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Introducing Plato's System through σχήματα:
Isagogical Aspects of Platonism in Late Antiquity*

In the *Academica*, a sort of encyclopaedia of ancient philosophical thought, Cicero, who is discussing the (pre-)history of Platonism, focuses the reader's attention on the unity of the various traditions and the possibility of viewing Plato as the only source for a sort of system of thought shared by different philosophical schools – a possibility that seems to have concretely emerged with the *germanissimus Stoicus* Antiochus of Ascalon¹. This early Platonism, which Cicero presents as a *disciplina* and *ars philosophiae*, and which he therefore regards as already being far removed from the methodological core of Socrates' philosophy, springs from the reflections and discussions surrounding the rich doctrinal legacy of the Master, in relation to which it is possible to identify an *ordo* and specific arrangement of the topics investigated. The crucial studies by Donini and Ferrari show how the gradual establishment of this 'system' in the Imperial Age reflects the growing need to present Platonism – particularly by comparison to Stoicism² – as a coherent thought in all of its aspects³. Initially, this process was an uncertain one, marked by *dissensio philosophorum* as well as by 'odd' conceptual rather than terminological congruences between different philosophies⁴. This early stage was followed by one that led to the progressive consolidation of Platonism, which from the 3rd century AD onwards reigned supreme, absorbing Aristotelianism – a crucial passage for the creation of isagogical philosophical patterns – and contributing to the demise of Hellenistic philosophies. The research perspective to be pursued is therefore a two-fold one: it concerns, on the one hand, the conceptual material developed within the systematic framework that emerged over the centuries in the form of a theology and, on the other, the arrangement of this material

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¹ See Cic. *ac.* I 17-18. On Antiochus of Ascalon, see Glucker 1978; Bonazzi 2012; Sedley 2012; Ferrari 2013.

² See Cic. *fin.* III 74.

³ See Donini 1994; Ferrari 2003 and Ferrari 2016. See too Bonazzi 2003 and Bonazzi 2015.

⁴ See Cic. *ac.* II 17 and *Tusc.* V 32.

on the basis of the growing importance of written texts and the related wide-scale production of commentaries.

The way in which the *disciplina* is presented is no longer by discussing problems starting from the well-known Socratic question, which is a question of epistemic priority, but rather by setting out from a sort of acknowledgement of the priority of Plato's authorship⁵. Every doctrinal exposition would appear to be indissolubly connected to the exegesis of certain dialogues or of specific Platonic passages from which it is possible to infer some truths via exegetical methods and procedures that often reveal a philological rather than simply philosophical attachment to the written text⁶. More generally, philosophy switches from the question *What is X?* to the question *What is X according to Plato?* In other words, by adopting some interesting strategies, it starts to present a system that finds confirmation in the multifaceted thought of its *auctoritas*⁷.

The exegetical methods adopted are usually discussed in the introductions to the commentaries⁸ and in specifically introductory texts. Early on in the tradition, the hermeneutical σχήματα used or endorsed had yet to be officially established and universally acknowledged, and therefore applied. For instance, among the three modes of exegesis presumably applied in the Middle Platonist period⁹. Diogenes Laertius (III 65) mentions the purpose (τίνοσ εἴνεκα), which emerges as the antecedent to the isagogical scheme, the σκοπός, which no enquiry can lack according to the Neoplatonists. As is well known, the preliminary questions varied in content and number, although some common ones were identified: the purpose of the work (σκοπός), its place within an author's corpus (τάξις), its usefulness (χρήσιμον), and its authenticity (γνήσιον)¹⁰. Therefore, as already Plezia showed in his pioneering study¹¹ – pioneering, that is, with regard to its topic, since in terms of its outcome it is a rather enumerative work – the only certainty we have is that the σκοπός was a recurrent element. As I will endeavour to show, it emerged as *the* exegetical principle, chiefly for two reasons.

First of all, for the Neoplatonists it was important to understand and define *that in view of which* (τὸ οὗ ἔνεκα, Anon. *Proll.* 23,9-10) Plato had written something significant, yet not in order to refute the accusation of *inconstantia*, to overcome

⁵ On the importance of Platonic *auctoritas* for the development of the practice of exegesis, see Sedley 1997.

⁶ See Sen. *epist.* 108,23.

⁷ See Eudor. *apud* Ar. Did. *apud* Stob. *Anth.* II 49, 25-50, 1 Wachsmuth - Hense.

