"PLATONISM, MEDIEVAL"

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Routledge
Encyclopedia of
PHILOSOPHY

Vol. 7

pp. 431-39

London and New York 1998
PLATONISM, MEDIEVAL

Medieval Platonism includes the medieval biographical tradition, the transformation of the dialogue form, a general outlook spanning commitment to extramural ideas, intellectualism in cognition, emphasis on self-knowledge as the source of philosophizing, and employment of the dialogue form. Platonism permeated the philosophy of the Church Fathers, the writings of Anselm and Abelard, the twelfth-century renaissance, the Italian Renaissance and the northern renaissance. Indeed the mathematical treatment of nature, which inspired the birth of modern science in the works of Kepler and Galileo, stems in part from late medieval Pythagorean Platonism.

The term 'Platonism' is of seven-eleventh-century origin. Medieval authors spoke not of Platonism but rather of Plato and of Platonists (platonici), applying the term 'Platonist' to an extreme extramural realism about universals, or a commitment to the extramural existence of the ideas. Thus John of Salisbury characterized Bernard of Clairvaux as 'the foremost Platonist of our time' in regard to his theory of ideas. For Aquinas, Platonists hold an overly intellectualist account of human knowledge, ignoring the mediation of the senses. In general, medieval writers agreed with Cassiodorus' maxim, Plato theologus, Aristotelis logicus. Plato was primarily a theologian, an expert on the divine, eternal, immaterial and intelligible realm, a classifier of the orders of angelic and demonic beings, whereas Aristotle was primarily a logician and classifier of the forms of argument.

Medieval Platonism combines elements drawn from Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism. It generally assumes a dualistic opposition of the divine and temporal worlds, with the sensible world patterned on unchanging immaterial forms, often expressed as numbers. It also affirms the soul's immortality and direct knowledge of intelligible truths, combined with a suspicion of the mortal body and a distrust of the evidence of the senses. Neoplatonists sympathized with Porphyry's aim (in his lost De harmonia Platonis et Aristotelis) of harmonizing Plato with Aristotle. A Platonic outlook (largely inspired by the Timaeus) dominates the early Middle Ages from the sixth to twelfth centuries, whereas the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the age of scholasticism, witnessed an explosion in the knowledge of Aristotelian texts, often transmitted through Arabic intermediaries. The new interest in Aristotle was such that, although the Timaeus was widely lectured on during the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, by 1255 it was no longer required reading at the University of Paris. Interest in Plato re-emerged in the Italian Renaissance with the availability of genuine works of Plato, Plotinus and Proclus. Nevertheless, through Pseudo-Dionysius in particular, Platonism reverberates in many thirteenth-century authors, especially in theology.

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1 Platonism and Christianity

Platonism's medieval popularity is related to its overall religious outlook. The early Christian Fathers, especially CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, ORIGEN, Gregory of Nyssa, Basil, Ambrose and AUGUSTINE, regarded Platonism as closer to Christianity than other ancient pagan philosophies, and readily grasped it as the vehicle for articulating the Christian message (see PATRISTIC PHILOSOPHY). Plato was praised for anticipating Christianity by recognizing the existence of a unique, transcendent, benevolent deity who freely created the world. Plato also taught the doctrine of a created immortal, rational human soul, made in the image of God (Theaetetus 176b), and even prescribed a way of salvation. Plato was also an expert on the nature of the divine intelligences: ERIUGENA, for example, thought of Plato as one who taught the nature of the world soul and of angels (Periphyseon III.732d). Indeed some, such as Peter Abelard and JOHN OF SALISBURY, even discovered hints of the Trinity in Plato (Abelard, Theologia Christiana I.68; John of Salisbury, Polycraticus VII.5).

