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Résumé de l'article

Cet article examine la conception de l'histoire du platonisme qui se détache de l'Examen vanitatis de Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola. Il analyse les sources et les méthodes utilisées par Gianfrancesco pour comprendre l'histoire de la philosophie — critique généalogique des sources, analyse historiographique et histoire comparée — et soutient que son Examen vanitatis est façonné par l'apologétique chrétienne anti-platonicienne. Il démontre qu'en s'intéressant de près aux interprétations que Marsilio Ficino et son oncle Giovanni Pico ont proposées de l'oeuvre de Platon et son histoire, et en replaçant ces dernières dans le contexte plus large de l'histoire du platonisme, Gianfrancisco Pico a participé à une entreprise plus vaste qui visait à tourner la page, voire à refermer entièrement le livre de ce chapitre du Quattrocento. Bien que ni Ficino ni Gianfrancesco ne trouvent un accord universel parmi les anciens platoniciens, Ficino revisite cette période comme l'histoire d'une enquête herméneutique qui aurait inexorablement lié le platonisme au christianisme, tandis que Gianfrancesco l'interprète comme une série de mensonges et de désaccords qui auraient à l'inverse menacé le christianisme. En essayant de protéger l'histoire sacrée, Gianfrancesco Pico a fini par contribuer à développer les outils qui serviront à la critiquer.

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Tearing Plato to Pieces: Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonism

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This article considers Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola's understanding of the history of Platonism in his Examen vanitatis. *It analyzes his sources and methods for understanding the history of philosophy—genealogical source criticism, historiographical analysis, and comparative history—and argues that his approach is shaped by anti-Platonic Christian apologetics. It documents how Gianfrancesco Pico closely studies Marsilio Ficino's and his uncle Giovanni Pico's understandings of Platonism and its history, and how his contextualization of their work within the broader history of Platonism is part of a larger endeavour to turn the page and even close the book on this chapter of the Quattrocento. Although neither Ficino nor Gianfrancesco finds universal agreement among ancient Platonists, Ficino explains their history as one of inquiry and interpretation, in which Platonism and Christianity are inexorably united, whereas Gianfrancesco characterizes it as a history of lies and disagreements that threaten Christianity. In trying to protect sacred history, Gianfrancesco Pico helped develop the tools that would eventually critique it.*

*Cet article examine la conception de l'histoire du platonisme qui se détache de l'*Examen vanitatis *de Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola. Il analyse les sources et les méthodes utilisées par Gianfrancesco pour comprendre l'histoire de la philosophie — critique généalogique des sources, analyse historiographique et histoire comparée — et soutient que son* Examen vanitatis *est façonné par l'apologétique chrétienne anti-platonicienne. Il démontre qu'en s'intéressant de près aux interprétations que Marsilio Ficino et son oncle Giovanni Pico ont proposées de l'œuvre de Platon et son histoire, et en replaçant ces dernières dans le contexte plus large de l'histoire du platonisme, Gianfrancisco Pico a participé à une entreprise plus vaste qui visait à tourner la page, voire à refermer entièrement le livre de ce chapitre du Quattrocento. Bien que ni Ficino ni Gianfrancesco ne trouvent un accord universel parmi les anciens platoniciens, Ficino revisite cette période comme l'histoire d'une enquête herméneutique qui aurait inexorablement lié le platonisme au christianisme, tandis que Gianfrancesco l'interprète comme une série de mensonges et de désaccords qui auraient à l'inverse menacé le christianisme. En essayant de protéger l'histoire sacrée, Gianfrancesco Pico a fini par contribuer à développer les outils qui serviront à la critiquer.*

"But once the Socratic son of Ariston, Plato, already famous for eloquence and wisdom, had followers, they no longer called themselves Socratics but Platonists. They were so many and so renowned that they established their

own sects."[1] In his *Examen vanitatis*, Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469–1533) traces the history of ancient philosophy according to one of his preferred methods, arguing *per species*, following his subject's roots to its trunk, limbs, and branches, to examine whether the multiplication of sects of philosophy forms a coherent body. Gianfrancesco's historical method is a type of twisted genealogical criticism. If Plato was a disciple of Socrates—a *Socraticus*—why were his disciples known as Platonists instead of continuing the family name of Socrates? Gianfrancesco reasons that just as the followers of Plato were known as Platonists, so the followers of Aristotle, himself a disciple of Plato, were known by a different name: the Peripatetics. Would this also make Aristotle a *Platonicus* or even a *Socraticus*? Are the numerous Academies different species within the same genus or different families altogether? With his introductory comments on the history of Platonism, Gianfrancesco Pico is not simply correcting the nomenclature of the Hellenistic schools of philosophy. Rather, he is identifying Platonism as one of the most prolific schools in the history of philosophy, and he takes an axe to the ancient Academies in order to destroy what survives of them in his day.

His uncle Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–94) had also questioned the boundary markers separating ancient schools, but with the different goal of overcoming philosophical sectarianism. This information is not new. Ever since Charles B. Schmitt, scholars have noted in Gianfrancesco's work his tendency to distance himself from his uncle's goal of establishing philosophical concord. The younger Pico, conversely, sought to reveal the discord at the heart of all ancient philosophy.[2] Most research on Gianfrancesco's philosophical writings has focused on his studies of either Aristotle or scepticism, but he was

1. Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Examen vanitatis*, in Giovanni Pico and Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Opera omnia,* 2 vols. (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1969), 2:735 (henceforth cited as Pico, *Op*.), a facsimile reproduction of Giovanni Pico and Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Opera omnia,* 2 vols. (Basel: 1557–73): "Verum Socraticus Plato Aristonis filius clarus iam et eloquentiae nomine, et sapientiae, ubi sectatores habuit, ii ipsi se non Socraticos amplius, sed Platonicos vocaverunt, qui tam multi fuerunt, tamque celebres ut et ipsi sectas constituerint." All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

2. Charles B. Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469–1533) and His Critique of Aristotle* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967), 48–49; Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 255; Miguel Granada, "Apologétique platonicienne et apologétique sceptique: Ficin, Savonarole, Jean-François Pic de la Mirandole," in *Le scepticisme au XVIe et au XVIIe siècle*, ed. Pierre-François Moreau (Paris: Albin Michel, 2001), 43; and Gian Mario Cao, "Scepticism and Orthodoxy:

certainly also a close reader of Plato and later Platonists. On this topic, Schmitt has argued that although Gianfrancesco is not a Platonist, he adopts "a certain sympathy for Plato" to bolster his critique of Aristotle.[3] Yet to criticize Aristotle does not immediately place the critic in the camp of Plato, and to study Platonic works does not necessarily make the student a Platonist.[4] Inspecting the extant sources for the history of the Platonic Academies, Gianfrancesco produces one of the most thorough examinations of the history of Platonism of his day. To be more precise, Gianfrancesco closely studies Marsilio Ficino's (1433–99) understanding of Platonism and its history, and evaluates it against the extant sources about the ancient Academies. His contextualization of Ficino and his uncle's Platonisms within the broader history of Platonism is part of a larger endeavour to turn the page and even close the book on this chapter of the Quattrocento. However, in critiquing the history of Platonism, Gianfrancesco Pico leaves the door open to similar criticism of sacred history.

Shortly after the passage cited above, Gianfrancesco resumes his history of philosophy and repeats the old adage that Aristotle's own school came to be known as Peripatetic since he used to teach while walking with his students in the Lyceum. With a new school came a new style of philosophy. Although born from Platonism, Peripatetic philosophy was unlike it. Gianfrancesco, however, lingers on the point that Aristotle and Plato do in fact share a similarity insofar as they are equally obscure, albeit in different ways. Plato's style confuses all sorts of topics in his dialogues and mixes the use of fables and myths, while Aristotle's style resembles the behaviour of a cuttlefish that sprays ink to hide from readers approaching his work.[5] Contrary to the harmonizing hermeneutics

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Gianfrancesco Pico as a Reader of Sextus Empiricus," *Bruniana et Campanelliana*, Supplementi 22 Materiali 3 (2007): 271.

3. Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469–1533)*, 63.

4. Granada, for instance, argues that Gianfrancesco took up Savonarola's call to arms against humanism and ancient philosophy, picked up the weapons of Sextus Empiricus, and sent a few salvos in the direction of Ficino and Giovanni Pico's Platonisms ("Apologétique platonicienne et apologétique sceptique," 11–47).

5. Schmitt missed this particular occurrence of the cuttlefish image in his otherwise detailed study of the rhetorical device: "Aristotle as Cuttlefish: The Origin and Development of a Renaissance Image," *Studies in the Renaissance* 12 (1965): 60–72. On debates on whether Plato's style is confused or divine among Renaissance humanists, see Denis J.-J. Robichaud, *Plato's Persona: Marsilio Ficino, Renaissance*

of his uncle, Gianfrancesco Pico concludes that the two philosophers are otherwise in fundamental disagreement.

Having described the confused origins of the divisions of ancient philosophical sects in Athens, Gianfrancesco returns to the history of Plato's Academy:

> After Plato's death either Speusippus, or as others claim Xenocrates, kept his school. At any rate Xenocrates either taught first or second after Plato in the Academic estate, whence the Academics are said to have afterwards been divided into many families: two according to Cicero; Lactantius cites an old and a new Academy; and Seneca also in the last book of his *Quaestiones naturales* mentions old and new Academies, and others refer to many more. Having read and studied diverse sources I discovered (unless I'm mistaken) nine sects of Platonists, designated with the name of the same estate: 1) the first Academy was Plato's and his disciples' and students', in which Xenocrates especially flourished, and has permanent fame; 2) the second, which is also called the middle Academy, was headed by Arcesilaus, the pupil of Polemon; 3) the third Academy received the name the new Academy and had Carneades and Clitomachus as its leaders; 4) there is mention of a fourth Academy, which flourished under Philo and Charmides; 5) the origins of the fifth refer to Antiochus; 6) there is another with the name of the Egyptian Academy, whose founder was Ammonius; 7) another which is known as the Roman or Italian Academy that sprang up with the authority of Plotinus; 8) the Academy was also carried into Lycia by Proclus; 9) and I add (if it pleases the Platonists) that Iamblichus either built or embellished an Academy. Although I don't ignore the fact that this history was formerly written differently, yet I also know that the authors to which one ought to refer for this Platonic succession do not entirely agree, since Diogenes Laertius says one thing, Numenius and Eusebius something else, and Lactantius again otherwise, Augustine something else, others put things in a different manner, Sextus Empiricus again says something else, and Cicero says something else when he doesn't make Aristotle dissent in essence from the old Academy,

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Humanism, and Platonic Traditions (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 69–77, where I do not discuss Gianfrancesco Pico.

