1. Introduction¹

Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 260/4 – 340) lived in an age of transition. To begin with, in Eusebius’ lifetime the Roman Empire changes dramatically. The foundation of Constantinople by Constantine in 324 and its quick development thereafter as a cultural, political, and religious center is one well-known important change. More importantly, in Eusebius’ lifetime Christianity ceases to be an outlaw religion that experiences persecution from the Roman authorities and becomes a state religion.² It is noteworthy that one of his two longest apologetic works, the Preparation of the Gospel, which must have been completed by 320, does not allude to persecution, while the other, earlier, work of his, the Demonstration of the Gospel, clearly does.³ There is, however, another sense of transition that is relevant in the case of Eusebius. He is an example of a Christian intellectual who also turns to embrace Platonist philosophy to the extent that he, as I will try to show in this paper, qualifies as a Platonist philosopher in a certain sense; that is, in a sense that the two designations, Christian intellectual and Platonist philosopher, do not make a double identity, but, as is also the case with Eusebius’ mentor, Origen, rather a unity of a sort. This unity is what I would like to investigate in this paper.

One important feature that permeates Eusebius’ apologetic work is that he, like all early Christian thinkers, accepts Scripture as the primary authority that constitutes the yardstick by which the value and truth of anything else is to be judged.⁴ Like Justin, Clement, and Origen, to just name the most noteworthy early Christian thinkers, Eusebius employs precisely this criterion in his judgment of pagan culture,

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¹ The research involved in this paper goes back to the time of my doctoral thesis in Oxford under Michael Frede and to my Master’s dissertation at King’s College London under Averil Cameron. I am grateful to Averil for introducing me to the world of Christianity. To her is this paper dedicated. An earlier ancestor of this paper was commented by M. Edwards, who supplied me with written comments, which I used in the revision of the paper. I would like to thank the editor of the volume, Ryan Fowler, for his patience, for his encouragement, and his helpful remarks on a penultimate draft. The paper in its present form was written while I was holding a senior research fellowship at the Excellence Cluster “Topoi” in Berlin.

² The relation between Constantine and Eusebius and the establishment of Christianity as a state religion has been the subject of several studies, most importantly, Barnes 1981 and Cameron 1999, 34–50.

³ See Barnes 1981, 71–72 with references to Demonstratio (3.57ff, 5.3.11 etc.).

⁴ On Eusebius’ apologetic works as a whole, see Frede 1999. On the priority of Scripture as an authority against which pagan philosophy is judged, see Karamanolis 2013, 29–53.
which also includes philosophy; he critically reviews this inclusive pagan culture in his two complementary works, the *Preparation for the Gospel* and the *Demonstration of the Gospel*.\(^5\) This critical review is part of Eusebius’ attempt to justify Christianity against pagan criticisms. One of them, recast at the beginning of the *Praeparatio* (1.2.1–3), shapes the work’s overall perspective.\(^6\) According to this criticism that Eusebius now addresses, Christians abandoned their own tradition of Greek culture to instead espouse the Jewish tradition.\(^7\) This criticism was not first issued at the time of Eusebius; rather, it had been voiced earlier by pagans like Celsus and had been addressed already by Clement and Origen.\(^8\) Apparently the same criticism was still a threat at the time of Eusebius, presumably because it was repeated with new emphasis by a formidable pagan critic like Porphyry, one of Eusebius’ main targets, if not the main one, as we shall see below.\(^9\) Eusebius sets out to address this renewed challenge by arguing first that Christianity is superior to pagan culture and philosophy and also by attempting to demonstrate that the best part of Greek culture is in agreement with Christianity and has anticipated some of its elements because it used to draw on Hebrew wisdom.

Eusebius carries out his argument in stages in the *Praeparatio*. In books 1 to 10 he sets out to argue first the irrational character of popular Greek beliefs and customs (books 1–6) and the superiority of the Jewish views and of Jewish theology most especially (books 7–10). In books 11 to 15, though, Eusebius proceeds to show that the philosophy of Plato is quite unlike the rest of the Greek culture and philosophy, which is why in these books Eusebius criticizes philosophers other than Plato, such as Aristotle, the Stoics, the Sceptics, or the Epicureans.

Eusebius’ appeal to Plato marks a juncture point in the *Praeparatio*. While he thoroughly criticizes Greek culture and philosophy in books 1 to 10 and also 13 to 15, yet in books 11 to 13 Eusebius openly praises Plato’s philosophy. The keynote is voiced at the beginning of book 11 of the *Praeparatio*: Plato is said to be the most superior philosopher (κορυφαίον πάντων, *P.E.* 11.proem 3). This, of course, is a relative rather than an absolute statement. Plato is not said to be simply the best of all

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5 Abbreviated in this article as *P.E.* and *D.E.*; Eusebius himself tells us that the two works are complementary (*P.E.* 15.1.8, 15.62.16–18). From the two works the *P.E.* is extant in its entirety (15 books), while from the *D.E.* only the first ten books and part of the fifteenth out of the original twenty have come down to us. See the general introduction to the French edition in *Sources Chrétiennes* (SC) by J. Sirinelli 1974, Frede 1999, 223–250, and (specifically about the *P.E.*) also Johnson 2006.

6 The other criticism mentioned in the *Praeparatio*, which is, however, addressed in the *Demonstratio* is the irrational and undemonstrated character of Christianity. See the title of *P.E.* 1.3: “That we did not choose without examination to follow the doctrines of the word of salvation.”

7 On this criticism, which features at the beginning of the *Praeparatio*, and the way Eusebius sets out to address it, see Frede 1999, 241–243 and also Opitz 1935, 5–6, Berkhof 1939, 41–46.


philosophers, but the best pagan philosopher and the best case of Greek intellectual, which makes him distinct in Greek culture as a whole. We need to remember here that Eusebius considers Christianity to be a philosophy, namely the philosophy of Christ, which, in his view, surpasses all others.¹ On this matter, Eusebius continues a tradition that goes back to Justin, to Clement, to Tertullian, and of course, to his mentor, Origen.¹¹ Eusebius also continues a Christian tradition of appreciation of Platonic philosophy. His eloquent praise of Plato, however, is quite striking even within the Greek tradition.¹² Two questions are to be addressed here, first how Eusebius’ pronouncement of Plato as the best of all pagan philosophers should be understood, and second, on what grounds Eusebius contrasts Plato’s philosophy with the rest of Greek culture and philosophy.

