S. I should be content with this allegory did it not seem strange to me that God should not have made man and woman for the purpose of procreation, and that sin should be the cause of generation, which is essential for the perpetual preservation of the human race.

P. God made man and woman such that they could raise up children in their own image; but the true end of man is not generation, but happiness in the contemplation of the Divinity and in the Paradise of God. In this contemplation he remained immortal and had no need of generation, because in him the human essence and species was perpetually preserved, just as immortals have no need to beget children of their own species. Behold the angels, planets, stars and heavens, they do not give birth to children in their own likeness. And generation, as Aristotle says, was a remedy for mortality. Therefore man, as long as immortal, did not procreate his kind; but when through sin he was made mortal, he came to his own aid by raising up his like, which power God had bestowed potentially upon him, so that by one means or another the human race should not perish.

S. This first allegorical meaning pleases me not a little, and my desire for the second has waxed stronger in the hearing. I pray you, therefore, make no delay.

P. The first man, and indeed every other in the whole wide world, is made, as Holy Writ testifies, in the image and likeness of God, both male and female at once.

S. How every man? Every man or every female?

P. Every male and every female.

S. How can the female alone be at once both male and female?

P. Every man or woman has a masculine part which is perfect and active, to wit the intellect, and a feminine part which is imperfect and passive, to wit the body and matter. And thus the divine image is impressed upon matter, since the form which is masculine is the intellect, and the informed which is feminine is the body. In the beginning, therefore, these two parts, masculine and feminine, were joined in absolute union in the perfect man whom God had made, so that the sentient and feminine body was the obedient servant of the masculine intellect and reason. There was then no division in man, and his whole life was intellectual. And he was placed in the earthly paradise in which were all manner of beautiful trees and fragrant [shrubs], and the tree of life, the most excellent among them; in the same way in the intellect which is enlightened, such as that of Adam and of every other man equally perfect, there is knowledge of every eternal thing, and above all, pure and vital knowledge of the Divinity. Now God commanded Adam to eat of every tree in the garden, even of the tree of life, which would give him eternal life; so the intellect, through the knowledge of eternal things and more especially of the Divinity, becomes immortal and eternal and attains to its true happiness. But he was not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because he would thereby become mortal; in other words, he should not let his intellect be diverted by sensual activities and the things of the body, such as sensual pleasure and the pursuit of riches, for these are good in appearance and bad in reality. The tree is called the tree of knowledge of good and evil because the knowledge of these things concerns neither the true nor the false, which relate to eternal things of the intellect, but only the good and the bad, as they affect the appetite of man. For to say that the sun is bigger than the earth can be called neither good nor bad, but true or false; to acquire riches, on the other hand, you would call neither
true nor false, but good or bad. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil which was forbidden to Adam symbolises the pursuit of the knowledge of corporeal things, diverting the intellect from the object of its true happiness. This tree alone can make man mortal, for as eternal truth of God make the intellect divine, true, and eternal as they are, so sensuous, corporeal and corruptible things make it material and corruptible like themselves. And the Divinity could foresee that this life of union of the two parts of man, and of the obedience of the feminine body to the masculine intellect, although it brought happiness to the man and immortality to his essence, which is his intellect, it rather corrupted his bodily and feminine part. And not only is this true of the individual, for when the intellect is inflamed with the knowledge and love of the eternal and divine it abandons all care of the body and leaves it to perish before its time, but also of the preservation of the human race; for those who are wedded to a life of intellectual contemplation despise corporeal love and flee from the lascivious act of generation, and this intellectual perfection would cause the human race to become extinct. Therefore God determined to establish some division or mean between the feminine and sensual part and the masculine and intellectual part, turning the intellect and the senses to certain corporeal desires and activities necessary for the sustenance of the individual man and for the preservation of the species. This is the meaning of the text when it says: ‘it is not good for the man to be alone. I will make him an help meet for him’, to wit, that the sensual and feminine part should not be so subservient to the intellect that it will offer no resistance, but should draw it somewhat to bodily things for the benefit of both the individual and the race. When man, therefore, had been shown all the animals and had recognised in them all, how each took heed for corporeal nourishment and the propagation of its kind, he began to find himself defective, because he also had not a similar reason for affection for his feminine part. Being, then, desirous of imitating them in this, the text says that God caused a sleep to overcome Adam, and as he lay dormant, He divided the feminine part from the masculine, which from that time forth Adam recognised as his true wife separated from himself. This signifies that as unwonted sleep came to Adam, denoting loss and relaxation of that first intellectual vigil and ardent contemplation, the intellect began to incline to the body, as the husband to the wife, and to have due care for its sustenance as for a part of itself, and for the propagation of its kind in order that the race might be preserved. In this respect, therefore, the masculine and feminine parts were separated for a good and necessary end, and there followed the resistance of feminine matter and the inclination of masculine intellect towards it, with a due recognition of the needs of the body. When, however, inclination was no longer tempered by reason, as was meet and the purpose of the Creator, but overstepped the dividing line between intellect and matter, it became submerged in sensuality, and there followed the fall of man. This is the meaning of the story of the serpent who deceived the woman, telling her to eat of the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil; for when she and Adam had eaten thereof, their eyes would be opened and they would be as gods, knowing good and evil. And the woman seeing that the tree was good for food, and a delight to the eyes, and to be desired to make one wise, partook of the fruit and gave of it to her husband. And straightway their eyes were opened so that they became aware of their nakedness, and sewed fig leaves together to make aprons. The serpent represents the carnal appetite which, when it finds the feminine part somewhat separated from the intellect, her husband, and defying his
rigorous laws, first incites and deludes her into defiling herself with carnal pleasures and sullying herself with the pursuit of immoderate riches, which is the truc of the knowledge of good and evil, for the two reasons I gave you. And the serpent showed the man and woman that by this means their eyes would be opened, that is, they would know many things of a like nature which they did not know before, to wit, much subtle craft and cunning knowledge pertaining to lasciviousness and greec which before they lacked. Moreover, he said they would resemble the gods in the fertility of their conception: for is God, the intelligences and the heavens are the procreative causes of all creatures lower than they, so man by means of continual sexual intercourse comes to beget numerous offspring. The corporeal and feminine part not only did not allow herself to be ruled by her intellectual husband in this matter, as was but right, but drew him into the slough of corporeal things, eating with her of the fruit of the forbidden tree. And straightway their eyes were opened, not those of the intellect, for these were rather firmly sealed, but the eyes of the imagination, which serve the body in its carnal and wanton practices. And they became aware of their nakedness, that is of the disobedience of the flesh to the intellect, and therefore they contrived to cover their members of generation as shameful and rebellious against reason and wisdom. And immediately, the story continues, they heard the voice of God and hid themselves, which means that they were ashamed to recognise those divine things which they had abandoned. Punishment came crowding on the heels of sin, and the sacred narrative tells of the three different punishments of the serpent, the woman and the man. God cursed the serpent above every other beast, and made him to go on his belly and to eat dust all the days of his life, putting enmity between the woman and her seed and the serpent and his seed, so that man shall bruise the head of the serpent and the serpent shall bruise his heel. This means that the carnal appetite of man is more unbridled than in any other animal; and the serpent goes with his belly on the ground, that is the carnal appetite inclines the heart to earthly things, and turns it away from the things of heaven. His whole life long he eats of the dust, because carnal desire battens on the basest and meanest of all created things; and hatred arises, because carnal appetit is detrimental to the body and destroys it with loose living, from which many ills and deformities derive, so that even desire itself fails, consumed away by the disorders and diseases of the body. The woman was punished with untold sorrow and labour: in sorrow should she bring forth children, and her desire should be to her husband, who should rule over her. This means that a dissolute life brings sorrow to the body, and its pleasure is mingled with pain, and in labor must it bring forth its kind. None the less, since Eve loved the intellectual part as her husband he should still rule over her to govern and restrain her corporeal activities. To the man, because he listened to the words of the woman and ate of the forbidden tree, God said that the ground should be cursed for his sake, and with sorrow and weariness should he till it all the days of his life; and thorns should spring up for him, and he should eat of the herb of the field, and eat bread in the sweat of his face until he return unto the earth from which he was taken: for dust he was and unto dust he should return. This signifies that earthly things should be accursed and harmful to the intellect, and should be sour and harsh food for it, like that which brought mortality to the immortal. And all earthly pursuits would be fraught with toil for man, and painful like the prick of the thorn. His food would be the herb of the field, which is the food of irrational animals, for like them he had placed
his life in sensuality alone, and if he wished to eat bread it would be by the sweat of his brow, digging and toiling: which signifies that if he wished to eat the food of men and not of beasts and to carry on the work of man, it would be difficult for him by reason of the contrary tendency already contracted towards brute sensuality. And God told him that all these evils would follow upon his sin until he should return to the earth whence he came. Of all mortal creatures of the earth he alone was made immortal, and yet he wished to become as the dust of the ground, being embiggod in the sins of the body; and this was why he had to return to dust as to his origin, equal in mortality to the other creatures. And the text straightforward continues: Adam called his wife’s name Eve, that is, animal endowed with speech, and woman, because she was the mother of every living creature. This means that he called the corporeal part by a name such as that of the other animals because it was the cause of every kind of bestiality in man. Moreover, God, through the medium of the intellect, which had left the contemplative life for one of action and become sufficiently debased to understand the things of the body, began to teach Adam and Eve crafts so that they made coats of skins to cover their nakedness; and He sent them forth from the garden to till the ground, that is He took them away from contemplation to attend to earthly things, leaving them, however, the possibility of returning to eat of the tree of life and to live eternally. And this is why God is said to have placed to the east of the garden of Eden cherubims and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life. The cherubims denote the two spiritual intellects with which man is endowed, the potential and the active, and the flaming sword turning every way is the human imagination which turns from the corporeal to seek the light of the spiritual, that it may escape from the mire to beold and

follow the way of the tree of life and live eternally by the light of the intellect. Adam, however, exiled from Eden with the sentence of mortality on his head, procured his succession and the preservation of the race by raising up sons to himself; but since he had fallen into sin his first-born, Cain, was a sinful man and slew his brother, the second son, Abel, which means ‘nothing’, because he remained as naught, since he perished from the succession. But when the violence of his sin had abated, being one hundred and thirty years old and reverting in some measure to the things of the intellect, which is the copy of the Divinity, he begot a third son in his intellectual likeness who was called Seth, which means ‘firmly fixed’: ‘for God’, he said, ‘hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel whom Cain slew’. Seth was the father of a race of virtuous men, as is told in Holy Writ, and from that time forth men began to call upon the name of the Lord. This signifies that the first fruits of sin are evil, such as Cain, which signifies evil possession; and when the sin has lost the greater part of its power they are vain and empty like Abel, which means ‘nothing’; but when man returns to the intellectual life and to knowledge of the name of God, his seed is virtuous and endures, as that of Seth. This, Sophia, is the allegorical wisdom which the true narrative of Moses signifies: the union of the male and female in man, their establishment in Paradise, the command laid on them, their division, their sin through the deception of the serpent, the punishment of all three, the possibility of a remedy, the engendering of evil and imperfect offspring, and finally of the perfect which succeeded the two first; all these things the first man really suffered in his body, and they are symbolic of the life and works of every man, his ultimate happiness, the demands of his corporeal nature, and the consequences of excessive sin together with its punishment and the possibility of eventual salvation. If you
look into the story, you will behold as in a mirror the life of every man with his good and his evil, and you will recognise the way which must be shunned and the way which must be followed to attain to eternal happiness where there is no death.