⁸ See Romano 1994.

⁹ See Barnes 1993, 134-140; Mansfeld 1994; Ferrari 2001 and Ferrari 2010.

¹⁰ See Procl. *in R.* I 5, 3-5 Kroll. On this matter, see Hadot 1990, 21-47.

¹¹ See Plezia 1949.

problems related to the *obscuritas* of the text, or to define Plato's true doctrine – as had been the case for the Middle Platonists. Rather, Neoplatonists pursued this goal in order to stress the crucial relation established in Late Antiquity between Platonic doctrine and Unity, understood in metaphysical and literary terms. There is one σκοπός, first of all, because it is the literary equivalent of the metaphysical One. From a more strictly Platonic and methodological perspective, it represents – as Socrates states in the *Phaedrus* – the possibility of *tracing back to a single idea* elements strewn here and there through an all-encompassing view, so as to define each entity and thus clarify what is being taught in each case.¹² The presence of only one σκοπός, therefore, ensures the divine nature of Plato's philosophy, as well as that of the text celebrating it, insofar as the Divinity, in Neoplatonism, coincides with Unity – a unity which on a literary level is ensured by the single purpose. This is one of the key points in the light of which philosophy is presented by way of introduction to the systematic exegesis of the dialogues: philosophy acquires the character of theology, since it is a philosophical system revolving around the One, which is also the First God.

Secondly, the σκοπός is *de facto* the most effective exegetical tool to show that Plato and Aristotle are not in doctrinal conflict¹³. This is the approach adopted by Porphyry, Aristotle's first Platonic commentator¹⁴. Drawing upon the thesis put forward by the Peripatetic Boethus of Sidon, Porphyry rules out a metaphysical σκοπός for the *Categories*¹⁵ and claims that the purpose of this text is given by linguistic categories endowed with meaning¹⁶. When, in this treatise, Aristotle describes the sensible individual as 'primary substance', what he is saying is that sensibles are primary insofar as they are named first¹⁷; and this does not exclude the possibility that Aristotle may have identified primary substances with the intelligibles elsewhere, if the purpose of enquiry differed from that of the *Categories*¹⁸.

The crucial development of the preliminary question of the σκοπός may therefore be related to the encounter with the Aristotelian tradition, and not only because of the consequences of its application on the part of Porphyry and other commentators on Aristotelian texts, but because this application presupposes a discussion that finds its starting point in Aristotle's writing. For the Neoplatonists

¹² See Pl. *Phdr.* 265d3-5 and Arist. *Po.* 51a30-35.

¹³ See Hoffmann 1987.

¹⁴ See Karamanolis 2004.

¹⁵ Porphyry, however, does not use the term σκοπός, but rather πρόθεσις, a less common term than the former but one that is attested as its synonym.

¹⁶ See Moraux 2000, 149-184, esp. 155. On Boethus see Alesse 1997.

¹⁷ See Porph. *in Cat.* 91, 19-27 Busse.

¹⁸ See Porph. *in Cat.* 91, 14-17.

the σκοπός is no different from the Aristotelian τέλος; and although they tend to use the former term rather than the latter to describe the textual aim or final cause, usage of τέλος is also attested with exactly the same meaning¹⁹. The distinction between the two terms is actually of Stoic origin and was adopted by late Peripatetics – whom Simplicius describes as νεώτεροι²⁰, precisely by virtue of the fact that they distinguished the τέλος from the σκοπός. However, the Stoic Arius Didymus rejected this distinction in favour of the more ancient linguistic usage, which he acknowledged as the more properly Aristotelian. What is also interesting is that, within a rhetorical-Aristotelian context, the τέλος acquired a crucial place in preliminary discussions, a place that was later filled by the σκοπός²¹.

Nevertheless, although the *Rhetoric* is quoted by the Alexandrian commentator Olympiodorus²² – whose school is associated with the drafting of the anonymous *Prolegomena to Plato's Philosophy*, which is the only Neoplatonist introduction to Plato to have reached us and which contains more isagogical patterns than any other work – it did not directly influence late-antique commentators, unlike the works from the *Organon*. In the *Prolegomena* the question of the methodological as well as introductory importance of the σκοπός is traced back – and discussed in the light of – the *Phaedrus*, which affirms the need to begin all enquiries by defining one's object²³. Moreover, unlike the *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, which were already commented upon by Alexander of Aphrodisias and represent fundamental works for grasping the metaphysical depth of Neoplatonist exegesis, the *Rhetoric* is not included in the *curriculum* of 'minor mysteries' that Marinus records in relation to the education of the scholar Proclus²⁴. As is widely known, it is precisely in the *Physics*²⁵ that Aristotle expounds the theory of the four causes, assigning great prominence to the final one, the τέλος – τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶν τὸ οὐ ἕνεκα²⁶. When reinterpreted by Seneca, or rather by his Platonist source, this theory is for the first time extended to encompass five causes²⁷ – a move justified by its application to Platonist philosophy, an application already attempted by the Peripatos, if we are to believe the report