The two questions are complementary. To begin with the former, the way Eusebius speaks, makes clear that the philosophy of Plato is the kind of philosophy that came closest to the truth as is articulated in Scripture; and for that reason, in his view, Plato can serve as a criterion for the alleged agreement between Greek Philosophy and Scripture. This assessment becomes clear quite early in the Praeparatio. Already in book 2, in a chapter with the title “How Plato thought of the Theology of the Ancients” (P.E. 2.7.1), Eusebius quotes Plato’s statements in the Republic to the effect that one needs to have beliefs about divine beings for which there is no proof and also that the stories about gods, such as those about Cronus and Zeus which are told by the Greek poets, are awful and should not be believed (Republic 377e–379d). As the title of this chapter makes clear, Eusebius considers Plato as an ally in his criticism of Greek popular beliefs, which allegedly justifies the Christian rejection of them. Eusebius repeats this point throughout the Praeparatio (e.g. P.E. 13.1–2). In the beginning of book 11 of the P.E. Eusebius goes a step further; he appeals to Plato as a philosopher who both differs from Greek culture and who is also profoundly indebted to Hebrew wisdom. This view about Plato makes him assume the role of a second authority in Eusebius, as can be seen from what comes next in the Praeparatio, and this suggests, I submit, that Eusebius is a Platonist of a sort.

It is one of my objectives in this paper to investigate what this judgement of Eusebius about Plato precisely means. I would like to specify the sense in which Euse-

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¹ Eusebius speaks of the philosophy according to Christ (ἡ κατὰ Χριστὸν φιλοσοφία; P.E. 14.22.17; cf. P.E. 12.32.7), which he contrasts with the pagan understanding of philosophy. And he often points out that the latter is of little use (e.g. P.E. 15.10.7). In both respects Eusebius operates like the Christian thinkers of the second and the third century. See Karamanolis 2013, ch. 1, esp. 69–53.

¹¹ Clement, Strom. 6.8.67.1; Justin speaks of Christianity as the perfection of philosophy, Dial. 8.1–2. Elsewhere Eusebius describes Christianity similarly, as the “highest philosophy” (D.E. 1.6.56); cf. Basil, Letter 8 (Loeb, vol. 1, p. 48 De Ferrari), Gregory of Nyssa, Vita Mosis 305b.

¹² On the appreciation of Plato by early Christians see the classic work of Ivanka 1964. Clement, for instance, praises Plato as a reliable guide to the search of God (Protrepticus 6.68–69.1) and as a “friend of truth” (Stromata 5.10.66.3), but he is more modest in his praise than Eusebius. Also Lactantius calls Plato “the wisest of philosophers” (Div. Inst. 1.5.23). See my comments on Karamanolis 2013, 34–5, 43–44.
bius conceives Plato as an authority and determine the manner in which he appeals to Plato (section 2). I will claim that Eusebius does this first by means of defending the truthfulness of Plato’s philosophy against all other philosophical schools, and second by taking sides within the discussion about the interpretation of Plato’s philosophy that takes place among contemporary Platonists (section 3). Eusebius is particularly interested in Plato’s views on first principles, which he construes, I will argue, in a way that Plato’s doctrine squares with Eusebius’ own views on Christian God (section 4).

2. Eusebius on Plato: Praise and Criticism

In his eleventh book of the Praeparatio Evangelica Eusebius sets out to make the case that Greek philosophers had taken over or, as he puts it, had stolen their doctrines from Hebrew wisdom. Eusebius had already announced that in book 10 (P.E. 10.1.3) and now moves to demonstrate this in the case of the best pagan philosopher, Plato (P.E. 11.proem).¹³ The heading of the second chapter of book 11 makes clear Eusebius’ aim, namely “That the philosophy in accordance with Plato in its most important details follows (ἐπακολουθεῖν) the philosophy of Hebrews” (cf. P.E. 11.proem 2, 11.8.1).¹⁴ Eusebius goes on to substantiate this claim with reference to what he takes as the most important philosophical doctrines: these concern what qualifies as “being” and the existence of the intelligible realm (P.E. 11.9 – 12), the status of the highest God and the other divine entities (P.E. 11.13 – 23), the Forms (P.E. 11.24 – 25), the soul and its immortal nature (11.26 – 28), the conception of cosmogony (11.29 – 34), and the final judgment (11.35 – 38).

Eusebius’ method of illustrating the alleged concord between Plato and Hebrew wisdom is to quote either Plato,¹⁵ or, as he says, an eminent Platonist interpreter such as Plutarch, Numenius, Atticus, Plotinus, or Porphyry on the one hand, and Scripture or its interpreters, such as Philo or Clement, on the other. Eusebius himself announces that method with regard to Plato in P.E. 11.pr. 4. This is, of course, in line with Eusebius’ overall strategy in the Praeparatio and in the Demonstratio, which was to support his claims by extensive quotes from pagan and Hebrew sources. This is a well-known argumentative strategy in antiquity and becomes particularly widespread in late antiquity. Philosophers like Plutarch and Galen make abundant use of it; in their criticism against the Stoics, both Plutarch and Galen quote extensively from them.¹⁶ The same strategy was used by Christians like Clement (in his Stromata)

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¹³ For the nature and the structure of the P.E. see J. Sirinelli 1974 and Frede 1999, 240f.
¹⁴ As Frede 1999, 247 rightly suggests, the verb ἐπακολουθεῖν is ambiguous, as it can mean both “come after chronologically” and “follow someone’s views.” Eusebius’ claim is right if the former is meant, but he clearly wants to suggest also the latter.
¹⁵ The most frequently cited Platonic dialogues are the Timaeus, the Phaedo, the Republic, and the Laws.
¹⁶ Earlier on, Philodemus (first c. BCE), follows the same strategy.
and Origen (in his *Contra Celsus*). The point of this strategy is, in the case of the views of opponents, to expose their mistakes and contradictions, or, in the case of an author they favor, to let this author speak directly without the mediation of interpretation. In either case the aim of this strategy is to impart a sense of objectivity to the reader.\(^7\)

This sense of objectivity is corroborated by another means of conviction, Eusebius’ display of learning. His knowledge of contemporary Platonism is quite striking. He knows not only a number of Platonists of the past, but also many who were more or less contemporaries of his, like Plotinus, Longinus, Amelius, and Porphyry. Eusebius calls them “new philosophers” (νέοι, *P.E.* 3.6.7, 11.18.26) or “contemporary ones” (καθ’ ἡμᾶς, *P.E.* 15.20.8).\(^8\) Eusebius must have been at pains to get access to works as new as theirs and excerpt them. His knowledge of Plotinus in particular is unusual, since, from what we know, Plotinus was relatively unknown outside his circle in the early fourth century.\(^9\) This evidence is indicative of Eusebius’ strong interest in Platonism. In fact Eusebius is not only interested in Platonism; as we will see in the following (sections 3–4), his selective use of Platonist works suggests a personal involvement in contemporary Platonist debates and a personal preference for some interpretations of Plato and the dislike of others.

