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Losev's Eidetic Dialectic: The Structuring of Being and Anagogical Cognition

Abstract
Alexei Losev dared to make the radical gesture of integrating Platonist hermeneutics into modern thinking by turning to the genuine tradition of ancient Platonism, especially to the works of Iamblichus and Proclus. The article compares the dialectical approaches of Hegel and Losev, and analyzes the problem of negativity in dialectical discourse. The eidetic dialectic of part and whole, based on the contemplative and anagogical mode of cognition, is considered as a real alternative to negative reductionism and nihilism in contemporary philosophy.

Keywords
anagogy, eidetic dialectic, nihilism, ontology, Platonism.

Let us begin with a statement of fact: the dialectic is no longer associated exclusively with Hegelian philosophy and such derivative forms of thought as dialectical materialism and Frankfurt School critical theory. The crisis of Hegelianism, which was largely due to its inability to limit the devastating onrush of dialectical negativity and resist the development of nihilism (which sealed the fate of modern philosophy, according to Nietzsche and Heidegger), generated a search for new forms of dialectical thought.

A renewal of the Platonic dialectical tradition, capable of challenging the Hegelian tradition, thus appears quite natural here. Long before the late-period Foucault discovered the relevance of Platonist hermeneutics, and Badiou recognized the necessity of the Platonic gesture, a radical turn towards the Platonic dialectic occurred in the work of Alexei Losev. An eidetic dialectic of part and whole based on a contemplatively anagogical form of cognition was, in Losev's eyes, a force capable of challenging modern philosophy's negative reductionism and nihilism.

In *Philosophy of the Name*, written in 1923 and published in 1927 (roughly the same time as Heidegger's *Being and Time*), Losev provides the first sketch of his dialectical system. As Losev writes, "I understand the *dialectic* as the logical elaboration (i.e., the elaboration in logos) of being considered in its eidos" (1990: 167).

This dialectic is a general dialectic, since it unfolds within the domain of traditional ontological categories such as essence, unity and multiplicity, causality, quality, quantity, etc. In this sense, it should be distinguished, according to Losev, from more specific types of the dialectic, for example, those of nature or history. This general dialectic is also a formal dialectic, because it implies abstraction from substantive moments in the elaboration of a logical-eidetic intuition of being. As Losev writes, "As a purely logical elaboration of purely eidetic being, the general dialectic is something indestructible for thought, insofar as it wants to be logos and wants to contemplate eidos" (1990: 167).

> In the eidos, being is meaningful and visible in its entirety; therefore, "the dialectic is the theory of the element of thought, which embraces all manner of eide in unified, integral being" (Losev 1990: 168).

The theory of the interaction of part and whole is this dialectic's constitutive aspect. Hence Losev's theory of *topology* as the *quality* of things forming a whole, i.e., the "theory of the eidetic morph, or the perfect space," and of *arithmology* as the theory "of the eidetic schema, or the perfect number" (Losev 1990: 346).

Note that both *topology* and *arithmology* are theories of meaning, which is considered, to quote Losev, in terms of "self-identical difference" in the first case, and "mobile rest," in the second. We see in these expressions a dialectical interaction between the four major ontological catego-

ries of Platonism—namely, identity, difference, motion, and rest—which are the supreme forms of ideas in Plato's ontology and immediately follow the idea of being, for whose essential description they are, in fact, meant. In Losev's work, this description is eidetic. But what is the eidos?

The eidos of a thing is its intellectually[1] grasped concept, which supposes a given thing to be precisely this thing, different from other things (Losev 1990: 168); moreover, this supposition is topological and arithmological. And, what is quite significant, the "eidos of a thing is precisely what never changes, as if the thing itself actually did not change, and thus the logos of the thing, as the schema of semantically apprehending the eidos, is also something immutable" (Losev 1990: 173).

A comparison of Losev's dialectical project with the most well-known version of the dialectic, the Hegelian, reveals that, unlike the dialectic of eidos proposed by Losev, the Hegelian movement of dialectical speculation involves introducing negativity as the concept's defining aspect.

One of the leading Hegel experts and interpreters in France, Jean Hyppolite, whose views on Hegel's philosophy had a quite significant impact on Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, Althusser, and Lacan, remarked on this point quite clearly in his book *Logic and Existence*, first published in 1952: "Hegel's philosophy is a philosophy of negation and negativity. The Absolute is only by determining itself, that is, by limiting itself, by negating itself" (Hyppolite 1997: 105). According to Hyppolite, it is through negation that "genuine affirmation of the Absolute, the one which is no longer immediate" is effected; "affirmation is negativity or the negation of the negation" (1997: 106).

