

## **Call for abstracts for the 2019 ISNS Conference in Ottawa**

### **Number, Cosmogony, and Ontology in Plato, Presocratic Thought, and Ancient Near Eastern and Greek Myth: Origins, Relations, and Significance**

Donna M. Altimari Adler <[donnaaltimari@comcast.net](mailto:donnaaltimari@comcast.net)>.

This panel explores number as a feature or instrument of cosmogenesis, as a divider of being, as an index to the dynamism of being, or as an ontological index to patterns of being in ancient Near Eastern and Greek creation myths and theogonies; in Presocratic thought, as, for example, in Pythagoras and Philolaus; in Plato's writings (including but not limited to the *Parmenides*, *Republic*, *Timaeus*, *Laws*), and in the later Platonic tradition (Plato as assimilated in Neoplatonic, Christian, Jewish, and Islamic thought), especially as it interpreted the *Parmenides* and *Timaeus*. It explores, inter alia, whether and how number was thought to mediate the descent of the Many from the One, in various accounts, and to bridge the gap between spiritual and material realities. Papers clarify the conceptions of number implied in the sources that they study, and help to elucidate the origins and foundations of the connection between number and cosmogony and number and ontology in Western tradition.

### **Cosmological Perspectives on Platonist Cosmic Ascent**

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The philosophic ascent is a key theme in Plato, and was taken up enthusiastically by Platonism as a central *topos* both of the theory of philosophy and of philosophical practice. Much work has been done on this *topos* in Platonism, most of it concentrating either on the course of the ascent itself or on the metaphysics taken to be involved in the ascent. This panel will emphasize the relations between the embodied soul and the materialised cosmos in which it finds itself, and from which it intends to escape by moving upward to the immaterial levels of reality.

Papers are welcome on any of the following topics (and this list is by no means exhaustive), and with regard to any antique Platonist or Platonists:

- What role does matter play in cosmic ascent? How is the philosopher to overcome or otherwise use matter in achieving his goals?
- What role does the celestial cosmos play? To what degree can a philosopher sidestep the cosmic spheres in the ascent (as perhaps Plotinus), and to what degree are they a barrier or a terrain to be navigated (as perhaps Iamblichus)?
- How are we to interpret the different bodies or quasi-bodies which the late antique Platonists attributed to the soul's descent through the stars (e.g. pneumatic, ætheric, the *ochêma*), and what role do they play in the ascent? Is a phenomenological account of embodiment possible with regard to these constructs?
- How do time, fate, and other cosmic (as opposed to hypercosmic) forces affect the philosopher in his attempts to ascend beyond the cosmos?
- What role does ritual play in the ascent, vis à vis the cosmos and its physical properties?
- What role do the cosmic daimones play in hindering or furthering cosmic ascent?

### **Light and Tradition**

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The theme of Light is present from early on in the Greek tradition of philosophy from Plato (for example *Republic*) to Aristotle (Light as Active Intellect in *De Anima*) to Plotinus (*Ennead* Four, Book Five) and to Iamblichus. On the other hand the discourse of Light is also prominent in the writings of Byzantine theologians, in Islamic philosophy and Sufism, as well as in European scholastic theology up through the early Enlightenment (Spinoza) and to the contemporary French metaphysician Gilles Deleuze. Taking the lead from Deleuze's description of Neoplatonic developments on Light as a foreign element inside the

Greek tradition, this panel welcomes presentations on how the discourse of Light has brought new directions, heterogeneous aspects and at times even heterodox formations within a given intellectual tradition. Authors might also explore how philosophy and other intellectual discourses in Western or non-Western traditions can relate to, echo or dialogue with each other via the figure, dynamism, or analytics of Light within and beyond their proper historical space.

