Origen of Alexandria: Spheres, Squares and Other Abstract Objects

Robert M. Berchman

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My aim is: to teach you to pass from a piece of
disguised nonsense to something that is patent nonsense.
Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* #464

Précis

There is a story - *Flatland* – about a square which lives in a two-dimensional world. [1] One day a square is enlightened by a sphere about the three-dimensional world. The square cannot see the sphere except as a two-dimensional projection in his flat two-dimensional world. A circle magically appears, grows, and shrinks out of existence as it moves through a plane. The clever way in which the sphere enlightens the square is with the cryptic nonsense phrase "upward not northward." In square language this is strictly nonsense for upward and northward are synonymous. Of the four possible directions of movement to flatlanders if gravity pulls southward, north is up and south is down. Thus when the sphere says "upward not northward" it is like someone saying: "come closer but do not get any nearer" which sounds like nonsense. But in the case of the sphere talking to the square, this is not nonsense but an illuminating sort of nonsense designed to turn mind in a third direction - beyond the limits of their worlds - to other possible worlds.

Origen has little patience for disguised or patent nonsense preferring a good bite of 'illuminating nonsense'. He proposes that *gnothi seauton* and *homoiosis theo* are not generalizations derived from experience psychologism]; not subjective mental states with psychological properties [intuitionism]; not signs or a game played with signs or a manipulation of linguistic symbols [formalism]; but abstract objects or conceptually independent intelligible objects [realism]. He claims that transcendent subjectivity is dependent upon a *gnothi seauton* [a god within]. He argues that *gnothi seauton* triggers a

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[1] Abbott, (1996) 47-65.

desire for ascent to a *homoiosis theo* [likeness to God] wherein a transcendent self beyond an empirical self and an ideal language beyond ordinary language are acquired - through the *praxis* of contemplative prayer. [2]

Controversies

Controversy swirls about Origen's knowledge and use of later Platonic, Aristotelian and Pythagorean sources; [3] and whether use denotes dependency - thereby compromising Christian principles. [4] Even though there are differing social allegiances to philosophical schools and religious communities in late antiquity it may well be that such an approach is reductionist and thus misleading. [5] The Hadot-Wittgenstein thesis may offer a way out an intractable, unnecessary impasse. [6] The argument is straightforward: 1] language is a tool or instrument with a family resemblance of various activities; 2] its rules are signposts that point toward shared practices; and 3] since language use is public thus claims that there are private languages is anachronistic. These claims carry implications. Since language derives meaning from its public context, Origen's use of metaphysical

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[2] Since there is an extensive recent historical-literary reference and scholarship on *gnothi seauton*, *homoiosis theou*, and prayer on the *corpus Origenianum* exists. For detailed studies of these concepts from an historical, literary, and textual perspective see Castagno, (2000); Limone, (2018); Crouzel, (1962); Edwards, (2002); Ramelli, (2009) 217-263; and on the spiritual senses in general, cf. e.g. Gavrilyuk and Coates, (2001). This enquiry focuses primarily on questions in Origen's epistemology of theology, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of language.

[3] For analysis of Origen's use of philosophical sources, see Limone, (2018).

[4] Within Origen studies two options represented by: 1] Crouzel, (1962); Edwards, (2002) and; 2] Ramelli, (2009) 217-263; Limone, (2018) remain dominant. Either one denies a direct and constitutive Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical influence on Origen's theology; or admits of indirect and derivative influence of later Platonic and Aristotelian thought on Origen's philosophical theology. Arguments for 'distancing' Origen from later ancient philosophy rest on textual and literary claims that range from the few direct citations of Origen of pagan sources; of the distinction between the Christian and Pagan Origen; that Origen wrote no commentaries on Platonic or Aristotelian texts; and that his thought is articulated through distinct Patristic exegetical and hermeneutical *topoi* distinct from Stoic and Platonic ones.

[5] See, Heide, (2016) 41-59.

[6] P. Hadot, (1998/2004); Wittgenstein, (1958).

language infers no commitment to a Platonic, Aristotelian, Pythagorean or Stoic *suntassein.* Moreover, since his use of a later Platonic-Aristotelian grammar and syntax rests on *nous-logos* ontological and epistemological claims, no essential differences exist between kinds of first principles metaphysics. With a network of overlapping similarities they constitute a family resemblance of metaphysical sets with shared characteristics rather than different philosophical systems.

Horizons

Origen's metaphysics are anchored in the realist claim of causally deriving the *panta* [all] of being from a triune monistic *arche* [principle]. Initially adumbrated in the *anupotheton* [ungrounded] of the *idea tou agathou* [Form of the Good], which is Plato's response to the Parmenidean One, the Form of the Good functions as both an intelligibility and ontological ground that gives rise to and sustains all beings and forms of life. Origen's Logos as *idea ideon* and *ousia ousion* functions similarly.[7] As an *arche dunamis* Logos contains the Forms in his mind as a pre-figuration; and as *energeias* he instantiates these in matter as beginnings, causes, and species of creation through use of a metaphysic of prepositions. [8]

Origen's 'abstract object realism' follows from such premises. As a foundationalist, his epistemology is primarily *of* theology and *of* first philosophy and secondarily a theory of knowledge. [9] It is based on Plato's Republic, Parmenides, *Meno*, *Theatetus* and portions of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and *De Anima*. [10] He also inherits a middle Platonic reception of Plato and interpretation of Aristotle via a commentary tradition mediated by Ps. Aristotle's *De Mundo* and Alexander of Aphrodisias's *De Intellectu* and *De Anima*. [11] His epistemology of theology is informed by an Aristotelian notion where

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[7] Origen, *CCels* VI.64; II.135; *DePrin* I.4.5.68ff.

[8] Origen, *De Prin* I.2.30.7; I.4.3.65; I.2.12.45. cf. Koch, 1932: 255; Berchman, (1983)130-131.

[9] On Origen's epistemology of theology, see Berchman, (2017) 340-353.