Augustine's Platonism was hugely influential on medieval philosophy, and Book VIII of his De civitate Dei (City of God) is a convenient source book of ancient philosophical ideas. Augustine portrays Platonism as a systematic philosophy focused on unity, truth and goodness. In his early De vera religione (On True Religion), Augustine claimed one need only change a few words to see how closely Plato resembled Christianity (De vera religione IV.7), and in De civitate Dei, Plato is portrayed as the philosopher closest to Christianity; for example, Plato had defined philosophy as the love of God (VIII.11). According to the Confessions, Augustine's conversion to Christianity had been influenced by his reading 'books of the Platonists' (libri platoniciorum), most likely Marius Victorinus' translations of Plotinus and Porphyry. These texts convinced Augustine that truth was incorporeal and that God was eternal, unchanging and the cause of all things, paralleling truths revealed in St Paul's epistles. Augustine was deeply influenced by the Christian Neoplatonism of Victorinus: Confessiones VII.11 reproduces Victo-
nus's doctrine of the various levels of reality (see Marius Victorinus). Also according to Augustine, Plato's understanding of God as true being mirrored the Biblical definition of God as 'I Am Who Am' (Exodus 3:14).

Among the most important Augustinian texts for medieval readers were the De genesi ad litteram (Literal Commentary on Genesis) and De doctrina Christiana (On Christian Doctrine) which provided the medieval world with a semiotics and scriptural hermeneutics, influencing Cassiodorus, Rhabanus Maurus, Hugh of St Victor, Peter Lombard, Bonaventure, Grosseteste and Erasmus. De doctrina Christiana offered a formidable scriptural justification for Christian appropriation of pagan thought: just as the Jews fleeing captivity had borne off the spoils of the Egyptians, so too the Christians could make use of the pagan heritage to teach morality and religion. The work reiterates Ambrose's claim that Plato's wisdom came directly from the Prophet Jeremiah. Augustine later recognized that Plato lived about a century after Jeremiah, but he continued to entertain the notion that Plato could have learned about the Bible from contact with holy men in Egypt, and medieval philosophers, including Abelard and Ficino, carried on this tradition. However, the Christian Fathers often suspected Plato because of his commitment to the soul's pre-existence and transmigration, his polytheism and his silence on the incarnation (interpreted as an innocent ignorance by Petrarch and Ficino).

Platonism persisted in theological discussions on the nature of the divinity. Neoplatonic writers from Eriugena to Nicholas of Cusa thought of God as both beyond being (superessentia) and yet the form of all created beings (forma omnium). Eriugena calls God the 'form of forms' (forma formarum), for Thierry of Chartres, God is 'the form of being' (forma essendi). Following the condemnations of Amaury of Bène and David of Dinant in 1210, neo-Aristotelian philosophers criticized these formulations as leading to pantheism. Thus Aquinas developed his distinction between the divine being and the individual being of each thing. However, both Meister Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa later reapplied the formula forma omnium to God.

Aside from theology and cosmology, Platonism was evident in medieval epistemology, ethics and social and political thought. The Platonist emphasis on certain knowledge over opinion, on intellectual knowledge as opposed to the unreliable offerings of the senses, entered into the Middle Ages through Augustine. The Platonic doctrine of recollection continued in the Augustinian form of illuminationism (for example, in Bonaventure), whereby the mind is said to know by being illuminated from within (either by a natural or a divine light or by a combination of both) (see Augustinianism). Plotinus' identification of evil with privation and non-being was repeated by Augustine and Aquinas. In the medieval period, Platonism in mathematics, the view that mathematical entities (such as numbers and classes) exist separately in their own right, took the form of a defence of the reality of universals as real things (res) against the nominalist position that universals were merely words (voces) (see Buridan, J.: Universals).

