

**“From Athens to Alexandria: Reconsidering the Prehistory of (Neo)platonism”
(1st century BCE-1st century AD)**

T1 Hanc Academiam novam appellant, quae mihi vetus videtur, si quidem Platonem ex illa vetere numeramus, **cuius in libris nihil affirmatur et in utramque partem multa disseruntur, de omnibus quaeritur nihil certi dicitur.** Cic. *Acad.* 1.46

They call this the ‘New Academy’, though I think it is old, assuming we count Plato as part of the Old Academy. In his books nothing is affirmed, there are many arguments on either side, everything is under investigation, and nothing is claimed to be certain (Trans. C. Brittain)

T2

Quem enim auctorem de illo locupletiore Platone laudare possumus? cuius in libris multis locis ita loquitur Socrates, ut etiam, cum de moribus, de virtutibus, denique de re publica disputet, numeros tamen et geometriam et harmoniam studeat **Pythagorae more coniungere.** *Rep.* 1.16.

For what more trustworthy authority on Socrates can we cite than Plato? And in many passages of Plato’s works Socrates, in the midst of his discussions of morals, of the virtues, and even of the State, makes it clear by what he says that he desires to combine with these subjects the consideration of arithmetic, geometry, and harmony, following the methods of Pythagoras. (trans. Keyes)

T3 Platonis autem auctoritate, qui **varius et multiplex et copiosus fuit, una et consentiens duobus vocabulis philosophiae forma instituta est Academicorum et Peripateticorum** qui rebus congruentes nominibus differebant. Cic., *Academic Books* 1.17

Originating with Plato, a thinker of manifold variety and fertility, there was established a philosophy that, though it had two appellations, was really a single and uniform system, that of the Academic and the Peripatetic schools, which while agreeing in doctrine differed in terminology. (Tr. Tsouni)

T4 Speusippus autem et Xenocrates, qui primi Platonis rationem auctoritatemque susceperant, et post eos Polemo et Crates unaque Crantor in Academia congregati diligenter ea **quae a superioribus acceperant tuebantur.** Cic., *Academic Books* 1.34

Speusippus and Xenocrates, however, who were the first people to take over Plato’s theory and authority, and after them Polemo and Crates, along with Crantor—all fellow Academics—diligently preserved the doctrines they had received from their predecessors. (tr. Brittain)

T5 Deinceps videndum est, quoniam satis apertum est sibi quemque natura esse carum, quae sit hominis natura. id est enim, de quo quaerimus. atqui perspicuum est **hominem e corpore animoque constare, cum primae sint animi partes, secundae corporis.** deinde id quoque videmus, et ita figuratum corpus, ut excellat aliis, **animumque ita constitutum, ut et sensibus instructus sit et habeat praestantiam mentis, cui tota hominis natura pareat,** in qua sit mirabilis quaedam vis rationis et cognitionis et scientiae virtutumque omnium. Cic. *De Finibus* 5.34

We must next examine the question of what human nature is, since that is the object of our search. Evidently human beings consist of mind and body, but the mind and its components are primary, the parts of the body only secondary. We may also observe that the human body has a configuration superior to that of all other creatures.

The human mind, for its part, has a constitution that provides it not only with sense-perception but with the dominant element, intellect, which the whole human person by nature obeys. Intellect encompasses the wondrous powers of reason, understanding, knowledge and all the virtues. (tr. Annas and Woolf)

T6

ita fiet, ut animi virtus corporis virtuti anteponatur animique virtutes non voluntarias vincant virtutes voluntariae, quae quidem proprie virtutes appellantur multumque excellunt, propterea **quod ex ratione gignuntur, qua nihil est in homine divinius**. Cic. *De Finibus* 5.38

It follows that the mind's virtue will rank more highly than that of the body, and that the volitional virtues of the mind will come in ahead of the non-volitional. The former are virtues properly so called, and are far superior because they spring from reason, the most divine part of the human being. (tr. Annas and Woolf)

T7

Intrandum est igitur in rerum naturam et penitus quid ea postulet pervidendum; aliter enim nosmet ipsos nosse non possumus. quod praeceptum quia maius erat, quam ut ab homine videretur, idcirco assignatum est deo. **iubet igitur nos Pythius Apollo noscere nosmet ipsos cognitio autem haec est una nostri, ut vim corporis animique norimus** sequamurque eam vitam, quae rebus iis ipsis perfruatur. Cic. *De Finibus* 5.44

