

Aisthesis or Perception

During a recovery period from a fairly serious operation I had the opportunity to spend some leisure time to help speed along the recovery process. For the first three weeks I was up and down all hours of the night with two or three hours of sleep here and another hour there. In other words, for several months my condition prevented me from a regular night's sleep during which day blended into night and night into day. The alternations between sleep and being awake were more frequent than the normal cycle, so it offered an opportunity for some observations that otherwise could have gone unnoticed. Looking back on that period, I was struck by a fact we all know about but take little time to explore, namely, the close identity between the waking and dreaming states. All sorts of thoughts pass through the mind pretty much in the same fashion whether awake or asleep, making you which is which. One fact stands out as to when you're awake: events in all their concreteness are there in-your-face and require a response which is equally concrete.

When dreaming, we lack this ability to respond and remain totally passive, for we're at the mercy of what happens to be floating through our minds. A direct insight into this passive condition occurs when waking up suddenly from sleep and recalling the dream which happened a moment earlier. While not based in the reality to which we awaken, strangely enough these dreams do not differ from the thoughts going through our heads when fully awake. They continue along their merry way even when we're engaged in a conversation or any type of activity. Sometimes we're barely aware of the person with whom we're having a conversation or the task we're carry out. This current is seamless, really, sometimes making you wonder what constitutes reality. One thing is certain. Dreams at sleep and thoughts while awake form a world independent from the physical one, often with a force that's more compelling than that which engages you at the moment. In other words, the expression "day dreaming" is not what people commonly think it is; rather, day dreaming *is* reality as anyone honest enough would admit.

During my recovery I entertained myself with a few DVDs, recent movie releases, which helped fill in the time. While watching them I was struck by the contrast between that-which-was-watching the DVD (the so-called "I") and the general absence of flow of thoughts and images. In a way, the movie offered a suspension of this flow by reason of its imitation of what occurs in real life. We hear of the delight movies offer as a temporary diversion from the tedium of daily life, and this was a typical example. True to a limited extent, but both the mental flow during sleep and being awake I had been watching with greater attention than usual during my short periods of sleep within the recovery process turned out to be the movie *par excellence*. Unlike a conventional movie which engages attention, the real one tends to be more tiresome than entertaining, not unlike perpetual soap-operas. Such is the chief difference between them. Regardless of the content of both, one thing is for certain: thoughts and images are an inescapable part of human existence, so we might as get used to them.

Constantly the issue of thoughts and images comes up in discussions about the spiritual life, a topic which bears parallel to the influence of dreams as I've described above. Generally speaking, mental activity is a bothersome companion we shake rarely, and when we do, those brief moments turn out to be the happiest of our lives. This activity shouldn't be confused with

those occasions we apply our minds to study or the like, very different indeed. We find traces of this mental bothersomeness going all the way back to the Desert Fathers of Egypt, generally considered the first Christian monks, and continuing unabated into the present. I became more aware of this close identity between dreams and the waking state as the period of my recovery gave way to a return to normal life and hence a normal period of uninterrupted sleep. People of every culture recognize the similarity between thoughts and dreams as well as how they differ radically from the state of mind one acquires through the practice of contemplative prayer, let alone applied study. Various interpretations exist, but all boil down to a recognition of a Great Divide. Just the fact that it is so pervasive and cross-cultural points to a mental activity that's acknowledged yet little fathomed except here and there. People inclined to delve deeper keep the issue alive enough to hand it on for others to take up though the end result is more or less the same: thoughts and images flow uninterruptedly through our minds whether we're asleep or awake. This perennial problem assumes much more serious proportions in an age when we're encouraged to fill our minds with all sorts of information and stimuli, a fact which makes us reluctant to explore that which is at our very doorstep...rather, within us, not without.

So in light of all this, the present essay, while neither scientific nor scholarly, speaks from the vantage point of some familiarity with sources going back to the beginnings of our Western and Christian heritage. More specifically, I'm concerned with their application in daily life and how they speak today with a relevance that truly is unparalleled. As for the enthusiasm sustained over many years, allow me to mention the philosopher Pierre Hadot whose book **What is Ancient Philosophy?** situates ancient authors in their rightful place as masters of the spiritual-philosophical path. Couldn't recommend it highly enough. It is to Hadot's enduring merit that he brings these people out of the rarified air of the classroom into the marketplace or their natural habitat. After all, they didn't start out in universities but by holding conversations with ordinary fellow citizens of their day. While the contributions and insights accumulated over following centuries are vital, there's a definite appeal to this early period of our heritage which is hard to shake once you've been exposed to it. One could say the appeal is almost magical, and I'm sure Hadot would agree. More specifically, within this essay I make recourse to the writings of Plato and Gregory of Nyssa. On one hand Plato represents the very best of the ancient world and Gregory represents just about the very best of the early Christian era (and with admitted prejudice, I might add for later eras of the Church). Not only that, but Gregory of Nyssa lived in a time when the distinction between philosophy and theology (the term "spirituality" didn't exist then; theology was spirituality) was not distinct as they are today. As a friend with similar interests remarked, there's nothing worth reading after the fourth century AD; that which came afterwards were elaborations upon what already had been set down.

With these preliminary remarks in mind, I decided to explore in greater detail not so much the difference between the dream and waking states—for both boil down to the same thing from the vantage point of applied spirituality—but how to bring them more in line with a higher goal. This goal makes its presence felt indirectly by a nagging dissatisfaction with the mental prison in which we're walking (and at sleep, dreaming) about. At the same time we're carrying the key to let us out yet are unaware of it. We could alter this image a bit by saying that the door to our prison is closed but not locked; all we have to do is push open the door to obtain our freedom. This approach is more in line with spirituality and philosophy which means foregoing more modern data on dreams (Karl Jung comes to mind), even staying away from that topic

altogether. Since I had long-term familiarity with the writings of Plato, my search evolved into a distinction between perception and knowledge as he presented it through the voice of Socrates. To put it a bit more technically, I decided to leave untranslated the Greek of these concepts (which will be used henceforth), namely, *aisthesis* and *episteme*. The observations presented here do not pretend to be authoritative but are merely personal impressions garnered from Plato and Gregory of Nyssa. Thus I am fully aware of them being one person's interpretation and are so offered with full awareness as such. I've found genuine delight with the task and try to see how I can fit in the text both from and into my own experience. On occasion the texts can be read in light of other sources, an experience that has proven equally fruitful in a few limited instances. One more recent example is Schopenhauer whose book **The World as Will and Representation** I happen to be reading at the moment. He makes the proud claim of being a genuine interpreter of Plato, one which bears some truth as far as I can see up to this point. But returning to Plato, several months ago I did a re-read of his **Theaetetus** which more than any Dialogue expands energy upon the distinction between *aisthesis* and *episteme*. While Plato leaves the issue unresolved, my inquiry led to another Dialogue, **Phaedo**, which treats knowledge as recollection or *anamnesis* but recollection in a much fuller sense than we use it today. More will be said later about this faculty whose ancient usage may sound foreign nowadays, that is, recalling something that had existed in the past which can be (mis-)interpreted as akin to re-incarnation. That approach was taken and easily understandable but certainly is far from Socrates' intent.