Hyppolite speaks of the double sense in which Hegel's philosophy is a philosophy of negation: first, it understands the absence of a thing as something positive, assuming that even determination should be constructed through negation; and second, the repetition of negation in negation, that is, the negation of negation, constitutes true positivity. Thus, in Hegel's philosophy, a quite transparent break occurs with the metaphysical tradition, according to which determination cannot be constructed through negation and must not contain it. Hegel himself emphasizes the particular importance of negativity for dialectical thinking when, in § 79 of the first volume of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, he gives his well-known characterization of logical forms as such: "In terms of form, the logical domain has three sides: (α) *the abstract* side or that of the *understanding*, (β) *the dialectical* or *negatively rational* side, (γ) *the speculative* or *positively rational* side" (Hegel, 2010a: 125). For Hegel, these three sides are not separate, independent parts but should be thought of as inherent aspects of the logically real, that is, of the concept.

[1] That is, as Losev phrases it, the eidos is apprehended by "mental vision" (Losev 1990: 173).

Commenting on this passage, Alexandre Kojève notes that, although the dialectical side indeed cannot be separated from the other two sides of the logical, "[I]t must be noted right away that 'Logic' is dialectical (in the broad sense) only because it implies a 'negative' or negating aspect, which is called 'dialectical' in the narrow sense" (Kojève 1980: 169). Hegel himself considers this dialectical aspect and the dialectical as such in detail in § 81, where we learn that whereas the dialectical aspect denotes the sublation "of such finite determinations by themselves and their transition into their opposites" (Hegel 2010a: 128), the dialectical in itself can be of two kinds: separated in isolated determinacy and genuinely determinate. The first results in "mere negation" and skepticism; the second, in true scientific knowledge, in which the content acquires "an immanent connection and necessity" (Hegel 2010a: 129).

It would seem that attainment of true scientific knowledge involves the emergence by means of dialectical negativity into the realm of positive speculation and the deployment of determinations of reason, were it not for one thing: in Hegel's system, all determinations are negative, and the "scientific" character of Hegelian speculation has nothing to do not only with the scientific rigor of the "finite" determinations produced by metaphysics but also with the positivist understanding of science, widespread in our day as well, with its "criteria," "methods," etc. According to Hegel, scientific rigor is vouchsafed exclusively by means of the dialectic; moreover, "the dialectical moment constitutes the moving soul of the scientific progression and is the principle through which alone *an immanent connection and necessity* enters into the content of science, just as in general the true, as opposed to an external, elevation above the finite resides in this principle" (Hegel 2010a: 129). And everything would be fine had Hegel himself not previously characterized the dialectical as the "negatively rational" side of the logical—meaning that, in Hegel's philosophy, the scientific is negative in character.

In Hegel's work, this negative side of the scientific is in fact expressed by the term "speculation"; moreover, this term is interpreted as "positively rational." But let us look more closely at this "positivity," the result of the dialectic. This is what Hegel writes in § 82 of the *Encyclopedia*, where he examines the value of the "speculative" in detail: "The dialectic has a positive result, because it has a *determinate content* or because its result is in truth not an *empty, abstract nothing,* but instead the negations of *definite determinations* that are contained in the result precisely because it is not an *immediate nothing*, but a result instead" (Hegel 2010a: 132).

If we look at that part of the passage that Hegel has italicized, we might be confident in the dialectic's "positive" result. However, looking at the meaning of the passage as a whole, it is easy to see it argues that the dialectic's result is not nothing, but rather negation. Nor is it accidental that Hegel stipulates that the result of speculative dialectics "is not an im-

mediate nothing." Negation as a positive result? A nothing, but "not an immediate nothing"? In any case, what is remarkable from our viewpoint is the connection between dialectical negativity and nothingness. Recall that the subject as such here is being, which, since it is imbued with the negativity of nothingness, immediately risks becoming nihilistic non-being.

In *Being and Nothingness*, Jean-Paul Sartre draws attention to the nihilistic risk of the Hegelian dialectic:

> This permits Hegel to make being pass into nothingness; this is what by implication has introduced negation into his very definition of being. This is self-evident since any definition is negative, since Hegel has told us, making use of a statement of Spinoza's, that omnis determinatio est negatio. And does he not write, 'It does not matter what the determination or content is which would distinguish being from something else; whatever would give it a content would prevent it from maintaining itself in its purity. It is pure indetermination and emptiness. Nothing can be apprehended in it.' Thus anyone who introduces negation into being from outside will discover subsequently that he makes it pass into nonbeing. (Sartre 2001: 14–15)

Losev's eidetic dialectic is obviously in perfect contradiction with Hegelian negative reason and speculation, if only because the eidos of a thing presupposes its essential unchanging *self-identity*, as opposed to Hegelian speculation, where the concept is "the one and the other, and neither the one nor the other." In Losev's case, the dialectic does not take the route of negating metaphysical determinateness, but rather that of suffusing the concept with a more determinate meaning whose determinateness emerges both topologically and arithmologically. Most important, however, this meaning emerges through the interaction of part and whole in the process of thinking—that is, via the intellectual contemplation of the *place*, of the *topos* of the eidos in eidetic or ideal space, where its very *identity* depends on its *difference* from other eide. The same also applies to arithmological motion and rest.

