

Female principles in Platonism*

John Dillon

This is not exactly intended as a feminist tract, but I cannot deny that its theme was prompted to some extent by current debates as to the essence and the role of the female in society and in theology. I am concerned here, however, rather with the role of the female in the cosmos. The point has been made, with some justification in my view, that, in the case of Christianity, the circumstance that the Holy Spirit, the *Hagion Pneuma*, which is functionally and, in Hebrew, grammatically, a female principle, *ruah*, happens to become in Greek a neuter noun (and in Latin a masculine), results in an impoverishment and a distortion in orthodox Christianity in respect of the feminine, a lack for which even the elevation of Mary to the status of a Mother Goddess does not really compensate. In this respect, as we shall see, the Gnostic sects are more imaginative and accommodating.

But I do not really want to involve myself in making controversial judgments on Christianity. My concern is primarily with the Platonist tradition, and secondarily with certain sectors of the «underworld» of Platonism, such as the Gnostic sects and the Chaldaean Oracles. Within that tradition I want to discuss the various roles which have been found for a female principle to play.

Before I begin I would like to make what seems to me a significant distinction between *functional* femininity & merely grammatical femininity.¹ Since

* This originated as a lecture to the Department of Classics of the University of Barcelona, to whose hospitality and friendly criticism I am much indebted.

1. For some remarks on the origins of the feminine endings in Greek, see P. CHANTRAINE, *Morphologie historique du Grec*, 2nd. ed., Paris 1964, pp. 29-33, *La formation des noms en grec ancien*, Pa-

nouns in the various languages we are involved with, Greek, Hebrew and Latin, can find themselves in the feminine gender from purely technical causes, a significant term in a philosophical system may find itself in the feminine for no very substantial reason. For instance, it is not clear to me that there is any compelling reason why the word for «soul» in Greek (*psyche*), Latin (*anima*), and Hebrew (*nephesh*), should be feminine, while the word for mind (*nous, animus, lev*) should be masculine. But the fact that this is so does, I think, at least help to create the basic antithesis between reason, or intellect, and the unreasoning life-principle, or even sense-perception (which, of course, is also a feminine, *aisthesis*). To anticipate for a moment our historical account, Philo is following the logic of Greek grammar, as well as being thoroughly Platonic, when, in Book I of the *Allegories of the Laws*, he allegorises Adam as *nous* and Eve as *aisthesis*.²

II

But let us begin at the beginning, both chronologically and cosmologically. There is a case to be made for regarding Platonism proper as beginning only with the death of Plato, but I do not propose to be as strict as that.³ There are three entities in particular which I wish to dwell on in Plato's own philosophy. These are the Indefinite Dyad, the World Soul of the *Timaeus*, the *Statesman*, and *Laws X*, and the Receptacle (*ὑποδοχή*), or Nurse of Becoming in the *Timaeus* —all feminine entities both grammatical and functional.

The Indefinite Dyad (*ἀόριστος δυάς*), of course, occurs nowhere as such in Plato's written works, except perhaps in the form of the Unlimited of the

ris 1933. On the origins and significance of gender distinctions in language in general, see the excellent discussion of Götz WIENOLD, *Genus und Semantik*, Meisenheim am Glan 1967. Efforts on the part of comparative philologists to characterise the features of grammatical gender have been frequent, and entertaining. I give, as an example, that of Jakob GRIMM, in his *Deutsche Grammatik* (New ed. Gutersloh 1890), Vol. III, p. 357 (quoted by WIENOLD, *op. cit.*, p. 20):

«Das maskulinum scheint das frühere, grössere, festere, sprödere, raschere, das thätige, bewegliche, zeugende; das femininum, das spätere, kleinere, weichere, stillere, das leidende, empfangende; das neutrum das erzeugte, gewirkte, stoffartige, generelle, unentwickelte, collective.»

This plainly aspires to scientific objectivity, and to some extent attains it, but even as a statement of Grimm's personal views it is valuable, as the content of a well-schooled Indo-European-speaking mind. Those who have speculated on this question are broadly in agreement that the assigning of grammatical gender to objects not distinguished by natural gender is largely due to the personifying tendency of the primitive mind, which assigns sexual roles and characteristics to inanimate objects and even to abstractions, aided in this activity by its power of analogy. Certainly such «primitive» mental activities have left their mark on Greek philosophical speculation.

2. *Leg. All.* II 19-25.

3. I cannot at the moment think of anyone who is, but it could be argued that Platonism, as a system, originates only with Xenocrates.

Philebus (16C) - which also has a feminine form, ἀπειρία - but it is generally accepted, on the testimony of Aristotle, to have been a basic principle of his metaphysics, at least in his later period.⁴ At *Metaphysics* I 6 (987b20ff), Aristotle refers to Plato's basic principle opposed to the One as a dyad of the «great and small», performing the role of matter (ὕλη). This is presented by Aristotle, rather tendentiously, as if it were a kind of pair, instead of an undifferentiated indefiniteness, but what Plato probably had in mind is more or less what is derivable from *Philebus* 24A-26D, where Unlimitedness is presented as something which can range indefinitely between opposite poles, the most general of which are the opposites Great and Small. (Aristotle uses the phrase ἀόριστος δυάς later, in Books M, 1081a14, and N, 1088a15, to describe this principle, though it is not quite clear whether this is Plato's own term for it).

