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Plutarch and Second Century Platonism

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It is suitable, perhaps, to begin such an essay as this, as Plutarch himself would have wished, with a Plutarchan profession of faith and of humility in the face of the divine. By way of preface to his reply to certain objections to divine providence presented in his essay *On the Delays in the Divine Vengeance* 549E, Plutarch says the following:

> The fact is that we really have no part or parcel in Being, but everything of a mortal nature is at some stage between coming into existence and passing away, and presents only a dim and uncertain semblance and appearance of itself; and if you apply the whole force of your mind in your desire to apprehend it, it is like the violent grasping of water, which by squeezing and compression, loses the handful enclosed, as it spurts through the fingers. (Trans. Babbitt)

In a way, these are banalities (though the imagery of taking a handful of water is lively), but they appear also to be deeply felt. When one is approaching the question of the living faith of a man like Plutarch, who is both a Platonic philosopher in an age of scholasticism, and a scholar and an antiquarian in an age of profound conservatism and reverence for the past, it is no easy matter to disentangle the genuine beliefs from the formalities. This goes also for the other figures with whom we shall be dealing: Taurus, Atticus, Albinus, Apuleius, Maximus of Tyre, and Numenius, all second-century men enmeshed in traditional attitudes, but each with personal challenges to face. To adopt Plutarch's image, one must handle the evidence gently, lest the truth spurt out like water through our fingers.

Plutarch

What, then, were the guiding principles of Plutarch's spirituality? I would identify them as devotion to Apollo as god of Delphi and to Delphic

worship and ceremony; a cosmic dualism; and, in ethics, a civilized moderation—Peripatetic *metriopatheia* as opposed to Stoic *apatheia*. Let us discuss each of these features in turn.

The Delphic Divinity

To begin with Apollo, it is plain that for Plutarch it is not the son of Zeus and Leto who is to be worshiped nor yet the Sun (see his strictures in *De Pythiae oraculis* 400D), but rather the supreme God of Platonism, the Good of the *Republic*, the Demiurge of the *Timaeus*, who reveals himself preeminently as the god of Delphi. Apollo is to be etymologized, following the Pythagoreans, as 'Not-Many', and, therefore, the Unitary and Simple (*De E apud Delphos* 393BC):

> In fact the Deity is not Many, as is each of us who is compounded of hundreds of different factors which arise in the course of our experience, a heterogeneous collection combined in a haphazard way. But Being must have Unity, even as Unity must have Being. Now divergence from Unity, because of its differing from Being, deviates into the creation of that which has no Being. Whereafter the first of the god's names is excellently well adapted to him. . . . He is "Apollo," that is to say, denying the Many and abjuring multiplicity. (Trans. Babbitt)

Such a god may be symbolized in this world by the sun (as in the *Republic*), but he is by no means to be identified with the sun (393DE). As to his nature, Plutarch accepts, both here and elsewhere, the Platonic norms, enunciated in *Republic* 2, concerning how God should be spoken of: he is unitary, as we have seen, unchanging, beneficent, not subject to passions. Any untoward supernatural manifestations must be attributed not to the Supreme God but to an inferior deity, about whom we will have more to say later, in connection with Plutarch's dualism and demonology. In chap. 39 of his *Life of Pericles*, he takes the opportunity to remark that Pericles was called "Olympian" because "his pure and undefiled exercise of power was an image of the immortal gods," and he criticizes the poets for attributing anything else than this to the gods.

In a passage like this, and in numerous others, Plutarch speaks of "the gods" but it is not clear that in this he is paying much more than lip-service to polytheism. If we are to talk of "gods," they can be seen at most as manifestations of the supreme deity in various roles; Plutarch is happier with the more indefinite term *to theion*, "divinity."

Such divinity, of course, is not to be thought of as having human (or any other) form, or human personality. In another passage from the *Lives*, the *Life of Numa*, chap. 8, Plutarch, in discussing Numa's alleged Pythagoreanism,

notes that he followed Pythagoras (and, it is implied, right reason) in banning images of God in either human or bestial form:

> For that philosopher maintained that the first principle of Being was beyond sense or feeling, was invisible and free from mixture, and discernible only by the intellect.