2 The sources of medieval Platonism

Until the fifteenth century, the only Platonic texts available in the Latin west were part of the Timaeus (17a-53b) and, from the mid-twelfth century, the Meno and Phaedo. Medieval Platonism was largely indirect, filtered through the writings of the Christian Fathers, especially Augustine. Gregory of Nyssa's Platonism influenced Eriugena. Aspects of Platonism (for example, the theory of ideas) were also transmitted through Latin writers including Cicero, Seneca, Martianus Capella, Aulus Gellius, Macrobius, Boethius, Cassiodorus and Isidore (see Encyclopedists, Medieval). Medieval discussions of Platonic ideas were based not on Platonic dialogues (for example, Aquinas shows no evidence of having read the Meno), but primarily on Augustine's discussion of ideas in his De diversis quaestionibus LXXXIII (On Eighty-Three Different Questions), Question 46, which itself drew on Cicero's Academics I.19. For Augustine, the Platonic Ideas (ideae) were really divine paradigms in the mind of God. Augustine distinguished the divine ideas from the logos or rationes of things, created forms which guaranteed the continuity of the species through time, a version of the Stoic seminal reasons discussed chiefly in his De genesi ad litteram. Similarly, medieval people learned of Platonic arguments for the immortality of the soul from Cicero's Tusculan Disputations.

The Timaeus was the only Platonic dialogue widely circulating through the whole medieval period, available in the fourth-century Latin translation of Calcidius. Cicero's earlier translation (De universo) was almost unknown in the early Middle Ages (although Augustine expressly cites it in De civitate Dei XIII.16). Also in wide circulation in the Middle Ages was Calcidius' extensive, eclectic Commentary on the Timaeus, mingling elements of Middle Platonism (inspired by Numerius) and Porphyrian Neoplatonism. It popularized a Middle Platonist view of Plato for the Middle Ages, in which the cosmos is constructed from three principles: God (deus), form (exemplum) and matter (silva). The first principle,
God is the Supreme Good, cause of all and end of all, beyond substance and nature and above all intellect. God is also characterized as free will and as providence. The second principle is matter, understood as neither sensible nor intelligible, lacking all form. The divine mind informs matter as soul vitifies body. The third principle is form, the intelligible world of the Ideas, understood as God's thoughts. The world soul, understood as made by God, is a kind of second mind. Calculidius was frequently glossed in the twelfth century in particular; of interest to medieval writers was his discussion of the four elements and his number speculation. Interest in numbers was justified by Scripture, and buttressed by Augustine in *De musica* and by Boethius' *De arithmetica*, and by other texts that communicated Pythagorean Platonism to the West (for example, Martianus Capella’s *De nuptiis Philologae et Mercurii* (The Marriage of Philoloy and Mercury)). Calculidius’ *Commentary* includes references to the argument in *Phaedrus* that the soul is self-moving, the comparison in *Theaetetus* of the mind with a wax tablet and the *Republic’s* comparison of the Form of the Good with the sun.

Macrobius’ *Commentarius in somnum Scipionis* (Commentary on the Dream of Scipio) was another influential source of Porphyrian Neoplatonism, especially important for twelfth-century philosophers such as William of Conches. Macrobius focuses on the final section of Cicero’s *On the Republic*, his version of Plato’s *Republic*, which is known as ‘Scipio’s Dream’ (*somnum Scipionis*). Here a dream is recounted which is reminiscent of the Myth of Er, providing an account of the destiny of human souls emphasizing the need to live a life of virtue and hold the body in contempt. Macrobius’ allegorical interpretation offers a typically Neoplatonic cosmology including the three hypotheses, One, Mind and Soul. The account of the world soul includes a discussion of the nature of the self-mover. Macrobius gives an account of the procession of the soul from God down through the Homeric ‘golden chain’ of beings (see Encyclopedists, Medieval §3). Martianus Capella’s fourth-century allegorical compendium of the Liberal Arts, the *De nuptiis Philologae et Mercurii*, also conveyed Platonic sentiments (see Encyclopedists, Medieval §4), as did Cassiodorus’ *Institutiones* (Institutions) and Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologica* (Etymologies) (see Encyclopedists, Medieval §§6–7). These works were influential from the ninth century to the twelfth century in particular.

The most influential work of Boethius was his *De consolatione philosophiae* (Consolation of Philosophy), which transmitted a Stoicized Platonism to the medieval world. This work presents the Platonic view that the soul can become forgetful of itself through immersion in the affairs of the body, but that it can recover its essential rational nature and attain to the vision of God. Several poems in the *De consolatione philosophiae* transmit in condensed form a Platonic cosmology, especially *III metrum 9, ‘O qui perpetuus mundum ratione gubernas* (You, who in perpetual order, govern the universe), which was widely commented on from the ninth century onwards (for example, by Remigius of Auxerre).

