

12 **Dominicus Gundissalinus'** *On Unity and the One*

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The works of Dominicus Gundissalinus (or Gundisalvi; ca. 1115–post-1190) form a turning point in the history of European medieval philosophy, marking a fundamental step toward the integration of Islamicate philosophy into the Latin tradition. Gundissalinus was not a master in a medieval university, nor was philosophizing his main occupation; he was mostly a translator from Arabic to Latin and an archdeacon of the cathedral of Toledo. This does not, however, diminish the role or the scope of Gundissalinus' reflections on metaphysics, gnoseology, and psychology.

One of the characteristic traits of twelfth-century Iberia was the movement of an unprecedented number of people and books from the Islamic south toward Castile and Aragon.¹ Fleeing from the Almohad invasion of al-Andalus, these refugees brought to the Christian north their cultural heritage, both material and immaterial: books and people, skills and expertise. This flow fueled the famous “translation movement” that had started in Iberia at the beginning of the twelfth century and whose main center was by then Toledo. The pioneering translators of Toledo took up the task of making available to Latin readers some of this dazzling collection of new books, which promised to present novel solutions to long-debated problems, theories and practices capable of advancing Latinate science, and even new disciplines that Latin people had never yet heard of.²

To be correctly understood, Gundissalinus' contribution to the history of philosophy must be contextualized within that intellectual framework. Aside from his ecclesiastical duties, Gundissalinus was primarily a translator, very often working with other translators (especially Abraham ibn Daud and Johannes Hispanus).³ Gundissalinus' philosophy is structurally bound to his work as translator: he appears to have felt compelled to philosophize upon the works he translated, connecting their doctrines to theories and problems debated in the Latin tradition. His reasons for writing philosophy in this way are unknown. It might be that someone requested Gundissalinus to write the works, or that he was teaching at the cathedral school, like his colleague Gerard of Cremona.⁴ Or it might be that Gundissalinus wrote in order to understand what he was translating, or even that he did so simply out of a passionate interest in philosophical matters. Almost nothing can be established in this regard, at least currently.

What we can say is that his appreciation of the substantive (albeit incomplete) compatibility between the Islamicate and the Latinate traditions opened up opportunities to engage with abiding philosophical problems from a groundbreaking new angle.

The story of his works' circulation in the later Middle Ages is rather intricate,⁵ and Gundissalinus' influence is often underestimated as a result. Yet traces of his thinking can be found in many medieval authors, including John Blund, Thomas of York, Bonaventure, Albert the Great, Roger Bacon, John Peckham, Geoffrey of Aspill, and Thomas Aquinas.⁶ Gundissalinus also impacted the Jewish tradition thanks to Hebrew translations of his works in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, with Jewish authors such as Gerson ben Solomon and Hillel ben Samuel using his material in their writing.⁷

As regards authorship, *De unitate et uno* presents a peculiar case. The work circulated with a pseudo-epigraphical attribution for centuries, and after Gundissalinus' death, it was attributed to Boethius, of which more later in this chapter. An examination of Gundissalinus' philosophical oeuvre, of which *De unitate et uno* appears to be the first treatise, suggests that he had increasing access to Arabic sources over the course of his career; this was probably due to the translation projects he was pursuing in Toledo. The direct influence of the works that Gundissalinus was translating serves as a valuable indicator in establishing a chronology of his original writings, and the translation of Ibn Gabirol's *Fons vitae* marks a new point of departure for Gundissalinus. Translated by Gundissalinus and John of Spain, *Fons vitae* provides Gundissalinus with the cornerstone of his own speculation. This does not entail a mere adherence to Ibn Gabirol's perspective—quite the contrary: Gundissalinus would progressively detach himself from some doctrinal aspects of Ibn Gabirol's thought that were no longer in line with his own scrutiny of reality. Avicenna takes up the opposing pole of Gundissalinus' bifurcated attraction.⁸

