Proclus, Ammonius and Boethius on Divine Knowledge

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The theme of divine knowledge is of the greatest importance in late Neoplatonic philosophy. It is connected with two fundamental philosophical questions: an epistemological one about the nature of knowledge and a metaphysical one about the relationship between the One and the many. The way in which Proclus and Boethius approach the problem and the solutions which they put forth are extremely interesting both from an historical and from a theoretical point of view.

I

Proclus first, and Boethius later, both consider the question of divine knowledge starting from an analysis of the concept of providence (which is the One itself, considered in its operations on the world it created). One of the greatest difficulties involved in the idea of providence is raised by the way in which it, eternal and incorruptible, knows the manifold and contingent world of beings. In some sense knowledge is obviously an identity between knower and known. Consequently if the known object is temporal, the subject that knows it must in some way be on its level and participate in its nature which in this case is temporal. Actually things are different and Proclus introduces this different perspective through a dissertation on the degrees of knowledge or rather the types of knowledge.

First, he says, there is a type of knowledge connected with irrationality. It includes sense and imagination and concerns particular objects, obviously known as particulars. Secondly, there is rational knowledge which includes opinion and science, perceived now through either beings in the process of becoming (opinion) or through unchangeable and stable realities (science). There follows intellectual knowledge in which we find a direct comprehension of rational knowledge. In its turn, this intellectual

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The present essay represents the first step in a wider research on later Neoplatonism, both in its Western and Eastern branches. As such it is concerned primarily with a direct and first-hand analysis of texts, leaving to further steps a more extensive utilization of contemporary critical literature. As will be evident the main interest is theoretical and speculative.

Dionysius, Vol. V, Dec. 1981, pp. 127-164

knowledge is subdivided into two species: perfect intelligence, which is and thinks of the whole as a totality, and particular forms of intelligence which are and act according to a modality corresponding to their nature.[1]

The types of knowledge so far mentioned — from the irrational to the rational and finally the intellectual — are however relative to an understanding function which is endowed with a specific form and each type can only attain to those objects to which it is formally suited. *Beyond* intelligence there is supreme knowledge according to which the One exerts its providence on each being and on all beings together.[2] This does not mean that divine knowledge is devoid of reason and intelligence but, on the contrary, that it is

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1. For what precedes see Proclus, *De decem dubitationibus*, 1, 3, *passim*. Quotations from this opuscule and the *De providentia* are drawn from the edition by D. Isaac (Paris, 2 vols., resp. 1977 and 1979). Where not otherwise stated, translations are my own.

The three opuscules by Proclus on providence and on evil seemed to be a juvenile work to some scholars of the past (cf. e.g. A. Berger, *Proclus. Exposition de sa doctrine*, Paris, 1840, pp. 121-2; J. Freudenthal, "Zu Proklos und dem jüngeren Olympiodor," in *Hermes*, XVI, 1881, pp. 214-5; H.F. Müller "Dionysios, Proklos, Plotinos," in *BGPhMA*, XX, 1918, *passim*). H. Boese *(Procli Diadochi Tria Opuscula . . .*, Berlin, 1960, p. X) and D. Isaac *(Proclus. Dix problèmes concernant la providence*, Paris, 1977, p. 19) think, with better likelihood, that they belong to Proclus' maturity if not to his old age.

Probably he composed them after the Platonic commentaries *(Timaeus, Phaedrus, Theaetetus, Republic, Parmenides . . .*), and before the *Platonic Theology*. H. Boese rightly remarks (*op. cit., ibid.*), that in the *Opuscules* Proclus shows his wide acquaintance with the Platonic dialogues, and in a passage quotes his own commentaries *(De malorum subsistentia*, I, 17-18, pp. 172-3, Boese), whereas in the *Platonic Theology* he only touches on the great themes of the *Opuscules*, taking them as already known and illustrated.

By universal consent, *Platonic Theology* was Proclus' last work: cf. H. D. Saffrey-L.G. Westerink, *Proclus. Théologie platonicienne*, I, Paris, 1969, p. CL, where Dodds' opinion is also quoted, according to which both the style and the phraseology of this writing are "senile". As a matter of fact, the commentaries on the *Timaeus* as well as on the *Parmenides* are quoted in the *Platonic Theology*, while this latter work is not quoted elsewhere.

2. *De decem dubitationibus*, 4, 1 ff., p. 56 ff. It is important to remark that in the *De providentia* there is a division of cognitive faculties which, though more complete, is fundamentally analogous to the one stated in the *De decem dubitationibus*. There is word, in the first place, of knowledge, sensitive and rational (chap. 15-16), while separating sensitive from passional life; then of rational knowledge (this is also endowed with a double movement, of correction and education towards the "inferior lives", and of discovery of its own rational world, especially through the apprehension of the incorporeal forms of geometry and arithmetic: see for all *ibid.*, chap. 17-18), intellectual and finally hypernoetic (*ibid.*, chap. 19).

above reason and above intelligence. It is a common notion, states Proclus,[3] that the divine is superior to intelligence and he demonstrates it as follows. In each existent being, knowledge corresponds to being.[4] As a consequence each kind of knowledge must pertain to a hypostasis or subsistence in whose nature it inheres[5] — sensitive knowledge to beings devoid of reason, reason to beings endowed with reason, and so on. So, if providence is a form of existence in conformity to the One, it also knows in conformity with its being — but this is to say that its knowledge is above any possible form and any possible determinate being.

In all beings, in truth, the One is present. Not in all of them however is the universal present because some of them are particular; not in all of them is form present because some of them are devoid of form; not in all of them is nature present because some of them are contrary to nature; but in all of them, all that can be known is one because the One is above all beings and all determinations.[6] It is the universal cause of subsistence. In other words, what does not participate in the One absolutely does not exist.[7] All that exists, whatever it is, is one; and he who knows all things, knows them all according to the One, which is common both to the things that are and to the things that are not.[8]

If we want to define the nature of the unity which distinguishes providence we must say that it is not the unity of the individual (ἄτομον), because this is "the last of all beings"[9], and is what it is by participating in the universal to which it is therefore inferior. Nor is it the unity of the universal itself, which is certainly one but not "the One in itself". While the One is undivided the universal is divided as it has in itself the differences of the beings it includes. Nor is it the unity of totality, divisible and divided in itself by definition. Different from all these, the unity of providence does not admit in itself of any division or movement. In this the unity of providence is unlike the unity of intelligence which, though it is

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3. On the theory of common notions, formulated both in the Stoic and Epicurean milieu, and also in Platonic (then Neoplatonic) and Aristotelian circles, see H. D. Saffrey-L. G. Westerink, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 159-161, and A.S. Pease, in his edition of the *De natura deorum* of Cicero, Cambridge, Mass., 1955, pp. 247-9 and 579-581.
4. Cf. *De decem dubitationibus*, 4, 14-16, p. 57.
5. *Ibid.*, 7-8.
6. Cf. *ibid.*, 37-44, p. 58.
7. Cf. *ibid., 44-46, p. 157, 26-28:* εἰ δέ τι μὴ μετέχει τοῦ ἑνός, οὐδ' ὂν ἂν εἴη τὸ παράπαν, οὐδ'ἂν προνοίας δύναιτο μετἔχειν.
8. Such things are not, according to otherness (cf. Plato, *Sophist*, 258 b) rather, of course, than in an absolute sense not existing.
9. *De decem dubitationibus*, 5, 13, p. 59.

one, is manifold in its being and in its understanding, and it is also unlike the unity of the soul which, being movement, also thinks in movement.[10]

The reason why the One is different from all the other beings derives from its nature. It is the "maker" and "saviour" of all beings, according to the fine definition of Proclus, and therefore has a truer existence than any substance and a higher intelligence than any form of knowledge.[11] It follows that the One knows everything in the same way and nothing escapes the One; no being escapes it and no knowledge escapes it. Proclus avails himself of a geometric image,[12] to explain how the One sums up and recapitulates in itself all that is generated by itself:

> "As the whole circle is centrally (κεντρικῶς) in its centre, if it is true that the centre is the cause and the circle the caused, then every number is in the monad, following the same reasoning, in a monadic way. In the One of providence all the things exist in a stronger way, since that One is greater than the centre and the monad; as, then, if the centre had knowledge of the circle, it would know it in a centric way [that is, from the point of view of the centre], just as its existence is centric, and would not subdivide it according to the parts of the circle; so also the unitary knowledge of providence is, in its indivisibility, knowledge of all the divided, and of each of the beings individualized and totalized to the utmost degree; and as every thing exists according to the One, so it knows them according to the One. Neither is this knowledge subdivided according to the known objects, nor can they be mixed together because of the unique unity of knowledge; but, as it is unique, it receives all the infinity of the knowable, and constitutes a unity superior to each unity that is in them".[13]

The comparison means that in the first place, the One embraces the fullness of reality as the cause contains in itself the reason of its effects; secondly, and analogically, it means that the knowledge that the One has about itself embraces the infinity of the knowable in a synthesis which nevertheless infinitely transcends their sum, just as the cause transcends its effects.

At this point we come to a new question. If we grant that providence is the cause of all that exists and so transcends it how

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10. *Ibid.*, 21-29.
11. *Ibid.*, 22-23.
12. Inspired by Plotinus, *Enneads* 6, 8, 18, 23 and 38 and elsewhere.
13. *De decem dubitationibus*, 5, 34-52, p. 60.

can we then think that it knows it since the One is transcendent and the universal being is relative and contingent? The very moment we define the contingent we oppose it to the transcendent. As a consequence, if we postulate the existence of the contingent we are induced to deny the existence of the transcendent and vice-versa. It is however evident, and Proclus stresses the point, that providence must on the one hand know the objects it makes, and on the other hand in no way places itself on the same level as them. If the nature of the contingent is indeterminate, that is, open to a variety of results, the nature of the absolute is exactly the opposite — determined, certain, univocal. Taking this for granted, what then will be the nature of the knowledge that providence has of the contingent?