Let me now focus on Eusebius’ judgement of Plato. Eusebius praises Plato in various places within the eleventh book of the *P.E.* as an admirable philosopher (θαυμάσιος; *P.E.* 11.8.1, 11.9.5), one expressing himself in an admirable way (*P.E.* 11.21.7). Eusebius’ formulation of praise shows that he appreciates two aspects of Plato: his philosophical views on the one hand, and his style on the other, being typical of his age in this regard.\(^10\) For Eusebius, however, it is Plato’s philosophy that counts most, and like most contemporary philosophers, especially Platonists, he maintains that Plato’s philosophy amounts to a set of doctrines, such as the world’s creation by a divine intellect (outlined in the *Timaeus*), the immortality of the soul (in the *Phaedo* and the *Timaeus*), the role of Forms in perceiving and in thinking, or the judgment of the souls in afterlife (both discussed in the *Republic*).\(^21\) Eusebius is similar with Platonists like Numenius, Alcinous, or Plotinus not only in conceiving of Plato’s philosophy as a system of doctrines, but also in considering as his task to elucidate, de-

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17 On the method of quotations in the *Præparatio*, see Berkhof 1939, 52–53.
18 On the issue of philosophical works available to Eusebius in the library of Caesarea, see Grafton-Williams 2006, and concerning Platonist works, also Kalligas 2001, 584–598.
19 See Rist 1981, 159–163. Eusebius preserves a part of Plotinus’ *Enneads* that is missing from all manuscripts of the *Enneads*, namely *Enm.* 4.7.8.28 – 4.7.8.49, that is quoted in *P.E.* 15.10.
20 As we know, Plato’s works attracted much attention in late antiquity specifically for his literary merits, and indeed some of the students in Platonist schools were motivated by their desire to imitate Plato’s style. See Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 19.20.4.
21 On the dominance of the dogmatic interpretation of Plato in late antiquity, see Karamanolis 2006, Introduction, 6–36.
fend, and make the best possible sense of these doctrines.²² Eusebius, however, also differs from these Platonists, because he admires Plato for his doctrines on the grounds that he finds in them traces of truth that are fully fleshed out in the Scriptures, which is why, Eusebius claims, Plato can be used by Christians with profit (P.E. 12.5, 12.31, 14.10.7); for Eusebius it is in this sense that Plato is judged superior to all other pagan philosophers (P.E. 11.1.3) and his philosophy emerges as the only true philosophy of Hellenism.²³ Eusebius, however, comes also to argue that, when Plato departs from the views of Hebrew wisdom and follows alternative paths of inspiration for the construction of his doctrines, he cannot be trusted.²⁴

These two claims about Plato form a unity, as they make part of the same idea in Eusebius as well as in earlier Christian thinkers, according to which pagan wisdom draws its best elements from the ancient Hebrew one. The theme of dependency is a recurrent topic among early Christian thinkers.²⁵ We find it already in Justin, in Clement, in Origen, and also in Eusebius’ contemporary Lactantius. There are two main versions of it. On the first version the Hebrew culture is considered more ancient and also superior to the Greek one, on the grounds that the former succeeded in arriving at the truth expressed in the Scriptures while the latter had a limited grasp of the truth, that is to the extent that Greek thinkers had drawn on the Hebrew Scriptures. On the second version, that we find mainly in Clement and perhaps also in Justin, there is a simultaneous dispensation of the Logos or the divine wisdom to both Hebrew and Greek culture, yet the former followed this wisdom more closely than the latter.²⁶ The difference between the two versions is not negligible. On the second version Greek philosophy and Hebrew tradition are taken to stand on the same footing, while on the first version the former is taken to be derivative from the latter. Both versions, however, converge in the view that Christianity is the fulfillment and perfection of the Logos and both are motivated by the view that Greek philosophy is inferior on the grounds that it fails to express the truth of the Logos in a number of philosophical issues, such as on cosmogony and especially on God.

Quite interestingly, in Eusebius we find both versions of the dependency theme. He accuses the Greeks of plagiarizing the wisdom of the so-called barbarians, which include the Hebrews (P.E. 10.4.28–29, 11. proem), and this, he claims, applies to Plato as well. If this accusation is true, Eusebius argues, Christians should no longer be

²² Platonist works with titles like Didaskalikos tòn Platònodos dogmatōn, of Alcinous, or De Platone et eius dogmate, of Apuleius, reflect this attitude.
²³ ἀληθής φιλοσοφία; Against Hierocles 45.4, τὸν δῆ μόνον πάντων ἕλληνων ἀληθείας προθύρων ψάυσαντα; P.E. 13.14.3.
²⁴ Ὡτι μὴ πάντα ἐπιτυχώς εἰρηται τῷ Πλάτωνι, διὸ ὡκ ἀλόγως τὴν κατ’ αὐτὸν παρήκτιμεθα φιλοσοφίαν; P.E. 13.14
²⁵ On this theme see Ridings 1995 and Boys-Stones 2001, 176–202. The use of this theme by Eusebius is extensively discussed by Johnson 2006, 55–93
criticized for preferring the Hebrew tradition, since this is also what Plato did. This claim transpires one of the reasons why Christians adhered to the dependence view, namely because it enabled them to counter the pagan argument to the effect that Christians had abandoned an old tradition for a new; through their dependency claim Christians used to fend off the charge of novelty, that was a widespread pagan criticism against Christianity.² Christians did that by showing their appreciation of, and loyalty to, the best of the pagan tradition, which in their view was following the Jewish one.

Such a claim suggests that Christians took the Hebrew Scriptures to be the norm, and in this sense they were still exposed to the pagan criticism why this has to be so. Eusebius realized this, and this is why, I think, he, with regard to Plato, opted for the second, non-hierarchical version of the dependency claim. When Eusebius comes to discuss Plato’s doctrine of intelligible entities, he claims that “the admirable Plato followed [the Hebrew prophets], as is clear from his own words, either as a result of hearing himself their doctrines... or because he himself discovered the nature of these things, being considered by God worthy of such knowledge” (P.E. 11.8.1).² Quite remarkably, Plato is credited here with independent access to Logos or the wisdom, which informs also the Scriptures. This attribution, of course, does not change the fact that Plato’s philosophy is in agreement (συνδρομή) with Hebrew wisdom, but it does change the fact that the value of Plato, according to Eusebius, does not lie on that, since Plato is presented as also divinely inspired and in this sense he is put on the same footing with Hebrew wisdom.

This, however, needs to be qualified, because Plato, Eusebius suggests, is not as infallible as his pagan followers were claiming;²⁹ rather, he claims that some of Plato’s claims are false, which makes Plato’s philosophy only partly true. In book 13 of the Praeparatio Eusebius claims in chapter 14 “That Plato has not stated all things correctly: therefore is it not without reason that we have declines his philosophy and accepted the Hebrew prophecies.” In Eusebius’ view, one instance of Plato’s mistaken view concerns the transmigration of the souls and also the view about the division of the soul (P.E. 13.16). Besides, Plato, Eusebius adds, accommodates views about love and the women that are at odds with the Mosaic views (P.E. 13.19–20). A clear indication of Plato’s failure is the fact that he fell into contradictions (P.E. 13.14.6).

