

## *Nous* Metaphysics until Middle Platonism and the Age of Apologists

The dissertation aims at analyzing the main psycho-philosophical and theological applications of the Greek expression *nous* (mind, reason, maybe spirit) starting with a description of its various etymological concepts, then analyzing texts of Homer, presocratic philosophy, Plato and Aristotle, and others all the way up to Middle Platonism and the age of apologists. In Middle Platonism, my scope includes the works of Philo of Alexandria, Plutarch, Numenius and Albinus (Alcinous), and Justin strongly influenced by contemporary Platonic philosophy. My analysis of this one-thousand-year period between Homer and Justin is structured in three parts. In the first section, my focus is on the literary and philosophical background to my central subject i.e. Middle Platonic and Justin's *nous*-metaphysics, which is however an extremely large topic and thus cannot be explored in full detail. My analysis thus can only elaborate on the main steps in the development of the interpretation of *nous* and on those who these interpretations can be associated with. Thus, several texts from early era have been excluded from the scope of my study, such as some fragments of Epicharmus or Philolaus, the exoteric writings of Aristotle that defined Aristotle's reception in the Roman era, Xenocrates's fragments that greatly influenced the contemporary view of Plato, and some other potentially relevant texts as well. With respect to Hellenism, I only elaborate on a short passage by Philo of Alexandria, in which I shed light on some typical aspects, which I consider most relevant concerning stoic psychology. In the second section of the dissertation, an analysis of the psycho-philosophical and theological applications of *nous* is carried out in the domain of Middle Platonic philosophy. A fully extensive examination of all possible shades of meaning of *nous* within Middle Platonic philosophy is also beyond the scope of my study, thus I only focus my attention on the meaning of *nous* at a few writers in the first and second century who presumably used the word not only to express some commonplace concepts of contemporary philosophical doctrines, but for whom it played a more significant role. As a result, from among those who strongly opposed peripatetic and stoic tradition, Plutarch and Numenius have been analyzed, and from among those who tried to integrate several schools, Albinus (Alcinous) has been selected for analysis. Furthermore, Philo of Alexandria is also elaborated on in some detail, who however did not closely belong to Greek philosophical tradition, but is still worth a detailed analysis because of his special eclecticism. Finally, in the third section of my thesis, the meeting point of Greek philosophical tradition and biblical revelation is explored in the scarcely remained works of Justin Martyr. Other writers might also have been chosen for analysis in this respect, for example, Clement of

Alexandria, however, Justin's talk with the old man on the seaside was the perfect example to illustrate the meeting of Platonic philosophy and Christianity within one concept. Furthermore, Clement is so deeply integrated to Alexandrian tradition that a thorough analysis of him should have inevitably led to an examination of Origen and Neoplatonic philosophy as well, which would have shifted the scope of my analysis into a completely different dimension. Consequently, an analysis of the sole figure of Justin seemed much more suitable for presenting the meeting of Greek philosophical tradition and biblical revelation. This third section of my dissertation finally ends with a brief overview on patristic literature.

This huge subject could have been approached from several angles, and each approach would have favored and selected different authors in the scope of analysis, while excluding others from it. Thus, I shall first outline the primary objectives of my study, then explain the reasons for my choice of authors and describe the specific structure of my study as a result of my choice. It is to be noted that, however, compared to the immense literary and philosophic background of Middle Platonism my analysis may only seem to be an outline, however, compared to the scope of my work it is still analyzed rather extensively while stating several times that a fully comprehensive analysis of Middle Platonism could not have been carried out within my study. Furthermore, I need to mention that my initial intention was to give the same level of detail to the analysis of the *Septuagint* in my study as I have given to Middle Platonism, as it strongly influenced the interpretation of Justin's philosophical and theological concepts. I have carried out a basic analysis of the subject and surveyed the relevant texts, as a result of which I came to the conclusion that the subject is too large and could only be properly analyzed in the form of a separate study. Considering my economical concerns it may seem surprising that I have elaborated on exploring the background in quite a lot of detail and extension in my study. For reasons described above, I would not have elaborated in further detail on the *Septuagint*, on authors excluded from my scope and on patristic literature, even if my analysis of the background of second century literature had been significantly shorter. In other words, the detailed exploration of the background was not intended to be carried out at the cost of the unexplored subjects mentioned above. The reason for my decision to elaborate on the background quite extensively and to expand the focus of my study, which is Middle Platonism, into a historical analysis of the interpretation of concepts, was due to the fact that I considered a comprehensive approach in the analysis of *nous* interpretations more fruitful than the phenomenological-structuralist approach that strictly separates the ages, authors, and even the texts of the authors from each other. A comprehensive historical analysis of interpretations seems more capable of identifying those

