

The Iamblichean Soul and the Problem of Evil

HANDOUT

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1. Plotinus, *Ennead* IV.8 (6).8.2-3: ...οὐ πᾶσα οὐδ' ἡ ἡμετέρα ψυχὴ ἔδω, ἀλλ' ἔστι τι αὐτῆς ἐν τῷ νοητῷ αἰεὶ' (...not even our own soul sinks in its entirety but there is always some part of it in the intelligible world. [Trans. Fleet])
Cf. IV.7 (2).13.2-3; V.1 (10).10.13-21; IV.3 (27).12.1-4; II.9 (33) 2.4-5; VI.7 (38) 5.28-30. Discussion of the ἀπάθεια of the soul in III.6 (26).1-5.
2. Plotinus writes as though souls are responsible for cutting themselves off from the intelligible world in III.9 (13).3.7-16 and V.1 (10).1.1-6 but in IV.8 (6) he treats evil not as the cause of the soul's association with the body but as a product of that association – see esp. IV.8 (6).5.24-33 and IV.8 (6).4.13-30. He ascribes the descent of souls to a god in IV.8 (6).5.13 but in IV.8 (6).5.26 says that soul comes down ῥοπῇ αὐτεξουσίῳ ('by a spontaneous inclination'). A similar view in I.8 (51): full exposition of Plotinus' position in I.8 (51).14; metaphor of infection in I.8 (51).4.22 and 8.16; I.8 (51).15.21-8 stresses that it is always possible for a soul to turn back towards its intelligible source.
3. Proclus, *Commentary on the Timaeus* III.333.28-334.8

ἀπὸ δὴ τούτων ὁρμώμενοι παρρησιασόμεθα πρὸς Πλωτῖνον καὶ τὸν μέγαν Θεόδωρον ἀπαθές τι φυλάττοντας ἐν ἡμῖν καὶ αἰεὶ νοοῦν ... ὁρθῶς ἄρα καὶ ὁ θεῖος Ἰάμβλιχος διαγωνίζεται πρὸς τοὺς ταῦτα οἰομένους· τί γὰρ τὸ ἀμαρτάνον ἐν ἡμῖν, ὅταν τῆς ἀλογίας κινήσεως **πρὸς ἀκόλαστον φαντασίαν ἐπιδράμωμεν**; ἄρ' οὐχ ἡ **προαίρεσις**; καὶ πῶς οὐχ αὕτη; κατὰ γὰρ ταύτην διαφέρομεν **τῶν φαντασθέντων προπετῶς**. εἰ δὲ **προαίρεσις** ἀμαρτάνει, πῶς ἀναμάρτητος ἡ ψυχὴ;

Using this as a starting point let us express ourselves freely in opposition to Plotinus and the great Theodorus (sc. of Asine), who kept something in us **free from affection** and ever in intellection ... the divine Iamblichus was quite correct to argue against those who supposed so. After all, what is it in us that makes a mistake whenever, once the non-rational is aroused, **we resort to unchecked imagination**? Is it not our **independent choice**? Of course it is, for it is thanks to this that we differ from **our impulsive imaginings**. But if our **independent choice** makes a mistake, how is the soul free from error? (Trans. Tarrant)

Cf. III.313.23-4: κύριοι γὰρ ἐσμεν τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς ὁμιλεῖν καὶ χωρίζεσθαι τῶν κακῶν ('we are responsible for consorting with good and shunning evil').

4. Proclus, *On the Existence of Evils* 33.22-5

Si autem a materia adducuntur, ubi est le automobile et anime electiones, si attractionibus anime velut adductivo quodam generationis causam permittemus?

If, on the other hand, souls are drawn by matter – that is, if we attribute the cause of their generation to the attraction matter exercises upon souls, as something that draws them – where is their self-motion and ability to choose? (Trans. Opsomer and Steel)

5. Iamblichus on the soul as a mean between intellect on the one hand and body on the other: see *De anima* §7, with the comments of Finamore and Dillon, 15 and 91-3 and Ps.-Simplicius' *Commentary on Aristotle's De anima*, 5.38-6.17, 89.33-90.25 and 240.33-241.26 = Sections B, C and D in the Appendix to Finamore and Dillon (233-9), with their comments at 15-16 and 253-8. Cf. Steel 53-55, 58 and 66.

