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The Ideas as Thoughts of God

John Dillon

Xenocrates' Nous-Monad

The precise origin of the concept of the Platonic Forms, or Ideas, as thoughts of God is a long-standing puzzle in the history of Platonism, which I am on record as dismissing somewhat brusquely in various works.[1] I am glad to have an opportunity to return to it now, in this distinguished company.[2] I propose to begin my consideration of it on this occasion by returning to the seminal article of Audrey Rich, published in *Mnemosyne* back in 1954.[3] As you may recall, Rich's thesis in that article was that the concept arose, whenever it arose – sometime in the early Hellenistic age, was her guess – as a reaction to Aristotle's concept of the Unmoved Mover of *Met.* Lambda as an intellect thinking itself, and "a desire to reconcile the Theory of Ideas with the Aristotelian doctrine of immanent form" (p. 132).

It seems to me that Rich was broadly correct in this conjecture, but that she was simply too cautious in her attribution of the origin of the theory. I would argue – and have indeed argued on a number of occasions before this – that really all that is required for the development of such a theory (though no doubt stimulated by both the theorizing and the gibes of Aristotle) is the postulation that the account of the nature and activities of the Demiurge in Plato's *Timaeus* is not to be taken literally; and we know this position to have been maintained, among

1. E.g. *The Middle Platonists,* Duckworth, London/Ithaca, 1977 (2nd ed. 1996), p. 95; *The Heirs of Plato*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, p. 107-11.

2. This paper was originally delivered to a colloquium on the topic 'Les Formes platoniciennes dans l'Antiquité tardive', organized by Alexandra Michalewski and Pieter d'Hoine, held in Paris on Jan. 17, 2009. I am most grateful to them for affording me this opportunity to express my views.

3. "The Platonic Ideas as the Thoughts of God", *Mnemosyne* ser. 4, vol. 7, 1954, p. 123-33.

his immediate successors, by both Speusippus and Xenocrates.[4] After all, once it has been agreed that the Demiurge and his temporal creative activities, involving his contemplating of a Paradigm distinct from, and logically superior to himself, is a myth, the alternative more or less imposes itself of a divine intellect eternally engaged in creative activity, modelling the physical universe which it creates upon a system of formal principles which constitute the contents of its intellect. How this would have worked for Speusippus is less perspicuous, I think, than how it would have worked for Xenocrates,[5] so it is to Xenocrates that I prefer to turn.

First of all, it seems best to distinguish what we know, or think we know, about Xenocrates' theology, before we turn to the airing of conjectures, however plausible. From the doxographic notice of Aetius (*Placita* I 7, 30, p. 304 Diels[6] = Fr. 15 Heinze/213 Isnardi Parente), we may gather that, for Xenocrates, the supreme principle was, among other things, an Intellect. The relevant part of the passage runs as follows:

> "Xenocrates, son of Agathenor, of Chalcedon, <holds> as gods the Monad and the Dyad, the former as male, having the role of Father, reigning in the heavens (*en ouranói basileuousan*), which he terms 'Zeus' and 'odd' (*perittos*) and 'intellect' (*nous*), which is for him the primary God."

We have, then, a primary God (*prótos theos*), who is both unitary and an intellect (no contradiction between these two characterizations, it seems, being discerned by philosophers before Plotinus). The Monad is also identified by Xenocrates, as we learn from Plutarch (*Proc. An.* 1012E), as 'the undivided and unchanging' element in the formation of the World-Soul by the Demiurge at *Timaeus* 35A. This latter piece of information might seem to pose a problem, but it really ceases to be such, if we bear in mind the other fact that we think we know about Xenocrates, mentioned above: to wit, that he did not take the creation account in the *Timaeus* literally. This would make it more or less inevitable that the Demiurge be identified with Xenocrates' Nous-Monad, and that it is the blending of this entity with his second principle, the Indefinite Dyad (represented by 'that substance which is divided about bodies'), that produces Soul.