But to a God so devoid of personal characteristics what personal devotion can there be? A good vantage point from which to discern Plutarch's attitude to the divinity is the prefatory portion of his essay *On Isis and Osiris,* addressed to his good friend, the Delphic priestess Clea. The whole passage (351C–352A) constitutes a useful statement of what one might term Plutarch's "philosophical *gnōsis.*"

He begins by stating that what one asks first and foremost of the gods is a knowledge of themselves—with the Platonic caveat "so far as such a thing is attainable by men" (see *Theaetetus* 176A). God, he explains, gives human beings the other things that they request, but of *nous* and *phronēsis* he gives them only a share (*metadidōsin*), since these are properties peculiar to himself. The excellence of God lies not in his power and strength but in his wisdom, both his acquaintance with Real Being and his providential care of our realm of Becoming.

So the striving after the truth, and especially the truth of the divine things, is a fulfillment of the injunction to become like unto God. It becomes plain, however, that 'knowledge of God' does not consist merely in fashioning true propositions about the godhead, but in the performance of approved rituals and religious observances. The end of these, he says (*On Isis and Osiris* 352A), is "the knowledge (*gnōsis*) of him who is the first, the Lord of All, the object of intellection." Isis constitutes a proper symbol and vehicle of this *gnōsis,* as her very name indicates (Plutarch etymologizes it as deriving from *eidenai to on,* "knowledge of Being").

One might feel here that he is saying much of this as a compliment to Clea, but in fact he did not have to embark on the enterprise of praising Isis at all, if all this did not reflect his deeper convictions; and there is no reason to suppose that it does not. To call Plutarch a "gnostic," then, is, I think, meaningful, if the term is carefully qualified (the usefulness of the term in its "traditional" sense, after all, is being seriously questioned by scholars these days). Plutarch plainly holds that knowledge of God is not simply a matter of philosophizing in the modern sense, but rather of training and disciplining the mind through ascetic practices and the observance of ritual. Of course, intellectual philosophizing—the practice of dialectic and other Platonic methods—is necessary also, but it will not achieve knowledge of God without the observance of a certain way of life. This

position can, I think, be characterized as "gnostic."

This, however, addresses only the summit, so to speak, of Plutarch's system of belief. Like Philo in relation to the observances of Judaism, Plutarch held that possession of the higher gnosis did not exempt one from the observances of one's religion. He took great pride in being a priest of Apollo at Delphi and served actively as such for many years, even into old age, as he testifies in his essay *Whether an Old Man should Engage in Public Affairs* (792F):

> Now surely you know that I have been serving the Pythian Apollo for many Pythiads, but you would not say: "Plutarch, you have done enough sacrificing, marching in processions, and dancing in choruses, and now that you are older it is time to put off the garland and to desert the oracle on account of your age." (Trans. H. N. Fowler)

As the elderly Plutarch danced in his choruses, in whose honor did he consider that he was dancing? One does not dance, I think, in honor of the Good, or of the One. Possibly Plutarch felt, as did later Platonists such as Porphyry, Iamblichus, or Proclus (though not, I think, Plotinus), that the correct way to honor the deity was through the forms of ritual traditional to one's culture, but one may detect also in Plutarch, as later in Proclus, a delight in ritual for its own sake, which is only, after all, to put Plutarch in the mainstream of traditional Greek piety, as emphasized by A. H. Armstrong in the introduction to this volume.

Cosmic Dualism

Plutarch is notable, within the Platonic spectrum, for his dualist tendencies. It is the general consensus of modern scholars, as it was of ancient ones, that Plato was not a dualist, in the strong sense. He recognizes the disorderly influence of matter, certainly in the *Timaeus,* but even in *Laws* 10, despite appearances, there is no need to assume any such entity as an evil world soul. However, Plato does lay himself open to such an interpretation for those who want to find such an entity, and his description of the creation of the world in the *Timaeus* is ambiguous enough to persuade some distinguished modern scholars, such as Gregory Vlastos, that he envisages a precosmic state of disorderly motion, upon which order is then imposed.

