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ORIGEN'S THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE.

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TWO QUESTIONS, broadly speaking, confront the investigator of noetic problems ; one is a question of fact, and the other is a question of explanation. Every man, when he says, "I know," allows the existence of these facts and takes up an attitude toward knowledge, and this it is the business of epistemology to study. The theory of knowledge is thus only an attempt to describe and explain the implications of the act of knowledge as known in self-consciousness.

Historically considered, this problem was not clearly raised until the time of Kant. But it is a mistake to suppose that he invented the problem itself. All pre-Kantian thought is more or less concerned with it, though it was mainly occupied with more general problems. In this sense, it is true that the data for a scientific treatment of knowledge did not exist before Kant's time, for the state of knowledge did not permit of it. Further, owing to the relatively unstable state of human affairs, the changing fortunes of states and individuals prevented knowledge existing for its own sake. It was subordinated either to ethics, or the church, or politics. In Kant, however, knowledge is a special field of investigation. In the light of these facts, it is clear that Origen has not worked out a theory of knowledge in the Kantian sense ; but it is also plain that, as a

systematic thinker, the noetic problem is implicitly considered. The study of the opinions and conceptions of the great church father centers, therefore, in the question: What contribution, if any, has he made to the development of historical epistemology, critically understood? And to this question this essay is devoted.

Such a study as is proposed should be inductive and deductive. We may, therefore, attend, in the first division of the subject, to Origen's views on the nature, economy, and metaphysics of knowledge; and, in the second place, endeavor to place ourselves *en rapport* with the time in order to estimate the influences amid which our author reached his views.

I.

1. *Composition and nature of human knowledge.*—It would be more correct to speak of Origen's anthropology than of Origen's psychology. For it is true, as Denis has pointed out,¹ that he applies himself little, directly, to the science of mind as known in concrete experience. Owing to his peculiar *tour d'esprit*, he eagerly investigates the preëxistent state of the soul and its future blessedness. He held, indeed, that this was the only means of understanding its real nature. The substance of his teaching on the empirical phenomenon of knowledge may, however, be exhibited in the following observations.

Origen confines the possibility of knowledge *to man*. Brutes cannot be said to *know*. In an interesting anticipation of Descartes' theory of the relation of man to the lower animals, he says (*C. C.*, 4:83): "What is the chief guide (τὸ ἡγεμονικόν) of men? Reason. And of ants? An irrational principle, moved by instinct, impulse, and imagination, but without reason, by a certain mechanism of nature." In this passage, and in others,² Origen argues exactly like the Cartesians, who find the end served by animal life in the admirable mechanism whereby they are suited to the service of man. To such mechanisms knowledge, inasmuch as it is always knowledge of the good, is impossible. The animal is but a machine (κατασκευή); man partakes

¹ DENIS, *La philosophie d'Origène*, Part I.

² *Cf. C. C.*, Bk. 4, secs. 81, 86, etc.

of reason (λόγος), and therefore the good (τὸ καλόν) is alone possible to him. This fact, interesting on its own account, is also remarkable since, whilst theories of metempsychosis and reincarnation were common in his time, Origen does not accept them in his explanation of the appearance of reason in man. What he means by "reason" will be explained by and by.

Origen, like Paul, is a trichotomist in word, but a dualist in spirit; for purposes of exposition the latter aspect of his teaching will be emphasized. Now, Origen maintains that knowledge depends upon the union of body and soul and may be hereditary; knowledge is a function of the mind, but it may be greatly influenced by the bodily connection. Always remembering that knowledge and virtue are one (knowledge is always knowledge of the good), he held that sin renders us impervious to the light of the λόγος; so that knowledge depends upon the recovery of the body from its sinful isolation from reason and purity, and this result may be greatly aided by a good ancestry. In his *Commentary on John* (20:2, 3, 5, 25, etc.) he states (again anticipating more recent theories), "A father has his ancestors' traits transmitted to him," and teaches that one man has more virtue than another because his ancestors have been, like Abraham, men of worth. This fact seems at first sight contradictory to Origen's great contention that the real causes of knowledge and virtuous living are in ourselves, and if we place too much stress on such passages as the above, this impression will deepen; but the fact is that Origen does not attempt to reconcile personal responsibility for ignorance of virtuous knowledge with heredity; he simply claims that knowledge is influenced by heredity, and, since it is the union of matter and spirit which is the conditioning fact of knowledge, as known to us, it is therefore a factor in the individual's (τέκνον) experience.

Origen is, notwithstanding, far from being a sensationalist. Two of his observations on this subject will show this. (1) Body cannot think or know. "Mind for its operations needs no physical space, nor sensible magnitude, nor bodily shape, nor color, nor any other of those adjuncts which are the properties of body or matter;" but he also teaches that underlying every

bodily organ is "a certain peculiar sensible substance,"³ by means of which the mind (*νοῦς*) has substantial relations with the senses and through them with the world of perceptible objects. Hence it is the *soul* that is chiefly implicated in sensuous knowledge; though, influenced by his subordinationism, Origen almost confounds it with the bodily organs, since for him the soul (not the *πνεῦμα*) is a rarefied, very finely attenuated substance, whose chief function is to be susceptible to individual objects. The soul is not concretely, therefore, the virtue-knowing power, but by purity it may become such; for *ψυχή* is the *νοῦς* degenerated through sin. (2) Sense-knowledge is imperfect, and must be transcended if virtue is to be attained. This is also the Stoical teaching, but, unlike the latter, our author takes higher ground. Planting himself on the validity of sense-knowledge, he would have the neophyte learn "to ascend from things of sense to those of the understanding." In discussing Rom. 1 : 20, he remarks that "though men who live on the earth have to begin with the use of the senses upon sensible objects in order to go from these to things intellectual, yet their knowledge must not stop short with the objects of sense." "The whole universe is God's temple;" but "the disciples of Jesus regard phenomenal things only that they may use them as steps to ascend to the knowledge of the things of reason."

