

The Figure of Socrates in Numenius of Apamea: Theology, Platonism, and Pythagoreanism (fr. 24 des Places)*

DOI: 10.14746/PEA.2022.1.8

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Socrates undoubtedly represents one of the most fascinating, mysterious as well as controversial figures of the entire ancient philosophical gamut and in the history of Western thought. Even comparing the testimonies of authors from the 5th and 4th centuries B.C., a multifaceted, even contradictory image of Socrates emerges, which is therefore difficult to trace back to a unitary profile.¹ The philosophical and historical relevance of the Socratic character has also decisively influenced modern historiographical categories, going so far as to define archaic philosophers as Presocratics precisely in order to empha-

* I am grateful to Catherine Fullarton who corrected the text in English and to Angela Ulacco for the precious suggestions.

¹ For a general overview of how several ancient authors like Antiphon, Plato, Xenophon, and Aristotle present the figure of Socrates see pages 11–21 of the introduction of Ferrari (2007). See, too, Vlastos (1998).

size Socrates's enormous Influence on the Western thought.² Although Socrates did not write anything, his profile has nevertheless been linked (albeit in very different ways and forms) to the pivotal role his character plays in Plato's dialogues. This is especially the case in the early Platonic dialogues – those called “Socratic,” by scholars, because of the paramount importance of the character Socrates, who is also more faithful to the image of the “refuting” Socrates, typical of dialogues like the *Apology*, *Eutyphro* and *Ion*. The image of Socrates we find in the first Platonic dialogues seems to differ substantially from the one we find in later works such as the *Sophist*, the *Parmenides* and the *Timaeus*, until, finally, the character of Socrates disappears altogether by the *Laws*.³

The great relevance that the character of Socrates had in antiquity (and beyond) is, however, undoubtedly associated with the central role this character played within the Platonic tradition. Plato's fundamental place in Western thought has in fact contributed to making his teacher Socrates an equally venerable figure.⁴ The link between Socrates and Plato is a functional aspect in corroborating the thesis of the unity of Platonism.⁵ Particularly in the Imperial Age, there were many cases in which Socrates was interpreted not as “the philosopher of aporias” but rather as a sapiential figure whose peculiar philosophical aspect was demonology, as in the cases of Plutarch and Apuleius.⁶ Furthermore, the figure of Socrates influenced the different ancient philosophical currents in different ways, which has led to different interpretative outcomes.⁷ As I said before, this is particularly evident within the Imperial Age, in which Platonic thought returns to the centre of philosophical debate to the extent that some ancient thinkers interpret Plato's doctrines as a systematicity.⁸ This Platonic centrality contributed in some cases to make

² On the origin of the term *presocratics* in philosophical historiography see Curd (2020).

³ This aspect was accepted by Arcesilaus who followed the Socratic pattern of abstaining from writing anything down to prevent any possible dogmatism. On Arcesilaus, see Cic. *De Or.*, 3, 17. As Bonazzi conveniently notes, scholars agree in attributing to Arcesilaus a recovery of the “Socratic” Platonic dialogues to underline that Plato's true “spirit” was aporetic and sceptical, and that the most important spokesman of this approach was the Socrates presented in Plato's early dialogues. This perspective was intended to provide an image of Socrates opposing to the Stoics' and Cynics' views of a “dogmatic Socrates”. For more about this aspect, see Bonazzi (2015: 98) who refers in turn to Long (1997⁴: 118–125). See also Ioppolo (1995).

⁴ This view has been criticized by Rossetti (2022), who affirms that the figure of Socrates must not be interpreted as too close to the Platonic philosophy “through the categories” of the 5th century B. C.

⁵ Donini (2013: 440) underlines how, for Plutarch in the *Adversus Colotem*, the figure of Socrates is strictly connected with Plato, to underline an ideal philosophical continuity, in the same way Plutarch does with Plato and Parmenides. In Plutarch's work, Plato's thought is discussed in a sort of group, together with Parmenides and Socrates, who are two authors considered by Plutarch as highly influential on Plato.

⁶ Donini (2003) provides a detailed analysis of the figure of Socrates in Middle Platonism, concentrating particularly on the thought of Plutarch and Apuleius. The scholar demonstrates how, during the 1st and 2nd century AD, detachment from the sceptic drift of the Academy was accompanied by a “pythagorization” of the figure of Socrates, in particular by Numenius.

⁷ For a well-structured discussion about the reception of the figure of Plato among ancient Platonists, see Palumbo (2012).