> and also unities it to the new Academy, which he gives to Arcesilaus, and says with reason that Carneades remained in the same Academy, which is openly negated by others, as will be made clear further on.[6]

The point of Gianfrancesco Pico's history of nine Platonic Academies is that it is not only the ancient philosophers who disagree among themselves; the source texts for the history of ancient philosophy also contradict each other. In other words, Gianfrancesco criticizes the sources for ancient historiography even more than the arguments of ancient philosophers. Unlike the linear continuity of ancient Christianity, he believes, the ancient traditions of philosophy are broken and confused.

In addition to the principal Latin sources available to earlier generations for understanding the history of Platonism—Cicero's *Academica*, and Augustine's *Contra Academicos* and Lactantius's *Divinae institutiones* (both largely influenced by Cicero's works)—the Quattrocento chiefly benefited from the Latin translations of two Greek doxographical sources: Ambrogio Traversari's (1386–1439) translation of Diogenes Laertius, and George of Trebizond's (1395–1473) translation of Eusebius's *Praeparatio evangelica*.[7]

6. Pico, *Op*., 2:735–36: "Post Platonis obitum eius auditorium tenuit vel Speusippus, ut alii vel Xenocrates. Certe Xenocrates a Platone vel primus, vel secundus docuit in Academia villa, unde et qui Academici dicti in multas postea familias divisi, duas et Cicero, et Lactantius citavere veterem et novam: Seneca item in quaestionum naturalium ultimo libro Academicos tamen veteres et iuniores citat: Alii multo plures. Novem ego Platonicorum sectas multa diversa legendo et observando (si non fallor) comperi, ab eadem villa nomen sortitas: Primam quae discipulorum Platonis et auditorum fuerit in qua floruisse maxime Xenocratem constans fama est: secundam quae et media dicta est cui praefuerit Archesilaus auditor Polemonis: tertiam cui et Novae cognomen est factum, cuius princeps Carneades atque Clytomachus: quartae quoque mentio invenitur quae sub Philone floruerit, Charmidae: quintae primordia in Antiochum referunt: alia est Aegyptia nomine cuius institutor Ammonius, alia quae Romana sive Itala, Plotini authoritate sussulta, Lycia item quae Proclo fertur accepta, addo (si placet Platonicis) eam quam Iamblichus sive instituit, sive exornauit: quanquam non ignoro diverse olim scriptum, quanquam item in hac successione platonica referenda authores omnino non convenisse scio, quando alio modo Laërtius, alio Numenius, et Eusebius, Lactantius alio, Augustinus alio, Diverso alii, alio Sextus, alio Cicero utatur, qui Aristotelem dissentientem re ipsa, non facit ab Academia veteri, cui etiam novam iungit, quam dedit Archesilae, et in eadem ratione dicit Carneadem permansisse, quae tamen ab aliis aperte negantur, ut progressu patefiet." The Arabic numerals are my addition.

7. On Traversari's translation of Diogenes Laertius, see Marcello Gigante, "Ambrogio Traversari interprete di Diogenio Laerzio," in *Ambrogio Traversari nel VI centenario della nascita: convegno internazionale di studi*, ed. Gian Carlo Garfagnini (Florence: Olschki, 1988), 367–459, and Eugenio Garin, *Il ritorno dei*

Cicero's *Academica* was foundational for understanding the history of Plato's famed school. Even though it was available during the Middle Ages, it did not receive the same attention as it did during the Renaissance, and despite Lactantius and especially Augustine's influence in the Middle Ages, few writers of the period paid the same attention to Academic scepticism and the history of Platonism.[8]

Beyond these older Latin sources and more recent Greek texts (and their Latin translations), Gianfrancesco also exploits the newest sources at his disposal, Sextus Empiricus's *Pyrrhoniae hypotyposes* and *Adversus mathematicos*, which were known but not widely popular in the Quattrocento. Scepticism provides Gianfrancesco not only with a formal method for critiquing other ancient schools of philosophy but also with the very subject matter of his history of philosophy: disagreement and dissent.[9] In fact, scepticism's own history is also fraught with confusion with Platonism. First, the origins of the supposed founder of Pyrrhonism are clouded in historical fog. Second, under Arcesilaus (a student of both Peripatetic and Platonic schools) the Academy is said to have turned to scepticism, which establishes for Gianfrancesco possible origins for scepticism in Socratic ignorance. Arcesilaus, too, is problematic since the sources disagree on whether or not his scepticism is identical either to Platonism or to Pyrrhonism. In essence, Gianfrancesco contends that the

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filosofi antichi (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1983), 53–65. On Ficino's use of George's translation of Eusebius, see John Monfasani, "Marsilio Ficino and Eusebius of Caesarea's *Praeparatio evangelica*," *Rinascimento* 49 (2009): 3–13; Denis J.-J. Robichaud, "Marsilio Ficino's 'Si Deus Fiat Homo' and Augustine's 'Non Ibi Legi': The Incarnation and Plato's *Persona* in the Scholia to the *Laws*," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 77 (2014): 87–114, 109–10; Denis J.-J. Robichaud, "Ficino on Force, Magic, and Prayers: Neoplatonic and Hermetic Influences in Ficino's *Three Books on Life*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 70 (2017): 44–87, 61; Robichaud, *Plato's Persona*, 198–99, 283n66.

8. Charles B. Schmitt, *Cicero Scepticus: A Study of the Influence of the Academica in the Renaissance* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972), especially 18–58.

9. Gian Mario Cao has done excellent work explaining how Gianfrancesco appropriates disagreement (διαφωνία) and dissent (στάσις) as sceptical modes of argumentation, in Cao, "Scepticism and Orthodoxy." There are two short preliminary studies on Gianfrancesco's investigations into the history of philosophy: Luciano Malusa, "Renaissance Antecedents to the History of Philosophy," in *Models of the History of Philosophy: From Its Origins in the Renaissance to the "Historia Philosophica,"* vol. 1, ed. Giovanni Santinello, and for the English edition, ed. Constance W. T. Blackwell and Philip Weller (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993), 38–49; and Lucia Pappalaro, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola: fede, immaginazione e scetticismo* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 79–93.

partition of philosophy into what scholars typically call the Hellenistic schools largely originated and developed in the violent and divisive history of Platonism itself.

Gianfrancesco is kind enough to list for his readers some of his sources (Diogenes Laertius, Sextus Empiricus, Cicero, Seneca, Augustine, Lactantius, Eusebius, and Numenius) but he leaves out one of the most important authors who informed his hermeneutical framework for interpreting the history of Platonism: Marsilio Ficino.[10] That Gianfrancesco's history of Platonism uses Ficino as a point of departure is clear from a brief comparison with Ficino's explanation of the succession of Platonic Academies in book 17 of his *Platonic Theology*.[11]

Book 17 of the *Platonic Theology* neither resembles a modern history nor is akin to humanistic *historia*. Rather, it is Ficino's philosophical investigation into the various interpretations of Plato's writings, specifically regarding the question of the soul's relationship to the body. Although Ficino distinguishes the Academies according to chronological succession and geographical location, his dominant principles of organization are philosophical and exegetical hermeneutics, insofar as he assigns a spokesperson to each Academy to serve as a philosophical guide for a particular approach to the Platonic corpus. On these grounds, Ficino differentiates six Platonic Academies that stand, one could say, in mirrored relationship with six leading ancient theologians—Zoroaster, Mercurius Trismegistus, Orpheus, Aglaophemus, Pythagoras, and Plato—although there does not seem to be a direct correspondence between a particular ancient theologian and a particular Academy: "Of the Greek the

10. On Sextus Empiricus in the Quattrocento, see Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469–1533)*, and Schmitt, *Cicero Scepticus*; Granada, "Apologétique platonicienne et apologétique sceptique"; Cao, "Scepticism and Orthodoxy"; Gian Mario Cao, "Nota sul recupero umanistico di Sesto Empirico," *Rinascimento* 35 (1995): 319–25; Gian Mario Cao, "The Prehistory of Modern Scepticism: Sextus Empiricus in Fifteenth-Century Italy," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 64 (2001): 229–80; Gian Mario Cao, "Inter alias philosophorum gentium sectas, et humani, et mites: Gianfrancesco Pico and the Sceptics," in *Renaissance Scepticisms*, ed. Gianni Paganini and José R. Maia Neto (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), 127–47; Luciano Floridi, "The Diffusion of Sextus Empiricus's Works in the Renaissance," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56.1 (1995): 63–85; Luciano Floridi, *Sextus Empiricus: The Transmission and Recovery of Pyrrhonism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

11. On Ficino's six Platonic Academies see also Michael J. B. Allen, *Synoptic Art* (Florence: Olschki, 1998), 51–92; Robert Goulding, *Defending Hypatia* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010), 161–64; Robichaud, *Plato's Persona*, 159.

old academy flourished under Xenocrates, the middle under Arcesilaus, the new under Carneades; of the foreign, the Egyptian academy flourished under Ammonius, the Roman under Plotinus, and the Lycian under Proclus."[12]

Of Ficino's six Academies the first four interpreted Plato's statements in a way that acknowledges that the Athenian writes about sacred matters in poetic form, while the latter two understand his words strictly according to the letter. Ficino provides further distinguishing traits in his schema:

> But the four academies older than those [of Plotinus and Proclus] differed from them while agreeing among themselves in supposing the writings of Plato entirely poetic. But they mutually disagreed in that Carneades was of the opinion that Plato, in the manner of the Skeptics, had thought of and treated all things as being doubtful, and had not come to any decision on any issue; whereas Arcesilaus [*sic* Archesilas] supposed that Plato held nothing for certain but only what was verisimilar or probable. Xenocrates together with Ammonius thought that Plato not only had held some things as being true and certain—and these were just a few truths concerning divine providence and the immortality of souls. So, treading in the footsteps of Xenocrates and Ammonius, we do not deny that Plato had affirmed certainties about the soul, but much that he says about the soul's circuit, being poetic, we take to mean differently than the words appear to signify [literally]. And this is especially since he did not invent such circuits himself but described those of others: first those invented by the Egyptian priests under the figure of the purging of souls, and then those

12. Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, ed. and trans. Michael J. B. Allen and James Hankins with William Bowen, 6 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001–06), 6:6–7 (17.1.2): "Atticarum vetus sub Xenocrate floruit, media sub Archesila, sub Carneade nova; peregrinarum Aegyptia sub Ammonio, Romana sub Plotino, sub Proculo Lycia." In his youthful *De voluptate* (1457), Ficino does not write a thorough history of Platonic traditions but nonetheless demonstrates his awareness of what one could consider the sceptical line of Platonism often associated with the new Academy. In his preface to the work, Ficino speaks of three kinds of philosophical argument: the first asserts and defends fixed propositions in a disputation (in the manner of the Stoics and Peripatetics); the second searches for meaning and argues from what is probable and verisimilar (in the manner of the Academics and Socratics); and the third holds that all is indifferent, nothing is certain, nor even probable (in the manner of the sceptics). Marsilio Ficino, *De voluptate* in Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* (Venice: 1497), facsimile reprint with introduction by Stéphane Toussaint (Enghien-les-Bain: Éditions du Miraval, 2006), fol. 10, vii verso.