Also from the ninth century, medieval authors were exposed to another blend of Platonism deriving from Proclus and emphasizing the transcendence of the divine, to the extent that the divine is better described as non-being than as being. These Christian texts, purporting to be written by Dionysius, St Paul’s convert at Athens, and thus as ancient and authentic as the Gospels themselves, were in reality pious forgeries produced by a sixth-century Christian follower of Proclus, Pseudo-Dionysius’ *De divinis nominiibus* (The Divine Names) examines scriptural and philosophical appellations for the divine and argues that they all fail to fully express the nature of the highest being, who is nameless and beyond all names. Names are really processions from the divinity and do not reach the divinity itself. Negations, in fact, express the nature of the divine more accurately than affirmations. This theme is expressed even more radically in the *De mystica theologica* (Mystical Theology), which had enormous influence on the later medieval mystical tradition, transmitting to the Latin West the Platonism of the Parmenides in the form of negative theology. Pseudo-Dionysius had an enormous influence on Albert the Great, Aquinas, Bonaventure and Grosseteste among others, particularly through his concept of the self-diffusion of the good (*bonum diffusivum sui*), his principle that all things have being through being one, and his notion that the being of all things is the ‘above being’ of the divinity (*esse omnium est superesse divinitat*) (see Pseudo-Dionysius).

Both Boethius and Pseudo-Dionysius contributed to the development of medieval Platonism by continuing to emphasize the primacy, transcendence and unspakability of the one, good God. Pseudo-Dionysius, however, following Proclus, formalized the system of hierarchical levels postulated to exist between the divine One and the formless nothing, chiefly in two books: *De coelesti hierarchia* (The Celestial Hierarchy) and *De ecclesiastica hierarchia* (The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy). Influenced by Pseudo-Dionysius’ Procean formulations, medieval Platonists thought of reality as a series of ontological levels which proceed from the One right down to the nebulous realm of formless matter.

Johannes Scottus Erigena, an Irishman who...
resided at the Carolingian court, produced in the
nineteenth century the first synthesis of the Platonism of
Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius. Eriugena’s Platonism
is indirect, through Greek Christian Platonists,
Basil and Gregory of Nyssa as well as Pseudo-
Dionysius. Though aware of the theological differ-
ences between the Augustinian and Dionysian tradi-
tions, he regarded them as different expressions of the
one truth. Eriugena’s dialogue *Periphrseon* (On the
Division of Nature) developed a Neoplatonic cosmo-
logical system which synthesized Dionysian and
Augustinian Platonism. All things proceed from and
return to the One in an eternal cosmic cycle (*exitus-
reidus*), which is at the same time God’s self-
articulation. The spatio-temporal world which ap-
ppears solid and corporeal is really an incorporeal
world of qualities which emanates from the primor-
dial causes, which are eternal but created ideas in
the mind of God. Eriugena boldly identifies Augustine’s
primary causes with Pseudo-Dionysius’ divine will-
ings, thus synthesizing eastern and western interpreta-
tions of the Platonic ideas.

All things must return to their source, and the
divine ideas will be reunited in God. Human souls are
originally one with the One, but in their outgoing they
become shrouded in appearances, generating the
corporeal body. Each will also return to be one in
the Logos, though each soul will remain at the level
dictated by the level of its intellectual contemplation.
Eriugena follows Gregory of Nyssa in claiming that
corporeal body is merely an illusion produced by the
commingling of incorporeal qualities, and that the
division of the sexes is a consequence of the Fall. The
untorned matter from which God creates is really
God’s own hidden, transcendent nature. Although
Eriugena refers to the world soul (*Periphrseon* 1.476c),
drawing on Macrobius and Virgil, it does not play a
significant part in his system but perhaps is to be
identified with the Holy Spirit, as in later twelfth-
century Platonism.