At any rate, we have, as one of the two first principles of all things, a feminine entity which serves as «matter», or the womb of all becoming. As such, it is tempting to bring it into some relationship with the receptive principle of the *Timaeus*, described at 48D-53C, as, indeed, Aristotle does, on various occasions, as we know. This entity, however, the «Receptacle» (ὑποδοχή) or «Nurse (τιθήνη) of all becoming» (49A), seems to be something lower on the ontological scale, since it merely receives the copies of the Forms, which have already taken shape in the Paradigm (or, to demythologise all this, in the divine Intellect), without serving as the *material out of which* anything is made,⁵ whereas the Indefinite Dyad is the principle out of which the Forms, regarded as Numbers, emerge in the first place. Ne-

4. I say 'generally accepted', but of course there has been fierce controversy on this question, notable protagonists being Harold CHERNISS, in *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy*, I, and many trenchant book reviews (against), and the Tübingen School of Konrad Gaiser (*Platons Ungeschriebene Lehre*) and H-J Krämer (in favour). But I think it is fair to say that a consensus exists to the effect that Aristotle is not simply mistaken in his reports of Plato's doctrine of the One and the Great-and-Small.

One possible explanation of the extraordinary degree of misinterpretation present in such a passage as *Phys.* IV 209b11-16 (on which, see Harold CHERNISS, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy*, pp. 112-24), where Aristotle first declares that in the *Timaeus* Plato says that χώρα is the same as ὕλη, and then that he uses a different terminology for this (presumably the Great-and-Small) ἐν τοῖς λεγομένοις ἀγράφοις δόγμασιν, would be that the 'ἀγράφα δόγματα' were in fact a document put together in the Academy only after Plato's death, perhaps not till the time of Xenocrates, purporting to be what the Master had maintained in conversation, and which would thus involve grave distortions, especially if, as I believe, the Master in fact played his cards pretty close to his chest. If so, this would be paralleled later in what Clitomachus and others did to Carneades' 'doctrines', and Amelius to those of Plotinus. Such a document would then in effect be the Gospel According to Xenocrates, which would help to explain the distortions. Aristotle would know this, of course, but would feel free to take it at its face value for polemical purposes.

5. It is important to specify that the Receptacle in the *Timaeus* is not a material principle in the Aristotelian sense, though later Platonists generally took it as such. The combinations of triangles which form the primary bodies are not formed by the Demiurge from the Receptacle, but rather projected onto it, as onto a kind of television screen. The Receptacle is simply their χώρα or ἔδρα (*Tim.* 52A). Only Plotinus, however, among later Platonists, really seems to appreciate the complexities of Plato's position (cfr. *Enn.* II 4).

vertheless, the fact that at *Tim.* 50D Plato is prepared to characterise it as a «mother», with the realm of Forms (or perhaps Intellect?) as the Father, and the cosmos as the offspring, seems to give it a status akin in honour to the Dyad, and this has productive results, I think, in such entities as Xenocrates' Dyad and Philo's Sophia.

So, from the perspective of later Platonism, we find in Plato a female, receptive, formative principle at both the top and the bottom, so to speak, of the cosmic scale. Whether or not for Plato himself these two entities are in some way the same is quite obscure, but in the metaphysical schema of his immediate follower, Speusippus, they seem to have been, as we shall see presently.

For the moment, however, I wish to turn to the other vitally important female principle in Plato's philosophy, the World Soul. In *Timaeus* 34B-36D the creation of this entity is presented in terms that are notoriously obscure,⁶ but what at least is clear is Plato's intention to present it as an essentially intermediate and mediating entity. The intricate blending of the three elements of Substance, Sameness, and Otherness is designed to enable the Soul to commune with both the realm of True Being and that of Becoming, the physical world. It must be noted that the World Soul, thus constituted, is a rational entity; even the Circle of the Other «partakes of reason and harmony» (36E), as it contemplates every aspect of reality along with the Circle of the Same. On the other hand, this rationality of the Soul's is derivative, having been bestowed upon it by its maker, the Demiurge - or, once again to demythologise the *Timaeus* story, Intellect (*Nous*). The relations of *Nous* and World-Soul, and the degree of rationality accorded the latter, will be a recurring theme in this account of Platonic doctrine.

The position of the World Soul in relation to the Demiurge has further light thrown on it in the Myth of the *Statesman* (269C-274D), though a light that brings with it its own obscurities.⁷ Here the soul is much more closely linked to the body of the cosmos, to the extent that in a number of passages it is unclear what is being talked of, and some scholars, notably P-M. Schuhl, have wished to take the motion of the cosmos independent of the Demiurge as purely mechanical.⁸ However, later Platonists saw here

6. I find CORNFORD's interpretation (in which he follows Proclus) still the most convincing (*Plato's Cosmology*, pp. 59-66), though it is a little disturbing that Xenocrates, on the evidence of Plutarch (*De Proc. An.* 1013E) does not seem to have grasped the subtleties of it.

7. I treat the *Statesman* after the *Timaeus* διόσκαλιος ἕνεκα, though I regard it as in fact somewhat earlier (I am not among those who accept 'Owen's Theory' as to the early dating of the *Timaeus*). However, the relation between Demiurge and World Soul in the *Statesman* is better discussed, I think, in the light of the more circumstantial exposition in the *Timaeus*, and I do not see that we need to postulate any development or alteration of Plato's doctrine between those two fairly contiguous dialogues — if they are correctly interpreted (along the lines laid down by Harold CHERNISS, e.g. in «The Sources of Evil according to Plato», *Proc. Amer. Philos. Soc.* 98, 1954, pp. 23-30).

8. There has been much discussion of this question. I refer the reader to the following: P-M. SCHUHL, 'Sur le mythe du Politique', *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 39, 1932; Gregory

the workings of a World Soul, and it is the *Statesman* Myth in particular that encourages Plutarch in his distinctive view of the World Soul as essentially irrational, so we cannot neglect the passage.

