

What is Platonism?

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§1. The Problem

The question posed in the title of this paper is an historical one. I am not, for example, primarily interested in the term 'Platonism' as used by modern philosophers to stand for a particular theory under discussion – a theory, which it is typically acknowledged, no one may have actually held.¹ I am rather concerned to understand and articulate on an historical basis the core position of that 'school' of thought prominent in antiquity from the time of the 'founder' up until at least the middle of the 6th century C.E.² Platonism was unquestionably the dominant philosophical position in the ancient world over a period of more than 800 years. Epicureanism is perhaps the sole major exception to the rule that in the ancient world all philosophers took Platonism as the starting-point for speculation, including those who thought their first task was to *refute* Platonism. Basically, Platonism sent the ancient philosophical agenda. Given this fact, understanding with some precision the nature of Platonism is obviously a desirable thing for the historian of ancient philosophy.

One might suppose that the task of determining the nature of Platonism can be handled in a relatively straightforward and perspicuous manner if one stipulates that Platonism is the view or collection of views held by all those who called themselves 'Platonists' or followers of Plato. Thus, we could take a purely phenomenological approach: Platonism is just whatever anyone in the relevant period identifies as Platonism.³ A similar approach could be made in determining who is a Platonist. As a strictly historical method, this is not an unreasonable way to proceed.⁴ Nevertheless, it has several drawbacks.

First, the fact that philosophers did not self-identify as Platonists until sometime in the 2nd century C.E. means that we would have to exclude from our construction of Platonism, on the

¹ Willard van Orman Quine and Richard Rorty come readily to mind as two prominent philosophers who have used the label 'Platonism' as a foil for the development of their own philosophical positions. I am very far from holding that modern uses of the term 'Platonism' are unconnected or only uninterestingly connected with the historical reality. Nevertheless, precisely because there is *some* connection, albeit at times remote, it would be useful to have a clear grasp of the historical phenomenon before arriving at judgments about either.

² That Platonism was actually held in some sense to antedate the teachings of Plato is one surprising fact that I shall address below. I am here interested in the Platonism that is, to use the unfortunate pejorative term, 'pagan'. So, I shall have nothing to say about, for example, 'Christian Platonism' except by implication and on the assumption that this label indicates one historical variety of Platonism.

³ According to J. Glucker, *Antiochus and the Late Academy* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1978), 206-25, philosophers began declaring themselves as Platonists in the second century C.E. Antiochus of Ascalon, for example, was always referred to as an Academic. According to Glucker, the shift from use of the term 'Academic' to 'Platonist' occurred owing to the actual demise of the Academy and then, after a period of quiescence, a resurgence of interest in the philosophy of the founder.

⁴ See H. Dörrie and M. Baltés, *Der Platonismus in der Antike : Grundlagen, System, Entwicklung*. 7 v. (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1987-2002).v.1, 4: 'Platonismus wird verstanden als die Philosophie, deren Vertreter sich ΠΛΑΤΩΝΙΚΟΙ – *Platonici* nannten. Der so verstandene Platonismus gewann alsbald alle Merkmale einer philosophischen Schule – αἵρεσις – *secta*, ähnlich den Merkmalen, durch die sich die übrigen Schulen, namentlich die Stoiker, auszeichneten.'). On the meaning of the term αἵρεσις in this period see Glucker, *Antiochus and the Late Academy*, 166-93. After discussing a large amount of evidence, Glucker concludes that αἵρεσις is never used of a 'school' in an institutional or organizational sense but always of a way of thinking or set of beliefs.

basis of a technicality, as it were, the contributions of many philosophers who were quite evidently in some sense followers of Plato and of his philosophy. The list of the philosophers thus excluded would be quite impressive. It includes members of the Old Academy such as Speusippus (c. 410 – 339 B.C.E.) and Xenocrates (396/5 – 314/313 B.C.E.) as well as numerous significant figures of what is anachronistically called 'Middle Platonism' such as Antiochus of Ascalon (c. 130 – c. 68 B.C.E.) and Numenius (2nd c. C.E.). I single out these philosophers from among many others because the remains of their writings – in some cases extensive and in others exiguous – surely have *some* role to play in giving an historical answer to my question. In this regard, the skeptical philosophers of the 'New Academy', Arcesilaus (316/315 – 241/340 B.C.E.), Carneades (214 – 129/8 B.C.E.), Clitomachus (187/6 – 110/09 B.C.E.), and Philo of Larissa (158 -84 B.C.E.) are especially interesting.⁵ For there is a serious and complex question of whether skepticism does or does not represent an authentic element of Platonism.⁶ It would seem to be needlessly scholastic to dismiss the question out of hand just because New Academics did not actually call themselves 'Platonists'.

Second, among self-described Platonists as well as among de facto ones, there were serious and substantial disagreements about various doctrines understood to comprise Platonism. If we move forward to the end of our period, those of undoubtedly Platonic pedigree such as Proclus (412 – 485 C.E.) and Simplicius (c. 490 – 560 C.E.) preserve for us extensive doxographies of disputed positions among Platonists across many centuries. These disputes focus on matters small and large. A scholar such as Dörrie, deeply conversant with these disputes, and committed to the phenomenological approach, would insist that the recognition of contradictions *within* Platonism should occasion no unease. For example, according to Dörrie, it belongs to authentic Platonism to argue *either* that our entire soul is immortal *or* only that one part of it is; to argue *either* that Forms are within a divine intellect *or* that they are not; to argue

⁵ The term 'New Academy' evidently goes back at least to Sextus Empiricus. See his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, I 220, where he distinguishes the Academy under the headship of Carneades ('New') from the Academy under the headship of Arcesilaus ('Middle'). The term 'Middle Platonism' is a relatively modern invention, along with 'Neoplatonism'. Thus, confusingly, Middle Platonism (roughly 80 B.C.E. – 250 C.E.) postdates the New Academy and includes both philosophers who did not identify themselves as 'Platonists' (though they were in some sense disciples of Plato) and those who did. We might wish to consider that if Platonism were to be entirely determined by those who called themselves 'Platonists', then there would not be much difference between Platonism and Neoplatonism since the overwhelming majority of those who called themselves Platonists were in fact what we today call 'Neoplatonists'. The question of what distinguishes Neoplatonism from Platonism is not a simple one. It is more accurate to understand the doctrines of those called 'Neoplatonists' as versions of Platonism. It is not at all clear that there are doctrines that distinguish collectively those philosophers writing between the 3rd and the 6th centuries C.E. from, say, those of the members of the Old Academy, like Speusippus and Xenocrates. See J.M. Dillon, *The Heirs of Plato. A Study of the Old Academy (347-274 BC)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), especially chs. 2-3, on the 'Neoplatonic' elements of Old Academic doctrine. The role of Xenocrates in casting Plato's teachings into a systematic form or, perhaps more contentiously, in giving witness to its final systematization by Plato himself, should not be underestimated. See also C.J. De Vogel, "On the Neoplatonic Character of Platonism and the Platonic Character of Neoplatonism," *Mind* 62 (1953): 43-64. In a seminal paper, E.R. Dodds, "The Parmenides of Plato and the Origin of the Neoplatonic One," *Classical Quarterly* 22 (1923): 129-142, sought to trace the roots of the central idea of Neoplatonism to Middle Platonic versions of Platonism.

⁶ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, I 221-235, argues that adherents of the New Academy, e.g. Carneades, are not skeptics (226-232), while Arcesilaus is one (232-235). Whether either or neither of these represent contributors to authentic Platonism is a delicate question. Sextus tends to doubt that Plato can be held to be a skeptic, as he, Sextus, understands that term (225).

either that the universe was created literally in time *or* that it was not; to argue that evil is to be identified with matter *or* privation or with neither; and so on.

My unease with this approach consists simply in the fact that it is superficial. For among Platonists, the disputes were fundamentally different from disputes between Platonists and members of other schools. In the former, there was, or so I aim to show, commonly agreed upon principles on the basis of which the disputed positions were advanced. In the latter, Platonists argued that their opponents were fundamentally mistaken in principle. It is I believe upon these principles that we should focus in order to understand Platonism.

One of these principles is, of course, that Platonists are adherents of Plato's philosophy. And this in turn raises the large issue of how one is to proceed from 'what Plato says' to 'what Plato means'.⁷ The gap between what Plato says or, more accurately, what Plato's characters say, and what Plato's means, is potentially an abyss. It is possible to leap into that abyss and never be heard from again. Most students of ancient philosophy, however, suppose that there are ways to bridge the gap, that is, reasonable assumptions that allow us to draw conclusions (modest or otherwise) about Plato's meaning on the basis of what is said in the dialogues. But to allow that there is a gap at all is to admit that there is a philosophical position or a set of these, whose parts may or may not be consistent, that goes beyond just what the dialogues say. For example, 'the' theory of Forms or 'a' theory of Forms may be constructed from the dialogues, but no account of Forms that I know of does not attempt at least to generalize from the words of the dialogues or to draw out their implications.⁸

The gap between the paraphrasing of the literal and the construction of the doctrinal is the gap between what Plato wrote and Platonism.⁹ I think we must recognize at the outset that Platonists were interested in the former primarily because it was an indispensable means of arriving at the latter.¹⁰ But it was not the only means. It hardly needs emphasizing that from the claims that 'Plato believed p' and 'p implies q', we cannot infer that Plato believed 'q'.

⁷ Gerald Press' felicitously titled collection of essays *Who Speaks for Plato?* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), nicely expresses the question. My present concern skirts the fact that Press and others think this question perhaps impossible to answer definitively. For I think we can identify the nature of Platonism even if we came to be convinced that Plato was no Platonist or that we have no way of knowing whether he was or was not.

⁸ The remarks by Plato at *Phaedrus* 274C-277A and in the 7th *Epistle* 341C-D suggesting the unreliability of the written word as a guide to Plato's inner thoughts undoubtedly added to the sense that Plato must be *interpreted*. See *infra* n. 21. See also 2nd *Epistle* 314C. See H. Tarrant, *Plato's First Interpreters* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000) for a very useful study of the pitfalls and vagaries of Platonic interpretation from the Old Academy up to the Neoplatonists.

⁹ P. Shorey, *What Plato Said* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1933) provides an excellent example of a scholar who attempts to sail as close to land as possible in his account of what is in the dialogues. But even Shorey again and again tries to tell us what Plato really means when he says so and so. See H.F. Cherniss, *The Riddle of the Early Academy* (New York, N.Y.: Russell & Russell, 1945), ch.3, 'The Academy: Orthodoxy, Heresy, or Philosophical Interpretation?'

