

Call for abstracts for the 2018 ISNS Conference in Los Angeles

Panels

Renaissance and Early Modern Platonisms

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Now that Ficino's *Parmenides Commentary* has been published, it might be time to think more systematically about the evolution of Ficino's thought as a whole, or indeed, about the intellectual and literary trajectories of Renaissance Platonism. Authors of interest include Ficino, naturally, but also other authors including Cusa, Kepler, Bruno and possibly extending to Cambridge Platonism. We also might think about the figures who made this Renaissance possible, such as Pletho.

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

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

Platonising heresy in the early modern period: the case of Origen's revival

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The early modern period marks arguably a new era in the history of the reception of Plato in the West. The rediscovery of one of the most controversial figures in the history of Christianity, namely Origen of Alexandria, meant at the same time the reappraisal of Plato and Platonism. As for Origen himself, he was both accused and defended by different sides and for the most varied reasons. Although in 1486 Giovanni Pico della Mirandola was accused of heresy for having claimed in his 900 Theses that Origen might be rather saved than damned, for example, at the beginning of the following century the "prince of humanists", Erasmus of Rotterdam, set Origen at the cornerstone of his biblical exegesis. Origen and, in some occasions, his Platonic background became gradually a hotly debated topic.

The start of the Protestant Reformation sparked even more the debate on the figure of Origen. Martin Luther himself, for example, repeatedly stressed his belief in the damnation of Origen and Philipp Melanchthon, Luther's closest collaborator, identified in Origen the first perverter of the doctrine of justification, and one that improperly mixed philosophy and theology, namely Platonism and Christianity. Plato and Platonism must have their own role in the history of philosophy, so Melanchthon, but they have not to be confused with the faith in Jesus Christ.

In the following century, the dispute on the role of Origen and his Neoplatonic philosophy in the history of Christianity continued. Socinians accused the early Church, in particular Origen and Clemens of Alexandria, of having distorted Christianity through the use of Platonic concepts. An emblematic work in this direction was for example Souverain's "*Le Platonisme dévoilé*", published in 1700, which described the early years of Christianity as the "Platonic captivity". Together with Origen's thought, Platonism too became thus somewhat "heretic" over the centuries.

In light of these historical developments, this panel welcomes contribution on the reception of Platonism in the early modern period broadly understood (roughly 1500- 1700), as mediated through Origen of Alexandria. Although there is a large bibliography on the history of the influence of Plato and Neoplatonic authors in the early modern period, it is not sufficiently examined how the reading of Origen influenced the understanding of Platonism and its relationship with Christian thought. Possible topics of enquiries could be, but are not limited to:

- Origen's theology and its relationship with Platonic philosophy;
- Platonic, Origenist, and Christian metaphysics;
- Origen's influence on the relationship between Platonism and Christianity.

Ex uno nihil fit nisi unum: Greek, Latin, Arabic, and Hebrew Perspectives.

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At the beginning of his Commentary on the *Liber De Causis* (lib. 1, tract. 1, cap. 16, p. 13, 69-71 Fauser), Albert the Great writes: "This proposition, that from what is one and simple, only what is one can result (*ab uno simplici non est nisi unum*) is written by Aristotle in a letter which is on the Principle of the Being of the Universe (*qui est de principio universi esse*), and it is taken up and explained by Al-Farabi, Avicenna and Averroes".

The principle that from what is one only what is one can derive, lies at the basis of what is known as the Neoplatonic theory of emanation, and represents one answer to the age-old conundrum of how the Many can derive from the One. Its antecedents have been traced back to Alexander of Aphrodisias, Plotinus, and the pseudonymous Theology of Aristotle, while its influence has been discerned in Avicenna, Maimonides, and Thomas Aquinas, to name but a few. This panel solicits contributions on all aspects of this principle and the question it is intended to answer: from the Presocratics to the Middle Ages, in Greek, Latin, Arabic, or Hebrew. What are the origins of this principle? Is there any possibility that, as Albert maintains, could Aristotle have actually said such a thing? How is it supposed to solve the problem of the origin of multiplicity? What was its influence on medieval thought, in all the languages of the Abrahamic tradition?

Beauty and Pedagogy in Neoplatonic Thought

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This panel invites papers that explore the relationship between beauty and pedagogy in Neoplatonic thought, its sources and its influences. Pedagogy includes multiple strategies, methods, and aims to acquire a knowledge, art, or practice that induces conversion of the soul. Beauty signals a form that draws the soul upward; it begins with appearance, but compels a movement beyond appearances to their source.