Let's commence with **Theaetetus** 186b-e which treats the difference between *aisthesis* and *episteme* shortly after Socrates asks his young counterpart (the dialogue is named after him) into "which class do you put being (*ousia*)? For that, above all, is something that accompanies everything." In other words, Socrates wants to begin his discussion under the broadest category possible, a starting point from which we get a handle on being or just about everything under the sun. He gets the response from Theaetetus, "I should put it (*ousia*) among the things which the soul (*psuche*) itself reaches out (*eporego*) after by itself." The verb *eporego* is important, implying a desire for more of what one has already or a perceived lack...i.e., an insufficiency real or imagined within the context of a desire to obtain knowledge. However, this desire is specific, with reference to the soul as "by itself" (*kath' hauten*), putting *psuche* and *ousia* on the same plane. Thus it's a question of aligning the desiring soul with the object of its desire, *ousia*. Next Socrates brings in the sense of touch or *epaphe*, literally a handling-upon, the preposition *epi* (upon) indicating the same desire as in *ep(i)orego* ('through touch the soul *perceives* the hardness of what is hard'). In this sentence we find the verb *aisthanomai*, the root for *aisthesis* or perception. Socrates continues with saying that both men and creatures have this capacity for perception "as they are born" relative to "the experiences which reach the soul through the body." Here is another use of the preposition *epi* connected with the soul (literally, 'upon the soul'). Instead of the verb *eporego* we have another one, *teino*, with implications of tension or stretching to the utmost. The proper way to direct this strain, if you will, comes through "a good deal of trouble and education." The first term is *pragma* or anything necessary...business...and the second term is *paideia*, not education as we're accustomed to use it in the modern sense but as having people realize their true nature through the cultivation of virtue or *arete* which, in turn, signifies the best or most excellent aspect of anything, not just that which is relevant to human behavior.

Socrates speaks of the identity between truth (*aletheia*) and being, that truth is essential to attain it. For this to be actualized, a person must use the double form of exertion noted by the two verbs in the last paragraph, *eporego* and *teino*. The reasoning process (*sullogismos*, a computation or conclusion from premises) is tantamount to singling out the superiority of knowledge (*episteme*) over experiences, the province of *aisthesis*. He situates the various senses of seeing, hearing, smelling and feeling under this latter faculty, perception. With this in mind, Socrates says that “we shall not now look for *episteme* in *aisthesis* at all but in whatever we call that activity of the soul when it is busy by itself about the things which are.” The word “whatever,” easy to overlook, is an important clue insofar as Socrates seems not exactly certain as to the nature of “that activity of the soul.” He knows simply but surely of its existence..one could call it after the manner of Schopenhauer the soul’s “what-ness”...but can say no more, a sign of his humility. This gets down to what I feel is at the heart of **Theaetetus**, namely, that although we can never pinpoint this “what-ness” we can see a manifestation of it in the soul “when it is busy by itself about the things which are.” This requires some picking apart. The verb here is *pragmateuomai*, to be engaged in business or to exert oneself in a given activity, and hearkens back to the other two verbs *eporego* and *teino* discussed in the last paragraph. It’s interesting to see in this Dialogue that Socrates and others speak of the *psuche* almost as if it were something independent of ourselves, that we carry it around within us. That manner of speaking brings up the fact that if so, who or what is that which is talking about the soul...a higher entity as yet to be identified or what? Such talk is common not just here but in many religious and philosophic contexts which discuss the nature of the soul, all ultimately having not the slightest clue about it except that hard to define “what-ness.” Yet if we follow Socrates’ words about the soul as *pragmateuomai*, we have a good notion as any. This *pragma* character is self-contained or “by itself” (*kath’ hauten*), giving the impression that its constitution is, as it were, circular and moves according to this mode of behavior which is a process of curling back upon itself. However, the soul exerts its busy-ness with respect to “things which are” (*ta onta*). Since like is attracted to like, we could say that the circular constitution of the soul is attracted to the circular nature of *ta onta*. Admittedly this sounds a bit far-fetched yet has some echo of truth from experience when we look more deeply into ourselves and how we deal with life. After this, Socrates’ young interlocutor launches into a discussion about judgment (*doxa*) which seems important yet is liable to fall into either under what is true or false.

As to the soul having a circular nature as well as applied to *ta onta*...an insight one can gain not so much by reading but by meditative-philosophical practice...here’s a quote from the **Phaedrus** which defines the soul in that fashion: “Let us then liken the soul to the natural union of a team of winged horses and their charioteer (246a)...Now Zeus, the greater commander in heaven, drives his winged chariot first in the procession (246e)...But when the souls we call immortals reach the top, they move outward and take their stand on the high ridge of heaven where its circular motion carries them around as they stand while they gaze upon what is outside heaven (247b)...The place beyond heaven...is without color and without shape and without solidity, a being that really is what it is (*ousia ontos ousia*), the subject of all true knowledge (*episteme*), visible only to intelligence, the soul’s steersman. Now a god’s mind (*dianoia*) is nourished by intelligence and pure knowledge (*episteme*), as is the mind of any soul that is concerned to take in what is appropriate to it, and so it is delighted at last to be seeing what is real and watching what is true, feeding on all this and feeling wonderful, until the circular motion brings it around to where it started (247c-d)...And when the soul has seen all the things that are as they are (*ta*

onta ontos) and feasted on them, it sinks back inside heaven and goes home (247e)...Now that is the life of the gods. As for the other souls, one that follows a god most closely, making itself most like that god, raises the head of its charioteer up to the place outside and is carried around in the circular motion with the others (248a).

Here the soul, endowed with wings, reaches the limit which defines the *kosmos* (keep in mind this term can apply to anything beautiful, decorated or arranged in good order). Beyond this limit of ordered beauty is present “a being that really is what it is” or *ousia* itself. It was noted above in the context of **Theaetetus** 186b-e when Socrates said to his friend, “into which class do you put being (*ousia*)? For that, above all, is something that accompanies everything.” *Ousia* is all-embracing and in the **Phaedrus** quote, it lies “beyond heaven” which coincides with Theaetetus’ remark, “I should put it (*ousia*) among the things which the soul (*psuche*) itself reaches out (*eporego*) after by itself.” To get there, the winged soul must reach out...*eporego*...not at the behest of something external but *kath’ auten* or “by itself.” This extending of the soul reaches the bounds of the *kosmos* but doesn’t go beyond. Rather, it is content to see (*theaomai* means more something akin to behold) what automatically it perceives as “all the things as they are” after which it “goes home.” The wings provided by Zeus suffice for the reaching-out but stop the soul at the *kosmos*’ edge, exchanging them for a beholding which for Socrates is more than enough. This beholding is absolutely essential for effecting knowledge or *episteme* which transcends the realm of *aisthesis* or perception (‘without color, without shape, without solidity’). Knowledge now takes the place of *eporego* or reaching out, which is a way of saying that the soul has no need to enter this realm; *episteme* takes the place of entry and causes the soul to “sink back inside heaven” or within the *kosmos*. One might wonder what the soul does once back home; nothing is said here but it is developed in Book Seven of the **Republic** after the famous image of the cave dwellers. There Plato speaks of *paideia* or education of those within his city-state, a process which enables a person to develop his full character not in accord with the shadows on the cave’s wall but with the true light streaming into that hole. Such is the role of *episteme* with regard to those bounded by *aisthesis*, perception. Then again, not everyone may be in a position to impart *paideia*. The **Phaedrus** gives the impression that the *episteme* acquired beyond the *kosmos* is sufficient in and by itself without engaging in activity. It has brought down through *episteme* “a being that really is what it is,” sufficient on its own merits to effect change within the arena of *aisthesis*.

