PORPHYRY

And the Platonic-Aristotelian Tradition

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Preface

I would like to express first of all my gratitude to my doctoral advisor, Prof. Friedrich A. Uehlein. It is appropriate for me to say that this study owes much to his subtle and lucid suggestions.

In the following we shall endeavor to enhance Porphyry’s contribution to Neoplatonism by examining his position vis-à-vis a number of thinkers both prior and immediately subsequent to him in the hope of complementing recent studies which in my opinion have polished his hitherto lackluster role as an original philosopher in this current of thought.

The reasons for dedicating such an enquiry are stated in the introduction. The Greek terms τὸ ὄν, ἐίναι are respectively rendered into English as being and Being.

Where specifically indicated, translations here are my own, (CR). Unless otherwise stated quotations from Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus are drawn from:

a) The Dialogues of Plato, translated by B. Jowett, Oxford 1892,

b) The Basic works of Aristotle, ed. by R. McKeon, New York 1941,


A key to the name symbols is contained by the respective author/work in the bibliography.

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Introduction

If Being and the One be two different things, it is not because the One is One that it is other than Being; nor because Being is Being that it is other than the One; but they differ from one another in virtue of otherness and difference—(1)

It can be surely affirmed that the above passage is representative of a continuous line of thought beginning with Plato and still echoing its fateful possibilities of interpretation to anyone doing any serious philosophy. The alternative to this Platonic theory in classical Greek doctrine where the One basically transcends Being (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας) (2) is Aristotle’s ontology in which we find the primacy of Being and the forgetfulness of the metaphysical One of his teacher with its due implications for western thought, “But since there is something which moves while itself unmoved, existing actually, this can in no way be otherwise than as it is (…). The first mover, then, exists of necessity, and in so far as it exists by necessity, its mode of being is good, and it is in this sense a first principle“(3).

Therefore primary Being is ἀρχή, or first principle of the Aristotelian eternal cosmos and
the science, episteme, which investigates being qua being, τὸ ὤν ἢ ὤν, together with the relations of non-being and becoming is metaphysics, or Πρώτη φιλοσοφία (4). With these preliminary concepts which epitomize previous schools of thought (5), Aristotle discusses other known categories such as one, many, the same, like and unlike (6).

a) A Paradigm of a multifaceted Outlook

Porphyry was born in Tyre, a town and ancient Phoenician seaport on the coast of Lebanon 233/4 and died in Rome 305. Until recently he was known in the history of philosophy as a polymath, disciple and editor of Plotinus. In 1913 J. Bidez wrote the first comprehensive study on Porphyry. His portrait of the man is not so flattering but nevertheless it stuck for a while. “Porphyry...is one of those people whose extreme easiness to assimilate someone else’s ideas diminishes greatly any originality. If one wanted to describe him with expressions used for a contemporary writer he would say of him that he had the vivid and quick mind of an excellent journalist, a swift pen, sharp scissors and that he put these tools in turn at the service indeed of the gullibility and superstition of oriental cults, the scientific and literary critique of Longinus, and finally the religiousness of Plotinus. In what we have left of his writings, there is not a single thought, an image, of which it can be affirmed that it was his own. Not only did he contradict himself as he got older and discovered new thinkers and places, but also during the most beautiful and prolific period of his life, as he was under the influence of Plotinus, he was not even capable of setting up (between the various aspects of his intelligence) rapid and complete links so as to put an end to discrepancies and let harmony rule” (7).
As we shall see this judgement does not render justice to our philosopher.

b) Literary and Philosophical Works

In addition to his commentaries on Plato and Aristotle (8), his most influential work remains Isagoge, or an introduction to Aristotle’s Categories. This book became the basis for the teaching of logic throughout the Middle Ages and it was responsible for the dispute over universals beginning with Boethius, who translated it into Latin, down to Abelard (8a). Porphyry was also an important reference point for Renaissance Platonists. Ficino, for instance, translated him together with Plotinus. Although not much survives of his sizable output, indirectly it has been possible to reconstruct certain works from writers whom he influenced such as Victorinus and Augustine. In fact from the church father’s City of God fragments have been obtained (from Wolff in 1856 and Bidez in 1913) allegedly from his Philosofia ex Oraculis haurienda and De Regressu Animae, respectively (8b). Andrew Smith (9) cites Dörrie’s extractions of Porphyry’s Symmikta Zetemata from Nemesius’ De Natura Hominis. The outcome seems to reshape Bidez’ above conclusions, that he was an unimaginative thinker, since Porphyry is here making use of Stoic terminology in talking about Neoplatonic arguments on the correlation between body and soul in a manner not dealt with in Plotinus’ Enneads. Smith brings on a more interesting aspect when mentioning Hadot’s attribution to Porphyry of an anonymous Neoplatonic commentary on Plato’s Parmenides. Here a new relationship of the One and Being emerges. Hadot’s findings were first published in 1961 and later discussed in the “Entretiens sur l’Antiquité Classique”, sponsored by the Hardt Foundation of

Smith is of the opinion that Hadot's arguments, "are very persuasive and as certain as the evidence allows. But they are not absolutely certain" (11). Nonetheless, if Hadot is correct, and only time will tell, new light will be shed on Porphyry's metaphysics. Smith's 1974 wish, "A collection of Porphyry's fragments is long overdue and essential for further investigations" (12), finally comes true in 1993 when he edits 'Porphyrii philosophi fragmenta' (13). In it we have the most up-to-date catalogue of Porphyry's literary and philosophical works listing in all 75 titles of which there are 11 complete works, 35 fragments of various length and of the remaining ones we know only the name through indirect testimonia (14). Smith's catalogue substitutes the previous ones from Beutler and Bidez both for its breadth and full outline (15). In it we can see how versatile our philosopher's activity was, covering: literature, philology, history of philosophy, ethics and religion (16). "Once on Plato's feast I read a poem,---The Sacred Marriage—my piece abounded in mystic doctrine conveyed in veiled words and was couched in terms of enthusiasm; someone exclaimed: 'Porphyry has gone mad'; Plotinus said to me so that all might hear: 'You have shown yourself at once poet, philosopher and hierophant' (17)."

c) Work Plan
An attempt will be made in the following to determine Porphyry’s intellectual versatility and to see how it unfolded in dealing with and in interpreting the inherited Greek culture of his time with a clear emphasis on the philosophical tradition. In this way a comprehensive study will be implemented so that we may have a better appraisal of a Neoplatonist who in my opinion has been somewhat underestimated. Neoplatonism (--- indicating Platonic philosophy with its various schools and nuances as they developed from the third to the sixth century (18) and precisely from the foundation of the school of Alexandria by Ammonius Saccas, first half of the third century, to the closure of the Academy in Athens by Justinian in 529) covers many factors which flow into each other and carry out different themes and concepts. An overwhelming ingredient of this movement is the reappreciation of two Platonic dialogues, Timaeus und Parmenides.

Another component is the revival of Pythagoras (19), or Neopythagoreanism with its symbolism of numbers by which reality with its complex and hierarchical structure became all the more meaningful and comprehensible. Moreover, “The element (...) corresponding to a more general notion of a hierarchy is rather that of order (τάξις), and it is this word indeed (with its various meanings and derivatives) which the Neoplatonists sometimes make use of in connection with hierarchical structures (...).

Finally, some words like ἄνω, κάτω, spatial expressions to which a metaphorical intelligence can be imparted, are also added to the rank vocabulary of Neoplatonism” (20).
Of course the main catalyst is the philosophy of Plotinus. But Merlan affirms this: “Plotinus, once considered to be the founder of Neoplatonism, is now being interpreted as its greatest member, important but not all important in the history of Neoplatonism. The soil out of which he grew, sometimes referred to as pre-Neoplatonism, sometimes as Middle Platonism, exhibits qualities precisely mediating between the Academy and Neoplatonism” (21). This system of thought, being the last great pagan philosophy and a watershed between antiquity and the Middle Ages, may be judged important for various reasons of which the first and most obvious one is that we may think it to be true or simply because it shows what men are prone to believe under certain moods or certain circumstances (22). An additional element still making up this philosophy is the Hellenized Judaism of Philo with its conception of logos as an expression of divine activity, and its introduction of intermediary powers between God and the world. Moreover, its interpretation of matter as basically eternal and a principle of evil causing mankind to sin is a reminder of Pythagorean and Platonic themes: The body is the grave of the Soul, σῶμα—σῆμα (23). A final building block of Neoplatonism is its somewhat irrational side due to a profound desire of spiritual renewal and soteriological aspirations nourished by various doctrines and forms of oriental religiousness among which the Chaldean Oracles of the second century AD, take up a primary role.

The latter combine philosophical and mythical doctrines of oriental origin with a pretention of imparting a revealed truth.
These hexameter oracles were the oracula chaldaica on which Proclus wrote a vast commentary (Marinus, vit. Proclī, 26). Concerning its origins Dodds tells us:

“By his own account, Julianus received these oracles from the gods: They were Θεοπαράδοτα. Where he in fact got them we do not know (...) Julianus may of course have forged them; but their diction is so bizarre and bombastic, their thought so obscure and incoherent as to suggest rather the trance utterances of modern ‘spirit guides’ than the deliberate efforts of a forger. It seems indeed not impossible, in view of what we know about later theurgy, that they had their origin in the ‘revelations’ of some visionary or trance medium, and that Julianus’ part consisted, as Psellus (or his source Proclus) asserts, in putting them into verse. This would be in accordance with the established practice of official oracles; and the transposition into hexameters would give an opportunity of introducing a semblance of philosophical meaning and system into the rigmarole” (24).

For the above reasons Neoplatonism could be considered as a form of eclecticism or rather a philosophical and religious syncretism. And still although there are different schools and tendencies in various periods throughout its life span, they all share nevertheless some common elements such as the acceptance of Plato’s authority, the inclination to explain with hierarchies and intermediate levels the relationship between the intelligible and the sensible and ascribing to philosophy the task of a moral and religious renewal.
Concerning the school of Alexandria (24a) whose most illustrious disciple was Plotinus it is difficult to reconstruct precisely what it originally stood for because its founder Ammonius Saccas did not leave us any writing. He seems to have held a belief in the immateriality of the soul and a conviction that Plato and Aristotle basically reached the same conclusions (25). This of course is a recurring theme in ancient thought. Even Cicero roughly two centuries before tells us of the same consequences, “But originating with Plato, a thinker of manifold variety and fertility, there was established a philosophy that, though it had two appellations, was really a single uniform system, that of the Academic and the Peripatetic schools, which while agreeing in doctrine differed in name” (26). But with Plotinus surely, Neoplatonism finds its highest formulation. Porphyry certainly contributed outstandingly to his teacher’s distinction and also added, as we shall see, a new twist to this school of thought.

What we intend to show in this study is the way Porphyry related to the intellectual tradition of his day. Indeed he was an offspring of his times of which he interpreted, or, better yet, reinterpreted the whole Greek cultural experience intensely and faithfully. To begin with, we shall discuss Porphyry’s understanding of some Homeric and pre-Socratic themes. In the second chapter, we shall examine accordingly Plato’s relation and contribution to our philosopher’s system (and indeed to all of Neoplatonism) which consequently becomes the substratum as well as the cornerstone of this entire work and therefore, in our opinion, justifying its length. Then in the third and fourth chapters, Porphyry’s position towards
Aristotle and Plotinus will be dealt with respectively.

In the remaining part we shall review the significant aspects of Porphyry’s Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides in which, as we propose, we shall see the highest recurring moment of the unity of Platonism and Aristotelianism: represented particularly by the One simply One identified with pure indeterminate Being.

In the Addenda we present a discussion of some critical points which the latter work allegedly has in common with Proclus’ version of Plato’s dialogue.
Notes/ Introduction

1. Plato, Parmenides 143b.
2. Plato, Rep. 509b
3. Aristotle, Met. (tr. by Ross) 1072b, 7-12
4. cf. ibid Bk. IV 1, 2
5. ibid Bk. I passim
6. ibid Bk V, 1, 6, 9, passim.

“Porphyre...est de ceux chez qui une extrême facilité à s’assimiler les idées d’autrui diminue fort l’originalité. Si l’on voulait le caractériser avec les expressions qui s’emploient pour un écrivain de notre temps, on dirait de lui qu’il avait l’esprit vif et rapide d’un excellent publiciste, une plume alerte, des ciseaux adroits, et qu’il mit ces instruments tour à tour au service de la credulité et de la superstition des cultes orientaux, de la critique scientifique et littéraire de Longin, enfin de la religiosité de Plotin. Dans tout ce qui nous reste de ses écrits, il n’y a pas une pensée, pas une image dont on puisse affirmer à coup sûr qu’elle est de lui. Non seulement il se contredit à mesure qu’il avança en âge et qu’il découvrit de nouveaux penseurs et de nouveaux milieux, mais, même dans la période la plus belle et la plus féconde de sa vie, quand il eut subi l’ascendant de Plotin, il ne réussit pas à établir entre les divers compartiments de son intelligence, des communications assez rapides et assez complètes pour supprimer les désaccords et faire régner dans l’ensemble une parfaite harmonie ”.
8. cf. below nos. 13 and 16.
8b. O’Meara, Porphyry’s Philosophy from Oracles in Augustine, Paris 1959.
10. ibid p.xii, footnote no.7
11. ibid p.xii
12. ibid p.xiii
13. Po/Fr
16. Po/Fr, pp.L-Liii
17. Porphyry, Vita Plotini 15, 1-5
20. O’Meara, Structures Hiérarchiques dans la Pensée de Plotin, Leiden 1975, pp. 3,5, passim:
   “L’élément (...)qui correspond à une notion plus générale d’une hiérarchie est plutôt celui de l’ordre (τάξις) et c’est ce mot (avec ses divers sens et ses derivés) qu’emploient quelquefois les Néoplatoniens à propos de structures hiérarchiques(...)Enfin des mot tels que ἀνω, κάτω expressions spatiales auxquelles il faudrait apporter une intelligence metaphorique, s’ajoutent eux aussi au vocabulaire hiérarchique du Néoplatonisme” (tr. CR).
24a. cf. p.11

«Platonis autem auctoritate, qui varius et multiplex et copiosus fuit, una et consentiens duobus vocabulis philosophiae forma instituta est, Academicorum et Peripateticorum, qui rebus congruens nominibus differebant ».
Chapter One:
Porphyry and the Early Hellenic Culture

And a man who is puzzled and wonders, imagines not to know (whence even the lover of myth is in a sense a philosopher, for myth is made up of wonders)(1).

In this chapter we shall review the first phase of our philosopher’s writings with the basic argument that Porphyry was a Platonist and thus interpreted the early Greek cultural phenomena according to this point of view.

1. Epistle to Anebo

This work is for us completely lost. What we have in the main is an unnamed dissertation generally known by the title of De Mysteriis. In it there is the answer on the part of Abammom (who presents himself as a prophet, a preceptor and an outstanding priest) to Porphyry’s letter to Anebo. Preceding De Mysteriis we find an anonymous note saying that Proclus while commenting on Plotinus’ Enneads identified the author of the reply to be “The divine Jamblichus” who took on the pen name Abammom. In the above note we have the following phrase:

ο ἄντιγραφων πρὸς τὴν προκειμένην τοῦ Πορφύριου ἐπιστολήν.
(An answer to the preceding letter of Porphyry)(2). Therefore the letter to Anebo used to precede the tractate De Mysteriis, as if it was intended to
be an inseparable part ushering in Jamblichus’ work (3).

In addition to De Mysteriis, which as we have said is an answer to Porphyry’s letter, the other sources (of minor value in our opinion) for the reconstruction of the Epistle to Anebo are: Eusebius of Caesarea’s Praeparatio Evangelica (3.4,5.8ff), Augustine’s De Civitate Dei, which gives us a summary of the letter in ch. 11, book X, and Cyril’s Contra Julianum, the latter being the patriarch of Alexandria (4). This Porphyrian work was first published by Thomas Gale in 1678 and its edition, except for some small variations, served as a basis for Thomas Taylor’s translation of 1821 (5). In the letter, written during his stay in Sicily 268-298 (5a), Porphyry questions an Egyptian priest, Anebo, whose answer is given instead by his tutor Abammon. The content of this reply makes up Jamblichus’ De Mysteriis, as mentioned above.

“I commence my friendship towards you from the gods” says Porphyry to Anebo “and good demons, and from those philosophic disquisitions which have an affinity to those powers. And concerning these particulars indeed much has been said by the Grecian philosophers; but, for the most part, the principles of their belief are derived from conjectures “(6). Porphyry requests some definite guiding knowledge from a religious source who may explain to him what philosophic reason has failed so far to do. And he proceeds, “In the first place it is granted that there are gods. But I inquire what the peculiarities are of each of the more excellent genera by which they are separated from each other (…) I also ask, why since the gods dwell in the heavens, theurgists only invoke the terrestrial and subterranean gods? (…) How do theologists, or those who are wise in divine
concerns, represent the gods as passive, to whom on this account (it is said) erect phalli are exhibited, and obscene language is used? But if they are impassive, the invocations of the gods are in vain (…). If however the gods are incorporeal alone, how will the sun and moon, and the visible celestials be gods..? I wish you therefore to unfold to me the truth respecting these particulars” (7).

And Porphyry says earnestly, “It very much indeed perplexes me to understand how superior beings, when invoked, are commanded by those that invoke them, as if they were their inferiors; and they think it requisite that he who worships them should be just, but when they are called upon to act unjustly, they do not refuse so to act“(8). This pointing out of religious contradiction on the part of Porphyry goes even further in what sounds like existential despair.

“I likewise wish you to unfold to me, what the Egyptians conceive the first cause to be; whether intellect or above the intellect? Whether alone, or subsisting with some other or others? Whether incorporeal or corporeal and whether it is the same with the demiurge or prior to the Demiurge? Likewise, whether all things are from one principle or from many principles? Whether the Egyptians have a knowledge of matter or of primary corporeal qualities; And whether they admit matter to be unbegotten or to be generated?”(9). And finally our philosopher concludes, “The Egyptians resolve all things into physical and nothing into incorporeal and living essences. Most of them likewise suspend that which is in our power from the motion of the stars; and bind all things, though I know not how, with the indissoluble bonds of necessity which they call fate“(10).
So in the above inquiry we have basically seen the elementary themes debated by Platonists of the second and third century AD. What is interesting here is that Porphyry expected the divinely revealed doctrines of the Egyptian priesthood to offer a Platonic philosophy that would be logically complete and coherent. But as it turns out this anticipation was somewhat foiled at least at the time of the epistle (11).

2. On the Cave of the Nymphs

\( \text{o k\'osmo\c{}}} (...) \sigma\pi\epsilon\lambda\alpha\iota\nu \kappa\alpha \d\acute{\eta} \tau \rho \omicron \nu \). (Plotinus, Enn.IV,8,3,5.)

And the world (...) cavern and cave.

This work came down to us in its entirety. Indeed it is a rare example of allegorical commentary on Homer’s epic poetry which we now quote for our convenience:

And at the head of the harbour is a slender-leaved olive and near by it a lovely and murky cave sacred to the nymphs called Naiads. Within are kraters and amphoras of stone, where bees lay up stores of honey. Inside, too, are massive stone looms and there the nymphs weave sea-purple cloth, a wonder to see. The water flows unceasingly. The cave has two gates, the one from the north, a path for men to descend, while the other, toward the south, is divine: Men do not enter by this one, but it is rather a path for immortals. (11a)

(\text{Od. XIII, 102-112})

What Porphyry is about to elucidate is again a fundamental tenet of Platonic philosophy, “Homer’s cave of the nymphs symbolizes the sensible world into which the soul has descended and from which it must escape” (12). Whereas Plato wanted to ban Homer and the various poets from his Republic whether they had an allegorical meaning or not (13), the Neoplatonists by contrast reconciled Homer with their teacher, Plato, by turning to
mythical exegesis which indeed has also a precedent in Plato himself. Stories concerning the gods should be heard by a very restricted number of persons, buried in silence, “But if there is absolute necessity for their mention, a chosen few might hear them in a mystery” (14).

The Suidas lexicon (15) mentions a lost writing of Porphyry, “On the Philosophy of Homer”, from which we could infer that because of his message, essentially philosophical and Platonic, the poet Homer was considered to be a philosopher (16).

In the reading of the cave of the nympha, “Porphyry is concerned here with Homer to the extent that Homer is a source of truth, a theologian, a definitive and authoritative witness to a revelation shared by Pythagoras and by Plato and containing the key to the mysteries of the structure of the universe and the fate of the souls” (17). What is then the allegory of the Ithaca cave of the nympha, and what of Ithaca itself? According to the best and most accurate geographical accounts of antiquity such as that of Artemidorus of Ephesus, “Twelve stadia (2.2 km) east of Cephallenia, going from the harbour of Panormus, lies the island of Ithaca, 85 stadia (15.7 km) in length, narrow and conspicuous, with a harbour called the harbour of Phorcys. There is also in this harbour a beach where the sacred cave of the nympha is located, where it is said Odysseus was put ashore by the Phaeacians” (18). Thus the existence of the island is not entirely an Homeric fiction. That being the case, the more we try to show the cave to be consecrated to the gods even before Homer’s time, the more we shall realize that this dedication is “full of wisdom of the ancients” and so it deserves deep analysis, and its symbolism should be revealed (19). Therefore the ancients consecrated caves and caverns to the cosmos while making it a symbol of
matter. Likewise, we have the cave as image of the world, a place of death and birth from where everything emerges and into which everything will gradually end up (20).

Thus the cosmos is connatural to matter of which rocks and stones become symbols appearing hostile to form. Hyle was considered indefinite due to its pristine amorphous state. Furthermore, the ancients took the dampness and humidity of caves and their murkiness as an appropriate metaphor of the properties that the universe owes to matter (21).

Before continuing with our exposition of Porphyry’s work it will be useful to our understanding and appreciation of it if we briefly discuss the philosophical basis of the concept of matter prevailing at the time of Neoplatonism. In Plato’s Timaeus, in addition to the intelligible and the sensible we find a third nature which is ‘space’, χώρα: “and is eternal and admits not of destruction and provides a home for all created things” (22). Chora as primal matter (or ἐκμαγείον, as that on which any impression is made) is shapeless and thus can receive (ὑποδοχή) any form (23).

By Aristotle ὅλη substitutes Plato’s concept of recipient, “Now if place, τόπος, is what primarily contains each body, it would be a limit, so that the place would be the form or shape of each body by which the magnitude or the matter of the magnitude is defined: for this is the limit of each body (...) when the boundary and the attributes of (for instance) a sphere are taken away, nothing but matter is left. This is why Plato in the Timaeus says that matter and space are the same; for the ‘participant’ and space are identical. (It is true indeed, that the account he gives there of the ‘participant’ is different from what he says
in his so-called unwritten teachings (23a). Nevertheless, he did identify place and space.) I mention Plato because, while all hold place to be something, he alone tried to say what it is. In view of these facts we should naturally expect to find difficulty in determining what place is, if indeed it is one of these two things, matter or form” (24).

So as we mentioned above, Plato’s chora (the recipient, the space-in-which) becomes Aristotle’s hyle, matter out of which things come into being, “And that out of which they come to be (i.e. natural things) is what we call matter” (25). By the time Middle Platonism came into the scene, around mid-first century BC up to the beginning of the third century AD, we have by and large two prevailing principles: God and matter (26).

Plotinus, on the other hand, in discussing about hyle refers to unqualified matter. That is, not a particular one which may constitute a specific kind of thing. Unqualified matter is without magnitude, bodiless, invisible, without quality or affections, unalterable and indestructible, unlimited and indefinite and it has no mass. Nevertheless, although it has no form of its own it does have a nature and it is an underlying substrate (26a).

Finally, in Porphyry’s Sent. 20 we have his analysis of the concept of matter which frankly seems to be paraphrasing Plotinus’ Enn.III 6,7,3-27, “The properties of matter, according to the ancients are the following: It is bodiless, in fact not identical to bodies, without life, it is neither spirit nor soul nor living in itself, shapeless, irrational, limitless, and powerless. Therefore, it is neither being nor yet non-being (...). Opposites always appear on it: The small and the great, the less and the more, deficient and exceeding; always becoming and never abiding (...
like a game running towards non-being it is a flight not towards a place, but consisting in abandoning being (...) It is like a mirror reflecting in another place that which lies elsewhere; it seems full but in reality it has nothing, though it seems to have everything” (26b).

Therefore, with this brief discussion on the concept of hyle we are now in a better position to see that it is because of matter as Porphyry understood it that the cosmos is misty and dark but at the same time owing to the intermingling of form and order it is also beautiful. The ancients consecrated the caves not only to the cosmos but also to the Naiads, the nymphs who presided over the waters of the cave (27).

Porphyry continues his exposition by affirming that the Pythagoreans, Empedocles and later Plato called the cosmos cave because of the above mentioned Homeric passage. In Empedocles the powers that actually guide the souls remark the following ‘We have come here within this roofed cave’ (B120,DK). And Plato (Rep.514a-515b): ‘picture mankind living in a subterranean dwelling in a cave, with an entrance open to the light and a long path extending the entire length of the cave’ and the other speaker says ‘this is a bizarre image’ and Socrates continues ‘dear Glaucon, this image is to be applied to everything that has been said up to this point, comparing the place we live, as we experience it with our eyes, to the underground prison, and the light of the fire, that is in the cave, to the power of the sun’ (28).

In this myth Plato describes the sensible world where we only get shadows of the real one. Porphyry is here underlying the comparison made by Plato of our world with the cave. The meaning of the myth lies in the contrast between the life the
inhabitants of the cave think they are leading and the intelligible real world accessible only outside and beyond the material dwelling.

For the theologians (28a), Porphyry says, the caves represent not only the cosmos and its powers but also noetic substances. On the one hand, they are symbols of the sensible world because the caves are dark, murky and damp (and so is the cosmos in addition to being resistant to form and therefore of unstable matter); on the other, again, they signify the intelligible world of solid and enduring nature not easily grasped by the senses.

The word theologian means those people speaking of gods and divine things. The word appears for the first time in Plato's Republic (379a). Here it seems to be strictly the business of poets to speak of the divine, while in Aristotle (Met. 1000a, 9) the word applies to the first poets, Homer and Hesiod. The Homeric cave with two entrances symbolizes only the sensible world. Its flowing waters where the Naiad nymphs have their temple stand for (29) the souls descending into the world of becoming. Porphyry cites Heraclitus (22B77, DK), "It is a delight, not a death for souls to become wet". That is, they enjoy coming into existence. And similarly, we get the following (22B 60, DK) "The way up and down is one and the same". Here we clearly have the cosmic view of the cycle of life and death.

In Plato's Phaedo we have the same principle, "There comes into my mind an ancient doctrine which affirms that they (the souls of the dead) go from hence into the other world, and returning hither, are born again from the dead. Now if it be true that the living come from the dead, then our souls must exist in the other world, for if not, how could they have been
born again? (...) Are not all things which have opposites generated out of their opposites?” (30). And in the Gorgias, Socrates quotes Euripides (492a), “who knows if life be not death and death life?”. Porphyry tells us that it is necessary for the souls to descend to moisture and once they have been moistened to become embodied. But pure souls elude coming into being, as Heraclitus says (22B 118,DK), “A dry soul is the wisest”. For the souls initiated into the material world and for the deities (daimons) that preside over becoming, the cosmos is both holy and pleasing although by its material nature it is shadowy and murky (31). Above we mentioned the word daimon. The Greek says (32) γενέθλιος δαίμων, a deity which destiny gives to each one of us since birth. In Plato the daimon is intermediate (τὸ μεταξύ) between the divine and the mortal (Symp.202e). In the Phaedo (107e) the cycle of opposites concerning the individual soul and its daimon is so explained, “For after death, as they say, the genius of each individual (ὁ ἐκάστον δαίμων) to whom he belonged in life, leads him to a certain place in which the dead are gathered together, whence after judgement has been given they pass into the world below, following the guide who is appointed to conduct them from this world to the other, and when they have there received their due and remained their time, another guide brings them back again after many revolutions of ages”.

In “De regressu animae” Porphyry reveals to us that the soul is thrown into the birth cycle as a trial from God, “So that when knowing the evils of matter we would return to our father”(32a). But if unable to subdue the
materiality in us with its non-being upon death the soul would reincarnate other human beings—unlike Plato and Plotinus who include animals in this process of reembodiment (32b). In the allegory of the Homeric cave, Porphyry enquires why the amphoras contain honey (33). We are told that the theologians used honey to symbolize many things, capable of both preserving and cleansing. In Plato’s Symposium (203b5) we learn some intoxicating qualities of this sweet, “Now Plenty (Πόρος) who has the worse for nectar (there was no wine in those days) went into the garden of Zeus and fell into a heavy sleep; and Poverty (Πενία) considering her own straitened circumstances, plotted to have a child by him and accordingly she lay down at his side and conceived Love”. The priestesses of Demeter were called Melissai (bees) by the ancients as initiates of the earth goddess, and her daughter, Persephone, was melitodes, honey-like (34). Therefore we have a series of correlations which involve bees and honey representing initiates and priestesses together with their connection with mystery deities such as Demeter, Persephone and the moon goddess, Selene.

In the Phaedo (82b), good but not too perfect souls, “pass into some gentle and social kind which is like their own, such as bees or wasps or ants”. Thus the bee symbolizes the soul entering becoming with a purpose of doing good things and thereupon they would go back to their place of origin. Again the Phaedo, “No one who has not studied philosophy and who is not entirely pure at the time of his departure is allowed to enter the company of the gods, but the lover of knowledge only“(82c).
In the Ithaca cave there are two entrances, as we mentioned. Homer specifies that one was toward the north and the other toward the south and that the northern one was for descent and the southern one, “Men do not enter by this one, but rather it is a path for immortals” (35).

Now what is the symbolism behind all of this? Porphyry maintains that according to Numenius (on whom we shall briefly throw some light) and his lesser known companion Cronius the cave is the image and symbol of the cosmos and the two extremities in the heavens, metaphorically the two entrances, are represented by the summer (Cancer) and winter (Capricorn) tropics. Through the northerly entrance (Cancer) souls descend into becoming and by way of the southerly one (Capricorn) they ascend to the gods. For this reason, indeed, Homer used the word immortals, meaning souls and not gods (36).

In the myth of Er (37), Plato tells us of the dead soldier, Er, coming back to life after twelve days and narrating the fate of his soul. Er saw the soul separated from the body arriving at a place together with a great company where there were two openings in the earth and in front of these, in the sky, another two openings. In the middle there were judges seated who after the verdict were telling the just to ascend by the heavenly way on the right and the unjust to descend by the lower way on the left. From the other two openings Er had seen other souls, some exhausted and dusty from the journey ascending out of the earth and some clean and bright descending out of heaven. Thus both in Homer and Plato the meaning of this allegory is undeniably similar.
Concerning the precursor to Neoplatonism, Numenius, we know that he was born in Apamea, Syria, around mid-second century AD. From the few fragments (37a) which we possess of his writing 'On the Good' we can clearly state that he considered himself a follower of Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato, of whom he said to be a Moses speaking Attic (38). He proclaims that the basic teachings of the Egyptians, Jews, Chaldeans and Brahmans agree with those of Pythagoreanism and Platonism (39). His works is comprised of six books. The first contains the proof for the absolute incorporealness of true being. In the second book we have the definition of being as eternal, stable and always identical to itself, not subject to birth, death or becoming. In the third and fourth books as far as we know there is only the allegorical interpretation of the old and new testament, and finally in the fifth and sixth we have the determination of the essence and relationship between the first and second god (40).

Proclus reports the following: “Numenius mentions three gods and calls Father the first, Creator the second and creation the third. In fact, according to him the cosmos is the third god. For him the demiurge is of dual nature. Namely, the first and second god; and the cosmos created by the demiurge is the third. It is better to express ourselves in this way than the way he does with such a tragic language: the Ancestor, the Son and the Descendant” (40a).

Numenius was much influenced by the Chaldean Oracles (41). Indeed in these oracles we have the first principle mind, the father who is also called Monás, pristine unity bringing
forth as its thoughts the world of ideas and numbers. To this absolute nous-monás, as the essence of ideas and numbers, follows a second deity, the world soul. In conjunction with matter, the world soul as the demiurge creates the cosmos while the first mind, πρώτος νοῦς, remains untouched from this activity. What we now have is basically a second nous to which the transcendent first entrusts creation. The second nous, the world soul, is antithetical to the first. It is in fact the duality of the original unity. While the first Nous remains in itself, the second is both thought and perception. And because of its demiurgic activity, it turns to fashioning the cosmos. By virtue of this double function the second Nous is no longer pure unity like the first but divides itself and thereby becomes duality. So the demiurge with its creative activity is not only the basis of order but also the life principle of the cosmos. And likewise by remaining in itself it is also mind.

Thus this dual relationship of the demiurge, relating to creation and mind, gives rise as we said to a division of itself, to duality. So, again, in addition to the πρώτος νοῦς, there are two other gods: the second Nous, and the third representing the life principle of the cosmos (42).

In the cave of the nymphs, Numenius affirms that Parmenides (28B1,DK) mentions two gates (43) (in the proemium the latter describes his journey which brings him under the guidance of the Heliades to the gate where the paths of night and day are to be found). Indeed, Homer placed the entrances of the cave, “At the southernmost and northernmost gates of the
heavens because the cave is consecrated to souls and to water nymphs, and these regions are appropriate to the birth and rebirth of souls” (44). Besides, suitable winds were granted to souls coming into the world and departing from it. Thus the north wind, Boreas, is right for those souls entering and the south wind, Notos, to those leaving it.