¹⁰ Plotinus, for example, suggests, perhaps with only the slightest irony, that Plato was neither the first 'Platonist' nor certainly the only one, but simply the one most divinely inspired. G.R. Boys-Stones, *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy. A Study of its Development from the Stoics to Origen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), asserts that 'Platonism is at root...the belief that Plato's philosophy was dogmatic and authoritative'. As Boys-Stones goes on to argue, this does not mean that Plato's words were always accepted at face value. His true meaning had to be interpreted. 'Platonists were able to commit themselves to the truth of a proposition *on the grounds that* Plato had said it, and it might be, even before they themselves understood *why* it was true'. Platonist philosophy involved *imprimis* puzzling out what Plato meant as a means of advancing towards knowledge: and the real uncertainties that might be thrown up by this exegetical process (as, for example, in Plutarch's *Platonic Questions*) show that the process was quite honest in its concept, not a disingenuous appropriation of Plato for doctrines worked out in spite of him' (103).

Nevertheless, Platonists were eager to be initiated and nurtured in their understanding of Platonism as far as possible by reading Plato.

It was fairly widely believed in antiquity that Plato was not the first Platonist, as we might put it. Aristotle tells us that Plato ‘followed the Italians (i.e., the Pythagoreans) in most things’.¹¹ Plotinus tells us that Plato was not the first to say the things that in fact we today widely identify as elements of ‘Platonism’, but he said them best.¹² Since Plato was not the first and therefore not the only champion of Platonism, there was generally held to be nothing in principle untoward in arguing that Plato *meant* what he did not happen to say explicitly. To draw out the implications or the true meaning of what Plato said, in other words, was part of the project of articulating and defending Platonism.¹³

The attempt to expose the inspired meaning of Plato’s words was evidently consistent with a refusal to accept Plato’s authority without question. For example, Olympiodorus (before 510 – after 565 C.E.), in his *Commentary on Plato’s Gorgias* relates the revealing story that his own teacher, Ammonius (before c. 440 – after 517 C.E.), rebuked a student who gave as the reason for some doctrine or other that ‘Plato said it’. Ammonius replied that, first of all, that was ‘not what Plato meant’ (οὐκ ἔφη μὲν οὕτως) and second, even if he did, it was not true *because* Plato said it.¹⁴ Ammonius’ first point is as significant as his second: Plato’s words cannot always be taken at face value. They must be interpreted. And in their interpretation, they must be defended by argument.

In trying to understand what Platonism is, we must, therefore, recognize that Platonism is, in a sense, bigger than Plato. But we must also recognize that the evidence for Plato’s expression of Platonism was, in several crucial respects, conceived of more broadly than is generally the case today.

The core evidence is, of course, the Platonic *corpus*. As Diogenes Laertius reports, Thrasyllus (d. 36 C.E.) divided the works of Plato into nine ‘tetralogies’ or groups of four.¹⁵ To

¹¹ See *Metaphysics* A 6, 987a30. Aristotle goes on to attribute ‘the peculiarities’ (τὰ ἴδια) of Plato’s philosophy to his having in his youth come under the personal influence of Cratylus and Socrates. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, III 5-8, confirms and expands on this account. Association of Platonism with Pythagoreanism was a regular, albeit varied, feature of Neoplatonism. See Iamblichus, *On the Pythagorean Life* 74, 18-21; 94, 18-22 on Plato’s dependence on Pythagoras and D.J. O’Meara, *Pythagoras Revived: Mathematics and Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 91-111.

¹² Cf. *Enneads* V 1. 8, 10-14: ‘So, these statements of ours are not recent or new, but rather were made a long time ago, though not explicitly. The things we are saying now are interpretations of those, relying on the writings of Plato himself as evidence that these are ancient views’. Plotinus is here referring to the basic principles of his own metaphysics. See D. Sedley, ‘Plato’s Auctoritas and the Rebirth of the Commentary Tradition,’ *Philosophia Togata II*. Edited by J. Barnes and M. Griffin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 110-29 and Boys-Stones, *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy*, ch.6, for differing views of the reestablishment of Plato as a philosophical authority for Platonists.

¹³ Plotinus, *Enneads* VI 2. 1, 4-5, says that he is ‘trying to coordinate (ἀνάγειν) our opinions with those of Plato’. Plotinus wanted his own views to be identical with Plato’s. Cf. J.N. Findlay, *Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines* (London: Routledge & Kegan. Paul, 1974), 377, who, describing the Platonism of Plotinus, says, ‘It is simply what one arrives at if one meditates on the major speculative passages in Plato’s written work with a willingness to carry eidetic thinking to the limit, a willingness which has not been present in many of the empiricists, pluralists, nominalists, skeptics, formal logicians, anti-mystics and pure scholars who have ventured to interpret Plato’. Whatever reservations one might have about Findlay’s hermeneutical stance, it does in fact accurately mirror that of the Platonists themselves.

¹⁴ See Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Plato’s Gorgias* 41 9, 10-13. In this passage, he aptly cites *Phaedo* 91C1, where Socrates exhorts his interlocutors to ‘care little for Socrates but much more for the truth’.

¹⁵ See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* III 56. Diogenes, III 61, goes on to mention an earlier division into trilogies by Aristophanes the Grammarian (c. 257-180 B.C.E.) evidently based on dramatic similarities.

these he appended a number of works he judged to be spurious. There is considerable controversy today over the question of whether Thrasyllus originated the division into tetralogies.¹⁶ There is even greater dispute regarding Thrasyllus' division of authentic and spurious material. From our perspective, what is most important is that the Thrasyllan scheme established the authentic *corpus* of Platonic writings for Platonists ever after.¹⁷

The 36 works of the nine tetralogies include 35 dialogues and 13 *Epistles* that are counted as one work. Not all of these are today universally recognized as genuine. Of the dialogues of doubted authenticity, *Alcibiades I* is the one that was most important for Platonists because that dialogue was apparently read first in their philosophical 'curriculum'.¹⁸ Among the *Epistles* of doubted authenticity, the 2nd and the philosophical portion of the 7th are unquestionably the most significant for Platonists. These were used by them regularly to bolster their interpretations of the dialogues.¹⁹

In addition to the writings in the *corpus*, there were Aristotle's reports of Plato's 'unwritten teachings'. The view that Plato had unwritten teachings and that these differed in any way from what is said in the dialogues is a matter of intense and even bitter controversy.²⁰ It is not controversial that all self-described Platonists of our period took these reports seriously if not always a face-value.²¹ Further, there were Aristotle's interpretations of the doctrines expressed

¹⁶ See H. Tarrant, *Thrasyllan Platonism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), especially chs. 3-4. J. Mansfeld, *Prolegomena: Questions to be Settled Before the Study of an Author or a Text* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), especially ch. 2.

¹⁷ See J.M. Cooper, *Plato. Complete Works* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Co, 1997) which contains all of the genuine and spurious material as established by Thrasyllus. Tarrant, *Thrasyllan Platonism*, argues that the division of the dialogues by Thrasyllus reflects a positive interpretation of Platonism rather than merely a neutral organization of the extant material. According to Tarrant, Thrasyllus is a key figure in the development of subsequent versions of Platonism.

¹⁸ For the evidence pro and con for the authenticity of *Alcibiades*, see J.-F. Pradeau, *Alcibiade* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999) and N. Denyer, *Alcibiades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). On the Neoplatonic order of studying the Platonic dialogues, see I. Hadot, *Simplicius. Commentaire sur les Catégories* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), 44-7.

¹⁹ For an introduction to the question of the authenticity of the *Epistles* see G.R. Morrow, *Plato's Epistles* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962).

²⁰ See H.J. Krämer, *Arete bei Platon und Aristoteles; zum Wesen und zur Geschichte der platonischen Ontologie* (Heidelberg, C. Winter, 1959), translated into English as H.J. Krämer, *Plato and the Foundations of Metaphysics* (Buffalo, N.Y.: SUNY, 1990); K. Gaiser, *Platons ungeschriebene Lehre. Studien zur systematischen und geschichtlichen Begründung der Wissenschaften in der Platonischen Schule* (Stuttgart: E. Klett, 1963); T.A. Szlezák, *Platon und die Schriftlichkeit der Philosophie: Interpretationen zu den frühen und mittleren Dialogen* (Berlin/New York: Walter De Gruyter, 1985) and an English version of a summary statement of the last mentioned, T.A. Szlezák, *Reading Plato* (New York: Routledge, 1999). The most famous opponent of the idea that Plato had unwritten teachings and that Aristotle is an accurate witness to these is H.F. Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1944 and *The Riddle of the Early Academy*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1945). A recent comprehensive study of the case for Plato's unwritten teachings is provided by M.-D. Richard, *L'enseignement oral de Platon: une nouvelle interprétation du platonisme* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1986). See G. Vlastos, "Review of *Arete bei Platon und Aristoteles* by H.J. Krämer," *Gnomon* 41 (1963): 641-55, for an influential argument critical of the thesis that Plato had unwritten teachings. A convenient collection and translation of both the Aristotelian passages in which the unwritten teachings are mentioned or described and the Neoplatonic commentaries on these can be found in Krämer, *Plato and the Foundations of Metaphysics*, 203-17 and also in Findlay, *Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines*, 413-54.

²¹ Syrianus (– c. 437 C.E.), for example, in his *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, regularly criticizes Aristotle's reports of Platonic unwritten doctrine. It appears that on the basis of the doubts expressed by Plato about the value of writing in *Phaedrus* 274C-277A and 7th Letter 341C-D (the former unquestionably genuine and the latter held to be so by most Platonists), the value of testimony about unwritten doctrines is likely to be thought to be

in the dialogues. These were assumed by Platonists to be informed by Aristotle's knowledge of the 'unwritten teachings' as well as his intimate contact with Plato over a period of many years. Since they were more concerned with Platonism than with the material contained in the published writings, it was, accordingly, entirely reasonable for them to rely on Aristotle here as it would perhaps not be if their interest were principally historical or scholarly.²²

The use by Platonists of the Aristotelian material is complicated by the fact that it was generally assumed by them that Aristotle was not an *anti*-Platonist. More precisely, it was thought that the philosophy of Aristotle was in 'harmony' (συνφωνία) with the philosophy of Plato.²³ As Simplicius put it, Aristotle was authoritative for the sensible world and Plato for the intelligible world.²⁴ The differences between them are only apparent and stem from the fact that Plato examines the sensible world on the basis of principles drawn from the intelligible world and Aristotle proceeds in the opposite manner.²⁵ I shall say some more about the concept of the harmony of Plato and Aristotle in section four, including why it is perhaps not the 'crazy' idea Richard Sorabji denounced it as being.²⁶ For now, I simply note that Platonists saw no impediment to drinking from the font of Aristotelian wisdom in order to understand Platonism better.