⁸ For a complete analysis of the strategies, styles, and purposes of the exegesis of Plato in the imperial age, see Donini (1994), which is, in my view, the most complete and exhaustive contribution available today on this topic.

his master Socrates a highly incisive character among Platonists.⁹ Authors who read Plato systematically interpret the character of Socrates as a philosopher who developed his own doctrine – a doctrine which Plato inherited and, in turn, further developed. From this perspective, Socrates can be understood as a sort of pioneer of the Platonic doctrines, an authoritative source for Plato himself who inherited and developed some crucial aspects of his master’s thought.

My aim in this essay is to analyse the way in which the figure of Socrates was interpreted by the Neopythagorean Numenius of Apamea in the context of criticism of the Platonic tradition. Indeed, Numenius is undoubtably Platonic in his spirit, even though Pythagorean philosophy also plays a central role in the development of his thought. In Numenius, as we shall see, the personality of Pythagoras represents the most important authority, so that even his references to Socrates and Plato are inevitably influenced by this philosophical genealogy, and they are described as Pythagorean thinkers.¹⁰

In recent years, there has been a revival of studies on the Pythagorean tradition in the Imperial Age, but very little has yet been said about Numenius’s portrayal of Socrates. Aside from Donini’s aforementioned studies on the presence of Pythagoreanism and its genealogies in Imperial Age Platonism, and Michalewski’s recent contribution on philosophical authority in Numenius, there are, to my knowledge, no studies that systematically analyse the role and presence of Socrates in the Numenian fragments.¹¹

As I said before, in Numenius’s view, Socrates represents a philosophical authority within a theological perspective encompassing both Pythagoras and Plato. As Michalewski observes, the association of Socrates with a metaphysical dogmatism represents an original element within the Platonic tradition, in virtue of the fact that Socrates was a sort of “symbol,” we might say, of the sceptical phase of the Academy.¹² For this reason I think that the link between Pythagoras and Socrates is worth further deepening, to understand a more general tendency in Imperial Platonism.¹³ However, before delving fully into the matter, it would be appropriate to understand the main sources of philosophical authority for Numenius, and to try to distinguish the different meaning that Socrates and Plato have within Pythagorean genealogy.

Numenius belongs to the group of thinkers who were strongly critical of a unitary view of the Academic tradition.¹⁴ As I will try to demonstrate in this paper, Numenius’s

⁹ See again Donini (2003).

¹⁰ According to Donini (2013: 450 ff.) the first hints of interest in Pythagoras among the Platonists are present even before Anthiochus, but this tendency became “usual” with Eudorus of Alexandria and the circulation of the *Pseudopythagorica* among the intellectual circles of the Imperial Age. On the alleged date of composition of the *Pseudopythagorica*, see Ulacco’s introduction (2017: 1–16).

¹¹ Donini (2003; 2013); Michalewski (2021).

¹² See, Michalewski (2021: n. 3).

¹³ Michalewski (2021: 133).

¹⁴ On this aspect Numenius opposes Plutarch, who in his unfortunately lost work *Περὶ τοῦ μίαν εἶναι τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ Πλάτωνος Ἀκαδημειαν* probably sustained the thesis that there is a unity in the Academic tradition, from Plato onwards, without any “sceptical detachment”. On this topic and the “rebirth of dogmatism” of Antiochus of Ascalona, see Ferrari (2013) and Dillon (1996²: 52–106).

criticism is directed against those who did not follow the Platonic-Pythagorean teaching, i.e., both the old Academics and, especially, the sceptics. According to Numenius, as we will see in more detail in this paper, the sceptical phase of the Academy produced a deep break within the Platonic tradition, in which the Academics arguably betrayed the original “dogmatic” Platonic message, which for Numenius consists in a philosophical link with Pythagoreanism, and which carries within it metaphysical and theological aspects that are closely connected to each other.

However, the theological perspective that Numenius attributes to Pythagoras, and then to Socrates and Plato, is wholly incompatible with scepticism.¹⁵ Therefore, the starting point of our investigation is to establish which figures or traditions Numenius considered to be sources of philosophical and sapiential authority.

Numenius has been understood by many scholars as an author strongly influenced by Eastern cultures. These investigations have led, as in the case of Norden’s and Puech’s studies, to the establishment of Numenius’s direct dependence on Eastern religious traditions such as Hebraism and Gnosticism. Norden’s and Puech’s radical theses have been criticised by Festugière, Dodds, Whittaker, Athanassiadi, and in a recent essay by Bonazzi.¹⁶ In fact, the thesis of Numenius’s dependence on Oriental traditions appears to its critics to be a thesis with a strongly conjectural basis, not sufficiently supported by textual elements capable of demonstrating the existence of a relationship with the philosophical-religious traditions of the ancient East.