¹⁹ See e.g. Olymp. in *Phd.* 7 § 10,12-18 Westerink.

²⁰ See Simp. in *Ph.* II 2 (303, 30-33 Diels).

²¹ See Arist. *Rh.* 1415a, 22.

²² See Olymp. in *Alc.* 11,14-15 Westerink. On the Neoplatonists' interest in rhetoric see Kustas 1973, 5-26 (even though the analysis provided in the sections dealing with the influence of Christian rhetoric on pagan Neoplatonism are not always convincing).

²³ See Pl. *Phdr.* 237b 7 - c 2 and Anon. *Proll.* 21,3-6 Westerink - Segonds - Trouillard.

²⁴ See Marin. 13 Saffrey - Segonds.

²⁵ See Arist. *Ph.* 2,194b23-195b21, as well as *Metaph.* V (Δ), 2,1013a-1013b.

²⁶ See Arist. *Ph.* 2, 194b32-195a2.

²⁷ See Sen. *epist.* 65,2-14.

according to which Eudemus regarded Aristotelian physics as a systematisation of Plato's one²⁸. With Proclus the thesis reaches six causes²⁹ and is presented from an incisive literary-metaphysical perspective in the *Prolegomena to Plato*. In this text, which analogically connects the cosmos of the dialogues with the metaphysical one, the characters, time and place are analogous to the material cause, the style to the formal cause, the soul to the efficient cause, demonstrations to the instrumental cause, problems to the exemplary cause, and the Good to the final cause³⁰.

It is therefore on the basis of the physical reflections contained in some Aristotelian texts that the exegesis of the dialogues assimilates that content and form that distinguishes not just the τέχνη ῥητορική, but also the science of theology³¹: exegesis derives its exactness from Aristotelian science, whereas it acquires its specific difference from the speculation surrounding (Neo-)Platonist metaphysics, which centres on the notion of the One/Good. This is confirmed by the nature of the connections between the patterns used across different disciplines.

In order to show that the *intentio libri* cannot wholly be taken to coincide with the Neoplatonist σκοπός, let us examine a passage from the introduction to Virgil's *Bucolics* by Aelius Donatus³², a contemporary of Iamblichus, a philosopher who provided a crucial contribution to scholastic patterns³³ and, in particular, to the σκοπός. The Latin grammarian clearly associates the *intentio libri* with the Greek σκοπός³⁴, yet not exactly with the Neoplatonist σκοπός, as he lends this isagogical scheme a double value by distinguishing two aspects of the aim of the *Bucolics*: its literary aspect (the *imitatio* of Theocritus) and its celebratory one (the *laus Caesaris*). Although this distinction is not entirely foreign to philosophical

²⁸ See Simp. *in Ph.* I *prooem.* (7, 10-17 Diels).

²⁹ See Procl. *in Ti.* II 357, 13-15 Diehl.

³⁰ Anon. *Proll.* 17,42-48. On the microcosm of the dialogues, see Coulter 1976.

³¹ See Saffrey 1992a, 35-50 and Dörrie - Baltes - Pietsch 2008.

³² On this text, see Monno 2003 and Monno 2006. The scheme put forward by the Latin grammarian would seem rather typical of textbooks from this period, and constitutes one of the earliest examples of what in the following centuries came to be defined as the *accessus ad auctores*: see Spallone 1990.

³³ See Dalsgaard Larsen 1972, 435-444. The *Prolegomena to Plato* only refer to two authorities, namely Iamblichus and Proclus (Anon. *Proll.* 26,16; 25,6; 26,7). It is possible, therefore, that through Proclus' work(s) - see Mansfeld 1994, 28-37 - the Anonymous came to adopt originally Iamblichean exegetical principles, such as the canon. The first attestation of the term σκοπός in an isagogical context is provided by Iamblichus' pupil Dexippus (*in Cat.* 16,16 Busse).

