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PANAGIOTA M.C.

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CHRISTINA - PANAGIOTA MANOLEA

IAMBlichus ON REASON-PRINCIPLES

Iamblichus' notion of reason-principles (λόγοι) gives us a reliable account of his views on the acquisition of knowledge and the derivation of qualities in the material world. The way he understands the reason-principles as cognitive is indispensable for the reconstruction of his epistemology, which has been rather neglected so far. Moreover, the way he understands the reason-principles as creative reflects his theory on the derivation of things, the creation and the origin of matter.

The elements of Iamblichus' theory on reason-principles are to be found not only in his *De Mysteriis* and the commentaries on Plato and Aristotle, but also in the *Protrepticus* and the *De Vita Pythagorica*, the latter two being works in which the emphasis is not on metaphysics. In many cases his arguments belong to the heritage, which is common to all Platonists. His views on reason-principles are not expounded systematically, as they usually appear even in places where the context would not normally allow such a discussion.

The notion of λόγοι is by no means new in the post-Aristotelian tradition: the Stoics regarded the σπερματικοὶ λόγοι as the seeds from which everything (parts of the universe, plants, animals) arises according to destiny¹. They also constitute one of the parts of the human soul². Nature is to move according to them as well³. Plotinus used the notion of λόγος in many different ways⁴,

1. *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* II 1027 and 1074; cf. also II 580, where the higher principle of the world is called «spermatic λόγος of the world». At II 717 the λόγοι are called imperishable and at II 780 the soul is described as self-moved according to its spermatic λόγοι. At III 141 there is a reference to the participation according to spermatic λόγοι.

2. *SVF* II 828.

3. *SVF* III 141. The fact that both the human soul and nature are self-moved is due to the λόγοι, which are the Eternal Causes. In Stoicism, the latter take the place of the Platonic ideas (*SVF* II 780 and 1132). For a quick yet complete review of the function of the Stoic spermatic λόγοι, see R.E. Witt, «The Plotinian logos and its Stoic basis», *Classical Quarterly* 25 (1931), 103-105.

4. See, for example, E. Früchtel, *Der Logosbegriff bei Plotin* (München, 1955).

nevertheless, he was influenced by the Stoic notion⁵. More generally, his views on the reason-principles are the following: there are λόγοι in plants and animals; they are the projection of another λόγος, which is placed above, i.e. in the intelligible world⁶. The latter, which is innermost in the Demiurge, is called «ὁ μὴ ἐν ὕλῃ λόγος», in contrast with the «λόγος ἐπὶ τῆς ὕλης»⁷. It is due to the μὴ ἐν ὕλῃ λόγος that matter and form co-exist and natural beauty arises⁸. The soul of each individual possesses the reason-principles of all the individuals, which it animates in succession, and the reason-principles of every individual animal seem to be contained in the Intellect⁹. There, they act as formative principles by unfolding themselves as they think¹⁰. Moreover, Plotinus holds that the formative principles are the real thing, whereas the perceptible features of things are their images (εἰδωλον or μίμημα)¹¹. Iamblichus, in his turn, developed a more elaborated theory of reason-principles and their function.

A careful study of scattered references in Iamblichus' extant works and preserved fragments shows that he attempted a philosophical approach towards the presuppositions and the mental faculties, which need to be activated for the acquisition of knowledge both of the intelligible and the material world by means of reason alone. Knowledge for Iamblichus is achieved through the reason-principles in the human intellect. The essence of man is constituted of reason and intellect, and therefore, man's peculiar work or function is no other than a most accurate knowledge of truth and a true judgment about beings¹². Man has cognitive powers which can be incited to the acquisition of everything which participates in Beauty, i.e. all species of culture. But what is necessary is an awakening from the lethargy and a purification of thoughts for the removal of all

5. Witt, op.cit., 105-111; cf. A. Graeser, *Plotinus and the Stoics. A Preliminary Study* (Leiden, 1972), 141-143 and E. K. Emilsson, *Plotinus on Sense-perception: A Philosophical Study* (Cambridge, 1984), 154, n. 6.

