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***INTRODUCTORY REMARKS
ON NEOPLATONIC METAPHYSICS AND
DAMASCIUS' DE PRIMIS PRINCIPIIS***

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From a metaphysical point of view, the fundamental point of Neoplatonism [1] consists in an articulate and elaborate attempt to deduce reality in a very specific and profound sense. I shall try here, in an introductory fashion, to define roughly that sense in a simple way [2].

Suppose that there are things which are F [3] or at least that there is a thing which is F (there is no restriction in the range of 'F'; it is enough if it is true to say with reference to something that it is F). Now in order for a thing to be F (or, indeed, in order for it to be possible that something be F), F-ness must be "available" in the world; there must be available in reality a certain content of being, a certain definite determination of being, here F-ness, in order that things may exist which are determined in accordance with that determination of being, or exhibit that determination or exemplify that content. In order for things to exist having a certain property, the content of the property must be available, in the first instance.

This availability of the contents of being, like F-ness, implies their existence in reality. For nothing can be available if it is absolutely non-existent. Thus the existence of a reality F-ness is presupposed by the existence of really F-things.

The above is, of course, of the essence of Platonism. And it is readily seen to be self-evident, provided that it is properly understood. Perhaps the shortest way to show this is the negative one of disposing of the following usual and trivial objection, namely that such a view commits a category mistake inasmuch as ascribes existence to both concrete things and abstract contents of being disregarding their categorial difference: abstract contents of properties do not exist (in the same way) as concrete things exhibiting them.

This line of objection [4] is absolutely invalid; nay it rests on an impermissible misunderstanding of the criticized doctrine. For no Platonist or realist metaphysician would ever have the least doubt as to the radical, more than categorial [5], difference in the mode of existence of concrete things and abstract contents. The claim is that the abstract contents must exist in some way or other in order for things of this world to exist in the way concrete things exist. And indeed they take much pains vigorously to define that particular mode of existence which pertains to the former, and adequately and sharply distinguish it from that pertaining to the latter.

The category mistake is rather committed by the objector. For he, under the spell of his vague and inarticulate belief that everything which exists must be like the things he sees and touches, is apt to infer from his inability to observe an abstract content beside his desk or at the corner of his room, the nonexistence in reality of all abstract being.

But enough of the digression. Let us proceed further.

The move from concrete to abstract existence does not lead us to ultimate principles. For reason wants to understand how exactly is it that a particular content of being, say F-ness, does in fact exist and is, therefore, available for exemplification by concrete things. Reason cannot rest content with a multiplicity of Ideas or Forms as first principles, if not for any other reason (and I mean here the inherent repugnance to admit a given multiplicity as the ultimate fact of the total Reality), at least for the very tangible reason that some Forms are seen manifestly to presuppose others.

So we have the realization of the second step: the structure of the abstract contents must be attended. We must reproduce that objective structure in accordance with the following plan: A is a principle of B if the reality of B presupposes that of A whereas the latter is independent of the former: in order for there to be B (and B-things) A must exist "in advance", must have been already made possible as an available reality.

This second step was nothing new with the Neoplatonists. It was taken far before them, explicitly by Plato. And it led with him, ultimately, to two Principles, in accordance with Pythagorean Dualism. So what is the characteristic of Neoplatonism in this respect?

The answer is very brief to state: the peculiarity of Neoplatonism lies in its endeavour to discover the detailed structure of reality in all its immense articulation and subtle connections, the attempt to trace, and adequately describe, all the steps through which reality ascends from the last things to the first and descends from the first to the last. It is in fact instructive to compare the enterprise to the similar in spirit one undertaken by Hegel; it is not sheer accident, perhaps, that even their respective position vis-à-vis the traditions to which they belong are similar; for just as Hegel (and in general the Romantic Idealism) closes in an important sense the line in West-European philosophy, so Neoplatonism constitutes the culminating point of Greek Philosophy.