3 Platonism in the debates about universals

The medieval debate over the ontological status of
universals (signified by general terms such as ‘animal’
or ‘man’) re-enacts the dispute between Plato and
Aristotle over the nature of forms. This problem
emerges in Porphyry’s *Isagoge* (Introduction) where,
introducing Aristotle’s *Categories*, he raises a number
of questions while commenting on Aristotle’s *De
interpretatione* (*Peri haremos* 1.1 3–18, includ-
ing whether universals had real existence or were only
creations in the mind; if they were real, whether they
were corporeal or incorporeal; and if incorporeal,
whether they existed apart from sensible things or
were contained in them (see *Porphyry*). **Boethius,**
in his commentaries on Porphyry, suggested an
answer to the question which attempted to reconcile
Plato with Aristotle. For Boethius, following Aristot-
le, a universal is by its nature predicable of many
things, and hence is not an individual and cannot be a
sensible substance. However, neither is it a merely
empty category since it is indeed the thought of
something. The species is the result of the mind’s
abstraction from what is given in the senses. The
universal is in itself immaterial, but it subsists in
material beings and does not exist apart from things,
as Plato thought (see *Universals*).

Medieval interpretations of Boethius led to the
dispute between nominalism (identified with Roscelin
of Compiegne) and realism (identified with William of
Champeaux and Bernard of Chartres). William of
Champeaux, a teacher at the Cathedral School of
Notre-Dame in Paris, known chiefly through his
student and critic Peter Abelard, was an extreme
realist. According to John of Salisbury, Bernard of
Chartres was also a Platonist about universals,
holding that aside from the ideas in God there were
created forms (*formae nativae*) that existed apart from
God and from the mind (Dutton 1991: 70–96).

According to Abelard, **William of Champeaux**
held the view that a universal exists in common in
each of the instances; thus man exists identically in
Socrates and in Plato. In order to be identical in each
instance, it must be identical in itself and to a thing
existing apart. Roscelin, on the other hand, main-
tained that universals were mere names, utterances,
‘vocal breath’ (*flatus vocis*) as Anselm termed them
(see Roscelin of Compiegne).

Peter Abelard, who had been taught by both
Roscelin and William, attempted to mediate between
these extremes, especially in his *Logica ingredientibus* (Logic for Beginners). Abelard, who regarded Plato as
the ‘greatest of philosophers’ (*maximus philosophorum*), held a modified Platonism about universals,
whereby the universals are held to be forms existing in
the mind of God (*conceptio Dei*). He ridiculed the
realist position that species were merely words,
but he was also critical of the view that species were
things. Species were predicateg of things, and only
words, not things, can be predicateg of things. The
problem is to decide what ontological status these
*predicamenta* (substantial categories) have. For Abe-
lard, a thing is always concrete and individual. When
several things, such as humans, share a common
type, what they share is ‘being human’ (*esse
hominem*). This is not itself a thing but neither is it
merely a name: it is a concept founded in the thing but
not existing in the same mode as the thing. Abelard’s
interest is in the meaning which is expressed by a
4 Twelfth-century Platonism

In the eleventh century, Platonism, mediated through Augustine’s works, is evident in Anselm, most notably in the *Monologion* and particularly in this work’s acceptance of the existence of the forms and the self-existent highest good. The twelfth century saw a Platonic renaissance, centred mainly in the cathedral schools of Chartres and St Victor (see Chartres, School of; Hugh of St Victor), and was characterized by cosmological speculation inspired by the *Timaeus*, combined with Boethius, Macrobius and Martianus Capella. The challenge was to produce a complete scientific picture in conformity with Genesis from the fragment of Plato’s natural philosophy which was known.

From Philo and the Middle Platonists onwards, the parallels between Plato’s cosmology in the *Timaeus* and the account of creation in Genesis provided the opportunity for Platonic commentators on the work of the six days (the *Hexaemera*). *Timaeus* 41c was interpreted as teaching that the world is created by the will of God who is ‘Father of all’. Abelard deduced from the *Timaeus* that God – the most perfect being – had created the most perfect world, a doctrine which was revived by Leibniz in the seventeenth century. For twelfth-century authors, Plato’s literary method of exposition was similar to Christian parable; Plato taught using fables and symbols (integra, or ‘coverings’) which the commentator must interpret.