### **Divine Power and Presence in Later Platonism: Theurgy, Ritual, Epistemology, Aesthetics, and Metaphysics**

Robert Berchman <[berchmanrob@earthlink.net](mailto:berchmanrob@earthlink.net)>

It is well-known that for later Platonists, 'becoming like a god' was considered the central goal of philosophy, following Plato's *Theaetetus* 176b-c. This panel invites papers which consider the ways in which divine power and presence were conceived and conceptualised within Neoplatonism and Early Christianity in relation to first philosophy, theurgy, contemplation, contemplative prayer and ritual practices - but also in relation to metaphysics, ethics, ontology, epistemology, theology and cosmology. How was divine identity, divine assimilation or divinization conceived by Neoplatonic philosophers, such as Origen, Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus and Proclus? How were divine power and presence connected with metaphysical, ethical and ontological principles and notions within a variety of later Platonisms? What relation was postulated between first principles, divine power or presence and cognitive states, rationality and epistemology? Can we study first principles, divination and theurgy within the context of the history of the philosophy of mind and language? From this perspective, is it possible and productive to focus on the non-propositional and non-discursive languages often employed by Neoplatonists and Christians for the purpose of effecting union with the divine? Is it useful to focus on the aesthetic dimensions of later Platonic contemplative prayer, ritual and theurgic practices? What is the significance and the possible implications of the doctrine of the henads, as seen in Proclus (and possibly also in Iamblichus' philosophy)? This panel invites papers that consider any of these issues or other topics relating to divine power and presence. Papers on the reception of later Platonic conceptions of the divine, ritual texts and ideas within later historical, philosophical and cultural contexts are also encouraged, as are papers that utilise interdisciplinary approaches and cross-cultural perspectives

### **Platonism and Modern Physics**

Alexey Burov <[burov@fnal.gov](mailto:burov@fnal.gov)>

The importance of Physics in the contemporary world is obvious and difficult to overestimate. Obscure, however, even to scientists, philosophers, and historians, are the roots of Physics in ontological, epistemological, ethical and soteriological concerns. Contemporary Physics developed through millennia from a complex philosophical base involving such issues but has forgotten its origins, although those origins continue to have great relevance for the future of Physics. The poor understanding and appreciation of that relevance is the key motivation for this panel. Papers exploring the bond between the development of the discipline of Physics from key ontological, epistemological, ethical, and soteriological ideas in Plato's works and Platonic tradition, as well as papers that can speak to the continuing relevance of such ideas to the future of Physics are welcome on this panel.

### **The Realm of the One**

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This panel explores the realm of the One in Platonist thought. We encourage papers discussing modes of thinking about the One (including negative theology), discussions on the henadic realm, the relationship between the One and Intellect, or the One and creation, as well as the concepts of the Unified, Limitedness and Unlimitedness in later Platonist

thought, among other topics. We also encourage papers that examine ways that Christian Platonists or Platonists in other traditions integrate aspects of the realm of the One into their religious frameworks.

### **Protection (*boētheia*)**

Leo Catana <catana@hum.ku.dk>

In ancient Greek, the term *boētheia* (meaning 'protection', 'help', 'assistance', 'care', 'advantage', etc.) was used in a variety of contexts. It was used in a medical context, for instance when a doctor treated a patient effectively. It was used in a forensic context, e.g. when a litigant in a court room sought protection by appealing to witnesses and jurors. It was used in the context of interstate relations, when one *polis* established an alliance with another *polis* in order to form a military defence. It was used in religious contexts, when humans appealed to the gods in order to achieve their assistance. In classical Greek, the term *boētheia* was thus well-established in popular discourse.

Philosophers like Plato and Aristotle used the term as a point of departure for reflections on the proper meaning and value of *boētheia* in ethical and political theories. For instance, in Plato's *Gorgias* we find Callicles and Socrates defending two opposed understandings of *boētheia*: Callicles argues that it should be used in a strict forensic and egoistic meaning (protection of self-interest at law courts); Socrates argues that it should be used in a different but still ethical meaning, namely about the protection of one's integrity. Aristotle too picked up on this notion (e.g. *Eudemian Ethics* 1229a), and so did a variety of other philosophers in the later tradition, including Plotinus (e.g. IV.8.2.14, VI.7.41.1, III.2.15.8). Although the term has a wide and frequent occurrence in ancient and late ancient thought, it has not yet been studied extensively (for the few existing studies, see below). For instance, it is not covered in Dover's otherwise comprehensive book, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (1974). More recently, Matthew Christ has discussed altruism in classical Athens in several publications, though mainly outside philosophy. This means that new insights are to be gained by tracing the uses of the notion of protection in ancient and late ancient philosophical traditions. The panel welcomes papers that examine and discuss philosophical uses of *boētheia* in these traditions.

