

VINCENZO GIOBERTI
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF PHILOSOPHY, BOOK I
CHAPTER 4, 'THE IDEAL FORMULA'
BRUSSELS, 1840

What we call the *ideal formula*¹ is a proposition that expresses the Idea in a clear, simple and precise way by means of a judgment. Since a person cannot think without judging, he cannot think the Idea without making a judgment whose meaning is the ideal formula. This must consist of two terms joined together by a third, in keeping with the nature of every judgment, and it must not go wrong by excess or defect.² It would go wrong by defect if it did not contain all the elements integral to the Idea – if, in other words, all notions that occur in the human mind could not be reduced synthetically to some one of the elements of that formula. It would go wrong by excess if there were something more in its explicit content than the integral elements – if, that is to say, one of the concepts that the formula expresses were contained in others signified by it.

In taking up this topic, I do not intend at this time to proceed with the rigor of method that befits ontology, with a simple and austere synthesis that would be out of place in this introductory work. Since the doctrine that I am setting forth (though at its roots it is as ancient as the truth) is completely against the rules current in philosophy, I thought that I should smooth the way with the type of presentation that would permit me to compare the main points of my approach with the customary rules and bring my system as near as possible to current science.³

Now contemporary philosophy is by nature psychological, and ontology, even when permitted, is considered only an adjunct to the experimental science of the human mind. My belief is just the opposite, and my position is firm: in fact, in the appropriate place I hope to be able to show, with evidence that will leave nothing wanting, that ontology is wholly independent of ordinary psychology and that the latter is entirely dependent on the former. Nonetheless, since it is quite true that psychology must correspond to ontology and be interwoven with it as facts are linked with ideas, the one can serve to confirm the claims of the other and thus promote the intent of a work which, like this introduction, is one of simple preparation. Therefore, I will make psychological excursions and digressions whenever it serves my purpose, and thus I will proceed as need be, by way of analysis and synthesis. I will try to do this in such a way, however, that the main points of the synthetic process are sufficiently explicit, and that the argument resulting from them is capable of convincing readers accustomed to speculative material, or else of supplying them the means to correct me should I happen to fall into error.

¹*Formola ideale.*

²Rosmini had also used this distinction between errors of defect and excess to organize his account of previous philosophies: *Nuovo saggio sull' origine delle idee* (Rome: Salviucci, 1830), I, 5-6.

³*Scienza attuale.*

The construction of the ideal formula is connected with the search for what can be called the philosophical Prime.⁴ Philosophers until now have labored at two inquiries, which in substance come down to just one. One group went hunting for the first idea,⁵ another for the first thing. The first idea and the first thing are those on which all other ideas, in the order of the knowable,⁶ and all other things, in the order of the real, in some way depend. I say *in some way* because philosophers are divided into many factions on the special nature of this dependence. I call the first idea the *psychological Prime* and the first thing the *ontological Prime*. But since the first idea and the first thing are identified with one another, in my opinion, and because the two Primes become one, I give this absolute principle the name of *philosophical Prime*, and I consider it the foundation and unique basis of all the real and all the knowable.

On the problem of the ontological Prime, philosophers can be divided into three classes – theist, naturalist and pantheist – whose names themselves indicate which Prime each recognizes. The Prime of the pantheists is the synthesis of the other two; either the concept of God or that of nature can dominate it, giving pantheism a particular character. All the oriental philosophers, who alone deserve the name *ancients* in an absolute sense, are theists or pantheists. Pure naturalism – atheism, in other words – is an analytic, modern and European commodity. In the system of Capila, as it appears from the account of it given by the Indianists, the concept of nature is much the dominant, yet it is not the only concept. Hence, contrary to popular opinion, I cannot bring myself to believe that the followers of the *Sanchia* commonly called atheist are atheists. Elsewhere I will set forth the reasons why I believe that the *Pracriti* of Capila is nature in the pantheist sense and therefore contains a divine element.⁷ Thus, I regard pure atheism as foreign to the Orient, at least if we are talking about schools and teachings that have gained some celebrity.

The idea expressed by the ontological Prime, whatever it may be, is not simple but composed of more concepts, which could not make a single idea unless they were connected together and organized. Nor could this organic entity⁸ subsist unless, among the various concepts from which it comes, there were one dominating as the basis or logical root from which the others merely derive. But this original concept of the ontological Prime, coming before other notions⁹ only in the order of logic, becomes of necessity a psychological Prime, and then from this perspective the philosophers of whom we are speaking are forced to leave pure ontology and move on to psychology. But if the search for the ontological Prime leads of necessity to seeking the psychological

⁴*Il Primo filosofico.*

⁵*Della prima idea.*

⁶*Scibile.*

⁷*Samkyha*, traditionally the work of a sage named Kapila, is one of the six main lines of ancient Indian thought. It is the metaphysical theory that corresponds to the practice of *Yoga*, and its earliest text survives from the third century CE. Its cosmology is fundamentally materialist, deriving the world and the souls in it from a primordial substance called *praktri*, meaning ‘nature; *Routledge Encyclopedia* (1967), IV, 155-7 [get up-to-date source]; Gioberti ???

⁸*Organismo.*

⁹*Nozioni.*

Prime, this suggests that the two Primes must make only one in substance, and the first thing must also be the first idea. Nor in truth could it be otherwise since every thing is a concept and every concept a thing. Hence, if it is certain that the psychological Prime must in some way produce all concepts and the ontological Prime all things, the two Primes must of necessity be combined. Separating the two Primes gave birth to psychology and completely ruined philosophy, as the course of our argument will reveal. Reuniting the two Primes in just one provides us with the philosophical Prime, which is absolute – the basis of the real and the knowable.

Philosophers (including in their number teachers of religion also, as one should) involved in the search for the psychological Prime, whether to formulate the ontological Prime or to solve a problem of psychology, are divided into a large number of factions which are quite different, at least in form if not always in substance. I shall not undertake to make an exact enumeration of all the ideas baptized as Primes because it would require great effort not strictly required by my present purpose. But I think I do not stray far from the truth in reducing the principles of these ideas to seventeen, as follows: the One, the Necessary, the Intelligent, the Intelligible, the Incomprehensible, the Good, the Infinite, the Universal, the Immense, the Eternal, Absolute Potentiality, Pure and Free Act, Cause, Substance, the Absolute, the Identical and Being.¹⁰

But a quick analysis that anyone can do for himself shows that the first thirteen concepts cannot be psychologically primitive. Spinoza and the modern pantheists of Germany have given greater currency to the ideas of Substance, the Absolute and Identity. But these are secondary because they are relative: the first refers to the qualities or modes that presuppose it; the other two imply the general idea of relation itself¹¹ by declaring it absent. A relative concept resulting from two prior concepts cannot be prime. What remains, then, is the concept of Being, which constitutes the psychological Prime and therefore the philosophical Prime, according to the stipulation that we have made.

That Being is the philosophical Prime is an opinion¹² dating back to primitive times, as we shall see elsewhere. Among the moderns who professed it outright, the most illustrious, no doubt, is Nicolas Malebranche, neglected by his compatriots; they preferred German fantasies or the frivolities of Descartes to the teachings of the greatest thinker of the age after Leibniz – or the greatest French philosopher of all time. I am not speaking about any of the Germans who have revived that opinion, if only in appearance, altering and bringing it into disrepute with the nonsense of pantheism. In our day, the illustrious Antonio Rosmini, in his *New Essay on the Origin of Ideas*, partly renewed the ancient opinion and brought it into the debate that gives the main theme of his book a depth and sharpness of insight uncommon today.

As psychological analysis, Rosmini's work is more finished than that of his predecessors and has led science forward without fail. No one before him has made as complete and

¹⁰*L'Ente.*

¹¹*L'idea stessa di relazione in genere.*

¹²*Sentenza.*

thoughtful an investigation of what I call the psychological Prime – insofar as reflection can deal with it. But for theoretical science¹³ it is not enough, not enough for that same analytic understanding¹⁴ of the mind that cannot avoid errors and attain its goal, even within merely experiential limits, unless it is based on the principles and conclusions of a higher discipline. This, in my view, Rosmini has not done. Following the rules of psychologism, he sought new results for science as an analytic observer, but as an ontologist he may have cut his gains short, not taking science back to that height where the best of the ancients had put it. This takes nothing at all away from the just praise due him since in this case the loss must be attributed to method and the gain to genius, the one being the fault of the time, the other the merit of the philosopher. But if anyone should ask me why the eminent Author followed a defective method, I would answer that it is not given to the better minds to rise completely above the problems of their times.

I will describe the reasons that cause me to speak in this way, realizing that I am dealing with one of those people who are not offended when, for love of truth, someone disagrees with their views and explains the grounds for disagreement. I assume that the reader is familiar with the work of the illustrious writer; otherwise, it would not be possible to understand my argument¹⁵ since I am forced to subject myself to a strict brevity and to reduce another person's arguments¹⁶ to short formulas.