If the above be accepted as data that we can rely on, then all that calls for conjecture, it seems to me, is the contents of this divine intellect. Here, although explicit evidence fails us, we are left with some pointers. We know a certain amount about Xenocrates' theory of Forms, after all, albeit mainly from the hostile reports of Aristotle. Aristotle reports indignantly (or derisively)[7] that Xenocrates identified the Forms with numbers, but he nowhere specifies where Xenocrates wished to situate them. From certain remarks of Theophrastus, in his little aporetic

4. Scholiast on Ar. *De Caelo* 279b32ff. = Speusippus, Fr. 61 Tarán.

5. For Speusippus, after all, the supreme principles are a (supra-essential) One and an Indefinite Dyad, or (principle of) Multiplicity (*pléthos*), so that demiurgic activity proper, together with the generation of Forms (and their projection on the material substratum to form the physical world) becomes the role rather of the World Soul.

6. Originally derived from Stobaeus, *Anth.* I 36 Wachs.

7. E.g. *Met.* H 1028b24ff.; M 1076a20ff.; N 10856a5ff.

volume entitled *Metaphysics* (2. 10, 5b26 ff.), however, we might conclude that some Platonist (presumably Xenocrates), had a concept of the first principle that combined Aristotle's Unmoved Mover (about which Theophrastus has just been raising some problems), with something rather more positive, derived from a demythologized interpretation of the *Timaeus.* The problem that Theophrastus is raising here is why, if the first principle wishes the best for all its products, they are not all equally good:[8]

> "And if from the best comes the best, the heavenly bodies should derive something finer than their rotation from the first principle, unless indeed they were prevented by not being able to receive anything better; *for surely that which is first and most divine is something that wishes for everything what is best.* But perhaps this is something immoderate and not to be sought for; for he who says this is demanding that all things should be alike and in the best of all states, exhibiting little or no difference between them."

Now this may or may not be a very effective line of criticism. The important thing for our purposes, though, is what it is a criticism *of.* Not, surely, any longer Aristotle's Prime Mover, for that wishes nothing for anything. This entity seems rather to be a combination of the Aristotelian Prime Mover with something like a demythologized Timaean Demiurge, who does "wish all things to be as good as possible" (*Tim.* 29E); and that, I suggest, is the sort of entity that Xenocrates wished to postulate his Nous-Monad as being. What we seem to have here, then, is a Prime Mover with some form of outward-directed intentionality; and it can hardly wish the best for all things without having some conception, first of all, of the things concerned, and secondly, what would be their best state. We have here, then, a God with Thoughts, thoughts which are formative of physical reality.

To support this, there is also the contemporary, if rather dim-witted, attestation of the Sicilian Alcimus,[9] reported by Diogenes Laertius (III 13), that "each one of the Forms is eternal, a thought (*noéma*), and moreover impervious to change." Alcimus does not specify who is thinking the thought that each Form is, but in the context it really cannot be an individual human mind; the Forms must be the thoughts of an eternal Thinker. Such a report need not be dismissed out of hand as a misunderstanding of Plato's own doctrine;[10] it may well reflect the accepted position of the Academy under Xenocrates.

Lastly, the Xenocratean definition of the soul – also satirized by Aristotle[11] – as 'number moving itself' (*arithmos heauton kinón*) would seem to indicate that,

8. I have discussed this passage already in 'Theophrastus' Critique of the Old Academy in the *Metaphysics*', in W.W. Fortenbaugh & G. Wöhrle (eds.), *On the Opuscula of Theophrastus,* Steiner, Stuttgart, 2002, p. 175-87.

9. Alcimus' purpose in writing his book was to prove that Plato had borrowed all his best ideas from Epicharmus – a piece of Sicilian chauvinism over which we will draw a veil.

10. After all, the argument presented in the *Parmenides* (132Bff.) against the Forms being thoughts need not be relevant here. That is an argument against subjectivity: the Forms being merely constructs of the human mind.

11. *De An.* I 2, 404b27-8, etc. (= Fr. 60 H/165-87 IP).

since Forms are held by Xenocrates to be numbers, what Soul does is to set in motion, and project further, the Forms that are imprinted on it by Intellect. What Soul adds to what it receives from Intellect is motion, in the sense of both mobility and motivity.

Antiochus and Varro

The evidence, then, for the doctrine of Forms as thoughts of God in the Old Academy, at least from Xenocrates on, while no more than circumstantial, is, I think, reasonably plausible.[12] We must now examine the further stages of its development, where the evidence is firmer.

