

Common Notions from Plotinus to Iamblichus

Riccardo Chiaradonna

Institute for Mediterranean Studies (IMS) –Rethymno, Crete (online)

15/11/2023

T1: Galen, *De methodo medendi* X.40–41Kühn (ed. Lorusso, Rome 2018)

Πῶς οὖν ἐξεύρωμεν αὐτὸ μεθόδῳ; πῶς δ' ἄλλως ἢ ὡς ἐν τοῖς Περὶ τῆς ἀποδείξεως ἐλέγετο; τῆς ἐννοίας πρότερον ὁμολογηθείσης ἥς χωρὶς οὐχ οἷόν τ' ἐστὶν εὐρεθῆναι τὴν οὐσίαν τοῦ προκειμένου πράγματος, αὐτὴν δὲ τὴν ἐννοιαν ὁμολογουμένην ἅπασιν ἐλέγομεν χρῆναι λαμβάνειν ἢ οὐδ' ἂν ἀρχὴν δεόντως ὀνομάζεσθαι. τίς οὖν ὑπὸ πάντων ἐστὶν ἀνθρώπων ὁμολογουμένη περὶ τοῦ νοσεῖν ἐννοια; καὶ κατὰ τίνος μάλιστα φέρουσιν ὑποκειμένου πράγματος τοῦτ' ὁ ῥῆμα τὸ νοσεῖν;

How then do we find this out correctly and methodically? How else than by the means specified in *On Demonstration*? First of all the common conception must be agreed upon: without it, it is impossible to discover the substance of the matter at issue. We said that it is essential to adopt a common conception that is agreed by all, or else it is not fit to be called a starting-point. What conception, then, in the sphere of being sick is agreed by all men? And to what underlying subject-matter do they most particularly apply this 'being sick'? (trans. Hankinson)

T2: Galen, *De differentiis pulsuum* VIII.704Kühn

τὸ μὲν ἕτερον ἐξηγούμενον σαφῶς τὴν τοῦ πράγματος ἐννοια ἦν ἔχουσιν οἱ ὀνομάζοντες αὐτὸ.

[The conceptual definition] provides a clear expression of the conception of a thing possessed by those who are capable of 'naming' it.

T3: Alcinous, *Didaskalikos* 4.6–7 (ed. Whittaker 1990)

Ὅταν οὖν φῶμεν τὴν νόησιν ἀρχὴν εἶναι τοῦ ἐπιστημονικοῦ λόγου, οὐχὶ τὴν νῦν λεγομένην φαμέν, ἀλλὰ τὴν ὅτε χωρὶς τοῦ σώματος ἦν ἡ ψυχὴ, ἥτις, ὡς ἔφαμεν, τότε μὲν νόησις ἐλέγετο, νῦν δὲ φυσικὴ ἐννοια, καλεῖται δὲ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ἡ φυσικὴ ἐννοια καὶ ἐπιστήμη ἀπλή καὶ πτέρωμα ψυχῆς, ἐσθ' ὅτε δὲ καὶ μνήμη. Ἐκ δὲ τούτων ἀπλῶν οὐσῶν ἐπιστημῶν ὁ φυσικὸς καὶ ἐπιστημονικὸς συνέστηκε λόγος, φύσει ἐνυπάρχων.

So when we say that intellection is the principle of epistemic reason, we do not mean the so-called intellection that we have now, but what the soul has when it is separate from the body — i.e. what is called intellection in that state, as we said, but is now a natural concept. Plato also refers to a natural concept as 'simple knowledge' [see perhaps *R.* 438e] and the 'soul's wing' [*Phdr.* 246e] – and sometimes even 'memory' [e.g. *Phdr.* 250a]. From these items of knowledge, i.e. of simple knowledge, natural epistemic reason is constituted, arising in us naturally. (trans. Boys-Stones, Text 13A)