Using Calcidius’ commentary on the *Timaeus* (see §2), twelfth-century Platonists developed an account of the world in terms of the four elements and in terms of complex number symbolisms. Among commentators on the *Timaeus*, perhaps the most Platonic were Bernard of Chartres, Thierry of Chartres and William of Conches. These writers stress the relation between macrocosm and microcosm, and harmony between the divine and created spheres. William of Conches, who probably taught at Chartres, is the most important of the twelfth-century Platonists, and his *Timaeus* commentary is the most extensive medieval commentary on that dialogue. For William, the *Timaeus* is a unified theological work displaying the beneficence of the creator. He also commented on Boethius’ *De consolatione philosophiae* and on Macrobius, as well as composing two systematic works, *Philosophia mundi* and a revised version entitled the *Dragmaicon*, set in the form of a dialogue between the Duke of Normandy and the Philosopher. Many Pythagorean elements and much number symbolism was associated with the articulation of cosmology in the twelfth century. Thierry of Chartres in his *De sex diemur* (Concerning the Works of the Six Days) sees creation as an articulation of unity into plurality, following the suggestion of Calcidius.

William, also following Calcidius, sees the *Timaeus* as a work of natural justice showing how God creates and governs the world. God has established an unvarying natural law which is discoverable at the heart of things. For him, God creates the intellectual realm and allows other causes (such as stars) to govern the lower world, thus proposing a doctrine of mediated creation at variance with Augustine’s single-act view (see Natural Philosophy, Medieval). The Chartres school followed Bernard of Chartres in positing a level of created forms between God and sensible reality, influenced by Eriugena’s primordial causes and Augustine’s seminal reasons (see §2). Seeking to reconcile Plato and Aristotle, as John of Salisbury reports. Bernard of Chartres posited intermediaries between God and created things. These native forms (*formae native*) link the eternal archetypes to passive matter (*hyle*) (see Chartres, School of).

William’s account of creation discusses the role of the four elements in detail. Like others (for example, Adelard of Bath), William saw himself as expanding on the teaching of Plato: ‘It is not my intention to expound here the words of Plato, but to set down here the view of natural scientists [physici] concerning substances; but even if I have not expounded Plato’s words, I have said all that he said about elements, and more’ (*Dragmaicon*, quoted in Dronke 1988: 309). He attempts to define the elements and addresses the question as to whether they are perceptible by the senses and corporeal and whether the division of matter ends with these indivisibles (atoms). William takes the view that the four elements are corporeal, unchanging substances which, however, are only found in combination. The elements then are corporeal but are actually grasped by intellect since they are too small to be perceived by the senses on their own. Though they are unchanged, they are created. God first made the four elements from nothing and then everything else out of the four elements, except the soul of man, which God made directly.

A major challenge to Christianizing Plato’s cosmology was to interpret the role played by the Platonic Demiurge (see Plato §16). Christian Platonists were initially quick to identify the Demiurge with the Logos, the Second Person of the Trinity. This allowed them to make a further identification between the Holy Spirit and the world soul (*anima mundi*).
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which in the Timaeus enlivens the material cosmos. William of Conches initially, in his commentary on Macrobius, quite boldly identified the world soul of the Timaeus with the Holy Spirit, as Abelard was alleged to have done. The Council of Sens had condemned the identification, attributing it to Abelard. William then appears to have grown more cautious, simply offering a number of different views in his Philosophia Book One (the world soul is the Holy Spirit, or a natural force implanted in things by God, or a certain incorporeal substance in bodied and making no reference to the world soul in his

Bernard Silvestris, in his partly versified, allegorical account of the creation, the Cosmographia, makes use of many Platonic ideas from the Timaeus, including that of a world soul personified as Enkelidēs (who also appears in Martianus Capella and Cicero), but in a manner quite different from William of Conches. Bernard has a world of ideas (Noys) and a domain of unformed matter (personified as Silva - Calculidius' term for 'matter'). Gradually Noys imposes order on Silva until the whole world has been made. The sensible world imitates the intelligible, man is a microcosm of the macrocosm. Bernard also saw Plato as beginning with two principles: unitas et diversum, unity and diversity (see BERNARD OF TOURS). William of Conches explicitly connects Plato with Pythagoras, and argues that since number possesses the highest perfection, nothing can exist without number. Another Platonic cosmology in versified form was Alan of Lille's De planctu naturae (The Lament of Nature), a dialogue between the poet and Nature, which was influenced by Bernard Silvestris.