S. I thank you for this lesson from Holy Writ, and may it teach me to walk in the path of circumspection and prudence. But let us not, therefore, neglect the similar allegory of the androgyne of Plato, which takes its origin from the former.

P. Now that you have understood the allegory behind the Mosaic account of man’s first disobedience you will find it but a simple matter to understand the significance of the Platonic myth. This teaches that men were first dual, half male and half female united in one body, that is intellect and corporeality were united in man in accordance with the original design of his creation, so that the corporeal and female half should be entirely subservient to the intellectual and male half, without division or opposition. Further the male nature derives from the sun and the female from the earth, and the whole androgyne was composed of both these parts, from the moon. Therefore, as I have told you, the sun is the pattern of the intellect, the earth of the body, and the moon of the soul, which is at once both intellectual and corporeal and comprises the whole human essence, just as the moon is made up of the light derived from the sun and gross matter similar to that of the earth, which, moreover, is the opinion of Aristotle. And since the androgynes were very powerful, they sought battle against the gods; in other words, being entirely dominated by the intellect and rapt in the contemplative life without resistance or opposition on the part of the body, were almost equal to the angels and matched themselves against the disembodied intelligences: as David says of the creation of man, ‘Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels’, and Moses, speaking in the name of the Lord, ‘the man is become as one of us’—before his fall. Jupiter, therefore, casting about for a remedy, caused him to be divided into two halves, male and female. And the two parts are not infused intellect and character, as some imagine, but the male is the intellectual part and the female corporeal part, and the two together make up the whole man. For man being entirely given up to contemplation became one with the angels and spirits, which is contrary to the purpose of the Creator, to wit, that he should be equally composed of mind and body; and when his nature became wholly angelic the human frame was destroyed and both the individual and the race would have perished. And this it is which Plato calls man’s straining with the gods. Therefore he was divided, that is his body was made to offer some resistance to the intellect and the latter to incline to the necessary care of the body and its material nature, so that the life of man might be human rather than angelic. And further, Plato says that from this division love was born, because each half desires and loves reintegration with its other half; in other words, the intellect would take no heed of the body save for the love which it bears its consort and female half, nor would the body be governed by the intellect were it not for the love and affection which it bears its husband and masculine half. Moreover, the story tells us that even when the two halves came together in love they did not seek those things which were necessary for their sustenance, and they perished; wherefore the god Jupiter caused their members of generation to be turned facing each other, and so they remained satisfied and in union and in procreation of their kind their division was healed. This signifies that the purpose of the division of the intellectual and corporeal parts was that
leading to sinful actions. Again the body, loving the soul as the woman the husband and male,roused herself to desire his perfection, striving with sense, eyes and ears, and with the [inner] sense of imagination and memory, to obtain what is necessary for right thinking and eternal intellectual treasure in which the mind of man is blessed. And this desire and love is absolutely virtuous, and the more ardent it is, the more praiseworthy and perfect. In this, therefore, Plato has shown the birth of love and of every species of human love only, of which he makes the intellectual part to be the father and the bodily part the mother. And the first love of man is this mutual love between the one part and the other, such as the love between man and woman. In the second place these two parents give birth to every kind of extrinsic love and desire of man, and these may be divided into three categories; the intellectual, which are absolutely virtuous, like those of the united and whole man in the original life of bliss in the garden of Eden; the corporeal, which are requisite and restrained, the moderation of which places them amongst the virtuous desires of the body, such as man experienced when he was divided for his essential good and before his fall; and finally, corporeal desires, which are unbridled, superfluous and inordinate, making those who are subject to them bestial and vicious in their sin, and such was the life of man when he was embogged in the knowledge of good and evil, sunk in lasciviousness and inured to sin. These [species of love and desire] all depend on the mutual love which exists between the intellect and the body, as I have explained to you.

S. I am now versed in Plato's conception of the parentage of the love of man, who is a miniature world in himself. I would have you tell me further if he has also designated the first parents of the universal love of the whole corporeal world of creation.
P. When Plato had shown us who were the parents of human love in the book of the Symposium, in the name of Aristophanes, as you have heard, he was also careful to designate the first parents of universal love in the whole corporeal world, in the name of the prophetess Dotima, the teacher of Socrates in the school of love. She told him that the birth of love was on this wise. On the birthday of Venus all the gods were assembled at a banquet and with them Poros, god of plenty, son of Metis or Sagacity. Now when they had done feasting, Penia or Poverty came in to them like a poor waif to glean some morsel to eat from the rich viands from the table of the gods; and she stood without like the poor beggars who go knocking from door to door. Poros, being drunk of nectar (for wine was as yet unknown), went into the garden of Jupiter to sleep; and Penia, considering her own straitened circumstances, devised with some subtlety how she might have a child by Poros, and therefore went and lay down beside him and conceived Love. And from these parents was born Cupid, the votary and follower of Venus because he was born on her birthday and ever desirous of the beautiful because Venus is herself beautiful. And because he is the son of Poros and of the poor beggar woman, Penia, he partakes of the nature of them both. In the first place he is rough, squalid, always flying bare-foot over the earth without house or shelter to cover his head or bed or blanket to lie on. He sleeps in the street, under the open heaven and, like his mother, is ever in want. Like his father, however, he is continually meddling with good and beautiful things, and is irdent, bold and impetuous, a skilled hunter, ever weaving new intrigues, diligent in caution, eloquent, a philosopher at all times. He is a promise-breaker, enchanter, sorcerer and sophist, and in accordance with his mixed nature he is neither wholly mortal nor immortal, but is alive and dead in one and the same day, and is flourishing at one moment and fainting the next. And this is his perpetual state because he combines the natures of his father and mother. What he gains he loses, and what he loses he regains, so that he is never in want and never in wealth. He is a mean between knowledge and ignorance; for none of the gods is a philosopher or a seeker after wisdom, because they are wise already; neither does the truly wise or quite ignorant man seek after wisdom, for he has no desire to grow wise. And truly this is the worst defect in an ignorant man, that he neither is nor desires to be wise, because we cannot desire that of which we feel no lack. The philosopher, therefore, is a mean between the ignorant and the wise, and because he is not beautiful like the wise man he seeks after the wisdom which he lacks. Nor is he ugly like the ignorant man, who is not only wanting in beauty but also the desire of it. Love, therefore, is truly a mean between the ugly and the beautiful.

S. The story is well told, and the blended natures of the rich father and the poor mother are truly mirrored in the circumstances and characteristics of Love. But I would know the significance of Poros the father and Penia the mother, and of the time, place, and manner of the birth of Love their son.

P. The wise Dotima reveals with great ingenuity in this myth who were the predecessors of Love, and how he was born, and what manner of nature his parents bestowed on him. In the first place he was born when the gods were assembled together at a feast on the birthday of Venus. Some there are who understand by the birth of Venus the influence of the intelligence, first in the angelic world and then in the soul of the world, life already having been imparted by Jupiter, essence by Saturn, and first being by
Caelus, who were the three gods at the feast before the birth of the greater Venus in the angelic and lower world and in the world soul. But we take no heed of such abstract and vague allegories which do not correspond to the letter of the story. This same Diotima, as you have heard, understood Venus to represent beauty, wherefore she says that Love always loves the beautiful because he was born on her birthday. This means, therefore, that love was born at the same time as beauty, because all love is of a beloved object, and every beloved is beautiful; and because of its beauty, whether real or apparent, it is loved, love being a desire of the beautiful. Further, she says that when the gods were feasting at the birth of Venus, poverty-stricken Penia was standing without to glean some scraps from the table of the gods. And the god Poros, the son of Sagacity, being the worse for nectar, left the house where he was feasting with his companions and went into the garden to sleep. Penia, desirous of having a son by him, lay down beside him and conceived Love. This signifies that when the gods, that is God, together with the angelic world, impressed beauty in their own image on the created and corporeal world, in which task they vied with one another in generosity and were glad at heart as at the feast on the birthday of Venus or beauty itself, potential matter desirous of sharing in the beautiful forms and divine and angelic perfections, intervened on behalf of its own poverty. Poros, the son of Sagacity, that is the influencing intellect, being the worse for nectar, that is filled with the divine Ideas and Forms, desired to impart these for the benefit of the lower world, even though an inclination to something lower was a defect in him. And this is why he is said to have gone into Jupiter’s garden to sleep there, that is to put to sleep his vigilant cognitive faculty and to apply it to the corporeal world of motion and generation which is the garden of

Jupiter. For the heavenly intellect is the house and palace of Jupiter, where they were feasting and drinking the divine nectar, which symbolises the eternal contemplation and desire of the supreme beauty and majesty of the Divinity. When the intellect, the son of Sagacity, which is the most high God, wished to impart of himself to the lower world, the poor woman Penia came to him in her distress, that is the potentiality of matter, desirous of perfection, became pregnant of him who was intoxicated with the desire of corporeal perfection, dormant as he was in his eternal and divine contemplation, and somewhat distracted from it in order to impart perfection to necessitous matter. Love then was born of them both, because love implies perfection, not in actuality but in potentiality; and so the intellect which is in the body subject to generation is potential form and potential intellect, and because it is intellect it recognises beautiful things, and because it is potential it lacks their possession and desires actual beauty. And this is what is meant by calling [love] a mean between the ugly and the beautiful, for the potential intellect and the material forms are a mean between pure and wholly formless matter and the disembodied forms and actual intelligences of the angels which are truly beautiful. Therefore Diotima assigns to Love on the part of its imperfect mother the conditions and activities of corporeal and necessitous matter, which is mortal and changing, and the intellectual qualities and perfections of the intellect, Poros his rich father. And he makes him a philosopher and not a sage, because the potential intellect desires wisdom and is potentially wise and not actually like the angelic intellect. And so Diotima showed by her story that the potential intellect partakes of the actual or active intellect, angelic or divine, and its potentiality is not derived from its own intellectual nature, as some think, but only from its association with needy matter, deprived of all
actuality and made up of pure potentiality. Further, she taught that the first cause of the birth of love is beauty, itself procreated, and its true parents are knowledge of beauty, which is its father, and the lack of it, which is its mother. For that which is loved and desired must first be known as beautiful and wanting, or potentially wanting, when there must be a desire of its everlasting possession. Therefore, Sophia, you must know that the father of universal love in the lower world is the knowledge of beauty and its mother is the lack of this beauty.