De unitate et uno is a crucial witness to Gundissalinus' eager, and perhaps disingenuous, enthusiasm concerning the *Fons vitae*. Ibn Gabirol's text is the main source for the short treatise. Its textual presence is pervasive, almost oppressive. Yet notwithstanding the textual and doctrinal closeness to *Fons vitae*, reducing Gundissalinus' *De unitate* to a summary or a collection of themes from Ibn Gabirol's *Fons vitae* would be rather simplistic. Instead, Gundissalinus weaves a web of tacit references to assertions by Latinate authors with which Ibn Gabirol's doctrines are compatible and by which they are justified. The golden thread of the treatise is a quotation from Boethius' first *Commentary on Isagoge*: “quicquid est, ideo est, quia unum est” (“whatever exists, therefore, exists because it is one”).⁹ From the beginning, *De unitate* suggests a rather peculiar continuity with Boethius' thought. Quite probably, the pseudo-epigraphical attribution of the treatise to Boethius originated from these redundant textual proximities.

In its short span, *De unitate et uno* has a remarkably coherent and organic structure. It engages with a single problem. It has a unified focus. And it examines its main ontological, cosmological, and physical insight with almost no digression.¹⁰ In this respect, the text evidently has a precise aim grounded on one fundamental question: What does it mean to be “one”? A preliminary answer is given at the very beginning of the treatise: “Unity is that by which each thing is said to be one.”¹¹ Yet this claim needs to be explained, refined, and applied to the world we see. A thing is said to be “one”—that is, a single and individual entity in its existence—only on account of unity. Therefore, unity has a principal ontological value, since every existing thing is “one” in itself. However, unity is not just a common predicable; it is a predicable only by relation to the crucial and fundamental function it performs ontologically. Unity, indeed, brings everything forth into existence, as stated by Boethius in his claim that “whatever exists, therefore, exists because it is one.”¹²

According to Gundissalinus, the ontological value of unity can be understood only in its structural relation to universal hylomorphism. God, the Creator, is the true and absolute One, the simple and complete origin of existence. Following the Neoplatonic principle by which the effect must be at the same time different and similar to its cause, the created universe cannot be simple nor one, but is made one by unity, the existential power infused by God into the effect of His creation.¹³

Unity (*unitas*), though, is different from union (*unitio*), which is the kind of unity that makes every single creature one and constitutes a union of two different and opposite entities, matter and form.¹⁴ The hylomorphic duality is resolved through the *unitio* of matter and form, by which they are made one thing. Things, single and particular in their existence, only exist in “singularity” and “particularity.” This fact does not imply that universals do not exist. Yet it follows the acknowledgment that unity and being are correlatives by nature. *Unitas* and *esse* are characteristics of God and are reflected in His creatures, which, nonetheless, cannot be except through a specific form of causation, namely the union of their hylomorphic components.

Creatures are *one* while God is *the One*.¹⁵ Creatures are similar to God, for the effect receives something of its cause. However, they are also fundamentally different. God’s oneness is utterly perfect and simple, whereas creaturely oneness always has the trait of composition. It is a *composed* one, made of the *addition* of two entities. Indeed, creatures always result from a union of matter and form. As a consequence, being and unity are inseparable partners by nature and, for this same reason, every existing thing desires unity. In fact, existence can be received only by unity.¹⁶

This metaphysical notion of unity allows Gundissalinus to find a balance between, on the one hand, his strong interpretation of hylomorphism as expressing an ontological duality and, on the other, the acknowledgment

that a thing—a substance, in Aristotelian terms—is fundamentally “one” in its individuality.

The bond between matter and form—their *union*—is the intrinsic cause of the existence of any thing under consideration. When they are made “one” by unity, the thing is brought into existence. But as soon as the unifying bond is removed, the thing disappears; that is to say, the form is separated from matter, and corruption occurs.¹⁷ In fact, matter tends toward multiplicity and dispersion: “Matter [. . .] is contrary to unity. It is so because matter, by itself, flows away and its own nature is to be multiplied, divided, and dispersed, whereas unity holds, unites, and keeps it together.”¹⁸ Accordingly, unity’s function is to hold together matter and form, and consequently the hylomorphic compound, countering the tendency of matter toward dispersion.