Nevertheless, Numenius’s fragments do not lack references to Oriental cultures, a fact which has proved to be one of the workhorses of those scholars who argue in favour of a philosophical-cultural connection between Numenius and the East. For instance, in fr. 8, in which Eusebius of Caesarea explicitly mentions Numenius’s *Περὶ τὰ γαθοῦ* in his *Praeparatio Evangelica*, we read that Numenius described Plato as a “Moses speaking in the Attic language” (Μωσῆς ἄττικίζων).¹⁷ This comparison between Moses and Plato has led scholars to reflect more broadly on whether Numenius may have adhered to Hebrew

¹⁵ See Bonazzi (2006: 232; 236 ff.).

¹⁶ See Norden (2002²); while, according to Puech (1985: 35–84), some passages of the *Περὶ τὰ γαθοῦ* demonstrate that Numenius adhered to the Hebraism. To strengthen his thesis, Puech also affirms that at that time the city of Apamea was the crossroad of Oriental cultures such as Gnosticism and Hebraism, and that Numenius was influenced from these cultural phenomena. From a philosophical point of view this influence is attested by the monad-dyad dualism which can be found in some Oriental theological systems. Puech posits that it is impossible to conceive of a “pure Platonism” in Numenius without considering his knowledge of Oriental cultures. A criticism against Puech has been voiced by Bonazzi (2015b), who assumes that the so-called Orientalism of Numenius can be reduced to a single interpretation of the Platonic doctrine of the principles, which lead to a justification of the transcendence of the first principle without implying an adhesion to Gnosticism and other eastern cultures existing in the cultural context of the II century AD. See Dodds (1960: 7); Festugière (1953: 131–132); Whittaker (1967). In particular, Festugière critiques Norden’s thesis, who affirms that Numenius’s gnosticism is founded on the unknowability of the first principle. Festugière claims that Norden’s thesis is extremely radical and that not one of the Numenian fragments provides convincing hints in this direction. Also critical of Numenius’s supposed Orientalism is Athanassiadi (2006: 76–81), who underlines the fact that Numenius’s interest in Eastern doctrines can be reduced to intellectual curiosity (fr. 55: *occultorum curiosori numidium*). On this topic see also Domaradzki (2020: 143 n. 13).

¹⁷ Numen. fr. 8, 14.

culture or, at the very least, may have been strongly influenced by Hebrew circles.¹⁸ This thesis has been strongly criticised by Mark Edwards, who believes that the knowledge of Jewish culture by a second-century intellectual like Numenius can be considered nothing more than a tacit cultural element, and thus not sufficient to legitimise an adherence to Hebrew culture by Numenius, who, more likely, would have limited himself to the study of philosophical-religious doctrines of the time.¹⁹

The text from which we begin our discussion, which is fundamental for understanding Numenius's position toward the Academic tradition and Pythagoras's authority, is fr. 24 of des Places' edition. The fragment's source is, once again, Eusebius of Caesarea, who mentions Numenius as representative of Platonic philosophy. In fact, in Eusebius's perspective, Plato, as well as the later Platonists, are considered to be those thinkers who are closest to the Hebrew tradition, which is the forerunner of the Christian one. As Karamanolis has demonstrated, Eusebius mentions Numenius within his discussion of the role of Plato's philosophy.²⁰ In this long excerpt from this somewhat "historiographical" work, entitled *On the Infidelity (or Detachment) of the Academics towards Plato* (*Περὶ τῆς τῶν Ἀκαδημαϊκῶν πρὸς Πλάτωνα διαστάσεως*), Numenius takes a stand against the sceptical drift of the Academy, blaming the Academics (in particular, the exponents of scepticism) for having somehow misrepresented Plato's doctrine. Numenius's aim is to retrieve a theological Platonism; the reference to Pythagoreanism thus becomes an almost inevitable point of reference to re-establish a claim of authority. In order to denounce the Academics' drift, Numenius considers first and foremost the theories of Plato's first followers:

Now during the time of Speusippus, the nephew of Plato, Xenocrates, the successor of Speusippus, and Polemon, who received the school from Xenocrates, the character of the teachings always remained nearly the same, due to the fact that this famous "suspension" had not yet appeared, nor indeed had other doctrines of that kind.²¹

¹⁸ According to Burnyeat (2005: 148–151), Moses plays a central role in Numenius's philosophy – in particular concerning Numenius's perspective on eternity.