§2. The Fundamental Features of Platonism

In this section, I propose to sketch what I take to be the contours of the common ground shared both by all those who self-identified explicitly as Platonists and all those self-identified as proponents of the philosophical position of which Plato was held to be the greatest exponent. I am not exactly sure what it would mean to provide direct evidence for the accuracy of this sketch

enhanced. This position seems to me to be more reasonable either than the position that dismisses the genuineness of the 7th *Letter* just because it casts doubt on the seriousness of Plato's writings or the position that takes the 7th *Letter* and the *Phaedrus* passage to indicate that the writings have *no* probative value for determining Plato's doctrines, that is, for determining what Platonism is. See L.P. Gerson, "Plato *Absconditus*," in *Who Speaks for Plato*. Edited by G. Press (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 201-10, for further argument.

²² See, for example, Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* c.14, in which he recounts Plotinus' method of doing philosophy, in particular his absorption of the 'primary texts' followed by his 'unique' (ἴδιος) and 'unusual' (ἑξήλλαγμένος) approach to the theories built on these. Upon a classroom reading of Longinus' works, Porphyry notes that Plotinus remarked: 'Longinus is a scholar, though not at all a philosopher' (19).

²³ On the idea of the harmony between Aristotle and Plato, see my forthcoming *The Platonism of Aristotle* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004).

²⁴ See Simplicius, *Commentary on the Categories* 6, 19 - 7, 33. Elias (or David), *Commentary on the Categories* 123, 7-12, says that the exegete must not only show that Aristotle is in harmony with Plato, but that both Aristotle and Plato are in harmony with themselves, that is, they are self-consistent. Here is an interesting implicit rejection of developmentalism in the thought of both Plato and Aristotle. Olympiodorus, in his *Commentary on Plato's Gorgias* 41, 9, says in passing, 'Concerning Aristotle we must point out that in the first place he in no way disagrees with Plato, except in appearance. In the second place, even if he does disagree, that is because he has benefited from Plato' (Jackson, Lycos, Tarrant trans.)

²⁵ See Simplicius' *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* 1249, 12-13, where he contrasts the apparent 'verbal difference' (in ὄνομα) between Plato and Aristotle from a putative 'real difference' (in πράγμα). The reason for the verbal difference is the different starting-points of the two philosophers.

²⁶ See for example, Richard Sorabji's general introduction to the series of ground-breaking translations of the Greek Aristotle commentaries (most of which were by Platonists), in C. Wildberg, *Philoponus. Against Aristotle, On the Eternity of the World* (London: Duckworth, 1987), where he refers to the idea of harmony as a 'perfectly crazy proposition' though he allows that it 'proved philosophically fruitful'. One might well wonder why, if harmony is a crazy idea, the attempt to show it should be other than philosophically fruitless.

short of providing expositions of the basic philosophical positions of the above mentioned philosophers. Accordingly, my sketch may be taken in the first instance as a sort of hypothesis about the essential nature of Platonism. It is thus subject to confirmation or disconfirmation on the basis of analysis of the relevant texts. In the fourth section below I shall show how this sketch can actually be used to do some honest work in the history of philosophy.

The feature common to virtually all varieties of Platonism is a commitment to what I would characterize as a 'top-down' metaphysical approach to the entire budget of philosophical problems extant in any particular period.²⁷ What is most distinctive about Platonism is that it is resolutely and irreducibly 'top-down' rather than 'bottom-up'. A top-down approach to philosophical problems rejects and a bottom-up approach accepts the claim that the most important and puzzling phenomena we encounter in this world can be explained by seeking the simplest elements out of which these are composed.

The top-down approach appeals to irreducible, intelligible principles to account for these phenomena. Among these are human personhood, and the personal attribute of freedom, cognition, the presence of evil, and the very existence of a universe. The top-down approach holds that answers to questions about these phenomena are never going to be satisfactorily given in terms of, say, elementary physical particles from which things 'evolve' or upon which the phenomena 'supervene'. According to this position, 'Platonism' is *ur* 'top-downism' and its authentic opposite is *ur* 'bottom-upism'. Varieties of 'bottom-upism' are practically coextensive with varieties of materialism.²⁸ By 'materialism' I mean, basically, the position that holds that the only things that exist in the world are bodies and their attributes, however the latter be construed. All materialists, that is, all anti-Platonists, share the view that, even if attributes are taken to be immaterial in the anodyne sense that they are real and that they are not themselves bodies, they are dependent upon bodies for their existence and explicable entirely in materialistic terms. Thus, for the materialist there are no immaterial or incorporeal entities. Hence, the explanation or account of problematic features of life are obviously not going to be 'top-down'. The explanations must begin and end ultimately with bodies or their parts and the scientific laws governing these.

Here, then, is a brief and very schematic compendium of the features of the 'top-downism' that is Platonism.

- (1) **The universe has a systematic unity.** The practice of systematizing Platonism may be compared with the formulation of a theology based upon Scriptures as well as other canonical evidentiary sources. The hypothesis that a true systematic philosophy is possible at all rests upon an assumption of cosmic unity. This is Platonism's most profound legacy from the Pre-Socratic philosophers. These philosophers held that the world is a unity in the sense that its constituents and the laws according to which it operates are really and intelligibly interrelated. *Because* the world is a unity, a systematic understanding of it is possible. Thus, particular doctrines in metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and so on are ultimately relatable within the system. More than

²⁷ I borrow the idea of a 'top-down' metaphysics from the late Norman Kretzmann, though he uses the term somewhat more narrowly than I do.

²⁸ Atomism and its development into Epicureanism provides the clearest example of a 'bottom-up' approach. Stoicism is especially interesting in this regard because, though it is resolutely materialistic, it wishes to be in principle 'top-down'. There is no space here to enter into a discussion of Platonism's treatment of Stoicism as inconsistent in principle, as a kind of materialism of bad faith. I add here only that in the case of Plotinus, for example, the criticism of Stoicism has clearly at its basis presumptive 'top-downism'.

this, they are inseparable because the principles that enable us to formulate doctrine in one area are identical with those that enable us to formulate doctrine in another.

Many scholars have pointed out the *unsystematic* nature of Platonism understood as consisting of the raw data of the dialogues. This fact is not necessarily inconsistent with the amenability of claims made in the dialogues to systematization.²⁹

- (2) **The systematic unity is an explanatory hierarchy.** The Platonic view of the world – the key to the system – is that the universe is to be seen in hierarchical manner. It is to be understood uncompromisingly from the ‘top-down’. The hierarchy is ordered basically according to two criteria. First, the simple precedes the complex and second the intelligible precedes the sensible. The precedence in both cases is not temporal, but ontological and conceptual. That is, understanding the complex and the sensible depends on understanding the simple and the intelligible because the latter are explanatory of the former. The ultimate explanatory principle in the universe, therefore, must be unqualifiedly simple. For this reason, Platonism is in a sense reductivist, though not in the way that a 'bottom-up' philosophy is. It is conceptually reductivist, not materially reductivist. The simplicity of the first principle is contrasted with the simplicity of elements out of which things are composed according to a 'bottom-up' approach. Whether or to what extent the unqualifiedly simple can also be intelligible or in some sense transcends intelligibility is a deep question within Platonism.
- (3) **The divine constitutes an irreducible explanatory category.** An essential part of the systematic hierarchy is a god adduced first and foremost to explain the order of the sensible world or the world of becoming. Platonism converges on the notion that the divine has complete explanatory ‘reach’. That is, there is nothing that it cannot explain. Thus, ontology and theology are inseparable. The Platonic notion of divinity includes an irremovable personal element, though this is frequently highly attenuated. This attenuation in part follows along the diverse efforts to employ both the intelligible and the simple, as well as the divine, to explain everything else. The residual personhood of the divine agent of transient order is retained in part owing to the fundamental Platonic exhortation to person to ‘become like god’ (see #5 below). Additionally, benevolence and providence are viewed as essential features of the divine, equally in an attenuated sense corresponding to the 'depersonalization' of the divine.
- (4) **The psychological constitutes an irreducible explanatory category.** For Platonism, the universe is itself alive and filled with living things. Soul is the principle of life. Life is not viewed as epiphenomenal or supervenient on what is non-living. On the contrary, soul has a unique explanatory role in the systematic hierarchy. Though soul is fundamentally an explanatory principle, individual souls are fitted into the overall hierarchy in a subordinate manner. One of the central issues facing the Platonists was the relation between intellect, intellection, and the intelligibles, on the one hand, and soul on the other. Just as the psychical was thought

²⁹ Although the so-called Tübingen school of Platonic scholarship rests upon a version of systematic Platonism supposedly drawn principally from the unwritten teachings, I am not equating the systematic aspect of Platonism with the Tübingen school's version of that. Rather, given that Platonism is essentially systematic in that it is based on the relatively simple assumptions outlined here, the Tübingen school's version is only one among many possibilities.

to be irreducible to the material, so the intelligible was thought to be irreducible to the psychical. All striving by anything capable of striving is to be understood as in a way the reverse of the derivation of the complex from the simple, the sensible from the intelligible. Thus, the intellectual was not an aspect of or derived from the psychic, but prior to that.

- (5) **Persons belong to the systematic hierarchy and personal happiness consists in achieving a lost position within the hierarchy.** All Platonists accepted the view that in some sense the person was the soul and the soul was immortal. Since perhaps the most important feature of the divine was immortality, the goal or τέλος of embodied personal existence was viewed as 'becoming like god'. But obviously one does not have to strive to become what one already is. The task of 'becoming like god' is typically situated within the fundamental polarity in the general Greek concept of nature or φύσις between 'what is' and 'what ought to be'. Thus, normativity is woven into the account of what is objectively real. We are exhorted to become what we really or truly or ideally are. One might say that the first principle of Platonic ethics is that one must 'become like god'.
- (6) **The epistemological order is included within the metaphysical order.** Modes of cognition are hierarchically gradable according to the hierarchical levels of objective reality. The highest mode of cognition corresponds to the first explanatory principles. All modes of cognition including sense-perception and requiring sense-perception as a condition for their operation are inferior to the highest mode. That persons can be the subject of both the highest mode of cognition and of the lower modes indicates an ambiguity or conflict in personhood between the desires of the embodied human being and those of the ideal disembodied cognitive agent. The conflict is reflected, for example in the differing attractions of the contemplative and the practical.