Unity and matter are opposite entities: the former unifies, the latter multiplies. Their powers must be balanced. However, perfect equality is achieved only in the highest creatures, such as the celestial bodies. The lowest degree of existence lacks balance, which is why multiplicity and corruption occur. Although the causative power of unity does not weaken, the effect of its causation does so because of the substrate upon which it acts. As matter becomes thicker in the lower levels of the hypostatic universe, the efficacy of unity also becomes feebler. As a consequence, composite beings become susceptible to generation and corruption.¹⁹ This dynamic is explained by the difference between unity and union, the former being the cause of the latter. That which changes is not unity, but union. Different unions are given by the only admissible variable of this equation, which is matter. It is because the matter is progressively thicker, denser, and more bodily that union is not perfectly realized everywhere and that, consequently, the being of lower things is less complete.

Gundissalinus offers four fascinating examples of this dynamic. The first compares the flowing of matter to a river whose water is clear at the source, but dark when it flows into marshes, on account of the earth and mud accompanying it through its course.²⁰ In a similar fashion, matter has, in itself, some aspect of brightness (such as spiritual matter) and some aspect of darkness (such as corporeal matter), a differentiation that, following Ibn Gabirol, is brought about by the form of quantity joining the last layer of matter.

In other examples, Gundissalinus associates unity and light. The flowing of unity from God is like the radiation of sunlight. Our perception of the light changes when it meets brighter or darker air. This difference is due not to different lights, but to different states of the medium. The same dynamic can also be understood by analogy with a thin white cloth. Worn by a black body, that cloth would be perceived as less white than if worn by a white body. Its transparency reveals some blackness (or whiteness) of what is below. In both cases, though, the cloth remains the same.

The third example is the most intriguing. Almost certainly relying on a third source, Gundissalinus describes a sort of experiment with glass and light. When three or more glass windows are positioned perpendicular to the sunlight, the first window receives more light than the second, and the second more than the third, and so on, in a progressive weakening of the light. This is not a characteristic intrinsic to light, but characterizes light conditioned by passing through layers of glass. Likewise, unity becomes weaker and weaker while descending through each of the different layers of matter, down to the final layer. In this progression, unity itself, like the unconditioned light, remains unaltered, whereas the refracted light and the composed union, together with the receiving glass and matter, will differ in their effect.²¹ In both cases, unity and sunlight are not affected in themselves, but their effects change because of their different substrates.

According to Gundissalinus, unity is a constant factor. It flows from God and brings everything into existence. Matter, to the contrary, is the variable of the ontological equation—paradoxically so, if Gundissalinus were adhering to the Aristotelian perspective that would mark philosophical speculation just a few decades after his death. In its progressive detachment from the Creator, matter changes and becomes gradually thicker and denser, until corporeity arises in the last layer of this hypostatic universe. As a consequence of this intrinsic differentiation of matter, different species of creatures come into existence. Each one of them is characterized by a different ontological status as determined by the proper union appropriate to each species.

Like his ontology, Gundissalinus' hypostatic cosmology, too, is based on Ibn Gabirol's *Fons vitae*. The first entity created by God is the Intellect, whose unity is simple and whose matter is purer than that which is in any other degree of existence.²² Following its descent, matter is informed by the forms of the Rational, Sensible, and Vegetative Souls, respectively; then, below them, by the form of Nature; and finally by the corporeal forms.²³ This last degree of existence corresponds to the substance to which the nine categories inhere.²⁴ In this cosmological progression, every layer is different from the others. If unity is considered, that difference can only be caused by the process of multiplication of matter, which intrinsically differentiates matter. However, it is evident that this process would be much more complicated if we were to provide a complete ontological description of each hypostasis, each having its proper form. In *De unitate et uno*, Gundissalinus does not engage in such an analysis, as he would in his later *De processione mundi*.²⁵ Even there, he would avoid discussing further crucial problems arising from the cosmological process, and one in particular: How can matter differentiate itself without interacting with a form? In this case, too, Gundissalinus' framework seems to be far away from thirteenth-century Aristotelianism and its refined hylomorphism, although some aspects of his consideration of matter would resonate in, for instance, Roger Bacon's thought.²⁶

