

THE
NO-PLATONIST

WHITTAKER

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THE NEO-PLATONISTS:

A STUDY IN
THE HISTORY OF HELLENISM.

BY

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set forth the doctrine of his school was due, however, as his contemporaries recognised, to the insight with which he penetrated to his master's essential thought and to his lucidity in expounding it. Some illustration of this may be furnished from the *Sententiae*. Then, as an example of his more personal work, an exposition may be given of the *De Abstemtina*. The treatise has, besides, a more general interest in the specimens it offers of the ethical questions raised and discussed in later antiquity, not in a spirit of scholastic casuistry but with a genuine desire for their solution in the light of reflective conscience.

Preoccupation with ethics may be noticed in the *Sententiae*, which contain a more systematic classification of the virtues than Plotinus had explicitly given. Porphyry classifies them into Political, Cathartic, Theoretic and Paradigmatic. The virtues of the first class set the soul free from excess of passionate attachment to the body, and produce moderation; those of the second class liberate it altogether from this attachment, so that it can now turn to its true good. The third class comprises the virtues of the soul energising intellectually; the fourth, those that are in intellect itself, to which the soul looks up as patterns. Our care must be chiefly about the virtues of the second class, seeing that they are to be acquired in this life. Through them is the ascent to the contemplative virtues of soul and to those that are their models in pure intellect. The condition of purification is self-knowledge¹.

When the soul knows itself, it knows itself as other than the corporeal nature to which it is bound. The error to which we are especially liable is ascription of the properties of body to incorporeal being. The body of the world is everywhere spatially, its parts being spread out so that they can be discriminated by the intervals between them. To God, Mind and Soul, local situation does not apply. One part of intelligible being is not here and another there. Where it is, it is as a whole. The union of an incorporeal nature with a body is

¹ *Sententiae*, 34.

altogether peculiar¹. It is present indivisibly, and as numerically one, to the multitude of parts, each and all. What appears to be added—as locality or relation—in departing from incorporeal being, is really taken away. Not to know being and not to know oneself, have the same source, namely, an addition of what is not, constituting a diminution of being which is all,—and which, except in appearance, cannot be diminished. Recovery of yourself by knowledge is recovery of being which was never absent,—which is as inseparable from you in essence as you are from yourself².

This is of course the doctrine of Plotinus taken at its centre. With equal exactitude Porphyry reproduces his conception of being as differentiated intrinsically and not by participation in anything external³. Plurality of souls is prior to plurality of bodies, and is not incompatible with the continued unity of all souls in one. They exist without diremption, yet unconfused, like the many parts of knowledge in a single soul⁴. Time accompanies the cognitive process in soul, as eternity accompanies the timeless cognition of intellect. In such process, however, the earlier thought does not go out to give place to the later. It appears to have gone out, but it

¹ *Sententiae*, 35: οὐτε οὖν κρᾶσις, ἢ μίξις, ἢ σύνοδος, ἢ παράθεσις· ἀλλ' ἕτερος τρόπος. Cf. 6: οὐ τὸ ποιοῦν εἰς ἄλλο πελάσει καὶ ἀφή ποιεῖ ἃ ποιεῖ· ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ πελάσει καὶ ἀφή τι ποιοῦντα, κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς τῇ πελάσει χρῆται. On this Ritter and Preller remark (524 a), "Favet theurgicis hoc placitum." Here is a good illustration of the readiness which historians have often displayed to see the "theurgical" in preference to the scientific side of the Neo-Platonists. Whether by itself or taken along with the context, what the passage suggests is a kind of Occasionalist phenomenon. All changes, even in bodies, have their true cause in immaterial being. Material approach or contact is not an efficient cause, but accompanies as its "accident" the real order of metaphysical causation.

² *Sententiae*, 41: ὁ δὲ οὕτω σου ἐστὶν ἀναπόσπαστον κατ' οὐσίαν, ὡς οὐ σαυτοῦ.

³ *Sententiae*, 38: οὐ γὰρ ἐξωθεν ἐπίκτητος, οὐδὲ ἐπεισοδιώδης αὐτοῦ ἡ ἑτερότης, οὐδὲ ἄλλου μεθέξει, ἀλλ' ἐαυτῷ πολλά.

⁴ *Sententiae*, 39: διέστησαν γὰρ, οὐκ ἀποκοπέισαι, οὐδὲ ἀποκερματίσασαι εἰς ἐαυτὰς τὴν ὅλην· καὶ πάρεισιν ἀλλήλαις, οὐ συγκεχυμένα, οὐδὲ σωρὸν ποιούσαι τὴν ὅλην·... ὥσπερ οὐδὲ αἱ ἐπιστήμαι συνεχύθησαν αἱ πολλαὶ ἐν ψυχῇ μᾶ... καὶ αἱ πάσαι, μία· καὶ πάλιν ἡ ὅλη ἀλλῆ παρὰ πάσας.