Such is what Socrates means by his insight into the soul’s busy-ness or *pragmateuomai* or when it “is busy by itself about the things which are.” There exists an activity which runs parallel to it yet is the exact opposite and can never become winged as that soul which reaches the uttermost bound of the *kosmos*. The noun to describe this is *polupragmon* or busy-ness about many (*polus*) things, that adjective being prefaced to the noun which, in turn, describes the proper character of the soul. Within the Christian Greek Orthodox tradition this noun is used to describe monks when they strayed from their observance and was a sure-fire sign they were treading upon dangerous ground. A good way to translate *polupragmon* is meddlesomeness, of poking around into matters not belonging to the soul and therefore harmful to it. The temptation to delve into this territory starts off harmlessly enough by an impulse of curiosity but quickly yanks the soul away from its inherent activity of *pragmateuomai* into the unnatural one of *polu-pragmon*. Within the spiritual order, it may be conceived as a transition from simplicity to complexity. As anyone who knows from practicing the spiritual life, this transition is lightening fast. To have fallen abruptly, as it were, from the edge of the *kosmos* after having seen “all the things that are as they are” indeed is disconcerting. It makes you wonder what’s going on, if you’re engaged in chasing phantoms even worse than those bound in the cave of the **Republic**. Actually nowhere to the best of my knowledge does Socrates have something to say

about this inherent human weakness. I'm sure if he were worried about our imperfect efforts he would have mentioned them. However, repeated "flights" to the edge of the *kosmos* wear down this unsettling experience...perhaps never fully...but enough where *episteme* dominates one's life. Socrates goes on to talk about the *polis*...city state...with its multiple classes of citizens who presumably are there to help each other along in these winged flights to the edge of the *kosmos*. That's why the subtle phrase *kath' hauten* (by itself) is crucial, a way of saying that the soul needs to be on constant guard as to its self-contained (circular) character. We could say be on guard in the sense of "being *kata*" (*kath'* is a variant) in order to ward off the temptation of "being *peri*" (around, i.e., busy-like-a-bee) with respect to "things which are" (*ta onta*). *Ta onta* are the only objects worth investigating, and we return to them should we get lost in the meddlesome practice of ultimately wasting our time.

The terms presented thus far—*eporego*, *teino* and *pragmateuomai*—relate to the soul's striving for knowledge or *episteme*. Yet instead of being oriented towards the future or outside the soul, they are to be understood as pertinent to the soul in and by itself, *kath' hauten*. Pretty much that locates the soul's focus as totally within the present. At the same time the soul must attribute its existence from somewhere, so to speak. At the same time instinctively we feel that the soul has a source, so how do we locate it? Keep in mind that often when we discuss the soul, we posit it almost like an object somewhere out there, the "we" being the agent talking about it. This is a linguistic device of sorts, not a metaphysical problem, enabling us to speak of our in-most nature of which, it was pointed out, we haven't the slightest clue except it's "what-ness." Still, despite the language, the image created is a dualistic one which in actuality is not true. Chances are that if that which is talking about the soul is an entity higher than the soul, automatically our attention would be focused upon that entity. Language about the soul never takes this route, so we can with confidence stick with such talk as a linguistic device, a mode of discussing it.

But before getting into some remarks by Plato as to the soul and *episteme*, consider an attribute that as far as I can tell is missing in any such discussion whether pertinent to the soul or to how it goes about its business. In a word, that attribute is gratitude. Practically speaking, we show gratitude spontaneously and without affectation. And with the just mentioned distinction between soul and the agent which is talking about it (linguistic device or not), who cares, really, when we are truly grateful? We have hit upon the very truth about ourselves when in this state of mind and in a sense have reached the end of our search, both resting in and enjoying what we've discovered. Of course, this satiety doesn't mean we sit around all day but employ each moment of gratitude as it comes to us for a deepening of this sentiment. Such talk is linear, presupposing an exponential growth in gratitude. We could put it this way, but that's inaccurate as anyone imbued this sentiment knows. If we were to adopt the linear image, that means quickly we'd come to a point where we'd explode. Although strictly speaking gratitude has a cause, to us its experience comes out-of-the-blue from God only knows where. Regardless of what caused us to be grateful, we have sure-fire knowledge of its presence, for it is wholly other from most of our common experiences. That's all that matters, for gratitude is an end in and by itself. Following a conventional practice when wishing to get information about a subject, I Googled the word "gratitude" and was shocked (though not completely so) to read that psychology has begun to give it attention as recently as the year 2,000! It appears to that very late date attention had been given over to distress or negative emotions which says a lot

without going into details.

To my knowledge, Plato doesn't have Socrates talk about gratitude though his gregariousness based in part upon acceptance of his personal ignorance and a desire to learn from people has all the hallmarks of a grateful person. Thus if Socrates depicts the soul as that which reaches out in and by itself (*kath' hauten*) towards being...reality...that means its structure is built upon (if not comprised of) gratitude. There's no evidence in the Dialogues to support this, just a hunch judging from the way Socrates comports himself. We can deduce that the soul is forward-looking, rather is circular, by its very composition, that it doesn't sit still; just consider the graphic verbs *eporego* and *teino* applied to it. However, easily we can misunderstand this direction if posited in linear and temporal terms. Gratitude is forward-looking but in a fashion quite different from this familiar movement. The relative unfamiliarity with gratitude (which comes to a surprise, really) makes us think of its movement in terms of going place-to-place. That may be in conflict with earlier remarks of the soul being circular in that it turns back upon itself. The soul has apparent linear direction only insofar as it acknowledges its source. But if we can't help but sticking to a linear way of thinking, we can say that the soul, despite its forward outreach, is rooted firmly in the past. And that past exists outside the temporal/spacial domain or within *anamnesis*, recollection. Recollection of those instances, let alone the source of gratitude, is sufficient proof for the existence of *anamnesis*, that it's the real-est thing out there. The best proof for this is the witness of a grateful person whose joy is contagious.

Plato has Socrates speak about *anamnesis* or recollection in the **Phaedo**, more specifically 73-6, and presents this word in conjunction with *episteme*, knowledge. I prefer to keep in mind an alternate meaning of *episteme*, acquaintance, which also implies skill in that with which we're familiar. This idea of familiarity fits in nicely with the soul being structured according to gratitude as well as what we pick up from how Socrates interacts with people. The actual source of his teaching rests upon "an ancient theory" (*palaios logos*, 70c) whose source isn't given which says that "souls arriving there (underworld) come from here, and then again that they arrive here and are born here from the dead." That's it as far as a source goes which allows Socrates some license to alter the *logos* handed down to him which, after all, means "word" as spoken...amplified...upon his own authority. Keep in mind that Socrates is speaking in prison shortly before his death, so this situation (after having been rejected by Athens) endows him with no mean authority. Other than that, the face value of his argument based upon recollection doesn't seem terribly convincing. Some of the examples appear collected by association of objects or ideas, because they have features in common. On a deeper level and without being explicate about it, Socrates is using his personal authority based upon contemplation or as he'd put it, *theoria*. The main thrust of Socrates' argument is about going go from one "opposite" (life) to another (death) which, in turn, will lead back to life. One could argue that the cycle is endless, a series of re-incarnations, but given the implication that the soul is structured upon gratitude, it appears improbable.

This notion of incarnation may be seen as a misunderstanding of the soul's circular nature. We can perceive it correctly yet incorrectly transfers it to a place where it has no role, namely, successive rounds of birth and death. Perhaps we could say with some truth that a person not centered upon gratitude is more inclined to speculate about reincarnation compared with a truly grateful person. Socrates' faith in the "ancient theory" or *logos* seems a bit tenuous,

especially here when he's on the brink of death. However, there's no indication whatsoever in the **Phaedo** that he is desperate and grasping for straws. Instead we have a demonstration of the soul in action...taking up a *logos* handed down from tradition...and seeing if it finds echo within oneself which in this case hits its mark. For this reason we can say that Socrates speaks with authority on such matters. In fact, just prior to his death Socrates gives substance to this "ancient theory" which previously it had lacked. We may get this from an alternate meaning of *logos* as a mere report, not checked through fully.