6. Plotinus *Enn.* III.8.2; cf. III 8.7, where the λόγοι are linked with existence, birth and contemplation. Additionally, the λόγοι linked with birth determine the identity of the sensible object and are referred to as formative principles (*Enn.* III.2.2).

7. *Enn.* V.8.2. For the ἐν ὕλῃ λόγος see also *Enn.* IV.3.11.

8. Cf. *Enn.* IV.8.11. We should also mention *Enn.* V.8.3, where the λόγος of Beauty is said to be both in nature and soul.

9. Plotinus, *Enn.* V.7.1.

10. Plotinus, *Enn.* III.7.11 and IV.7.3; cf. Emilsson, op. cit., 24 and L.P. Gerson, *Plotinus. The Arguments of the Philosopher* (London, 1994), 115-118.

11. Plotinus, *Enn.* VI.3.15, IV.1.3 and I.2.3; cf. Emilsson, op. cit., 120-121 and L.P. Gerson, op. cit., 155-158.

12. Iamblichus, *Protr.* 42.13-16.

obstacles to knowledge, which exist as a result of birth. He who strives to know Beauty or Good as much as possible by discursive reason alone, and neither takes the sight as an accessory in the processes of the discursive power, nor allows any other sense to act in connection with his reasoning power, will do this most purely. If one uses his discursive reason per se, in its absolute purity, one will strive to investigate and apprehend everything which is true being, subsisting pure and per se, liberated as far as possible from eyes and ears and from the whole body in general, because by its presence it disturbs the soul to acquire truth and wisdom¹³. Otherwise it is impossible for one to apply oneself to such studies or to proceed immediately to the apprehension of the highest and most perfect good¹⁴.

When purified, the human intellect can strive towards the acquisition of knowledge by means of the activation of a system of universal reason, which has been engraved by the divine in every intellect. This system consists of all the forms of things and the significations of nouns and verbs. With the use of these instruments and powers man should apprehend the science of logic and aim to acquire theoretical wisdom in the whole realm of being. In all the species of things man should learn scientifically the principles and criteria of all knowledge, because the acquisition of the demonstrative science is especially worthy and proper for him¹⁵.

In particular, discursive reason investigates and comprehends universally the intelligible causes or creative principles of all things. As this knowledge is most real and proximate to truth, all rational men specially strive to acquire it. This science alone is not based on a hypothesis, because it discovers the principles of all beings and is able to give the reasons for its own characteristic principles¹⁶. The acquisition of this knowledge takes place in the rational part of the soul, which provides the soul with the honour to live a perfect life according to right reason. Iamblichus believed that the acquisition of truth is the best work of the rational part of the soul, which is superior to the irrational and exists for the sake of the intellect. The thoughts of the human intellect are activities, i.e. the perceptions by which it sees or apprehends intelligible entities¹⁷.

Iamblichus recognised that human cognitive powers are twofold: bodily and immaterial. If a man is deprived of both of them together, he is reduced to the

13. *ibid.* 63.1-18.

14. *ibid.* 6.18-7.8; cf. *In Alc.* fr. 2 Dillon.

15. Iamblichus, *Protr.* 19.18-23.

16. *ibid.* 22.5-10.

17. *ibid.* 30.2-4, 34.13-18, 41.20-22, 41.29-42.1.

condition of a plant; deprived of the latter alone he becomes a brute¹⁸. The senses belong to the bodily cognitive powers and provide man with a certain species of knowledge, which is limited. The immaterial cognitive powers of the soul are the cognitive reason-principles, which reside originally in the hypercosmic soul as representations of the Forms in the demiurgic intellect (or the Mind of the All). The reason-principles in the demiurgic intellect and the hypercosmic soul are superior to the ones in our souls, the former being cognitive and creative, the latter only cognitive. Reason-principles also exist in nature as creative and in matter as enmattered forms¹⁹. This variation of the same principles or, otherwise, the idea of the same λόγοι that exist in the intelligible world and also manifest themselves in the soul, in nature and in matter, i.e. in the various levels of reality, has a distinct Neoplatonic flavour.