The philologist comes out in Porphyry when he tells that the name of the north wind, Boreas, stems from βορᾶ which means nourishment. And since nourishment is food, the wind that blows from that part of the earth that is bursting with food is called Boreas (45). But our philosopher states that since nature has its origin in otherness, ἑτερότης, things with two entrances, “have everywhere been made to symbolize it” (46). Heraclitus is brought into play when opposites such as right and left, night and day remind the reader that the structure of the natural world is indeed harmonious due to the tension between opposites, “On the circumference of a circle the beginning and end are equal” (47). In Homer otherness takes on the allegory of the two jars, pithoi, “of gifts he gives, one full of evils, the other of benefits” (Il. XXIV, 528). Likewise in Plato’s Gorgias (493a-494a) the image of otherness, or plurality, unfolds within man’s soul symbolized by a jar. The ignorant were called the uninitiated or leaky, and the place in the soul where the desires of the uninitiated are seated was compared to a jar full of holes because it is never satisfied. Porphyry agrees that the jar signifying the soul contains, as a result, actions and conditions of various sorts (48).
Now let us go back to Ithaca and the planted olive tree.

“And at the head of the harbour is a slender-leaved olive and near by it a lovely and murky cave”. Porphyry believes that this tree is not there by chance; rather, it encompasses the whole riddle of the cave. The olive tree belongs to Athena who represents thoughtfulness, phronesis. Since the goddess was born out of the head of Zeus, the theologian Homer (49) thought it best to put the tree at the head of the harbour, meaning that the universe is not the result of mere chance, but was brought about by an intelligent being which is not part of it. Nonetheless the creator is near its creation like the olive tree near the cave (50).

In Porphyry’s περὶ ἄγαλματων (On Images) Athena, symbol of wisdom, resides in the moon from where (51) souls descend into the world of becoming (52). Thus our philosopher seems to believe that the universe is governed by Nous. And the being which holds everything together is the demiurge (53): Nous and creator of the cosmos. Arriving at the cave, says Homer, one must put down all outward possessions and be stripped naked and take on the aspect of a beggar. And on the advice of Athena, beneath the olive tree one is to learn how to eliminate all the passions which are so destructive to our soul. “No, I do not think Numenius and his friends were off track in thinking that, for Homer, Odysseus in the Odyssey was the symbol of man passing through the successive stages of coming into being” (54). The voyage of Odysseus would only come to an end when he reaches those people, “who do not know the sea and put no salt on their food” (Od.XI,122-3). As by Plato,
the sea represents the material universe (55). Thus Odysseus clearly personifies coming into being of the soul which after the cathartic experience returns to its true abode (the φίλην πατρίδα of Plotinus, Enn.I,6,8,21ff).

In concluding this exegesis Porphyry reminds us that Homer named the harbor “the harbor of Phorcys” (There is a harbor belonging to Phorcys, the old man of the sea—Od.XIII,96). Phorcys’ daughter, Thoosa, was the mother of Polyphemus, the Cyclops, whom Odysseus blinded. Lamberton in the notes to the translation of this work suggests that the Cyclops stands for the physical existence of Odysseus (56). The poet, according to Porphyry, indicates that Odysseus’ sinful state, simply his coming into existence, would be remembered “right up to his arrival home”. Hence for Odysseus to be seated under the olive tree would be appropriate so as to appease, through wisdom, the daimon presiding over becoming (57). Porphyry believes that it is not in the nature of things to suppress sensible life, symbolically the blinding of Polyphemus. The philosopher will accept life (vita Plotini,11) instead of escaping from it (Enn.I,9,16). And the purpose of living, thus, turns out to be the attainment of contemplation and possibly assimilation into real being, ὁμοίωσις (58).

3. The Life of Pythagoras/ Introduction

This work was part of the first book of the four making up the History of Philosophy (59), starting with Homer and ending with Plato. If we rule out some short fragments also contained in Smith’s edition (60), this history is basically lost. In Beutler’s article on Porphyry’s History of Philosophy (61) we see
that most of the fragments we possess stem from books one, three and four. The fragments declared to be part of book two are of dubious source (62). What we have of book one covers the period beginning with the fall of Troy and includes such authors as Homer, Hesiod, the seven wise men, and Pythagoras. Porphyry’s account is visibly chronological. Hence we can infer that the alleged content of book two comprising such pre-Socratic philosophers as Empedocles and Gorgias is somewhat justified (63).

The fact that Porphyry ended his History of Philosophy with Plato strongly suggests the notion that previous Greek thought, according to him, a Neoplatonist, was looked upon as a necessary step towards Plato. The current critical text of the life of Pythagoras appeared first in the Nauck edition of Porphyry’s Opuscula (65). In the discussion that we are about to undertake we continue to uphold the position that our philosopher’s approach in interpreting early Greek culture, as we have seen in our analysis of the cave of the nymphs, is that of a Platonist. With this in mind we affirm that for Porphyry Pythagoras too is basically a ‘Platonist’. But before examining the Porphyrian text, we would like to explain our understanding of Pythagorean doctrines so that we might be more critical in tackling Porphyry’s work.

“The history of Pythagoreanism is perhaps the most controversial subject in all Greek philosophy and much about it must remain obscure (…) Pythagoras was a contemporary of Anaximenes but his school existed, and its doctrines developed and diverged, for the next two hundred years. Little can be attributed
with certainty to the founder himself” (66). So begins Guthrie his discussion on our present topic. Nonetheless, he warns us that a lack of understanding of Pythagoreanism, “is a severe handicap in the study of Plato himself” (67). Accordingly, since almost nothing is known of Pythagoras and little of the Pythagoreans we shall take our cue from Aristotle and label this current of thought as “The so-called Pythagoreans” or simply the Pythagoreans (67a).

The latter, unlike their Ionian predecessors were essentially interested in scientific research, and practised a way of living whereby science would be a means towards a philosophical and religious end (68). Moreover since its doctrines were considered a mystery to be understood only by the initiated and regenerate, its disclosure became all the more difficult. The first Pythagorean, to our knowledge, ever to have broken the oath of secrecy was a contemporary of Socrates, Philolaos (69). Diogenes Laertius informs us that Plato asked Dion in Sicily to buy the three books from Philolaos containing Pythagorean precepts for one hundred minae (70).

One point all literary sources agree upon when talking about this religious, philosophical movement is metempsychosis: The transmigration of the soul at death into another body either human or animal. This was confirmed to us by Xenophanes (21B7,DK). The soul is compelled to reincarnate into another body so as to expiate an original state of sin. That Pythagoras was the inventor of such a belief seems unlikely. It is more probable that this doctrine was drawn from Orphism.
In fact Plato in the Cratylus mentions explicitly Orphic poets and attributes to them the renowned σώμα-σήμα formula, the creed that the body is a place of atonement for a primordial guilt (71). In this context the soul is immortal not only for the Orphics but also for the Pythagoreans. However, although these two sects agree on the existence of an afterlife and the necessity of catharsis as a vital step towards liberation from the cycle of births, their respective way to carry this out differs.

While the Orphics thought purification could take place through religious practices (72) lifting the soul to the divine (73), the Pythagoreans were of the belief that catharsis and therefore salvation could come about particularly through ‘science’ (74). Religion and science indeed were complementary to each other and accordingly the rational became related to the religious sphere of man (75).

3.a. A Pythagorean Canon.

“The so-called Pythagoreans, who were the first to take up mathematics, not only advanced this study, but also having been brought up in it they thought its principles were the principles of all things. Since of these principles numbers are by nature the first and in numbers they seemed to see many resemblances to the things that exist and come into being, more than in fire, earth and water (such and such modification of numbers being justice, another being soul and reason, another being opportunity and similarly almost all other things being numerically expressible...); since, then, all other things seemed in their whole nature to be modelled on numbers, and numbers
seemed to be the first things in the whole of nature, they supposed the elements of numbers to be the elements of all things” (76).

Thus Aristotle gives here an account of why the Pythagoreans saw in numbers the benchmark for all things. Since these are ultimately numbers the basis of nature therefore is numerical. “In their geometric view of number the Pythagoreans saw no difference between points and units. The essential concept is limit (...) For the Pythagoreans the unit-point came first, from it the line, from line surface and from surface solid---they equated these with numbers” (77). In the correlation between numbers and things we have the one corresponding to the point, two to the line, three the surface and four the solid (78). The perfect number is ten. It being the sum of the first four numbers and it was represented by an equilateral triangle, a tetraktus. Each side of this figure, by which the Pythagoreans used to swear, reveals the number four (79). Thus the number ten indeed merits the Pythagorean title of the full and perfect number because it contains in itself in addition to the basic ratios of the concordant musical notes, the formulas of the line, surface and solid (79a).

Philolaos was of the opinion that the world and everything in it came into being from two primordial principles: limit, πέρας, and its imposition on the unlimited, τὸ ἀπειπον, so as to create the limited (DK,44B1). Of these two principles (ἀρχαί) the limit, the unit, or the one was the good which they even called mind or God, and the other was the indefinite dyad being considered as plurality and evil. As we just mentioned the two fundamental beginnings, the monad and the indefinite dyad, are primal;
that is, one is not derived from the other: Both are coexistent eternal foundations. Nevertheless, the Pythagoreans in view of the reverence for form, goodness and limit seemed to grant, arbitrarily, a primary status to the monad (80).

Likewise Plato in the unwritten doctrines starts off with two primary underived principles, the One (τὸ ἕν) and the indefinite dyad (ἀδύναμος δύο), and presupposes that Being in its totality cannot be predicated upon a single metaphysical foundation without having a contradiction of the One duplicating itself (81). In other words, a twofold principle theory of unity and multiplicity, form and matter, finite and infinite must be necessarily postulated. In spite of the fundamental coexistence of the above two roots of Being, it can be safely affirmed, in my view, that Plato (like the Pythagoreans above) because of his devotion to goodness and beauty, expressed through form and harmony, granted as well a higher value and importance to the One.

Thus the Pythagorean worldview, unlike the Ionian and Milesian one, offered a new frame of mind, a new meaning to life. Because of number we have order, rationality and consequently the universe is rhythmical and good (81a), “And philosophers tell us (...) orderliness and temperance and justice bind together heaven and earth and gods and men, and that this universe is therefore called cosmos or order” (82). Before starting our discussion on Porphyry’s work we would like to make a few observations about Orphism, a subject worthy of note indeed for our understanding of Plato and Neoplatonism.
3.b. Orphism, the Mystery Religion: 
“Plato paraphrases Orpheus everywhere”
(Olympiodorus, On the Phaedo) (83)

In analyzing the religious phenomena of the Greeks we must bear in mind that from the very beginning there was a dividing line, a discrimen, separating the Homeric world (together with its Pantheon which turned out to be the official state religion) from the mysteries. And from these the one that took root in the Greek mind was Orphism (84). Whereas the Olympian gods were personifications of natural forces enshrined as we said in the official public religion with its naturalistic perspective of which Thales could say that all is full of gods (DK, 11A22), with the appearance of Orphism (85) with its belief in the transmigration of the soul (---and such 'Orphic' philosophers as Heraclitus talking about the destiny of the soul (DK 22 B45, DK 22B 98) and the cycle of life and death (86), as well as Empedocles (87) who expounds on the ways of catharsis---) we get a meta-sensible world picture which strongly contends with the naturalistic one (87a).

By the time we get to Plato these mysteries are absorbed and turned into myths. In the so-called eschatological myths of the Republic, Phaedo and Gorgias, the Athenian philosopher gives us, “some sort of account of regions into which the methods of dialectical reasoning can not follow. That there are such regions he fully admits. It is part of his greatness to
have confessed that there are certain ultimate truths which it is beyond the powers of human reason to demonstrate scientifically. Yet we know them to be true and have to explain them as best as we can. The value of myth is that it provides a way of doing this. We take account of myth not because we believe it to be literally true, but as a means of presenting a possible account of things which we know to exist but must admit to be too mysterious for exact scientific demonstration. Examples of these mysteries are free will, and divine justice, and in speaking of these Plato makes use of Orphic myths” (88).

To be sure, we could conclude that for Plato the Orphic myths by and large do become complementary to reason so that we are able to reach a higher ground of meaning. Thus Orphism (starting out as a reform movement in the worship of Dionysus) as a mystery religion profoundly influenced Pythagoreanism which in turn reformed Orphism through its cult of science and philosophy (89). Indeed, without Orphism: Pythagoreanism, Heraclitus, Empedocles and certainly Plato would not be rightly accounted for.

3.c. Porphyry’s Pythagoras

Burnet in his Early Greek Philosophy asserts that in talking about Porphyry’s Life of Pythagoras, or Jamblichos’ or the account of Diogenes Laertius, we find ourselves in fact in the region of the miraculous, “They are based on authorities of a very suspicious character, and the result is a mass of incredible fiction” (90). Porphyry’s sources were Nichomachos and Antonius Diogenes. The latter wrote a book called “Marvels from beyond Thule” which is
parodied in Lucian’s Vera Historia (91). We agree with Burnet because it only confirms and gives credit to what we said earlier. Namely, Porphyry’s approach to early Greek culture is that of a Platonist. And therefore for him, we repeat, Pythagoras is in the main a Platonic philosopher. The historicity of the details of the book is irrelevant. What counts is what he is trying to say to us, the message that his literary work conveys to the reader (91a).

Porphyry’s Life of Pythagoras is something of a collection of source material. The text which is incomplete begins with the childhood and family backdrop of Pythagoras (Samos c.570- Metapontum 490). His father was Mnesarchus of Samos and his mother Pythais. His early education was among Egyptians, Chaldeans and Phoenicians. And Porphyry recounts that Aristozenos of Tarentum, a disciple of Aristotle (92), writes that Pythagoras at the age of forty left his native Samos to escape the tyranny of Polycrates and migrated to southern Italy, Croton, a leading Achaean colony from where he unfolded his activity with other western Greek cities.

What Pythagoras said to his followers is somewhat problematic since the initiated were under the oath of secrecy. However the following creed became universally recognized: a) the belief in the transmigration of the soul which he held to be immortal and upon death of the body it was thought that it would reincarnate another person or animal; b) past events were believed to repeat themselves in a cyclical process, and therefore nothing is new in an absolute sense; and finally, c) all living creatures were regarded as kindred. These were
the beliefs that Pythagoras is said to have introduced in Greece (VPy19).

Of his followers some were called mathematici and some acusmatici. The mathematici were those who had mastered the deepest parts of his wisdom, and the acusmatici those who had only heard brief precepts without full explanation (VPy37). What he recommended to his disciples was to speak religiously of the divine, and to have just and correct opinions about them. Furthermore, to sacrifice to the gods of the heavens with odd numbers and to those of the earth with even ones.

As regards opposing powers he called the best: Monad, daylight, straight and equal, and the lesser one: Dyad, darkness, circular and unequal (VPy38). Pythagoras used to recommend abstaining from flesh of sacrificed animals and specifically privy parts, marrow, feet and head because they symbolize respectively: Foundation, becoming, growth, beginning and end (VPy43). Porphyry discusses these topics in detail in his work De Abstinentia, on the abstinence from animal flesh (93).

Although a meat diet does no harm to the soul or body (Abst.I,15) as is proven by medical opinion and the fact that athletes eat meat so as to improve their condition, nonetheless, it does not follow, says Porphyry, that it is the proper thing to do for philosophers (Abst. II,4). Further on, in chapter 28, we ascertain that Pythagoreans were lifelong abstainers from animal meat. The ban on flesh eating is due to the direct affinity of all life (93a), “In order to appreciate this treatise it is necessary to understand something of its philosophical background and the view of life held by (...) some of the greatest thinkers the
world has ever known, among them Pythagoras, Empedocles, Socrates and Plato” (94).

Again, Porphyry mentions the Pythagorean doctrine of the Monad because it is the reason for identity and sympathy in the universe (VPy49). The Dyad on the other hand was looked upon as the cause for difference and inequality, transforming and concealing the various forms (VPy50). Concerning the realm of numbers, each one corresponds to a certain power. Through numbers and mathematics in general the intellect approaches the incorporeal which is the threshold of the idea, as Plato’s Phaedo (78c-d) clarifies.

Finally, we are told (VPy52) that the word for receptacle: δεκάς, was coined by the Pythagoreans to explain the figure ten (δεκάς). For them this number is perfect because it contains in itself all the numerical difference and all proportions.

From Croton where Pythagoras had founded a religious community he was forced into exile and died at Metapontum. From this account indeed it can be inferred that Pythagoras’ philosophy emerges as a rudimentary kind of Platonism with its pursuit of knowledge defined as in fact mathematical and philosophical investigation. And the purpose of this philosophy was to set the soul free from the bonds of the material body and consequently to allow the intellect of the initiated to grasp the permanent and unchanging nature of Being.

4. Concluding remarks

In this chapter, therefore, we have considered how Porphyry interpreted some themes of early Greek culture. As we have pointed out, in his initial works (Epistle to Anebo, On the Cave of
the Nymphs and the Life of Pythagoras) he explained the leading elements of this society (to be specific, the mystery religions, the transmigration of the soul and the manifestation of the logos, with its clarification of the cosmos through the mathematization of physical entities) (96) to be basic Platonic themes whose intimate link with our Neoplatonic Porphyry we shall discuss in the following section.

Notes/ Chapter one

2. Porfirio, Lettera ad Anebo (Po/Le) Sodano’s intro. p. XXXVIII-XXXIX.
5. Po/Le, Sodano’s intro. note no.2 p.XLIX (our excerpts are drawn from Th. Taylor’s tr. Porphyry’s Epistle to Anebo (Po/Ep) pp. 12-19.
5a. Porfirio, Storia della Filosofia (Po/Hi) intro. by Sodano p.22
6. Po/Ep, 1
7. ibid 2-11 passim
8. ibid 28
9. ibid 35
10. ibid 38
12. O’Meara Py/Re p.27,
13. Plato Rep. 378d
14. ibid 378a
17. Po/cny, cf. intr. essay by Lamberton, p.5
18. ibid 4
19. ibid 5
20. Xenophanes, DK 21B 29, DK 21B 27
21. Po/cny, ds 5+6 passim
22. Plato, Timaeus, 52b
23. ibid 50c.
23a. In the unwritten teachings Plato apparently identified the ‘participant’ with the great-and-small (Aristotle, Met. 987b,18-22).
24. Aristotle, Physics 209b,1-20 passim
25. Aristotle, Met. 1032a 17
26b. Po/Se (tr.CR).
27. Po/cny, 6
28. ibid 8
28a. ibid 9
29. ibid 10

" (...) Weil Ich ihn nicht bei Seinem wahren Namen nennen darf, der Eros ist. Sonst wollte Ich zeigen, wie sich an das Ende der Anfang knüpft, wie nämlich der Eros mit dem Tode in einem geheimen Zusammenhange steht, vermöge dessen der Orkus (oder Amenthes der Aegypter, nach Plutarch de Iside et Os. c. 29, der also nicht nur nimmt sondern auch gibt) und der Tod
das grosse Reservoir des Lebens ist. Daher aus dem Orkus, kommt alles, und dort ist schon jedes gewesen, das jetzt Leben hat. Wären wir nur fähig den Tashenspielerstreich zu begreifen, vermöge dessen Das geschieht, dann wäre alles klar".

(...) Because I am not allowed to call him by his real name which is Eros. Otherwise, I wanted to show how the end is connected with the beginning; namely, how Eros is secretly related to death, because of it Orcus (or Amunthes the Egyptian, according to Plutarch de Iside et Os. c. 29, who not only takes but also gives) and death are the great reservoir of life. Thus from there, from Orcus, comes everything. And all those who are now alive have been there already. If we could only understand this sleight of hand owing to which this is happening, everything would then be clear. (tr.CR).

31. Po/cny, 11,12
32. Po/cny, (with Greek text) SUNY, Buffalo 1969, cf.12,5
32a. Bidez, (Bi/VP) p.27* (reconstructed text of de regressu animae, from Augustine’s de Civitate Dei, X 32).
"Dicit etiam deum animam mundo dedisse ut materiae cognoscens mala ad patrem recurreret" (p.39*, tr.CR).
32b. Bidez, ibid p.38*. "Nam Platonem animas hominum post mortem revolvi usque ad corpora bestiarum scripsisse certissimum est. Hanc sententiam Porphirii doctor tenuit et Plotinus; Porphyrio (...), sed alia nova corpora redire humanas animas arbitratus est"---In point of fact, it is definite, Plato wrote that after death the soul of man reincarnates even bodies of animals. Plotinus teacher of Porphyry is of this opinion too; for Porphyry (...), he
33. Po/cny 15
34. ibid 18
35. ibid 20
36. ibid 23
38. Suidas Lexicon, ibid, v. entry Numenius.
39. Krämer, Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik, Amsterdam 1964, p.65
40. ibid p.69
42. Krämer, (Kr/Gm) pp.66-71 passim
43. Po/cny 23
44. ibid 24
45. ibid 28, 29
46. ibid 29
47. Heraclitus (DK 22B 103): ξυνὸν γὰρ ἀρχῇ καὶ πέρας ἐπὶ κύκλου περιφερείας (tr.CR).
48. Po/cny ibid 30
49. v. our note no.17
50. Po/cny 32
51. ibid 18
52. Bidez (Bi/VP) p.14* line 17
53. The Greek says ὁ συνέχων τῶν κόσμων δημιουργός. cf. de antro nymph. (Po/Na), p.79
54. Po/cny 34
55. ibid
56. ibid, v. Lamberton p.42, note 28
57. ibid 35
58. Po/Ab, I,29 tr. by Th. Taylor, ed. by Wynne-Tyson, London 1965
59. Beutler, (Be/Po) col.287
60. Smith (Po/Fr), section, historica, pp.220-249 passim
61. Beutler (Be/Po) col. 287
62. Po/Hi, cf. table of contents
63. ibid, intro. by Sodano p.9
64. ibid
65. Porphyrii, Vita Pythagorae (abbr. Vpy), in (Po/Na).
67. (Gu/Hi) p.147
67a. Aristotle, Met. 985b,23
68. (Gu/Hi) pp.148-9 passim
69. Plato, Phaedo 61e
70. Diogenes Laertius, Lives of eminent philosophers (III,9).
71. Plato, Cratylus, 400c
73. (Gu/Hi) pp.198-9
74. ibid p.289 passim and pp.148-9 passim
75. ibid p. 250, p.306
76. Aristotle, Met. 985b,24-986a2
77. (Gu/Hi) p.259
78. idem p.260
79. (Bu/EG): Burnet, Early Greek Philosophy, London 1892, p.102
79a. (Gu/Hi) p.260
80. ibid p.248 passim
81. Krämer, Platone e i Fondamenti della Metafisica, Mi 1982, p.154
81a. Guthrie, Orpheus and Greek Religion, London 1953, p. 219
82. Plato, Gorgias 507e-508a passim
83. Kingsley, Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic (Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition), Oxford 1995, p.112; v. also Guthrie (Orpheus and Gr. Rel. ibid pp.242-3) where the author is of the opinion that Plato thought of the Orphic religion and his own philosophy as
complementary because similar doctrines (such as the transmigration of the soul and its corollary: The best life consists in "practice for death") appear now as the subject of an Orphic myth, now as the object of dialectical proof.

84. (Gu/Or) p.6ff
85. ibid p.148ff
86. (Bu/EG): pp. 153-4 passim; v. also Plato, Phaedo 70c.
87. (Ki/AP) pp.36-9
87a. (Or/Fr) nos. 227, 233, 251
88. (Gu/Or) p.239
89. (Ru/Hi) p.51
90. (Bu/EG) p.87
91. ibid
91a. Again, Pythagoras represents such ideas as the transmigration of the soul and the metaphysical principles of the one and the indeterminate dyad which, as we know, are basic pillars of Plato’s thought.
92. Po, VPy,9 (in Po/Na)
93. Po, de Abstinentia (in Po/Na); English, op. cit. (ref. no. 58).
93a. ibid, de abst. III,26
94. ibid, intro. by Wynne-Tyson p.9
95. VPy46
96. Aristotle, Met. 985b-986a
Chapter Two: Plato’s Relation and Contribution to Porphyry

Introduction

Just like generations of leaves, such are those also of men. As for the leaves, the wind scatters some upon the earth and the forest, as it burgeons, brings forth others when spring is come. Even so of men, one generation springs up and another passes away. (1)
At this stage of our work we would like to discuss Plato’s relation and contribution to Porphyry inasmuch as this connection is relevant to determining our philosopher’s original position within Neoplatonism. Here the all important subject matter to be sure is Plato’s doctrine of the soul and its disclosure of the metasensible, together with its implications for Middle Platonism which in turn paves the way for Porphyry’s own interpretation.

The soul as topic of discussion is the most significant field of research for all Platonists. And, as we shall see, it is the intermediate juncture which must be dealt with before reaching for the core of the intelligible realm and beyond of Plato’s philosophy (2). Moreover, we are convinced that the Platonic theory of soul can be properly appreciated only with a due introductory background to its ontology and metaphysics.

1. Plato’s Doctrine of the Soul

1.1. The Theory of Ideas

The gist of Plato’s message to posterity, in our opinion, is a profound reversal of the ordinary worldview of his day. While such previous philosophers as Parmenides and Anaxagoras (3) attributed being to corporeal entities, and others identified knowledge with what can be clearly seen and touched (4) and
thought of the good as only an hedonistic experience, Plato in contrast with a firm conviction believed that the truly real being (τὸ ὀντὸς ὄν) is that which has a simple and unchanging nature as well as an invisible and intelligible existence (4a). Unlike the physical mechanical explanations showing us the ‘how’ and not the reason why there are such specific process results, Plato endeavors to find true causality in the eidos, giving us consequently a meaning which unfolds itself in an intertwining network of ideas. The above instances of sensualism and hedonism are categorically rejected by the Athenian philosopher by stating that true knowledge can only be attained by turning towards our inner selves, and thus securing goodness by sidestepping the appeal of the material sphere (5). Indeed the acknowledgement of this metasensible dimension which Plato discloses is the so-called second voyage (5a). In the original Greek: δεύτερος πλοῦς is a maritime expression “the next best way”, of those who try another scheme if the first fails (those who use oars when the wind fails) (6). In our case, this second way of sailing symbolizes the voyage undertaken with our personal efforts, by the mind. “The second voyage I embarked upon in search of this cause, do you want me, he said, to explain it to you, oh Cebes?” (7).

In the seventh letter (341c-e) Plato makes known that “There neither is nor ever will be a treatise of mine on the subject. For it does not admit of exposition like other branches of knowledge; but after much converse about the matter itself and a life lived together, suddenly a light, as it were, is kindled in one soul by a flame that leaps to it from another, and thereafter sustains itself (...) But I do not
think it is a good thing for men that there should be a disquisition, as it is called, on this topic—except for some few who are able with a little teaching to find it out for themselves. As for the rest, it would fill some of them illogically with a mistaken feeling of contempt, and others with lofty and vainglorious expectations, as though they had learned something high and mighty” (8).

Hence this ‘second voyage’ implies two levels of being. One is metasensible, intelligible and perceptible only with the eye of the mind, and the other is the phenomenal level of the sensible world (9). Therefore with Plato we now have a fundamental teaching already professed by the mysteries of Orphism (10), the presence in man of an intelligible sphere, the realm of the soul. Likewise, we have a seemingly clear correlation between the immanent/transcendent and the ephemeral/permanent aspects of being. The intelligible or metasensible is characterized by the world of ideas or forms, and the material or sensible sphere is made up of copies, imitation of these forms. For Plato the only reality is the world of Being and all the rest, our phenomenal world, is only a likeness conforming to it.

1.1.a. Some Clarification of the word Idea

The Greek word eidos as well as the cognate word Idea derive from the verb ἰδεῖν, to see, and basically means the form or figure, the usual aspect that a thing presents to vision (10a). The Platonic idea is not what we mean by a concept, a thought or any mental image or psychological data. On the contrary, all of the latter are shadows of reality. For Plato the idea, or forms of Being, confronts our
thoughts constantly (10b). It is something which our mind turns to when it thinks. Without ideas our mind would surely not be. The idea is a metaphysical foundation or the essential ontological structure of all things. Without this intelligible entity the sensible world could not exist. Again, ideas are Being on which all becoming depends. To designate these ontological essences Plato used the term ousia (11).

Wedberg’s essay sums up into five classes the ideas most referred to in Plato’s writings:

a. Ethical and esthetical ideas, such as the idea of the good, the idea of the just, the idea of the beautiful;
b. Ideas for certain very general notions, such as the ideas of sameness and difference, being and non-being, likeness and unlikeness, one and many;
c. Mathematical ideas, such as the idea of the circle, the idea of the diameter, the idea of two, three, etc.
d. Ideas for natural kinds, such as the idea of man, the idea of ox, the idea of stone;
e. Ideas for kinds of artifacts, such as the idea of the table and that of couch (12).

The ontological status of ideas is that they are eternal (In Porphyry, cf. our p. 148, all of these forms stand for one of three possible types of universals). In the Phaedo (78b-c), for instance, an idea is necessarily simple. In fact its simplicity is taken for granted by Socrates in proving the immortality of the soul (13). The metaphysical position of ideas clearly comes out in Hippias Major (287c-d) as follows:

Socr. Then this, namely justice, is definitely something.
Hipp. Certainly.
Socr. Again, it is by wisdom that the wise are wise, and by goodness that all things are good?
Hipp. Undoubtedly
Socr. That is, by really existent things, one could scarcely say, by things which have no real existence?
Hipp. Quite so.
Socr. Then are not all beautiful things beautiful by beauty?
Hipp. Yes, by beauty.
Socr. Which has a real existence (δύναμις)?
Hipp. Yes, what else do you think?

Plato of course as the first prominent logical realist in the history of philosophy, answers the problem in the affirmative. X is beautiful, X is just, X is white and so on because respectively beauty, justice and whiteness exist, ontologically (14). Therefore, as we mentioned (15), with the disclosure of the metasensible sphere Plato relates the reason why there is a certain effect X1 instead of X2 unlike the physical mechanical order of the phenomenal world where probability is the rule.

1.2. The One and the Indefinite Dyad

Even though ideas are articulations of the wholeness of Being nonetheless they are set up in a complex and distinct hierarchical order (16). At the bottom end of the scale we have the geometrical-mathematical ideas and at the topmost the ethical and esthetic ones. By contrast, in the Republic (509b-511b), Plato speaks of an unconditional fundamental which is beyond the world of ideas and consequently beyond Being.
And this highest principle is the good which, like the sun responsible for becoming, generates Being and its intelligible world
Thus this uttermost good, originally undifferentiated, ἐν-ἐν, not admitting of any predication (the first hypothesis of Plato’s Parmenides, 137c), gives rise to its continuation or consequence, ἐν-ὄν, the one that is (the second hypothesis 142b, and the only one according to Proclus) which by its very existence is subject to any predication relevant to a being, τὸ ὄν (18).

In the so-called unwritten doctrines, attributed to Plato in Aristotle’s metaphysics, there is another original principle: the indefinite dyad coexistent with the one. These two underived metaphysical roots are directly responsible for Being and its world of ideas. That is, Being is the result of unity and multiplicity, the one and the indefinite dyad (19).

Besides, whether this second principle is on a par with the one or subordinate to it we cannot find out (20) (In Porphyry of course the latter is ancillary to the one). For the sake of our present discussion we shall assume that Plato, as we already mentioned (21), along with the Pythagoreans who were the originators of this twofold principle theory, granted arbitrarily a primary status to the one (21a), “Early Pythagoreanism was not a monistic philosophy. On the contrary, it started with a dualistic explanation of the world, péras opposite to ἀπειρόν, being at the top of the list of principles. If at a later stage Pythagoreans turned to monism, this development is rather due to the influence of Plato’s doctrine which apparently was understood in this sense” (22). In fact, from the dialogues, we can say that his whole metaphysics implies, or rather seems to lean strongly towards the axiological
priority of the one. As we read in the Republic (508e-509c), “Now, that which imparts truth to the known and the power of knowing to the knower is what I would have term the idea of the good and this you will deem to be the cause of science (ἐπιστήμη) and of truth (ἀλήθεια) insofar as the latter becomes the subject of knowledge (...) light and sight may be truly said to be like the sun, and yet not to be the sun, so in this other sphere science and truth may be deemed to be like the good, but not the good; the good has a place of honor yet higher (...) you would say, would you not, that the sun is not only the author of visibility in all visible things, but of generation and nourishment and growth, though he himself is not generation? certainly.

In like manner the good may be said to be not only the author of knowledge to all things known, but also of their Being and essence, and yet the good is not the essence, but far exceeds essence in dignity and power (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει ύπερέχοντος). And the next line (509c) is indeed revealing: “Glaucon said, with a ludicrous earnestness, by Apollo how amazing”. The word Apollo may be interpreted as a pun of alpha privativum α- and πολλά. That is, not many but one is the cause of all things by analogy to the sun (cf. Plotinus, Enn.V,5,6,26-30).