Rosmini's teaching, insofar as it has to do with my topic, can be reduced to this basic proposition: that the psychological Prime is not identical to the ontological Prime. This in substance is the whole mistaken component of his system, in my view. But since my¹⁷ way of speaking is different from that of the illustrious Author and **beyond the norm**, I must examine some of his conclusions. I shall reduce Rosmini's theory to the four points that follow:

1. All ideas have originated from the idea of being.^a
2. The primitive idea of being represents only possible being.^b
3. Perception of the real existence of things is an action¹⁸ of a judgment by which an equation is made between the idea of possible being and sensory apprehension.^{c19}
4. The concept of the reality of absolute Being, of God, does not arise directly and through intuition but only in an indirect way and through demonstration.^d

Let us examine them.

I. *All ideas have originated from the idea of being.* I accept this first statement with the

¹³*Scienza speculativa.*

¹⁴*Cognizione analitica.*

¹⁵*Discorso.*

¹⁶*Ragionamenti.*

¹⁷*Questa.*

¹⁸*È opera di.*

¹⁹*L'apprensione sensitiva.*

^aRosmini, *Essay on the Origin of Ideas* (Milan: 1837), II, sec. 5.

^b*Ibid.*, II, part 1, chaps. 2, 5; part 2, chap. 5; part. 6, chap. 2.

^c*Ibid.*, II, sec. 5, part 2, chap. 4; parts 4-5; III, sec. 6, part 3.

^d*Ibid.*, II, sec. 5, part 2, chap. 5; sec. 4, part 6, chap. 2; III, sec. 6, part 5, chap. 5; sec. 7.

qualifications that I will mention shortly but could not express here without making other points first.

II. *The primitive idea of being represents only possible being.* If this claim were true, it would follow that the idea of the possible precedes that of the real, which in the first place is contrary to the rules of psychology.²⁰ Given that the abstract follows the concrete and arises from it according to the natural mental process, concrete cognition²¹ of the real must precede abstract cognition of the possible. But if one asserts that a different rule holds in the first act of the mind and that the beginning of intellectual activity²² takes place in a particular way, I note that this way, whatever it may be, must conform to the rules of logic. But according to the rules of logic, the possible presupposes the real because something possible could not be conceived without something real. If nothing is in reality, nothing can be. A potency that consisted in a mere potentiality²³ without a prior act would be nothing, not a true potency. This is why God is called pure act and why his power²⁴ is included in his actuality. Nor can one claim that that the cognition of this truth is a result of argument, moving up by reasoning²⁵ from the concept of the possible to that of the real, since in fact the mind moves down from the concept of the real to that of the possible.

To prove this, assume that we have only the idea of the possible, and tell me whether this possible, as such, is real or apparent. If you say that it is apparent, the basis of the knowable is destroyed and skepticism is inevitable. If it is real, the first concept clearly represents not a mere possibility but a reality in that a real possible, as possible, is real absolutely unless it refers to a prior reality of which it is the abstract, which is contrary to the present case where we are speaking of the first concept. A mere possibility, if it deserves belief, is entirely real because it is not only real but necessary, and indeed everyone agrees on the necessity of possibles as possibles. But if the possible is represented to a person's intuition as real, it is clear that the primitive concept must be the real and not the possible since the real is only real²⁶ and becomes possible by abstraction, but the possible by itself²⁷ cannot become real and is not possible. Therefore, it is against the rules of logic to make the concept of the real arise from that of the possible and assume that the latter can exist without the former.

²⁰*Ordine psicologico.*

²¹*Cognizione.*

²²*Esercizio intelletivo.*

²³*Una potenza che consistesse in una mera potenzialità.*

²⁴*Potere.*

²⁵*Opera del discorso, salendo col raziocinio.*

²⁶*Il reale solo è reale.*

²⁷*Il possibile solo.*

A question will arise: in what way does the concept of the possible arise from that of the real? I answer that the possible is the real only inasmuch as it is thought,²⁸ and hence it arises from the mind's reflecting on the first concept of the real. Since a person is endowed with the faculty of thinking about his own actions, once he has had the intuition of the real, he can fix his mind upon that intuition. In this reflective act, the immediate object of thinking is the thinking itself – the intuition. But since intuition grasps²⁹ the real, the reflective act cannot grasp the intuition without also perceiving the real conjoined with it. It by no means perceives the real in itself, however, since in that case the reflective act would not differ from the direct; it perceives the real in the intuition instead. But when the real is regarded as in the intuition, it loses the individuality that makes it real and keeps only the abstract, generic form that makes it possible.

The psychological transformation of the real into the possible thus results from uniting reflection with intuition. Relating the object to³⁰ reflection gives rise to the concept of the possible, as relating the object to intuition produces the notion of the real. Let us then suppose that I have a triangular body before my eyes. By looking at it, I acquire the idea of a real triangle. But if I then reflect on this same idea and regard the triangle not as outside of me but as in my mind, I have the idea of the possible triangle because the concept that I have of that triangle applies to an infinite number of real triangles. In short, the concept of the real becomes a concept of the possible by losing its concreteness and becoming abstract, which occurs by means of reflection.

With regard to the mind that possesses it, the idea of Being needs to be considered in two different moments: in the first act and in the second act. The first act is a task³¹ of intuition, the second is a task of reflection. In the first act, Being is represented as pure³² reality, completely simple, absolute, necessary and perfect; in the second act it is represented as possible. But possibility presupposes reality as reflection presupposes intuition, neither more nor less. The proportion and correspondence that holds between the two psychological acts and the two ontological states is absolutely precise. The notion of possibility implies an intellectual elaboration, an abstraction, that cannot occur in intuition, a completely simple faculty that consists merely of contemplating the object as it is, without adding anything to it or taking anything away. The possible can no more be *intuited* with the eyes of the mind than *seen* with those of the body.

And truly, if the object of intuition were the possible, it would be correct to assume either that the possible is real, which takes us back to the earlier argument, or that an object can subsist solely in the condition of the possible, which is absurd. Indeed, one can ask if the objective referent³³ of the idea of Being is in the mind or outside the mind. Anyone who says that it is in the mind would incur all the skeptical consequences psychologism, and

²⁸*In quanto è pensato.*

²⁹*Apprende.*

³⁰*Verso.*

³¹*Opera.*

³²*Mera.*

³³*Termine.*

the objective truth of things would be destroyed. But Rosmini expressly embraces the contrary view and states that the idea of Being is a true entity distinct from the mind, that it is numerically one for all people, immense, eternal, immutable and absolute.

If it is outside the mind, then, how could it ever subsist and be shown to the human mind if it were a mere possible? How could it communicate to the mind that intellectual light of which Rosmini speaks and without which intuition could not take place? And what would this pure possible be, then? The idea of possible being, perhaps, inasmuch as it is found in the divine mind? But in that case we will have the intuition of the possible being in the real Being – in God, that is – following the teaching of St. Augustine, St. Bonaventura and Malebranche, which Rosmini explicitly denies.

I confess that I cannot really understand what the concept is that the illustrious Author makes for himself of the objective character³⁴ of ideal being. In some places he seems to treat it as some sort of mean³⁵ between God and the human mind – a mean that cannot be logically permitted, however. Between Creator and creature no mean is possible, and Rosmini's ideal being, if it is not God himself – the real Being – is of necessity a created thing. How, then, can it be taken as immense, eternal, absolute and immutable? How can skepticism be avoided? Whether the idea of being is treated as an internal sensible and a modification of our mind (a hypothesis expressly repudiated by Rosmini), or is held to be some sort of externality,³⁶ but contingent, relative and disjunct from God, the ontological consequences are the same. Furthermore, how could this ideal being ever exist outside the mind without constituting³⁷ a real thing? According to Rosmini, subsistence is reality, and saying that possible being subsists is the same as saying that it is real.

What led a mind as careful as Rosmini's into error was proceeding by a merely psychological method that consists of dealing with internal facts by means of reflection alone.^e From what point, really, does the process of reflection start? An act of the mind. The mind turns back to its own intuition, and reflection consists of this turning back. But we have just now seen that the concept of the real is transformed into the concept of the possible when it passes from the intuitive act to the reflective act. No wonder, then, if reflection, turning back to intuition and finding the concept of possible being, stops there

^eThe illustrious Author himself confesses that he has traveled this road. Speaking of ancient Catholic doctrine, he expresses himself as follows: 'Everyone sees that I have come to the same results, but by a different route. The theological school started, as I said, from thinking about God; I started simply by thinking about man and found myself nonetheless arriving at the same conclusions. This reaching the same goal by two opposed paths, it seems to me, is a confirmation, a demonstration of the truth. Moreover, doctrine may have received a new illustration and better evidence in this way, if I am not mistaken, and perhaps language itself also gained more precision and reason a firmer and more secure way of proceeding.' (Rosmini, *Rinnovamento*, pp. 408-9) The conclusions are not the same since psychologically Rosmini has been able only to get at possible being, which on its own cannot have ontological value, cannot serve as the basis of the knowable, cannot give a scientific and objective value to psychology itself.