This rather austere description is primarily intended to accommodate the possibility of the existence of *varieties* of Platonism.³⁰ Varieties of Platonism can actually contain contradictory positions on particular issues.³¹ For example, Platonists who agree on the priority of the intelligible to the sensible or, more accurately, imperfectly intelligible, can disagree on what the parts of the intelligible universe are and whether or not some of these are reducible to others. To take another example, Platonists who agree that there is a first principle of all can hold contradictory views on its activity, its knowability, its explanatory 'reach' etc. One last relatively minor example is that it is not part of the essence of Platonism to be for or against theurgical practices. But it does belong to the essence of Platonism to hold that the goal of human existence is to be somehow reunited with that from which humans are or have been separated. It is for this reason somewhat misleading to characterize Platonism in terms of dualism(s) like

³⁰ Compare the somewhat different schema in P. Merlan, *From Platonism to Neoplatonism* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1953) and M. Baltes, "Was ist antiker Platonismus?," in *Dianoemata. Kleine Schriften zum Platonismus* (Stuttgart/Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1999), 223-47, concentrating mainly on the formulations of Platonism prior to the Neoplatonic period, adds to his sketch of the elements of Platonism the eternity of the world, reincarnation, personal freedom, and the doctrine that knowledge is recollection. This is a mixed bag, whose items, for the most part, belong to what I would regard as specific versions of Platonism, not to Platonism itself.

³¹ Indeed, Plotinus, *Enneads* IV 8. 1, 27ff, mildly ventures the claim that there are apparent contradictions in Plato himself ('he does not appear to be saying the same thing everywhere', οὐκ ταυτὸν λέγων πανταχ/φανεῖται). Hence, Plato must be interpreted. And this interpretation must be according to criteria that are the fundamental principles of Platonism.

mind (soul)/body or even intelligible/sensible. The hierarchical explanatory framework of top-downism is conceptually prior to these dualisms. A type of Platonism might indeed posit such a dualism. However, more basic is the essential explanatory realism within the hierarchical metaphysical framework.

Here is why the dualistic characterizations of Platonism are derivative. Platonism holds that phenomena in the sensible world can only be explained ultimately by intelligible principles. But these phenomena are themselves not coherently characterizable as non-intelligible; otherwise, there would be nothing to explain. So, the putative dualism of sensible/intelligible disguises rather than reveals the fundamental assumption. Again, the dualism mind (soul)/body is secondary to the Platonic position that embodied human existence has to be understood or explained in terms of intelligible ideals. Thus, embodied persons are images of disembodied ideals. If anything, one insisting on dualism as a property of Platonism would be more accurate to describe this as a dualism of embodied person/disembodied person rather than a dualism of mind (soul)/body.

Understanding Platonism as what underlies the varieties of Platonism explains why some things are missing from the above list. First, anything that might be termed ‘uniquely Socratic’ is missing. The ethics of Platonism as Platonists understood it flowed from the combination of the ontology, theology, and psychology as represented largely in what, for better or worse, have come to be known as the middle and late dialogues. The exhortation to ‘become like god’ is embedded in the technical metaphysical and cosmological views of *Theaetetus* and *Timaeus*.³² Accordingly, there was for them nothing uniquely edifying in the so-called ‘Socratic paradoxes’, found principally though certainly not exclusively in the so-called ‘early’ dialogues.

Second, the theory of Forms is not here explicitly mentioned. Partly, this is owing to the assumption that Forms are not ultimate principles in Platonism. In this regard, Platonists took guidance both from a straightforward interpretation of the Form of the Good in *Republic* and from Aristotle's account of various theories of reduction to first principles within the Academy.³³ What was beyond dispute, however, is that Platonism is firmly committed to the existence of an intelligible, that is, immaterial or incorporeal realm, that is ontologically prior to the sensible realm. Thus, Platonism is a form of explanatory realism, in principle similar to theories that posit neutrinos or the unconscious to explain certain phenomena. The precise status of the contours of the intelligible realm – τὰ νοητά - was a legitimate topic of dispute *within* the Platonic ‘community’.³⁴ Thus, for example, a question such as ‘what is the range of Forms?’ was widely debated.³⁵ What is most crucial to appreciate in this regard is that all discussion about Forms was carried out on the assumption that Forms are not themselves ultimate ontological principles, both owing to their plurality and internal complexity.

Third, there is no mention of politics, whether this be the ideal state of *Republic* or the somewhat different views of *Statesman* and *Laws*. No doubt, all sorts of extra-philosophical explanations can be adduced to explain the indifference of Platonists between the 3rd and 6th

³² See *Theaetetus*, 176B and *Timaeus*, 90A-D.

³³ See *Republic*, 509B and H.J. Krämer, "Epekeina tes ousias. Zu Platon, Politeia 509B," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 51 (1969): 1-30, on the early interpretations of this crucial passage.

³⁴ See, for example, Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* c.18, in which Porphyry recounts his own doubts about the status of the intelligible in relation to the intellect. In c.20, Porphyry mentions Longinus' implicit opposition to Plotinus' account of Ideas, presumably the account which makes them inseparable from a divine intellect (cf. V 5.; VI 7., etc.).

³⁵ See, for example, Syrianus, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* 107, 5ff; H. Dörrie, M. Baltes, *Platonismus*, v. 5, 336-353.

centuries C.E. to political philosophy, including the increasing danger to pagans who engaged in politics. More to the point, however, is that for Platonists, political philosophy was understood to belong to the discussion of 'popular and political virtue' as described by Plato.³⁶ This was inferior, albeit instrumental, to the virtue that constituted assimilation to the divine.

Consequently, the teaching of political philosophy was basically ignored. One might perhaps compare in this regard Martin Luther's pointed assertion that 'Christianity has nothing to do with virtue'. This typically provocative remark of Luther's expresses the principle that in trying to determine what Platonism (or Christianity) is, we should aim to discover what 'all and only' Platonists (or Christians) believe.

One can I think appreciate more fully what is included and what is excluded from the above account of Platonism if one reflects on the systematic unity of its various features. As in Stoicism, in the Platonism of our period everything is connected with everything else. The difference, of course, is that while Stoicism is more or less consistently materialistic, Platonism maintains a non-materialistic and hierarchical explanatory framework. Specific problems relating to the natural world in general, that is, problems about living and non-living physical entities, cognition, language, and morality, are all addressed within this framework. For Platonism, the sensible properties of things or sensibles themselves are never the starting-points for explanations. The sensible world is always understood as explicable by the intelligible world, that is, by that which is ultimately transparent to an intellect. Specifically, it is an image produced by the intelligible world, though versions of Platonism differ on how to characterize these images. There is nothing self-explanatory about an image. Its 'real' inner workings are to be sought in that of which it is an image. Because there is an all-encompassing hierarchy ordered in terms of complexity and intelligibility, the orientation of investigation is thoroughly 'vertical' and almost never 'horizontal'. Thus, there is little room for political philosophy. For political philosophy must start with irreducible political, that is, practical principles. But there cannot be such in Platonism. All principles for Platonism are to be located among that which is relatively simple and intelligible. The concrete and contingent nature of the political militates against the top-down approach.

The systematic unity of Platonism can be seen most clearly in its treatment of all matters of cognition. For Platonism, cognition is to be understood, again, hierarchically, with the highest form of cognition, *νόησις* or 'intellection' as the paradigm for all inferior forms, including those which involve the sensible world. The representationalist aspect of all the images of this paradigm is a central focus of Platonic interest. In addition, cognition is what most closely identifies souls or persons, with possession of the highest form of cognition constituting the ideal state. Since the highest form of cognition is a *non*-representational state, one in which the immaterial cognizer is in a sense identified with the objects of cognition, psychology and epistemology are inseparable from the ontological and theological principles. In short, to understand fully a matter relating to language or belief or rational desire is ultimately to relate those embodied phenomena to the simple and intelligible first principles.

§3. Platonism by Negation

I would like now to enrich my sketch of Platonism by suggesting another approach. One might suspect a distorting effect of the anachronistic Neoplatonic 'systematization' of Platonism. It must certainly be granted that a 'system' is not so much what we find in the dialogues of Plato,

³⁶ See *Phaedo* 82A11. Cf. 69B6-7; *Republic* 365C3-4; 500D8; 518D3-519A6.

at any rate, as what we make of what we find. I have already suggested that Platonism is inevitably and rightly taken to be something more than the sum of the conclusions of arguments in the dialogues. Nevertheless, in an effort to narrow the gap between what Plato says and claims about what Plato means, I suggest we consider for a bit the consequences for a philosopher who rejects the positions that are decisively rejected in the dialogues. Plato has quite a lot to say about his historical predecessors and contemporaries and he is also often quite specific about what in their views he finds unacceptable. I shall try to show that if we look at Platonism as the philosophical position that results from the rejection or negation of these views, we shall be in a better position to see the basis for the Platonic system. Although the construction of a philosophical position by negation may appear obscurantist, it is not entirely out of keeping with the approach endemic to the competing philosophical schools beginning in the 'Middle Platonic' period.

It will be convenient to begin with the argument in Plato's *Parmenides* whereby Socrates aims to refute Zeno's defense of Parmenidean monism. According to Plato, Zeno argued that

If things are many, then the same things must be both like and unlike. But this is impossible: for it is not possible for unlike things to be like, nor like things unlike. So, if it is impossible for unlike things to be like or like things unlike, it is also impossible that things should be a plurality. For if there were a plurality, they would have impossible attributes.³⁷

Socrates' solution to this problem is basically a theory of Forms.³⁸ Things *can* be both like and unlike so long as we recognize the 'self-identical' (αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό) Forms of Likeness and Unlikeness from the attributes of likeness and unlikeness that like and unlike things possess. In other words, a plurality is possible because any two things can be like insofar as they are each one and unlike insofar as each is different from the other. The qualification 'insofar as' indicates that being either like or unlike does not exclusively identify the thing thereby producing a contradiction. The qualification is justified only because there exists in itself a Form of Likeness and Unlikeness and these are non-identical.