S. I understand this; but these seem to be the parents only of love in the corporeal world, and, moreover, only in the lower world subject to generation. And I have already learnt from you that love first originated in the angelic world, and to that origin you assigned the very same two causes, to wit, the knowledge and lack of beauty.

P. It is true that love, not only in the lower world but principally in the angelic, is caused by a knowledge of beauty which is lacking; but this is the infinite beauty of God which is lacking in all created intellects and is the object of their knowledge and desire. This beauty Plato calls the greater Venus or beauty of the intellectual world, and she was not born in time because she is eternal and immutable, nor can her love be born again, but if it was ever born it must have been from eternity in the divine world. Nor is its lack caused by association with necessitous Penia or of matter with intellect, for in that world there is no matter; but because the creature, insomuch as it is created, must fall short of the highest perfection of the Creator and of the excellency of His beauty, far exceeding that of His creatures. Poros and Penia are, therefore, truly the parents of the love which is born in the lower world at the birth of the lesser Venus, that is the beauty imparted to generated bodies, but not of the love of the angelic world, which is more exalted than Poros intoxicated in the garden of Jupiter and is alien to necessitous Penia.

S. I have heard the fables of the poets and philosophers concerning the birth of love and its parentage, and the wisdom and significance of their stories. I wish now that you would tell me fully and clearly who are the first parents of love, both human and universal.

P. First, Sophia, I will tell you whom I think to be the common father and mother of universal love, and then, if you wish, I will refer it to the love of the men and of the world.

S. This order pleases me, because the general should come before the particular. Tell me, therefore, what is the common father of all love, and what its mother.

P. I do not believe, like Diotima, that the mother is absolute poverty, nor that the father is the rich intellect, as she would wish. Nor do I hold that the beauty of Venus has any connection with his birth, and that she is the midwife and goddess who presides over it in the absence of his father and mother, as Plato elsewhere asserts. For love is said by all to be the son of Venus, and according to some to have no father. But setting aside the conjectures and opinions of others, I will tell you that the universal father of all love is the beautiful, and the universal mother is knowledge of the beautiful together with privation. These two, like a true father and mother, engender love and desire; for he who recognises the beautiful to be lacking in himself straightway loves and desires it. This love is born and conceived of the beautiful in the mind of him in whom it is wanting and who knows and desires it. The beautiful which is the beloved is therefore the father and generator of love, and the mother is the mind of the lover, made pregnant
of the seed of the beautiful. And the seed is the pattern of this beauty in the mind of the knower which, being pregnant therewith, desires union with the beautiful and the generation of its kind. And you have already understood how the nature of the father and generator belongs to the beloved, and the nature of the mother to the lover who is made pregnant of the beloved, and desires birth in the beautiful, as Plato himself says.

S. This precise and clear definition of the parentage of universal love gives me no little pleasure. But before I ask you for further explanation you must solve a contradiction for me which appears in two words. You say that the mother of love is the knowledge of the beautiful which is lacking, and on the other hand that she is first made pregnant of the form of the beautiful, and therefore desires and loves it. The contradiction is this: if the mind of the knower is pregnant of the beautiful he does not lack it; nay, he even possesses it, just as the woman who is with child can in no wise be called barren.

P. If the form of the beautiful were not in the mind of the lover in its aspect of beautiful, good and pleasant, he would never be able to love the beautiful; because those who are entirely without beauty have no desire for it, but he who desires it is not entirely without it, since he has knowledge of it and his mind is impregnated with the form of its beauty. But because he lacks the essential, to wit, perfect union with the beautiful, the desire of this all-important effect which he lacks comes to him, namely the desire of the enjoyment in union of the beautiful. And its form impressed on his mind incites him to desire, just as the woman with child looks for the day of her delivery that she may bring forth to the world the secret contents of her womb. Thus the mother of love, that is the lover, though wanting in perfect union with the beloved, is not entirely without the form and copy of its beauty, which causes her love and desire to union with the beauty which is lacking. S. I like well what you say, but one difficulty remains. It seems that the mother and lover made pregnant by the beautiful father brings forth and conceives as her son the father himself; for you say that generation and childbirth are none other than the active enjoyment of union with this same father.

P. Your argument is subtle, Sophia, but if it were yet more penetrating you would see the solution: that the act of enjoying union with the beautiful is not absolutely and entirely the same as the beautiful itself, though resembling it as the child his own father. For to this paternal likeness is joined a maternal impression of the knowledge of the lover. And the act would not be one of enjoyment if it were not, on the part of the knower and lover with respect to the beautiful, the object of his knowledge and love. In this way it is the true son of lover and beloved, and takes its material part from maternal cognition and its formal part from paternal beauty. And as Plato shows, love is a desire of that which is made pregnant of beauty to give birth to it in the likeness of the father; and such is the love not only of the mind but also of the body.

S. Tell me how each of these kinds of love consists in pregnancy and the desire to give birth to the beautiful, and why such generation is so much desired.

P. You may see how not only in man, but in every animal, there exists the desire for knowledge of its kind, and what trouble, labour and danger the parents, and particularly the mother, undergo in the generation and rearing of their children, even so far as to give up their life for them. The immediate end is the production of the beautiful, similar
to that by which the mother is made pregnant, and the final end is the desired immortality. For since individual animals do not possess eternal being (as Aristotle demonstrates), they desire and strive to perpetuate their species by the propagation of their kind. And very often they are more solicitous for the life and existence of their offspring than for their own, deeming their life of the past but that of their offspring of the future. So they must perpetuate their own lives by continual generation of their kind. These same ends are also found in the human soul, which being pregnant of intellectual beauty, virtue, and wisdom, desires continually to generate similar beauty in virtuous actions and the practice of wisdom. For their actual generation confers true immortality that is of greater worth than that which is acquired by the animals through the propagation of their kind. And as the father’s body suffers corruption, yet his seed is preserved and perpetuated in his children, so the powers of the soul, although they may fail, are perpetuated in virtuous acts and habits of right thinking, which make them eternal. This, therefore, will explain to you how the father of love is the beautiful beloved, and the mother the knower and lover of it; and that she, being made pregnant of him, loves and desires to give birth to similar beauty through which she may be made one with and have everlasting enjoyment of the beauty of her consort.

S. I think I have a sufficient understanding of how the beautiful or beauty is the father of love, and the knower and desirer the mother who, being made pregnant of him, desires to give birth to beauty in his image, which signifies union and enjoyment of this beautiful beloved. But I see that in this way the whole process is bound up with beauty, because the father is the beautiful, the pregnant mother embodies its cognitive form and pattern, and the desired son is the

movement towards unitive fruition of this beauty. And I wonder that you rate beauty so highly, for if it were prior to all love, it would follow that it preceded not only the lower world and the abstract intellect of man, but also the heavenly and the whole angelic world, since in each of these, as you have said, love is found and they are all the objects of love. Again, if as you have sometimes said, love exists in the supreme Divinity for His creatures, and we have the testimony of the Scriptures that He is their Lover, how can beauty be supposed to precede that which absolutely precedes all things?

P. Do not marvel, Sophia, that beauty should be that which makes every beloved thing to be loved and every lover to love, and that it should be the beginning, middle and end of all love, to wit, the beginning in the beloved, the middle in its repercussion on the lover, and the end in the enjoyment and union of the lover with its beginning, the beloved. For since the supremely beautiful is the most high Maker of the universe, the beauty of every created thing is the perfection of the work of the master Craftsman in its construction, and it is in respect of this quality that the thing made bears the greatest resemblance and relationship to the maker, and the created to the creator. And since this Divinity is diffused throughout the whole universe, it is not strange, but only natural, that it should be prior to every other being and should be that which makes its recipients lovable and those who are acquainted with them, lovers, desirous of partaking of them, and through their medium, of the divine beauty of the craftsman. And this is not only prior to the love in created things, whether corporeal, corruptible and heavenly, or incorporeal, spiritual and angelic; but also to the love which comes from God for His creatures: for this is none other than the wish that the beauty of His creatures may
grow to be like the supreme beauty of their Creator in Whose image they were created. Beauty, therefore, must precede love in God, just as something beautiful and lovable is a prior condition of the existence of a lover.

S. I am considering your reply to my question, and although it seems to give you satisfaction it brings none to me, because I do not well understand the greatness of the dignity and excellence of this beauty, nor do I see how it is of such importance that it can be the beginning of all excellent and perfect things, as you allege. I wish that you would set my mind at rest concerning the essence of beauty. I remember well that once you defined it to me as grace which delights the mind that has knowledge of it, moving it to love; but I have still the same thirst to learn of the essence of this grace and of its supreme importance for the Creator and for the whole universe, even as I desire to learn of the essence of beauty, defined in this way.