Iamblichus refers in a detailed way also to the creative reason-principles, the creation by which is ever new, flourishing and permanent²⁰. For him, (a) the transcendent demiurgic intellect, the primary cause of the material world, is absolute and separate, (b) the heavenly demiurgic intellect creates the heavenly bodies and (c) the third demiurgic intellect is the proximate cause of the sublunary world. The transcendent demiurgic intellect sends forth the original creative thoughts or intelligent paradigms of the world, which are unified within itself. The world is an imitation or an image of the archetypes in the transcendent demiurgic intellect. The creation of the world depends on its activity of intellection, as it generates by means of its thought. When it creates, it gives existence to its thoughts through the medium of the third demiurgic intellect. This intellect is identified by Iamblichus with the creative reason-principles, the active elements of the Demiurge, which bring the disorderly motion of matter into order. It receives souls full of reason-principles coming down to earth from the heavens and gives life to mortal beings according to the reason-principles. In order to keep the souls willingly close to the process of generation, it charms them with the principles of nature²¹.

For Iamblichus the pure creative reason-principles are many and divided into generic and specific²². The creative reason-principle of a thing or quality is

18. *ibid.* 35.14-16.

19. Iamblichus, in *Tim.* frs. 9 and 35 Dillon (=Proclus, in *Tim.* I 87.6 and I 321.24 respectively). Iamblichus in his *in Cat.* fr. 117 Larsen (=Simplicius, in *Cat.* 374.7-376.12) refers to the reason-principles of the soul and of nature.

20. Iamblichus, in *Tim.* fr. 24 Dillon (=Proclus, in *Tim.* I 195.22).

21. *ibid.* frs. 10 and 34 Dillon (=Proclus, in *Tim.* I 307.14 and I 93.15 respectively). Also in *Soph.* fr. 1 Dillon (=Hermann, *Plat. Dial.* VI pp. 249-50, and Greene, *Scholia Platonica*, pp. 40=445-6).

22. Iamblichus, in *Cat.* fr. 69 Larsen (=Simplicius, in *Cat.* 231.20-232.14).

necessarily taken into consideration for the definition of this thing or quality. For example, since the existence of the generic justice and the specific justice is owed to the existence of corresponding creative reason-principles, it follows that their definitions are different²³. Iamblichus gives us a more detailed view on the way he understands the reason-principle of Justice in the hypercosmic soul. It exists as a unified immaterial and immobile substance in actuality, without the need of any material or bodily instrument or motion. In the case of qualities Iamblichus distinguishes between each quality itself, which is imparticipated, and the reason-principle of each quality, which is participated as a whole. As it is not absolutely defined, it is mixed with the imperfect and indefinite matter and adorns it by imposing its order on it. The nature or the order of the participated reason-principle, however, do not suffer any destruction resulting from the fact of participation, because the immaterial substance of the reason-principle is immutable²⁴.

Each creative reason-principle is conceived as extending its creativity outside itself and to other entities²⁵. In his discussion on the common bonds among the reason-principles, the forms and nature, Iamblichus argues that the principle of otherness, which is the cause of oddity and diversity in the world, exists in all three of them²⁶. As far as the procedure of creation is concerned, Iamblichus clarifies it in terms of participation of things in the creative reason-principles. They are participated and cover everything. The things which participate in them absolutely are immaterial, while the things which participate in them to some extent are material²⁷. The shape and figure of each material being is determined by the trace of the participated reason-principles, which is impressed on it²⁸. But to have only the trace of a reason-principle is a mere capacity, which needs to be actualised in order that the proper descriptive name or predicate can be applied to the particular material thing²⁹.

In his theory of perception, Iamblichus presents the hypercosmic soul, which is placed in the psychic realm, as a charioteer, who corresponds to the common

23. *ibid.* frs. 64 and 70 Larsen (=Simplicius, in *Cat.* 203.14-204.11 and 232.25-233.9 respectively).