Plutarch was certainly of this opinion, which he presents in his treatise *On the Creation of the Soul in the Timaeus*—recognizing, however, that in this he is going against the views of his predecessors. It is his contention, carefully argued particularly in chaps. 6–7, that the cause of evil in the world cannot be matter, which has no qualities or propensities whatever,

but an irrational, 'evil' soul and that this is Plato's doctrine in the *Timaeus, Philebus, Politicus,* and *Laws* (see particularly *On the Creation* 1014B).

I have suggested elsewhere that Plutarch may owe his dualism to his teacher Ammonius, whom he portrays in the *De E* (394A) as holding that the sublunar world is in the grip of a secondary god whose characteristics are antithetical to those of Apollo.[1] But wherever he derived it from, it seems to be part of his world view. It emerges strongly in the *Isis and Osiris,* where its Persian origin is also made evident (see 369A–E). It is worth quoting from this passage what is a definitive statement of Plutarch's dualism:

> There has, therefore, come down from the theologians and lawgivers to both poets and philosophers [he has quoted Heraclitus and Euripides] this ancient belief, which is of anonymous origin, but is given strong and tenacious evidence—that the universe is not kept on high of itself without mind and reason and guidance, nor is it only one principle that rules and directs it as it were by rudders and curbing reins, but that many powers do so who are a mixture of evil and good. Rather since Nature, to be plain, contains nothing that is unmixed, it is not one steward that dispenses our affairs for us, as though mixing drinks from two jars in an hotel. Life and the cosmos, on the contrary—if not the whole of the cosmos, at least the earthly one below the moon, which is heterogeneous, variegated and subject to all manner of changes—are compounded of two opposite principles (*archai*) and of two antithetic powers (*dynameis*), one of which leads by a straight path and to the right, while the other reverses and bends back. For if nothing comes into being without a cause, and if good could not provide the cause of evil, then Nature must contain in itself the creation and origin of evil as well as of good.

For Plutarch, the tensions within the cosmos center on the figure of the World Soul, symbolized in the myth of Isis and Osiris by Isis, who is not itself an evil entity but irrational and subject to the evil influence of the Indefinite Dyad, symbolized by Typhon, or Ahriman. This World Soul, however, strives blindly toward the light of order, represented by the One and its Logos, and accepts ordering from that source, which leads to the creation of the physical cosmos (see *Isis and Osiris* 372E; *On the Creation* 1026E–1027A). The same tension must be seen as present in the human soul, and thus Plutarch's spirituality may be seen as containing a more pronounced notion of 'original sin' than is usual for a Platonist.

On the other hand, Plutarch is no 'world-negater' in a gnostic sense, or even to the extent that this might be said of the Neopythagorean Numenius, whom we shall consider presently. He simply sees this world as a theater in which a cosmic drama is played out, resulting from the tension between opposing forces, but where the Good triumphs. His position in ethics bears this out.

Ethics

In the area of ethical theory, a Platonist of Plutarch's time had in effect a choice between adhering to the Peripatetic doctrines of moderation of the passions (*metriopatheia*) and of virtue as a mean, and the more austere Stoic doctrines of extirpation of the passions (*apatheia*) and of the almost unattainable level of virtue of the Stoic sage, the great majority even of philosophers being mere 'improvers' (*prokoptontes*), not yet possessing true virtue. Antiochus of Ascalon, in the previous century, despite his Stoic tendencies in physics, was Peripatetic in his ethics, as were Taurus and Albinus later, in the mid-second century, whereas Eudorus of Alexandria and Atticus (who was Plutarch's follower in other respects) favored the Stoic ethical system. This is not, of course, the way they would have seen it: Plato could be quoted in support of either position, and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics,* in particular, seems to have been taken by Platonists to represent Academic teaching.