[10] On Aristotle in the Greek *Patres*, see Runia, (1989) 1-34; On Origen's use of Aristotle see Heide, (2016) 41-59; cf. Berchman, (1992) 231-252; (1984) 167-200.

[11] For use of both treatises by Origen, see Boehm, (2003) 451-463; Berchman, (1992) 241-242.

knowledge is not merely an internal activity of grasping external objects in inner space, but one of an instance [*nous*] exemplifying its kind, which Aristotle following Plato called *Nous*. A focal theory of meaning emerges here where 'Being' is said in many senses and different beings are not said to be purely homonymous, but rather to be "related to one thing (πρόσ *ev*). [12]

Numbers and Other Abstract Objects

The notion of language games is an analogy to emphasize that we should look at the many ways language is used in context without assuming that these uses have a common essence. Use of arithmology as an exegetical tool by Philo and Origen is an example of a language game or family resemblance whose use does not denote a common Neopythagorean essence.

Philo of Alexandria proposes that: 1] there is an identity between numbers and things; 2] numbers describe facts about other abstract objects; 3] God and Logos are abstract objects that fall into the same class as numbers; 4] like numbers they belong to concepts but are not properties of any concept; and 4] like numbers they are neither spatial, nor physical, nor subjective. [13] Origen also assumes an identity between numbers and things. [14] Among these are: firstly, notions of meaning where being is related to God and Logos as 'monad[s];' [15] secondly, to Logos as 'the [first] counted or countable number;' [16] and

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[12] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1003a33-34. G.E.L Owen translates this ττρός *εv* formula as "focal meaning", and in his paraphrase, it means that all the "senses [of 'being'] have one focus, one common element", or "a central sense", so that "all its senses can be explained in terms of substance and of the sense of 'being' that is appropriate to substance." Owen, (1960) 168-9 and189.

[13] For example monad and one [One as Monad and One as the first sequence of numbers] discloses the nature of the unity which is God and Logos; and secondly, that numbers as abstract objects instantiate and provide a mapping of concrete objects. For example the number six provides an arithmological account of the six days of creation [Gen 1:31b LXX]. On Philo's exegetical use of the number one, see *Opf.* 15, 27, 35, *Leg* 2.3, *Praem* 39; and the number six see *Opf.* 13. cf. Berchman, 2013, 179-183.

[14] On Origen, Clement and Alexandrian Pythagoreanism, see G. Bostock, (2003) 465-478.

[15] Origen, *CJh* I.20-23.

[16] On the counted or countable number see Aristotle, *Physics*, IV.11 219b6.

thirdly where being is mapped through mathematical notions of 'class [identity] and extension [relation].' [17]

Numbers are central to this *pros hen* scheme. Since numbers are objects of intellect or conceptually independent objects [mathematical realism], they are neither spatial, nor physical, nor subjective, but are non-sensible and objective. Moreover, while numbers belong to concepts, they are not a property of any concept. This is clear from the etymology of *arithmos*. [18] The word is related to *ARO*, usually found in the longer form of *ararisko*, 'to join, put together.' *Arithmos*, therefore, has the connotation of something joined - a structure. Numbers thus are understood as structures, so that one speaks of triangular, square, or pentagonal numbers. This is clear from the representation of the *tetraktos*, the arrangement of the numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4: [19]
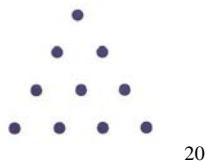
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[17] For example, the commonplace statement of identity that Jupiter's moons are four, which looks as if predicates four of Jupiter's moons, should be read as the number of Jupiter's moons is four, as asserting that the two objects – the number of Jupiter's moons and four – are identical. The "is" in "is four" is not the ordinary predicative "is" but asserts numerical not qualitative identity just as in "Euclid *is* the discoverer of geometry." Statements of relation are about the affinity: contingent/accidental - *per se*; or necessary/essential - *a se* between numbers and things. cf. Berchman, (2013)168.

[18] On the rules of Neopythagorean language games see Berchman (2013) 172-178.

[19] Formalism is often mistakenly associated with Neopythagorean mathematics where mathematical activity comprises the study of possible formal manipulations within a system, as well as the manipulations themselves, where "symbols" need not be regarded as either linguistic or concrete. But practicing Neopythagorean 'exegetes' like Philo, Clement, Origen, Nicomachus, Numenius, Middle and Neoplatonic commentators of the *Timaeus* and 'pythagoreanizing' Gnostics hold that: the "finitary" part of mathematics, or the simple truths of arithmetic, describes indubitable facts about real objects; and that the "ideal" objects that feature in mathematics [geometricals] facilitate research about abstract and concrete objects. Such emerges when it is proposed proposes that first principles are known in accordance with a mathematical grammar and syntax proper to their being.

[20] The sum of 1+2+3+4=10, and ten is a triangular number. The number one represents some special problems, since in Pythagorean thinking it was not

Origen predicates unity of each of the different levels of divinity. God the Father is:

> A simple intellectual essence, or if I may say so a unity [*henas*] throughout…[21]

The Logos is a one and the Spirit is an intellectual existence that cannot be divided. [22] In the *Peri Archon* Origen also references God the Father and the *Logos* in mathematical terms. They are called a first and second 'one' –a simple one and a one-in-many:

> The Father is purely and simply one, is absolutely simple, Whereas there is multiplicity in our Saviour…he was one but For this reason became many as well. [23]

The rational structure among first principles and creation is mathematical-geometrical and includes the affinity of numbers and things: [24]

> i.   God is a simple one beyond the monad who is the ground of creation: or a
>
>   . [point] – and is one dimensional

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considered part of the numerical system, so that two was the first even number and three the first odd number. Thus there are three meanings of the number one:

    a) one as *monad*
    b) one as that which is beyond *monad*
    c) one as the first in the sequence of numbers

According to Aristotle, the Greeks distinguished between two types of numbers:[43]

    1)   'the number which we count' (*arithmos o arithmoumen*) and
    2)   'the counted or countable number' (*arithmosarithmoumenos or arithmetos*).