specific characteristics of *nous* interpretations which indicate that there were common features among the interpretations of various ages, based on which a certain development of the concept may be identified. These features are intuition for intelligible things and, in this respect, recognition at one grasp, in one moment, in a way similar to a touch or grasp. This feature can be associated with the concept of *nous* and can be considered quite typical even if such a generalization may seem too simple, and counterarguments may exist as well. Epicharmos may be taken as an example for this, for whom *nous* is a part of the soul connected to the brain, which he thinks is not only possessed by humans but animals as well. Parmenides may also be highlighted, for whom *nous* includes both discursive and non discursive thinking (however, intuition is a priority to discursive thinking for him too), just like Plato or Aristotle could be used as an example in a certain respect, for whom *nous* includes features which are traditionally attributed to discursive thinking. On the contrary to the mentioned – and other existing but here not mentioned – examples it may be concluded with some certainty that the fundamental meaning of *nous* is associated with an intuitive form of cognition, and this aspect cannot be properly analyzed by a structuralist approach, which opposes examining historical background and comparative analysis of various ages. In conclusion, my purpose with commencing the analysis of the *nous* concept of Justin and Middle Platonism with a long historical overview and then placing it within a historical framework is to deepen the above mentioned aspect of the meaning step by step throughout the analysis, an aspect which gains more significance in Middle Platonism and becomes a symbol of religious interest characteristic to this age.

[1.] In the first chapter of the first part of my dissertation, I focus on the most significant etymological interpretations supporting the hypothesis of Douglas Frame. This hypothesis claims that *noos* is from the root *\*nes-*, which probably meant „returning from death” originally, and thus was associated with initiation into some mystery. Frame believes that this meaning of the concept indicating hieratic connotations reflects a sun-worshipping practice of an early age. In this context, the basic meaning of *nous* is returning to sunlight, lightness, or life, including the spiritual insight or revelation obtained via the initiation ceremony and also the sun-god Helios, who is the source of the revelation.

[2.] In the second chapter *nous* is analyzed in relation to Homer’s view on the human character, and only then do I elaborate on what shade of meaning it carries in Homer’s epos’.

My first point in this respect is that Homer's *psuchê* does not mean the spiritual, psychological, or mental centre of psychological processes of the soul in a modern sense, but simply a shade, a dream, smoke, breath or a vague picture of a powerless human in Hades. Erwin Rohde and Jan Bremmer believe that the fragmentation of Homer's human character is of a dualistic nature, one part of which is the visible and physical form with all its energy, living functions, will, emotions and reason, while the other is the *psuchê*, which is only manifested in the course of a human life in dreams, ecstasy, and fully reveals itself only after death. B. Snell, C. A. van Peursen and P. Vivante, however, state that Homer's human character is fragmented to several parts along the many terms related to the soul – *noos*, *noêma*, *phrên/phrenes*, *thumos*, *bulê*, *menos*, *mêtis*, *êtor*, *kêr* or *kardia*. Both views however, agree about the fact that Homer's *psuchê* is not a central point of mental activity to which *nous* should be allocated. Further on in my examination, I argue that the basic meaning of *nous* in Homer's epos' is simply the realization of a situation, or a more precise and concrete definition of a view, and the corresponding planning process which can be considered a certain type of vision.

[3.] The third chapter of my dissertation focuses on a psycho-philosophical and theological analysis of *nous* in pre-Socratic philosophy. In my psycho-philosophical analysis, I basically believe *nous* is a certain mental manifestation of *psuchê*, which is considered vigor, which increasingly becomes the tool to gain insight into the reality behind the visible world. In this respect, my attention is primarily focused on the works of Parmenides, as his philosophy played a major role in questioning the certainty of senses in the process of getting to know true reality. I continue my examination with analyzing *nous* as a universal divine principle placing it into a process which finally leads to the *nous* concept of Anaxagoras. By including Xenophanes, Diogenes of Apollonia, Leucippus, and Heraclitus, I intend to show that the various pre-Socratic principles indicate such cosmic truths against which all things can be measured, thus Anaxagoras' *nous* is considered to be a divine principle, which is primarily responsible for arranging the universe.