Let us consider first what Proclus thinks is the nature of knowledge in general:

> "Every form of knowledge, being always intermediate between a knowing subject and a known object, starting from the former, moving towards the latter and joining them together, it is necessary that only one of the following antithesis should prove true: either knowledge is modified together with the knower, and is like the knower, or it is like the knowable; otherwise neither possibility is true, as knowledge cannot meet either. If its subsistence should be in what is known, it would be determined only in accordance with it; if, on the contrary, it were in both and apart from both of them, it would not belong more to the one than to the other of the extremes. But, as it is in the knower, and tends towards the known, it is obvious that, being the completion of the former, and tending to the other, it should be rightly defined in accordance with the nature of the knower, since it partakes of what is known only in so far as it can fully distinguish itself from the forms of knowledge of the other known objects; in fact knowledge must have something of what is known, as that is its goal. Once we have demonstrated that, we can say that the knowledge set in the knower is characterized, as far as its being is concerned, by the subsistence of the knower, and it is evident that the forms of knowledge of the unchangeable beings are in their turn unchangeable in every respect, and those of the changeable are the opposite".[14]

As previously stated, providence is nothing but the One, so its knowledge will simply be the knowledge of the One and it will address itself to everything keeping its own characteristics

14. *Ibid.*, 7, 2-25, pp. 61-62.

unchanged. In this way, it will know the many under the sign of unity and the contingent beings under the sign of necessity. In short, it will know everything according to its own existence and not according to the existence of the known objects. If they are divided, generated in time, corporeal, unstable, it knows them in the light of its own nature according to which it is incorporeal, timeless, undivided and transcending all possible oppositions. This is because "knowledge is determined according to the qualities of the knower, and in this case the knower is unitary, unchangeable, setting limits to itself according to the One".[15]

How, then, does providence know contingent beings? Not according to what they are, but according to what it is. As it transcends contingent beings it does not descend to their level; but, being placed, as it were on an inaccessible peak, from that sublime height it considers and evaluates all lower things in their absolute nature. In short, the knowledge that providence has of contingent beings is not contingent in itself but absolute.

This is the keystone, the most important speculative achievement of the whole argument of Proclus.

> "By knowing the undetermined in a determined way (τὸ ἀόριστον οἴην ὠρισμένως γινὼσκουσα),[16] providence knows that the indeterminate is such [in itself] and that it is determinate in providence; and it knows that not only it is determinate in providence — this would not be the same as to know it in itself; nor just that it is indeterminate in itself — this would not mean to know it according to its [providence's] own existence. Therefore its knowledge embraces both, the determinate through the knower, and the indeterminate according to its own nature. And it knows this wholeness because it has a determinate comprehension of the indeterminate, since the indeterminate is not, but is on the point of being, and its knowledge already contains the cause of the indeterminate. Providence in fact knows that something indeterminate will come into being, and on seeing its cause knows it; and as it exists, it also knows the indeterminate — actually, the indeterminate does not exist indeterminately but in a determinate way, and it knows immaterially and without dimensions what, coming after it, is material and extended".[17]

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15. *Ibid.*, 45-48, p. 63.
16. *Ibid.*, 8, 11-12, p. 63, p. 163, 10.
17. *Ibid.*, 11-30, pp. 63-64. Compare the parallel passage, with interesting variations on the theme that "the inferior being is known under a modality superior to it, and the superior under an inferior one", in *De providentia,*

To say that providence knows the causes of contingent beings amounts to saying that it is their cause; therefore it is the cause of all the beings it knows and it knows all the beings of which it is the cause. Its causal operation appears particularly at a privileged moment, when determinate generation (or, in other words, the generation to determination, the birth to individuation) opens the gates of being — or else of existence[18] — to indeterminate things.

One might ask at this point how Proclus actually conceives of the causal relationship between providence and contingent beings which he has set forth. Some of his expressions, along with an image he avails himself of — the seed and the seminal reasons it contains — could make us think that he sees the results of the action of providence as a transliteration (metaphysical, of course) of the unitary principle which is providence into other subjects and therefore as an infinitely extended multiplication and individuation of itself — from which the universe derives its origin. For instance he says:

> "If that reason [of providence] looked after the cause of subdivision which is in itself, it would find that this very reason, even though undivided, is however in another subject; and the fact that it is in another and not in itself, enabled them to be divided, to become different from themselves, and not to be each of them everywhere".[19]

In our time we cannot help associating these words with Hegel's world of concepts and we are inclined to interpret them according to the dialectics of the in-itself/out-of-itself. It seems that we cannot but interpret them as follows: the cause of subdivision, from which the world of the many and of contingent beings takes its origin, is set in providence, that is in the One itself. Though it remains undivided (or also: though it was formerly undivided . . .), it simultaneously transfers itself to something else; it splits, as it were, ontologically; and its very "being in another" is the source of the many or, better still, *is* the many.

Obviously the problem of the relationship between the One and the many, put in these terms, has the advantage of respecting the evident metaphysical principle that the One is the sole cause of all that exists: it is both cause of itself, if we can speak of a "cause" in

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63-64, pp. 81-82. Prop. 124 of the *Elements of Theology*, is an admirable epitome of these same themes.

18. τὴν εἰς τὸ εἶναι πάροδον: *De decem dubitationibus*, 8, 51, p. 65, p. 164, 43-44.

19. *Ibid.*, 41-46, pp. 64-65.

this case, and of what derives from it. But *how* does the many derive thence? This is really the question that calls for our attention. If we put forward the hypothesis of a mere multiplication of the One, we run up against the principle of its indivisibility. Proclus' opinion — even if the above sentences sound ambiguous — actually takes both possibilities into account. We can understand it clearly from some passages in the *Elements of Theology*.

Proposition 98 reads as follows "Each separate cause[20] is everywhere and nowhere at once"[21]: everywhere, because of the communication of its potency (each cause is in fact the source of existing beings which are dependent on it and which are capable of participating in it and it is present in them all by means of its irradiations); nowhere, because of its way of existing, which has nothing to do with space. Proclus explains further, and his explanations are very important: if the transcendent cause were merely everywhere, this would not prevent it from being cause and being in all those taking part in it; but in this case it would not exist separately from them all. Instead, it must exist simultaneously in all and separately from all. Were it merely nowhere, naturally this would not compromise its absolute transcendence; but it would prevent it from being omnipresent in all the beings caused by it through its bounteous dispensation. So the transcendent cause must be at once separated (as their principle), from all the beings it fills with itself and present in all those capable of participating in it.[22]

Obviously one cannot simply suggest as a sensible solution of the problem, that the One is partly everywhere and partly nowhere — both because the cause, as such, does not stand torn into pieces, and because the very terms 'everywhere' and 'nowhere' would lose all their meaning, even the semantic one, and would be immediately contradicted. Let us investigae further the previous statement, according to which the cause

> "is wholly everywhere, and at the same time nowhere; what can take part in it attains it all, and finds it entirely present to itself; yet it is also transcendent as a whole; what takes part in it does not exhaust it, but receives from it so much as it is able to contain. It does not find itself in difficulty because of its

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20. Separate from its effects, that is transcendent. To say that the One is a "separate" cause (αἴτιον χωριστὸν) is the same as saying that it "transcends all things, and resides in no being inferior to itself" (*Elements of Theology*, 98, p. 87, 33-34 Dodds).
21. *Ibid.*, p. 87, 27.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 89, 6-9.

bestowal, when many take part in it, as it is separated; nor are those taking part in it at a loss, since it is everywhere".[23]

It is important to notice that providence is the universal cause of being, of goodness and of unity; and it is also the *determinate* cause — as Proclus repeatedly stresses — of indeterminate beings. But what exactly does he mean by 'determinate' and 'indeterminate'? Let us say at once that providential knowledge is determinate in itself, whereas "indetermination exists in the beings that come next to providence".[24] Granted that providence is grounded on the One[25] and that the One of providence is not like the one of matter,[26] nor like the individual one,[27] nor like the universal one,[28] it follows that "the One of providence is more One than any corporeal or any incorporeal unity, and that its infinite potency is more infinite than any finite or any infinite potency".[29] It is for instance more infinite than quantitative infinity, which is clearly so in only one aspect (namely the quantitative one), whilst under all the others it is finite and consequently subordinate to an infinity "more infinite" than itself and ultimately to the infinity of providence which coincides with absolute unity.

The beings that descend and are generated from the One bear in their own ontological structure the mark of the simultaneous presence of the One and infinity. These two are not however completely identified in dependent beings, as they are in the transcendent and ineffable nature of providence, but are variously composed and associated.

"So we shall understand that the infinite potency of providence, since it embraces all the potencies belonging to all the realities it attends to, generates them all according to mere unity, and keeps each of them in its specific infinity, so as to give them all a unity corresponding to the nature of each of them. The one in fact is not the same everywhere, as for instance in corporeal and incorporeal beings, nor is it the same in long-lasting and in short-lived beings . . . . Besides, what is incorporeal is nearer to the One, whereas the body is very far from it, because of its endless subdivision; and it is no problem, if one being is more

23. *Ibid.*, p. 89, 13-19; cf. *Platonic Theology*, Saffrey-Westerink, I, 22, p. 102, 22-26.
24. *De decem dubitationibus*, 8, 52-3, p. 65.
25. *Ibid.*, 10, 4.
26. *Ibid.*, 15-16, p. 66.
27. *Ibid.*, 19 ff.
28. *Ibid.*, 24 ff.
29. *Ibid.*, 11, 1-4, p. 67.

than another, if we consider that each being always becomes another by diminution in respect of what precedes it, until it reaches the last degree of its series".[30]

We could suppose, considering the basic distinction between the nature of the absolute (which is absolutely one and absolutely infinite) and the nature of the beings which are generated by it (in which the One and infinity, though both present, are differently and variously associated) that the definition of the contingent is the following: it imitates infinity by means of indetermination and the One by means of determination.[31] In this way, providence would be at the same time and in the same respect the first cause of the determinate, by the agency of the One, and of the indeterminate, by the agency of infinity. But we must not think that on the one hand only determinate beings exist, conformed to the One, and on the other only indeterminate beings, conformed to infinity. Actually, determinate and therefore necessary beings are not devoid of infinity, nor are contingent beings devoid of limit.[32]

Granted that providence includes the One and the infinite potency of the One, finite and infinite beings derive from it separately. But since infinite potency belongs to the One, it follows that in this world of ours the beings that are made up by both (that is, by the finite and the infinite) form one unitary being;[33] if the One forms it rather than infinity, it will be necessary; if infinity forms it rather than the One, it will be contingent. But as also, in our composite world, infinity is never devoid of the One, the contingent aims at the necessary and fulfils itself in it.