Eusebius applies this criticism much stronger to philosophers other than Plato, but, as I said, Plato is not exempt from it either. Here Eusebius follows a well-known

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27 Celsus, for instance, criticized Christianity for being a novelty (καινοτομία, Origen, C. Celsum 3.15). Similarly speaks also Plotinus, Enn. 2.9.711.
28 Πλάτων ὁ θαυμάσιος ἐπηκολουθηκέναι διὰ τῶν οἰκείων φωνῶν ἔστι δήλος, εἴ τε ἐξ ἀκοῆς εἰς αὐτὸν ἴκουσης μαθῶν... ἐκό καὶ παρ᾽ ἐκατοῦ τῇ τῶν πραγμάτων ἐπιθαλῶν φύσει εἰδ’ ὑπακούοιν ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ καταξιωθεὶς τῆς γνώσεως. On this passage see Frede 1999, 247–8.
29 Origen noticeably claims that Celsus cannot accuse Christians of relying on faith when he treats Plato’s texts as sacred (C. Celsum 6.1, 17).
motive in philosophical invective, namely the idea that contradictions are a mark of failure in philosophy. We find this in various ancient sources. For example, the Pyrrhonian sceptics quite systematically point to the contradictions among dogmatic philosophers in order to strengthen their view that the truth is unattainable.⁰ For the Christians now the contradiction among pagan philosophers is taken as a sign of the dissatisfaction of pagans with the views of their tradition, which according to the Christians testifies to Hellenic philosophy’s partial knowledge of the Logos.³¹ We find the same claim in Plutarch, who in his *De stoicorum repellentibus* makes the case that the Stoics fall into contradictions to the extent that they depart from Plato, on whose philosophy they generally draw.³² Similar, I think, is Eusebius’ claim in the *P.E.* that Plato is right to the extent that he follows the Logos that informs also the Hebrew Scriptures, while he falls into contradictions whenever he diverges from what the Logos dictates. When this occurs, he writes, Christians can dispense with Plato and prefer the Scriptures that preserve the entire truth (*P.E.* 13.13.66).

If we reflect on Eusebius’ argument outlined above, which in its basic form we can find also in Origen,³³ we can see that Eusebius’ effort to integrate Plato’s philosophy in the framework of Christianity has a polemical aim, which is twofold: one is to articulate a response to those accusing Christian Platonists of deserting Plato for Christianity, the other is to address the claim that Christians who espoused Plato misconstrued his philosophy. We know that Celsus criticized Origen for misunderstanding Plato, and the latter fired back arguing that Celsus is unable to move from the letter to the spirit of Plato’s works.³⁴ Porphyry on the other hand criticized Origen for deserting Plato for Hebrew myths (*Eusebius, Hist. Eccl.* 6.19), and he was generally critical of those who rated Plato below Christian treatises (*V. Plot.* 16). From Eusebius’ point of view, both criticisms were misplaced. Christians like Origen and Eusebius appreciated Plato’s philosophy on the grounds that this contains true doctrines, as that regarding the intelligible realm, which they also found in Scripture. On the other hand, however, they did not consider Plato infallible, but rather stressed his limitations and failures, and in such a way they justified why they followed Plato only partly.

One possible reaction to this point is that neither Eusebius nor Origen qualifies then as a Platonist, since ancient Platonists as a rule hardly ever abandon let alone criticize Plato. Rather, ancient Platonists from the times of the old Academy and until

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30 See e.g. Sextus, *P.H.* 3.6–7
31 Clement, *Strom.* 1.16.80.5–6, 1.17.87.2.
32 On Plutarch’s argument against the Stoics in that work, see Boys-Stones 1997, 41–58.
33 Origen himself takes the qualified view of Hellenic philosophy that we find in Clement and later in Eusebius, according to which Hellenic philosophy is a manifestation of Logos, whose perfection is Christianity, and that has as a result an agreement between Christianity and most Hellenic schools of philosophy on topics like the divine providence (*C. Celsum* 1.10). See further Karamanolis, 2013 ch. 1, esp. 34–48.
Plotinus and Eusebius’ contemporary, Porphyry, set out to defend what they take to be Plato’s point of view or Plato’s doctrine, although they differ considerably both in their perceptions of Plato’s philosophy in general and on specific issues in particular.

This last claim, however, does not seem to me to be entirely true. Aristotle, for instance, did criticize Plato, as we know, and he was still considered a Platonist—at least by Platonists like Antiochus. Another relevant case in this regard is that of Numenius, who flourishes in the mid second century CE. 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 (fr. 24 Des Places). Of course, Eusebius’ criticism is more severe than that, as he rejects as false certain Platonic doctrines. What is important here, though, is that Eusebius’ critical attitude to Plato does not automatically annihilate the value ascribed to Plato’s philosophy; the criticism rather aims to point out what is the right measure of value that should be credited to Plato. In that respect Eusebius is similar to Numenius, in that the latter ascribes more value to Pythagoras than to Plato, as Eusebius does to the Scriptures; both Eusebius and Numenius share the belief that Plato followed Logos and preserved the truth, albeit partly. Despite the fragmentary status of the evidence we have of Numenius, it becomes quite clear that, in his view, all other philosophers in antiquity, including Aristotle, the Stoics, and the Academics themselves, erred and should not be trusted; Eusebius maintains this view as well.

It is no accident, of course, that Eusebius preserves most of the extant fragments of Numenius, including the fragments of the latter’s work On the dissension of the Academics from Plato (Περὶ τῆς τῶν ἀκαδημαϊκῶν πρὸς Πλάτωνα διαστάσεως; P.E. 14.5–9; Numenius frs. 24–29 Des Places). We need to constantly remember, that Eusebius’ excerpts always serve an argument, which is, as we are told in P.E. 14.2, in the present example, that Greek philosophers are contradicting each other (περὶ τῆς τῶν φιλοσοφῶν πρὸς ἀλλήλους φιλοσοφίας καὶ μάχης). I have said above that evidence of contradiction is typically brought up in philosophical polemics to support the claim of falsity. Eusebius, however, speaks of contradiction in a special sense. He divides pagan philosophers into those earlier and later than Plato (P.E. 14.3.6, 14.4.12–15), and he argues that, with regard to the former, Plato was critical, but was, Eusebius implies, right in his criticism, since his predecessors failed to arrive at the views found in the Scriptures that Plato for the most part advocated, that is, mainly the doctrine of the world creation by God and of the immortality of the soul. As for the philosophers after Plato, especially his successors in the Academy, they also

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35 On Aristotle’s criticisms of Plato, the standard work is that of Cherniss 1944, but he greatly overstates Aristotle’s criticism of Plato compared to his debt to him. On Antiochus and later Platonists who treat Aristotle as a means of understanding Plato, see Karamanolis 2006.

failed to the extent that they departed from Plato’s views as they introduced new doctrines to the Academy. It is at this point that Eusebius introduces the excerpts from Numenius. For both Eusebius and Numenius, the contradiction of the Academics to Plato marks their departure from the truth. It is noticeable that they describe this departure in terms of a rebellion (στασιάζειν, P.E. 14.3.6, στάσις, P.E. 14.4.14, διάστασις Numenius at P.E. 14.4.16), which implies both arrogance and strife. This is confirmed by the vocabulary that both Eusebius and Numenius choose (ζηλοῦν, P.E. 14.4.14, ἐφιλοτιμήθησαν Numenius at P.E. 14.5.12).