First we must turn to Antiochus of Ascalon. It happens that I have just been reading through a distinguished collection of essays on Antiochus, products of a conference held in Cambridge in July 2007 (in which I was not involved), shortly to be published by Cambridge University Press,[13] and I have been interested by the attitudes of the participants to the possibility that Antiochus had a Theory of Forms of any kind. There is an 'austere' view of the evidence, propagated by Jonathan Barnes in an influential paper,[14] which basically denies that we can attribute to Antiochus anything like a Platonic Theory of Forms, and this line is broadly followed by, for instance, Charles Brittain, while Mauro Bonazzi, and, I am glad to say, David Sedley, adopt a more 'generous' interpretation of the evidence, with which I would concur. Neither, however, seems to me to accord proper attention to the evidence of Antiochus' faithful follower M. Terentius Varro, to which I would accord considerable weight (see below).

It was the view of Willy Theiler,[15] enunciated back in 1930, that the theory of the Forms as thoughts of God was in fact an innovation of Antiochus himself. As will be clear from what has preceded, I do not see this theory as Antiochus' invention, but I do agree that Antiochus contributes a new twist to it. This 'twist' comes, in my view, from Antiochus' thoroughgoing adoption of Stoic metaphysics. This in turn results from Antiochus' judgement that the Stoic doctrine of God and his relation to the world may be viewed as merely a formalization of Plato's doctrine in the *Timaeus,* as this was rationalized in the later Academy by Xenocrates and Polemon. This rationalization involves, first, demythologizing the account of the creation of the soul and the world by the Demiurge, so that the Demiurge becomes a divine intellect, whose action upon the universe is eternal rather than initiated at a point in time, and who is employing for this action, not any kind of 'paradigm' external

12. While recognizing that we have no explicit evidence of Polemon's views on the Forms or their proper place, there is no reason to suppose that he would have dissented from the position of Xenocrates in this matter.

13. D. Sedley (ed.), *The Philosophy of Antiochus of Ascalon*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012 (forthcoming).

14. J. Barnes, "Antiochus of Ascalon", in J. Barnes – M. Griffin (eds.), *Philosophia Togata: Essays on Philosophy and Roman Society*, Oxford Univerisity Press, Oxford, 1989, p. 51-96 (see esp. Appendix E).

15. In *Die Vorbereitung des Neuplatonismus*, Weidmann, Berlin, 1930.

to himself, but rather the contents of his own intellect. If Polemon contributed anything further to this scenario, it would in my view be the specification that this divine intellect is not transcendent over, but immanent within the cosmos – if we may derive that conclusion from the admittedly very bald doxographic report by Aetius[16] that 'Polemon declared that the cosmos was God'.

This in turn brings us very near to the Stoic position, as enunciated by Polemon's erstwhile pupil Zeno. The only question that remains uncertain is whether Polemon still retained a belief in immaterial essence, as being proper to God – and indeed to Forms and Soul – or whether he had been prepared to entertain the theory that was going the rounds in some quarters in the later Academy (such as Heraclides of Pontus, for example)[17] that soul, at least, and possibly also the supreme divinity, was composed instead of a very special kind of fire (comparable to Aristotelian aether), of which the stars also are composed.

I put forward this possibility only very tentatively, and it is by no means crucial to my overall position. There is no need to deny Zeno and his followers a certain measure of originality, and the development of a doctrine of 'craftsmanly fire' (*pyr tekhnikon*) as a suitable material for the Active Principle of the universe to be composed of can be seen as a reasonable solution to certain worries about the mode of interaction between immaterial and material essence that seem to have been besetting the Academy in the decades before Zeno appeared on the scene. After all, a key dictum on this topic can be derived (and seems to have been so derived by Zeno, among others – including Antiochus later) from Plato's *Sophist* 248C: "We proposed as a sufficient mark of real things the presence in a thing of the power of being acted upon or of acting in relation to however insignificant a thing." The conclusion is ready to hand that things cannot act upon one another, or be acted upon, unless they have some quality or substance in common, and that would be some degree of materiality.