We explained above, in its rough outline, what it is to be a Principle; it is to be ontologically presupposed by something else. Now we may add that a First Principle is something (a) to which we can attach a whole body of other "inferior" realities in such a way that while they presuppose its existence, it presupposes the existence of no one among them, and (b) which does not share the level on which it subsists with other co-ordinate realities (co-ordination being a form of inter-dependence. For to be co-ordinated is to be part of a nexus which in its totality as well as in its parts depends on a certain (higher) principle which is the nexus' proximate ontological cause or presupposition. But to be a part is to depend not only on the whole whose part something is, but also on the other parts of the same whole, without which the whole could not be the whole which it is [6]).

In effect a first principle is a principle which if it depends at all, on something else, it depends on something higher, i.e. something which is presupposed by everything lying on the level of the said principle or below it, without presupposing anything from those areas in its turn [7].

Neoplatonism, then, wishes adequately to explain reality, i.e. to describe it fully in its hierarchical structure; to express, in so far as it is possible to express in human thought and language, that immense articulation in which every reality finds its natural place in a system of dependences, beginning (at our end) with the given to our mundane existence, and ascending to the principles of the world as we found it here, and then to the first principles, in order to end with the Absolutely First Principle, the *μόνον ἀνυπόθετον*, the ultimate Datum of the total Universe of existence, the reality not further explainable, the presupposed-by-everything, nothing-presupposing-reality which is the beginning and the end of the World and of our inquiries about the World; from which also the descent is made, tracing the same system of

dependences in the complementary direction, which leads to the derivation or ontological deduction of all realities in their natural order.

And this is the sense (in a rough, preliminary delineation) of what was said at the beginning of these remarks about Neoplatonism's fundamental point in *Metaphysics* consisting in its obstinate attempt to derive reality. Nothing less than this majestic enterprise is launched, and consistently carried out, to explain how each and every reality was made possible as a reality. The complete ontological "history", as it were, of each and every reality has to be traced, a history which alone and only can explain the possibility of that reality (and of such a reality as it is in its specific content) to form part of the sum-total of Reality at the precise place of the all-inclusive structure where it presents itself as a reality.

In a definite sense we have here the detailed realization of the project set out by Plato in his *Republic*. And what loftier and more divine object of human speculation can be found than this? And what more difficult method than to try to cope with that formidable object, by both relentlessly driving towards the ultimate (which in general defines Philosophical spirit as such), and omitting none of the immense mass of the details requisite for a thorough, substantial and valid understanding of reality?

For it is abundantly clear from even a cursory inspection of the history of Philosophy, that these two methodological requirements, ultimate explanation and adequacy in detail are too often at war with one another: the spectacle presents itself of philosophical systems either preoccupied to such an extent with rendering a satisfactory description in minutiae completeness of the immediately given world that the quest for ultimate principles is quenched artificially, in many cases with the warning that we must not trespass the bounds of sense; or pretending to give the ultimate answers with only a summary investigation of the vast structure of reality – a most superficial procedure which cannot even begin to satisfy Reason and our spiritual needs. In Neoplatonism we find no mere compromise between two opposing tendencies, but the *de facto* proof that they are not really and in their very nature opposing, that they are made opposing by the inability of philosophers to cope with both of them simultaneously. In effect we must neither proceed too hastily to First Principles, so as to lose the necessary detail of structural complexity, and therefore the principles as well, which we are trying inexperiencedly to secure, nor loiter among details with our eyes moved away from that for the sake of which the inquiry into the details is at all undertaken. A maxim which, by the way, again has been enunciated and taught by the Platonic *Philebus*.