The difference between Hegel's dialectic of negativity and Losev's dialectic of positivity becomes even more pronounced in the theory of essence. Hegel defines essence negatively, although it is assumed to be the truth of being. As Hegel himself writes in the *Science of Logic*, "In this fashion, essence is only the *first* negation, or the negation, which is *determinateness*, through which being becomes only existence, or existence only an *other*. But essence is the absolute negativity of being; it is being itself, but not being determined only as an *other*: it is being rather that has sublated itself both as immediate being and as immediate negation, as the negation which is affected by an otherness" (Hegel, 2010b: 342).

The very frequency with which Hegel employs the concept of negation in this passage is quite revealing, not to mention that essence itself is

clearly and unambiguously defined as the "absolute negativity of being." In Hegel's negative dialectic, this definition is justified by the fact that essence itself functions as a dialectical moment, that is, as a negatively rational moment in the transit from "being" to "concept." Note that Hegel likewise defines "being" and "concept" negatively, suggesting their essential contingency on "nothingness."

Hegel defines being, essence, and even reflection dialectically, as "movement from nothing to nothing" (Hegel 2010b: 346). One could object that Hegel is discussing in this case the dialectical movement of reflection's three moments—"positing," "external," and "determining," respectively. In the first case, however, it is both itself and its non-being, but only as its own negative. In the second case, it subjects to negation what was originally negated, and in the third case we are confronted with the unity of two negations!

In other words, we move from nothing to nothing via nothing and within the space of this nothing, if essence or, per Hegel, the truth of being is defined in the speculatively dialectic spirit as absolute negativity (Hegel 2010b: 337).

Given its Platonic orientation, Losev's dialectic presents us, of course, with an entirely different theory of essence. The first thing that catches the eye, however, is the overcoming of negative Hegelian reductionism, which held that essence can be defined *only* negatively. Losev crucially eliminates one-sided negativist reductionism. Losev's dialectical system assumes the availability of all possible types and methods of elaborating essence. As Losev notes, "The essence of all elaboration consists in the extraction from general essence of one or another of its moments as an independent and isolated whole, i.e., in the hypostatization of these moments" (Losev 1990: 184).

We might liken the hypostatization of essence's moments from general essence to the way our gaze alternately singles out one or another part of a whole picture. Nihilism in relation to the essence or the truth of being is manifested whenever an isolated or hypostasized fragment of the overall picture is declared the only existent, while all the other moments are reduced to nothing. That is, the picture is essentially reduced to its fragment; the part is declared the whole. This applies as well to Hegelian dialectical negativism, where we are confronted with a hypostatization of the part to the detriment of the whole, and the essence of the dialectic is seen only as negative. To avoid this, Losev's eidetic dialectic offers a theory of part and whole as the basis for an entire dialectical methodology.

Within this context, it is interesting to examine how, in *Philosophy of the Name*, Losev attempts to justify the concept of the whole as a dialectical category. According to him, the dialectic shows "that the one and the many are a logically necessary contradiction, an antinomy, for the one *cannot* be without the many and *requires* it, for the many itself is necessarily also a unity; and that this contradiction is *necessarily*, *logically* neces-

sarily reconciled and synthesized in a new category, namely, in *the whole*. '*The whole*' is the dialectical synthesis of 'the one' and 'the many'" (Losev 1990: 15).

Losev cites a cabinet as a simple example of this dialectical synthesis of one and many: it is simultaneously a whole and consists of many parts (boards, drawers, etc.). Let us remember this example, inasmuch as it is quite useful for understanding the *difference* between the whole in Losev's dialectic and its function in Hegel's negatively rational dialectic.

The categories of whole and part are accorded a much more modest status in Hegel's dialectical system. The *Science of Logic* devotes only a few pages (in the second section, entitled "Appearance," of "The Doctrine of Essence") to the relations between the whole and its parts. Actually, whole and part are not even categories for Hegel, insofar as "essence," "appearance," and "reality," respectively, as the most common and fundamental concepts, function as categories in his philosophy.