5 Platonism in the thirteenth century

Thirteenth-century knowledge of Plato drew on the usual sources in Augustine and Latin writers, but also gained new insights into Plato from criticisms contained in the rediscovered works of Aristotle and his Arabic commentators, especially Averroes (see IAN RUSHD). Rather stiff literal translations of the Meno and Phaedo were produced by Henricus Aristippus in the 1150s; although listed in the library of the Sorbonne after 1271, these texts were not much studied and had little influence. Similarly, William of Moerbeke's translation of part of the Parmenides with Proclus' commentary also had little influence until popularized by Nicholas of Cusa. Moerbeke also translated Proclus' Elements of Theology which was available to Thomas Aquinas. Moerbeke's follower, the Flemish encyclopedist Henry Bate, was one of the first to be able to discern the difference between Plato's own texts and the later Platonism of Proclus.

In general, however, Platonism in the thirteenth century survived mainly in the universities' theology faculties, as the arts faculty syllabuses were gradually reorganized to accommodate the new Aristotelianism.

One of the most influential texts for thirteenth-century philosophers was the Sentences of Peter Lombard. Lombard stated that Plato had three principles to explain the cosmos: matter, forms and the divine artificer, whereas Aristotle had only two: matter and species. This passage was regularly commented on to clarify whether Plato and Aristotle accepted the doctrine of creation, and whether they thought that creation was compatible with the beginninglessness of the world (as Aquinas held). In his commentary on the Sentences, ALBERT THE GREAT acknowledged that Plato had posited a world of forms that existed independently of the mind of God. Albert's outlook was strongly influenced by Neoplatonism and no doubt helped to shape the Platonism in the thought of his student, Thomas Aquinas.

Though Aquinas is the great exponent of the new Aristotelianism, adopting Aristotle's criticisms of the univocal understanding of the good in Plato and other criticisms of the existence of the Ideas, yet he remains quite Platonic in other domains, for example, in his account of participation (how created things participate in being and receive the gift of esse from the divine being) which was strongly influenced by Pseudo-Dionysius. Aquinas sides with Aristotle against Platonism, which he sees as a doctrine that overstressed the mind's intellectual capacities, claiming that humans could know immaterial forms directly without mediation of the senses. In Summa contra gentiles 1.13.10, in his discussion of the argument for the existence of God from motion, Aquinas explicitly discusses the difference between the Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions of the nature of motion, drawing on Phaedrus 245c. His source, however, is not directly Plato but more probably the tradition stemming from Calcidius and Macrobius.

Robert Grosseteste translated and commented on Pseudo-Dionysius' His De luce (On Light) offers a typically Neoplatonic cosmology and metaphysics of light. Grosseteste's account of the soul weds Aristotelian naturalism with a Neoplatonic account of the higher principles of intellect and reason.

Platonism in the thirteenth century is often associated with members of the Franciscan order and with a mathematical approach to the understanding of nature. RICHARD RUFUS OF CORNWALL defended Plato's theory of ideas against Aristotle's criticisms, and Bonaventure's Itinerarium mentis in Deum (Journey of the Mind to God) is thoroughly Platonic (see BONAVENTURE). Bonaventure accepted a form of Aquinized version of Neoplatonism. For a Buddhist perspective, see STAFFORD SANDERS.

See also: ARISTOTELIANISM, NEOPATONISM.
a form of Augustinian illuminationism, a Christianized version of Platonic recollection (see Augustinianism). For Bonaventure, sensible things are traces of divine things. In typically Platonic terms, Bonaventure's sixth step in the mind's advancement towards God refers to the Good beyond being.