Implicated in this doctrine, which is plainly non-sensational, is our author's theory of the "aids." Origen considered any agency valid that helped the student to get clear of sense. Knowledge grows by transcendence; through dialectic, through phantasy and all the movements of self-consciousness, but more particularly through the operations of what he calls the divine sense (*αἴσθησις θεία*), or consciousness in its higher cognitive activity, which is immediately cognizant of a world of reality unknown to mere sense. Great were the powers attributed to this function of the mind. It is the arbiter amid the confusion of the sensuous-continuum; settling the claims of the images that crowd in upon the understanding, it revives in us our

³ Rufinus has : "substantia quædam sensibilis propria."

active consciousness of the truth; it is cognizant, under the Holy Spirit, of the "deep things" of God and the preëxistent state. This conception of thought as an active factor in the growth of knowledge came from the Gnostics; for the Gnostic *νόησις* is the equivalent of Origen's *αἴσθησις θεΐα*.

We tread on firmer ground, however, when we enter the ethical sphere, because, as already stated, knowledge and virtue are one for Origen. The immense influence of Christianity on the theoretical life of man will appear when it is stated that, according to our author, every genuine act of knowledge assumes the form of a moral judgment, the quintessence of which is the free act of the will whereby the substance of truth is appropriated (*πίστις*). The following observations are central: (1) The activity of the *will* is the heart, so to speak, of genuine cognition. Three kinds of activity are recognized: that which is *ἐξ ἑαυτῶν*, that which is *ἀφ' ἑαυτῶν*, and that which is *δι' ἑαυτῶν*. It is the last of these that describes the activity of will as known in consciousness. It is the spontaneous rationality which constitutes the peculiarity of the human species. (2) Rational power and *free* will involve each other, and each belongs to the essence of mind as cognitive. Free will is the core of the self. Thus *πίστις* is to be understood, in both Clement and Origen, in the sense of a free appropriation of the truth (*πρόληψις ἐκούσιος*), the reasonable acquiescing of the soul in reason (*ψυχῆς αὐτεξουσίου λογικῆ συγκατάθεσις*); for will is involved in the operation and conditions the act of faith. "Man is the master and father of his actions," as Aristotle put it. (3) The outcome of the activity of the rational will in cognition is a moral *judgment*. "The rational animal has, in addition to imagination, also reason, which judges the images (of sense) and disapproves of some and accepts others, in order that the animal may be led according to them." To this activity of judgment is attributed all the varieties and complexity of human life and opinion, such as national history exhibits—all depends upon the power of free moral judgment bestowed on us by the Creator. But, further, and specially, it is the cause of all progress in knowledge. *This is the heart of the Alexandrian epistemology.* Clement emphatically

declared that free will in man involved the possibility of attaining perfect knowledge. This idealism, which is even stronger in Origen, is the condition of any true conception of history or destiny, since all progress is the constant forth-putting of the will in new directions, the constant correction of error, failure, and moral defect. The ideal of knowledge ("the vision of all in God") can be attained only as the outcome of the conflict with sense, and the elimination of error and sin by free will.

Origen recognized the influence of feeling in cognition. "Love and mental grasp go hand in hand."⁴ As he states in his Commentary on the Canticles: "If love be made for the good; if the good alone be worthy of approbation and consists, not in pleasure or bodily comforts, but in the possession of God and in the virtues of the soul, there is no love approvable but that which attaches itself to God and the virtues." In this passage feeling appears to be not unlike the *λογικὴ ὄρεξις*, or reasonable desire, of the Stoics. It is not a simple influence moving the will as a motive to act, but the movement of the will itself. Hence in the same work he distinguishes it from *ἐπιθυμία* (passion) and *ὄρμη* (impulse). The former belongs to the *ψυχὴ* (*νοῦς* fallen under sin) and is *σαρκικός*; necessary, indeed, to unite the soul to the flesh; but love is wholly spiritual; is a sort of understanding of the truth in its entirety; is a power in the soul of embracing with an unwavering, irreversible certainty the object of knowledge—God. The love of God, therefore, is the security and guaranty for the fulfilment of all that lies hidden in his reason. Ritter⁵ has accused Origen of inconsistency at this point; it seems to us, unjustly. He thinks that this doctrine renders the pursuit and outcome of our striving after knowledge precarious and inconsistent with Origen's well-known views on the dependence of cognition upon free will. But the fact is that our author finds nothing inconsistent in the contradiction which declares that truth may be had by the heart for the love of it, and the dependence of that fact upon our own choice. The Logos, indeed, "by the immensity of his love," is

⁴ Cf. LADD, *Philosophy of Knowledge*, chap. ii.

⁵ *Gesch. der alt. Philos.*, in loc.

beyond the possibility of error, but even in this case freedom is involved. The only thing that is excluded is the so-called liberty of indifference. Love must rest on free choice, since it is the guaranty of the attainment of the true, as well as the good. One more observation before we quit—the observation on the nature and origin of knowledge.

Origen taught that all knowledge involved the conception of an end. It is a well-known statement of his that faith (the active principle whereby truth is apprehended in its simplest forms of realization) "knows the end from the beginning." The "end" of cognition is the good, and the good and God are one. Both exist in the unity of the absolute Reason, the *λόγος*. Thus, the highest attainment of cognition, the vision of all in God, must only fulfil the prophecy of the most elementary act of the morally determined individual. Thus, sense-perception ever seeks the end—the knowledge of the *λόγος*. As he says: "The dullest mind can understand the elements of knowledge, but what soul can perceive that Jesus is the *λόγος* by sense-perception?" The judgment of the moral will, brought under the universalizing of the Holy Spirit, is needed for this. Kant's formal will of the good, Plato's "idea," the "universal" of the Stoics, have been compared to this teaching of Origen; but, it seems to us, without aptness. The truth seems to be that Origen's "end" is the human reason in accord with its object, and the progressive assimilation of the object and the subject. "End" and means are characteristically united in the thought of this church father. The good (*τὸ καλόν*) expresses this, inasmuch as it also includes the true.