So we must delve into the workings of nature and reach a deep understanding of what it requires. If not, we cannot know ourselves. This precept seemed too lofty to have a human origin and was therefore assigned to a god. Hence the Pythian Apollo bids us to know ourselves. But the only way to gain this knowledge is to understand the powers of our body and our mind, and to follow the life that utilizes them to the full. (tr. Annas and Woolf)

T8

ita fit, ut **duo genera propter se expetendorum reperiantur, unum, quod est in iis, in quibus completur illud extremum, quae sunt aut animi aut corporis**; haec autem, quae sunt extrinsecus, id est quae neque in animo insunt neque in corpore, ut amici, ut parentes, ut liberi ut propinqui, ut ipsa patria, sunt illa quidem sua sponte cara, sed eodem in genere, quo illa, non sunt. nec vero umquam summum bonum assequi quisquam posset, si omnia illa, quae sunt extra, quamquam expetenda, summo bono continerentur. Cic. *De Finibus* 5.68

Thus we find that there are two separate categories of things that are valuable in their own right. The first is where the ultimate good is realized, namely in the category of mind and body. The second is the class of external goods, namely those that belong neither to mind nor body, such as friends, parents, children, relatives and one's own country. These are indeed valued in their own right, but do not fall into the same class as mind and body. In fact if all these external goods, however desirable, were included in the supreme good, then the supreme good could never be attained. (tr. Annas and Woolf)

T9

Age nunc, Luci noster, extrue animo altitudinem excellentiamque virtutum: iam non dubitabis, quin earum compotes homines magno animo erectoque viventes semper sint beati, qui omnis motus fortunae mutationesque rerum et temporum levis et inbecillos fore intellegant, si in virtutis certamen venerint. **illa enim, quae sunt a nobis bona corporis numerata, complent ea quidem beatissimam vitam, sed ita, ut sine illis possit beata vita existere**. 5.71

'Come now, Lucius, construct a mental picture of the virtues' lofty grandeur. You will then be left in no doubt that those who possess the high minded character and the uprightness to attain them live happy lives. Such people realize that, in a contest with virtue, all the whims of fate, all the changes that time and circumstance bring, are but foolish trifles. It is true that what we count as bodily goods do make a contribution to the happiest life. (tr. Annas and Woolf)

T10

ΣΩ: **Τί ποτ' οὖν ὁ ἄνθρωπος;** ΑΛ: Οὐκ ἔχω λέγειν. ΣΩ: Ἐχεις μὲν οὖν, ὅτι γε τὸ τῷ σώματι χρώμενον. ΑΛ: Ναί. ΣΩ: **Ἡ οὖν ἄλλο τι χρῆται αὐτῷ ἢ ψυχῇ;** ΑΛ: Οὐκ ἄλλο. ΣΩ: Οὐκοῦν ἄρχουσα; ΑΛ: Ναί. (...) Ἐπειδὴ δ' οὔτε σῶμα οὔτε τὸ συναμφοτέρων ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος, λείπεται οἶμαι ἢ μηδὲν αὐτ' εἶναι, ἢ εἴπερ τί ἐστι, μηδὲν ἄλλο τὸν ἄνθρωπον συμβαίνειν ἢ ψυχῇν. *Alc. I* 129e–130c

SO: Then what is a human being? AL: I don't know what to say. SO: Yes, you do—say that it's what uses the body. AL: Yes. SO: What else uses it but the soul? AL: Nothing else. SO: And doesn't the soul rule the body? AL: Yes. (...) Since a human being is neither a body, nor a body and soul together, what remains, I think, is either that one is nothing, or else, if one is something, one is nothing other than a soul.
(tr. Hutchinson)

ΣΩ. Οὐκοῦν πάλιν ὅστις αὖ σῶμα θεραπεύει, **τὰ ἑαυτοῦ** ἀλλ' οὐχ αὐτὸν θεραπεύει; ΑΛ. Κινδυνεύει.