The last passage is particulary indicative of the fact that both the sensible and the intelligible world depend on the idea of the good for their respective being. Indeed, it is clear as well that the good is the ultimate cause for the unfolding universe of knowledge with its various degrees of being and non-being. The ἐν-ἀγαθόν consequently permeates and at the same time transcends all of Being.
Of course it must be clarified that the good we are talking about is not to be understood in a moral way. Plato’s agathon is of the highest metaphysical order imparting life both to the intelligible and to intelligence itself. It, the good, is the ultimate ground of Being as well as becoming. Let us follow how Plotinus explains the one-good, “Only intelligence can inform us of the things of its scope (…) and still purer, still less touched by multiplicity, are its priors, or rather its Prior. The one then is not intelligence but something higher still: Intelligence is still a being but that First is no being but precedes all Being. It cannot be a being, for a being has what we may call the shape of its reality but the one is without shape, even intellectual shape” (23).

And Plotinus carries on, “Thus Plato knows the order of generation: from the good intelligence; from intelligence the soul” (24). And further on he adds, “Generative of all, the one is none of these; neither thing nor quality nor quantity nor intellect nor soul; not in motion, not at rest, not in place, not in time (cf. Plato’s Parm. 138b5-6, 139b3, 141a5): It is the self defined, unique in form or, better, formless, existing before form was, or movement or rest, all of which are attachments of Being and make Being the manifold it is” (25). And still we get, ”By its omnipresence: there is nowhere where it is not; it occupies, therefore, all that is; at once it is manifold or rather, it is all things. If it were simply and solely everywhere, all would be this one thing alone: but it is, also, in no place, and this gives in the final result that while all exists by means of it, in virtue of its
omnipresence, all is distinct from it in virtue of its being nowhere” (26).

And finally, “...Awareness of this principle (ὁ σύνεσις ἐκείνου) comes neither by knowing nor by intellection (cf. Plato’s Parm. 142a2-3) that discovers the intellectual beings but by a presence overpassing all knowledge. In knowing, soul abandons its unity; it cannot remain simple. Knowing is taking account of things; that accounting is multiple; the mind thus plunging into number and multiplicity departs from unity. Our way then takes us beyond knowing; there may be no wandering from unity; knowing and knowable must all be left aside; every object of thought, even the highest, we must pass by, for all that is good is later than this and derives from this as from the sun all the light of the day. Not to be told, not to be written (cf. Plato, seventh letter 341c5). In our writing and telling we are but urging towards it. Out of discussion we call it to vision. To those desiring to see, we point the path. Our teaching is of the road and the travelling (cf. Plato, Rep.532c3); the seeing must be the very act of one that has made this choice” (27).

It is crystal-clear that almost everything Plotinus says of the one is simply a thorough and careful portrayal of what Plato expressed about the good in the Rep.VI, as well as in the first hypothesis of the Parmenides (28). But what was Plato’s understanding of the metaphysical boundlessness? Did he have such a notion or was it merely what the Greek philosophers (i.e. Pythagoreans) called the indefinite or unlimited?
The latter, by all means, has something of a relative implication. It is a passive, chaotic entity (or strictly speaking a non-entity) and as such it is a function of forms (εἴδη) as well as of greatness-and-smallness (29). For Plato, on the other hand, the eidos which is measure, truth and beauty mediates so as to produce from an unlimited chaos a well-defined cosmos which for the Greek mind was the expression of harmony and order (30).

Therefore boundlessness, or rather the unconditional-indeterminate is basically a negative concept. Aristotle reflecting faithfully the spirit of his times summarizes this notion as follows: “The infinite turns out to be the contrary of what it is said to be. It is not what has nothing outside it that is infinite, but what always has something outside it (...) A quantity is infinite if it is such that we can always take a part outside what has been already taken. On the other hand, what has nothing outside it is complete and whole” (31).

Consequently, matter (32) in itself is limitless and irrational. It is precisely in hyle that intelligence intervenes so as to impart order which is number and quality. For Plato all things may be broken down into four component classes: finite, infinite, the union of the latter two and lastly the cause of this union: Nous (Phil. 27a-28e passim). Thus the world is governed by mind and not by chance (Phil. 30a-e passim), and mind is beyond the three previous component classes (limit, unlimited, and a mixture of the two) making up any entity (33a). And whereas in the phenomenal sphere the world soul dictates its stringent laws (34), on the intelligible level
Moreover, Nous or mind correlated with the intelligible ideas plays the role of the demiurge in the Timaeus, and it is also foreshadowed both in the Republic VI and in the Parmenides (the second hypothesis, the one which is, proceeding from the first, absolute unity). Accordingly, to answer our question what was Plato’s understanding of the boundlessness, we may simply say that by positing the good (the one) beyond Being which is determined and fixed, Plato consequently acknowledged the existence of the infinite metaphysical unity. That is to say, while all things may be broken down into a mixed determinate-indeterminate, transcending these entities and at the same time remaining immanent (39) we have the one which is infinite
and absolute. Porphyry’s Sent. 31 gives us the following interpretation of the metaphysical infinite, “God is everywhere because He is nowhere. And this is also true of intellect and soul—for each of these is everywhere because each is nowhere. But God indeed is everywhere and nowhere, and nowhere with respect to all things which are posterior to Him. And He alone is such as He is, and such as he wills Himself to be. Intellect is in God, but is everywhere and nowhere with respect to the natures posterior to it. And soul is in God and intellect, and is everywhere and nowhere, with respect to the body. But body is in soul, and in intellect, and in God. And as all beings and non-beings are from and in God hence He is neither beings nor non-beings, nor subsists in them. For if, indeed, He was alone everywhere, He would be all things and in all, but since He is also nowhere, all things are produced through Him, and are contained in Him because He is everywhere. They are however different from Him because He is nowhere. Thus, likewise, intellect being everywhere and nowhere is the cause of souls, and of the natures posterior to soul. Yet intellect is not soul, nor the natures posterior to soul, nor subsists in them; because it is not only everywhere, but is also nowhere, with respect to the nature posterior to it. And soul is neither body, nor in body, but is the cause of body; because being everywhere, it is also nowhere with respect to body. And this progression of things in the universe extends as far as to that which is neither able to be at once everywhere, nor at once nowhere, but partially participates of each of these”(40).

The above theory of mixtures, or opposites (συστοιχία), mentioned in Plato’s Philebus was
derived from a Pythagorean tradition (41). The limit (πέρας) expresses perfection, the good and the real determinate while the unlimited (ἀπειρον) reflects imperfection and evil. From these opposites harmony is born (42).

1.3. Was Plato’s viewpoint Dualistic?

In addition to the underived twin metaphysical roots of the one and the indefinite dyad of the last section, Plato likewise acknowledged, as we pointed out (43), a clear distinction between the permanent, intelligible world and the changing sensible one that we live in. In the latter correlate he attempts to reconcile Parmenides’ world of Being (28B3,DK) with Heraclitus’ all things are in motion and nothing at rest (Plato, Crat.402a). Evidently, the foregoing seems to imply that Plato indeed upholds the two-level theory of Being, the intelligible and the sensible in their respective standings. But are these two ontological planes so distinct from one another as to allow an actual duality?

According to some interpreters, Aristotle included, Plato seems to have posited an unyielding dualism within Being itself and as a result there seems to be no connection between these two ontological realms. However, if we delve into the Platonic texts in view of what Plato himself affirms we can indeed understand how far his position is from postulating an overall dualism, or a demarcation line of metaphysical principles.

As regards again the pristine duality of the one and the indefinite dyad, Findlay tells us, “The dualism of ἀρχαί, of basic principles, which runs through Plato, and which is solemnly documented by Aristotle really reduces to a
monism. One of the \( \alpha \rho \chi \alpha i \) is really no \( \alpha \rho \chi \eta \) at all, but a mere shadow of the other. The one is really responsible for everything, and the indefinite dyad which opposes it is merely what it needs to be itself. As Parmenides (the ultimate source of Plato’s revised, critical Eleaticism) puts it (28B8,DK)--Men have made their custom to name two forms of which it is not right to name one, that is where they have gone astray—“ (45). Still another level of alleged dualism goes as follows. Plato posits intelligence as creator and ruling cause of the cosmos (Phil.30e); and by means of the intelligible and eternal pattern Nous (personified in the demiurge (Tim.28e-29c)) creates the physical orderly universe. Then, a third principle \( \chi \omega \rho \alpha \), space (46), is introduced, the receptacle of all becoming (\( \nu \pi \delta \delta \chi \eta \)). It (space) is eternal and admits of no destruction and provides a home for all created beings (Tim.52b). It seems that with this third principle a misunderstanding may have arisen, in that the eternity of matter (= space/\( \chi \omega \rho \alpha \)) preceding the demiurgic creation (Tim.52c-53b) is brought into play. Undeniably the consequences to be drawn from the above statement are critical to Plato’s role in, for example, the Christian dogmatic tenets; that is to say, God, or the one could be interpreted as coeternal with matter. In that case He would not be the only absolute fundamental: God and matter would be both without a beginning (47). Nonetheless, if we take a closer look at the text a solution might be within reach. Since creation did not take place in time (for time started with the cosmos, Tim.38b) or rather, considering that time came into being with the cosmos itself, we may infer that time did not exist before creation and consequently there was no chaotic eternal matter before the world
(Tim.52e-53b). Thus we can conclude that not even at this level is there actual dualism. Consequently, the Platonic account was only a myth, a metaphorical description and not a literal dualistic position (48) (Concerning Porphyry we may say that his reading of the above third principle indeed is in line with the Plotinian position as discussed in our chapter 4, section A. Likewise, cf. Sent. 2o, our p.25ff).

1.4. Knowledge through Dialectics (49)

What is dialectics? The term deriving from the Greek verb διαλέγεσθαι, means to converse with, to discuss a question with another. The word is initially used as an adjective, for instance διαλεκτική τέχνη, the art of dialectics. According to Aristotle this art was an invention of Zeno of Elea (Diog. Laertius IX,25). But what was verbal dispute for the Eleatics (What Platonists in fact call eristic, Soph.225, Phaedr.261c) becomes indeed a philosophical method by Plato. The connecting link was unquestionably the Socratic technique of question and answer in search of ethical definitions (cf. Phaedo 75d, 78d, and the term elenchus) which Plato specifically describes as dialectical (Crat. 390c).

With the transition from the Socratic search of definition to the Platonic assertion of ideas (as reflected in the Phaedo 100c-101d) the role of dialectics becomes central: After ten years devoted to mathematics the philosopher to be will devote the years between thirty and thirty-five to the study of dialectics (cf. Rep.531d-534e, 537b-539e).
However, again, what is dialectics by Plato? The question is indeed not easy since as usual Plato thought about something in various ways and from different angles. In the Phaedo and the Republic dialectics is regarded as a progressive ascent by way of a string of hypotheses (cf. Phaedo 100b) until a final position is reached (cf. Phaedo 101d, Rep.511e) representing an unconditional position.

In the Republic (510b,511b) the so-called “unhypothesized principle” (τὸ ἀνυπόθετον) is identified with the good in itself (αὐτὸ τὸ ἄγαθὸν, Rep.532a-b) that subsumes within itself all the previous hypotheses ascending to it (Rep. 533c-534d passim).

Now, if this type of dialectic is only a series of specific instances, leading us to a universal notion (Rep. 537c), that which emerges from the Phaedrus, in due contrast, consists of two different moments: still σύναγωγή, and (in addition) διαίρεσις, a division of ideas giving us thus the descending phase of dialectic (50).

Consequently, it is clear that any dialectical enquiry has to be directed towards the really real (ὤντως ὁν) in the Platonic scheme of things and towards the absolute totality which is unconditional, “And it is also, said I, the chief test of the dialectic nature and its opposite. For he who can view things in their connection is a dialectician; he who cannot, is not” (Phaedr.537c). This of course implies that the philosopher is basically interested in the contemplation (Θεωρία) of the non-ephemeral, of that which is universally valid. Thus the nature of philosophy is the contemplation of
the whole network of ideas (συμπλοχή ειδών). And theoria, must necessarily change both the individual and the group in which this process takes place because it makes for new possibilities of being.

But contemplation is not only a mere abstract expression. Indeed, it can become catharsis. Therefore it has ethical implications, “…My opinion is that in the world of knowledge the idea of good appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort; and, when seen, is also inferred to be universal author of all things beautiful and right, parent of light and of the lord of light in the visible world, and the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectual; and that this is the power upon which he who would act rationally either in public or private life must have his eye fixed” (Rep.517c). On that account, through dialectics we experience a cathartic moment which brings about a conversion in our being (μετάνοια).

1.5. On the Nature of the Soul

The acknowledgement by Plato of the metasensible world as a result of the ‘second voyage’ he undertook gives new meaning to the Orphic-Pythagorean themes relating to the soul dealt with in our first chapter. The soul is the intelligible dimension of man. Guthrie referring to Dodds’ “Plato and the Irrational”, says the following, “Plato admitted two levels of truth, which may roughly be called truths of religion and truths of reason. There will always be some truths, and those the highest, which cannot be probed dialectically but must be conveyed in the form of myth, the details of which can claim only probability, not precise accuracy. At the same time he regarded it as
the philosopher’s duty to push back the frontiers of reason and win for it all possible ground from the domain of mythical imagery—— As an example, we may say that immortality was for Plato a matter of rational proof, whereas what befell the immortal part of us after death could only be hinted at in a ἱερὸς λόγος (51).

1.5.a. Truth/Knowledge connatural to Soul

If we were to stick to sense data only, our knowledge of the world would be both incomplete and flawed. Plato claims that if we have the idea of truth, for instance, it cannot derive from the changeable world surrounding us but rather from that which is constant as well as permanent. This enduring level of course is the dimension of Being where the soul has contemplated such ideas as truth, beauty and justice. Consequently, these ideas must be present in the soul itself. From our everyday experience, for example, we notice that no sensible object is perfectly equal to another of its kind, and that there is something of a hiatus between this sense data and the ideational paradigms they refer to. The latter seem to be more exact. Hence, where does this incongruence stem from, this plus of the notional reference with regard to the experiential facts and figures? To be sure, the benchmark against which the outside world is taken into account resides in our mind.

A striking example is the perfection of the mathematical sciences whose exactness lies not in the sensible objects but in the soul. The ideal accuracy of mathematical formulas serves as a pattern and criteria of flawlessness which empirical objects constantly endeavor to
approximate. It is in fact thanks to the regulative principle of these perfect yardsticks that our sciences renew and enhance themselves continually.

Likewise, Plato puts forth arguments concerning the various ethical and esthetic notions (such as beautiful, just, good etc.) which seem to be in us and we constantly make use of in our judgements. He believes that in applying these norms we necessarily draw from the recollection, or anamnesis of previous states of mind surely more attuned to perfection than the current receptive condition of our consciousness.

"It makes no difference, said Socrates. So long as the sight of one thing suggests another to you, it must be a cause of recollection, whether the two things are alike or not. Quite so. Well, now, he said (i.e. Socrates), what do we find in the case of the equal sticks and other things of which we were speaking just now? Do they seem to us to be equal in the sense of absolute equality, or do they fall short of it in so far as they only approximate to equality? or don't they fall short at all? They do, said Simmias, a long way (…) Then we must have had some previous knowledge of equality before the time when we first saw equal things and realized that they were striving after equality, but fell short of it. That is so" (52).

Thus if the soul has already gained insight into (ontological) truth, our task must be to bring this awareness out on a conscious level by means of recollection: becoming therefore catharsis. It is our belief that whereas in Greek tragedy (in its heyday of fifth century BC) this cathartic process because of
individual hybris (cf. Aeschylus’ Agamemnon, Sophocles’ Oedipus Rex and Euripides’ Electra, among others) came about by blood and suffering, with the advent of Platonic philosophy (together with the ripple effects of the sociocultural changes taking place during and after the Peloponnesian war) this practice of self-awareness (ἀσκησις) could take place no longer by way of physical violence alone but also (for those capable of reaching such a state of mind) through ἐπιμέλεια, taking care of one’s own soul (Laws 727a), which of course is due to an anamnesis of one’s intelligible origins triggering thus a contrition and consequently a genuine reconciliation, or reappropriation, of one’s own real nature, οἰκειωσίς (cf. Porphyry’s de Abst. ibid I,29).

This is virtue, “In fact, it is wisdom that makes possible courage and self-control and integrity or, in a word, true goodness, and the presence or absence of pleasures and fears and other such feelings makes no difference at all, whereas a system of morality which is based on relative emotional values is a mere illusion, a thoroughly vulgar conception which has nothing sound in it and nothing true. The true moral ideal, whether self-control or integrity or courage is really a kind of purgation from all these emotions, and wisdom itself is a sort of purification” (53).

Therefore, so far we have covered the due metaphysical background to Plato’s doctrine of the soul. Beginning with the theory of ideas, we then expounded on our understanding of the one and the indefinite dyad. At that point, we descended gradually by discussing Plato’s views on Nous, which we shall comment on still in more detail. Lastly, we touched upon the human
soul capable of having knowledge of itself through recollection of its roots and thus harmonizing itself with the intelligible world. In the next section we shall deal with Plato’s ascetic ideal as awakening, implying a return to our true abode.

1.5.a.1. Knowledge as Catharsis

Plato considers knowledge as correlative to Being for the simple reason that we can have true cognition of X, on condition that it really exists. True episteme is knowledge of reality. But between absolute knowledge (Being) and ignorance there is a sort of grey area belonging neither to being nor to non-being. This of course is the world of opinion, doxa (54). From the above we can discern two forms of learning: doxa and episteme. The former is connected with the world of sense data and the latter with the intelligible dimension. Nonetheless doxa maintains a certain cognitive level of perception but does not have in itself the validity of episteme. “The difference, Socrates, is only that he who has knowledge will always be right, but he who has right opinion will sometimes be right and sometimes not” (Meno 97c).

But Plato goes further on, showing the possible aspects of learning and making the various types of cognitive perception really stand out. In this way (cf. Rep.511d-e) he breaks down the concept of opinion into simple conjecture and belief, and that of knowledge (or episteme) into understanding and reason. These four faculties of the soul (conjecture/ἐικασία, belief/πίστις, understanding/διάνοια, and reason/νόησις) correspond to various levels of truth. Conjecture and belief refer to the sensible world, respectively: sense
perception of shadows and sensible objects as copies of the idea whereas understanding and reason can deal with the intelligible sphere: The first is knowledge of mathematics and geometry and the second, reason, is the immediate grasping of the ideal form and the absolute principle, the good.

“At any rate, we are satisfied, as before, to have four divisions; two for the intellect and two for the opinion, and to call the first division science, the second understanding, the third belief and the fourth perception of shadows; opinion being concerned with becoming, and intellect with Being” (Rep.534a).

As regards understanding which deals with mathematical hypotheses Plato tells us the following, “And as to the mathematical sciences which, as we were saying, have some apprehension of true being, but never can they behold the waking reality so long as they leave the hypotheses which they use unexamined, and are unable to give an account of them. For when a man knows not his own first principle and when the conclusion and intermediate steps are also constructed out of he knows not what, how can he imagine that such a fabric of convention can ever become science? Impossible he said” (Rep.533b-c9).

These various levels of knowledge with their respective degrees of objective reality were formulated in the myth of the cave and its metaphor of the dividing line (55). In it Plato delineates his metaphysical position covering the various stages of human consciousness. The Athenian philosopher, again, draws on the expediency of a myth so that released from the analytical frame of mind we may have more leeway to deliberate on certain epistemological realities mirroring somewhat
our human condition. That is to say, to conclude, in the above mentioned allegory the shadows represent the sensible appearances of things while the statues the sensible things themselves. The wall is the dividing line, the discrimin, between sensible and metasensible (56) levels of Being. In relating the symbolism of the cave to the four faculties of the soul we can say that the shadows correspond to the epistemological moment of conjectures, and the vision of the statues to belief. And the transition from the perception of the statues to the objects themselves which the prisoner sees outside the cave in broad daylight and the subsequent vision of the sun symbolize the various dialectical achievements through understanding and reason which disclose the ecstatic experience of the one (cf. Porphyry, Sent. 44 in which the levels of knowledge/being, and the fundamental things of time/eternity are discussed).

1.5.a.2. The Philosopher Daemon

On Aphrodite’s birthday (56a) there was a feast of the gods at which Poros (Plenty) was one of the guests. At the end of the party Penia (Poverty) approached the premises with the intention of panhandling. Seeing Poros, who had drunk heavily, sound asleep in the garden she decided to lie down at his side and thus conceived Love (Eros, ἔρως), the daemon (δαίμων). Now it is thanks to this genealogy that love seems to have a double nature. He is no god, nor a man. Neither mortal nor immortal. He is rather one of those beings halfway between divine and human, wisdom and ignorance. Eros is basically a philosopher (57). Wisdom belongs only to god, and ignorance to him who is completely averse to wisdom. On the other
hand, philosophy is characteristic of those who are neither wise nor ignorant. Indeed, love is the mediating force between the sensible and the metasensible world.

“What then is Love? I asked; is he mortal? No. What then? (...) He is neither mortal nor immortal, but a mean between the two (τὸ μεταξῦ). What is he, Diotima? He is a great spirit (δαίμων), and like all spirits he is intermediate between the divine and the mortal. And what, I said, is his power? He interprets, she replied, between gods and men, conveying and taking across to the gods the prayers and sacrifices of men, and to men the commands and replies of the gods (...) For God mingles not with man; but through Love all the intercourse and converse of god with man, whether awake or asleep, is carried on (...) No god is a philosopher or seeker after wisdom, for he is wise already; nor does any man who is wise seek after wisdom. For herein is the evil of ignorance, that he who is neither good nor wise is nevertheless satisfied with himself” (58).

That which men call love is a mere shadow. True love on the other hand is desire of the beautiful, of the good (Symp.206a), of immortality and of the absolute (59). Love has many paths leading to various degrees of the good. Of course, in Plato Eros is an additional means through which one may approach the ontological forms (59a). The lover begins with the immediate aesthetic impression then goes through all the discursive stages until the supreme goal, the unconditional idea is attained. Eros is the energy which elevates the soul to the absolute vision. “The nature of Eros has undergone the preliminary transformation required in order to talk about
love for, and desire for ἀυτὸ τὸ καλὸν (beauty itself), the absolute beauty in which all other beautiful things participate (…) At the end of its gradual ascent through dim and fragmentary intimations the soul is united with the perfect archetypal beauty in a blaze of light wherein it beholds the things that are (to borrow the language of the Phaedrus 249e)” (60).

Therefore, if this daemon culminates in the identity with the supreme beautiful, this same force (Eros), due to its discursive pattern, can surely be latched onto at a lower level by those submitting themselves to a philosophic paideía.

Consequently, by following the path indicated by the dialectical chain of reasoning we can surely grasp the ontological (τὰ ἐρωτικὰ, Symp.210e) structure revealing the absolute idea. “The energy which carries the soul in this highest flight is the same that is manifested at lower levels in the instinct that perpetuates the race and in every form of worldly ambition. It is the energy of life itself, the moving force of the soul; and the soul was defined by Plato precisely as the one thing that has the power of self-motion” (60a). It is not by chance that in approaching the final revelation of the greater mysteries of love, Diotima (Symp.210-211) speaks the language of the sacred marriage borrowed from the Eleusinian Mysteries. The lover is here possessed by the madness of divine inspiration, an insanity which merges into memory of archetypal realities, into insight and prophetic vision, speaking the language of poetry and myth (61).

A clarification of the term Eros is here overdue. The name ἔρως has been mistakenly limited in common talk to what is really only
one manifestation of this universal desire. Just as the word ἀνάμμελις (making) in fact signifies creation of any kind, but has been misappropriated to one species—poetry, metrical composition—so the name Eros is misappropriated to one species of passions, but really means any desire for good things and happiness (62). Hence in the Symposium there is an upward movement, if you will, both epistemological and ontological, representing the respective phases of the initiation into the mysteries of love. “The respective passages in which Socrates describes the ascent of the loving, contemplative mind to the vision of Beauty and goodness itself, are rightly thought to enshrine everything that is central in the teaching of Plato” (63) (cf. Porphyry Sent. 37, our pp. 112 where Πενία and Πόρος, Symp.203b, represent opposite tendencies of the soul, as well as Sent. 40, p.128, in which we have the assimilation to the first principle).

Therefore, Eros, the philosopher daemon, is the longing for the metasensible (which to the Neoplatonists becomes nostalgia for faraway ‘Ithaca’, pain for wanting to return home). Love for the intelligible abode bestows wings to the fallen souls enslaved in the sensible dimension (Phaedr. 251a-c) (64).

To conclude this section, we would like to show how Plotinus in like manner proposes the ascent of eros (Enn.V9,2). “What is this other place and how is it accessible? It is to be reached by those who, born with the nature of the lover, are also authentically philosophic by inherent temper (65); In pain of love towards beauty but not held by material loveliness,
taking refuge from that in things whose beauty is of the soul, (such as virtue, knowledge, institutions, law and custom) and thence, rising still a step (66), reach to the source of this loveliness of the soul, thence to whatever be above that again, until the uttermost is reached, the first, the principle whose beauty is self-springing: this attained, there is an end to the pain unassuageable before (67). But how is the ascent to be begun? Whence comes the power? In what thought is this love to find its guide? (68) The guiding thought is this, that the beauty perceived on material things is borrowed. The pattern giving beauty to the corporeal rests upon it as idea to its matter and the substrate may change and from being pleasant become distasteful, a sign, in all reason, that the beauty comes by participation. Now, what is this that gives grace to the corporeal? Two causes in their degrees: the participation in beauty and the power of soul, the maker, which has imprinted that form. We ask then, is soul, of itself, a thing of beauty? We find it is not since differences are manifest, one soul wise and lovely, another foolish and ugly. Soul-beauty is constituted by wisdom. The question thus becomes, what principle is the giver of wisdom to the soul? And the only answer is intelligence, the veritably intellectual, wise without intermission and therefore beautiful of itself (69). But does even this suffice for our first? No. We must look still inward beyond the intellectual (70), which from our point of approach, stands before the supreme beginning, in whose forecourt, as it were, it announces in its own being the entire content of the good (71), that prior of all locked in unity, of
which this is the expression already touched by multiplicity” (72).

Concerning the two paths indicated by the above passage: wisdom (φρόνεσις) and love (ἔρως), some explanation is called for. Wisdom and love are indeed means available to us so that the duality of our human condition may be overcome. (In the latter path we have the correlate lover/loved and in the former knower/known). Plato’s philosophic eros, as we said, is a mediator between good and evil, but in itself it is neither one (οὔτε ἄγαθὸν οὔτε κακόν). The daemon of the Symposium is designated by its own peculiarity: The needy circumstances which prompt it (ἐπιθυμία, 202d2) to overcome its intermediate nature (τὸ μεταξὺ). Thus, there is an awakening to a new state of being which essentially brings about an assimilation into the Godhead (ὁμοίωσις τῷ θεῷ) (73). Indeed, the duality of Eros can be overcome not only by searching for the metaphoric ‘better-half’ of us gone missing since birth but also by desiring, possibly through the other, that which is absolutely higher, the good (74): Since the soul has lived already in the intelligible realm, it constantly endeavors to retrieve the completeness it once had. And through recollection of that pristine condition Eros gets its wings and conquers its polarity (75). If we compare the ascent through dialectics (myth of the cave) with that by means of Love (the myth of Eros) we see that both uplift us towards the absolute. That is to say, the path of knowledge and that of love lead to the same goal, the supreme unconditional.

In the Symposium (210a) Plato talks about the initiation into the mysteries of love which
consists in raising the soul to epopteia (ἐποπτεία), the highest initiation. Thanks to Eros the soul’s return home is hastened. And as we have already discussed, just as knowledge is anamnesis of a metasensible reality, so is love a condition of recollection triggered by the elevation of the soul. Again, knowledge is pure noetic intellection similar to Eros’ final goal (76). “For if this is what you desire, I am ready to melt you into one and let you grow together, so that being two you shall become one (...) There is not a man of them who when he heard the proposal would deny or would not acknowledge that this meeting and melting into one another, this becoming one instead of two, was the very expression of his ancient need. And the reason is that human nature was originally one and we were a whole, and the desire and pursuit of the whole is called love. There was a time, I say, when we were one but now because of the wickedness of mankind God has dispersed us” (77). Here of course Plato is narrating the myth of the Androgynous, or Hermaphrodite. A long time ago we were a whole, but then we ‘split up’ and the tireless search for the soul mate, the primal unity, began to take place.

1.5.b. Man as Soul

Soc. Then a man is not the same as his own body?
Al. That is the inference.
Soc. What is he then?
Al. I cannot say.
Soc. Nay, you can say that he is the user of the body.
Al. yes.
Soc. And the user of the body is the soul?
Al. yes, the soul.
Soc. And the soul rules?
Al. yes
Soc. Let me make an assertion which will, I think, be universally admitted.
Al. What is it?
Soc. That man is one of three things.
Al. What are they?
Soc. Soul, body, or both together forming a whole.
Al. certainly.
Soc. But did we not say that this actual ruling principle of the body is man?
Al. yes we did.
Soc. And does the body rule over itself?
Al. certainly not.
Soc. It is subject, as we were saying?
Al. yes.
Soc. Then that is not the principle which we are seeking?
Al. It would seem not.
Soc. But may we say that the union of the two rules over the body, and consequently that this is man?
Al. very likely.
Soc. The most unlikely of all things; for if one of the members is subject, the two united cannot possibly rule.
Al. true.
Soc. But since neither the body, nor the union of the two, is man, either man has no real existence, or the soul is man?
Al. Just so.
Soc. Is anything more required to prove that the soul is man?
Al. certainly not; the proof is, I think quite sufficient (78).

In late antiquity this dialogue was attributed to Plato. But with the advance of philological studies its authenticity has been called into question. Nonetheless, to all intents and
purposes, we think we can consider it indeed Platonic (79).

1.5.b.1. The Origin and Essence of Psyche

While beginning this section I cannot help thinking about something I read on Plato: That the same thoughts turn up again and again, articulated in different ways, in different context and with varying emphasis (80). We, to be sure, writing about his philosophy cannot do otherwise. In the main this is true of any doctrine to be communicated. To comprehend a philosophical concept, and especially Plato, we must cleanse our hearts and minds beforehand. Perhaps this is why the Athenian thinker presents basically the same tidings but at various dialectical levels and from different angles. The Platonic method, in my opinion, is twofold: cathartic and educational. If we follow him through we see that these two variables, catharsis and education, change all the time. For instance, at the beginning of our encounter with his thoughts we may need more intellectual cleansing than enlightenment. But as the relationship of teacher and student evolves and purification has run its course, the pedagogic side then becomes more fully absorbed and effective. Undoubtedly, Plato’s main message is that man has a soul and it is immortal. His debt to the Orphic-Pythagorean spiritual view (already discussed in chapter one) is clearly visible in such early dialogues as Charmides and Meno. His basic position is the following: the soul is imperishable and subject to cyclic rebirths (metempsychosis) into a body which also happens to be the root of its misfortunes, “You ought not to attempt to cure the eyes without the head, or the head without the body, so neither ought you to
attempt to cure the body without the soul. And this, he said, is the reason why the cure of many diseases is unknown to the physicians of Hellas, because they disregard the whole which ought to be studied also; for the part can never be well unless the whole is well. For all good and evil, whether in the body or in human nature originates, as he declared, in the soul (…) And therefore if the head and body are to be well you must begin by curing the soul” (Charm.156e-157a) (v. note 80a).

And in another dialogue (Meno, 81b) we get as follows, “Soc.- some of them were priests and priestesses, who had studied how they might be able to give a reason of their profession: There have been poets also who spoke of these things by inspiration, like Pindar, and many others who were inspired. And they say (…) the soul of man is immortal, and at one time has an end which is termed dying, and at another time is born again, but is never destroyed”.

In this context the goal of existence becomes purification. Furthermore, the Pythagorean method of identifying the cleansing of the soul with philosophy (81) is picked up by Plato and can be seen in such works as Phaedo (The true philosopher is always occupied with dying, 67a-e passim) and the Sophist (226d-227a-d) where the Eleatic stranger calls purification the process by which one throws away the worse and preserves the better, or in other words: simply any taking away of evil from the soul.

Therefore, at this early stage of the Platonic dialogues the main theme is catharsis by way of preparation for death and hence the return of the soul to its true roots. Besides, Plato (unlike Pythagoras (82) who strictly believed in past incarnations) turned into episteme the
previous Orphic-Pythagorean worldview which was quite remote from the ontological awareness of Being and its sphere of ideas. In other words, from our preceding observation we can infer that the Pythagorean remembrance of previous existences indeed becomes anamnesis of ideal forms ($τὰ ἑιδὴ$) through the dialectical process which is Platonic episteme.

Ideas through ‘scientific method’ first make their appearance in Meno (81c-86c passim), “The soul, then, as being immortal and having been born again many times, and having seen all things that exist, has knowledge of them all (...) there is no teaching but only recollection (...) And if the truth of all things always existed in the soul, then the soul is immortal”. And likewise in the Phaedo (75b-76), natural objects always fall short of the ideal standards. These are paradigms existing in the mind prior to their respective sensible instantiation. But at the same time, it is surely thanks to the latter that we come up to the idea. Indeed, physical nature as image of the real provokes the soul, causing it to remember what it already knows (Phaedr.247c-e). Again, it is on account of the space-time extension of the ontological forms that the soul becomes aware of its identity which after all is the true knowledge it has of itself: Know thyself, ἀγαπᾷ σαυτὸν.

Soul is therefore the faculty, the inherent capability, by which we know the ideas because we have already seen them with the mind (a splendid example of this has crossed into the ordinary Greek language: the word ὠἶδα, which has a common root with ἐἰδος, means literally I have seen, perfect tense, but it is used for the present tense of the word to know: I have seen= I know). Thus soul and idea are an
epistemological correlate. Soul is similar to the idea: both are immortal, immaterial and invisible (83).