³⁴*Entità.*

³⁵*Mezzo.*

³⁶*Un non so che di esterno.*

³⁷*Constituire.*

The whole problem arises from the difference of the method followed. Rosmini's is sound and admirable, yet it is neither primary nor unique in that it completes ontologism without wanting to take its place. This is the only way that the new and profound analysis of our Author will be able to purge itself of its defects, establish a firm basis for itself and enrich science.

and deems it the first concept because it is first, in fact, with respect to reflection, the tool that belongs to psychology. But if the psychologist had not stopped at this point and had gone on farther, if he had put his own tool down to pick up that of the ontologist, availing himself of the reflection that we call ontological and turning his own thought not just back to intuition, to be sure, but to the object of intuition, to being, then he would see being as it is in itself, in its absolute and simplest reality. But in this final advance psychologist would be an ontologist, which is contrary to the rules and practices of psychologism.

III. *Perception of the real existence of created things is an action of a judgment by which an equation is made between the idea of possible being and sensory apprehension.* Since equating assumes identity, I do not believe that there can be an equation between a sensible and an intelligible, which are entirely different elements. What sameness can the sensible, as such, have with the intelligible? If the sensible were identical to the intelligible, the intelligible would be useless, and the sensible would be manifest by itself because it would be intelligible of its own nature, and the sensists³⁸ would be right. If the intelligible and the sensible disagree,³⁹ then, how can there ever be an equation between them?

The judgment can be an equation between two different elements only insofar as they have something in common, something identical between them. But this identity can consist only of the intelligible. Hence it is necessary for the two terms of the judgment to participate in the intelligible and to be intelligible⁴⁰ so that there is identity and thus the equation. But sensible apprehension is not an intelligible element. Therefore, the uniting of mere sensible apprehension with the idea of possible being will never be able to produce a judgment.

Someone may reply that, according to Rosmini, judgment occurs insofar as the mind, having the idea of being always before it, sees in the idea the sensibles of which it receives impressions, and by seeing them in being, it knows that they truly are, and forms the judgment. But in this case even phantasms that we form in our thoughts⁴¹ or that arise spontaneously from the power of imagination would have to happen through real things since we would also see those phantasms in the being of which we have continuous intuition. Why not believe in their reality, then? Obviously, it is not enough to see things through the concept of being in order to be clear about their subsistence, though it is necessary to apply that concept to them through explicit and positive judgment.

But what is the rule that determines this application, **I ask**. Is it perhaps the external and sensible impression, which differs from the internal and imaginary impression? This claim must be circular since the first of these impressions differs from the second only because the idea of existence applies to one and not the other. Applying the concept is

³⁸*I sensisti.*

³⁹*Sono disformi.*

⁴⁰*Partecipino dell'intelligibile e siano intellettivi.*

⁴¹*Animo.*

what differentiates the two impressions, which is a very long way from determining the application of the concept by the difference between the impressions. Besides, to apply the concept of being to sensible impressions, one must know the impression since there can be no applying to what is blind and random. But if the sensible is already known, the idea is already applied to it, and applying it anew would be useless and ridiculous.

In short, one cannot imagine a comparison between the intelligible and the sensible in general nor between the real sensible and the imaginary sensible **which makes it possible** to conclude that the intelligible conforms to one and not the other; this comparison is impossible unless one assumes that the sensible, whatever it may be, is a concept, since comparison can take place only between concepts. But one can have no concept of the sensible, as sensible, since what is sensed cannot be thought, as such. The sensible can be thought only in the intelligible. If it is a concept, then, the judgment that unites it with the idea of being is already made. If it is not a concept, the comparison and the judgment cannot take place. The first case begs the question again; the second assumes a judgment formed with only one concept – a judgment that is not a judgment, in other words.

Furthermore, with this judgment the illustrious Author wishes to explain the concept of existence, which he calls the subsistence of things. But how can this idea arise from the judgment in question, always assuming that the judgment is possible? On one side, we have just a pure sense impression;⁴² on the other, the concept of possible being. If the two terms are put together, what must result from them? The idea of a possible impression, and nothing more. The two terms cannot give what they do not have in them. Between existence and the possibility of existence lies an infinite gap that only creative omnipotence can cross. From what does the concept of existence come, then? From the possible? Surely not. From the impression? But the impression contains nothing intelligible, is not a concept, and cannot produce any unless one grants the rejected and repugnant hypothesis of the sensists, to which Rosmini is most averse. From jumbling the possible together with the sensible? But if each of them separately cannot give what it does not have, neither will they be able to do so if they are put together.

In some passages Rosmini hints that the idea of *subsistence*, as idea, is the pure concept of possible being, and that inasmuch as it is distinguished from the concept, it is not an idea but a judgment. But he is clear that the term *subsistence* or *existence* expresses a judgment only inasmuch as it signifies a concept. Hence, one needs to explain the origin of the concept. A judgment can be called a concept inasmuch as it is a composite idea that contains the notions expressed separately by the terms of the proposition. But what are the terms of Rosmini's judgment? They are the sensible and the possible, and nothing more. But since we have just now seen that putting these two terms together cannot beget⁴³ the idea of existence, this cannot be a judgment either.

One must also guard against confusing the idea of subsistence with the subsistence itself of something. It seems to me that Rosmini may allow this mistake by making the

⁴²*Una mera impressione sensitiva.*

⁴³*Procreare.*

following claim: that when one conceives of the subsistence of something, the only intelligible element is the idea of possible being. If that were true, it would follow that the concept proper, expressed by the term *subsistence*, would be the same as the subsistence of the object. Yet everyone sees that the terms *possible being* and *subsistence* are not synonyms. Therefore, they have meanings that differ at least in part.

What is the difference? The idea of the real expressed by the second term, not by the first. Therefore, if the concept of the real does not make up part of the intelligible element but of the thing, it follows that the real and the concept of the real are the same, which is impossible to believe. And yet it is this confusion on which the argument of the illustrious Author is based, so it seems to me. The reason is this: by saying that belief in the subsistence of bodies is the effect of a judgment born solely from the idea of possible being and from the sense impression, he assumes that subsistence and the idea of subsistence are one and the same. But since we understand what this term *subsistence* means, it is clear that the concept, as a concept, and the thing signified are different from one another. But how can they be different if the only intelligible element involved in this transaction is the concept of possible being?

This argument raises a question of the greatest weight and difficulty, though modern philosophy has forgotten even the reason for it. This is the question: the concept of the concreteness and individuality of things arises from what and consists of what? If, as Rosmini believes, every concept is generic, how will one ever be able to conceive of the concrete and the individual? To avoid this difficulty, the illustrious Author was forced to deny that the idea of concreteness and individuality is an idea, maintaining that it is a mere judgment. But this solution cannot be allowed, as is obvious from what has been said.

A person has a true concept of individual reality – of existence. But how can it be acquired? By sensation or feeling? These faculties reveal to us only subjective modifications. By the perception of the Scots? By itself this perception is not enough because it does not reveal the forces⁴⁴ – the created substances and causes – of which existences truly consist. By the idea of the possible? The possible cannot give the real. By abstractions of some other kind? Abstractions follow and do not precede the notion of the concrete; they presuppose the concrete and cannot create it. Therefore, **one must assume that the concrete and individual is known by means of a special and direct intuition, analogous to the perception of the Scots, from which it differs, however, in that it shows us not only the surface but the substance of things.**

Here I am to content to mention the solution to the problem that I will shortly clarify; from the argument up to this point, I want no one to infer that by rejecting Rosmini's teaching, which explains the idea of subsistence by that of possible being, I wish to explain it by the idea of real Being, having substituted one for the other as an immediate object of intuition. This explanation would be false, as we will soon see, and would lead straight to pantheism. True, we may see all our sense impressions in the real Being,

⁴⁴*Le forze.*

present to our mind, but this is not the direct concept from which we deduce the real existence of things. And here is the reason: since the Being intuited is not only real but necessary and absolute, if we asserted the real existence of things in virtue of this simple concept, we should have to infer that all things are modifications of God that exist necessarily, and so we would be pantheists. Therefore, it is not by applying the idea of real Being to things that we know their existence.

IV. *The concept of the reality of Being, of God, does not arise directly and through intuition but only in an indirect way and through demonstration.* This proposition follows necessarily from the two that come before it. Rosmini observes that treating God as a direct object of intuitive cognition is an opinion of St. Bonaventura,⁴⁵ and he expressly rejects it.^f And surely it cannot be accepted if intuition grasps only possible Being. In that case, the only effective way to achieve cognition of the supreme Being is demonstration. But for demonstration to be valid, it must be based upon a prior synthesis, seeing that deduction is an intellectual artifice by which what is already known by primitive apprehension is reproduced by the mind in its own mode: this is clarifying the known rather than discovering the unknown. Rational synthesis as well as analysis, deduction as well as induction, must necessarily be based upon a prior and basic cognition, identical in substance to what follows it but different in form.

The difference rests mainly on two issues. First, deductive and inductive reasoning happens in time and sequentially,⁴⁶ while what I call *primitive synthesis* is instantaneous, has no chronological sequence⁴⁷ and consists of simple intuition. Second, in reasoning and analysis the mind gives truth a subjective form, taking it apart, putting it back together, handling it according to the proper laws, yet without altering its substance, while the mind puts⁴⁸ nothing of its own into primitive synthesis but simple intuition; it is the simple spectator of the object present and sees it as it is in itself, without adding anything or taking anything away.