These teachings of Origen show us fairly well the conception he had of the nature of knowledge. The distinctive thing about them is the combination of subtle insight and sublime moral and spiritual conviction. What is lacking, from our more modern standpoint, is the clear perception of the order and relation of value in the topics discussed. But this was due to the influences amid which he lived, of which we shall speak later. We pass now to two other departments of Origen's reflections on this subject, namely, the economy and metaphysic of knowledge.

2. *The economy (οἰκονομία) of knowledge.*—Origen's theory of the threefold sense of Scripture was a thoroughly philosophical instrument. The thought underlying its formation and use is that there is a dispensation (οἰκονομία) in knowledge, providentially determined, suited to the various orders of understandings found in the world. The truth, Origen teaches, must be administered like medicine, *i. e.*, in judicious doses advantageous to the healing of the soul's diseases. He goes so far as to say that when they are harmless a pupil should be allowed to continue in error, when it is clear that there is no capacity for understanding the truth. "There are some [he says]⁶ who are capable of receiving nothing more than an exhortation to believe, and to these we address that alone; while we approach others again, as far as possible, in the way of demonstration." Under the present heading we may conveniently consider the stages and limits of knowledge and the criterion of certainty.

Basing ourselves on the threefold sense, as above, three kinds or stages of knowledge are distinguished.⁷ (1) The first stage (after the soul has left the preëxistent state and has entered the state of redemption) is concerned with the external, with "things which are the object of perception;" just as the somatic sense of Scripture has to do with the language and mere words, its grammatico-historical aspect. Upon this basis little can be built that is absolute and final. Hence our author underestimated the knowledge of "body" or "matter," and the sciences of form, logic, and mathematics. He speaks of the "show" of knowledge made by these knowledges, which he could skilfully use on occasion. On the other hand, our author also teaches that, inasmuch as "the working of the Father and the Son" takes place universally, even these sciences are worthy of study as embodying truth. This underestimating of the sciences of matter, and this contradictory exaltation of them, when viewed in the light of the "end," are a characteristic turn of mind in Origen. This knowledge is full of illusion; yet it is true in the light of the end served. (2) By "perpetual activity and voli-

⁶ *D. P.*, Bk. I, preface.

⁷ Cf. *C. C.*, Bk. 4, chap. 13, and *D. P.*, Bk. I, chap. "Threefold Wisdom."

tion" a deeper kind of cognition becomes possible—"the innate longing of the mind for the thing itself" (*ὄψια*), *i. e.*, the knowledge of the soul and its destiny. But first the mind needs clearing, and for this purpose Platonic dialectic, the use of certain intellectual forms supplied in Aristotle's logic, the systematic reading and study of the Scriptures, the trials of piety, the aid of the Holy Spirit, must be employed. The mind cleared from the influence of permitted sin, the knowledge of the soul may be traced. In this there are certain well-marked stages, beginning in the preëxistent state. At its creation the soul is innocently perfect, but by degrees it comes to know the difference between good and evil; finally it *desired* this knowledge and fell. This is the first stage. Then the soul thickened into a body.⁸ In the body man has occasional monitions of the state whence he came, and in Christianity these were consummated, thus revealing the true source of his origin. For Christianity reveals the unity of spirit throughout the universe. This is the second stage. Then it is possible to rise into fulness of knowledge, beginning with conviction of sin and going on to the true knowledge of nature, the principles of providence, the end of things—in fact, everything that may be useful to piety "in the middle of things." Such a knowledge has been revealed through the *λόγος*, and the Scriptures tell the story thereof. But this kind of knowledge is also deficient; falls short of divine completion. Even the moral sense of Scripture has much in it that is contrary to merely human understanding. The aid of allegory, or the poetic and symbolic imagination, is needed to bridge over the contradiction here between ordinary and revealed truth. But still deeper knowledge is possible. (3) The third kind of knowledge is "the knowledge of the perfect." It is the business of this kind of knowledge to instruct and train men with reference to perfection through "the athletics of piety." Perfection, indeed, exists in degrees. The spirits in mid-air have opportunities of knowledge denied to us. But the unquenchable idealism of Origen teaches that the hum-

⁸ It should be borne in mind that the soul is a finely attenuated substance, of different degrees of density according to the worth of the individual.

blest of our fallen race is not an archangel, not because he is *unable*, but because he is *unwilling*. The pneumatic man is in the way, at any rate, of obtaining perfect knowledge; and, as his knowledge is not separated from the other kinds of knowledge, he carries with him all his "birth scars" when he passes through the grades of discipline; for even in the hereafter the soul will still be engaged upon its problems and the understanding of things and events, "as the very food on which it feeds." The soul's longing for truth, indeed, can never be satisfied until it sees the vision of all in God, which is perfect knowledge.

Thus, then, kinds of knowledge are distinguished. In another way he distinguishes the knowledge of "the existent, the rational, and the perfect;" knowledge of this world, that of the princes or powers of this world, and that of the perfect.⁹ The principle of differentiation in this doctrine is not clear; but light is thrown on it by the needs that caused the invention of the theory of the threefold sense of Scripture, which were partly philosophical and partly practical. The "end," or the knowledge of the good in God, is, of course, the most potent of the factors modifying the current conceptions of the kinds of knowledge, and in this the element called *πίστις* is the most original. We shall see more clearly, later on, the influences which led to these modifications. Let us now consider the limits of knowledge.