> intoned in poetic songs only by Orpheus, Empedocles, and Heraclitus. I leave aside the fact that Pythagoras introduced the transmigrations of souls always into those his customary conversations and symbols.[13]

A few points are noteworthy here. First, Ficino differentiates the scepticism of the Academy when it flourished under Carneades—who thought that all things are uncertain or doubtful and suspended his judgment on all matters—from the scepticism of the Academy when it flourished under Arcesilaus, who similarly thought, Ficino writes, that nothing could be known with certainty but that one could argue for probable and verisimilar positions. Second, Ficino claims to follow the interpretive guidance of the old Academy of Xenocrates and of the Egyptian Academy of Ammonius, both of whom taught that at times Plato would assert certain doctrines or dogmas in his writings, while at other times he would speak poetically or interpret the doctrines of others, namely the teachings of ancient Zoroastrian oracles, Egyptian priests, initiates into Orphic mysteries, and Pythagoreans. At first this seems like an odd choice for Ficino. Why would the Renaissance's arch-Neoplatonist side with Xenocrates and Ammonius over Plotinus and Proclus?

A similar question also puzzled Michael J. B. Allen in his careful examination of Ficino's account of the six Platonic Academies.[14] He argues that in Ficino's mind, Platonism underwent two severe catastrophes: the first when Zeno of Citium, the founder of Stoicism and a former student at the

13. Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, 6:44–47 (17.4.1): "Academiae vero quatuor iis antiquiores in hoc ab iis discrepabant inter se congruentes, quod scripta Platonis omnino poetica esse arbitrabantur. Sed inter se differebant, quod Carneades Platonem et putavisse et tractavisse omnia opinabantur Scepticorum more velut ambigua, neque ullum in rebus ullis habuisse delectum. Archesilas autem certum quidem nihil habuisse Platonem, verisimile tamen aliquid et probabile. Xenocrates simul atque Ammonius illum aliqua non modo tamquam verisimilia tenuisse et probabilia, verum etiam tamquam vera certaque affirmavisse, eaque esse paucula quaedam de providentia dei animorumque immortalitate. Nos ergo Xenocratis et Ammonii vestigia sequentes Platonem affirmavisse quaedam de anima non negamus, sed multa, quae de circuitu euius ab ipso tractantur, tamquam poetica, aliter intellegimus quam verba videantur significare. Praesertim cum circuitus huiusmodi haud ipse invenerit, sed narraverit alienos: primum quidem ab Aegyptiis sacerdotibus sub purgandarum animarum figura confictos, deinde ab Orpheo, Empedocle, Heraclito, poeticis dumtaxat carminibus decantatos. Mitto quod Pythagoras animarum transmigrationes consuetis illis semper confabulationibus suis symbolisque inseruit."

14. Allen (*Synoptic Art*, 74–85) also shows that Ficino often relies on Augustine's *Contra Academicos* and Cicero's *Academica* and the *De natura deorum*, as well as on Diogenes Laertius.

Academy, introduced materialism within its walls; the second when the *Corpus dionysiacum* went missing until its rediscovery in late antiquity. Following the first incident, Arcesilaus introduced a sceptical approach to the Academy in order to protect Platonism from further philosophical corruptions. That is, in turning Socratic ignorance into the only lesson acceptable in the Academy, Arcesilaus instrumentalized sceptical philosophy as a tool to fight materialism. Xenocrates's Academy seems to have been the last point of contact with Platonism before it fell into scepticism and confused interpretations of Plato. Thus, Platonists became better interpreters of Plato's philosophy only when they learned from the Platonic teachings of the *Corpus dionysiacum*.[15]

As for Ficino's alignment with the school of Plotinus's and Origen's teacher Ammonius, Ficino admires him probably because, like Eusebius and Jerome, Ficino thought that Ammonius Saccas and the Christian Ammonius of Alexandria were one and the same person: a key intermediary between Christianity and later Platonism. Yet since Ammonius wrote nothing, as Porphyry and Longinus relate, it would have been difficult for Ficino to work with anything more than his reputation and the doxographical anecdotes that are extant.[16] Indeed, Ficino would have known that Plotinus, along with his fellow classmates Origen and Erennius, had made a vow not to reveal Ammonius's teachings. But since the pact was apparently broken it would seem that some of his wisdom—perhaps Christian wisdom—began to seep into the philosophy of later Platonists. Ficino may have ignored a fragment of Porphyry's *Contra christianos*, preserved by Eusebius, that claims that Ammonius was in fact an apostate of Christianity and a pagan convert, and that Origen himself began as a Greek pagan Platonist before converting to Christianity, since a few indications from Ficino's writings seem to support the view that Ficino understood both philosophers as Christians.

15. Ficino's hypothesis that the *Corpus dionysiacum* was concealed in antiquity should be understood in light of longer traditions trying to explain why early church fathers did not know these writings. See John Monfasani, "Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in Mid-Quattrocento Rome," in *Supplementum Festivum: Studies in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, ed. James Hankins, John Monfasani, and Frederick Purnell, Jr. (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1987), 189–219; as well as my forthcoming "Valla, Erasmus, and the Dionysian Question," in *The Oxford Handbook to Dionysius the Areopagite*, ed. Mark Edwards, Dimitrios Pallis, and George Steiris (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

16. For an introduction on the scholarship on Ammonius, see Luc Brisson, "Prosopographie," in Prophyre, *La Vie de Plotin*. ed. Luc Brisson, et al., 2 vols. (Paris: Vrin, 1982–92), 1:69–71.

At the very least, even if Ficino were to have believed that Ammonius turned away from Christianity, he might still have supposed that Ammonius brought its theological mysteries with him into the Platonic Academy, informing the philosophy of Plotinus and later Platonists. The fact that Ficino is ambiguous and says very few words to explain his praise of Ammonius is understandable. Richard Goulet has argued that much of the evidence for this period of the history of Platonism still remains confused today because it was already very confused in antiquity. On the one hand, Porphyry conflated two different people named Origen (Ammonius's student and the Alexandrian Christian father whose writings were often condemned) into one individual, and on the other hand, Eusebius mistook Plotinus and Origen's instructor Ammonius to be another Christian author of the same name.[17] Ficino believes that he has some of Xenocrates's texts (in addition to doxographical material from antiquity)—since he attributes the spurious Platonic dialogue *Axiochus* to Xenocrates—although modern scholars would reject his claims.[18] Allen helps clarify Ficino's comments. Xenocrates, having studied with Plato himself during his lifetime, represents one of Plato's earliest and most faithful interpreters before Plato's later interpreters turned to scepticism. Ammonius represents a point of contact between Christianity and later Platonism, after

17. See Richard Goulet, "Porphyre, Ammonius, les deux Origène et les autres," *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuse* 57 (1977): 471–96. Kettler, however, argues that there was just one Origen, but this is still doubted; see Franz Heinrich Kettler, "Origenes, Ammonios Sakkas und Porphyrius," in *Kerygma und Logos*, ed. A. M. Ritter (Göttingen: Vandenhoek and Ruprecht, 1979), 322–28. See also Heinrich Dörrie, "Ammonios, der Lehrer Plotins," *Hermes* 83 (1955): 439–78; and Mark J. Edwards, "Ammonius, Teacher of Origen," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 44 (1993): 169–81. On Origen in the Renaissance, see Edgar Wind, "The Revival of Origen," in *Studies in Art and Literature for Belle Da Costa Greene,* ed. D. Miner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 412–24; Daniel P. Walker, "Origène en France au début du XVIe siècle," in *Courrant religieux et humanisme à la fin du XVe et au début du XVIe siècle* (Paris: PUF, 1959), 101–19; Max Schar, *Das Nachleben des Origenes im Zeitalter des Humanismus* (Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1979); Pasquale Terracciano, "Tra Atene e Alessandria. Origene nella *Theologia Platonica* di Marsilio Ficino," *Viator* 42, multilingual edition (2011): 265–94; and Pasquale Terracciano, *Omnia in figura: l'Impronta di Origine tra '400 e '500* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2012), and the literature cited therein.