Far from opposing the assumption that God is known in a demonstrative mode, then, my view is actually supportive because there can be no demonstration that does not take its strength from a prior intuition. The proofs of God's existence are *a posteriori* or *a priori*. But since both kinds are based upon a syllogism whose minor premise includes a simple contingent fact, external or internal to the mind, neither could have absolute and apodictic force if the process of demonstration that bases truth on fact were not preceded by an intuition in which fact is based on truth, as will shortly be clear.

One certainly need not believe that intuition is perfect, in contradiction of that opposition

^f See note 2 in this volume.

⁴⁵ *Bonaventura ???*

⁴⁶ *Successivamente.*

⁴⁷ *Processo.*

⁴⁸ *Mesce.*

established in Scripture between the knowledge⁴⁹ to come and what takes place in the present – *through a glass, darkly*.^g In this life the perfection of human intuition is potential,⁵⁰ knowing understood as actual⁵¹ is in every way defective. Thus it happens that there are two sides to the Idea: one of its faces is the intelligible, real Being; the other is the superintelligible,⁵² the inner essence of being. We may grasp the superintelligible because by instinct we are conscious of our power⁵³ to know it. The dark knowing of which Saint Paul speaks alludes to the incomprehensibility of things, and knowledge⁵⁴ through a glass is the analogic knowledge⁵⁵ that we can have of one part of the incomprehensible, either by rational deductions or by revelation. Analogy, in fact, is a species of intellectual reflex by which one thing is known imperfectly⁵⁶ in another, as in a [mirage: *miraglio*].^h It suffices to mention these things here and return to them elsewhere.

The philosophical Prime, therefore, is real Being, which as the mother-idea and chief cause of all things unites the properties of the other two Primes. In this composite expression, *real Being*, the second word points specifically to the psychological relation, and the first to the ontological, although the two concepts interpenetrate and make a perfect unity. One might express this by the word *being* alone since Being with nothing added to it is not possible being but real being. And we will often take it in this sense, permitting ourselves now and then to add the epithet *real*; some ambiguity may arise from the imperfection of the language that we use.

Having seen of what the philosophical Prime consists, let us stop for a moment to consider intuition, or rather that first act of thinking that grasps the Prime. At this point, I certainly do not want to lay out the theory of that intuition, which is a whole science by itself, but just to call attention to certain elements of Rosmini's doctrine in which the illustrious Author appears to stray from the truth.

We have just now seen that he considers the first concept of Being abstract and generic, representing the merely possible, and that he also holds the view that bodies subsist – not as an idea, certainly, but as the result of a judgment. These two claims come from a third that recurs in every passage of his works, confusing the reflective idea⁵⁷ with the direct or

^gI Cor. 13:12.⁵⁸

^hSee the passages from Gerson⁵⁹ cited in note 5 of this volume.

⁴⁹*Cognizione*

⁵⁰*Potenziale.*

⁵¹*Il Conoscimento preso in atto.*

⁵²*Il sovrintelligibile.*

⁵³*Potenza.*

⁵⁴*Cognizione.*

⁵⁵*La scienza analogica.*

⁵⁶*Imperfettamente] perfettamente.*

⁵⁷*Idea riflessa.*

⁵⁸*Paul ???*

⁵⁹*Gerson ???*

intuitive idea that some call *perception* in the sense given this word by the Scottish School.

Perception or the direct idea is intuition or the immediate grasping⁶⁰ of the object; the reflective idea is the intuition of the intuition, the perception of the perception, the process⁶¹ of thought turning back upon itself. The goal⁶² of intuition or immediate grasping is the object in itself – the object, finite or infinite, but always real, concrete, positive and individual. The goal of reflection is the intuition and with it the idea of the object, not as in itself but abstract, generalized, stripped of all individuality, and reduced to the state of the merely possible. Thus one sees that the direct idea or perception converges with the reflective idea, either because both are an act of thinking or because of the substance of their object. But they differ in the way they grasp that object since one takes it as it is in itself, in its concreteness, and as real, while the other grasps it as it is in the mind, in its abstractness, and as thinkable or possible, inasmuch as the possibility of the thing is its thinkability.

Now my opinion is that Rosmini, in the first place, confuses the reflective idea with perception and gives the latter the character of the former, treating it as the mere concept of possible being, abstract and generic. But from what has been said, it seems that this concept is merely reflective and presupposes immediate intuition of the object – of Being in its concrete and individual reality. In the second place, he also confuses the perception of sensibles with sensation and with feeling,⁶³ and from sense he derives the concept that one has of the individuality of things. The outcome is inevitable if every idea or perception is abstract and generic since the abstract and generic cannot supply the concrete and individual, which is their chief contrary, but it fails if a person perceives sensibles by an immediate and direct intuition like that by which he perceives real Being.

This immediate cognition of sensibles is the *perception* of the Scottish philosophers, which I believe to be a fact beyond doubt and well attested by careful observation. True, the perception of the Scots is not enough by itself to give us a complete notion of sensible, spiritual and material things because it shows us only sensible properties without the intelligible element by which we conceive of them as substances or causes. The perception of the School of Edinburgh is not enough, then, for a full account of the concept of the existence of bodies, and one must resort to another principle of which we shall soon speak.

Reid's perception is in substance what Rosmini calls *bodily sensory perception*.⁶⁴ He acutely observes that by itself it does not produce cognition of bodies and that we still need an intelligible element which, according to him, is the idea of possible being. But

⁶⁰*Apprensione.*

⁶¹*Opera.*

⁶²*Termine.*

⁶³*Confonde altresì la percezione dei sensibili colla sensazione e col sentimento.*

⁶⁴*Percezione sensitiva corporea.*

possible, abstract, generic being – can this produce the concept of individuality? Surely not. Therefore, concludes Rosmini, we get individuality surely not as the effect of an idea but rather of a judgment. To me this seems impossible to sustain for the reasons already stated. However we may use it, the name *individual* alone must also express an idea.⁶⁵ This can be nothing but an intuition of individuality itself, like the primitive intuition that we have of real Being.

Up to now we have assumed that real Being is concrete, singular and individual. This statement needs clarification. The concepts of concreteness, singularity and individuality are composed of two elements, one positive and the other negative. The positive element is what is asserted and thought when others say these words, and I will not try to define it because any definition would be less clear than the thing itself. Briefly, it is what is before the mind when one perceives Being and the real in itself by a direct and immediate act. The negative element is limit, contingency, imperfection. All concrete, singular, individual creatures are imperfect because they are finite and finite because they are contingent, which is also the source of their plurality. But when we apply the notions of concreteness, singularity and individuality to real Being, the negative element must be eliminated from them because Being is absolute and infinite.

From this it follows that Being can also be called abstract, general and universal inasmuch as these concepts express the absence of the negative element found in the contrary concepts. Being is therefore abstract and concrete, general and particular, individual and universal all at once but in different respects, and in a way different from creatures because Being has only the positive element contained in each of these notions, not the negative element that goes along with them. Being is concrete and individual because it is real and positive in the highest degree; it is abstract and universal because it is pure (free of any form, that is), infinite and absolute. Concreteness and individuality are the real without the being; abstractness and generality are the being without the real. The first belong to real existences; the second to possible being. From the former arise created things; from the latter reflective ideas. The division between concrete and abstract, individual and general is the analysis of real Being, and real Being is the synthesis of those properties.

I have given these warnings to make it clear that our psychological Prime is no mere abstraction but reality itself. There is nothing abstract in it but purity, which far from contradicting reality is needed to constitute it in the highest and absolute degree. No one starts with the abstract, clearly, and this observation alone shows that the concept of possible being cannot be the human mind's first step, for this reason, that it is the concept of real Being made abstract through reflection by the mental separation of objective reality from the cognition of that being. The majority of modern philosophers also treat the notion of plain being⁶⁶ or real Being as abstract, it is true: hence the statement repeated in a hundred books that the idea of being is a mere abstraction. Of possible being, this is entirely true. But if real being is what they mean, it is as true as saying that

⁶⁵*Conciossiachè il nome solo d'individuo, di cui ci serviamo, debba pure esprimere una idea.*

⁶⁶*Ente schietto.*

infinite space is round since Being in itself is the beginning of everything, the source of concreteness no less than of abstraction.

Modern logic has a great fear of turning abstract things concrete, and rightly so, but does not worry about converting the concrete into the abstract, a different vice and more serious than the first, which it usually precedes. Because primitive truth, though concrete in itself, still contains the seeds of abstractions with regard to the mind, a person must turn the concrete into the abstract in order to be able to convert the abstract into the concrete. Hence, when the second conversion comes after the first, the work already done is undone, and the genuine state of affairs is restored, at least in part. In this way, for example, the realists of the middle ages, with their *humanness*, *treeness* and so on, reconstituted the reality of the being destroyed by the abstractions of the Peripatetics. Transforming the concrete into the abstract is an evil that does no good, then, since it negates the primitive truth, whereas the contrary process is an evil that can become a good if, at least in part, it restores the truth destroyed a little while before.