¹⁹ See Edwards (1990).

²⁰ Karamanolis has provided an important suggestion about the fact that Eusebius quotes Numenius. According to Karamanolis, Plato is, in Eusebius's view, an important reference point, even though the primary authority is the Scripture; in other words, Plato is not infallible. In this perspective, the quotation of Numenius is strategic for Eusebius. Karamanolis (2014: 179) states that: "Numenius did not hesitate to claim that Plato had been partly responsible for the derailment of the Academics from Arcesilaus to Philo, because, he suggested, Plato had not made sufficiently clear his dependency on, and commitment to, the doctrines of Pythagoras, as he should have done especially given Plato's dependence on Pythagorean philosophy." To sum up, Eusebius's quotation of Numenius is designed to underline the character of Plato's philosophy of Plato, which is close to the truth, albeit not identical with it. See Karamanolis (2014: 171–180). However, I am not convinced that Numenius considers Plato to be a philosopher who did not grasp the "Pythagorean truth;" rather, it seems to me that Numenius's goal is to stress the continuity between Pythagoras and Plato.

²¹ Numen. fr. 24, 5–12: Ἐπὶ μὲν τοίνυν Σπεύσιππον τὸν Πλάτωνος μὲν ἀδελφιδούν, Ξενοκράτη δὲ τὸν διάδοχον τὸν Σπευσίππου, Πολέμωνα δὲ τὸν ἐκδεξάμενον τὴν σχολὴν παρὰ Ξενοκράτους αἰεὶ τὸ ἦθος διατείνεται τῶν δογμάτων σχεδὸν δὴ ταῦτόν, ἔνεκά γε τῆς μέπω ἐποχῆς ταυτησὶ τῆς πολυθρυλῆτου τε καὶ εἰ δὴ

Numenius's criticism of Academic scepticism thus assumes a political sense.²² The sceptical current Numenius criticises is the one represented by Arcesilaus of Pythane, whose theses are incompatible with a systematic conception of reality and the theology that Numenius wants to justify instead.²³ What emerges from the very first lines of the fragment is that Numenius does not fully accept the thought of Plato's followers, Xenocrates, Polemon, and Speusippus, because their doctrines would not have been entirely traceable to Plato's teaching. Nevertheless, from Numenius's point of view, none of their interpretations directly contradict Plato's doctrines, and so neither are they in conflict with Plato.²⁴ According to Numenius, the real break from the Academics therefore occurs with scepticism.

The Academics' decisive separation from Plato consists in the *ἐποχή*, i.e., the suspension of judgement that would lead to the distortion of Plato's original theological message by the Academy's sceptical current.²⁵ In other words, the early Academics remained anchored to a dogmatic conception of reality, failing to elaborate on the suspension of judgement that represents the real breaking point in the Academic tradition. In fact, the *ἐποχή* represents the heart of that sceptical approach that does not allow knowledge of principles and first causes. As Numenius moves within a theological perspective, the suspension of judgement of the *ἐποχή* is completely incompatible with a theological and hierarchical conception of reality.

What clearly emerges is Numenius's rejection of sceptical Platonism, which is accused of radically distorting Plato's doctrine by eliminating the possibility of knowing the highest realities. As examples of (in)fidelity to the school's progenitor, Numenius examines the Epicureans, the Stoics, and the Socratics. Numenius considers the Epicureans to be those who, with due differences in style and argumentation, remain most faithful to the original doctrine of Epicurus. While Numenius says that Xenocrates and the other followers of Plato have, to some extent, misconstrued Plato's original doctrine, in the Epicurean tradition there is a sort of coherence with Epicurus's original teaching.²⁶ The reason underlying the Epicureans' "faith" to their teacher consists in the fact that they did not question the latter's original doctrine. By virtue of this description of the Epicurean "spirit," it can be inferred that Numenius interprets the sceptical drift of the Academy

τινων τοιοῦτων ἄλλων. Ἐπει εἷς γε τᾶλλα πολλαχῆ παραλύοντες, τὰ δὲ στρεβλοῦντες, οὐκ ἐνεμέϊαν τῇ πρώτῃ διαδοχῇ. Transl. Petty (2012: 37).

²² This definition is by O'Meara (1989: 10).

²³ See Opsomer (1998: 129; 171–172).