18. James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 1:307; Robichaud, *Plato's Persona*, 81–85, 92.

it emerged from scepticism, and the moment when the true interpretation of Plato resurfaced.[19]

Xenocrates and Ammonius are thus Ficino's spokespersons for different ways to interpret Plato. As I have argued elsewhere, Ficino adopts prosopopoeic hermeneutics for the Platonic corpus; that is, he identifies some places in the corpus where Plato speaks Socratically, others when Plato communicates through Pythagorean *personae*, and finally, when Plato speaks in his own persona (in the *Laws*, the *Epinomis*, and the *Letters*). These three positions correspond to aporetic and dogmatic philosophical hermeneutics, as well as a Platonic middle ground between the two.[20] Ficino reiterates this judgment in book 17 of the *Platonic Theology*, telling his readers that after studying all of the opinions of the philosophers, Plato "eventually chose the Pythagorean school before the rest as being closer to the truth (*verisimiliorem*) and the one he would illuminate in his own writings."[21] Accordingly, Plato adopted Pythagorean interlocutors in his dialogues: Timaeus of Locris, Parmenides of Elea, and Zeno, as well as opinions from other so-called Pythagoreans. Concerning Plato's use of the dialogue form and of the character Socrates in his writings, Ficino produces three further arguments in book 17 of the *Platonic Theology.* First, Plato never affirmed that only the Pythagorean doctrines are explicitly true. Rather, even Pythagorean philosophy is verisimilar and subject to debate. Second, he repeats the old adage that Socrates claimed to know only that he knows nothing. In this context, he means that Socrates conveys doubt on the Pythagorean doctrines, as well as the opinions of others, and that when Socrates puts forward dogmatic statements he employs irony or attributes these opinions to others (one need think only of Diotima in the *Symposium*),

19. Allen (*Synoptic Art,* 75) has put forward the hypothesis that Xenocrates and Ammonius represent for Ficino the correct way to interpret Plato, neither excessively dogmatic nor excessively sceptic, but he ultimately questions this hypothesis since he argues that with the exception of this particular case regarding arguments about the soul, it is Plotinus whom Ficino ultimately chooses as a guide.

20. See Robichaud, "Marsilio Ficino's 'Si Deus Fiat Homo' and Augustine's 'Non Ibi Legi'"; Denis J.-J. Robichaud, "Marsilio Ficino and Plato's Divided Line: Iamblichus and Pythagorean Pseudepigrapha in the Renaissance," in *Pythagorean Knowledge from the Ancient to the Modern World: Askesis-Religion-Science*, ed. Almut-Barbara Renger and Alessandro Stravu (Wiebaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2016), 437–52, and especially in Robichaud, *Plato's Persona.*

21. Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, 6:50–51 (17.4.4): "[…] pythagoricam denique sectam tamquam verisimiliorem prae ceteris elegisse, quam suis litteris illustraret."

and in doing so often adopts a Pythagorean persona to launch into mythical expositions (e.g., in the closing myth of the *Gorgias*).[22] Finally, Ficino repeats that Plato speaks in his own voice in the *Laws*, the *Epinomis*, and the *Letters*—an opinion that Ficino interprets, I have argued, with the help of a manuscript scholion to the *Laws*.[23]

Ficino's account of the history of Platonism, therefore, does not simply replicate the traditional Renaissance sources for the history of Platonism since he does not merely follow Cicero's discussion of Academic scepticism, or Augustine's claim that Platonism is fundamentally an esoteric tradition that never conveys explicit doctrines.[24] In Ficino's opinion, Plato does indeed express explicit dogmas, particularly about providence and the soul: "Does Plato affirm nothing then about matters divine? Without a doubt he affirms a few truths: that God cares for human affairs, and rewards and punishes the immortal soul for its works. But he maintains nothing else."[25] Most of Plato's affirmations on divine matters are therefore either poetic expressions that resemble the truth (his use of myths for instance), and put into the mouth of an interlocutor (positively through a Pythagorean, negatively through a sophist), or again cast into doubt by Socrates. To take one example, in contrast to the overly literal interpretations of the *Timaeus* offered by Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Proclus, which suggest that Plato views the world as perpetually generated, Ficino writes that one should realize that this is not Plato's view, as such, but the view of his interlocutor:

22. On Ficino's understanding of Socrates, see James Hankins, "Socrates in the Italian Renaissance," in *A Companion to Socrates*, ed. Sara Ahbel-Rappe and Rachana Kamtekar (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 337–52; James Hankins, "Socrates in the Italian Renaissance," in *Socrates: From Antiquity to the Enlightenment*, ed. Michael Trapp (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 179–208; and especially for this particular argument Robichaud, *Plato's Persona*, 111–48. On Ficino's understanding of Socrates's Pythagorizing in Plato's dialogues, see Robichaud, *Plato's Persona*, esp. 149–72.

23. Robichaud, "Marsilio Ficino's 'Si Deus Fiat Homo' and Augustine's 'Non Ibi Legi'"; and Robichaud, *Plato's Persona*, esp. 187–229.

24. See Eugène Napoleon Tigerstedt, "The Decline and Fall of the Neoplatonic Interpretation of Plato," *Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum* 52 (1974): 5–10; and the discussion of Ficino's revision of Augustine's hermeneutics in Robichaud, *Plato's Persona.*

25. Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, 6:52–53 (17.4.6): "Num ergo nihil de divinis affirmat Plato? Quaedam proculdubio: deum scilicet humana curare atque animae immortali operum praemia reddere vel supplicia. Aliud vero affirmat nihil."

> If it is perhaps to be so interpreted, then this will be the view of Timaeus, the Pythagorean, rather than that of Plato, since in the *Epinomis* Plato says himself that the stars are either going to be immortal or for a different purpose long-lived: that their [one] life might suffice for them without their needing a longer one.[26]

Yet, despite his criticism of these Neoplatonists on specific matters, Ficino thinks that Plotinus is one of the best guides for correctly interpreting Plato and that he must have learned this method from his teacher Ammonius. Indeed, in his preface to his edition of Plotinus, Ficino explicitly states that Plotinus is the first philosopher whose writings correctly interpret the theological significance of Plato's corpus.[27]

Ficino's differentiation between literal and non-literal readings of Plato in the *Platonic Theology* is therefore precisely concerned with differentiating dogmatic and non-dogmatic approaches. When Ficino states that he is following Xenocrates and Ammonius, one ought to understand that Xenocrates stands at the head of one triad of Academies that fell into extreme aporetic philosophy, and Ammonius is at the forefront of another that slipped into extreme dogmatism.[28] There is a final similarity between Ammonius and Xenocrates that should also be considered. They are both said to have held that Plato and Aristotle are in concord. The most common source available in the Renaissance for associating this position with Xenocrates, as previously noted, is Cicero.[29] Ammonius's case is more difficult insofar as the evidence is found in two entries in Photius's *Bibliotheca*, but there is not yet any clear confirmation that Ficino knew the work.[30] In short, Ficino's claim that he follows Ammonius

26. Ficino, *Platonic Theology,* 6:52–53 (17.4.6): "Quod si forte illud ita exponendum est, Timaei pythagorici sententia erit potius quam Platonis, siquidem Plato ipse in *Epinomide* inquit astra aut immortalia fore aut alio longeva ut vita sua illis sufficiat atque longiore non egeant."

27. Marsilio Ficino, *Opera omnia,* 2 vols. (Enghien: Les Éditions du Miraval, 2000), 2:1537 (hereafter Ficino, *Op.*), a facsimile reproduction of Marsilio Ficino, *Opera omnia*, 2 vols. (Basel: 1576).

28. See Allen in note 19, above.

29. Cicero, *Academica*, 1.4.

30. Despite the appealing possibility that Ficino associated Xenocrates with Ammonius because of their mutual agreement in finding concord between Plato and Aristotle, it is generally held that Photius's work did not circulate very much in Renaissance Italy outside of Cardinal Berssarion's circle. Although Ficino exchanged a couple of letters with the cardinal and also had a network of correspondents in Venice and

and Xenocrates does not indicate that he relies on any of their specific works to understand Plato, which would have been impossible for Ammonius; rather, it suggests that Ficino believes that Ammonius and Xenocrates held a similar middle path between dogmatism and aporetic scepticism, which is the position he ascribes to his own hermeneutics and to Plato himself. Hence, Ficino's account of the six Platonic Academies is a history of Platonism only insofar as it is a history of philosophical hermeneutics.

Gianfrancesco Pico's succession of the Platonic Academies compares to Ficino's as follows:

Ficino

Zoroaster	Aglaophemus	1) Xenocrates	4) Ammonius
Hermes	Pythagoras	2) Arcesilaus	5) Plotinus
Orpheus	Plato	3) Carneades	6) Proclus

Gianfrancesco Pico

1) Xenocrates	6) Ammonius
2) Arcesilaus	7) Plotinus
3) Carneades	8) Proclus
4) Philo	9) Iamblichus
5) Antiochus	

To put together his history of the Platonic Academies, Gianfrancesco takes Ficino's six Academies and modifies the schema in two ways: he incorporates the fourth Academy of Philo and the fifth of Antiochus from Sextus Empiricus, and inserts Iamblichus's school into the list. He also responds directly to Ficino's hermeneutical framework in the fourth chapter of the first book of the *Examen vanitatis*, which is devoted to demonstrating, as the chapter title indicates, how Plato "was torn apart and mutilated into small and minute pieces

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Rome, and although Ambrogio Traversari had at least one of Bessarion's two manuscript copies of the *Bibliotheca* at one time, before it entered into the library of San Marco, Ficino never explicitly mentions Photius's *Bibliotheca*. Without further evidence there is no solid ground to claim that Ficino knew this work. See, for instance, the entry by Mario Claudio Vicario in *Umanesimo e Padri della Chiesa*, ed. Sebastiano Gentile (Rome: Rose, 1997), 208–10.

by his followers in a most pugnacious discord."[31] The chapter works directly with Sextus Empricus (including translations and paraphrases of sections from *Pyrrhoniae hypotyposes* 1.210–32), and also draws from an array of sources, including novel ones for his day such as Pseudo-Galen's *De philosophica historia*, fragments of Numenius, Atticus, and the *Souda*.[32]

Gianfrancesco begins by distinguishing the ancient schools of philosophy, according to a Pyrrhonist classification, into those who either assert, negate, or doubt truth claims. The first group, according to Sextus, includes dogmatists like Aristotle, Epicurus, and the Stoics; the second, Clitomachus, Carneades, and other Academics who think that truth cannot be grasped; and the third, the Sceptics, whom he characterizes shortly thereafter as zetetic, ephetic, and aporetic.[33] Gianfrancesco compares Sextus's classification to Pseudo-Galen's *De philosophica historia*, where there are not three but four primary sects: dogmatists, sceptics, quarrelsome argumentative philosophers, and a mixed form.[34] Since Galen includes the Academic Clitomachus among the group of contentious philosophers, Gianfrancesco clarifies that what Galen names "argumentation," Sextus calls the negating comprehension of the new Academy. Thus, even his own exposition of Galen's and Sextus's classifications of philosophy lures Gianfrancesco into the history of Platonism, in part to differentiate Academic Platonism from scepticism (as Sextus also does in *Pyrrhoniae hypotyposes* 1.33), and in part to dislodge Plato's seemingly unassailable central place in ancient philosophy.