ΣΩ: Ὅστις δέ γε τὰ χρήματα, οὔθ' ἑαυτὸν οὔτε τὰ ἑαυτοῦ, ἀλλ' ἔτι **πορρωτέρω τῶν ἑαυτοῦ;** ΑΛ. Ἐμοιγε δοκεῖ. *Alc. I* 131b–131c

SO: Furthermore, if someone takes care of his body, then isn't he caring for something that belongs to him, and not for himself? AL: That seems likely. SO: And isn't someone who takes care of his wealth caring neither for himself nor for what belongs to him, but for something even further away?
Alc. I 131b–131c (tr. Hutchinson)

T11

ὁ γὰρ Ξενοκράτους γνώριμος Πολέμων φαίνεται τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν αὐτάρκειαν εἶναι βουλούμενος ἀγαθῶν πάντων, ἢ τῶν πλείστων καὶ μεγίστων. δογματίζει γοῦν χωρὶς μὲν ἀρετῆς μηδέποτε ἂν εὐδαιμονίαν ὑπάρχειν **δίχα δὲ καὶ τῶν σωματικῶν καὶ τῶν ἐκτὸς τὴν ἀρετὴν αὐτάρκη πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν εἶναι.** Clem. Alex. Strom. 2.22.133.7 p. 186 Stählin

Polemo, the associate of Xenocrates, seems to wish happiness (eudaimonia) to consist in self-sufficiency in respect of all good things, or at least the most and greatest of them. For he lays it down that happiness can never be achieved apart from virtue, while virtue is sufficient for happiness even if bereft of bodily and external goods.
(trans. Dillon)

T12

ΣΩ. Ἐχομεν οὖν εἰπεῖν ὅτι ἐστὶ **τῆς ψυχῆς θειότερον** ἢ τοῦτο, περὶ ὃ τὸ εἶδέναι τε καὶ φρονεῖν ἐστίν; ΑΛ. Οὐκ ἔχομεν. ΣΩ. **Τῷ θεῷ ἄρα τοῦτ' ἔοικεν αὐτῆς,** καὶ τις εἰς τοῦτο βλέπων καὶ **πάν τὸ θεῖον γνούς, θεὸν τε καὶ φρόνησιν,** οὕτω καὶ ἑαυτὸν ἂν γνοίῃ μάλιστα. ΑΛ. Φαίνεται. *Alc. I* 133c

So: Can we say that there is anything about the soul which is more divine than that, where knowing and understanding take place? AL: No, we can't SO: Then that region in it resembles the divine, and someone who looked at that and grasped everything divine—god and understanding—would have the best grasp of himself as well. (tr. Hutchinson, with alterations)

T13

quam vim animum esse dicunt mundi, eandemque esse mentem sapientiamque perfectam, quem deum appellant, omniumque rerum quae sunt ei subiectae quasi prudentiam quondam procurantem caelestia maxime, deinde in terris ea quae pertineant

ad homines; quam interdum eandem necessitatem appellant. quia nihil aliter possit atque ab ea constitutum sit, inter<dum> quasi fatalem et immutabilem continuationem ordinis sempiterni.

Acad. 1.29

[T]hey (sc. the Old Academics) say that this power is the world soul, and that it is also a mind and perfect wisdom, which they call god and a kind of providence over all the things subject to it, which exercises forethought primarily over celestial affairs, but also over terrestrial matters of relevance to human beings. Sometimes they call this necessity, because nothing can be other than as it is determined in the fated and immutable sequence of its eternal order. (tr. Brittain with alterations)

T14

haec tractanti animo et noctes et dies cogitanti existit illa <a> **deo Delphis praecepta cognitio, ut ipsa se mens agnoscat coniunctamque cum divina mente se sentiat**, ex quo in satiabili gaudio compleatur. ipsa enim cogitatio de vi et natura deorum studium incendit illius aeternitatem imitandi, neque se in brevitae vitae conlocatam putat, cum rerum causas alias ex aliis aptas et necessitate nexas videt, quibus ab aeterno tempore fluentibus in aeternum ratio tamen mensque moderatur. Haec ille intuens atque **suspiciens vel potius omnis partis orasque circumspiciens** quanta rursus animi tranquillitate humana et ceteriora considerat! hinc illa cognitio virtutis existit. Cic. *Tusculan Disputations* 5.70