However, I am in danger of wandering from the main point. This is all by way of background to what I wish to maintain, to wit, that Antiochus need not have felt that accepting the Stoic doctrine of *pyr tekhnikon* or *pyr noeron* was in conflict with his position as a champion of the Old Academy – an institution about whose views, as we must continually remind ourselves, he knew a great deal more than we do. Once that is accepted, it seems to me that Antiochus can both employ very Platonic-sounding terminology to describe the Forms, as he (or at least his spokesman, 'Varro') does at *Acad.* I 30-2: "that which is eternally simple and uniform and identical with itself" – a formulation borrowed pretty closely from *Phaedo* 78D – and yet view these Forms, or this system of Forms, as none other than the system of *logoi spermatikoi* constituting the contents of the cosmic Logos, this Logos in turn being for him nothing other than an updating and rationalization of the Demiurge and World Soul of the *Timaeus.* And of course, in the Stoic system, which Antiochus could quite happily adopt, the contents of

16. Reported in Stobaeus, *Anth.* I 36, 5 W-H., just before his doxographic report of Xenocrates' views, discussed above. It is not in fact entirely clear to me whether Xenocrates in his turn regarded this supreme Nous-Monad as transcending the cosmos, as he presents it as 'ruling in the heavens'. But that cannot be pressed too far, I suppose.

17. Cf. Frs. 98-99 Wehrli.

the cosmic Logos are reflected in the contents of our individual minds, since our minds are mere sparks, so to speak, emanating from the cosmic Logos. In this way, the Forms can be also seen as concepts (*ennoiai* or *prolépseis*) in our minds. This does not, however, make them purely subjective entities, as they are only reflections of the *logoi spermatikoi* in the Logos.

Now all this seems to me quite a logical development, and it seems to me perfectly reasonable also that Antiochus should express himself, in describing his Theory of Forms, with what must appear to us a certain degree of systematic ambiguity, but I have to recognise that, to a certain type of scholarly mind of the Barnesian persuasion, all this appears quite fantastic. To quote Barnes himself: "Any attempt to reconstruct Antiochus' thought requires fantasy and imagination. But fantasy must be responsible to the evidence, and imagination must acknowledge one sobering fact: we do not know very much about Antiochus".[18] My reply to that is that, if one is not prepared to make (judicious) use of fantasy and imagination, not only in respect of Antiochus, but also in respect of the Old Academy and of Middle Platonism in general, one had better steer clear of the area altogether. It all depends, after all, what one regards as 'evidence'; the attitude of a forensic defence lawyer, favoured by Barnes and others, such as Charles Brittain, is not going to get us very far at all.

After getting that off my chest, I turn to what I regard as a decisive piece of evidence as to Antiochus' theory of the Forms as thoughts of God, and that is a passage from the works of his follower Varro, preserved in Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* (VII 28).[19] The context is slightly odd, but compelling enough for all that. I will quote it at some length, as it gives a useful insight into Varro's Antiochian theology in general:[20]

> "What success attends the effort of Varro, that shrewdest of scholars, to reduce those gods, by would-be subtle arguments, to the sky and the earth, and give that reference to them all? The attempt is impossible. The gods wriggle out of his clutches; they jump from his hands, slip away, and tumble to the ground. Before speaking of the females, the goddesses that is, he says:
>
> 'As I have already said in the first book about places,[21] there are two recognised sources of origin for the gods, the sky and the earth. Hence some gods are called celestial, others terrestrial. I started, earlier on, with the sky,

18 J. Barnes, *op. cit*., p. 52.

19. The suggestion, put forward by Barnesians (such as David Blank in the collection of essays mentioned in n. 13), that it is rash to assume that Varro is simply representing the position of Antiochus on philosophical questions, is surely quite absurd. Varro was indeed a very learned man in many areas, but in philosophy he is attested, by both Cicero and Augustine, on the basis of evidence available to them, to be a thoroughgoing disciple of Antiochus, and there is no reason to doubt this.

20. Augustine is quoting here from the final book of Varro's vast compilation *Antiquitates rerum humanarum et divinarum,* in 41 books, the last 15 of which concerned divine matters. In this final book, he discussed 'select gods', that is, the central deities of the Greco-Roman pantheon. I employ here the Penguin translation of Henry Bettenson.

21. That, it would seem from *CD* VI 3, means the fourth book of the second part of the *Antiquitates*, and the twenty-ninth of the whole work.