Our senses, under the influence of sin, impose limits to knowledge; but we have power to transcend sense; the understanding (*νοῦς*) can be delivered from the thralldom of sense; whilst, towering above all, is the *πνεῦμα*, which, when compared with the *νοῦς*, is as a lamp to the sun. Even the *πνεῦμα* does not attain to perfect knowledge; there is something higher than knowledge, *i. e.*, the *vision* of God. Knowledge, properly speaking, is confined to man, and, in this connection, Origen teaches a doctrine of final purpose as the test of the limit of knowledge. He teaches that, inasmuch as the end must be as the beginning, man is always actively gaining knowledge, even beyond the present state of existence. His arguments for immortality,

⁹ Cf. *D. P.*, Bk. 4, chap. "Threefold Wisdom."

final salvation, or the complete assimilation of human nature with the divine nature, is thus one of the conditioning elements of his theory of knowledge; *i. e.*, he finds in the inextinguishable desire for truth an index of the permanence of the thinking substance. He states¹⁰ in language of great clearness: "Now, since the heavenly virtues are incorruptible and immortal, the substance of the human soul should be incorruptible and immortal. And not only is it for this reason, but much more because of the nature of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, from whom every creature draws his participation in the intellectual light which is unique, incorruptible, and eternal. It is a necessary consequence that all substance that participates in this eternal nature endures always, and is itself incorruptible and eternal, so that it recognizes itself in the eternity of the divine goodness. . . . Observe now if there be not impiety in the supposition that intelligence, which is competent to know God, perish in its substance: as if the fact itself of being able to understand and know God did not suffice to its perpetuity, above all when one considers that intelligence, even when it falls and does not receive God into itself purely and perfectly, preserves no less the germs of renovation and reparation to recover a better state. For the interior man (*intellectualis natura*) renovates itself in the image of God who created it." "It follows that those who have in this life a certain rough sketch of knowledge . . . would, in future ages, possess the perfect and finished picture in all its beauty."

In the same way the criterion of certainty in knowledge seems to follow from the structure and nature of knowledge as such; inasmuch as it is the intercourse of finite reason with the *λόγος* that is the postulate differencing ordinary from "true" knowledge. This is as far as he goes in telling us how to distinguish the true from the false. Now, inasmuch as the Scriptures are the highest revelation of reason, it follows that they are the criterion of validity and certainty; but very little is said of the process of sifting the certain from the uncertain. Complete and certain knowledge rests, therefore, on revelation, and, in the last

¹⁰ *D. P.*, Bk. 4: 34.

resort, wholly on the latter, though the teachings of the church, so far as they accord with reason, are also to be determinative of faith. Thus, the criterion of certainty, his postulate of validity, is the *ipse-dixit* of Scripture, in harmony with a certain freedom of speculation on the objective criteria thus provided. This position must not be confounded with the Augustinian or post-Reformation theory of church authority; Origen teaches that faith and reason can never be opposed to one another. The mind, *i. e.*, cannot find the test of valid knowledge wholly within itself or outside itself, but in coördinate action.

To sum up: Knowledge exists in an economical dispensation; hence there are stages corresponding to the orders of reality with which the mind is brought in contact. Origen's theory of knowledge is thus a theory of transcendence; *i. e.*, he teaches that the object of cognition is not a phenomenon merely of the subjective consciousness, but exists as objective to the self, yet in living relation to it. To know it, to attain to genuine cognition, one must transcend the sense data. It is no *Ding-an-sich*, as Kant taught; the mind has no "blind windows" according to Origen. It was a daring speculation that led our author to the postulate upon which his metaphysical monism rests, the postulate, namely, that reason and the revealed will of God are one; for in it so-called secular knowledge finds its justification, as it were, and the philosophies of the schools their place in the same categories as those of the faith of the church. The fertility of this suggestion is proved by the fact that hardly ever since Origen's day has the relation of faith and reason been correlated so successfully.

3. *The metaphysics of knowledge.*—The following brief exposition of Origen's views will show the chief positions on this subject. As already stated, the ontological postulate of Origen's system is the reality of the idea of the good. Knowledge, in its inmost nature, is a revelation from, and of, the divine goodness. It is a gift, in the appropriation of which reason is active, specially in its ethical and æsthetical aspects. God and the good are, therefore, equivalent ideas, and human knowledge is the derivation of this ontological fact. The object of knowl-

edge, accordingly, as a material presentation, counts for little in the noetic life ; counts for little, except as it is seen in connection with this postulate. Things have existence and extension for our minds through the bestowal on them of God's thought. Matter is the mirror of spirit, and as the product of God's will it is never separated from its ground ; God eternally creates it, until it shall become the adequate expression of the spirit. Matter, in this view, is no dead core of unmeditated stuff, but the living product of creative energy, containing the germs (*σπέρματα*) of the potential will of the good.¹¹ The peculiar nature of matter, as opposed to spirit, is thus obliterated and subordinated to the spiritual demand for unity, and knowledge is connected, contentwise, with this spiritual reality which absolutely fills all space and time with its presence.

This reality, with which we are cognizant in knowledge, is a personal will, with which we are in continual commerce : knowledge and personality thus implicate each other. To know is an act only of personal beings ; metaphysically, it is a species of transaction between personal wills. The metaphysics of knowledge owes much to Origen for this conception, which struck at the fundamental weakness of ancient philosophy, its failure to determine the idea of God's personality. Not only has Origen demonstrated the absolute immateriality of God where others assumed it ; this was one of the greatest tasks that the human mind could have undertaken in Origen's day ; but he has carried this thought out in the logical implications of personality : unity, absolute intelligence, etc. To quote¹² : "He is, then, neither a body, nor in a body ; but he is an intelligible nature, of absolute simplicity, who admits in himself nothing that is borrowed *ab extra*, and who, in being susceptible of more or less, is absolutely a monad (*Μονάς*, 'Ενός), a unity, a supreme understanding, source, and principle of all intelligent nature and of all understanding." Origen here insists less than his predecessor, Clement, on the incomprehensibility of God, and this is the more remarkable when we reflect that absolutism was a sort of catalepsy in those days. Our author teaches that it is only

¹¹ *D. P.*, Bk. 4 : 35.