As an elucidation upon this notion of authority on the philosophical/spiritual level admirably displayed by Socrates, there comes to mind a book by Ken Wilbur (**Eye to Eye**), an author more versed in Eastern forms of spirituality than in Western ones. Wilbur minces no words that Eastern forms are more adept at handling the flow of mental images...true...but the Western tradition has quite a lot to say on the matter. Sadly it got buried over the centuries in rarified scholar-speak, but that doesn't negate its inherent value (hence the value of Hadot's books noted earlier). **Eye to Eye** discusses the inability of various disciplines to dialogue with each other. The spiritual eye is the most important of them all yet in the West never was cultivated to such a high degree as in India. On the other hand, the West is advanced in science which tends to look down upon spirituality, an unfortunate situation which perhaps could have been averted. To have a proper dialogue among various disciplines, each "eye" or field of study must learn how to speak on the same level or to engage in conversation eye-to-eye. That is to say, the eye of one discipline requires alignment with the other eye which is not to say that it must neither condescend nor feel humiliated. Not only that, a spiritual eye that has been open can assent to realities just as real as scientific ones and do so with the same rigor as hard science. Clearly the spiritual eye of Socrates was wide open suggesting that many of his interlocutors eyes were closed or at least partially so. Though not the topic at hand, I bring this matter up briefly because Wilbur hits upon an important issue which bears upon the interest in things spiritual floating around nowadays. **Eye to Eye** helps dispel a lot of misunderstandings and make people in the wide variety of disciplines feel good about themselves about dialogue, a practice dear to Socrates' heart.

Socrates doesn't speak theoretically at the point of death but gives a concrete example of *anamnesis*, actually a splendid one, for love is involved, a sentiment allied to gratitude: "Well, you know what happens to lovers: whenever they see a lyre, a garment or anything else that their beloved is accustomed to use, they know the lyre, and the image of the boy to whom it belongs comes into their mind. This is recollection (*anamnesis*), just as someone, on seeing Simmias, often recollects Cebes, and there are thousands of such occurrences" [73d]. Shortly afterwards Socrates gives the example of the Equal ('to which all these objects strive,' *orego*...like *eporego*) as another demonstration of *anamnesis*. Here *episteme* is reliant upon sense perception, *aisthesis*: "Surely we also agree that this conception (*ennoeo*: reflection, with an intent in mind) of ours derives from seeing or touching or some other sense perception (*aisthesis*), and cannot come into our mind in any other way, for all these senses, I say are the same" [75a]. Yet at the same time in 75b Socrates says that "our sense perceptions (*aisthesis*) must surely make us realize that all that we perceive (*aisthesis*, noun) through them is striving to reach (*prothumeomai*: to be eager, zealous) that which is Equal but falls short of it." The verb is not unlike *eporego* and *teino* above. It is a more specific focusing of the two insofar as it pertains to desire based upon *thumos*, the seat of emotions as well as agent of thought. Such

“thumic” longing as related to knowledge isn’t for a short period of time but abides “throughout our life, for to know is to acquire knowledge (*episteme*), keep it and not lose it. Do we not call the losing of knowledge forgetting” [75e]? This loss of knowledge isn’t forgetting in the conventional sense; rather, it is *lethe*, a passing into oblivion or passing out of existence which to the untrained eye, is something Socrates is about to do when he takes the poison.

An example of this love vis-a-vis *episteme* and beauty (*to kalon*) may be found in the **Symposium**: “The result is that he will see the beauty of knowledge and be looking mainly not at beauty in a single example...but the lover (*erastes*, one with *eros*) is turned to the great sea of beauty, and gazing upon this, he gives birth to many gloriously beautiful ideas and theories, in unstinting love of wisdom (*philosophia*), until having grown and been strengthened there, he catches sight of such knowledge, and it is the knowledge of such beauty (210d-e)...It (beauty) will not appear to him as one idea or one kind of knowledge. It is not anywhere in another thing...but itself by itself with itself; it is always one in form (*monoeides*)” (211a-b). Here Socrates takes *episteme* one step further, by perceiving it as beauty, *to kalon*. Note the containment of this particular knowledge: “itself by itself with itself.” These words are reminiscent of the soul at the edge of the *kosmos* noted above in a passage from the **Phaedrus**. There the soul looked at “what is outside heaven” whereas the **Symposium** quote has this paradoxical known/unknown realm contained or having that one form, *monoeides*. One could almost gather that *episteme* is knowledge of the unknown, not unlike Socrates’ famous ignorance. As a quick side note, sometimes discussion of love is done within the context of boys or young men which implies homosexuality. This runs through most of the **Dialogues** and can be disconcerting for some people. Apart from any modern take on the matter, it’s interesting to speculate how ancient Christian authors handled reference to boys. They must have glossed over them. Then again, evidence is overwhelming that many Church Fathers borrowed heavily from the **Dialogues**.

In the **Phaedo** Socrates takes *episteme* to a new level: “But when the soul investigates by itself it passes into the realm of what is pure, ever existing, immortal and unchanging, and being akin to this, it always stays with it whenever it is by itself and can do so; it ceases to stray and remains in the same state as it is in touch with things of the same kind, and its experience then is what is called wisdom” [79d]. Again we have the phrase *kath’ hauten* (by itself) when the soul is investigating or *skopeo* which implies attentiveness...a looking-out not unlike a watchman. That which motivated the soul to engage in such investigation isn’t explicit but given our remarks about gratitude, most likely wants to find out how it relates to this source and return the favor, if we may put it so. A clue as to this implicit source of gratitude is “ceasing to stray” and “remaining in the same state as it is (*kath’ hauten* again).” Once in that immobile state, the exact opposite of *polupramon* or of being a busybody, the soul touches (*ephapto*...literally, binds-upon) “with things of the same kind.” Such may be a description of gratitude which Socrates terms wisdom, *phronesis*. This isn’t the more familiar word for wisdom, *sophia* is the term, but a minding to do such and such a thing or an intention. Certainly *phronesis* is a world away from the realm of *aisthesis* as presented by Plato.

While Plato has *phronesis* as subordinate to *aisthesis* or perception, the latter plays an important role with Gregory of Nyssa on the spiritual plane as an essential faculty for how we relate to God. For this reason a closer examination of a lengthy excerpt from his **Answer to**

Eunomius' Second Book (M.1101+ & J.393+) is in order simply because he goes into considerable detail as to the role of sense perceptions which prepare us for perceiving God who transcends *aisthesis*. Like Plato, Gregory cautions that such perceptions aren't as trustworthy as knowledge, yet if we keep this admonition firmly in mind, sense perceptions excel in bringing us closer to God. Here follows the text sentence by sentence (some are quite long by modern standards) with some notations afterwards intended to demonstrate the subtlety of what Gregory is trying to communicate:

Every term [*logos*]— every term, that is, which is really such— is an utterance [*phone: voice*] expressing some movement [*kinema*] of thought [*ennoia: that which is conceived or a notion*].