### **Soul, Intellect, and Afterlife**

John F. Finamore <[john-finamore@uiowa.edu](mailto:john-finamore@uiowa.edu)> and Ilaria Ramelli <[i.i.e.ramelli@durham.ac.uk](mailto:i.i.e.ramelli@durham.ac.uk)>

Plato established the nature and function of the human soul in his dialogues. Later Platonists adopted and adapted his doctrines. This panel explores the ways that Platonists conceived the human soul as an Intelligible being housed in an earthly body, how they articulated the means of its salvation, and the manner in which they imagined its afterlife once freed from the body.

### **Evil in the Platonic and Neoplatonic Traditions**

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Plato is not typically credited with developing a systematic, philosophical account of evil. That being said, Plotinus and Proclus did come to formulate more robust theories of evil that can be viewed as opposed to one another, and yet, both claim to ground their answers in the works of Plato. In *Ennead* I.8, Plotinus explicitly identifies matter as a principal source of evil and as a deceptive power luring the embodied soul towards evil deeds. At the same time, he seems to hold that matter ultimately emanates from the One, as does everything else. Proclus criticizes Plotinus for precisely this reason, arguing that Plotinus' theory must either assert that matter is ungenerated or that the One is responsible for evil. Both options are impermissible for Proclus. Instead, Proclus views evil as parasitic, something that feeds on the being of its host, rather than as merely privative. This poses the questions: what kind of theory/theories of evil is attributable to Plato and how do various Neoplatonic

thinkers, such as Proclus and Plotinus, differ in their readings of Plato in order to formulate approaches to evil? We therefore welcome papers addressing any theory, question, text, or problem relating to evil in the Platonic and Neoplatonic traditions. Of special interest are papers specifically addressing the approaches of Plotinus and Proclus respectively, as well as their approaches in comparison with one another and in view of their Platonic textual background.

### **Readings and Receptions of the *Timaeus***

Marilynn Lawrence <[pronoia12@gmail.com](mailto:pronoia12@gmail.com)>

Plato's *Timaeus*, a comprehensive cosmology that he called a 'likely story' (eikô̄s muthos, 29d), is considered one of his most influential dialogues in late antiquity, and one of the two 'perfect' dialogues of the Neoplatonic curriculum (the other being *Parmenides*). While the logic and physics of Aristotle were preparatory for the metaphysical works of Plato, the *Timaeus* was the key source for cosmology, physics and theories of the natural world for Hellenistic and late antiquity Platonists and Hermeticists, as well as the impetus for the Gnostic's response. Direct commentaries on the *Timaeus* by Plutarch, Calcidius and Proclus survive, but the impact of the *Timaeus* is evident in the surviving writings of all middle Platonists and Neoplatonists.

This panel is an invitation to present research on any aspect of the *Timaeus* and how it was interpreted by later thinkers as they weighed it against the ideas of Aristotle, Stoics and others. Papers on interpretations and receptions of the *Timaeus* in the Renaissance and later periods are also welcome, as are those on the influences it has had in contemporary philosophy, psychoanalysis, and theology (especially the concept of the *chôra*).

### **Neoplatonism in Comparative Light: Eschatological Issues**

Deepa Majumdar <[dmajumda@pnw.edu](mailto:dmajumda@pnw.edu)>

In this panel we welcome papers that compare eschatological issues in Neoplatonism with those in other traditions. Such issues, which include the doctrine of reincarnation, cosmic laws of distributive justice, and the nature of the afterlife, bear a profound interconnection with one another. They inspire metaphysical questions – but also ethical questions that come with political implications. Thus political correctness and identity politics change significantly once we infuse the implications of the doctrine of reincarnation into our political analyses. We welcome papers that connect eschatological issues with one another and to the larger metaphysical and theological paradigms they fall under.