P. I also remember that I showed you part of the spiritual essence of beauty. For I told you that of the five external senses beauty is not apprehended by the three material, to wit, touch, taste, and smell (for the temperate qualities and the pleasures of sexual intercourse are not called beautiful, nor yet a taste sweet to the palate or a soft fragrance); but only by the two spiritual senses: that is, partly through hearing—fine speeches, excellent reasoning, beautiful verses, sweet music, and beautiful and harmonious melodies—and for the most part through the eyes, in beautiful forms and colours, regular patterns, and light in all is varied splendour and so on. This will show you that beauty must be a spiritual thing, abstracted from the body. I have also proved for you that the greatest beauty inheres in those faculties of the soul which are most exalted above the body, namely: firstly, in the imagination the seat of beautiful images and thoughts inventions; in a higher degree, in the understanding separated from matter, which finds beauty in learning, art, science, and the practice of virtue; and even more perfectly in the pure intellect, seat of the highest human wisdom, which is the true image of the highest beauty. This, therefore, may serve as an introduction in showing you how beauty is in itself foreign to matter and to the body, and how it is imparted spiritually to matter.

S. Yet the vulgar commonly attribute beauty principally to bodies, as proper to their essence, and it certainly seems to pertain more truly to them [than to things of the spirit]. And if incorporeal things are called beautiful it seems as if it were only metaphorically, as, for example, when they are called great after the manner of bodies, such as great mind, great intellect, great memory, great art, although the incorporeal is in itself non-dimensional, and can in truth be neither great nor small except [metaphorically] by comparison with corporeal objects, which are measurable. Beauty, likewise, seems to be a property of bodies and alien to incorporeal objects, in which it is only spoken of by imagery.

P. Although this is true of greatness because it is proper to quantity and quantity to the body, what reason have you to suppose that beauty is the same?

S. Besides the uses of speech which apply the word beauty to bodies, corporeal beauty is reputed by the vulgar to be the true beauty, and there is another reason: for beauty seems to be the proportion of the parts to the whole and the symmetry of the whole with its parts, as, indeed, many philosophers have defined it. Therefore it is a property of measurable body and of a whole composed of parts, and properly presupposes a body characterised by quantity. And if it is attributed to incorporeal things, such as harmony
and reasoned oratory, this is because they, like the body, have parts of which they are composed in due proportion, and therefore they are termed beautiful, like the composite and proportioned body. In this way in the thoughts of the imagination, understanding and intellect, the relation of the parts to the whole is copied from the body, which is truly composed of proportionate parts which are called beautiful. Therefore the true home of beauty, as of magnitude, appears to be body, which is the proper substance for quantity and composition of parts.

P. The use of this word beautiful by the vulgar s in like proportion to the knowledge they have of beauty. For because they can understand no beauty save that apprehended by corporeal sight or hearing, they believe there to be none else besides this, unless it be fictitious or dreamed or imagined. But those whose mental vision is clear and who see far beyond corporeal things have a greater knowledge of incorporeal beauty than those whose pleasure is in sensual delights. And they know that the beauty of the body is of little price and mere outward show compared with that of the spirit; for corporeal beauty is the shadow and image of spiritual beauty, from which it is derived, and is none other than the splendour which the spiritual world imparts to the corporeal. They see also that the beauty of corporeal objects does not proceed from their corporeal or material nature: for then every body and every material thing would have the same mode of beauty, since matter and corporeality is the same in every substance; or again, the greatest would be the most beautiful, which frequently does not hold in reality, for beauty abhors extremes and the largest body, like the smallest, is misshapen. And [the wiser spirits] know that the beauty in bodies is derived from participation in that of the incorporeal beings higher than they; and the incompleteness of their participation gives the measure of imperfection of their beauty: so that deformity is inherent in body and beauty comes to it from its spiritual benefactor. The eyes of your body, Sophia, are therefore not sufficient for the perception of beautiful things: you must behold them with the eyes of the spirit and you will recognise true beauty such as the vulgar can never know. For as the physically blind cannot apprehend beautiful forms and colours, so those who are mentally blind can neither apprehend nor rejoice in the brightest spiritual beauties. And there is no pleasure in beauty where there is no knowledge of it, and he who tastes not of its waters is deprived of the sweetest of delights. If, then, corporeal beauty, which is but the shadow of the spiritual, so delights the beholder that it seizes control of all his [actions and thoughts] and not only enslaves him, but kills in him all desire to shake off his yoke, how much greater will be the effect of unullied intellectual beauty, of which the corporeal is only the shadow and image, in those who are worthy to behold it! May you, therefore, Sophia, be numbered amongst those who dedicate themselves not to the shadow of beauty but to that which is its master, the highest beauty and gladness.

S. This lesson will suffice, and I shall be deceived no more in thinking of beauty as do the vulgar. But I wish that you would solve for me the question of the proportion of the parts to the whole, which militates in favour of the common view, and which proves beauty to be a property of bodies and to exist only by analogy and not as a property in incorporeal substances.

P. This definition of beauty given by some modern philosophers is neither true nor adequate; for if this were the case no simple body not composed of various parts
you consider well, you will find that although there is beauty in proportionate and harmonious things, it transcends
their proportion, and therefore beauty is found not only in
objects composed of proportionate parts, but in an even
higher degree in simple objects.

S. It follows, then, that the disproportionate can be
beautiful.

P. No, for to be disproportionate is a defect and evil, and
nothing which is evil is beautiful. This, however, does not
imply that proportion is synonymous with beauty; for
amongst those things which are neither proportionate nor
disproportionate because they are not composite, objects of
rare beauty are found, and further, some proportionate and
harmonious things are not beautiful, and not every beautiful
and good thing is proportionate. Moreover, proportion
and harmony are also found in evil things: for example,
amongst merchants it is said that the sharper and the swindler
soon agree, and fear goes hand in hand with cruelty and
prodigality with theft. Every beautiful thing, therefore, is
not proportionate, nor every proportionate thing beautiful,
as these moderns imagine.

S. What, therefore, is the beauty of corporeal things, and
what makes well-proportioned figures and bodies beautiful
if beauty is not proportion?

P. You must know that matter, the substratum of all lower
bodies, is in itself formless and the mother of every de-
formity; but being informed in all its parts by the influence
of the spiritual world it becomes beautiful, and it is the
forms transmitted to it by the divine intellect, the soul of
the world, or the spiritual and heavenly worlds, which take
away its deformity and give it beauty. Thus beauty in the
lower world comes from the spiritual and heavenly world,
just as ugliness and deformity are properties peculiar to it;

Proportioned one to another could be called beautiful, and
therefore neither the sun nor the moon, nor the stars in their
beauty, nor shining Venus and Jupiter clothed in majesty.

S. But these have the beauty of circular form, which is
the most beautiful of all figures, making a whole in itself
and containing parts.

P. The circle is certainly beautiful in itself, but its beauty
is not caused by the proportion of the parts one to another
or to the whole; for its parts are equal and homogeneous
and therefore cannot have no proportion. Nor is it the beauty
of the circle which gives beauty to the sun, moon and stars,
for in this case every circular body would be beautiful as
the sun; but their beauty consists in luminosity, which in
itself is not a figure and has no proportionate parts. More-
over, flaming fire, gleaming gold, and shining precious
stones would not then be beautiful, because they are wholly
simple and their parts are of one nature with the whole,
without any difference of the one relative to the other.
Again, according to this theory, only the whole would be
beautiful and none of the parts, except in relation to
the whole; but you may know a face which is sometimes
beautiful and sometimes not, although the proportion of
the parts to the whole remains unaltered. Beauty, therefore,
does not appear to consist in the proportion of the parts.
Moreover, according to this philosophy, pleasing colours
would not be beautiful, nor even light, though it is the most
beautiful of all things in corporeal world, in which it is
the source of all beauty. Similarly, in hearing, a soft voice
would not (as it is) be called beautiful. And if beauty of
music is to be the harmony of the parts, what, then, is intel-
lectual beauty? If it is said to be ordered reasoning what can
be said of the understanding of simple things and of the
purest divinity, which is the highest beauty? Therefore if
by reason of its defective and imperfect material nature which goes to the making of all its bodies.

S. Every body would then be equally beautiful is that its essence is informed by the superior world.

P. I will grant you that every body has beauty imparted to it by the form which informs its matter; but they are not all equally beautiful, because the forms do not shed their perfection in like manner upon all lower bodies, nor do they remove the deformity of matter to the same extent in every substance. Thus, in some they take away a small measure of the deformity, and in others to a greater degree; and the more of this material deformity the form is able to remove the greater will be the beauty of the body, and the less it has power to remove, the less beautiful will be the body and the more defective. This difference exists not only in the different species of the bodies of the lower world, but also in the various individuals of a species: for one man will be more beautiful than another, and one horse a finer specimen than another, if the form of which his essence is composed has better subdued matter, and therefore been able to take away a larger measure of its deformity, endowing it with beauty.

S. Why, then, do proportionate bodies appear beautiful?

P. Because the form which best informs matter orders the parts of the body by the light of the intellect so that they are proportionate to one another and to the whole; and they are so arranged that they may further the ends and activities of the body, unifying in the best form possible the whole and the parts, whether different or similar, that is homogeneous or heterogeneous, so that the whole should be single and perfectly informed. And thus it is made beautiful. Now when matter is stubborn the form is unable to unite and order the parts to the whole after the manner of the intellect, and the body remains deformed and its beauty is decreased on account of the disobedience of defective matter to the informing and beautifying form.

S. I am glad to learn in what the beauty of lower bodies consists, and what makes it and whence it comes. But one thing remains obscure to me—a part of your argument against those who say that beauty is proportion—to wit, that pleasing colours are beautiful; and yet they are not united by form. In the same way light is of great beauty, yet its parts are not informed and united as a whole; and again, the sun, moon, and stars, although they are bodies, are not composed of form nor are they informed by any form. Why, therefore, are they beautiful? Moreover, music, harmony, sweet voices, polished oratory, sonorous verses—these things have neither formless matter nor any form which informs them, and yet they are beautiful. Finally, those beautiful creatures of the imagination and understanding and of the human intellect which you have described are not composed of matter and form, and yet their beauty surpasses that of every other thing in the lower world.

