

THE CAMBRIDGE  
HISTORY OF  
PHILOSOPHY  
IN LATE  
ANTIQUITY



EDITED BY  
LLOYD GERSON

## PLATONISM BEFORE PLOTINUS

HAROLD TARRANT

## I THE PLATONICS

This chapter deals with the development of Platonism from the late first century BCE to the end of the second century CE. The principal figures here, in rough chronological order, were Eudorus, Thrasyllus, anon. *Commentary on the Theaetetus*, Plutarch of Chaeronea, Theon, Taurus, Albinus, Nicostratus, Atticus, Severus, Harpocration, and Alcinoüs. All are normally treated as Platonists today; antiquity treated most of them as ‘Platonics’.

By the end of the first century CE we hear of philosophers who could be described as ‘Platonics’ (*Platonici*), whether as a title connected with a recognized profession or as a general description of their concerns.<sup>1</sup> There were a number of centres around the Mediterranean at which a ‘Platonic’ might reside and operate. During the Hellenistic period there had been no need for such a term at all, since one’s philosophical background had usually been indicated with reference to the philosophical group or school with which one had studied (usually at Athens), and to which one continued to feel some allegiance. Up to Cicero’s generation it was normal for those with serious educational ambitions to study in Athens, and not unusual to seek tuition from more than one school. Those men of letters who felt the need to communicate in a philosophical vein did not normally have to adopt any title that indicated their favourite philosophy, while those who claimed to officially represent a school, and to teach its doctrines or methods, adopted such titles to legitimize their role. Such a title was usually based on the name that the original school had taken, usually from the location of its activities. Hence those feeling a close connection with Plato’s school would have been known simply as ‘Academics’.

<sup>1</sup> See Gucker 1978: 206–25 for a discussion of the relevant terminology. Cicero’s brother once calls him a *homo platonicus*, but there is no evidence as yet that any philosopher chooses to specify his interest using this term. Gucker speaks of Thrasyllus as the first known philosopher to be called by this term.

The term 'Academic' had described individuals of very different types. The fragments of the early Scholarchs (Heads of the Academy) show that they differed considerably in their range of interests and in the doctrine that they promoted. There was considerable scope for disagreement with Plato himself, as shown by the metaphysical system of Speusippus, his nephew, who was first to succeed him. To Xenocrates, the third Scholarch, though he was less often in open disagreement with Plato, are credited many doctrines that one would not have expected Plato to endorse. Both of these had been part of the vibrant debates of Plato's later years, and were consequently more obviously influenced by the Plato that we know from the 'late' dialogues. Fourth came Polemo, who had joined the Academy under Xenocrates and clearly specialized in ethics. In this area our sources see him as having been in broad agreement with his predecessors, particularly Xenocrates. Together with his long-term friend and colleague Crates, who briefly succeeded him, he appears to have developed the notion of divine love as an educational catalyst, building on Plato's much earlier *Symposium*, and to have cultivated the more Socratic image of a man inspired by something divine. These features may have given a more Socratic image to the Academy overall than it had had under earlier Scholarchs.

Up until this point later sources saw the Academy as retaining the same general character of positive teaching as they associated with Plato, but Numenius (fr. 24.5–18) thought that the Platonic doctrines were being eroded, even though he seems to have respected Xenocrates in particular. In his eyes, as in the eyes of Cicero and his mentor Antiochus of Ascalon, the major break had come with the accession of Arcesilaus, who seems to have modelled himself on a rather different 'Socrates', the one who in Plato's early dialogues frequently professes his ignorance and habitually refrains from offering his own opinion on the matter being debated. The Academy had engaged dialectically with other schools, but for the demolition of rival systems rather than for the construction of any positive body of doctrine of its own, and it adopted the technique, not unknown in Plato's so-called 'early' doctrines, of arguing both for and against a thesis. This 'sceptical' Academy as we call it continued for some generations, and its greatest exponent was Carneades in the middle of the second century BCE. Interpretations of Carneades himself varied, but a loyalty to some version of Carneades had continued alongside the school's nominal loyalty to Plato for some time. As long as the Academy maintained some sense of an unbroken tradition one needed no separate category of philosophers to be known as Platonists.

Some twelve years into the final century BCE the Mithridatic Wars caused major upheaval in Athens, the schools ceased to function in their traditional way, and Athens lost much of its pre-eminence in the higher educational world.

Followers of the Platonic Academy, already seemingly experiencing uneasy relations, broke into open dissension, and conflict occurred over the true heritage of the Academy between the surviving Scholarch, Philo of Larissa (158–84 BCE), and his rapidly rising pupil, Antiochus of Ascalon. The latter wanted to draw a distinction between the Old Academy, as it had been under Scholarchs down to Crates, and a New Academy ushered in by Arcesilaus at the beginning of the second quarter of the third century BCE, but the distinction itself proved controversial and the term ‘Academic’ eventually became confined to those who welcomed the contribution of Arcesilaus and his so-called ‘scepticism’, not necessarily to the exclusion of doctrines associated with Plato and his immediate successors. Ultimately, this also meant that a different term would have to be found for those who preferred to signal their allegiance to Plato without any suggestion that they found Arcesilaus’ contribution helpful. Inscriptional evidence and a variety of texts make it clear that the term ‘Platonic’ eventually supplied what was needed, but from the beginning the term was potentially confusing.

An anonymous *Commentary on the Theaetetus*, which cannot be later than the papyrus which preserves it (c. 150 CE) and is often held to date from the first century CE or slightly earlier, refers to ‘those from the Academy’ as those who accepted the ‘sceptical’ heritage of the school, associating them with a particular type of *philosophic activity or stance* (70.12–26, cf. 6.30–41), while some in his day used the term ‘Academic’ more obviously to indicate a sceptical position (54.38–43). It is thus becoming a word to describe a particular type of philosophical stance, in the same way as ‘Epicurean’, ‘Stoic’, or ‘Pyrrhonian’ (6.21, 6.29–7.1, 11.23, 61.11, 63.3, 70.18). The term ‘Platonic’, however, is used at 2.11–12 and fr. D to indicate people occupied with the interpretation of Plato. It remained possible as late as Proclus to refer by the term ‘Platonic’ to interpreters whose primary allegiance is to another philosopher’s system.<sup>2</sup> This meant that no term unambiguously referred to those professing adherence to Plato’s doctrines, although the majority of Plato’s interpreters clearly did so.

In these circumstances a working definition of a Platonist in this period might include any who appear to promote an essentially Platonic doctrinal system, which will, as a minimum, involve a role for transcendent ideas and for some kind of life beyond the body for the core of the human person; and any with a special liking for dealing with Platonic texts, regardless of any

<sup>2</sup> Panaetius the Stoic (*In Tim.* 1.162.12–13) and Numenius, more correctly called a Pythagorean (*In Remp.* 2.96.11, cf. *Iambl. De an.* 23). The case of Trypho, who is called a Stoic and Platonic by Porphyry (*VPlot.* 17), is unclear, but he may have been a Stoic with strong interests in interpreting Plato.

allegiance to another philosophy. A full treatment of Platonism during this period would find some place for all Platonic interpreters (except those who are polemically motivated), for, as is often observed, doctrine and interpretation of key Platonic texts seem to go hand in hand. In fact some of the most noteworthy developments in Platonic interpretation seem to stem from the 'Neopythagorean' Numenius, even though by no means all of his doctrines made a lasting impression on the development of Platonism.

## 2 VARIETIES OF PLATONISM

The Platonism of the two to three centuries before Plotinus is traditionally known as 'Middle Platonism'. This term is inclined to give the impression that there is a distinct brand of Platonism that intervenes between (1) the true Platonism of Plato and his immediate successors and (2) a distinct modification of that Platonism that characterizes Plotinus and all ancient Platonists thereafter. In this regard the term 'Middle Platonism' is misleading, and I hope largely to avoid it here. Some Platonists with whom we shall deal were more faithful to the original spirit of Plato's doctrines than Plato's immediate successors, and others had ideas that took sufficient liberties with interpretation and doctrine to embarrass Plotinus and his circle.

Because Plotinus never wrote commentaries, much of the philosophical work of Porphyry, Iamblichus, Proclus, Damascius and Olympiodorus appears to have as great a debt to pre-Plotinian interpreters as to the philosophical vision of Plotinus. Porphyry speaks of the *hupommēmata* (reminders or annotations, usually indicating some kind of 'commentary') that were read in Plotinus' circle, and they included the work of prominent second-century Platonists, of at least one Pythagorean (Numenius), and of prominent recent Peripatetics. That they were all read does not indicate that they were treated with equal respect, but rather that all could offer a platform that became the basis for fruitful doctrinal and exegetical discussion. It is noteworthy that there is no mention of the commentaries of any whom Plotinus had known personally, whether teachers such as Ammonius Saccas, rivals such as Longinus, or friends such as Origenes and Amelius. It is not surprising, then, that through Porphyry the so-called 'Middle Platonists' seem to have had as much influence on the way that Plato commentaries developed as Plotinus did. And of the friends of Plotinus whom Porphyry used, Origenes and Amelius were in turn influenced by pre-Plotinian Platonists.

Those who had cast doubt on the originality of Plotinus during his lifetime saw him as belonging to the tradition of those with a combined allegiance to Plato and to Pythagoras, including both Moderatus (late first century CE)

and Numenius who were nominally Pythagoreans.<sup>3</sup> This ought to alert us to the fact that contemporaries did not see a great resemblance between Plotinus and seemingly more conventional Platonists, such as the biographer Plutarch (c. 45–125 CE), Gaius (*floruit* c. 125 CE), Albinus (*floruit* c. 150 CE), and Atticus (*floruit* c. 178 CE). Hence Plotinus himself could be seen as something of a ‘fringe Platonist’, but that cannot be said for his influential follower Porphyry, who came to Plotinus already steeped in the more regular scholarly Platonism taught by Longinus and retained a mind of his own on some important issues.

One way of distinguishing types of Platonism among Plotinus’ predecessors has been to classify them according to their friendliness or hostility to certain other philosophers and philosophical schools, particularly Academic ‘sceptics’, Aristotle, Pythagoras and the Stoa. Karamanolis has recently examined the whole period with regard to its shifting attitude towards Aristotle, most often an uneasy ally, but an undoubted enemy for Atticus and perhaps also for some others.<sup>4</sup> Scholars of the early twentieth century were sufficiently struck by widespread use of Stoic terminology to postulate strong influence on that front, but this is seldom accompanied by radical concessions to Stoic doctrine, merely by the willingness to be swayed by good Stoic arguments on occasions where the natural boundaries of Platonism permitted it. And in logic the Platonists, if they were going to offer strong guidance to their pupils, had little choice but to supplement anything they could find in Plato with approved doctrine from either Aristotle or the Stoa. Even so, some found more to criticize here than others. So many different attitudes to Aristotle and (to a lesser degree) the Stoa are detectable that it is ultimately impossible to categorize these Platonists according to such criteria. What we can say with some certainty is that Plotinus had such a wide range of precedents that the degree to which he chose to be swayed by Aristotle or the Stoa was his own decision.

Platonists might also be distinguished on the basis of their dominant interests, some seemingly being preoccupied with mathematics, such as Theon of Smyrna (contemporary with Plutarch), others with ethics (though grounded in theology), and others with philosophical literature, such as Apuleius (*floruit* c. 160 CE). Such a distinction is problematic because of our limited knowledge of the output of most of them. Again, they could be distinguished on the basis of geography, dividing those operating in Athens from those functioning elsewhere, as Dillon (1977) did, but with the subsequent collapse of the ‘School

<sup>3</sup> Unknown persons, answered by Amelius, Longinus and the author himself in Porph. *VPlot.* 17–21.