Finally, *De unitate et uno* discusses two central corollaries of Gundissalinus' theory. Metaphysical unity is the primary meaning of the term "unity." However, there are other kinds of unity to which the term can refer, all of them grounded on the metaphysical meaning of unity.²⁷ Beings can be said to be one by essence (God), one by hylomorphic composition (angels and souls), one by continuity (a tree or a rock), one by composition (the planks making one ark), one by aggregation (a people or a flock), and one by analogy (the helmsman and the governor holding one office).²⁸ Other things are said to be one by sharing an accidental characteristic (snow and swan in their whiteness), one by number, one by a common possession (intellect, thing, and its word), one by a sacrament (spirit, water, and blood), one by nature (species), one by nation (tribe), and one by agreement concerning virtue or vice.²⁹

Having clarified the richness of senses in which unity can be said, Gundissalinus turns to one final problem: How are continuous and discrete quantities related to the metaphysical priority of unity? Curiously, Gundissalinus reduces continuity to discrete quantity. He claims that every continuous quantity is composed of discrete unities that, scattered, are said to be discrete and, gathered, are said to be continuous. Unities, therefore, are the basic constituents of quantity and, through this, of physical corporeality. Accordingly, these unities are the "root" (*radix*) of both discrete and continuous quantities.

This doctrine, which appears akin to atomism, is presented only briefly, and Gundissalinus does not address (or even seem aware of) the ramifications of his position—or if he is, he does not seem concerned about them. The unities composing physical substances function as his main explanation of the differences in weight, density, and mass of substances, since

the more connected and compacted the parts of a body are, the thicker and more "quantum" that body will be, such as in the case of a stone. Whereas to the opposite, the more dispersed and scattered the parts of a body are, the subtler, lighter, and less "quantum" it will be, such as in the case of the air.³⁰

Consistently, Gundissalinus summarizes his position by claiming that "continuous quantity comes into substance only on account of unity joining and flowing in it."³¹

From its first hypostasis to the very structure of corporeal reality, oneness, union, and unity are the main traits through which God structured his creation, making it similar to Himself and yet intrinsically and necessarily "other."

The success of Gundissalinus' *De unitate* was largely due to its pseudo-epigraphical attribution to Boethius. Such attribution is probably a consequence of the opening quotation from Boethius' commentary on *Isagoge* and the expositional nature of the text in relation to Boethius' assertion.

From a doctrinal point of view, however, attributing the treatise to Boethius was anything but straightforward. While *De unitate*'s themes of creaturely dependence upon God fit neatly with the Neoplatonic themes of Boethius' *De consolazione philosophiae* and his *De hebdomadibus*, Boethius' ontology is grounded on a limited hylomorphism and entirely privileges the preeminence of form over matter. Boethius and Gundissalinus thus contradict one another in their ontological doctrines. Consequently, the works authored by Boethius, including the misascribed *De unitate et uno*, exhibited a consistency problem within his thought.

The scholarship agrees that Thomas Aquinas was the first Latin thinker to realize that the treatise could not have been authored by Boethius: Aquinas dismissed Boethius' authorship of *De unitate* at least twice in his philosophical production.³² But even as an anonymous work, *De unitate et uno* continued to be read and used by Latin and Renaissance thinkers, including Nicholas of Cusa. The text was translated into Hebrew (as "Boethian") by Judah ben Moshe Romano in the first half of the fourteenth century.³³ Around the same time, Conrad of Prussia wrote a commentary on it.³⁴

The actual authorship of the treatise was finally recognized and acknowledged by the first critical editor of *De unitate*, Paul Correns.³⁵ After his 1891 edition, *De unitate et uno* was critically edited again in 1956 by Manuel Alonso Alonso,³⁶ and a new critical edition of the work was completed by María Jesús Soto-Bruna and Concepción Alonso del Real in 2015, the most reliable version yet of this important text. I have used this edition for the following English translation of Gundissalinus' *De unitate et uno*.