The former is the number used every time we count: one, two, and three...The latter is represented by duas, trias, tetras... and is best translated as 'pair, triplet, quadruplet...' in a concrete sense. The understanding of *arithmos* as 'something joined together,' as a 'structure' is clearly seen in Aristotle's definition of 'melody' as an *arithmos dieseon*, a structure or arrangement of small half tones. Similarly Aristotle defines a polygon as an *arithmos trigonon*, a structure or arrangement of triangles. It is this concept of *arithmos arithmetos* which forms the foundation of the teaching about the identity of numbers and things, or, in a weaker form, of the affinity between numbers and things.

[21] Origen, *DePrin* I.1.6.

[22] Ibid. *Clo* II.4; *De Prin* I.1.3

[23] Origen, *CJnh*, I. 20-21.

[24] For parallels see Philo's mapping of the "number" one and the number one beyond the monad, see Berchman 2013: 181-183.

ii. Logos as Saviour is the monad, a one-in-many, the first in the sequel of numbers: or a

.. [line] – and is two dimensional

In addition:

iii. Logos as Demiurge is the cause of being and existence.
iv. Logos as Christ stands halfway between divine unity and the multiplicity of creation. As a power of unity and order he is able to order chaos and restore the world to harmony.
v. Creation is the actualization of divine forms in the sensible world through the agency of the demiurgic intellect.[25]

Following Origen's understanding of a cosmic Fall and Restoration there is a continuous flow from the monads into a state of multiplicity and division:

From one beginning arise many differences and varieties, which in their turn are restored…through their subjection to Christ and their unity with the Holy Spirit, to one end, which is like the beginning. [26]

And:

The great diversity of this world comes from the diversity of the motions of those who fell away from the original unity in which they were created by God...but he recalls these very creatures, so different from each other in mental quality, to one harmony of work and endeavor...to produce the harmony of a single world. [27]

The God who brings together his creation into a harmonious whole is in the words of [Wisdom. 11: 21] is he: "who made all things in number, measure and weight." On the basis of this text, Origen goes on to stress that rational creatures and physical matter are made according

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[25] Philo also maps the demiurge and creation in mathematical-geometrical terms.
iii. Logos as Demiurge is a many-in-one, the second in the sequel of numbers: or a

. [plane, area] – and is three dimensional

..
iv. Creation is the first number to show the nature of the solid: or a

:: [square] – and is four dimensional. Philo, *Opif.* 53; 60. cf. Plato, *Timaeus*, 27dff; 53bff.

[26] Origen, *De Prin* I.6.2.

[27] Ibid.II.1.1-2.

to 'abstract objects' such as number and measure; that consequently harmony applies to the ordering of creation; [28] the ordering of his love; [29] the determination of times and seasons; [30] and to the nature of his judgment. [31] Crucial here is - if there is an arithmological connection between first principles, numbers and things – the existence of abstract objects are crucial to extending Origen's proposal.

Arguments for the existence of abstract objects offered by Plato were long debated in the Academy. [32] The status of Forms and mathematical objects are of a characteristically Platonic interest in two ways: firstly, science cannot be done without numbers and secondly, abstract entities such as Forms and Numbers are identical with the divine intellect. The status of abstract entities was not only a matter of deep concern in the Academy. The crucial question is: since the Logos is the place of Forms and other abstract objects such as numbers [33] - are other mental and physical states and their properties, including the *epinoiai, logikoi* and *theoremata* of the Saviour possible abstract objects as well? [34]

There are three arguments in philosophy of mathematics that justify the existence of Forms, numbers and other abstract objects. Proofs that numbers, possible worlds, sets, relations, properties, and mental states such as sense and meaning are - *a priori* and real - include: [35] 1] the indispensability argument, which shows that since we cannot do empirical science without numbers, the claim that metaphysically good reasons exist to affirm the existence of non-physical entities; [36] 2] the

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[28] Origen, *DePrin* II.9.1.

[29] Ibid. *CCt* III.

[30] Ibid. *CMts* 74.

[31] Ibid. *CRm* II.3.

[32] The status of mathematical objects was at the center of debate in the Academy. See (Findlay) 1974, 57ff.

[33] Origen defines Logos as *idea ton ideon* cf. *CCels*. VI.64.1; the *ideai, eide* and *logoi* are contained in Logos cf. *De Princ., I.4.5.68*; *CJh* I.24.1 as pre-figurations of all the genera and species of the sensible world cf. *CCels*. V.39.43.

[34] As proposed later, this appears to be so. cf. Wolinski, (1995) 465-494.

[35] Contemporary questions about abstract objects have their origins in Frege's distinction between abstract and concrete objects where numbers, sets, relations and properties are viewed as both abstract [a priori] and real.cf. Frege, (1980).

[36] Field, (1989) 14-20. The indispensability argument establishes the truth of a claim based on the inferential indispensability of the claim. Descartes claims something is conceivable if it is logically possible [*Meditations* VI]. Hume proposes that if it is causally possible, whatever is conceivable is possible.

ontological commitment argument, that maps how a first philosophy theory could be reduced to a series of ontological commitments in a variety of ways; so that a single theory can admit of a plurality of ontological interpretations without favoring one over others; [37] and 3] the conceivability argument, which proposes that the existence of abstract entities is conceivable if it does not involve a logical contradiction. [38]

Another version of the conceivability argument is Leibniz's law. Entities are identical only if they share all properties in common. On the basis of these arguments God and mind are logically possible for their possibility not only does not involve a contradiction, but abstract entities like God and minds are possible because they do not share the same properties as physical entities. The Quine-Putnam indispensability argument has attracted a great deal of contemporary attention, in part because many see it as the best argument for mathematical realism (or platonism). Thus anti-realists about mathematical entities (or nominalists) need to identify where the Quine-Putnam argument goes wrong. Many platonists on the other hand rely on this argument to justify their belief in mathematical entities. The argument places nominalists who wish to be realist about other theoretical entities of science (quarks, electrons, black holes and such) in a particularly difficult position. For typically they accept something quite like the Quine-Putnam argument as justification for realism about quarks and black holes. This is what Quine calls holding a "double standard" with regard to ontology. The indispensability argument also offers a good argument for metaphysical realism for it places physicalists, who are realists about the existence of the theoretical entities of physics, to consider the existence of the theoretical entities of metaphysics [Ideas, first causes and principles, minds, God and such] as real. To consider the Quine-Putnam argument as justification for realism about quarks and electrons but not about Ideas and first causes, would involve another "double standard" with regard to ontology.