As we said above, in Proclus' opinion the One is infinite potency (it is, to speak more accurately, its own infinite potency). The beings deriving from it reflect its unitary nature, within the limits which are proper to manifold realities divided among themselves; but at the same time they reflect its infinity — now understood in the sense of their active ability to receive existence and not as active ability to be absolutely, and consequently to cause to be. Conceived in this way, the *potency* of infinity takes on the meaning of *'possibility of being'*. As such, it does not exist by itself, but depending on and connected with unity. In fact, "every potency is the potency of another that possesses it, not of itself",[34] which derives from the principle that potency has no ontological

30. *Ibid.*, 22-39, p. 68.
31. *Ibid.*, 12, 6-9.
32. *Ibid.*, 13, 30-31, p. 70.
33. *Ibid.*, 14, 10, p. 71 = p. 169, 9.
34. *Ibid.*, 21-22, p. 72.

individuality, but the sole function of unfolding the subject to which it belongs. In the case of the infinite potency of the One, the One is the hinge and centre it depends on and displays; in the case of every indeterminate being, unity is instead the final goal (τέλος) towards which moves the sequence of its stages of existence. Indetermination consists in not being yet and this is what we call contingency. Its fulfilment takes place in being (or not being) of necessity.[35]

The cycle of what is indeterminate (or contingent) could be summarized in the movement from the potency of being (that is from not being yet) to the state of being necessary or real. It is, obviously, a necessity which is not absolute but relative to the nature of indeterminate beings. Thus it is best to say that the indeterminate, on coming to be, becomes determinate, and the contingent becomes necessary. If the sun is high, it is necessary that it should be so; whereas before dawn its rising is still to take place and is therefore indeterminate and contingent.

Such is the sense Proclus attributes to the contingent. It corresponds to the indeterminate, to what has not yet occurred or — if we like — to the future. Certainly however, the category of the future is not only concerned with what is future for us, or for any possible observer, but what in itself and in the abstract is future or, in other words, what is not yet. If we take as a reference point a stated moment in time, the future is what opens before it, not yet realized, whereas the past is behind it, fixed in a real existence which, as such, is also necessary. *"Factum infectum fieri nequit"*. But this is, to a certain extent, arbitrary, as it is not possible to establish an *absolute* reference point which divides exactly all that is past from all that is future. What is future, with respect to moment x, may be past or present with respect to moment y, or vice-versa. In other words, the limit between the past and the future shifts continuously with the flow of time and universal becoming. Each

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35. *Ibid.*, 14, 22-25, = p. 169, 20-170, 23: ὅτι μὲν οὖν πᾶν χαὶ τὸ ὁποδοῦν ἀόριστον ἐν τῷ μήπω εἶναι τὸ ἀόριστον, ἔχει καὶ τοῦτο ὅ φασιν ἐνδέχεσθαι, τελευτᾷ δε εἰς τὸ ἐξἀνάγκης ἢ εἶναι ἢ μὴ εἶναι.
In *Platonic Theology* Proclus affirms that the determinate is cause of what is immobile, uniform and containing; the indeterminate is the cause of the ordaining and distributing potency, capable of generation and distribution (III, 8, p. 217, transl. Turolla, Bari, 1957). We can therefore say that the determinant is "intelligible measure" (form, idea, essence), whereas indetermination is "cause of the inexhaustible potency in relation to being" (*ibid.*, p. 216) that is, of the ability generative of being, that the One possesses towards all that exists. Could we then say that, as the first is the *formal* principle, the second one is the *existential* principle? In fact, Proclus' statements seem not to admit of any other interpretation.

instant of time may belong to the past, the present or the future at once. The contingency of an instant is therefore the contingency of all times and all the world's beings. Thus we can say of all beings that they are contingent in themselves. This development is not drawn from Proclus — he only defines and very clearly, indetermination as not being yet;[36] but it is implicit in his own argument from which it derives just as a corollary issues from a theorem.[37]

II

Among Proclus' disciples in Athens there was Ammonius son of Hermias, also related on his mother's side to Syrianus. Later a teacher and scholarch in Alexandria from 485 on, Ammonius in some passages of his works remembered with admiration the explanations of his "divine teacher" and covered him with the highest praise.[38] We know that Proclus, apart from commentaries on Plato — many of which are still extant — also wrote commentaries on texts of the Aristotelian *Organon,* in particular on the *De interpretatione* and the *Prior* as well as the *Posterior Analytics.*[39] While writing his own commentary on the *De interpretatione,* Ammonius recalled the lessons of Proclus, perhaps without having the "official" text, but probably using notes which he himself had taken down. His commentary relates Proclian

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36. *De decem dubitationibus,* 14, 23-24, quoted.
37. The same conclusion issues from the opposition between eternity and time as it is stated in the *Elements of Theology* in particular (also in the commentary on the *Timaeus).* All that is measurable in time has a past and a future numerically distinct; therefore it is not, but becomes along with the time which measures it. This means that it exists in becoming, and is constantly other from what it was, because of the flow of time. As a consequence it does not exist as a simultaneous whole, but owns an existence dispersed in temporal duration. In other words, it has its being in not-being; for what is coming to be is not the thing which it is becoming (cf. *Elements of Theology,* 50, pp. 48-9, Dodds). The existence and the activity of the eternal are the exact opposite. What is eternal is a simultaneous whole (ὅλον ἅμα); there is not a part that already existed, another still to exist but all that it is capable of being it already possesses in its entirety, without diminution and without extension. "Where there is neither the earlier nor the later, neither the 'was' nor the 'will be', but only a being what it is, there each thing which is is simultaneously all at once; and the same can be said of its activity" (*ibid.,* 52, p. 50, 18-20).
38. Cf. the commentary on the *De interpretatione,* p. 1, 7-11, together with p. 181, 30-32, Busse.
39. Cf. L. G. Westerink, *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy,* Amsterdam, 1962, p. XII, n. 22.

doctrines. An even greater evidence of its being inspired by Proclus is shown by an *"excursus"* on the divine knowledge of future contingents which belongs to the commentary upon the ninth book of the Aristotelian work. The tenor of the text is purely metaphysical, tending to theological, so that it clearly stands out from the context which is of a purely logical nature.[40]

The Ammonian treatise on providence is included in the course of a discussion on contingent propositions related to the future. After dividing the propositions "according to the subject", Aristotle in the *De interpretatione*[41] had established their differences "according to the predicate", always in reference to the values of true and false. It is here that the modality of time appears, since it is necessary that each of the propositions be determined according to past or present or future. Since there are four oppositions of the propositions, two "angular" (universal affirmative, particular negative, particular affirmative, universal negative), one among indefinites, one among singulars, the first three will be in the same condition with respect to distinguishing true and false or being simultaneously true, but this is not so for singular propositions.[42]

If we want to give an example let us take the particular affirmative against the universal negative. When considered according to the necessary matter, the affirmation will be true, the negation false; according to the impossible, the affirmation false and the negation true; according to the contingent, again the affirmation true and the negation false. The same considerations hold for the second of the "diagonal" oppositions and for the indefinites.[43]

As for the singular propositions, those according to the necessary and the impossible divide the true and the false in the same way as the others with reference to all times; but according to the contingent, the propositions pertaining to different times have a different validity. In the past and in the present, since what is talked about is proved by evidence, the distinction between true and false is immediate. This would not be so if the time were in the

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40. Amanuenses and editors of the past were also led by these characteristics to sever it from its context; so we find it copied apart in the MS. latin 16.080 of the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris (114r - 115v), and edited in an English version in London in 1658.

41. The division according to the subject (by which a proposition may be universal, particular, indefinite or singular) is given in *De interpretatione*, VII, 17 a 38 ff.; the one according to the predicate (by which a proposition may be necessary, contingent, possible or impossible), *ibid.*, IX, 18 a 28 ff.