<sup>4</sup> Karamanolis 2006. Lucius, Nicostratus and Eudorus come to mind, insofar as they are hostile to Aristotle’s work the *Categories*, but it is unsafe to infer a general hostility from this more specific one.

of Gaius' theory that had once seemed to give a little coherence to the non-Athenian practitioners, such a distinction fails to capture any essential difference. Finally one might make distinctions on the basis of the degree of literalism with which interpreters approached Platonic texts, with Atticus as Proclus' supreme example of the literalist, followed perhaps by Plutarch, Gaius and Albinus; at the other extreme one finds Numenius and those influenced by him. In the end, however, it would seem that early imperial Platonism had many faces that are not easily categorized. It was finding its way forward, first discovering how to read Plato, then discovering explanations for the anomalies, and ultimately finding explanations for passages that pointed towards unpalatable doctrines. Ultimately, this led to reading Platonic texts *imaginatively*, but as John Dillon has shown with regard to Platonist commentaries of the era a great deal of 'pedantry and pedestrianism' remained alongside more illuminating exegesis.<sup>5</sup>

### 3 THE WRITTEN COMMUNICATION OF PLATONISM

The writings of these Platonists fell into a variety of categories, one of which was the Platonic 'commentary'. It is a constraint for us that no complete or near-complete commentary survives. The *Theaetetus* commentary does not get far beyond the introductory stages of the dialogue before the papyrus runs out at around 158b, but it does give us a reasonably clear idea of the type of lemmata, the way that they are explained by paraphrase, and the extent of the more adventurous hermeneutic material. Two papyrus fragments of an *Alcibiades* commentary do not give a radically different impression, nor do other papyrus fragments to be dated from this period. The chief dialogue to attract commentaries was the *Timaeus*, this seemingly being the work that every Platonist curriculum had to include. The impressive fragments of Taurus' *Commentary on the Timaeus* (T22–34 Gioè), perhaps written at around his alleged *floruit* of 145 CE, are sufficient to make us wish for more, but, unfortunately, we do not possess from this period a substantial piece of continuous commentary on this pivotal dialogue, other than the work of Galen on its medical parts. Galen had Platonist leanings, but he lived and thought primarily as a physician, not as a professional philosopher. His admiration for Plato did not cause him to commit to key doctrines concerning the transcendent Ideas and an immortal inner person. And he informs us that he is atypical in wanting to comment upon these later physiological parts of the *Timaeus* at all. At the beginning of the work Platonists in the second century tended not to comment on anything

<sup>5</sup> Dillon 2006.

preceding Timaeus' great monologue,<sup>6</sup> and all that we know to have attracted regular Platonist comment before Porphyry could be loosely described as the part pertaining to physical and metaphysical principles.

Some idea of the sections of the *Timaeus* that attracted attention can be gleaned from Calcidius' rather later Latin translation and commentary. This is generally agreed to reflect broadly the perspective of pre-Plotinian Platonism, and it makes substantial acknowledged and unacknowledged use of the Platonist Theon of Smyrna, the Platonizing Peripatetic Adrastus, and the Platonizing Pythagorean Numenius. These debts, however, should not be allowed to obscure the fact that Calcidius has an agenda, which is itself a later one than the period with which we are dealing. Not all even of this commentary has survived, but we also have its table of contents that gives a general idea of the commentary's scope. Calcidius' translation of the Latin begins at the beginning, but his commentary proper begins with 31c and later material returns to 28b. The early conversation and the story of Atlantis he dismisses as involving straightforward narrative.<sup>7</sup> Translation and commentary run out at 53c. A commentary so clearly divided into topics rather than into sections of text does have its later (and fuller) counterpart in Proclus' *Commentary on the Republic*, but to what extent it was normal in the first two centuries CE we cannot guess. It is quite possible that a number of different formats were used according to the teaching styles of different individuals and the suitability of each style to particular Platonic works.

Some interpretative works actually centred on single questions raised by Platonic texts or on quite short passages in dialogues. We have several examples of the former in Plutarch's *Platonic Questions*, while his *On the Generation of the Soul in the Timaeus* is of the latter kind, but it seems that a number of authors did tackle key passages like the 'Myth of Er' in the *Republic*.<sup>8</sup>

Interpretative works served to expose the pupil to the heritage of Platonism, once they had opted for it. Other works were required to introduce Platonic doctrines to those who might be considering such an option and to those who wished to familiarize themselves with a variety of philosophical systems as Cicero and many others had done. The doctrinal handbook, such as that of

<sup>6</sup> Severus is the one singled out for mention by Proclus (*In Tim.* 1.204.17–18 = T3 Gioè) for declining to comment on any of the introductory material; compare our remarks on Calcidius below.

<sup>7</sup> 58.26–59.2 Waszink; like his avoidance of allegorical interpretation, this treatment of the story of Solon, prehistoric Athens, and Atlantis as a *simplex narratio* . . . *rerum ante gestarum et historiae veteris recensitio* seems to guarantee that he is not here under the influence of Numenius (Proc. *In Tim.* 1.76.30–77.23 = fr. 37 des Places) or Cronius. Rather it suggests Severus (Proc. *In Tim.* 1.204.16–18; cf. Longinus, *ibid.* 18–24).

<sup>8</sup> Dercyllides in Theon, *Exposition* 198.9; cf. Plutarch's discussion of the four regular solids in the *Timaeus* in *Obsolence of Oracles*.

Alcinous or Apuleius' *De Platone*, should be distinguished from introductions to Platonic texts such as Albinus' *Prologue* and the source (in the Thrasyllan tradition) of Diogenes Laertius 3.48–67. There remained rivalries between the different philosophies, so that polemical treatises continued to be written against, for instance, Stoics and Epicureans. With Atticus, it becomes clear that anti-Aristotelian polemic could become polemic against those of one's own primary persuasion who adopted facets of Aristotelian doctrine. Indeed, it is inevitable that Platonism's dominance during this period would result in what we might call 'internal' quarrels about Platonism's true nature.

Platonists were acutely aware that Plato had mostly written in dialogue form, and that he was both a philosopher and a literary author. As a result those Platonists with obvious literary talents sometimes tried to use them to enhance their message. Plutarch wrote many dialogues in the Platonic tradition that attempt to communicate ideas of a predominantly Platonist kind. Numenius also wrote in dialogue form in his *On the Good*. Apuleius experimented with a variety of literary forms, often leaving us with strong suggestions of a philosophical message without reducing the works' appeal for those who might normally reject philosophy. Examples are to be found in his *Metamorphoses* (or *Golden Ass*) and his series of short pieces known as the *Florida*.

#### 4 THE QUESTION OF PRE-PLOTINIAN PLATONISM'S SOURCES

The questions of the origins of what was then called 'Middle Platonism' used to be keenly debated. When viewed, rather artificially, as a single movement, the Platonism of this period seemed to demand a father-figure whose vision gave it its shape, as (it was presumed) Plato had done earlier and Plotinus would do later. The Platonists with whom we are dealing had not usually left enough for us to expect to see them acknowledging such a figure, Plotinus had not been in the habit of referring to intellectuals of the Roman era, and Porphyry's list of commentators read in Plotinus' circle (*VPlot* 14) includes only Severus, Gaius and Atticus of those styled 'Platonists'. Of those who are mentioned regularly by Proclus in his *Commentary on the Timaeus* (again probably reflecting what had once appeared in Porphyry) the earliest is Plutarch, who spans the first and second centuries CE.

Plutarch himself, although an 'intellectual giant' of the Platonic tradition, is too late to have interested scholars as the supposed luminary who introduced the new Platonism, and there were other arguments for by-passing him too. First, though not inclined to conceal firmly held views, he is not an open advocate of the Platonist 'dogmatism' that scholars had perceived as a precondition for this kind of Platonism, and he seems to see himself in the tradition of the 'New'

as well as the 'Old' Academy, questioning the validity of the distinction that Antiochus of Ascalon had forcefully made. Antiochus had been the staunchest advocate of Platonic 'dogmatism', but when Plutarch mentions him in his *Life of Cicero* (4) he appears to disapprove of his innovations and to suspect his motivation. Second, Plutarch, though a lively intellectual of Platonist persuasion who conversed regularly with others, was not the Head of some famous Platonist school and is not the 'professional philosopher' that scholars were seeking. Third, we have enough of Plutarch to know that he did not leave behind the clearly articulated Platonic system that was thought to have been influential, for he often communicates obliquely, making considerable use of multi-speaker dialogues when writing in the Platonic tradition, sometimes employing myth and metaphor to hint at his deepest views, and at others applying Platonism to more peripheral questions of some contemporary interest. Hence, the onus is usually on his own interpreters to read a Platonic system into his work. Finally, Plutarch refers to others who can be regarded as his own predecessors.

Much of this only demonstrates the unrealistic expectations about a second founder of Platonism: the expected professional philosopher who re-establishes Platonism by promoting a new vision with dogmatic force and systematic clarity never existed. It is, however, to Plutarch that we must first go if we desire to trace further back the origins of early imperial Platonism. To begin with, Plutarch can be plausibly connected with several of those who followed him. His name is regularly connected with Atticus in Proclus (*In Tim.* 1.326.1, 381.26–7, 2.153.29, 3.212.8). The hero of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* (or *Golden Ass*), narrated in the first person and so suggestive of autobiographical elements, is said to be related to Plutarch and to his nephew Sextus, also a Platonist, something that appears to place this odd work (or perhaps its Greek model by Lucius of Patrae) somehow in the Platonist allegorical tradition and to acknowledge a debt to Plutarch. Such a debt is easy to envisage in the light of the Isis book with which the work concludes, and Apuleius also seems close to Plutarch on matters of demonology in his *De deo Socratis*. Finally Aulus Gellius (*NA* 1.26.4) has his Platonist mentor Taurus refer in glowing terms to 'our Plutarch', apparently acknowledging a debt. These hints are at least as much as one might expect to have found in our fragmentary evidence, and establish that Plutarch was an influential figure in this period of Platonism.

It is therefore with Plutarch that one should begin any search for the origins of Platonism. Here it is vital that the depiction of the intellectual life in which Platonist views are aired is not such as to conjure up images of large formal schools, but of informal intellectual gatherings where views other than those of Platonists could find expression. This was a world in which intellectuals would travel a good deal, sharing views with those that they encountered

elsewhere. Though individuals tended to assume that others had read widely, oral activity was clearly of great importance, possibly reflecting the belief that Plato himself privileged oral over written activity.<sup>9</sup> Revered intellectual beliefs of non-Greeks were often introduced, from Egypt for instance, or Persia. Plutarch's own revered mentor Ammonius, who bears an Egyptian name and appears in a number of dialogues, already speaks with confidence in the broad correctness of the Platonic tradition, and the views expressed by him seem to have Plutarch's approval. Other characters can also introduce material in the Platonist tradition, sometimes involving interpretation of Plato, and especially of mathematical elements in Plato, which were clearly attracting considerable interest.<sup>10</sup>

In general the interpretation of Plato is better seen in the *Platonic Questions* and in *On the Psychogony in the Timaeus*, neither of which is in dialogue form. The latter work names several sources, including the Academics Xenocrates and Crantor from the first and second generations after Plato himself, Eudorus of Alexandria, an Academic from the late first century BCE who also knew and approved of both these early exegetes,<sup>11</sup> and Posidonius of Apamea, the Stoic polymath who influenced Cicero, Strabo and Seneca among others. Plutarch refers in fact to 'those around' Posidonius (1023b), a common way of referring to a given philosopher along with any others who may adopt his position; hence one may, but is not forced to, postulate a group of interpreters who agree with Posidonius' explanation of the construction of the Platonic World Soul. Posidonius' interpretation of Plato's psychology in the *Timaeus* is also referred to by Plutarch's contemporary Platonist, Theon of Smyrna,<sup>12</sup> and by Sextus Empiricus, in whom it appears that Posidonius considered himself to be interpreting *Pythagorean* theory (seeing Plato's character 'Timaeus' as making a distinctively Pythagorean contribution, F85EK = S.E. M. 7.93). Posidonius (T91 = F151 EK) likewise attributed Platonic tripartite psychology to Pythagoras too. Finding Pythagoreanism in Plato would become a regular part of the philosophy of the age, particularly for self-styled Pythagoreans.<sup>13</sup> However, Galen

<sup>9</sup> Aristotle's account of Plato's so-called 'unwritten doctrines' is clearly becoming important at this time, sufficiently so to have inspired an emendation to the text of *Metaphysics* by Eudorus and Euharmostus (Alex. Aphr. *In Met.* 58.31–59.8 = Eudorus T2 Mazzarelli).