24. *ibid.* frs. 39 and 65 Larsen (=Simplicius, in *Cat.* 130.2-6 and 216.6-219.35 respectively); *De myst.* I 10. See also in *Cat.* frs. 80 and 81 (=Simplicius, in *Cat.* 288.9-31 and 289.13-290.10 respectively).

25. Iamblichus, in *Cat.* fr. 65 Larsen (=Simplicius, in *Cat.* 216.6-219.35).

26. Iamblichus, in *Tim.* fr. 48 Dillon (=Proclus, in *Tim.* II 36.24).

27. Iamblichus, in *Cat.* fr. 53 Larsen (=Simplicius, in *Cat.* 145.10-146.21).

28. *ibid.* fr. 75 Larsen (=Simplicius, in *Cat.* 266.4-34); *De myst.* 37.10-12.

29. Iamblichus, *Protr.* 57.7 ff.

sense. When perception is about to take place, the charioteer is said to rouse the circuit of the Other. The latter, which knows the material world directly and by affinity, stirs up the cognitive reason-principles of sensible things and reports them to the Soul in general. But also the circuit of the Same, which contemplates the intelligible world, knows the sensible world – in a causal capacity, however. So the whole soul has a knowledge of the material world. Something similar happens with the souls of the gods³⁰. Iamblichus calls the Soul the place of the principles which reside and act in it³¹. Symbolically speaking, he refers to the Tetrad, this term denoting the Soul proper which gathers the whole intelligible world into itself, in a sense that it contains in itself all the reason-principles ultimately deriving from the One³². As the Soul is an image of the Intellect, so the reason-principles contained in it are similar to the thoughts contained in the Intellect³³. The principles in the soul are substantial and self-moved, when they are projected on the material world³⁴.

Iamblichus believed that, among human beings, only the philosopher has a correct representation of the immutable ideas, which are of and from themselves accurate exemplars, for the philosopher is a spectator of things themselves. The theoretical knowledge of the philosopher becomes creative in the sense that it gives him the power and opportunity to act according to it, in order to acquire all good in his own life and for the benefit of other people as well. This explains why the laws of the philosopher are permanent and his actions right and beautiful. In fact, for Iamblichus the philosopher is a case of person who has science because he apprehends real beings, and not mere knowledge by which everybody can acquire phenomenal facts and information. In addition the philosopher not only possesses science but also uses it³⁵. Thus, because philosophy imparts to men a knowledge of the eternal creative principles or ideas and accustoms them to imitate these, it is the most useful and practical of all things³⁶.

Among the objects of knowledge Iamblichus also included the intellect per se, all virtues, the mathematical sciences and philosophy. Forms and qualities are not known in themselves, but in so far as they contribute to the creation of

30. Iamblichus, in *Tim.* fr. 59 Dillon (=Proclus, in *Tim.* II 309.11).

31. Iamblichus, in *Cat.* frs. 101 and 112 Larsen (=Simplicius, in *Cat.* 339.34-340.12 and 361.7-364.6 respectively); *De myst.* 69.15-16, 106.15-17; in *Tim.* fr. 55 Dillon (=Proclus, in *Tim.* II 240.4).

32. Iamblichus, in *Tim.* fr. 53 Dillon (=Proclus, in *Tim.* II 215.5).

33. Iamblichus, in *Cat.* frs. 108 and 110 Larsen (=Simplicius, in *Cat.* 792.20-793.23 and 353.16-356.7 respectively).

34. Iamblichus, in *Cat.* fr. 107 Larsen (=Simplicius, in *Cat.* 786.11-787.28); *De myst.* 68.12-69.5.

35. Iamblichus, *Protr.* 55.12-14, 55.26-56.4, 56.9-12, 57.10-11.

36. *ibid.* 99.28-100.4.

composite material bodies; thus, they are seen in composite things. Only considered in conjunction with bodies, they are comprehensible by the senses. He also believed that there is more knowledge of that which is definite and determinate than of contraries and more of causes than of effects³⁷. For him the complete knowledge of subjects under investigation can be acquired only after the reactivation of the soul's ability to comprehend the noetic realm. As a matter of fact, he was in agreement with the Platonic principle that the items of knowledge are always reminiscences, thanks to the preservation of divine traces of all ideas in it after its union with the body³⁸.