²⁴ This seems to be confirmed by Numenius himself, who affirms that he was more interested in defending Plato rather than in blaming Xenocrates. See Numen. fr. 24, 14–16.

²⁵ On the role of the *ἐποχή* in the Academy, see Bonazzi (2015: 79 ff.).

²⁶ See Numen. fr. 24, 23–35.

as a deep betrayal of Plato's thought, a radical detachment that has produced a genuine lacuna within the tradition.²⁷

The most relevant element for the purposes of our study, however, concerns a certain parallelism that Numenius draws between the Stoics and the representatives of the Socratic schools, each of whom emphasised one peculiar aspect of Socrates's thought, *de facto* forming a multitude of unique Socratic doctrines. Similarly, Numenius finds in Stoicism a tendency to emphasise one point or philosophical aspect more than others, thus constituting autonomous orientations such as to imply real and distinct currents within Stoicism, whereby some authors were more Stoic (στωϊκώτεροι) than others. Through this approach, Stoics end up quibbling about unintelligent disputes.²⁸ It seems to me evident that a perspective according to which an "autonomous" current of thought is formed from certain interpretations, as with the Stoics and Socratics, is completely at odds with the Numenian need to establish a genealogical unity between Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato. The aim is therefore to rehabilitate the figure of Socrates as an exponent of that Academic unity that was subsequently lost.

Numenius presents Socrates as a sapiential philosopher, aporetic and inquiring, far from the philosopher of "I know that I do not know," but a true master whose theological doctrine was expounded to his pupils through enigmatic formulas, and evidently not fully grasped by his followers:

The reason is that while Socrates was setting forth three Gods and philosophizing about them? in the rhythms appropriate to each other, his auditors were unaware if this and believed that he was saying everything at random and always opportunistically from the dictates of change – sometimes one thing, sometimes another, whichever way the wind blew.²⁹

The central thesis of this passage consists in affirming, in a rather ambiguous and mysterious way, that Socrates "posited three Gods," a concept so mysterious and complex that none of his followers seems to have fully understood the meaning of this message.³⁰

Numenius makes this reference to a sort of *diaphonia* between the various Socratic schools to underline the alleged doctrinal drifts that some of Socrates's followers had

²⁷ In a recent article, Boys-Stones discusses the question by recalling Sedley's thesis. Sedley sustained that the role Plato plays among Platonists was not so different from the one that Epicurus and Zeno played for the respective followers. On the contrary, Boys-Stones says that Plato's role cannot be compared with Zeno's and Epicurus's because Platonists saw in Plato a sapiential figure rather than the founder of a philosophical school. See Sedley (1997) and Boys-Stones (2018: 184–188). A discussion of Boys-Stones's thesis is presented in Michalewski (2021: 130–131).

²⁸ Numenius's anti-stoic attitude is clearly revealed in fr.52 regarding the ontological status of matter.

²⁹ Numen. fr. 24, 51–56: Αἴτιον δε, ὅτι τρεῖς θεοὺς τιθεμένου Σωκράτους καὶ φιλοσοφούντος αὐτοῖς ἐν τοῖς προσηκτικῶν ἑκάστῳ ῥυθμοῖς, οἱ διακούοντες τοῦτο μὲν ἠγνόουν, ὦνοντο δὲ λέγειν πάντα αὐτὸν εἰκῆ καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς νικώσης αἰεὶ προστυχῶς ἄλλοτε ἄλλης τύχης ὅπως πνέοι (transl. Petty 2012: 39).

³⁰ Michalewski (2021: 135) proposes to extend Numenius's criticism to fr. 23, in which he substantially criticises the theology of the Athenians, who condemned Socrates in the process. In this case it seems clear that the Athenians' theology is in open contradiction with the Socratic one; indeed, Socrates's condemnation

autonomously contributed, evidently not understanding his original teaching. This allows Numenius to overturn the sceptical image of Socrates, rehabilitating it as that of a true theologian. The pseudo-aporetic aspect with which Numenius presents Socrates's thesis is, in my view, justified by the impossibility of communicating the doctrine of the three Gods to those interlocutors who are not naturally predisposed to grasp the essential features of theology.³¹

This allusion seems to be a reference to the dynamics of the Academy, underlining the fact that autonomous stances, such as those of the Socratics, first, and later, the Sceptics, risk distorting the original meaning of Socratic theology. According to Numenius, thinkers like Antisthenes, Aristippus, and the Megarics failed to grasp the true meaning of the Socratic doctrine of the three Gods and thus somehow betrayed the philosophical message of their teacher – a message that was nevertheless fully understood by Plato, who inserted himself, through Socrates, within a Pythagorean theological tradition.