Following a brief consideration of the debate on whether Democritus—who, according to some, inspired Pyrrho—should be considered a dogmatist, as Sextus believes, an aporetic thinker or a mixture of both, as Galen claims, Gianfrancesco Pico turns his attention to the main source of confusion: Plato. He paraphrases Sextus as follows:

31. Pico, *Op*., 2:741: "Utrum ulla sit veritas, et si sit, utrum haberi possit an minime inter philosophos Gentium non convenisse, quorum diversissimae opiniones referuntur, ibique etiam ostenditur Platonem ea de re, sectatoribus per partes particulas minutiasque distractum atque discerptum, pugnacissima discordia."

32. Cao has prepared a meticulous table of comparison between the texts of the *Examen vanitatis* and Sextus Empiricus ("Scepticism and Orthodoxy," 303–66).

33. Compare Sextus Empiricus, *Pyrrhoniae hypotyposes*, 1.1–3 (1–7) with Pico *Op*., 2:741–42.

34. Galen, *Opera omnia*, ed. C. G. Kühn, vol. 19 (Leipzig: 1830), 233–34.

> Besides these, some restore Plato among the dogmatists, others think that he was a doubter, in fact others reason that he ought to be placed in part with one group, in part also with the other group; just as Permedotus [*sic*] and Aenesidemus. They give the following reason about his meaning, that in the gymnastic dialogues, where especially Socrates is introduced either mocking (*ludens*, playing) or wrestling against the sophists, it seems that Plato puts forth a kind of dialogue that is ambiguous, but where he asserts anything ponderous or serious (*serio*), either in the *persona* of Socrates or Timaeus, thinking about ideas, providence, or that one ought to love virtues and avoid vices, then Plato advances dogmas.[35]

Gianfrancesco's investigation into the prosopopoeic hermeneutics of the Platonic corpus conveys that some interpreters consider Plato dogmatic in passages when he speaks through certain characters but aporetic in others when he adopts alternative personae. This passage closely follows the pages of Sextus (*Pyrrhoniae hypotyposes* 1.33.221), but Gianfrancesco also makes it clear, shortly thereafter, that he has Ficino in his sights.[36]

Turning Ficino's approach upside down and working at cross-purposes, Gianfrancesco holds that the dominant mode for understanding the history of Platonism is according to prosopopoeic interpretations of Plato. Although Plato writes gymnastic dialogues, Gianfrancesco relates, Sextus will not count him among the sceptics. Even the Platonists dissent among themselves on how to interpret Plato, some understanding Plato sceptically, others dogmatically. If Ficino found disagreement among Platonists regarding Plato's teaching about the soul in book 17 of his *Platonic Theology*, Gianfrancesco reminds his readers that they cannot agree on even the most fundamental doctrines in all fields:

35. Pico, *Op*., 2:742–43: "Praeter haec alii Platonem inter dogmaticos reponunt: alii dubitabundum censent fuisse: alii partim quidem inter eos, partim etiam inter illos reponendum arbitrantur: sicuti Permedotus et Aenesidemus: ii causam hanc sui sensus afferunt quod gymnasticis dialogis ubi maxime Socrates introducitur adversus Sophistas aut ludens, aut luctans, ambiguum videatur sermonis genus invehere, ubi vero quicquam affert serio et pensiculate, vel in persona Socratis, vel Timaei, puta de Idaeis, de providentia, vel de virtutibus et vitiis diligendis vitandisque, tum dogmata proferat." Compare Sextus Empiricus, *Pyrrhoniae hypotyposes*, 1.33.221 to Pico, *Op*., 2:742–43. Gianfrancesco takes Permedotus from the manuscript reading κατὰ περμήδοτον, which seems to be a corruption of κατὰ τῶν περὶ Μηνόδοτον, see Cao, "Inter alias philosophorum gentium sectas," 135–36.

36. See the works cited in note 10. Although possible, it is not at all apparent that Ficino had *Pyrrhoniae hypotyposes* 1.33.221 in mind when writing about Plato's use of interlocutors.

metaphysics, psychology, epistemology, morality, and ethics. In other words, they argue over what Plato said about God, the soul, the criteria for truth, pleasure, the good, the bad, the greatest good, the worst evil, indifferents, etc.[37] Gianfrancesco's argument can be distilled as follows: if the Platonists cannot agree among themselves on how to interpret Plato correctly, then one should not trust them. His criterion is unrealistic. He proposes a kind of universal agreement (not found in his own Christian tradition) as a standard for the validity of Platonism.

Gianfrancesco was not the first to set up universal agreement as the criterion for the validity of a tradition. Ancient precedent can be found in the exploration of internal disagreement among Platonic Academies: for example, Numenius's *Περὶ τῆς τῶν Ἀκαδημαϊῶν πρὸς Πλάτωνα διαστάσεως* (On the disagreement of the Academy from Plato) and Atticus's *Πρὸς τοὺς διὰ τῶν Ἀριστοτέλους τὰ Πλάτωνος ὑπισχνουμένους* (On who interprets Platonic doctrines through Aristotelian ones).

Like Gianfrancesco Pico, the second-century middle Platonist (or Pythagorean Platonist) Numenius, whose work on the Platonists' betrayal of Plato survives in fragments preserved in Eusebius's *Praeparatio evangelica*, uses disagreement (διάστασις, στάσις, or διαφωνία) to analyze the history of Platonism. However, unlike Gianfrancesco, Numenius's main goal is to defend Plato from his critics, and more specifically to defend a Pythagorizing Plato. Numenius writes that already under Xenocrates, even before the introduction of the sceptical dogma of suspension of judgment, the Academy began to alienate itself from Plato. He continues:

> And I do not wish to speak ill about Xenocrates, but rather in defense of Plato. For what gnaws at me is that they neither endured nor did all they could to save Plato regarding the complete agreement of opinion in all matters. And yet Plato deserved this, being no better—nor however being no equally lesser—than the great Pythagoras, who became so revered because his disciples followed and venerated him.[38]

37. Pico, *Op*., 2:743.

38. Numénius, *Fragments*, ed. Édouard des Places (Paris: Les Belles Letres, 1973), 63 (fr. 24): "Καὶ οὐ μὲν βούλομαί τι φλαῦρον εἰπεῖν διὰ Ξενοκράτη, μᾶλλον μὴν ὑπὲρ Πλάτωνος ἐθέλω. Καὶ γάρ με δάκνει ὅτι μὴ πᾶν ἔπαθόν τε καὶ ἔδρων σῴζοντες τῷ Πλάτωνι κατὰ πάντα πάντῃ πάσην ὁμοδοξίαν. Καίτοι ἄξιος ἦν αὐτοῖς ὁ Πλάτων, οὐκ ἀμείνων μὲν Πυθαγόρου τοῦ μεγάλου, οὐ μέντοι ἴσως οὐδὲ φλαυρότερος

Numenius's Pythagorean approach seeks to establish a union between Pythagoras and Plato while breaking the bonds between the Athenian and his later Academic interpreters. Gianfrancesco's approach is different if only because he had already critiqued Pythagoras and Pythagoreans in the first two chapters of the *Examen vanitatis* before turning to the Platonists. In the fourth chapter, however, he further makes use of Numenius's work to sow the seeds of discord.

He is particularly interested in Numenius's critique of Arcesilaus, the infamous head of what is often called the second or middle Academy because it is said that he introduced scepticism into its halls. No writings by Arcesilaus survive, and his role in the Academy has always been somewhat of a problem for the history of philosophy. Gianfrancesco Pico compares his sources about him. According to Numenius, Arcesilaus is a shape-changing empusa (a bugbear like the lamia, mormo, and strix) or a polycephalic Hydra who tricks and enchants everyone with his sophistries, and who betrayed Plato by studying under the dialectician Diodorus and the sceptical Pyrrho.[39] According to Sextus, however, Arcesilaus holds positions in common with the Pyrrhonists, namely that he suspends his judgment about all things, refuses the probable and the verisimilar, and seeks tranquillity as the end of philosophy. Nevertheless, Sextus also does not wish to include him in his sect. While he might appear to be a Pyrrhonist he is in truth a dogmatist because he takes these Pyrrhonist arguments and turns them into dogmatic criteria for truth (or the lack thereof). In fact, both Sextus and Numenius (along with Diogenes Laertius and Gianfrancesco) quote the same verses attributed to Ariston of Chios that mock him as a type of chimaera with a monstrous body composed of a Platonist head, the torso of a Diodorus, and a Pyrrhonist tail.[40] Turning to other sources (Cicero, Lactantius, and Augustine) does not solve Gianfrancesco's problem. They merely reinforce his conclusion that it is not only the later Platonists who disagree in their interpretation of Plato; the sources for the history of Platonism disagree as well.

ἐκείνου, ᾧ συνακολουθοῦντες σεφθέντες τε οἱ γνώριμοι ἐγένοντο πολυτιμητίζεσθαι αἰτιώτατοι τὸν Πυθαγόραν"; Eusebius, *De evangelica praeparatione,* trans. George of Trebizond (Treviso, 1480), 14.ii.

39. Numénius, 67 (fr. 25); George includes the image of the Hydra but not the empusa in his translation of Eusebius.

40. Sextus Empiricus, *Pyrrhoniae hypotyposes*, 1.33.232–35; Numénius, 66 (fr. 25); Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum*, 4.33. George of Trebizond translates the characterization of Arcesilaus.