The Stranger describes the universe (τὸ πᾶν) in 269c7 as «a living thing which has been allotted reason by its framer» (ζῶον ὃν καὶ φρόνησιν εἰληχὸς ἐκ τοῦ συναρμόσαντος), and this would, on Platonic principles, imply the presence in it of soul, though a soul granted rationality by a principle external to it, as is the case in the *Timaeus*. The phrase used to describe its innate motion just below (269d2), ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἔμφυτον, can be taken to refer to this essential irrationality, though it may just as well, I suppose, refer to the purely mechanical tendency of the world body to revolve on its axis when released from constraint. Again, in 270A, when released from the control of the Demiurge, it «proceeds of its own accord» (δι' ἑαυτοῦ αὐτὸν ἰένει), having built up a momentum which carries it on for many myriads of revolutions, a turn of phrase really more compatible with purely mechanical motion. Later, at 273B-D, we hear of the world being «taught» by the Demiurge, then «forgetting» its teaching, and tending back towards its original state of chaos, presented in very similar terms to that of the «original» state of things in the *Timaeus* (30A) — all of which is at least compatible with a description of the behaviour of inanimate matter. It is, furthermore, a remarkable fact that the word ψυχή is nowhere used in the whole course of the Myth (except to refer to individual souls, at 272e1-2).

Plainly, however, *pace* Schuhl, there is a soul of some sort involved here. At 269d8, the universe is said to «partake in body» (κεκοινώνηκέ γε καὶ σῶματος) which implies that it is not just body, and at 270a3-4 it receives life and a «contrived immortality» (ἄθανασία ἐπισκευαστή) from the Demiurge, at least the former of which implies the presence of a soul of some sort. Then there is the σύμφυτος ἐπιθυμία of 272e6, which, together with the «learning» and «forgetting» of 273B-D, suggests an irrational soul amenable to rational ordering, but having no innate reason of its own, which is precisely what Plutarch sees here.

So Soul is pretty certainly present in the *Statesman* Myth, but how exactly its activity is to be distinguished from the mechanical motions of the world body remains a disputed question.

The other place in which the doctrine of a World Soul emerges — this time explicitly — is in *Laws* X, and here the complication arises, or appears to

VLASTOS, 'The Disorderly Motion in the *Timaeus*', *CQ* 33, 1939, pp. 71-83 (repr. in R. E. ALLEN, *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, London 1965); HANS HERTER, 'Gott und die Welt bei Platon: Eine Studie zum Mythos des Politikos', *BonnJbb.* 158, 1958, pp. 106-117; id. 'Die Bewegung der Materie bei Platon', *RbM.* 100, 1957, pp. 327-47; T. M. ROBINSON, *Plato's Psychology*, Toronto 1970, ch. 8; J. B. SKEMP, *The Theory of Motion in Plato's Later Dialogues*, Cambridge 1942 (2nd ed. Amsterdam 1967); id., *Plato's Statesman*, London 1952. Intro., pp. 82-112; and, most recently, R. D. MOHR, 'Disorderly Motion in Plato's *Statesman*', *Phoenix* 35, 1981, pp. 199-215.

arise, of two opposing Souls, a beneficent and a maleficent. In a well-known passage, 896DE, the Athenian Stranger reasons as follows:

«Must we then necessarily agree, in the next place, that Soul is the cause of things good and bad, fair and foul, just and unjust, and all the opposites, if we are to assume it to be the cause of all things?»

Cleinias: «Of course we must».

Athenian: «And as Soul thus controls and indwells in all things everywhere that are moved, must we not necessarily affirm that it controls the heavens also?»

Cleinias: «Yes».

Athenian: «One soul, is it, or several? I Will answer for you—«Several». Anyhow, let us assume not less than two —the beneficent soul and that which is capable of effecting results of the opposite kind.»

(trans. Bury).

I am prepared to agree with Harold Cherniss⁹ and others that no dualism of Good and Evil World-Souls is, despite appearances, intended by Plato here, but it is more relevant to our theme that, rightly or wrongly, later Platonists generally did assume that an Evil World-Soul is being described in this passage, though subordinate to, rather than coordinate with, the good Soul, which Plato presents as presiding over the heavens, and the regular motions of the heavenly bodies. The implication here is, though it is not stated in this passage, that the irregularities of the sublunar world must be laid as a charge against the evil Soul.

We have here, then, between the *Philebus*, the *Statesman*, the *Timaeus* and *Laws X*, with some reinforcement from reports of Plato's oral teaching, a comprehensive range of female cosmic principles, such as continues to be of basic significance in later Platonism, in one guise or another: first, the Indefinite Dyad; then, a rational World Soul; then (at least in the view of later Platonists), an irrational (either neutral or maleficent) World Soul; and lastly, formless and all-receptive Matter. I wish now to make some attempt to trace the subsequent development of these entities over the five hundred years or so that separate Plato and Plotinus. Of necessity, this survey must be selective, but I will try to pick out the most important, and most interesting, manifestations.