³⁴ See Don. *Verg. ecl. praef.* 64. Aelius Donatus thus proves to be familiar with the technical terminology of the commentaries, which - according to Mansfeld 1994, 21 n. 24 - he drew from his reading of commentaries on the Greek poets. On the correspondence between σκοπός and *intentio*, see Alpers-Gölz 1976, 132-133.

exegetical discussions – as is shown by Origen, Ammonius Saccas' pupil in Alexandria, according to whom the aim of the inspirer of the Sacred Scriptures, namely the Divine Spirit, is *chiefly* to make the meaning of the accounts of God's visible works known *yet also* to conceal it³⁵ – Aelius Donatus' operation brings out an interesting difference compared to the more peculiar Neoplatonist exegetical strategy. The section on the *intentio* follows that devoted to the *causa*: the latter too is analysed according to two perspectives (*ab origine carminis* and *a voluntate scribentis*) and reveals a relation of mutual implication with the *intentio*, which in turn is subjected to a similar process of duplication with respect to its form and content³⁶.

By contrast, in Neoplatonism the cause and the aim do not have a double aspect; what's more, they do not simply *imply* one another, but fit within the exegetical category of the σκοπός. As the literary counterpart to the metaphysical One, the final cause of all beings, the σκοπός must be conceived as both the cause of the literary cosmos and as its aim. In other words, it represents the category encompassing all causes³⁷. The anonymous author of the *Prolegomena* must thus have regarded multiplicity – and hence the double aspect which the Latin grammarian assigns to the *intentio*, and to the *causa* before it – as a 'methodological' error. Besides, the assignment of a double title to the dialogues³⁸ – suggesting a second σκοπός³⁹ – would appear to be based on extrinsic didactic criteria, far removed from the aims pursued in philosophical teaching. Correctness lies in the harmonisation of form and matter, i.e. in the encounter between the conceptual matter at the basis of Neoplatonism and the organisation of the material used to express it and explain it. As noted by Synesius of Cyrene, who does not so much speak of correctness but rather mentions what stems from it, namely beauty, philosophy removes all weakness even from language and tends towards a dignified and composed beauty that is suited to nature and to the Ancients' thought⁴⁰.

³⁵ See Origenes *Phil.* I 14-15 and the commentary in Harl 1983, 75-78. On the role played by Origen with respect to the use of essentially philosophical patterns, see Neuschäfer 1988 I 77 ff. and Hadot 1990, 36-44.

³⁶ See Don. *Verg. ecl. praeef.* 50.

³⁷ See *Proll.* 21,23-32.

³⁸ The use of a double title is already attested by Aristotle, who uses the expression of ἐρωτικοὶ λόγοι with reference to the *Symposium* (*Pol.* II 1262b 11) and ἐν τῷ ἐπιταφίῳ with reference to the *Menexenus* (*Rh.* III 1415b 31). According to Mansfeld 1994, 71-74, the double titles of all the dialogues are due to Thrasyllus' classification: see D.L. III 57.

³⁹ It is likely that, according to the Anonymus' understanding, the particle ἢ ('or') occurring between the title and subtitle of a work served to distinguish two parts and hence two alternative aims.

⁴⁰ Syn. *Dion* 3 (241, 6-9 Terzaghi).

Although the metaphysical value acquired by the σκοπός as final cause in the history of Neoplatonism cannot be placed on the same level as the literary example just mentioned or other similar ones, it is important not to underestimate the fact that, at a certain moment in the history of exegesis, some interpretative grids became firmly established. Through them, rhetorical teaching and philosophical enquiry – while clearly hierarchically distinguished, at least by philosophers,⁴¹ within the context of a debate that has recently flared up again⁴² – come together in the Muses' chorus⁴³ thanks to the philosopher: he who harmonises all the arts, bringing multiplicity back to unity⁴⁴. Rhetoric – one of the Muses of the *paideutic* chorus – serves as a bridge linking the patterns adopted by the commentators of both literary and philosophical texts. Besides, Porphyry, Iamblichus and Proclus had also devoted themselves to rhetoric⁴⁵, prior to *quenching their thirst at the fount of philosophy*⁴⁶. The motif of philosophical 'conversion' is featured in the *Life of Isidore* by Damascius, the last Athenian scholarch, who in his work clearly affirms that rhetorical exegesis (ἡ ῥητορικὴ ἐξήγησις) is an important stage⁴⁷ in the education of a soul which, however, can only attain true purification through philosophy⁴⁸.

