

The Commentaries of Proclus on the First
Book of Euclid's Elements of Geometry
Translated by Thomas Taylor
(London, 1792)
Book I, Chapter 5

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CHAP. V.

What the Instrument is, which judges of the Mathematical Genera and Species.

LET us now consider what that instrument is⁷, adapted to the judgment of mathematical concerns; and let us appoint Plato as our guide in this affair, who, in his Republic, divides cognitions separately from such things as are the objects of knowledge; and distributes cognitions in conjunction with things subject to knowledge. For of the things which are, some he ranks among intelligibles, and others among sensibles. And of intelligibles, some are again pure intelligibles, and others subject to cogitation. And of sensibles, some are purely sensibles, but others conjectural. To intelligibles, indeed, which are the first of the four genera, he assigns an intelligible knowledge; but to those which are subject to cogitation, he attributes thought: to sensibles, faith; but to conjecturals, a conjectural or assimilatory power. And he shews, that the assimilatory power has the same proportion to sense as thought to intelligence. For the conjectural power knows the spectres of sensible forms, while they are beheld in water and other bodies, which perspicuously represent their image: since, by their situation in water, they are after a manner, allotted the last seat in the gradations of forms, and truly become the resemblances of resemblances. In like manner, thought beholds the images of intelligibles in a degraded state, fallen from primary simple and indivisible forms, into multitude and division. Hence, a knowledge of this kind, depends on other more ancient hypotheses; but intelligence arrives at that principle which is no longer supposed. If then, mathematical concerns are neither allotted an essence separate from all division and variety, nor that nature which is apprehended by sense, which is obnoxious to many mutations, and is in every proportion divisible, it must be manifest to every one, that they are essentially subject to cogitation: but cogitation presides over these as an instrument adapted to judgment, in the same manner as sense to sensibles, and the assimilatory power to conjecturals. From whence, indeed Socrates determines that the knowledge of these is more obscure than the first science, but is more evident than the impulsive apprehension of opinion. For in this the mathematical sciences are inferior to intelligence, because they contemplate that which is evolved, and is endued with a power of progression; but

⁷See note to the first chapter.

they are superior to opinion, by that stability of reasons which they contain, and which cannot be confuted. And they originate from supposition, through a diminution of the first science; but they contain forms independent of matter, from their possessing a knowledge more perfect than that of sensibles. We have therefore determined an instrument adapted to the judgment of all mathematical concerns, i. e. cogitation, according to the mind of Plato; which places itself indeed above opinion, but is excelled by intelligence.