Here we have a transition from *logos* to *phone* or from conception to a particular expression of the *logos* in the form of a voice. *Ennoia* is used with the preposition *kata* (according to) as related to *kinema*, movement. Obviously the movement involved isn't physical but pertains to *ennoia*. Such movement of thought—or a *logos* which has become a *phone*—is very different from the one associated with *polupragmon*, meddlesomeness, which gives birth to continuous thoughts and dreams as noted above. Therefore this sentence contains a verb of physical action (*kinema*) applied to three non-physical realities: *logos*, *phone* and *ennoia*.

But every operation and movement [*energia & kinesis*] of sound thinking [*hugios & dianoia*] is directed as far as it is possible to the knowledge and the contemplation [*gnosis & theoria*] of some reality [*ton onton*, genitive case].

Another noun is used for movement (*kinesis; kinema* being found in the previous sentence) which is derived from the same verbal root and here put with *energia*, alternatively as energy. *Kinesis* might be considered the expression or manifestation of *energia*. Both pertain to sound thinking or the noun *dianoia* implying understanding or meaning which is *hugios*, healthy. Both operation and movement are directed...the Greek text has no verb...yet the preposition *pros*, towards-which, indicates such a direction. It has two goals or objects: *gnosis* or knowledge and *theoria* or contemplation. They must stand together as one, for if separated, can lead to all sorts of mistaken notions. The object of these two nouns...knowing it and viewing it carefully...is "some reality" which in Greek is plural and alternately can mean "existing things." Gregory doesn't specify this reality(-ies) until the next sentence. Gregory inserts the words "as far as it is possible" as a caution to indicate the limitations of *energia* and *kinesis* as well as the possibility of missing the mark. Perhaps he intimates that possibility of a mistaken notion should *gnosis* or *theoria* be taken separately.

But then the whole world of realities [*phusis: nature & ton onton*] is divided into two parts; that is, into the intelligible and the sensible [*to noeton & to aistheton*].

Phusis means more something like nature or the property of something which ties in with *ton onton* noted above as "some reality." *Phusis* here is a kind of umbrella term under which are located two realities, the intelligible and sensible. The former (*ton noeton*) derives from the verb *noeo*, to perceive, observe or notice and can have a material or immaterial object for its regard. The latter (*to aistheton*) is the sensible and was mentioned a number of times pertaining to **Theaetetus** as *aisthesis* related to *episteme*, knowledge. This division sets the stage for how Gregory approaches the same problem of knowledge vs. perception as Socrates had done.

With regard to sensible phenomena [*aisthesis* & *phaino*], knowledge [*gnosis*], on account of the perception [*katanoesis*] of them being so near at hand [*procheiros*], is open for all to acquire; the judgment of the senses [*epikrisis* & *aisthetikos*] gives occasion to no doubt about the subject before them [*to hupokeimon*].

“Sensible phenomena” reads literally as “appearances according (*kata*) to sense” meaning that the five senses give rise to that which appears and implies that which does not have lasting substance. When it comes to more stable appearances not according to sense, they assume a form other than that presented by smelling, touching, tasting, hearing and seeing. To them is applied *gnosis* noted above with respect to “some reality.” Here *gnosis* is used with *katanoesis* or perception, apprehension; verbal root is *noeo* (cf. above used with *ton noeton*) with the preposition *kata* (according to) prefixed to it. Such apprehension is available to anyone and therefore is not special simply because of the immediacy of the senses (*procheiros*, implying readiness). Sense perception applies judgment or literally, a judging-upon (*epikrisis*). This term also means a determination or discrimination with respect to the senses.

The differences [*diaphora*] in color, and the differences in all the other qualities [*poiotes*] which we judge [*epikrino*] of by means of the sense of hearing, or smell, or touch, or taste, can be known and named [*gignosko* & *onomazo*] by all possessing our common humanity [*koinoneo* & *phusis*]; and so it is with all the other things which appear to be more obvious [*epipolaios*] to our apprehension [*katalepsis*], the things [*pragma*], that is, pertaining to the age in which we live [*anastrepho* & *bios*, with *kata*], designed for [*katagignomai*, with *pros*] political and moral ends.

The capacity to judge (*epikrino*; cf. *epikrisis* regarding the senses) has for its object differences or *diaphora*, the preposition *dia* (through) suggesting seeing or carrying (*phero*) the senses through to what lies behind them. The senses don’t go there but point the way. Such judgment is common (*koinoneo...koinonia*) to every person by reason of his *phusis* or (human) nature. This includes the ability to name what is perceived. Apprehension or *katalepsis* means to seize or take possession of an object (*katalambano* being the verbal root: to catch according to. *Kata* or according to means in accord with some principle or order). *Pragma* or thing is noted in the **Theaetetus** quote above in the form of *pragmateuomai* where the soul “is busy by itself about the things which are.” However, this verb has negative implications such as being meddlesome or poking around in things which do not pertain to us. In the sentence at hand, such *pragma* can apply to being meddlesome, that is, regarding “the age in which we live” or an environment marked by superficiality, *epipolaios* meaning on the surface or appearances. This world is the one in which we live or *anastrepho...literally*, returning to these superficial realities. The *pragma* may not start off intending to end like this but often they do, suggesting that reliance upon sense perception is tenuous.

But in the contemplation [*theoria*] of the intelligible world [*noeros* & *phusis*], on account of that world transcending the grasp [*huperkeimai* & *katalepsis*] of the senses, we move, some in one way [*stochastikos*, adverb], some in another, around [*kineo*, with *peri*] the object of our search; and then, according to the idea arising [*dianoia* & *eggignomai*] in each of us about it, we announce the result [*exaggello* & *to noethen*] as best we can, striving to get as near as possible to the full meaning of the thing thought [*noeo*] about through the medium [*emphasis*] of expressive phrases [*rhema*].

Theoria above was in the context of “some reality” but here is in reference to the nature

(*phusis*) which is intelligible, *noeros* or belonging to the *noos* or mind, heart or perception. This nature transcends or lies above (*huper + keimai*) the ability of senses to grasp (*katalepsis*: from *katalambano*) as noted above regarding “our apprehension of things.” This inability to receive (*lambano*) in *kata*-fashion or in accord with a familiar order is due to the intelligible world lying-above. Due to this fact, each person attempts not so much to achieve this transcendence but thoughts (*noeo*, which come from our *noos*) in accord with everyone’s capacity. The adverb here is *stochastikos*, from a verbal root meaning to aim at something, to guess. Some partial or incomplete knowledge must be present to put this aiming in motion. Regardless, the common denominator is that of motion (*kineo*) which assumes a direction around or *peri* what we’re aiming at. With regards to the result of this aiming ideas (*dianoia*) arise within us. This noun was given as “sound thinking” or one which is through (*dia*) the *noos* or mind. This idea/mind arises within us or is innate meaning a kinship (*eggignomai*: to be inborn) between us and it, however incomplete it may be. Note that the sentence at hand says we don’t effect this arising but it happens on its own accord. The idea of announcing our results suggests not keeping it to ourselves but sharing them. “Expressive phrases” or *rhema* are used to articulate our announcing, this word meaning that which is uttered compared with *logos*, a word by which an inward thought is expressed. The noun used (*emphasis*) connotes an appearing or reflection of that which had been uttered.

In this, though it is often possible to have achieved the task [*katorthoo & spoudazo*] in both ways, when thought [*dianoia*] does not fail to hit the mark [*hamartano*], and utterance [*phone*] interprets notion [*hermeneuo & to noethen*] with the appropriate word [*prospheues & euthubolos*, adverb], yet it may happen that we may fail [*apotugchano*] even in both, or in one, at least, of the two, when either the comprehending faculty [*kataleptikos & dianoia*] or the interpreting capacity [*hermeneutikes & dunamis*] is carried beside the proper mark [*paraphero & proseko*].