So far in our discussion we have shed some light on the following points:

a) The main goal of a man who considers himself a philosopher is to look after the welfare of his soul through purification.

b) The dominance of soul over body.

c) The soul’s immortality and its identity with the intellect (84).

Now, what does the soul consist of, and in what way is it immortal? In the Rep. IV, Plato gives us the full crystal-clear partition of the soul into: rational (λογιστικόν), high-spirited (θυμοειδὲς), and appetitive (ἐπιθυμητικόν). But after this division we have the subsequent query, “Whether these principles are three or one, whether, that is to say, we learn with one part of our nature, are angry with another and with a third part desire the satisfaction of our natural appetites; or whether the whole soul comes into play in each sort of action” (85). But indeed it seems difficult for a composite soul (σύνθετον), such as we have seen, to be eternal (86). Nonetheless, Plato is of the opinion that psyche in its truest nature is immortal and simple and it only seems composite because of its association with the body.

“But when returning into herself she reflects, then she passes into the other world, the region of purity and eternity and immortality and unchangeableness” (87). Thus from the Phaedo to the Republic there seems to be a change of attitude regarding the nature of the soul. Whereas in the Phaedo only reason corresponds to the true nature of psyche and the other two parts are a result of its
association with the body, in the Republic Plato acknowledges the fact that passions and appetites belong as well to the soul. Furthermore, an explicit monitoring of these is highlighted within the concept of unitive soul (88), obviously on the part of reason.

The tripartition appears again in Rep.IX (580d-581a), in Phaedrus (246a-b, 253c-255b, as a myth) and in Timaeus (69d-72d) where each part is given its proper bodily seat. The head is the place of the divine in us, as Plato calls it (Tim. 44d) contrasting with the mortal elements placed in the chest (Tim. 69e). God himself has given us the divine part of our soul (δαιμων, Tim. 90a) as a proof of our affinity with heaven (cf. note no.88a).

The creator, δημιουργός, set in order the four elements and out of them he created the universe which is a single animal encompassing in itself all other animals, mortal and immortal, “Now of the divine, he himself was the creator, but the creation of the mortal he committed to his offspring. And they imitating him, received from him the immortal principle of the soul; and around this they proceeded to fashion a mortal body and made it to be the vehicle (τὸ ὀψιμα) of the soul, and constructed within the body a soul of another nature which was mortal, subject to terrible and irresistible affections——first of all, pleasure, the greatest incitement to evil; and pain, which deters from good; also rashness and fear, two foolish counsellors, anger hard to be appeased, and hope easily led astray;——These they mingled with irrational sense and with all-daring love according to necessary laws, and so framed man” (89).
As we previously stated, the rational part of the soul, the divine in us, is responsible for controlling the other two components: all three parts in a unitary soul. The sovereign part, reason, was granted a vision, before birth, of the eternal ideas. In the heaven above the heavens (ὑπερουράνιος), “There abides the very being with which true knowledge is concerned; the colorless, formless, intangible essence, visible only to the mind, the pilot of the soul. The divine intelligence being nurtured upon mind and pure knowledge, and the intelligence of every soul which is capable of receiving the food proper to it, rejoices at beholding reality” (90).

At this point of our argument the soul finds itself still subject to periodic rebirths so that purification may come about. “And there is a law of destiny, that the soul which attains any vision of truth in company with a god is preserved from harm until the next period, and if attaining always is always unharmed. But when she is unable to follow, and fails to behold the truth (...) and her wings fall from her and she drops to the ground, then the law ordains that this soul shall at her first birth pass, not into any other animal, but only into man; and the soul which has seen most of truth shall come to the birth as a philosopher, or artist or some musical and loving creature” (91).

We come to the conclusion of this section by asserting that for Plato the soul indeed is a tripartite unit (rational, passional and appetitive), and the argument goes as follows. The soul of the gods, in Phaedrus for instance, are compared (together with the human soul) to a charioteer and two horses. But while the
godly soul harbouring the ‘driver and the horses’ is of one and the same nature, because it has no evil tendencies, the human one, on the other hand, having still to expiate, is not in harmony with itself: it has a plurality of essences within its inner unity (Phaedr. 246a). But once the purification has run its course the human soul will be similar to the divine: of one and the same nature. Of course, the soul is self-moved (αὐτοκίνητον) as well as the source and principle of motion to all other things: “The beginning is unbegotten, for that which is begotten has a beginning” (92). Thus, as we have seen, self-motion is indeed the essence (οὐσία) and definition of psyche (Phaedr. 245e3–5).

1.5.b.2. Dualism in Man?

Just as Plato’s position is basically monistic (93), as far as the first principles are concerned, so (we maintain) is his point of view regarding man’s body and soul status (Tim. 34c5). As we mentioned, Plato’s stance on the structure of the soul was gradually modified (94). That is to say, whereas in the Phaedo he held it to be rational but at the same time accompanied by passional and appetitive aspects (because of its association with the body), in the Phaedrus in contrast we are presented with a tripartite psyche shared by gods and man and of respectively simple and mixed nature. Again, in the Phaedo (67e) there is almost a diametrical opposition between body and soul; nonetheless a clear bias does emerge that the soul is of higher rank than the body. This theme assuredly accompanies such dialogues as Crito and the Apology,”You my friend (...) are
you not ashamed of heaping up the greatest amount of money and honour and reputation, and caring so little about wisdom and truth and the improvement of soul, which you never regard or heed at all?” (Apol.29d-e). But although the soul is superior to the body, nevertheless, life does not deserve to be honoured and lived if the body finds itself in a hopelessly critical condition:

“Soc.-Well is life worth living with a body which is worn out and ruined in health? Crito- certainly not” (95).

It seems obvious that the maxim—mens sana in corpore sano—would have been adopted by Plato because to those wanting to be philosophers he advocated the training of the body and mind (Rep.535c-d), “Our present mistake, said I, and the disesteem that has in consequence fallen upon philosophy are, as I said before, caused by the unfitness of her associates and wooers. They should not have been bastards but true scions. What do you mean? he said. In the first place, I said, the aspirant to philosophy must not limp in his industry, in the one half of him loving, in the other shunning, toil. This happens when anyone is a lover of gymnastic and hunting and all the labor of the body, yet is not fond of learning or of listening or inquiring, but in all such matters hates work. And he too is lame whose industry is one-sided”.

In the Timaeus (87e-88b) the same subject matter is further dealt with and vigorously emphasized, “Everything that is good is fair and the fair is not without proportion (...) We should conceive (περὶ τοῦ συναμφοτέρου) of the double nature which we call the living being;
and when in this compound there is an impassioned soul more powerful than the body, the soul, I say, convulses and fills with disorders the whole inner nature of man (…). And, once more, when a body large and too strong for the soul is united to a small and weak intelligence (…) the motions of the stronger, getting the better and increasing their own power, but making the soul dull and stupid, and forgetful, engender ignorance which is the greatest of diseases”.

Consequently, due attention must be given to both body and soul since man (συναμφότερον) as a whole is involved in these two spheres of being.

In the Laws (716c-718a passim) Plato formulates a sequence of values which emerge as follows: The highest and foremost value is to honor God, the measure of all things. And those who are like him conform to his measure. These are God’s friends and he accepts their offerings. Plato goes on by summarizing the way we should be worshipping respectively the gods, lower gods, daemons, heroes and ancestral gods. Next in order is to honor one’s own parents, living and dead.

Thereupon, the lawgiver moves on to man’s own individual radius of caring (Laws,727a-728e passim). The most cherished thing we have is our own soul: After the gods and our own parents we have to honor our soul above all other things, but next to it we also have to honor our body (cf. Porphyry, To Marcella, nos. 8,9,16,17,) (96). So for Plato the body was not something evil; it has to be respected but subordinate to the soul whose sovereign element is reason (Tim.90a). Likewise, in the Republic, reason (λογιστικών) plays the leading role in the
tripartite soul. Indeed, this part is the
daimon dwelling in us, the divine in us
(Tim.90c). The view of man in the Timaeus does
not differ from that held in the Republic where
the soul’s particular activity is taking care
of, ruling and deliberating.

The principle of subordination is essential
both in the construction of the tripartite soul
and in the order of the state resulting
consequently in the definition of justice
(Rep.IV) (97). Of course the severe attitude
of the philosopher, in Phaedo, who exercises in
preparing for death is at this stage rarely to
be found, or rather it gets somewhat narrowed
down, by the time we approach for instance
Timaeus. The belief held in this dialogue
(representing a more mature point of view) is an
attuned development of soul and body through an
equal training of both. So Plato’s final
position, in our opinion, is that man is a
συναμφότερον, he is both body and soul. But in
this composite entity soma must be subordinate
to psyche so as to have a harmonious whole
(Tim. 90c5-d6).

Thus we can safely argue assuredly that Plato
is a monist as regards both the first principle
(indefinite dyad secondary to the one), as we
stated before, and man’s body/soul distinction
where in fact reason must rule over passion and
appetite (and thereby holding sway, or
enveloping the physical entity). Indeed, we
intentionally use the word ‘enveloping’ because
it calls to mind the way the world soul, as we
shall see, enfolds the cosmos.

But in this setting where does evil come from?
That evil which assails us constantly and which
is more widespread than good? This was a plaguing question to Plato’s peace of mind: “For few are the goods of human life, and many are the evils, and the good is to be attributed to God alone; of the evils the causes are to be sought elsewhere, and not in Him” (Rep.379c). And in the Laws (906a-b) Plato is still of the same opinion, “For as we acknowledge the world to be full of many goods, there is, as we affirm, an immortal conflict going on among us, which requires marvellous watchfulness; and in that conflict the gods and demigods are our allies, and we are their property. Injustice and insolence and folly are the destruction of us, and justice and temperance and wisdom are our salvation (...) But upon the earth we know that there dwell souls possessing an unjust spirit (λημεω), who may be compared to brute animals, which fawn upon their keepers”.

So, we repeat, where does evil come from? The answer may be drawn from Plato himself. To the extent that the soul is not ruled by reason we have in fact a basic cause of evil in the world. The soul being the originator of all motion in the world is the agent of good and evil: It (psyche) becomes good or bad only as a result of its knowledge (catharsis) or ignorance (98). In all things coming into the world there are two elements coexisting: necessity and mind (ἀνάγκη καὶ νοῦς) (99).

In the Timaeus necessity is subordinate to reason: the latter overrules it by means of persuasion (πειθώ) towards what is best. But from this dialogue it clearly comes out that persuasion is not all powerful. In the main however things happen according to the rule of reason. “Thus far in what we have been saying, with small exception, the works of intelligence
have been set forth" (Tim.48a). Nevertheless in the universe there are elements which act against reason but these are of secondary importance. The primary force is truly rational and it directs necessity. To be sure, Plato was not a pessimist. He believed in divine providence (Tim.44c7-d1) which is the mainspring of beauty and order in the world, taking care also of the individual person. “The phenomenal world is a spatial reflection, of the ideas, which alone are perfectly real entities (...) All phenomena must fall short of the reality of the ideas (...) So all the phenomenal world is always involved in what may be called ‘negative evil’ since it is a derogation of reality” (100).

1.5.c. The World Soul

Why did the demiurge create the cosmos instead of preferring nothingness? (This being the metaphysical question par excellence: Ratio est in natura, cur aliquid potius existat quam nihil?)---Plato tells us that the demiurge, the creator of the world soul, the divine part of the human soul and the lower gods, fashioned the universe after the eternal pattern of the ideas. Since intelligence always finds itself in the company of necessity, as we mentioned, the created cosmos turns out to be as good as it possibly can. Consequently, the demiurge is not a completely dominant figure because the forces of necessity have to be constantly won over by persuasion (Tim.47e-48a).

The Platonic demiurge comes into play because of the need of an intelligent efficient cause which we are already familiar with in the Philebus (27b), the so-called fourth principle,
bringing about the mixture of the finite with the infinite. The demiurge to be sure is not necessary to explain the world of ideas, but it becomes absolutely essential to interpret our sensible world. In short, Plato accounts for creation as follows. There is an eternal archetype of ideas, there is a copy of it (our universe) and the craftsman is the demiurge. All of this he relates to us after invoking the aid of the gods and goddesses and praying that the words about to be spoken would be acceptable to them (Tim.27c).

But for what purpose did the demiurge want to bring the cosmos into being? “Let me tell you then why the creator made this world of generation. He was good, and the good can never have any jealousy of anything. And being free from jealousy (ἀφθονος), he desired that all things should be as like himself as they could be. This is in the truest sense the origin of creation and of the world” (Tim.29e-30a).

Our world is the very image of the eternal network of forms containing in itself all intelligible beings (Tim.30c-d). This ontological framework necessitates and guides all human moral and scientific awareness. In other words, all possible instantiations of Being are potentially incorporated in the above Timaeus reference. If world time is the moving image of eternity (ibid 37d-e) then all spatial-temporal enactments or manifestations of any idea with its concomitant cosmic and historical processes are sustained by the a priori structure of Being.

For instance, the Copernicus or Darwinian theories are ‘closer’ to the respective ideas they embody than previous worldviews because
they are ‘truer’, or reflect more faithfully the ontological ‘truth structure’ of the world. What this means is that essentially the future is open. When a new hypothesis comes into play (as Einstein’s relativity theory did) which substitutes previous conjectures, then a further building block will be laid on the continuous human self-awareness and approximation of intelligible Being.

The implication, needless to say, of this argument is mind-boggling. Unlike Aristotle’s philosophy where the whole chain of Being, to all appearance, is a static scale, beginning with hyle and ending up in the unmoved mover (101), with Plato it is indeed a totally different game. Here we only have the promise of divine providence and likewise the guarantee that the result of any ‘historical’ enterprise (provided it is carried out under the aegis or auspices of reason) will be in agreement with the original forms of the universe ‘containing in itself all intelligible beings’. Nevertheless, the path remains undisclosed because new possibilities of Being, yet unknown to us, are constantly looming on the horizon of becoming which may give new sense criteria both to the cosmos and ourselves. In creating the world soul the demiurge made use of three elements: the same (ταυτόν), the other (θάτερον) and being (οὐσία) and mingled them into one form (Tim.34c-35a passim). The threefold components assure that the soul mediates between (as, τὸ μεταξὺ) the intelligible and the sensible spheres. Again, in this creation myth we have an ontological dichotomy and an asymmetrical dependency between being which has no becoming and the ever becoming which never is (102).
In point of fact, it is noteworthy that in this construct it is indeed the world body which lies inside the created soul, unlike the human soul finding itself inside the body (103), “Now when the creator has framed the soul according to his will, he formed within her the corporeal universe, and brought the two together and united them center to center. The soul, interfused everywhere from the center to the circumference of heaven, of which also she is the external envelopment” (Tim.36d-e).

Thus, again, Plato calls the visible cosmos that embraces all living creatures an animal with soul and intellect (ibid, 30b) which is a copy of the intelligible living being enfolding within itself all intelligible creatures (ibid, 30c-d). Thus the Platonic world soul, a self-moving and hence immortal transcendent being, is the living Nous which imparts motion to the universe. And in our opinion it is not by coincidence that Aristotle’s unmoved mover is described as Being, life and intellect (εἶναι, ζωῆ, καὶ νοῦς) (104). The world therefore is a visible god, created by the eternal demiurge. Thereupon, δημιουργός brought into being the souls destined to take on a bodily human shape.

“Once more into the cup in which he had previously mingled the soul of the universe he poured the remains of the elements, and mingled them in much the same manner; they were not however, pure as before but diluted to the second and third degree (...) and assigned each soul to a star; and having placed them there as in a chariot (ὡς ἐς ὁχήμα), he showed them the nature of the universe, and declared to them the laws of destiny, according to which their first birth would be one and the same for all,
no one should suffer a disadvantage at his hands” (Tim. 41d-e).

Therefore, from this moment on we have the tripartite soul of mixed nature (105). Whoever lives according to reason (during his first life experience) will, as a result, come back to his appointed star. On the other hand, if this is not feasible, then he will go into a cycle of rebirths until, with the help of reason, he has overcome the plural nature of his tripartite soul with its irrational elements so that he may also return to the pristine abode (106).

1.5.c.1. The Belief in the Individual Soul

At this stage we would like to briefly recap certain aspects of our work on Plato’s theory of the soul because, as it happens, after the death of the latter opinions on this matter seem to be taking a diverging trail maybe due in part to a tendentious reading of the master. The reason, according to Plato, why one is born is to expiate and thus purify the tripartite psyche which if healthy will submit to its highest constituent, reason. At the end of the cathartic period the souls of the good (Phaedr.246a-c) will resemble those of the gods. In fact for these, as the metaphor of the chariot makes clear, there is no plural nature (and this would be the goal of a philosopher’s life: ὅμοιωσις θεῶ, to be similar to a divine being, Theaet. 176b). Therefore from the above we distinctly have a belief in the individual survival of the soul. This conviction is further explained by the various myths of reincarnation of which Plato gives us more than one interpretation but always upholding the constant uniqueness of the human psyche. For
instance, in the story of Er (Rep.614b) we see that neither punishment nor reward is forever. Because of a limited number of souls both the blessed and the punished alike come back to earth after their millenary absence (615b). Of course free choice is proclaimed, “you will choose your genius (δαίμον) (...) the responsibility is with the chooser, God is justified” (617e). Again, in the Phaidrus (246e-249b) after ten thousand years all souls regain their wings and come back to the gods (with the exception of those who for three consecutive rebirths have lived according to the canons of philosophy: the latter somewhat privileged go back to the divinities after only three thousand years). And finally, we have the demiurge (Tim.41d-e) who as we know creates the various souls, ‘he showed them the nature of the universe and declared to them the laws of destiny’ and thereupon he entrusted the created gods with the task of fashioning the mortal bodies of mankind. And those who have lived a righteous life shall return to their native stars (Tim.42b-d) and there lead a blessed existence. Consequently, we can safely conclude that for Plato life on earth is constantly vindicated by the belief in the individual survival of the soul. Unfortunately (as we stated at the beginning of this section), in our opinion, there is no such article of faith in subsequent Greek philosophy.

1.5.c.2. Is Plato the Founder of Acosmism?

The word acosmism was made famous by Hegel to characterize the philosophy of Spinoza’s Deus sive natura, the identification of God with nature. He understood Spinoza’s doctrine as a denial of the real existence of our world along with its individual material and spiritual
things (since they are nothing but modifications of the unique infinite substance) and consequently all that actually exists is God (107). Well, what does this Hegelian term have to do, after more than two thousand years, with Plato’s world soul? We are of the opinion that the seeds of this ‘pantheistic notion’ are to be found in the Athenian philosopher inasmuch as, as we stated before (108), in Timaeus (36d-e) he puts the world body inside the world soul. But in view of the fact that in this dialogue there is the eternal material principle, chora, it cannot therefore be asserted that Plato would fully subscribe to the doctrine of acosmism (109). On the other hand, by Plotinus and generally Neoplatonism, this Hegelian term plays out a more clear-cut role: The whole cosmos and its physical reality are contained within the world soul (again, lying between the intelligible and the sensible spheres: τὸ μεταξύ, Tim35a,1-4), just as this is in Nous, which is in the One (110). Thus we can conclude that sure enough Plato’s seeds, as described in Timaeus, have indeed grown into Neoplatonic acosmism whose pervasive influence in fact is felt right down to modern philosophy (111).

2. The Transition to Middle Platonism and its Concept of Soul (112)/ Introduction

The common denominator of Middle Platonism (which takes form around the first century BC) is the return to the Platonic theme of transcendent Being (112a) with its realm of intelligible ideas. The text which became the point of departure was Timaeus (113). Alexandria of Egypt was the center stage of this movement for the simple reason that it was exposed, more than any other city, to the
influence of both Hellenic rationalism and religious mysticism (114). From this place, Middle Platonism spread to the Latin west. The heyday of this philosophy is around the second century AD, and its importance speaks for itself: Without it Neoplatonism would not be easily accounted for.

In Porphyry’s Vita Plotini (114a), for instance, we learn that his teacher Plotinus (who was even accused (114b) of plagiarism) was also explaining and appropriately interpreting various philosophers belonging to both this group—such as Cronius and Numenius (115)—as well as the Peripatetics (Alexander of Aphrodisias and Adrastus) who likewise were influenced by Middle Platonism. Some of the characteristics (116) of this school are:

a) Incorporealness of Being. “Active causes could not be other than incorporeal; for bodies are passive and fluid and are never identical with themselves (…) So then, even as there exists something purely passive, so there is necessarily also something unqualifiedly active; and this we will find to be nothing other than the incorporeal” (117).

b1) Transcendence of God. In Albinus the divine reaches its pinnacle in Nous itself, as follows:
1. First Intellect, or Primary God
2. Second Intellect, or World Soul Intellect
3. World Soul

The first intellect rouses up the world soul and turning it towards itself brings about its intellect. The cosmos is set up, or mediated by the second intellect and indirectly by the first. “Since the intellect is superior to soul, and superior to potential intellect there is actualized intellect, which cognizes
everything simultaneously and eternally, and finer than this again is the cause of this and whatever it is that has an existence still prior to these, this it is that would be the primal God, being the cause of the eternal activity of the intellect of the whole heaven. It acts while remaining itself unmoved (...)
Since the primary intellect is the finest of things, it follows that the object of its intelligizing must also be supremely fine (...)
It thinks of itself and its own thoughts, and this activity of it is form (...)
He is the good (...)
He is the beautiful” (118). The primary God then is eternal, ineffable, self-perfect (119). In Middle Platonism the divine logos is the archetype of human reason. The intelligible ideas are thoughts of God (120) and the logos is the idea of the ideas (121). In other words, whereas Plato postulated the realm of ideas ‘above’ intelligence with the demiurge referring to these as pattern for his creation (122) and Aristotle posited Nous as absolute Being thinking of itself and its thought as thinking on thinking (Met.1074b34) in Middle Platonism we have the attempt to mediate between these two leading thinkers (123), of which Albinus gives us this sample:
“And since there exists both intellection and sense-perception, there exists also objects of these, that is to say, intelligible and sensible objects; and since of intelligible objects some are primary, such as the (transcendent) ideas, and others secondary such as the form in matter, which are inseparable from matter, so also intellection will be twofold the one kind of primary objects, the other of secondary” (124).

b2) A foreshadow of the hypostases theory. John Dillon begins his commentary on Albinus’
tenth chapter by stating that this section is perhaps the most interesting and original part of the work. Indeed, what we have here is an anticipation of the Neoplatonic hypostases. In the above passage where we find “Intellect is superior to soul and superior to potential intellect there is actualized intellect (...) and whatever it is that has an existence still prior to these this it is that would be the primal God”, we have a hierarchy of axiological tenets. First we notice an ascending order of dignity between potential intellect and intellect in actuality. But promptly Albinus points out that there must be something superior to these and that would be the supreme principle (125). Of course all of this makes sense if we interpret the potential intellect to be the intellect in the human being (as by Aristotle, de An.III,5,430a10ff) and the active intellect as Nous or the intellect of the cosmos. But still prior to this active intellect there must be some intellect transcending it and this would be accordingly the first principle (126).

c) Hyle and the Universe. In the following Albinus gives us a concise and clear example of Middle Platonic thinking on matter and the world. “Plato calls this a mould (Tim. 50c), all-receiver (ibid, 51a), nurse (ibid, 49a, 52d, 88d), mother (ibid, 50d, 51a), and space (52a-d), and a substratum tangible by non-sensation and graspable only by a bastard reasoning (ibid, 52b)… It is likewise proper to all-receptive matter, if it is to receive the forms thoroughly, not to have subsistent in itself any of their nature” (127). Dillon rightly observes that Albinus adheres closely to Plato’s description in the Timaeus, specifically 49a-52d, and likewise remarks that
the term hyle, employed here by Albinus, is not used by Plato but by Aristotle as a technical term, just like the word substratum (hypokeimenon) (128).

Concerning the coming into being of the universe, Albinus’ Didaskalikos explains that by generation we must not understand that Plato asserts that there ever was a time when the world did not exist, but rather that the world is perpetually in a state of becoming and reveals a primordial cause of its existence (129). Now this last paragraph reflects our previous discussion (130).

Plato states that time and the cosmos came into being at the same instant (Tim.38b); so time and the world are correlates. And the world moreover is perpetually in a state of becoming. All this fits in with our observation that if time is a moving image of eternity (Tim.37d-e) then all spatial-temporal events are approximate enactments of the a priori structure of transcendent Being which, in turn, can only be the primordial cause which Albinus mentions above in sections b1,b2,c.

In the same paragraph of the Didaskalikos (14.3) Albinus declares that God does not create the world soul, since it exists eternally, “But he brings it to order, and to this extent he might be said to create it, by awakening and turning towards himself both its intellect and itself, as out of some deep coma or sleep, so that by looking towards the objects of intellection inherent in him it may receive the forms and shapes, through striving to attain to his thoughts”. We agree with this position, and refer to Tim. 30c-d in which we see the demiurge instilling order in the world by means of soul and intelligence: thus
producing an image of the real, intelligible cosmos. Besides, since soul is extended from the centre to the outer limits, the result is that it binds together and encloses all around the body of the world (131).

In this context the foremost goal of the individual is to assimilate into the Godhead, “We ought to fly away from earth to heaven as quickly as we can” (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν, Theaet.176b). And Albinus paraphrasing Plato indicated the same end: We attain likeness to God first if we have the proper nature, then if we develop the proper way of life and finally if we use reason and education and the correct philosophical tradition (132) (cf. Porphyry, To Marcella, nos. 13,17).

Therefore as a transitional school of thought, Middle Platonism was responsible for retrieving the true value of the Platonic tradition (133). We must bear in mind that in the half-century period after Plato’s death (around 347 BC) the Academy went through some unexpected changes brought about as well by the disappearance of the free city states under Macedonian domination. This stifling political situation undoubtedly contributed to the rise of the materialistic philosophy of Hellenism, such as Epicureanism and Stoicism (134). It is indeed sheer luck that Middle Platonism, later on, began to evolve and not by chance in Alexandria with the due revival of Plato’s metasensible world which consequently paved the way for Neoplatonism.
2.1. Albinus’ Doctrine of the Soul (135)

2.1.a. The Soul in relation to the Body (Didask. ch. 23)

Keeping to Plato’s Timaeus (with regard to the origin of the soul) Albinus states, ‘even if we seem to be repeating ourselves’ (136), when the gods received the human soul from the primal God, i.e. the demiurge (137), they added to it two mortal parts (138). The divine part they placed in the head and the rest of the body was subjected to its service and attached to it as a vehicle (τὸ ἠχημα, Tim. 44d-e) and to the mortal parts of the soul they gave different dwelling places. The spirited part they placed in the heart whereas the appetitive one between the diaphragm and the navel.

2.1.b. The Soul and its Parts (Didask. ch. 24)

The soul is divided into three parts corresponding to its powers (dynameis). These parts are apportioned rationally into their proper places. The affective and the rational are by nature partitioned off since the latter deals with the intelligible reality while the former with what is pleasurable and painful. A further proof of the difference between reason and the affective element of the soul is that each part has its own way of enhancing itself: Reason is cultivated through teaching while the latter through training of one’s habitual behavior (139). The section just covered although ‘Platonic’ (in fact Albinus draws on both the Republic 436a-441e and the Timaeus 69b-72d) nonetheless it seems more original and by all means interesting (140). Together with the traditional tripartite division (which he properly explains at the beginning of the
chapter) a bipartite paradigm of the soul is here introduced as follows: the rational (λογιστικόν) and the passionate (παθητικόν). These constituent elements are no longer called parts (μέρη) as Plato named them but dynameis which is the Aristotelian term (141).

2.1.c. The Immortality of the Soul (Didask. ch.25)

The proof of the immortality of the soul is given by the fact that whatever it attaches itself to, it brings life. And that which bestows life to something is itself immortal: unchanging in its substance, intelligible, invisible and incomposite. In addition to his acceptance of the theory of learning as anamnesis, Albinus likewise acknowledges the Platonic definition of soul as life-giving and self-moving and therefore immortal. Furthermore, the soul enters into the body “following upon the natural processes which form the embryo” (142). The embodiment includes both human and non-human forms. The souls of the gods and those destined to be human possess the following archetypal structure: critical (κριτικόν), or rather cognitive (γνωστικόν), appetitive (ὄρμητικόν) and thirdly appropriative (οἰκειωτικόν) (143).

2.2 Numenius and Psyche (144)

“Ath.-Must we not of necessity admit that the soul is the cause of good and evil, base and honourable, just and unjust, and of all other opposites, if we suppose her to be the cause of all things? Cle.-We must
Ath.-And as the soul orders and inhabits all things that move, however moving, must we not say that she orders also the heavens?
Cle.- of course
Ath.-One soul or more? More than one---I will answer for you; at any rate, we must not suppose that there are less than two---one the author of good, and the other of evil" (Plato, Laws 896d-e).
In interpreting this passage Numenius concluded that matter, as the source of evil, is in possession of its own soul and as such it is also the starting point of motion and life (145). Numenius praises Plato for believing in the existence of two souls: one good and the other evil (146).
As to the relationship between body and soul, it is basically one of antagonism: A harmony between the two is impossible, fr.43 (146a). Evil definitely stems from matter. This conviction gives rise to the belief that any embodiment must be considered as bad (147). Nonetheless, he believed in the transmigration of the soul, frs.34,49. Thus we repeat while evil is the principle of the irrational and responsible for the chaotic motion of matter, the good soul by contrast is the basis for rationality. And, as it turns out, this good soul is nothing but intellect (cf. Po/Ma nos. 5,33,34) (148). In the human sphere, likewise, the soul is divided into two: one rational and the other irrational (fr.44).
To conclude, Numenius in remembering the Phaedrus (245c7) where Plato states that ‘All soul is immortal’, is also of the opinion that both the rational and the irrational souls of man participate in immortality (frs.46,47).
3. The Soul according to Porphyry

Introduction

To be sure, for our philosopher soul is something which is halfway (τὸ μεταξὺ) between indivisible essence and that divisible in bodies. Intellect is solely an indivisible essence, and bodies are exclusively divisible. And finally, qualities and material forms are divisible in bodies (Sent. 5). (149)

This aphorism (Sent.) makes reference to Timaeus 35a, in which Plato speaks of soul as an entity between the indivisible, intelligible essence and the divisible, sensible one. Plotinus (150) comments on these lines in a way similar to Porphyry, “This is the deeper meaning of the profound passage (in Timaeus) where we read: ‘By blending the impartible eternally unchanging essence with that in division among bodies he produced a third form of essence partaking of both qualities’. Soul therefore is, in this definite sense, one and many; the ideal-form resident in body is many and one; the supreme is exclusively one”.

The nineteenth century discovery of papyri containing fragments of a commentary on Plato’s Parmenides (151) unfortunately does not include the third Parmenidean hypothesis which was identified by Plotinus (Enn. V,1,8,24) to be the third hypostasis of his system: Soul (152). In any case, we can refer to parallel Porphyrian texts both in Victorinus (153) and in the Sententiae where our philosopher discusses the psyche. Moreover, in the Suidas Lexicon we find two works of Porphyry concerning the nature and function of the soul: the Symmikta Zetemata which Dörrie published (154), and “Whether the Soul is Actuality,
against Aristotle” (155); of another composition “On the Faculties of the Soul”, not mentioned in the Suidas, we possess long fragments in Stobaeus (156).

For Beutler it is worth considering whether the latter work might be part of Symmikta Zetemeta which among other things deals with the soul. In “On the Faculties of the Soul” Porphyry’s talent concerning the history of philosophy stands out rather well. According to him Plato arrived at the formulation of the tripartite soul because of a practical reason: the making of his ideal state whereas Aristotle reaches the same conclusion thanks only to his scientific enquiry (157).

3.1. Soul’s Relation to the Body

The question how the soul relates to the body was so important to Porphyry that at one time he spent three days just interrogating his teacher Plotinus (158) about this problem. Unfortunately he does not tell us whether Plotinus’ answer was at all satisfactory. Concerning the modality by which the soul is present in the body Porphyry relates the following, “Things incorporeal, although not present with bodies spatially are nonetheless there in a way which is connatural to them to descend. That is, despite the fact that they are not there spatially, they are still present by disposition” (159). To be sure, for the soul and body to associate there must be a natural inclination towards one another. In Plotinus we find something similar (Enn. I,1,8,15ff), “Say rather that it (soul) appears to be present in the bodies by the fact that it shines into them: it makes them living beings not by merging into body but by giving forth,
without any change in itself, images or likenesses of itself like one face caught by many mirrors”.

As to where body and soul interrelate, this observation turns out helpful, “Things essentially incorporeal, are not present with bodies by hypostasis and essence; for they are not mingled with bodies. But they impart a certain power which is proximate to bodies, thanks to the hypostasis deriving from descending. This descent constitutes a certain secondary power proximate to bodies” (160). Porphyry is here explaining the presence of the soul in the body while keeping its essential nature untouched (161). Furthermore, as Dörrie illustrates (162) Porphyry applies Stoic theories concerning the various types of compounds (σύγχυσις, κράσις, μίξις, παράθεσις). In our case we have the latter parathesis (proximity) without mingling or formation. Indeed, this point continues the tradition begun with Plato’s Timaeus. In the following aphorism we get an additional exposition of this doctrine (163).