***On Unity and the One* by Dominicus Gundissalinus**

Translated by Nicola Polloni

Unity is that by which each thing is said to be one. Whether it is simple or composite, spiritual or corporeal, a thing is one by unity. It can be one only by unity, just as it can be white only by whiteness, or be so much only by quantity. Besides, [a thing] is not only one by unity, but as long as it is something, it is what it is as long as unity is in it. And when it ceases to be one, it ceases to be what it is. For this reason, it has been said that "whatever exists, therefore, exists because it is one," which is demonstrated as follows.

Undoubtedly, in created things, all existence comes from the form. However, existence comes from the form only when the form is made one with matter. In fact, there is existence only by the joining together of the

form with matter. For this reason, the philosophers describe [matter] by saying that “existence is the presence of form in matter.”

However, when the form is made one with matter, something which is “one” necessarily comes to be from their joining together. And that thing, in its coming to be, only persists as long as unity holds the form together with matter. As a consequence, the destruction of a thing is nothing else but the separation of [its] form from matter. Separation and union are contraries, though. Therefore, if something is destroyed by the separation [of form and matter], that thing is surely preserved in its existence by [their] union.

Union [*unitio*], however, only exists by unity [*unitas*]. When unity is separated from something united, its union, by which that thing was one, is dissolved. And when the union is dissolved, the essence of that thing—which stemmed from the union [of matter and form]—is destroyed, because it becomes something which is not one. For this reason, not only is a thing brought to existence by unity but existence is also maintained in that thing by unity. Therefore, existence and one inseparably accompany each other and appear to exist together in nature.

Since the Creator is the true One, the things he established—each of them—received [its] existence one as a gift from Him. As a consequence, anything which receives its existence from Him is one. Accordingly, every substance moves toward and through the One, and none of the existing things desires to be many. To the contrary, desiring to exist, all of them desire to be one, since everything desires by nature to exist, and it can exist only by being one. Therefore, everything tends to [be] one. Unity, indeed, is what makes everything one and holds everything together, for it is diffused into every existing thing.

On this account, considering that matter has existence only by the union with its form and that only unity can keep the form united to matter, matter requires unity in order to become one in itself and acquire existence. Matter, indeed, is contrary to unity. It is so because matter, by itself, flows away and its own nature is to be multiplied, divided, and dispersed, whereas unity holds, unites, and keeps it together. For this reason, matter must be held together by unity in order not to divide or disperse itself. In fact, anything requiring something else to become one cannot become one by itself. Nonetheless, what cannot become one by itself certainly is dispersed by itself. Indeed, anything that is able to make something contrary to a [considered] agent makes it contrary to what [that agent] has made. In fact, contraries are the effects of what is contrary. Since unity causes [something to be] one; therefore, matter will cause division. Accordingly, unity by itself holds matter together. And whatever holds [something] together by itself cannot be the cause of [its] separation. Therefore, the form existing in matter, which completes and holds together the essence of everything, is the unity descending from the first Unity that created it.

In fact, the first and true Unity, which is in itself Unity, created another unity, which lies below it. Yet since every created thing must be completely different from what has created it, the created unity must be completely different from and almost opposite to the creating Unity. Because the creating Unity has neither beginning nor end, neither change nor diversity; therefore, multiplicity, diversity, and mutability accrue to the created unity. In some matter, then, [unity] has a beginning and an end, while in another [matter] it has a beginning, but not an end, because in some it is subject to change and corruption. And in others, [unity is subject to] change, but not to corruption. In those things [in which] matter is subtle, simple, far from contrariety and separation, unity is indeed proportionate to it, and [is] made one with it in such a way that both become [something which is] one, indivisible in act. This is the case for the celestial bodies, in which unity is inseparable from matter. Accordingly, they have no end, for they are perpetual. However, in those things [in which] matter is thick [and] weak, unity cannot be proportionate to it. Indeed, its unifying power and [its capacity to] hold their essence together is weakened. As a consequence, their essence is dissolved because they are not held together by unity. This is the case of generated things, which have a beginning and an end. For the closer any unity is to the first and true Unity, the more one and the simpler will be the matter it informs. And to the opposite, the further unity is from the first Unity, the more multiplied and composed [its matter will be].