Plutarch himself, despite frequently striking Stoic attitudes in his popular essays, was firmly on the side of *metriopatheia* and the mean. The essay *On Moral Virtue* gives a definitive statement of his ethical theory. Here Aristotle's doctrine in *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.5–7 forms the basis of his position, though tinged with the Pythagorean conception of the mean as a quasi-musical harmonizing of the irrational soul by the rational (see *On Moral Virtue* 444EF). For Plutarch, the individual soul is a battlefield of opposing forces, even as is the cosmos. In the course of criticizing the Stoic conception of a unitary soul, he has the following to say (445B):

> In this last instance [the case of temperance], indeed, the irrational seems, with particular clearness, to allow us to observe the difference between itself and the rational, and to show that passion is essentially quite a different thing from reason. For self-control (*enkrateia*) would not differ from temperance (*sōphrosynē*), nor incontinence (*akrasia*) from intemperance (*akolasia*), as regards the pleasures or desires, if it were the same part of the soul that we naturally use for desiring as for forming judgments. But the fact is that temperance belongs to the sphere where reason guides and manages the passionate element like a gentle animal obedient to the reins, making it yielding in its desires and willingly receptive of moderation and propriety; but the self-controlled man, while he does indeed direct his desire by the strength and mastery of reason, yet does so not without pain, nor by persuasion, but as it plunges sideways and resists, as though with blow and curb, he forcibly subdues it and holds it in, being the while himself full of internal struggle and turmoil. (Trans. Helmbold)

He here invokes the Platonic image of the charioteer and horses, from the *Phaedrus* myth, as constituting a particularly striking image of the soul's

true nature. Plutarch's moral stance is in fact no less stern than that of any Stoic; it is just that his vision of the world, and of the human soul, is different.

Daemons

I have not, so far, alluded to a popular topic in discussions of Plutarch, his views on daemons. This aspect of his belief structure should not be neglected, but it is wrong to single him out as unusual in this respect. Everyone in Plutarch's world, not least the Christians, believed in daemons, in the sense of intermediate beings between God and humans, beneficent or maleficent, to whom a great many phenomena affecting one's daily life could be attributed. It has been well remarked that daemons in the ancient world filled many of the roles taken on by germs today. They were responsible for diseases of both mind and body, as well as for many infelicities of the weather. But on a more philosophically significant level, they provided a bridge between a divinity who (or *which*) was not subject to change or passions nor even possessed a personality and suffering and hoping humanity.

Plutarch's views on daemons are not, I think, entirely consistent, but they are nonetheless interesting for that.[2] One can discern in his thought both a 'static' and a 'dynamic' doctrine of daemons. On the one hand, we have passages (e.g., *On the Obsolescence of Oracles* 416C–F) in which what seems to be envisaged is a permanent class of intermediate beings, relieving god of too intimate connection with the concerns of earthly existence; on the other, we have a remarkable doctrine of the apparently endless cycle of changes upward and downward on the scale of being, which souls may undergo as they pass from human to daemon to god and, it seems, back again (e.g., *On the Face in the Moon* 944 CD; *De defectu oraculorum* 415B).

It is not relevant to our present purpose to discuss Plutarch's theory of daemons as such. All that concerns us is to note that daemons serve, on the one hand, to exempt god from any imputation of malevolent behavior or of taking pleasure in bloody or cruel sacrifices, and on the other, to buttress Plutarch's belief in the immortality of the soul and reincarnation, which, though traditionally Platonic, has some distinctive aspects.

Soul and Intellect

Plutarch derives from somewhere a strong contrast between soul and intellect (*nous*) (e.g., *On the Daemon of Socrates* 591 DE) and, together with that, a belief in what he calls a "double" or two-stage death, set out in the myth of the dialogue *On the Face in the Moon* (945BC). Soul and intellect

18. Relief of Apollo and Nike. Roman. Neo-Attic school. late 1st century B.C.–early 1st century A.D.

depart from the body at what we call death and ascend to the region of the moon, but then intellect leaves soul behind and ascends to the region of the sun. The reverse process also takes place, the sun sowing intellects in the moon, and the moon sowing the new intelligized souls into bodies.

In another myth, that of the dialogue *On the Daemon of Socrates* (591DE), we learn more. Relations between intellects and the soul-body complexes they manage will differ widely; normally the intellect is separate, floating above the body "like a fisherman's buoy," and it is this that may be seen as our personal daemon, but sometimes, it seems, it is dragged down into body as well.

Such a belief in a separable intellect is reminiscent of a doctrine that turns up in the Hermetic Corpus (*Tractate* 10, esp. sections. 19–21), where we learn that not all individuals have a *nous* and that in some cases the relationship with the *nous* becomes so unsatisfactory that it constitutes an avenging daemon. Whether Plutarch derives any influence from that quarter is doubtful, but certainly this doctrine, like his basic dualism, is an accretion of his Platonism brought in from outside.