<sup>10</sup> There are mathematical passages scattered throughout Plutarch's *Moralia* (on which see below), while Theon of Smyrna and Moderatus are known to us mainly as a result of their mathematical and Pythagorean interests.

<sup>11</sup> 1013a–b; Eudorus is also mentioned at 1019f–1020c.

<sup>12</sup> *Expos.* p. 103 Hiller = F291 EK in relation to the seven numbers used in the construction of the World Soul.

<sup>13</sup> Stob. *Ed.* 2.49.8ff., possibly still influenced by Eudorus whose work is utilized shortly before; 'Aetius' (Stob. *Ecl.* 1.12, 20, 22, 49; Ps.-Plut. 2.6, 4.2) as discussed in Tarrant 2000: 75–6; Moderatus at Porph. *VPyth.* 53, and Thrasyllus, Moderatus, Numenius and Cronius at *idem VPlot.* 20.71–6 and 21.1–9; Nicomachus of Gerasa, and 'Pythagoras' in Lucian *Auction of Lives* 3–6.

makes use of Posidonius' defence of the tripartition of the soul in the course of approving the psychology of Plato's *Republic*, suggesting that Posidonius had admired Plato himself.<sup>14</sup> The evidence suggests that Posidonius was an important figure in the history of Platonic interpretation, even though one cannot expect Platonic interpretation and doctrine to coincide in somebody who described himself as a Stoic. That is palpably the case in the 58th and 65th *Epistles* of Seneca, which give considerable insights into the Platonic interpretation of the time, and confirm the interest that a Stoic may legitimately take in Platonic texts.

Eudorus is better entitled to be considered a Platonist, in spite of his status as an 'Academic'<sup>15</sup> and his own undoubted interest in the Pythagoreans.<sup>16</sup> Consequently there was a time when scholars looked to Eudorus to explain a whole variety of common features in pre-Plotinian Platonism, and he occupied, perhaps deservedly, twenty-two pages in Dillon's book *The Middle Platonists*, sharing a chapter with Philo of Alexandria. John Rist was an early sceptic regarding what he saw as a still-growing tendency to credit unexplained doctrines to Eudorus,<sup>17</sup> and a promised edition of Eudorus' fragments by Bonazzi and Chiaradonna appears set to take a minimalist view, particularly regarding material in the second Book of Stobaeus' *Eclogues*. Rejecting the Stobaeian foundations upon which much of what Eudorus' reputation as a Platonic interpreter rests would leave much of the recent scholarly picture of Eudorus without any real cohesion. There are also a few arguments from silence, and particularly from the silence of Proclus' commentaries,<sup>18</sup> that warn us that he may just have been one figure among many of his time who played some part in giving shape to the new Platonism. We cannot even say what kind of philosopher he was. Does his interest in Pythagoreans imply more commitment than it had for Posidonius? Does his association with positive teachings imply the commitment to dogma that many postulate, or does the evidence show no more than it had done for

<sup>14</sup> See F142–6 and 150–53 EK, from books 4–6 of *On the Doctrines of Plato and Hippocrates*.

<sup>15</sup> Stobaeus *Ecl.* 2.42.7 = T1 Mazzarelli, Anon. 1, *Intr. ad Arat.* 97 Maass (= T11), and *Simpl. In Categ.* 187.10 (= T16).

<sup>16</sup> See his account of Pythagorean metaphysical principles at *Simpl. Phys.* 181.10ff., backed by his emendation of the text of *Arist. Met.* 988a10–11 (recorded by Alex. *In Met.*) so that the matter as well as Ideas are derived from the One; and, if Eudorus may be credited with the theory of the *telos* of Platonism at *Stob. Ecl.* 2.49.8ff., one notes that Socrates and Plato are said to be following Pythagoras; finally, the closeness of aspects of Eudorus to some late Pythagorean texts has suggested to Dillon 1977: 117–21, among others, the influence of the Pythagoreanism of the period. The alleged similarities between Eudorus and Philo of Alexandria, who is once called a 'Pythagorean' by Clement (*Strom.* 2.19.100.3.4) and who is not otherwise directly associated with a philosophical school, also do something to suggest that Eudorus was a Pythagoreanizer.

<sup>17</sup> See his review of Tarrant 1985, where he speaks of 'Pan-Eudorism'.

<sup>18</sup> As Proclus depends largely on Porphyry for his early material (Tarrant 2004), it seems that Porphyry too failed to see Eudorus as a central figure.

Philo of Larissa and Plutarch, who both expressed views of their own together while seeing some merit in Academic Scepticism? Do his objections to the Aristotelian account of the categories make him a trenchant anti-Aristotelian? Does the apparent fact that he wrote one or more Platonic commentaries make him a clear case of a 'Platonist', when Potamo, also of Alexandria, wrote on the *Republic* but called himself an 'Eclectic'?<sup>19</sup>

More importantly we have to ask whether Eudorus was really an innovator. On the composition of the Platonic World Soul he found something useful in two Old Academic views, but is not credited by Plutarch with a view of his own. Perhaps he is simply one of 'those around Posidonius', but perhaps he said nothing that required reporting. Later (1020c) he is affirmed to be following Crantor on the mathematics of the soul's harmonic nature, and the reason why he has been reintroduced at 1019e is the clarity of his exposition. Was he perhaps more of an interpreter than a philosopher, or more of a scholar than an original mind? There are a few key doctrines that scholars like to credit him with, including the view that 'assimilation to God' is the human goal, that the Ideas are the thoughts of God, and that the world demands not only transcendent Ideas (in the Platonic tradition) but also immanent forms (in the Aristotelian tradition). The first is clearly and interestingly discussed in the Stobaeian passage that allegedly follows him, but we may detect the basic doctrine in Ciceronian texts that go back to Antiochus if not before, and Plato gives plenty of prompting in this direction (cf. *De leg.* 1.21). The second is quite plausibly Old Academic. The third is already present in Platonic material in Seneca (*Epistles* 58 and 65), and Whittaker (1969), with an eye on Eudorus, favoured a source commenting on the *Timaeus*, but Plutarch's discussion of Posidonius' interpretation of the World Soul certainly gives prominence both to intelligibles and to the limits of physical bodies (as distinct from their matter).

The evidence points to Eudorus having given momentum to the Platonist movement not by the striking originality of his doctrines but by his ability to explain clearly the concepts that belonged to an earlier age. In this regard he was continuing in the footsteps of Posidonius. We cannot even affirm that Eudorus would have regarded himself as a 'Platonist', however appropriate the term seems. If that disappoints our desire to identify a Platonic visionary at this time, then it may simply be that our desire is misplaced. What was really important is widespread admiration for Plato and the breadth of the desire to understand him. It made his philosophy a regular topic of conversation at the more serious gatherings of intellectuals. The texts that we have reflect a vibrant intellectual background, and it is to them that we must turn.

<sup>19</sup> See D.L. 1.21 for his philosophy and the *Suda* ad loc. for his commentary.

## 5 PRESENTING AND EXPLAINING THE CORPUS

The most important text for Platonism is the text of Plato himself. Some works had clearly remained quite well known throughout the Hellenistic period, including *Timaeus*, *Phaedo* and *Republic*. However, the Hellenistic scholar Aristophanes of Byzantium had arranged only fifteen works when he sought to shape the corpus, along dramatic lines, into trilogies.<sup>20</sup> These fifteen included the *Minos* and *Epinomis*, which are almost certainly spurious, and a group of *Epistles*, some of which may have been. They gave no exposure (apart from the *Euthyphro*) to what we think of as the Socratic side of Plato, with its focus on undermining the theses or activities of others rather than on establishing central theses. His arrangement did not have the effect of leaving all the rest of the corpus in obscurity, but debates in the first century BCE about the nature of the Platonic heritage, and in particular about how far Plato had sanctioned the straightforward exposition of doctrine, needed answering with reference to a comprehensive and authoritative body of texts. Such a corpus may have existed, but seems not to have been widely circulating or adequately explained.

We can say better who was trying to *explain* the whole corpus than who was helping to make it more freely available. But certain works now being written presuppose the availability of comprehensive texts. We have a short introduction, or *Prologue*, to the full corpus by the second-century CE Platonist Albinus, and the first of three appendices to Diogenes Laertius' *Life of Plato* (D.L. 3.48–67) is also just such an introduction. Both refer to the work of Thrasyllus, who appears, directly or indirectly, to be Diogenes' principal source, but is criticized by Albinus. Albinus (*Prol.* 4) accuses Thrasyllus (court intellectual of the Emperor Tiberius in the early first century CE) and Dercyllides (of unknown date) of having placed dramatic considerations ahead of substantive ones when arranging the corpus into nine tetralogies. So as far as Albinus was concerned, one or the other of these two must take responsibility for the form of the thirty-six-work corpus that has come down to us.<sup>21</sup> We know too from an Arabic source (al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, p. 614 Dodge) that Theon of Smyrna, a Platonist of distinctly mathematical interests whose *Exposition of Mathematics Useful for the Understanding of Plato* has come down to us, wrote at some time in the late first or early second century CE on the order and titles of Plato's dialogues. The *Exposition* refers both to the harmonic theory of Thrasyllus and to an

<sup>20</sup> *Republic–Timaeus–Critias; Sophist–Statesman–Cratylus; Laws–Minos–Epinomis; Theaetetus–Euthyphro–Apology; Crito–Phaedo–Epistles.*

<sup>21</sup> Certainly not everything associated with Thrasyllus was new, and there appears to have been some early tradition that the corpus had been originally arranged like a sequence of tragedies in the *Diomysia*, but Albinus knew no earlier tetralogies than those that he associated with these two.

interpretative work by Dercyllides on the spindles and whorls of the 'Myth of Er' in Plato's *Republic*. It is therefore likely that one or the other was the primary inspiration (but not necessarily 'source') of Theon's own activities in introducing the corpus.

The place of Thrasyllus in organizing the corpus is controversial, but the role of Dercyllides is still more difficult to fix, since we cannot affirm where he stood in relation to Thrasyllus. All we can be certain of is that he recognized the same first tetralogy, consisting of *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito* and *Phaedo*. However, he addressed the Platonic theory of matter in the eleventh book of a work *On Plato's Philosophy*, and it may be with this extensive work about Plato in mind that Dillon is content to treat him as a Platonist.<sup>22</sup> This contrasts with a widespread unwillingness to use this term for Thrasyllus, even though a scholiast on Juvenal affirmed that he had devoted himself to the *Platonica secta*.<sup>23</sup> If Thrasyllus leaned at times towards the Pythagoreans, this may simply reflect an alliance that was typical of the age, and the claims of these two to be regarded as Platonists are approximately equal.