> speaking about Janus, whom some have identified with the sky, others with the world. So now I will begin to treat of feminine deities by speaking about Tellus.'
>
> I understand the difficulty experienced by an intelligence of such range and quality. A plausible line of argument leads him to see the sky as an active principle, the earth as passive. And so he attributes masculine energy to the former, feminine to the latter; and he fails to realise that the activity in both spheres is the activity of him who created both.[22] Varro uses the same line of interpretation in his previous book,[23] in dealing with the celebrated mysteries of Samothrace.
>
> He starts by making a solemn undertaking (adopting a kind of religious tone of voice) that he will explain those teachings in writing and convey their meaning to the Samothracians themselves, who do not understand their purport. He says, in fact, that a study of the evidence in Samothrace leads to the conclusion that one of their images represented the sky, another the earth, another the archetypes which Plato called 'forms'. He urges that Jupiter should be understood as the sky, Juno as the earth, Minerva as the forms; the sky being maker, the earth material, the forms providing the patterns for creation. I pass over the fact that Plato ascribes such importance to his 'forms' that, according to him, the sky does not create anything, using them as patterns; in fact it is itself so created."

Augustine tries here to confute Varro by appealing to a literal interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus,* in accordance with which the heavens are created with the rest of the world (*Tim.* 37D), but this just serves to point up the fact that Varro/Antiochus is basing himself on a de-mythologized, Stoicized interpretation of the same dialogue, according to which the Demiurge becomes the Stoic active principle (*to poioun*), while the Receptacle becomes the passive principle, and the Paradigm the active principle's creative reason-principles, or *logoi.*

What we may note in particular about this piece of allegorization by Varro is the natural and uncontroversial way in which he introduces the conception that Minerva (Athena), springing as she does from the head of Zeus, may represent the totality of Forms as thoughts of God. Varro is not trying to introduce his readers to this concept as something innovative; rather, he is making use of it, as something he expects to be well recognised, as a basis for delivering an allegorization of the Great Gods of Samothrace. This should surely tell us something about the degree of acceptability of the concept of the Forms as thoughts of God in the intellectual circle which Varro is addressing.

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22. Here Augustine slips in a bit of propaganda for his own (Christian) position. In fact, we see here Varro adopting, as did Antiochus, the basic Stoic distinction between an active and passive principle in the universe, symbolizing the first by the sky and masculine divinities, the latter by the earth and feminine divinities. There is no question of postulating a further, higher divinity, 'who created both'.

23. That is to say, Book 40, in which he discussed 'uncertain gods', that is, divinities which it is difficult to identify with certainty. The identity of the Kabeiroi, the Great Gods of Samothrace was quite uncertain, since they were pre-Indo-European entities, but conjecture linked them with the Dioscuri, who had a heavenly and a chthonic aspect.

Philo of Alexandria

So then, I would maintain, a Stoicized version of the doctrine of the Forms as thoughts of God is a feature of the Platonism propounded by Antiochus of Ascalon. Let us move on from this, then, to observe its next manifestation.

This occurs in the works of the Platonizing Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Philo, a half-century after Antiochus. Philo is actually the first author unequivocally to present the formulation of Forms as thoughts of God, and this circumstance has unfortunately seduced some Philo scholars, such as Roberto Radice, in his study *Platonismo e creazionismo in Filone di Alessandria* (Milan, 1989), to claim him as the inventor of it. While this notion is plainly quite untenable, there is yet a certain amount for which Philo may perhaps be given credit. Philo inherits a Platonism which seems to have evolved somewhat from the solidly Stoicized metaphysics propounded by Antiochus towards a renewed concept of the transcendence and immateriality of God, helped on its way, it would seem, by the revival, in the mid-first century B.C., of the Pythagorean tradition, which may be associated with the figure of Eudorus of Alexandria, an older contemporary of Philo's, with whom he may have been personally acquainted. At any rate, we find in Philo, particularly in such a work as the *De Opificio Mundi,* a system involving a transcendent supreme God, an intelligible world (*kosmos noetos*), presented as the 'internal reason' (*logos endiathetos*) of God, and a Logos that goes forth and creates the physical cosmos (*logos prophorikos*), and thereafter holds it together. At *Opif.* 16, for instance, we find the following description of God's creative activity:

> "For God, because he is God, understood in advance that a beautiful copy (*miméma*) would not come into existence apart from a beautiful model (*paradeigma*), and that none of the objects of sense-perception would be without fault, unless it was modeled on the archetypal and intelligible Idea. Having resolved to create this visible world of ours, He fashioned first the intelligible world, in order that in fashioning the physical world he might be able to use an immaterial and most godlike model, producing from this older model a younger copy which would contain within itself as many sensible classes of being as there were intelligible ones in the original."