To the mind occupied night and day in these thoughts there comes the knowledge enjoined by the god at Delphi that the mind should know its own self and feel its union with the divine mind, the source of an unquenchable joy. For thought upon the power and nature of the gods of itself kindles the desire of attaining an immortality that resembles theirs, nor does (the mind) think that it is limited to this short span of life, when it sees that the causes of things are linked one to another in an inevitable chain and nevertheless their succession from eternity to eternity is governed by reason and intelligence. As he (the sage) gazes upon this spectacle and looks upward or rather looks round upon all the parts and regions of the universe, with what calmness of soul he turns again to reflect upon what is human and touches him more nearly. Hence comes his knowledge of virtue. (Tr. King, with alterations)

T15

Ἦστιν οὖν Εὐδῶρου τοῦ Ἀλεξανδρέως, Ἀκαδημαικοῦ φιλοσόφου, διαίρεσις τοῦ κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν λόγου, βιβλίον ἀξιόκτητον, ἐν ᾧ πᾶσαν ἐπεξελήλυθε προβληματικῶς τὴν ἐπιστήμην, ἧς ἐγὼ διαιρέσεως ἐκθήσομαι τὸ τῆς ἡθικῆς οἰκεῖον. Ἔχει δ' οὕτως. Τριμεροῦς ὄντος τοῦ κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν λόγου τὸ μὲν ἐστὶν αὐτοῦ ἡθικόν, τὸ δὲ φυσικόν, τὸ δὲ λογικόν. Τοῦ δ' ἡθικοῦ τὸ μὲν περὶ τὴν θεωρίαν τῆς καθ' ἕκαστον ἀξίας, τὸ δὲ περὶ τὴν ὁρμήν, τὸ δὲ περὶ τὴν πρᾶξιν. (...) Didymus ap. Stobaeus *Eclogai* 2.7.2 64-72

Eudorus of Alexandria, an Academic philosopher, wrote a division of philosophical discourse, a book worth getting hold of, in which he goes through knowledge in its entirety, issue by issue. I shall set out what of this division belongs to ethics. It goes like this. Philosophical discourse is divided into three parts: ethics, physics, logic. Ethics is divided into topics concerned with (i) the contemplation of the value of each thing, (ii) impulse and (iii) action. (tr. Boys-Stones)

T16

A. Σωκράτης, Πλάτων ταῦτα τῷ Πυθαγόρᾳ, **τέλος ὁμοίωσιν θεῷ**. Σαφέστερον δ' αὐτὸ δηήθῃσεν Πλάτων προσθεὶς τὸ 'κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν', φρονήσει δ' ἐστὶ μόνως δυνατόν, **τοῦτο δ' ἦν τὸ κατ' ἀρετὴν ζῆν**. Ἐν μὲν γὰρ θεῷ τὸ κοσμοποιὸν καὶ κοσμοδιοικητικόν· ἐν δὲ τῷ σοφῷ βίου κατάστασις καὶ ζωῆς διαγωγή· ὅπερ αἰνίζασθαι μὲν Ὀμηρον εἰπόντα (ε 193) κατ' ἵχνια βαῖνε θεοῖο· Πυθαγόραν δὲ παρ' αὐτὸν εἰπεῖν· Ἔπου θεῷ· **δῆλον ὡς οὐχ ὁρατῷ καὶ προηγουμένῳ, νοητῷ δὲ καὶ τῆς κοσμικῆς εὐταξίας ἀρμονικῷ**.