¹² *D. P.*, Bk. 1 : 1.

personality in man and God that can give us the ultimate ground of the knowable or the possibility of knowledge. As Windelband¹³ rightly points out, this conception was due to the immense influence of Christianity, the central postulate of which was, in the Alexandrian theology, that God had become man. Henceforth, indeed, for centuries, the problem of thought becomes the problem of human personality in its historical evolution, and from this standpoint the metaphysics of reality and knowledge, as a concrete affair, as a definite growth, has been regarded ever since. The essential identity between reason and the revealed will of God in the Scripture thus finds its metaphysical guarantee in this further idea of the identity of the self-revealing reason of the absolute personality and finite rational personality.

We may now briefly sum up the more distinctive views of Origen somewhat as follows:

All knowledge rests on the postulate of the reality of the idea of the good; human knowledge is the equivalent of the divine idea revealed as reason. Here insight is more than argument (*πίστις*).

Faith, which freely receives the truth, coöperates with reason, in the attainment of knowledge. These two activities are not separate, but express the operation of the unitary, active soul of the seeker after knowledge. The transcendent object of knowledge is known only by a rational faith.

We may, by the power of free will, direct our minds toward the source of truth; thus valid moral judgments and illogical conduct depend upon the use we make of the soul's power of choice. Rooted in love, the will may permanently choose the attainment of perfect knowledge, which is, as frequently stated, the vision of all in God.¹⁴ It is our duty to rationally desire truth above everything else, and freely to accept the revelation of God.

More obscure "momenta" in the products and processes of knowledge, some of which have been presented, concern the place of animal intelligence in the scale of reality. He has

¹³ *History of Philosophy*, Eng. tr., *in loc.* ¹⁴ *Cf. D. P.*, I, 5; I, 6; II, 1; II, 4, etc.

shown that knowledge and virtue are one, and denies this to the lower creation. Some of the happy suggestions of Origen are to be found in this connection. On the whole, however, the above express the more formal and impressive of his teachings on the subject of human cognition. This brings us face to face with our next inquiry: What were the influences which determined Origen in forming his theory of knowledge? which will occupy us in the balance of this essay. These may be roughly divided into immediate and remote.

II.

Among the remote influences conditioning Origen's conception of knowledge, those may first be considered which modified the general problem. These are partly philosophical and partly religious.

1. The problem was complicated by the readjustment of racial temperaments, which had been going on under the Roman ascendancy. The *Zeitgeist* of Origen's day was founded on this amalgamation of races; through the fusion of races their peculiarities tended to become assimilated with each other, and thereby new features of mind were formed, which, whilst these races lived in comparative isolation, were not greatly developed. Thus the prevailing emotional tone of the Aryan group came in touch with the broad intellectuality of the Greek races; and both these were profoundly modified by the dominant will of the Roman-Italian. And this fact led to the fusion of languages, ideas, and culture; for under the general *mélée* of races Romans learned Greek and Greeks learned Latin. Thus Greek thought was enabled to penetrate east and west; thus oriental philosophy found lodgment through Greek channels in the middle West; the Greek language becoming, like the German in modern times, the language of intellectual people and the dominant tongue of the cultured world. In this way, by this fusion of races and languages, the culture of the second century admitted every standpoint, from the mythological to the nihilistic, according to the preference of the student. The scientific spirit was exhausted; since Aristotle (384-22 B. C.)

no great additions had been made to the stock of scientific knowledge. The old dogmatism collapsed, by reason of its failure to meet the pressing claims of the individual. In brief, the age of Origen saw all the main lines of Greek speculation—the Platonic-Aristotelian, Epicurean, the Stoic, the skeptic, the Pythagorean and Platonic Eclectics, and the Jewish-Greek—concentrated in the general movement of thought. Philosophical dogmatism failing, recourse was had to the practical and religious interest for inner satisfaction. A peculiar susceptibility to ideas founded upon authority, knowledge based upon the assumption of special religious inspiration, rapidly developed in society. Philosophy itself gave up its dialectical method and metaphysical thinking. Knowledge becomes more and more identified with vision; other channels than sense-perception and thought are admitted; intuition, mystical exaltation of the spirit, becomes more and more prominent. The old demand for a method of proof is displaced in favor of theurgic rhapsody. Knowledge and religious insight are identified.

This condition of things was also favored by the state of religion. Polytheism was still the popular cult; but Euripides and Sophocles, not to mention Anaxagoras, Metrodorus, and Euhemerus, had long since dissipated the Homeric, and, for that matter, all popular traditions, regarding the gods. But with the increasing consciousness of ethical needs came a craving for a satisfying unity in experience. The exoteric demand was met by allegorizing the myths and mixing them with the Greek philosophemes; the esoteric demand was met among the cultured few by mixing together Jewish ethical monotheism, Stoical pantheism, and Platonic idealism, thus opposing the allegorical compromise. But it failed. And no more instructive lesson can be learned from this epoch than this: our ethical and theoretical interests can never be divided and give us peace. Polytheistic naturalism ceased to be a power as soon as personality and conduct became problems of thought, but the syncretism of philosophic and religious opinion, in Origen's day, only exhibits the human spirit preparing to take flight to more satisfying *Weltanschauungen*.

It is the eternal distinction of Christianity that it took this *blasé*, worn-out age in hand, and practically made it over again, by a process of inward renewal and quickening. The story of the first three centuries is simply the story of the way the human spirit delivered itself from its swaddling clothes and began to clothe itself anew with garments suited to its youth; or, to drop metaphor, the intellectual life of those years was a struggle with religious skepticism. Christianity, to which modern philosophy owes an unpaid debt of immense proportions, supplied the world with a new spirit and hope, so that it "went at" its problems with an energy that shows no abatement after nineteen centuries. This is the significant and unparalleled work that the introduction of the personality of Christ into men's lives, and their contact with him, accomplished. It is, therefore, fitting that we should briefly estimate the influence exerted by this new force on the noetic problem.

