knowledge (short of God's) depends; and this is first philosophy, wisdom. The other types of knowledge are arranged hierarchically from more comprehensive to less so.²⁰³ As for the unmoved movers:

²⁰³ Incidentally, another way to express the dependence of all lower forms of knowledge upon first philosophy, beyond those which we have already seen, would be by an appeal to Aristotle's view that actuality is prior to potentiality. This would suggest a way of explaining how first philosophy is a cause of the lowest levels of human apprehension, in spite of the apparent temporal (i.e. historical) priority of the latter. And this, in turn, would grant the profoundest possible meaning to what are perhaps Aristotle's most famous words, those with which the Metaphysics opens: "All men by nature desire to know." The brief account, which follows these words, of the progression from the encounter with sense-

That the movers are substances, then, and that one of these is first and another second according to the same order as the movements of the stars, is evident. (Metaphysics 1073b1-2)

Aristotle, as we know, argues that even the passive (i.e. human) intellect is separate from the body, in a sense that is intermediate between mere theoretical separation and the complete independence of the active intellect. The eternal motions have a similarly intermediate position between the unmoved movers and earthly sensible beings. Though no amount of explanation would be sufficient to exhaust all of the complexities of Aristotle's position (his obliquely outlined position) on these matters, I believe that the force of the discussion that has led us to this conclusion compels us to offer the following hypothesis: The development of first philosophy, participated in by many human beings over some extensive period of time, and finally reaching some outer limit of thought beyond which the human intellect cannot go, exhausts itself -- or to use an image which we introduced earlier, it extinguishes itself in pure actuality (the active intellect/unmoved mover) -- at which point we (i.e. the cosmos) must either begin again, at the lowest level of comprehension, or, in Empedoclean fashion, slowly devolve to the point of incomprehension from which the process of universalizing can start again. As the evolution of knowledge

data to the historical development of the philosophical sciences, is Aristotle's 'phenomenology of mind'.

is necessarily repeated through an unending cycle, so the progression of human thought, partaken of by individual humans, but only to the extent that they are able to transcend to the greatest possible degree their rootedness in potency -- and hence only by a happy few -- forms an unbroken cycle.²⁰⁴

The precise contingencies of this cycle (i.e. the particularities) are perhaps recalcitrant to reason -- Aristotle apparently did not attempt to work them out for us - - but this did not inhibit him in postulating such eternal cycles. I say "cycles" in the plural because, as in the case of the heavens, there are numerous eternal rotations, numerous areas of knowledge, although all are subordinate to the first circle, that which is directly caused by the first God, which means the universal science of substance, the highest manifestation of our love. Though Metaphysics XII.8, on our reading, posits the existence of a distinct unmoved mover or active intellect for each area of knowing, the relationship of subordination preserves the notion of a single ultimate motive force, as in the case of the general from Aristotle's military analogy in XII.10.

²⁰⁴ The question of whether this view can be squared with the view that there have not always been humans, is an issue for another day.

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