The claim made by Socrates is perfectly generalizable and applicable to the explanation of any case of predication whether of contraries such as likeness and unlikeness or not. Plato in effect interprets the Eleatic argument against plurality as extreme nominalism, avoidable only by a theory of Forms.³⁹ Part of what Platonism is, then, is the rejection of the extreme nominalism

³⁷ *Parmenides* 127E2-8. Cf. *Phaedrus* 261D. It is I think significant that none of the arguments against plurality quoted or paraphrased by Simplicius and Philoponus are exactly of this form. See Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* 97, 12 - 16; 99, 7-16; 138, 3-6; 139, 19 - 140, 6; 140, 27-141, 8; Philoponus, *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* 42, 9 - 43, 6. Plato reads Zeno such that the theory of Forms is the solution to the problem of how a plurality is possible.

³⁸ *Parmenides* 128E-130A.

³⁹ Nominalism is the view that only individuals exist. Extreme nominalism is the view that there is only one individual or that 'all is one'. See R.E. Allen, *Plato's Parmenides* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 80, '...Aristotle's and Plato's diagnosis of Eleatic monism is the same: that monism rested on an implicit and unstated nominalism...' As Allen notes, Aristotle, *Physics*, A 3, 186a22-32, denies that the fact that a thing is distinct from its attributes entails that its attributes are separate. Platonists I think assumed that a solution to extreme nominalism that stopped short of positing the separateness of Forms (or something doing the job that Forms do) was

that Eleatic monism is. But this still leaves much scope for disagreement about the precise nature of the explanation for the possibility of predication among all those who believe that an explanation is necessary.

In *Sophist*, Plato confronts Parmenides again, this time within the context of his rejection of four views of 'what is real' (τὸ ὄν).⁴⁰ The first two, pluralists of various sorts tell us what is real, like the hot and cold or wet and dry whereas monists claim that reality is one. The latter two, the so-called giants and gods, actually seek to identify reality in some way. The former claim that 'reality' (οὐσία) is identical with 'body' (σῶμα).⁴¹ The latter, whom Plato calls 'friends of the Forms', claim that 'real reality' (ὄντως οὐσίαν) belongs only to that which is 'always in the same state'.⁴² Pluralists are dismissed because though they tell us what things are real, they do not define reality. Monists fail to distinguish reality from the one thing they claim to be real.

The response to the giants or materialists is different. It is accepted by the interlocutors that they will admit that the virtues like wisdom or justice that can come to be present in a soul are not themselves bodies.⁴³ Therefore, they cannot identify reality with being a body. It may be supposed that Plato is here presenting a false dichotomy: if something is not a body it is bodiless. But this ignores the fact that the attributes of bodies, for example, their surfaces, are not bodies, though this does not entail that they are bodiless, in the sense that they are entities that exist separate from bodies. The materialist can benignly insist that to be real is either to be a body or an attribute of a body, where all attributes are dependent on bodies for their existence.

Apart from the obvious but perhaps not fatal point that this position, like that of the pluralists, tells us what is real without telling us what 'real' means, Platonism will want to insist that if 'wise' or 'just' or, indeed, any predicate, is 'something' (τι) real, then there must be a separate entity whose name this predicate bears, even if the presence of an instance of that entity's nature is *not* separate from the subject. Materialism, unlike monism, does not purport to show the impossibility of its contradictory. But if the materialist will concede that it is not possible that *only* bodies, that is, three-dimensional solids, exist, then they will eventually be forced to agree not only that non-bodily entities exist, but that these are prior in existence.⁴⁴

The refutation of materialism in this passage is like the refutation of monism in *Parmenides* in insisting on the reality of the complex objects of predicational judgments.⁴⁵ And it is reasonable that if Plato held that a rejection of nominalism leads to a postulation of intelligible principles called 'Forms', then he also held that the explanation of how predication is possible also entails the rejection of materialism.

The famous definition of reality that the Eleatic Stranger offers the materialists at 247E1-4, namely, that 'the things that are real are nothing else but the power (δύναμις) of acting (τὸ ποιεῖν) or being affected (τὸ παθεῖν)', is clearly provisional as the immediate following

not sustainable. Moreover, Aristotle himself indirectly concedes this in his *Metaphysics* by arguing for the relative imperfection of sensible composites.

⁴⁰ *Sophist* 242B-249D.

⁴¹ Ibid. 246B1. Cf. *Theaetetus*, 155E.

⁴² Ibid. 248A11-12.

⁴³ Ibid. 247B7-C2.

⁴⁴ At 247C, Plato allows that a diehard materialist might not agree that anything other than 'what he holds in his hands' exists.

⁴⁵ This is why Antisthenes is sometimes identified either as the recalcitrant or the gentle materialist. For as Aristotle tells us, *Metaphysics*, Δ 29, 1024b32-4, Antisthenes held that a thing could only be named by its own formula, thereby making false judgments almost impossible. That is, he held that any collocation of words in a statement referring to something must all be names for the identical thing. In effect, he denies the possibility of predication. See W.D. Ross, *Aristotle's Metaphysics: A Revised Text* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), v.1, 346-7.

lines show. That it is also dialectical follows from the fact that its refutation would proceed exactly as does the refutation of the pluralists account of reality.⁴⁶ That is, reality is clearly something other than either acting or being affected, though everything that does either is real.

The same definition is also used to defeat the friends of the Forms.⁴⁷ For they hold that only Forms are real. But if this is so, then the activity that consists in knowing Forms has no part in the real. Indeed, asks the Stranger, are we to be persuaded that it is true that

Motion, life, soul, and thought are not present in the perfectly real (παντελῶς ὄντι), that it neither lives nor thinks, but stands alone solemn and holy, having no intellect (νοῦν), being immovable?⁴⁸

This rhetorical question is answered in the negative. Motion, life, soul, and thought belong in the perfectly real. Therefore, the perfectly real is not motionless. Hence, we cannot admit that the real is only changeless nor can we, if we wish to include intellect in what is real, admit that the real is only what is changing. For without things that are at rest, there can be no objects for intellect to attain. Therefore, that which is real or the sum of all that is real must include both what is changeless and what is changing.

I wish to make several basic points about this famous and puzzling passage. First, this argument does not claim that Forms change. On the contrary, it insists that there must be unchanging objects if intellect exists. But the argument does not say that these must be Forms, or that they must be Forms as conceived of by their ‘friends’. What Plato is rejecting is the exclusion of the activity of knowing from the realm of the really real. That is, he is rejecting the view that the only things that are real are Forms and therefore, if Forms are known, they are known by something that is not real or less than real.

The problem then becomes discerning what the inclusion of intellect, etc., in the really real amounts to. Why does intellect have to be so included in order for there to be knowledge of Forms? The friends of the Forms object to the claim that knowledge is an activity because this seems to entail that the Forms, by being known, are being affected. But why should this lead the Eleatic Stranger to insist that if knowledge, etc. exists, then it belongs to the really real? Logically, he should only be claiming that *if* knowledge exists, and if knowledge is an activity, and if the objects of knowledge are thereby acted upon, then change (i.e., being acted upon) belongs to what is really real because it must belong to Forms. But in fact, as we have just seen, he goes on to insist that the objects of knowledge must be changeless.⁴⁹

Why does that which knows Forms have to be as real as they? At least one part of the answer to this question is that intellect must be the same kind of thing as what it knows. This is, in fact, not a new idea. It is exactly what Plato argued in his *Phaedo* in the so-called Affinity Argument.⁵⁰ The soul, or a part of it, must be like the Forms in order for knowledge to occur.

⁴⁶ See A. Diès, *La définition de l'être et la nature des idées dans le Sophiste de Platon* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1932), 31-35.

⁴⁷ *Sophist* 248A4-249D4.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 248E6-249A2.

⁴⁹ Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy*, 437-439, argues that what the friends are forced to admit is a Form of Motion, though he goes on to point out that the motion of intellect is not physical motion and does not imply a change in what is known.

⁵⁰ See *Phd.* 78B4-84B8 and W.D. Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), 111. I have discussed this argument at some length in *Knowing Persons*, 79-88.

But we do in fact have knowledge, as was shown in the Recollection Argument. Therefore, our soul, or a part of it, is, like Forms, an immaterial entity, separate from the sensible world. Thus, the argument that knowledge exists is connected with the rejection of at least one version of the theory of Forms and, indirectly, of materialism. For Plato, the falsity of materialism establishes the identity of the knowable as immaterial. Then, assuming that knowledge is at least possible, the way is open for an argument that it is only possible for a knower who is also immaterial.⁵¹

There is, perhaps more to it than this. For one might suggest that the immaterial soul and its cognitive life is like changeless Forms insofar as it is immaterial, but unlike them insofar as it is changing or in motion. And it is the latter property that should exclude it from the realm of the really real. But this would, counter to the text, amount to the exclusion of intellect from the really real. It is for this reason that Neoplatonists generally supposed that the necessary inclusion of intellect within the realm of the really real implied the permanent connection of *some* intellect with Forms and the concomitant characterization of the really real as being other than unqualifiedly changeless.⁵²

In addition to Plato's rejection of Eleatic monism, materialism, and at least one version of a theory of Forms, there are many places in the dialogues where he confronts his predecessors, including Anaxagoras in *Phaedo*, Protagoras in the dialogue that bears his name as well as in *Theaetetus* along with Heraclitus, and Cratylus in his eponymous dialogue. It seems to me, however, that the core of Platonism negatively defined is the enterprise of drawing out the conclusions of the rejection of nominalism and materialism which are in fact two faces of the same doctrine. By contrast, the rejection of Protagorean relativism or Heraclitean flux theory do not, in themselves, make one a Platonist.⁵³ Limiting Platonism on the negative side to the rejection of nominalism and materialism admittedly makes Platonism a large tent. But it is not an infinitely large one. Indeed, viewed from a modern perspective, one might suppose that it is a tent too impossibly small to inhabit.

§4. Was Aristotle a Platonist?

Though it may at first seem odd, yet another way of understanding what Platonism is involves our asking the question of whether Aristotle was a Platonist. For a long time, the canonical answer to this question has been: he was at one time and then he was not. That is, Aristotle started out as a Platonist, and then, turning his back on his 'roots', became in his maturity resolutely anti-Platonist. This hypothetical trajectory for Aristotle is the sole axis for

⁵¹ The claim that knowledge is impossible is not, as one might suppose, something a skeptic can maintain. Such a claim would be patently dogmatic. At best, a skeptic could claim that someone does not have the knowledge he claims to have. In *Phaedo*, Plato argues in the Recollection Argument that we could not make the judgments about sensibles that we do, namely, that they are inferior representations of Forms, unless we had previous knowledge of Forms. The Affinity Argument then goes on to argue that we could not have knowledge of Forms unless we were of the same nature as Forms, that is, immaterial.