To conclude then this rough indication of what is, I think, the fundamental general point in the metaphysical aspect of Neoplatonism (itself being one of its two main aspects – the other being the religious). By following the line of ontological presupposition we ascend the ladder of Reality towards the First Principles. To the extent that B presupposes A, to such an extent is B derived by A; so if A is the sole proximate presupposition of B, B is entirely derived from A. Ontological presupposition and ontological derivation are the two sides of the self-identical coin of causal (in the most general sense, the ontological one) connection. To ascend to the very first Principles, the system of presuppositions constituting the totality of reality must in detail be scrutinized, exactly in order to find disclosed the common sources of all derivation, to intellect revealed the un presupposing presupposition of all existence.

Two brief last remarks may be appended here.

Firstly, it will be noticed that the reality of abstract contents, or rather the subsistence of abstract realities (X in itself, where X is what is usually called a property or a character or an attribute or the like), is here taken for granted, not only for the sake of the Neoplatonists to be commented,

but on the part of the Commentator himself as well. Positive arguments for that view cannot of course be given here, so let it suffice to be remarked that its being erroneous (or puerile) is usually taken for granted nowadays, or is propounded as resting on very general contentions which however are in fact of very doubtful value, and, at any rate, remarkably easily refutable by anyone caring to defend the apparently lost cause.

Secondly, it may be objected that in speaking of presupposition above I failed to distinguish whether an existential presupposition or a presupposition in nature and essential character was intended. For, it may be argued, take two realities B and A. B can be said to presuppose A if the existence of B requires the “previous” existence of A, if B could not exist in case that A was non-existent; but B can also be said to presuppose A if its nature (or a moment or part or essential character of its nature) requires the nature of A (or something essentially involved in that nature), as, e.g., is the case if B is a species of A; in this second alternative, what it would be meant by saying that the reality B presupposes the reality A could be nothing more than that if something was to have or bear the B-feature (i.e. to be B), it had to possess the A-feature as well (i.e. to be A); thus it might seem that no existential commitments were involved in this construal (apart from the ordinary commitment in the existence of empirical objects as exemplifying various properties in articulate hierarchies of implication).

The above distinction helps, and vice versa gains point from, the de-ontologization of the notion of presupposition suggested in the above remarks; for the second alternative might be insisted on as the proper construal of that notion.

But unfortunately the introduced distinction rests on a common modern misunderstanding of the connected distinction between existence and essence or nature. Again I cannot pursue the subject systematically here [8]. But in view of the intrinsic metaphysical importance of the problem, and, also, because of its bearing in the correct interpretation of Neoplatonic (and, in general, Greek) thought – as against, for instance, Scholastic Metaphysics – a rough explanation must be outlined now at this place.

The distinction between the existent thing and its existence is in many ways a particularly natural one; indeed, it presents itself to the reason with a considerable degree of self-evidence. We can certainly distinguish between the content of a reality and its “presence” [9] as a reality in the Universal Order, between the what reality it is, and the mere fact of its really being a reality, its forming part of the total system of Reality. True, many first-level objections can be raised against this distinction [10], but, I believe, they can be met adequately in a serious examination of the issue.

In order to apprehend the real dimensions of the problem, let us discard the term “existence”, since it is in modern, and especially contemporaneous, philosophy rather restricted in its application, as it is often taken to cover some privileged portion of reality (usually the concrete, empirical World – in which case existence is made to coincide with one of its species, namely physical or empirical existence). Also, let the term “being” be avoided, in order not to beg certain crucial questions touching the Neoplatonic doctrine of ὑπαρξίς vis-à-vis οὐσία and ὄν. I shall employ instead the terms “reality” and “subsistence” – the latter of which is especially apposite (as the least misleading) in rendering ὑπόστασις [11] – in their widest signification; a “thing”, or a reality, subsisting is anything at all “present” in whichever way in the all-inclusive totality of Reality, anything forming any part whatsoever in that totality; the particular kind of its “presence” or subsistence is disregarded, and the mere moment of its “presence” or subsistence simpliciter is retained [12].

We thus abstract from any possible specific kind of subsistence; what does these remain,

common to all kinds of subsistence and all kinds of subsistent realities [13]? The answer to this question may be adumbrated preliminarily as follows.