42. Cf. Ammonius, *op. cit.*, p. 128, 30-129, 4.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 129, 5-35.

future. Since what is talked about has not yet happened (which, for all we know, could happen or not happen, and therefore is still indeterminate), it is impossible to ascertain in a determinate manner which proposition will be true and which false.[44] This had already been said by Aristotle,[45] and is confirmed by Ammonius with the remark: "this principle seems to be logical, conforming to truth, and necessary as regards all parts of philosophy".[46]

As for ethics, it makes us understand that not everything occurs by necessity, but that some things depend on us, as beings capable of choosing or not choosing, acting or not acting. As for the doctrine of nature, it should be asked whether all things occur by necessity or if some things happen by chance or by luck; as for logic, we must inquire whether each opposition divides the true and the false determinately or if there are some that divide them indeterminately; and lastly, for theology, whether the affairs of the world are governed by providence, whether everything occurs by necessity (analogously to eternal realities), or if some things happen by contingency, being produced by particular causes.[47]

There are two ways to analyze the problem, one being logical, the other factual. In the context of the first, the position of the advocates of the necessity of future events (and therefore of universal determinism) can be stated through this syllogism:

> "If you reap (in the future), and not: 'maybe you will reap, maybe not', but absolutely: 'you will reap'; and if you do reap, likewise not: 'maybe you will reap, maybe you will not', but absolutely: 'you will not reap'; therefore you will necessarily reap or will not reap".[48]

By discarding the "maybe" we discard the contingency and introduce (at least in our intention) a strict necessity. But, replies Ammonius, if we accept this way of thinking, that is to say that reaping or not reaping in the future is necessary, we fall into a contradiction; in fact if *one* of these alternatives proves necessary, the other one is evidently impossible; but then how can we sensibly say: "this or that will be"?[49]

Besides this "logical argument" there is, in the case of providence, another one to be taken into consideration which is

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44. *Ibid.*, p. 130, 1 ff., and particularly 23-26.
45. Cf. *De interpretatione*, IX, 19 a 28-29, and the whole preceding discussion, from 18 to 33.
46. Ammonius, *op. cit.*, p. 130, 27-29.
47. For what precedes see *ibid.*, p. 130, 29-121, 19.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 131, 25-28.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 132, 6.

factual or founded upon facts, as follows. Let us put forward this division: either the Gods know determinately (ὡρισκένως) the outcomes of contingents, or they have, like us, an indeterminate knowledge (ἀόριστον γνῶσιν) of them, or else they have none.[50] The third hypothesis is absurd, since the Gods make and ordain all things and fully dispose of them. It is therefore impossible that they ignore what they confer subsistence upon, or (another equally absurd hypothesis) that they neglect it as if by indolence. To be sure, if we think, with an almost unconscious mental process, that divine knowledge is identical to ours both in nature and in capacity, we will be inclined to conclude that the Gods do not care about any particular being on the grounds that this would bring about in their nature an alteration of that state of "intelligent quiet"[51] which is their own. This error is peculiar to those who do not realize the transcendence possessed by divine knowledge and its potency compared with ours.

Just as the sun is capable of illuminating simultaneously all the things that are in the world (unless a solid body interferes with its rays), so the incorporeal and absolutely immaterial potency of the Gods is simultaneously near all beings and every one of them.[52] Nothing can escape it, except our inadequacy or our opposition to containing it — and in such a case providence will not really be checked, but we will not welcome its influx, just as someone closing his eyes, or sleeping in the sun cannot see the sunlight, although he is enveloped by it on all sides. It follows also that those who estrange themselves from divine providence by their dissolute life are not in reality out of its reach. As the Athenian guest says in Plato's *Laws*,[53] there could not be a being small enough (hidden maybe in the depths of the earth) to be ignored by providence which sees all things from above, nor so large as to escape its ordaining potency. Divine potency spontaneously donates good to all beings and necessarily reaches even those who want to be deprived of it, bringing them back to conformity with nature by means of the deserved punishment.[54]

We can conclude that the Gods do know what happens in our world; we can also add that they know it in a determinate manner. If not, their knowledge of the contingent would not be knowledge

50. *Ibid.*, 11-13.
51. *Ibid.*, 21.
52. *Ibid.*, 25-30. The comparison with the sun is present, in analogous terms, even if in a different context, in Proclus, *De decem dubitationibus*, p. 75, 24-27, Isaac; it is a recurrent Neoplatonic leit-motiv.
53. Cf. X, 12, 905 A.
54. Ammonius, *op. cit.*, p. 133, 7-12.

but merely conjecture. It is nevertheless inadmissible that there could be conjectural knowledge in those who do not undergo any change in themselves. Parmenides, as well as Plato and Aristotle — Ammonius reminds us — had already affirmed that for the Gods there is neither past nor future, since neither of them is (the one is not any longer and the other is not yet, the one is already changed and the other born to change). But the Gods absolutely *are,* and in them the coming-to-be is unacceptable even as a hypothesis.[55] It is in fact necessary that what is immutable precedes in metaphysical excellence that which becomes, "so that what becomes, can last".[56] Therefore, if the Gods are principles with regard to all that exists, all things are placed near them in the One which is, now and eternally. Temporal "measures" show themselves simultaneously with the subsistence of the universe and only apply to those realities which are and which work in time.

Let us say then that conjectural knowledge, bound to becoming, to time and its distinctions of past, present and future, cannot be attributed to the Gods. It would consequently not be wise to attribute to the divine knowledge nothing more than to our own and to maintain that it is ambivalent and indeterminate. We might as well make the knowledge possessed by beings devoid of reason equal to our own knowledge and attribute to them too the intellection of the universal and of ideas.[57] It is necessary for the Gods to be the first causes of all that exists; but if this is so, how can one reasonably say that they do not know the outcome of their own creation or of what springs from them according to any given modality — as if they did not provide them with existence and life and did not care about them?

The relationship between divine nature and contingent natures lies between two fixed terms: providence deals with the things belonging to this world "as from their own reality", treating them and considering them for what they are, mutable beings subject to becoming in time. In doing this it acts in conformity with its own nature, "one and simple and wholly invariable", and "through its own being",[58] without swerving from its purposes or changing from one deliberation to the other or from one action to the other. Its being alone, immobile and immutable in itself pervades all things that can share in its light.

Let us lay down some fixed points. Divine potency ordains

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55. *Ibid.*, 18 ff.
56. *Ibid.*, 24:
57. *Ibid.*, p. 134, 1-3.
58. *Ibid.*, resp. 10, 14, 17; and cf. the whole passage 8-18.

contingent realities, of which it determinately knows the outcomes. Obviously it knows in conformity with its own nature, that is in a determinate way, things which, considered in themselves, are on the contrary indeterminate, being born to develop in multiplicity and change.

Because it is so, the indeterminate could nether be nor be organized or ordered in itself were it not for the demiurgical and pronoetic causality of those beings which are immutable in themselves. And this is true not only of that being which is immutable in itself fully and pre-eminently, but also of some more particular beings closer to the realities of the universe. This should not surprise us since children need more care than adults, and fools more than the wise.[59]

This being granted, a second division ensues, more restricted than the former. If the Gods know the possibles, and know them in a determinate way, and know for instance that only a wooden wall will save Athens from the danger of the barbarians, or that Laius by procreating offspring will bring his own house to ruin, it is evidently unthinkable that these things will not occur; otherwise it must be that they lie. Therefore, either all things occur by necessity, or the things of our world are neither known nor foreseen by the Gods.[60] Through the present discussion, we have eliminated the possibility that the Gods have an indeterminate knowledge of the contingents, and so here we remain with a clear-cut alternative between universal determinism and absolute neglect of the world on the part of God.

To resolve the dilemma, which is certainly "tough", as Ammonius says, since it seems to be confirmed by evidence, he refers to the thought of the "divine Jamblichus", distinguishing between the various kinds of knowledge. In principle, "knowledge is a mean between the knower and the known, if it is true that it is the operation of the knower upon the known"; and "sometimes the knower knows the known better than the nature of the known itself does, sometimes less and sometimes in the same way".[61] We can illustrate the three different instances by saying that when the intellect knows that which is particular and singular in events, its knowledge is "better" than that which is known (first instance); when it turns to itself and considers its own substance, such knowledge is of the same kind as the knower (second instance);

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59. *Ibid.*, 31-35.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 135, 7-11.
61. The reference to Jamblichus, *ibid.*, 14; also 16-19.
62. For what precedes cf. *ibid.*, 20-23.

when, on the contrary, ascending to the summit of its own capacities it considers the things pertaining to the divine government — how all things issue forth from their one and only Principle and how they are individually determined and specified — its knowledge is without doubt "less" than the known (third instance).[62]

This being the case,

> "we must say that the Gods know all generated things, both those existing and those about to happen, in conformity with a modality suitable to the Gods, that is through a single determinate and immutable knowledge, and that is why we must further say that they enclose in their mind's reach also the science of contingents".[63]

This is true in so far as the Gods generate all the things existing in the world, and not only their substances but also their capacities and their operations — both those that are in conformity with nature and those that are against nature. In this way we may say that the Divinity realizes the nature of the contingents better than the contingents themselves do and if these have an indeterminate nature, and may either occur or not, the Divinity possesses a determinate science of them. In fact, "it is necessary for it to know divisible things in an indivisible and dimensionless way, manifold things in a unitary way, temporal things eternally and generated things in an ungenerated way".[64] Divine knowledge does not become with the becoming of things, neither is there any past or future near the Gods, nor can the 'was' or the 'will be' (which indicate change) be said of them, but only the 'is' of the present; and this same is not commensurate or commensurable with the 'was' or the 'will be' but sets itself against them and is opposite to them, being before all temporal images and simply signifying divine immutability and stability.

Therefore it should not be thought that the contingents have a necessary outcome although the Gods know them in a determinate way. Actually, they will not occur because the Gods know them in a determinate way, but because, endowed with a contingent and ambivalent nature, they will certainly have this or that outcome; and the Gods must know which one it is. "This same outcome from its own nature is contingent, whereas from the knowledge the Gods have of it, it is not at all indeterminate but determinate".[65] We too are sometimes able to know by intuition

63. *Ibid.*, p. 136, 1-4.
64. *Ibid.*, 15-17.
65. *Ibid.*, p.136, 30-137, 1.

the necessary issue of contingent causes, as when physicians, at first uncertain in their prognosis of an illness, finally declare themselves in favour of one of the other outcomes as if it were the *only one* left to the patient.

Some maintain by analogy — continues Ammonius — that the Gods do not have a determinate knowledge of the contingent and therefore of the future because their predictions seem equivocal when dealing with things to come. But, as Syrianus remarked, a distinction must be made between divine knowledge and prophetic quality. What enlightens is not identical to what is enlightened. Prophetic talk is always human, and is consequently partial and ambiguous which is not to say that it is not also to the advantage of those listening to it, so that it may exercise their intuitive qualities. The Gods do address us respecting our nature, and they bestow their gifts upon us according to our merits.[66]

III

Already in the first, but especially in the second commentary on the *De interpretatione* (probably dated respectively at 512 and 515-516), Boethius shows a deep interest in problems concerning human and divine knowledge about the future. To rightly understand his thought it will be useful to state at the outset a few points about his notions of the necessary and the contingent.