P. Your question is good, and I was going to explain to you the beauty of these things had you not asked me. In the lower world all beauty is of form, as I have told you, which when it succeeds in overcoming formless matter and in subduing rude corporeality, makes substances beautiful. Therefore, it is right that the forms themselves should be more beautiful, or even beauty itself, since of their own power they can make the ugly beautiful. For if they were not beautiful they would be either ugly, or neutral, that is neither beautiful nor ugly; and if they were ugly how could they give beauty by their essence? For an opposite cannot by virtue of its essence produce its opposite, but rather its kind. Again, if form is neutral why does it cause beauty rather than ugliness? and yet it is always beauty which
follows on form. You must, therefore, concede that the forms are more beautiful than what they inform. Colours, therefore, are beautiful because they are forms, and if substances with vivid colouring are made beautiful by them, how much more beautiful must they themselves be, or even beauty itself! And pure light will have even greater beauty, since it makes colour and coloured objects beautiful, and it is the true form in abstract bodies and blest with corporeality, as you have already learnt. If light, then, is the mother of the ephemeral beauties of the lower world it is but right that it should be most beautiful. The sun, moon and stars are beautiful on account of their light, which serves them all as form, and they themselves, according to Themistius, may be called forms rather than informed bodies. And since the sun is the father of beautiful light it is but fitting that it should be first amongst all beautiful corporeal things. Then follow the other heavenly luminaries which receive the sun’s light first and continually. After them the sun makes all other shining and coloured substances in the lower world beautiful; and in particular flaming fire, since it is more formal and less corporeal by reason of its subtlety and lightness, and because it partakes in a higher degree of the solar light. And its formality appears in this, that it does not allow its nature to be violated or changed by any other opposite element, except when it is totally consumed, because no other element can cool or damp it, or induce in it any quality contrary to its own nature so long as it remains lire; this, however, is its own custom with the other elements: for it heats water and earth and dries the air, contrary to their proper natures. And throughout the whole lower world light is universal form, taking away the ugliness of darkness of chaotic matter; and those bodies which have most part in it, it makes the most beautiful, so that it is rightly called true beauty. The sun from

which it derives is the source of beauty, and it passes first through the moon and stars, its noblest adherents. Harmony is beautiful because it is a spiritual form, ordering and uniting many and divers voices into single and perfect harmony, after the manner of the intellect; and soft voices are beautiful because they are a part of harmony and, partaking of the whole, they partake of its beauty. The beauty of oratory comes from this spiritual beauty which combines and unites many different kinds of material words into a perfect intellectual union, forming a species of harmonic beauty, so that it can rightly be called more beautiful than corporeal beauty. Poetry, with its intellectual beauty, has more of the harmonic beauty of sound. The beauties of knowledge and understanding and of the human intellect clearly take precedence of every corporeal beauty because they are truly formal and spiritual and bring order and unity to the many and various sensitive and rational concepts of the soul; and further, they bestow the treasures of learning upon minds disposed to receive beauty. There is also an artificial beauty in all objects which are beautified by art. In this way the beauty in the whole of the lower world issues from the spiritual in the forms and by their presence in corporeal substance. And these forms or formal beauty are always abstracted from matter, for they will in no wise consort with deformity, which might tarnish their beauty. The virtues, therefore, and wisdom are always beautiful, but informed bodies are sometimes beautiful and sometimes not, according to whether their matter is tractable or hostile to formal beauty.

S. I understand how all natural beauty in the corporeal world derives from the form or forms impressed upon its material substance; but I do not yet understand the origin of the beauty of artificial things, since it does not come
from the spiritual or heavenly source of the natural forms, nor is it of their number and nature.

P. As the beauty of natural things is derived from natural forms, whether essential or accidental, so the beauty of artificial things derives from artificial forms. Therefore the definition of both kinds of beauty is the same.

S. And what is this definition?

P. Formal grace, which delights and moves him who apprehends it to love; and as this formal grace belongs to natural form in natural beauty so it belongs to artificial form in artificial beauty. If you would understand how the beauty of artificial objects comes from the form of the art [with which they are fashioned], imagine two pieces of wood of the same size, one carved in the form of a most beautiful Venus, the other untouched, and you will recognize that it is not the wood which makes the Venus beautiful, because the other similar piece of wood has no beauty, and therefore its form or artificial design must be its beauty and that which makes it beautiful. And as the natural forms of bodies are derived from an incorporeal and spiritual origin which is the soul of the world, and ultimately from the first divine intellect, in which two spiritual beings all forms first exist with more exalted essence, perfection and beauty than in lower bodies subject to division; so the artificial forms are derived from the mind of the human artificer in which they first exist with greater perfection and beauty than in the object. [though it be] beautifully designed. And as when we ignore the material of an object the better to consider the beauty of its design we are left only with the Idea in the mind of the craftsman, so, subtracting matter from beautiful natural objects, only their ideal forms remain, pre-existing in the first intellect and thence imparted to the soul of the world. You will easily recognize, Sophia, how much more

beautifun must be the single idea of a work of art in the mind of the artist than when it is dismembered and diffused throughout the material object; because union enhances all beauty and perfection, and division detracts from it, and the elements of the beauty of the wooden statue of Venus are separated, each standing on its own merit, so that the beauty of the created statue will be less vivid and weaker than that which is in the mind of the craftsman. For he conceives the form of his work with all its parts, the one setting off the other and increasing its beauty, and the beauty of the whole is contained in each part and that of each in the whole without discord or division. If, therefore, a man were to see the one and the other, he would know that the beauty of the design is beyond comparison with that of the thing designed as being the cause of its beauty; and in the company of corporeal substance it decreases in perfection as the substance increases. For the greater the mastery of form over the roughness and ugliness of matter, the greater the beauty of the artificial object, and the greater the opposition of matter to form the less will be this beauty. It follows, therefore, that form is most beautiful without body, just as body is infinitely ugly without form.

And natural things are of the manner of artificial things: because it is clear that those forms which make natural bodies beautiful exist with a far higher degree of beauty in the mind of the Creator and true architect of the world, that is in the divine intellect; for there they are all abstracted from matter, mutation or alteration, and from all manner of division and multiplication; and the beauty of the whole makes each one of them beautiful, and the beauty of each is found in the whole. These forms are also all contained in the soul of the world, which is its second artificer, though not with that measure of beauty which is in the first creative intellect, because in the soul they do not exist in pure union,
but with some multiplication or ordered diversity, the soul being the mean between the creator and the created. In the world soul, however, they enjoy a far greater measure of beauty than in corporeal things, for there they exist spiritually in ordered unity, abstracted from matter, mutation and motion. And from the world soul emanate all the souls and natural forms in the lower world, distributed amongst the various bodies, and all subject to change and motion with successive generation and corruption, save only the rational human soul, which is free from corruption, mutation and corporeal motion (though with some intellectual motion and spiritual reception of the forms). For it is not combined with body like the other souls and natural forms, of which (as we said of the artificial) those which predominate in their association with matter are more beautiful in themselves and make the body which they inform more beautiful, and those which are submerged in matter are less beautiful in themselves and make the body which they inform defective. And the opposite is true of natural bodies, for the most beautiful is that which is elevated by its form and is the most subjected to it, and the ugly is that which resists its form and draws it down to itself. You, Sophia, will recognise from this discourse how beauty of lower natural and artificial bodies is none other than the grace which each has from its own form, whether essential or accidental, or from its artificial form. And you will understand that the forms in themselves, of one kind or the other, are more beautiful than that which they inform, and are far more excellent in beauty in their spiritual than in their corporeal being, even though their corporeal beauty is apprehended partly by corporeal vision and partly by corporeal hearing, unlike the spiritual which is apprehended by the eyes of the soul or of the intellect which are capable and worthy of such perception.

S. How are the eyes of our soul and intellect thus fitted for perception of spiritual beauty?

P. Because our rational soul, as it is the image of the soul of the world, bears the hidden impress of all the forms existing therein, and therefore by the use of reason, like [that world soul], it distinguishes each one of them and loves and relishes its beauty. The pure intellect which shines forth in us is likewise the copy of the pure divine intellect, and is stamped with the unity of all the Ideas; and this it is which, crowning the discourse of reason, reveals to us those ideal essences in intuitive, single and abstract knowledge, when our well schooled reason merits such knowledge. So that with its eyes, we may behold in one intuition the highest beauty of the first intellect and of the divine Ideas. And in this perception we rejoice, and love is born in us. With the eyes of the understanding and by ordered reason we can see the beauty of the soul of the world, and in it the hierarchy of all the forms, which perception is again productive of pleasure and love. To these two spiritual beauties of the first intellect and of the soul of the world correspond, as their copy and image, the two corporeal beauties apprehended by sight and hearing. That apprehended by sight is the image of the intellectual beauty because it consists wholly in light and is perceived through the medium of light. And you know already that the sun with its light is the image of the first intellect. Therefore, just as the latter illumines with its beauty the eyes of our intellect and fills them with beauty; so its image, the sun, with its light, which is the splendour of that intellect made into form and essence in the sun, illumines our eyes and makes them to apprehend all the beautiful shining bodies [of the lower world]. The beauty which is apprehended through hearing is the image of the beauty of the soul of
the world, because it consists in concord, harmony and order, as the forms exist in the soul of the world in ordered union. And as the hierarchy of the forms which is in the world soul beautifies our soul and is apprehended by it, so the ordering of the various parts in harmonious song, pithy oratory and verse is apprehended by our hearing, and through this medium delights our soul by reason of the harmonious and concordant forms impressed upon it by the world soul.

S. I have understood how corporeal beauty, apprehended by both vision and hearing, is the image and copy of the spiritual beauty of the first intellect and of the soul of the world; and that as our eyes and ears apprehend the two species of corporeal beauty, so our understanding and intellect apprehend both kinds of spiritual beauty. One difficulty, however, still perplexes me. I see that it is our soul and intellect which, through the medium of the eyes and ears, know and judge of corporeal beauty, and take pleasure in it and love it, for our eyes and ears seem truly to be merely the channel and path of corporeal beauty to our soul and intellect. I find it reasonable, therefore, that they should incline to corporeal rather than to spiritual beauty as you have said.

P. There is no doubt that it is the soul which knows judges, and senses all forms of corporeal beauty and takes pleasure in them and loves them, and that it is not the eyes and ears, although they are the medium of this knowledge. For if the latter were to know and love beauty it would follow that everyone would have an equal knowledge of corporeal beauty, and love it and rejoice in it in like manner, for all have eyes and ears; yet you may see many beautiful things which are hidden from many with the keenest vision and neither afford them pleasure nor move them to love. And how many men of good hearing are there who have no taste for music, nor does it seem beautiful to them, nor can they love it; and to others beautiful poetry and oratory seem but trifles to while away the hours. Knowledge of corporeal beauty, therefore, and its power to evoke pleasure and love, would seem to depend not on the eyes and ears by which this beauty is communicated, but on the soul whether it journeys.