Human reason is a continuous alternation of synthesis and antithesis, and the labor of reflection is to abstract and concretize continuously. The performance, distribution and relating of these operations, for better or worse, gives rise to the virtues and vices of the scientific method. Two types of abstraction and composition, one lawful and natural, the other harmful and contrary to nature, can be distinguished. Harmful abstraction consists of dissociating elements that belong together and destroying the natural synthesis of things. Next in line comes the harmful composition which jumbles elements that do not belong together, forming a mental synthesis contrary to real synthesis and producing an actual illusion of the imagination,⁶⁷ like the *maya* of the Indian schools. Helpful abstraction takes apart illusory and apparent synthesis, disconnecting the discrepant elements united by that synthesis. Helpful composition finally reunites elements that are in accord and remakes – or, to put it better, re-cognizes⁶⁸ – real synthesis. But abstraction that separates Being and the One from existences and the manifold by destroying the imaginative phantasm that completely identifies them, and composition that restores the intelligible to the rule of Being and the sensible to the rule of the intelligible – both of these are helpful and legitimate since in this case the abstract fallacy is turned into a concrete truth by converting the concrete fallacy into an abstract truth.

The idea of Being, as we have stated it, contains a judgment. It is impossible for the mind to have the primitive intuition of Being without knowing that Being is: in the contrary case, to be⁶⁹ would be nothing and real Being would not be real, which is contradictory. Nor does the reality of Being present itself to the mind as something contingent and relative, so that it might not-be, but as necessary and absolute, so that the contrary is not thinkable. A person cannot think nothing, in fact. And this incapacity is not merely subjective or dependent on the contradiction involved in thinking without thinking something; it is also objective in that the mind knows that nothing is not only

⁶⁷*Una vera illusione fantastica.*

⁶⁸*Rifà o per dir meglio riconosce.*

⁶⁹*L'essere.*

unthinkable for us but also impossible in itself. Hence, the judgment in question can be expressed in these words, *Being is necessarily*,⁷⁰ provided one notes that the concept expressed by the last word serves only to clarify a property inherent in Being itself, as Being. But if it seems right to express this latter point by a separate word, saying *necessary being*,⁷¹ it is because the first of these words, as we shall soon see, is abused in ordinary language.

The judgment – *Being is necessarily* – contained in the primitive intuition is not rendered by the mind in a free and spontaneous act, like other judgments. The mind is not the judge in this case, but a mere witness and auditor of a verdict⁷² that it does not issue. In fact, if the mind were the decider⁷³ and not merely a spectator, the prime judgment – basis of all certainty and of every other judgment – would be subjective, and skepticism would be inevitable. It is Being itself that pronounces the primitive judgment and causes the mind to hear it in an immediate act of intuition.

Being posits itself in the presence of our mind⁷⁴ and says *I am necessarily*. In this objective utterance⁷⁵ lies the basis of all evidence and all certainty. The vehicle by which it comes to the mind is the Intelligible – Being itself. In fact, Being reveals itself and declares its own reality to a person by means of its own intelligibility, without which the very act of thought could not occur for the person. By means of the Intelligible, in virtue of which intuition occurs, intuition takes notice of Being. And since Being is the Intelligible itself, it follows that Being is understood by us inasmuch as it is posited, and that it is posited inasmuch as it is understood.⁷⁶ The two become one and the same.

When the intuiting mind views Being as its object, it sees the autonomy that belongs to Being but does not assert it in a determinate and volitional act, as happens in other judgments. The mind knows Being by the simple act that constitutes intuition, but the assertion involved in this knowing comes from the object – from Being itself – not from the intuition. True, when thinking turns back upon itself and primordial intuition enters the domain of reflection, the person says (first to himself and then to others) *Being is*. But this is a reflective, not an intuitive judgment. The reflective judgment is voluntary, subjective and human, and yet it is authoritative, legitimate and objectively valuable because it simply repeats the intuitive judgment that precedes it and on which it is based. In this sense, a person's reason truly is the reason of God.

Repeating the divine and objective judgment in an act of reflection is the first link in philosophy as human artifice. But this link is joined with a divine judgment and draws

⁷⁰*L'Ente è necessariamente.*

⁷¹*Dire ente necessario; thus, if ente necessario replaces necessariamente, the proposition becomes l'Ente è ente necessario.*

⁷²*Sentenza.*

⁷³*Definitore.*

⁷⁴*L'Ente pone sè medesimo al cospetto della mente nostra.*

⁷⁵*Parola.*

⁷⁶*Inteso da noi in quanto si pone, e si pone in quanto s'intende.*

all its power from it. It follows, then, that the basis of philosophy lies in revelation; that God is the first philosopher, in the strict sense of the word; and that human philosophy is the continuation and repetition of divine philosophy. Therefore, God is not only the object of science; he is also its first teacher,⁷⁷ the teacher of the knowable because He is the Intelligible. The work of philosophy begins not in man but in God. It does not ascend from mind⁷⁸ to Being but descends from Being to mind. This is the deep reason in ontology that makes psychologism absurd. Before philosophy is a human activity, it is a divine creation. Psychologists deprive philosophy of its foothold in the divine, detach it from Being, make it mere human artifice, condemn it to skepticism and assign it *nothing* as its origin and end.

Between the primitive divine judgment and secondary human judgment – between intuition and reflection – lies the medium of speech.⁷⁹ It is by means of speech that intuitive truth becomes accessible to reflection, putting man in a position to repeat God's judgment for himself and others. But the speech that expresses the reality of Being is created by Being itself. Speech is thus a second revelation or – to put it more precisely – the primordial revelation put in a certain form by its very revealer. That form is a proposition expressing the judgment. Equipped with this objective proposition, reflection appropriates the corresponding judgment, repeats it, develops it and, with its help, weaves the work of science. Hence, one sees that *the divine judgment is expressed by a proposition equally divine whose repetition in reflection marks the beginning of human philosophy and whose development is its continuation.*

To show how the ideas are connected, let me quickly go over what I have explained in part and will soon explain more fully.

In the judgment under discussion we have the basis of the ideal formula. But it was just now noted that this formula consists of a judgment made from three different concepts. In the aforesaid judgment there is only one concept, however, and the three terms result from its replication. So we must search for another judgment that gives us the three concepts when joined to the first judgment. This inquiry is based on a postulate which the solution itself will show to be reasonable.

The new judgment that we are tracking down must be blended with the first to make a single judgment. Otherwise, the ideal formula would be composed of two separate judgments, giving us two formulas instead of one. The ideal formula is organic, and all its parts must be linked together logically to form a single body. Therefore, we must begin our search with some concept that, on the one hand, differs substantially from the concept of Being and, on the other hand, has an intrinsic connectedness with it.

Language furnishes us with a term whose meaning is a close relative of the concept of Being, and this is also apparent from its etymology. The term is *existence*, common to all

⁷⁷*Maestro.*

⁷⁸*Spirito.*

⁷⁹*Corre il mezzo della parola.*

modern languages that derive from Latin. Taking this as our hypothesis, let us see if we can use it to construct the formula that we are searching for.

The Latin word *existere* means *to appear, go out of, emerge and be shown*. It is used to mean the showing or rather the unfolding of something previously hidden, wrapped up or involved in something else and then coming out of it and making itself visible externally.^j This is its proper and etymological sense, the source of the metaphorical sense which in our tongue has come to belong to the word *existence*. However, even though the relation of the Italian expression to the Latin is metaphorical because it expresses for the metaphysical order what the Latin says of the physical order, on a different level the correspondence is still precise since in both concepts there is a reference to the passage from potency to act.^k The Latin *existere* announces the activity by which something that used to be potentially begins to become actual. And *existence* in Italian usage also expresses an analogous concept, as we shall soon see.

The only discrepancy is that in the ancient word the actualization of potency is expressed by way of unfolding, whereas in the modern word the reference is to producing, so that in this respect we make a metaphor of the term used by the Latins. Granted, ordinary people – even philosophers, quite often – use the word *exist* synonymously with *be*,⁸⁰ and vice-versa, and so they say that *God exists* and that *the world is*.⁸¹ But these ways of speaking, though very common, have by no means eliminated the original meaning. And sensitive ears will certainly pick it up. Vico, for example, that very diligent and knowledgeable student of philosophical precision in words, faulted Descartes for having said *I think, therefore I am*. Descartes, not terribly sharp in such matters, uses the two words promiscuously all the time, showing not the least sign of recognizing the difference between them. **The guilelessness⁸² of the writer proves the naiveté of the philosopher.**

Besides the relation of potency and act, the word *existere* expresses, or at least suggests, another intellectual element of no small importance, and we should mention it. As anyone can see, the word is composed of the particle *ex* and the verb *sistere*. This verb and its cognates or derivatives express, more or less directly, the metaphysical concept that moderns call *substance*, from the Latin word *substantia*. Its pedigree is short, though Seneca and Quintilian used it, and its absence from Cicero's philosophical works is often palpable; *substratum*, beloved by some moderns, also emerged. The word *existere*, indicating substance by its verb and derivation by its particle, includes the concept of *one substance, found potentially in another, which thereby passes to an actual state and*

^jForcellini (*Lexicon*, Padua, 1805, II, 250) makes it synonymous with *prodire, apparere* and *exire*, expressed by the Italian words *to leave, appear* and *go out of*. He observes that it is 'often used for *esse*, but in such a way that it connotes some movement of what is leaving or appearing, *being present* or *absent*.'