This plainly owes much to the *Timaeus* (28AB, 48E, etc.), but with the significant difference that now the paradigm is nothing other than the contents of the divine intellect. Philo goes on (17-18) to present us with the vivid image of an architect being commissioned to build a fine city, with all its accoutrements (he probably has the original planning of Alexandria in mind!), and carrying round the whole plan of the city in his head as a model in accordance to which he can refer when laying out the physical city. Such is God's situation with regard to the physical universe. Now, the elaboration of this exemplum is no doubt Philo's own work, but the exemplum itself may not be original to him. It bears a certain similarity to the exemplum used by Cicero in *Orator* s.8, which adduces Pheidias and his statues of Zeus and Athena, and which may well derive from Antiochus (though the 'austere' school of thought would demur on this, since Antiochus is

not referred to); but there is also the significant difference that Pheidias is presumed to be contemplating something like a 'Platonic' Form of the divinity concerned, whereas the architect is simply drawing on his own expertise. However, as we shall see in a moment, both images seem to be combined in the reference to the artist adduced by Alcinous, in ch. 9 of his *Didaskalikos*.

There is much more evidence, of course, to be derived from Philo, but I take it that on this occasion I am not so much delivering a general survey of the concept of the Forms as thoughts of God in the later Platonist tradition as trying to establish its provenance, so we may spare ourselves a full investigation of Philo's employment of the concept. On the face of it, his main contribution (though I do not believe that it is original to himself)[24] is the concept of the *kosmos noetos* – although even this is not much more than a de-mythologization of the 'intelligible living being' (*noéton zóion*) of *Tim.* 30C-31B.

Alcinous and the "classical" doctrine of Forms as thoughts of God

Let us turn instead to a consideration of Alcinous. Alcinous (now that we are no longer allowed to identify him with Albinus) is a slightly mysterious figure, but he may reasonably be situated in the mid-second century A.D., and his *Didaskalikos,* or 'Handbook of Platonism', does not aspire to be a work of any originality – indeed, there is some evidence (including one more or less verbatim passage in ch. 12) that his work is essentially an 'update' of a similar work by Arius Didymus, back in the late first century B.C.[25] At any rate, there can be little chance that he is in any way influenced by Philo.

What he presents us with, in ch. 9, is a fairly bald summary of Platonist doctrine on the Forms. It is worth quoting this at some length:[26]

> "Matter constitutes one principle,[27] but Plato postulates others also, to wit, the paradigmatic, that is the Forms, and that constituted by God, the father and cause of all things. Form (*idea*) is considered, in relation to God, his thinking (*noésis*); in relation to us, the primary object of thought (*próton noéton*); in relation to matter, measure (*metron*); in relation to the sensible world, its paradigm; and in relation to itself, essence. For in general everything that we can conceptualize must come to be in reference to something of which the model (*paradeigma*) must pre-exist, just as if one thing were to be derived

24. We may note that Timaeus Locrus uses the phrase *idanikos kosmos* (§30), and TL is hardly likely to be dependent on Philo, even if he post-dates him. The influence is more likely to be the other way about (Philo does at least know of pseudo-Pythagoric writings, such as that of Ocellus Lucanus (*Aet.* 12).

25. *Pace* Tryggve Göransson, *Albinus, Alcinous, Arius Didymus*, Ekblad & Co, Göteborg, 1995, who produces some good negative arguments, but does not ultimately convince me.

26. The translation is my own, from *Alcinous. The Handbook of Platonism,* Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993.

27. He has dealt with this in the previous chapter.

> from another, in the way that my image derives from me; and even if the model does not always subsist eternally, in any event every artist, having the model within himself, applies the structure of it to matter."