To subsist at all is simply not to be the [14] absolute Nothing; just as to subsist after a particular fashion, to be a specific reality, is not to be a specific nothing (if one may be allowed to use the odd expression), namely that specific nothing which consists [15] in the ontological absence or “negation” or suppression of a specific reality [16]. Thus to attribute subsistence to a reality is merely to affirm its not being absolutely Nothing.

But not to be absolutely Nothing is to be Something or other; and to be something is to be some-one-“thing”. So to subsist, in the here employed sense, is ultimately to be one.

Consequently to attribute subsistence to a reality is merely to affirm its oneness.

But to affirm the oneness of a certain reality is not to say anything about, or even of, it. For if we mentally (or conceptually) subtract the oneness (or its not being absolutely nothing) of something, there simply remains nothing, and not something to which subsistence can be appended (in however essential and intrinsic a way) in the manner of a predicate, as it were, transforming it from non-subsistent to subsistent. The model of attribution or predication breaks down completely here. In anything which is X without being X-itself we can validly distinguish that something which is X, from X-ness itself, and from its being X. But we can not distinguish from a reality its subsistence; for this latter is its oneness, its being something at all, and if we try to subtract this nothing remains.

We conclude from this brief sketch, which will gain more and more point as our exposition of Neoplatonic doctrine proceeds, that the distinction between a reality or “thing” and its subsistence is ontologically illegitimate. And the same holds good for the distinction between a being (of whatever order) and its existence, in so far as the moment of subsistence in its existence is considered, and not the particular fashion of its subsistence which makes up its specific mode of existence.

We can see now how this view affects the alleged distinction of the two senses of “presupposition” which was the occasion of the making of the above remarks, the instance for these ontological elucidations. Real nature and its subsistence cannot be ontologically distinguished. Presupposition in nature and presupposition in subsistence are not two “things” – they are one and the same, ontologically speaking; any residual difference is rather epistemological or gnostic, epistemic in character: I mean that we may conceptually and verbally attribute subsistence to a reality thus expressing our knowledge of its reality; but the vehicle of our conception or expression, namely the predication, is not real: we merely repeat the same thing when we predicate subsistence of a reality. It is really an identity statement. And similarly the distinction between presupposition in subsistence and presupposition in nature may indicate our point of view or of interest, but no valid objective distinction. To see this immediately, let it be supposed that the nature of B presupposes the nature of A in the sense of presupposition that the objector would wish; then clearly B could not subsist without the nature of A; but the nature of A is really inseparable and indistinguishable from the subsistence of A [17] as was shown summarily above; therefore, etc. And vice-versa, let it be supposed that the subsistence of B presupposes the subsistence of A; but subsistence is inseparably and indistinguishably tied up with the subsistent entity as the subsistent entity which it is in its specific nature; hence etc.

A final note on this subject. There have been made some attempts to trace back the scholastic distinction between *essentia* and *esse* or *existentia* to late Greek metaphysics – naturally with no success [18]. But the reason for this failure has not, to my knowledge, been adequately

explained out of the very nature of the Greek doctrine of ὑπόστασις, ὑπαρξίς and ὄν. Such an explanation, if I am not wildly wrong, will be found in the following exposition.

A brief note on Damascius' philosophical style and mode of thinking

It is generally true that the Neoplatonists did not fare particularly well with modern scholarship. One meets again and again with ignorant reproaches, grave misunderstandings, puerile objections, faulty reports, prejudiced “interpretations” – all of which, and the many other more and less important shortcomings, stem from two sources: sheer lack of acquaintance with their voluminous writings on the one hand, and fundamental difference in the respective general outlook (with its implications on the general mode and structure of thought) and spirit on the other.