Accordingly, the unity that brings the matter of the Intellect to existence is more “one” and simpler, not multiplied or divisible by essence. And if it is divisible, it will be so by accident. This unity is more “one” and simpler than any other unity that brings the other substances to existence, for it is joined without mediation to the first Unity that created it.

However, since the unity subsisting in the matter of the Intellect is the unity of simplicity, the unity subsisting in the matter of the Soul, which is below it, necessarily grows and multiplies [itself]. As a consequence, change and diversity happen to it. Unity, then, is expanded and multiplied little by little while descending from what is superior through every degree of the inferior matter, until it reaches the substance which bears quantity, that is, the substance of this world. Being furthest from the first Unity, [this matter] is thick, bodily, and compact, and due to its thickness and largeness, it is opposed to the superior substance, which is subtle and simple. In fact, the latter is the subject of the onset and the beginning of unity, while the former is the subject of the end and the extremity of unity.

The end, however, is very far from the beginning, since it is only called “end” insofar as it is a failure of power and a limit. The degradation of simplicity and the diminution of its power happen through the descent of the unity from the higher to the lower. This is similar to the water that is subtle and clear in its source but, flowing down little by little, becomes thick and dark in marshes and ponds. In a similar fashion, unity varies

little by little through the varieties of the matter bearing it. In fact, since something of matter is spiritual while something else is corporeal, [in it] something is pure and bright, while something else is thick and dark. And this happens because of quantity, whose parts are more dispersed in some things, such as the air, and more compact in other things, such as a stone.

Following the degrees of its distance from the first Unity at the origin, each and every part of matter receives unity, which is nobler [than matter] in reason of its property. Accordingly, we see the parts of fire as “one” in every way, simple and equal, so that its shape appears to be one, having no diversity in itself. To the contrary, we find the parts of air and water to be more diverse and separate, so that it is possible to distinguish among their parts and unities. In hard and thick things, however, diversity and darkness are already greater [than that].

In the highest things, matter is informed by the form of the Intellect, and further on, by the form of the Rational Soul, while afterward by the form of the Sensible Soul. Then, below that, [it is informed] by the form of the Vegetative Soul, and after that, by the form of Nature. And finally, in the lowest things, [matter is joined] to the form of the body. All this does not happen because of the diversity of the power of the agent, but because of the property of the matter receiving it.

Form, indeed, is like light. For just as a thing is seen on account of light, so too cognition and knowledge of things are provided by form, and not by matter. This light, however, is brighter in some things and darker in others, depending on whether the matter in which it is infused comes to be brighter or darker. The more sublime matter is, the subtler it will be, and completely permeated by light. Consequently, that substance will be wiser and more perfect, such as the Intelligence and the Rational Soul. And on the contrary, the lower matter is, the thicker and darker it will be, not completely permeated by light. As has been said already, the more matter descends, [the more] it is made compact, thick, and bodily, and its middle parts block the last ones from being perfectly permeated by light. In fact, it is impossible for light to permeate the second part as much as [it does] the first, nor does as much light reach the third part as reaches the second part, and so on, little by little, down to the lowest part, in which the light is weakened. For it is furthest away from the source of light.

Nonetheless, as it has been said, this does not happen on account of the light in itself, but on account of the great density and obscurity of matter in itself. Similarly, when the sunlight is mixed with the dark air, it lacks the power [that it has] when is mixed with bright air. And similarly, the whiteness of a very thin white cloth is occluded by the abundance of blackness when it is worn by a black body. And similarly, if three or more glass windows are set up in order one after another perpendicularly to the sunlight, it is surely ascertained that the second [window] receives less light than the first, and the third less than the second. And up to the last one, there is a diminution of light which is due not to the light itself,

but to the distance of the glass windows from the light. In the same way, the light of the form of unity which is infused into matter becomes weak and dark while descending, as [when] the light which passes through the first of these [windows] is different from [that passing through] the second one, and [that passing through] the second [is different] from [that passing through] the last one.