9. In 'The Sources of Evil According to Plato's', *cf.* above, n. 7.

III

First of all, the Old Academy. Both Speusippus and Xenocrates retained the basic pair of principles, One, or Monad, and Indefinite Dyad,¹⁰ and each of them develops the doctrine in interesting ways. This is particularly true of Speusippus, if we are prepared, as I am,¹¹ to accept as essentially Speusippian ch. 4 of Iamblichus' *De Communi Mathematica Scientia*, which certainly presents a cosmology highly compatible with what we can gather from Aristotle's rather contemptuous and very allusive accounts of Speusippus' doctrine. In this passage the two primary principles are presented as the One and Multiplicity (πληθος). This latter is, admittedly, a neuter noun, but it performs a characteristically female role, being the cause of division, and thus of the generation of all things, and is referred to directly below as «like an entirely fluid and pliable matter (ὅμοια τινι παντάπασιν καὶ εὐπλαθεῖ ὕλη)». In fact, what Speusippus seems to be doing is to connect the primal Multiplicity (the Unlimited, or «Great-and Small») with the Receptacle of the *Timaeus*,^{11a} by postulating the same «female» creative principle manifesting itself at a series of levels, altering its nature as a receptacle according to the level of formative agent which acts upon it. This is, at any rate, the best sense I can make of Speusippus' scheme (which Aristotle, as we know, satirises as making the universe «episodic», *Met.* XII 10,1076a1). The primal union is that between One and Multiplicity, and this produces numbers. The first principle of number, then —whatever that is— acts upon the matter corresponding to it, which is only the original Multiplicity as modified by the action of the One. This union in turn produces geometricals, both plane figures and solids. This third level of entity produces, out of the first principle of geometricals and its corresponding Matter, the Soul, which sets the geometrical level in motion, and hence acquires the definition «the Idea of the omnidimensionally extended» (Fr. 40 Lang). The identities of the fourth and fifth level are not made clear in the *DCMS* passage, but, if we are to extrapolate logically from what we have seen so far, the fourth level would result from the action of Soul on its corresponding Matter, to produce the level of physical life. The fifth and last level, arising out of the action of immanent Soul upon what is now Matter in the

10. Speusippus, Fr. 34 Lang.= Fr. 48 Taran (the doctrine is here attributed to 'the ancients', but that should not deceive us); Xenocrates, Fr. 15 Heinze.

11. Following the brilliant lead of Philip MERLAN in *From Platonism to Neo-Platonism*, ch. 5. See also the excellent article of Harold TARRANT, 'Speusippus' Ontological Classification', *Phronesis* XIX, 1974; pp. 130-145. The attempt of Leonardo TARAN in the introduction to his recent edition of the fragments (*Speusippus of Athens*, Brill, Leiden 1981, pp. 86-107), to impugn the identification I do not find decisive. I deal further with this in an article in *Phronesis* XXIX, 1984, pp. 325-332.

11a. An identification actually made by Aristotle at *Phys.* 209b35ff., and one for which he has been strongly criticised, e.g. by CHERNISS in *The Riddle of the Early Academy*, p. 17 ff.

«vulgar» sense, would be that of the world of inanimate bodies. Since this elaborate process cannot be conceived of as taking place in any sort of chronological succession, how the various levels can be distinguished becomes for me, at least, a deep mystery, as it plainly was for Aristotle. The argument given in *DCMS* IV (p. 16, 18ff) for this process, however, deserves quotation, since it provides a rationale for the whole procedure:

«If one postulates one single Matter and Receptacle,¹² it would be unreasonable not to expect that, since the Form of the One that imposes itself upon it is totally uniform, we should get a uniform class of thing resulting. The consequence of that would be that all classes of thing would be numbers, for we would not be able to postulate any differentiating cause why at one stage numbers were generated, and then lines, and planes, and solid figures, and not always the same class, since they would be springing from the same principles uniting in the same way.»

The argument, therefore, is that, since different classes of entity do in fact arise in the cosmogonic process, and we cannot postulate a differentiation within the One itself, nor yet within Multiplicity, «pliable» though it is, unless different stimuli are applied to it, one must come up with some such scheme as this to account for the phenomena. Whatever about the validity of this argument, the interest of Speusippus' scheme from our perspective is that it provides a link between all the female principles we have so far been considering, Dyad, Soul and Matter. We do not see any such linkage again till Plotinus, with his doctrines of Intelligible Matter, and of Soul as in a sense the «matter» of Intellect (e. g. *Enn.* II 4, 1-5; V 1, 3, 20-23).

Xenocrates presents no such complexities, but he does present us with a problem—or at least his Fr. 15 does. Since this is a doxographic summary of his doctrine by Aetius, the problem may not in fact go back to Xenocrates himself. From Aetius we learn that Xenocrates

«held as gods the Monad and Dyad. The former, as the male principle, has the role of Father, ruling in the heavens. This he terms Zeus and “Odd” (*perittos*), and Intellect, and it is for him the supreme God. The Second is, as it were, the female principle, *in the role of Mother of the Gods* (if this is how μητρὸς θεῶν δίκην is to be taken), ruling over the realm beneath the heavens, who is for him the Soul of the All.»

Now either Xenocrates really made his second principle a subcelestial entity, and identified it with the World Soul, or there is a lacuna in the text, or there is no lacuna, but Aetius is misunderstanding Xenocrates. As to the

12. Note here the conjunction of ἕλη and υποδοχή, indicating that Speusippus (if it is he) had no qualms about presenting the Platonic Receptacle as Matter. I do not, however, see this as an objection to Speusippian authorship of this text, as does TARAN (*op. cit.*, p. 107). The term ἕλη does not have to be either the invention of Aristotle, or, even if it is, confined to him by copyright.

first possibility, it is difficult to see how Xenocrates could have combined the Indefinite Dyad with a World Soul, especially as we learn from the same Aetius (Fr. 28H) that he called his second principle «the everflowing» (ἀένναος), by which, says Aetius, he means Matter, by reason of its multiplicity (πληθος). This reference to πληθος may be an intentional reminiscence of Speusippus, and if so, it is possible that Xenocrates could have telescoped all the levels of Speusippus' second principle, and identified it with the World Soul. But that leaves him in the strange position of identifying an essentially negative entity with one which is basically positive, being the principle of order (presumably) in the cosmos, since it rules over it —unless, of course, Xenocrates is taking a distinctly Gnostic view of the ruling principles of this world.