[37] Quine, (1953) 13-19. The ontological commitment argument has generated contemporary controversy because it offers a good argument not only for ontological pluralism and ontological relativity but for Aristotelian and Neoplatonic ontologies. Whatever ontology a given theory or language commits to, are the sorts of existences that the theory commits itself to. Ontological commitments are commitments to the existence of certain sorts of entities. When we talk about either individual things or kinds of things, we commit ourselves to the existence of the things we talk about.

[38] Conceivability = logical possibility. On the basis of different versions of the 'conceivability argument' or Leibniz's law [A and B are identical to each other only if they have all properties in common] a second distinction between the content of thought and language and the neurological-psychological processes of thinking and speaking can be made. The content of thought and language, as distinct from their processes, are inclusive of meaning or reference.

Summary I.

Origen proposes a metaphysics partially characterized by Neopythagorean mathematics. [39] He infers from realist premises that abstract objects exist in the mind of God. What requires explanation is why without them self- knowledge and subjectivity would be incoherent and inexplicable. What piques interest further is - if Forms and numbers as abstract objects exist, then are other abstract objects ontologically warranted as well? Would they include divine names, attributes and even mental activities such as prayer? On the basis of the indispensability, ontological commitment and conceivability arguments such identity claims appear plausible. [40] Given the principle of unity or the identity of God, Logos and creation - a god within; and a desire for likeness unto god -abstract objects are open to internalization; to interiority through the agency of contemplative prayer. [41]

A God Within and Likeness to God

A.C. Lloyd distinguishes between two notions of self-knowledge: *conscientia* [consciousness] and *gnothi seauton* [god within] that may

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[39] See Origen's comments on the number 50. cf. *CMt* XI.3.Following Philo, *Spec*. II.176-177; and Clement, cf. *Strom*. VI.11.

[40] Informally, identity is a relation each thing bears to itself: the identity of *a* and *b* implies, and is implied, by *a* and *b* sharing all their properties. There are two kinds of identity. *Numerical* identity or isomorphic similarity is distinguished from *qualitative* identity or exact similarity. Things are *numerically* identical only if they are one and the same thing [i.e. have the same *intrinsic* properties in common]: the Evening Star and the Morning Star are the same. Things are *qualitatively* identical if they look the same [i.e. have the same *extrinsic* properties in common]: planets, stars, identical twins and Ford automobiles are quantitatively identical. Objects also differ in respect of their intrinsic and extrinsic properties. A thing's intrinsic or inherent properties never change whereas its extrinsic properties do as Cambridge properties - a subset of extrinsic properties Cambridge change is non-genuine change. In this sense, an object's *numerical* identity is *a se* or isomorphic identity with no change possible in intrinsic properties while qualitative identity is *per se* or similar. For example, the commonplace statement that Jupiter's moons are four, which looks as if it predicates four of Jupiter's moons, should be read as the number of Jupiter's moons is four, as asserting that the two objects – the number of Jupiter's moons and four – are identical. The `is' in `is four' is not the ordinary predicative `is' but asserts numerical *identity*, just as in Euclid is the discoverer of geometry.

[41] See Origen, *CCt* Preface; *Orat*. 1.

help clarify Origen's notions of 'consciousness' and 'interiority.' Self-knowledge in the Platonic tradition is anchored in a *gnothi seauton* that consummates in a *homoiosis theo* [union with God: Plato, *Theaet* 176ab]. [42] The crucial point to note is that subjectivity [self-reflexivity] cannot be translated as consciousness of the kind which après Descartes knows only its own internal mental states in their representational, phenomenalist or constituting activities. [43]

The discovery of a *logos* self-knowledge and subjectivity results in an awareness that there is a [qualitative] identity of thinking and being. Indeed, the veracity of subjectivity, subjective states, and self-knowledge rests ultimately not only on being conscious of the *causal* relationship between self or subject and first principles but on recognition of a '*gnothi seauton*' complemented by a desire for '*homoiosis theo*.'

Origen develops the principles of 'a god within' and achieving 'likeness unto god' in terms of a strict moral and ascetic way of life, through which the subject transcends its empirical self and becomes like god. Here a later Pythagorean and Middle Platonic notion of the soul's need to be in a state of attunement is stressed. Origen concurs: [44]

> The soul if found apart from that order and harmony
> in which it was created by God will…bear the penalty
> of its own want of cohesion. [45]

Echoing Philo, [46] Origen describes man as a musical instrument to emphasize the power of spiritual harmony:

> …the well-tuned instruments [*scil*. David and his sons]…
> were endowed with musical agreement. Such
> agreement is so effective that when just two who are in
> accord with the divine music put a request to the Father…
> he grants it. [47]

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[42] On *homoiosis theo* in Alexandrian Pythagoreanism and Origen, see G. Bostock (2003) 465-478. For where these terms appear in Origen's works, see Castagano, (2000); Limone, (2018).

[43] Gurtler, (2005) 113-130; Berchman, (2007) 175-190.

[44] G. Bostock, (2003) 474-478.

[45] Origen, *De Prin* II.10.5.

[46] Philo, *Cher* 128.

[47] Origen, *CMt* XIV 1.