To account for this phenomenon one might well say with Holstenius “neque enim publici haec saporis sunt, aut quae vulgus eruditorum facile attingat”; but one should also proceed further and endeavour to discover and impartially describe those differences in fundamental attitudes and modes of thinking, which, existing between the Ancient and the Modern Spirit in general, and between late Ancient Greek Culture on the one hand and the contemporaneous lapse into a new Primitivism on the other, can account for the remarkable phenomenon mentioned above. Such a project, to be carried out in detail, awaits still today its realization, together with the enterprise, essentially interconnected with it, of giving a coherent and true account of Neoplatonism in its historical development and culmination. Regrettably, there does not exist in our cultural decline an adequate History of Neoplatonism.

It is, of course, not the object of these meagre remarks to signalize the guidelines for an inquiry into the fundamental causes of difference between Neoplatonism and Contemporaneous (and even more generally Modern) Spirit. What may be done though, is to indicate a few cardinal characteristics of Neoplatonic thought, with special reference to Damascius, which should, I think, be taken into consideration in any systematic attempt to tackle the major problem, and

which, moreover, are often left unattended, or their importance is missed – with grave misrepresentations as a natural result. I shall here append the roughest hints towards some such fundamental features of Neoplatonic thought, as particularly exemplified in the last Head of the Platonic Academy.

1) Absolute Rationalism in all its rigidity [19]. By which I mean the view that whatever Reason asserts, is there in reality in the precise way in which Reason discovers it. In Strict Rationalism there is, again, no room for commonsensical “reasonableness” and *prima facie* plausibilities of the ordinary consciousness [20].

2) Extreme subtlety of reasoning in abstract subjects, reasoning conducted with the least possible help from experience or imagination [21]. Philosophers well versed in Pure Mathematics can understand the force of the ancient commonplace [22] that Mathematics is the necessary road to Philosophy.

3) Extreme subtlety in distinctions can become arid scholasticism if the finely dissected body of details thus discovered is left disconnected for lack of the unifying power principle which is able to reveal, and keep the eye fixed on, the essential unity behind the apparently unconnected multiplicity. Neoplatonists possessed to an astonishing degree this “Platonic” power. But extreme variety of items bound in a coherent whole, a harmonious unifying principle for the vast manifold of reality, implies immense articulation and immensely complex structure. Complexity and integration go together in the field of reality at large as in the case of organic entities.

4) Immense articulation and structure is, only too understandably, graspable with difficulty proportional to the abstractness of the inquiry, to the subtlety with which it is carried in its details, to the degree to which the imposition (or rather the revelation) of unity on the extremely finely analyzed field is successful [23], to, correspondingly, the naturalness as against the artificiality of the emerging representation of the whole of reality, and, so, to the immensity of the articulated structure. And, of course, Neoplatonism being strictly Rationalistic, help from common sense and commonsensical plausibilities and ordinary “reasonableness”, is out of the question here. But overwhelming difficulty of such kind, in grasping the meaning of the order of reality, is called, in the usual course of reasoning, obscurity. Which is evidently erroneous; for one must distinguish objective obscurity in the studied thought itself due to its own inadequate grasp of the truths conceived by it, from subjective difficulty in the interpreter to grasp the thoughts which in themselves and as expressed adequately in the reasoning under investigation (to the extent feasible by the inherent, deformative error-propensities of human thought and language) correspond to the truths and realities conceived. The former can be rightfully called “obscurity”. The latter’s real name is, in our case, abstruseness. And abstruse the Neoplatonic thought really is *par excellence*.

5) The very subtlety of the Neoplatonic movement of thought, in conjunction with its determined abstractness, requires a continuous process of qualification of what is at each stage enunciated. For the thought is expressed in language, and language is naturally adapted to the common (mainly practical) needs of the human kind, so that its elements are loaded with commonsensical meanings (offsprings of ordinary concerns), and are thus unfit, unless properly “purified”, to express abstract thoughts. Furthermore, Reason conceives in its subtle workings of entities, distinctions and connections to which no ordinary conception (let alone expression) adequately corresponds, for the very simple reason that they are not discernible by Reason as apprehended in the ordinary level of thought. For both these reasons, the Neoplatonist must be continuously on his guard against “natural” (in a sense) misunderstandings of his formulations – and this shield of protection cannot be effected but by an apparently tedious process of

continuous qualification of what is said – a process which, naturally, adds to the difficulty of correctly grasping the thought “intended” in so far as the “uninitiated” reader or hearer is concerned, and which can only be taken by the latter as another sign of the hopeless confusion and obscurity of the writer’s thought.