We have to notice that, as early as the time of Paul, the need of converting *πίστις* into *γνώσις* was felt, and the germs of the great doctrine, which took shape later, especially in Clement's *Christian Gnostic*, are already visible on the pages of the New Testament. There it is taught that truth is validated in the faith of the "pure in heart," who are conscious therein of their union with God. This faith rests on love, which brings with it a convincing *γνώσις* of the truth, of the ethical personality, and especially of the ideal of perfection, which is the most distinctive of all the ideals held up by Christ. Christ is thus the norm or law of all worthy cognition, since through him deliverance from sin, regeneration, and redemption become for the first time practically possible to all. The New Testament thus teaches that *it is character that determines true insight*, and in character *πίστις*, as including the kenosis of the whole ethical personality, subjectively and objectively, is the *sine qua non* of knowledge of the truth.

Two causes impelled the more precise emergence of thought on this subject within the church, with the mention of which we may conclude our account of the more remote influences determining Origen's conception of knowledge. One of these resulted

from the relation of Christianity with humanity, which gave birth to the activity of Christian and non-Christian Gnosticism, and their counterpart, the activity of the Apologists. Too little credit will be done to the former movement if a pure love of truth be not admitted; too much, if the Gnostic systems be regarded as anything more than *attempts* at a unification of *πίστις* and *γνώσις*. Now, to this mode of speculation we owe the first systematic use of the conception of self-consciousness (*παπακολουθεῖν ἑαυτῷ*), and out of it was derived the thought of reason as an active element in knowledge. Hence the Christian Gnostics were the first theologians of the church.¹⁵ Their object was to present Christianity as a rationally defensible content after the manner of the Greek, Jewish, and oriental cults. There was this difference between them, however, that the Gnostic movement derived its standpoint from a syncretism of religious beliefs on a New Testament foundation. The apologetic movement had much the same object; but it was content to move strictly within the sphere of the Christian facts. Their contribution to philosophy lay, therefore, more in the effort to determine the nature of revelation; knowledge being the rational unity of morality and religion, of which the dogmas of Christianity are the highest expression.

The second impelling cause may be described as the growth of the scientific spirit in the church, which arose out of the need of a scientific dogmatic. When the speculation of the school of Irenæus is considered, we observe the conservative and judicial tendency asserting itself against the extreme claims of the "Hellenizers." It would, indeed, be unfair to judge the whole school by Tertullian's saying: "Credibile est quia ineptum est; certum est quia impossibile est—credo quia absurdum;" but it is equally true that they resisted the speculative use of reason. The need of system, in their judgment, was more historical than theoretical; they thus carried the Hellenizing of Christianity forward in its milder phases. The gradual fixing of a scientific dogmatic was assisted only negatively, therefore, by this school. It was far otherwise with the Alexandrian school; for in Alex-

¹⁵ Cf. HARNACK, *Hist. of Dogma*, Vol. I, pp. 222 ff.

andria the speculative interest attained its highest activity. Confining our attention to the problem of knowledge, we notice that to Gnosticism Clement opposed a *γνώσις* more profound and discrete, respecting alike the tradition of the Old and New Testaments. In this thinker the problem is closely connected with the conviction, which he shared with the whole Alexandrian "school," that extra-scriptural, especially Greek, knowledge contained truth. He borrows the Stoic distinction between *πρόληψις* and *ἐπιστήμη*, to designate the distinction between *πίστις* and *γνώσις*. Faith is defined as *πρόληψις ἐκούσιος*, which, with the aid of philosophy, leads to *γνώσις*; philosophy (*σοφία*) being the mediating term in the equation, and the distinctively new element. Indeed, the Alexandrians give to philosophy greater influence in the construction of scientific dogmatic than any other early school.¹⁶ In Origen this tradition was carried forward and reached a perfection, in this respect, which no previous Christian thinking shows.

These, then, were the remote influences operating through the spirit of Origen's age and helping to modify the views of thinkers on the subject of knowledge. Of these the most potent was the influence of religion and practical life, in which a channel was prepared for the infusion of the new life of the Christian revelation in Christ. In turning to the more immediate conditions which surrounded Origen, therefore, these profound general considerations have to be kept in view, if we would explain the features of his conceptions.

2. The first of the immediate influences was undoubtedly our author's living grasp on the central fact of Christianity—the incarnation. In this fact God is present in person, and it was the knowledge of this that became the master-passion of Origen's soul; for which he mutilated his body. In it is already postulated the unity of God and man, subject and object, truth and knowledge, letter and spirit, without which his advance in systematic reflection would have been impossible. As already stated, faith is a way of knowing, no more to be separated from reason than from truth itself; and from this fundamental pos-

¹⁶ Cf. *Strom.*, 7: 10, 12, and "The Christian Gnostic."

tulate, notwithstanding the strictures of Neander,¹⁷ we think he never seriously departs. There was, indeed, much in his practical and religious life to prevent a serious departure from this position: his relations with missionaries and pastors, who looked to him as their theological leader solicitous to preserve the purity and simplicity of their faith; his relations with men of the stamp of Celsus, the philosophic skeptic and scholar, who can be reached only by an argument drawn from the historical and practical effects of the faith on the average mind; his relations with his pupils and heathen inquirers who made frequent inquiries on this very matter—all this was a deterring influence from straying wilfully from this fundamental datum of the Christian consciousness. The knowledge of God in Christ, specially as seen in the tragedy of Calvary, was, indeed (so Origen held), limited, incomplete, and, standing by itself, is but germinal (*σπερματικός*); but it is a genuine *γνώσις* notwithstanding, a true starting-point for all cognition; it is the point at which we begin to “partake” of the *λόγος*.