Because of this difference in the form of unity, something is said to be one by unity, not in one, but in many ways. For there is something that is [said to be] one by the simplicity of essence, namely God. And another is [said to be] one by the conjunction of simples, namely, angels and souls, each of which is one by the conjunction of matter and form. And another is [said to be] one by continuity, such as a tree or a rock. And another is [said to be] one by composition, as one ark [is made] of many planks or a house of many spaces. And other things are said to be one by aggregation, such as a people or a flock, a jumble of stones, or a heap of wheat. Others are said [to be] one by analogy, such as when the helmsman of a ship and the governor of a town are said [to be] one by the similarity of their office.

Other things are said to be one by accident, as different subjects of the same quality are said [to be] one in that [quality], such as that the snow and the swan are one in their whiteness. Others are said [to be] one by number, as different accidents inhering in the same subject are said to be one by number—that is, by counting, such as [when we say that] this [is] sweet and this [is] cerulean, or this [is] long and this [is] wide. Other things are said [to be] one by reason, but [they are] so in two ways: by reason of a common possession, as the intellect, the [intellected] thing, and [its] word are one in genus; and by reason of one sacrament, as spirit, water, and blood are said [to be] one. Other things are said to be one by nature, as many humans are one by their participation in the species. Others are said [to be] one in virtue of [their] nation or language, as many humans are said [to be] one people or one tribe. Other things are said [to be] one by habit, yet in two ways. Indeed, [many humans are so] by the agreement of virtue and love, as [when it has been said that] “the multitude of believers was one heart and one soul.” However, many humans are said [to be] one [also] by assent to the same vices, as [when it has been said that] “who joins a prostitute becomes one [in the] body.”

In this way, everything desires unity, and it is also said that what is multiple wants to be one. In fact, whatever exists is what it is either because it strives to be a real unity or because, at least, it strives for that by imitating [it].

Every existing thing is one or many. Nonetheless, plurality only exists by the aggregation of unities, which become a multitude when they are dispersed and a magnitude when they are continuous in matter. As a consequence, there is no difference between the unities [composing] a discrete quantity and those [composing] a continuous quantity subsisting in matter, except that the former are dispersed while the latter are

continuous. Therefore, what is continuous comes forth only from what is dispersed, since the meaning of continuity in what is continuous is just the continuation of the dispersed [unities]. Accordingly, continuous quantity necessarily comes forth into substances only through unities.

Whatever part of quantity one might choose must necessarily be one or many. As it has been said, however, every plurality derives from unities. Whence it is clearly understandable that discrete and continuous quantities have one root, since they are composed from one thing and are resolved into one [thing]. And [it is clear], too, that the more connected and compacted the parts of a body are, the thicker and more “quantum” [*magis quantum*] that body will be, such as in the case of a stone. Whereas to the opposite, the more dispersed and scattered the parts of a body are, the subtler, lighter, and less “quantum” [*minus quantum*] it will be, such as in the case of the air. As a consequence, it is true that continuous quantity comes into substance only on account of unity joining and flowing in it.

Unity, therefore, is that by which each thing is one, and [that by which that thing] is what it is.