Basically, however, Plutarch's religion is that of a Platonist, and such is his resounding affirmation of the immortality of the soul, delivered in the course of an attack on the Epicureans, toward the end of his treatise *That Epicurus Actually Makes a Pleasant Life Impossible* (1105CD):

> Hence in abolishing belief in immortality, they also abolish the pleasantest and greatest hope of ordinary men.
>
> What, then, do we suppose they do to the pleasures of the good, whose lives have been just and holy, who look forward to nothing evil in that other world but instead to all that is most glorious and divine? For in the first place, just as athletes receive the crown not while they are engaged in the contest but when it is over and victory is won, so men who believe that life is done are inspired by their virtue to a most wonderful confidence when they fix their eyes on these hopes, which include that of seeing at last the condign punishment of those who in their wealth and power are injurious and insolent now and who in their folly laugh all higher powers to scorn. In the next place no one impassioned for the truth and the vision of reality has ever been fully satisfied in this world, since the light of reason, veiled by the body as by a mist or cloud, is wavering and indistinct; but like a bird that gazes upward, they are ready to take wing from the body to some luminous expanse, and thus they lighten and disburden the soul of the gear of mortality, taking philosophy as an exercise in death. (Trans. Einarson and De Lacy)

This, inspired as it is by Plato's *Phaedo*, gives no hint of the complexities arising out of one's relationship with one's *nous* or problems of identity resulting from reincarnation. What Plutarch really believed in that area is not clear, but certainly he held, with Socrates at the end of the *Apology*, that

"nothing bad can happen to a good man."

We began with God, and let us end with God. The purpose of life, for Plutarch as a Platonist, is "becoming like to God," *homoiōsis theō*. We have seen this expressed in this passage from the dialogue *On the Divine Vengeance* (550DE):

> Consider that God, as Plato says (*Theaetus* 176E), offers himself to all as a pattern of every excellence, thus rendering human virtue, which is in some sort an assimilation to himself (*exhomoiōsin . . . pros hauton*), accessible to all who can "follow God." Indeed this was the origin of the change whereby universal nature, disordered before, became a "cosmos": it came to resemble after a fashion and participate in the form and excellence of God. The same philosopher says further that Nature kindled vision in us so that the soul, beholding the heavenly motions and wondering at the sight, should grow to accept and cherish all that moves in stateliness and order, and thus come to hate discordant and errant passions and to shun the aimless and haphazard as the source of all vice and jarring error; for man is fitted to derive from God no greater blessing than to become settled in virtue through copying and aspiring to the beauty and the goodness that are his. (Trans. Einarson and De Lacy)

Plutarch's spirituality, then, is basically optimistic and world-affirming. He recognizes a tension in the world between good and evil, but without falling into nihilistic, world-abhoring gloom. In that, at least, he is more akin to Plotinus after him than to many of his contemporaries, products of that "age of anxiety" which E. R. Dodds so acutely identified in his well-known book of that title.[3]

Other Platonists of the Second Century

It would be desirable, I think, to set Plutarch in the context of other second-century Platonists and Pythagoreans to see how representative or otherwise he is of Platonism in this era, but unfortunately the material for making such an assessment is very largely lacking. We know the names and something of the views of fully half a dozen figures of this period in Platonism, but we do not have much that tells us what religious beliefs they held.

What we know of L. Calvenus Taurus is derived primarily from the reminiscences of Aulus Gellius in his *Noctes Atticae*, and these reveal an urbane and donnish figure, not subject to mystical or ascetic excesses. However, we do learn, not from Gellius but from Iamblichus, in his *De Anima* (ap. Stobaeus *Anthologium* 1.378, Wachsmuth), that Taurus "and his followers" put forward two views as to why souls are sent by the gods into bodies—*either* "for the completion of the universe, that there may be as many living things in the cosmos as there are in the intelligible realm" (a

doctrine derived from Plato's *Timaeus*) or (what is more interesting) "that the gods may reveal themselves through souls; for the gods come out into the open and manifest themselves through the pure and unsullied life of souls." This latter notion has, it seems to me, a distinctly religious content. We are placed on this earth as projections of the divinity, and it is up to us to live up to this high calling, necessarily by 'likening' ourselves to God, in the accepted Platonic manner. This is perhaps derivable in part from such Platonic passages as *Phaedo* 62B (we are here on guard duty, as it were, for the gods) and *Laws* 644DE (we are puppets of the gods), but the tone of it is rather different. However, on a doxographic notice such as this one should not build too much.