In *The Middle Platonists*,¹³ I was inclined to suspect the second alternative, a lacuna in the text of Stobaeus (where the doxographical notice is found), and I am still inclined to that solution. A possible alternative, however, is that Aetius is grossly confused. At any rate, the text cannot be correct. We know, after all, from Plutarch (*Proc. An.* 1012D) that Xenocrates held that the Soul (and we are talking about the World Soul of the *Timaeus*) is a product of the action of the One on the Indefinite Dyad (his definition of the Soul as «number moving itself» gains in meaning, I think, if one sees it as a development of Speusippian doctrine). So the Soul cannot also be the Indefinite Dyad.

Faced with this problem, some scholars, notably Heinze¹⁴ and, more recently, H.-J. Krämer,¹⁵ have maintained that the Dyad mentioned in Fr. 15 cannot be the Indefinite Dyad, but must simply be the Soul seen as a dyad. But this will hardly do. As reported by Plutarch (*Proc. An.* 1013E), Xenocrates identified the «undivided essence» of *Tim.* 35A with the One, and «that which is divided about bodies» with Multiplicity (πληθος), «which he also calls the Indefinite Dyad», and the Soul is the product of these two. Aetius is purporting to present here a summary of Xenocrates' metaphysics, and if he leaves out the Indefinite Dyad, and calls the Soul a dyad instead, then he is plainly in a state of deep confusion about his subject-matter —a much more probable situation, in my view, than that Xenocrates is involved in self-contradiction.

This does not quite dispose of the problem, though. Xenocrates chooses to theologise his principles, making the Monad Zeus, and the Dyad «the mother of the gods», by whom we must understand Rhea (already identified with the Dyad by Philolaus (Fr. 20a), no doubt on the basis of a supposed connexion with ῥέω —which would also concord with Xenocrates' epithet for it, ἀένναος). The fact that this puts Zeus in an Oedipal relationship with

13. P. 25. There is, incidentally, an embarrassing misprint in my translation of Fr. 15 there. For 'beyond the heavens' read 'beneath the heavens'.

14. *Xenocrates*, p. 35 n. 1.

15. *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik*, pp. 39-41.

his own mother does not seem to disturb him. What disturbs me, though, about the text is the phrase «μητρὸς θεῶν δίκην». «Δίκην» used adverbially is a rather high-flown locution. It actually occurs no less than seven times in the surviving portions of Aetius, but in all other cases it has its correct meaning of «in the manner of», whereas here it would have to mean rather «in the role of», or «representing», which would be something of a solecism, though not, perhaps, impossible for a late Hellenistic writer. It is here, at any rate, that I would conjecture a lacuna, adopting a proposal of Pierre Boyancé¹⁶ that we understand Δίκη with a capital letter, as a personification. Boyancé does not, however, take the obvious next step of postulating a lacuna between θεῶν and Δίκην. But Xenocrates is not a fool. Rhea cannot be Dike, since Dike is known, since Hesiod (*Works and Days*, 256) to be a *daughter* of Zeus, not his mother; and that is a very proper theologising of the World Soul.

If either of my solutions of the problem of Fr. 15 is accepted, we find Xenocrates making use of two female principles, the first, the Indefinite Dyad as a material principle, the second, the World Soul. Neither of these entities can be considered an «evil» principle in any dualistic sense. I was wrong, I think, in *The Middle Platonists* (p. 26), to describe Xenocrates' Dyad, following Heinze,¹⁷ as an «evil and disorderly principle», because of his alleged influence on the metaphysical schema of Plutarch's *Isis and Osiris*, to which I shall turn presently. No entity which is theologised as Rhea, it seems to me, can be regarded as positively evil, as opposed to incidentally introducing into the world effects that seem «evil» to us, as by-products of multiplicity. Certainly, Xenocrates is attested as believing in evil daemons (φαιλοί δαίμονες Fr. 23-5ff), and the role of Hades as ruler of the realm below the moon is a rather ambiguous one, but it does not follow from that that we can refer back to him the strong dualism represented by Osiris and Seth-Typhon. Plutarch's dualism is picked up elsewhere.

As for the World Soul, the theologising of it as Dike is very apt, I think, as a portrayal of the Soul as presented in the *Timaeus*. Dike, in Hesiod, on the one hand sits by Zeus' side as his *paredros*, or assessor, and on the other roams about in the physical world and reports back her impressions. This seems to characterise very well the circles of the Same and the Other of which the Soul is composed. Xenocrates' World Soul is thus a rational entity, though it possesses reason derivatively, as bestowed upon it by Nous; it also presides over the realm of coming-to-be and passing away, of motion in all its forms. That is what it is to be «a number moving itself».

16. 'Xenocrate et les Orphiques', *REA* 36, 1948, p. 218ff.

17. *Xenocrates*, pp. 30-5.

IV

The legacy of the Old Academy in the matter of female principles is thus a broadly coherent one —Indefinite Dyad, World Soul, Matter, all three creative, receptive of rational influence, «evil», if at all, only incidentally or negatively. Only the possible maleficent Soul of *Laws* X stands out as anomalous, and we cannot be sure what Plato really intended there. What I would like to do in the latter part of this paper is to examine a few of the female entities which occur in the later Platonist tradition, and see how they fit into this Old Academic framework. I will take, in turn, Philo of Alexandria's Sophia, Plutarch's Isis, the Hecate of the Chaldaean Oracles and the Sophia of Valentinian Gnosticism.

Strictly speaking, Philo's monotheism should leave no place for an independent female principle in the universe, but in fact, both the influence of Platonism and the already established Wisdom tradition in Hellenistic Judaism conspire to carve out a place in his system for such a principle. Such a principle is often simply equated with the Logos, and as such is outside the scope of this investigation, but in a number of passages we find the figure of Sophia, God's Wisdom, coming into her own.