Harmony is only preserved when the Good Shepherd guides the irrational impulses of the soul. [48]

The context for soul's development assumes a fall away from unity into multiplicity and a return to a state of unity and harmony:

> Our Saviour wishing to save man, wished to save
> his body, soul and spirit and so assumed all three. At
> the time of the Passion they were separated. At the time
> of the Resurrection they were united. [49]

Both concepts imply a redemption which encompasses the cosmic and subjective in four parsings: first, a fall from unity to multiplicity; secondly a return to unity and harmony; thirdly, the multiplicity of creation and the fragmentation of soul; and fourthly, a need for macrocosm and microcosm to be brought back into unity and harmony. On the Cross man is sundered and in the Resurrection he is united through Christ who harmonizes the three aspects of his being:

> The three have met together in his name, and he is
> there among them, because they are consecrated
> to him, and none of the three, body, soul or spirit are
> opposed to him. [50]

Ultimately the principle of *homoiosis theo* is related to the issue of correlation between divine and human unity. Clement notes:

> To believe in God ….is to become a unit, being indissolubly united in him; and to disbelieve is to be separated, disjointed, and divided. [51]

Origen proposes that the man who separates himself from God becomes many:

> When he sins, the man who is one becomes many…
> divided into parts and fallen from a state of unity. [52]

Clement maps assimilation to God through Pythagorean imagery.

> That Pythagorean saying was mystically uttered
> concerning us, that man ought to become one; for

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[48] Ibid, *Hier* V.6.

[49] Ibid, *Dial* 7. 1-16.

[50] Ibid. *CMt* XIV.3.

[51] Clement, *Strom.* IV.157.2.

[52] Origen, *Phil.* VIII.3.

> the high priest is himself one; God being one
> in the immutable state of the perpetual flow of good things. [53]

Origen concurs:

> God is one. He is described as one not only in number
> …but also in nature, because he never becomes anything
> other than himself…Similarly the imitator of God is
> himself one. [54]

Origen was well aware that skeptics, for example, not only denied that there could be knowledge of the external world, they also denied the possibility of self-knowledge, subjectivity Moreover they denied the epistemic certainty of a *gnothi seauton* or a *homoiosis theo tout court*. To refute these arguments, he proposes [along with Aristotelians and Platonists] a hierarchy of increasing self-awareness: beginning from sense-perception and ending in a *gnosis* where the mind discovers not only a transcendent self beyond an empirical self, and an *episteme* beyond the limits of somatic meaning and subjectivity but additionally an ideal language beyond ordinary language - wherein *Logos* speaks us and where divine aseity mixes with human perseity through the *praxis* of contemplative prayer.

How Origen managed to convince himself that *gnothi seauton* was a unified self-reflexivity rather than a binary self-consciousness rests upon giving the thinker the extended sense of participating in a single divine property - x rather than dual intelligible and sensible properties – y/z. He could not make this qualification explicit without relying on the Aristotelian distinction between sensitive and intellective souls. He viewed [self-reflexivity] as participating in a higher *nous poietikos* which leaves 'God within' to serve as the criterion of self-knowledge, subjectivity and meaning. Origen associates mind-as-reason with an 'exterior self' and mind-as-consciousness with an 'interior self' in 'union' with Logos. Once negating its exterior self [*sarx*], the soul finds a higher [*nous-pneuma*], and interior 'gnostic' self, who as a knower of all possible objects of spiritual awareness achieves *homoiosis theo*. [55] If this is plausible, he offers an image of self-consciousness, the subject, subjective states, and self-knowledge as a kind of 'inner sense' tied to the concept of *logos* as actualized self-

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[53] Clement, *Strom.* IV.151.3.

[54] Origen, *HReL* I.4.

[55] Plato, *Theaetetus*, 176ab.

consciousness which occurs when the self has *gnothi seauton*, thereby experiencing *homoiosis theo.* [56]

> …the highest good to which all nature is progressing…is
> That the highest good is to become as far as possible
> like God. ..man received the honor of God's image in his
> first creation but the perfection of God's likeness is reserved
> for him at the consummation. [57]

Within this context six claims come into play: 1] formal and final causality is the condition for the possibility of contemplative prayer; 2] mental states are actively reflective, and not merely passive and representational, when intentionally contemplating divinity; 3] *Logos* is a third thing as [*nous poietikos*] or 'active intellect' which as God's wisdom intentionally receives and directs human thought and speech; 4] the *logikoi*, *epinoiai*, and *theoremata* of the *Logos*-Christ are 'divine intentionalities that illuminate a soul's quest for unity with divinity; [58] 5] as love, bread and light these divine attributes intentionally direct human thought and speech toward first principles; and 6] the optimum way to 'intentionally' trigger the *logikoi*, *epinoiai* and *theoremata* of the *Logos*-Christ is through contemplative prayer and exegesis of Scripture. [59] There are various *epinoiai, logikoi* (*CCels.* II.24) and *theoremata* of Christ (*CJn* II.8) and each denotes *Logos* as he eternally as Christ is in the world. [60] The amount of wisdom, light, and love

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[56] For Neoplatonic parallels to Origen's appropriation of *gnothi seauton* and *homoiosis theo* see, Schroeder, (1986) 337-359; cf. Alfino, (1988) 273-284; Berchman, (2003) 437-450.

[57] Origen, *De Prin* III.6.1.

[58] On the theological significance of the mind-language predicates of the *Logos*-Christ see, Bertrand, (1951); Crouzel, (1961); Orbe, (1955) Ruis-Camps, (1970); Wolinski, (1995) 465-494.

[59] Origen, *CJn,* II.10. 64-65.