“It is not proper to think that the multitude of souls was generated on account of the multitude of bodies; but it is necessary to admit that, prior to bodies, there were many souls, and one soul, the cause of the many. Nor does the one and whole soul prevent the subsistence in it of many souls; nor do the multitude of souls distribute by division the one soul into themselves. For they are distinct but are not separated from the soul, which ranks as a whole(...) and all souls are in a certain way one(...) In souls sameness prevails over difference whereas in bodies it is difference over identity (...) When soul turns to
matter, it becomes in want of all things and suffers an emptiness of its proper power; but when it is elevated to intellect, it is found to possess a plenitude of all its powers. Rightly so, those who first got to know these two conditions of the soul called the first Penia (Poverty) and the second Poros (Plenty)” (Sent. 37).

Needless to say, reference is here made to Plato’s Symposium (203b-c). Poverty is symbolized by a turning of the soul towards matter; and Plenty, its turning towards the intellect. We would like to emphasize that on embodiment the unity (ἐνοσις) existing between all souls (in the hypostasis soul) is preserved: It is not split into parts when individuation takes place. Moreover, the next aphorism (Sent.13) indeed reveals what we call the principle of degradation of ousia, relative to its ontological locus away from the one. “Everything which generates by its very essence, generates that which is inferior to itself. And everything generated naturally turns to that which has generated it. However, of generating natures some do not turn at all to the generated; others sometimes turn to it and sometimes do not; others still are only turned to the generated and not to themselves”. In other words, in the going out and returning to itself process (πρόδοσα--ἐπιστροφή) there is a gradual alienation from the one which, in turn, brings about a loss of potential at its conversion phase. In the following we have a corresponding Plotinian passage, “This engendering principle must be the very highest in worth; and its immediate offspring, its secondary, must be the best of all that follows” (Enn. V,4,1,39-41). In the above Sent.13 Porphyry is at the core of Neoplatonic
triadic motion: permanence (μονή), procession (πρόοδος) and conversion (ἐπιστροφή). From this system of so-called hypostases we can infer that the principle that generated soul is the same as that which brought about intellect (Νοῦς), obviously not in similar fashion (164).

In this unfolding of the particular three levels of intelligible reality lies the notion of hierarchy of Being common indeed to Neoplatonism. Once more, there is a progressive increase, or decrease of ontological δύναμις in function of the specific turning to, or away from the One which respectively up- or degrades ousia. Here a brief digression is due so as to appreciate more fully our subject matter. For Neoplatonism after Plotinus the triad of being-life-intelligence (or mind) represented both an interpretation of the structure of Being in itself and an explanation of the make-up of distinct beings (τὰ ὄντα). Being is thought of as a self-affirming act comprised of three moments, as we stated: permanence, procession, and returning to itself (conversion) (166). In Plotinus the second hypostasis is the duality in unity of Being, and Nous is therefore transcendental object and transcendental subject. The ensuing elaboration within this specific hypostasis of a subordinate triad (1. being, τὸ ὄν/ὑπαρξις 2. life, ζωή/δύναμις αἰών 3. intelligence, νοῦς) is, again, the work of post-Plotinian Neoplatonists although a tendency in this direction is already observable in one or two passages of the Enneads (V,4,2; VI,4,8) (167).

"The choice of ζωή (life) as a description for the middle term of the triad, the movement of thought which links object to subject (being to mind) is determined by Plato’s Sophist 248e-ff,
where \( \zetaωη \) and \( νοῦς \) are said to be characters (traits, symbols) of \( τὸ ὄν \) (being). Under the influence of this Platonic passage, Plotinus mentions several times (Enn. I,6,7; V,4,2; V,6,6; and III,8,8) \( \zetaωη \) as co-ordinate with \( τὸ ὄν \) and \( νοῦς \) (though not as a link between, nor as in any sense a separate hypostasis) (...). Moreover, Proclus and Damascius elicited a triad \( ὑπάρξις-δύναμις-νοῦς \) which they equated with \( ὄν-ζωη-νοῦς \) (Pr., in Tim. I 17.23). The latter triad seems to have played a part in the theology of Porphyry (Pr., in Tim.III 64,8ff)” (168).

As regards \( \zetaωη \) (life) Porphyry makes this observation, “The homonymous is not in bodies only, but life also may be expressed in many ways. There is in fact the life of a plant, that of an animal, the life of an intellectual being, of nature, that of soul, the life of intelligence and of that which is beyond (…) This is also life although no reality proceeding from it leads a life similar to its mode of living” (Sent. 12).

From this aphorism one is reminded of Aristotle’s expression that life can have various meanings (de An. 413a,22-26), or that there are many senses in which a thing may be said to be (Met. 1003a,33). Before recapping Porphyry’s notion of soul and consequently concluding this section on its relation with the body, we would like to propose Sent.30 dealing with the hierarchical triad, or the relation between the One, Nous and Soul, “None of the universal and perfect hypostases turns to its progeny, but all turn to what generated them, including the world body: This in fact being perfect turns to soul which is endowed with intellect, and for this reason it moves in
a circle. The soul of this world body turns to intelligence, and intelligence turns to the first principle of all things. All beings, therefore, reach out to this principle, as much as possible, beginning from the last of things. The elevation, however, to that which is first is either proximate or remote. Hence we can say that each being not only aspires after God but also enjoys Him according to its possibilities. It is typical of particular substances to turn both to the numerous and to their offspring (169). And this is what error consists of, shameful uncertainty. For these substances, therefore, matter is evil insofar as it has converted them towards itself while they could have turned instead to the divine. Thus it follows that perfection produces secondary ousias---beginning with the first ones (and keeping these turned towards the first principles), and imperfection, on the other hand, causes what is first to turn to secondary ousias and to love things which are remote from the principles” (170).

So we can briefly recap by stating that for Porphyry soul/psyche is the third hypostasis (emanating from intelligence/νοῦς the second hypostasis) which gives life to the cosmos. And world soul is also the triad: being, life and intelligence (171) which is likewise intermediate (τὸ μεταξὺ) between indivisible, intelligible being and the divisible being of bodies (171a).

Thus, soul can turn either towards its principle (Nous) through contemplation, or towards the cosmos, θεωρία, (172) in its creative phase. The multitude of individual souls (173) giving life to individual bodies, we repeat, stems from the world soul. But particular souls have also a twofold
possibility of action, as we said above (Sent. 30), either towards its intimate being (Nous and the One), or towards the outside (Θεωρία, body) which is indeed a principle of error.

Porphyry (Sent. 10) draws upon Anaxagoras (DK 59 B1) to express the Neoplatonic triadic principle of being-life-intelligence which is present at all levels of reality, “All is in all but in a proper way according to the essence of each thing: in the intellect, in an intellectual way, in the soul rationally, in plants in a seminal way, in bodies as images, and in that which is above all these in a super-intellectual and super-essential way” (cf. Proclus, El. Th. ibid prop. 103).

Therefore we can say along with Porphyry via Victorinus that if soul as soul is both the Being (esse) of soul, and living (vivere) and thinking (intelligere), in other words: if soul is three, then it is indeed the image of the superior triad. In fact, soul qua soul is by itself (per se) a giver of life and intelligence (174). Moreover, our philosopher affirms that what nature binds, nature also dissolves and that which soul binds, it alone can dissolve. Nature indeed binds body to soul, but only soul can bind itself to the body. Nature therefore, liberates the body from the soul but the soul liberates itself from the body (Sent. 8). However at what moment does the soul associate itself with the body? Porphyry attempts to answer this query in the following.

3.1.a. To Gaurus, on the Way the Embryo Receives the Soul (174a)

This essay begins with a question whether embryos must be considered living human beings,
or whether they only possess nutritive, vegetative life (174b). Porphyry’s own reply is that since embryos are solely governed by the laws of nutrition and growth, they must be held to be consequently vegetative. In addition (so he thinks), considering the embryos as living human beings because once born they are endowed with life, is a somewhat precipitate judgement. Admitting that it will be proven that the embryo is not a living human being, either in actuality (because it is vegetative) or potentially, then it shall be rather simple for Plato’s doctrine to establish the necessity of the soul’s entrance into the body together with its precise moment (174c). Thus with this objective in mind Porphyry intends to show indeed that the embryo is not a human being either A) in actual fact or B) potentially. As a result, he arrives at the conclusion that the soul comes from the outside but only after childbirth (174d).

A) The Embryo is not a Living Human Being, in Actual Fact

1) Proof by means of Plato’s doctrine

Vegetables and plants nourish themselves by means of their roots whereas animals through their mouths and as a result digest their relative intake thanks to the internal organs which they are endowed with. Conversely, the embryo feeds itself and inhales not through mouth and nose but respectively via a) an immanent power derived from the sperm which seems to attract blood (similar to the way plants absorb humidity from the soil) and b) the umbilical cord (174e).
Porphyry mentions Plato (Tim. 70d,ff/91a,ff) teaching that the vegetative power of the sperm belongs to the third part of the soul, the appetitive, which also deals with the vegetable realm in nature. All that participates in life necessarily lives but it does not belong to a self-moving soul. The only thing plants have in common with animal life is the word ‘living’. That is to say, it is a problem of homonymy (174f). Thus the embryonic state of life is rather similar to a plant than a live human being. What demonstrates that the soul comes from the outside (after the gestational phase is complete and the baby is born) is this phrase from the Timaeus 43a, “Making up out of all the four elements each separate body and fastening the courses of the immortal soul in a body…”.

2) Proof by the Nature of Things

Our philosopher declares that even without Plato’s help it can be ascertained that the formation of the embryo resembles that of plants. The father allowing the semen to fall and the mother gathers it so that it may grow in a way similar to plants which are grafted and inoculated (46.20). As long as the sperm remains in the father, it is governed by his vegetative power and superior soul working together for the making of the ‘fruit’. But once the sperm has been injected into the mother the creative natural principle associates itself with her vegetative power and soul. And finally at childbirth the baby (with its vegetative soul) receives the soul, again, from the outside. Porphyry even cites the Old Testament (Genesis II,7) in support of his thesis: When God made man He then breathed into
him the breath of life, and man became a living soul (48.15). Moreover, Porphyry maintains that the intellect enters man’s soul at a later phase of his growing-up process. And for this he again refers to Plato and Aristotle (50.10). Indeed, in some individuals, intellect does not even manifest itself. Intellect is a rare thing to possess. It is present only in those whose souls are qualified to receive it. That is the reason why anyone who has knowledge of God keeps His presence and whoever does not remains absent from the Almighty (Tim. 53b 3). Old age of itself does not necessarily bring wisdom (Plato, Laches 188b). Aristotle, in addition (de Gen. Anim., II3, 736b 27ff), affirms that intellect comes from the outside (50.25).

B) The Embryo is not a Living Being, Potentially

Therefore having shown that the embryo is not a viable being in actual fact (that it does not possess a self-moving soul), Porphyry now tackles the other proof, that the embryo potentially is not a living being. The embryo is not endowed with sensation because its sensory apparatus is yet not fully developed. As a result, it is only potentially capable of sensation, impulsion and reason but not: Like a being that has already received these faculties but does not exercise them. On the contrary, it is similar to that which can receive the potentiality to carry out the above faculties, however it is still incomplete for anything to happen (53.1-10). In referring to Plato, he says how can the soul enter the body if the embryo does not even have any head, heart or liver (53.10). In fact the Athenian had the following sites for his tripartite
soul: 1) reason/head, 2) passion/heart, and 3) appetite/liver (Tim.70a, 73c-d).

Furthermore, if someone (say a Stoic) were to declare that just as the sperm contains seminal reasons for teeth and beard (causing them to grow into their respective features after birth), so it is feasible that it (the sperm) may also carry them for impulse, sensation and imagination: For Porphyry this opinion would not be valid since the soul then would have to derive from ‘seed’ (sperm) and thus the vegetative would be considered superior to the self-moving soul (53.27-54.7).

Even the ancient Chaldeans, says our philosopher, believe that in the eastern sky there is an eternal intelligible flux which makes the world go round and animates all its beings by sending compatible souls to them. This side of the sky, through which souls enter the cosmos is full of power (57.5-10). This Chaldean belief is mentioned to show that there is almost universal consensus that the soul enters the body only after birth. To corroborate his thesis Porphyry brings up a third and final proof: “Even if the Embryo is living, in actual fact or potentially, still the soul comes from the outside” (58ff). Unfortunately, this position is not fully explained because the text breaks off. But from what has been discussed in the preceding proofs, A and B, we have nonetheless a sufficient and forceful presentation of his argument (174g).

If Gaurus therefore is not completely convinced and believes that the embryo still participates in a self-moving soul (and not only in the natural principle of nutrition and growth),
Porphyry nonetheless as far as he is concerned does not think that Plato’s doctrine is in any way in retreat (59.28).

So to recap: with the sperm there is vegetative life and growth during the whole gestation period. At birth when the soul has entered the body, sensitive life begins to appear. Later on, we have in addition the discursive phase. And finally, if conditions are favourable, Nous may be attained.

3.2. Soul and its Elements

As we said earlier (175) according to post-Plotinian Neoplatonism all intelligibles have a triadic structure unfolding itself upon the hierarchy of Being. And Porphyry’s theory of soul is an example of this (176). In the latter we have Platonic and Aristotelian elements. That is to say, Aristotle’s theory of the soul (de An. 415a 14-16) is interpreted in light of Platonic and Neoplatonic metaphysics by which its respective three powers (intellective, sensitive and nutritive) are interpreted as a progressive turning away from the world soul and (in due proportion) approaching matter. The hierarchy of the triad being-life-mind, reflected in all levels of reality, goes from soul to bodies, from simple to complex. Soul is bound to body by a conversion to the bodily passions and may be liberated by becoming impassive to it through catharsis (Sent. 7) (177).

Thus Porphyry following the hypostases doctrine (Sent.30), not only associated man’s soul with the world soul, but also described Nous as the essence of soul, and accordingly identified soul with intelligence. From this relation it ensues that all manifestations of soul taking
place below intelligence---from the nutritive to the discursive part---are not to be attributed to soul proper but rather to its so-called vehicle (ὀχήμα).

For Porphyry the authentic soul is what Aristotle calls Νοῦς θεωρητικός (178). The question whether the soul has elements (or parts) was not taken into account by Porphyry since it became a common belief (thanks to the ‘semantic correction’ brought about by Aristotle’s de Anima 432a 13ff and 433b 2-6) that Plato’s tripartite soul could only be understood as faculties (dynameis) belonging to one soul (179).

The above term ὀχήμα was coined by Plato (Tim.41e, Phaedr. 247b). It referred to the vehicles of the stars with which the souls were shown (by the demiurge) the nature of the intelligible universe (179a). In the Chaldean Oracles (180), the term ὀχήμα comes up again, precisely in fr. 120, “We must take care of the purification of our luminous body, which the Oracles also call delicate vehicle (ὀχήμα) of the soul”. This quasi-material vehicle of the soul was made up of accretions from: ether, sun, moon and air (181). Porphyry is of the opinion that theurgic practices are only applicable to this susceptible vehicle and not to soul proper, “The idea of a semi-corporeal entity πνεύμα or ὀχήμα, on the borderline between spirit and matter occurs both in Porphyry and Plotinus (and the later Neoplatonists). It performs several functions in respect of soul:
1. Acts as a substrate to the lower soul.
2. Is an organ of perception.
3. Is the subject of magical and theurgic rites (182).
In the Neoplatonic exegesis of the Phaedrus myth-247b- the ὀχήμα takes up the role of the soul’s companion. In other words, the ruling part (or faculty) of the soul (reason) mounts the vehicle just as the charioteer ‘gets on his chariot’. The image of the ὀχήμα served as a basis to both Plotinus and Porphyry for the unification theory (ἕνωσις) of the soul (183). In addition, it may be inferred that Plato’s famous line: that the soul in her totality has the care of inanimate being everywhere (Phaedr. 246b) may no longer be valid for Porphyry (184) because (as we said in Sent.30) in order to be fulfilled soul must turn to its principle, Nous and not to something lower in the ontological, hierarchical scale (185).

3.3. The Soul’s Uncoupling from Body
“The call to separate soul from body seems to be the major ethical injunction which Porphyry lays upon us in his moral treatises (…) Everything corporeal must be avoided: Omne corpus fugiendum est” (186).
The separation of soul from body is a necessary step paving the way for the union with the intelligible world. In our discussion of aphorism 8 (187) the key subject matter of uncoupling is clear enough. Here only soul binds itself to and releases itself from the body. The latter, on the contrary, is bound to and freed from the soul by nature. A similar thought in Plotinus will shed new light on the above maxim, “By the ‘descent’ and ‘embodiment’ of current phrasing must be understood not that soul becomes an appanage of body but that it gives out to it something of itself; similarly, the soul’s departure is the complete cessation of that communion” (Enn. VI 4,16,14-16).
This thought anticipates aphorism 9 where Porphyry specifies the various kinds of soul separation from the body. As it happens, there is: a) natural death in which nature dissolves the bond between soul and body, and b) philosophical death by which the soul liberates herself from the body. This consideration brings us to Plotinus again (I 6,6,9-10), “Courage is but being fearless of the death which is but the parting of the soul from the body, an event which no one can dread whose delight is to be his unmingled self”. If we aim for the philosophical death we must train the meditative person in us so that we may reach that dual function of the soul which expresses the inner and outer, the contemplative and the active person in the world.

Smith considers Plato somewhat more pessimistic than either Plotinus or Porphyry since the Athenian, in fact, saw life as a preparation for death whereas the latter two were vividly aiming at a philosophical separation from life and consequently were indifferent to natural death (188). Besides, how can we come to terms with the necessity of individual incarnation and the suspicion that it is the person’s fault for being thrown into this world? In Plato (Tim. 42b-c) any embodiment subsequent to the necessary first is caused by individual wickedness. Likewise in Plotinus (IV 8,5,1ff) “It is possible to reconcile all these apparent contradictions---the sowing of souls to birth, their descent aiming at perfecting the universe, the judgement and the cave, necessity and free choice (in fact necessity includes the choice) and embodiment as an evil; the Empedoclean teaching of an exile from God, a wandering away, a sin bringing its punishment. And still the ‘solace of fleeing’ of
Heraclitus. In a word, a voluntary descent which is also involuntary (...) Hence there is no inconsistency or untruth in saying that the soul is sent down by God (...) Still there is a twofold flaw: the first lies in the motive of the soul’s descent (its audacity, τόλμα) and the second in the evil it does when actually here. The first is punished by what the soul has suffered by its descent. For the faults committed here, the lesser penalty is to enter into body after body (...) Thus, in sum, the soul, a divine being and a dweller in the loftier realms, has entered body: it is a god, a later phase of the divine. But under stress of its powers and of its tendency to bring order to its next lower, it penetrates to this sphere in a voluntary plunge: if it turns back quickly all is well; it will have taken no hurt by acquiring the knowledge of evil and coming to understand what sin is”.

As a matter of fact, In Porphyry’s de Regressu Animae (189), there is a similar description. The soul is sent by God into the world so that when it gets to know evil it returns as quickly as it can to its original abode. This return process may begin any time provided man’s inner dimension, his inner soul, turns to the intelligible world which is his higher self (190).

3.4. From Psyche to Nous

In this section we shall attempt to further discuss the relationship between soul and Nous, the spiritual and the ontological.

“Thus the self-knower is a double person: there is the one that takes cognizance of the principle in virtue of which understanding occurs in the soul or mind; and there is the
higher, knowing himself by the intellectual principle with which he becomes identical: This latter knows the self as no longer man but as a being that has become something other through and through. He has thrown himself as one thing over into the superior order, taking with him only that better part of the soul which alone is winged (191) for the intellectual act and gives the man, once established there, the power to appropriate what he has seen” (Enn.V 3,4,10-14).

So, how is the ascent from soul to intellect possible? The intelligibles (τὰ νοητά) are for Plato the objects of thought, and the capacity to know them depends on the individual νόσος (Rep. 507e). Hence, given that intelligibles are objects of knowledge, nous then becomes both efficient cause and final goal of noesis (Rep.532a). The soul in Plato is never described as an intelligible being (νοητὴ ωὐσία). For the Athenian thinker soul is not equivalent to nous: This rather gets implanted into the soul (Tim.41b-e). Psyche is basically the cause of natural motion (ἄρχη κινῆσεως). Consequently, in Plato we have a separation between soul (which is not transcendent) and nous. And the latter becomes the object of reference and basis for the former (192). Indeed, it was first Plotinus who saw an affinity and likeness between soul and nous (193); and for him, as a result, the doctrine of soul is the most important field in philosophy (194). Soul has two conditions: in its pre-existence state it is idea, present in nous; on the other hand, as soul: It distinguishes itself from nous and becomes the intellect’s “matter” (195).

In Dörrie’s edition of the Porphyrian Symmikta Zetemata, Nemesius discloses the following
fragment of our philosopher, “Just as soul is in itself when it reckons, so it is in Νοῦς when it meditates” (196). Here we find a concise illustration of the gradation principle leading soul to the intellect. The operative aspects of soul at this stage are reckoning (λογίζεσθαι) and meditation (νοεῖν). It goes without saying that the essence of soul is noetic. “Soul contains the forms of all things, and functions according to them, either being called forth by something outside or turning itself to them inwardly. And when called forth by something outside, it forms in itself sensations but when it enters into herself, towards nous, it finds itself in thoughts” (Sent.16) (197). Of these two aspects the first is a pre-stage to the meditative process: Only when soul comes to itself, does it reach nous, “Such is the union in the soul’s temper that even the act of intellect once so intimately loved she now dismisses; intellection is movement and she has no wish to move. The object of her vision has itself (she says) no intellection, even though it is by means of the intellectual principle that she has attained the vision, herself made over into intellectual principle and becoming that principle so as to be able to take stand in that intellectual space” (Enn. VI 7,35,1-6).

For Porphyry soul is consubstantial with Nous inasmuch as it is pre-existent in it (as we mentioned above): Indeed Intelligence is the principle (ἀρχή) and source (198) of soul. To be sure this Porphyrian thought is reported to us by Augustine (199). In this context we cannot help thinking of Porphyry’s Sent. 10 where he remembers Anaxagoras: “All is in all but in a proper way according to the essence of each thing” (200). And, in Sent. 40 we have
the pinnacle of spiritual ascent: the assimilation to the first principle. “The more you turn to yourself (though it is present and inseparably conjoined with you) the more you are present with real being (...). For those who are able to proceed into their own essence intellectually and to obtain a knowledge of it, will (...) be able to recover or regain themselves, through the union of that which knows with that which is known. And with those who are present with themselves, truly-existing being will also be present (...). For our sake, we can again turn to ourselves and thus become united to divinity” (201).

As we found out in the Vita Plotini (202) Porphyry experienced the ‘unio mystica’ only once, in his sixty-eighth year and his teacher four times. However, the fact that Porphyry desired but failed to bring the ordinary man into a common design of salvation with the philosopher also undermined, we believe, his trust in the capacity of man to reach the divine. By contrast, Plotinus being less interested in the non-philosopher had less reason for such disappointment (203).

4. Concluding Remarks

So what kind of an answer have we given to Homer’s lines (that mankind is like generations of leaves one springing up and another passing away) stated at the beginning of the chapter? With Plato man has been given a soul which is intelligible, immaterial and immortal. Thereupon, we find that the fundamental theories of the master basically took another direction: individual immortality dissolves into and gives way to intelligible Νοῦς (Albinus, Didask. ch.14, and Numenius frs. 3-8,
The answer which has taken us a good part of this chapter to expound on is in fact very Homeric: Man is like leaves, sprouting up and falling away. There is hardly any trace of individual survival in all of post-Platonic philosophy. What we can hope for at best, after several incarnations of getting fit for the occasion, is to be one with our creator. For this period in the history of ideas individuality becomes an affair belonging to the material world, a quasi-state of sin, or rather ὑβρις. ‘Our true self’, the intelligible soul, was considered essentially part of God in which we as individual spiritual beings no longer exist.

Therefore, the term acosmism (which as we mentioned is the being of the world, mind and matter, as modifications of the only truly existing eternal substance) or (its broader implications) the ‘pantheism’ of Νοῦς and the world soul necessarily comes up again. Indeed, it is the answer of post-Platonic philosophy to Homer’s words. From Aristotle, Epicureanism, Stoicism, Middle Platonists, Neoplatonists right down to and including Spinoza, Hegel and Schopenhauer: there seems to be no intelligible space for the individual human soul.
Notes/ Chapter two

1. Homer, Iliad VI 146-149
2. Dörrie, Die Lehre von der Seele (Dö/Se) p.167.
3. The Parmenidean being is not immaterial. Its spherical nature and such expressions as “everything is full of being” (πάν δ’ ἔμπλεόν ἐστιν ἐόντος---DK 28B 8,24) make it somewhat the being of the cosmos, immovable and eternal (cf. Russell, (Ru/Hi)p.66). This lack of immaterialness concerns also the Anaxagorean nous. As Plato himself points out, “As I proceeded I found my philosopher altogether forsaking mind or any other principle of order, but having recourse to air, and ether, and water and other eccentricities” (Phaedo, 98b).
4. Hirschberger (Hi/GP) cf. p.93ff. Also, Plato, Protagoras 354b-355e.
5. Hirschberger, (Hi/GP) p.83ff
5a. cf. De Vogel, (De/Re) p.163
7. Plato, Phaedo 99d (τὸν δεύτερον πλοῦν ἐπὶ τὴν τῆς αἰτίας ξήτησιν ἢ πεπραγμάτευμαι βούλει σοι, ἡφι, ἐπίδειξιν ποιήσωμαι, ὃ κέβης; (tr. CR)
8. The Platonic Epistles, tr. by J. Harward, New York 1976
9. Plato, Phaedo 78d-79b
10. v. ch. I, p.41
10b. De Vogel (De/Re) pp.7,9,30 passim
12. ibid p.35
13. ibid pp.47-48 passim
14. ibid pp. 30-31
15. v. our pp.53-55
18. Brumbaugh, Plato on the One, the Hypotheses in the Parmenides, New York 1973, p.86
19. Krämer (Kr/Pla), pp. 255-266
20. De Vogel, (De/Re) p.201
21. v. our pp.39-40
21a. cf our p. 40, note 80
22. De Vogel, (De/Re) p.201
23. Plotinus, Enn. VI 9,3,33-40, (tr. slightly modified, CR)
24. ibid V 1,8,10ff
25. ibid VI 9,3,41ff
26. ibid III 9,4/also. Po, Sent. 31, p.63
27. ibid VI 9,4,1ff
28. Findlay (Fi/Pla) p.370
29. ibid p.61
30. Crombie, An Examination of Plato’s Doctrine (vol.II), London 1963, p.460
31. Aristotle, Physics 207a,1-9
32. v. Porphyry’s Sent. 20, cf. our p.25ff
33. That is, the Pythagoreans
33a. Findlay, (Fi/Pla) p.280
34. Plato, Phil. 30a-e, “We conclude that our souls and minds come from the soul of the universe which is the supreme cause”
35. Plato, Rep. VII 517c
36. Limit and unlimited, as we said, are the first two component classes out of the four which make up an entity (Plato, Phil.27b)
37. Findlay (Fi/Pla) appendix I, p.414/no. 3: Simplicius on Aristotle’s Physics, 187a12. But, we may ask, what does hyle mean in the world of ideas? We reply that ὄλη is the πλήθος.
38. Findlay, (Fi/Pla) p.372
39. Plato, Phil.23c, Rep.VI 508e-509c
40. Po, Auxiliaries to the Perception of intelligible Natures (= Sententiae); tr. Th.
Taylor, London 1823. And cp. Plotinus, Enn. III, 9, 4; and Proclus, Elementatio Theologica Prop. 98 (Tr. and intro. with commentary by Dodds, Oxford 1963).
41. Findlay, (Fi/Pla) pp. 57-58
42. DK 44A 23
43. v. in this ch. Theory of ideas, sect. 1.1.
44. tr. CR
45. Findlay, (Fi/Pla) p. 324
46. v. our p. 24ff
47. cf. De Vogel, (De/Re) p. 206
48. ibid p. 208
50. Plato, Phaedrus 265c-e, in: Collected dialogues of Plato, Princeton 1999; NB. excerpts from this edition will be indicated by initials PUP (Princeton University Press).
52. Plato, Phaedo, 74d-75a, PUP
53. ibid 69a-c
54. Plato, Rep. 476e-477b
55. ibid, myth of the cave (514a-518d)
56. The term metasensible seems more adequate than its synonym supersensible.
56a. Although we briefly mentioned this story (p. 29) we shall repropose it, somewhat.
57. Ricken, Phil. der Antike (Ri/Ph), pp. 90-91
58. Plato, Symp. 202e-204a passim
59. Ricken (Ri/Ph)
61. Markus, ibid p.140
62. Cornford, ibid p.123
63. Findlay (Fi/Pla) pp.144-145
64. cf. Plotinus, Enn. I 6,8,16ff; and, Homer, Odyssey X,417ff
65. cp. Plato, Phaedrus 248d 3-4
66. cp. Plato, Symp. 210b3-c6
67. cp. “ Phaedr. 251e5
68. cp. “ Symp.210e3
69. Aristotle, de An. III5,430a 22
70. Plato, Rep. 509b 9
71. cp. Plato, Phil. 64c 1
72. cp. “ Tim. 37d 3-6
73. Krämer, Platonismus und hellenistische philosophie, Berlin/New York 1971, p.175
74. cf. Reale, Per una Nuova Interpretazione di Platone, Mi,1991, p.475
75. ibid p.481
76. v. ch. II, sect. 1.4, Knowledge through Dialectics.
77. Plato, Symp. 192e-193a
78. “ Alcibiades Maior, 129e-130c
79. De vogel (De/Re) p.228, note 87
80. coll. dial. of Plato PUP, ibid, cf intro. by Huntington Cairns p.XVII
80a. Today’s holistic medicine involves aspects of both body and mind (soul).
81. v. ch. I sect.3: Life of Pythagoras
82. ibid
83. Plato, Phaedo 78b-79b. This is the culmination of the Parmenidean premise that thought and Being is the same thing (DK 28 B3): τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι. Of course this is a building block of Plotinian thought (V 1,8,15ff), “Earlier, Parmenides made some approach to the doctrine in identifying Being with intelligence, while separating from the
realm of sense. Knowing and Being are one thing”.
84. Guthrie (Gu/Pla) p.5
85. Plato, Rep. IV 436a
86. Guthrie, ibid p.6
87. Plato, Phaedo 79d
88. Guthrie, ibid p.8
88a. That the soul is divine goes back to the Orphic philosophers. cf. ch.I sect. 3b
Orphism, the mystery religion/Also, Empedocles, DK 31B 115,5
89. Plato, Tim.69c-d
90. “Phaedr. 247c-d
91. “ “ 248c-d
92. “ “ 245c-d
93. cf. ch. II, sect. 1.3 Was Plato’s viewpoint dualistic?
94. cf. ch.II, sect.1.5.b.1 (the origin and essence of psyche)
95. Plato, Crito 47e (PUP)
96. Porphyry, To Marcella, Atlanta 1987
97. De Vogel (De/Re) p.176
100. Cherniss, ibid pp.245-246 passim
101. Aristotle, met. XII, 6-9 passim; Physics, I 1-4, II 1 passim
102. Plato, Tim. 27d
103. “Phaedo,82e; Gorgias 493a
104. Aristoteles, met. 1072b-1073a
105. Plato, Phaedr. 246a-c
106. “Tim. 42a-d passim
107. Hegel, Encyclopedia of the philosophical sciences in outline, cf. section 50
108. cf. our pp. 97
109. cf. our p. 24. But if indeed chora (pp. 67-68) comes into being with time then our position becomes more likely.
112. Theiler, Gott und die Seele im kaiserzeitlichen Denken. cf. entretiens sur l'antiquité classique ibid tome III pp.65-95
112a. Ricken (Ri/Ph) pp. 193-195
113. ibid
114. ibid
114a. Porphyry (Po/VP) 14
114b. idem 17
115. cf our p.30
116. cf our p.31
117. Alcinous (or Albinus), The Handbook of Platonism (Didaskalikos), tr. with intro. and comm. by J. Dillon, Oxford 1993, (ch.) 11.2
118. ibid 10.2-3-4 passim
119. Krämer, Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik (Kr/Gm) p. 104
120. Cf. Rist, Eros and Psyche, Toronto 1964, pp.66-67
121. Ricken, phil. der Antike (Ri/Ph) p.194
122. Plato, Rep. 508e-509b; Parm. 132b-134d;
123. cf. p. 18, no.26 for Cicero’s comment.
124. Albinus, (Al/Di) 4.7
125. Witt, Albinus and the hist. of Mid. Plat. (sect.IX) (Wi/Al) pp.114-144. Also, cf. Albinus, Didask. 10.2-3
126. (Al/Di), commentary p.102
127. ibid, 8.2-3 passim
128. ibid, comm.. p.90
129. ibid, 14.3
130. cf. our ch.II, sect. 1.5.c. The world soul
131. Albinus, (Al/Di) 14.4
132. cf. our ch.II, sect. 1.5.c.2. Is Plato the founder of acosmism?
132a. Albinus, (Al/Di) 28.4
133. A detailed study of the old Academy after Plato’s death and the ensuing Hellenistic thought can be found in the following authors:
a) Merlan, From Platonism to Neoplatonism, The Hague 1968
b) Krämer: Platonismus und Hellen. Phil./ Berlin 1971;
Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik (Kr/Gm)
134. Russell (Ru/Hi) part III: Ancient phil. after Aristotle.
135. Witt (Wi/Al) p.107
What we know of Albinus’ life is obtained from Gelen who having been present in Pergamum at the lecture of a ‘pupil of Gaius’ went from there to Smyrna so as to get to know ‘the Platonist Albinus’. This happened around 151/2 AD. Albinus was a student of Gaius whose lectures on Plato he is believed to have edited. Gaius himself was a Platonist of some influence since his commentaries were read in the school of Plotinus (Po/VP 14.3).
136. Albinus, (Al/Di) 23.1
137. cf. our sections b1 + b2, pp. 101-103
138. Albinus (Al/Di) 23.1
139. ibid. 24.1-4 passim
140. ibid. comm. by Dillon on ch. 24, p.149
141. ibid. p.150
142. Albinus, (Al/Di) 25.6—This part reveals an interesting similarity with Porphyry’s position in section 3.1.a. (ch. II): An essay to Gaurus.
143. Plato (Phaedr.246a-c) showing the difference in the tripartite soul between man and the gods.
144. cf. our discussion on Numenius p. 31ff
145. Waszink, Porphyrios und Numenius, in Entretiens, Porphyre p.68
146. Numénius, fragments (Nu/Fr) fr. 52 passim
146a. ibid, cf. intr. section: l’Âme, p.20
147. ibid, frs. 43,48
148. ibid, fr. 41
149. Porphyry, Sententiae (v. note 40). Modern English (CR) from original tr. by Th. Taylor, ibid, Greek text: Sententiae ad intellegibilia ducentes, (Po/Se), from now on only Sent. no. will be given.

