

PHENOMENA. Only those things received under the conditions of time and space are regarded as “phenomena, insofar as they are thought as objects according to the unity of the categories” (*Critique of Pure Reason* [1st ed., 1781], A 248). In this text, as opposed to ordinary usage, phenomena are distinguished from appearances; the distinction, however, must be correctly understood. When one says, “The senses represent objects as they appear, the understanding as they are, the latter statement” must “be understood in the empirical meaning” (A 258), that is, as objects for the human mind. In contrast, the term “noumena (*intelligibilia*)” is applied to those things “which are merely objects of understanding, and which, nevertheless, can be perceived as such by intuition, though not by sensible intuition (therefore, *coram intuitu intellectuali*)” (A 249). The phenomena therefore are the things that appear to us in sensible intuition, whereas the noumena are the things in themselves, to which we have no access in sensible intuition, and so we can know objects in experience only as they appear to us, and not as they are in themselves.

Our concepts themselves can never determine an object; for this purpose, an intuition is needed to supplement such concepts, and for us this intuition can only be sensible. The human mind has no intellectual intuition that would make possible the “transcendental use” of our concepts, that is, a use that would reach the thing-in-itself “beyond the sphere of possible experience” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A 248). The noumena, however, are ordered to this usage, which is “not contradictory” (A 254), since they are “merely limiting concepts” (A 255); one encounters them not as “intelligible objects” but merely as “a problem” (A 256). They are not “arbitrary inventions” (A 255); on the contrary, they are “necessary” for our thinking (A 254), although only of “negative use” (A 255) “in order to impose a limit upon the presumptions of sensibility” (A 255). Here, moreover, one should “prevent sensible intuition from being extended to things in themselves,” and one should not claim that “sensibility is the only possible mode of intuition” (A 254). As a consequence, “our understanding attains in this way a sort of negative extension” (A 256), that is, our understanding is not limited by our sensibility, but rather needs to limit its own thinking based on sensibility by giving the name of *noumena* to things that cannot be considered as phenomena. Our understanding would do well to impose limits upon itself by recognizing that it cannot know these noumena by means of the categories; hence, “it is compelled to think of them merely as of an unknown something” (A 256).

Beyond this usage lies that of the moral order, which shows man “as a being endowed with internal freedom

(*homo noumenon*)” (*The Metaphysics of Morals* [1797] 1968, 6:418), and which can give to his “causality as a noumenon” (*Critique of Practical Reason* [1788] 1968, 5:50) “for the first time objective, although only practical, reality” (5:48).

By way of evaluation, it may be said that Kant loses what can be gained by the sort of synthesis characteristic of Aquinas’s thought, for he does not call upon the process of abstraction to obtain the noumena—for example, essences and being—from the phenomena. At the same time, in a certain way he returns to Plato by assuming that the noumena are accessible to intellectual intuition alone, even though he justly denies to the human mind an accessibility to such intuition.

SEE ALSO CRITICISM, PHILOSOPHICAL; DUALISM; KNOWLEDGE, THEORIES OF; VORSTELLUNG.

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NOUS

The term *nous* appears throughout the history of GREEK PHILOSOPHY, from the pre-Socratics to PROCLUS (c. AD 410/412–485). For this reason, the translation of this term into modern English as INTELLIGENCE, INTELLECT, thought, mind, and even SPIRIT cannot be precise. It would seem prudent to preserve the original Greek term and to use a translation only when the context in which the term appears makes clear which of these is especially appropriate.