The important point here is that for both Numenius and Eusebius, Plato is the measure against which all other philosophers are to be judged, which also explains why Plato is the most quoted author in the Praeparatio; this is a typical feature of the Platonist in late antiquity. Antiochus and Plutarch also took Plato as the standard against which all other philosophers must be judged, including Aristotle, the Peripatetics, and the Stoics.³⁷ To the extent that Eusebius exhibits this feature, he emerges as a Platonist of a sort in my view. Before I will elaborate further on that, I would like to move to another feature that points to Eusebius’ Platonist identity.

3. Eusebius’ anti-Aristotelianism

The shared critical aim of books 14 and 15 of Eusebius’ Praeparatio make up a unity: they aim to show that, except for Plato, all pagan philosophers are erring. As I have already said, Eusebius has a specific way of going about this: he sets out to show that pagan philosophers contradict each other, and also Plato. As I have implied above, these are not two ways in which contradiction occurs in pagan philosophers, but rather one, since, as Eusebius argues, they fell into contradictions to the extent that they departed from Plato, the measure of truth in pagan philosophy according to Eusebius. Book 14 of the Praeparatio criticizes, among others, Presocratic philosophers, Cyrenaics, Epicureans, and Pyrrhoneans, while book 15 sets out to target Aristotle and the Peripatetics as well as the Stoics. For his criticism, Eusebius drew mainly on the same Platonist sources that he used in order to expound Plato, namely Numenius, Atticus, Plotinus, Longinus, and Porphyry. Now, however, he also uses a Peripatetic source, namely Aristocles of Messene. Already the appeal to a Peripatetic source, namely Aristocles of Messene, is surprising, given Eusebius’ intense criticism on Aristotelian philosophy in P.E. 15. And we wonder what purpose this choice of Eusebius serves. Let us look into that more closely.

The details of Aristocles’ profile make the whole matter even more interesting. Although little is known of him and even his date is still quite uncertain,³⁸ he is at-

³⁷ On Antiochus see Cicero, Academica 1.33–4, De finibus 5.13, on Plutarch, see for instance his Against Colotes 1114f – 1115c, and his On moral virtue (esp. 442b-c, 450f).
³⁸ For a long time Aristocles was thought to be the teacher of Alexander of Aphrodisias on the basis of a conjecture according to which the name “Aristotle” preserved in four ancient testimonies,
tested to have written a work on *Whether Homer or Plato was better* (Πότερον σπουδαιότερος Ὁμηρος ἢ Πλάτων; Suda s.v. Aristocles). We do not know in what subject Plato or Homer was better, but the mere comparison of the two is indicative of Aristocles’ favorable attitude to Plato. This is suggested also by evidence to the effect that Aristocles wrote on Plato’s *Timaeus*.³⁹ We are, of course, not entirely certain about the truth of that report, let alone whether it concerns the Peripatetic Aristocles, yet it should not come as a surprise that a Peripatetic wrote on the *Timaeus*. We know with some certainty that Adrastus wrote a commentary on this dialogue of Plato, which was much discussed at the time.⁴⁰ We have, however, some better evidence to come by, and this comes from Eusebius himself. Aristocles, we are told, wrote a work *On Philosophy* (Περὶ φιλοσοφίας), which is known only from the quotations in the *Praeparatio Evangelica*. In this work Aristocles traced the development of Greek philosophy from its early stages to Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, while he also criticized the Pyrrhonean Sceptics, the Cyrenaics, Protagoras and Metrodorus, the Eleatics, and the Epicureans.⁴¹ It is on these critical sections of Aristocles that Eusebius relies for his criticism of these philosophers.

Once again, Eusebius’ excerpts, this time from Aristocles’ work, are motivated by his polemical aim of demonstrating the falsity of most part of Greek philosophy, and for that reason they fail to give us a fair picture of it. If we read these parts carefully, though, it emerges that a more constructive exposition preceded them. Aristocles criticizes philosophers like the Pyrrhoneans and the Epicureans for deviating from the sound tradition of philosophy (ἀρχὰς τοῦ φιλοσοφεῖν; *P.E.* 14.17.9; fr. 7 Chiesara/fr. 5 Heiland), and he speaks of the principles of philosophy (ἀρχὰς τοῦ φιλοσοφεῖν; *P.E.* 14.18.30; fr. 4 Chiesara/fr. 6 Heiland), whose violation ruin philosophy (*ibid.*). In the excerpts preserved by Eusebius, Aristocles does not explain which these principles are, yet his criticisms suggest that these principles concern mainly epistemology and ethics. The distrust of sensory perception and the suspension of judgment that the Pyrrhonean sceptics advocate, for instance, are seen as a violation of these principles (fr. 4 Chiesara/fr. 6 Heiland), which is why Aristocles excludes the PyrrHONEans from the sound tradition of Greek philosophy. The Eleatic philosophers also violate these epis-

³⁹ Proclus, in *Timaeum* 1.20.2 (vestigium V Heiland). There is disagreement among scholars as to whether this is Aristocles of Messene or Aristocles of Rhodes, who is mentioned earlier by Proclus. The discussion is reviewed by Chiesara 2001, 52–3.


⁴¹ On the nature of Aristocles’ work *On Philosophy* see Chiesara 2001, xxiv – xxxviii and Karamanolis 2006, 37–41. The testimony to the effect that Aristocles discussed the development of Greek philosophy comes not by Eusebius but by Philoponus in his *On Nicomachus’ Introduction to Arithmetic* 1a, test. 5 Chiesara (Test. 7 and vestigium 1 Heiland). On this topic see below.
temological principles, Aristotle suggests, although their argument is different (fr. 7 Chiesara/fr. 5 Heiland). A similar attitude towards sceptic epistemology can be found in Clement’s *Stromata* book 8, where Clement draws on Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics in order to construct an argument against the sceptical suspension of judgment, especially in its Pyrrhonean form (*Stromata* 8.4.15.2). As with Clement, similarly with regard to Aristocles, we find a clear assumption in operation regarding the existence of a healthy tradition of pagan philosophy, against which some philosophical schools are judged and criticized as deviations. In the case of Aristocles it is not clear who made up this tradition of sound philosophy. From what we can gather from Eusebius’ excerpts of Aristocles’ critical discussions, this tradition was basically established by Plato and also Aristotle.