150. Plotinus, Enn. (IV 2,2,52-55)

151. We take for granted Porphyry’s authorship of this work.


153. Hadot, Porphyre et Victorinus (Ha/PV), Paris 1968/ 2 vols. of which the second contains only text materials of the two ancient thinkers.

154. Po, Symmikta Zetemata, ed. Dörrie, Mù 1959

155. Bidez, Vie de Porphyre (Bi/VP) p.53*

156. Beutler’s art. : Porphyrios 21, in RE XXII 1 (Be/Po) col.289

157. ibid

158. Porphyry, VP 13

159. Po, Sent. 3

160. Po, Sent. 4

161. Smith, Porphyry’s place in the Neoplatonist tradition (Sm/PP) p.2

162. Po, Symm. Zet. ((Po/SZ) pp.24-34

163. In Taylor’s tr. it’s no. 39

164. cf. Po, Sent. 30 pp. 114-115

165. Smith (Sm/PP) p.2

166. Hadot, Être, Vie et Pensée chez Plotin et avant Plotin (entr. sur l’ant. class. tome V : les sources de Plotin, Genève 1957, p.107)

167. Proclus, The Elements of Theology (tr./intr. and comm.. by Dodds, Oxford 1963, cf p.252, props. 101, 102

168. ibid p.253 passim

169. cf. Po, sent 13 our p. 112

170. cp. Plotinus, IV 4,16,23-31

171. v. above note no. 166
171a. Po, Sent. 5 p.109
172. Smith, Po place (Sm/PP) p.7
173. Po, Sent. 37, our p. 111-112
174. Victorinus (text no.60), (Ha/PV)) vol. II
174b. ibid 33.5
174c. cf. Albinus (Al/Di) 35.6 as well as Deuse, Untersuchungen zur Mittelplatonischen und Neuplatonischen Seelenlehre, Wiesbaden 1983, p.178
174d. Po/Ga 34.11 ff; 36 passim
174e. ibid 37
174f. ibid 39
174g. The text breaks off at 61.10// The rest 61.13+62.30 is in such a bad state that a translation is not possible (sic, Festugière).
175. cf. our p.113
176. cf. above note 174
177. cf. our ch.II sect. 1.5.a.1. (knowledge as catharsis).
178. Dörrie (Dö/En) pp.176-178)
179. Po/SZ pp.104-105
179a. Concerning the demiurge, Porphyry seems to have gradually changed his mind on the original Platonic version, as we see in the following three instances:

“ In the fourth book of the History of Philosophy Porphyry writes, ‘In fact, Plato said that the essence of the divine reaches three Hypostases, and that the supreme God is the Good; after Him, second, is the demiurge, and third the world soul. Finally, what does not participate in the divine is already subjected to material difference’ ” (tr. CR).
2) "After Amelius, Porphyry agreeing with Plotinus gives the name demiurge to the hypercosmic soul; and to the intellect of this soul, to which it turns, he gives it the name self-existent (τὸ αὐτοζῷον) so that the pattern followed by the demiurge, according to him, is the intellect". Porphyrii, in Platonis Timaeum Comm. Fragmenta XLI, ed. Sodano, Napoli, 1964 (tr. CR).

3) In this, we see that the term demiurge does not even appear but the substance of the expression indeed remains. Porphyry here still posits a divine triad: God/the Father, God/the Son (being the intellect of the Father), and a third God of whom Augustine tells us that He is intermediary between the two: horum medius, but without delineating the role it plays (cf. Bidez: Porphyry, de regressu animae fr. 8, p.37* (= Aug., de civitate Dei, X 23). In man, the anima intellectualis is consubstantial with the intellect of the Father which is the Son of God, "consubstantialis paternae illi menti, quem Dei filium confitemini", (de regressu animae fr. 10, p. 37* / = Aug., de civitate Dei, X 29 (tr. CR).
This doctrine is very similar to that of Numenius (cf. ed. Des Place, frs. 13, 16)). In other words, the Father is Being, the Good (fr. 13) and the Son is the intellect and as such already double (dittos, fr. 16).

180. cf. notes ch. I, no. 41
181. Chaldean Oracles, (Ch/Or) commentary to fr. 120, p.187
182. Smith, Po place, (Sm/PP) pp.152-158 passim
184. ibid pp.177-178
185. cf. Po, Sent.30, our pp. 114-115
186. Smith, (Sm/PP) p.20
187. cf. our p.116
188. Smith, (Sm/PP) p.28
189. cf Bidez p. 27*
190. Smith, (Sm/PP) p.35
191. cf. Plato, Phaedr. 246c1
193. ibid, p.193
194. ibid, p. 193 and p. 197
195. Plotinus, Enn. III 9,5,1-3
196. Po, Symm. Zet. p.85:

\[ \text{æj} \quad \text{¹} \quad \text{yuc¾} \quad \text{pet} \quad \text{m} \quad \text{eV} \\
\text{m} \quad \text{eVn} \quad \text{™n} \quad \text{˜autÍ} \quad \text{™stin}, \]

\[ \text{Ótan log…zhtai, pet} \quad \text{d} \quad \text{e} \quad \text{en} \quad \text{tô} \quad \text{vô}, \text{Ótan noÍ.} \quad (\text{tr.CR}) \]
197. This Sent. is no. 17 in the Taylor tr.
198. Smith, (Sm/PP) pp.48-49
199. cf. above 179a, pt. 3
200. DK 59 B1
201. This Sent. is no.41 in Taylor’s tr. which we have slightly modified.
202. Po/ VP 23
203. Smith, (Sm/PP) p.54
203a. cf. Sent.37 p.111-112; Sent. 40 p.127
204.cf.Zintzen (Zi/Se) pp.48, 50,51, 55
Chapter Three: Porphyry and Aristotle

Introduction

Σύμβολα γὰρ πατρικὸς νόος ἔσπειρεν
κατὰ κόσμον, ὡς τὰ νοητὰ νοεῖ:
καὶ κάλλη ἄφραστα καλεῖται.

Paternal Νοῦς sowed symbols
throughout the cosmos; he who thinks
the intelligibles, which are called
ineffable beauties. (1)
A) Greek Commentators on Aristotle

The practice of writing commentaries on Aristotle's work began around 50 BC, in an attempt to retrieve the spirit of the old Peripatetic school after a period of neglect following the death of Theophrastus 287 BC. One of the reasons for this eclipse was the unavailability of Aristotle's most significant philosophical monographs, the so-called pragmateiai, school treatises (2). In 86 BC, after the sack of Athens, Sulla (3) confiscated the Aristotelian manuscripts from a certain Apellicon and brought them back to Rome where they were entrusted to a Greek grammarian by the name of Tyrannio of Amisus so that they could be transcribed. This ponderous undertaking was brought to an end by Andronicus of Rhodes (who came to Rome for the occasion), the eleventh head, scholarch, of the Aristotelian school of philosophy in Athens.

Andronicus, as it turned out, brought about a critical edition of Aristotle's treatises, assembled according to a logical order in which, he believed, they should be read, and thus forming the basis of today's edition (4). The earliest commentaries in our possession date back to Aristotelians of the second century AD, whose general activity comes to a head in the work of the greatest interpreter of Aristotle's teachings within the Peripatetic tradition, Alexander of Aphrodisias who in fact was designated for the Aristotelian chair in Athens between 198 and 209 AD (5).
The next similar boost to Aristotle’s thought comes with Porphyry in the third century (5a). The Suidas lexicon attributes two works, now lost, to our philosopher which deal with the relationship between the teachings of the two main ancient scholars. The first commentary containing seven books bears the title ‘On the school of Plato and Aristotle being one’, and the other (if it is not the same book) ‘On the difference between Plato and Aristotle’ (6). It is worthwhile to observe that Porphyry’s commentaries covered in detail various facets of Plato and Aristotle. To the latter he dedicated at least ten interpretations, and to Plato around seven (7). Moreover, from the ancient Arabic literary world it is possible to reconstruct some of Porphyry’s writings dealing with commentaries on Aristotle (8).

B) The fundamental Concordance between Plato and Aristotle.

“The harmony of Plato and Aristotle was accepted to a larger or smaller extent by all commentators in the Neoplatonist tradition, and the great bulk of the ancient commentators, Christians included, are in that tradition” (9). This eclectic propensity of Neoplatonism undoubtedly has its source in Middle Platonism (10). To be sure, Porphyry as well followed this tendency in which Aristotle’s logic was thought of as an introduction to Plato’s metaphysics (11). As a matter of fact, if we consult Smith’s compilation of Porphyry’s fragments (12) we find that our philosopher’s commentaries concern basically both Aristotle’s work on logic and Plato’s so-called metaphysical dialogues. Furthermore, we can safely assume, in our opinion, that Porphyry was well aware of and familiar with Plato’s
unwritten doctrines since, as we know, Aristotle mentions them in his metaphysics. The Neoplatonist commentaries reflect somewhat their study curriculum: Beginning with Aristotle's logic as 'lesser mysteries' and ending up with the 'greater mysteries' of Plato's Timaeus and Parmenides through which the ascent to the unconditional was achieved (13). "I think it is probable that Porphyry inaugurated this mixed syllabus of Plato and Aristotle reading: It would be quite in keeping with his view that Plato's and Aristotle's systems are ultimately one and the same" (14).

C) The Significance of the Commentaries

The CAG (Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca) (15) in addition to their face value also represent the thoughts of Neoplatonists and Aristotelian schools. Moreover they contain fragments and testimonia from various periods of Greek philosophy such as the pre-Socratics. The Latin-speaking Middle Ages acquired their learning of Aristotle partly through the medium of these writings (16).

The issues under consideration in this chapter will be Porphyry's commentaries on both Aristotle's logic and Physics (via Simplicius) whereas the metaphysics will be touched upon in our final section.
1) Commentaries on Aristotle’s Logic

“Aristotle has (...) a clear idea of the difference between logic and other studies with which it has sometimes been identified or confused---grammar, psychology, metaphysics. It is for him a study not of words but of the thought of which words are signs; of thought not with reference to its natural history but with reference to its success or failure in attaining truth; of thought not as constituting but as apprehending the nature of things “ (17)

A. Isagoge—The importance of this work is determined to a great extent by the controversy that sprung up over universals during the Middle Ages and by the metaphysics developed with the help of the Aristotelian Logic (18). This small unpretentious treatise bears the name Introduction, Isagoge, to Aristotle’s Categories written in fact for the Roman senator Chrysaorius who evidently having some trouble in understanding Peripatetic logic decided to write to Porphyry for help. The date and place of composition is around 270 in Sicily where, urged by Plotinus, he decided to go so as to alleviate or possibly get over his depressive and suicidal state of mind (19). This booklet does not claim to be an original contribution to logic or metaphysics. It is rather an attempt to help students understand Aristotle’s following terms, later called predicables: 1)genus 2)species 3)difference 4)property 5)accident (respectively: γένος, εἶδος, διαφορά, ἴδιον, συμβεβηκός).

In the Topics (101b 17-24, 139a 29-30), Aristotle examines in detail these terms which serve as a groundwork for Porphyry’s Isagoge. In reference to the above five terms, Aristotle’s actual predicables are as follows:
1) definition 2) property 3) genus and 4) accident (respectively: ὄρος/ὄρισμός, ἴδιον, γένος, συμβεβηκός).

As we can observe Porphyry changed the make-up of the list by adding species and difference and removing definition (20) so that we now have five predicables instead of the original Aristotelian four.

In our study of Porphyry’s work we intend to show that his main goal was to discuss Aristotle’s Categories foremost from a logical point of view and consequently to integrate the Peripatetic method of reasoning about sensible substances into the Neoplatonic frame of mind.

In other words, Porphyry makes use of the Aristotelian logic with such concepts as genus and species as a moment of preparation for Neoplatonic metaphysics and thus attempts to make Aristotle acceptable to this current of thought. In fact, in the introductory page of the Isagoge our philosopher wants to avoid deeper issues concerning the above generic and specific terms and so sticks to simple analytical explanation of the particular words. This, after all, fits in with the mentioned request of Chrysaorius.

“I shall put aside the investigation of certain profound questions concerning genera and species, since such an undertaking requires more detailed examination:
1) Whether genera or species exist in themselves or reside in mere concepts alone;
2) Whether, if they exist, they are corporeal or incorporeal; and
3) Whether they exist apart or in some objects and in dependence on them” (21).

In the above excerpt we see how the problem of universals is indeed presented but not resolved. Likewise, again, it is clear that our philosopher wants to abstain from any
metaphysical discussion, and simply tackles the logical reading of the text. “I shall try to make clear how in logic (λογικώτερον) the ancients and especially the Peripatetics dealt with genus, difference and the rest” (22).

Before dealing with our interpretation of Porphyry’s viewpoint let us briefly review previous opinions on this matter. Whereas Plato framed the world of ideas above Νοῦς (so that the demiurge could refer to them as transcendent beings), Aristotle, on the other hand, interpreted these forms as inherent in particular entities and in addition he designated Νοῦς as absolute intelligence thinking on itself. To Plato the transcendent εἴδη are primary real intelligibles independent of the human mind. And to the Peripatetic the immanent forms are also independent which together with matter fashion any particular thing (τὸ σύνολον).

To these we add a third interpretation of intelligibles: the logical one which as a single idea represents the many drawn from sense-data experience. Thus we sum up the respective three positions:
1) Universale ante rem (UAR), primary universals (Plato);
2) Universale in re (UIR) (Aristotle); and
3) Universale post rem (UPR), which is a derived logical conceptual entity (22a).

A1. Why did Aristotle write the Categories?

To be sure, logic considers the basic form that any discussion must have so as to communicate something. It shows how thoughts come into place, the structure of the discursive method as well as the elements used in trying to prove or convey a point at issue. Therefore, logic as
a tool (ὄργανον) is necessary to confront any type of analysis (and in the Categories primarily we find a study of the ten most simple elements making up a sentence: Substance, Quantity, Quality, Relation, Place, Time, Posture, State/or Condition, Action and Affection). “The Organon as a whole is supposed to serve as the instrument by which one investigates the various theoretical and practical parts of philosophy, i.e. physics or natural philosophy, metaphysics or first philosophy, and ethics. This picture, enshrined as it is in the traditional ordering of the treatises of the Aristotelian corpus, and defended by Porphyry following Alexander of Aphrodisias, suggests that the Categories is the right place to begin the study of Aristotle’s philosophy, and that is why it is placed first in the traditional order of the corpus” (23).

As we mentioned, the Categories study the primary components used in any logical discussion. For instance, if we break up the following sentences: 'The man is jogging', or 'The man is driving' we get a set of truly uncombined terms (meaningless by themselves) in which each element inextricably refers to one of the above ten categories (24). Whereas in metaphysics they may represent basic meanings of Being, in logic categories are the main genera to which each word of a sentence relates in order to get one’s message across (of a distinct sense or import): Just as the ontological categories give the ultimate definition of Being, so (from a logical standpoint) we have the final significance of words by means of the above ten categories. In the earlier clause ‘The man is jogging’, the word man is the category substance and ‘is jogging’ is the category action. Likewise, if I
say 'John is now at school', John is substance, now is time, and 'at school' place. Of the ten categories, substance (the first) is the subject and the other nine are predicates, “Everything else but first substance is either affirmed of first substance or present in such as its subject” (25).

Moreover, in analyzing the terms of a sentence we notice that we have neither a true nor a false meaning, “Not one of these terms in itself will involve any positive statement. Affirmation, as also denials, can only arise when such terms are combined or united together. Each positive or negative statement must either be true or false (...) but an uncombined word or expression (for instance, man, white, runs or conquers) can neither be true nor be false” (26).

This means of course that true or false is not the property of single words but rather belong to a proposition logically composed of these primary elements. Consequently, these units or categories are not definable in themselves because there is no further universal element they can refer to. But at the same time we see that not definable is also the so-called individual for the opposite reason: its particularity. We can never affirm of a subject what is in its nature individual and also numerically one (27).

Therefore the categories as such and the individual synolon are diametrically opposed: highest abstraction versus most concrete uniqueness (the latter can only be perceived empirically but in fact it is still : ὁν τι). Nonetheless, between the universal categories and the individual there is a string of concepts making up our sentences which stand for definitions. However, to be sure, the name indicating the particular can only come up as
subject. Once more, we get to know the respective theories or notions extending between the universal categories and the particular only through definition, “To reveal the essence of a thing is not the same as to prove a proposition about it. Now definition exhibits the essence, but demonstration proves that an attribute is, or is not predicated of a subject” (28).
Thus a given definition (ὁρισμός) means determining the nature of the object pointed to by a word. And to define something we need to know the genus and the difference (29): Animal (genus) + rational (difference) = man (species). Therefore we can conclude with a quote from Porphyry that the Categories were written, “To discuss things and expressions that are said without combination, and how many genera there are of these. For expressions will be classified in the same way as the things that are primarily designated by them” (30).

A2. The Porphyrian Reading of the Categories

As we stated earlier the ultimate ten categories are diametrically opposed to the individual, and nothing can be said of either of these poles (and the only way we can be aware of the particular is through our sense perception). In addition, in both Isagoge and On Aristotle Categories the concepts of genus and species (together with difference, property and accident), as pointed out, are logically interpreted by our philosopher. That is to say, these are universalia post rem (UPR), or theoretical conclusions, which have their reason of being in the ideas drawn from particular experiences. For instance, genus (animal) can be shown (and not defined, strictly speaking) as that predicated of many
things which differ in species and number, such as ox, man, and bird. Likewise, species is predicated of Plato and Socrates (ex pluribus), differing from one another only in number (31). Consequently, the species/man logically includes the genus/animal and the difference/rational in its definition but not conversely: the concept of man is not automatically contained in the term animal, “Genera must be admitted beforehand (i.e. they are more abstract) and when informed by the specific differences complete the species” (32). Thus, as it turns out, we come to the conclusion that the above Porphyrian UPR indeed goes hand in hand (for its applicability) with the method of modern science, born in the Renaissance, by which a formula, or theory is arrived at after various experiments, on a trial and error basis (33). This in turn can be traced back, to some extent, to Aristotle’s recommendation for the natural sciences, “The natural way of doing this is to start from things which are more knowable and obvious to us and proceed towards those which are clearer and more knowable by nature” (34).

B. On Aristotle Categories

There are in our possession eight Neoplatonic commentaries on Aristotle’s Categories. Porphyry’s version set out in question and answer form basically reaffirms the same teaching as the Isagoge. Our philosopher’s big commentary on the same subject dedicated to Gedalios is lost (36). In reply to the question why Aristotle in the Categories declares that particular substance is primary and prior to universal substance, Porphyry believes that the Peripatetic does not mean that a single particular substance is
prior to its universal but: that the whole class range of particulars is indeed prior to it. In other words, we cannot think of a universal predicate existing apart from its empirical locus from which it was extrapolated or inferred (37).

In the Categories, individuals are called primary substances because (according to Porphyry) Aristotle is discussing the classification of significant expressions and these apply firstly to sensible individuals and secondly to abstract universals predicated of them. Indeed, the primary purpose of language is to communicate about ordinary things and their individual properties (38). Unlike the Platonic forms (the real UAR), Porphyry’s inferred universals have only conceptual existence, posterior (post rem) to sensible things. But let us analyze some of the main questions and answers in the Proemium to this work (39).

1. Why did Aristotle introduce a new meaning to the word category, since in ordinary language the term denotes the speech of the prosecution against the defendant at a trial? Answer: Ordinary language talks about everyday things and uses expressions commonly employed to point out such things whereas the philosopher interprets things unknown to most people and necessarily needs new words to express things he has discovered. An example is the word entelechy, which is the form imposed on, say, a piece of bronze by an artist and thus making it a statue.
2. Was Categories the only title that he gave the book, or did he also call it, as do others, The Ten Categories?
Answer: Categories, and not Introduction to the Topics, or On the Genera of Being, or On the Ten Genera.

3. What is the subject matter of the book?
Answer: To show the way words and expressions have been assigned to things and therefore revealing the particular sound employed to designate the respective objects. When these expressions were posited man began to think about their interrelations and saw that certain things expressed nouns (onomata) and others, such as walk/walks, verbs (rhemata).

4. What are the various interpretations given to Aristotle’s Categories?
Answer: Some took them to be genera of Being (as Plotinus), others as expressions qua expressions (Athenodorus).

(Porphyry takes to task both of these approaches with the help of Boethus, a pupil of Andronicus of Rhodes, and Herminus, a teacher of Alexander of Aphrodisias: For our philosopher the Categories are neither metaphysics nor mere grammar.)

5. Who were the latter?
Answer: They were the followers of Athenodorus and Cornutus, who took the objects of the investigation to be expressions qua expressions, that is, expressions as used properly and figuratively and so forth, for these are differentiae of expressions qua expressions. Fixing upon these, they raised the question of what category they belonged to and finding none, they complained that the division
was incomplete, since it fails to include every sort of significant expression.

6. Have all the commentators been mistaken about the subject matter of the Categories? Answer: Certainly not. Boethus, in his commentary on the Categories, said what we have said, and so did Herminus, though briefly.

7. Tell us what Herminus says, since you say he spoke briefly.
Answer: Herminus says that the subject of the work is not the primary and highest genera in nature (…) nor the issue of what the primary and fundamental differentiae of things said are, since in that case the discussion would seem to be about the parts of speech. Rather it is about the sort of predication that will properly belong to what is said in each of the genera of Being (40).

On the section: Concerning Substance, Porphyry tells us that Aristotle begins his treatise with this category because all other things are in substance and depend upon it for their being. Moreover since it is impossible to define the ten categories (because these are the highest genera, 87, 17-18), we have, as a result, no definition of them. But substance indeed underlies all other genera, and these in turn cannot be without it (88,10) (41). But what about the individual substance (τὸ ἄτομον, Aristotle/Cat.II,1b6)? This is neither asserted of nor can be found in a subject (ibid V, 2a12-13): This condition in fact differentiates primary from secondary substance. That is, secondary substances (species and genera) are predicated of primary substance (as subject); but, primary substance, on the other hand, is not asserted of a subject.
Animal is predicated of man, thus also of a particular man. But if this were not the case (i.e., if animal were not predicated of any individual man) it could not, as a result, be predicated of the species man, in any way whatsoever. The Porphyrian ingenuity lies in this: According to him individual substance does not mean just one of the particular individuals but all of the particulars from whom we infer, or conceive the koinos, the ‘man’ that is predicated in common. Our philosopher is of the opinion that it is not possible to think of man in general apart from the particulars. In other words, the term man is UPR, it is a concept drawn from the particular empirical conception of many individual persons.

“But if it is from the perception of particulars that we come to conceive of the common predicate, which we no longer think of as a ‘this’, but as a ‘such’, then if the particular animals are eliminated, what is predicated in common of them will no longer exist either. Also, expressions that signify beings are applied initially to individuals, and it is from them that our thought proceeds to the common items (tà koina). Since, however, the subject of this work is significant expressions, and expressions are primarily applied to sensibles (for they are what we first encounter in perception) Aristotle stated, appropriately to his subject matter, that these were the primary substances. As sensibles are the primary objects of signification, he posited individual substances as primary relative to significant expressions” (42).

Since the central theme of the treatise is meaningful assertions applied to sensibles
(men, again, first assign names to what they perceive and second to those things that are primary by nature), then it is reasonable for the Peripatetic to have called sensibles and individuals primary substances.

Therefore, to sum up, as regards significant expressions sensible individuals are primary substances, but concerning the priority in nature intelligible substances are put foremost. And as stated, of the ten categories only nine can be predicated, and the tenth (substance) cannot. Furthermore, individual substances like X and Y do not admit of a more and a less considered in itself. That is to say, the latter X and Y are no more X and Y today than tomorrow (97,15ff). And finally, according to Porphyry particular substances (i.e. those which are numerically one) are receptive of contrary qualities that are external to them, and these are the other nine categories (99,17ff). “And since individual substance, which is numerically one, has this property, so do secondary substances. For if Socrates is virtuous and foolish, so also will man be virtuous and foolish, and animal as well, since Socrates is both an animal and a man. So as substance, man and animal are receptive of contraries, since man is a substance and animal is a substance. But as universals, they are not receptive of them; rather, the items that fall under them are. Just as color is neither white nor black, but white and black fall under it, so man qua common item and animal qua common item predicated of a number of things are not themselves wise or foolish or sick or healthy, but the wise and the foolish man and the sick and healthy man fall under them” (43).
That is, the idea of man drawn from the particulars, ex pluribus, is neither wise nor foolish, but these attributes nevertheless fall under the koinon, the UPR.

C. Modern Ramifications of UPR, universale post rem

As we indicated, the Porphyrian conceptual universal seems to go hand in hand with modern methodology of science. From what we have discussed, we can undoubtedly discern that the general idea drawn from various particular empirical experience indeed represents a quantum leap on the part of Porphyry. When the latter declares (On Ar. Cat. 90,33-4) “that individual substance does not mean just one of the particulars, but rather all of the particular men, from whom we conceive the man that is predicated in common” (the UPR man), then in our opinion we have the basis for an experimental trial and error method, similar to that applicable not only to the various physical sciences but also to the roots of modern empirical philosophy (cf. Bacon’s Novum Organum (1620), and especially the third book of Locke’s Essay concerning Human Understanding (1690) which seem to be referring to the testability of UPR concepts: These are constantly verifiable—or better falsifiable and therefore more precise in its application field—by experience which implies of course that tentative knowledge is the only certainty of the human condition) (43a).

Porphyry’s On Aristotle Categories was translated into Latin by the Venetian G.B. Feliciano (1490-1554). Not by chance, we
believe, Galileo (1564-1642), the founder of modern science and a philosopher, in his work “The Dialogue concerning The Two Chief World Systems” (1632), subtly points out through the three speakers of his dialogue (the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic by the name of Simplicio, the Copernican Salviati who must have been inspired by a Neoplatonic worship of the light of the sun that consequently had to occupy the center because of its nobility (43b) and thirdly the impartial and sharp-witted Sagredo) the apparent unsustainability of the Aristotelian physics which, among other things, made a distinction between the celestial and the sub-lunar world.

Porphyry (since his general view is that the Categories is about ordinary sensible substances) in a parallel way declares that what was stated about individual substances (what we call UPR), that they are more of a substance as compared with specific and general substances (97,20-24), is not applicable to the so-called heavenly substances: Because, we infer, these are outside, or beyond our experiential range and for that reason any theories concerning them (thus rebutting Aristotle) cannot be tested, “First of all, I will not be able to show this for the case of eternal substances” (99,1-2). Moreover, it can be affirmed that all existing entities or things, are indeed particulars; but nonetheless we can fashion universal concepts such as man that are relevant to many particulars and to these universal concepts we actually give names. Their universality consists solely in the fact that they are relevant to a set of particular things. Therefore, it follows that the laws of science are arrived at (or inferred from experimental findings and thus applicable as abstract ideas, UPR) to predict new
experimental conclusions. But, if other new results (experimental) go against this prediction, they of necessity show the law (which was an extrapolated as well as a demarcated principle) to be flawed. Consequently, a new theory (UPR) can always change accepted scientific truths.

In Bacon’s theory of induction by which the Novum organum distinguishes between the true method (interpretatio naturae) and a false one, Galileo’s famous passage of his Sagggiatore (section 6) comes to mind, “The great book which lies before us------I mean the universe”.

2. Simplicius’ Fragments and Testimonia concerning Porphyry’s Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics.

“Aristotle’s clarification of the sciences(...) divides them firstly into theoretical, which aim at knowledge for its own sake, the practical, which aim at knowledge as a guide to conduct and the productive, which aim at knowledge to be used in making something useful or beautiful. The theoretical sciences are subdivided into theology (or metaphysics), physics and mathematics. Physics deals with things that have a separate existence but are not unchangeable (i.e. with natural bodies which have in them a source of movement and rest); mathematics with things that are unchangeable but have no separate existence (i.e. with numbers and spatial figures which have only an adjectival existence, as qualifying substances); Theology with things that both have separate existence and are unchangeable (i.e. with the substances which exist free from any connexion with matter)” (43c).
A. Hellenic Philosophy of Nature

Aristotle’s definition of physics is surely not what we mean today by this science but rather a metaphysics (44). The matter dealt with in the Aristotelian physics is nature, φύσις. The latter is defined as a principle of motion and change (Ph. 200b,12). Moreover, motion (κίνησις, Ph. 200b,11, 202a,5 and μεταβολή, Ph. 241a26) includes the following forms: Generation and corruption (motion according to substance), change (quantity), increase and diminution (quality) and locomotion (place (Cat. 1b25) (45).

Whereas for the pre-Socratics Physis was the totality of Being (46), for Aristotle it becomes simply the world of motion and change, “And since natural science, like other sciences, is in fact about one class of being (i.e. to that sort of substance which has the principle of its movement and rest present in itself) evidently it is neither practical nor productive (...) Physics must be a theoretical science, but it will theorize about such being as admits of being moved, and about substance (...) as not separable from matter” (met. 1025b 20-29).

In Aristotle motion and therefore change is a primordial state of nature (Ph.185a 12ff) and, likewise, a scientific premise constantly confirmed and verified.

To fully appreciate this statement we have to bear in mind that by Plato the only self-moving principle was the soul. Consequently, to explain coming into being Plato’s demiurge had to create the world soul (47) which necessarily becomes the main condition and cause of motion
whereas for the Peripatetic the foremost source of fundamental motion is nature. And inevitably connected to motion we find place.

In addition to what we have already discussed (48), place obviously belongs to all existing entities which are located ‘somewhere’ (Ph. 208a 27-33 passim). It is the basic boundary of anything containing a body (Ph.210a 20). Furthermore, the void (Ph.IV 6-9) which for the pre-Socratic Atomists (Leucippus and Democritus) was an indispensable medium for motion (Ph.213a-b) becomes, in fact, unacceptable in the Aristotelian scheme of things (horror vacui). For the latter, motion does not imply at all the existence of the void, “But not even movement in respect of place involves a void; for bodies may simultaneously make room for one another, though there is no interval separate and apart from the bodies that are in movement” (Ph.214a,28-30).

If each of the single natural elements has its own motion (fire/air upwards, and earth/water downwards) then it is obvious that the condition allowing this locomotion is indeed not the void (Ph.214b,14-17). The latter is non-existent, a non-being (Ph.215a 10). As for the most historically renowned term, time, Aristotle defines it in function of two factors: Motion and soul. Time is the number of motion in respect of ‘before’ and ‘after’ (hence time is not motion, Ph.219b).

On top of that, the influence of Aristotle’s teacher comes to the fore when talking about the soul: Without it there is no time but only motion, “Whether if soul did not exist time would exist or not is a question that may fairly be asked; for if there cannot be someone to count there cannot be anything that can be
counted, so that evidently there cannot be number; for number is either what has been, or what can be counted. But if nothing but soul, or in soul reason, is qualified to count there would not be time unless there were soul” (Ph.223a,22-28).

Time and the world are eternal in the Greek worldview: There is no Big Bang (48a). In Plato’s Timaeus, as we already discussed, the universe comes into being together with time (Tim.38b). There never was a time (this as moving image of eternity, Tim.37e) when the universe did not exist. Similarly, with Aristotle, the eternity of time and the world were clearly stated, “There never was a time when there was not motion, and never will be a time when there will not be motion” (Ph.252b3). Finally, concerning the notion of infinity, for both Plato and Aristotle and indeed the whole Hellenic culture, it (τὸ ἀπειρὸν) is a sign of imperfection, a negative concept (48b). As for the Peripatetic infinity exists only in potentiality, such as number (+/- ad infinitum), space (infinitely divisible), and time (never-ending duration, sempiternum: ἀεὶ) (Ph.III,6).