6) But there is a profounder reason for this uniquely peculiar, intellectual “hedging”, this intriguing and perplexing process of continuous qualification and modification; a reason thoroughly Platonic, as I believe, and found to an eminent degree in Plotinus and in Damascius (in differing but connected ways) and in Proclus, here to a lesser degree in an important sense. The reason is the belief in the Unformulability of (absolute) Truth, save by direct intellectual intuition, in a state of identification, more Parmenideo, to the reality disclosed, to the being revealed. By “Unformulability” I mean the impossibility of so adequately formulating truth as to be a perfect mirror-image of the reality itself expressed in it, an image, therefore, absolutely safeguarding itself against any possible misunderstanding by all educated, capable and healthy minds. This being so, exposition of truth can only be a matter of total appeal to the receiving soul.

Plato’s total appeal consists in a divine indeed (i.e. unsurpassable by merely human powers) harmonious blend of dialectical dexterity and artistic creativity no less than sensitivity, of scientific arguments and imposing myths, of elevated diction and style and clear, fully rationalistic reasoning, of immediate self-evident intuition and enigmatic, symbolically meant hints.

In Plotinus the approach is less objectivistic, more subjective, as it were: the appeal lies in dialectical subtlety and cogent, if idiosyncratic, reasoning indeed, but also in the glowing fervor of his proclaimed involvement and passionate belief (something which occasionally raises, through the mere force of its genuine conviction his otherwise defective and personal style to true, simple, emotional, and almost modern, rather than intellectual style eloquence) – without neglecting his peculiar and important use of similes, images and other such mutually corrective subservients in the cause of only inadequately expressible truth.

With Damascius, probably owing to lack of artistic proclivities and talents on the one hand, and to a rigidly objectivistic and rationalistic (Iamblichean, I should say) turn of mind on the other, the attempt to put into severely limited ordinary human language the all-important truths of Philosophy and Theology is totally “intellectual” in nature; but what thus is lost in radiant grandeur or glowing fervor does not entirely disappear: it is put into an incredibly rich, wonderfully subtle and delicate, enormously and nicely articulated reasoned structure – a marvel of consummate “dialectal” expertise devoted to the cause of absolute Truth and nothing else for some, but for many nowadays a miracle of useless sophistication, of ill-directed industry, a monstrosity whose real point rests on manifestly showing what, impregnated by the utterly misguided thinking and spirit of an age, real intellectual abilities are likely to generate in the field of reason when turned on the wrong pursuit unchecked by “experience” or common sense or ordinary rationalism [24]. I claim that the latter alternative is profoundly mistaken – and shall endeavour to make good this contention in detail in the body of my comments.

I tried above to enumerate a few “formal” characteristics of Neoplatonism in general, which particularly apply to Damascius’ philosophical method and style. I believe it useful to concentrate introductorily on such features as against the material content of the doctrines for various reasons – not least among which is that in this way superficial, but widespread misunderstandings are easily comprehended, reckoned with, and corrected [25]. For instance it explains such a grave error as the extravagant notion that Damascius is something of a skeptic!

