ALBINUS' METAPHYSICS
AN ATTEMPT AT REHABILITATION
BY
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I. THE INNER CONSISTENCY AND THE ORIGINAL CHARACTER OF ALBINUS' INTERPRETATION OF PLATO

R. E. Witt's book, published in 1937 and still the most recent general work on this subject, claims to be the first "exhaustive examination of the Didaskalikos itself" 1). It is, however, mainly concerned with an investigation into the sources of Albinus' work and with a comparison of his doctrine with those of earlier Platonists and that of Plotinus, but it does not include a systematic examination of the inner coherence of Albinus' interpretation of Plato. Now it is very remarkable that Witt repeatedly reproaches Albinus that his Platonism is full of contradictions and logical inconsistencies (p. 120; 128; 133-4; 135). In its most general formulation this criticism charges Albinus with the fundamental mistake of combining an Aristotelian theology with a literal interpretation of the Timaeus (p. 135). This opinion may even be said to be the current view 2). Such a fundamental criticism in fact implies that Albinus is unworthy of the name of a philosopher. Yet one asks oneself first of all how on earth Albinus could possibly be reckoned in later antiquity among the coryphaei of Platonism 3). Would the intellectual capacities of Albinus himself and moreover of those of the principal thinkers of the subsequent centuries who judged favourably about him, rank so far below those of modern historians of philosophy? A very flattering thought to be sure! At any rate Albinus himself did consider his interpretation of Plato to be consistent, a fact which even Witt acknowledges 4). Yet I

1) R. E. Witt, Albinus and the History of Middle Platonism, Cambridge 1937.
3) Ample evidence for this statement may be found in P. Louis, Albinos Épitomé (Paris 1945), p. XIII. Épitome is the title of the best manuscripts and is therefore to be preferred to the usual name Didaskalikos.
4) "To Albinus there must have appeared to be no inconsistency" (p. 120). "Yet it would seem that Albinus himself was not aware of these difficulties" (134; cf. 142).
cannot help getting the impression that Witt has not made any real attempt to see Albinus' doctrine from the historian's primary point of view, viz. from the immanent one, which tries to understand a system from its central point. Or to put it in another way: an intelligent and patient study of the work itself must precede an examination of the sources and further scientific research. Moreover, Witt gives the impression of judging Albinus from a systematical point of view which is that of Plotinus' philosophy 1). All these reflections have induced me to try to understand Albinus from within. It is therefore not my intention to discuss the historical exactness of the interpretation which Albinus gives of Plato, but only to examine its inner consistency. Because the fundamental criticism of Albinus touches the principal points of the theological part of his doctrine only, and particularly the relation of the transcendent God to the world, this inquiry will not go beyond these limits. The great problems of the interpretation of Plato have their central point in the relations between God, the Ideas, the worldsoul and the world-nous. This holds good with regard to Albinus as well as to Plotinus and all modern interpreters.

The method of this inquiry is obvious. First I will make an attempt to show that the current criticism cannot be justified and that the above-mentioned difficulties and contradictions do not exist. After that I shall try to arrive at a deeper understanding of the logical connexion between his fundamental statements and to show the original character of Albinus' interpretation of Plato. In a second part I shall discuss the sources of his interpretation. But it will perhaps be useful to survey beforehand Albinus' conception of the transcendent God, as far as there is no difference in opinion between scholars, that is to say, letting apart some aspects which touch his relation to the world.

1) "Yet nowhere (sc. in Middle Platonism) is there found a coherent system, in which the relation between God and the universe is adequately explained ... the doctrine of the Plotinian One has not yet been formulated ... Moreover, as we may see in the Didaskalikos X, the orthodox Platonists of the second century, whatever refinements they introduce into their conception of God, are unable to get rid of the belief in his personality" (123-4). The impersonal Plotinian God is undoubtedly used here as one standard for judging the adequateness and coherence of Albinus' interpretation.