Dercyllides unearthed his material on Platonic matter from Hermodorus, an Old Academic and contemporary of Xenocrates, and this recalls the way that Posidonius and Eudorus were taking Old Academic texts into consideration in the interpretation of Plato. Even though Hermodorus is responsible for the outline of the theory, Dercyllides is still selecting the views that he will promote, still convinced like other Platonists of the age that Plato had a theory of matter, and still writing in a way that suggested an interpretation of the receptacle in the *Timaeus*, the Indefinite (*apeiron*) of *Philebus* 23c ff., and Aristotle's reports of Plato's 'unwritten doctrine'. Among the ideas that Dercyllides sees fit to pass on here is the notion that Plato worked with a system of three basic categories, 'in itself', 'relative to an opposite' and 'relative to another'. So, a Platonist system of first principles is beginning to take place, closely related to a Platonist logic.

Both Dercyllides and Thrasyllus seem not only to have been involved in organizing the corpus but also to have been attempting to explain how philosophy in the Platonic tradition operated. Among the material in Diogenes that arguably derives from Thrasyllus' stance is the claim that Plato did establish doctrines, revealing them only in the instructional (*huphēgētikos*) works, while inquisitive (*zētētikos*) works aimed rather to refute. This major division was central to a classification by the dialogue's so-called *character*, which resulted in four

<sup>22</sup> Dillon (1977: 133) places him in the milieu of Alexandrian Platonism, and (2006: 20–2) treats him in the company of Platonists without further ado.

<sup>23</sup> Scholion on *Juv.* 6.576 = Thrasyllus 11a.

species of instructional works (physical, logical, ethical, political) and four of inquisitive also (perhaps for ‘testing’ the youth, for ‘delivering’ their own inner theories, for ‘exposing’ the sophists, and for ‘overturning’ them).<sup>24</sup> The classification must have originated with persons who saw two strands in the Platonic tradition, one doctrinal and the other more aporetic. As if to further explain the disputes about interpreting Plato, the material in Diogenes suggests that he had deliberately concealed some of his meaning by using a plurality of terms in the same sense, and the same terms in different senses. This not only involves interpretation, but establishes that Plato was a complex author who *required interpretation*.

Much of the significance of Dercyllides and Thrasyllus might have been lost, but for the scholarly activities of Porphyry, inherited from his early mentor Longinus. It had been Porphyry who passed information about Dercyllides and Hermodorus to Simplicius, and Porphyry was in general a major source of pre-Plotinian material for Platonists of later antiquity. Porphyry himself shows how Longinus had been able to place Plotinus in the same tradition as Thrasyllus and Pythagorean authors like Moderatus and Numenius (*VPlot.* 20–1), seeing him as somebody who dealt with the basic principles of Plato and Pythagoras together. Porphyry also preserves something about a Thrasyllan ‘*Logos* of the forms’ in his *Commentary on Ptolemy’s Harmonics*.<sup>25</sup> One assumes that Thrasyllus had tried in a work on harmonics to relate the *logos qua* ratio of Pythagorean harmonics to some universal principle, associated with a controlling divinity, which is somehow responsible for embracing all the formal principles of the natural world. Porphyry has this *logos* not only unfolding the formal power encapsulated in seeds, but also underpinning a cognitive process that extracts the forms from matter and eventually yields an awareness of the Platonic Idea. But it is only the beginning of the process that is marked as Thrasyllan, and all one can say with confidence is that Thrasyllus had some *logos*-theory that involved formal principles, and that Porphyry thought it special enough to refer to. The fact that Porphyry has strayed a long way from his goal of commenting on Ptolemy and thus seems to be following a source, coupled with the facts that he has stated a policy of naming sources and that no other source is mentioned, led me to conclude that most of this material was broadly Thrasyllan. If this were right the passage would be especially notable for two reasons: first, such a *logos*-theory inevitably makes one think of Thrasyllus’ contemporary Philo of Alexandria, and second the passage contains allusions to doctrinal material in

<sup>24</sup> There are uncertainties here, as can be seen from the variant *epideiktikos* replacing *endeiktikos* at Albinus, *Prol.* 6.

<sup>25</sup> Page 12 Düring.

the sixth and seventh Platonic *Epistles*, material that is otherwise unnoticed in extant works until the second century CE.

The activities of those who undertook the organization of the corpus did not ensure that all works included by them were accepted as Plato's own. The *Epinomis* was still attributed to Philip of Opus, while the authorship of such works as the *Alcibiades II*, *Hipparchus* and *Erastae* were all apparently debated during this period.<sup>26</sup> There is no evidence, however, that any were omitted from the corpus arrangements that have come down to us, including two in Arabic sources (one seemingly derived from the work of Theon referred to above) and the *Prologue* of Albinus. Other Platonists seem to have had few doubts about works other than these four.

The activities of the corpus organizers made little impact on some Platonist authors of the period. Plutarch, the anonymous *Theaetetus* commentator and Alcinous show little or no awareness of the activities of Thrasyllus and Dercyllides.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand a second-century papyrus recently published, and perhaps from another commentary on the *Theaetetus*, offers an explanation of the internal cohesion of the second tetralogy. It explains particularly the special non-dogmatic character of the *Theaetetus*, as opposed to the preceding *Cratylus* and the following *Sophist* and *Politicus*, in terms of Plato's desire to counter erroneous positions on epistemology before explaining the rest of his theory. What is said suggests conformity also with Thrasyllus' second titles, as *Cratylus* is about the correctness of names, and *Theaetetus* about knowledge; it also agrees with the depiction of the *Cratylus*, *Sophist* and *Statesman* as 'logical' dialogues, i.e., dialogues offering instruction in logic.

The kind of Platonism associated with Thrasyllus, Dercyllides and Theon had been learned rather than edifying, and certainly not inspired. It had tended to see mathematics (including harmonics), and therefore mathematical passages in Plato, as a principal concern. However, these authors do show a clear awareness of the metaphysical element in Plato, in Thrasyllus' *logos*-theory, in Dercyllides' treatment of Platonic matter, and in Theon's comparison of philosophy to a sacred rite (*Expos.* 14.18–16.2), which uses the mystery terminology of the *Phaedrus* and aims at the goal of assimilation to the divine. This brings us to

<sup>26</sup> For the *Epinomis* see D.L. 3.37, anon. *Proleg.* 13–19; for *Hipparchus* and *Alcibiades II* see Aelian *VS* 8.2.16, Athenaeus 6.506c, and Tarrant 1993: 17 n. 37, 150–1; for the *Erastae* see perhaps even Thrasyllus T18C (= D.L. 9.37).

<sup>27</sup> The technical terms for the classification of dialogues are absent, so far as may be told, from the commentator's discussion of the nature and primary topic of the *Theaetetus* in columns 2–3; they appear to have no explanatory value for Plutarch; and Alcinous, discussing which types of syllogism Plato employs in which situations, uses the term *huphēgētikos* for dialogue character at 158.28 without importing the rest of the classification.

the threshold of a fully revived Platonism that depicts Plato as the builder of a doctrinal system.

## 6 MOVING FORWARD

The central author in the next part of our account will be Plutarch. Even so, we should perhaps begin with reference to the 58th and 65th *Epistles* of Seneca, which reveal to us some features of the developing Platonist metaphysics. *Epistle* 65 discusses the types of causes acknowledged by various schools, and at 7–10 Plato is considered to have added a fifth cause to the four familiar Aristotelian ones, a paradigmatic cause (or Idea) over and above final, motive, formal and material causes. This already gives the basic five-cause system that is present even in the introduction to Proclus' *Commentary on the Timaeus*,<sup>28</sup> and one might well believe that it was present in interpretative works on the *Timaeus* before Seneca; but it may simply be that Seneca draws primarily on the familiar wisdom of the intellectual world at Rome. It is plausible that Thrasyllus had exercised a controlling influence on the way in which Plato's philosophy was seen in Roman circles, particularly those close to the imperial household.<sup>29</sup> Since, as a Stoic, Seneca does not approve such multi-cause systems, it is unlikely to be his own innovation.

A division into six of Plato's senses of 'what is' in *Epistle* 58 is compatible with the metaphysic of the five-cause passage. One recalls how the corpus organizers were conscious of Plato's tendency to use terms in a plurality of senses (D.L. 3.63–4), and the division in this *Epistle* should be seen against that background. We have a generic sense of being, referring to everything that may be said to 'be', and five others. These five again suggest a metaphysical hierarchy. Again, the material seems related to the interpretation of the *Timaeus*, particularly to the famous question that launches Timaeus' monologue: 'What is it that always is and has no becoming?' (27d),<sup>30</sup> but Seneca may here too be indebted to contemporary intellectual debate, and one feels that details are at times being understood in distinctly Stoic terms.

<sup>28</sup> *In Tim.* 1.2.30–4.5; note that an auxiliary or instrumental cause is sometimes added (as in Porphyry fr. 120), but this does not alter the shape of the basic five-cause system.

<sup>29</sup> If Thrasyllus is still the source of Porphyry at *Harm.* 13.21–14.29, where the leap to the Idea is again an 'add-on', it is worth noting the influence of the philosophical digression of *Epistle* 7 there alluded to, which actually calls the Idea 'the fifth', and sees it as offering a step-up beyond the four elements there involved in empirical cognition. For a passage in Plutarch that makes much of hints of a five-fold metaphysic in Plato, see *Mor.* 391b–d.

<sup>30</sup> The question gives impetus to Numenius' metaphysical discussion in *On the Good*, frs. 3–6, and Ammonius' contribution to discussion of the Delphic E (below); cf. Whittaker 1965.

## 7 THE PLACE OF ALCINOUS

As one moves towards the authors of the second century Alcinous becomes increasingly important because of the range of philosophical topics he covers. Of Alcinous we know nothing except the name by which his *Handbook of Platonism* or *Didascalicus* has come down to us. We do not even know whether the name is that by which its bearer had originally been known, or, like the names of Porphyry and others,<sup>31</sup> a name acquired by a non-Greek within a philosophical school. What concerns us here is the nature of his handbook, the date at which it was put together, and the date(s) from which its basic materials are derived. Alcinous is clearly trying to produce from disparate materials a reasonably coherent introductory doctrinal handbook, as can be seen at the close:

To have said this much suffices for an introduction (*eisagōgē*) to Platonic doctrine-building (*dogmatopoieia*). Perhaps parts of it have been stated in an organized fashion, and parts as they came up and without order, but [it has been presented] so that as a result of what has been stated we may become keen to study and discover the rest of his doctrines too.

This suggests that he is conscious that his materials have not produced an organic whole, but that this does not worry him because he is only setting students upon a Platonic path, in recognition that Platonism is a life's journey and cannot come neatly packaged in Epicurean fashion.

Alcinous is certainly following a source closely at the beginning of his exposition of Platonic physics (12.1), where the similarities with a passage (in Stobaeus) of Arius Didymus can scarcely be coincidental. At other times much less striking similarities with Apuleius' *De Platone* also suggest some common source. It has been argued by Göransson that Alcinous is not following a single source but a number of sources,<sup>32</sup> and there certainly seem to be a number of different layers of material in the work. Parts of it are laced with vocabulary that emphasize the author's agreement or disagreement with certain ways of reading Plato, which do not appear to be the kind of thing that is preserved when following sources. These parts, including the end of the section on logic where interpretations of the *Euthydemus*, *Parmenides* and *Cratylus* are suggested (end of 6), chapters 7–11 on mathematics and metaphysics, chapters 23–5 on psychology, and parts of the earlier chapters on ethics (27–30), deal with the dominant interests of

<sup>31</sup> There are interesting cases of adopted names in Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*, since the author had been known (i) by the transliteration of his own name under Longinus, (ii) by its translation into Greek by Amelius, and (iii) by a word that suggested royalty more obliquely under Plotinus (17). Amelius' name had been changed to suit a philosopher who exalted the One, making it Amerios ('Partless', 7), while Amelius bestowed the name Mikkalos on Paulinus (also 7).