⁵² Actually, the change assumed to be present in the really real, namely, 'the motion of intellect' (ἡκίνησις nou', *Laws* 897D3) was understood as equivalent to the 'activity of intellect' (ἡἐργεῖα nou') attributed by Aristotle to the Prime Mover. See *Metaphysics* L 7, 1072b27. Aristotle identifies this activity with 'life' (ζωή), the essential property of soul. Also, cf. Plotinus, VI 2. 15, 6-8 on the identity of κίνησις and ἐργεῖα in intellect.

⁵³ The rejection of Protagorean relativism and Heraclitean flux theory do entail Platonism only if one adds the additional premise that knowledge, conceived of by Plato in *Republic* and *Phaedo* as infallible cognitive identity with immutable intelligible entities, is possible for us. That is, we are the sorts of entities for whom knowledge is possible. See L. Gerson, *Knowing Persons. A Study in Plato* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), chs. 2, 4-5.

further hypotheses about Aristotle's development. Developmentalism according to the axis Platonist – anti-Platonist has its modern origin in the writings of the great German scholar Werner Jaeger.⁵⁴ This general developmentalist hypothesis has been widely embraced and applied in the major areas of Aristotle's thought – logic, psychology, ethics, and metaphysics. The basic hypothesis is seldom questioned, even when the details are rejected.⁵⁵

It is I think salutary to note that Platonists, for the most part, did not regard Aristotle as an anti-Platonist. Hence, they had no inkling of development away from Platonism. Rather, they held that Aristotle's philosophy was in harmony with Platonism. For example, the indispensable Diogenes Laertius (c. 200 C.E.), tells us, for example, that Aristotle was Plato's 'most genuine disciple'.⁵⁶ Beginning perhaps in the 1st century B.C.E., we can already see philosophers claiming the ultimate harmony of Academic and Peripatetic thought. Antiochus of Ascalon is frequently identified as a principal figure in this regard.⁵⁷ A similar view is clearly

⁵⁴ See W. Jaeger, *Aristotle : Fundamentals of the History of his Development* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), whose seminal work still dominates Aristotle exegesis today, perhaps even unconsciously in the minds of some scholars.

⁵⁵ See J.M. Rist, *The Mind of Aristotle : A Study in Philosophical Growth* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), who sets out to redo the work of Jaeger and arrive at a more accurate chronology of Aristotle's development. But Rist retains Jaeger's Platonist/anti-Platonist hypothesis. See W.R. Wians, *Aristotle's Philosophical Development : Problems and Prospects* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1996), for a good summary of Jaeger's position as well as a number of stimulating papers showing the dominance of Jaeger, despite many objections and reservations. There is also an excellent bibliography that includes all the major studies in this area. See the review by S. Menn, "Aristotle's Philosophical Development," *Apeiron* 31 (1998): 407-415. W. Wehrle, *The Myth of Aristotle's Development and the Betrayal of Metaphysics* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 1-29, provides an acute critique of some forms of developmentalism. But Wehrle is primarily interested in refuting developmentalism within Aristotle's metaphysics or ontology. He generally avoids dealing with the material relevant to the question of whether the 'non-developed' Aristotle is or is not a Platonist. G.E.L. Owen, "Logic and Metaphysics in Some Earlier Works of Aristotle," in *Aristotle and Plato in the Mid-Fourth Century*. Edited by I. Düring and G. E. L. Owen. (Göteborg: Elanders Boktryckeri Aktiebolag, 1960), 163-90 and G.E.L. Owen, "The Platonism of Aristotle," in *Logic, Science and Dialectic. Collected Papers in Greek Philosophy*. Edited by Martha Nussbaum (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), 200-220, tries to turn Jaeger's position on its head, arguing that Aristotle started out as an anti-Platonist and moved towards Platonism. D.W. Graham, *Aristotle's Two Systems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 329-331, criticizes Owen's hypothesis, though he does agree that Aristotle moved towards Platonism in a specific sense, albeit contending that 'Aristotle's Platonism is a mistake of major proportions' (275). I. Düring, *Aristoteles : Darstellung und Interpretation seines Denkens* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1966), vii-viii, proclaims his complete rejection of Jaeger's developmentalist hypothesis. See also I. Düring, "Aristotle and Plato in the Mid-Fourth Century," *Eranos* 54 (1956): 109-20; I. Düring, "Aristotle and the Heritage from Plato" *Eranos* 62 (1964), 98-9, where a rejection of developmentalism is coupled with a claim for the harmony of Plato and Aristotle, and I. Düring, "Did Aristotle Ever Accept Plato's Theory of Transcendent Ideas?" *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 48 (1966): 312-16. Düring, for example, saw that a rejection of a theory of Forms did not contradict Aristotle's commitment to the eternity of intelligible objects. T. Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 11-13, tentatively follows Owen, although Irwin adds 'I see no good reason to believe that [Aristotle] spent most of his time deciding whether to agree or disagree with Plato, and hence I doubt if attention to debates with Plato or Platonism is likely to explain his philosophical development. I am inclined to think the comments on Plato are an incidental result of Aristotle's reflection on problems that arise for him apart from any Platonic context' (12). The extraordinary claim in the last sentence deserves further scrutiny which I cannot here provide.

⁵⁶ See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* V 1, 6: gnhsiwtato" twh Platwno" maqhtwn.

⁵⁷ For Antiochus of Ascalon, see Glucker, *Antiochus and the Late Academy*; Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, ch. 2, and J. Barnes, "Roman Aristotle," in *Philosophia Togata II*. Edited by J. Barnes and M. Griffin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), especially 78-81, who tries to give a sympathetic interpretation of Antiochus' 'syncretism'. As Dillon, 57-8, notes, Antiochus' view of the matter undoubtedly rested in part on the availability of a great deal more of the writings of the Old Academy than is available to us. Cicero, *De Finibus* V 3, 7, says, 'as you have heard Antiochus

expressed by Cicero.⁵⁸ Later in the 2nd century C.E., we observe the Platonist Alcinous in his influential *Handbook of Platonism* simply incorporating what we might call ‘Aristotelian elements’ into his account of authentic Platonism.⁵⁹ Finally, and most importantly, for a period of about three hundred years, from the middle of the 3rd century C.E. to the middle of the 6th, Aristotelianism and Platonism were widely viewed and written about as being harmonious philosophical systems.⁶⁰

The first concrete indication we possess that Platonists of this period were prepared to argue for the harmony of Aristotle and Plato is contained in a reference in Photius’ *Bibliography* to the Neoplatonist Hierocles’ statement that Ammonius of Alexandria, the teacher of Plotinus, attempted to resolve the conflict between the disciples of Plato and Aristotle, showing that they were in fact ‘of one and the same mind’ (ἓνα καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν νοῦν).⁶¹ The second indication of an effort to display harmony is found in the *Suda* where it is stated that Porphyry, Plotinus’ disciple, produced a work in six books titled *On Plato and Aristotle Being Adherents of the Same*

say, in the Old Academy are included not only those who are called Academics...but even the old Peripatetics, of whom Aristotle is the first and best’. See next note.

⁵⁸ See Cicero, *Academica* I 4, 17: ‘But on the authority of Plato, a thinker with a variety of complex and fecund thoughts, a type of philosophy was initiated that was united and harmonious and known under two names, the Academics and the Peripatetics, and they agreed substantially while differing in their names’. Also, *Academica*, II 15, ‘Peripateticos et Academicos, nominibus differentes, re congruentes...’ Antiochus was apparently reacting to the view of Philo of Larissa, who held to the harmony of the Old Academy and the New Academy, which introduced skepticism from the time of Arcesilaus onward.

⁵⁹ See J.M. Dillon, *The Handbook of Platonism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), especially the introduction and commentary. That the Platonist Atticus (fl. 175 C.E.) wrote a treatise titled *Against Those Who Claim to Interpret the Doctrine of Plato Through That of Aristotle* supports the conclusion that the harmony between Plato and Aristotle was at least a current view. Perhaps as Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 247-50, suggests, Atticus was writing against the Peripatetic Aristocles, teacher of Alexander of Aphrodisias, who had argued that the philosophy of Aristotle ‘perfected’ that of Plato. Atticus held that Aristotle differed from Plato on basically three fundamental issues: (1) he denied that virtue was sufficient for happiness (see J. Baudry, *Atticus, Fragments de son oeuvre* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres 1931)), fr. 2; (2) he denied the providence of the divine (frs. 3, 8); (3) he denied the temporal creation of the world (fr. 4). On all three points, Atticus was assuming mainstream Middle Platonic interpretations of Plato, especially of *Timaeus*.

⁶⁰ The Greek term translated here as ‘harmony’ and usually used by Neoplatonists to indicate agreement between Plato and Aristotle is συμφωνία. Plato, *Symposium* 187B4, uses συμφωνία synonymously with ἁρμονία. The latter term tends to be reserved among the Neoplatonists for a more technical use in scientific theory. See A.C. Lloyd, “The Later Neoplatonists,” in *The Cambridge History of Late Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*. Edited by H. Armstrong (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1967), 275, for a broad outline of the principle of the harmonists.

⁶¹ See Photius, *Bibliotheca*, 173a18-32; 171b33ff; Porphyry, *On the Return of the Soul* fr. 302F, 6 Smith. See I. Düring, *Aristotle in the Ancient Biographical Tradition* (Göteborg/Stockholm: Institute of Classical Studies of the University of Göteborg, 1957), 332-6, for a compilation of the texts from the Neoplatonists relating to harmony. See H. Schibli, *Hierocles of Alexandria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 27-31, with notes 98, 100, who discusses the prevailing view that Hierocles got from Porphyry his idea that Ammonius taught the harmony of Plato and Aristotle. See note 96 for references and Dodds’ dissent from this view. Whatever the case, Schibli goes on to suggest that Porphyry’s attribution of a teaching of harmony to Ammonius is dubious. But Schibli’s principal reason for saying this is that Plotinus, Ammonius’ greatest pupil, must not have been a harmonist because he criticized Aristotle. Two points can be made here. First, the *Enneads* of Plotinus amply confirm Porphyry’s claim (*Life of Plotinus* ch. 14) for the profound affect Aristotle’s thinking had on Plotinus. Second, Plotinus’ (sometimes severe) disagreements with Aristotle on various issues did not preclude his assuming a harmony between the two on a deeper level and more than, say, Porphyry’s disagreements with Plotinus precluded the former’s recognition of *their* harmony with each other and with Plato.