The verb *katorthoo* literally means to set upright with the preference *kata* (according to) prefaced to the verb and has as its object the task noted in the previous sentence, namely, the way some people “move around the object of our search” and attempt to specify it as best as possible. This task is something we strive after or are jealous for...*spoudazo* being the verb with this meaning...which does not mean necessarily that we obtain the object of our search. Again *dianoia* is mentioned (earlier it was used as idea and thinking) when it achieves its goal or doesn’t fail to hit its mark, the basic meaning of *hamartano*, the common New Testament verb for “to sin.” Earlier *phone* was used as utterance which here, along with *dianoia*, interprets notion or *to noethen* which earlier was the result of our search. Such interpretation or explanation (*hermeneuo*) uses an appropriate word, the adverb *euthubolos* meaning a straight manner of throwing. In the sentence at hand, a corresponding verb to *hamartano* as missing the mark is *apotugchano*, failure or missing the object we’re searching for. Both *dianoia* and *dunamis* or capacity (fundamentally, power) are subject to making this failure. They do this by “being carried beside their proper mark.” Note the contrast between the two prepositions here: *para(phero)* and *pros(echo)* or besides and direction towards-which. The sense here is passive, not active, for *dianoia* and *dunamis* both have a subjectivity vis-a-vis the attractiveness (which may not end up being so) which engages their attention.

There being, then, two factors [*onta*] by which every term [*logos*] is made [*euthuno*] a correct

term, the mental exactitude [*asphaleia* & *noos*] and the verbal utterance [*prophores* & *rhema*], the result which commands approval in both ways, will certainly be the preferable [*eudokimos*]; but it will not be a lesser gain [*hesson* & *agathos*], not to have missed [*diamartureo*] the right conception [*proseko* & *hupolepsis*], even though the word [*logos*] itself may happen to be inadequate [*hesson*] to that thought [*dianoia*].

Onta or existing things is a general term made more specific by *logos* by endowing them with form or by a correct or straight guidance, *eu-thuno*, a verb suggesting the calling to account. The “two factors” at hand are 1) mental exactitude or *noos* (mind) which is literally safe from falling down (*asphalos*, adjective) and 2) the *rhema* (above as ‘expressive phrases’) which is *prophores* or literally, growing up from. Should both one and two coincide, we have something which is *eudokimos*, preferable, or literally, of good repute. While preferable, it is acceptable should we miss (*diamartureo*: *harmartano* as above with the preposition *dia*, through, for emphasis) the conception (*hupolepsis*: that which is taken up) which is right, *proseko* being a verb used above as “proper mark.”

Whenever then, our thought [*dianoia*] is intent upon [*spoudazo*] those high and unseen things which sense cannot reach [*aisthesis* & *epihkneomai*] (I mean, upon that divine and unspeakable world [*aphrastos* & *phusis*] with regard to which it is an audacious thing to grasp in thought anything in it at random and more audacious still to trust [*epitrepo*] to any chance word [*epitugchano*] the representing of the conception [*dianoia*] arising from it), then, I say, turning from the mere sound of phrases, uttered well or ill according to the mental faculty [*dunamis*] of the speaker, we search for the thought [*exetazo* & *dianoia*], and that alone, which is found within the phrases, to see whether that itself be sound [*hugios*, adverb], or otherwise; and we leave the minutia of phrase and name to be dealt with by the artificialities of grammarians.

Three uses of *dianoia*: thought, conception and mental faculty. The first when *dianoia* is intent or *spoudazo* upon what sense cannot reach, *epihkneomai*, or attain. The second when *dianoia* tries audaciously to grasp a chance word and third, when *dianoia* hits upon something which is sound (*hugios*: used with *dianoia* as an adjective above as ‘sound thinking’). Thus our intent or striving as signified by the verb *spoudazo* requires proper direction which the other verb *exetazo* (search) suggests. There remains the question from where comes this intent upon what lies beyond sense for that which is unspeakable (i.e., the divine nature, *phusis*). Gregory doesn’t spell it out fully, presuming that his readers have this desire. It stands in sharp contrast to grammarians or those who do not approach a text (presumably) scripture through the practice of what we would call *lectio divina*.

Now, seeing that we mark with an appellation [*semaino* & *onomastikos*] only those things which we know [*gignosko*], and those things which are above our knowledge [*gnosis*, with *huper*] it is not possible to seize [*dialambano*] by any distinctive terms [*prosegoros* & *semeiotikos*] (for how can one put a mark upon a thing we know nothing [*semaino* & *agnoeo*] about?), therefore, because in such cases there is no appropriate term to be found to mark [*prosagoreuo*] the subject adequately, we are compelled by many and differing [*diaphoros*] names, as there may be opportunity, to divulge [*anakalupto*] our surmises [*huponoia*] as they arise [*eggignomai*] within us with regard to the Deity.

Marking and knowing are placed on the same level, the former meaning to indicate by a sign, here with respect to the naming process. They stand in contrast to what lies above (*huper*) our knowledge or better, our capacity for seizing, the *lambano* in *dia-lambano*. Not just

lambano but one which is *dia* or through, one which wishes to grasp thoroughly. Usually such objects of desire have distinctive terms or endowed with the capacity to produce a sign (*semeiotikos*). Rhetorically Gregory asks the question of applying this capacity for signs vis-a-vis what we don't know about. The only recourse he offers is to divulge...reveal (*anakalupto*)...that which we surmise. The noun here is *huponoia*, literally a hidden thought or what we suspect, and this rests upon grounds which are not fully certain when it comes to the Deity. These surmises arise from within ourselves, are inborn or innate (*eggignomai*). Because these surmises are guesses, chances are they could hit upon the object of conjecture. However, the divine realm escapes all such grasping (*dialambano*). Thus our inborn ignorance with respect to God gives, at best, partial or incomplete clues about him which never can fall under appellations (*semaino*, signing).

But, on the other hand, all that actually comes within our comprehension [*katalepsis*] is such that it must be of one of these four kinds: either contemplated [*theoreo*] as existing in an extension of distance [*diastematikos*], or suggesting the idea [*parecho* & *ennoia*] of a capacity in space within which its details are detected [*katalambano*], or it comes within our field of vision by being circumscribed [*perigrapho*] by a beginning or an end where the non-existent bounds it in each direction (for everything that has a beginning and an end of its existence, begins from the non-existent [*me onti*], and ends in the non-existent), or, lastly, we grasp [*katalambano*] the phenomenon by means of an association of qualities [*suntheke* & *poiotes*] wherein dying, and sufferance, and change, and alteration, and such-like are combined [*sunzeugnumi*].

In this sentence Gregory shifts from what we have difficulty knowing to that which comes within our comprehension, our ability to receive (*lambano* in a *kata* fashion, according to which, noted above). This approach is not giving up attempting to reach the unknowable divinity but to prepare the way by looking at four basic constituents of the created realm. They are as follows: 1) That which has physical extension or *diastema*, the adjective being used here. 2) The "stuff" within this extension which presents the idea or *ennoia* (noted in the first sentence) pertinent to capacity or that which fills it. Herein lie "details" which we can grasp with certainty, *katalambano*. 3) Our field of vision, sight, which is circumscribed, *peigrapho*, which literally means to write around with the intent of assessing the contents. This which lies within our sight has a beginning and end, much like the Greek notion of *kosmos*, which also can be taken as a decoration. *Diastema* is bounded only by *me onti*, that which is non-existent or with the notion of *kosmos*-as-decoration in mind, which doesn't detract from *diastema* but enhances its inherent beauty. 4) The association (*suntheke*) of qualities which also means a composition, event a contract, which here consists of the coming into existence and passing away of all phenomena. The *sun* (with) in *suntheke* suggests a unity, not discontinuity, the sense being re-enforced by another *sun* as in *sunzeugnumi*, combined.