[60] Five theses follow from this notion of focal meaning: (1) There is an *episteme* [way of thinking] that contemplates [*theorei*] being as being [*on e on*] complemented by a *phusis* [nature] to which first principles and causes belong necessarily and per se [*kath' auto*]. 2) *Episteme* is not merely an internal activity of grasping external objects in inner space, but one of an instance [*nous*] exemplifying its kind, which following Plato he called *Nous*. (3) If the activity of human thinking [*episteme*] is a theorizing [*theorein*] that contemplates ultimate causes and first principles, then human *nous* must join *episteme* in contemplation [*theorei*], for it is *nous* that apprehends the causal structure of reality that *episteme* contemplates. This also means the *episteme* that contemplates the *phusis*

souls receive depends on the degree they are capable of attaining self-realization within '*theia aisthesis*.' (*HGn* I.8). Hence the *Logos* appears to different classes of souls according to their capacities. To the sick he will appear as healer, for guidance he appears as shepherd, and his appearance as Wisdom and Life is kept for the perfect for the extent to which the *Logos* is proportionate to their likeness to him. [61]

Summary II

Origen proposes a philosophical anthropology partially within Neopythagorean contexts. Incorporating harmony into his schema of salvation recognition of 'God within' triggers a sense of disharmony and disunity in the soul and a desire for 'assimilation to God.' In this act a negative-affective displacement occurs where soul empties itself and achieves an *arithmos* - a joining; a putting together whose end is *homoiosis theo*: [62] The acquisition of *gnothi seauton* and pursuit of *homoiosis theo* results in: 1] an abandonment of an empirical self, enframed by causal possibility, confined within sense and sensibility, and limited to ordinary language; 2] the acquisition of a transcendent self, open to logical possibility; and 3] access to an ideal language [prayer] that can neither be ordinarily - 'said' nor spoken of – but only 'shewn.' [63]

Contemplative Prayer

The passages which map Origen's aesthetics of prayer best are those which emerge in *On Prayer* and the *Commentary on the Song of*

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of 'being as being' has the character of *noesis* [intellection]. (4) Thinking is not an external thinking [of what we know other than ourselves as knowers] via images, representations, calculations, deductions or propositions. It involves no spatial difference, no mediating image or representation, no separation between knower and known, so as to turn self-knowledge into an unreliable knowledge of something else. (5) Thinking *refers.* It is always *of* or *about* something. *Noesis* involves no subject-object distinction; it is a pointing, extending, or an extending toward abstract objects [*prote ousia/aitiai*]. *Aisthesis* involves a subject object-distinction; it is a pointing, extending, or an extending toward concrete objects.

[61] For the theological and liturgical contexts of prayer in Origen see, Hurtardo, (1999); Bradshaw, (1992); Martin, (1964).

[62] In the case of prayer as *arithmos*, where *ARO*, usually found in the longer form of *ararisko,* the self is structurally joined to Logos and God.

[63] See, P. Hadot (2002) where prayer is mapped as a spiritual exercise [*melete*].

Songs. [64] But it is in the *Homilies on Leviticus* that a very blunt claim, in rather cryptic language surfaces, that symbolizes what the contemplative *praxis* of prayer in its *pros hen* sense means:

> I think that he is said to 'chew the cud' who gives his effort
> to knowledge and meditates on the law of the Lord day and night. [65]

An aesthetics and language of prayer emerges in Origen, where thinking and speaking *of* first principles are contemplatively associated with sights, smells, sounds, tastes, and touch. [66] His epistemology of theology is grounded in a two-fold aesthetics of prayer which proposes not only a visual, tactile and olfactory *noesis* but also a contemplative *praxis*. This *noesis* and *praxis* of sights, smells tastes and touch become logically possible [as an *arithmos*] within prayer by contemplatively applying the categories [of substance, quantity, quality, relation place, and position]. [67] Since Origen is keen to synthesize mental and physical property language to attempt a qualitative identity between mental and physical states, contemplative prayer often involves a non-propositional and non-discursive 'naming,' a noetic earthiness, wherein light, smoke, ringing, smoothness , food, drink, and sex "calls" forth an *episteme* of first principles through an aesthetics of prayer. [68]

In *On Prayer*, Origen distinguishes four types of prayer according to traditional *topoi* of invention: praise, thanksgiving, confession and petition. [69] He also distinguishes between petitionary prayer for earthly and spiritual goods. [70] The highest form of prayer is contemplative

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[64] Origen, *Orat*, I.1; *CCt* Pro. For studies on the spiritual senses in Origen and western Christianity see, Gavirlyuk and Coakley, (2011).

[65] Origen, *HomLev*, VII.6.

[66] On the spiritual senses in Origen see, Rahner, 1979: 81-103; Origen's concept of contemplative prayer complements well later Platonic theological-epistemological tenants.cf. I. Hadot, (1984); Addey, (2014) 137-142. cf. Berchman, (1991) 184-216.

[67] For the categories as applied to prayer see, Origen, *DeOr,* VI.I.

[68] There is an immense bibliography on early Christian prayer and liturgy but little on prayer as *episteme* or as contemplative *praxis.* For a concise discussion of this issue see McGuckin, (2004). For contextualizing Origen on prayer with later Platonic tropes, see Tiomkin and Dillon (2015).

[69] For Origen's use of rhetorical *topoi* see O'Cleirigh (1995) 277-286.

[70] See, O'Meara, (1954) 7.

utilizing a *'ennoeo ton theon'* or *'theoreo'* formulae. [71] Things worth praying for have a "true and intelligible character [*ton alethinon kai noeton*] [72] for contemplative prayer is not merely many words [*polulogia*], nor merely words [*logoi*], but *Logos* revealing itself to *logos.*

Through contemplative prayer a soul participates within a divine *noesis noeseos*:

> But whoever has contemplated [*ho tetheorekos*]
> The better and more divine things, which are necessary
> To Him, will obtain the objects of His contemplation
> [*on tetheoreke*], for they are known of God, and are
> known to the Father even before they are requested. [73]

This is so:

> For the eyes are lifted up from interest in
> Earthly things…they look beyond whatever
> Is begotten and contemplate [*ennoein*]
> God alone, and hold modest converse with
> The one who hears them. Such people afford
> The greatest benefit…being transformed into
> The image… [74]

Two cases illustrate such participation.