According to Hegel, whole and parts presuppose each other; moreover, the whole figures as self-subsisting, whereas the parts, which subsist *immediately*, form the appearance of the whole. However, Hegel is primarily interested in the *relation* between whole and parts, and in our view something quite curious happens here. Hegel *identifies* the whole and its parts:

> In the relation of whole and parts, the two sides are these self-subsistences but in such a way that each has the other reflectively shining in it and, at the same time, only is as the identity of both. Now because the essential relation is at first only the first, immediate relation, the negative unity and the positive self-subsistence are bound together by the 'also'; the two sides are indeed both posited as *moments*, but *equally* so as concretely existing *self-subsistences*. (Hegel 2010b: 451)

Let us reflect on what Hegel says; Losev's example of the cabinet will prove extraordinarily useful in this case. If we consider parts and whole separately, the parts figure as appearances of the self-subsisting whole. That is, as a self-subsisting whole, the cabinet is in fact its parts, for example, a drawer in the cabinet or the boards from which the cabinet is built; that is, in this case, the drawer does not exist in and of itself, but as a drawer in the cabinet. If, however, we examine them *in correlation*—that is, as a cabinet with a drawer—then, according to Hegel, we separate them into *equal self-subsistences*! Generally speaking, the identification of part and whole, of drawer and cabinet, is already effected here (of course, only *in relation* to each other, but for Hegel it is precisely the *relation* that is determinant). Naturally, no one disputes that part and whole exist in relation to one another, but this is in no way tantamount to their *identity*.

For Hegel, on the contrary, the parts function, for all intents and purposes, *as* the whole *in the correlation* of whole and parts. What does Hegel mean when he asserts that each of the sides is "reflected" in the other and

is given as the identity of both? Invoking the example of the cabinet again, we might somehow admit that the drawer in the cabinet is, along with other parts, "reflected" in our perception of the cabinet as a whole. However, it seems at very least dubious that the cabinet, as the other side of the correlation, is reflected in the drawer, the boards, etc.

The key point is not this, however, but rather that Hegel argues each of the sides is given as the "identity of both." That the drawer is a drawer in the cabinet, and that the cabinet contains the drawer, in no way testifies to the "identity of both," if, of course, by identity we mean the identity invoked by formal logic and metaphysics. Hegel, however, denies this metaphysical identity, as expressed by the classical formula A = A or A is A. He introduces the notion of positive and *negative identity*. Moreover, the latter is truer dialectically: the first identity, as a metaphysical identity, is subject to sublation within it. Negative identity means that A = ⌉A or A is not-A (at the speculatively "positive" stage it will transpire, naturally, that A = (A ∧ ⌉A) ∧ ⌉(A ∧ ⌉A); this is the notorious totality that Hegel also terms "infinite progress")[2]. It is negative identity apprehended in this way that leads Hegel to the *identification* of whole and part. That is, the whole is simultaneously its parts, while the parts are the whole.

In the case of the cabinet invoked by Losev to illustrate the *dialectical* interaction of part and whole, Hegel's *logic of negative identity* would lead to the following consequences. In the first stage, the cabinet would be the cabinet with all its parts (A = A). In the second stage, it would no longer be the cabinet, and its parts would no longer be parts (A = ⌉A), while in the final, speculative phase it would be the cabinet and not-cabinet, with its parts and without them (A = A ∧ ⌉A). Perhaps Hegel would term this logic dialectical, but from Losev's viewpoint the dialectical consists in something else altogether.

We have already seen how essence is determined by the negative dialectic in Hegel's system; let us now examine how Losev's eidetic dialectic approaches the concept of essence. According to Losev, dialectical movement assumes that we must hypostasize its moments (parts) from the *general essence* (the whole). Let us turn to Losev:

> The [following] moments are contained in essence: 1) apophasis; 2) eidos (of four types, including intelligence; 3) with the eidetic or essential meon; 4) logos; 5) sophia, or the corporeal moment; 6) energy, or symbol; 7) the material-meonal moment of otherness as the principle of the

[2] On negative identity, see, for example, the passage in the *Science of Logic* (Hegel 2010b: 184–188) where Hegel discusses the identity of extensive and intensive magnitude, or of the one and the many. It is one thing to speak of the dialectical synthesis of the one and many (Losev), and quite another to speak of their dialectical identity (Hegel).