Considering this, in order that the Supreme Being [*phusis* & *huperkeimai*] may not appear [*dokeo*] to have any connection [*oikeiotes*] whatever with things below [*pragma*, with *pros*], we use, with regard to His nature, ideas and phrases [*noema* & *rhema*] expressive of separation from [*apochoreo*] all such conditions; we call, for instance, that which is above all times pre-temporal [*proaionios*], that which is above beginning un-beginning, that which is not brought to an end unending [*ateleutetos*], that which has a personality [*hupostasis*] removed from body incorporeal [*asomatos*], that which is never destroyed imperishable [*aphthartos*], that which is unreceptive of change, or sufferance, or alteration, passionless [*apathes*], changeless, and

unalterable.

God is given here as that nature (*phusis*) which is supreme or *huperkeimai*, lying above it or outside its sphere. Gregory doesn't say this *phusis* lacks connection with created reality but appears such (*dokeo*). The term for this connection is *oikeiotes*, kindred or intimacy with creation. He puts it better by saying that God lacks intimacy with *pragma* lying below him (who is *huperkeimai*, above). Within this essay *pragma* was seen in two ways: as the business of the philosopher and as meddlesomeness or *polupragmon*. With this in mind, *pragma* may be taken as belonging to the latter. Such disconnection with *pragma* is re-enforced by the verb *apochoreo*, to separate. Gregory continues in the sentence at hand by listing those things which are separate from God which essentially boil down to those things which are subject to alteration, change.

Such a class of appellations [*onoma*] can be reduced to any system [*technologeio*] that they like by those who wish for one; and they can fix on [*epharmozo*] these actual appellations other appellations "privative [*steretikos*]," for instance, or "negative [*aphairetikos*]," or whatever they like.

The broad, all-encompassing nature of the four elements of the created realm noted above are subject to a system, of putting into an order or (literally) rules pertinent to art. Nevertheless, they remain bounded when compared with the divine nature.

We yield [*parachoreo*] the teaching and the learning of such things to those who are ambitious [*philotimos*] for it; and we will investigate the thoughts [*exetazo* & *nous*] alone, whether they are within or beyond the circle of a religious and adequate conception of the Deity [*eusebos* & *theoprepos* & *hupolepsis*].

Here yielding is more than giving way; it is a separation from persons who are eager (*philotimos*, loving honors) to systematize anything pertinent to God without knowing him. For his part, Gregory confines himself to an investigation or seeking out of thoughts alone. *Nous* is the noun here which alternately means mind or perception, the heart of a matter of investigation. He hopes to see if they are suitable for a conception or *hupolepsis* of God (cf. 'right conception' above).

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The following is a supplement of sorts, several references from Plato and Gregory of Nyssa regarding *aisthesis* and *episteme*:

Aisthesis or Perception in Gregory of Nyssa

We have carefully explained these matters since human nature has difficulty in accepting any aversion to pleasure (I call pleasure love of one's body. The soul's happiness does not partake of anything unreasonable and is not slavishly devoted to pleasure). We are able to recognize the particular manifestations of each kind of life, that is, of good and evil, because evil seduces our sense perceptions, whereas virtue gladdens our souls by directing them aright. Sense perception still seems to be a criterion for persons recently initiated into a more sublime life. Their souls are not yet worthy to see the good, for they are untrained and unaccustomed for such a comprehension. Our desire remains unmoved with respect to any unknown quantity even

though it is especially attractive; neither does desire pre-exist, nor does any pleasure arise apart from anything not longed for. The road to pleasure is longing itself. We must understand this with regard to persons who have not yet tasted the pure, divine pleasure with which they also receive the teachings of virtue and by which the sense perceptions are sweetened. This is similar to a doctor who sweetens a sharp, painful remedy for a sick person by seasoning it with honey's pleasant taste. (**Psalm Inscriptions**, 28-9)

The psalm next speaks of the perfect mark of virtue. "You have put gladness into my heart." It mentions the heart instead of the soul and mind, for the mind cannot be enticed by evil's allurements. Psalm Four contrasts the heart's gladness with respect to material, corporeal well-being and says that persons concerned only with present matters take their stomach as a criterion of the beautiful. Concern for material things multiplies wheat and wine and contains in part every pleasure related to the stomach and banquets. They lie at the root of every material preoccupation and do not profit us at all. The enjoyment [of pleasure] does not arise at once nor is it found stored up in human nature as when men lay up the pleasure they zealously strive after; rather, when certain deceptive illusions lay hold of our judgment by our love of pleasure, they immediately disappear into nothing. One trace of such a phantasm remains after pleasure disappears and that is shame, a deep, indelible sign from one's experiences. This resembles a skilled hunter who recognizes an animal by its tracks; even though the tracks do not reveal the animal, they make it known. (**Psalm Inscriptions**, 35-6)

Ecclesiastes next states "I said in my heart, 'Come now, I will prove you with mirth, and behold, you have good things, and behold, this also is vanity'" [2.1]. He does not immediately submit himself to such an experience nor has he tasted a more severe, solemn life to obliterate pleasure; rather, Ecclesiastes experienced such things and pursued a sober, constant course of action which yields wisdom for those who pursue it. Ecclesiastes shrinks away from sense delights because passion does not attract him to these vanities; he believes that knowledge of the true good confers perception to anyone faithful to it. From the beginning the enemy indulges in laughter and mirth and calls passion anything mad or deranged. (**Ecclesiastes** 309-10)

"I have looked," Ecclesiastes says, "on all my works which my hands have made and on my labor which I have labored to perform, and behold, all was vanity and waywardness of spirit, and there is no advantage under the sun" [2.11]. Each sense perception has its limits and operation under the sun, but further on he says that the senses cannot comprehend transcendent reality. Ecclesiastes teaches us that we should not admire wealth, honor, authority, banquets, parties and so forth. Instead, he sees that their one end is vanity whose abundance is unlimited. When tracing formless letters in water, this act of writing only has existence while we perform it because our hand always follows the water's surface and smooths over the impressions just made. Our exertions and energy on behalf of pleasure are similar. Once the action ceases, pleasure is blotted out and nothing remains; neither do those persons who have experienced pleasure have any trace of it. Such is the meaning of Ecclesiastes' words when he says that nothing remains under the sun for those who labor, for their end is vanity. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever, free us from such vanity. Amen. (**Ecclesiastes** 352-3)

Since sense perception comes into being at our first birth, our minds await a return to mature

age so that it might appear, however so little, in a person. And so the senses gradually dominate our minds and always have a strong affinity with any thought our minds put forth; we accordingly judge as good or bad whatever sense perception accepts or rejects. Therefore it is difficult for us to comprehend the true good because we are preoccupied with sense criteria which constrict the beautiful by enjoyment and pleasure. Just as we cannot see the beauty in heaven when the sky is darkened, so the soul's eye cannot see virtue obscured by pleasure's mist. Because our senses are attracted to pleasure, our minds are impeded from attending to virtue. Thus pleasure becomes the principle of evil because our minds assent to an irrational judgment of the good when influenced by the senses. If the eye claims that beauty consists in the lovely color of appearances, it draws the mind in that way. It is the same for the other sense perceptions; anything delighting the senses is considered good. If it were possible to discern for the mind what is good right from the beginning, we would not be subject to our irrational senses and be transformed into beasts reduced to slavery. Thus confusion results with regard to anything worthy of love in our nature along with that which we perceive as wrong. Ecclesiastes says "There is a time to love and a time to hate." Such words discern the nature of things and show what we must love and hate. (**Ecclesiastes 4:19-21**)