G. Boys-Stones, *Platonist Philosophy 80BC to AD 250*, Cambridge 2018, 368

[...] it seems certain that Platonists did not all (or did not always) deny the possibility of an empiricist foundation for some form of cognition. For one thing, they had to explain the cognitive abilities of animals, which are evidently able to make systematic empirical

discriminations in the world around them, and more generally to learn from experience. Even those Platonists who believed that animal souls were essentially rational might have fought shy of claiming that animal cognition involved ‘recollection’. (Those who denied that they were rational would not have this available as recourse at all). But something more fundamental to their own metaphysics prevented Platonists from linking all cases of concept-acquisition to recollection. It might be possible to construe Plato as having posited ideal correlates for *sensibilia*; but Middle Platonists did not take him this way. [...] their belief was that forms corresponded by and large only to natural species. There is certainly no form ‘Green’. But that means that our ability to develop a concept of ‘green’ can have nothing at all to do with recollection: it must be entirely based on our empirical experience. But if experience can get us to concepts of all empirical properties — and, presumably, the way they are regularly ‘bundled’ in the natural world [...] — then there seems to be no principled objection to the possibility that humans could develop a fully articulated mental apparatus capable of successful pragmatic discrimination, and of underwriting a fully rational life, purely by the mechanisms of empiricism.

T4: Plotinus, 6.5 [23] 1.1-8

(1) Τὸ ἓν καὶ ταὐτὸν ἀριθμῷ πανταχοῦ ἅμα ὅλον εἶναι κοινὴ μὲν τις ἔννοιά φησιν εἶναι, ὅταν πάντες κινούμενοι αὐτοφυῶς λέγωσι τὸν ἐν ἐκάστῳ ἡμῶν θεὸν ὡς ἓνα καὶ τὸν αὐτόν. Καὶ εἴ τις αὐτοὺς τὸν τρόπον μὴ ἀπαιτοῖ μηδὲ λόγῳ ἐξετάζειν τὴν δόξαν αὐτῶν ἐθέλοι, οὕτως ἂν καὶ (5) θεῖντο καὶ ἐνεργοῦντες τοῦτο τῇ διανοίᾳ οὕτως ἀναπαύοιντο εἰς ἓν πῶς συνειρδόντες καὶ ταὐτόν, καὶ οὐδ’ ἂν ἐθέλοιεν ταύτης τῆς ἐνότητος ἀποσχίζεσθαι.

A common conception says that there really is such a thing as being one and the same in number simultaneously present as a whole everywhere: everyone is spontaneously moved to say that the god present in each of us is one and the same. And if one did not ask the manner of this, and bothered to rationally examine their opinion, they would assume that this was so; and in the act of thinking this they would come to rest, fixing themselves somehow upon something one and the same, and they would not want to be cut off from this unity. (trans. Emilsson and Strange)

T5 : Plotinus, 3.7 [45] 1.1-16

(1) Τὸν αἰῶνα καὶ τὸν χρόνον ἕτερον λέγοντες ἐκάτερον εἶναι καὶ τὸν μὲν περὶ τὴν αἰδίων εἶναι φύσιν, τὸν δὲ χρόνον περὶ τὸ γινόμενον καὶ τόδε τὸ πᾶν, αὐτόθεν μὲν καὶ ὥσπερ ταῖς τῆς ἐννοίας ἀθροωτέραις ἐπιβολαῖς ἐναργές τι παρ’ αὐτοῖς περὶ αὐτῶν ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ἔχειν πάθος (5) νομίζομεν λέγοντές τε αἰεὶ καὶ παρ’ ἅπαντα ὀνομάζοντες. Πειρώμενοι μὴν εἰς ἐπίστασιν αὐτῶν ἰέναι καὶ οἷον ἐγγὺς προσελθεῖν πάλιν αὖ ταῖς γνώμαις ἀποροῦντες τὰς τῶν παλαιῶν ἀποφάσεις περὶ αὐτῶν ἄλλος ἄλλας, τάχα δὲ καὶ ἄλλως τὰς αὐτὰς λαβόντες ἐπὶ τούτων ἀναπαυσάμενοι καὶ (10) αὐτάρκες νομίσαντες, εἰ ἔχοιμεν ἐρωτηθέντες τὸ δοκοῦν ἐκείνοις λέγειν, ἀγαπήσαντες ἀπαλλαττόμεθα τοῦ ζητεῖν ἔτι περὶ αὐτῶν. Εὐρηκέναι μὲν οὖν τινὰς τῶν ἀρχαίων καὶ