The three Gods ascribed to Socrates are evidently those of Numenius's onto-theological hierarchy set forth in the *Περὶ τὰ γαθοῦ*.³² We know from various testimonies that Numenius conceives of reality hierarchically, distinguishing three divine levels of reality: the good, the demiurge, and the rational-ordering principle immanent to the cosmos, a sort of *Anima Mundi ante litteram*.³³ Most probably, as we shall see better shortly, regarding the role of Socrates, the three Gods Numenius attributes to Socrates derive from the exegesis of a famous passage of Plato's second epistle, as many scholars have pointed out.³⁴

Before delving into an examination of the Numenian doctrine of the three Gods, it is worth emphasising how he places Socrates together with Plato and Pythagoras in a unified philosophical tradition. We learn from fr. 24:

Plato was a Pythagorean (he knew that Socrates dispensed these same teachings from no other source than that, and that he had spoken in full awareness of this); in this way therefore, he too bound things together, yet neither in a customary nor an obvious manner [...] Therefore, as a man assuming an intermediate position between Pythagoras and Socrates, he eased

is, according to Numenius, founded on the fact that his theological message was not adequately understood by most of his followers.

³¹ This aspect has both an historical and philosophical meaning. It is philosophical as far as some of the Socratics were not able to get the kern of the Socratic teaching, but also historical concerning Socrates's role towards the traditional theological knowledge Numenius mentions in fr. 23 as a critical aspect of the society that led Socrates to receive the death sentence.

³² It is Proclus who refers to Numenius talking about three Gods (see fr. 21; 22 des Places). However, the issue of whether the second and the third God must be considered two separate entities or rather two aspects of the same reality is a crucial argument in Numenius's philosophy that scholars continue to debate.

³³ A general introduction to Numenius with a wide analysis of the most important aspects of his metaphysics can be found in Frede (1987). On the possibility that Numenius's third God can be identified with a World Soul, see Krämer (1964: 71–81) and Frede (1987); some reservations are expressed by Opsomer (2005: 65) and Ferrari (2014: 61), while Jourdan (2021) is critically opposed to this view.

³⁴ See Tarrant (2017).

the gravity of the one down to the level of benevolence, and led the familiar cleverness and playfulness of the other away from irony up to the level of dignity and majesty. And in this respect, blending Pythagoras with Socrates, he appeared more human than the one and more serious than the other.³⁵

Here, a continuous line emerges from Pythagoras to Plato. From Numenius's point of view, Pythagoras represents the highest philosophical authority³⁶ – one to which Plato himself is also traced.³⁷ Moreover, Numenius's Pythagoreanism is in line with his critique of the scepticism of the Hellenistic age, as it represents a purely metaphysical aspect of Plato's doctrine that stands in contrast to Scepticism itself. In the Imperial age there is, therefore, corresponding to a recovery of Platonic dogmatism, a revisitiation of the figure of Socrates who – almost naturally, we might say – is brought back to the ancient Pythagorean tradition like Plato himself.³⁸

For Numenius, Pythagoras represents the original philosophical authority, even though Plato obviously also played a central role.³⁹

The main issue now is to establish Socrates's role within this pythagorizing genealogy considering the doctrine of the three Gods. As I said earlier, it is Numenius who proposes a metaphysical-theological hierarchy in which there are three divine levels, in continuity with the Platonic-Pythagorean tradition. However, I consider it plausible that Numenius is in this case not presenting his original doctrine, but merely explicating what some authors, whom he considers the highest philosophical authorities, have said before him. It therefore makes sense to attribute to Socrates the delineation of a doctrine of the three Gods, which evidently had not yet been explicated in these terms by Pythagoras and later taken up by Plato, so it is possible to imagine that Socrates may have been the *trait d'union* introducing Plato himself to the Pythagorean doctrine.⁴⁰ Although such elements of Numenian metaphysics are traceable in Plato's dialogues, Numenius is explicit in saying that Plato, in expounding his doctrines, *pythagorized*, i.e., drew on a store of knowledge and doctrines already present in ancient Pythagoreanism that he developed. Plato is thus presented as a somewhat enlightened man, the last exponent of a trinomi-