Present in Homer (ὁ νόος) to signify mental perception—comprehension, thought, project (see *Iliad* IX, 104; XVII, 176; *Odyssey* XVIII, 136)—the term *nous* acquires relevance in the philosophical as early as the first of the pre-Socratics. Besides PARMENIDES (c. sixth to fifth century BC), who identifies BEING with thought (τὸ νοεῖν) (frag. 3), considering both to be a single, complete, and absolute reality, it is especially ANAXAGORAS (c. 500–428 BC) who begins to develop a distinctive doctrine of *nous*. Anaxagoras understands *nous* to be the PRIME MOVER of the cosmos, the divine, providential, and omniscient cause, whose nature must be different from the material principle that is the origin of all things (frag. 12). Without clearly determining its ontological status, Anaxagoras understands that in order for *nous* to be able to fulfill its task of knowing and governing the physical world, it will have to be separate, not mixed with material reality: “only it is in itself” (μόνος αὐτὸς ἐπ’ ἑωυτοῦ ἔσται) [frag. 12, 6]. It is probable that SOCRATES’s (c. 469–399 BC) conception of divinity, according to Xenophon’s (c. 431–352 BC) testimony (*Memorabilia* I, 4, 8), was in part based on the teachings of Anaxagoras. This dual (psychological and cosmological) dimension of *nous* remains present in subsequent philosophical developments, in such a way that it will become relevant for psychology, COSMOLOGY, METAPHYSICS, and ETHICS, and also affects the realm of religion.

Despite their debts to Anaxagoras in regard to *nous*, both PLATO (c. 427/8–347/8 BC) and ARISTOTLE (384–322 BC) criticize Anaxagoras for insufficiencies in his treatment of the topic. According to Aristotle, Anaxagoras limited the use of *nous* to serving “as a *deus ex machina* for the making of the world, and when he is at a loss to tell for what cause something necessarily is, then he drags *nous* in, but in all other cases ascribes events to anything rather than to *nous*” (*Metaphysics* I, 4, 985a 18–21; cf. Plato, *Phaedo* 97c–98b). It will be these two thinkers, Plato and especially Aristotle, who will develop the doctrine of *nous*.

Nous in Plato. For Plato, the degrees of knowledge correspond to the different levels of reality. To achieve the superior sort of knowledge, which he called νόησις, is the goal of philosophy: that is, to know the principle of all that is real, the nonhypothetical principle on which all else depends (see *Republic* 511b 6–7). Below νόησις, Plato locates διάνοια, the reasoning proper to the sciences that, like mathematics, need to use figures and models. When Plato distinguishes the parts of the human soul in the *Republic* (439d–440b) and in the *Phaedrus* (253c–e), he does not introduce further distinctions within the rational soul (λογιστικόν), although in some texts he refers to *nous* as the guide that allows the soul to contemplate true being, the ideas (see *Phaedrus* 247c;

Letter VII 343b). In the *Timaeus*, Plato identifies the demiurge with *nous*, the intellect capable of contemplating the world of ideas—κόσμος νοητός—in the imitation of which it fashions the visible world, the physical cosmos, which it endows with a soul that possesses *nous*, and is thus apt to contemplate the ideal world and move the universe in a harmonious way, in imitation of the circular movement proper to *nous*. It is also thanks to the work of the demiurge that human souls participate in *nous* and are therefore able to raise themselves to the contemplation of supersensible reality (see *Timaeus* 29e–31a, 33b–34b, 41c–d, 69c–d; *Philebus* 30d–e; *Laws* 897b–898e).

Nous in Aristotle. In Aristotle, the doctrine of *nous* becomes more precise but more complicated. Among the various meanings that Aristotle attributes to *nous*, the following are the most relevant: (1) the concept of God, developed especially in *Metaphysics* Λ; (2) the soul’s faculty that allows man to know, as studied in *De anima* III, 4–5; (3) the distinction between theoretical *nous*, the function of which is to contemplate, and practical *nous*, the cognitive principle proper to human action (*De anima* III, 10); (4) the specific activity through which man accesses the first principles of knowledge (*Posterior Analytics* II, 19; *Nicomachean Ethics* VI, 6); and (5) the virtue proper to *nous*, in its function of knowing first principles (*Nicomachean Ethics* VI, 2–3).