<sup>32</sup> Göransson 1995.

second-century Platonism, with a greater interest in hermeneutics and a more pervasive interest in theology and psychology. Some of these parts cannot accurately be called 'introductory', for there is little point in discussing what the *Cratylus* really means for anybody unfamiliar with the content of the dialogue itself, and little point in going into what one believes to be the human good 'if one accurately understands his writings' unless the reader already has a basic familiarity with Plato. There is also little obvious point in including as an appendix to the theology some twenty-three lines (166.15–38) on how one proves the qualities to be incorporeal without offering any reason for the reader to be interested in such issues.

Finally, one would expect a single coherent handbook of doctrines to be arranged in accordance with the division of Platonic philosophy that was offered at the outset. However, the actual arrangement differs considerably from that outlined in chapter 3 (153.25–154.5). Here there is a fundamental tripartition into theoretical–practical–logical. *Logic* is divided into division, definition, induction and syllogistic. *Practice* is divided into ethics, 'economics' (or family management) and politics. *Theory* is divided into theology (studying unmoved objects), physics (studying the heavens and the physical world) and mathematics. In what follows theory precedes practice, and comes in the order mathematics–theology–physics. There is no discussion of 'economics' or of definition *per se*. The account is preceded by an elaborate discussion of Plato's *criterion* (epistemology), a section on analytics (if it should not be restored at 153.31) is added to the logic, an extensive section of Platonic psychology and a chapter on fate are added after the discussion of physics, and there is a chapter before the close on the sophist, based closely on Plato's *Sophist*. It may have been prompted by the final lines of the preceding section on politics (188.5–11), which are based primarily on the *Statesman*, and, with the end of chapter 6 (159.38–160.41), it reflects a strong interest in the so-called 'logical' dialogues of Plato: *Cratylus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman* and *Parmenides*, with the addition of the *Euthydemus*.<sup>33</sup> This in turn suggests a desire to give Plato as 'scientific' an image as possible. We shall discuss Alcinous' doctrines and date as we progress.

## 8 PLUTARCH

Plutarch is another figure requiring separate discussion. Though he is better known for his biographies, which themselves serve to illustrate moral lessons,

<sup>33</sup> The names of these dialogues occur eight times in all in the text, while those of other dialogues are mentioned only a further fourteen times. The source of D.L. 3.50–1 includes only the first four as being of the 'logical character', Albinus *Prologue* 3 seems to agree, but Galen included his summary of the *Euthydemus* along with those of the other four in his first book of *Compendia*.

and therefore have their own quasi-philosophical purpose, we possess several wide-ranging works addressing philosophical and related issues more directly. It has already been argued that Plutarch is a central figure in early imperial Platonism, and for this reason he is deserving of careful attention. However, there are a variety of difficulties involved in studying him, many of them similar to the difficulties that we experience when reading Plato. Both are literary authors, and Plutarch frequently casts his best work in dialogue form, making it clearer what he thinks worth discussing than what *doctrines* he adhered to. He is also cautious, finding something in common with the New Academy even though it is quite clear that he finds no reason whatever to avoid either belief or commitment.

Fortunately Plutarch sometimes speaks himself within his dialogues, allowing one to be clearer where the author stands. In the *E at Delphi* he is the penultimate speaker to offer an explanation of why the epsilon has been inscribed on Apollo's temple, and takes second place to his teacher Ammonius, who offers the final and seemingly definitive account, taking the E to stand for an affirmation of the god's unqualified 'existence' beyond the realm of generation in the form of the address εἶ ('you are'). Plutarch in this work is still depicted as a young man, but his preference for a mathematical explanation (taking the E as the number 5) is carefully linked not only with Pythagoreanizing speculations about the properties of this number, but also with an interpretation of passages from the later dialogues of Plato (391b–c), including the *Sophist* and *Philebus*. We see here evidence of Plutarch's early puzzling over some of the most enigmatic passages of Plato, trying to understand them in relation to one another.

Ordinarily the view that Plutarch espouses in person will coincide with his interpretation of Plato, and without forcing the Platonic text available to him. Thus he is a natural Platonist, who has little difficulty understanding the world in which he lives in Platonist terms. The most obvious way in which Plutarch bears witness to the revival of what is recognizably 'Platonism' is in his open commitment to the supernatural. Since Hellenistic philosophy there had been no shortage of theology, but the clear tendency had been to regard god(s) as part of an organic whole, the natural world, typified in the Stoic identification of god and nature. There is no evidence that we have moved significantly beyond this in Eudorus or Thrasyllus, for example. With Plutarch, committed to the validity of Greek religious traditions through his role as priest at Delphi, a great deal of additional divine machinery becomes necessary to explain the proper functioning of oracles, dreams and the like.

A famous passage of Plato's *Symposium* (202d–203a) had sought to explain prophecy through *daimones*, a multifarious tribe of beings responsible for bridging a gulf between humans and gods. Plutarch introduces this theme early in his important discussion of *daimones* in *The Obsolescence of Oracles* (415a), and

the *daimones* here (416c) differ significantly from gods insofar as they share in the non-rational emotions (*pathē*) of humans, and consequently also in degrees of virtue (417b). Their intermediate nature is said to parallel that of the moon, between earth and sun (416e),<sup>34</sup> and for Plutarch their place is essential in order to avoid *either* a radical division between gods and humans *or* an insufficient distance to separate them, so that gods actually come to be present personally at religious rites (416f–417b). It is also vital to explain the uncivilized rituals of early or remote humans, for Plutarch follows Greek traditions in accepting the impeccable rationality of anything that can properly be called a god. Hence his character Cleombrotus piously claims that unseemly myths also tell of the exploits of *daimones* rather than of gods. It is to the vagaries of these *daimones* that he would attribute temporary desertion of oracular shrines. When this subject is revived at 431b with a request for an explanation of *how* the *daimones* are responsible for the operation of oracles, Plutarch's teacher Ammonius is allowed to suggest that *daimones* are in fact only souls clothed in air,<sup>35</sup> and that we need no explanation for the contact of soul upon soul. At this point Lamprias, the narrator and Plutarch's brother, comes in to argue that souls with special prophetic powers after death are only retaining gifts that they had in life, but whose power was often swamped by its immersion in the bodily world (431e–432f). Prophetic souls are those most responsive to the required external impulses, including physical ones such as vapours, and prophecy, at Delphi or elsewhere, is not attributable to any process of reasoning (432c–d). Appeals to the legacy of the Academy and an aporetic (but not despairing) conclusion warn us that Plutarch desires to keep an open mind. What has been important is the overall kind of discussion rather than its details.

At the beginning of the treatise *On Isis and Osiris* is an address to the priestess Clea that explains Plutarch's indecision (351c–d):

Sensible people, Clea, must ask for all good things from the gods. We go on to pray especially to obtain from their very selves as much knowledge about them as humans can achieve, thinking there is nothing greater for humans to receive nor more sacred for a god to grant than the truth. God makes a present of the rest of their needs, but to intelligence and wisdom he grants access, keeping and using these as his own proper possessions.

Knowledge is the very source of god's power and happiness, and our quest to 'assimilate ourselves to god as much as possible'<sup>36</sup> is a quest for knowledge,

<sup>34</sup> This association of *daimones* with the moon is present also in the more imaginative treatise *On the Face of the Moon* 944c–d.

<sup>35</sup> Here one should look not only to Hes. *Erg.* 123–5 for a precedent, but also now to the *Derveni Papyrus* 6.2–3, cf. 9–10; their airy nature may be inferred if editors correctly restore the beginning of line 11, but also perhaps from the airy nature of Zeus and other divinities in the exegetical parts of the text.

<sup>36</sup> The human goal or *telos* in Plutarch (*Mor.* 550d–e, cf. 1015b) as elsewhere in later Platonism.

especially knowledge about gods (351e). Plutarch may speak as one who has travelled part of the road, but no human can speak with the authority of one who has himself reached the desired knowledge. As a result Plutarch will yield much space in his dialogues to others who have made it their business to search for the truth, but to none does he allot a wholly authoritative position. In this regard he does not shun all signs of disagreement with Plato, particularly where the Platonic evidence is not wholly consistent. This is evident in the *Eroticus* or *Love Dialogue*. Here the divinity of Eros, which Socrates and 'Diotima' forcefully argue against in Plato's *Symposium* (201e–202d), is a central plank in the argument. It is even claimed that philosophers and poets are in agreement about Eros' divinity (363e–f), specifically mentioning Plato and alluding rather to a variety of material in the *Phaedrus* where Love is said to be 'a god or something divine' (242e2). Further, Plutarch's own experience of a loving marriage has ensured the denial of some of the recurrent themes of the *Symposium*, such as the superior nature of male-to-male love, an idea still associated with some Platonists in the second century CE.<sup>37</sup> Plutarch treats all loving relationships as being on a par.

In the context of an increasing willingness to introduce non-Greek material into broadly Platonist discussions, a willingness that will be continued by Numenius, Iamblichus and Syrianus later, it is important that Plutarch himself in the *Eroticus* makes use of comparisons with Egyptian *muthologia*, which according to 762a preserves scattered traces of the truth. The very word *muthologia* suggests the presence of a rational message embedded in a story, and hence inaccessible without deep interpretation. After a request at 764a, Egyptian thoughts on love are introduced. Central to this is the analogy of Eros and Aphrodite to the sun and moon respectively, which hints at the lack-lustre nature of sexual activity without love (764d). But Plutarch with his usual caution warns of ways in which the analogy is less appropriate (e.g., 764e). Again the central myth-like passage of the *Phaedrus* (244a–256e), which like Plutarch's work may be seen as apologetic for Eros, underpins the discussion, with Eros regarded as the source of, or catalyst in, our being returned from the image of beauty here to the true beauty beyond. The result is that the foray into Egyptian religion remains rooted in Platonism.

Egyptian *muthologia* is tackled at much greater length in *On Isis and Osiris*, and Plutarch warns that it should not be taken literally (355b), but in the manner of those who approach myths 'in a holy and philosophical fashion' (355d). A hint of what this might be is given at 359a: like a rainbow that reflects the light of the sun, so the *muthos* reflects a kind of *logos* that turns back the mind to other,

<sup>37</sup> See 'Ion' in Lucian, *Symposium* or *Lapiths* 39; more subtle by far is Taurus 10 T = Aulus Gellius *NA* 17.20.1–7.



encountered more directly after death. Even though Plutarch offers advice and instruction to a lady willing to be guided, he has felt it necessary to work through a whole range of theories beginning with the less sophisticated, giving them consideration but subjecting them to criticism, and working gradually towards the Platonizing account that he prefers. Though intended to be instructive, the treatise is methodologically an Academic investigation: perhaps because he considers method to be part of the lesson communicated.