The exegetical categories suggested in rhetorical treatises thus prove necessary, yet are not sufficient in themselves to *justify* their application within the Platonic system: there is a particular connection between σύστημα and σχήμα, a connection that first started taking shape as a reaction to the sceptical turn taken by the Academy⁴⁹, and which was first consolidated when Platonism became a σύστημα: for it was by becoming a (metaphysical-theological) system that it established, justified and multiplied the use of σχήματα. So while the Middle Platonist schools witnessed the emergence of the *need for a system*, with exegetical suggestions that

⁴¹ See Syn. *Dion* 4 e 10.

⁴² See Cassin 2002, 179.

⁴³ See Them. *Or.* 21,255A and Syn. *Dion* 4. With his portrait of Dio, Synesius offers us an image of the ideal philosopher as a 'double' man, endowed with two distinct yet closely related personalities: one rooted in rhetoric, the other in philosophy. See Brancacci 1985, 392.

⁴⁴ See Syn. *Dion* 5 (246, 14-15).

⁴⁵ See Marin. 8; 10.

⁴⁶ See *Suidae lexicon*, s.v. Πορφύριος, IV 178, 14-18 Adler. In his *Homeric Questions*, Porphyry describes the Athenian grammarian Apollodorus as his teacher: Porph. *fr.* 15T Smith. On Proclus and the Athenian and Alexandrian sophists and grammarians of Late Antiquity, see Di Branco 2006, 131-179. On the interest in Hermogenes in Late Antiquity, see Kustas 1973 and Kustas 2001.

⁴⁷ See Them. *Or.* 24,303B-304A. On the teaching of grammar, see Cribiore 2001, 185-219.

⁴⁸ See *Ep. Phot.* 201 Zintzen = 137B Athanassiadi.

⁴⁹ On the sceptical turn of the Academy, see Dillon 2003, 234-238.

were not always formalised – as may be inferred, to give only one example, from Albinus' text⁵⁰ – Neoplatonism integrated these didactic-exegetical suggestions within the conceptual system of a philosophy that no longer had any rivals or anything to prove, but only needed to preserve its (textual and doctrinal) divinity.

Moreover, it may be noted that in the *Prolegomena to Plato* historical information is combined with biography – another isagogical scheme – in order to meet a specific aim. An important role in the creation of this scheme was certainly played by Porphyry of Tyre, a pupil of Plotinus', and his biographer. His *Life of Plotinus and the Arrangement of His Work* (Περὶ τοῦ Πλωτίνου βίου καὶ τῆς τάξεως τῶν βιβλίων αὐτοῦ) established the propaedeutic importance of the βίος. While editorial concerns led Thrasyllus to write an introduction to Plato consisting of a βίος and the arrangement of his dialogues into tetralogies⁵¹, and while Apuleius was the first Platonist author of a handbook to Plato prefaced by a biography, Porphyry's operation – as Harder explains – is an unprecedented one⁵². In acknowledging his master's greatness, Porphyry establishes his place among the classics; but in order to do so, he must present Plotinus as an outstanding figure⁵³, i.e. he must preface his writings with an exemplary βίος. From this perspective, the inclusion of a life of Plato in the *Prolegomena to Plato* may seem superfluous, insofar as Plato was already a classic at the time and his life must have been widely known. However, upon closer scrutiny, we find that the aim here is much the same as the one pursued by Porphyry: Plato's βίος presents a classic author but also, and most importantly, an outstanding figure, whose life must be reconstructed on the basis of his doctrine, so that it may be used for didactic purposes and for the exegesis of his writings⁵⁴.

The decisive impulse towards the application of isagogical patterns may therefore have been provided by Porphyry and by the Platonist absorption of Aristotelianism, which – among other things – brought about the emergence of a form of introductory literature. At its basis stands the *Isagoge* – i.e. Porphyry's introduction to Aristotle and his *Categories*⁵⁵ – which does not really provide any isagogical patterns and whose importance therefore lies not so much in the content it presents as in the effect it had on Neoplatonist schools. While Plotinus seems

⁵⁰ See Alb. *Intr.* IV 149, 17-V 149, 3 Reis.

⁵¹ See D.L. III 1. On Thrasyllus, see Tarrant 1993 and Mansfeld 1994, 58-107.

