



Apuleius's Platonism

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Introduction

Lucius Apuleius (c. 125–after 170 CE), of the North African city Madaura, was a Roman philosophical writer of the 2nd century CE. Apuleius's identity is thrown into an interesting light by his notorious description of the narrator of his comic novel *Metamorphoses*, perhaps his most famous work, as a relative of Sextus of Chaeronea, who, in turn, was a relation of the Middle Platonist Plutarch. It is possible that this reference indicates merely an intellectual affiliation with Sextus and the Platonic school. From Apuleius's *Florida*, a collection of epideictic orations, we learn that he undertook philosophical studies, broadly construed, during a sojourn in Athens that lasted several years and that may have been spent in the intellectual vicinity of the Middle Platonist Calvenus Taurus. Apuleius is thus commonly grouped with the Middle Platonists (see also the separate *Oxford Bibliographies* article "Middle Platonism" for a general discussion and various Greek and Roman representatives), a label that has become rather problematic, since it appears to streamline intellectual currents of Platonism that have been shown to vary significantly. Alternative terms, such as "post-Hellenistic" philosophy, have been suggested, but the term "Middle Platonism" is still widely used, with the caveat, however, that it ought to refer to a chronological timeframe, roughly the 1st century BCE until Plotinus, rather than a homogenous philosophical outlook. The most conspicuous element in Apuleius's own philosophical output is a rather complex demonology, designed to ensure that divine providential care permeates the entire cosmos. Other features of his writings are what may be regarded as trademark attributes of his time: a tendency to fit Plato's thought into a digestible, handbook-style system, instead of practicing critical inquiry or exegesis; a religious interpretation of philosophical doctrine, no doubt informed by his close affiliation with various mystery cults contemporary with him; and an emphasis on rhetoric as a suitable means of conveying philosophical wisdom, a feature in line with the literary and cultural taste of the Second Sophistic. Reluctance to accept Apuleius's standing as a philosopher is a modern phenomenon. He was held in high esteem for his role as a Platonic philosopher already during his lifetime, and St. Augustine would later single him out, in Book 8 of his *City of God against the Pagans*, as one of the noblest disciples of Plato—a description that is then followed, it is true, by a devastating critique of Apuleius's doctrine on demons.

General Overviews

Hijmans 1987 is a helpful entry point for those interested in understanding Apuleius's philosophical project. Gersh 1986 includes Apuleius in a survey of Latin philosophical authors from Cicero to Priscian the grammarian, intended as a preparatory step for a study of Platonism in the Middle Ages. Dillon 1996 in his now-classic study of the Middle Platonists discusses Apuleius in the context of the so-called "School of Gaius" (see Philosophical Influences), and provides a useful survey of the author's life and works, physics (including theology), ethics, and logic. Moerschini 1978 is a collection of previously published articles that deal with variety of philosophical, philological, and literary focus points. Moerschini 2015 is a broad-scale analysis of Apuleius's Platonism that folds his previous inquiries into a broader discussion of the intellectual exchanges between Middle Platonism and other philosophical currents at the time, addressing, moreover, the significance of rhetorical display for philosophical writers of the imperial era. Dörrie, et al. 1996–2008, in the authors' monumental project that traces the development of Greek and Roman Platonism in its entirety and from its beginnings, discusses individual aspects of Apuleius's metaphysics and psychology with reference to his *On Plato and His Doctrine*, the *On the God of Socrates*, the *On the Cosmos*, and the *Apology*. All of the above-listed studies combine general overviews of varying lengths with in-depth treatments of specific aspects of Apuleius's Platonism that, due to the fact that many details of the author's philosophical perspectives are relatively under-researched, remain significant contributions in their respective contexts. Specific parts of these studies are, therefore, listed again and with more detailed descriptions, under multiple other headings in this article.

Dillon, John. 1996. Apuleius of Madaura. In *The Middle Platonists: A study of Platonism 80 B.C. to A.D. 220*. By John Dillon, 306–338. 2d ed. London: Duckworth.

First published in 1977. A helpful, albeit critical, overview of Apuleius's philosophical positions, including his theology, psychology, demonology, his doctrine on fate and providence, and his ethics; with a brief discussion on logic.

Dörrie, Heinrich, Matthias Baltes, and Christian Pietsch. 1996–2008. *Der Platonismus in der Antike*. Vols. 4–7.1. Stuttgart: Frommann–Holzboog.

Extensive collection of ancient source material. Provides German translations of the Greek and Latin primary sources, often with an in-depth commentary and extensive annotations (in German). Uses the edition of Apuleius's works published in Beaujeu 1973 (cited under Collections of Latin Editions).

Gersh, Stephen. 1986. Apuleius. In *Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism: The Latin tradition*. Vol. 1. By Stephen Gersh, 215–328. Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press.

Gersh identifies in Apuleius a "pendant for triadic schemata" (p. 228), a pattern he adopts for his own discussion. Unifying headings such as "Gods, Demons, Men" and "God, Matter, Form" are helpfully contextualized and, where appropriate, framed with a discussion of Plato's original dialogues, the views of the doxographers, and other relevant sources.

Hijmans, Benjamin L. 1987. Apuleius *Philosophus Platonicus*. In *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt II 36/1: Philosophie, Wissenschaften, Technik*. Edited by Wolfgang Haase, 395–475. Berlin and New York: De Gruyter.

Survey of Apuleius's Platonism that covers theology, psychology, the nature of time, medicine, pedagogy, and ethics, with a discussion of Apuleius in his various roles as a translator, orator, and writer vis-à-vis his audiences. Particular effort is made to evaluate the doctrinal harmony between Apuleius's *On Plato and His Doctrine* and the *Asclepius*, a work considered spurious by most scholars (see *Asclepius: Editions, Translations, Commentaries, and Topical Studies*), but no ultimate verdict is given by Hijmans.

Moreschini, Claudio. 1978. *Apuleio e il Platonismo*. Florence: L. S. Olschki.

Selection of previously published articles on issues ranging from the theme of "curiosity" in Apuleius's works to philological and philosophical topics in the *On Plato and His Doctrine*. Framed by a discussion of Middle Platonists from Antiochus of Ascalon to Apuleius, and a discussion of the latter's impact on the subsequent centuries. Note that Moreschini here still accepts Apuleius's intellectual affiliation with Gaius (see *Philosophical Influences*). In Italian.

Moreschini, Claudio. 2015. *Apuleius and the Metamorphoses of Platonism*. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols.

An updated and supplemented version of various topics raised in Moreschini 1978 that takes care to trace the development of Middle Platonic perspectives within the wider context of philosophical education during the imperial era. Individual chapters cover the *Apology*, *Florida*, *Metamorphoses*, *On Plato and His Doctrine*, *On the Cosmos*, and the *Peri Hermeneias* (considered spurious).

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