In Sect. 109 of *On Flight and Finding* (*Fug.*), for example, we find the Logos described as the son of God, and Sophia «through whom the universe came into existence» (δι' ἧς τὰ ὅλα ἦλθεν εἰς γένεσιν). Sophia is here not simply a material cause, since Philo uses the preposition *dia*, which is that proper to the instrumental cause - normally, in fact, the Logos (cfr. *Cher.* 125ff). This representation of Sophia as the instrumental rather than the material cause concords well, in fact, with a piece of allegorising we know of from Varro¹⁸ (who was in philosophy a follower of the Platonism of Antiochus of Ascalon). He is reported as identifying Athena (Minerva) with the cause *secundum quod*, a rendering of *kath'ho*, which is a variant of *di'ho*. It looks very much as if Philo is influenced by the contemporary Stoic and Platonist allegorisation of Athene, springing, as she does, from the brow of Zeus, with the Logos, in his treatment of Sophia here. She is not quite an Indefinite Dyad here (Philo uses the term «dyad», e. g. *Spec. Leg.* III 180; *Somm.* II 70, but always to describe Matter); she is more like a rational World Soul, assisting a divine Nous in his creation —somewhat reminiscent, indeed, of Xenocrates' Dike.

At 116-117 of *The Worse Attacks the Better* (*Det.*), however, Sophia is given the epithets τροφός and τιθηνόχομος (reminiscent of the τιθήνη of *Timaeus* 49A), and described as «mother of all things in the world (μήτηρ τῶν ἐν κόσμῳ γενομένη), affording to her offspring, as soon as they are born, the nourishment which they require from her own breasts, a development of

18. *Ap. Aug. CD* VII 28.

Plato's image which he would certainly not have approved of, as it gives Matter far too benign and positive a role. Indeed, one is now inclined to think rather of Xenocrates' Rhea, as earth-mother. To complicate the issue further, Philo just below (118) represents Sophia as the manna in the desert, which he etymologises as «*ti*», the most general category of Stoic logic, but, which he normally identifies with the Logos (cfr. *LA* III 175), and which he here describes as λόγος θεῖος.

What this indicates is not, I think, complete incoherence in Philo's thought, so much as a tension between the concepts of Sophia and the Logos, which potentially fulfil very much the same cosmogonic role. We can see the same tension between the roles of Demiurge and World-Soul in later Platonists such as Albinus or Numenius. What we have here is a creative and nurturing principle, plainly, in Philo's mind, subordinate to God, but still presented as *mother* to all things (including the Logos), rather than anyone's daughter, and so more a Rhea-figure than a Dike-figure. Sophia certainly owes something to the tradition of Jewish Wisdom literature, but in Philo's thought, in my view, Platonism predominates.¹⁹

Philo had the problem of fitting a female principle into a strongly monotheist framework. With Plutarch we find the contrasted situation, of a female principle or principles being introduced into a thoroughly dualist framework. I propose to confine my investigations to just one manifestation of femininity, the figure of Isis in the treatise *On Isis and Osiris*.

Plutarch does also recognise the Indefinite Dyad (*Def. Or.* 428F), as «the element underlying all formlessness and disorder», which he identifies not only with the Necessity (*Anagke*) of the *Timaeus* (48A, 56C, 68E), but also with what he sees as the Maleficent Soul of *Laws* X. However, when he theologises this, as he does in the *De Is.* (369E), it is as *male* principle, the Persian Ahriman or the Egyptian Seth-Typhon. It also fills the role of Matter, though it is a more actively evil principle than Matter is traditionally taken to be. Isis, however, takes on some characteristics of Matter as well, as we shall see.

Isis is presented at *De Is.* 372E as follows:

«Isis is, in fact, the female principle in nature, and that which receives all procreation, and so she is called by Plato (*Tim.* 49A, 51A) the «nurse» and «all-receiving» (πανδεχής), and by the majority of people «myriad-named» since, through being turned this way and that by the Logos (if that is the meaning of ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου τρεπομένη), she receives into herself all the shapes and Forms (ιδέας). She has an innate love for the primal and most dominant element of all things, which is identical with the Good, and this she yearns for and pursues; but the portion which comes from evil she tries to avoid and reject,

19. For an interesting discussion of the *Wisdom of Solomon*, see David WINSTON, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, trans., with intro. and comm., New York 1979 (Anchor Bible Series), esp. pp. 20-63.

for she acts as place and matter (χώρα καὶ ὕλη) to both, but inclines naturally always towards the better, and offers to it opportunity to create from her and to sow into her effluxes and likenesses, in which she rejoices and is glad that she is made pregnant and filled with these creations. For creation is the image of Being in Matter, and the thing created is the imitation of the existent.»

What we have here is a female principle of the «World Soul» variety, but an irrational World Soul, which Plutarch assimilates to the Receptacle of the *Timaeus*. In fact we find very much such an entity in ch. 10 of Albinus' *Didaskalikos*, a World-Soul essentially irrational, which requires «arousing» by the supreme God, who is the cause of its intellect.²⁰ It is not positively an evil principle; simply ambivalent, and open to influence from either side, though inclining towards the better.