⁵² Lamberton 2001, 434, argues that Porphyry's work on his master's life is «a unique document, arguably the most reliable account of an ancient philosopher to come down to us from his own time».

⁵³ See Harder 1960 and now also Saffrey 1992a.

⁵⁴ See Motta 2016.

⁵⁵ Thus Chiaradonna 2008 *contra* Barnes 2003.

to have been indifferent to propaedeutic issues in school education, and hence to the development of an *ordo lecturae*, the *Enneads* – which we read according to the τάξις they were given by Porphyry – reflect an important change of approach from the master to his pupil⁵⁶. It has been noted that Porphyry's systematic arrangement of the *Enneads* divides Plotinus' philosophy according to a spiritual trajectory⁵⁷. The first *Ennead* brings together the ethical treatises; the second and third correspond to the physical part of philosophy; the third, fourth, fifth and sixth deal with the divine. The ascending order of the treatises may have been influenced by the thematic arrangement of Aristotle's acroamatic writings⁵⁸. However, significant analogies are also to be found with Albinus' *Prologue*, which explicitly criticises the 'tetralogically thematic' reading order of the dialogues⁵⁹. In place of this order, which he deemed unsuitable for teaching purposes⁶⁰, Albinus suggested reading the *First Alcibiades*, *Phaedo*, *Republic* and *Timaeus* in class, so as to allow students to *progress* towards the knowledge of divine realities through the acquisition of various virtues⁶¹. As is widely known, the Stoic Chrysippus had been the first to advise young people to take logic classes first, then lessons in ethics and finally ones in physics, before devoting themselves to the teachings about the gods⁶². So although the order of the various parts of philosophy had already been expounded by Chrysippus, he had presented it in the form of a scholastic scheme illustrating the succession of the various disciplines taught at the Stoa⁶³ and not – as in Neoplatonism – as a hierarchy of values consistent with a philosophical system that sets it in relation to the order of the various hierarchical levels of being. The arrangement of the texts within each *Ennead* from the easiest to the most difficult reflects systematisation criteria – not entirely unknown to the Middle Platonists, as Albinus shows – capable of influencing the Iamblichean 'canon' of the dialogues. In late Neoplatonism, the *ordo rerum* and *descriptio disciplinae* underlie the didactic suggestion of a progressive reading order connected to each individual σκοπός, and come together into a single isagogical scheme capable of explaining to aspiring Platonists the constitutive hierarchy of a metaphys-

⁵⁶ See Lambertson 2001, 444-445.

⁵⁷ See Goulet-Cazé 1982, 303-306; Saffrey 1992b; Hadot 1999, 318; Marzolo 2006, 42-43.

⁵⁸ See Porph. *Plot.* 24 Henry - Schwizer. See too Mansfeld 1994, 113.

⁵⁹ See Mansfeld 1994, 70 e 95-97.

⁶⁰ See Dunn 1976 and Reis 1997.

⁶¹ See Alb. *Intr.* V 149, 31 – 150, 13 and IV 149, 15.

⁶² See SVF II 42, p. 16, 29-17, 2 (= Plu. *Stoic. rep.* 1035a 1-4); D.L. VII 40-41.

⁶³ The sequence of the three parts does not have any hierarchical connotations, as they all have the same object - i.e. λόγος - which is nonetheless approached from different didactic perspectives.

ical-theological system articulated as a multiplicity structured into various levels of being. In the *Prolegomena to Plato*, the *ordo lecturae*, the analogical reflection of a higher world, more clearly proves – as a preliminary step – the validity of the circularity of the principle of causality:⁶⁴ from the ‘descending’ point of view, the hierarchy of Principles unfolds on the basis of alterity from the summit through a progressive increase in multiplicity; but from the ‘ascending’ point of view of the tension towards assimilation through the various degrees of virtue – illustrated by the order in which the dialogues are to be read – the multiple reverts to Unity.⁶⁵

It appears, therefore, that Neoplatonist isagogical patterns do not simply follow extrinsic criteria, serving as merely rhetorical devices that can be used to read *any* text. Rather, they appear to be closely connected to the doctrinal acquisitions of the only philosophy of Late Antiquity, a philosophy whose teaching method offers the clearest example of a theoretical effort that is inseparable from exegesis.

⁶⁴ See Procl. *Inst.* 33-39 Dodds.

⁶⁵ See Anon. *Proll.* 26,16-44 and Procl. *in Ti. I prooem.* 12, 30-13, 10.

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