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Notes

- 1 See Burnett, “Coherence.”
- 2 This is the case of alchemy, for instance: a discipline that was completely new to the Latin audience at the time. See Mantas-España, “Interpreting the New Sciences.”
- 3 See Polloni, *Twelfth-Century Renewal of Latin Metaphysics*, 1–19. On the problem of anonymously transmitted translations and possible solutions to this impasse, see Hasse and Büttner, “Notes on Anonymous Twelfth-Century Translations.”
- 4 See Burnett, “Communities of Learning.”
- 5 The number of works written by Gundissalinus is still a matter of debate in the literature. For some works, his authorship is commonly acknowledged: these are *De divisione philosophiae*, *De unitate et uno*, *De anima*, and *De processione mundi*. The attribution of others is more controversial, and in most cases little can be said to either demonstrate or refute Gundissalinus’ authorship. This is particularly true for the *De immortalitate animae*, whose authorship tends to be ascribed to William of Auvergne. See Polloni, *Twelfth-Century Renewal of Latin Metaphysics*, 21–24; also Polloni and Burnett, “Peregrinations of the Soul.”
- 6 See Polloni, *Twelfth-Century Renewal of Latin Metaphysics*, 266–69.
- 7 See Schwartz, “Medieval Hebrew Translations”; Hasse, *Avicenna’s De anima in the Latin West*, 18.
- 8 See Polloni, *Twelfth-Century Renewal of Latin Metaphysics*, 190–209.

- 9 Boethius, *In Porphyrium* 1, PL 64, 83B.
- 10 To better appreciate Gundissalinus' change of angle and continuity of doctrinal features, see Polloni, *Twelfth-Century Renewal of Latin Metaphysics*, 30–37, where I discuss *De unitate et uno*'s theories, and 54–76, expanding on Gundissalinus' *De processione mundi*.
- 11 Gundissalinus, *De unitate et uno*, ed. Soto-Bruna and Alonso del Real, 104.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid., 116. See also Soto-Bruna, "La *lux intelligentiae agentis*"; Soto-Bruna, "La 'causalidad del uno' en Domingo Gundisalvo."
- 14 See Gundissalinus, *De unitate et uno*, 108.
- 15 See *ibid.*, 110.
- 16 See *ibid.*, 108 and 140–42.
- 17 See *ibid.*, 106.
- 18 Ibid., 112: "Materia [. . .] contraria est unitati, eo quod materia per se diffiuit et de natura sua habet multiplicari, diuidi et spargi; unitas uero retinet, unit et colligit."
- 19 See *ibid.*, 118.
- 20 See *ibid.*, 122–24.
- 21 See *ibid.*, 132–34.
- 22 See *ibid.*, 122.
- 23 See *ibid.*, 126.
- 24 See *ibid.*, 122.
- 25 See Polloni, *Twelfth-Century Renewal of Latin Metaphysics*, 54–76.
- 26 See Polloni, "Roger Bacon."
- 27 See Gundissalinus, *De unitate et uno*, 136.
- 28 See *ibid.*
- 29 See *ibid.*, 138–40.
- 30 Ibid., 146: "quo magis fuerint sibi coniunctae et constrictae, ipsum corpus erit spissius et magis quantum, ut lapis, et e contrario, quo magis fuerint partes corporis dissolutae et rariae, ipsum erit subtilius et leuius et minus quantum, ut aer."
- 31 Ibid., 146: "continua quantitas non uenit in substantiam nisi ex coniunctione et constrictione unitatum in illa."
- 32 Aquinas, *Quaestiones de quolibet* 9, q. 4, a. 1, ed. Leonina, 144–48: "Ad secundum dicendum quod liber ille non est Boetii, unde non oportet quod in auctoritate recipiatur. Sustinendo tamen librum, potest dici quod formam et materiam large accipit pro actu et potencia, ut dictum est"; Aquinas, *De spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 1, 21, ed. Leonina, 19.630–32: "Ad vicesimum primum dicendum quod liber De unitate et uno non est Boetii, ut ipse stilus indicat."
- 33 See Schwartz, "Medieval Hebrew Translations." The Hebrew text has been critically edited by Schwartz, "Gundissalinus, *Maamar ha-ehad ve-ha-ahdut*."
- 34 Conrad of Prussia, *Commentary on the De unitate et uno*; see Fidora, "Una nota sobre Conrado de Prusia."
- 35 Correns, *Die dem Boethius fälschlich zugeschriebene Abhandlung*, 3–11.
- 36 Alonso Alonso, "El 'Liber de unitate et uno.'"

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