μακαρίων φιλοσόφων τὸ ἀληθὲς δεῖ νομίζειν· τίνες δ' οἱ
 τυχόντες μάλιστα, καὶ πῶς ἂν καὶ ἡμῖν σύνεσις περὶ (15)
 τούτων γένοιτο, ἐπισκέψασθαι προσήκει.

When we say that eternity and time are different things, and that eternity pertains to the sempiternal nature, while time pertains to what comes to be and to this universe, we immediately think, as we do in the case of more concentrated apprehensions of thought, that we possess an evident impression of them in our souls, since we are always talking about them and referring to them on every occasion. But when we try to go on to examine them and, as it were, get close to them, we once again find ourselves at a loss what to think: different ones of us fix upon different declarations of the ancient philosophers about them, and perhaps even disagree about how to interpret these statements. So we stop here, and deem it sufficient if when asked we can state their views about them. Content with this, we give up enquiring any further about these matters. Now we must indeed think that some of the ancient and blessed philosophers have found the truth. But who among them most attained to it, and how we might gain an understanding of these things for ourselves, needs to be investigated. (trans. McGuire and Strange)

T6: Simplicius, *In Cat.* 213.12–20 = Porphyry, 70F. Smith (see **T2**)

ἔστιν δὲ ἐννοηματικὸς ὁ ἀπὸ τῶν γνωρίμων τοῖς πᾶσιν
 εἰλημμένος καὶ κοινῇ παρὰ πᾶσιν ὁμολογούμενος, οἷον ὅτι ‘ἀγαθὸν ἐστὶν
 ἄφ’ οὗ συμβαίνει ὠφελεῖσθαι, ψυχὴ ἐστὶν ἄφ’ ἧς ὑπάρχει τὸ ζῆν, φωνὴ
 ἐστὶν τὸ ἴδιον αἰσθητὸν ἀκοῆς’. οὐσιώδεις δὲ εἰσὶν ὅροι οἱ καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν (15)
 αὐτὴν τῶν ὀριζομένων διδάσκοντες, οἷον ‘ἀγαθὸν ἐστὶν ἡ ἀρετὴ ἢ τὸ μετέχον
 ἀρετῆς, ψυχὴ ἐστὶν οὐσία αὐτοκίνητος, φωνὴ ἐστὶν ἀήρ πεπληγμένος’. καὶ
 οἱ μὲν ἐννοηματικοὶ ὅροι ἅτε κοινῇ παρὰ πᾶσιν ὁμολογούμενοι οἱ αὐτοὶ εἰσιν,
 οἱ δὲ οὐσιώδεις κατὰ αἰρέσεις ἰδίας προαγόμενοι ἀντιλέγονται ὑπὸ τῶν
 ἑτεροδόξων.

A conceptual account is one which is taken from what is knowable to all and commonly agreed by all, for example ‘good is that by which it happens that we are benefited, the soul is the source of life, sound is the proper perceptual object of hearing’. A substantial definition is one which also explains the substance of what is being defined, for example ‘good is virtue or that which participates in virtue, the soul is self-moving substance, sound is air when impacted upon’. Conceptual definitions, in that they are commonly agreed by everybody, are the same, while substantial ones are produced according to individual schools and are disputed by those who hold differing opinions.