We are no better served with such figures as Atticus and Albinus. From the former we have a polemical tract directed against those who try to interpret Plato through Aristotle[4]—and thus against Aristotelianism. This includes a spirited defense of God's providence against Aristotle's effective abolition of it, which takes on distinctly theological overtones. Atticus was doubtless a man of exemplary Platonic piety, but one cannot, I think, derive a true idea of his personal spirituality from this rhetorical polemic. From Albinus, on the other hand, what we have is a dry scholastic handbook of Platonic doctrine, from which nothing that could be regarded as a personal spiritual stance can be extracted.[5]

The situation is not much different with the interesting figure of Apuleius, who also, in his self-styled capacity as a Platonic philosopher (he may more properly be regarded as a lawyer and rhetorician), writes a treatise on Platonic philosophy, as well as an essay *On the Daemon of Socrates.* These, however, are products of scholasticism and rhetoric respectively and reveal little about Apuleius's personal views, except that he was a Platonist. The personal devotion to Isis shown by Lucius in *Metamorphoses* 11 is possibly much nearer the views of the real Apuleius, but that is more relevant to the beliefs of "ordinary men" than of Platonists as such.

Another quasi-Platonist figure of whom we have evidence is the sophist Maximus of Tyre, a number of whose orations concern topics that could come under the head of "spirituality." Particularly interesting are Oration 2 (Hobein), *Who Is God according to Plato?,* which complements the descriptions of the divinity given by Albinus and Apuleius in the handbooks; Orations 8 and 9, *On the Daemon of Socrates,* which gives a comprehensive theory of daemons analogous to that of Apuleius; Oration 5, *Whether One Should Pray*; and Oration 13, *Whether, If Divination Exists, There Is Free Will.* It is in these last two orations, which concern the problem of providence and free will, that we may most possibly discover something of Maximus's own views, and indeed this topic may serve to unite our discussion

of all the previous figures, since the conflict between the doctrines of God's providence and human free will is perhaps the most burning philosophical and spiritual issue in second-century Platonism.

For the Stoics, being materialists and determinists, there is no theological problem (though some logical ones remain), nor is there for the Epicureans, who allow a different sort of determinism to hold sway; but for Platonists (and Aristotelians) the contradiction between the all-foreseeing and all-directing providence of God and the urge to preserve initiative and free choice on the part of the individual was a very grave problem, over which much ink was spilled in this period and later. If all is foreordained, how can there be praise and blame for human actions, and what is the use of praying to the gods? If human beings are free agents, how can their actions be foreseen by God, and in what sense, therefore, is God omniscient?

Besides Maximus's rather superficial contributions, we have a whole essay *On Fate* falsely attributed to Plutarch,[6] another treatise of the same title by the Peripatetic Alexander of Aphrodisias,[7] and chapters in the handbooks of both Albinus (chap. 26) and Apuleius (chap. 12). There is no need in the present instance to go into the complexities of the scholastic solutions offered in particular by Pseudo-Plutarch. Suffice it to say that, although the problem can hardly be said to have been solved in this period, much progress was made toward defining its parameters. Somehow the concepts of providence, free will, fate, and chance have to be fitted harmoniously into an overall world view.

For a Platonist, it is axiomatic, first of all, that God cares for the world, has set the course of events in it in motion, and knows, at least in general, what will happen to it. But it is also axiomatic that the human will is autonomous (this guaranteed for later Platonists by the famous phrase in *Republic* 10.617: "The blame is with the chooser; God is blameless"). It was also generally accepted that, below the Moon at least, *heimarmenē* or Fate, in the sense of a chain of necessary causes, held sway in the physical world and had considerable effect on our lives. But it was held to be somehow subsumed into, or comprehended by, God's providence, and it still left room for *to eph' hēmin,* "what is in our power," or individual discretion. It is in trying to accommodate these two concepts to each other that most ingenuity is expended. Here is Albinus's attempt:

> All things are within the sphere of [lit. "in"] Fate, but not all things are fated. (*Didaskalikos* 26)

Fate has the status of a law. It does not say, as it were, "Because so-and-so has done this, he will suffer this," for that would result in an infinity of

possibilities, since the actions that take place are infinite, and the results of them are also infinite.

