
A Platonic Pythagoras: Platonism and Pythagoreanism in the Imperial Age edited by Mauro Bonazzi, Carlos Lévy, and Carlos Steel

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This volume collects the papers presented at a colloquium of the same title held at Gargagno on Lake Garda in April 2005, and becomes now the second in a new series of publications of colloquia in ancient philosophy, *Diatribai*, edited by the above distinguished trio. It is as such warmly to be welcomed. There are nine papers, ranging chronologically from Philo of Alexandria to Proclus, and having as an overall theme the various modes of appropriation of ‘Pythagorean’ themes in the Platonism of the Imperial period.

The papers are as follows:

- Carlos Lévy, ‘*La question de la dyade chez Philon d’Alexandrie*’
Francesca Calabi, ‘*Filone di Alessandria e Ecfanto. Un confronto possibile*’
Daniel Babut, ‘*L’unité de l’Académie selon Plutarque. Notes en marge d’un débat ancien et toujours actuel*’
Pierluigi Donini, ‘*Tra Academia e pitagorismo. Il platonismo nel De genio Socratis di Plutarco*’
Christoph Helmig, ‘The Relationship between Forms and Numbers in Nicomachus’ *Introduction to Arithmetic*’
Dominic O’Meara, ‘Hearing the Harmony of the Spheres in Late Antiquity’
Elena Gritti, ‘*Insegnamento pitagorico e metodo dialettico in Proclo*’
Alessandro Linguiti, ‘*Prospettiva pitagorica e prospettiva platonica nella filosofia della natura di Proclo*’
Carlos Steel, ‘Proclus on Divine Figures: An Essay on Pythagorean-Platonic Theology’.

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The volume is completed with an *index locorum* but not, sadly, of subjects. I will deal with the papers, briefly, in turn.

Carlos Lévy's paper deals with a significant problem in Philo's thought—what to do about the Pythagorean-Platonist second principle, the Indefinite Dyad. Necessarily, Philo has to recognize that something corresponding to a material principle is necessary for the creation of a world at all, but he is wary of postulating anything that would be at all independent of God. A solution is to recognize God's Wisdom, or Sophia, which is an entity sufficiently subordinated to God not to challenge his uniqueness or omnipotence. He notes the interesting passage at *Opif.* 8, where Philo declines to describe the passive element in the universe as a 'cause' (αἴτιον).

Francesca Calabi, in a useful contribution (now appearing in English [2008]) confronts Philo with the pseudo-Pythagorean tradition of political treatises, especially that by Ecphantus, and discerns substantial similarities. These treatises have been given very varying dates over the years, but I see no great difficulty in situating them around the latter part of the second century BC, giving them time to acquire a patina of authenticity by the time of such figures as Nigidius Figulus, Eudorus, and Philo.

The third contribution, that of Daniel Babut, though very sound and interesting, comes oddly, perhaps, in such a collection, since his main concern is to explore the nature of Plutarch's acceptance of the New Academic tradition within Platonism, and his rather 'Academic' rejection of the excesses of Pythagorean dogmatism and credulity. His paper involves extended studies of such works as *De primo frigido* and *De genio Socratis*; and I think he proves his point.

Pier-Luigi Donini (who receives much praise from Babut, despite certain disagreements of emphasis) pursues much the same topic, with, once again, special concentration on the *De genio*. It is indeed remarkable how this dialogue seems to combine Socratic/New Academic and Pythagorean strands in Plutarch's thought. As Donini sees it, the unifying figure here is Epaminondas, who combines Pythagorean training with an admirably Academic streak of scepticism. This in turn he relates to the biographical detail that we glean from the *De E* 387f, where Plutarch speaks of himself as learning 'Academic' moderation after a spate of youthful fascination with Pythagorean number-mysticism. I find his arguments most persuasive.

We turn next to the figure of Nicomachus of Gerasa, and a most useful study of his position on Forms and numbers by Christoph Helmig. I agree with him that the balance of probability points to the conclusion that for Nicomachus, Forms are numbers—though there are also, of course, Forms of numbers—and that Nicomachus distinguishes between ‘Form-numbers’ and scientific numbers, which are the proper subject of the *Introductio arithmetica*. Nicomachus is thus more of a Pythagorean than an ‘orthodox’ Platonist. This position is distorted by later Neoplatonic commentators, such as Philoponus and Asclepius—though not by Iamblichus.

Dominic O’Meara next contributes a most insightful study of the Pythagorean doctrine of the music of the spheres, also drawing on Nicomachus, though the evidence in respect of him is indirect, relayed through Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Proclus (doubtless drawing on his lost *Life of Pythagoras*). O’Meara takes us through, first, the evidence for Pythagoras’ somehow cognizing the harmony of the sphere (his pneumatic vehicle was in much better shape than that of most of us), and then for views on the utility of this achievement (*scil.* by transmuting this into therapeutic music for the emotionally disturbed).

We turn next to Proclus himself, with an extended account by Elena Gritti of Pythagorean-influenced theories of the nature of arithmetic and geometry as an influence on Proclus’ dialectic, particularly in the *Commentary on the Parmenides* and the *Platonic Theology*. This becomes something of a detailed account of Proclus’ own procedure; but the connection with Pythagoreanism is preserved by emphasizing the iconic role of numbers, the Pythagoreans having been identified by Proclus [*Theol. Plat.* 1.2, 1.4] as pursuing theology δι’ εικότων.

Alessandro Linguiti, in a much briefer paper, focusses on Pythagorean elements in Proclus’ philosophy of Nature. These involve, as it turns out, the expressing of phenomena of the natural world in arithmetico-geometrical terms, and in emphasizing vertical, rather than horizontal causation, in both cases at the expense of an Aristotelian perspective. Inevitably there is some overlap with Gritti, but this is a sound and useful paper.

Lastly, Carlos Steel provides a masterful overview of Proclus’ interpretation of ‘figure’ (σχήμα) in the divine realm, which, it must

be said, strays pretty far in its elaboration from anything that any Pythagorean, or even pseudo-Pythagorean, can have conceived; but yet Steel can show that it has its roots in a document of pseudo-Philolaus about the dedication of different angles and figures to different gods. As Steel well shows, the doctrine derives from close exegesis of passages both of the *Parmenides* and of the *Phaedrus*, ultimately arising in the fertile brain of Syrianus.

All in all, a most stimulating collection of papers.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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