Essentially there are two types of necessity: the former occurs when an entity that could be in a different way *actually* is in the way it is said to be (for instance: "Socrates is sitting", while he is actually sitting; we can call this a factual or conditional necessity).[67]The latter occurs when for instance we say that the sun moves on. In this case the necessity does not depend so much on the occurrence of a fact,[68] but on the order of things in consequence of which the sun cannot move or not move, but *must* move (this is simple necessity in Boethius' language).

Let us examine the contingent. In Boethius' opinion,[69] Aristotle did not maintain that the alternatives of contingent propositions concerning the future ("this will happen", "this will not happen")

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66. *Ibid.*, p. 137, 22-23.
67. Cf. *De interpretatione*, II, p. 241, 29-242, 27, Meiser.
68. We do not say: "it is necessary that the sun should move, *while* it is in movement", but: "it is necessary that the sun should move *absolutely*, in virtue of a law of nature" (cf. *ibid.*, p. 241, 24-27; see also *De consolatione*, V, 6, 91 ff.).
69. *Ibid.*, p. 208, 1-10.

are neither true nor false. His statement that future contingents are no more connected with being than with not being had been given such an interpretation by some — among them the Stoics.[70] On the contrary, Boethius held, Aristotle maintained that one of the above propositions is true, the other false, and that they are so in an indefinite (that is, still devoid of concrete determinations) and polyvalent way. This comes from the very nature of future events — open to all outcomes.

The definition by Boethius exactly echoes Aristotle's terms. "All the things that are in the same relationship with being and not being are contingent; and as their being or not being is indefinite, also the corresponding affirmations and negations are indefinitely true or false, as the one is always true, the other always false. But which is which is not yet known".[71]

Under the circumstances, the contingent is strictly bound to the possible: what is undetermined with respect to being or to not being is what *may* be or not be. It is therefore in tune with the truth of things to say of future events not: "it will be", but: "it may happen".[72] If one could really say that what one foretells will happen, it would be impossible that what is foreseen should not take place. If then we want to state *which* realities are contingent, we must say in Boethius' words (once again echoing Aristotelian concepts): "all that either occurs by chance, or depends on free will or the will of the individual or in consequence of the polyvalence of nature may have either result, so that it may or may not occur, is contingent".[73]

When therefore we say that one among the things that may or may not happen will take place, we say something false, and even if what had been foreseen should by chance occur, its foretelling was wrong. Actually we should have said: "this event will take place *contingenter*",[74] that is, will take place, if it will, but might also not take place", or: "it will not take place", we would foresee it as necessary and this would alter the very nature of the future which is contingent. It is therefore erroneous to foresee under the modality of necessity what is contingent in itself.

Taking these things for granted, the fundamental problem can

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70. Cf. Aristotle, *De interpretatione*, IX, 18 b 7-9: "If things are so, i.e., that every affirmation or negation is either true or false, nothing is and nothing happens by chance or fortuitously, *neither will be or will not be*" (emphasis ours). Clearly, the Stoic exegesis is forced.
71. In *De interpretatione*, II, p. 200, 1-18.
72. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 212, 1-3.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 190, 1-6, and also p. 203, 2-13.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 212, 16 and cf. 8-15.

now be formulated as follows: "whether divination subsists where not all things occur by necessity".[75] What is foretold according to the truth will take place by necessity. But divination, which is the same as divine prescience, does not foresee that all future events will take place by necessity. As a matter of fact, Boethius says, according to several statements of the ancients, divination often amounts to saying "this will happen, but if it happens, that will not", as if future events could still be stopped and take place in a different way from what had been foreseen. But if so then the event does not happen nor will it happen by necessity.[76] Let us say then that not all things occur by necessity, but some of them by contingency. If God knew that those things will happen by necessity which actually will happen by contingency, He would be mistaken in His providence.[77] In fact He knows that future things are not necessary but contingent.[78]

These are the chief features of the discussion in the second commentary on the *De interpretatione.* The pages of the *De consolatione* dedicated to the same problem some ten years later are no less clear because of the literary genre of the commentary and its didactic aim. In them we notice a greater speculative maturity, a richer and more articulated setting, and a more clearly Neoplatonic inspiration.

The question from which the inquiry on providence arises is the fundamental problem of the *De consolatione:* why do "the good suffer the penalties deserved by criminals, whereas the wicked seize the rewards due to virtue?"[79] "If we cannot understand the reason of this, what is there in this which appears different from the disorder of chance?"[80] While answering this question, Lady Philosophy unfolds the doctrine of providence and fate. They both derive from and depend on the divine simplicity. It is worth quoting: "The origin of all things, the evolution of mutable natures and whatever is moved in any way take their causes, order and forms from the immutability of the Divine mind. This, placed in the stronghold of its simplicity, determines the manifold modality according to which all things occur. This same modality when it is considered in the purity of God's understanding is called providence; when instead it is referred to those beings that it

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75. *Ibid.*, p. 224, 27-30.
76. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 255, 1-9.
77. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 225, 10-23.
78. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 226, 9-13.
79. *De consolatione,* IV, 5, 12-12, Bieler.
80. *Ibid.*, 18-20.

moves and disposes of, it has been called fate by the ancients".[81]

Providence coincides with Divinity itself as it is the principle of the universal design of beings; fate on the contrary is the principle of particular regulations by means of which each individual being is tracked through the details of its particular history. In this way providence and fate are the complementary aspects of the creative and ordaining intervention of the Divinity in the universe. We can say that providence is the idea the Divinity has of the world whereas fate is this same idea made concrete and carried out in the determinations of temporal existence. While the former is "the simple and motionless form of things that must be fulfilled", the latter is "the changeable connexion and the temporal order of all that Divine simplicity has decreed to be done",[82] and therefore of all that is effectively realized.

To illustrate the interplay between divine immutability and the changeableness of the universe, allowed by providence and fate, Boethius has recourse to the image of concentric circles around the same centre. The centre symbolizes the motionless simplicity of the divine mind; the circles revolving around it represent the different degrees of reality. According to their distance from the centre, they move at a greater or lesser speed.[83]

The premise of the distinction between providence and fate (though considered in their synergy), paves the way for the speculative developments of the fifth book of the *De consolatione.* The two short introductory discussions of the relationship between chance and causality and the freedom of the will are intended to sweep away objections on principle. We have already pointed out that at least some realities are free from necessity: those depending on chance, free will or the uneven course of nature. As a consequence, if there is chance (in its Aristotelian meaning) and freedom of the will, necessity is not universal. This certainty enables us to formulate the relationship of divine knowledge with free will.

At first sight it seems impossible to avoid being caught in a

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81. *Ibid.*, IV, 6, 18-26. It is a common doctrine of Neoplatonism that all beings have their cause in the One; let it suffice to cite two fundamental propositions, the fifth and the eleventh, from the *Elements of Theology* of Proclus.

82. *Ibid.*, 49-52.

83. This image should not be taken to suggest as a matter of fact that there is a *descensus* or a degradation from the centre to the circumference, or that the transcendence of the centre to the circles concentric to it does not exist. It is only accurate in the implication that in cosmic reality there are degrees of perfection more or less near the supreme perfection of the Divinity.

dilemma. It is a common notion that God is not subject to error and that he foresees in eternity not only the actions, but also the thoughts and will of men. But if this is the case only what He has foreseen will take place as there could not exist any other action or will but those foreseen by unerring divine providence.[84] Everything would be subject to necessity. If it should happen that what had been foreseen could take place in a different way than He foresaw it (as one might suppose in order to save the freedom of choice), God would no longer have a real prescience of the future, but only a vague opinion, which is blasphemy.[85]

A resolution of this problem might be sought from those who maintain that a given thing occurs not because providence has foreseen that it will occur (making it necessary in itself), but because what will happen in the future cannot be concealed from His eyes. In other words, "it is not necessary that foreseen things should happen, but it is necessary that what will take place should be foreseen".[86] In this way necessity is turned upside down: future events in themselves are not necessary, but their knowledge on the part of providence is. Boethius replies: the problem lies not in knowing whether prescience is the cause of the necessity of future events, or whether the necessity of God's knowledge is their cause, but of demonstrating that, whatever be the order of the causes, what is known beforehand takes place, though leaving out all necessity.[87] Besides this, to say that God foresees future events so far as they will happen is tantamount to limiting His providence to the actual occurrence of these events and is therefore to admit that this is the cause of providence itself.[88]

If the absurdity of these conclusions impels us to go back to the alternative thesis — according to which something may happen in the future in such a way that its coming to pass would not be certain and necessary — how then could God Himself foresee its happening? Of the uncertain there is no science; and what science is it that knows future events for what they are or else which knows that they may equally occur or not?[89] The solutions put forth to this point are both unacceptable. A third way is suggested by a renewed reflection on the nature of the contingent.