This possibility is suggested because Aristocles’ criticisms show clear dependence on the work of Plato and Aristotle. He refers, for instance, to the *Theaetetus* while criticizing Protagoras’ theory of knowledge (*P. E.* 14.19.23; fr. 6 Chiesar/fr. 4 Heiland), and he also relies on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (*P. E.* 14.18.2; fr. 4 Chiesara/fr. 6 Heiland) and the *De anima* (*P. E.* 14.21.6–7; fr. 8 Chiesara/Heiland) in his criticism of the Pyrrhoneans and the Epicureans respectively. As I said above, however, Aristocles speaks of the development of Greek philosophy, which allegedly reached a peak with Plato’s philosophy, and he also speaks of the principles of sound philosophy that some philosophers betrayed. A short fragment that we have from Aristocles about the Stoics advances the claim that they took over Plato’s principles of reality, matter and God, and yet modified them. This evidence suggests that Aristocles spoke first in his work of what he calls the sound tradition of Greek philosophy, turning next to the philosophers who in different degrees diverged from it and especially from their principles. The same fragment shows that, according to Aristocles, it was Plato and Aristotle who set up these principles, which the Stoics followed to some degree. Presumably Aristocles considered the Stoics to fall within the sound tradition of philosophy, at least to some extent, because of their dogmatic epistemology, as also Antiochus of Ascalon (130–68 BCE) had done. If this is so, then Aristocles perhaps had also a positive point in his work, namely to show what the nature of philosophy is, what its principles are, who had set them, and who had followed them. This was clearly the project of Antiochus, given Cicero’s evidence in the *Academica* and the *De finibus*. And given that Aristocles was a Peripatetic who thought highly of Plato, he must have implied or maintained the essential agreement of Plato and Aristotle.

I say “essential” because, from what we know through Eusebius, Aristocles singled out epistemology and ethics as the two most important areas of philosophy, and it is with reference to these that he criticized later philosophers. Similar again was

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42 On Clement’s argument in *Stromata* 8, see Havrda 2011, 343–375 and Karamanolis 2013, 125–128.
43 In *P. E.* 15.3.14 (fr. 3 Chiesara and Heiland.)
44 On Antiochus’ attitude to the Stoics, see Karamanolis 2006, ch. 1, esp. 64–80.
45 This becomes clear especially in Aristocles’ criticism of the Pyrrhoneans and the Epicureans (fr. 4 and 8 Chiesara/fr. 6, 8 Heiland).
the position of Antiochus of Ascalon, who also considered epistemology and ethics as the two most important philosophical areas, and he, as we know, argued for the essential agreement of Aristotle with Plato.⁴⁶ In the case of Aristocles, we lack the supply of evidence that we have about Antiochus, but Aristocles’ overall philosophical profile and the claims he makes in the surviving fragments, most of which preserved by Eusebius, speak in favor of a thesis similar to that of Antiochus. There should be no doubt that Eusebius left out such evidence because it was at odds with his own aims, namely to single out Plato as the only pagan philosopher who hit upon the truth and discard the rest of pagan philosophy, while Aristocles probably highlighted the agreement of Plato and Aristotle on most important philosophical issues and he may have considered the Stoics as being close to them too. Aristocles’ point of view strongly conflicts with the one that Eusebius takes in book 15 of the Praeparatio, where he strongly criticizes Aristotle’s philosophy, by relying on the Platonist Atticus, who castigates specifically the partisans of the view that there is common ground between the Platonic and the Aristotelian philosophy.

There is in fact one piece of evidence that testifies to Eusebius’ exclusion of Aristocles’ argument to the effect that Aristotle was essentially in agreement with Plato. In the beginning of his anti-Aristotelian section in book 15 of the Praeparatio, Eusebius announces that he will disregard all hostile critics of Aristotle and that he will resist their malicious invectives. Eusebius sets out to establish his impartiality towards Aristotle by applying the same method that he also did with Plato, namely to rely on the philosopher’s most illustrious interpreters. Thus Eusebius chooses to rely on Aristocles, who, as Eusebius tells us, in his seventh book of his On Philosophy, is concerned to discharge Aristotle from various false accusations levied against him (P.E. 15.1.13). Aristocles focuses eventually on two such accusations: those he considers to be the most widely believed (P.E. 15.2.12). The first is slanderous concerning Aristotle’s private life, namely that he married Pythias, his own sister, while the other is that Aristotle was ungrateful to Plato (ὅτι ἠχαρίστησε Πλάτωνι; P.E. 15.2.13).

Aristotle’s ungratefulness to Plato is mentioned by several ancient sources, yet not always with the intention of criticizing Aristotle. Aristoxenus, the music theorist and one of Aristotle’s early pupils in the Peripatos, reportedly argued that Aristotle had founded his school while Plato was still teaching in the Academy (Aristocles at P. E. 15.2.3; fr. 64 Wehrli). As our source, Aristocles, reports, Aristoxenus’ purpose was to praise Aristotle and criticize Plato. Aristoxenus made this claim in his Life of Plato, which was critical of and even hostile to Plato, and Aristocles was concerned to restore the truth, apparently because he had argued earlier in his work that Aristotle shares some of Plato’s fundamental doctrines and principles of philosophy. Eusebius, however, breaks off immediately after Aristocles addresses the first charge, forgetting that he earlier let his source, Aristocles, announce also the second criticism against Aristotle that he was planning to address, namely that of Aristotle’s ungrate-

⁴⁶ See Karamanolis 2006, 55–64.
fulness to Plato. This instance is indicative of the way Eusebius composed his Praeparatio. Presumably, he used assistants to search for and recite ancient sources, and he was responsible for the cut and paste. When Aristocles’ text came to the treatment of Aristotle’s charge for ungratefulness to Plato, Eusebius asked his assistant to stop the recitation.

There should be no doubt that Aristocles also addressed the second charge against Aristotle. What is missing is, of course, a matter of speculation. Otto Immisch conjectured that in this part Aristocles cited Aristotle’s famous elegy for Plato that is addressed to Eudemus of Rhodos and which is preserved by Olympiodorus (In Gorgiam. pr. 41.9 Ross).⁴⁷ We have no way to prove or disprove this conjecture. The main issue here is that Eusebius did not want to discharge Aristotle from this criticism.

Yet the question is why. The reason, in my view, is that Eusebius closely associates Aristotle’s divergence from Plato’s philosophical doctrines with the alleged personal tension between Aristotle and Plato. This explanation is actually maintained by Atticus, whose polemical work against Aristotle’s philosophy Eusebius favorably cites. Not only does Atticus affirm in the strongest possible terms Aristotle’s departure from Plato’s most important doctrines, but he also emphasizes that there was an underlying personal motive for that departure. Aristotle, Atticus argues, showed a spirit of quarrel and opposition against Plato⁴⁸ and he goes as far as to suggest that Aristotle’s criticisms of Plato were motivated by the former’s eristic nature, merely by his wish to contradict Plato.⁴⁹ The implication of this evidence, which Eusebius cites at length, is that Aristotle was not motivated only by philosophical concerns in his divergence from Plato but also by personal enmity. The association of doctrinal divergence and personal motives is not uncommon in the doxography of ancient philosophy. Antiochus, for instance, criticizes the Stoics as thieves who merely cloth Plato’s theories in new terms and differ from Plato only in order to justify their new school.⁵⁰

The same claim features also in Numenius’ work about the dissension of the Academicians from Plato, which Eusebius again cites favorably in the Praeparatio. As we have seen earlier (p. 179–180), in this work Numenius suggested that the departure of Plato’s students from Plato’s doctrines amounts to a rebellion that is not motivated by philosophical reasons, but by personal motives.