School (μὴ τὴν αἵρεσιν).⁶² We know nothing of this work apart from the title and what we can infer from what Porphyry actually says in the extant works. It seems reasonably clear, however, that a work of such length was attempting to provide a substantial argument, one which was evidently in opposition to at least some prevailing views. It is also perhaps the case that Porphyry is questioning the basis for the traditional division of the ‘schools’ of ancient philosophy, as found, for example, in Diogenes Laertius.⁶³

The view that the philosophy of Aristotle was in harmony with the philosophy of Plato must be sharply distinguished from the view, held by no one in antiquity, that the philosophy of Aristotle was *identical* with the philosophy of Plato. For example, in Plato’s dialogue *Parmenides*, Socrates suggests that Zeno’s book states the ‘same position’ as Parmenides’ differing only in that it focuses on an attack on Parmenides’ opponents. Zeno acknowledges this identity.⁶⁴ The harmony of Aristotle and Plato was not supposed to be like the identity of the philosophy of Zeno and Parmenides. Again, Eusebius famously tells us that Numenius asked rhetorically, ‘what is Plato but Moses speaking Attic Greek’.⁶⁵ No Neoplatonist supposed that Aristotle was just Plato speaking a Peripatetic ‘dialect’.⁶⁶

Aristotle was supposed to be a Platonist because he adhered to the principles contained in the sketch of Platonism in section two above. This, however, did not mean that he agreed with all other Platonists, including Plato himself, about all the doctrines flowing from these principles. In particular, his attitude to what F.M. Cornford once felicitously called ‘the twin pillars of Platonism’ namely, the theory of separate Forms and the immortality of the soul, is highly complex.

Aristotle is obviously a relentless critic of some theories of Forms. So, evidently was Plato, as we saw above. But Aristotle does not, it seems, deny the ontological priority of the intelligible world to the sensible world. Exactly what sort of priority is this? In many passages in *Metaphysics*, Aristotle argued both for the priority in substance of actuality to potency and even for the priority in substance of the eternal to the transitory.⁶⁷ The priority in substance of the eternal to the transitory looks very much like the sort of priority that Aristotle says Plato was

⁶² See *Suda*, Π 2098, 8-9 (=fr. 239T Smith). On the meaning of the term αἵρεσις in this period see Glucker, *Antiochus and the Late Academy*, 166-93. After discussing a large amount of evidence, Glucker concludes that αἵρεσις is never used of a ‘school’ in an institutional or organizational sense but always of a way of thinking or set of beliefs.

⁶³ See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* I, 19-20, where ten philosophical schools are listed. Diogenes also here refers to another historian, Hippobotus, who gives a similar list. See *Suda*, s.v., αἵρεσις as well. It is, of course, possible that the division between the Peripatetic and Academic ‘schools’ is sharper than that between Aristotle and Plato. Diogenes, I, 20, gives two definitions of αἵρεσις: (1) it refers to the view of those who follow or seem to follow ‘some principle’ (λόγῳ τινί) in regard to their treatment of ‘appearance’ (φαινόμενον) and (2) an ‘inclination’ (πρόσκεισιν) to follow some ‘consistent doctrine’ (δόγμασιν ἀκολουθίαν). Elias (or David), *Commentary on Aristotle’s Categories*, 108, 21-22, offers this definition of αἵρεσις: ‘the opinion of educated men agreeing among themselves (συνφώνουντων) and disagreeing with others (διαφώνουντων)’.

⁶⁴ See *Parmenides* 128A-E.

⁶⁵ See E. Des Places, *Numenius. Fragments* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1973), fr. 8 who notes, however, that Numenius’ comparison was probably limited in its ambit.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Ammonius, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Categories* 3, 9-16 and the anonymous *Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy* attributed to Olympiodorus, 5, 18-30, explain that ‘Peripatetic’ is a term that comes from Plato’s habit of walking around while philosophizing. Accordingly, Aristotle (and Xenocrates), as followers of Plato, were called ‘Peripatetics’, though the former taught in the Lyceum while the latter taught in the Academy.

⁶⁷ See *Metaphysics* Θ 8, 1049b11-12; 1050a5; 1050b3-4; 1050b7ff.

interested in.⁶⁸ Plato held that if X can exist without Y, but Y cannot exist without X, then X is prior to Y in nature and in substance. This is a perfectly reasonable way to understand the Platonic notion of the priority of the intelligible world in relation to the sensible world.

Granted such priority, it will be objected that for Aristotle this intelligible world is a barren terrain, consisting of nothing but the self-absorbed thinking of the prime unmoved mover. An enormous scholarly literature exists on the question of what the this mover is actually thinking of, with the opinion fairly divided.⁶⁹ Charles Kahn provides a concise summary of the basis for the interpretation that the prime unmoved mover is thinking of all that is intelligible.⁷⁰ He lists four points against what he terms 'the prevailing view', namely, that when God knows himself he knows nothing else: (1) At $\Lambda 7$, 1072b25 Aristotle says that 'God has always what we have sometimes' which picks up b14-15, '[God's] way of life is the best, a way of life that we enjoy for a little time'. If what we sometimes enjoy is contemplation of intelligibles, then God's superior life can hardly be less than cognition of these intelligibles; it must be cognition of all that is intelligible; (2) At $\Lambda 7$, 1072b19-21, it is said that 'intellect thinks itself according to participation in the intelligible'. This is a strong indication of the meaning of the famous phrase in $\Lambda 9$, 1074b33-5 that God is 'thinking thinking of thinking'. It is by thinking of all that is intelligible that God thinks himself, just as we think ourselves when we think what is intelligible.⁷¹ The difference between God and us is that (a) we are more than the activity of thinking because we are not pure actualities; (b) our thinking is intermittent; and (c) we do not think all that is intelligible at once. But none of these differences contradict the point that God's perfect self-reflexive cognition includes *content*; (3) Hence, as suggested by $\Lambda 7$, 1072b22, intellect is determined by the essences which are its objects; (4) The claim that if God knew anything other than himself he would be less perfect is spurious, because thinking is identical with its object. As Kahn puts it, 'the Prime Mover is simply the formal-noetic structure of the cosmos *as conscious of itself*' (Kahn's emphasis).⁷² One could dispute all of these points. I

⁶⁸ *Metaphysics* Δ 11, 1019a1-4. See J.J. Cleary, *Aristotle on the Many Senses of Priority* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988).

⁶⁹ See, for example, T. De Koninck, "'La Pensée de la pensée' chez Aristote," in *La Question de Dieu chez Aristote et Hegel*. Edited by T. De Koninck and G. Planty-Bonjour (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1991), 69-151 and T. de Koninck, "Aristotle on God as Thought Thinking Itself" *Review of Metaphysics* 47 (1994): 471-515, for many of the references.

⁷⁰ See C.H. Kahn, "On the Intended Interpretation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*," in *Aristoteles Werk und Wirkung. Aristoteles und seine Schule*. Edited by J. Wiesner (Berlin/New York: Walter De Gruyter), v. 1, 327, n. 24.

⁷¹ Cf. *De Anima* Γ 4, 429b26-8; 430a2-5.

⁷² A fifth point should be added arising from the argument of F. Brentano, *The Psychology of Aristotle* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1977, reprint of 1867 edition), 127, developed by R. George, "An Argument for Divine Omniscience in Aristotle," *Apeiron* 22 (1989): 61-74. This is that L 10, 1075b8-10 where Aristotle rejects Anaxagoras' account divine mind as the good, in favor of his own account. In that account, Aristotle compares God as good with the way that medical science is health. The line is puzzling if it is not connected with L 4, 1070b30-35 which reads: *epei; de; to; kinoun eñ men toi~ fusikoi~ añqrwpwñ añqrwpo~, eñ de; toi~ ajo; dianoia~ to; eido~ h] to; eñantion, tropon tina; tria aitia añ eih, wdi; de; tet tara. ugieia gar pw~ h] iatrikh; kai; oikia~ eido~ h] oijkodomikh; kai; añqrwpo~ añqrwpon genna; eñti para; tauta; w~ to; prwton pantwn kinoun panta.* Bonitz, followed by Jaeger and Ross, changed the words *wl' to;* in the last line to *to;* *wl' for* no textual reason at all; they made and accepted the change for no other reason than that the text would then would be naturally read to say that God is to everything else as medical science is to health, the form of a building in the maker is to the building, and a human parent is to its child. But if this is so, then Aristotle would seem to be maintaining that God possesses the forms of all things, that is, God knows all these. George points out that in *Metaphysics* Z 7-9 three types of production are discussed: by nature, by art, and by spontaneity (that is, when neither nature nor art is

only wish to stress that insofar as Aristotle is interpreted as holding that divine thinking has content, he must be seen to be relying on the *Platonic* principle of hierarchy and of the ontological priority of the intelligible to the sensible.⁷³

The aversion to understanding Aristotle's God as thinking about all intelligibles is based largely on $\Lambda 9$, not on $\Lambda 7$. For it is in $\Lambda 9$, and only there, that Aristotle famously claims that God is 'thinking thinking about thinking'.⁷⁴ Many scholars infer from this phrase alone that if God is thinking about 'thinking' ($\nu\acute{o}\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$), that is, thinking about himself, then God cannot be thinking about anything else.⁷⁵ Such an inference, of course, is invalid, *unless* we suppose that that something else could not also be identical with thinking, the explicit object of thinking in Aristotle's conclusion. The justification for holding that this is so, is supposedly found in the argument for the conclusion of which the claim that God is thinking thinking about thinking is a part. The central argument is:

- (1) God is thinking of what is best.
- (2) God is best.
- (3) Therefore, God is thinking of himself.⁷⁶

The first premise is directly inferable from the claim in $\Lambda 7$ that 'thinking is in itself concerned with what is in itself best'.⁷⁷ The problem addressed in $\Lambda 9$ is really with the second premise. This premise was also a claim or, perhaps better, an hypothesis, boldly made in $\Lambda 7$.⁷⁸ The problem with it is that if God is in essence an intellect that thinks, and not the activity of thinking itself, then God's essence would be a potency in relation to the activity of thinking. In that case, God would not be the best; he would be a potency in relation to the best, that is, to thinking. So, if God is best and thinking of what is best, God must be thinking, not an intellect that thinks.

The words that follow the conclusion 'therefore, God is thinking of himself,' namely, '[God is] thinking thinking about thinking' are an explication of the words 'therefore he is thinking ($\nu\omicron\epsilon\acute{\iota}$) himself'. They do not add a further conclusion.⁷⁹ That is, because God's essence

responsible). So, it would seem that in the L 4 passage, Aristotle is introducing a *fourth* type of production where the form is in the producer.