S. Since you merely lead me into yet greater difficulties, I will interrupt your answer that you may tell me the reason why all souls have not the same knowledge and love of the beautiful and why they do not all take the same pleasure in it, when every eye and ear transmits this beauty to the soul.

P. If you will give me leave to continue, you will see the answer to this question in the solution of your difficulty. You know that corporeal beauty is formal grace. And I have already told you that all abstract forms are contained spiritually in ordered union in the world soul, of which our rational soul is the image, because its essence is a latent figuration of all those spiritual forms impressed upon it by the world soul, its original and pattern. This latent figuration is what Aristotle calls potentiality and universal preparation of the potential intellect to receive and understand all forms and essences: for if they were not all potential and latent in it, it could not receive and understand them in actuality and by pre-existence. Plato says that our reason and understanding is the recollection of things pre-existing in the soul in a state of oblivion, and this is the same potentiality of Aristotle, and the latency of which I have told you. You must know, therefore, that all the forms and Ideas do not spring from bodies into our soul, because to migrate from one subject to another is impossible; but their representation by the senses makes these same forms and essences to shine forth which before were latent in our soul. This
enlightenment Aristotle calls the act of understanding and Plato memory, but their meaning is the same though expressed differently. Our soul is therefore filled with formal beauties which, in truth, are its proper essence, and if they are concealed within it this latency is not on account of the intellect which is its essence, but by reason of the connection and union it has with the human body and matter. For although it is not blended with matter, the union and connection which it has with it suffices to render its essence, in which is the hierarchy of formal beauty, shadowy and obscure, so that the beauty diffused amongst bodies must first be imaged within it to bring to light the latent beauty. But since this latency and darkness differs greatly in the souls of human individuals according to the diversity of obedience of their bodies and matter to their souls, it happens that one soul will recognise beauty easily and another with greater difficulty, and a third not at all, because of the stubbornness of his matter, which does not allow light to be brought to the darkness which it causes in the soul. Therefore you may see one man who of himself will straightforwardly recognise beauty, and another who will have need of teaching, and a third who will never be taught. Again, a soul will recognise some forms of beauty with ease, and others with difficulty, because its matter is more proportionate and similar to some bodies and beautiful things than to others. Thus the latency and shadow of beauty in the soul is not everywhere the same: wherefore the soul easily recognises a part of this beauty through the communication of the senses, and a part not. And the differences amongst various men in this respect are too numerous to be set forth. You must know, therefore, that all natural beauty which our soul perceives through the medium of bodies is none other than that formal beauty which the world soul has taken from the intellect and distributed amongst earthly bodies, and that true beauty from which it fashioned and informed our understanding in its own image and likeness. Hence we can easily pass from the knowledge of corporeal beauty to that of the beauty of our intellect and of the world soul, and by means of our pure intellect to the knowledge of the highest beauty of the first divine intellect, as from a knowledge of a copy to that of its original. So corporeal beauties are made spiritual in our intellect, and as such they are known by it; and for this reason I have told you that the eyes of our understanding and intellect know spiritual beauty: but whilst the understanding knows the beauty of the forms which are in the world soul by distinguishing the various species of corporeal beauty which its image assumes in the world and which are caused by it, the pure intellect has direct knowledge in simple intuition of the beauty of all things united in the Ideas of the first intellect, which is the final human beatitude. And you must know that those souls which have difficulty in perceiving corporeal beauty, that is the spiritual which lies within it, and can barely extract it from material ugliness and corporeal deformity, also find difficulty in knowing spiritual beauty of the soul, to wit, virtue, science and wisdom. And although every man who has eyes sees the bodily beauty, yet not every man recognises it as beautiful nor delights in it, but only its lovers, and they in varying measure according to the depth of their affection. In like manner, although every soul knows spiritual beauty, they do not all hold it in the same esteem, nor do they all rejoice in its possession, but only those who are lovers, and these in a greater or less degree according to their natural inclination to spiritual love.

S. I understand how our soul has spiritual knowledge of beauty, first of the corporeal and then of the incorporeal,
which beauty pre-exists in the first intellect and in the world soul with surpassing brightness and splendour, and in our understanding in darkness and latency; and also that as those who have a more perfect knowledge of beauty bear love for it, and others do not, so those who have a greater knowledge of the incorporeal are its ardent lovers, and others are without this love. Further, you have told me that those who have a clear knowledge of corporeal beauty and who apprehend it with ease are those who recognise more fully and swiftly the spiritual beauty of the intellect and highest soul. One objection to this view, however, occurs to me, and of no small importance, namely: if the love of beauty is caused by perfect knowledge of it, it follows that as those who have a full knowledge of corporeal beauty are those who have a full knowledge of the spiritual, so those who love corporeal beauty intensely must be the chief lovers of incorporeal intellectual beauty such as wisdom and virtue. Yet the contrary is clearly the case: for those who greatly love corporeal beauty are devoid of knowledge and love of that of the intellect and wellnigh blinded to it; in the same way, those who have the keenest love of intellectual beauty are wont to despise the corporeal, spurring and hating it, and fleeing from it.

P. I am glad you have raised this difficulty, because its solution will show you how far corporeal beauty may be known and loved and how far it must be eschewed and hated, and the nature of the most perfect knowledge and love of it and of the false, sophistical and apparent. You have heard that the soul is the mean between the intellect and the body, and I am speaking not only of the soul of the world, but also of our copy of it. Our soul has, therefore, two faces, like those of the moon turned towards the sun and the earth respectively, the one being turned towards the intellect above it, and the other towards the body below. The first face looking towards the intellect is the understanding with which the soul reasons of universal and spiritual knowledge, extracting the forms and intellectual essences from particular and sensible bodies, ever transforming the corporeal world into the intellectual. The second face turned towards the body is sense, which is particular knowledge of corporeal things, to which is added the materialness of the corporeal things known. These two faces have contrary or opposed motions; and as our soul with its upper face or understanding makes the corporeal incorporeal, so the lower face, or sensible cognition, approaching the objects of sense and mingling with them, draws the incorporeal to the corporeal. Corporeal beauty is recognised by our soul by these two forms of knowledge with one or other face, that is sensible and corporeal or rational and intellectual. For each of these two forms of knowledge of corporeal beauty there arises a corresponding manner of love in the soul—for sensible cognition, sensual love, and for rational cognition, spiritual love. There are many who hold that the face of the soul turned towards the body is luminous and that turned towards the intellect is dark: and this is because their soul is sunk in the body to which it cleaves, and the body is rebellious and hardly overcome by the soul. Their whole knowledge of corporeal beauty is sensuous, and therefore the whole love which they bear it is purely sensual, and they neither know nor love spiritual beauty, nor do they delight in it or deem it worthy of love. These are the most miserable of men, differing little from brute beasts, save that they have the additional qualities of lasciviousness, wantonness and concupiscence, greed and avarice, and the other affections and passions which make men not only base and worthless but also untried and insatiable, in continual strife and discord, knowing neither ease
of mind nor contentment; for the imperfection of such desires and pleasures takes away all satisfaction and lasting peace in accordance with the nature of restless matter, the mother of sensible beauty. There are others, however, who can more truly be called men, for the face of their soul which is turned towards the intellect is no less luminous than that which is turned towards the body, and is some it is even more brilliant. These make rational cognition the true end of their sensible knowledge, and only value sensible beauty perceived by the lower face in so far as rational beauty can be called from it by the upper face, which is true beauty, as I have told you. And though they allow their spiritual soul to remain with the lower face towards the body, the sensible forms are immediately raised by contrary motion to the upper, rational face which draws from them the intelligible forms and species, recognising this to be the true beauty in them and leaving the corporeal and the sensible as the rude husk of the incorporeal or its shadow and image. And as the one form of knowledge is the end of the other, so the one form of love is the end of the other; that is the intellectual of the sensual; for these men love sensible beauty in so far as a knowledge of it causes them to know and love the spiritual and non-sensible. And this alone they love as true beauty and rejoice in its possession. For the rest, which is corporeal and sensible; not only do they not love and delight in it, but even hate it as gross matter, and flee from it as from a dangerous enemy, because association with corporeal things is a stumbling-block to the happiness of our soul, cutting it off with the sensible light of the lower face from the intellectual light of the upper, which is its true happiness. And just as gold when it is alloyed and mixed with baser metals and elements loses its beauty, perfection and purity because its goodness consists in being unalloyed and free from all impurity, so the soul which is obscured by the love of sensible beauty can be neither beautiful nor pure, nor attain to its beatitude until it is purified and cleansed from every incitement to this beauty; and then it comes to possess its true intellectual light without let or hindrance, and therein finds its happiness. You deduce yourself, therefore, Sophia, in imagining that he has the greatest knowledge of sensible beauty who has sensible and material knowledge of it and neglects to extract the spiritual beauty. This knowledge of corporeal beauty is imperfect, because he who makes the accessory to be the principal has a warped judgement, and he who prefers darkness to light has not true vision, and he who turns his affection from the original to the copy or image does himself injury. [I hereby assert that] perfect knowledge of corporeal beauty is such that spiritual beauty can easily be extracted from it; and thus the lower face of our soul, turned towards the body, has light enough when it is the servant of the light of the upper and intellectual face, and is its accessory and inferior and its medium, and if the upper yields to it, both the one and the other will be imperfect and the soul will lose its equilibrium and happiness. Love, therefore, for inferior beauty is fitting and good only when its purpose is to extract from it the spiritual beauty which is the truly lovable, and when love is mainly directed towards this spiritual beauty, and the corporeal only receives the second share, and this for the sake of the spiritual. For just as spectacles are good, beautiful and prized in so far as their strength is proportioned to the eye and assists in the imaging of the visual forms, and if they are too strong and out of focus they are not only useless, but harmful and an impediment to sight, so knowledge of sensible beauty is good and is the source of love and pleasure in so far as its end is in knowledge of intellectual beauty and induces love and enjoyment of the latter. And when it is not confined within its due limits and not directed
towards that end it is harmful and detracts from the beauty of intellectual light, [the possession of] which is the end of human endeavour. Take warning, therefore, Sophia, lest you be ensnared in the love and pleasure of sensible beauty, drawing your soul from its fair intellectual beginning to plunge it into the morass of deformed body and gross matter. Be not like him in the fable who, seeing beautiful forms mirrored in dirty water, turned his back on the original, and, pursuing the shadowy images, flung himself headlong into the turbid waters where he was drowned.