Gianfrancesco Pico thereafter directs his attention to Renaissance Platonists. He briefly debates Nicholas of Cusa's (1401–64) Platonism before speaking about his uncle and Ficino:

> On account of this one can discern how uncertain are Plato's teachings, which have also been lacerated by his followers into parts, smaller bits, and minutiae. But how much this pertains to Plato's affirmation or ambiguity is not wanting in the Platonists who in our age advance another interpretation about him, that he teaches everywhere. However, in the midst of this doctrine Marsilio Ficino introduces the discord that what Plato wrote in his own voice in the *Epistles*, in the *Laws*, and the *Epinomis* or on the philosopher, he wishes for it to be held as most certain, but what in other books is disputed in the mouths of Timaeus, Socrates, Parmenides, and Zeno, he wishes it to be held as verisimilar. But there is such variety in Plato as also in the dialogues themselves, which are composed about topics on which there is still dispute. Marsilio and others wrote that the *Parmenides* is about the One, the principle of things, and about the Ideas. My uncle Giovanni Pico, in his book *De uno et ente*, thought that the dialogue itself should not be classified at all among the dogmatic ones, as it is more truly disposed as logical exercises. And if someone assesses the dogmas of the Platonist Marinus who was a student of Proclus, he would easily understand that he began this quarrel before my uncle, and Atticus the Platonist will support him for the reason that in the work that he wrote *Against Those Who Profess to Follow Plato After Aristotle Do Not Follow Him At All* affirms that Zeno, Parmenides, and those who were learned in the Eleatic discipline, only studied logical disciplines. Who, therefore, would doubt that this is treated by Plato in his dialogue about the opinion and teachings of Parmenides?[41]

41. Pico, *Op.*, 2:743: "Hinc quam incerta sit Platonis doctrina percipi potest, quae a sectatoribus, et per partes, et per particulas, et per minutias etiam lacerata sit. Sed enim quantum attinet ad affirmationem ipsius vel ambiguitatem non defuere Platonici qui aetate nostra aliam de eo ipso sententiam ferrent, docere illum ubique. Verum inter hanc doctrinam id attulit dissidii Marsilius Ficinus quod quae in epistolis, vel in libris de Legibus, vel in Epinomi sive philosopho disserit, Plato suo ipse ore, ea haberi debere certissima vult, quae vero in libris caeteris Timaei, Socratis, Parmenidis, Zenonis, ore disputat, verisimilia. Sed tanta est in Platone varietas, ut ipsi etiam dialogi qua de re sint compositi adhuc certetur. Parmenidem de uno esse rerum principio, deque Idaeis, et Marsilius et alii scripsere. Ioannes Picus

Gianfrancesco Pico's account of Ficino's hermeneutics is copied directly from Ficino's own description in his *De vita Platonis*, which is identical to the framework that Ficino employs in book 17 of the *Platonic Theology*:

> **Gianfrancesco Pico, *Examen vanitatis*:** Verum inter hanc doctrinam id attulit dissidii Marsilius Ficinus quod quae in Epistolis, vel in libris de Legibus, vel in Epinomi sive philosopho disserit, Plato suo ipse ore, ea haberi debere certissima vult, quae vero in libris caeteris Timaei, Socratis, Parmenidis, Zenonis, ore disputat, verisimilia.[42]

> **Ficino, *De vita platonis*:** Quae in Epistolis vel in libris de Legibus et Epinomide Plato ipse suo dixit ore certissima vult haberi, quae vero in caeteris libris Socratis, Timaei, Parmenidis, Zenonis ore disputat, verisimilia.[43]

It is thus beyond doubt that Gianfrancesco had Ficino's works on his desk when he wrote this chapter of the *Examen vanitatis*. He recognizes the novelty of Ficino's hermeneutics but remains dissatisfied. What for Ficino are the prosopopoeic aspects of Plato's dialogic form are for Gianfrancesco Pico nothing more than Plato's confused and self-contradictory style.

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patruus in libro de Uno et Ente dialogum ipsum inter dogmaticos minime reponendum censet, ut qui sit logicae exercitationi verius accommodatus. Et si quis Marini Platonici dogmata qui Proclum audivit perpendit, eum pro patruo litem dedisse facile compraehendet, adstipulabiturque ei Atticus Platonicus eo in opere quod adversus eos scripsit, qui postquam Aristotelem profiterentur Platonem minime sequebantur. Affirmat enim Zenonem, Parmenidem, et qui Eleaticae [Cleaticae, *sic Op*., 2: 743] disciplinae professores essent, logicae facultati tantummodo studuisse, apud Platonem vero eo in dialogo de Parmenidis opinione et doctrina tractari quis ambigat?" For a brief discussion of this passage, see Robichaud, *Plato's Persona*, 242–43.

42. Pico, *Op.*, 2:743; "However, in the midst of this doctrine Marsilio Ficino introduces the discord that what Plato wrote in his own voice in the *Epistles*, in the *Laws*, and the *Epinomis* or on the philosopher, he wishes for it to be held as most certain, but what in other books is disputed in the mouths of Timaeus, Socrates, Parmenides, and Zeno, he wishes it to be held as verisimilar."

43. Ficino, *Op*., 1:766; "what Plato wrote in his own voice in the *Epistles*, in the *Laws*, and the *Epinomis*, he wishes for it to be held as most certain, but what in other books is disputed in the mouths of Timaeus, Socrates, Parmenides, and Zeno, he wishes it to be held as verisimilar." On Ficino's prosopopoeic interpretation of the Platonic corpus, see the works in note 20, above.

Gianfrancesco was aided in the formulation of his arguments by Numenius's *On the Disagreement of the Academy from Plato*:

> Plato Pythagorized (he knew that Socrates said these very things [i.e., on the existence of three Gods] from no other place than from Pythagoras and that he spoke knowingly), and would thus join matters together, neither in a normal nor evident manner. Going through each as he thought appropriate, concealing them between what is and is not clear, he wrote free from danger, but he himself caused the discord and diversity of interpretations about his dogmas, due neither to envy nor to ill-will, but I do not wish to say anything unbecoming about elders. But knowing this it is necessary to turn our attention back to that other topic, just as we proposed at the beginning to separate Plato from Aristotle and Zeno, so now we separate him from the Academy and thus, god willing, we will let him be now what he truly is according to himself, a Pythagorean. At present, having been torn apart with more fury than any Pentheus, he suffers in his limbs, but as a whole he is in no way transformed nor reformed from his whole self. Thus, as a man keeping the middle path between Pythagoras and Socrates, lowering the former's holiness to make it friendlier to mankind, but raising the latter's cleverness and playfulness out of irony into honours and dignity, and mixing Pythagoras with Socrates he became more common than the one and holier than the other.[44]

44. Numénius, 64–65 (fr. 24): " Ὁ δὲ Πλάτων πυθαγορίσας (ᾔδει δὲ τὸν Σωκράτην μηδαμόθεν ἢ ἐκεῖθεν δὴ τὰ αὐτὰ ταῦτα εἰπεῖν καὶ γνόντα εἰρηκέναι), ὧδε οὖν καὶ αὐτὸς συνεδήσατο τὰ πράγματα, οὔτ᾽εἰωθότως οὔτε δὴ εἰς τὸ φανερόν· διαγαγὼν δ᾽ἕκαστα ὅπῃ ἐνόμιζεν, ἐπικρυψάμενος ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ δῆλα εἶναι καὶ μὴ δῆλα, ἀσφαλῶς μὲν ἐγράψατο, αὐτὸς δ᾽αἰτίαν παρέσχε τῆς μετ᾽αὐτὸν στάσεώς τε ἅμα καὶ διολκῆς τῆς τῶν δογμάτων, οὐ φθόνῳ μὲν οὐδέ γε δυσνοίᾳ· ἀλλ᾽οὐ βούλομαι ἐπ᾽ἀνδράσι πρεσβυτέροις εἰπεῖν ῥήματα οὐκ ἐναίσιμα. Τοῦτο δὲ χρὴ μαθόντας ἡμᾶς ἐπανενεγκεῖν ἐκεῖσε μᾶλλον τὴν γνώμην, καὶ ὥσπερ ἐξ ἀρχῆς προὐθέμεθα χωρίζειν αὐτὸν Ἀριστοτέλους καὶ Ζήνωνος, οὕτω καὶ νῦν τῆς Ἀκαδημίας, ἐὰν ὁ θεὸς ἀντιλάβηται, χωρίζοντες ἐάσομεν αὐτὸν ἐφ᾽ἑαυτοῦ νῦν εἶναι Πυθαγόρειον· ὡς νῦν μανικώτερον ἢ Πενθεῖ τινι προσῆκε διελκόμενος πάσχει μὲν κατὰ μέλη, ὅλος δ᾽ἐξ ὅλου ἑαυτοῦ μετατίθεταί τε καὶ ἀντιμετατίθεται οὐδαμῶς. Ὅπως οὖν ἀνὴρ μεσεύων Πυθαγόρου καὶ Σωκράτους, τοῦ δὲ τὸ σεμνὸν ὑπαγαγὼν μέχρι τοῦ φιλανθρώπου, τοῦ δὲ τὸ κομψὸν τοῦτο καὶ παιγνιῆμον ἀναγαγὼν ἀπὸ τῆς εἰρωνείας εἰς ἀξίωμα καὶ ὄγκον καὶ αὐτὸ τοῦτο κεράσας Σωκράτει Πυθαγόραν, τοῦ μὲν δημοτικώτερος, τοῦ δὲ σεμνότερος ὤφθη."

There are some family resemblances between the hermeneutics of Numenius, Ficino, and Gianfrancesco. Indeed, Ficino often quotes Numenius positively. Yet Numenius aims at a different goal than Ficino.[45] Numenius wishes to tear out the "Socratic" contamination from Plato's true Pythagoreanism. Ficino also claims that Plato forges a "middle path" between his two predecessors and that even Socrates Pythagorizes in propounding myths in Plato's dialogues, but Ficino is nonetheless not of the same mind as Numenius. Ficino values both the Socratic and Pythagorean personae adopted by Plato, and wishes to remove neither the *serio* nor the *ludus*, neither the dogma nor the aporia from his interpretation of the Platonic corpus. For his part, Gianfrancesco knows quite well the passage quoted just above; he employs it elsewhere in the *Examen vanitatis*. Numenius gives him ammunition for his attack on Ficino: Plato is to blame for the confusion of the Platonists, specifically because of his employment of prosopopoeia, i.e., his adoption of different dialogic personae.[46] How could the later Platonists not disagree over the interpretation of the Platonic corpus, Numenius and Gianfrancesco contend, when Plato is in disagreement with himself in his own works?

Gianfrancesco maintains that Ficino and Giovanni Pico's disagreements with each other are in fact a continuation of these ancient battles over Plato.[47]

45. On Ficino and Numenius, see Robichaud, "Marsilio Ficino's 'Si Deus Fiat Homo' and Augustine's 'Non Ibi Legi,'" and Robichaud, *Plato's Persona*, 149, 157, 201–02, 269n1, 275nn106–07, 278n11, 281nn59–60, 282n66.