6. Ps.-Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle's De anima* 6.8-10

καὶ μένη ἅμα καὶ μεταβάλλη διὰ τὴν τῶν μόνως τε μενόντων καὶ πάντα μεταβαλλομένων μεσότητα ἢ ἡμετέρα ψυχῇ ἐκατέρῳ πως ἐπικοινωνοῦσα τῶν ἄκρων

... our soul simultaneously abides and changes because it is a mean between what is permanently abiding and in every way changing, and yet it shares somehow in each of the extremes. (Trans. Finamore and Dillon)

7. Ps.-Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle's De anima* 6.12-15

διὸ οὔτε μένειν τι αὐτῆς θησόμεθα κατὰ τὸν Πλωτῖνον ἀεὶ ὡσαύτως καὶ καθαρῶς οὔτε παντελῶς προϊέναι ἐν τῇ εἰς γένεσιν ροπῇ, ἀλλ' ὅλη πρόεισι καὶ μένει εἰλικρινῶς ἐν τῇ πρὸς τὰ δεύτερα ροπῇ.

Therefore we will not agree with Plotinus that any of it remains always the same and pure or that it processes completely in its inclination towards generation. Rather, it processes as a whole and remains pure in its inclination towards what is secondary to it. (Trans. Finamore and Dillon, modified)

8. Iamblichus on pure souls which descend in order to make the world a better place: *De anima* §29, with the comments of Finamore and Dillon, 16-17 and 159-60.

9. (i) ροπή used in the account of Iamblichus' views at Ps-Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle's De anima* 90.20.

(ii) Ps.-Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle's De anima* 241.7-10:

εὐλογον ἄρα μᾶλλον δὲ ἀναγκαῖον οὐ τὴν ἐνέργειαν μόνην, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ αὐτὴν τὴν ἀκροτάτην, τῆς ἡμετέρας φημί, διαφορεῖσθαι πως καὶ χαλᾶσθαι καὶ οἷον ὑφίζανειν ἐν τῇ πρὸς τὰ δεύτερα νεύσει.

It is reasonable then, or rather necessary, that not the soul's activity alone but also its essence and the highest part itself – of *our* soul I mean – is somehow dissipated and

slackened and as it were sinks down in tending towards what is secondary. (Trans. Finamore and Dillon, modified)

On the metaphorical use of χαλᾶσθαι here, cf. Steel 66 and n.53

(iii) ῥέπειν is used in the *Phaedrus* myth, at 247b4. For the use of both νεύειν and ῥέπειν by the Neoplatonists, see Festugière 227, n.4 and des Places 76, n.1.

10. (i) Ps.-Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle's De anima* 6.3-4:

ποτὲ δὲ ἀφισταμένην πῶς ἑαυτῆς ἐν τῇ ἔξω ῥοπῇ καὶ κατὰ **προβολήν** ἐνεργοῦσαν καὶ εἰς μερισμὸν προῖοῦσαν·

...at other times it somehow departs from itself in its inclination toward what is external to it, actualizing in accordance with its **projection** and proceeding into partedness; (Trans. Finamore and Dillon). Cf. Finamore and Dillon, 254.

(ii) Use of προβολή and προβάλλω in Ps.-Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle's De anima* 240.33-241.26 (= D in the Appendix to Finamore and Dillon): at 241.2-3 the soul is described as 'projecting secondary lives' (προβαλλομένη δευτέρας ζωᾶς) while at 241.16-17 the ascending soul is described as 'abandoning every external projection' (ἀφιεῖσα ... πᾶσαν τὴν ἔξω προβολήν) and at 241.22 the lower, secondary life of the soul is referred to as 'the projected life' (τὴν προβληθεῖσαν ζωὴν).

(iii) προβολή and προβάλλειν elsewhere in Iamblichus: *De anima*, §13 and §38 (with the comments of Finamore and Dillon, 185); *Reply to Porphyry (De mysteriis)* II.2.51.14-16 Saffrey-Segonds; *De communi mathematica scientia* 43.21 and 44.7-10; Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories* 374.28 and 375.6. Cf. Finamore, 1985, 13 and 28, n.9.

11. According to Aristotle, we pursue what appears to us as the good, τὸ φαινόμενον ἀγαθόν, i.e. the good as presented by our φαντασία. The wicked pursue the wrong end, having a mistaken view of the good. See Moss 2012 and *Nicomachean Ethics* III.4-5.

12. Iamblichus, *De anima* §39:

Πλωτῖνος δὲ καὶ οἱ πλεῖστοι τῶν Πλατωνικῶν ἀπόθεσιν τῶν παθῶν καὶ τῶν μορφωτικῶν διαγνώσεων ... τὴν τελεωτάτην κάθαρσιν ὑπολαμβάνουσιν.