S. Gladly do I hear your teaching, and I would indeed follow it, for I know of the dangers and pitfalls which beset the way of knowledge and love of corporeal beauty. And I now understand that the latter, in so far as it is beauty, is not corporeal, but only that which the corporeal derives from the spiritual or the splendour which the spiritual infuses into lower bodies, the beauty of which is truly but the shadow and image of intellectual and spiritual beauty. And the true good of our soul is to rise from corporeal to spiritual beauty and to know the higher intellectual beauty through the lower and sensible. I would still know, however, what is this spiritual beauty which makes every incorporeal thing beautiful and is also communicated to bodies, and not only in large measure to those of the heavens, but also in greater or less degree to the lower and corruptible bodies, and above all to men in the understanding and intellect. What is this beauty, therefore, which is thus distributed throughout the universe and all its parts and through which the whole and every part is made beautiful? For although you have explained to me that beauty is formal grace, the knowledge of which inspires love, this is only the beauty of formed bodies and of their forms; but I would know more precisely how this can be the shadow and image of the incorporeal, and what manner of thing this incorporeal beauty is upon which the corporeal depends. For when I have this knowledge I shall recognise what is true beauty which gives of itself to all things, and a particular knowledge and the definition of corporeal beauty which you have given me will be superfluous because the definition of the latter is not the definition of beauty itself, but only as it exists in body. And I do not know what the essence of this same beauty is when it is separated from body, and this knowledge would I have above all things. I pray you then, shew this thing to me also.

P. In beautiful artificial things, as you have heard, beauty is nothing more than the art of the craftsman diffused throughout the objects which he makes and throughout their several parts. Hence true and first artificial beauty is the knowledge and art pre-existing in the mind of the craftsman, upon which the beauty of artificial objects depends, as on their original Idea communicated to them all. In the same way, the beauty of all natural bodies is none other than the splendour of their Ideas, and therefore these are the true beauty by which all things are made beautiful.

S. Your explanation is no less obscure than that which you set out to explain. You tell me that true beauty is Idea; therefore you must needs tell me what Idea is no less than beauty itself, especially since the being of the Ideas, as you know, is far more hidden from us than the being of beauty. You would therefore explain the clearer part by what is hidden. And not only is the essence of the Idea more mysterious than that of beauty, but its very existence is also more ambiguous and uncertain; for all allow there to be a true beauty on which all other beauty depends, whereas many of the wisest philosophers deny the existence of the Platonic Ideas, such as Aristotle and all his followers, the
Peripatetics. How, therefore, will you explain to me what is sure by what is ambiguous, and what is evident by what is mysterious?

P. The Ideas are none other than the knowledge of the created universe with all its parts in the mind of the highest Craftsman and Creator of the world, the existence of which no reasonable person can deny.

S. Tell me the reason why it cannot be denied.

P. Because if the world is not accidentally created, as, moreover, is proved by the relation between the whole and its parts, it must have been produced by a mind or wise intellect, which created it in that most perfect order and proportion that you and every wise man may discover. And he who considers it aught cannot but rest amazed at the wondrous [perfection], not only in the whole but in the least of its parts, in the order and relation of which he will see the highest perfection of the mind of Artificer and His infinite wisdom in creating the world.

S. I would not deny this, nor do I think it can be denied, for in myself and in each of my members I see the great wisdom of the Creator of all things, which passes my comprehension and that of all wise men [upon the earth].

P. You say well, and you would stand even more amazed were you to see the anatomy of the human frame and of each of its parts, with how much cunning ingenuity and wisdom it is contrived and fashioned, for in every part the immense wisdom, providence and care of God the creator is revealed: as Job says, 'in my flesh shall I see God.'

S. Come, tell me of the Ideas.

P. If the wisdom and art of the supreme Craftsman has made the universe in all its parts and divisions of parts in the highest perfection, harmony and order, the knowledge of all these things, contrived with such skill, must pre-exist in the same perfection in the mind of this Creator of the world, just as the design of artificial things must first be known in the mind of their craftsman and artificer, otherwise they would not be artificial but only accidental. This foreknowledge of the universe and of its parts in the divine intellect is what is known as the Ideas, that is divine foreknowledge of the things in creation. Have you, therefore, now understood what are the Ideas and what is their true nature?

S. I understand this clearly. But tell me, how can Aristotle and the other Peripatetics deny their existence.

P. It would need a long discourse to tell you how Aristotle disagrees with Plato, his master, with regard to the Ideas, and the reason for each of his arguments and those which are the most telling. I will not embark upon this subject at the present, because such a lengthy disgression is far from our purpose and would only serve to spin out our discussion. I will merely tell you for your satisfaction that what we have said of the Ideas Aristotle neither denies nor can be deny, although he does not call them by this name. For he asserts that the Nomos of the universe pre-exists in the divine mind, that is the wise ordering of it, from which order the perfection and plan of the world and all its parts is derived, just as a general plans how he will marshal his army, and upon this plan depend the organisation and operations of every section of his troops. In effect, therefore, the Platonic Ideas in the mind of God are allowed by Aristotle, although he speaks of them under another name and with other figures of speech.

S. I have understood this conformity; but tell me something of the different opinions of Plato and Aristotle concerning
the essence of these Ideas, which Aristotle and his followers sought so strongly to deny.

P. I will tell you in brief. You must know that Plato placed in the Ideas the essences and substances of all things so that everything which they engender in the corporeal world is considered as but the shadow of substance and essence rather than substance and essence itself. Therefore he despises corporeal beauty for itself because, he says, being the mere shadow of Ideal beauty, it is only of value in revealing and inducing a knowledge of the latter and in itself is almost worthless. Aristotle’s opinion is less extreme: for he considers that the supreme perfection of the Craftsman must produce works of art perfect in themselves, and therefore that the corporeal world contains the true essence and substance of all its parts, and that the Ideas are not the essences and substances of things, but the procreative causes upon which their order depends. Therefore he holds that the first substances are individual and that in each of them is preserved the essence of the species. Nor does he hold that the universals of these species are the Ideas, since these are the causes of real substances, but only intellectual concepts of our understanding taken from the substance and essence which is in every real and particular thing. These universal concepts he therefore calls secondary substances because they are abstracted by our mind from first particulars. And he does not hold, like Plato, that the Idea are first substances nor secondary, but the primary cause of all corporeal substances and of all their essences composed of matter and form: for, according to him, matter and body are contained in the essence and substance of corporeal things; and into the definition of every essence, genus and differentiae, enters first matter or corporeality, to wit, the common material form, as the genus, and the specific form as the differentiae, because essence and substance are composed of both matter and form. And seeing that in the Ideas there is neither matter nor body, there is, therefore, according to Aristotle, neither essence nor substance in them, but the Ideas are the divine origin on which all essence and substance depend, first substances being the first real and corporeal effects and secondary their intellectual copy. He therefore teaches that the beauty of the corporeal world is true beauty, but caused by and dependent on the first ideal beauty of the first divine intellect. From this difference which exists between these two students of matters divine arise all the others concerning the Ideas, and also the greater part of all their disagreements relating to things natural and divine.

S. I like to know these distinctions, and it would please me still further to hear to which of these opinions you most incline.

P. Even this difference, if you consider it well, you will find consists rather in the application of words than in their meaning, according to which they ought to be used, to wit, the significance of essence, substance, unity, truth, goodness, beauty and such like, which is applied to objects in reality; so that in meaning I follow them both because it is one and the same in both cases. In the use of words perhaps Aristotle should be followed, because the language of the modern is more polished and his terms more discriminating and subtle in their application. There is a further point to be considered: Plato, finding that the early Greek philosophers did not hold there to be any essence, substance or beauty other than that of corporeal things, and that naught else existed save body, like a true physician was obliged to cure them with the contrary belief. Thus he showed them that the body in itself has neither essence, substance nor beauty,
nor indeed anything but the shadow of the spiritual and Ideal essence and beauty of the mind of the Creator of the world. As a result of Plato’s teaching Aristotle found the philosophers entirely ignoring the body and considering that all beauty, essence, and substance existed in the Ideas and none in the corporeal world; and therefore they had lost interest in the knowledge of corporeal things, of their activities, motion and natural mutations, and of the causes of their generation and corruption. This negligence would cause imperfection and deficiency in the abstract knowledge of the spiritual origin of body, for intimate knowledge of the effect finally induces perfect knowledge of its cause. Therefore it seemed expedient to Aristotle to moderate this extreme which in the process of time had perhaps come to overshoot the mark of Plato. And, as I have told you, he showed that essences and substances produced and caused by the Ideas truly exist in the corporeal world, and true beauty is also found there, though depending on the purest and most perfect Ideal beauty. Thus Plato was a physician who cured disease by excess and Aristotle a physician who preserved the health, already procured by the work of Plato, by the practice of temperance.

S. It has given me no little satisfaction to know what is meant by the Ideas and why their existence is necessary, and also that Aristotle does not absolutely deny them, and the difference between his conception and that of Plato. And I will not question you further on the matter, so as not to distract you from our subject of beauty. To revert to this theme, you told me that true beauty consists of the intellectual Ideas or the knowledge of the pattern of the order of the universe and its parts pre-existing in the mind of its Creator, i.e. in the first divine intellect. Though it seems possible to me to grant that their beauty is greater and prior than any bodily beauty, of which it is the cause, I cannot grant that the Ideas are the true and absolute original beauty by reason of which every other thing is made beautiful or is beauty: because the Ideas are many since we are agreed in calling them the Ideal patterns of the universe and all its parts, which are so many as to be well-nigh numberless. And if each of these Ideas is beautiful or beauty itself, the first and true beauty must needs be something else higher than the Ideas, through participation in which every Idea is beautiful or beauty. For if true beauty were peculiar to one of the Ideas none other could be true or primary beauty, but secondary through participation in the first. You must explain to me, therefore, what is the first true beauty upon which that of all the Ideas depends, since beauty of the Ideas themselves does not satisfy the requirements of first beauty, by reason of their multiplicity.