46. Pico *Op.*, 2:840.

47. Eugenio Garin first revealed some of these disputes in his scholarship on Giovanni Pico's *Commento* (ca. 1486) to Girolamo Benivieni's *Canzona de Amore*. Much of Giovanni Pico's criticism of Ficino was cut out of the early modern printed editions of the *Commento* and left behind in manuscripts. See Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate, Heptaplus, De ente et uno*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Florence: Vallecchi, 1942); Eugenio Garin, "Marsilio Ficino, Girolamo Benivieni e Giovanni Pico," *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana* 23 (1942): 93–99; Paul O. Kristeller, "Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and his Sources," "The Latin Poems of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: A Supplementary Note," and "Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and His Latin Poems, A New Manuscript," now in *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, 4 vols. (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1984–96), 3:227–331; Roberto Ridolfi, "Girolamo Benivieni e una sconosciuta revisione del suo Canzoniere," *La Bibliofilia* 66 (1964): 213–34; Michael J. B. Allen, "The Second Ficino-Pico Controversy: Parmenidean Poetry, Eristic, and the One," in *Marsilio Ficino e il Ritorno di Platone*, ed. Gian Carlo Garfagnini, 2 vols. (Florence: Olschki, 1986), 2:417–55; Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Commento*, with Stéphane Toussaint, *Les Formes de l'invisible* (Lausanne: l'Age d'Homme, 1989), 53–59.

In the *Examen vanitatis*, Gianfrancesco refers to a particular dispute between Giovanni Pico and Marsilio over the interpretation of Plato's *Parmenides*. Traces of this dispute are still visible in the pages of Giovanni's *De ente et uno* (1491) and Ficino's commentary to the *Parmenides* (printed in its final form in 1496). I will pass over the intricacies of the debate and limit myself to the essential features important for understanding Gianfrancesco Pico's arguments on the discordant history of Platonism in the *Examen vanitatis*. Giovanni envisioned the *De ente et uno* as part of a larger project establishing a concord between Plato and Aristotle. In questioning the interpretation of the *Parmenides* that claims that Plato is arguing for the metaphysical (or henological) priority of the One over being, Giovanni struck at the powerful and immensely influential interpretation of the *Parmenides* put forward by late ancient Neoplatonists. As the final dialogue in the curriculum established by Iamblichus, the *Parmenides* is the pinnacle of the Neoplatonic arrangement of the Platonic corpus. In such a view, Platonic dialectics in the *Parmenides* do not train the mind in logical exercises, as some like Alcinous argued, but aim at helping it ascend towards the One.

Although Giovanni Pico does not explicitly name Ficino as his target in the *De ente et uno*, the preface to the work reveals that Neoplatonic henology was a subject of dispute in Medician Florence. Giovanni recounts that he and Angelo Poliziano (1454–94) debated Lorenzo de' Medici (1449–92) regarding the Platonists' disagreement with Aristotle. He claims that the central point of contention was the Neoplatonic priority of the One over being, and it does not take much hindsight to realize that Ficino is in the background of the dispute, since Ficino holds that although the *Parmenides* has a logical form, its subject is theological or henological. Giovanni Pico disagrees, classifying the dialogue as a dialectical exercise (*exercitatio dialectica*).[48] Hence, the dialogue for Giovanni is aporetic, asserting nothing whatsoever. Ficino, who is better versed in the specificities of Neoplatonic interpretative traditions than any of his contemporaries, argues against this position. In chapter 38 of his *Parmenides* commentary, Ficino approximately follows Proclus's approach, understanding

48. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *De Ente et uno*, ed. Stéphane Toussaint, in Toussaint, *L'Esprit du Quattrocento, Le De ente et uno de Pic de la Mirandole* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1995), 138; Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Dell'ente e dell'uno*, ed. Raphael Ebgi and Franco Bacchelli (Milan: Bompiani, 2010), 208. On the question of the *decorum* in Ficino's *In Parmenidem* see also Allen, "The Second Ficino-Pico Controversy," 440–42.

Plato's interlocutors allegorically according to the *decorum* assigned to each interlocutor, which agrees perfectly with Ficino's prosopopoeic hermeneutics for interpreting the Platonic corpus:

> Lastly, one should not neglect the following corollary: just as Plato always gives Parmenides, who discusses (*disputantem*) here the One, precedence over Melissus, who discusses (*disputanti*) being in the *Sophist*, in the same way he is very likely to give the One priority over being, since we would expect Plato to follow in the *Parmenides* the decorum he generally establishes in his dialogues between topics and interlocutors (*personis*). Persuaded by the words of Plato mentioned above, his disciples assigned the One-and-Good priority over essence and intelligence; according to Proclus, all of these are highly venerable Platonists: Plutarch, Ammonius, Plotinus, Amelius, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Theodorus, and all their followers. I myself think that Plato did adopt this doctrine, since there is no controversy between the old and the new school over the issue. The new school originates with Syrianus and Proclus, eminent men indeed who were entirely in agreement; among their successors are the great philosophers Hermias, Damascius and Olympiodorus.[49]

In these pages, one reads a different division in the history of the Platonic Academies than in book 17 of the *Platonic Theology*, since Ficino here writes of an old academy and a new one beginning with Syrianus.[50] Ficino follows them regarding the priority of the One over being since he finds no disagreement

49. Marsilio Ficino, *Commentaries on Plato*, Volume 2: *Parmenides*, ed. and trans. Maude Vanhaelen, 2 parts (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1:170–73 (ch. 38): "Postremo neque posthabendum est eiusmodi corollarium, sicut Plato Parmenidem hic de uno disputantem anteponit ubique Melisso disputanti in *Sophiste* de ente, ita verisimiliter ipsum unum anteponit enti, si modo decorum sit ut utrobique in materiis personisque servaturus, quod ubique servare solet. Superioribus Platonis verbis persuasi familiares eius unum bonumque essentiae intellegentiaeque praefecerunt et, ut narrat Proclus, probatissimi quique Platonici, Plutarchus, Ammonius, Plotinus, Amelius, Porphyrius, Iamblichus, Theodorus caeterique sectatores eorum. Ego vero id sensisse Platonem arbitror in quo schola illa vetus extra controversiam cum nova consentit, nova vero a Syriano et Proclo, magnis profecto viris, idem penitus sententibus ducit originem, in qua post illos Hermias et Damascius Olympiodorusque praecipui numerantur." See Proclus, In *Parm*., 618–59, esp. 638–40.

50. On the *Syrianici* see also Allen, "The Second Ficino-Pico Controversy," 417–55; Allen, *Synoptic Art,* 78–92.

among any of the Platonic schools on this particular point, unlike the question of the soul that he discusses in book 17 of the *Platonic Theology*.

However, Ficino does not mention one documented voice of dissent from the Platonic consensus: Proclus's student Marinus. The *Souda* contains an entry explaining that Marinus wrote a commentary arguing that the *Parmenides* is not a theological work but a dialectical dialogue about the Ideas. However, after sharing his interpretation with Isidore he received countless demonstrations that the divine interpretation of the work is more truthful.[51] Gianfrancesco utilizes the same notice from the *Souda* to recast Giovanni Pico and Ficino in the respective roles of Marinus and Proclus.[52] Perhaps Ficino remains silent in his *Parmenides* commentary about Marinus to maintain the consensus of the Platonists, but it is also possible that he ignores the source since elsewhere he does not hesitate to point out disagreements among Platonists. However, Ficino's only explicit mention of Giovanni's interpretation of the dialogue, in chapter 49 of the *Parmenides* commentary, may hint that he knows about Marinus's dissent over the *divine* dialogue:

> I wish that admirable young man had considered with attention the arguments and discussions (*disputationes discursionesque*) above, before attacking his master with such audacity and claiming without fear, in opposition to the doctrine of all Platonists, that the divine *Parmenides* is simply logical and that Plato, like Aristotle, has identified the One and the Good with being![53]

51. Thomas Gaisford, ed., *Souda*, 2 vols. (Oxford: 1834), 2:2400.

52. Toussaint also compares Ficino to Proclus and Giovanni Pico to Marinus (Toussaint, *L'Esprit du Quattrocento*, 103–04).

53. Ficino, *Commentaries on Plato*, 1:234–35 (chap. 49): "Utinam mirandus ille iuvenis disputationes discursionesque superiores diligenter consideravisset, antequam tam confidenter tangeret praeceptorem, ac tam secure contra Platonicorum omnium sententiam divulgaret et divinum Parmenidem simpliciter esse logicum et Platonem una cum Aristotele ipsum cum ente unum et bonum adaequavisse!" On this passage, see also Allen, "The Second Ficino-Pico Controversy," 430–31, and Vanhaelen's introduction to Ficino, *Commentaries on Plato*, xx–xxv, xxix–xxxiv. In addition to the disagreements over the soul that he explains in book 17 of the *Platonic Theology*, Ficino also points out differences among Platonists regarding the demiurge, as well as the division of the triads being–life–intellect and intelligible–intelligible/intellective–intellective: see my forthcoming article "Marsilio Ficino on the Triad Being-Life-Intellect and the Demiurge: Renaissance Reappraisals of Late Ancient Philosophical and Theological Debates," and my "Fragments of Marsilio Ficino's Translation and Use of Proclus'

As in the example of Parmenides and Melissus discussed above, Ficino once more appeals to *decorum* to make his point. Just as Melissus is subordinate to his teacher Parmenides (interpreted as the subordination of being to the One), so Proclus has pre-eminence over his disciple Marinus, and so, the analogy holds, Giovanni Pico should have listened to his instructor Ficino before critiquing him.