In like manner his treatise on the *daimonion* of Socrates builds up towards the preferred account, which occurs shortly before the end of an action-packed dialogue, is delivered by Socrates' friend Simmias of Thebes, and includes the story of Timarchus' vision at the Oracle of Trophonius. According to the theory set out here Socrates' *daimonion* was not a unique phenomenon, but a case of an uncorrupted and dispassionate intellect, left in contact with a part that floats on high while the rest of his soul is submerged in matter. This illuminates him with a daimonic light (*daimonion phengos*) for sensing the rationally expressed but voice-free communications of his *daimōn*, intellect being touched from without by a superior intellect. Contact with the original source of the thought makes linguistic structures irrelevant images (588d–589c). Since the whole theory concerns the individual's personal *daimōn*, and this *daimōn* is intellectual and 'outside' (*thurathen*, 589b) impacting upon the purest and most receptive intellect inside, it is difficult not to suspect the influence of Aristotle's external active intellect of *De anima* 3.5.

The story of Timarchus serves to give a vivid cosmic setting to the body-free intellects, giving them pinpoints of light and placing them around the moon, with gods in the planets above them. These separated intellects are rightly called *daimones* because of their external nature (591e), but each is an individual's *daimōn*, with a direct line connecting it to the highest internal part of the individual over whom it watches.

Apuleius a little later will make the tutelary *daimōn* a third kind, distinct from both the mind within (which is sometimes called *daimōn*) and from the spirits of the dead (*De deo Socratis* 150–6). Following a tradition already found in Philo (*Gig.* 6–9) Apuleius had argued that *daimones* uniquely fulfil the role of the proper dwellers of the air (*DDS* 137–41), while Alcinous too is ready to associate classes of super-human beings with particular elements,<sup>38</sup> but Plutarch avoids simple material connections while assuming that the air is the medium

<sup>38</sup> *Didasc.* 15; the term seems to have been used here in a more general sense, embracing the heavenly bodies (171.15) and perhaps the Earth itself (171.27–34), which might explain a *daimonic* presence in all elements (as might *Epinomis* 984d–985c), not the air alone. Nothing, however, prevents an animate being from passing outside its own characteristic element, like a sea-bird (properly terrestrial) flying and diving.

through which the intellect on high is able to make connection with the internal intellect below (589c). Plutarch's theory of *daimones* is complex, lacking the attempt that these later authors make to be systematic, but consequently allowing more scope for explaining the beliefs and practices of forefathers and overseas friends alike. It is not surprising that Plutarch often talks of the vice of superstition (*deisidaimonia*, literally 'worrying about *daimones*'), devoting a whole treatise to it and distinguishing it from piety.

Plutarch is best known among later Platonists as a champion of literal creation. Surprisingly for one who employs allegorical interpretation of other religions, he is not keen to interpret Plato non-literally except where poetic language clearly demands it (*On Isis and Osiris* 370f). Hence he avoids appealing to Socratic irony in the *Theaetetus* (*Platonic Questions* 999c), or to the status of Timaeus' cosmology as a *muthos*. His relative literalism caused later interpreters such as Proclus to see him, perhaps unfairly, as a precursor of the more rigorous literalism of Atticus later in the second century. A statement at *On the Procreation of the Soul in the Timaeus* 1014a appeals to principles of interpretation that recognize the unusual nature of the work to be interpreted, but seeks to get around the difficulties by a further appeal to 'what is likely' (*to eikos*) and to details of the language. The tactic would appear legitimate in view of Plutarch's conviction that earlier interpreters have gone far beyond the reasonable bounds of interpretation in seeking to get around the idea that the World Soul was brought into being (1013d–e).

Plutarch is committed to the idea that the supreme god is both father (i.e., the one to give life from himself) and creator of the world (*Timaeus* 28c; *Platonic Questions* 1000e), but this does not entail that *everything* must derive from him. Rather he regularly affirms that both unordered bodily matter and *unintelligent soul* have always existed, and that the creation involves the giving of intelligence by god to soul followed by souls' organization of body (*Platonic Questions* 1003a, *On the Procreation of the Soul in the Timaeus* 1014a–c). In this way the creator may be the artificer of beauty and goodness, and anything ugly or evil may be attributed to the original motive impulse of soul, saving Plutarch what he perceives as the folly of attributing evil either to a good god or to unqualified matter, or perhaps to the Stoic 'consequence' (*epakolouthēsis*, 1015a–c). His original chaotic matter he finds in the Receptacle of the *Timaeus* (now looking less like Isis!),<sup>39</sup> while the original chaotic soul is detected in the Indeterminate (*apeiron*) of the *Philebus*, the Divisible nature at *Timaeus* 35a (identified with

<sup>39</sup> Plutarch is aware that there is potential confusion because original soul may be described homonymously as 'matter' and 'substrate' (1022f), and because the receptacle itself includes irrational motion that must be attributed to soul (1014b). But note that neither here nor in *On Isis and Osiris* is it suggested that Plato's Receptacle is evil.

Necessity), the soul responsible for evil at *Laws* 10.896e–898c, and the ‘innate desire’ (*sumphutos epithumia*) of *Statesman* 272e6 (*On the Procreation of the Soul in the Timaeus* 1014a–1015b). So the creator is the author of the universal order or *cosmos* rather than the creator of the ‘stuffs’ that made up that *cosmos*, and it is for him this *cosmos* (as other Platonic works are held to show) that Plato calls ‘generated’ (1017b–d).<sup>40</sup>

Plutarch’s care over developing a coherent interpretation of Plato that also underpinned his philosophical agenda did not prevent most of his successors disagreeing with him. The tendency was for subsequent Platonists to distinguish ways of saying the world was ‘generated’ (*genētos*) that did not imply its creation in time. The most thorough surviving treatment of the issue is that of Taurus, happily preserved in Philoponus’ *On the Eternity of the World* 6.8 (= Taurus 22 τ and 23 Ϝ). Besides the obvious sense of ‘generated’, Taurus distinguished things of the generated type (though never actually generated); of composite structure (though never actually composed); in generation (though never not so); or eternally dependent on a generating cause. Whether or not he was influenced by Aristotle, Taurus himself preferred to adopt the Peripatetic position that the world was eternal, and that its literal creation would mean its susceptibility to destruction (cf. *De caelo* 1.12).

The position adopted by Alcinous also differs from that of Plutarch insofar as he denies that ‘generated’ means there was ever a time when there was no *cosmos*, and he appears to accept both the last two senses of Taurus (14.169.32–5); however, he goes on immediately to offer a picture of the creator who awakens a slumbering World Soul (soul of the *cosmos*!), turning it towards himself, so that on viewing the intelligible Ideas within him it may receive the forms (*eidē kai morphas*, 169.35–41). This may seem close to Plutarch’s view that creation is the ordering of what has been hitherto unordered, but it differs in preserving the denial that there had been a *pre-cosmic* state of soul or even body. Instead Alcinous is postulating a period or periods where the organizing power within the world experiences something akin to a hangover or coma (*hōsper ek karou tinos batheos ē hupnou*). This presumably involves something akin to the universe of Plato’s *Statesman*, with a world whose internal forces send it from time to time into a state of forgetfulness (273c6) and perplexity (273d5) until, before its collapse, the god resumes the helm. Much the same position has been adopted as an explicit compromise by the relatively late second-century Platonist Severus (6 τ), who makes the *cosmos* ungenerated in the simplest sense,

<sup>40</sup> One consideration qualifies Plutarch’s picture of a generated *cosmos*, and that is his endorsement of the *Statesman*’s picture of alternating cycles of order and degeneration (269c–274d); but even in Plato there is a suggestion that the cyclic universe is itself engendered by a divinity (269d1, 269d8–9).

though its successive phases – and successive orders – are generated. What Alcinoüs and Severus have perhaps tried to achieve is a position where an eternal universe could be postulated without making god's providence, affirmed earlier at 12.167.13, redundant. The threat that providence would become redundant is one of the principal fears that caused Atticus to insist on a generated universe (frs. 4.9, 13), as if providential care could never be offered to a self-sufficient being, only to an entity that owed its very existence to the carer. As Dillon has observed (1977: 253), his customary hostility towards Aristotle means that 'the logical problems raised by Aristotle bother Atticus not at all'.

Providence is something that Platonists cannot compromise on, found as it is in a vital passage (30b6–c1) of the all-important *Timaeus*, where the cosmos is said to have become ensouled and intelligent thanks to god's providence. Hence it is part of the very discussion of the world's generation that is central to the debate over generation. Proclus' discussion of this passage (*In Tim.* 1.415.19–416.5), perhaps ultimately dependent on Porphyry, seems to belong to pre-Plotinian times, beginning with Plutarch, alluding also to the *Chaldaean Oracles*, and at times reminding one of Numenius' distinction between the demiurge and a superior but inert *nous*-god that also functions as the Good. Plutarch (fr. 15) is here credited, it seems, with the view that the demiurge is correctly named 'providence' (*pro-noia*), because though he is intelligence (*nous*) he contains within him something over and above intelligence. Talk of the correctness of names indicates that the broad etymological strategies of the *Cratylus* are being employed, that *noia* is taken to indicate *nous*, and that *pronoia* is being taken to indicate something prior, and hence superior, to *nous*: or at least to *nous* as normally conceived. Being a fairly conservative Platonist Plutarch can only have had in mind the Idea of the Good of Plato's *Republic*, which is superior to knowledge, truth and being (6.508e3–509b10). The demiurgic mind of the *Timaeus* is *fundamentally* good (29e1), and it is his necessarily benevolent will that results in his providence at 30c1. Whether Plutarch ever followed through the implications of this is doubtful, for there is no reason to suppose that Plutarch could not have placed the Good somehow *within* the figure of the demiurge, where pre-Plotinian Platonists sometimes placed the Platonic Ideas,<sup>41</sup> though Middle Platonists often seemed equivocal on the Plotinian circle's vexed issue of whether Ideas are properly internal or external to the demiurgic mind. This may reflect a tendency of the era to see the Platonic demiurge as a complex figure, masking both the Idea of the Good and the power of creative intelligence.<sup>42</sup> But

<sup>41</sup> Most obviously in Seneca *Epistle* 65.7, and Alcinoüs 9.163.14–15.

<sup>42</sup> So I think Numenius fr. 21, where Proclus (*In Tim.* 1.303.27) must if the evidence is to be consistent be speaking of the Platonic demiurge being a double persona for Numenius, embracing aspects of

the Proclan passage follows the idea through further. *Pronoia* becomes an activity of the Platonic demiurge prior and superior to the activities of intellect (415.23). Two activities on different metaphysical levels suggest separate entities, standing in the same relation as father and son. So in mythical terms the intelligent ruling god Zeus, whose name indicates the cause (*Di-*) and life-giver (*Ze-*) according to Plato's *Cratylus* (396a2–b3) as the passage observes, has as his father Kronos that which is prior to him, unsullied intellect (*koros nous*, *Crat.* 396b5–7). Thus Plato is thought to place a god with single transcendent activity, the Chaldaean 'Once', before a god of double transcendent activity, the Chaldaean 'Twice', who now gives his laws<sup>43</sup> and now returns to remain in contemplation.