Isis is, then, poised between a pair of antithetical principles. She is not herself the antithesis of the Good. Yet she is presented by Plutarch a little further on (373EF), rather curiously, as the antithesis of a triad (Osiris - Isis - Horus) into which, he says, «the better and more divine nature» is divided: «the Intelligible (νοητόν), Matter (ὕλη), and the product of these, which the Greeks call the world (κόσμος)». Plutarch goes on to identify these respectively with the Paradigm, the Receptacle and the «offspring» (ἔκγονος) of the *Timaeus* (50 CD). This triadic division must leave out of account the primally evil principle (the Dyad, or Seth-Typhon), and also, I suggest, the primally good one. What we have is a triad of Logos, irrational World-Soul (acting as its matter), and physical world.²¹

Isis is, then, a significantly different figure from Sophia, and more than a step from her in the direction of Gnosticism.²² Indeed, there is one strange phrase in Plutarch's account (373A), which I now think I made too much of in *The Middle Platonists* (pp. 202-3), but which I still find puzzling. Plutarch speaks of the *logoi* which descend to be «impressed» on the World Soul being seized by «the disorderly and disturbing element which has been driven here from the region above» (τὸ ἄτακτον καὶ ταραχώδες ἐνταῦθα τῆς ἄνω χώρας ἀπεληλαμένον). If we take ἡ ἄνω χώρα to refer to the intelligible, divine world, as seems indicated, this would imply that the Indefinite Dyad (Seth-Typhon) originated in that realm, and that some sort of Fall occurred

20. Cfr. also *Did.* ch. 14, p. 169, 30 ff. Hermann, where the same thing is said, the evocative word κάρος being used for the 'slumber' of the soul.

21. I have been criticised by reviewers (e. g. Harold TARRANT in *Prudentia* X, 1978, p. 111) for speaking so confidently about a *logos* doctrine in Plutarch. There is some justice in this criticism, and I should be more cautious now, but I do not see how Plutarch's presentation of Osiris as the *logos* here can be dismissed as not 'part of Plutarch's regular system'. What is his regular system?

22. I have not here dealt with the World Soul as presented in the *Proc. An.*, which, as Werner DEUSE has recently shown (*Untersuchungen zur mittelplatonische und neuplatonische Seelenlehre*, Wiesbaden 1983, ch. II) is regarded by Plutarch as essentially non-rational, receiving reason as something external to it. Plutarch is much influenced here by his interpretation of the *Politicus* Myth.

which would involve the World-Soul itself (*Sophia*), but it seems to imply the ultimate origin of the principle antithetical to the One from the One itself. However, perhaps one should not press this too far—ἀπεληλαμένον may only imply that Evil is forever banished from the divine realm. In any case, it does not directly bear on the situation of Isis herself, which seems archetypally median and ambivalent.

V

But let us turn now from Plutarch to a brief and selective survey of the «underworld» of Platonism, where female principles abound and proliferate. First let us consider the *Sophia* of Valentinian Gnosticism, as the Valentinian is that one among the Gnostic systems that gives the clearest evidence of Platonist influence, at least in the form in which it is (indignantly) relayed to us by the heresiologist Hippolytus.²³

Sophia is, of course, not the only female principle in Gnosticism, merely the most interesting, in that it is her Fall and repentance that sets the whole cosmogony going. In Valentinus' system, as presented by Hippolytus, we begin with the supreme God, the Forefather, who procreates by himself²⁴ an initial pair of entities, one male (Intellect - *Nous*) and one female (Truth - *Aletheia*), and through them, then, a string of paired male and female entities, called Aeons, the most junior of which, on the female side, is *Sophia*. These aeons, twenty-eight (or thirty) in all, together form the Pleroma. I will let Hippolytus take up the tale of *Sophia*'s misadventures (*Ref.* VI 28,6-7):

«Now when the twelfth of the twelve (sc. Aeons proceeding from the Aeons Anthropos and Ecclesia), the youngest of all the twenty-eight aeons, a female, *Sophia* by name, observed the quantity and power of the productive aeons, she hastened back into the depth of the Father and perceived that all the other aeons, being begotten, were procreating in pairs, but that the Father alone was procreating without a partner. She wished to emulate the Father and to produce offspring of herself alone, without a partner, in order that she might achieve a work which would not be in any way inferior to that of the Father.»

Sophia is thus the first feminist. Her ambition is not really evil, just radically misguided. (In Irenaeus' account (see n. 13 above), her sin is simply desire to know her Father, «to comprehend his greatness»; there is no ques-

23. *Refutation of All Heresies*, VI 29, 2-36, 4.

24. In another version, that of Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* I 1, 1-8, 6), who seems to be reporting the system of Valentinus' follower Ptolemaeus, the Forefather is paired by a female principle, his *Ennoia* (Thought), an entity rather reminiscent of Philo's *Sophia*, on whom he engenders *Nous* and *Aletheia*, and then a total of thirty aeons.

tion of emulation, since in that version he has a consort, Ennoia). In any case, the result of Sophia's presumption is a feeble abortion, the Demiurge, Ialdabaoth, who then creates the physical world, and a host of demons to rule it, and ultimately Man himself - although he and his henchmen cannot get Man to work properly. Meanwhile Sophia, full of repentance, sets about correcting her error. This involves inserting a spark of divine pneuma into Man, and ultimately provoking the generation of Christ from the whole Pleroma, as a saviour of the world, after the completion of which salvation the world will dissolve.

Sophia's production of Ialdabaoth finds a curious parallel in Plutarch's *De Iside*, if we may turn our attention back there for a moment. At 373BC, Plutarch gives an allegory of a composite Greco-Egyptian myth about the birth of Apollo (Horus) from Isis and Osiris, «while these gods were still in the womb of Rhea». This means that «before this world was made visible and its rough material (*hyle*) was completely formed by the Logos, it was tested by nature (φύσει ἐλεγχομένην, whatever that really means), and brought forth of itself the first creation imperfect». This «first creation» is termed the elder Horus, and is said to have been born in darkness, a cripple — «a mere image and phantasm of the world that was to be».