In *Metaphysics* Λ, 7–9, Aristotle affirms that God, the first unmoved mover, on whom “depend the heavens and nature” (1072b 13–14), has to be PURE ACT, intelligence, νοῦς, which is identical to its contemplative activity: thought, νόησις, which thinks itself: “Its thinking is a thinking on thinking” (ἡ νόησις νοήσεως νόησις; 1074b 34). In *De anima*, Aristotle speaks of *nous* as the highest faculty of the soul. Precisely because it is capable of knowing all things, it cannot be attached to the body, as Anaxagoras similarly taught. Nevertheless, when explaining how man exercises his cognitive activity, Aristotle understands that it is necessary to distinguish between an intellect “which is what it is by virtue of becoming all things, [and] another which is what it is by virtue of making all things: this is a sort of positive state like light” (430a 16–17). The former is called νοῦς παθητικός: the capacity to know intelligible forms; the latter will be later called νοῦς ποιητικός, and its function is to actualize the cognitive capacity of the former. Only this latter power, because it is “separable, impassible, unmixed, since it is in its essential nature activity (τῇ οὐσίᾳ ὦν ἐνέργεια) [. . .], is immortal and eternal” (430a 17–23), and has a nature analogous to divinity in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. For this reason, it is logical to think that Aristotle is referring to the active intellect when he affirms, rather frequently,

that the intellect is what is most divine in man (see *Nicomachean Ethics* 1177a 15–16, 1177b 30; *De anima* 408b 29). He is also referring to the active intellect when, in his mysterious assertion *On the Generation of Animals*, he adds to his assertion of its divine nature a claim about its external origin: “*nous* alone enters in, as an additional factor, from outside, and it alone is divine” (736b 27–28).

In the sphere of epistemology, Aristotle calls *nous* the nondiscursive knowledge of axioms and the foundation and condition of the possibility of any further knowledge, and consequently regards it as superior in importance and exactness to scientific knowledge (see *Posterior Analytics* 100b 5–17). The difference with Plato, who thought that the human soul had to possess in itself some first notions as a ground for any other knowledge, is that for Aristotle, man reaches the knowledge of principles, *nous*, through an inductive process that starts from EXPERIENCE. Although there are divergent scholarly interpretations about this question, the meaning that Aristotle attributes to *nous* in this context does not seem to be that of a simple intuition devoid of any previous rational activity.

Aristotle distinguishes among the intellectual virtues two that correspond to the practical use of the intellect—ART and PRUDENCE—and two corresponding to the theoretical use—science and WISDOM. He also presents *nous* as a proper virtue in its function of apprehending first principles; he is relatively silent, however, when determining its specific characteristics. With some probability, Aristotle considered the virtue of *nous* in relation both to the knowledge of theoretical and to that of practical principles (see *Nicomachean Ethics* VI, 2–3, 1139b 12–17). Both Plato’s and Aristotle’s assertions regarding *nous* will later be rethought, both in Academic and Peripathetic circles.

Plotinus and Later Thinkers. The philosopher who later paid most attention to *nous* was PLOTINUS (AD 204–270). He considered *nous* to be the second subsisting HYPOSTASIS, after the One. Plotinus criticizes Aristotle because Aristotle’s *nous* does not have the simplicity necessary for the first principle, as he makes of it simultaneously subject and object of intellection. The first principle should be absolutely simple, and thus it should be beyond being and thinking, the One from which *nous* proceeds as its image, being an absolute thought that contains in unity the multiplicity of differences. *Nous* is for Plotinus unity-multiplicity and is the identity of being-thought (see *Enneads* V, 3). Out of *nous* emerges the third hypostasis, soul. Every other soul, including the human soul, depends on it. For Plotinus, and for his disciple PORPHYRY (c. AD 234–after 301), part of the human soul would be linked to *nous*, allowing man in his condition of incarnate soul to return to the

first principle (see *Enneads* IV, 7, 10–13).

Plotinus elaborated on his doctrine of *nous* using Middle Platonic speculation, probably from the *Didaskalikos* of Alcinous (AD first to second century), who—following the teachings of Antiochus of Ascalon (first century BC)—makes of God a first *nous*, containing in itself the ideas, out of which a second *nous* would proceed, probably a reflection of the world soul of the *Timaeus* (see *Didaskalikos* 9, 3, 1–3; 10, 2, 1–9; 10, 3, 1–14; 14, 3, 4–9). Before him, PHILO JUDAEUS (13 BC–AD 45/50), in the context of creationism, understood the God of Genesis as *nous*, the intellect that creates the universe following the dictates of its wisdom (see *De opificio mundi* 8, 1–9, 4; 16, 1–19, 4).