The tendency to associate doctrinal disagreement with personal tension is not a feature of late antiquity; rather, it goes back to Aristotle’s lifetime. As I have already said, Aristoxenus claimed precisely this point, and it is this line that was revived by the Christians. Clement claims that Aristotle departed from Plato while the latter was still alive to found his own school (Strom. 1.14.63.5). And later Origen endorses the view of Aristoxenus that Aristotle was ungrateful to his teacher and claims, like

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⁴⁷ Ross 1955, 146.
⁴⁸ φιλονικῶν, ἐφιλονίκησε P.E. 15.7.2; Atticus fr. 5.15–30, 15.8.11; fr. 6.72–73, 15.9.7; fr. 7.37–39 Des Places.
Clement, that Aristotle left Plato in order to innovate (Contra Celsum 3.13.15). This is precisely the line that Eusebius takes up, and the one which later Theodoretus of Cyrhrus continues (Cur. Aff. Gr. 12.50–51; cf. 8.34). Immediately after breaking with Aristocles, Eusebius moves on to illustrate Aristotle’s doctrinal differences from Plato in the strong polemical terms of Atticus, starting, quite conspicuously, with their differences in ethics (P.E. 15.3–4; fr. 2 Atticus Des Places), the field of philosophy that was considered most important by Antiochus and Aristocles, among others. This choice of source, namely Atticus, best serves Eusebius’ overall aim of exposing the contradiction among pagan philosophers, which testifies to the overall failure of the pagan philosophical tradition.

Eusebius’ polemical attitude to Aristotle has, I think, one specific target, namely Porphyry. The latter is targeted by Eusebius also for his anti-Christian stance, since Porphyry is the author of a work Against the Christians. Porphyry is one of Eusebius’ main targets in the P.E., and it is no accident that Porphyry is the most frequently quoted author in this work after Plato. Eusebius addresses almost all issues regarding pagan religion with reference to Porphyry and he does that by drawing on a large number of Porphyry’s works, mainly his religious and historical ones. With this strategy Eusebius means to show to the reader that Porphyry’s allegations against Christianity are self-refuted by his own evidence about pagan religion. Yet Porphyry was also someone who much appreciated Aristotle and wrote a number of commentaries on Aristotle’s works. Porphyry was one of those Platonists who argued for the fundamental agreement between Aristotle and Plato on most essential philosophical issues. The details of Porphyry’s relevant argument escape us, but we can understand that Eusebius disliked it, given the emphasis he put on the opposite claim. There is actually evidence to suggest that Eusebius is so selective of Porphyry’s work that he eventually misrepresents its main thesis regarding Aristotle’s philosophy.

As I have shown elsewhere, this is the case with Porphyry’s work Against Boethus, which Eusebius excerpts in P.E. 15. This is the only purely metaphysical treatise of Porphyry that Eusebius excerpts, and apparently, as we shall see, he did this for a reason. In this work Porphyry argued against the Peripatetic Boethus (first c. CE), a pupil of Andronicus, criticizing him for departing from Aristotle’s doctrine of the soul, which, as Porphyry appears to suggest, is similar with Plato’s. Eusebius obscures this point in the way he quotes from Porphyry’s work in question. Not only

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51 On the excerption of Porphyry’s work in the P.E. see Grant (1973), 184–187.
52 Porphyry wrote two commentaries on the Categories, a commentary on the On Interpretation, and one on the Physics (i.e. the first five books; fragments in Smith 1993). Several other commentaries are attributed to him (i.e. on Aristotle’s Prior Analytics, the Sophistical Refutations, the Metaphysics, and the Nicomachean Ethics) but with much less certainty.
53 I examine this issue in some detail in Karamanolis 2006, ch. 7.
54 Eusebius cites from the following works of Porphyry: On the Philosophy from Oracles, Literary Discourse, On the cult of idols, On Abstinence, Epistle to Anebo, Against Christians, Against Boethus.
55 See Karamanolis 2006, 290–298.
does he exclude evidence that establishes that Boethus’ view is Porphyry’s target but he also cites a passage from Against Boethus that criticizes Aristotle’s theory of the soul in very strong terms (P.E. 15.11.4; Porphyry fr. 249 Smith). We have good reasons to believe, though, that this is not a passage from Porphyry’s work. As I argued elsewhere, both the language and the content of the passage are quite unlike Porphyry’s Against Boethus. Besides, the fact that the passage makes a reference to the Laws (891d–e), while Porphyry in Against Boethus elaborates on the arguments of the Phaedo, also suggests a different point of view. The fragment must come from Atticus, the well-known and Eusebius’ favorite critic of Aristotle. The editor of Atticus’ fragments, Eduard Des Places, includes this text in his collection (fr. 7 bis), though with some doubt.

One might say that this misattribution can be an accident. There is, however, another piece of evidence suggesting that Eusebius tried to obscure here the point of Porphyry’s work in Against Boethus. This is the fact that Eusebius cites the allegedly Porphyrian text (P.E. 15.11) after a quotation from Atticus’ anti-Aristotelian treatise (P. E. 15.9; fr. 7 Des Places) and before a text from Plotinus (P.E. 15.10; Enn. 4.7.8⁵), and with the heading “From Porphyry on the same matter,” which refers the reader back to the heading on Plotinus, which is “On the immortality of the soul against Aristotle claiming that the soul is actuality” (P.E. 15.10). Also after this presumed text of Porphyry Eusebius quotes again from Atticus without naming him or referring to his work, which is quite atypical of Eusebius, while the heading of this new text of Atticus suggests that it has the same target as Porphyry, namely Aristotle,⁵⁸ which, however, is not the case. From all we know, in Against Boethus Porphyry was criticizing Boethus for departing from Aristotle on the soul. A fragment from Ps.-Simplicius’ De anima (247.23 – 6) that mentions Boethus as contradicting the common view of Aristotle and Plato on the immortality of the soul appears to confirm that.⁵⁹ Most probably Porphyry criticized Boethus for assuming that the soul is a quality of the living body, while according to Porphyry the soul is rather identical with the intellect and as such is ontologically different from the living body. If this is so, then Eusebius assimilates Porphyry’s position to that of Atticus and Plotinus, which is critical of Aristotle. Presumably Eusebius makes an effort to show that this critical view of Aristotle was quite established among Platonists, while in fact this was far from being the case.