<p>T7: Ἀρξομαι δὲ τῆς πρὸς σὲ φιλίας ἀπὸ θεῶν καὶ δαιμόνων ἀγαθῶν τῶν τε τούτοις συγγενῶν φιλοσοφημάτων, περὶ ὧν εἴρηται μὲν πλεῖστα καὶ παρὰ τοῖς Ἑλλήνων φιλοσόφοις, εἴρηται δὲ ἐκ στοχασμοῦ τὸ πλεον τὰς ἀρχὰς ἔχοντα τῆς πίστεως.</p>	<p>I will take as the starting point of my friendship with you [Anebo] the gods and the good demons as well as the philosophical teachings concerning them, teachings upon which very much has been said by Greek philosophers also, the greater part, however, of their statements having only</p>	<p>Eusebius, <i>Praep. evang.</i> 14.10.1 = 2.286.14–17 Mras/Porphyry, <i>Ep. Aneb.</i> fr. 1 Saffrey-Segonds</p>
--	---	--

	conjecture as the principle of proof.	
T8: Παρὰ μὲν γὰρ ἡμῖν λογομαχία τίς ἐστὶ πολλή, ἅτε ἐξ ἀνθρωπίνων λογισμῶν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ εἰκαζομένου· οἷς δὲ μεμηχάνηται ἢ πρὸς τὸ κρεῖττον συνουσία, εἰ παρῆται τὸ μέρος τοῦτο εἰς ἐξέτασιν, μάτην αὐτοῖς ἢ σοφία ἐξήσκηται.	Among us [the Greeks] there is no doubt much logomachy, since the Good is conjectured from human reasonings; but as for those who have brought about union with the higher being, if they have disregarded the investigation of this part [of theology], then it is in vain that they practise wisdom.	Eusebius, <i>Praep. evang.</i> 14.10.2 = 2.286.19–22 Mras/Porphyry, <i>Ep. Aneb.</i> fr. 100 Saffrey-Segonds (+ <i>Praep. evang.</i> 5.10.11 = 1.244.12–16 Mras)
T9: [...] ὡς τὰ μὲν τῶν ἐννοιῶν καὶ τὰ τῆς ἱστορίας ἀναμφιλέκτως συνίστησι τὴν ψυχὴν εἶναι ἀθάνατον· οἱ δὲ εἰς ἀπόδειξιν παρὰ τῶν φιλοσόφων κομισθέντες λόγοι δοκοῦσιν εἶναι εὐανάτρεπτοι διὰ τὴν ἐν πᾶσιν εὐρησιλογίαν τῶν ἐριστικῶν. τίς γὰρ λόγος τῶν ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ οὐκ ἀμφισβητήσιμος τοῖς ἐτεροδόξοις, ὅπου καὶ περὶ τῶν δοκούντων ἐναργῶν ἐπέχειν αὐτῶν τισὶν ἐδόκει;	[...] since evidence either of conceptions or of history establishes indisputably that the soul is immortal, while the arguments brought forward by philosophers for demonstration seem easy to overturn on account of the ability of the Eristics in finding arguments on every subject. For what argument in philosophy is not disputed by those who hold different opinions, since some thought that it is fit to suspend judgment even about matters which seem to be evident?	Eusebius, <i>Praep. evang.</i> 14.10.3 = 2.287.1–7 Mras/Porphyry, <i>Contra Boethum de anima</i> , fr. 5 Sodano = 246F. Smith
T10: Ἀκήκοας πόσος πόνος, ἵν' ὑπὲρ σώματός τις τὰ καθάρσια θύσῃ, οὐχ ὅτι τῆς ψυχῆς τὴν σωτηρίαν ἐξεύροι; χαλκόδετος γὰρ ἢ πρὸς θεοῦς ὁδὸς αἰπεινὴ τε καὶ τραχεῖα, ἥς πολλὰς ἀτραποὺς βάρβαροι μὲν ἐξεῦρον, Ἕλληνες δὲ ἐπλανήθησαν, οἱ δὲ κρατοῦντες ἤδη καὶ διέφθειραν· τὴν δὲ εὔρεσιν Αἰγυπτίοις ὁ θεὸς ἐμαρτύρησε Φοίνιξί τε καὶ Χαλδαίοις (Ἀσσύριοι γὰρ οὗτοι) Λυδοῖς τε καὶ Ἑβραίοις	Have you have heard how much pain has been taken to offer the sacrifices of purification for the body, to say nothing of finding the salvation of the soul? For the road to the gods is bound with brass, and steep, and rough, and in it Barbarians have found many paths, but the Greeks went astray; others who already had it, even ruined it; but the god gives testimony to the Egyptians, the Phoenicians, the Chaldeans (for these are Assyrians), as well as to the Lydians and the Hebrews,	Eusebius, <i>Praep. evang.</i> 14.10.5 = 2.287.14–19 Mras [cf. 9.10.3 = 1.496.9–12 Mras]/Porphyry, <i>De philosophia ex oraculis</i> 1 (141 Wolff) = 324F. Smith