> second figuration of essence, i.e., figuration outside itself, in otherness. With this in mind, essence can be elaborated by these seven different means. (Losev 1990: 168)

Thus, we can construe essence by different means that are *moments* of general essence, like the parts of a whole. That is, according to Losev, we can regard essence apophatically, such that essence becomes a "single indistinguishable point of ecstasy" (Losev, 1990: 168); eidetically, where essence appears in schematic and topological form—"in its own eidos," as Losev writes; logically, through the prism of formal or noetic logic; and so on. Moreover, it is important that when we engage in this elaboration, one method does not displace all the rest, reducing them to naught, which enables us to develop a positively dialectical knowledge of the truth of the whole, including in this process the apophatic, meontological, eidetic, noetic, and formal-logical moments. All of these are *possibilities of a full* ontological elaboration of the truth of being or essence. From the standpoint of the Platonist dialectic (which we find not only in Losev's work but earlier as well, in the philosophy of Plato, Iamblichus, and Proclus), Hegelian negative reason can only be one hypostasized *part* of that truth of being of which *both dialectics and metaphysics* speak, albeit a part that attempts to *identify* itself with the whole. In Hegel's case, however, this identity is, perhaps, *only negative* (to borrow Hegel's own terms).

Losev provides a genuinely dialectical description of the relationship between essence and phenomenon in the *Dialectics of Myth*:

> *Essence* and *phenomenon* also presuppose each other dialectically. […] (a) If essence exists, it is *something*, i.e. it has a property that substantially distinguishes it from everything else. It is, consequently, *knowable* or *manifests* itself somehow. Either there is essence, and then there is its phenomenal manifestation, or there is no phenomenal manifestation of essence, but then there is nothing one can say about whether it is essence or whether it exists at all. […] (b) Any phenomenon is a phenomenon of *something*. This something must be *distinct* from the phenomenon itself. If it is not distinct from it, then the phenomenon is not a phenomenon of *something*, but then it is not, in fact, a phenomenon. […] Consequently, *either a phenomenon is the phenomenon of an essence and always presupposes a non-phenomenal essence, or else there is no phenomenon at all*. (Losev, 2003: 126)

Nearly every word in this passage is directed against the Hegelian negative or, more precisely, the negative-identical understanding of the relationship between phenomenon and essence (for Hegel, a "non-phenomenal essence" is something patently impossible, as is, for that matter, the "metaphysical" (in his view) thesis that essence *is something*) and reveals the positive significance of both essence and phenomenon in dialectical thought. This significance is genuinely dialectical, because it is our

profound conviction that the genuine dialectic traces its roots not to Hegel but to Plato. The Hegelian dialectic is merely a hypostasized negatively rational variant of general dialectical theory.

In the *Dialectics of Myth*, Losev wrests practically all the fundamental dialectical categories, beginning with subject and object, and ending with consciousness and being, from the captivity of negativity. As Losev writes,

> Let us consider calmly, however, and, most importantly, dialectically what a 'subject' and 'object' are, and what their mutual relation to each other is. [...] (a) A subject — is it something or nothing? A subject is something. Does it exist or not? A subject is something that exists. Can it be thought and perceived? Absolutely. [...] This means, further, that it is an object, for an object is precisely something that exists and can be thought and perceived. [...] (b) An object — is it something or nothing? An object is something. [...] Hence, from the viewpoint of genuine dialectics there can be neither a subject without an object nor an object without a subject. Every subject is an object, and every object is (at least as a possibility) a subject. (Losev 2003: 122–123)

Losev defines both subject and object positively, as *something existent*. The dialectical nature of their correlation is manifested, first, in that they mutually presuppose each other; and second, in that they can dialectically pass into each other, not in the sense of Hegelian negative identity (whose result is not something, but the identity of something and nothing), but in the sense of an Aristotelian positive potentiality. Moreover, the essence of their correlation can be hypostatized dialectically in different ways, but within the *positive unity of the whole*. What has been said in regard to subject and object, Losev later repeats like a refrain with respect to idea and matter, and mind and being (Losev 2003: 122–124).

As far as the truth of being or essence are concerned, Losev employs, along with such qualifiers as apophatic and meontological, the words eidetic and noetic. This might raise the question of the degree to which Husserl's phenomenological ideas influenced Losev. Although Husserl's phenomenology had some influence on Losev, especially in the matter of discerning essence and, to some extent, as concerns terminology, we should not exaggerate its impact, as Losev, despite his contradictory attitude to Husserl, never agreed to the definitions that *eidos*, *noesis*, and *noema* acquired in phenomenology. Thus, in the third footnote in *Philosophy of the Name*, Losev writes as follows,

> I take the ancient term "noema" from Husserl, for whom it denotes the semantic correlate of objectivity as such (the perceived as such, the remembered as such, the sensed as such, etc.), but this term has a much broader meaning for me, since, instead of Husserl's stationary and stupefied structure, I see here the noema's dialectically hierarchical ascent

> towards its limit, towards the idea, not to mention the dialectical origin of this limit itself. (Losev 1990: 188)

Losev's Platonism (in the sense of his having inherited a tradition of dialectical thought originating with Plato) is clearly manifested in this reference to dialectically hierarchical ascent. In Plato and Losev's sense of the word, the dialectic opposes ontological nihilism not only in terms of affirming entities and preventing their reduction *ad nihil* but also because it is hierarchically ascending, that is, anagogical. In Platonism, anagogical cognition opposes the *immediate apprehension* of being's essence and structure characteristic of all thinking prone to nihilism.

