EVIL AS PRIVATION: THE SOUL

For many Platonists disputes regarding the extent to which the soul is responsible for its own sinful actions are to be decided ultimately by consideration of the question of whether its sinfulness is part of its essence, or rather reaches only as far as its powers or activities. Proclus deals at length with the two extreme positions on this issue, the theory of an evil World Soul most famously advanced by Plutarch and Atticus and the view of Plotinus that the soul comes to sin only subsequent to its descent through its contact with matter. In the next chapters we shall take a careful look at his treatment of each of these positions.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE EVIL WORLD SOUL

Texts

5.1 [DMS c. 25, p. 204.1–15] We must now consider other souls that have no part in being but are certain images, parts of the more degenerate soul that the Athenian Stranger calls “maleficent,” whether they have no propensity to evil or evil exists in them also, but in a different manner. If they are worse than the soul of humans—I mean than that image that is in us—evil for them is not acting in accordance with nature. Good and evil will not be in them in the same manner as they are in our souls which always alternate between good and evil. But if they are parts of another soul that is antecedent to them, just as are our souls, then it is clearly necessary that, as the superior soul is capable of worse or better, so its image should follow it, sometimes pursuing what is above and other times descending into generation and the sphere of matter. For as irrationality is dependent on reason, inferiority consists in the opposition to reason, not receiving its light or taking care of its own lack of measure by the measure that is there. That lack of measure was not its power, but weakness and defect of power...

5.2 [DMS c. 40, pp. 228.1 – 230.21] In what follows we shall examine evil as it is in itself and its nature. But before this we shall look at the causes of evils, [to determine] whether or not all of them have one and the same cause. For some say that they do while others disagree. Those who speak of one source of evils derive from it every sort of evil; others, establishing as the principle of the nature of evil an active power of evil in souls, assert that from this evils are generated; still others, taking a position between these two, leave the forms of evils in the intellective nature and confess that it is from here that evils, like all other things, proceed. Some of these thinkers employ various hypotheses to form their conclusions, while others make Plato the father of their doctrines. Of the latter group, some locate the forms of all things in the intellective sphere and call as witness Socrates in Theaetetus who establishes two