Plutarch then is seen here leading into a discussion of two gods that are far more reminiscent of Numenius, but he himself is content like Atticus (e.g., fr. 26) or Apuleius to speak of the demiurge of Plato's *Timaeus* as the supreme god, and many other Platonists would have agreed. However, even in Apuleius there seems to be a tendency towards the theoretical separation of two aspects of the demiurge, as Finamore's clever discussion of *On Plato* 193–4 shows.<sup>44</sup> Here too we may have a modest step towards the kind of separation of two divine entities that we meet in Numenius and in chapters 10 and 28 of Alcinoüs. Finamore also seeks to relate this to Apuleius' description of the principal god and creator as 'supra-mundane' at *On Plato* 204, but as *caelestis* at 193. Their Greek equivalents, one might have thought, could be applied to Alcinoüs' first god and heavenly intellect respectively. But that is if one takes *caelestis* as the adjective 'heavenly' as opposed to its common if poetic substantival sense of 'god'. Yet is it not strangely inept in the case of any transcendent god (*supramundanus*) to call it a *caelestis* even as a simple word for a god? Perhaps it is not, since even Plato's *Phaedrus* speaks of Zeus who is the great leader in the heavens, driving at the front in his winged chariot and arranging and caring for all things.

his first and second gods. There is little evidence that any Platonist figure prior to Numenius ever felt the need to have an inert intellect god above the creator-god, and it is noticeable that Alcinoüs (of whom that might be claimed, though he is of unknown date) does not feel *in sections directly dependent upon the Timaeus* (excepting the digression on the interpretation of generation), the need to distinguish between his inert transcendent principle of goodness and his governing heavenly intellect as he does in the theological chapter 10 (164.17–27, 164.40–165.4) and again in the ethics (28.181.42–5).

<sup>43</sup> One should note that Numenius' second god is called lawgiver in fr. 13, while his post-creational phase is seen in frs. 15 and 22 as retirement to his watchtower and as contemplation.

<sup>44</sup> Finamore 2006: 35–7, especially 37: 'Apuleius refers separately to the first god and to his mind – not because they are separate in actuality (for they are not) but because they are separable in thought. God . . . is a mind but, in Apuleius' personal religious thought, he is the highest being in a truly personal religion . . . His *nous* is just one aspect of him, and a lower one than that.' One might seek to avoid Finamore's inclination here to link the lower aspect of this divinity with providence, not the higher.

The ambiguity of several Platonist theological positions from Plutarch on must be due in part to the variety of Platonic texts that the would-be follower of Plato had to take into account in a respectful manner. This could be seen in the way that Apuleius, dabbling in the new negative theology, has to overlook one of the negative attributes implied by *Parmenides* 142a3–6 at *On Plato* 190. The text reads *Quem quidem caelestem pronuntiat indictum, innominabilem, et ut ait ipse aoraton, adamaston*. Reading *adoxaston* for this final term I translate ‘This celestial divinity he declares to be unable to be spoken of, unable to be named, and in Plato’s own words “invisible” and “un-opinable”.’ This list of related privative adjectives is implied by two sentences at *Parmenides* 142a3–6, including: ‘So it has no name, no description, no knowledge, no perception,<sup>45</sup> no opinion’, but it omits any term meaning ‘unknowable’, since that conflicts with the *Timaeus*’ statement at 28c4 quoted by Apuleius immediately afterwards: ‘the creator and father of this universe is *hard work to discover*’. Alcinous, who explicitly lists the *via negativa* among three ways of conceiving of god,<sup>46</sup> and employs several privative adjectives including (1) ‘unspeakable’ and (2) ‘un-needy’ (164.31–32), (3) ‘partless’ (165.34), (4) ‘motionless’ (165.23/38), and (5) ‘bodiless’ (166.1), seems influenced directly or indirectly by the *Parmenides*, Whittaker’s edition listing relevant parallels at 137d2–3, 138a6, 138e4, 139a3, and 139b4–5.<sup>47</sup> Again, however, the earlier Platonist shies away from drawing too many consequences for Plato’s theology from the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides*, which Plotinus’ school would embrace with relish. God may readily be called ‘One’,<sup>48</sup> but he is not so content-less as the *Parmenides* might suggest, has positive attributes, and remains both god and intellect.

Sometimes, however, there is a movement towards thinking in terms of metaphysical hypostases (mind, soul, etc.) rather than individual metaphysical entities. In Plutarch’s essay *On the Face of the Moon* we read ‘for intellect is better and diviner than soul to the same degree as soul compared with body’ (943a). The three are associated with Sun, Moon and Earth respectively, and, once souls have been purified of the body and risen to the lunar region, a ‘second

<sup>45</sup> One may claim that *anaisthēton* would have been more accurate but I suspect that Apuleius remembers the Platonic discussion of things eternal and things transient at *Phaedo* 79a–b, which confines all sensation to the latter, but privileges sight and uses the adjective *aoraton* (b12); just after this at 84a8 the *Phaedo* speaks of what is ‘true, divine, and un-opinable (*adoxaston*)’. I suggest that Apuleius, who has used this very passage at *On Plato* 193, has specifically remembered the use of these two adjectives there, prompting the *ut ait ipse* and the use of Greek. Plato does not use *anōnomaston*, nor *arrēton* in a relevant sense and prominent context.

<sup>46</sup> *Didascalicus* 10.165.16–34; the other ways are the *via analogiae* and the *via eminentiae*.

<sup>47</sup> 142a3–6 might also have been mentioned, as it seems relevant to (1).

<sup>48</sup> An example is Maximus Tyrius 29.7g, Aetius 1.7.31. On the rather limited scope that the Pythagorizing principles One and Dyad have in Plutarch see Opsomer 2007.

death' (942f) removes intellect from souls. More myth-like material in *On the Sign of Socrates* (591b) speaks of four principles (*archai*) of all life,<sup>49</sup> of which the latter three are movement, generation and decay. Monad joins the first two in the invisible, Intellect the next two at the Sun, Nature the last two at the Moon. The triad Monad, Intellect and Nature may seem an obvious precursor of the Plotinian hypostases, but it is hardly performing a comparable function. Alcinous may confuse commentators on his theology when at 10.164.18–23 he writes as follows:

Since than soul intellect is better, than intellect in potency the intellect that actively thinks all things together and for ever, and than this [intellect] its cause is fairer and whatever entity is established still higher than these, this would be the first god, which serves as cause of perpetual activity for the intellect of the entire heaven.

However, while the language seems more abstract and hypostatic, it is clear to me that the intellect in perpetual activity is the heavenly intellect, that it is thinking all things *intelligible*, i.e., all the Platonic Ideas, and that the first god is conceived of as cause of this intellect's activity and as superior, *qua* supreme Good, to the remainder of the intelligible world: 'over and above intellect and being'.<sup>50</sup> There is no suggestion that human beings can somehow ascend internally according to the same path by which their thoughts can grasp in succession each higher being at the universal level. The goal for us will be simply assimilation *insofar as one can* to the god within the heavens (28.181.42–5). Our intellectual goal can be reached by reason and instruction (182.5–8). No mystic union with the supreme principle seems possible in such a system.

## 9 EPISTEMOLOGY FROM PLUTARCH TO ALCINOUS

The first of Plutarch's *Platonic Questions* is devoted to explaining the Socratic midwifery of the *Theaetetus*, and especially the barrenness of Socrates in the role of intellectual midwife there (150c7–8). The explanation (1000d–e) is that Socrates has no time for ordinary theories and doctrines, but only considered cognition of the divine and intelligible important. This knowledge cannot be discovered by resources of our own, nor implanted by teachers, but must be 'recollected'. By reducing young persons to perplexity before revealing the innate concepts that can, upon refinement and development, lead to the

<sup>49</sup> The text is damaged; it may be that life is rather the first of principles.

<sup>50</sup> For god as *either* intellect *or* over and above intellect see the language of Origen in dialogue with Celsus at *Contra Celsum* 7.38; the phrase is not used by Alcinous, but is clearly inspired by the Idea of the Good at *Republic* 6.509b9 where the phrase 'over and above being' is used; later Platonism introduces 'intellect' with some support from 508d–509a, for 508e3–4 makes it 'cause of knowledge and truth'.

desired recollection. With so radically different a notion of the knowledge that is aimed at, denying that the teacher *qua* teacher possesses it and affirming that the learner already has the seeds of it, it is unsurprising that Platonism works with an epistemology quite unlike that of rival philosophies. Plutarch himself, while entirely prepared to look at standard questions of physics or ethics in a more traditional and didactic manner, often prefers to teach through hints when dealing with the incorporeal entities that Platonism now makes its principal consideration. The epistemological necessity of recollection is claimed in the much-disputed fragments 15–17, which come from the *Phaedo*'s exegetical tradition. Religious rites and myths are also seen as promoting enlightenment through recollection.

This kind of epistemology, based on the idea of innate notions that are common, but not equally accessible, to all human beings, is also found in the papyrus *Theaetetus* commentator.<sup>51</sup> Again this view sees midwifery as a kind of purificatory stage preparatory to progress in recollection by the pupil (46.43–48.11), for the midwife compels people to discuss and doubt their private notions (48.25–35). Latent common notions then need to be brought to the surface (47.19–24) and clarified (46.43–47.7) before one can give proper expression to them. The teacher is not obliged to be free of doctrine or to conceal it in all circumstances, but it must be avoided in *this* educative process (17.35–45, cf. 55.8–33). Since learning is identified with recollection, as in the *Meno*, and also with coming to know things, as at *Theaetetus* 145c–e (cf. 14.45–15.5), the end-point of recollection will be a kind of knowledge, the ‘simple knowledge’ that is prior to composite fields of knowledge (15.8–16). The author finds the definition of that simple knowledge at *Meno* 98a, thus confirming the *Meno*'s central place in this epistemology: simple knowledge is ‘right opinion bound by cause of reasoning’ according to the commentator's reading (3.2–3; 15.18–23). That this involves knowing-why as well as knowing-that may be inferred from 3.3–7, but details are not tackled in what is extant.

*Meno* 98a is important to a number of other relevant authors, including Albinus (*Prologue* 6) and whichever Taurus composed a *Commentary on the Republic* where the part of column 15 that defines Platonic knowledge is duplicated (Taurus 21 F). It is not, however, employed in the fourth chapter of Alcinous, where a different account of Platonic epistemology, privileging the *Timaeus*, *Phaedrus*, *Philebus*, *Sophist* and *Theaetetus* is given. Alcinous, seldom unduly influenced by dialogues regarded as ‘Socratic’ today, is keen throughout to make distinctions,

<sup>51</sup> Text and commentary in Bastianini and Sedley 1995; its date in relation to Plutarch remains controversial, though most would agree on its similarities. The exegesis is mostly extant until about 153c, with fragments at 157.

particularly between various cognitive faculties and their respective objects. The passage is notable for distinguishing between first and second intelligibles (155.39–42), the former (= Ideas) being apprehended non-discursively by intellection along with scientific reason, the latter (= immanent forms) by scientific reason along with intellection (156.5–8). He uses the concept of natural notions, regarding them as ‘a kind of intellection stored up in the soul’ mirroring true intellection that happens only in the discarnate state, and he claims that Plato refers to these notions as ‘simple knowledge’, ‘plumage of the soul’, and occasionally ‘memory’, and they are the stuff of scientific reason (155.26–36). It may seem odd that the term ‘recollection’ is avoided here, though the theory is treated and explained in more than passing detail in relation to the arguments for the soul’s immortality (25.177.45–178.12). The common notions of ethical qualities are also the basis for practical reasoning (156.19–23). The chapter has attracted quite a lot of attention, and contains insights into the ways in which second-century Platonism developed that cannot be paralleled in the fragments of others (partly because of the loss of any later commentaries on the *Theaetetus*).