Plotinus on the other hand, and most Platonists, consider the most perfect purification to be a divestment of the passions and of the knowledge that makes use of images. (Trans. Finamore and Dillon). On μορφωτικός cf. Finamore and Dillon, 188.

13. Iamblichus, *De communi mathematica scientia* 18.9-12:

ἐπ' ἐσχάτῳ δὲ ἐν τοῖς τετάρτοις καὶ πέμπτοις τοῖς συντιθεμένοις ἀπὸ τῶν στοιχείων τῶν τελευταίων κακίαν γενέσθαι οὐ προηγουμένως, ἐκ δὲ τοῦ ἐκπίπτειν καὶ μὴ κατακρατεῖν τινα τοῦ κατὰ φύσιν.

Evil arises at the fourth and fifth levels of reality, put together from the lowest elements and even then not primarily but as a result of falling away from and not being able to control their natural state. (Trans. Dillon and O'Meara).

Cf. Syrianus, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* 185.22-3 where both *παρυπόστασις* and *ἀποπτῶσις* ('falling away') are used in an account of the nature of evil, with the comments of Dillon and O'Meara, 210, n.482. Iamblichus may well be drawing on Speusippus here: see Dillon 1984 and 2003, 54-5.

14. Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories* 418.3-6:

τί οὖν αἴτιον φαίη τις τῆς τῶν θείων τούτων ἀνδρῶν τοιαύτης διατάξεως καὶ τοῦ μὴδὲ τὸν Ἰάμβλιχον ἐπιστῆσαι, τὸν πολλοὺς καὶ καλοὺς κατατείναντα λόγους πρὸς τὸ ἐν **παρυποστάσει** καὶ ἀποτυχίᾳ τὸ κακὸν οἶσθαι δεῖν;

What reason, therefore, can one give for such a disposition of these godlike men, and for the fact that not even Iamblichus objected to it, although he laid out many and excellent reasons with regard to the obligation to consider the bad [as consisting] in being **parasitic** and failure. (Trans. Gaskin in Sorabji, 101, modified).

15. Opsomer and Steel 26-7: the argument for regarding evil as a *παρυπόστασις* and so in a way uncaused which we find in Proclus, *De malorum subsistentia* 50 is based on Aristotle's distinction between causality *per se* and causality *per accidens*; cf. Sorabji 3-5 on Aristotle, *Metaph.* 6.3; ps-Alexander, *Mantissa* ch. 24; and Syrianus, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* 194.9-13.

16. Proclus, *De malorum subsistentia*.50.36-42:

... malum autem extrinsecus et superadventitium [ἐπεισοδιῶδες], inadeptio convenientis unicuique finis; inadeptio autem propter facientis debilitatem [ἀσθένειαν]; hoc autem quia naturam accepit talem, qua hoc quidem deterius, hoc autem melius, et hoc divisim ab invicem. Ubi enim le unum, simul et bonum; malum autem in natura divisa et non unum; incommensuratio enim et inarmonizatio et contrarietas in multitudine, ex hiis autem debilitas [ἀσθένεια] et le indigens.

... evil, coming from outside and being adventitious, consists in the non-attainment of that which is the appropriate goal of each thing. The non-attainment is due to the weakness of the agent, since the agent has received a nature of such a kind that a part of it is better, a part worse, each part being separate from the other. For where the One

is, there at the same time is the good. But evil is – and the One is not – present in a split nature. For incommensurability, disharmony and contrariety are in multitude; and from these weakness and indigence proceed. (Trans. Opsomer and Steel).

17. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* III.4.24-6:

ἄρα φατέον ἀπλῶς μὲν καὶ κατ' ἀλήθειαν βουλευτὸν εἶναι τἀγαθόν, ἐκάστῳ δὲ τὸ φαινόμενον; τῷ μὲν οὖν σπουδαίῳ τὸ κατ' ἀλήθειαν εἶναι, τῷ δὲ φαύλῳ τὸ τυχόν;

Are we to say that absolutely and in truth the good is the object of wish, but for each person the apparent good; that that which is an object of wish is an object of wish to the good man, while any chance thing may be so to the bad man? (Trans. Ross).

Aristotle goes on to insist in III.5 that both virtue and vice are voluntary and κατὰ προαίρεσιν (1113b3-5) but in the end is unable to decide just how we come by our individual perception of the good, our φαινόμενον ἀγαθόν (see especially *NE* 1114b13-21).

References:

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