B. Porphyry’s Commentary (49)

The sources of information concerning Porphyry’s analysis of Aristotle’s Physics are Simplicius and the Arabs (50). Almost all of the former’s references to our philosopher concern the first four books and a summary by
Porphyry of the fifth. Of these, book A contains about 2/3 of all references. One explanation for this imbalance may be that Porphyry only stressed certain aspects of the Physics. For instance, chapter 2 of book A carries a critique of the Eleatic theory of being-one and it rightly claims twelve fragments to its credit, the highest number among all the above books allegedly commented on by Porphyry. This of course is well justified by the fact that the subject matter, being-one, was of paramount importance for the Neoplatonists, similar perhaps to the significance Plato’s Parmenides took on in this school between the IV and VI century (51).

Simplicius’ attitude towards Porphyry’s Physics interpretation is somewhat critical and surely sober (52), always ready to express his point of view or even correcting or praising our philosopher. For instance, a) in Simplicius Phys. 163,16ff (=24, appendix), Porphyry’s ascribing to Democritus and Empedocles Aristotle’s phrase (Ph. 187a 31) “Some spoke of combination and separation” is utterly rejected. For Simplicius, Aristotle was instead referring to Anaxagoras (53); and b) Simpl. Phys. 97,4-8 (=13, app.), where our philosopher is praised for having correctly understood Aristotle’s irony in this, “As if one and being were always used in one and the same sense whereas beings are many” (Ph. 185b 31ff).

Unlike Themistius’ paraphrasing (παραφράζειν), or Alexander of Aphrodisias’ interpreting ἔξηγείσθαι), Zeller reminds us (54) that Porphyry’s commentary is a summary (συνοψίζειν), surely of book V, if not all of the first five books of the Physics, as the editor of CAG, Diels, seems to think (55). Porphyry makes a
4+4 division of Aristotle’s eight book treatise giving it the respective titles: On Principles (περὶ ἀρχῶν) and On Motion (περὶ κινήσεως).
This naturally goes against the Peripatetic tradition of 5+3 (56).

Nevertheless, out of respect for this venerable practice, Porphyry in point of fact wrote a brief summary of book five. After this exposition our philosopher is suddenly no longer mentioned by Simplicius (57). Indeed, the latter was somewhat taken aback that the very philosophic-minded Porphyry (in his summary of book five) despite the fact that everybody calls the first five books: On the Principles of Physics, and the remaining three: On Motion, nonetheless declared the above 4+4 methodic division of the work (58).

Furthermore, to try to determine the principles of physics, Porphyry says, is no task of a physicist but that of a metaphysician. Whereas the former makes use of the already given principles, the latter tries to establish them (59). Quoting Aristotle, Porphyry asserts that the notion of principle (ἀρχή) may be expressed in these four ways:
1. Material (ἐξ οὗ, from which);
2. Formal (καθ’ οὗ, that according to which);
(Aristotle considering form to be inherent in matter called it principle whereas Plato used the term ‘paradigmatic transcendent principle’, that is, universale ante rem and in re.
3. Efficient (ὑπ’ οὗ, that through the action of which);
4. Final (δι’ οὗ, or οὗ ἐνεκα, that because of which). Also (according to Plato) in addition to the already mentioned paradigmatic principle of πρὸς οὗ (something in relation to which),
there is as well the so-called instrumental one: δι’ οὗ, something by means of which (60).

A particular point of contention between Simplicius and our philosopher is triggered by the following, “Again, one itself, no less than being, is used in many senses, so we must consider in what sense the word is used when it is said that the all is one…” (Arist. Ph.185b 5ff). In commenting on the above excerpt Simplicius is of the opinion that Aristotle is making use, to be sure, of a concept analysis (διαίρεσις) peculiar to the one and does not mean at all what Porphyry seems to be interpreting: That the one has as many meanings as being (cf. Meta. F) and besides (so continues Simplicius) those who were to identify the one in the same manner as being, of necessity would have to state how being is one, whether as substance or whether as quality or in any other way (60a). Therefore, Simplicius concludes (61), Aristotle in an absolute and precise manner acknowledges that the analysis of the meanings of being is one thing and that of the one another. Now in this somewhat abstruse issue (62) Porphyry is evidently interested in Aristotle’s view as it applies to being—one of the Eleatics. However, as we have seen, Simplicius indeed does not agree with our philosopher’s expounding method which brings to bear a similar analysis to both being and one. Another key notion in Porphyry’s commentary is that of matter (63). Our philosopher bears witness to the fact that Derkyllides in his XI book “On the Philosophy of Plato” only interprets the words of the Athenian’s disciple Hermodorus: That Plato thought of matter as the great-and-small. Simplicius tells that Aristotle reminds us in many places that Plato indeed calls matter, once more, great-and-small(...) and that being is
both cause (agent) and principle (ἀρχή) while, on the contrary, matter as non-being cannot be a principle (64).

In point of fact, from our philosopher’s commentary on Plato’s Timaeus we can notice a close parallel with the present work under consideration (65). Philoponus informs us that Porphyry essentially agrees with all of Aristotle’s theories; and (he continues) concerning matter Porphyry believes that it (hyle) is only capable of receiving the various forms (what Plato calls ἐκμαγείον, Tim.50c), since in itself it is formless (66).

3. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter we have first discussed Porphyry’s work on Aristotle’s Categories with the premise that this writing was looked upon by our philosopher as a logical treatise dealing with the classification of ‘things’ and ‘significant assertions’ (p.161ff). In the second part where we analyzed Porphyry’s interpretation of Aristotle’s Physics, we began with Simplicius’ attestation that the Porphyrian commentary method is one of synopsis. On top of that, we were told of our philosopher’s notion concerning Aristotle’s theory of the four principles (archai), as well as Simplicius’ basic disagreement over Porphyry’s exegesis of Aristotle’s Ph. 185b5ff.
Notes/Chapter Three

1. The Chaldean Oracles, (Ch/Or) fr. 108 (tr.CR)
5. ibid
5a. Zeller, Die Phil. der Griechen, Leipzig 1903, III, sect. 2 Porphyrios, p.696, note 5
6. Sorabji, (So) p.2
7. Po/Fr pp.L and LI
9. Sorabji (So) p.3
11. De Libera, La Querelle des Universaux (de Platon à la Fin du moyen Age), Paris 1996, p.34
12. Po/Fr
13. Sorabji (So) p.5
14. Walzer, Porphyry (Wa) p.288
15. CAG, ed. Diels 1882-1885 are made up of 13 vol. plus another 2 of supplements.
16. Sorabji, (So) pp.27-29
17. Ross, Aristotle, New York 1964, p.21
18. Po, Isagoge, tr. by E. Warren, Toronto 1975 cf. intr. p.11
19. ibid p.9
20. ibid p.11
21. ibid 1.11
22. ibid 1.15
22a. Of course, Porphyry also subscribes to the UAR, the real Platonic universals.
23. Simplicius, in Cat. 5,5-15, in: Po/Ca
25. ibid V, 34-36
26. ibid IV, 2a, 4-10
27. ibid II, 1b6
28. Aristotle, Apo. 91a1
29. Aristotle, Met.1037b,29ff
30. Po/Ca 71,13ff
31. Po/Is, 2.25ff
32. ibid 15,17-19
33. Thiel, Aristoteles’ Kategorienschrift in ihrer Antiken Kommentierung, Marburg 1997, p.18ff
34. Aristotle, Ph. 184a,16ff/ For Porphyry this means to operate from a particulat UPR (based on sense data) to a more abstract one.
37. Po/Ca 90,32-91,9
38. ibid 91,8-9
39. ibid 55,3-60,1 passim
40. ibid 59,1-25 passim
41. cf. Aristotle, Cat. 2b5-6
42. Po/Ca 91,5-12
43. ibid 99,18-27
43a. Popper, Objective Knowledge, Oxford 1972. cf. ch.5, The aim of Science, pp. 191-205. NB. Both verifiability and falsifiability fulfill the requirements for UPR: Both methods work on theories involving UPR positions.
43c. Ross, Aristotle, (Ro) p.62
44. cf. Röd, Der Weg der Philosophie, (Rö) vol. I, p.164
45. ibid
46. v. our pp. 53-54 and 130 no.3, in which we state that for the pre-Socratics corporeal Being, or φύσις, was the totality of Being itself, unlike Plato (with his δεύτερος πλοῦς) as well as Aristotle (with the transcendent intelligible unmoved mover, met.1003a 18).
47. cf. our ch. II, sect. 1.5.c. The world soul. Also, Moreau, Plotin, Paris 1970, v. Le Demiur`ge et l’âme du monde, p.28ff (Le monde est un Tout organisé, comme un être vivant; il y a donc en lui une âme, et dans cette âme un Intellect, une Pensée; une Âme intelligente, pleine de raison et de sagesse, anime le monde; elle est en lui ce qu’il a de plus divin; mais elle n’est pas éternelle au sense absolu; elle jouit seulement d’une vie perpétuelle et raisonable pour toute la durée du temps. Platon admet donc simultanément l’immanence et la transcendance du divin. Une intelligence divine est à l’œuvre dans l’univers (...p.29).
48. cf. our pp. 24-25
48a. Moreau (Mo/Plo) pp.22-25
48b. cf. our pp.61-65
49. Simplicius in Aristotelis Physicorum libros, CAG, vol. IX/X, ed. Diels. NB, For all translations of Simplicius’ Work as regards Porphyry’s Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics, we are consulting: F. Romano, Porfirio e la Fisica aristotelica, Catania, 1985.
50. Beutler, art. Porphyrios, RE, (Be/Po) col.284
51. Romano, (Ro/Po) p.37 passim
52. ibid p.47
53. Romano (Ro/Po) (appendix) fragment no. 24 (altogether there are 48 frs. tr. the author, pp.73-115
55. Romano (Ro/Po) p.54
56. ibid p.56
57. ibid
58. Simpl. Phys. 802,7-13, in Romano : fr. 45 passim, p.113
59. ibid, fr. 1 passim, p.73
60. ibid, fr. 2 passim, pp.74-75
60a. ibid, frg. 6 and 7 passim, p.113
61. cf. Ar. met. 1016a,32ff/Romano, fr. 7, p.79
62. cf. Simpl. in Romano, fr. 7, passim, p.79
63. cf. our pp.24-26
64. Simp. (Ro/Po) fr. 31 passim, pp. 101-102
65. ibid fr. 31/ & cf. Porphirii, in Platonis Timaeum Comm. Fragmenta, ibid fr.XCII
66. Porphirii, in Plat. Tim. (Po/Ti) fr. XCIII
Chapter Four: Porphyry and Plotinus

Introduction

To those desiring to see, we point the path; our teaching is of the road and the travelling; the seeing must be the very act of one that has made this choice (1).
In our account so far of Plato and Platonism we have seen key changes or rather developments especially with respect to the metaphysical status of the basic fundamental postulates. As we pointed out, in Aristotle’s report on Plato’s unwritten doctrines there are two primordial coexistent principles, the one and the indefinite dyad (2).

In addition, as a result of the historical unfolding of the Academy (after Plato’s death around 347 BC), we explained that the above dualistic stand was basically a monistic worldview (3). That is to say: The one as first principle, and the indefinite dyad subordinate to it. Thus this is the situation, or philosophical scenario we find ourselves in by the time Neoplatonism began to take root. “The dyad is a secondary, deriving from the One. It finds in the one the determinant needed by its natural indetermination” (4).

The respective matters under consideration in the Porphyry Plotinus relation are, to be sure, for the most part analogous because of coinciding, fundamental points at issue, as compared for example with the ones already discussed, thus making the present chapter somewhat of an excursus. However, it will prove worthwhile to take this teacher-pupil connection into account for no other reason than to pave the way for our philosopher’s full-fledged metaphysical position which we shall discuss in the next and final chapter.

1. Porphyry in the School of Plotinus

As we learn from Bidez (5), Porphyry left Longinus in Athens (by whom he studied literature (philology), rhetoric and
philosophy) for Plotinus in Rome where he stayed from 263 to 268 AD (6). The first clash of opinion between Porphyry and his new school environment came about in light of Plotinus’ doctrine that intelligibles are not outside the intellect. At first Porphyry maintained the views of his friend Longinus, that ideas are in some way outside intelligence (7). As our philosopher reports, Plotinus had instructed Amelius to convert Porphyry from his apparently incorrect position. After a series of objections and replies, Amelius finally succeeded in his effort. And, as a result, Porphyry wrote a recantation of his previous stand and read it out before the members of the school, “From that time on I was entrusted with Plotinus’ writings and sought to stir in the master himself the ambition of organizing his doctrine” (8).

When Porphyry arrived in Rome Plotinus had already written 21 treatises. During his stay at the school the teacher wrote another 24; and the last ones were written during the time Porphyry was living in Sicily (VP, nos. 4,5,6). To understand what our philosopher did for Plotinus it is helpful to follow what he tells us about him, “At the conference he showed the most remarkable power of going to the heart of a subject, whether in exposition or explanation, (...) but he made mistakes in certain words” (VP,13).

Thanks to Porphyry’s background in philology he was entrusted, as it is mentioned, with the revision of his teacher’s writings (VP,7). Indeed, such editing was necessary since, due to poor eyesight, Plotinus could not re-read his compositions, “His handwriting was slovenly (...) he cared nothing about spelling; his one concern was for the idea” (VP,8). In the edition of the Enneads Porphyry imitated the
time-honored method of Andronicus of Rhodes (who classified the works of Aristotle) and Theophrastus: Compilation according to subject matter (VP, 24), without taking into consideration the chronological sequence (9). Therefore, all in all, Porphyry found himself organizing 54 treatises which he divided into 6 groups of 9, “An arrangement which pleased me by the happy combination of the perfect number six with the nines: To each such Ennead, I assigned matter of one general nature” (VP, 24).

The first Ennead contains treatises of a more ethical tendency; the second Ennead is comprised of disquisitions on the world, and all that belongs to it. The third, still keeping to the world, discusses the philosophical implications of some of its features (VP, 24). The fourth Ennead contains treatises dealing with the soul (VP, 25). The fifth is made up of treatises dealing with the intellectual principle. And the sixth and last Ennead discusses the first principle which is beyond (VP, 26).

Porphyry, indeed, was of great help to his teacher: Critical-minded with his objections and questions he (as also philologist and grammarian) helped Plotinus find the best expressions and reasoning so that his thoughts could be articulated more clearly and forcefully. As Bidez reminds us, without the help of his disciple the system of Plotinus would have been presented less properly. In fact, he thinks that the Enneads are a product of the collaboration between the two. And Porphyry’s name with good reason could appear on the title page below that of Plotinus (10).
2. Main Similarities and relative Differences between Porphyry and Plotinus

A. Main Similarities

As we touched upon at the beginning of the chapter the central issues under consideration between the two thinkers are parallel. In fact, Beutler maintains that the principles of Plotinian philosophy and its world structure (with its culmination in the one and its diametrically lowest point in hyle and the in-between hypostases of intelligence and soul which contains the world) appear unchanged in Porphyry (11).

In point of fact, in our philosopher’s Sent. 30 (12), we have an unwavering intimate interpretation of Plotinus’ doctrine as regards the interrelation between the one, nous and soul (Enn. IV 4,16,23-31). That is, from Hen emanates intelligence, and from this soul. On the other hand, in the conversion or returning phase (ἐπιστροφή) all generated beings find themselves in their innate tendency to go back to their origin. Each being not only aspires after God, but also is blessed with Him according to its ontological nature (analogia entis).

Besides, in this returning or ascending phase the created beings can only turn to their immediate predecessor. For instance, νοῦς becomes predominantly ‘intelligent’ because of its turning or ‘looking at’ its foregoing stage (where its immediate creator lies); while in the descending condition, it is essentially ‘intelligible’ (i.e. primarily ‘looked upon’: νοερόν-νοητόν). The latter correlation is thus transcendental subject and object of intelligence, respectively (13), which ‘drowns’
in the One according to its noetic essence (οἰκείως). In this scheme of things, evil or error is the self-distancing from the original source of Being. Therefore, as Beutler summarized, when it comes to the basic metaphysical worldview, Porphyry is in full harmony with his teacher.

B. Relative Differences

The most conspicuous and notable contrast between the two thinkers is the way they expressly interpret the first metaphysical hypothesis. For Plotinus this principle is the one: beyond Being and Nous (with its subject-object correlation) as well as beyond life (the latter naturally is Aristotle’s theological definition of God as absolute actuality of thought/νόησις which is also life/ζωή, met. 1072b,30).

The one is the source of Being. It is formless and indescribable: It is simply ‘the not this’ (Enn. V 5,6,13) (14). As we shall see in the next chapter, for Porphyry Being and intelligence are direct predicates of the one. What the Chaldean Oracles (15) called the father, Porphyry identified with the Plotinian one through which intelligence (i.e. the second one, or the one which is) affirms itself: Νοῦς (as we know) at its origin is τὸ ἔν. And the latter, for our philosopher, is the Being of the one which is: The Being of being (16).

Another interesting difference between teacher and pupil is their respective attitude towards philosophy. For Porphyry it was a means to reform religious superstition: Thus promoting as a result a genuine moral life.
Knowledge became strictly a medium through which the purification of the soul could take place. Consequently, the philosopher was the physician of the soul (Po, to Marcella, 31). On the other hand, for Plotinus, philosophy was a pure intellectual and mystical nisus to reach out for the absolute (17). And this effort made him indeed virtuous because similar to God (Enn. I 2, 1).

As Beutler reminds us, the essential difference between the two lies more in their respective manner of approaching the subject matter than in their doctrinal premises (excluding obviously what we mentioned above regarding their particular interpretation of the one and Being). Nevertheless, he continues, by Plotinus there is more objective, systematic philosophizing than can be observed in Porphyry by whom indeed there is a sincere attempt to reconcile man’s ethical behavior to the philosophical sphere of Being so as to be able to assimilate oneself to the divine (18)).
Notes/ Chapter Four

1. Plot. Enn. VI 9,4,15-16
2. cf. note 81 p. 40
3. cf. ch.II, sect. 1.3. Was Plato´s viewpoint dualistic?
4. Plot. Enn. V 1,5,6-8
5. Bidez, Vie de Porphyre (Bi/VP) pp.37-38 passim
6. Beutler, RE, art. Porphyrios (Be/Po) col.277
8. Po/VP 18
9. Bidez (Bi/VP) p.118
10. ibid p.131
12. v. our pp.115-6 with corresponding note 170
13. cf our p. 114
15 cf our excursus on Numenius p.31ff
16. Hadot, La Métaphysique de Porphyre, in: Plotin, Porphyre (Ha/PP) p.324
17. Zeller, Die Phil. der Griechen, III,2 section : Plotinus und seine Schüler, pp.701-2
18. Beutler, (Be/Po) col. 301, “Freilich liegt ein solcher Unterschied mehr in Blickpunkt als im grundsätzlichen Ausgangspunkt---doch ist ebenso unabweisbar, dass bei der Absolutheit
plotinischen Philosophierens, das mehr in den objektiven Ordnungen sich bewegt, als sich um die Beantwortung subjektiv drängender innerweltlichen Fragen bemüht, eine Blickpunktsveränderung (...) zu neuen Einsichten führte".
Chapter Five: Porphyry’s Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides

Introduction

Εὔχομαι τοῖς θεοῖς πᾶσι καὶ πάσαις ποδηγήσαι
μου τὸν νοῦν εἰς τὴν προκειμένην θεωρίαν, καὶ
φῶς ἐν ἐμοὶ στιλπνὸν τῆς ἀληθείας ἀνάψαντας
ἀναπλῶσαι τὴν ἐμὴν διάνοιαν ἐπὶ αὐτὴν τὴν
tῶν ὄντων ἐπιστήμην, ἀνοίξαι τε τὰς τῆς ψυχῆς
tῆς ἐμῆς πύλας εἰς ὑποδοχὴν τῆς ἐνθέου τοῦ
Πλάτωνος ὑφηγήσεως.

Invocation

I pray to all the gods and goddesses to guide
my mind in this study that I have undertaken.
To kindle in me a shining light of truth and
enlarge my understanding for the genuine
science of being; to open the gates of my soul
to receive the inspired guidance of Plato (1).
In this final chapter we shall take for granted Hadot’s identification of Porphyry as the anonymous writer of the commentary on Plato’s Parmenides (2). Therefore, our main goal is to interpret the central themes which cover the six fragments contained in the incomplete XIV page text (2a).

But, first of all let us examine some initial concepts which, as a result, will bring us more easily to our subject matter.

I. Preliminary Context

1. Preliminary Context

1.a. The Hypotheses of the Parmenides

The transition to the second part of Plato’s dialogue which deals with the hypotheses reflects somewhat the dialectical exercise proposed by Parmenides himself. In line with his program the latter attempts to demonstrate the consequences of assuming that the One is or is not (136e-137c) (3). From the eight or nine premises let us cover only the first two which apply directly to our enquiry.

1.a.1. If the One is (137c-160b) (4)

Hypothesis 1, (137c-142a, one-one).

If the one is, what follows for it in relation to itself? Nothing can be said of it. The one is absolutely one. It is neither many nor a whole of parts. It is nowhere. Therefore neither in motion nor at rest. It is not the same or different from itself or another. The one is not in time. Consequently it cannot become older or younger than itself or another.
In no way the one is. It cannot even be named or in any sense whatsoever known.

Hypothesis 2, (142a-155e, one-many).
If the one has being what follows for it in relation to the others?
That is to say, if the one is, it participates in and thus be different from being (ousia). Consequently, the one and being are parts of the one which is (tò Óv ōν). One being is a whole of parts (both one and many) having both extension and shape. Therefore, it can have motion and rest (145e-146a) as well as quantity and number (151b-e). One being exists in time. And it both is and is becoming, and is not and is not becoming older and younger than itself and others (151e-155c). And finally, being in time, the one being exists and becomes and it is subject to being known (155c-e) (5).

1.b. Ontological Difference:
in light of the Sophist (6)

The argument concerning the nature of being first comes up against the background of the historical Parmenides’ logical dichotomy: between tò ōν and tò μή-ōν which of course means an outright rejection of any transition from being to non-being (DK 28 B2), together with its corollary: a non-acceptance of change and motion (DK 28 B8). Likewise, in this fragment, being is one and not many. As for knowledge, we can only obtain it from being, non-being cannot be known (DK 28 B3) (7). An instance of Plato’s already tackling the problem of non-being can be found in his notion of space (χώρα /ύποδοχή, Tim. 52a) where coming in and out of being takes place (Tim. 50b-51b).
In the Sophist (238c,258e) we learn that absolute non-being is indeed ludicrous. Non-being is merely the other (259a). Plato’s world of ideas is interrelational, κοινωνία, (8). In the second Parmenides hypothesis we see that the one cannot exist by itself: The one implies multiplicity; without the many it is not. In the same way, each idea implies many ideas which necessarily are different from the first (συμπλοκή ειδών).

Again, in the Sophist Plato introduces five main kinds of forms (μέγιστα γένη) (9) by which in fact he deals a deadly blow to the problems brought about by the historical Parmenides. Initially, we have being, motion and rest. Now, in order for these concepts to exist they have to be first of all identical to themselves, thus participating in the idea of sameness (fourth genus). Similarly, for being to be always what it is, it has to be other, or different from motion and rest, just as each of these, in turn, has to be different from the others in order for it to be what it is, thus partaking in the idea of otherness, or difference (fifth genus) (Soph. 258e-259b) (10). Furthermore, with motion and rest we can say that each idea is at the same time itself (while remaining itself) and because of the one-many relationship of ideas, it becomes other than itself in the koinonía of forms: Each idea is both itself and other (to another).

To conclude, in this dialogue we get an insight into being which turns out to be nothing but the power of affecting and being affected by another, “My notion would be that anything which possesses any sort of power to affect
another, or to be affected by another, if only for a single moment, however trifling the cause and however slight the effect, has real existence, and I hold that the definition of being is simply power (Δύναμις)” (Soph. 247d-e) (10a).

1.c. The Neoplatonic Interpretation of the Hypotheses (11)

To understand Porphyry’s position within this school let us briefly discuss his teacher’s reading of the above. To be sure, Plotinus (12) availed himself of Plato’s Parmenides to underpin his argument that the three hypostases of his system (Hen, Nous and Psyche) correspond to the first three hypotheses of this dialogue: The One (137c4), One-many (145e5), as well as One and many (155e5), (Enn. V 1,8,1-27). At the beginning of this passage, Plotinus mentions Plato’s second letter (312e,1-4) to prop up again his hypostases theory, “It is in relation to the king of all and on his account that everything exists, and that fact is the cause of all that is beautiful. In relation to a second, the second class of things exists, and in relation to the third, the third class” (13). These three kings evidently correlate with the three Plotinian hypostases. In Proclus’ commentary on Plato’s Parmenides we have this observation as regards the above Plotinian formulation, “Other commentators(...) wish the multiplicity denied of the one to be the intellectual multiplicity; for the primal one is without multiplicity, they argue, whereas intellect is one-many and soul one and many” (14).
2. Synoptic Analysis of Porphyry’s Fragments (15)

As we mentioned in the introduction, we only have in our possession XIV pages of Porphyry’s Commentary which encompass six fragments discussing Plato’s Parmenides (137a-b to 143a), from just before the first hypothesis to halfway through the second. In this exposition the anonymous author (for us Porphyry) identifies the One (τὸ ἕν of the Platonic written and unwritten doctrines) with Being ( EINA): The Aristotelian God which is absolute thought and life (met.1072b,30) (16).

2.a. First Fragment (pp.I-II). At the end of this part, it is stated that Plato intends to enquire into the dialectical exercises suggested at Parm. 135d-e and carried out as of 137c (17). Here we have the first hypothesis, whether one is one. And the notion of the one is made relevant to God who is above all things, ineffable and unspeakable (I, 3-4) (18). For our thinker, God is even beyond the notion of the one and many (II,9-14). In consequence, whenever we want to think about God it is better not to imagine anything determinate. We should stop at the threshold of the ineffable prenotation of the absolute, of which nothing can be conceived (II 15-25). We should think of God in negative theological terms.

2.b. Second Fragment (pp. III-IV). It is very likely that this segment refers to Parm. 139b-140b, the first hypothesis where Plato points out that the one simply one is neither identical nor different, nor similar,
nor dissimilar (19). In fact, God is relationless towards those deriving their existence from Him, even though these imagine to have a reciprocal relationship with the absolute (III,3-13). God has an incommensurable pre-excellence and indeed is absolutely transcendent (ἐξηρμένων) to every other thing. Divine knowledge transcends the correlation between knowledge and ignorance since it is beyond the opposition of subject and object: His knowledge is absolute pure knowledge (20).

2.c. Third Fragment (pp. VII-VIII).
Here we have a long quotation of Parmenides (141a-d), on the relationship between the one simply one and time which of course is impossible. The one cannot be, or become older or younger than or of the same age as itself or another, or be in time at all.

2.d. Fourth Fragment (pp. IX-X).
In this section reference is made to the end of the first hypothesis (Parm. 142a). To the consequences of the latter, Porphyry poses a provocative question: How can we say that the one can neither be named nor defined, nor still be known when there are some religious traditions revealing positive characteristics of the One, namely the Chaldean Oracles? (21) After some discussion Porphyry comes to the same conclusion as Plato’s first hypothesis: In spite of some revelations by the Oracles we are none the wiser with regard to the first principle. Therefore the soul must content itself with its own ignorance which indeed is the only representation it can have of the absolute (22). Once more, revelation does not disclose anything about the One; what it does is to tell us solely about those things which emanate from it (23).
2.e. Fifth Fragment (pp. XI-XII).
In this section our philosopher expatiates on the beginning of the second hypothesis (142b):
If one is, can one be and not partake of being? Now, what does this mean for the one to partake of being (οὐσία)? For our commentator, it means that the one and being form a new entity which models itself on the first one (24). On the one hand, the one combining with being is not the primal one; but on the other we can also say that indeed it is: in view of the fact that a derivative is (in a certain way) that thing from which it originates (25). Thanks to the participation in the first one, the second one becomes one-being. Thus Porphyry concludes as follows. The second one becomes one-being because it participates in the first one (according to a supposed secret teaching of Plato, XII,22) which itself is Being beyond ousia (26). Moreover, the second one partakes of the first inasmuch as it is begotten by it. To be begotten means to receive Being: It means to become one-being (27). Therefore, the first one is Being in itself as well as the idea of being (ἰδέα τοῦ ὄντος) (28).

2.f. Sixth Fragment (pp. XIII-XIV).
In this final piece: Parm. 143a is alluded to, “But now, let us abstract the one which, as we say, partakes of being, and try to imagine it apart from that of which, as we say, it partakes—will this abstract one be only one or many? One, I think”. In Porphyry this one by itself is one and simple, and likewise it differs from itself (29) when becoming life and intelligence (29a).
In this fragment the one (considered in itself, abstract) is the pristine state of Νόος while the one partaking of being is a secondary
condition of it. Thus Porphyry distinguishes two aspects of intelligence, or Noûς (30).
In its primordial order it has the same predicates as the first one: Neither at rest nor in motion, neither the same nor different from itself or another; and in the second state, intelligence possesses the attributes of the second hypothesis: It is both at rest and in motion, the same and different from itself and another.
Furthermore, in the first state intelligence is not able to return to itself because it is perfectly simple (above intellection and beyond it for its power and excellence) (31) whereas in the second it returns to itself with a triadic movement as follows (32): In the initial moment intelligence exists in an indiscriminate condition of self-identity (A=A), without subject and object and as a result it purely is. Subsequently, it comes out of this state so as to gaze at itself, and by doing so it then becomes life and infinity. Finally, in the third moment, intelligence returns to itself while becoming intellection.

To conclude, thanks to the first state of primordial simplicity (Nous at rest, which is an indivisible act transcending the subject-object correlation) we get the premise for the second where intelligence comes out and immediately returns (the outgoing and incoming movement of life and mind) to its source while grasping itself as it really is: Intelligence and intelligible. Therefore, this twin noetic characteristic corresponds respectively to the dialectical unfolding of the first two hypotheses of the Parmenides, (33).
3. The One simply One

3.1. Negative and Positive Theology

In one of his early essays on our philosopher Hadot affirms that the basic problem in Porphyry’s metaphysics lies in the polarity between indeterminate and determinate (34). By these terms it is meant the manner by which we try to describe the unconditional. For instance if we consider the one by way of negative theology we say what God is not whereas the positive theological approach states what we think He is.

God is ineffable and unspeakable and beyond all things (‘Αρρήτου γὰρ καὶ ἀκατονομάστου διὰ πολλὰ τοῦ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν οὖν θεοῦ. Po, in Parm. I,3-4).

And, nevertheless, if the notion of the One is relevant to Him, it is not due to a flaw in His nature (the term one does away with all multiplicity). God is simple and there is nothing before Him. It, the One, is the principle of all things (35). Those who say what God is not are indeed much better off than those affirming what He is because they are not in a position to understand what they are saying (36). Once more, not only is God beyond the notion of multiplicity but also (Porphyry maintains) beyond the notion of the one. Accordingly, it is best to understand Him without understanding and to think of Him without thoughts.

Only so can we reach the prenotion, an image of the ineffable, represented through silence (37). In paraphrasing Victorinus we now propose a version of this argument. God is above all
existence, all life and all knowledge and above each and every being. In fact, in this sense we can even say that God is a “non-being”, above and beyond all beings. God is such as not to be known either as a being or a non-being. Only in ignorance may God be known: By means of His power He begot and led being to reveal itself. But it is according to the logos that it be so (quod sua ipsius potentia τὸ ὄν in manifestationem adduxit et genuit. Est autem λόγος istuc sic se habere) (38).

To conclude, we may say that for Porphyry our cognition of God is possible only by transcending all modes of knowledge, beyond the subject-object correlation (39).

3.2. The One as Pure Indeterminate Being

The pinnacle of Porphyry’s commentary is when he identifies the One with indeterminate Being as pure activity (40).

“Well look at that, as if Plato seems to be implying a secret teaching: That the one which is beyond substance and being (ὅτι τὸ ἐν τῷ ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας καὶ ὄντος) is neither being nor substance but rather it acts and is itself pure activity (τὸ ἐνεργεῖν καθαρὸν) so that it itself is Being which precedes being (αὐτὸ τὸ ἐἶναι τὸ πρὸ τοῦ ὄντος).

Thus by participating in this Being, the second one receives a derived Being: And this is the partaking in being (ὅπερ ἐστὶ μετέχειν ὄντος).

Therefore, it follows that Being is twofold: The first preexists being and the second is that which is engendered by the One which is beyond being, and is itself Being, absolutely, and in some way it is the very idea of being— (ἰδέα τοῦ ὄντος) “(41).

So we have the identification of the Aristotelian God, the unmoved mover (but qua
pure activity—τὸ ἐνεργεῖν καθαρὸν—as opposed to the ontological difference coming out of noesis: when the Absolute thinks of Itself), with the Plotinian metaphysical principle of the One. Indeed, for the first time ever in the history of philosophical ideas the nominal verb form: Εἶναι (Esse/Sein) is used to designate the simple activity of Being (which of course is the corresponding English verbal noun): identified in fact with the Neoplatonic doctrine of τὸ ἔν (42).

Thus, again, through Porphyry’s formulation we have indeterminate pure Being which is also the idea of being, ιδέα τοῦ ὄντος (XII,33), generating its first concrete form: the one-being (43).

But how was it possible for our philosopher to have identified the One with Being, and furthermore to regard the One as being the same as the Father of the Chaldean Oracles, the first moment of the intelligible triad? (44)

On that account, our task now is to point out how all these elements making up the metaphysical edifice of Porphyry converge.