In casting Ficino as the dogmatic Proclus and Giovanni as the aporetic Marinus, Gianfrancesco somewhat misses the mark—since characterizing Ficino's interpretation of the *Parmenides* as Proclean *sensu stricto* is not completely accurate insofar as Ficino follows Proclus and the other disciples of the Syrianic school only so far. He agrees with them concerning the priority of the One over being but he disagrees with their literal understanding of divine predication in the *Parmenides*, e.g., their interpretation that the predicates negated of the One are asserted of the second hypostasis the Intellect.[54] With clear echoes of his hermeneutical statements regarding Plato's personifications in his *epitome* to the *Laws* and in book 17 of the *Platonic Theology*, Ficino prefers to follow what he calls in his *Parmenides* commentary a "middle path" between their dogmatic interpretation and Giovanni Pico's aporetic interpretation.[55]

In addition to Numenius, Gianfrancesco draws on the fragmentary work of another middle Platonist, Atticus, to argue for the discordant history of Platonism. Based on Eusebius, one can say that Atticus flourished at the Athenian Platonic Academy ca. 176–80 CE, and may even have succeeded Taurus as its leader.[56] And it is in Eusebius that Gianfrancesco finds the fragments of Atticus that are useful for his critique of the Platonists, since the *Praeparatio evangelica* preserves large quotations from Atticus's polemical treatise against those who

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54. See, for example, Allen in note 50. On Ficino's use and critique of Proclus, see Robichaud, "Fragments of Marsilio Ficino's Translation and Use of Proclus," and "Marsilio Ficino on the Triad Being-Life-Intellect and the Demiurge."

55. See Allen, "The Second Ficino-Pico Controversy," and Vanhaelen in Ficino, *Commentaries on Plato*, xxv–xxviii. For Ficino's explanation of Plato's "middle path" between Pythagoras and Socrates see Robichaud, "Marsilio Ficino's 'Si Deus Fiat Homo' and Augustine's 'Non Ibi Legi,'" and Robichaud, *Plato's Persona*.

56. Atticus, *Fragments*, ed. Édouard des Places (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1977), 5–31; John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 247–58.

interpreted Platonic doctrines through Aristotelian philosophy. The work is of a similar combative sort as Numenius's *On the Disagreement of the Academy from Plato*, except that whereas Numenius defends Plato by attacking his Academic interpreters, Atticus does so by critiquing his Peripatetic interpreters and those who seek to establish a harmony between Plato and Aristotle. If the current scholarship is correct, Numenius was probably a contemporary of Atticus's predecessor Taurus (who also wrote a treatise *Περὶ τῆς τῶν δογμάτων διαφορᾶς Πλάτωνος καὶ Ἀριστοτέλους*), meaning that he would have flourished ca. 150 CE. Édouard des Places has hypothesized, moreover, that Atticus was probably influenced by Numenius, since we find both authors using two of the same rhetorical devices in their invectives: the evasive cuttlefish and maenads tearing Pentheus to pieces in their Dionysiac *thiasos*. In his study of the first image, Schmitt correctly names Atticus as the earliest source for the specific characterization of Aristotle as a cuttlefish evading his interpreters, but it turns out that the image is also found in Atticus's older contemporary Numenius's description of Arcesilaus. Numenius also shifts the referent for the image of Pentheus's dismemberment since he applies it to Plato, while Atticus attaches it to all of philosophy before Plato.[57] Gianfrancesco's title to chapter 4 of book 1 of the *Examen vanitatis* is clearly inspired from these scenes of savage butchery in the history of Platonism.

Ficino knows the fragments of Atticus's writings in George of Trebizond's translation of the *Praeparatio evangelica* and in Proclus's *In Timaeum*; they would have helped him conceive of the different interpretations of Plato. Ficino does not cite Atticus very often, but he invokes him (along with Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, and Aristobolus) in the *De Christiana religione* as a witness to the fact that some pagans usurped some of the mysteries and dogmas from Judaism.[58] However, in the very passage discussed above from book 17 of the *Platonic Theology*, as well as in his commentaries on the *Timaeus* and on Plotinus's *Enneads*, Ficino is interested in the fragments that he read about

57. See des Places's comments in Atticus, 19–20. As Schmitt already remarked, George does not translate the image of the cuttlefish found in the fragments of Atticus from Eusebius. He also leaves it out of his translation of the Numenius passage. As to Pentheus, he translates the passage about Plato's dismemberment from the fragments of Numenius but leaves out the figure of Pentheus, in Eusebius, trans. George of Trebizond, 14.4. He does, however, include Pentheus in his translation of the fragments of Atticus, in Eusebius, trans. George of Trebizond, 11.i.

58. Ficino, *Op.*, 1:29

Atticus, Plutarch, and Severus regarding their interpretation of the Demiurge, Ideas, and the creation of the world and matter in Plato's corpus. Of particular concern to him is that Atticus argues for the generation of the world, unlike the later followers of Syrianus who claim that the world is perpetual. Ficino is probably thinking of Atticus's Platonism in light of a biblical account of creation. The parallel, however, is not identical since the key passage from Proclus's *In Timaeum* makes it clear that Atticus's (and Plutarch's) arguments for a created world also presuppose the existence of time, disordered matter, and an irrational soul before creation, all of which do not square easily with Christian conceptions of creation.[59] Ficino is aware of these difficulties and begins to study them in detail in his commentary to Plotinus.[60] Annotations in Ficino's hand on a manuscript of Proclus's *In Timaeum* further confirm this.[61]

Clearly, then, Gianfrancesco Pico draws inspiration from the polemical works of Atticus and Numenius in a different manner than Ficino.[62] He employs the two middle Platonists in an eristic manner against Platonism, insofar as they are only important as witnesses to the discord among the interpreters of Plato. On the one hand, Atticus helps Gianfrancesco argue against Ficino's revival of the Neoplatonic interpretation of the *Parmenides* by providing him with the claim that Zeno, Parmenides, and the other Eleatics studied logic and not henology and theology. On the other hand, Gianfrancesco's appeal to Atticus (who refuses to harmonize Plato and Aristotle) also undercuts his uncle's position since the *De ente et uno* was conceived as part of a larger project aiming to harmonize the two philosophers.

Despite the central place of Plato in ancient philosophy, Gianfrancesco's anatomy of Platonism is subservient to the larger aims of the *Examen vanitatis* as a whole, including most notably its critique of Aristotelianism and his defence of Christianity. But Platonism, like Aristotelianism, was still alive when

59. Proclus, *In Timaeum*, 1.381–82.

60. Ficino, *Op.*, 1:1642.

61. The references to Atticus and Plutarch are on MS. Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, 24, fols. 141v and 142v, but all the notes in fols. 139v–150v are relevant to Ficino's analysis of the question.

62. One can begin cautiously to consider how the two Platonists fit into an even longer tradition since we know that Porphyry wrote a work entitled *Περὶ διαστάσεως Πλάτωνος καὶ Ἀριστοτέλους* (along with another work on the harmony of the two philosophers entitled, *Περὶ τοῦ μίαν εἶναι τὴν Πλάτωνος καὶ Ἀριστοτέλους αἵρεσιν*) and that in the fifteenth century Plethon fired the first shot across the bows that initiated the Plato-Aristotle controversy with his *Περὶ ὧν Ἀριστοτέλης πρὸς Πλάτωνα διαφέρεται.*

Gianfrancesco tried to vivisect it. In fact, Gianfrancesco feared that Ficino's and perhaps to a lesser extent his uncle's projects breathed a new life into Plato and his ancient heretical tradition. By trying to rip out the roots of Platonism, Gianfrancesco also critiques Ficino's broader revival of studying ancient wisdom, which Gianfrancesco characterizes as an ancient seedbed of paganism in which Platonic heresies sprouted up like weeds.

Like Numenius's characterization of Arcesilaus as an empusa, Gianfrancesco's understanding of the Platonic corpus distorts Ficinos's hermeneutics into a discordant beast, composed of multiple Pythagorean heads, Plato's broad shoulders, and Socrates's lustful lower parts. Despite noting strong disagreements among different Platonic schools, Ficino argues for a continuity between the successors of the *prisca theologia* and the various Platonic Academies, whereas Gianfrancesco argues that if a continuity exists it is nothing more than the fragmentary persistence of discordant heresies and paganism (a *prisca haeresis*), crawling in the shadow of the only true continuity from the ancient world: Apostolic succession. In other words, while Ficino finds room for dialogic *disputatio* among Plato's interlocutors and interpreters, Gianfrancesco finds nothing but discordant bacchants ripping Plato to pieces, leaving room only for the Christian faith.[63] By attacking Platonism, Gianfrancesco's apologetics are not just directed at Ficino. They also seek to purge ancient Christianity of so-called pagan influences. This anti-Platonic manoeuvre would also be repeated by Protestant Reformers soon after the first publication of the *Examen vanitatis* (1520), during a time of sectarian violence that made the disagreements of ancient philosophers pale in comparison. Comparison was the foundation of Gianfrancesco's method. Christianity, however, never developed an immunity to the kind of genealogical source criticism and historiographical analysis that he helped develop to critique ancient philosophy. In the end, because of his use of comparative methods, in

63. On humanist *disputatio*, see Christopher S. Celenza, *The Lost Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 85–86, and Christopher S. Celenza, "End Game: Humanist Latin in the Late Fifteenth Century," in *Latinitas Perennis*, ed. Y. Maes, J. Papy, and W. Verbaal, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2006–09), 2:204–05. Cao ("Scepticism and Orthodoxy") has made the case that Gianfrancesco should not be thought of as the first early modern sceptic but as an arch-dogmatist.

trying to protect sacred history, Gianfrancesco Pico helped develop the tools that would eventually critique it.[64]

64. On comparative methods and anti-Platonic apologetics in the Middle Ages, the Quattrocento, and among Protestant Reformers, see Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). On understanding early Christianity as an ancient philosophy, see part 3 of Pierre Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995). On anti-Platonic apologetics, see James Hankins, "Antiplatonism in the Renaissance and the Middle Ages," *Classica et mediaevalia* 47 (1996): 359–76; Denis J.-J. Robichaud and Matteo Soranzo, "Philosophical or Religious Conversion? Marsilio Ficino, Plotinus's *Enneads* and Neoplatonic *epistrophê*," in *Simple Twists of Faith: Changing Beliefs, Changing Faiths: People and Places*, ed. Simona Marchesini and James Nelson Nova (Verona: Alteritas, 2017), 135–66. On Ficino's response to Augustine's complex and often hostile relationship to Platonism, see Robichaud, *Plato's Persona*. On Giovanni Pico's development of critical tools to study the history of astrology, see Anthony Grafton, "Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: Trials and Triumphs of an Omnivore," in *Commerce with the Classics: Ancient Books and Renaissance Readers* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 93–134.