The more or less subconscious presupposition that divine

84. Cf. *ibid.*, V, 3, 5-11.
85. Cf. *ibid.*, 13.
86. Cf. *ibid.*, 21, 22.
87. Cf. *ibid.*, 22-28.
88. Cf. *ibid.*, 43-47.
89. Cf. *ibid.*, 53-59.

prescience makes the future necessary (and, as part of the future, human will as well) depends on a prior assumption which believes that everything occurs by necessity and which consequently adduces divine prescience as a proof of the existence of universal necessity. "Otherwise" remarks Lady Philosophy "if there is no necessity, neither can prescience be the sign of that which does not exist".[90] The discussion of the necessity or not of the whole had been extremely lively in ancient thought, both pagan and Christian. Boethius takes as established its more significant conclusions (it suffices here to recall the fifth book of the *De civitate Dei,* chaps. viii-xi), which discarded the existence of a universal necessity since this would deny the existence of a sovereignly free Divinity, good and willing to create. We can therefore well understand why he advances the following proposal. "Let us now admit once again that there is prescience, but that it does not impose any necessity upon anything; in this case, as I judge, the freedom of will will remain whole and absolute".[91]

The core of Boethius' thought is clear: since there is not a universal necessity there is a universal contingency. Everything *may* occur, nothing is *determined* to occur. When we witness an occurrence that takes place before our eyes, we do not on this account make it necessary. Likewise, "as the science of things present does not induce any necessity in what is happening, so neither does the prescience of future things induce any in those that will take place in the future".[92]

We are left however with the difficulty of understanding *how* divine prescience can have before it that which (at least with reference to a given moment) is future, and *how* it can know in a determinate way something which in itself (and once again with reference to a given moment) is indeterminate.

The difficulty originates in the unconscious "objectivism" through which we conceive the cognitive function.

> "Everything that is known is not comprehended in conformity with the force it has in itself, but in conformity with the capacity of those who know it. To give an example: sight and feeling diversely acknowledge the same roundness of a body. Sight, standing aloof, beholds it altogether by its rays; feeling instead, adhering to the sphere and followings its orb, as if it were bound to it, comes to take possession of the roundness of its parts. In a similar way sense, imagination, reason and intelligence behold

90. *Ibid.*, V, 4, 32-33.
91. *Ibid.*, 22-24.
92. *Ibid.*, 53-55.

man himself from different points of view. Sense judges form as it is embodied in matter, which makes it real; imagination judges the mere figure, stripped of matter; reason transcends even the figure, and considers the species itself, which is in particulars under a universal regard. The eye of intelligence is higher still, and surpassing the sphere of the universe, comes to behold with the pure vision of the mind the form itself in its simplicity".[93]

The various examples point out that cognitive potencies vary, from the knowledge which belongs to animals, to humans and finally to the transcendent and divine knowledge. This confirms the principle that knowledge depends not so much on the nature of things known as on the capability of the knowing subjects. Boethius does not mean that the nature of known things has no importance at all for their knowability, but only that any object is known more or less objectively, more or less truthfully, in accordance with the comprehending capacity of the subject who knows it.

We could say, to join these two together, that the objective pole is required but that it has a purely passive and static role, while the subject, by its active operation, determines the "level" of intelligent insight into the values objectively present in the object. It covers the target more or less completely, and could just as well miss it. This variation is even more true when we recognize that the degrees of cognitive capacity in man and apart from man are not one, but many.

"And here, what is chiefly to be considered is that the superior potency of understanding beholds the inferior, but the inferior can by no means raise itself to the superior. Actually sense has no force out of matter, neither can imagination attain to universal species, nor is reason capable of comprehending the simple form, but intelligence, as if looking downward, having conceived the form, judges all things which are below it according to the modality in which it apprehends the form itself, which could not have been known by any of the others. In fact it knows the universal of reason, and the figure that is object of imagination, and the matter perceived by sense, neither using reason, nor imagination, nor senses, but as if it were formally contemplating all things with that one flash of the mind".[94]

Universal notions correspond to objective realities which can

93. *Ibid.*, 66-80.
94. *Ibid.*, 81-88.

also fall under imagination and senses; reason considers them not through imagination or the senses, but in the concept. Likewise imagination, while also using the senses to form its world of images, judges the sensible realities not through the senses but through itself and in forms of specific patterns. Therefore it is right, concludes Boethius, that in the cognitive process every faculty should utilize its own prerogatives rather than those of its object since every judgment is an act intrinsic and proper to the judging subject.[95] Knowledge is a judgement and is consequently an act of the subject; this is Boethius' most significant word on this problem.

Since knowledge is thus, it follows that different natures are endowed with different and correlative kinds of knowledge, which are placed in an increasing (or diminishing) hierarchy of perfection in which each degree is subsumed under the superior and includes in itself the inferior ones. "Whatever lives in time proceeds, in the present, from the past towards the future, and is not able to embrace in a moment's space the whole extension of its life".[96] On the contrary, what is eternal is the Being "which comprehends in itself, all at once, the whole fullness of an endless life, from which neither something of the future is wanting, nor something of the past has escaped".[97]

The eternal Being is all at once; the totality of its being is not composed of parts necessarily different and distinct one from the other. To use an image, we could say that it "is fully master of itself, and is ever present to itself and, so to speak, near to itself".[98] Whereas every cosmic reality is "near to" another — a molecule to another molecule, an idea to another idea — only the divine being is near to itself, coinciding with itself and with its own ineffable nature.

The present in which Divinity dwells is not therefore the present as a moment of temporal becoming. The synonomy is utterly misleading. God is not "more ancient than created things by the quantity of time, but rather by a prerogative of His simple nature".[99] In brief: He radically transcends time, and in transcending time he transcends the whole world. We must therefore think that time aims at eternity as its final goal, imitating it and so to say running after it along the entire length of its own becoming.

"The infinite motion of temporal things imitates the present

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95. Cf. *ibid.*, 95-106.
96. Cf. *ibid.*, V, 6, 10-16.
97. *Ibid.*, 22-24.
98. *Ibid.*, 26-27.
99. *Ibid.*, 34-36.

> state of the motionless divine life, and, not being able to reproduce or equal it, from immobility it decays into movement, from the simplicity of the divine presence it declines to the infinite extension of future and past".[100]

If so, eternity in its turn embraces and comprehends in itself the totality of time which proceeds from it. The *mode* of inclusion is the same, at least formally, as that already considered with reference to the degrees of knowledge. Each of them keeps in itself the living, total reality of inferior degrees, and at the same time transcends them — and indeed it is just because it transcends them that it can keep them in itself. Therefore,

> "since every faculty of judgment comprehends in accordance with its own nature those things which are subsumed to it, and God always is in a condition of everlasting presence, also His knowledge, surpassing all temporal changes, remains in the simplicity of its presence, and embracing the infinite spaces of that which is past and to come, considers them in His simple act of knowing as though they were now in the making".[101]

We can readily observe that Boethius insists upon comparing divine knowledge with vision. Obviously, the comparison is not intended to be reductive. In the last part of the *De consolatione* he sets himself to consider the knowledge of the future from the side of God. Since it is a question of knowledge, we can understand why other problems, even though related, are not discussed. Yet it is clear from the context that this limitation does not shut out broader perspectives. In certain passages of particular importance Boethius uses more extensive terms.

While expressing a truth "that could hardly be reached by anyone who is not well inside the contemplation of God", he maintains for instance that the future itself, "if referred to the knowledge God has of it, is necessary; when on the contrary it is considered in its very nature it is absolutely free and exempt from every necessity".[102] But in what sense can we say that God has a necessary, (i.e., certain and determinate) knowledge of what in itself is absolutely free, (i.e., of what is indeterminate)? In one sense only and that is the sense according to which God is the source of existence for all things, their radical principle, their sole cause and foundation. Making use of a poetical image, full of philosophical meaning, Boethius speaks of the "love common to all

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100. *Ibid.*, 36-41.
101. *Ibid.*, 53-59.
102. *Ibid.*, 87-91.

things" as the cause "that gave being" to the universe.[103]

Divine knowledge is necessary and determinate (or better determinative) in so far as it bestows being on all that exists. This is the first condition of every other determination, as for instance the possession of a nature sometimes foreseeable, sometimes not foreseeable. The subordination of a given reality, in its happening, to the coherence of the system of which it is a part, or its independence from it, at least from certain points of view, do not interfere or contrast in any way with its dependence, *in being,* upon God. Conversely, it is clear that the concept of necessity is *toto coelo* different when applied on the one hand to the Divinity or on the other to the beings that originate from its transcedent will of goodness.

As Boethius says in the last speculative sequence of the *De consolatione* — which hands on to us the key to his thought — God derives the potency "of understanding and seeing all things not from the outcome of future realities, but from His own simplicity".[104] This means that their existence wholly depends on His own simplicity, which is their only possible source. And further: "Embracing all things with a present notion, divine prescience assigns all things their modality".[105] Since every reality has its foundation in God and draws from Him the reasons of its being and existing, we can say that He knows it because He makes it be, and *vice-versa;* and He knows it, at the same time both for what it is in Him and for what it is in itself — or better, for what it is in itself in Him since its total being derives from Him and is in Him.

IV

It is obvious that our three authors belong to a common tradition: between the first two there are ascertained relations, the third shares a noticeable similarity with them. Ammonius resumes Proclus' main themes: in particular, that divine knowledge is determinate but does not determine (in the sense that it does not necessitate) the future of the entities depending on it — and this is because their nature is contingent, i.e., polyvalent and open to many outcomes. Divine providence does not force it, but respects it in these characteristics of its own, which are not exclusively cognitive (if one recalls that the polyvalence of the future depends exactly on the fact that we do not know its real outcome yet), but above all metaphysical.

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103. *Ibid.*, IV, mt. VI, vv. 40-48.
104. *Ibid.*, V, 6, 137-139.
105. *Ibid.*, 142-144.

As for Boethius, his dependence on Ammonius, both in the second commentary on the *De interpretatione* and in the *De consolatione,* was first suggested some time ago.[106] Let us consider the facts. In his second commentary on the *De interpretatione*[107] Boethius himself reports that he draws his inspiration *in primis* from Porphyry while also drawing something from "other authors". Who is he speaking of? He often quotes the opinions of Syrianus, unique among the thinkers represenative of later Neoplatonism. This proves that he had either direct knowledge of his commentary on the *De interpretatione,* or at least of some passages (or doctrinal developments) quoted by scholars, obviously later than Syrianus himself.