The *De anima* of Alexander of Aphrodisias (AD second century), based in large part on Aristotle’s work of the same name, quite likely influenced Plotinus’s speculation about the *nous*, as well as later Islamic and medieval doctrine. In his attempt to solve some of the *aporias* in the Aristotelian treatise, Alexander drew together various statements by Aristotle, linking the *nous* that comes from outside with the god of the *Metaphysics*, and also with the *nous* separated from matter, νοῦς ποιητικός from *De anima*. He concluded that the latter had to be common to all men, thus making its activity necessary to allow for human thought. The work of Alexander translated into Arabic, along with its commentary in the tenth century by ALFARABI (c. 870–950) and taking into account as well the speculation of Marinus of Neapolis (fifth century), a disciple of Proclus, influenced the views of AVICENNA (980–1037) and AVERROËS (1126–1198). In the fourth century, Themistius, author of a commentary on *De anima*, was more faithful to the Aristotelian text and opposed Alexander’s interpretation of the active intellect. THOMAS AQUINAS (c. 1225–1274) would later follow his line of interpretation.

SEE ALSO ARISTOTELIANISM; EMANATIONISM; ILLUMINATION; PLATONISM.

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NUMINOUS

Rudolph OTTO (1869–1937) coined the term “numinous” in his book *Das Heilige*, published in 1923 (translated as *The Idea of the Holy*). By this term he meant to capture the uniquely religious element in the concept of the holy. He feared that, under Kantian influence, the term “holy” had been reduced to a purely ethical concept, that is, moral perfection alone. He affirmed this moral dimension of the term but asserted that HOLINESS also carries transcendent religious implications. Otto held that the numinous represents the non-rational dimension of GOD, whereas moral predicates such as JUSTICE, along with the traditional NAMES OF GOD, such as omnipotent and omniscient, represent the rational aspect of God.

Otto also objected to Friedrich Daniel Ernst SCHLEIERMACHER’s (1768–1834) subjectivization of the origin of RELIGION in man’s feeling of dependency, from which—supposedly—man then concludes God is an explanation. This approach implies that religion begins with a purely subjective experience of the self.

Otto’s View of Religious Experience. Otto said, rather, that the fundamental religious experience is a transcendent, intentional response to a holy being that is the object of religious WORSHIP or consciousness. Therefore, feeling-responses are not merely subjective or “self” feelings but meaningful responses to an object that can be described and reflected on. The characteristics of the object are what inform or explain that response. So, religion is not merely subjective in origin and is not irrational in the sense of coming from below the level of reason, but suprarational, coming from above in relation to a transcendent object.

On the part of the subject, this basic religious experience is a feeling of creaturehood as one stands before the holy being. To describe the religious dimension of this experience, Otto invented the word “numinous” to highlight the specifically religious elements of the experience of the holy being. The holy implies complete moral perfection but also specific religious qualities that cannot be reduced to either moral or aesthetic qualities. Otto described the religious object as the *Mysterium tremendum et fascinans* and as having the following six qualities:

1. A quality that awakens a specific religious awe or FEAR or shuddering, not reducible to the objects of other types of fears such as natural fear, fear of harm, or fear of moral transgression or punishment; a crude form of this element of the numinous would be the feeling that a good ghost story can convey involving unique feeling-dimensions, such as goose bumps or hair standing on end, not present in natural fears;
2. An overpowering majesty, before which one feels as “dust and ashes”;
3. An energy or urgency addressing oneself in particular: a living God;
4. An experience of deep mystery, of the numinous being as “wholly other” than this world and the kinds of beings in it; however, this should not be taken to mean that no analogous knowledge is possible;
5. A fascinating and attractive quality, for, despite all of the above, which might seem only daunting, the numinous being is also experienced as fascinatingly attractive from the very depths of one’s being, and not just as a source of power for one to tap into, but in itself; and finally,
6. A unique kind of sacred value: the numinous is experienced as “august.”

Otto stressed that no natural trait (e.g., a fear of lions) could ever explain a numinous trait (religious fear