	that they have found it. ¹	
--	---------------------------------------	--

H.D. Saffrey, A.-Ph. Segonds (éds.), *Porphyre. Lettre à Anébon l'Égyptien*, Texte établi, traduit et commenté, Paris 2012, 84

La mention des Grecs par opposition aux Égyptiens est très importante, elle reprend ce qui a été dit au Fr. 1, où Porphyre laissait entendre que les enseignements des philosophes sont incertains puisqu'ils résultent d'une simple conjecture (à quoi Porphyre chez Eusèbe ajoute la logomachie) tandis que les Égyptiens prétendent recevoir les enseignements mêmes des dieux. C'est pourquoi il est légitime de s'adresser aux Égyptiens et de leur poser des questions de théologie. A la fin de la *Lettre à Anébon*, la situation est pour ainsi dire renversée : les Grecs avec toutes leurs conjectures ont réussi à se poser la question du bonheur, tandis que les Égyptiens, qu'ils s'intéressent à cette question ou non, n'ont rien à dire de sérieux en cette matière, et sont même victimes du démon trompeur.

T11: R. Shem-Tov Ibn Falaqera (c.1225–after 1290), *De'ot ha-pilosofim* [*The Doctrines of the Philosophers*]. In Gad Freudenthal and Aaron P. Johnson, 'A New Porphyry Fragment?', in: *The Classical Quarterly* 70, 2020, 410–428.

Porphyry of Tyre said: 'when one hears something strange to which he is unaccustomed and whose contrary he had believed for a long time, he should not discount it and reject it without enquiring into it; nor should he enquire into it as if it were a falsehood and were untrue. Rather, after learning of [the matter], one should enquire into it and, if he finds that it is true, he should scrutinize it. For there are in those [unaccustomed] doctrines many things that require of the student much investigation and he may [also] hit upon some doubts; however, this does not happen with this kind of [unaccustomed] doctrines only, but is a universal feature of all doctrines, in most cases. For in all these matters there are things that are impossible or difficult to grasp, and oftentimes the error is due to the incapacity of our intellect to grasp them. Therefore, it is inappropriate that we relinquish any doctrine we have not grasped or that is beset with doubts. For if we do this, we will not have established a solidly held doctrine. Consequently, we must enquire into all doctrines that have been put forward or that can be envisioned and investigate them. And we will choose that [doctrine] that we will find to clearly excel over the others and to follow with necessity from the intellectual [or: intelligible, intellected] principles that are accessible to the senses, even if there remain some enigmatic things in them.' So far [his words].

T12: Iamblichus, *Reply to Porphyry* [*De mysteriis*] I.3

Φῆς τοίνυν πρῶτον διδόναι εἶναι θεοῦς· τὸ δ' ἐσ-
τὶν οὐκ ὀρθὸν οὕτωςι λεγόμενον. Συνυπάρχει γὰρ ἡμῶν @1
αὐτῇ τῇ οὐσίᾳ ἢ περὶ θεῶν ἔμφυτος γνῶσις, κρίσεώς τε
πάσης ἐστὶ κρείττων καὶ προαιρέσεως, λόγου τε καὶ
ἀποδείξεως προϋπάρχει· συνήνωταί τε ἐξ ἀρχῆς πρὸς (5)
τὴν οἰκείαν αἰτίαν, καὶ τῇ πρὸς τὰγαθὸν οὐσιώδει τῆς
ψυχῆς ἐφέσει συνυφέστηκεν. [...]
Ὁ δὲ αὐτός ἐστὶ μοι λόγος πρὸς σὲ καὶ περὶ τῶν

¹ This passage comes from Porphyry's commentary on Apollo's oracle on barbarian wisdom: also, see Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* 9.10.3 = 1.496.9–12 Mras.