Example I. In the *arton epiousin* access to divine *noesis noeseos* meets two language criteria - clarity and silence. Origen's clarity is that he not only allegorically combines the image of 'heavenly bread,' or the 'bread of life' with the fourth line of the Lord's Prayer – "on earth as it is in heaven," but he also employs property language, and an early version of the conceivability argument, to show how a soul can contemplatively direct itself towards a union with God and *Logos.* [75] Indeed, mental and physical property languages are conflated, whenever Origen reflects on the mediatory role of Christ - "who as the "Word made flesh, comes to redeem all flesh." Indeed, since *epiousin*

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[71] Castagno, (2000).

[72] Origen, *Orat*, XIV.17

[73] Origen, *Orat*, XXI.2

[74] Ibid. IX.2.

[75] There are many examples of Origen's use of property language and the conceivability argument in his *Commentaries* and *Homilies*. cf. e.g. *Song of Songs*, III.V; XIV.III; *Exodus*, VII.4; *Judges*, VI.2; and Ezekiel, XIV.III.2.

is a heavenly food from Jesus himself, who receives his food from the Father alone, without the intervention of any other being, 'living bread' [*epiousion*] is noetic bread, intended for noetic man [*noetos anthropos*] alone. [76] Among its many activities, it nourishes soul's rationality, the highest of which is contemplation [*theoria*]. [77] Here he combines the image of a noetic *epiousion* with a mind-language unity that yields a human-divine nourishing:

> We must therefore think here of *ousia* as being the
> Same nature as bread. And just as material bread
> Which is used for the body of him who is being
> nourished enters into his substance, so the living bread
> and that which came down from heaven offered
> to the mind and soul, gives a share of its own proper power
> to him who presents himself to be nourished by it. [78]

Origen introduces a version of the 'conceivability argument' to complement his mixed-property 'language game.' Conceivability is an epistemological notion concerning what can be thought, conceived or imagined that does not involve a contradiction. Since the soul needs to contemplatively pray to attain a unity with first principles, and since the *arton epiousion* offers a way by which a soul can intentionally direct itself toward receiving the *Logos* incarnate as *epiousion*, any soul nourished, sustained and shaped by *Logos* possesses not only divine *ousia*, but a qualitative identity with divinity when soul eats the 'Word made Flesh' as noetic or "Heavenly Bread." [79] In receiving the Eucharist, soul and first principles share noetic properties in common. [80] To support such a mixed property language game, Origen quotes Jesus' words at Jn10:30 and Jn4:32: "I have meat to eat which you do not know"... [and since]…"I and the Father are one," the *Logos*-Christ

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[76]   Mentioned briefly in the Gospels and the *Didache* VIII.2, *epiousios* only generated ample discussion, in the context of contemplative prayer and meditative practice, après Origen: in Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Basil, Cyril of Jerusalem, Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, Damascene, and Theophylact. cf. Chase, 2004: 42-58; Metzger, (1968) 64-66.

[77] Origen, *Orat*, XIII.213.

[78] Ibid. XXVII.9.

[79] De Lubac, (2007) 397-398 and 406-416.

[80] Also known as Leibniz's Law: A and B are identical to one another only if they have all properties in common.

is the meat or nourishment for rational souls. [81] His notion of spiritual or noetic development unites the 'true bread' [Jn6:32] with the 'true man' [Gen1:27]. [82] In nuce, Jesus as living bread is the nourishing element of the true man. By 'eating' the *epiousion*, a soul receives Christ, sharing in his divine properties. Indeed, a meeting of the soul in Christ occurs that is for Origen both culinary and reflective: [83]

> Just as the Priest does not eat food in his own house
> Or in any other place but the Holies of Holies, so my
> Savior alone eats bread […] while no one is able […]
> when he eats, he draws me to eat with him. I stand and
> knock […] [84]

The *Logos*-Christ replies:

> The bread I will give is my flesh, which I will give
> For the life of the soul. [85]

Referencing Ex19:5 [LXX]: "you shall be to me a particular people out of all the nations," Origen also plays on the etymological similarities between and *epiousios* and *periousios* [they both derive from *ousia*]. [86] He notes that while *epiousios* metaphysically denotes divine and human *ousia* uniting, *periousios* also refers to the ecclesiastical unity of the new Israel or Church [*periousios*] partaking in the *ousia* of God. God's people are made into his *periousios* – "as those abiding with the *ousia* of God and partaking of it. Here Origen emphasizes not only the *I* - but the *We* character - of the *praxis* of contemplative prayer.

Example II. In a fragment from a letter written by Ambrose to Origen [quoted by Jerome in *Letter 43 to Marcella*], a *praxis* of silent prayer emerges that fills out Origen's aesthetic of prayer. Counter-intuitively, categories common to Scripture and later Platonism are used, not only to define the relationship between first principles, but to map a correct contemplative practice during prayer. [87] Employing the categories of

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[81] Origen, *Orat*, XIII.204.

[82] Ibid. XXVII.2

[83] Origen, *HomEz*, XXVII.2

[84] Origen, *Orat.* XIV.III.III.

[85] Ibid. XXVII.4.

[86] In *Orat*, XXVII.7. Working of Mt. 6:11, imagery of alimentary 'contact' with the divine is imaged allegorically and aesthetically by Origen.