³⁵ Numen. fr. 24, 57–59; 73–78: 'Ο δὲ Πλάτων πυθαγορίσας (ἦδει δὲ τὸν Σωκράτην μηδαμῶθεν ἢ ἐκεῖθεν δὴ τὰ αὐτὰ ταῦτα εἰπεῖν καὶ γνόντα εἰρηκέναι), ὧδε οὖν καὶ αὐτὸς συνεδήσατο τὰ πράγματα, οὐτ' εἰωθότως οὔτε δὴ εἰς τὸ φανερόν· [...] 'Ὅπως οὖν ἀνὴρ μεσεύων Πυθαγόρου καὶ Σωκράτους, τοῦ μὲν τὸ σεμνὸν ὑπαγαγὼν μέχρι τοῦ φιλανθρώπου, τοῦ δὲ τὸ κομψὸν τοῦτο καὶ παιγνίημον ἀναγαγὼν ἀπὸ τῆς εἰρωνείας εἰς ἀξίωμα λαί ὄγκον καὶ αὐτὸ τοῦτο κεράσας Σωκράτει Πυθαγόραν, τοῦ μὲν δημοτικώτερος, τοῦ δὲ σεμνότερος ὤφθη (transl. Petty 2012: 41).

³⁶ See O'Meara (1989: 12–13).

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ See Bonazzi (2006: 236): "Au désintérêt de l'Académie pour Pythagore correspond la tentative progressive de "pythagoriser" Socrate chez les platoniciens de l'époque impériale [...]"

³⁹ See Numen. fr. 24, 22.

⁴⁰ Karamanolis (2006: 129).

al, along with Pythagoras and Socrates, which nevertheless holds together the peculiar characteristics of the previous authorities.

The doctrine of the three Gods can be traced in the famous passage of the second Platonic epistle in which we find a mysterious division of reality into different levels.⁴¹ According to Karamanolis and Tarrant, the reference to the second letter is crucial to understand the doctrine of three Gods⁴² Platonic epistles were considered authentic in antiquity;⁴³ indeed even Plotinus makes mention of this passage in the *Enneads*.⁴⁴ Even on a first reading of the passage, it is easy to understand how a text such as 312e1–4 of Epistle II, with its schematic and simple structure, lends itself almost naturally to ontological-hierarchically oriented interpretations.

Firstly, the author refers to a king of all, whose identification with a first principle is in this context taken for granted by Numenius. In fact, the allusive language of the pseudo-Platonic text could have been traced by Numenius to a reference to three divine orders of reality into which his metaphysics is divided. This would justify, on the one hand, the enigmatic language attributed to Socrates, which would have entailed a difficult reception within the various Socratic currents, as a teaching evidently not accessible to (hence not understandable by) all. For Numenius, Plato was the only one who managed to properly understand the doctrine concealed behind the Socratic allusions.

Nevertheless, it must be specified that, as Socrates left no writings, Numenius stresses and emphasizes what he finds in the second letter, where Plato attributes the authorship of the doctrine of the three Gods to the young Socrates.⁴⁵ What we read in the text is indeed a thought linked to Plato, but Numenius attributes its first formulation to Socrates.⁴⁶ In other words, from Numenius's point of view, what Plato writes in the second epistle can be considered a sort of explanation (or development) of the doctrine of three Gods that Socrates expressed orally.

Numenius's exegetical strategy cannot therefore be defined a *stricto sensu* historical reconstruction of the Socratic figure, but a theological reading of his doctrine. Numenius's exegesis of Socrates's thought turns out to be an argumentative strategy aimed at justifying a Pythagorean reading of Socrates, making the ancient Athenian teacher the

⁴¹ Pl. *Ep.* II, 312e1–4.

⁴² See Karamanolis (2006: 129); Tarrant (2017: 92–93). The reference to the second epistle has been taken for granted by all scholars; to my knowledge, there are no studies that deny an influence of the second epistle on Numenius's development of his theology.

⁴³ A short account of the transmission of the second Platonic epistle is Rist (1965), who traces the origin of the letter back to ancient Pythagorean settings.

⁴⁴ See e.g., Plot. *Enn.* I 8, [51]2; V 1 [10], 8.

⁴⁵ See Pl. *Ep.* II, 314c5.