The tradition of anagogical, hierarchically ascending comprehension of beings dates to Plato's *Symposium*, in which he identifies four stages of the soul's ascent to true beauty. Let us recall them briefly. At the first stage, the beautiful is perceived in the sensual world, as physical beauty. At the second stage, the beautiful is no longer perceived as outward beauty, but rather as inward beauty, that is, spiritual beauty, more precisely, the beauty of beautiful souls. The third stage of Platonic anagogy brings the subject comprehension of the beauty of knowledge, the revelation that knowledge itself can be beautiful. Finally, at the fourth stage, the contemplating mind gains access to the beautiful as such, the idea of the beautiful without reference to anything, absolute beauty.

Following Plato, Plotinus likewise speaks of a hierarchy of beauty, distinguishing physical, spiritual, intellectual, and absolute beauty. The One ecstatically goes out of itself since it is divine; in Neoplatonism, the divine is always what exceeds itself. Absolute beauty takes shape as intellectual beauty, is imbued with spiritual beauty, and informs physical beauty. The transmission (outflowing) of beauty from higher to lower stages is implemented by the eide, which emanate from mind and undergo an ever-increasing materialization as they flow downwards to the lower stages. Beauty's absence or ugliness indicates the exhaustion of beauty. Comprehension of beauty happens in reverse order: first, the body's beauty is revealed, then the soul's beauty, the mind's beauty and, finally, the beauty of the absolute.

We should not imagine here, in keeping with modern European aesthetics, that when the term beauty is used, it primarily denotes an aesthetic rather than ontological phenomenon. In Losev's system, the aesthetical is always bound up with the ontological and refers to it, especially when it is a matter not of an intra-aesthetical distinction between "explicit" and "implicit" aesthetics, but of ontology, as happens in the case of Plato and Plotinus[3]. Losev likewise detects this ontological significance in the *Symposium*'s anagogical theory:

[3] On the ontological view of the beautiful, see also Eco 2002: 17–26.

> In the *Symposium*, we find a theory of the hierarchical ascent of knowledge, of the stages of "erotic" ascent. Here, the dynamic of meaning and knowledge has not simply reproduced within itself the heterogeneously hierarchical structure as a general principle, but has itself become a heterogeneously hierarchical structure in this connection. [...] And we note quite palpably how meaning received the structure of being, and how, having received the structure of being, it had to generate within its own continuous emergence the articulation of this emergence [...] that is, to turn into an entire ladder of semantic ascent. (Losev 1993: 378–379)

Anagogical cognition reproduces in its deployment the structure of entities, thus becoming like them. In Platonism, the soul's principal trait is its ability or capacity for contemplation with the mind. (In fact, we need philosophy in order to develop this ability, for theory qua θεωρεῖν is doomed to remain nothing other than contemplation, moreover, anagogical contemplation, meaning contemplation that is not pointless.)

The fact that anagogical, hierarchically ascending cognition concerns not only the comprehension of beauty but all comprehension of beings is discussed by Plato himself in his famous *Seventh Letter*, regarded by many scholars as Plato's philosophical testament. He writes, "For everything that exists there are three instruments by which the knowledge of it is necessarily imparted; fourth, there is the knowledge itself, and, as fifth, we must count the thing itself which is known and truly exists" (Plato *Epist*. VII 342b).

Note the similarity between the last two stages of knowledge and what is said in the *Symposium*. The difference is that the first two stages of knowledge in the *Symposium* are interpreted *substantively*, that is, the object of knowledge (body and soul, respectively) are indicated, whereas the three initial stages from the *Seventh Letter* are understood *formally*, that is, the method of knowledge is indicated (naming, defining, and depicting, respectively). In both cases, however, the highest level cannot be reached without passing through the previous stages. Moreover, Plato writes of the need for a "well-constituted mind" to penetrate each stage deeply, and that "much effort" is required for generating the knowledge needed in rising from one stage to the next (Plato *Epist*. VII 343e). From the viewpoint of Platonism, it would be a serious mistake to assume that knowledge of true being is immediately accessible to us or that it can become obvious to the untrained mind. In this connection, Pierre Hadot speaks of *formation*, thus translating the Greek παιδεία and implying a specific maturation of the mind for truth (Hadot 2002: 316).