One might suppose — in accord with Courcelle's thesis — that the quotations from Syrianus in Boethius' commentary on the *De interpretatione* could have been derived from the analogous commentary by Ammonius. This seems impossible since none of them is paralleled in the work of Ammonius (which has been handed down to us in full, whereas the commentary by Syrianus has been lost). On the other hand, some expressions of Boethius could lead us to think that he had the original text of Syrianus at hand.[108]

Apart from the commentary of Ammonius (as the source of the quotations from Syrianus in Boethius), there are very few other possibilities: either the commentary of Proclus on the *De interpretatione,* or analogous commentaries (about which, however, we have no hint) by other contemporaries belonging to the schools of Athens and Alexandria. But this view would not explain why, while making use of a commentary of Proclus (for example), Boethius should not have mentioned his name — and the same could be said with reference to Ammonius or any other contemporary author.

A different possibility is that Boethius might have drawn his information from marginal scholia of a codex of the *De interpretatione,* or from the same in the commentary of Porphyry. In either case these codices would have come from the schools of Athens or Alexandria. This thesis has been upheld by J. Shiel,[109]

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106. By P. Courcelle, particularly in *Les lettres grècques en Occident,* Paris, 1948, pp. 264-278, and *La Consolation de philosophie dans la tradition littéraire, ibid.,* 1967, pp. 203-233.
107. Boethius, *In De interpretatione,* II, p. 7, 5-7, Meiser.
108. See the texts quoted in our *Severino Boezio,* vol. I, Genoa, 1974, p. 507.
109. See "Boethius' Commentaries on Aristotle", in *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies,* 4, 1958, pp. 217-244.

both with regard to the work in question and indeed to the whole Boethian production. It has been criticized (with specific reference to Boethius' works on the *Topics*, though the conclusion applies equally to his other works) by E. Stump[110] on well-grounded arguments.

Whatever Boethius' dependence on this or that commentator may have been, it is certain that he derived his culture and *forma mentis* from the tradition of post-Plotinian Neoplatonism. He strongly felt the influence of Porphyry — to which we must add contributions of the Athenian and Alexandrian schools which themselves owed much to Porphyry as well as to Jamblichus. By degrees Boethius enriched this cultural stock with elements drawn from different sources[111] but always within the circle of the late Neoplatonic tradition. And this — it is worthwhile stating — was the only one of importance in its time, monopolizing the cultural panorama both in the East and in the West.[112]

This remark is all-important since it enables us to see Boethius as a thinker wholly at one with contemporary culture, or better, as one of its outstanding representatives. To some extent his position was anomalous because of his Western location — which offered him the opportunity of introducing variants, at times of considerable importance — while still steadily anchored to the Greek world as he was also through family ties.[113]

We must stress that Boethius belonged to this cultural tradition. Within it, the relevance of his contribution is that if on the one hand he preserved a faithfulness "of school" to its great principles — the Good and the One, to quote the main ones —, on the other hand he also interpreted them in accordance with wider speculative horizons. His adhesion to Christianity brought him in fact to a kind of Christian Neoplatonism not unlike the one elaborated by his Christian contemporaries of the Alexandrian school. Boethius is not a "provincial" who awkwardly imitated what the Greek thinkers of his time were working out, but he was a coequal of theirs. Through him, the Western world fully partook of the ideal adventure of the last great flourishing of Greek thought

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110. "Boethius' Works on the Topics", in *Vivarium*, 12, 2, 1974, pp. 77-92.
111. It is significant, for instance, that Porphyry's thought reached him at first through the mediation of Marius Victorinus.
112. We refer once again to the volume by P. Courcelle on *Les lettres grècques en Occident, cit.*
113. Here we have in mind the more than probable Eastern descent of the father, and the obvious relations of all kinds that the "*gens Anicia*" had with the East (a good number of its members had been already living in Constantinople for a long time).

and the Middle Ages received the heritage of that same tradition that Proclus and his school handed down to the Byzantine East.

Such a unitary vision of the last stage of ancient thought enables us to better understand the cultural and speculative continuity that links the late classical age to the mediaeval and then to the humanistic and finally to the Renaissance eras. It is easy to realize how two worlds springing from a single root could meet again at the moment of the disappearance, in the West, of the mediaeval age and, in the East, of the millenary life of the Byzantine Empire. Italian and European humanism could not have seen so happy a confluence of Western and Eastern scholars and could not have taken advantage of their common cultural effort, if there had not originally been one matrix, and if their respective middle ages had not kept on returning to it and developing its virtualities in their different ways.

Having said this, which obviously has an importance of its own on the historical level, let us observe that the stronger interest by which we are impelled to go through the pages and thoughts of these thinkers of antiquity is in itself mainly speculative. It follows that it is important to understand the meaning of their theoretical message on points which, brought by them to a remarkable degree of clarity, can have for us the value of an example, an indication and a stimulus.

Such, without a doubt, is the theme of divine knowledge, and the related notion of the divine nature in itself. The conception of knowledge (originally Jamblichean) maintained from the first and without significant variations by our authors, is a *unicum* in ancient philosophy.[114] The importance placed on the role of the subject might lead some to charge it with subjectivism. In fact, it bears no marks of subjectivism in the modern sense of the word. By subjectivism we usually mean any theory of knowledge that removes the presence of the object by resolving it into the subject — which in some way or other generates or produces the object. This subjectivism does not say, of course, that the object completely disappears but that at best its presence has a merely empirical meaning. The reality of knowledge lies entirely in the subject.

Nothing of the kind is found in our authors. They put forth a

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114. Not only Proclus (*De providentia*, II, 5, 3, p. 20, Isaac), but above all Ammonius (*In De interpretatione*, p. 135, 14, Busse) refer to Jamblichus while dealing with providence and divine knowledge: generically the first, with a specific reference to the doctrine of knowledge (which is common also to Proclus and Boethius) the second.

graded and hierarchial vision of knowledge in accordance with the typical setting of Neoplatonic metaphysics. Knowledge is a function of nature: a more perfect nature possesses a corresponding knowledge, a less perfect one a less perfect knowledge, and so on through the infinite degrees of the lesser or greater perfections of reality. (In other words, knowledge is *one* of the perfections; therefore a more perfect nature, the better it is and acts, the better it knows). This excludes the position that knowledge has but one form and is therefore univocal in all beings. On the contrary it is defined as an extremely articulated speculative structure in which there is a correlative form of knowledge corresponding to every form of being.

As to the inner articulation of the cognitive act, on this account the object does not disappear in it but has a precise and positive function. While the knower is the dynamic pole, which searches the known in depth (realizing its own capacities in a differentiated way according to whether it inheres in this or that nature), we can consider the known as the static pole. Its nature in fact, is what it is. It does not become different from itself owing to the cognitive act by which it is reached. If the knower moves towards the known and at last takes possession of it, the known as such includes a whole complex of qualities and fixed data.

So we maintain both the objectivity of knowledge (we know in truth something objective, not a dream, a fiction, or even an unconscious splitting of the subject), and also its subjectivity, since knowledge is a function of the knower. The metaphysical hallmark of this complex and yet well-balanced conception is the intuition of the world as polycentric and polymorphous but at the same time anchored to the transcendent Unity, without which everything would immediately fall into nothing; and the more reality is polycentric, the more indispensable is the presence of the Unity that joins together and sets everything in order.[115]

Immanent in everything, the nature of the One is also radically distinct from every other nature. If the world is temporal (or, if we prefer, perpetual), Divinity is eternal. But its knowledge is such as its nature is. If its nature is eternal, eternal is its knowledge too: let us better say, with Boethius, *"presentialis"*; that is, the knowledge of a never-failing present which in itself has nothing of time and therefore is not subject to becoming in any way nor under any

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115. Among the great number of texts that could be cited, it is enough to recall, by Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, 117, *Platonic Theology*, vol. I, I, 15, p. 70, 15-25, Saffrey-Westerink; I, 3, pp. 13, 22-14, 4 and 11, 7, p. 49, 27-50; by Boethius, the passage III, 11, 25-109 of the *De consolatione*.

regard. Such a knowledge is worthy of God and to have conceived its possibility is proper to a noble and elevated philosophy that borders on theology. It can claim the merit of having reached the concept of a purely metaphysical subsistence that sets itself beyond all dimension or cosmic limit. It is what is wholly other with respect to our world, it is its primeval root, its ultimate goal and its mystery which is also its explanation in depth. In its last expressions classical Greek philosophy proposes anew and unfolds the question by which it had always been fascinated: the question about Being in itself, the Absolute.

Some important consequences ensue from this conception of knowledge and in particular of the divine knowledge with regard to the metaphysical relations between the One and the many. If Christian culture is peremptory in stating and resolving them in conformity to the principle of creation, Neoplatonism in general seems to feel no necessity of giving them an answer. Our authors give few explicit indications on this subject but the bearing of their thought, followed in its inner links and basic trends, opens prospects of great interest for the future of Western thought in this direction also.

The most radical answer to the inquiry about how the Divinity knows the world and how he knows it in a determinate way whereas it is indeterminate in its own nature (to adopt Proclus' terminology), is to be found on a metaphysical level, not in cognitive terms. Of course, it is convincing to say that while we men, immersed in becoming and conformed to its properties, are not able to embrace all the moments of time, and to stretch, so to say, beyond the instant we occupy, to reach what is not yet,[116] the Divinity sees the whole succession of times before itself, made present to its transcendent unity. It is not that they become unitary and lose their natural dispersion, but that Divinity itself, while knowing them, reduces them to its absolute unity.[117]

As a consequence there is an essential difference between the two kinds of knowledge, human and divine. Human knowledge is unable to reach to what is not (yet) or, rather, what is potentially and not actually; divine knowledge on the contrary envisages on the same level, so to speak, and as equally valid objects of its vision, both what has already been and what is or what is not yet.

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116. Where the reason for this impossibility is not the fact that the future is *ahead* of us, while the past is *behind* us, but exclusively that the future is *not yet* — and in good logic one cannot know what is not.