[4.] In the following part, I go on to analyze Anaxagoras' influence on Plato and Aristotle's philosophy. For Plato, *nous* in most cases is a certain universal principle or virtue, which in many respects reflects Anaxagoras' philosophy. With respect to Aristotle, on the one hand, I focus on his statement, which claims that Anaxagoras considers *nous* and soul to be the same

thing (*De Anima* I, 2). In this respect, it is to be mentioned that Aristotle only states that Anaxagoras' *nous*, which is traditionally considered a teleological principle may be considered a certain kinetic principle as well, the moving function of which – according to most old philosophers – mostly belongs to the *psuchê*. On the other hand, in relation to *De Anima* III, 4 I examine if Aristotle integrates Anaxagoras' *nous* interpretation into his own *nous* concept or opposes and argues against it. My conclusion in this respect is that Aristotle's theory of *nous* is fundamentally not against that of Anaxagoras.

[5.] In the last chapter of my study, which focuses on literary and philosophical backgrounds, I especially focus on those few *nous* descriptions of Plato and Aristotle in which *nous* means a certain intellectual ability of the individual soul, and is related to the mental activity originating from itself. The reason for this is that from what Plato and Aristotle had to say about *nous* the description of thinking constitutes the greatest step compared to earlier stages in the development of the concept. The mental activity that Plato and Aristotle express by the term *nous* – in my opinion – is an intuitive form of thinking, which is different from the analytic, reasoning, deducting type of thinking, which – in the thinking process – first splits its object into pieces and then tries to understand the whole by building it from the pieces. This difference is usually expressed by the terms discursive and non-discursive based on Thomas de Aquino's *intellectus discursivus*. With respect to my point, the most remarkable aspect of Plato and Aristotle's analyzed texts may be that in certain cases the intuitive, i.e. non-discursive thinking may include certain features which are usually attributed to discursive thinking. Certain descriptions of these authors indicate that non-discursive thinking can also be propositional, that is, it may split its object to different judgments, a feature traditionally considered to be of a discursive type.

[5.1] In *Republic* VI, 511b-e Plato ranks the skills of cognition in the soul as follows. First is the mind (*nous* or *noêsis*), which is followed by the discursive intellect (*dianoia*), then comes faith (*pistis*), which belongs to the other side of the divided line (that is perception which is of a lower rank), and finally our lowest cognitive skill which contemplates images, guessing (*eikasia*), which Glaucon earlier called opinion (*doxa*). Concerning this matter I draw attention to the fact that Plato claims that the activity of the *nous* itself – which does not proceed from the direction of symbols, which mathematicians consider the starting point through argumentation towards the final conclusions, as does the *dianoia*, but proceeds

through notions attached to the ideas – also walks the above mentioned journey thanks to the ‘science of reasoning’ (*h` tou/ diale,gesqai evpisth,mh*).

[5.2] In *Second Analytica* II, 19 it is the *nous* from *epistêmê*, *nous*, *doxa* and *logismos* that we come to know the first principles with, which later on become the basis for scientific cognition. With the involvement of the *De Anima* III, 4-6 I identify the first principles with the intelligible forms or essences of the sensible things. I claim that the quality leap, as a result of which from a radically different, discursive type of cognition, based on sensory experience the *nous* is capable of reaching the point of grasping of first the principles, is detailed in *De Anima* III, 4 -6.

[5.3] In *De Anima* III, 4-6 Aristotle describes the formation of knowledge as follows: the noetic capacities which are in the state of potential suffer the effect of their subject, in the course of which the pictures coming from the subjects of knowledge get into the soul and so the common element is created, which according to Aristotle of Stageira is the prerequisite of thinking. At this point however, the mind is only potentially identical with the subjects of thinking, but their real processing has not yet started. It is so because in order to have thoughts born out of the forms that were previously taken in, an active effective reason is needed, which would be the *nous poêtikos* described in the fifth chapter. The thinking process described with *nous* or *noêsis* may also aim at the split subjects, which connect the predicate and the subject into a new revelation, or split a given judgment into predicate and subject, which yet again raises the possibility of propositioning the *nous*.