^kThe Crusca (*Dizionario della lingua italiana*, Padua, 1828, III, 519) calls *existence* *being in act* and the existent *that which is in act*.

⁸⁰*Esistere come sinonima di essere.*

⁸¹*Che Iddio esiste e che il mondo è.*

⁸²*La semplicità del filosofo prova l'innocenza dello scrittore.*

begins to stand on its own. The etymology of *existere* is enough to suggest the mental synthesis in the originating⁸³ concept which corresponds to that word.

Note also that the particle *ex* indicates, in the direct and material sense, a movement from inside to out, as the particle *in* expresses a contrary movement – or rather the rest or repose that results from an effort working from outside to in. This becomes clear if the word *existere* is compared to *insistere*. Metaphorically, then, the particle *ex* gives the direction of the action by which cause produces effect. Thus, in the originally metaphorical meaning which for us has become direct, the word *exist* makes the axiom of causality present to the mind, just as the Latin words *subsistere* and *substare* and our word *subsist* represent the axiom of substance.

Gathering together all these concepts indicated by the word *existence* and expressed by its more direct applications, we can say that existence is *the reality proper to an actual substance, produced by another substance that contains it potentially.* From this it follows that the idea of existence cannot stand on its own and refers necessarily to another, having the same relation to it that the effect has to its cause.

But this mother-idea can only be that of Being. Treating existence as an effect, the mind is compelled to seek a cause. But if this cause is another existence, and if what exists is an effect, the mind is forced to move up to another, higher cause until it finds one that is a pure cause without being an effect, an absolute cause necessary by its nature. Proceeding to infinity is not possible because there would be only an infinite succession of effects without any cause – effects, in other words, that would not be effects since they have no cause, nor, since they are effects, would they be causes. Pure, absolute, necessary Being is the only truly first cause that is by its own nature and depends on no other. The idea of existence is therefore inseparable from that of Being and is represented to us as an effect, that of which Being is the cause.

In what way is existence produced by Being? Proceeding *a posteriori*, ascending from effect to cause, one concludes of necessity that the effect is folded up in⁸⁴ the cause, the existent in Being, and that producing is simply unfolding. Then one will be obliged to reject creation and embrace the teaching of the pantheists and emanationists. Indeed, proceeding *a posteriori*, how could one reach any other conclusion? Whoever goes this route moves from effect up to cause and concludes that the cause must contain the effect in potency because the effect is an act that presupposes potency.

But the cause can contain the effect potentially in two ways: either by including in itself the substance of the effect and having only the ability to change its form by unfolding and externalizing it; or else by deriving not only the form but also the effect from nothing. By advancing *a posteriori*, one cannot come to know the creative potentiality because to

⁸³*Originario.*

⁸⁴*Implicata.*

reach this goal it would be necessary to eliminate the effect before having found the potency that produces it. But if the effect is mentally eliminated, its cause can no longer be recovered because the basis on which the argument rests is missing.

Actually, we can represent the *a posteriori* process as a line B ——— A, where point B indicates the idea of existence; point A the idea of Being; and the extent of the line the mind's discursive process. But if the mind wishes to conceive Being as creator, its thinking must eliminate point B, which expresses existence, before reaching point A, since what exists cannot be created, inasmuch as it already exists. In the first place, however, eliminating the concept on which the whole argument turns is logically absurd. In the second place, if one eliminates B before getting to A, how can the goal ever be reached? Nor can one say that, even if B is eliminated mentally, a preconceived notion of A allows reasoning to continue. If there is a preconceived notion of A, it shows that the reasoning is *a priori*, not *a posteriori*. In fact, the usual argument by which philosophers and theologians prove creation is *a posteriori* only in appearance and, like all arguments of this type, rests upon an *a priori* synthesis. But if one's route is, in effect, *a posteriori*, emanationism and pantheism will be the necessary outcome of reasoning, as we shall make clear in a more appropriate place.

Therefore, instead of asking how the existent is produced by Being, one must establish how Being produces the existent. (These two ways of speaking point toward the same inquiry but express two wholly contrary methods.)

Causality is certainly the link that joins the two terms of the proposition together – what produces with what is produced. Although the idea of cause is subject to various modifications, it is clear that it must be taken as plain and absolute, without limitation, when applied to Being. Otherwise, it would not conform to Being. But cause in the plain and absolute sense is first and efficient, and lacking these two properties it would not really be cause. As first cause, it is not the effect of a prior cause; as efficient, it does not produce the mere form or modality of its effects but their whole substantiality. Accordingly, if the cause of which we speak is truly first cause with respect to the effect as effect, then, with regard to the effect as contingent substance, the first Cause is also first Substance – the foundation⁸⁵ of Substance, **with respect to which there can be a thing effected only through second substance.**

The first and efficient Cause must be creative because, if it were not so, it could not possess those two properties. It would not be first if it took the substantiality of the effect that it produces from somewhere else. It would not be efficient if it kept substantiality inside itself and then externalized it productively but not creatively. A human being can be called a true efficient cause – but of forms, not substances. Even of forms, however, he is not a creator because he produces them as second cause by a power received from the first Cause.

⁸⁵*Sostegno.*

The idea of creation is therefore inseparable from that of cause taken in an absolute sense. And since the idea of cause constitutes one of the first principles of reason, it follows that the concept of creation must be counted among the most original⁸⁶ and clearest of the human mind. It is not possible, in fact, to separate the creative act from the active cause, the creative force from the capacity to act,⁸⁷ if the cause and its power⁸⁸ are conceived as infinite and absolute. But since the concept of causes – even the secondary and finite – involves the concept of a first and infinite Cause, being just an abstraction and modification of that concept, it follows that the idea of creation is in every case inseparable from the idea of causality.

It may be said, on the one hand, that theologians and philosophers who accept the idea of creation treat it as a great mystery; on the other hand, that all ancient philosophers were ignorant of it and many moderns oppose it. Moreover, if creation were obvious to reason, pantheism would not have tempted the deepest intellects of every era. Nor would it keep coming up again and again in the schools of philosophy, since one of the main reasons why so many find pantheism plausible is its promise to explain the fact of universal existence without recourse to creation.

I reply that the concept of creation is no more clear or obscure than the other concepts involved in the ideal formula. Every ideal concept has two sides, one intelligible, the other superintelligible.⁸⁹ One can compare it to a point of light gleaming in darkness, giving us not what can be called a view but a presentiment of the two sides, forcing us to accept them. The clear assumes the obscure, as in turn the obscure is not grasped without the clear. The obscure side of the Idea is the superintelligible, reproduced in every part of the ideal world and found both in the concept of Being and in that of the creative act. Just as the concept of Being is the root and foundation of other ideal notions, so the impenetrability of Being is the root and foundation of other obscurities, which is why we use the word *essence* to express the unthinkable.

Creation taken as the link between the absolute cause and its effect is entirely clear – clear *because* it is the cause, since cause cannot be other than creative if it is not limited, if, in other words, it is cause simply and absolutely. But the cause is being in relation to the effect, being as active and causal. Hence, since the act of the being comes from the essence, it follows that if the essence is impenetrable in itself, the essence of the cause must also be obscure, and therefore the essence of the causal act – of creation – must be obscure as well. The superintelligible of creation is recast as that of Being and reproduces its obscurity. Since we cannot conceive how to make something from nothing, we cannot comprehend the essence of Being or the internal mode of its activity.

But what is incomprehensible from one point of view is quite clear from another since the beginning of existence is what constitutes the effect and its relation to the cause. Without

⁸⁶*Originale.*

⁸⁷*La virtù creatrice dalla potenza di operare.*

⁸⁸*Potere.*

⁸⁹*Sovrintelligibile.*

having at least a confused notion of the creative act, this makes it completely impossible to understand the meaning of the term *effect* (which comes up so often in ordinary human speech) and of all words that express action. What is the essence of this creative act, then? In what way does Being activate and initiate what previously did not exist? In short, what is the inner logic⁹⁰ of creation? The human mind cannot answer these questions even though its inability does not derive from a special obscurity of the creative act as such, but from its relation to the essence of the creative cause.

In truth, since making forms is also a true creation, one encounters the same obscurity just in grasping the efficient causing of forms. If pantheists and emanationists accept this creation, while understanding it no better than the other one, they do so for two reasons. One is that they are constrained by the axiom of causality, which would never happen if the creating of forms – like that of substance – were declared impossible. The other is that human beings have within them, in their free will, as well as outside, the example and proof of this effective causing of forms, which is then accepted as a fact of experience even though it is not understood. But people do not experience the efficient causing of substances, knowing it by the activity of reason alone as a privilege of uncreated Being.