⁷³ See S. Pines, "Some Distinctive Metaphysical Conceptions in Themistius' Commentary on Book Lambda and Their Place in the History of Philosophy," in *Aristoteles. Werk und Wirkung*. Edited by J. Wiesner (Berlin/New York: Walter De Gruyter, 1987), v.2, 177-191, who translates from the Arabic and Hebrew relevant texts of Themistius on the content of God's thinking. Pines argues that the Peripatetic Themistius is influenced by Plotinus and Neoplatonists generally in his contention that God thinks all intelligibles in thinking himself. He thinks that Themistius deviates from the text of Aristotle in his interpretation. On Neoplatonic or Platonic sympathies in Themistius see O. Hamelin and E. Barbotin, *La théorie de l'intellect d'après Aristote et ses commentateurs* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1953), 38-43 and especially O. Ballériaux, "Thémistius et le Néoplatonisme: le nous pathetikos et l'immortalité de l'ame," *Revue de la philosophie ancienne* 12 (1994): 171-200. See, however, Düring, *Aristotle in the Ancient Biographical Tradition*, 333, who says that Themistius 'is on the whole remarkably free from Neoplatonic influence', though it is clear from the passages from Themistius quoted by Düring that Themistius believed that Aristotle was in harmony with Plato.

⁷⁴ *Metaphysics* Λ 9, 1074b34-5.

⁷⁵ See Ross, *Aristotle's Metaphysics, ad. loc.*

⁷⁶ *Metaphysics* Λ 9, 1074b15-34.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* Λ 7, 1072b18-19.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* Λ 7, 1072b14-15.

⁷⁹ The sentence reads: *αυτον α̅ρα νοει, ει̅περ ε̅στι; το̅ κρατιστον, και; ε̅στιν η̅νοησι- νοησεω- νοη- σι-̅.* See J. Brunschwig, "Metaphysics L 9: A Short-Lived Thought Experiment?," in *Aristotle's Metaphysics Lambda. Symposium Aristotelicum*. Edited by M. Frede and D. Charles (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 288-90, who

or οὐσία is identical with his thinking and not in potency to it, when he thinks he thinks himself. By contrast, another thinker, such as a human being, has an essence that is not identical with thinking. So, when human beings think, they are in essence not identical with what they think. Although they are not in essence identical with what they think, their thinking *is* in a way identical with what they think, as Aristotle will carefully add at the end of the chapter.⁸⁰ So, the crucial difference between God and human beings is not that God thinks of nothing whereas we think of something; rather, it is that God is not in potency to his thinking, while we are.⁸¹ Therefore, God (who is just thinking) is thinking about himself, i.e., thinking. The point of saying that God is ‘thinking thinking about thinking’ is not to drain all content out of God’s thinking, but to contrast that thinking with the thinking of things that are not essentially identical with the essence of thinking. The exalted position of the prime unmoved mover is owing to the fact that he is nothing but thinking, not to the alleged fact that there is no content to his thinking.⁸²

Of course, it is possible that independently of the point Aristotle is apparently making here, he might also believe that the identity of the activity of thinking with the object of thinking eliminates content from that thinking. But there is no reason to believe that this is so on the grounds that God is thinking thinking about thinking. And in fact there are no other grounds in $\Lambda 9$ for believing this.

Platonists more or less assumed that the prime unmoved mover's thinking of all intelligibles is parallel to Plato's Demiurge or eternal Intellect thinking all the Forms.⁸³ There is no space here to make the case for this interpretation. The principal point I wish to emphasize here is that this is an interpretation which would be taken much more seriously if scholars recognized Platonism as the set of principles outlined above and if, on this basis, they were to reconsider the claim that Aristotle either was always or must have become an anti-Platonist.

In regard to the immortality of the soul, what Platonism holds essentially is that personal immortality must be understood in an attenuated sense that excludes the idiosyncratic and

notices the question of the relation between the two clauses. He argues that ‘thinking thinking about thinking’ is a necessary and sufficient condition for ‘God is thinking of himself’. I am unclear why he thinks that this adds a fresh point to the conclusion of the argument, not an explication of its meaning. I take the *kai*ivas epexegetic.

⁸⁰ *Metaphysics* Λ 9, 1075a4-5: ἡ νόησις τῷ νοουμένῳ μία.

⁸¹ See M. Wedin, *Mind and Imagination in Aristotle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 220-9, argues against what he calls the ‘isomorphic view’ of divine and human thought, that is, the view that human and divine thought are the same in kind. In particular, he argues against C.H. Kahn, “The Role of Nous in the Cognition of First Principles in *Posterior Analytics* II.19,” in *Aristotle on Science: The Posterior Analytics*. Edited by E. Berti (Padua: Antenore, 1981), 437- who holds this view. Wedin’s principal reason for denying isomorphism is that human thought involves images whereas divine thought does not (244-45).

⁸² See R. Norman, “Aristotle's Philosopher God,” *Phronesis* 14 (1969): 63-74. Wedin, *Mind and Imagination in Aristotle*, 229-45, argues that the human mind and the divine mind are profoundly different and therefore that since the human mind has content, the divine mind does not. But the difference between God and humans is not a different kind of mind but the fact that we have an essence that is not identical with thinking while God’s essence is identical with thinking. From this difference it does not follow that God’s thinking has no content.

⁸³ Contrast J.M. Rist, *The Mind of Aristotle: A Study in Philosophical Growth* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 41, who says, ‘I shall also assume, however, that the originally distinct contexts of Plato’s theory of Forms on the one hand and of the gods on the other made it easy for Aristotle (in *On Philosophy*) to maintain certain parts of Plato’s metaphysics, viz., a suitably adapted version of his account of God as Self-moved Mover, while consistently rejecting the notion of separate Forms’. See J. Pépin, “Éléments pour une histoire de la relation entre l’intelligence et l’intelligible chez Platon et dans le néoplatonisme,” *Revue philosophique* 146 (1956): 39-64, on the Platonic basis for the Neoplatonic identification of Demiurge and intelligibles and Proclus’ demurrals.

focuses on the intellect.⁸⁴ This is owing to the fact that the contents of intellection are entirely universal. But intellect, when embodied, is evidently a part of the soul and cannot arise apart from soul.⁸⁵ These two points are exactly what Aristotle maintains in *De Anima*: (1) the intellect alone is immortal and (2) embodied intellection is inseparable from specifically psychical activity, that is, activities of the actual composite substance, such as imagination.⁸⁶ Again, my point here is simply that with a clear grasp of what Platonism is we should be less willing to suppose that Aristotle is to be interpreted as an anti-Platonist. Accordingly, notoriously difficult passages such as *De Anima* book three, chapter five may turn out to be somewhat more yielding to our understanding.

Is Aristotle *just* a Platonist? Certainly not. But within the above framework, I think we have reason to see, as Neoplatonists did, that Aristotelianism is a variety of Platonism. The crucial mistake is to conclude from Aristotle's unrelenting criticisms of Plato and other Academics and from the orientation of most of the *corpus* to categorizing and explaining sensible reality that Aristotle is not *au fond* a Platonist. Even when Aristotle is criticizing Plato, as in, for example, *De Anima*, he is led, perhaps *malgré lui*, to draw conclusions based on Platonic assumptions. These assumptions are not so general and benign that anyone can accept them.

§5. Conclusion

My main conclusion is that we should understand Platonism historically as consisting in fidelity to the principles of 'top-downism'. So understanding it, we have a relatively sharp critical tool for deciding who was and who was not a Platonist despite their silence or protestations to the contrary.⁸⁷ Unquestionably, the most important figure in this regard is Aristotle. I would not like to end this historical inquiry, however, without suggesting a philosophical moral. The moral is that there are at least some reasons for claiming that a truly anti-Platonic Aristotelianism is not philosophically in the cards, so to speak. Thus, if one rigorously and honestly seeks to remove the principles of Platonism from a putatively Aristotelian position, what would remain would be incoherent and probably indefensible.⁸⁸ Thus, an *Aristotelian* ontology of the sensible world that excluded the ontological priority of the supersensible is probably unsustainable. And an *Aristotelian* psychology that did not recognize

⁸⁴ See *Timaeus* 41C-D; 61C7; 65A5; 69C8-D1; 72D4-E1; 73D3. In none of these passages is the term 'intellect' used for the 'immortal part' of the soul, though that is the clear implication. See *Phaedo* 78B4-84B4; *Republic* 608D-612A. Whether Plato elsewhere, e.g. *Phaedrus*, held that other parts of the soul are immortal as well may be disputed.

⁸⁵ See *Timaeus* 30B; *Philebus* 30C; *Sophist* 249A.

⁸⁶ See on (1) *De Anima* A 4, 408b18-29 and G 5, 430a23 ; Cf. *On Generation of Animals*, B 3, 736b27 and B 6, 744b21; *Nicomachean Ethics*, K 7, 1177b30; *Metaphysics*, L 9, 1074b16. See on (2) B 1, 413a4-9; B 2, 413b24-27 along with Aristotle's insistence that the soul does not think without images. See G 7, 431a16-17 and G 8, 432a7-10.

⁸⁷ Accordingly, on this basis and not surprisingly, Academic Skeptics should be cashiered from the ranks of the Platonists.

⁸⁸ In this I would disagree with C.D.C. Reeve, *Substantial Knowledge : Aristotle's Metaphysics* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Co., 2000), ch.10, who argues that Aristotle gives us a recipe for constructing 'a naturalistic and Godless primary science'. I think this is exactly what he does not do for the reason that he is a Platonist. M.V. Wedin, *Aristotle's Theory of Substance : The Categories and Metaphysics Zeta* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), is another distinguished exponent of the view that the viability of Aristotle's metaphysics rests in part upon its anti-Platonism. Much the same can be said for his account of Aristotle's psychology. See Wedin, *Mind and Imagination in Aristotle*.

the priority and irreducibility of intellect to soul would be similarly beyond repair.⁸⁹ What contemporary exponents of versions of Platonism or Aristotelianism should perhaps conclude from a study of the history is that, rather than standing in opposition to each other, merger, or at least synergy, ought to be the order of the day.

⁸⁹ See M.F. Burnyeat, "Is an Aristotelian Philosophy of Mind Still Credible?," in *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima*. Edited by M. C. Nussbaum and A. Rorty (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) for an interesting argument from a slightly different perspective for the view that an Aristotelian philosophy of mind viewed essentially in functionalist terms is unsustainable.