#### 10 LOGIC IN ALCINOUS

For logic we are again dependent primarily on Alcinous, though I have dealt earlier with categories-theory in the context of the Platonist response to Aristotle. The content of most of those sections of the logic that were anticipated in the division of philosophy is relatively unsurprising, much of it Aristotelian with a Platonic veneer, and I shall concentrate on sections that I believe more original. The analytics has a distinctly non-Aristotelian appearance, for Alcinous highlights several high-profile ascent-passages from central dialogues: the ascent to the beautiful from *Symposium* 210a–e (157.16–21), leaving the physical for the intelligible; the methods of *Republic* 6.510b–d and *Phaedrus* 245c–246a (157.21–36) leading from demonstrated to undemonstrated intuitions; and the hypothetical method of *Phaedo* 101d (with another nod to *Republic* 510b), leading from hypothesis to non-hypothetical principle. The author’s enthusiasm for specifically Platonic content leads him to offer a miniature interpretation of the *Euthydemus* as a Platonic handbook of eristics (159.38–42), corresponding to Aristotle’s *De sophisticis elenchis* as the *Parmenides* foreshadows the ten categories of *Categories* (159.43–44). And it leads to a still lengthier interpretation of the *Cratylus* (160.3–41), which makes names conventional, but the name-giver only names correctly if the name reflects the nature of the thing to which it refers. Alcinous’ interest in the so-called ‘logical’ dialogues of Plato is underscored by the way in which he contrives to conclude the political section with material based on the *Statesman* as Whittaker’s *apparatus* shows (189.5–11), after which he

appends his discussion of the sophist, offering a miniature interpretation of the *Sophist* (189.12–27). The chapter balances the opening discussion of philosophy and the philosopher, but Alcinoüs appears to be adding his own material of an interpretative nature, which again presupposes a certain familiarity with the corpus on the part of the reader, to what had been originally designed more as a handbook of doctrines.

## 11 BASICS OF PHYSICS

The *Timaeus* has always dominated any picture of Platonic physics. It is the basis of chapters 12 to 23 in Alcinoüs, which include some material that might be called ‘theological’ in 12–15, including discussion of the paradigms and of *daimones*, while 23 shifts to psychology, still maintaining a *Timaeus*-based focus because it deals with the way the soul is combined with the human body. In contrast to the anti-Aristotelian Atticus (fr. 5) he seems to accept that aether is a fifth element in chapter 15, but there is no elaboration. Apuleius tends rather to regard it as a pure kind of fire in *On the God of Socrates* 138, but allows it to remain a separate element at *On the World* 291. An imaginative discussion of the five regular solids (*Timaeus* 53c–55c) and their relationship to the elements, based on the theory of Theodorus of Soli, appears in Plutarch’s *On the Obsolescence of Oracles* (427a–428a), but Ammonius seems sceptical of the five-element theory. Except perhaps for Atticus, these are not hard-fought issues, and Galen, at the beginning of his commentary on the dialogue’s medical significance, bears witness to the tendency of commentators on the *Timaeus* to stop before they get to physics proper.

Much more interesting is the issue of fate, which was a challenge to Platonists, since unlike the Stoics they wanted for the sake of their ethics to preserve some genuine autonomy for human beings, and yet Plato had made the creator show the newly created souls the ‘fated laws’ of the world at *Timaeus* 41e. Plutarch shows at *Moralia* 740c–d how fate, chance and individual autonomy are all allowed for in the Myth of Er at the conclusion of the *Republic*. The same passage is employed by Alcinoüs, whose fundamental position in chapter 26 is that all things are within fate’s domain, but not all things are actually fated. Further, while our choice of lives and of actions is a free choice, the consequences of this choice ‘will be brought to completion in accordance with fate’ (179.12–13). Fate is thus a little like a law of cause and effect. An unusual treatise *On Fate* is included among Plutarch’s works, though it is agreed to be by another author. It is notable for its doctrine of three stages of providence (572f–574d), detected in the creator himself, in the heavenly powers and in the *daimones* who watch over us on earth. They are all detected in the *Timaeus*, particularly at 41e–42e,

and whereas fate is subject to the primary providence, the second providence is somehow implicated with fate, while the third is posterior to fate and subject to it.

## 12 PSYCHOLOGY

Middle Platonist psychology employs, as expected, the tripartition of soul familiar from Plato's *Republic*, but not to the exclusion of the bipartite division associated rather with Aristotle. On the boundaries of Platonism, Galen's defence of the tripartition against Chrysippus in *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* is particularly well known. Alcinoüs in *Didascalicus* chapter 23 uses the three physical locations of the human soul from *Timaeus* 69c–72c, which he admits might have been employed in the preceding physical section (176.7), to lead into a dedicated discussion of psychology. This begins with a section demonstrating that the tripartition extends to the powers of the soul (1) because different physical locations are allotted to them, (2) because the powers are sometimes found to be in conflict, and (3) because the emotions and reasoning require a different education, teaching and habituation respectively. This is only represented as an argument for bipartition, and it followed another sign that the division between reason and emotion is what really matters (176.42).

Equally essential to the revived Platonism is the immortality of soul. Alcinoüs collects arguments from the *Phaedo*, *Republic* 10 and *Phaedrus* in chapter 25, where he also discusses the vexed question of the *scope* of this doctrine. We know that at some time this became a standard *topos* in the commentary tradition, and Harpocration, who was late enough to have been influenced by Numenius in many respects, is cited by Hermeias (15 T) as a proponent of the view that even souls of ants and flies are immortal, since the *Phaedrus* (245c5) declares the immortality of *all* soul, and that human souls, as Numenius too maintained (fr. 49), could therefore transmigrate into the meanest of creatures (18–19 T). Alcinoüs (178.26–32) offers arguments against the immortality of utterly irrational souls, and *Timaeus* 69c7–8, to which people like Albinus (test. 16 G) and Atticus (fr. 15) made appeal, supports them by referring to the extra form of soul added on by the younger gods as 'mortal'. Yet, also in conformity with the *Timaeus* (90e–92c), he adopts the belief that human souls can migrate into animals (178.36). And he also finds the equivalent of the appetitive and spirited faculties of humans in the souls of the gods (their *hormētikon* and *oikeiōtikon*, 178.39–46), so that tripartition does not in itself entail our possession of mortal parts of the soul. On the equally vexed contemporary question of why the soul descends into a body,<sup>52</sup> Alcinoüs is content to give some alternatives (178.36–8),

<sup>52</sup> This issue becomes more complex after Cronius, Numenius (fr. 48), and Harpocration (16–17 T) come to regard all entry into bodies as an evil for the soul.

including innocuous reasons like conformity with an arithmetic cycle or with divine will, and more sinister ones like the soul's own unbridled or body-loving nature.

### 13 ETHICS, GOAL AND VIRTUES

The ethics of the Middle Platonists can be spoken of as an area of greater agreement, though there were generally dissenters on any given issue. As in logic there was a tendency to appropriate for Plato what was perceived as useful in Aristotle, and certainly the Aristotelian doctrine that the moral virtues were both in one sense an extreme and in another a mean between two vices was employed by authors such as Plutarch (in *On Moral Virtue*), Apuleius (*De Platone* 228) and Alcinous (30.184.14–36). The appropriation is partially justified by such passages as *Statesman* 283c–285c and *Philebus* 23c–30e. There will be subtractions from and additions to the Aristotelian virtues, but one may say that orthodox early imperial Platonism inclines towards Aristotle on this issue.

A significant issue in the ethics of the day are the passions or affections (*pathē*), which some Stoic theory would have desired to eradicate completely. The passions for the Stoics were pleasure, pain, desire and fear, all so defined as to have them involve irrationally excessive responses to what one was experiencing. Plato sometimes seemed to turn desire and fear into expectations or anticipations of pleasure and pain respectively (e.g., *Protagoras* 356d, *Philebus* 34c–36b), so that the Platonist would naturally give precedence in the discussion to pleasure and pain. But Plato's principal discussion of pleasure in the *Philebus* did not encourage one to forsake pleasure altogether, merely to choose what was appropriate – indeed it left the life completely isolated from pleasure to the gods (33b), demanding something more complex to humans. The complex psychology demanded by the Platonists, with parts of the soul required to look after the interests of the body, made the eradication of pleasures and pains *as usually defined* impossible. Equally the affections were something usually opposed to reason, and one could not afford to have them grow stronger than reason. Therefore such authors as Plutarch, *Taurus* (17 τ) and Alcinous (32.186.14–29) favoured *metriopatheia* or the moderation of the passions, at least in the case of those passions that allowed moderation.

Problems with interpreting Plato's various discussions of virtue lead to the postulation of different levels of virtues or quasi-virtues, as also in Plotinus *Ennead* 2.2. I have treated this topic more fully in Tarrant (2007b), and argue that both Alcinous and Apuleius actually envisage three levels: a first at the *natural* level involving natural good qualities, a second at the level of habituation and involving effort to make progress, and a third involving learning and reasoning. These are all ways of coming close to the moral goal according to Alcinous

(28.182.3–6), and after a largely unsurprising discussion of Platonic virtue he goes on to affirm at the beginning of chapter 30 that there are virtues in other senses too, named after the complete virtues. He employs for them the terms for natural endowments (*euphuiai*) and advancements (*prokopai*). It is natural to take these separately as the former strive to build upon whatever nature has given one. A particular feature of non-perfect virtues is that one may possess some without others, unlike the perfect virtues (29.183.15–16). It may also be implied that they admit of greater and lesser degrees of intensity, something denied of perfect virtue. Apuleius discusses these matters in *On Plato* 2.228, though here again there is usually some ambiguity about whether we are dealing with two types of virtues or three. However, one thing this text does is to make explicit the need for nature, exercise and teaching all to be contributing if virtue is to be perfected. In the anonymous *Theaetetus* commentator too (11.13–12.8) we also seem to have three sets of desirable qualities: natural endowments, the same under further development, and virtue proper. I argue that Aristotelian texts like *Politics* 7.13.1332a38–40 postulating the desirability of all three, as well as Protagoras' great speech in Plato's *Protagoras*, have been influential in refining the later Platonic account of the various kinds of virtues.

Finally we must mention the moral goal or *telos*. Platonists during this period seem to be in general agreement that Plato's moral goal has been best expressed in the phrase 'assimilation to god insofar as is possible' (*Theaetetus* 176b etc.). Relevant texts include Plutarch *On Divine Vengeance* 550d–e, anon. *Commentary on the Theaetetus* 7, Albinus *Prologue* 5, Alcinous chapter 28, and Apuleius *On Plato* 2.252–3. Since most philosophies tended to align their concepts of what a god is with what a human *ought to be*, it was probably not their most controversial doctrine. However, this ought to warn us that the idea of assimilation to god might change as one's concept of god changes. It is in this context that we should view the clarification of Alcinous at 181.44: 'obviously the heavenly god, not in Zeus' name the god above the heavens'. Alcinous' first god owes much to Aristotle's unmoved mover (10.164.23–31) as well as to Plato's Idea of the Good. The first known figure to interpret Plato as postulating an unmoved god of this type and distinguishing it from any power active within the cosmos was Numenius in the middle of the second century. We have seen also in relation to the psychology that Alcinous seems to be aware of developments in the time of Numenius and Harpocration, so it seems logical to see Alcinous as already responding to some of Numenius' ideas. *Timaeus* 90a–d had clearly been advocating that we assimilate our souls to the perfectly rational soul moving and governing in the heavens, giving a reasonable idea of what kind of god Plato thought one should assimilate oneself to. Assimilation to anything akin to an Aristotelian unmoved mover sounds a ridiculous goal for human beings.

I think that we have confirmation here of my reading of Alcinous' text as an updated handbook, building on some traditional basics, but responding also to issues and ideas that were part of the intellectual world of his own time.

#### CONCLUSION

Early imperial Platonism may easily seem unexciting if one expects to find here ideas akin to those found in Plotinus or in Proclus. This is a period when Platonic interpretation was finding its feet, and what it meant to be a Platonist was still far from clear. There were significant differences of opinion in some areas, while other areas of philosophy were not so contentious. Anything involving theology, religion and our understanding of what we are doing in this world was perhaps most likely to receive serious attention, become controversial, and lead forward to the solutions offered by the school of Plotinus.