The word “partake” brings us to the second of the immediate influences conditioning Origen’s reflection, viz., Greek ideas. To begin with, he places himself in full sympathy with the noble thought of Plato that the craving for truth is divinely implanted in us all and cannot be repudiated by any. More positively, Origen borrows from Platonism his philosophical argument for the unity and spirituality of God.¹⁸ God, who is described as “simplex intellectualis natura” (in all parts *Μονάς* and, so to speak, *Ἐνάς*), is the source of all mind; in whom is all wisdom. This is, as we have already seen, the ontological postulate of Origen’s epistemology. So the spirituality of God is conceived; the *τὸ ὄν* of Platonism is the equivalent of Origen’s *ἀσώματον*. To quote on this point: “God is a substance in which neither color, nor form, nor touch, nor magnitude is to be understood as existing visible to the mind.” From this source the ideas, eternal in the *λόγος*, emanate by way of revelation. A similar idea is to be found in the *Theætetus*, a fact

¹⁷ Cf. *History of Christian Religion*, in *loc.*

¹⁸ *D. P.*, Bk. 4 : 1, 17; Bk. 1 : 1, 6, etc.

which Origen explains by the theory that it was revealed by the eternal Word to the Greek mind. Another Platonic conception prominent in Origen's formal treatment of the subject of knowledge is the idea of the participation of all things and minds, according to their degree, in the "ideas;" or, as Origen epitomizes them, in the *λόγος*. Plato also taught that sensible objects partook of the intelligible essences ("ideas"), and by virtue thereof they possessed character as things. Plato, however, never clearly proved the manner of this participation; the one and many remain in fundamental isolation in his system. Origen, availing himself of the Jewish scriptures and of Philo, makes use of the idea of an intermediate being, the *μονογενές*, who is related, on the one hand, to the unrelated Monad, and, on the other hand, to the dependent world of things and minds; and this being it is that imparts immanent rationality to things. This idea of participation (*μέθεξις*), however, is always used by Origen subject to the profound teleology which influenced him; things partake of the "only begotten" as they are worthy. A mind cleared from the influence of sin by dialectic and faith "partakes" more worthily than a less prepared mind; so of things in their degree.

Turning to other Greek influences, we have to observe the influence of the Stoic philosophy. The Stoical spirit suited Origen's ascetic temperament, and it is in this fact, rather than in any extensive adoption of Stoical ideas, that we have to notice Origen's dependence on this school. Now, among the Stoics wisdom and virtue are practically synonymous. Their division of philosophy into logic, physics, and ethics shows their conception of the relation of the knowledges to one another. We have already seen that, in like manner, knowledge is ethical to the core in Origen's mode of philosophizing; indeed, we may go farther and identify the search for the good (*summum bonum*) of the Stoics and Origen's "end." In the details, as well, we observe similar coincidences of view. For example, in justifying the lie of Lot, our author employs the Stoical division of actions into good, bad, and indifferent, and, like a Stoic, adopts the doctrine that the essence of the virtuous

act consists in its intention. For Origen, therefore, as for the Stoic, the wise man, the man of knowledge, is the virtuous man; for the vicious and ignorant can never be said really to know; and neither the Stoics nor Origen scruple to lay the burden of responsibility for a lack of knowledge on the shoulders of the abusers of moral freedom.

We turn now to the third influence in view of which Origen formed his conception of knowledge. It is well known, among scholars in patristics, that to Gnosticism belongs the credit of inciting Origen to philosophical reflection; though it must be acknowledged that much credit is also due to the oriental syncretism, which flourished in Alexandria. Much time and pains have been spent in the attempt to prove that Origen's universalism was the direct product of the latter influence, especially in the Syrian modification of Zoroastrianism. In general the influence is obvious enough; but the comparative study of these influences leads the writer to the conclusion that our author owes much more to Greek philosophy in this matter. In Gnosticism, however, we come into closer contact with those systems, after which much of Origen's own work was patterned, particularly those of Valentinus and Basilides. But it is quite certain that Origen's conception of *πίστις* excluded the *γνώσις* of these thinkers. Origen, as we have seen, recognized stages of *γνώσις*, ranging all the way from simple faith to full vision; but at no time is knowledge the fanciful product that appears in Basilides. The difference seems to lie in the fact that Origen's thought moves largely, if not wholly, within the sphere of the Scriptures and tradition, whilst Gnosticism did not accept the permanent validity of the Scripture canon or the authority of the whole church. Indeed, our author was not slow to criticise his Gnostic opponents. He utters his amazement¹⁹ at the spectacle of intelligent men teaching the fortuitous origin of matter; and as for the crude dualism and emanationism of Gnosticism, it was rejected as repellent to the demand for unity, as well as opposed to the teaching of Christianity. Yet Origen out-Gnostics the Gnostics in the question of the transcendental quality of knowl-

¹⁹*D. P.*, Bk. 2 : 1, 4.

edge. An extreme statement of his position is, perhaps, that where he says: "Those who have received the charisma of *γνώσις* and *σοφία* no longer live in faith, but in sight;" by which he seems to mean the same thing as the Platonic absorption into the "idea;" *i. e.*, such absorption as every seer and prophet experienced when under divine inspiration; or when the love of truth burned so purely on the altar of the soul that the external trappings of word, symbol, etc., became unnecessary to sustain the spirit in the contemplations of reality. What is obvious is that Origen looks at these systems through their relation to the practico-religious interest; this "adamantine" man will show Basilides and Marcion that Christian knowledge does not exclude, but comprehends, the truth of Gnosticism, and along with this even the more refined Buddhistic and Hindoo religious theories. For Origen the speculative proposition that God had revealed himself in Christianity included all human wisdom; his one task was to carry the implications of this central thesis to their logical and necessary results.