He goes on to say, just below, in connection with the question 'Of what things are there Forms?', that "the Forms are the eternal and perfect thoughts of God." And just below that again, in relation to the question 'Are there such things as Forms?', he argues: "Whether God is an intellect or possessed of an intellect, he has thoughts, and these are eternal and unchanging; and if this is the case, Forms exist."

Furthermore, in Ch. 10 (164, 29-31), when dealing with the primal Intellect, Alcinous speaks of it as "everlastingly engaged in thinking of itself and its own thoughts, and this activity of it is Form" (καὶ αὕτη ἡ ἐνέργεια αὐτοῦ ἰδέα ὑπάρχει). This statement, if analyzed closely, can be made to yield a good deal. It is an interesting development of Aristotle's doctrine of a self-thinking Intellect in a Middle Platonic direction. This Intellect does not simply think 'himself', but the contents of his mind, his *noêmata,* and these coalesce, when thought, into the composite singular *Idea* – which can be regarded as a way of designating the Paradigm of the *Timaeus,* the sum-total of the Forms. Thus whatever contradiction might be perceived between Aristotle's rather narcissistic first principle and the more creatively and providentially active Nous-Monad of Xenocrates can be inoffensively glossed over.

We see here, then, the theory of Forms as thoughts of God in what one might term its 'classical' or fully-fledged form, presented by Alcinous as basic Platonic doctrine. Indeed, the proposition that, since God is either an intellect or at least possessed of an intellect, he must necessarily have thoughts, is used as the premiss for a further conclusion, that there are such things as Forms at all. We may note also the passing allusion to the exemplum of the artist having a conception in his mind, which he then transfers to canvass, or embodies in stone or bronze. This seems to form a bridge between Cicero's Pheidias example and Philo's architect, and indicates that the image was by Alcinous' time a fairly well-worn one, in support of the argument for the Forms being divine thoughts.

In Plutarch also, somewhat earlier than Alcinous, the premiss that the Forms are divine thoughts or *logoi* turns up at a number of points in the corpus, though never (in the surviving works) quite as directly as we find in Alcinous.[28] In the *De*

28. Indeed, Franco Ferrari, in a succession of incisive and stimulating articles (most recently "Provvidenza platonica o autocontemplazione aristotelica", in L. van der Stockt et al. (eds.), *Gods, Daimones, Rituals, Myths and History of Religions in Plutarch's Works,* Universidad de Malaga – Utah State University, Logan (Utah), 2010, p. 177-92, has argued against any doctrine of the Ideas as thoughts of God in Plutarch, by reason of the fact that Plutarch, in various places (e.g. *Def. Or.* 426D), polemicizes against Aristotle's doctrine of the self-contemplating Unmoved Mover, in favour of a more providentially active conception of God, and indeed it does seem as though, at least in his surviving works (there is also the lost *Where are the Ideas according to Plato?* Cat. Lampr. no. 67, to be taken into account), Plutarch is wary of describing the Ideas as 'thoughts', preferring perhaps to think of them as *logoi*; but it is hard to see where else he can have conceived of them as residing other than in the mind of God. Cf. F. Ferrari, *Dio, idee e materia: la struttura del cosmo in*

sera numinis vindicta, for example (550D), we find a description of God setting himself up as a paradigm for all moral goodness, and thus establishing that the pursuit of virtue is nothing else than 'assimilation to God' (*homoiosis theói*). This is not as clear as one might wish as a statement of the theory, but we may combine this with a striking passage from the *De Iside et Osiride* (373AB), where Osiris is presented allegorically as the Logos of God, filled with *logoi* which impress themselves on matter 'like figures stamped on wax' (a reference to *Theaet.* 191Cff.). Further, we find a distinction made between the 'soul' and the 'body' of Osiris, the former being the Logos as residing within the mind of God, the latter the Logos in its emanatory mode, infusing the physical world with its contents – a scenario, indeed, very like that which we found in Philo a few generations earlier.