Iamblichus believed that nobody ever saw the absolute Justice or Beauty or Good with his eyes, nor perceived them by any other senses which act through the body. Their essences are apprehended intellectually after a thorough and accurate preparation, and only thus one will approximate the nearest to the knowledge of them. The intelligible substances are "things visible by nature", truly knowable and illuminated by divine light. It is only the knowledge of things that are visible by nature that is true and clear.

On the contrary, the things which are perceived by the senses are murky, unclear, unorganised and can be deceptive. The Demiurge does not turn his attention to them, and, similarly, those people who have practised the contemplation of the noetic realm are unsuited to discourse about the sensible objects³⁹. It is evident that Iamblichus, as a devoted Platonist, is of the opinion that sense-perception is definitely inferior to knowledge of the intelligible level of reality.

Despite that Iamblichus taught that the main function of man is the acquisition of knowledge, he realised that there are some necessary limits in the ability of the human intellect to share true knowledge. Concerning the knowledge of the material world, he seemed to agree with the Pythagorean argument that since the corporeal things are not finite in number and cannot be precisely defined, they cannot be objects of knowledge. Proper knowledge is that of what genuinely exists and is always the same remaining unchanged and always properly called "being"⁴⁰. But also the knowledge of the intelligible world is difficult to acquire. Iamblichus argued that it is by nature incomprehensible to us how the gods create the body, or the life in the body how they combine each with

37. *ibid.* 20.2-12, 38.3-7; in *Tim.* fr. 47 Dillon (=Proclus, in *Tim.* II 4.20).

38. Iamblichus, in *Phaed.* fr. 3 Dillon (=Olympiodorus, in *Phaed.* 65.13); *De myst.* 120.9-14. Cf. in *Tim.* fr. 5 Dillon (=Proclus, in *Tim.* I 30.2).

39. Iamblichus, in *Tim.* frs. 3 and 40 Dillon (=Proclus, in *Tim.* I 19.9 and I 399.28 respectively).

40. *De vita Pyth.* 159, 160.

the other, and, in general, how things proceed from the gods⁴¹. In addition, the essences of daemons and generally of the entities superior to humans are extremely difficult to comprehend, for those who do not have the mind of their soul thoroughly purified. Even the essence of the soul is not easily perceptible to everyone. All that the humans can perceive and make clear is the powers of the daemons⁴². But anyway, in the intelligible realm the form of the Good is the limit of our inquiries, and can scarcely be apprehended. But when it is perceived, it is the source of all that is right and beautiful⁴³.

The knowledge which is acquired through the cognitive reason-principles is clearly differentiated by Iamblichus from the perfect innate knowledge of gods which is in the human soul, preexists reason and demonstration and co-exists eternally with the soul in a unique form⁴⁴. This fact clearly distinguishes those who philosophize theoretically – and thus have a certain knowledge of gods –, from the theurgists, which are united with the gods⁴⁵. But the theoretical knowledge of gods is the presupposition for the active union with them, which, of course, is well beyond it⁴⁶.

As a general comment, Iamblichus' theory of the acquisition of knowledge is closely connected with his views on the existence and the function of the reason-principles, on the one hand, and with his opinion concerning the human capability of knowing the intelligible world to a certain extent, on the other. My account of this doctrine could be useful for the examination of the rational elements in Iamblichus' philosophy. But, in order to reconstruct his whole epistemology, there is still a long way to go.

41. Iamblichus, in *Tim.* fr. 88 Dillon (=Proclus, in *Tim.* III 356.6).

42. Iamblichus, in *Alc.* fr. 4 Dillon (=Proclus, in *Alc.* 84.1ff).

43. Iamblichus, *Protr.* 81.25-82.4.

44. Iamblichus, *De myst.* 7.14-8.2.

45. *ibid.* 96.13-16.

46. *ibid.* 98.8-13.