It remains that we speak of Philo and Jewish Hellenism. The influence of this school was the most direct, perhaps, of any, as the study of the terminology of this school and Origen's writings shows, and the secret of this influence lies in the fact that Philo was completely Greek and completely Jew. On the Greek side he was affiliated with Plato, the later Pythagoreans, and the Stoics; he was, therefore, for Origen a sort of epitome of philosophical opinion, a convenient emporium of weapons, in the shape of terms, against the opponents of revelation. On the Jewish side he was both a Palestinian and a Jew of the dispersion; and from this side Origen draws extensively, notably in the so-called argument from prophecy. These general characteristics, however, are only the indices of Philo's position on the problem of knowledge. On the latter subject he held that the knowledge of things human and divine was contained in its purest form in the Mosaic Scriptures, which are the most authoritative part of the sacred book. Hence everything that is right and good in Greek philosophy has been better taught in Moses' writings. Both Philo and Aristobulus before

him, as well as many of the Christian Fathers, including Origen, believed that the Greek philosophers borrowed from the Pentateuch. But Philo's conception of knowledge is unpsychological and vague; had the inflexible hardness which belonged to his rigid belief in authority. This is one of the points of divergence between him and Origen. For Origen, as we have already seen, the Scriptures are the criterion of certainty in knowledge, since they contain a revelation of the divine reason; but Origen never forgets the imperfection of the media of revelation and has the temerity to say that there are "scandals and offenses and impossibilities," as well as mistakes, in them, in consequence. Again, in both, the ground and source of inspiration and of the thought of the prophet is said to be the *λόγος*. But the *λόγος* of Philo is a hypostasis standing apart from God and the world—a dualism corresponding to the Greek dualism of sense and reason; whilst in Origen there is an ontological unity underlying all reality; and the result is, in Philo's case, a teleological dualism, visible in his theory of the transmigration of the soul—a result which Origen's profound monism caused him to avoid. Moreover, Origen's *λόγος* is never a mere hypostasis; he, indeed, combats the idea mainly on the ground that knowledge would be impossible on the principles of a fundamental dualism. Origen's *λόγος* is, primarily, a historical person, in whom are "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," by whom we come to know the "how and why" of all things. Philo's *λόγος* is patterned after the Stoic theory of forces; Origen's after the self-conscious soul. The key to these differences lies in the fact that Origen's reflection arose out of experiences such as Philo never had. Both were monotheists of the most pronounced kind; both adopted the argument of prophecy as an epistemological datum; but Origen was a Christian, and the incomparable richness of Origen's conception of knowledge, its nature, processes, and results, was doubtless partly due to this fact. The closeness of the connection between the two must not, however, be lost sight of. A good illustration of this is found in the fact that Origen answers the strictures of the Jew, introduced by Celsus in his *True Discourse*, just as a Hellenistic

Jew, like Philo, would have done, and actually used the weapons of the Jewish school of Alexandria in conducting his argument.²⁰ It is also highly probable that he also made use, in this connection, of certain Jewish apocryphal books, in which Zoroastrian tenets and Jewish religious ideas were mixed; but, with Dénis,²¹ we feel compelled to deny that Origen was indebted to these sources for his main data; for these were derived from Christianity, from the traditions of the church, the *regula fidei*, and from Greek philosophy in the main.

These, then, were the influences which helped Origen to form his conception of knowledge. In obedience to these influences, which contributed to make up that complex which we conveniently call the *Zeitgeist*, we may see why our author's views came to possess the character they have. Basing himself on the speculative view that in Christ we have the unity of subject and object, he thinks that herein is also given the unity of all the scattered knowledges of the nations; the precipitate, so to speak, amid all the seething influences, mention of which has been made in the second part of our study. Knowledge is not a reasoned process, though reasoning may lead to knowledge and is an integral part thereof; but Origen, in common with the time, emphasizes the intuitional aspect, and therefore knowledge is a gift, a surprise, a charisma, from the Absolute Mind; absolutely unattainable without free will, yet entirely independent of the action of the will. Knowledge is Christianity; the *revelation* of the love of God to a fallen world. Subjectively, knowledge is the content of the moral will of the good. This content, which Christ embodied objectively in his person, is no other than the content of the universal moral judgment made explicit and universal. Error, therefore, is a matter of *will*. Motivated by love, which is the movement of the will toward the truth, it (the will) progresses toward the goal of all cognition, viz., the complete envisagement of the good (*τὸ καλόν*), or the vision of all in God. This activity between the finite personal will and other will expresses our author's conception of all knowable reality. Thus the principal element concerned in knowledge is the will,

²⁰ *C. C.*, Bk. 1.

²¹ *Op. cit.*

and, as error is essentially the perversion of the will (from the morally good), the goal of all cognition must be the loving, unhesitating grasp of the reality of the idea of God's goodness. This is possible only slowly; "economically," so to speak; but the depth of Origen's optimism may be measured from the statement, already exhibited, that immortality and cognition include one another. It follows from this that that is authoritative which is declared true by the church in its highest experiences; but Origen's conception of authority is never hard, but resembles the position of more recent times, subsequent to the reign of the Augustinian theology. Authority can never quench reason.²²

In conclusion, we may admit that the value of these conceptions is historical. The study of Origen's philosophy is, in the opinion of the writer, of value in the broadest sense, and especially in our day. He is the best type of the rational Christian philosopher who is also a dogmatic theologian; a man who ever called for a larger use of reason in the affairs of faith. This study of his theory of knowledge may serve to show a portion of a philosophy of spiritual monism, the nature of which deserves to be more fully set forth, as not a few of our present theological and philosophical controversies wait, for their solution, upon it or its equivalent.

²² Cf. ALLEN, *Continuity of Christian Thought*, pref. of first ed., p. ix and chap. I