[5.4] In *Metaphysics* XII, 9 *nous* as first substance does not aim at subjects of external thinking. But since it is not a homogeneous substance, but a pluralistically divided realm of existence, it does not refer to divine thinking as one going round and round by itself without a subject. *Dianoia*, *epistêmê*, *aisthêsis*, and *doxa* however, are such forms of cognition which focus on external subjects.

[5.5] In this sub-chapter I point out Alexander of Aphrodisias’ interpretation of the above mentioned texts from Aristotle’s *De Anima* because in time he was not far from those Middle Platonic authors whom I am going to deal with later.

[1.1] In the second part of my thesis I turn to study Middle Platonism, in the course of which first I deal with Stoic psychology. Stoics considered the reality of the soul basically as an undivided complete unit, in the framework of which however they distinguished the seven capacities of the soul – that is the five senses, the capacity to speak and reproduce – from the guiding, directing, controlling element, which was called *hêgemonikon*. This latter was considered the part of the soul which was most permeated by the mind, and so within some restrictions could be identified with the mind or thinking. Thus it may occur that the expression *nous* is used as the synonym of *hêgemonikon* in the Stoic psychology. As for Middle Platonism the importance of this line is that some Middle Platonic authors interpret Stoic tradition in a way that the five sense in the soul and the capacity to speak and reproduce are identified as a kind of irrational part of the soul, while its guiding and controlling element was identified with the rational part of the soul, and this latter was called both *hêgemonikon* and *nous*.

[1.2] In this sub-chapter I analyze the ideas of Philo of Alexandria about the philosophy of the soul. The most dominant part of Philo's very eclectic thoughts about the philosophy of the soul is its division into two parts, rational and irrational, where the irrational part of the soul is occasionally identified with the types of perception, and the speaking and reproducing capacities of the soul, and calls the rational part *nous*, which in an unspoken way is identified with *hêgemonikon*.

[1.3] Here I mention some phrases in which Philo's notion of the *nous* occurs with other expressions, and denotes the rational element of the soul together with them.

[1.4] Philo of Alexandria very often uses *nous* to denote the first principle, just like the expressions *archê*, *theos*, *aition*, or *prôton aition*. The role of *nous* accepted as a universal principle is that of leading and guidance, just like that of the *nous* present in the individual soul. In the *nous* accepted as a universal principle Philo unifies Plato's *dêmiurgos* with Aristotele's primary substance as a primary cause.

[2.1] In the second part of my thesis, which deals with Middle Platonism I analyze Plutarch's notion of the *nous* exclusively from the point of view of the philosophy of the soul. In his work, *The Face of the Moon* he connects the three spheres of the universe with the three main parts of man, which are from the highest towards the lowest *nous*, soul, flesh. Thus Plutarch

distinguishes the *nous* from the soul. The rational element is attached to the *nous*, which is above the soul and the irrational element means the flesh. The rational or irrational character of the soul, which is between these two, is the outcome of the fact whether it is more affected by the flesh or the *nous*.

[2.2] Thus in Plutarch we cannot speak about a rational or an irrational part of the soul in the traditional sense, but rather about rational or irrational characteristics, since rational in this sense is rather some virtue, of which the soul may be part-taker under certain circumstances, than some ‘organ’ or innate part of the soul.

[2.3] The soul becomes more or less intelligent according to the extent to which it lets the superior *nous* affect it, and the extent to which the soul gives itself up to irrational desires and passions, which intend to affect it from the part of the flesh. The rational element in the soul is identical with the thinking denoted by *logos*, thus in its intuitive activity which aims at the cognition of god, some spiritual virtue of the *nous* is expressed.

[3.1] In this chapter I outline Numenius’ ontological scheme of existence in order to make it easier to follow the things said about his noology later on.

[3.2] The teaching about the three divinities, which is attributed to Numenius, Socrates, and finally to Pythagoras should be found in the Ancient Academy and especially in Xenocrates. This latter author in his fifteenth fragment identifies a first, second and third god, in many ways in a very similar sense to that of Numenius’. According to this the monadic male principle of this divine couple could be identified with Numenius’ first god, and the female principle of the divine couple the *duas* could be identified with the second god of Numenius, while the divine *uranos*-cosmos, which includes several divinities of the sublunary world, and the world above the Moon, would be identified with Numenius’ third god.