B. Εἴρηται δὲ παρὰ Πλάτωνι κατὰ τὸ τῆς φιλοσοφίας τριμερές, ἐν Τιμαίῳ μὲν φυσικῶς (προσθήσω δὲ καὶ Πυθαγορικῶς), σημαίνοντος ἀφθόνως τὴν ἐκείνου προεπίνοιαν· ἐν δὲ τῇ Πολιτείᾳ ἠθικῶς· ἐν δὲ τῷ Θεαιτήτῳ λογικῶς· περιπέφρασται δὲ κἀν τῷ τετάρτῳ περὶ Νόμων ἐπὶ τῆς ἀκολουθίας τοῦ θεοῦ σαφῶς ἅμα καὶ πλουσίως. **Τὸ δὲ γε πολύφωνον τοῦ Πλάτωνος οὐ πολύδοξον. Εἴρηται δὲ καὶ τὰ περὶ τοῦ τέλους αὐτῷ πολλαχῶς.** Καὶ τὴν μὲν ποικιλίαν τῆς φράσεως ἔχει διὰ τὸ λόγιον καὶ μεγαλήγορον, εἰς δὲ ταὐτὸ καὶ σύμφωνον τοῦ δόγματος συντελεῖ. **Τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶ τὸ κατ' ἀρετὴν ζῆν.** Τοῦτο δ' αὖ κτήσις ἅμα καὶ χρήσις τῆς τελείας ἀρετῆς. Ὅτι δὲ τέλος αὐτὴν ἡγεῖται, τέταχεν ἐν Τιμαίῳ εἰπὼν καὶ τοῦνομα· φράσω δὲ καὶ τὰ κροτελεύτιον τῆς περιοχῆς· ἔχει δ' οὕτως· “ὁμοιώσαντα δὲ τέλος ἔχειν τοῦ προτεθέντος ἀνθρώποις ὑπὸ θεῶν ἀρίστου βίου πρὸς τε τὸν παρόντα καὶ τὸν μέλλοντα”. Didymus ap. Stobaeus *Eclogai* 2.7.3.f

A. Socrates and Plato think the same as Pythagoras: the end is likeness to god. Plato articulates this more clearly when he adds ‘according to your power’: you have the power only in your intelligence. This would be what it is to live virtuously: for to god belong the creation and administration of the cosmos, while the organisation and conduct of life belong to the wise. Homer hints at this when he says ‘go in the footsteps of god’ [Odyssey 5.193]. (tr. Boys-Stones) But Pythagoras said besides ‘follow god’; obviously not as visible and preceding but as intelligible and harmonising the good arrangement of the cosmos. (tr. Tsouni)

B. Plato speaks in accord with the three parts of philosophy, in the *Timaeus* physically (I will add also in a Pythagorean manner), indicating sufficiently his previous observation, in the *Republic* ethically and in the *Theaetetus* logically. In the fourth book of the *Laws* he speaks clearly and at the same time richly on the subject of following god. However, Plato’s variety of expression does not amount to a variety of opinions. The things about the end are said by him in many ways. They have variety of expression by virtue of his eloquence and sublime diction but they end up together at the same harmonious point of doctrine, that is to live in accord with virtue. This amounts not only to the possession but also to the use of perfect virtue. That he considers it (i.e. virtue) to be the *telos* he states in the *Timaeus*, even mentioning the term; I will quote the end of the passage: ‘and having achieved this likeness one attains finally to that end of the best life which is set before men by the gods, both for the present and for the time to come’ (*Tim.* 90d) (tr. Hahm with alterations)

T17

Ἄλλως· Μόνον μὲν τὸ καλὸν ἀγαθόν· καθότι τῶν ὄντων οὐδὲν ἀγαθόν, εἰ μὴ τι μεταλάβοι τῆς ἀρετῆς, ὥσπερ ὁ δαλὸς καὶ ὁ σίδηρος τοῦ πυρός, οὗ χωρὶς οὐδὲν ἀπλῶς θερμόν· μετὰ δ' ἄλλων ἀγαθῶν τῶν τριῶν γενῶν, ὅσον μετείληφεν αὐτῆς τὰ δύο, τὰ σωματικὰ σὺν τοῖς ἐκτός. Ὡς γὰρ τῆς σελήνης ἀφώτιστος μὲν ἡ οὐσία καθ' αὐτήν, μεταλήψει δὲ τῆς ἡλιακῆς ἀγγῆς φωτίζεται, οὕτως οὐδὲν ὃ μὴ μετέχει τῆς ἀρετῆς ἀγαθόν. **Τοῖς γὰρ ἀνθρωπίνους τὸ δύνασθαι ὠφελεῖν ἐκ τῶν θείων πάρεστιν.** Didymus ap. Stobaeus *Eclogai* 2.7.4a

Here is another way: only the morally fine is good. Of existing things none is good unless it partakes of virtue, just as the torch and iron partake in fire, without which absolutely nothing is hot. Among the remainder of the three classes the following two, those pertaining to the body and the external ones (are good) insofar as they share in it (i.e. virtue). For just as the substance of the moon is in itself lacking in light, but is illuminated by sharing in the light of the sun, so nothing which has no share of virtue is good. So it is possible for human things to benefit by virtue of the divine things. (Tr. Hahm with alterations)