[87] See, Berchman, (1992) 239-244.

substance, quantity, quality, time, place, position, relation and modality, a spatio-temporal map of when and how to pray is proposed by Origen. Meals were to be accompanied by reading Scripture. Since the posture of the body images the qualities of the soul in prayer, the best way to pray while eating is to extend hands with eyes elevated. Prayer could be conducted while sitting or lying down, if the person is ill. The corner of the house should serve as a sanctuary for both individual and communal prayer. In commenting on the direction of prayer, Origen advocates facing towards the East while praying which indicates the soul is looking toward the dawn of the true Light, the Sun of justice and salvation. [88] Through the mixture of mental and physical property language, soul acquires a divine 'imagery.' In nuce, the practice of contemplative prayer brings into consciousness images of light that allow not only for a suspension of ordinary thought and language, but a union of properties between knowing human subject and known divine object as far as that might be possible. [89]

Summary III

Prayer as a contemplative *praxis* matters.[90] Its techniques achieve an 'affective displacement' that delivers the soul to its *telos* – a vision of first principles when soul intentionally thinks and speaks empirical reality away. This fracturing of the operations of propositional and discursive reasoning opens the embodied soul up to the divine within [*gnothi seauton*]. The conclusions of propositional thought and discursive language, though cogent, cannot be grasped by a noetic soul within grasp of the divine. Contemplative prayer is also about *logos* accessing *Logos*. Prayer permits the flowering of *Logos* in the human *logos*. Origen's proposal is that the self [in the contemplative practice

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[88] Light is not a mere metaphor for Origen and Plotinus. It has substantiality. Following Aristotle, they define light as incorporeal *qua* luminous. cf. Beierwaltes, (1961) 334-362. cf. Schroeder, (1992) 25-28.

[89] Acts of prayer are conducted as a noetic-pragmatic thought experiment or an *enhorasis.* Here logical possibility, as distinct from causal possibility, is the key not only to contemplative exegesis and prayer but to the actual practice of prayer. Origen limits logical possibility to a priori and synthetic presuppositions and causal possibility to a posteriori and synthetic propositions. Since a mental state is logically possible if it does not involve a contradiction, Origen considers logically possible scenarios in any *act* of contemplative prayer - including *homoiosis theou*.

[90] There are similar affective patterns in Plotinus. On the affective character of Plotinian thought experiments see, Rappe, (1996) 259-266.

of prayer] becomes aware of its "iconic" mental and physical character. As soul negates its *sarxic*-self, it affirms its *pneuma-nous* self; by negating its earthly self [*sarx*], it affirms its heavenly self [*pneuma-nous*]. [91] In nuce, in the contemplative practice of prayer the choice of divesting oneself of the old man while putting on the new man occurs. [92] Once this choice is made a heavenly self [*pneuma-nous*] enters into union with *Logos*. [93] The *praxis* of prayer is epistemically instrumental in this process. It results in a thinking away of corporeality [*sarx*] and thus a breaking up of ordinary propositional and discursive reasoning which leads to a noetic illumination based on a divine presence within [*gnothi seauton*]. [94]

Conclusion

Although there is little evidence Origen held doctrines with affinities to Russell's theory of denotation and Wittgenstein's elementary propositions, he nonetheless works within a fundamental 'language' distinction between 'saying' and 'showing' where speech is associated with what should not deontically or propositionally be said and silence with what can be merely shown. Since the relationship between thought, language and the world is ineffable, contemplative prayer is merely a 'showing' of divine reality and no more. [95] Two questions remain: is speech reduced to silence in the *praxis* of prayer; and is

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[91] The term *eikon* is scriptural [cf. LXX Gen 1:26-27]. It symbolizes for Origen an earthly/heavenly; letter/spirit; flesh/spirit dichotomy based on Pauline references. For purposes of this enquiry these distinctions denote ideal/ordinary ontological, epistemic and language distinctions.

[92] Origen frames this shift in a Pauline context contrasting *Gen*. 1:26 with *Gen*. 1:27.

[93] Origen's interpretation of relevant passages in the Introduction to the *Song of Songs* and *Gospel of John* suggest a double entrance of the Logos in the soul and the soul in Logos. Abolishment of the icon does not denote suppression of self-identity but a likeness [*homoiosis*] which does not abolish iconicity but perfects it.

[94] For later Platonic parallels, see Lloyd, (1964) 188-200.

[95] Wittgenstein's distinction between the sayable and unsayable or 'shown,' is pre-figured by Origen's distinction between ordinary language [propositional-discursive] and ideal language [non-propositional-discursive], or the languages of the ordinary-sensible and ideal-intelligible worlds which correspond with literal and allegorical exegesis of Scripture. cf. Wittgenstein, (1998) 2.021; 2.0211; Origen, *CCt*, Preface.

whether to be silent or to speak an interpretive choice? [96] Here Origen dialectically frames silence and speech as interpretive choices. In the act of contemplative prayer silence is elevated above speech, while in prayerful contemplation, silence is demoted below Speech. Whether Silence is identified with thought and elevated above Speech, [following Clement of Alexandria], or whether Silence is elevated above speech identified with thought, [anticipating Gregory of Nyssa], contemplative prayer involves, as Wittgenstein says, 'remaining silent about that which cannot be said and in what Heidegger calls: a "silence about silence" is difficult to apprehend.[97]

What Origen proposes is that knowing is not a matter of understanding reality propositionally from the outside in an indirect perceptual, phenomenal, phenomenological or linguistic way, rather - unlike *propositional* or indirect understanding, which involves perception, intuition, and ordinary propositional thought and discursive language - non-propositional and non-discursive reasoning offer a direct *pre-suppositional* grasp or 'touching' of a divine reality through an ideal language of prayer. More significantly, Origen affirms the nature and possibility of knowledge and language without Descartes' explicit reflection on the problem of the subject to whom knowledge is communicated, or through whom knowledge and language comes to be where subjectivity is the key to objectivity.

Contemplative prayer really matters. Its techniques achieve an 'affective displacement' that delivers the soul to its *telos* – recognition of 'a God within' and achieving a 'likeness to God' wherein a lower self thinks and speaks empirical reality away thereby achieving a divine subjectivity. Indeed, the more we pray, the farther we push *logos* toward *Logos* and the closer the self comes to a recognition of a *gnothi seauton* and its *homoiosis theo*.

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[96] Wittgenstein (1998) 6.4.5; 6.53-57.
[97] Heidegger (1962) 32-34 and 227.

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