The European philosophical tradition of recent centuries has shaped, however, a certain interpretation of Plato's ontology that is in sharp contrast with the way this ontology was understood in antiquity itself. The issue of the modernization or distortion of antiquity's authentic legacy in modern European philosophy was raised by Heidegger (who, incidentally,

did not escape this modernization himself). Plato's ontology still continues to be interpreted, however, along the lines of Hegelian idealism or positivism, which attempted to separate Plato from the subsequent Platonist tradition. We could ask a simple question: what is the basis for considering Proclus' interpretation of Plato's legacy a "Neoplatonist" modernization? Why are we obliged to understand Plato along the lines of Hegel or Zeller, rather than those of Proclus? Interpreting Plato as an idealist, under the influence of nineteenth-century German idealism (despite the fact that the ontological bases and worldviews of Platonism and German idealism are diametrically opposed) or, worse, the positivism of nineteenth-century German historians of philosophy, who created an entire caricature of Plato's doctrine with their invention of the "world of Platonic ideas," is just such a modernization.

Losev convincingly demonstrated this in his numerous writings on Platonism, whose goal was to overcome the huge misconception of Plato and his philosophy that had held European thought captive for centuries. It was the philosophical labors of Losev, who risked appealing to the centuries-long tradition of Platonism and especially to the works of Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Proclus, that made it possible to end the long period during which Plato's philosophy was completely misunderstood and thus create prospects for an adequate interpretation of his legacy, including (and primarily) an ontological interpretation.

Besides Losev's works, we should note the tremendous achievement of Heidegger's onto-hermeneutics in investigating the origins and principles of ontological thinking and, in particular, the spirit of criticism and distrust with which Heidegger regarded modern European interpretations of the ontology of antiquity. By pointing out the difference between Greek and modern methods of interpreting being, Heidegger's onto-hermeneutic stance indirectly demonstrated the impact that a general worldview, whether that of antiquity or modern Europe, had on the formation of ontological discourse. The Hegelian and positivist illusion that, when speaking about being (and, more broadly, about other concepts and categories of ontology), modern European thinkers had in mind the same thing as the thinkers of antiquity, and were thinking on the same ontological plane, was thus dispelled. In terms of identifying the original intentions of Platonist ontology, Heidegger's works were another major step towards the simple understanding that Plato should be primarily and exclusively interpreted within the Platonist tradition itself. However, Heidegger's own interpretations of Plato did not fully satisfy this requirement (Heidegger 1998: 167–169).

Following Losev's wise counsel that Plato should be interpreted via the subsequent Platonist tradition (Losev 1993: 696), let us turn to this tradition. We discover the difference between the modern European concept of Platonic philosophy and how the tradition of Platonism itself imagined it in the very first sentence of Proclus' *Platonic Theology*. Proclus

writes, "[T]he whole philosophy of Plato was at first unfolded into the light through the beneficent will of superior creatures" (Proclus 1986: 1). According to Platonism, these "superior creatures" are of four species: gods, daemons, heroes, and pure souls (i.e., souls that had not embarked on material, physical existence). They are all denizens of an invisible spiritual world. That is, Platonic philosophy is here understood not as the philosopher Plato's personal invention or discovery.

As Proclus claims, the superior creatures exhibit "the intellect concealed in them and the truth subsisting together with beings" (Proclus 1986: 1). Thus, through the writings of Plato, the beneficent will of the superior beings intended to make this hidden order of the spiritual or mental world (κόσμος νοητός) and the truth that eternally subsists with entities evident "to souls conversant in generation" (Proclus 1986: 1).

From the Platonist viewpoint, the individual's mind is not ready to apprehend true knowledge within this emergent reality. To prepare it, successive stages of contemplative ascent are required; this, indeed, is philosophy's purpose. Plato's philosophy arranges itself in the shape of an ascending staircase, like anagogical discourse, where each stage reveals a certain kind of knowledge, and only when this knowledge puts down "good roots" in the soul can the latter move onto the next level.

We are clearly confronted here with the significance of the spiritual topology in which we situate ourselves prior to undertaking philosophical interpretation. Whereas for Plato and Proclus this preliminary onto-topological order of spiritual reality necessarily includes the correlation of its place in the world with the presence (moreover, the *real* presence) in being of the four species of superior creatures, for Hegel or Zeller, for example, such correlation does not exist, since it is difficult to imagine Hegel being convinced of the real existence of Platonism's gods, daemons, heroes, and pure souls. Hegel's onto-topology is different, and he constructs his understanding of Plato in accordance with it. With some reservations, the same applies to Heidegger, who displays his own understanding of Plato in the essay "Plato's Doctrine of Truth." What can be said, then, about the various positivists, who flatly deny the very existence of any sort of onto-topology? Hence the gap in the hermeneutic tradition and the problem, still popular nowadays, of interpreting Plato's texts.