We are indirectly taught another lesson through the philosophy of this book, namely that perception within us is two-fold—bodily and divine. As the Word says in Proverbs, "You will find perception of God" [Pr 2.5]. A certain analogy exists between the activities of the soul and the sense organs of the body. This we learn from the present text. Wine and milk are distinguished by taste, while the intellectual and apprehending capacity of the soul grasps spiritual realities. A kiss is effected through the sense of touch; the lips of two persons make contact in a kiss. On the other hand, there is a certain sense of touch in the soul which takes hold of the Word and works in an incorporeal, spiritual way. As John says: "Our hands have handled the word of life" [1Jn 1.1]. Similarly, the scent of the divine perfumes is not perceived (by the nose, but by a certain spiritual and immaterial power drawing all the good odor of Christ by an inhalation of the Spirit. (**Song Commentary, 34**)

Animal sacrifices were many and frequent. If any lesson can be gained, it is enjoined upon you in mystery, that is, the necessity of sacrificing your own passions. "A sacrifice to God is a contrite heart. A contrite and humble heart God will not spurn" [Ps 50.19]. Hence, our sacrifice of praise glorifies such a One who smells the fragrance. The soul spiritually inhales a good fragrance like Paul, a "good odor of Christ" [2Cor 2.15], and transcends every symbolic fragrance of the Law. The soul becomes fragrant in her life, breathing the myrrh of priesthood and the incense of conscience composed from the different virtues; her life is a sweet smelling odor to the bridegroom. When Solomon speaks of the "divine sense" in comparison with the material spices of the Law, he adds that immaterial, pure, good scent compounded by the virtues: "And the scent of your ointments is better than all spices." (**Song Commentary 267-8**)

What, then, will they say is the medium or interval by which they divide the Father from the Son? Between bodies, indeed, there is an interval of atmospheric space, differing in its nature from the nature of human bodies. But God, Who is intangible, and without form, and pure from all composition, in communicating His counsels with the Only-Begotten Son, Who is similarly, or rather in the same manner, immaterial and without body— if He made His communication by voice, what medium would He have had through which the word, transmitted as in a current,

might reach the ears of the Only-Begotten? For we need hardly stop to consider that God is not separable into apprehensive faculties, as we are, whose perceptions separately apprehend their corresponding objects; e.g. sight apprehends what may be seen, hearing what may be heard, so that touch does not taste, and hearing has no perception of odors and flavors, but each confines itself to that function to which it was appointed by nature, holding itself insensible, as it were, to those with which it has no natural correspondence, and incapable of tasting the pleasure enjoyed by its neighbor sense. But with God it is otherwise. All in all, He is at once sight, and hearing, and knowledge; and there we stop, for it is not permitted us to ascribe the more animal perceptions to that refined nature. (**Answer to Eunomius' Second Book**)

Episteme references from Phaedo

-When men are interrogated in the right manner, they always give the right answer of their own accord, and they could not do this if they did not possess the knowledge and the right explanation inside them. (Cf. **Meno** 81e) 73.a

-Do we not also agree that when knowledge comes to mind in this way, it is recollection? What way do I mean? Like this: when a man sees or hears or in some other way perceives one thing and not only knows that thing but also thinks of another thing of which the knowledge is not the same but different, are we not right to say that he recollects the second thing that comes into his mind? 73.c

-Our sense perceptions must surely make us realize that all that we perceive through them is striving to reach that which is Equal but falls short of it; or how do we express it? 75ab

-If, having acquired this knowledge in each case, we have not forgotten it, we remain knowing and have knowledge throughout our life, for to know is to acquire knowledge, keep it and not lose it. Do we not call the losing of knowledge forgetting? 75d

-But I think if we acquired this knowledge before birth, then lost it at birth, and then later by the use of our senses in connection with those objects we mentioned, we recovered the knowledge we had before, would not what we call learning be the recovery of our own knowledge, and we are right to call this recollection? 75e

-When did our souls acquire the knowledge of them? Certainly not since we were born as men. Indeed no.

Before that then?

Yes.

So then, Simmias, our souls also existed apart from the body before they took on human form, and they had intelligence. 76c

Episteme or Knowledge in Gregory of Nyssa

The divine nature transcends our understanding and cannot be grasped by human nature because it ineffably supercedes every thought. The virtues outline the stamp of God's ineffable nature for those who turn to it with open eyes. Wisdom in its fullness as well as intellectual knowledge and every kind of apprehension are not the divine wings themselves but its shadow. This shadow is a great benefit for us: "I will cry for God the most high, to God who has benefitted me" by this shadow sent from on high to our life here below. God saved me by his Spirit who overshadowed me in a cloud. (**Psalm Incriptions**, 155-6)

A feeble mind may interpret in its own way what we have just said. Since vanity exists apart from the senses and the mind contemplating unseen realities attempts to explain what it

comprehends, we need to strenuously exert ourselves in the task of interpretation even though we cannot clearly express that which is inexpressible. We see the heavens, perceive their light, transverse the earth, inhale air, drink water and use fire in common. If we wish to understand each of these manifestations which are seen by reason of their essence or the means by which they subsist, a man cannot speak of other matters which are beyond him because his ability to comprehend unutterable reality is inadequate. If a word is labor with respect to those things transcending human ability and nature, then what can we say about the Word or the Father of the Word? Any lofty, eloquent words fall speechless if the true significance of what we seek is taken into consideration. (**Ecclesiastes** 293)

Therefore the person who earnestly applies himself to knowledge and does not occupy himself with vanity searches out the good and does not fail in his judgment of the good upon finding it. He is self-sufficient and does not allow temporal matters to affect his life; he pursues the good proper to every age in life, its beginning, middle and end. (**Ecclesiastes**, 312)

Beings are either material and endowed with sensation or they are intelligent and incorporeal. Immaterial beings transcend sense perception, and we have knowledge of them when we strip ourselves of the senses; however, our senses apprehend matter which cannot transcend the heavenly [spiritual] body and go any further than appearances. For this reason Ecclesiastes addresses us with regard to both earthly and heavenly realities that we may live free from error. Material life means bodily existence but contemplation of the good is hidden from persons who live according to their senses. (**Ecclesiastes**, 374)

In the art of painting different colors combine to represent the subject portrayed. However, the person looking at the image created by the skillful use of colors does not linger over the colors painted on the tablet; he beholds instead only the form which the artist has shown. Thus it is with the present scripture: we should not look at the material of the colors [i.e. the words]; rather, we should consider the image of the king expressed by them in the chaste concepts. (**Song Commentary**, 28)

What is signified by these words is, in our opinion, neither trivial nor unimportant. Through the comparison of milk from the divine breasts with the enjoyment obtained from wine we learn, I think, that all human wisdom, science, power of observation and comprehension of imagination cannot match the simple nourishment of the divine teaching. Milk, the food of infants, comes from the breasts. On the other hand, wine, with its strength and warming capacity, is enjoyment for the more perfect. However, the perfection of the wisdom of the world is less than the childlike teaching of the divine world. (**Song Commentary**, 35)

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