[3.3] In this sub-chapter I am dealing with the uncertain ontological status of the third god. It is most commonly thought that Numenius basically considers two gods, and the only reason why he tries to find a place for a third one in his system is that he wishes to meet some Platonic traditions, which he had concluded from Plato’s second letter. Others, however consider the third god in Numenius’ concept of god an autonomous principle. I discuss that Numenius truly had three different gods in mind, but since his whole philosophical system is



basically dualistic, he was not able to detail the way a third god separates from the others. However, the doubling of a second god and its separation as a third god is possible as a soul of the universe, not as the *nous*, since a certain Platonic slip provides basis for this.

[3.4] In the chapter titled *Numenius' Noology* I am trying to answer the question what the naming of god *nous* means concerning the three different gods. The first god is *nous* in as much as he founds the order of the world involving the second god and thinking about himself and the immanent cosmos of ideas as an undifferentiated unit. The ideas involved undifferentiated in the first god, however first appear distinctly only in his thinking of the second ideas which are to be considered as the proper *nous*. The third god separates from the second one at the point where the latter's way of differentiated intuitive thinking becomes a conclusive, discursive way of thinking, which breaks the intuitive vision of the ideas into the concrete natural beings of the created world. This third god which thinks in a discursive way however, is not the *nous* any more.

[3.5] Finally, Numenius does not assume one, but two separate souls to man one being rational and the other irrational. It is not irrelevant however that in his theory the rational soul also has irrational characteristics, and at the same time the irrational soul also has rational characteristics, which does not remind us of some continuation of the Aristotelian-Platonic rational and irrational parts of the soul, but of the Stoic study of the soul. In this system the *nous* is the substance of the rational soul before its incarnation, which on its way down in order to be able to adapt better to the earthly existence picks up further capacities.

[4.1] Concerning Albinus (Alcinous) I discuss that in his case we have to count with an ontological scheme of existence not with two levels (the first being the *nous* and the other the heavenly *nous* identical with the soul of the universe), but with three (first the *nous*, the heavenly *nous*, and the soul of the universe with its own *nous*). The reason for this is that the *theos arrêtos* in chapter X of *Didaskalikos* can not be identical with the *demiurgos* in chapter XII, which necessarily concludes that the heavenly *nous* which separates from the soul of the universe has to be the *dêmiurgos*.

[4.2] Similarly to most Middle Platonics Albinus (Alcinous) also differentiates between the rational (*logikon*) and irrational (*pathêtikon*) parts of the soul. However in his case the *nous* is not identical with the rational part of the soul, but is only certain capacity of it, the cognitive activity of which he calls *noêsis* prior to the soul's getting into the flesh, and after its getting into the flesh he calls it *psuchê ennoia* with an expression borrowed from the Stoics. In Albinus god can only be grasped only with the noetic capacity of the soul, and remains non-cognitive with the rational capacities of the mind.

[1.] In this part I deal with the history of research on Justin's notion of the *nous*. In fact we can only speak about such a thing from the twenties of the last century, when the unique Platonism of the age of the apologete came to the focus of attention. Concerning this matter I examine the statements of E. R. Goodenough, C. Andersen, J. H. Waszink, N. Hyldahl, J. C. M. van Winden and R. Joly.

[2.] A group of scientists almost completely exclude the Biblical influence from Justin's work and tend to find exclusively philosophical influence in the thoughts of the apologete, while others emphasize the Biblical elements and so lessen the effect of some fields of Greek philosophy. In this situation I try to answer the question of the extent to which the above mentioned factors influence Justin's application of the *nous* with the help of a text centered analysis. I come to the conclusion that it may occur in the introduction that Christian elements stay in the background and only come to the surface occasionally, like in the case when he mentions the attaching of the Holy Spirit to the *nous*, because Justin desires to disclaim Platonism – which is a deliberate strategy of the author. From the point of view of the *nous* however, not only this does give the reason for his dealing with the topic basically from a strong Middle Platonic point of view, but also the fact that in this field the Christian author himself also remains Middle Platonic.

[3] In the close of my thesis I draft the main shades of meaning of *nous* in those authors of patristics, in whose work this notion has a role bigger than general, and I examine how Justin's application of the *nous* fits in with the work of other religious authors.

**My publications and accepted writings (to be published later) in this topic:**

FLAISZ, E. 'Justin's Metaphysics of *Nous*', *Vallástudományi Szemle* 2/2 (2006), 122-150.

FLAISZ, E. 'Albinus's Noology', *Magyar Filozófiai Szemle* (accepted, to be published in 2007).