Pagan philosophers overlooked the doctrine of creation, and many moderns have opposed it. To avoid the reef of mystery, they wreck on an absurdity – pantheism. What does this show if not the prideful laziness of the human mind? And yet this truth had no worse luck than other ideal doctrines. There were sensists and skeptics as well as pantheists. The obscurity of creation arises from that of Being. Hence, if pantheists deny creation because it is somewhat obscure, the more logical skeptics deny Being because it is not entirely clear. True, by denying Being they commit an enormous number of paralogisms, but it makes no difference. Subverting the basis of all logic on behalf of logic itself, reaching an absurd goal by a direct route of reasoning, is precisely the highest value of skepticism.

All the false systems of philosophy and religion have in common the error of denying what is clear while loathing what is obscure, whereas correct philosophy obliges us to accept what is obscure in thanks for what is clear, from which the obscure is inseparable. Idealists and fatalists also deny the reality of bodies and free will because of their arcane nature.

Moreover, there is a special reason why philosophers, especially the ancients, neglect the doctrine of creation along with other parts of the ideal formula: because creation is simply a relation, a link, a bond between two other terms, whereas these terms express a truth about substance. Being and existences, permanent substances directly present to the mind – one the root of all cognition, the others subject to the senses – cannot so easily vanish from sight, whereas the creative act, immanent and not something substantial but modal, might readily be perceived as indistinct and therefore altered and excluded by reflection. What else? The very idea of Being was more or less altered by all ancient and

⁹⁰*Ragione.*

modern philosophers outside Christianity. As we shall see below, this alteration was the chief cause of their making the concept of creative action obscure.

If Being is the cause of things, then, it is necessarily the creator. But is it truly the cause? We have assumed this but not proved it. Actually, if one proceeds *a posteriori*, moving from the concept of existence up to that of Being, the latter must certainly be accepted as causal since its action is needed to explain the other concept. But then divine causality can be considered only emanative, not creative, as we have noted. If the approach is *a priori*, then, and the reflective concept of existence is not yet available, how can absolute Being be conceived as cause?

By itself the idea of real Being does not include the concept of a cause outside it. Otherwise, it would have to be conceived as acting necessarily. Creation would not be free, and a predestined creation leads to pantheism. In fact, if God does not create freely, his effects must be necessary and absolute, like God himself, and they cannot be distinguished from the divine nature. The idea of Being includes the potency to cause but not the causal act, if this act is to be free in its cause and contingent in its effects. Indeed, the very potency to create can be known only after the act because the potency is an abstraction known subsequently to its actuality, of which it is the concrete side.⁹¹ Therefore, if the creative act of Being is not known (and one who still only reflects on the intuition of Being itself does not know it), its potency to create also cannot be known, in which case it will not seem more useful to acquire the concept of creation *a priori* rather than *a posteriori*. In sum, if the notion of existence precedes that of Being, it is not possible to move up to creative Being. And if, on the contrary, we have only the notion of pure Being, without that of existence, how can that Being be conceived in its capacity of creative cause?

Nonetheless, I believe that this final step is quite simple in itself. We encounter no other problem than what arises from ingrained habits of the mind doing philosophy. When someone is used to a way of seeing, when in his mind a certain attitude and a particular view of things have become second nature, so to speak, then it is difficult, not to say impossible, for him to see something that requires a different perspective – indeed, a contrary perspective – especially if the custom of present and recent times, the very heavy weight of universal practice, authority and example are added to his own attitude. The more recent philosophers, not excluding those believed to be ontologists, have become so accustomed to psychologism that this method has transformed their nature. Now the intellectual context in which psychologism places the mind is good and right in some ways, but in other ways it is false – in very important ways, I daresay, because it is biased, narrow, eccentric, ineffective and full of flaws.

The ontologist goes to the center and summit of what can be known, takes in at a glance all the relations of things and contemplates them from their peak and their core – from Being. The psychologist, stationed somewhere on the periphery, can look directly only at a small part of them. One can be compared to a traveler who learns the layout of a city

⁹¹*Che ne è il concreto.*

and surrounding hills by climbing to the top of the highest building where, without having to move or turn his head, he takes it all in. The other tries to do the same standing at a window where a part of the landscape is visible.

Now one of the most pressing problems in which psychologism has no competence at all is creation. On the other hand, the ontological solution of this problem, the only one that I find plausible, is so far removed from the usual order of theorizing that even experts may be inclined to reject it before giving it every careful consideration and subjecting it to careful examination. To avoid this snag, if possible, with the honesty that may not seem rash to those who have thought long about the topic and have sifted through every part of it, I would like to ask readers to give this matter special consideration and inform it through the methodical procedure of the ontologism to which various parts of my work refer more or less directly.

To clarify the process by which the mind acquires the idea of creation, allow me a moment to offer a hypothesis, taking as true what this work aims to demonstrate. I shall assume that this proposition – *Being creates the existent*⁹² – expresses something real. In this way, we remove ourselves from the preconceived opinions and errors of the psychologism that treats the first truth as some unknown mental content which has, at best, a relation of correspondence and resemblance with the external object. We move outside ourselves in thought and consider the truth by itself. We are convinced that the intuition by which we grasp it is a pure and simple grasping of the object, and so, when the mind acts as mediator of the object, it mixes nothing of its own into what is perceived.

Thus, when the formula that we assume to be true is reduced to its genuine meaning – that of an objective and ontological process – each of its terms represents an objective reality that subsists effectively on its own, outside the mind. This reality is absolute and necessary in the first term, in *Being*, but in the second term, in the *existent*, it is relative and contingent. The link between these two terms is *creation*, an action that is real and positive but free. Being – the Substance and first Cause – thereby creates substances and second causes. It regulates and includes them in itself, conserving them in time by the immanence of the causal action which, **in regard to the time taken to complete it**, is a continuous creation. In the aforementioned formula, then, we have three realities independent of the mind: a Substance and first Cause; an organic manifold of substances and second causes; and a real and free act of the first causal Substance, and by means of this act the one Being is connected with the manifold of existences.

Such is the ontological process expressed by the formula that we have assumed. Now let us add to it the intuition that we have removed by abstraction and consider the formula in its objective character.⁹³ When the intuition that perceives the formula is restored to it, the ontological process becomes psychological, and each objective term of the truth becomes a concept with regard to our cognition of it. But in this transformation there is

⁹²*L'Ente crea l'esistente.*

⁹³*Entità.*

no actual change for either of the two parts. With regard to the object, the three terms of the formula – Being, existence and creative action – remain realities, as before. With regard to the subject, there is nothing in it but an intuition grasping those same three realities on its own, without taking into itself alteration or division of any kind.

Here one must not imagine, like the champions of psychologism, that the cognitive act makes some unknown appearance, image or form of external reality enter into us, and that this mental entity is the object of our thought so that, for our part, the truth is seen not in itself but in us. [Thomas Reid has thoroughly exposed the falsity of this notion with regard to knowledge of bodies](#), and here we only extend his teaching to the whole intuitive truth, standing on the same basis as the Scottish philosopher – on direct and objective evidence, in other words.

Nor should one assume, like the same psychologists, that when the mind grasps the various terms of the objective truth, it changes their order, starting with the existent and ascending to Being, while in the cycle of reality Being descends to the existent, and not the reverse. Assuming the primitive psychological order to be the reverse of the ontological order is not only a strange and gratuitous view, it is also plainly contrary to the objective evidence that we have of the identity of the two orders when it implies that our intuition alters the representation of real things. Granted, a person in a state of reflection can and does change, more or less, the real order of things mentally; in part, this is what the task of thinking scientifically⁹⁴ is about. But this cannot happen in intuition and has nothing to do with the first science. Therefore, since the idea is nothing but the object itself as perceived by our mind, it follows that the ideas of Being, the existent and creation are three realities, precisely as proposed by the formula. It also follows that the process in which we see them is equally real, given the single addition of the mind's intuition.

The conclusion of these findings is that the formula proposed by us is true. Our intuitive cognition must perceive its three terms in order of their real occurrence and must therefore grasp creation as a fact that the mind witnesses as it descends from Being to existences and grasps them in the creative act that produces them. But to convert this hypothesis into a completely certain statement, it suffices to take have in view the synthetic process that we shall mention shortly. From each part of this process it will seem obvious that one must either call into question the clearest concepts and least doubtful judgments of the human mind or else acknowledge that the process of ideation takes place as we have described it. Anyone who understands the nature and value of the synthesis will ask for no other proof. Before beginning this discussion, however, we can check the truth of our formula by a faster method.

That creation is the only way to explain the origin of existents, and that every other hypothesis leads to obvious absurdities, is very well known. There is no need to prove it here. The doctrine of creation, then, is a scientifically certain fact, proved indirectly when reason reflects and argues from the absurd alternatives. But if creation is truly a

⁹⁴*Lavoro scientifico.*

fact, how do we have knowledge of it in primitive intuition? This is the question that we have posed.