The relationship between beauty and pedagogy surfaces a multitude of questions: What is a proper judgment about beauty? How does one discern the power of beauty? What types of beautiful things aid pedagogy – music, virtue, bodies? If the goal of pedagogy is directed to the best kind of life, how

Does beauty contribute to that goal? These and similar issues are invited for discussion.

Conceptions of the Soul in Plato, Aristotle, and the Platonic Tradition

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In several dialogues, including the *Phaedo*, *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, and *Timaeus*, Plato investigated the nature and function of the soul. Aristotle criticized Plato and in his turn created his own theory of soul. Later Platonists used Plato and Aristotle's as models for their own interpretations of the soul.

This panel will focus on this evolution of thought on the nature and function of the soul. Contributors may wish to consider such questions as how the doctrine of soul changed over time, how individual authors modified earlier views and their reasons for doing so, the problems raised by the soul's immortality and transmigration, etc.

Eros and Philosophy in Plato and the Neoplatonic Tradition

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It is a fact generally known, though perhaps not fully acknowledged, that Plato's philosophy is deeply rooted in his ideas on *Eros* and its role in the cultivation of human knowledge. There are, therefore, important questions regarding the implications of *eros* in Plato that the Platonist and Neoplatonist need to ask. For example, what is the relationship between the so-called "erotic dialogues" and the later metaphysics of texts like the *Timaeus*? What does Plato's use of *eros* in his epistemology mean for understanding the relationship between the body and the soul? And what might Plato's treatment of *eros* as a ladder of ascent toward the Good mean for his views on interpersonal love and ethics? This panel will focus on highlighting the important questions relating to *eros* in Plato, as well as on possible responses to and developments of Plato's ideas found within the dialogues and within the Neoplatonic tradition more broadly.

Nature, Ecology, and Neoplatonism

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What would Plato say about the extinction of species? What would Plotinus and other neoplatonists say about climate change and plastic in the ocean? For all of our love of neoplatonism and for the nuances and surprises we find in neoplatonic writers, we shouldn't lose sight that we are in an ecological crisis brought on by humanity's effect on the environment. Platonic and neoplatonic views of nature differ from the way we thinking about the natural world today. For example, nature was an activity of the World Soul for Plotinus. Can we adapt ancient ways of thinking to create new ways of relating to nature? Can the work of neoplatonic writers be used in combination with other philosophies and disciplines to provide a better approach to the ecology crisis? This panel would like to explore these questions along with any topic that relates to neoplatonic understanding of nature, ecosystems, and the environment.

Neoplatonism in Comparative Light: The Search for a Transcendent-Immanent God

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Given these times when a resurgent nationalism is pitted against cosmopolitanism, it may be important to foster harmony and dialogue among diverse cultural and religious traditions. One way is to engage in theological comparisons between different conceptions of the Divine. In this panel, we reach beyond the west to seek harmony-amidst-differences or striking parallels between Neoplatonism and other traditions – whether western or not. We welcome

papers that explore the similarities and differences between different conceptions of the Divine – especially those that examine the details of the structure of the eternally simultaneous transcendence *and* immanence of the First Principle.

The One and the Dao

Christos Sideras <c.sideras@ucl.ac.uk>

We welcome proposals for a panel on the relationships between Neoplatonism and Daoism. Bearing in mind the internal heterogeneities within the two traditions, this may include discussions around oneness, duality, and multiplicity, as well as the origin of multiplicity, principles of form and formlessness, the finite and infinite, determination and indetermination, temporal and atemporal, processes of separation, union, and transmutation. Discussions around the nature of the self in the two traditions, the ways that are of the good and virtuous living, how rituals and particular practices, including fasting, can serve to prepare the person for re-union with the prime divine origin, and the role of nature in all, are also welcomed. We note that though proposals may be informed by the above themes, they are, however, not restricted by them, and we would also value contributions outlining divergence as well convergence.

The Good and the Beautiful in the Platonic Tradition

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Papers are invited on the concepts of good and beauty (and/or the beautiful), and their relationship to one another, in Platonic/Neoplatonic philosophies from all periods (classical, medieval, renaissance, and modern/contemporary) of Platonic thought. Papers may also examine their place and role in such topic areas as aesthetics, ethics, psychology, and conceptions of *eros*.