[26]

NOTES

[1] It is erroneous to consider Plotinus as the typical Neoplatonist. The tendency so to regard him, may be historically and psychologically explainable from the fact that, as it happened, Plotinus is the best known Neoplatonist during the so-called "critical" era (19th and 20th centuries); but still it is positively misleading and inaccurate, if not straightforwardly false. I conceive of the Athenian Neoplatonism (materially definable as the philosophy of the Platonic Academy from Plutarch of Athens until the closure of the School), under the spiritual and intellectual cardinal influence of Iamblichus, as the fullest and most mature manifestation of the Neoplatonic Spirit – a manifestation far from monolithic, to be sure. But this is not the proper place in which to argue for this view.

[2] Of course, I shall be over-simplifying, but I cannot give here a metaphysically adequate analysis of what it is for a thing to have a property. Such an endeavour was undertaken in my Oxford treatise ("Things and Predication"), to which I refer for the systematic metaphysical background of what I am here explaining.

[3] Much fuss is being made nowadays, specifically during this (20th) century, about some allegedly newly discovered philosophical significance in the distinction between words and things, expressions and things signified, formal and material modes of speech, conceptions and realities, and so on and so forth. And yet, if one examines objectively the case, nothing new emerges but common stock for the whole History of Philosophy. In fact, for all philosophical purposes it obviously makes not the least difference whether to say: "the statement that a is P, is true" or to say "a is P". Similarly, metaphysical doctrines and theories are usually condemned (really unheard) on the general ground that they are blind to the distinction between the conceptual (analyses, distinctions, connections etc.) and the real order (what is there in reality, what is really distinguished etc.).

But it can very well be argued that the alleged distinction either covers a misunderstanding (and a consequent misformulation) or a different kind of distinction, or is without object at least in philosophical contexts. The former when the probing of the general objection reveals the existence of a confusion in the objector's mind as regards the real content of the metaphysical assertion which he combats; as is, for instance, the case if to a metaphysician's claim that (as a result of an argument) two realities must be posed as distinct, one is prone to object that such a claim confuses conceptual distinction with real apart-being, while it turns out that, in truth, the objector himself confuses real distinctness (or distinction in reality) with physical separateness. But apart from this type of very common mistake, the presumed distinction lacks philosophical relevance; for something conceptual, conceives, or "intends" something real – otherwise it is void. And the transposition from the one to the other of the two corresponding orders (the one being ideally an exact replica of the other) can be little more than an affair of convenience in exposition. To that extent Parmenides has uttered the last word on the issue.

It would be a misunderstanding of my point here (briefly hinted at), if it was construed as naively proclaiming the dissolution of all epistemological and material-logical concerns and problems. They, unfortunately, cannot be exorcised like this. But intellectual superstitions should indeed

be liable to brief, drastic exorcisms. And it is such a superstition (perpetrated for too long) to believe that one can turn one philosophical discipline against another – in toto (here Epistemology against Metaphysics). For it is one thing to ask of how we can attain truth; and a totally different thing to claim that it makes no difference to an attained truth whether it will be formulated in the “conceptual” or the “real” mode of speech. To keep these two things separate (a modest, if trivial, request) was all it was asked above – and this short note is sufficient to destroy general accusations against realistic metaphysics.

A further irony in the matter is that the identity of (what they called) the “formal” and “material” modes of speech was proclaimed by some extreme Neo-positivists in the ill-conceived and badly executed idea of completely undermining in this way Metaphysics. They did not notice that their sword was capable of cutting in both directions.

[4] Which sometimes operates in a clandestine, unconscious fashion with some non-avowedly empiricist philosophers.

[5] This is no mere rhetoric. For a categorial difference exists between α -things and β -things when α and β belong to different categories of being (and, consequently, thought), whereas the difference at stake transcends such a difference in so far as it opposes the existence of α and β to that of an α -thing and β -thing.

[6] The theory of Wholes in Neoplatonism distinguishes senses of the “whole” to which the above clause does not apply. But it applies to wholes composed from parts – and such is the wholeness of a field governed by (or exhibiting) a certain order.

[7] The validity of this explanation, and its full meaning, will emerge, of course, later.