### **Alterity in Neoplatonism: Christian and non-Christian**

Seamus O'Neill <[sjoneill@mun.ca](mailto:sjoneill@mun.ca)> and Hans Feichtinger <[hansfeichtinger@gmail.com](mailto:hansfeichtinger@gmail.com)>

In *Ennead* 5.1.6, Plotinus says that the soul longs to answer the question of, "how from the One, if it is such as we say it is, anything else, whether a multiplicity or a dyad or a number, came into existence, and why it did not on the contrary remain by itself, but such a great multiplicity flowed from it as that which is seen to exist in beings, but which we think it right to refer back to the One." Given that the Neoplatonic first principle is absolutely transcendent, without attributes, and unable to be expressed in words, one of the foundational tasks of Neoplatonic thought is explaining how anything comes forth from the One. How can we understand the generation of the levels of increased multiplicity in the cosmos to derive from one principle rather than two or more? To ask it another way, how does alterity first appear in the cosmos?

This panel welcomes contributions on the topic of alterity in Neoplatonic thought, both Christian and non-Christian. Topics might include the self-othering of the first principle in its production of all things; emanation in Neoplatonism; comparisons and distinctions between the Neoplatonic hypostases and the Christian Trinity; the logical and metaphysical priority of the One to all that is other than it; the individual soul's distinction and relation to primary hypostases; how the One both transcends and is yet a component of the Neoplatonic

hierarchy; the origins and nature of matter in its distinction from the Principle; among other related topics. Papers on any Neoplatonic figures, both Christian and non-Christian, on related topics are welcome.

### **Platonism as Systematic Metaphysics**

Eric Perl <eperl@lmu.edu>

This panel invites papers on the Platonic tradition, from classical antiquity up to and including its reception into medieval and early modern thought, that address any version of Platonism, not primarily from the standpoint of religious studies, classical studies, or history of ideas, but as a system of philosophical metaphysics, that is, as a rational account of the nature of reality grounded in philosophic reflection and argumentation. Possible topic areas include, for example: the nature of matter; the relation of the sensible to the intelligible; the structure of intelligible reality; issues in the theory or theories of forms; the relation between being and intellect; the triad of being-life-intellect; limit and unlimited; participation; procession and reversion; the derivation of all things from the first principle; the first principle itself. This list is intended to be illustrative and by no means exhaustive.

### **Arab Platonisms: al-Kindi, Suhrawardi, Ibn Arabi, the Brethren of Purity, and al-Hakim**

Sara Rappe <rappe@umich.edu>

This panel warmly invites scholars working on forms of Arab Platonism, from the Abbasid Caliphate to modern times. Possible topics also include the work of moderns such as Strauss and Guenon or communities such as the Druze. The panel welcomes abstracts on translations, the reception of specific dialogues, questions of lineage, political interpretations, and topics in law, theology, eschatology, etc.

### **Neoplatonic Interpretation for the Immortality of the Soul: Damascius, Olympiodorus and Beyond**

José María Zamora Calvo <[jm.zamora@uam.es](mailto:jm.zamora@uam.es)>

This panel will focus on the philosophical doctrines of Neoplatonists concerning the immortality of the soul, paying special attention not only to the School of Athens, but also to the doctrines which, deriving from those of Athens, were relevant in Alexandria. The three preserved Neoplatonic commentaries on Plato's *Phaedo* -- attributed to Damascius (462-555) and Olympiodorus (495-565) -- offer us the most extensive treatment of such themes, but there are plenty of clues elsewhere. These texts contain valuable data not only to address the ancient interpretations of this dialogue, but also to access certain points of Late Neoplatonic doctrine of which we have no other traces but these commentaries, such as life as preparation for death, justified suicide, the argument 'from similarity', the argument 'from opposites', the refutation of the theory of the soul as 'harmonia', reminiscence, or mythical geography. I propose to focus on those three commentaries and the later tradition.