One finds a somewhat clearer exposition of the doctrine, in fact, in the works of the later Athenian Platonist Atticus, in the second half of the second century. In the course of a polemical treatise entitled *Against Those who Claim to Interpret Plato through Aristotle*,[29] extensive passages of which have been preserved for us by the ecclesiastical writer Eusebius of Caesarea, he has occasion to commend Plato's Theory of Forms (Fr. 7 Baudry):

> "It is just in this respect that Plato surpasses all others. Discerning, in relation to the Forms, that God is Father and Creator and lord and guardian of all things, and recognising, on the analogy of material creations, that the craftsman (*demiourgos*) first forms a conception (*noésai*) of that which he is proposing to create, and then, once he has formed his conception, applies this likeness to the material, he concludes by analogy that the thoughts (*noémata*) of God are anterior to material objects, models (*paradeigmata*) of the things that come to be, immaterial and intelligible, always remaining identically the same."

This seems to touch all the right bases, alluding both to the *Timaeus* (God as Father and Maker, *demiourgos, paradeigmata*) and to the *Phaedo* ('always remaining identically the same'), while adducing the process of artistic or craftsmanly creation.

This is not quite the end of the story, however. There is a troubling report, emanating from Proclus (*In Tim.* I 394, 6ff.), *via* Porphyry, who should have known, criticising Atticus for situating the Paradigm, as repository of the Forms, as distinct from, though inferior to, the Demiurge, whom he takes to be the supreme God. One does not know quite what to make of that, but it may be that Atticus, in wishing to preserve the objective reality of the Forms, saw no problem in postulating them as distinct from, though ontologically inferior to, his supreme

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Plutarco di Cheronea, D'Auria, Naples, 1995; "La teoria delle idee in Plutarco", *Elenchos* 17, 1996, p, 121-42; "*Pronoia* platonica e *noêsis noêseôs* aristotelica: Plutarco e l'impossibilità di una sintesi", in J. Garcia López & R.M. Aguilar (eds.), *Plutarco, Platón y Aristóteles*, Madrid, 1999, p. 63-77.

29. Probably directed against his contemporary, the Peripatetic Aristocles, the teacher of Alexander of Aphrodisias, who had had the audacity to compose a work (also quoted by Eusebius) commending Plato as a promising predecessor of Aristotle.

deity, while also being intelligized by him.[30] At any rate, the problem of their exact status continued into the next century with Longinus, who was head of the Academy in Athens and Porphyry's teacher before he came to Plotinus in Rome, and in ch. 18 of his *Life of Plotinus,* Porphyry tells against himself the story of his producing this doctrine in Plotinus' seminar, and, after a long debate, being converted to the Plotinian view that the Forms are in fact in the mind of the Demiurge – the only catch being, of course, that now the Demiurge is no longer the supreme principle, but a secondary one, Intellect, the One being superior to the Forms!

Conclusion

It would seem, then, that by the middle of second century A.D. there was very much of a consensus as to the nature of the Forms as thoughts in the mind of God, but that in the latter part of the century, with Atticus (and I suspect also with the Neopythagorean Numenius, whom I have left out of the present investigation),[31] the problem was beginning to arise: is this Creator God in whose mind the Forms reside really the highest God, or does perhaps the very fact of his intellection, comporting as it does something of a duality, preclude him from the radical unity that should be characteristic of a supreme divinity?

There seems a nice irony in ending with a problem, even as we began with one, so I will draw my remarks to a close at this point!

30. Atticus is also criticized, we may note (along with Plutarch and Democritus the Platonist), by Syrianus, in his *Commentary on the Metaphysics* (p. 105, 35ff.), for holding "that the Forms are universal reason-principles (*logoi*) subsisting eternally in the substance of the Soul; for even if they distinguish them from the commonalities (*koinotétes*) present in sensible objects, nevertheless one should not confuse together the reason-principles in the soul and the so-called 'enmattered intellect' (*enulos nous*) with the paradigmatic and immaterial Forms and demiurgic intellections." This complicates the situation even further! See on all this the most judicious analysis of Alexandra Michalewski, in her thesis (soon, we hope, to be published), *La causalité des Formes intelligibles dans la philosophie de Plotin,* Paris, 2008, p. 71-91.

31. Numenius' views would be interesting to discern, as he made a distinction (Frs. 12, 15 des Places) between a supreme divinity, the 'Father', whom he describes as an Intellect *at rest* (*hestós*), and a secondary one, the Demiurge, who is active in the work of creation. In which of them do the Forms reside? Possibly in both, in different modes, but we lack evidence on this point.