[8] Once more I must refer to my Oxford treatise referred to above, for a systematic examination of this distinction – but I do not now fully subscribe to the results achieved there as regards the present problem.

[9] By “presence” I do not mean presence in something else (and thus, *inter alia*, not local presence) but presence simpliciter, as a reality in itself. A metaphysically equivalent expression is manifestation.

[10] Some will concern a particular formulation of the distinction intended, rather than its content. For instance the distinction between the content of a being and its “actus essendi” does not coincide with that between an existent thing (i.e. a full being) and its existence, for the simple reason that an existent thing is already a content of being “acting” existentially. But there is harmless systematic ambiguity in the first member of the two distinctions, and no valid objection against the distinction meant can be raised on the ground that I used above in the text the two formulations as if they were identical.

[11] It, for instance, retains the conceptual ambiguity of the Greek word: we can speak both of the subsistence of a reality (thus appropriating ‘reality’ to the “thing” subsisting) and of something’s reality (signifying its subsistence).

[12] Abstract things are thus subsisting entities, just as concrete ones.

[13] A “subsistent reality” is really a useful redundancy.

[14] “The” here is of course misleading; but such misleadingness is unavoidable in human language. And it can be rendered innocuous by appropriate immunizing intellectual operations.

[15] In so far as a nothing can consist in something.

[16] The latter formulation appears, and is, circular; but this is the circularity of mutual (ontological) entailment, or even of bottom identity.

[17] We see here how my explanation is tied up with a realistic metaphysics (the only possible metaphysics), and how a possible motive for the objection lies in mere anti-realist feelings.

[18] See, e.g., St. Schindeler, "Aseität Gottes, Essentia und Existenz im Neoplatonismus", *Philosophisches Jahrbuch*, vol. 22, 1909, pp. 3-19; 158-171.

[19] This needs some qualification in the case of Plotinus. But, firstly, not all that modification which one may feel entitled to require *prima facie*. And, secondly, in my view, as I already said, Plotinus is not the typical Neoplatonist.

[20] We need a qualification here for the doctrine of κοινὰ and ἀδιάστροφοί έννοιαι. This qualification does not amount to mere accommodation. For it can easily be shown that the certain though inarticulate conceptions meant by that doctrine do not tally with what is nowadays meant by ordinary thought and common sense. (Much nearer it is to the common sense of the Scottish Philosophers, particularly Reid).

[21] Experience and imagination may help by providing examples or analogues. And this, so far as it is clearly understood that it is something subordinate and of the nature of psychological help, is no evil. But in ordinary thinking experience and imagination guide the thought, which thus, *eo ipso*, is not abstract. It would be interesting to enumerate the numerous ways in which that disastrous guidance is exercised in modern Methodologism.

[22] At least within the Tradition to which Neoplatonism belongs.

[23] This may sound paradoxical; but, in truth, evidently, the more multifarious the field covered by a unity, the more complex the integrated manifold under a harmonic principle, the less easily comprehensible the unity itself is (the more hidden the controlling harmony is).

[24] In essence, e. g., Dodds' construal of later, Iamblican influenced, Neoplatonism.

[25] Foremost among them is the confusion between the so-called "irrationality" of certain Neoplatonic doctrines (by which is normally meant that they are unpalatable to modern pseudo-scientific sensitivities) and the absolute, indeed too vigorous and unyielding, rationality of the way in which they are Neoplatonically argued for, supported and justified, as well as the complete coherence of the order of reality represented in such Neoplatonic ontological system. In this confusion, the extreme subtlety (to overrepeat myself) of the Neoplatonic reasoning contributes, by being construed on the part of students inexperienced in Abstract Metaphysics as "irrationality", i.e. as lack of cogent argumentation and systemic coherence.

[26] A notion inaugurated (in so far as I know), alas, by Ritter, from whom I should not normally expect this, and continued to find adherents rather recently, in a discussion in *Entretiens Hardt*, where I was not surprised to find it.