So Isis, it seems, produced a sort of foreshadowing of the cosmos on her own, before being filled with logoi by Osiris.²⁵ For Plutarch, this only indicates her desire for Form and order, but it has a curious resemblance to Valentinus' myth. A possible connexion (apart from direct dependence — Valentinus is a generation or so younger than Plutarch) would be a common dependence on Egyptian mythology. Valentinus was, after all, an Egyptian, and other aspects of his system show the influence of Egyptian religious conceptions.²⁶

There is much more that could be said about Sophia in Gnosticism, and about other female principles associated with her. In some versions, for instance, she generates a lower projection of herself, Achamoth (from Hebrew *hokhmah*, wisdom), who serves as an immanent organising principle for the physical world (like Plotinus' concept of *Physis* later), while Sophia remains above. But I want to turn, in the time remaining to us, to consider one further female principle from the Platonic Underworld, the formidable Hecate of the Chaldaean Oracles.

The Oracles date from the last decades of the Second Century,²⁷ somewhat later than Valentinus, and approximately contemporary with the Neopyt-

25. As is correctly noted by R. M. JONES, in *Classical Journal* 19, 1924, pp. 565-6, who compares the state of the Receptacle and its contents in *Tim.* 53.

26. For instance, the Forefather's production, without a partner, of Nous and Aletheia is reminiscent of Atum's production of Shu and Tefnut. On the question of a possible common source for Plutarch's Isis and Valentinus' Sophia, see TOUSHOUDT, *Ein unbekend gnostisch systeem in Plutarchs De Iside et Osiride*, Louvain 1942.

27. Their author, a certain Julian, served with Marcus Aurelius on his campaign against the Quadi in 173 A.D. as a sort of witchdoctor-in-residence, which provides a date for his *floruit*.

hagorean Numenius, with which they have some points of contact. In Fr. 3,²⁸ we hear of the «Power» (*dynamis*) of the Father, a female principle more intimately associated with the supreme god than even his Intellect — rather like Philo's *Sophia*, or the Valentinian Ptolemaeus' *Ennoia*, except that there is no indication that Power has any role in generating Intellect; it merely «remains with» the Father, while the Intellect «proceeds from» him.

This *dynamis*, however, is distinct from and superior to Hecate,²⁹ who stands on the border between the intelligible and sensible worlds, acting both as a barrier and as a link between them, very much in the role of World Soul. In Fr. 6 she is presented as an intellectual «diaphragm» or «membrane» (ὑπεζωκῶς τις ὑμῆν νοερός) between the two worlds, while in Fr. 30 she is described as «fount of founts, a womb containing all things» (πηγή τῶν πηγῶν, μήτρα συνέχουσα τὰ πάντα). She is regularly given the epithet ζωογόνοσ, «lifegiving» (Fr. 30; Proclus, *In Tim.* I 5,15; 11, 19-20; *In Parm.* 1153,30).

Thus presented, Hecate seems to fill much the same role as Plutarch's *Isis*, or Xenocrates' *Dike* (if we knew more about her). Some of her epithets, such as *metra*, «womb», connect her, like *Isis*, with the Receptacle of the *Timaeus*, but she is also analogous to the World Soul, in that she performs an active role in transmitting *logoi* to the physical world. Why the author of the *Oracles* chose Hecate for this central mediating figure, rather than, say, *Athene* or *Isis*, is not quite clear to me, but perhaps her role in magical ritual was significant in this connexion, since the *Oracles* are, after all, a handbook of theurgy, and Hecate, as a chthonic deity, is easier to summon up than *Athene* might be.

A complication in Hecate's status in that she is presented (in Fr. 50) as having «her centre established in the midst of the Fathers» and Psellus confirms this (*Expos.* 1152a), by saying that she is in the middle of the «source-fathers» (πηγαῖοι πατέρες), flanked by the ἄπαξ ἐπέχεινα (whom we might term «Transcendental I») above her, and the δις ἐπέχεινα (Transcendental II) below her.³⁰ Hecate is thus the median element in a triad, fulfilling the same role, that of *dynamis*, that the highest female principle performs. It is possible, I suppose, that Psellus' account of Chaldaean theology reflects Neoplatonic elaboration, and that in the *Oracles* themselves this basic triad is all there ever was. Des Places is of this opinion, but I am not so sure. Either way, though, Hecate takes on some of the character of the *Hagion Pneuma*, the Second Person of the Christian Trinity. It is with that figure that we began, so it is suitable to end our survey at this point.

28. I use the Budé edition of E. DES PLACES, Paris 1971.

29. DES PLACES tries to identify them (*Intra.* p. 13), but Psellus' *Exposition of Chaldaean Doctrine* (1152a, p. 189 Des Places) makes it clear that they exist on different levels.

30. These curious titles seem to result from an interpretation of the Chaldaean deities Ad and Adad ('Adad' being 'Ad' doubled).

VI

The entities surveyed in the second part of the paper demonstrate, I think, in interesting ways, that the relationship set up by Plato in the *Timaeus* between Demiurge, World Soul, and Receptacle is philosophically a most uncomfortable one. I cannot believe that he intends us to take it literally, and I am continually astonished at those scholars, some very distinguished, who wish to take it so. The lesson to be derived, I think, from the way in which the creative divine Intellect, the World Soul and the Dyad, or Matter, are presented in the Old Academy and in Middle Platonism is that those philosophers found it in all cases necessary to rearrange the relationship. Either the Demiurge becomes the supreme Intellect, repository of the Forms, and the World Soul his active principle or *logos*, while Matter takes on the features of an irrational World Soul, or the Demiurge is preserved as a secondary, creator god, while the World Soul takes on the role of a material principle, with or without a further material principle, either positively or just negatively evil, in the background.

At any rate, be that as it may, what I hope I have shown is that functional, as opposed to purely grammatical femininity has an integral place in the Platonic world-view—not the highest, certainly, but an honourable place nonetheless. «The female» has been given such a negative connotation, ever since the promulgation of the Pythagorean Table of Opposites, that it is right to remind ourselves of the considerable spread of roles which female principles in fact take on. *Chercher la femme* can be a rewarding activity for the Platonic philosopher.