συνεπομένων θεοῖς κρειττόνων γενῶν, δαιμόνων φημί (20)

καὶ ἡρώων καὶ ψυχῶν ἀχράντων· καὶ γὰρ περὶ τού-
των ἓνα λόγον ὀρισμένον τῆς οὐσίας ἀεὶ δεῖ νοεῖν, τὸ
δ' ἀόριστον καὶ ἄστατον τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ἀναιρεῖν δό-
σεως, καὶ τὸ μὲν ἐξ ἀντιρρόπου τῶν διαλογισμῶν ἀν-
τιστάσεως ἐπικλῖνον ἐπὶ θάτερα παραιτεῖσθαι· ἀλλό- (25)
τριον γάρ ἐστι τῶν τοῦ λόγου καὶ τῆς ζωῆς ἀρχῶν τὸ
τοιούτον, ἐπὶ δὲ τὰ δεύτερα ἀποφέρεται μᾶλλον καὶ
ὅσα τῇ δυνάμει καὶ τῇ ἐναντιώσει τῆς γενέσεως προσ-
ήκει. Μονοειδῶς δὲ αὐτῶν ἀντιλαμβάνεσθαι δεῖ.

Ἐοικέτω δὴ οὖν τοῖς αἰδίοις τῶν θεῶν συνοπαδοῖς καὶ (30)
ἡ σύμφυτος αὐτῶν κατανόησις· ὥσπερ οὖν αὐτοὶ τὸ @1
εἶναι ἔχουσιν ἀεὶ ὡσαύτως, οὕτω καὶ ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη ψυχὴ
κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ τῇ γνώσει πρὸς αὐτοὺς συναπτέσθω, εἰ-
κασία μὲν ἢ δόξῃ ἢ συλλογισμῷ τινι, ἀρχομένοις ποτὲ
ἀπὸ χρόνου, μηδαμῶς τὴν ὑπὲρ ταῦτα πάντα οὐσίαν (35)
μεταδιώκουσα, ταῖς δὲ καθαραῖς καὶ ἀμέμπτοις νοήσε-
σιν αἷς εἴληφεν ἐξ αἰδίου παρὰ τῶν θεῶν, ταύταις αὐ-
τοῖς συνηρτημένη.

You say first, then, that you ‘concede the existence of the gods’: but that is not the right way to put it. For an innate knowledge about the gods is coexistent with our nature, and pre-exists to all judgement and choice, reasoning and proof. This knowledge is united from the outset with its own cause, and exists in tandem with the essential striving of the soul towards the Good. [...]

And I make the same argument to you also as regards the superior classes of being which follow upon the gods, I mean the daemons and heroes and pure souls; for in respect of them also one should always assume one definite account of their essence, and reject the indeterminacy and instability characteristic of human concession; one should also avoid the inclination to one side of an argument rather than another, resulting from the balanced antithesis of reasonings; for such a procedure is alien to the first principles of reason and life, and tends towards a secondary level of reality, such as belongs rather to the potentiality and contrariety of the realm of generation. The higher beings, by contrast, one should grasp with a uniform mode of cognition.

So then, to the eternal companions of the gods, let there correspond also the innate cognition of them; even as they themselves possess a being of eternal identity, so too let the human soul join itself to them in knowledge on the same terms, not employing conjecture or opinion or some form of syllogistic reasoning, all of which take their start from the plane of temporal reality, to pursue that essence which is beyond all these things, but rather connecting itself to the gods with pure and blameless reasonings, which it has received from all eternity from those same gods. (trans. Clarke, Dillon and Hershbelle slightly modified)