

THE BOOK OF THE
TWENTY-FOUR PHILOSOPHERS

Liber XXIV philosophorum

EDITIO MINIMA

The Matheson Trust
For the Study of Comparative Religion

Introduction

The *Liber* is a medieval work, thought by some to have been composed in the 4th century AD. It is extant in its current Latin form in manuscripts from as early as the 12th century, usually in collections of philosophical or Hermetic miscellanea. It consists of twenty-four definitions of God, which were published with or without accompanying commentary for centuries. This introduction and this “minimal” edition for free digital distribution are a prelude to our forthcoming publication of a book including the commentary and all the relevant bibliographical references.

In order to benefit from the following pages, it is important to remember the meaning of the word “philosopher” in the Middle Ages. As has been thoroughly documented by Pierre Hadot, Algis Uždavinys and others, “philosophy” was always more a way of life and a prolonged rite of rebirth than just one among a variety of scholarly disciplines. It was simply true to its name, a “love of wisdom”, encompassing every discipline in a vital and transformative pursuit. In its mental training, it took the mind, along with the other human faculties, to its natural limits, striving for a wider and deeper intellectual “beyond”.

It is also important to remember that in former times numbers always meant more than just quantities. In our case, twenty-four is an image of totality, a number that encompasses all possible directions, tendencies, principles, being the number of letters in the Greek alphabet, of the hours of day and night, and as double of twelve related to the Zodiac circle and time cycles in general.

A “book of twenty-four philosophers” thus conjures up the sum of fully authorised views on a given topic. Such a title is a serious promise, it means something very much in earnest, and in order to do justice to it, we need to give time to its reading.

Stripped of any commentary as we publish them here, these sentences which influenced the likes of Dante, Meister Eckhart, Giordano Bruno and Leibniz, are meant to be like a knocking at the door, each one of them a compassionate attempt to wake us up from our everyday slumber.

Juan Acevedo
for The Matheson Trust
Cambridge, 21st June, 2015

Prologus

Congregatis viginti quattuor philosophis, solum eis in quaestione remansit: quid est Deus? Qui communi consilio datis induitiis et tempore iterum conveniendi statuto, singuli de Deo proprias proponerent propositiones sub definitione, ut ex propriis definitionibus excerptum certum aliquid de Deo communi assensu statuerent.

Prologue

Upon a gathering of twenty-four philosophers, only one question remained for them to answer: what is God?

They then agreed to have a recess, in order for each of them to come up with a definition in his own terms, to gain some certainty from their individual definitions and thus be able to make a consensual assertion about God.

I

DEUS EST MONAS MONADEM GIGNENS,
IN SE UNUM REFLECTENS ARDOREM

1

God: a unity generating a unity, reflecting in itself the one flame.

II

DEUS EST SPHAERA INFINITA CUIUS CENTRUM EST UBIQUE,
CIRCUMFERENTIA NUSQUAM

2

God: an infinite sphere whose centre is everywhere and whose
circumference is nowhere.

III

DEUS EST TOTUS IN QUOLIBET SUI

3

God: entire in his every thing.

IV

DEUS EST MENS ORATIONEM GENERANS,
CONTINUATIONEM PERSEVERANS

4

God: the mind that generates an utterance prolonged continually.

V

DEUS EST QUO NIHIL MELIUS EXCOGITARI POTEST

5

God: that better than which nothing can be conceived.

VI

DEUS EST CUIUS COMPARATIONE SUBSTANTIA EST ACCIDENS,
ET ACCIDENS NIHIL

6

God: that in comparison to which an essential substance is merely accidental, and the accidental is nothing.

VII

DEUS EST PRINCIPIUM SINE PRINCIPIO,
PROCESSUS SINE VARIATIONE, FINIS SINE FINE

7

God: beginning without beginning, unchanging progress,
endless end.

VIII

DEUS EST AMOR QUI PLUS HABITUS MAGIS LATET

8

God: love that hides ever more in the same measure it is owned.

IX

DEUS EST CUI SOLI PRAESENS EST
QUIDQUID CUIUS TEMPORIS EST

9

God: the only one for which whatever belongs to time
is always present.

X

DEUS EST CUIUS POSSE NON NUMERATUR, CUIUS ESSE NON
CLAUDITUR, CUIUS BONITAS NON TERMINATUR

10

God: its power cannot be measured, its being cannot be enclosed,
its goodness does not have limits.