⁴⁶ As stated above, the Platonic epistles were considered authentic in antiquity. Although several studies have demonstrated the inauthenticity of the Platonic epistles (with the partial exception of the seventh epistle, on whose authenticity the views of several scholars converge), we must also consider that the ancients considered the other letters to be original. Considering this, we must trace the epistles, at least intentionally, to genuine Platonic sources as far as Numenius and other ancient authors are concerned. On the inauthenticity of the second epistle, the study by Bluck (1960) is decisive, as well as the reply from Rist (1965).

spokesman of the Pythagorean theology matrix, which has been understood by Plato and then lost again in the history of the Academy. To justify his reconstruction, Numenius's thesis relies on Socrates's formulation of the doctrine of the three Gods that is one of the cornerstones of his own (i.e., the Numenian) doctrine. The assertion that the division of the real into three divine orders was already the work of the "Pythagorean Socrates," later taken up by Plato, is useful to Numenius for justifying his own metaphysical reading of reality and provides it with a philosophical *auctoritas* that is free from what would have been the sceptical drift of the Academy – a perspective that is decidedly far from a systematic theological one.

Conclusions

Our investigation of Numenius's reception of Socrates began with fr. 24 des Places, in which he outlines his view of the Platonic Academy and emphasises how the Academic scepticism constituted a *de facto* true distancing from Plato's original theological message.

From Numenius's point of view, Plato is part of a metaphysical-dogmatic tradition that harks back to ancient Pythagoreanism, which has Socrates as one of its most prominent exponents, but which also has been gradually dissipating from Speusippus and Xenocrates onwards. In accordance with Numenius's anti-sceptical spirit, Socrates is no longer considered the aporetic philosopher of Plato's early dialogues, but a theologian whose personality fits within a genealogy that reaches back to Pythagoras. The doctrine of the three Gods is presented to us by Numenius as Socrates's main thesis, one which the latter only sketches to his followers and which only Plato has completely understood and developed. In this sense, the link between Socrates and Plato consists in the attribution of the doctrine of the three Gods to Socrates and its explication in the second Platonic epistle; and this is why Numenius can find a continuity between Socrates and Plato. However, both Socrates and Plato are considered to be linked with the ancient Pythagorean tradition, so, in Numenius's view, their thought must be in continuity with Pythagoras's original doctrine.

Thus, in Numenius, the figure of Socrates takes on a new guise within Imperial Platonism, i.e., as a theologian. Socrates's role, in Numenius, takes on pythagorizing theological characteristics and is functional in investing Plato's doctrines with a chrism of authority according to a paradigm that, compared to the Sceptical tradition, is overturned. Numenius proposes a new image of Socrates, as a dogmatic theologian and the *trait d'union* that ideally unites Plato with Pythagoras. In Numenius, there is not the denial of Socrates's maieutic character that we find in the early Platonic dialogues; however, this character is not a symptom of a gnoseological scepticism. Nevertheless, for Numenius, this aspect does not invalidate the fact that the kern of Socratic thought consists in a sort of Pythagorean theology.

Socrates is therefore rehabilitated by Numenius as a dogmatic figure in an anti-sceptical key, to corroborate the thesis of a Pythagorean genealogy within the Platonic tradi-

tion. For this reason, Numenius is fundamentally an author who presents us a new image of Socrates: a theologian with Pythagorean background who inspired (and to some extent founded) the philosophy of Plato.

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**The Figure of Socrates in Numenius of Apamea:
Theology, Platonism, and Pythagoreanism (fr. 24 des Places)**

Numenius is one of the most important authors who, in the Imperial Age, deal with the figure of Socrates. Socrates is important in the Platonic tradition, in particular in the sceptical tradition, when the Socratic dubitative “spirit” of the first Platonic dialogues became important to justify the “suspension of judgement.” Numenius criticises the whole Academic tradition by saying that the Academics (particularly the sceptics) betrayed the original doctrine of Plato and formulated a new image of Socrates. For Numenius, Socrates plays a central role because Plato would have inherited his doctrine. What does Socrates’s doctrine consist in? According to Numenius, Socrates theorised a “doctrine of three Gods” (which can be likely found in the second Platonic epistle) which is strictly bound up with the main aspect of Plato’s thought. In fact, in Numenius’s view, Plato belongs to a genealogy which can be linked to Pythagoras himself. From this perspective, Numenius says that Socrates’s original thought is a theology which also belongs to the Pythagorean tradition and which Plato further developed. For Numenius, Socrates is not the philosopher of doubt, but a theologian who first theorised the existence of three levels of reality (Gods), which is also the kernel of Numenius’s metaphysical system. For this reason, Numenius puts Socrates within a theological genealogy that begins with Pythagoras and continues with Socrates and Plato, and that the Academics and the Socratics failed to understand.

KEY WORDS

Numenius, Socrates, Pythagoras, Plato, Platonic Academy.

