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BASIC ISSUES IN PLATONISM

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Introductory. On Plato and Platonism: the Problem of Authority and the Development of Dogma.

An Overview of the Development of Platonism from the Old Academy to Plotinus.

I. First Principles: God, Matter, Form. Issues of Monism and Dualism

II. Soul and Body; the Structure of the Soul; its immortality and its relation with body.

III. Ethics: Virtue, Happiness, Fate and Freewill, and the Purpose of Life (Metriopatheia vs. Apatheia)

Note: HP = *The Heirs of Plato*; MP = *The Middle Platonists*

I. God, Matter, Forms; Issues of Monism and Dualism

Let us first consider the variety of positions within the Old Academy on these questions (347 – 274 B.C.), and then a selection of later Middle Platonic ones.

(a) **God.** *Problem* : One, Good, True Being, Intellect, Creator (Demiurge), rational world-soul?

Speusippus, HP 63: 'God' distinct from One/Good – probably 'Demiurge' of non-literally interpreted *Timaeus* = rational world-soul;

Xenocrates, HP 102: God = Nous-Monad

(*Forms as Thoughts of God*, HP 120-1, cf. Alcinoüs MP 282-3, *Didask.* Ch 10; Atticus, MP 254-5)

Polemon, HP 166-7; 172: God is the cosmos: how should we interpret this? Probably, *immanent* rational world-soul.

Philip of Opus, HP 187, 190-2: again, immanent rational world-soul

Antiochus of Ascalon: see HP 171-2; MP 83: does Antiochus postulate God as immaterial, or rather as (Stoic) Pure Fire?

Eudorus of Alexandria, MP 126-7: God a One above a pair of Monad and Dyad.

Plutarch: God as True Being/Good/One, MP 199

Numenius: God the Father vs. Demiurge MP 366-72

(*Logos and secondary divinities*: Antiochus (above; cf. also MP 80); Philo of Alexandria, MP 155-61: God, Logos, Powers; Plutarch: Dionysus/Hades figure vs. Apollo, MP 169-70; Numenius: Demiurge figure, above.)

(b) **Matter/Dyad.** *Problems*; positive or negative force? Derived from Monad or not? Difference between Platonic Receptacle (of *Timaeus*) and Aristotelian Matter?

Speusippus: HP 40-1; 56-7: How does the Dyad/Multiplicity work?

Xenocrates: HP 99-105 – problem of interpreting Fr. 15 Heinze; matter as 'the everflowing' = *a-en, a-on*.

Polemon: HP 168-9: again, how much of the Antiochian account can we claim for him?

Eudorus, MP 128: derivation of matter from the One?

Philo, MP 158: Is Matter created by God, or is it just logically dependent on Him? 163-4 Sophia and the Dyad

Plutarch, MP 204: Matter and the Irrational Soul; 211: Matter and Necessity.

Moderatus of Gades, MP 349: sensible and intelligible matter?

Numenius, MP 373-4: Matter and evil

II. Soul and Body – Structure of the Soul; Immortality and Reincarnation; Soul's Connection with Body

1. Let us first turn to the question of the structure of the soul as presented by Plato, because it leaves a somewhat ambiguous legacy to his successors.

In the *Phaedo*, we find a simple antithesis between soul and body, the soul being a unitary entity, akin to (though not really a full member of) the realm of Forms and True Being, but immortal and (in itself) impassive, the passions being a distraction raised up for it by the body.

In the *Republic*, however, the passions, and an intermediate source of impulse termed by Plato the *thymos*, which one might characterize as 'the spirit of self-assertion', are attributed each to an aspect of the soul, which is now revealed as tripartite. This new structure is somewhat modified in the later dialogues *Phaedrus* and *Timaeus*, to produce a bipartite structure, with the two 'lower' parts of the *Republic* now grouped together as irrational: in the *Phaedrus* myth, as two horses, in distinction to the charioteer; in the *Timaeus*, as both separated from the rational element by the 'isthmus' of the neck.

The views of the Old Academy on this topic are not easy to discern, but see HP 122-3, for position of Xenocrates (and Speusippus?).

As regards nature of soul in itself, however, the definitions of Speusippus and Xenocrates (cf. HP 51-3 for Speusippus, 121-2 for Xenocrates) make clear that both World Soul and individual soul are to be viewed as *mathematical* entities of one sort or another, with an essentially mediating role in the universe, as between the intelligible and sensible realms.

In the later period, Antiochus of Ascalon seems to accept the bipartite structure of soul, MP 101-102.

As for Philo, he entertains both bipartite and tripartite possibilities, as well as entertaining the Stoic divisions of the soul (MP 175-6).

Plutarch has quite a distinctive view of the structure and nature of the soul, in keeping with his dualistic tendencies, cf. MP 194; 204-8.

Alcinous in the *Didaskalikos* gives an account of the mainline Platonist position in his period, MP 290-1 – following chiefly the *Timaeus*.

Numenius is again dualist in interesting ways – a theory of two souls, MP 374-8.

2. Immortality and Reincarnation

Another problem that Plato bequeaths to his successors is that of deciding how much of the soul survives death and experiences immortality (and reincarnation, since that was an inseparable corollary of immortality). In that connection, the mention of a 'mortal' part of the soul in the *Timaeus*(61C, 72D) caused some difficulty, as well as the curious apparent reinstatement of a unitary soul in *Rep.* 10.

Speusippus and Xenocrates are reported (by Damascius) as maintaining the immortality of the whole soul, including the irrational part (cf. HP 122-3) – as, it would seem, did certain later Platonists, such as Harpocration and Numenius (MP 260; 377).

There is an important discussion of immortality of soul in Cic. TD I 18-22, presumably inspired by Antiochus of Ascalon, cf. MP 96-101.

Reincarnation in general was uncontroversial (Antiochus, MP 101; Plutarch 223-4, Alcinous, 293; Numenius, 377 – though Bishop Hippolytus reports some dispute among Platonists on this question, perhaps arising from reflection on the *Phaedrus* myth, 412!) but reincarnation into animals – a position abandoned in later Platonism from Porphyry on – also seems to have been the consensus of Platonists up to Plotinus, despite the conceptual difficulties involved.

3. On issue of soul's relation to body, see my paper '**How Does the Soul Direct the Body, after all?**', which I will speak to.