The later thirteenth century saw a re-emergence of an Averroist Platonism, particularly with regard to the knowledge of separate substances. Siger of Brabant, for example, took a more Platonic line than Aquinas had done in arguing for the soul's direct knowledge of separate intelligible substances. Henry of Ghent's doctrine of the separate being of essences (esse essentiae) was also considered Platonist (see Henry of Ghent). Meister Eckhart held Neoplatonic, Proclean-inspired theories of the nature of the soul, and his affirmation of an uncreated part of the soul parallels the doctrine of the undescended part of the soul in pagan Neoplatonism (see Neoplatonism). The German Dominican writers Dietrich of Freiberg and Berthold of Moosburg are more openly favourable to Plato and Proclus, with Berthold writing a commentary on Proclus' Elements of Theology.

Nicholas of Cusa appears to have introduced William of Moerbeke's Latin translation of the Parmenides to a medieval audience, and he was also familiar with Proclus' Commentary on the Parmenides. Nicholas developed a strongly Neoplatonic account of the nature of the divine being who so transcends and reconciles all opposites as to be called the 'coincidence of opposites' (coincidencia oppositorum), echoing Eriugena's view of God as 'the opposite of opposites' (opposito oppositius). Drawing on the twelfth-century hermetic text The Book of the Twenty-Four Philosophers, Nicholas represents God as an infinite sphere whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere. Elsewhere, for example in De R non aliud (On the Not-Other), he develops the immanence and transcandence of God. In De docta ignorantia (On Learned Ignorance), Nicholas expresses the Platonic view that forms or notions exist separately from the things of which they are the forms, rejecting Aristotle's criticisms as shallow misunderstandings. Here Nicholas follows Eriugena and Thierry of Chartres in calling God 'form of all' (forma omnium), 'form of being' (forma essendi) and 'form of forms' (forma formarum). For Nicholas, all forms exist as one in God but 'contractedly' in created things.

See also: Aristotelianism, medieval; Averroism; Chartres, School of; Gilbert of Poitiers; Grosseteste, R.: Medieval philosophy; Neoplatonism; Platonism in Islamic philosophy; Platonism, Early and Middle; Platonism, Renaissance; Pseudo-Dionysius

References and further reading


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PLATONISM, MEDIEVAL

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PLATONISM, RENAISSANCE

Though it never successfully challenged the dominance of Aristotelian school philosophy, the revival of Plato and Platonism was an important phenomenon in the philosophical life of the Renaissance and contributed much to the new, more pluralistic philosophical climate of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Medieval philosophers had had access only to a few works by Plato himself, and, while the indirect influence of the Platonic tradition was pervasive, few if any Western medieval philosophers identified themselves as Platonists. In the Renaissance, by contrast, Western thinkers had access to the complete corpus of Plato’s works as well as to the works of Plutarch and many late ancient Platonists; there was also a small but influential group of thinkers who identified themselves as Christian Platonists. In the fifteenth century, the most important of these were to be found in the circles of Cardinal Bessarion (1403–72) in Rome and of Marsilio Ficino (1433–99) in Florence. Platonic themes were also central to the philosophies of Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64) and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–94), the two most powerful and original thinkers of the Quattrocento. While the dominant interpretation of the Platonic dialogues throughout the Renaissance remained Neoplatonic, there was also a minority tradition that revised the sceptical interpretation of the dialogues that had been characteristic of the early Hellenistic Academy.

In the sixteenth century Platonism became a kind of ‘countercultural’ phenomenon, and Plato came to be an important authority for scientists and cosmologists who wished to challenge the Aristotelian mainstream: men like Copernicus, Giordano Bruno, Francesco Patrizi and Galileo. Nevertheless, the Platonic dialogues were rarely taught in the humanistic schools and in universities of late Renaissance Europe.

1 The revival of Plato
2 Renaissance anti-Platonism
3 Cardinal Bessarion and the Roman academy
4 The Platonism of the Florentine school
5 Plato in humanist schools and in universities
6 Plato and the new cosmologies

DERMOT MORAN