XI

DEUS EST SUPER ENS, NECESSE, SOLUS SIBI ABUNDANTER,
SUFFICIENTER.

11

God: beyond what is; necessary; alone
in self-sufficing abundance.

XII

DEUS EST CUIUS VOLUNTAS DEIFICA ET POTENTIAE
ET SAPIENTIAE ADAEQUATUR

12

God: whose will is equalled by divine power and wisdom.

XIII

DEUS EST SEMPITERNITAS AGENS IN SE,
SINE DIVISIONE ET HABITU

13

God: eternity acting within itself without breaking up
or reaching an end.

XIV

DEUS EST OPPOSITIO NIHIL MEDIATIONE ENTIS

14

God: by mediation of what exists, opposition to nothingness.

XV

DEUS EST VITA CUIUS VIA IN FORMAM EST VERITAS,
IN UNITATEM BONITAS

15

God: the life which has truth as way to form and
goodness as way to unity.

XVI

DEUS EST QUOD SOLUM VOCES NON SIGNIFICANT PROPTER
EXCELLENTIAM, NEC MENTES INTELLIGUNT PROPTER
DISSIMILITUDINEM

16

God: what alone cannot be signified by words due to its
preeminence, nor comprehended by minds due to its
incomparability.

XVII

DEUS EST INTELLECTUS SUI SOLUM,
PRAEDICATIONEM NON RECIPIENS

17

God: the intellection of itself alone, free from every predicate.

XVIII

DEUS EST SPHAERA CUIUS TOT SUNT CIRCUMFERENTIAE
QUOD PUNCTA

18

God: the sphere which has as many circumferences as points.

XIX

DEUS EST SEMPER MOVENS IMMOBILIS

19

God: the ever-moving immobility.

XX

DEUS EST QUI SOLUS SUO INTELLECTU VIVIT

20

God: what alone lives from its own intellection.

XXI

DEUS EST TENEBRA IN ANIMA POST OMNEM LUCEM RELICTA

21

God: the darkness remaining in the soul after every light.

XXII

DEUS EST EX QUO EST QUICQUID EST NON PARTITIONE,
PER QUEM EST NON VARIATIONE,
IN QUO EST QUOD EST NON COMMIXTIONE

22

God: that from which everything is through no division,
by means of which everything is through no change,
in which everything is through no mixture.

XXIII

DEUS EST QUI SOLA IGNORANTIA MENTE COGNOSCITUR

23

God: what is known to the mind through unknowing alone.

XXIV

DEUS EST LUX QUAE FRACTIONE NON CLARESCIT, TRANSIT,
SED SOLA DEIFORMITAS IN RE

24

God: the light which does not shine through refraction, which
passes through and yet is sheer divine form in every thing.

Liber viginti quattuor philosophorum

1. Deus est monas monadem gignens, in se unum reflectens ardorem.
2. Deus est sphaera infinita cuius centrum est ubique, circumferentia nusquam.
3. Deus est totus in quolibet sui.
4. Deus est mens orationem generans, continuationem perseverans.
5. Deus est quo nihil melius excogitari potest.
6. Deus est cuius comparatione substantia est accidens, et accidens nihil.
7. Deus est principium sine principio, processus sine variatione, finis sine fine.
8. Deus est amor qui plus habitus magis latet.
9. Deus est cui soli praesens est quidquid cuius temporis est.
10. Deus est cuius posse non numeratur, cuius esse non clauditur, cuius bonitas non terminatur.
11. Deus est super ens, necesse, solus sibi abundanter, sufficienter.
12. Deus est cuius voluntas deificae et potentiae et sapientiae adaequatur.
13. Deus est sempiternitas agens in se, semper divisione et habitu.
14. Deus est oppositio nihil mediatione entis.
15. Deus est vita cuius via in formam est veritas, in unitatem bonitas.
16. Deus est quod solum voces non significant propter excellentiam, nec mentes intelligunt propter dissimilitudinem.
17. Deus est intellectus sui solum, praedicationem non recipiens.
18. Deus est sphaera cuius tot sunt circumferentiae quod puncta.
19. Deus est semper movens immobilis.
20. Deus est qui solus suo intellectu vivit.
21. Deus est tenebra in anima post omnem lucem relictam.
22. Deus est ex quo est quicquid est non partitione, per quem est non variatione, in quo est quod est non commixtione.
23. Deus est qui sola ignorantia mente cognoscitur.
24. Deus est lux quae fractione non clarescit, transit, sed sola deformitas in re.