> [If all things are fated], then what is in our power (*to eph' hēmin*) will disappear, and therefore praise and blame and everything like this.
>
> [The chain of causality begins] because, if a soul chooses such and such in life, it will then also perform such and such actions, and such and such results will follow for it. The soul is thus autonomous, and it is in its power to act or not, and this is not forced upon it, but what follows upon its action will be brought about in accordance with Fate.

Whether we find this satisfactory or not is beside the point. The important thing is that the preservation of a role for individual free will is a basic condition of Platonic spirituality. Only on this basis do prayer, self-discipline, and the practice of the virtues have any meaning.

It remains to round out our survey by considering at least one important representative of the Pythagorean "wing" of Platonism in this era. I use this form of words, since I do not see Neopythagoreanism as an independent philosophical movement in this era, so much as an attitude that might be taken up within Platonism. Admittedly, there is a tension between devotion to Pythagoras and to Plato as founding fathers, since a Pythagorean will attribute all that is good in Platonism to Pythagoras and his immediate followers and regard Plato as one (admittedly brilliant) follower. One may even become quite belligerent, as does Moderatus of Gades,[8] against the alleged tendency of Platonists to appropriate all that is best in Pythagoreanism for themselves and leave Pythagoreans with the dross. But generally, Pythagoreanism simply means, besides a personal devotion to Pythagoras and particular enthusiasm for number mysticism and a mathematical model for the universe, a more austere stance in ethics and the observance of a certain *bios*, or way of life, involving abstention from meat and beans and the adoption of the other Pythagorean rules, or *symbola*.

Leaving aside the remarkable figure of Apollonius of Tyana, whom I do not see as a philosopher in the strict sense and who may in any case be largely a literary creation of Philostratus, the only Pythagorean of whose spirituality we can form much idea is Numenius of Apamea, and even with him the situation is not very satisfactory, since we have only fragments of his works (once again, as in the case of Atticus, in Eusebius's *Praeparatio evangelica*) and doxographic reports.[9]

One first aspect of Numenius's spirituality to note is his omnivorous hospitality to the great religions of the world. In fragment 1a, we learn from Eusebius of his great respect for the teachings of the Brahmins, the Jews, the Magi, and the Egyptians (only the Druids, it seems, escaped his benevolent attentions). Of course, respect for ancient wisdom is very much a part of Platonism from the time of Plato himself, but Numenius seems to have carried his interest rather further than others, especially in respect to Judaism. Origen tells us (fr. 1b and c) that he discoursed much about the God of the Jews in his dialogue *On the Good* and that he gave allegorical interpretations of the works of Moses and the prophets. There is the intriguing possibility that he was acquainted with the works of Philo, but this cannot be proved. At any rate, from our point of view, what is important is his sense of the unity of religious experience and its concordance with the teaching of Plato and Pythagoras.

Other features of his philosophy connect him in an intriguing way with an extraordinary production of the second century A.D., the so-called *Chaldaean Oracles*,[10] the composition (possibly through a series of mediumistic trances) of a certain Julian in the reign of Marcus Aurelius. Both Numenius and the *Oracles* make a strong distinction between a First God, whom both claim is generally unknown to mortals,[11] and a secondary, demiurgic god, who is immediately responsible for the creation and guidance of the world. This is not a distinction made by Plutarch, though some such distinction appears in chap. 10 of Albinus's *Didaskalikos*. The relations between these two in Numenius's philosophy are of great interest, but not immediately relevant to our purpose. More to our purpose is to observe the mode of approach that Numenius recommends to his supreme principle, since it anticipates to some extent that of Plotinus to the One and may well be in its turn influenced by the doctrine of the *Chaldaean Oracles* that the Father may only be known by the "flower of the intellect," the mystical element in each of us (fr. 1). Fragment 2 of Numenius's *On the Good* provides a striking image of the watcher on the shore catching glimpses of a tiny fishing boat between the waves:

> We can acquire the notion of any material object from the comparison of similar objects and by the distinguishing characteristics of objects available to our sense: the Good, on the other hand, it is quite impossible to grasp on the basis of anything present to us or similar to it, but like someone seated in a lookout post, who, straining his eyes, catches sight for one moment of one of those little fishing vessels, a one-man skiff all on its own, bobbing amid the waves, even so must one remove oneself far from the things of sense, and consort solitarily with the Good in its solitude, where there is neither man nor any other living thing, nor any body great or small, but some unspeakable and truly indescribable wondrous solitude, there where are the accustomed places, the haunts and pleasances of the Good, and it itself in peace, in benevolence, in its tranquillity, in its sovereignty, riding gently upon the surface of Being.

Numenius's view of the world is more starkly dualist than that of Plutarch. Not only does he believe in an evil principle at work in the world, which he identifies with the Indefinite Dyad of Pythagoreanism (fr. 52), but he feels a dualism within the individual soul, to the extent of postulating two souls within each individual (fr. 43), a rational and an irrational. The descent of the rational soul into body he sees as an unqualified misfortune (fr. 48), and no reconciliation, only constant struggle, can come about between these two souls. This "gnostic" view he shares with the *Chaldaean Oracles* (fr. 102–4, 107, 112), and it adds up to a distinctly world-negating attitude, in distinction to that of Plutarch.

The spirituality of the second-century Platonists is not, therefore, a uniform thing, but embraces a fairly broad spectrum of attitudes, particularly toward the physical world and our place in it. The full extent of the diversity of the views of these thinkers is obscured for us, however, by the nature of the surviving evidence. Especially in the case of Numenius, we may regret the loss of a full text of his dialogue *On the Good,* and a man like Atticus, when not incensed by Peripatetic pretensions, might have revealed spiritual depths. On the other hand, it was not the fashion among Platonists of this period, as far as one can see, to compose personal testaments; there is no Platonist equivalent of the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius. Plutarch comes nearest to such self-revelation, but his utterances are generally given the protective filter of dialogue. Nevertheless, in the case of Plutarch, at least, one can feel, in reading his works, that one is touching a man.

Notes

1. Dillon, *Middle Platonists,* 191.
2. See Guy Soury, *La démonologie de Plutarque* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1942); F. E. Brenk, *In Mist Apparelled,* esp. chaps. 6, 7; and Dillon, *Middle Platonists,* 216–21.
3. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety.*
4. Fragments are preserved by Eusebius in his *Praeparatio evangelica,* but the material is most conveniently available in the Budé edition of É. des Places (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1977).
5. If indeed Albinus it is. The *Didaskalikos* is attributed in the manuscript to "Alkinoos." It has long been held that this was a scribal error for "Albinos," but John Whittaker (whose new Budé edition of the *Didaskalikos* may be expected shortly) has made a spirited effort to reestablish the name of "Alkinoos." The existing edition is that of P. Louis (Budé; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1945). *Didaskalikos* 19.10 contains interesting doctrine on the nature of God, but it cannot be claimed as personal to Albinus.
6. There is an edition by E. Valgiglio, *Ps.-Plutarco, De Fato* (Rome: A. Signorelli, 1964). See also vol. 6 of the Loeb edition of Plutarch, and Dillon, *Middle Platonists,* 320–26.

7. Now in a good edition by R. W. Sharples, *Alexander of Aphrodisias: On Fate* (London: Duckworth, 1983).
8. See Dillon, *Middle Platonists,* 346.
9. A collection of fragments and good introduction and notes are in the Budé edition of É. des Places, *Numénius* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1973). See also Dillon, *Middle Platonists,* 361–79.
10. Fragments edited by É. des Places (Budé; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1971).
11. Numenius fr. 17; des Places; *Chaldaean Oracles,* fr. 7, des Places.

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For the translations of Plutarch, I have used those by the various editors of his works in the Loeb Classical Library series, making such minor alterations as seemed desirable: *Plutarch's Moralia* (15 vols.; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949–). All other translations are my own. The relevant literature is not very extensive, but the following works may be helpful:

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