The ready answer is that we count it as a fact insofar as we perceive it. But to perceive a fact is to see, with the mind, the action – the movement, almost – of which the fact consists, and to see the origin from which the act moves, to see it as active along with the effect that results from it. But surely, in our case, the intuiting mind that perceives Being in its concreteness sees it *not* in its abstract character,⁹⁵ secluded within itself, but sees it as it really is – causing, producing existents, and externalizing itself by its actions. Hence, the mind perceives existents as ends of Being's activity. A person therefore acquires the concept of existence by having a mental view of the continuing production of that same activity. Since the psychological process of intuition is identical to the ontological, the content of our cognition⁹⁶ is not differentiated from the real order of things. Just as the three real terms – Being, creative action and existences – follow one another logically in the objective synthesis, so also the three ideal terms that correspond to them follow the same order in the human mind. The mind then sees existences produced in the Being that produces them, and *at every instant of its intellectual life it is a direct and immediate spectator of creation.*

The conclusion may seem odd, but it is rigorous and irrefutable. It cannot be called into doubt without doing one of three things: either **throw out** existences and fall into absolute idealism; or accept existences as uncreated and embrace the absurd hypotheses of naturalism, pantheism and emanationism; or admit the fact of creation but deny that the psychological process of intuition, by which we know the fact, is identical to the ontological process of the fact⁹⁷ itself. But whoever wants to deny the sameness of the two processes must establish that the idea is a subjective unknown – obviously not an absolutely simple intuition but a mental effort that changes the real order of things.

After the direction given to psychology by the Scottish school, however, this claim is impossible to maintain. If many today still insist on the contrary view, it happens because the works of the Scots – and Reid's especially – are more cited than studied or understood. **Their view is just that the object, inasmuch as it is intuited – the link that goes between the ideas – cannot be differentiated from the bond that connects the objects.** Now, in the sphere of objectivity, Being produces existences by way of creation. Then, in the subjective sphere, we acquire the concept of the existent because we perceive it, and we perceive it because we see it actually produced, before the mind's eye. The scheme of the human mind's synthetic labor, which we will explain in due course, will clear up every obscurity and remove all doubt about our proposition.

We noted above that in the immediate intuition of Being a judgment is contained that affirms the reality of that Being, and that this judgment, the basis of all proof,⁹⁸ is

⁹⁵ *Entità.*

⁹⁶ *Conoscimento.*

⁹⁷ *Cosa.*

⁹⁸ *Evidenza.*

objective and divine. Now we can add that Being, considered no longer just Being but causal Being, gives us the perception of a fact which is equally objective and divine – the fact of creation. Therefore, we take [??? *contezza*] by the intuition of a divine judgment and a divine fact.

Through the first, Being says *I exist*. Through the second, it proclaims *I create* – for to think of things as real, is, for God, actually to create them. Both are objective, but one is necessary, the other free and contingent. One is only within Being, the other is reflected toward an external end. The one is a pure judgment by which Being affirms itself. The other is a practical judgment, a judgment made actual externally, by which Being posits universal existence. Both derive from the Intelligible because the Intelligible is Being. But the first derives from the Intelligible because it freely understands itself.⁹⁹ The second derives from the Intelligible because it freely understands and wills an external fact. The divine judgment is the basis of knowledge; the divine fact is the basis of nature.

Hence, in virtue of this supreme judgment, philosophy is something divine, as psychology and physics are divine in virtue of its operation. The judgment provides the scope and content of the speculative sciences, as the fact provides for the natural sciences. And the whole human encyclopedia has its basis in a divine encyclopedia – a primitive formula, ideal or real, that comes to us given by God, a true revelation. In the philosophical sciences, the fundamental formula is governed by the divine judgment, which is a product of the ideas. In physics, it is governed by the grand and divine experiment of creation, which is a revelation of things. The first formula gives us the Intelligible, the second the sensible. One represents to us Being taken simply, the other depicts it for us as a creative cause.

The mathematical sciences, as we shall see farther on, have a place between these two formulas. Finally, it is important to note that the divine judgment and fact, the foundation of the real and the knowable, *argue for* the personhood of Being. I only mention this as a truth of great significance to which I will return in the appropriate place and explain it.

The true ideal formula that we have been pursuing, the supreme basis of all the knowable, can therefore be declared in the following terms: *Being creates existences*. In this formula the Idea is expressed by the concept of a creating Being, and since this concept cannot be had without that of existence and creation, the latter two notions belong indirectly to the Idea and to the component elements of the formula that expresses it. The idea of Being is thus the foundation and organic center of the formula. The idea of creation is its organic condition. And the three concepts joined together form the ideal organism. Without the idea of creation, the bond between the two other concepts would be missing. The extreme terms of the formula would be confused, as happens among pagans and philosophers; once this most important concept gets lost, *they shake the whole organism loose of its rational truths*.

⁹⁹*Intende ... sè stesso.*

Just as the subject (*Being*) of the ideal formula implicitly contains the judgment, *Being is*, likewise the predicate (*creating existences*) contains another judgment, *existences are in Being*. However, just as the predicate explicitly affirms that existences are from Being as from a first Cause, so it also declares implicitly that existences are in Being as in a first and absolute Substance. But if existences are in Being as in the first Substance because they are effects of the first Cause, then, as second causes and substances, subordinate to the first Substance and Cause, they are in themselves and depend on themselves. Confusion of the first Substance and Cause with second substances and causes has produced pantheism.

The formula also declares that the existent, having originated from Being, takes all the reality that it has from there. Hence it follows that, just as the existent cannot (as a matter of ontology) be without Being, even though it is distinct, so likewise it is not possible (as a matter of psychology) to think the existent without Being itself, even though the two terms are distinct in their concept. This real and mental simultaneity and interpenetration of Being and existent, which still does not eliminate the very basic distinction and infinite distance between them, is what is called the entity¹⁰⁰ of existences, taking this phrase in its strictest sense.

Being and existences are two things and two ideas, divided and conjoined, distinct and inseparable. This real and intellectual inseparability of Being and existent is such that the two terms gradually get mixed up, even in the language of the most careful speakers, and the concepts get confused, as we have already noted. But if one pays attention to the difference between the concepts, the similar usage of the words can help show how they are related to one another. When it is said that *God exists*, for example, it means that God is the highest reality in himself – necessary reality and source of that finite and contingent reality found in creatures. And when it is claimed that *the man is*, it is understood that the creature is in the Creator, the existent in Being, taking from it that limited and imperfect reality that we call existence.

The formula contains an ideal truth and an ideal fact. The ideal truth, expressed by the divine judgment, is the reality of Being. The ideal fact is the divine production of the existents, and it is called ideal, even though it is a fact, because it is divine and comes from Being. The ideal fact arises from the ideal truth by means of creation, which forms the passage from Being to existent. Since creation is the bond between truth and fact, it shares at its extremes in the nature of both. The intuitive cognition that we have of the ideal fact is accompanied by sensibles. The synthesis between the ideal fact of existence and the sensibles gives rise to experience, which, according to Aristotle, is the knowledge of individuals. And surely our information about individuals, as we will soon see, is given to us by creation.

The doctrine that I am explaining is so alien to the current way of doing philosophy that it is certain to find objectors. Among other objections that will be raised against me, it will be said that humans start with the idea of existence and that they move up from there to

¹⁰⁰ *Entità*.

discuss the idea of Being rather than follow the opposite process. This is entirely correct if the topic is the movement of reflection.

Starting from what makes the greatest impression on the mind, from what aims directly at psychological reflection – the sensibles, for example – reflection naturally passes from existence to Being, and not the reverse. For that reason, the last term in the intuitive order becomes first in reflection, and it is this dislocation which has led psychologists into error. But the process of reflection would be impossible if it were not preceded by a process of intuition like the one that we have described.

In proof of this, one notes that the concept and the very term *existence* include and express a relation to Being. But how could one grasp this relation if Being were not already known, if the dependence of the existent on Being were not a consequence of this knowledge? The very word *existentia* (*ex eo quod per se et a se subsistit*) – *ex ente*, as it were¹⁰¹ – assumes that the idea of existence not only is not isolated but also derives psychologically from the other concept, as the thing represented derives from Being. In intuition the idea of existence could not precede that of Being or be independent of it without contradiction. Therefore, one sees that we cannot get hold of existence except insofar as it is created by Being. And thus, in the moving and immanent process of intuition, the mind passes from Being to existence by the intermediate link of creation. This happens because Being is represented to the mind as active and creative.

Hence, even though its is immutable in itself, Being is established in movement (*ad extra*) and not in rest, unfolding itself in an external act and in time, leaving that immanent and restful actuality that belongs to its nature. It is in virtue of this intuition of active Being that the ancient Orientals distinguished the unrevealed God from the God who shows himself, paying their respects only to the former. The distinction was irreverent and absurd, but it has a metaphysical root in primordial intuition which, in the Idea, represents to us, all at once, both Being in itself and Being in its external and creative actualization.

¹⁰¹The very word *existence* (*from that which subsists through itself and by itself*), *from being* as it were.