117. An essential text for what precedes is Boethius, *De consolatione*, V. 6, 142-144, Bieler.

So far, we can say that *at least from our view-point,* what is characteristic of divine knowledge is the capability of rendering actual what (for us) is in potency, and of causing to be what (by itself) is not; while we also say that, considered in itself, divine knowledge is essentially unitary (i.e., simple and undivided), and is therefore identical to the same divine nature.

Granted that, *on the part of God,* conceiving existent beings that do not for us yet exist is quite expected, we must also admit that *for us* this is wholly inconceivable. This exceeds the boundaries of our contingent and relative world which is made up of what is limited and what is unlimited (as Proclus says in unison with Greek, and chiefly Pythagorean, tradition), and which derives the possibility of its existing from the very alternation between these two poles. To bestow being upon not being is what, by definition, we absolutely cannot do (as, for another reason, we cannot reduce being to not being). Dante exhorted: "As to the *wherefore,* ye of human birth, content yourselves".[118] Actually, our powers of metaphysical intuition are limited to the acknowledgement of what exists *independently* from us. Whereas for us non-existent beings absolutely do not exist, God "calls into existence what does not exist", as the Apostle says.[119]

We are however left with the difficulty of adequately conceiving the divine power of knowing non-beings as existent. By turning round the Latin saying, we could say that for the human mind *infectum factum fieri nequit.* In spite of all our efforts, we are unable to bring to exist now what may exist in the future: indeed, if we want to be truthful, we cannot even imagine what the future will bring forth from its bosom. The realm of the future is the realm of the possible, and consequently of the indeterminate, of which everything can be supposed and nothing can be said with certainty. From this misty realm of the future we cannot bring anything to our presence, however much we wish we had knowledge of what will be allotted us in it. But what do we mean when we maintain positively that divine knowledge, unlike ours, has present to itself the future too — i.e., what, by definition, is not yet? Evidently the not yet existent is present to God *as existent;* in consequence, it follows that the non-existent *is caused to exist* by the Divinity.

Let us put forth a further corollary which helps us to better understand the nature of divine knowledge as "maker" of being. In his commentary on the *Timaeus,* Proclus stresses the point that

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118. *Purgatorio,* III, 37 (transl. J. W. Thomas).
119. *Rom.,* 4, 17.

the universe cannot be said, in an exclusive way, to be perishable or imperishable, but that it is at the same time perishable and imperishable. He explains this seemingly contradictory concept as follows. The world is imperishable *from the temporal point of view* just in the same sense according to which it is not generated.[120] Evidently this characteristic of the world, since it applies to a single aspect of its existence, i.e., to the temporal one (the prominence of which is secondary in comparison with other aspects that are more important from a metaphysical point of view), is less significant than the view-point according to which the universe is perishable. In fact the latter concerns *its whole and total being,* not a single aspect of it.

The world is moved by the efficient Cause: "it is through this same Cause, in the same way, that it comes to being, and always comes to being".[121] On the other hand, according to Proclus' reasoning, the world is everlasting or possesses an infinite and unbroken duration, since the productive action by which it is determined is motionless; on the other hand its specific nature is to be in becoming, and consequently it comes unendingly to being, generated by the Father. This nature or state is nevertheless unchangeable. As the world is a whole, it is not unfinished and therefore it is not unceasingly on the way of being produced, but is produced already; and so we shall say that "not only is it always being produced, but what is always on the way of becoming was produced once and for all".[122]

The very nature of the universe makes *every moment and every part* of it to be constantly in becoming (if we may say so); and what is becoming is caused to exist and brought to being by the transcendent efficient Cause. It follows that not only the future (which *for us,* but only for us, does not exist, but also the past and the present — our ever moving and fleeting present — are, in their nature, always coming to be; and, like the future, they unceasingly emerge from non-being and unceasingly are made to be by their sovereign Cause.

Let us say, in conclusion, that the whole cosmic reality, becoming and needing to receive its being from another than itself, is, in the presence of the Divinity, as a non-being that is known as a being. Moreover, the knowledge of the Divinity is objectifying in the sense that *it causes to be* whatever it knows, or else that, by

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120. *Cf. Proclus, Commentaire sur le Timée,* transl. A.J. Festugière, vol. II, Paris, 1967, p. 144.
121. *Ibid.*, p. 145.
122. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

knowing them, it endows them with being. In other words there is no difference between the cognitive and the productive or creative capacity of Divinity. For us, who base the evidence of our reality on them, past and present have an imposing, indisputable existence. Since a given event has taken place, or a given reality has come to be, its being or having been cannot be questioned. But in this case too, our point of view is inexact. The past or the present are not more *real* than the future because this *does not exist yet,* whereas they *already are* or *have already been.* On the contrary, all the moments of time have a similar nature, and are therefore identical in the eyes of their sovereign Cause. By knowing them, He makes them come to be in their specific dimension, which is that of becoming. The view-point of the whole is the only one that is truly realistic and respectful of the nature of cosmic beings, because it is the point of view of the Cause which, while generating them, fixes their metaphysical state.

All this holds in Proclus' case but it is also and in the same way valid with reference to Ammonius and Boethius. It is nevertheless germaine to note that in both Ammonius and Boethius the cognitive aspect predominates (at least in the texts we have considered) over the metaphysical, even if the latter is not left out. Recall the insistence with which Boethius uses comparisons and images drawn from sight when speaking of divine knowledge.[123] Another characteristic element common to Ammonius and Boethius is the prevailing interest in the problem of reconciling human free will and divine prescience to which other problems of equally great interest are subordinated.

All this may explain why the student of Boethius must have recourse to a little treatise, the *De hebdomadibus,* improperly labelled "theological", rather than to the *De consolatione* in order to find a specific treatment of the theme of participation (which is the other side of the production of cosmic being on the part of the One).[124] Its tenor is openly Neoplatonic or more exactly, Proclean.

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123. Cf. for inst. *De consolatione,* V, 4, 42-45, Bieler; V, 6, 68-83, 99-105; 133-139, etc.

124. It is important to note that the two texts do not lack points of contact. The *De hebdomadibus* actually is an expansion or a gloss on a central part of the third book of the *De consolatione* (cf. esp. 10, 74-79; 11, 20-24, where the theme of participation is considered with reference to man, in the first case, and where Boethius maintains that "everything which is good, is good by participation in the Good", in the second). John the Deacon, the correspondent of Boethius to whom the short tract is addressed, had evidently been struck by the theme and its difficulties and had sought for a more detailed explication.

Its theme is about the metaphysical relations between the Good in itself and good things. "Things which are", states Boethius,[125] "are good"; all that exists aims at the Good. Since all things tend towards what is similar to them, the things that tend towards the Good are goods in themselves. But in which way are they good: by participation or by substance?

We will not follow in detail Boethius' short but extremely pregnant discussion.[126] We only want to display its main articulations. If good things were good in their substance they would be equal to the Good in itself and therefore equal to their principle; but this is contradictory. If on the contrary they were not good, how could they tend towards the good which has already been presupposed as the foundation of our reasoning? Laid down in this manner, the problem is essentially that of analogy, i.e., of a relationship between realities different from mere identification and total estrangement. Expanding its substance, we may say that it is a question of the metaphysical relationship between the Absolute and the manifold.[127]

Participation postulates analogy as the unique way of finding a non-contradictory rational solution. Analogy in its turn is made possible by the fact that, while generating all things by its voluntary decision, the supreme Good imprints on them the seal of its own image. There is only one being — argues Boethius — that is good and nothing but good. The things that make up the world could not even exist unless the one sole Good willed them to be; "and from this are they said to be good, because their being sprang from the will of the Good".[128]

In this way Boethius attributes to the Good, the will to generate the universe and to produce the being of things which, by virtue of this same reason, come to participate in its goodness and are called good. The unification of these aspects (which are also present separately in Proclus though in his texts their basic importance is not stressed), has a clearly Christian ring and is tantamount to the

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125. *De hebdomadibus*, 52-53, Peiper.
126. We ourselves have dwelt on it elsewhere, first in our *Severino Boezio*, Genoa, 1974, vol. I, pp. 700-732, then in the Introduction to the Italian edn. of the *De consolatione*, Milan, 1979, esp. par. 4, pp. 34-43, and lastly in a paper read to the International Congress of Boethian studies, Pavia, 1980, now in the *Atti, ibid.*, 1981, pp. 157-168.
127. The Good is actually nothing else than the other name of the One, as can be seen in numberless passages of Proclus, and, in Boethius, from e.g. *De consolatione* II, 11, 22-23. Both are the Neoplatonic names for the Absolute.
128. *De hebdomadibus*, 112-113.

very definition of creation. There is no creation in the Christian sense except when it is maintained that the Divinity wants to generate the universe and does so without any constraint or external necessity but solely from its free choice and that it generates its deeper root, being, whence every aspect of its reality comes.

Were they deprived of the first Good, continues Boethius, things could not be good in what they are: "and since they could not exist in act, unless the true Good had produced them, therefore their being is good; and nevertheless what springs from it is not similar to the substantial Good".[129] The expression *actu existere,* used by Boethius, includes two determinative statements: God generates created realities to *existence,* and to *actuality,* that is, to concrete and effective existence.

As we already saw in Proclus, the last stage of ancient philosophy resumes, completes and transcends the "classical" theses on the metaphysical relations between the One and the many moving towards a perception of the world's dependence *in being* on its first Cause. In his turn Boethius, working out notions very close and sometimes identical to Neoplatonic ones, brings them, in full accordance with their intrinsic and rational requirements, to express in philosophical terms those same truths which Christian revelation proposes to the faith of the believer. On the threshold of the Middle Ages, the insights of the final Greek speculation went into a natural and living symbiosis with Christian thought and provided in this way a powerful contribution to the foundation of a new culture.

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129. *Ibid.*, 136-139.