Such a shrewd mind as Hegel had already noted, in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, that it is difficult to summarize Plato's philosophy based on his works:

> [I]t is not, however, properly speaking, presented there in systematic form, and to conduct it from such writings is difficult, not so much from anything in itself, as because this philosophy has been differently understood in different periods of time; and, more than all, because it has been much and roughly handled in modern times by those who have either read into it their own crude notions, being unable to conceive the spiri-

> tual spiritually, or have regarded as the essential and most significant element in Plato's philosophy that which in reality does not belong to Philosophy at all. (Hegel 1995: 9)

Hegel notes the integrity of Plato's thought, and approves of the fact that it takes the viewpoint of the idea. He believes, however, that the way thought is developed in Plato's work is far from systematic, explaining that this was because "the philosophic culture of Plato, like the general culture of his time, was not yet ripe for really scientific form" (Hegel, 1995: 17). Hegel finds the truly scientific spirit only in Aristotle.

Summing up his examination of Plato's philosophy, Hegel remarks that it is presented in the accidental form of the dialogue; that the deepest truths turn up within it accidentally, as when one finds a gem in the desert; and that "no systematic connection is to be found" in the dialogues themselves (Hegel 1995: 116). Indeed, repeated attempts to find this connection were made throughout the nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries, but none of them, whether by Hegel, Zeller, Munk or Solovyov, led to serious results.

What is surprising is that none of the aforementioned thinkers turned for clarification to the internal tradition of Platonism itself, which was well aware of both the order of the dialogues and the methods of interpreting them, as well as, indeed, how to comprehend Plato's conception as a whole. And in fact an inviolable tradition had been established in the Platonist school of a full course of study of Platonist philosophy based on twelve dialogues, which were studied sequentially in the following order: *Alcibiades*, *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, *Cratylus*, *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Phaedrus*, *Symposium*, *Philebus*, *Timaeus*, and *Parmenides* (Lukomskii 2001: 515). Aside from these twelve works, the rest of Plato's works, including such extensive ones as the *Republic* and the *Laws*, were studied only as supplementary aids.

The Platonist tradition achieved an unprecedented hermeneutic sophistication in interpreting its founder's texts. (The commentaries of Iamblichus and Proclus can serve as exemplars of this sophistication.) Moreover, hermeneutic competence depended on the interpreter's command of the dialectical method. Such a hermeneutic dialectic involves the skillful use of four methods for comprehending meaning: the diaeretic (which studies how entities go outside their own limits); the analytic (which studies the return to principles); the horistic (which treats objects at rest in themselves); and the apodictic (which deals with causation) (Proclus *In Parm*. 650.17–651.9; 653.23–25; 982.21–30). The art of understanding Plato's texts thus also means understanding where, how, and when Plato is speaking diaeretically, analytically, horistically or apodictically, which, again, implies certain leitmotifs in his works.

As assumed by Platonism, the soul's capacity for intellectual contemplation, for growth elevating the mind towards truth, presupposes

a correspondence to what Losev calls the "heterogeneously hierarchical" structure of being. Indeed, just like philosophy in the Platonic or Aristotelian understanding of the term, anagogical cognition is possible only when entities have a hierarchical and heterogeneous structure. If, like Descartes or Heidegger, we assume entities are homogeneous in terms of structure and hierarchy—that is, in terms of indifference to the degrees of knowledge of its higher and lower species—then intellectual cognition would feel no need to climb towards understanding the higher levels of entities, and all the ontological richness of entities, as exemplified by the understanding of entities in a dialectic or metaphysics *guided by its own exemplars from antiquity*, would be *reduced* either to the obviousness of self-authenticating thought, as in Descartes, or the obviousness of *presence* in pre-intellectual immediate being, as in Heidegger. In both cases, we have before us ontological reductionism as a synonym of *ontological nihilism towards entities*, and the difference between Descartes' rationalism and Heidegger's anti-rationalism matters quite little here.

Ontological reductionism is overcome only if we look at entities from the viewpoint of the ontological whole. Moreover, entities themselves should be understood as structurally hierarchical unities, whose interconnected aspects and levels are disclosed in the ascending anagogical cognition that elevates us to the truth of being. The experience of this view of being and knowledge is known not only to the dialectics and metaphysics of the past but also, as evidenced by Losev's dialectical system, to contemporary thought.

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