3.2.1. The Will of the One

Διὸς δ’ ἐτελείετο βουλή —
And the Will of Zeus was fulfilled (45)

In the introduction to his book, Porphyre et Victorinus, Hadot gives us to understand that Porphyry might have drawn upon Plotinus’ treatise, ‘On Free Will and the Will of the One’ (Enn. VI, 8), to arrive at his metaphysical conclusion that Hen is Being (46). Consequently, we shall analyse the above Plotinian position so as to better comprehend the other points of this section.
Will should not be attributed to the one if it desires something not yet present. Rather we may state as follows, "As it willed to be so it is (...) It (the One) must be a consistent self willing its being and being what it wills; its will and itself must be one thing; and it is no less one because there is no difference between what it is and what it wanted to be. What could the one have wished to be other than what it is? (...) The Good (...) cannot be many; therefore the will and the essential being must be taken as one identity. The act of the will must be self-determined and Being self-caused. Thus reason shows that the One has created itself" (47).

The Plotinian One has a higher form of consciousness than either discursive reason or the intuitive perception of mind. Hen could never wish to be other than what it is. It posits itself and it is essentially will and its own cause (causa sui). In the One there is no contingency; It is all necessity which also means that it is subject to no necessity: Indeed, Being and merely pure activity are nothing but the One (48). Since the One is absolutely free it is also the cause of freedom. It has self-discernment (διακριτικὸν ἔαυτοῦ) implying a sort of self-consciousness (Enn. VI 7,16; V 1,7) which differs from intelligence inasmuch as it is more instantaneous in its transcendence (beyond Being) of the subject-object relation (49). Thus it seems that Plotinus is attributing positive characteristics to the absolute, at least in Enn. VI,8.

The One creates itself, chooses and wills itself as if it were no longer absolute simplicity transcending plurality. To repeat, τὸ ἐν is self-willing; and it is what it wanted to be. The absolute freedom of the one is
freedom to be itself, to determine itself and
to know itself. In this perspective,
intelligence represents a moment in the “inner
life” of the One which is also will.

3.2.2. The twofold Status of Intelligence (50)

In the preceding section we mentioned that the
one has some kind of self-discernment which
implies somewhat a self-consciousness
transcending the subject-object relationship.
Consequently, it cannot be denied that ‘inside’
the one there seems to be dialectical motion:
“And then, if it exists absolutely the reason
is that it is based upon itself, so to speak,
looking at itself so that if its Being consists
of this looking-at-itself it then means that it
creates itself” (51). Now, some of the above
points are present as a matter of fact in the
following critical passages of Porphyry’s
Commentary which of course does credit to the
earlier suggestion of the importance of Enn.
VI, 8 (52).

Porph. in Parm. XIII, 34-XIV, 21 (A+B):

A. So one could say that the power (Δύναμις)
according to which intelligence (not able to
return to itself) gazes is different and
superior to the distinction between
intellection and intelligible (subject-object)
and likewise beyond these in dignity and power
(53). It is one and simple. However this
itself (τὸ αὐτὸ τοῦτο) (54) differs from itself
according to the opposition between actuality
and existence (respectively, ἐνέργεια and ὑπαρξις)
(55). On the one hand, it is one and simple,
but on the other it differs from itself. But
what is different from the one is no longer one
and what is different from the simple is no longer simple. Thus according to its first form (this itself, power, or any other name which is necessary to point out that we are dealing with an inexpressible and inconceivable reality) it is one and simple while it is neither one nor simple when concerning the opposition between existence, life and intelligence (όντι, ἐν δὲ οὐδὲ ἀπλοῦν κατὰ τὴν ὑπαρξίν καὶ ζωῆν καὶ τὴν νοησίν).

B. (56)—According to existence thinking is also thought. But when intelligence comes out of existence (hyparxis) so as to become thinking, and return afterwards towards the intelligible and gaze at itself, then thinking is life. That is why if considered according to life intelligence is infinite. And thus all existence, life and intelligence are acts (ἐνεργειῶν) insofar as one could say that, a) considered according to existence the act is motionless; b) considered according to intellection the act is turned towards itself; and finally c) considered according to life the act has come out of existence (κατὰ δὲ τὴν ζωῆν ἐκ τῆς ὑπάρξεως ἐκκεντρισμένα ἐνέργεια) (57).

With respect to this consideration, intelligence is at the same time at rest and in motion, in itself and in another, it is a whole having parts, identical and different (58). But considered as the one in its purity, as the primordial and real one, intelligence is neither identical nor different, neither in itself nor in another (59).

Thus it seems quite evident that in the above excerpts there are many ideas which can be traced back to Plotinus’ (Enn. VI,8) where we see: 1) The self-consciousness of the one differing from intelligence insofar as it transcends it (which corresponds to Porphyry’s
double distinction between intelligence at rest and in motion as compared to neither at rest nor in motion), and 2) Hen creating itself and consequently seeming to be no longer in a state of simplicity (in turn, referring to the twin aspect of Porphyry’s absolute: as one and simple but also differing from itself, thus no longer one and simple).

Accordingly, we maintain that the inner dialectic of the one, in the main, as regards both Enn. VI, 8 and Porphyry’s above A+B can be construed as a form of knowledge in itself which comes out of its immediate Being in order to know itself, and thus becomes knowledge for itself. Likewise we affirm the basic identity of this inner essence with the One. As Victorinus puts it into words, “If all of this has been begotten at a second moment it means that all of this was already in God, and if all of this was already in God, since God is one, all of this similiarly was one in God, and furthermore all of this was one with what God is because God Himself was all of this” (60).

Existence, life and knowledge are all one with God in a condition of pre-existence, pre-life and pre-knowledge. In God knowledge and what can be known are identical (61). To recap, while intelligence in its second state (returning to itself after going out of itself and passing from existence to life) has the attributes of the second hypothesis (XIV 15-26: It is at once at rest and in motion, in itself and in another), in its first state, on the other hand, it has the attributes of the first hypothesis (XIII, 1-35: It is simple so that it cannot return to itself, neither at rest nor in motion, neither the same nor different, neither in itself nor in another) (62). This, in fact,
transcends the polarity of the one-many (63). In the Parmenides commentary we read that God’s knowledge has no otherness, no subject-object distinction (64).

In Porphyry’s History of Philosophy, fourth book, we find how Plato talked about the Good: From this then, in a way not comprehensible to mankind, comes into being total intelligence existing in itself in which all real beings and all substances of beings are to be found. The intelligence of God is beauty in itself (αὐτοκαλόν) because it possesses the idea of beauty (τὸ ἐίδος τῆς καλλονῆς). It originated in a preeternal manner (προαιενίος) and came about as the result of its cause: God, because it is Son and Father of itself (αὐτογέννητος καὶ αὐτοπάτωρ). This procession took place not because God, the cause, begot intelligence but rather because intelligence came out begetting itself by itself (αὐτογόνως) from God. Indeed, intelligence is atemporal and only it is eternal. And just as the first God is always alone (although all beings emanate from Him, he cannot nevertheless be named, let alone classified with these), so intelligence, which is the only one existing eternally is itself time for those beings existing in time because it remains in the sameness of its own hypostasis (ἐν ταυτότητι μένον τῆς ἑαυτοῦ αἰωνίας υποστάσεως) (65).

The implications of the above are clearly noticed in two sententiae which expound on the hierarchy of Being (66). In Sent. 10, it is stated that all is in all but according to the essence of each thing. Thus, the One similarly contains all but commensurate with its nature: beyond Nous and beyond Being, ὑπερουσίως. In addition, from the foregoing it follows that
the One and all of reality emanating from it unfold themselves in a proper way (οἰκείως) through triadic dialectical moments which contain: Being, life and intelligence (εἶναι, ζωή καὶ νοῦς).

3.2.3. Neoplatonic Triad (67)

Str. (...) And being, insofar as it is known, is acted upon by knowledge, and is therefore in motion; for that which is in a state of rest cannot be acted upon, as we affirm.
Theaet. True
Str. And, can we ever be made to believe that motion and life and soul and mind are not present with perfect being? Can we imagine that being is devoid of life and mind, and exists immutable in solemn aloofness? (Plato, Soph. 248e-249a)

In this excerpt Plato admits dialectical change (motion), life, soul and thought into the sphere of perfect being (τὸ παντελῶς ὄν). By Aristotle (met. 1072b,30), in similar fashion, we have the identification of the highest Being with the actuality of thought which is also life. In Plotinus as well Being, life and intelligence are all traits of Nous (second hypostasis).
The Enneads (IV 7, 9, 23) tell us that being is not a corpse; rather, it possesses life and intelligence (V 4, 2). All of this, needless to say, implies the activity of life which in turn unites being and thought (VI 7, 13). Furthermore, life seems to be a forward thrust away from its source, and receives its due definition by turning back to that source. This turning back (ἐπιστροφή) indeed is intelligence (V 3, 16) (68).

What we mentioned in the previous section (that the triad: Being, life and intelligence unfolds from the One through all reality, in a proper way) especially encompasses the pattern of the second hypostasis. Here according to Plotinus life plays a special role as compared with being and intelligence: It embodies motion. When life comes out of the One, intelligence immediately comes into being. Life is the activity of the Good; and Nous is activity within its own defined limits (69).

Once more, by Plotinus life coming out of the one immediately returns to its source by becoming intelligence: Upon turning towards the One, it turns into a movement which is self-limiting being. Thus being and thought whose unity makes up intelligence emerge at once as life determining itself (70). To sum up, within the already mentioned intelligible triad life symbolizes the going-out moment which paves the way for the turning back where the outgoing phase changes into the incoming one. In this formulation, indeed, we can already envisage the next Neoplatonic triad: Permanence, procession and conversion (71) which is closely related to being, life and intelligence, as a single dialectical process.

In the latter the function of life presupposes a dynamic notion of being which goes back to
Plato’s Sophist. To this notion Plotinus includes the tonic movement theory (τονική κίνησις) of Stoic physics which is an alternate in-and-outgoing action. For instance, when the movement is incoming we have unity and coherence of substance but on going outwards there is quality, limitation and growth. Consequently, substance and quality appear as two contrary moments of a single movement (72).

Now, with respect to Porphyry’s position we believe that he identified the triad Father-Power-Intellect (Πατήρ-Δύναμις-Νοῦς) of the Chaldean Oracles with the intelligible triad of existence-life-intelligence (ὤπαρξις-ζωή-νοῦς) (73). Although we are not in possession of Porphyry’s Commentary on the Chaldean Oracles (mentioned in the Suidas lexicon) nonetheless we can infer it from particular attestations (74). From the above two triads, the Chaldean and the intelligible, we can make the following comparison: The third term, Nous, appears in both; Power (δύναμις) corresponds to life (ζωή), and lastly Father relates to existence (ὤπαρξις). In Porphyry’s Parmenides Commentary (IX,1-4) we read that power/dynamis and the Nous of God are united in His simplicity (75).

Another point supporting our belief is that our philosopher is credited by H. Lewy with having introduced the Chaldean Oracles to the Neoplatonists (76). Besides, in the Parmenides Commentary (IX,5-14) reference is made to the second intellect which resembles the following fr. 7 of the Oracles, “For the Father perfected all things, and handed them over to the second intellect, which you (the entire human race) call the first intellect” (77).
In contrast, by Victorinus we get a consubstantiality of three persons making up the Christian triad: The Father is Being (esse) and the Son is motion or the act of determining this Being. The motion is twofold: The motion of life and the motion of knowledge. With life, being reveals itself whereas with knowledge it returns to itself. Father, Son and Spirit are consubstantial because Being, life and knowledge are reciprocally implied. As a result of this, life and knowledge are contained at first indiscriminately in Being. Moreover, the distinction between the three persons is due to a dynamic predominance. Each one is all three but gets its name from that which predominates (78).

Therefore, the Father is Being (Esse); the Son life (vivere) and the Spirit knowledge (intelligere). Thus we state that the Father exists; the Son reveals the Father, and the Spirit returns all to the Father. The Neoplatonic source for this is indeed Porphyry (79), “And so it is, since it possesses thinking and intelligence, it (thought) is identical to life and Being. But since there is more active force in thinking than in Being and in living, and since this Being is thinking (intelligere) which exists and this living is thinking which lives, it is necessary, if God is thinking or intelligence, that if God thinks it must think on Itself (…) If this is so, it makes Itself be, and comes into existence and makes up its own Being and also through the act of thinking makes up its living (vivere). Since all three were born from themselves, or better yet existing from themselves, God exists unbegotten from the unbegotten (ingenitus Deus est existens ex ingenitis). And since these are One, God is One and simple. And this is an inner thought thinking on itself without any
motion. Since it exists when it thinks and thinks when it exists, this is God from all eternity and through all eternity "(80).

4. The One which is: Determinate Being

The second hypothesis takes into account two terms, the one and being. As Plato tells us (Parm. 142b), If one is, can one be and not partake of being (ousia)? But what does it mean if one is? Does it imply that the one is such as to have parts? In fact, we can say that being and one are not the same, but both surely belong to the same: the one which is; the one-being (as one entity) containing one and being as its parts. Hence, any one-being is both a unit (whole) and a plurality (made up of parts) (81). The second hypothesis corresponds to an entity in which multiplicity, though in a complete unification, begins to emerge.

In Porphyry’s commentary, the second one which participates in being (οὐσία) obtains being (in a way) from a transcendent ousia. But how is this possible? We know that before the second one there is no Being. More precisely, before the one-being there is only the first one which is neither ousia nor energeia (82). The first one, strictly speaking, cannot be ousia except in a manner implying a secret teaching which in turn would reduce this transcendent ousia to the pure activity of Being (83). Thus we have: A) Pure indeterminate Being (the first One); B) The one which is, οὐσία (the second one). The predicate 'is' (to exist) of the above B is derived from pure indeterminate Being which is absolute, and therefore we have no subject or verb. As a result, we see that 'is', actually, is linked (σύζευγον) to a subject which is the second one receiving the derived 'is' from pure
Being (84). This Being (pure activity) is at the same time the idea of being (ιδέα τοῦ ὄντος) (85) as well as the transcendent form. Thus we have the first one as idea of the second one (for a Platonist the idea of something is the expression of its true being, ὄντως ὄν). But it is an idea like no other because it precedes Νοῦς. In this context, the idea of being takes on an ontological foundation. It is the pure activity (τὸ ἐνεργεῖν καθαρὸν) of indeterminate Being whose first determination is the one-being (86). Therefore, Being is twofold: The first preexists ousia, and the second is begotten by the one, beyond ousia, which is Being in itself, absolutely, and in a way, the idea of being (διττὸν τὸ ἐἶναι, τὸ μὲν προὐπάρχει τοῦ ὄντος, τὸ δὲ ὁ ἐπάγεται ἐκ τοῦ ὄντος τοῦ ἐπέκεινα ἕνος τοῦ ἐἶναι ὄντος τὸ ἀπόλυτον καὶ ὡσπερ ἱδέα τοῦ ὄντος. XII, 29-33).
Notes/Chapter Five


2. In the following we have some leading academics who welcome Hadot’s conclusions:
   c) H.J. Krämer, Platone e i Fondamenti della Metafisica (Kr/Pl) pp.307-308

2a) The XIV pages were edited and published by Kroll, Ein Neuplatonischer Parmenidescommentar in einem Turiner Palimpsest, Rheinisches Museum, 47, 1892, pp. 599-627


5. Cornford (Co/Pa) pp. 135-193

6. Charrue, Plotin Lecteur de Platon (Ch/Plo) pp. 212-218


9. Beierwaltes, Identität und Differenz (Be/Id) p. 19ff

10. Dorter, Form and Good in Plato’s Eleatic Dialogues, Berkeley 1964, pp. 150-162

10a. cf. our p.113-4 where Being (εἶναι) is existence (ὑπαρξίας) and life (ζωή) is dynamis
(δύναμις); and likewise, here we find that life and Nous are symbols of Being.

11. Corford (Co/Pa) The Neoplatonic Interpretation, pp.131-135
13. The collected works of Plato, ibid, PUP
14. Proclus (PRO) col. 1089.32-1090.3: cf footnote no.64 on the same page
15. Hadot, Porphyre et Victorinus (Ha/PV) pp.113-137 vol. I passim
16. cf. our p. 143-4 sect. B
17. (Po-Pa) II, 32 (i.e. fragment page II, line 32), in vol. II of Ha/PV). The commentary is in Greek/French while the Porphyrian texts in Victorinus are in the original Latin. All English translations are my own (CR).
18. That is, Fragment page I, lines 3-4
19. (Ha/PV) vol. I, p.118
20. ibid p.122
21. Po/Pa IX, 1-8
22. ibid X, 25-29
24. Po/Pa XI, 10-23
25. ibid XI, 23-XII, 10
26. ibid XII, 22-35
27. ibid XII, 20-22
28. ibid XII, 26-34
29. ibid XIV, 5-16
29a. Being, life and intelligence are respectively translated as: εἶναι, ζωή, νοῦς.
30. (Po/Pa) XIV, 26-34
31. ibid XIV, 1-4
32. ibid XIV, 16-26
33. Hadot (Ha/PP) pp. 284-285
34. “Le problème fondamental de la métaphysique de Porphyre consiste dans l’opposition entre incoordonné et coordonné (ἀκατάτακτον καὶ
κατατεταγμένον) in: Métaphysique de Porphyre, (Ha/PP) pp. 321,340
35. (Po/Pa) I 3-19. Also cf. Porphyrian texts in Victorinus no. 36 in (Ha/PV) vol.II
36. (Po/Pa) IX,26-X,6 passim
37. ibid II, 10-27; also cf. Victorinus, text no.78: God pre-existing, pre-living and pre-knowing holds as inner forms pre-existence, pre-life and pre-knowledge.
38. Victorinus (Ha/PV) vol.II text no. 19 passim; in addition, cf. Beierwaltes: Trinität, in Identität und Diff. (Be/Id) pp. 57-74
39. Po/Pa V, 30-35 passim
40. Ha/PP, p.288
41. Po/Pa XII,22-33
42. Ha/PV, vol. I pp.488-490
43. ibid; NB, In Porphyry’s ontology hyparxis is pure indeterminate Being (= existence).
44. Ha/PV vol.I p.112
45. Homer, Iliad, I,5 (tr. CR)
46. Ha/PV pp. 18,24,26; also Ha/PP p.79
47. Plotinus, Enn. VI,8,13 passim (tr.CR)
48. Ibid, Enn. VI,8,4,24ff. In absolute freedom Being and activity are identical:
Τὸ αὐτὸ τὸ ἐἶναι καὶ τὸ ἐνέργειν.
50. cf in this ch. section 2, Synoptic analysis of Porphyry’s fragments, 2.f. (sixth fr.).
51. Plotinus, Enn. VI 8, 16 (tr. CR)
52. cf. above no.46
53. Plato, Rep. 509b. Intelligence not able to return to itself is the One considered apart from that in which it participates, i.e. one-being (cf. above no.50)
54. Plato, Parm. 143a (τὸ αὐτὸ τοῦτο)
55. ἐνέργεια (...) καὶ ὑπαρξίς seem to oppose each other. The latter (existence/Being) is a primordial state of rest from which the former
(actuality) comes out. cf. (Po/Pa) XIV, 5-23, note no.2
56. NB, Although the excerpt “Intelligence returning to itself” belongs to section 4 of this chapter (the one which is: Determinate Being), for the sake of completion we present it here.
57. cf. note no. 55
58. Plato, Parm. 145b-147b
59. ibid, 137d-139e
60. Victorinus (Ha/PV) vol.II, text no. 80
61. ibid lines 5-9
62. cf. our p. 187 fr. 2.f.
63. The polarity is of course the realm of the second Parmenidean hypothesis.
64. (Po/Pa) V, 15-25 passim
65. (Po/FR) fr. 223F, pp.245-247 (tr. CR)
66. cf. our pp.116 and 114 for Porphyry’s sententiae nos. 10 and 12, respectively.
67. cf. our pp.113 and 114
68. Po/Se 30, cf our p.114-5 Also, Volkmann-Schluck, Plotin als Interpret der Ontologie Platons, Frankfurt a.M. 1957, chs. VI and VII
69. Plotinus, Enn. VI 7, 21
70. ibid
71. ibid
72. (Ha/PP) p.152
73. Dihle, Die Vorstellung vom Willen in der Antike, Göttingen 1985, pp. 119,128. Also cf. our p.113 nos. 166 and 167
74. (Ha/PP) Les Oracles Chaldaiques p. 98
75. cf. Chaldean Oracles (Ch/Or) fr.4, “For everything power has been assigned to the middle place; and among the intelligibles, it connects the father and the intellect: for power is with Him, but intellect is from Him”.
76. H. Lewy, Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy, Paris 1978, p.7. In these Oracles (fr. 129) matter is looked upon as something bitter and bad similar to Porphyry’s view which we have
seen in the cave of the nymphs (cny 34) as well as in Sent. 20, p.25
77. cp. Numenius, fr. 17 (Des Place) (v. our p. 49, no. 37a); “In fact, as Plato knew, the demiurge is the only one known to mankind whereas the first intellect, he who carries the name of Being in itself, remains completely ignored. For this reason he (Plato) declared the following: My fellowmen, He whom you imagine as the intellect is not the first. Before Him there is another intellect, primordial and more divine” (tr. CR). cf our pp.31-32 on Numenius.
78. Po/Se 10, p. 116 (All is in All)
80. Victorinus, text no. 87. Likewise: cf. Friedrich A. Uehlein, Die Manifestation des Selbstbewusstseins im konkreten „Ich bin“, Hamburg 1982; v. ch. Trinität, where the author points out the relevance of this theme to the post-Kantian Romantic thought of S.T. Coleridge.
81. Cornford (Co/Pa) pp. 136-7
82. (Po/Pa) XII, 22-33
83. ibid
84. (Po/Pa) XII,34
85. cf. above, no.41
86. For Plotinus the first hypostasis, the One, is unknowable and unspeakable whereas for Porphyry it is indeterminate Being, pure activity. cf. Enn. VI 7,17,41, in which any relation between first and second one is categorically excluded.
What we have attempted to show in this work is that Porphyry first through an allegorical interpretation of Homer’s cave of the nympha (Odyssey), and then by an enquiry into several pre-Socratic thinkers, by all means, recognized some of the themes that we come upon in Plato’s philosophy: the gradual uncovering of the logos with its explanation of the universe through mathematics, the doctrine of the one and the indefinite dyad, and the immortality of the soul (although not in the same sense, as we have seen, as the Platonic interpretation).

In chapter two, Plato’s relation and contribution to Porphyry, we concluded that just as Plato’s position is monistic with respect to the first metaphysical principles (indeterminate dyad secondary to the One), so is his view concerning man’s body and soul status: Soma is subservient to the rational psyche. Likewise we made clear the Athenian philosopher’s belief in the individual spiritual immortality and how this position, alas, after his death was undermined and gave way to the eternal intellect. In this new context we find Porphyry affirming that soul (whose goal is to be one with the creator) and body associate because of a natural disposition for one another (1): Man’s soul (identified by our philosopher with the world soul, the third Plotinian hypostasis, and accordingly correlated with Νοῦς) finds its essence only when its most intimate part (similar to Aristotle’s νοῦς θεωρητικός) turns to intelligence whereas the nutritive and discursive parts belong to the soul’s vehicle, τὸ ὄχημα (2).
Finally, in agreement with Plato and Aristotle, Porphyry believes that divine intellect enters man’s soul provided one is qualified for it (3). Thereupon, when dealing with our philosopher’s link with Aristotle, we examined his work on logic with the assumption that our philosopher understood the Peripatetic Categories as a logical treatise on the classification of ‘things’ and ‘meaningful expressions’ and consequently he tried to make Aristotle acceptable to the Neoplatonic school. In addition, when we studied Porphyry’s relation with his teacher Plotinus we learned that we were basically involved with parallel views except for the crucial exegesis of their respective first principles.

In chapter five, Porphyry’s Parmenides Commentary, we get a definite insight into the worldview of our philosopher which complements somewhat analogous opinions encountered in other previous works of his. And thus we would like to recap them, as follows:

All of reality (from the One simply One which is pure indeterminate Being (4) engendering the one-being/the second one, down to matter, non-being) (5) in fact carries a hierarchical structure reflecting at every level the intelligible triad (6) of existence/Being (ὑπαρξις), life and Nous. As we already indicated, Porphyry’s commentary unfortunately breaks off at the end of the second Parmenides hypothesis. Nonetheless, finally, from his history of philosophy (7) we know that for him the divine emanates up to the third hypostasis, the world soul which in fact takes in, or assimilates all individual souls (8) and contains the world.
1. cf our p.110
2. cf our p.122ff
3. v. our p.119, end of sect. 2
4. Po/Se 12 p.114
5. Po/Se 20 p.25ff
7. cf our p.138, no.179a/ pt.1, Po/Fr 221F
8. Po/Se 37, pp.111-112
The purpose of this section is to bring out some particular points which the two commentaries may have in common (and not necessarily in agreement with each other). In other words, to show how the two Neoplatonic thinkers (almost two centuries apart) do comment on similar passages of Plato’s dialogue. As we know, Porphyry’s interpretation covers Stephanus 137a-b to 143a (the first two hypotheses) whereas all we have of Proclus’ reading runs from 138a to 141e (Cousin 1133-1244/Klibansky 34-76k), which only brings us to the end of the first hypothesis.

5.1. The first point (Plato, Parm. 137d) (1):
The one having no parts is without limit, τὸ ἄπειρον. For the Greeks, this term is a sign of imperfection (2), a negative concept. Here our philosopher tells us that by the notion of the one he means an infinite power, cause of all beings, and the principle of all things which follow upon it. But God is even beyond the notion of the one. A similar view emerges in Proclus (1118, 19-25) which we quote in full. “Others take its unlimitedness to refer to its being of unlimited power (ʹἀπειροδύναμον) and that it is generative of all things (πάντων γεννητικῶν); and that it is the cause of all unlimitedness in existent things and extends the gift of itself through the totality of beings; for all things are contained in the one
and exist through the one, and none could come to be unless they become one by their own nature” (3).

In this excerpt Proclus ascribes to Porphyry, although not mentioning him by name (4), the belief that the one is infinite because it is not only the cause of all things but also the cause of unlimitedness in existent things. But as we have seen there is no reference in Proclus that God even transcends the notion of the one, as in Porphyry. Dillon believes that the commentary seems to be influenced by Porphyry, but could be that of a pupil (5).

5.2. The second point of contact (Po-Parm. III-V; cf. Plato, Parm. 139c: If the one is other than another, so long as it is one). Here the question is whether the one is other, or different from intelligence. The reply is that the one does not undergo either likeness or otherness because it has an incomparable superiority (ἀσύμβλητος ὑπεροχή) to everything else. Indeed, says Porphyry, the terms other and same are not appropriate to the one, just as ‘rising’ and ‘setting’ are not suitable, by analogy, when talking about the sun itself, or thinking that the land is moving when we sail past it. Now, all of this has no parallel by Proclus (1184.9-1185.10).

We only have this observation that the one transcends all other things not by virtue of otherness but through an unspeakable superiotity (ἄφραστος ὑπεροχή). Besides, Proclus elaborates on the double usage of the word ἄει, always. It means: 1) the endless Being of the cosmos, sempiternity; and 2) the eternity of Νοῦς. Thus the only thing possibly in common are the expressions ‘incomparable superiority’ (ἀσύμβλητος ὑπεροχή) by our philosopher, and
'unspeakable superiority' (ἄφραστος ύπεροχή) by Proclus (6).

5.3. The third point (Plato, Parm. 140e-141d: The one cannot be, or become, older or younger than, or of the same age as, itself or another, or be in time at all). For our philosopher this is all one argument while PRO divides it into six lemmas (Cousin 1223.33 to 1233.19). So we get the following (1223), “Far more so, then is the one transcendent over divine essence (…) also to deny of the one all temporal participation”. There is no counterpart by Porphyry who instead calls the logical form of Plato’s argument ‘sophistical’ (VIII, 20-35); this corresponding to the second lemma (1225.37) of Proclus. Therefore, both our thinkers here deal with the opinion held by some that Plato in this reading is being somewhat sophistical. Fortunately, we find some expressions in common. Porphyry (VIII,33) says: Sophistical arguments (σοφιστικὸς ὁ λόγος καὶ γυμναστικός); and Proclus (1225.38), “This argument might seem(…)sophistic”. Porphyry’s text breaks off at VIII,35. When it resumes (IX-X) we are at the end of the first hypothesis talking about the unknowability of God (cf. Plato, Parm. 142a). In the main, there is no correlation with Proclus. What follows is the second hypothesis, and as one would expect all comparisons come to an end (7).

5.4. At this stage, we refer to a text in PRO (Cousin 1106-1108.19) where the author discusses the opinions of three philosophers (8) who attempt to expound on the nature of the One because they fear that, “By reason of the lack of definition our imagination does not have anything to grasp onto” (Cousin, 1106). Hadot
seems inclined to attribute the three subsequent views to Porphyry (9).

5.4.1. The first thinker postulates (1106) νοότης (intellectuality) above intelligence which is imagined as simpler (ἀπλούστερα) than, and also causative of, intelligence. Higher than this lies τὸ νοοῦν (this is the substantivized present participle form of the verb νοόω, meaning to convert into pure intelligence) which causes intellection. And still higher than this: τὸ νόημα (thought) which is primordial. Furthermore, our thinker postulates pre-ontological causative existences which he claims to be none other than Hen.

For instance, ἀγάθωμα/κάλλωμα (all ending in : -ωμα) are respectively (translated by Dillon) Goodity (causing the good) and beauty-ness (causing the beautiful). So the One is νόημα, ἀγάθωμα, κάλλωμα (etc.) which as a result signifies assuredly that there is a potential multiplicity in Hen. For Proclus obviously this is unacceptable because the One has no attributes whatsoever.

Victorinus seems to be drawing on this doctrine to suggest that God encompasses praexistentia, praeviventia and praecognoscentia which in turn cause respectively Being, life and intelligence (10). That is to say, God who is pre-existing, pre-living and pre-knowing has these inner forms: pre-existence, pre-life and pre-knowledge.

5.4.2. The second thinker is of the opinion (1106.33ff) that we should distinguish between God and the state of being God (τὸ θεός εἶναι) and “To allot to the primal reality the state of being God and to give this as the distinguishing characteristic of the one”.
Proclus rebuffs this argument because it is impossible to understand the Being of the One, considering that Plato removed even existence from it. By Victorinus (text no. 71), who speaks of the same distinction, God and the state of being God is essentially identical since God is power and the principle of all. It really looks as though Proclus does not appreciate the intention of this second philosopher for whom there is no difference, when talking about immaterial entities, between X and the Being of X, unlike the Aristotelian distinction (which seems to be referred to here) between the ideal essence of a thing and the concrete thing itself (11).

5.4.3. The third and final authority (12) would like the one to include within itself the causal principles of Being, life and Nous and indeed of all forms (Cousin, 1107.9ff). Proclus similarly says no to this rationale because it is a needless duplication of reality resulting in an infinite regress, "It is better, then, as Plato did, to rest content with the negations, and by means of these to exhibit the transcendent superiority of the One--that it is neither intelligible nor intellectual, nor anything else of these" (1108.19ff).

By Victorinus we find that all is in God but through an ineffable way. The One is beyond Being, beyond life and beyond intelligence. But, at the same time all of these are in God because He is pre-Being, pre-living and pre-knowing (13). "These things were existing already in God, without a doubt, but they were not yet acknowledged, and not yet named". Here we have the inner forms of God as absolute knowledge (14). We conclude with a criticism of
the way Porphyry (defined by Proclus as a leading theologian) has dealt with the exegesis of the One. “We shall, therefore, be very far from making the primal God the summit of the intelligible world, as I observe to be the practice of some leading theologians, and making the father of that realm the same as the cause of all things (...) The primal God, however, who is celebrated in the first hypothesis, is not even a father, but is superior also to all paternal divinity. The former entity is set over against its power and its intellect of whom it is said to be the father and with those it makes up a single triad; whereas this truly primal God transcends all contrast and relationship with anything, so a fortiori it is not an intelligible father” (Cousin 1070.15) (15).

The reason for the above criticism against Porphyry boils down to the fact that whereas for our philosopher the first One is identified with pure indeterminate Being (which, as we have seen, leads to the absolute first intelligible triad of Being, life and Nous unfolding throughout reality), by Proclus (in contrast) we have the categorical refusal of any association between τὸ ἕν/the one (primal God) and ἑναί/Being.

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Notes/Addenda

1. (Po/Pa) I,25ff
2. cf our p.162
3. The unlimitedness in existent things may be infinite potentiality, such as sempiternity (infinite duration of the cosmos), or infinite divisibility, (cf our p. 162, end of sect. A).
4. cf. Dillon, Porphyry and Jamblichus in Proclus' Commentary on the Parmenides, in: GONIMOS, Buffalo, NY, 1988, p.21; v. also tabular form of passages attributed to Porphyry in PRO, p. 23
5. cf. PRO, ibid introduction by Dillon, section B, pp. XXIV-XXXIV
6. ibid
7. ibid
8. Greek text: ed. Cousin (PRO/Gr), or by Ha-Po/Vi (vol. II) pp.117-118
9. ibid pp.372-375
10. cf. Victorinus text no. 78
11. cf. Aristotle, met. 1031a15, 1043b2
12. For Dillon (PRO, p.396) this third thinker is Jamblichus.
13. Victorinus, no. 78 (28-31)
14. Victorinus, no. 79 (33-34)
15. cf. Chaldean Oracles (CH/Or) fr. 4
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