P. I am glad that you have raised this difficulty because its solution will put a satisfactory end to your desire to know what is the first and true beauty. First let me tell you not to be deceived in thinking that there is diversity and multitudinous division in the Ideas as in the worldly counterparts which depend on them. For the faults of effects do not occur and are not found in their perfect causes, but are peculiar to the effects, as such. And by virtue of their being as effect they are far removed from the perfection of the cause, so that defects occur in them which have no pre-existence nor proceed from their cause.

S. Yet it seems that from good causes proceed good effects, and that the effect must so resemble its cause that the cause may be known by its effect.

P. Although a good effect comes from a good cause, the goodness and perfection of the effect are not therefore equated with that of the cause, and although the effect
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P. And is not the whole universe with all its parts essentially one?
S. Certainly.
P. Therefore the knowledge of the universe and the Idea of it is one in itself, and not many.
S. Yes, but as the universe, being one, has many parts with different essences, so this knowledge and Idea of the universe will have many and different Ideas in itself.
P. Even did I grant you that the Idea of the universe contained many different Ideas of the parts in it, it is undoubtedly true that as the beauty of the universe is prior to the beauty of its parts, because the beauty of each is derived from that of the whole, so the beauty of the Idea of the whole universe is prior to the beauty of the Ideas of its parts. And, being the first, it is the true beauty, and by giving of itself to the other Ideas of the parts, it makes them beautiful in varying degrees. Moreover, the separate multiplication of the Ideas cannot be allowed, because although the first Idea of the universe, which is in the mind of its highest Creator, reflects the ordered multiplicity of its essential parts, this multiplicity does not therefore induce any essential or separable diversity in the Idea nor a dimensional or numerical division, as it does in the parts of the universe, but the first Idea is multifarious in such a way that it remains indivisible, pure and absolutely simple in itself, and in perfect unity, containing the plurality of all the parts of the created universe, together with the order of all their degrees, so that where one is there they all, and the whole does not take away from the unity of the one. Here one opposite is not separated in place from another, nor diverse and opposed in essence, but joined together with the Idea of fire is that of water, with the Idea of the simple, that of the complex, with the Idea of each part, that of the whole universe, and
with the Idea of the whole, that of each of the parts. In this way, the multiplicity in the intellect of the first Creator is pure unity and the diversity is true identity, so that man can rather understand it with his spiritual intellect than express it in corporeal speech, for the material nature of words prevents the accurate representation of this purity, far beyond the skill of any human artist to portray.

S. I think I have understood this sublime abstraction: how multifarious is contained in unity, and how upon one most simple thing depend many different and separate things. If, however, you were to give me some concrete example, I should be greatly pleased.

P. I remember having already given you an example which you may behold with your own eyes, to wit, the sun with all the colours and light of every corporeal substance. For although they all depend on the sun, and all the essences of the colours and the light of the universe in their varying gradations exist in it as in their Idea, none the less they are not multiplied and divided in it as in the lower bodies which it illuminates, but are comprise in one essence, the light of the sun, which in its unity contains all the different shades of light and colour in the universe. So you will see that when the pure light of the sun falls upon the humid clouds opposite to it, it forms the bow which men call the Iris, made up of many complex and varying colours, and thus you may only behold them all together or each separately. So too when the sun is imaged in our eyes it produces a multitude of different colours and lights all together in the pupil, so that we perceive the multiplicity which exists with the unity without being able to make any separable difference between them. In this way the sun makes all things resplendent; for it is impressed on air and water in a multitude of colours and

lights together, without separation, since it is one and single. Thus the perfect, single light of the sun, because it unites every grade of light and colour, is represented separately in different bodies with a myriad colours and lights, and in our eyes and in the diaphanous, such as air and water, with all these colours and lights united together, because the diaphanous is less removed from the simplicity of this light than the opaque, and more able to receive it as a unity. In this manner the intellect of the divine craftsman imparts its pure and supremely beautiful Idea containing every degree and essence of beauty in the bodies of the universe, with a multitude of separable and beautiful essences in a hierarchy of descending orders. In our intellect and in that of the angels and heavenly beings it is represented as multisiform united beauty without any separation or division; the more excellent the intellect which receives it in actual being and clarity, the greater is the unity of this multiforimity and the greater the union the greater the beauty of the intellect and the more nearly does it approach to the first and true beauty of the intellectual Idea which is in the divine mind. And for your greater satisfaction, besides this example of the sun which is the copy of the divine intellect, I will give you yet another—of the human intellect, which is similar in character to its pattern. You see how a simple concept is represented to our imagination or preserved in our memory, not in its single unity but as a united though multisiform product of the imagination emanating from the one and simple concept, and it is clothed in speech in a sequence of many words, each separate from the other. Therefore the concepts of our intellect are represented in our imagination or memory in the same way as the sun is mirrored in the diaphanous, and divine beauty in every created intellect; and they are expressed in speech as the light of the sun is represented in the opaque, and the beauty
and wisdom of God in the various parts of the created world. Thus you may behold the copy of the participation of the highest beauty and wisdom, not only in the visible light of the sun, but also—an even truer image—in the representation of our intellectual concepts in inner sense or outward hearing.

S. You have entirely satisfied me with this example of the reflection of the sun’s rays by the two kinds of recipients, to wit, the gross and opaque and the subtle and diaphanous, which may be compared with the representation of the divine intellectual Idea in the created universe in the two recipient natures, the corporeal and the spiritual and intellectual. For the sun with its light, as you have already told me, is not only an example of the divine Idea and intellect, but a true copy made by it in its own image. Therefore as the sun imparts its shining beauty as a whole or separately to the various gross and opaque bodies, so the divine intellect imparts its ideal beauty as a whole and separately to all the essences of the different corporeal parts of the universe; and just as the sun imparts the light of its beauty with multiform unity to subtle and diaphanous bodies, so the divine intellect imparts its ideal beauty with multiform unity to the created intellects, whether human, heavenly, or angelic. But one thing only I would know touching primary beauty, which you hold to be the pattern and form or Idea of the whole created universe, both corporeal and spiritual, that is the foreknowledge of it and its ordering in the divine mind or intellect in accordance with which it was produced together with all its parts. Now since this Idea of the universe is the first and true beauty, as you say, it would follow that the beauty of the world in form would be above every other beauty as being the first, which opinion seems to me utterly unreasonable; for the beauty of the divine intellect or mind clearly precedes the beauty of the Idea and pattern which is laid up in it and conceived by it, as the beauty of the cause takes precedence over that of the effect which it produces. This Idea is not, therefore, the first beauty, as you say, but that of the intellect and divine mind from which the Idea and its beauty emanate.

P. Your difficulty comes from false and inadequate knowledge, and is brought about by the inevitable use of inappropriate terms: for because we say that the Idea of the world is in the divine mind or intellect, you think that the Idea is something other than that intellect or mind in which it exists.

S. And perchance, for that which exists in something is of necessity other than that in which it exists.

P. Yes, if it truly existed in it, but the Idea does not truly exist in the intellect, but is the intellect and divine mind itself. For the Idea of the world is the supreme wisdom by which the world was made, and the divine wisdom is the Word and its intellect and its true mind. Because not only in it but in every active and created intellect, wisdom intent and intellect itself are one and the same, and only to us humans is its simplicity and pure union represented in this threefold form. The union is greatest in the highest and purest divine intellect, which in all its aspects is one and the same as ideal wisdom. Thus the beauty of the Idea is the very same beauty of the intellect; not that beauty is in it as a quality in a subject, but the intellect or Idea is this same first beauty by which everything is made beautiful.

S. Therefore you would not have the divine mind and intellect to be other than the pattern of the universe according to which it was created.

P. Truly no other.
S. The divine intellect, therefore, would only exist to give being to the world, since it is none other than the pattern from which this was created, and could have no intrinsic worth.

P. This does not follow, because the divine intellect is itself all-perfect and set above the whole created universe. And though I have told you that is its pattern, I do not mean you to infer that it was made for the universe as a model for a work of art, but rather that by reason of its supreme perfection the whole universe results and it is derived from it in its likeness and image; and its excellence exceeds that of the universe as the real person is greater than his image and the light than the shadow which it casts. So that supreme beauty, which in itself is absolutely pure, simple, and perfect unity, is produced in the universe in multiform unity of the single whole, with its several parts, far removed from its original perfection, just as the effect from its more excellent cause, as I have explained to you.

S. My mind is set at rest in the knowledge of this divine and abstract unity, and I see that the highest beauty is the first wisdom which, being imparted to the whole universe, makes every part of it beautiful, so that there is no beauty save wisdom, either impurely or imparted, the one productive, the other produced, the one absolutely pure and supremely one, the other diffused, extended, separated and multiplied, though always the image of that highest and true beauty, first wisdom. But I wish that you could set my mind at rest on still one score: since first beauty, as you have said, is divine wisdom and the Idea of the universe, or created intellect, or its mind, the beauty of God would seem to be prior to it, and to be the first true beauty, and the other that you hold to be the first to be rather the second. For the wise man precedes wisdom and the intelligent man understanding. The first beauty, therefore, must be that of the supremely wise and intelligent, and the second that of His supreme wisdom and intellect; and the more especially since this wisdom is the Idea of the universe, the pattern and model of the created world, as you have said, for you must allow it to be preceded by God Himself, since the architect must needs precede the design and first make his model according to which he will fashion his work. And as God precedes the Idea of the universe, so His beauty must be prior to the Idea, just as the beauty of the latter is the first beauty of the created universe. The beauty of the Idea and first intellect, or of the divine mind and wisdom, is therefore second in order of beauty, and not first, which priority belongs to the supreme Artificer, and not, as you would have it, to the Idea.

P. I am not sorry that you have raised this further difficulty, because its solution will finally disentangle this question and you will thereby gain a knowledge of the highest and true beauty prior to and far exceeding every other form. First, therefore, I will solve your difficulty, a comparatively simple task, showing you that the first intellect, according to Aristotle, is one and the same with the supreme Godhead, and in no way different, save in the terms and philosophical method which we use in speaking of His perfectly simple unity. For Aristotle holds that the divine essence is none other than supreme wisdom and intellect, which, being the most pure and simple unity, produces the single universe and all its parts in the ordered union of the whole. And in its capacity of creator it apprehends this whole with its parts and divisions of parts in one single act of cognition, that is it knows the highest wisdom which is itself, upon which everything depends, being made in its image and likeness. In the Divinity, therefore, the knower is one with its knowledge, the wise with its wisdom, and he who understands