The question now is why Eusebius was so critical of Aristotle and so favorable to Plato’s philosophy. It is true that earlier Christian thinkers, like Clement and Origen, do not particularly sympathize with Aristotle. Yet Clement is inspired by Aristotle’s

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⁵⁶ For more detail see Karamanolis 2006, 296 – 298. See also Sharples 2007 and Sharples 2010, 244 – 251.
⁵⁷ Des Places prints a question mark next to the number of the fragment.
⁵⁸ The heading is “Πρὸς τὸν αὐτὸν [sc. Aristotle] διενεχθέντα τῷ Πλάτωνι καὶ ἐν τῷ περὶ τῆς καθόλου ψυχῆς” (Against him [Aristotle] who disagrees with Plato also on the world soul.).”
ethics when he comes to the issue of the human final end. For instance, he defines virtue as the middle state (Strom. 2.13.59.6), which corresponds to the Aristotelian mean. Origen does not approve of Aristotle’s doctrine of the immortality of the intellect in De anima 3.5 and De generatione animalium 2.3 (Contra Celsum 3.80), yet neither Clement nor Origen is openly polemical against Aristotle, as is Eusebius. The latter’s attitude is rather a novelty among Christians. By doing so Eusebius takes sides in a debate among Platonists that was going for centuries as to whether Aristotle should be considered a member of the Platonist tradition or not. In the rest of the paper I will go into Eusebius’ motivation for that attitude; I will claim that this has to do at least partly with Eusebius’ views on the status of God.

4. Eusebius on Plato’s Theology

Being a Christian, Eusebius was particularly interested in the status of God and in God’s relation to the world. This kind of interest was common among philosophers in late antiquity, Platonists and Peripatetics alike. One relevant question here is about the nature of highest God. Platonists were much concerned with this question since they were confronted with a plurality of candidates in this regard: the Form of the Good in the Republic (508e), the source of all being (509b7–8), the divine craftsman of the Timaeus, or the One of the Parmenides. Some Platonists identified the craftsman of the Timaeus with the Form of the Good on the grounds that the former is essentially good, as is his product, the world (Timaeus 29a3, e1, 37a1). There were, however, also other Platonists who resisted this tendency on the grounds that the divine craftsman is constrained by necessity, that is, matter, and also because he is not absolutely simple and unified since he has thoughts. These reasons guided Platonists, like Moderatus and Numenius for instance, to postulate a God higher than the demiurge, whom they identified with the one of the Parmenides and the Form of the Good of the Republic.

Similar concerns can be traced also behind the Christian justification of the distinction of God, the Father, and his Logos, the Son. Christians wanted to safeguard the transcendence of God, the Father, and to distance him from the sensible realm, the realm of matter and vice. The crucial question, however, was how strong this distinction should be. For if it is too strong, then God the father is not the main cause of the creation, and if it is too weak, God would not be sufficiently distanced from his product, the world, and the evil occurring in it. Both tendencies are attested among early Christians.

60 Cf. also Paed. 2.16.4, Strom. 2.13.59.6. See Clark 1977.
61 The debate extends from Antiochus of Ascalon to Porphyry and goes on even afterwards. For a study of this Platonist debate, see Karamanolis 2006.
62 Numenius frr. 11, 16, 17, 20 Des Places.
63 For a brief survey of Christian positions on this issue, see Karamanolis 2013, 107–116.
Eusebius has a particular view on this issue, which is similar to that of Origen. Eusebius distinguishes between Plato’s Form of the Good, which is said to be beyond being in *Republic* 6, 509b,⁶⁴ and what derives its being from it (*P.E.* 11.21.6), that is, in Christian terms, between God-the-Father and God-the-Son, whom he identifies as the Logos. The former is responsible for all being, the creator of intelligible reasons, as Origen says, and only secondarily the creator of the sensible world, namely to the extent that he operates through the latter, while the latter is responsible for creation.⁶⁵ It is because Eusebius takes this view about God that he quotes Numenius on this topic, who distinguishes between a first and a second god in similar terms. The former is said to be “good per se” (αὐτοόν), the source of being and being in itself (δημιουργός τῆς οὐσίας, *P.E.* 11.22.3–5; fr. 16 Des Places, αὐτόν *P.E.* 11.18.22–23; fr. 17 Des Places), while the latter is said to be “good” (ἀγαθόν) to the extent that he participates in the first God (frs. 19.8–13, 20.7–12) and the source of all generation (δημιουργός τῆς γενέσεως; fr. 16.9). The latter is identical with the divine craftsman of the *Timaeus*, who thinks the Forms and creates and maintains the world, while the former is identical with the Form of the Good in *Republic* 6 (509b), and perhaps also with the first, superior, God of the *Seventh Letter* (323d). Eusebius and Origen agree with Numenius that God brings about eternally God-the-creator, the Logos.⁶⁶ The latter has a cosmological role to play; he permeates the entire universe and is thus responsible for upholding the order of the world according to the Father’s wish (*In Praise of Constantine* 11.12, 12.8).⁶⁷ Eusebius probably targets here the view of Platonists like Celsus, who claimed that “from the beginning the different parts of the world were distributed to different overseers,” that is, different demons of Gods (*Contra Celsum* 5.25).⁶⁸

Of course, Eusebius, like almost all contemporary Christians, understands creation in a temporal sense, which means that they assume that God at some point brought the world about.⁶⁹ Among Platonists this was a disputed issue, yet by the time Eusebius writes, most Platonists including Porphyry had sided with a non-literal interpretation of the cosmogony of the *Timaeus*. According to this interpretation, the world has never come about but always existed, but still God is its cause and

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⁶⁴ Later in the *Republic* the Good is described as “the brightest part of being” though (*Rep.* 518c9). Ancient Platonists, including Origen (*C. Celsum* 6.64.14–28) were puzzled as to whether the Good is beyond or part of being.


⁶⁶ Origen maintained that God’s wisdom, the Son, was created by God (*creata esse; Princ.* 1.2.3; ἐγενήθη *C. Celsum* 5.39). The term “created” is not to be taken literally here, since, as Origen says, this is an eternal and everlasting generation (*Princ.* 1.2.4). A similar view can be detected already in Clement, who claims that God is invisible and ineffable, the highest of intelligibles (*Strom.* 5.12.78.2–3, 81.3–6). See further Karamanolis 2013, 87–97.


⁶⁸ On this point see the discussion in Ehrhard 1979, 42–43.

⁶⁹ On the understanding of creation among early Christian thinkers, see Karamanolis 2013, 60–107.
principle in the sense that God accounts for the world’s existence, and temporal priority is needed to support that. Eusebius, however, suggests instead that the world is created (γενητός) for both Plato and Moses (P.E. 11.29). This view guides him in his selection of a suitable Platonist interpreter in this regard. It is no wonder that Eusebius cites Atticus who targets specifically the partisans of the view that the world is uncreated (οἷς ἀρέσκει καὶ κατὰ Πλάτωνα τὸν κόσμον ἀγένητον εἶναι; P.E. 15.6.3). As Atticus suggests, these are Platonists who had been convinced by Aristotle (ibid. 15.6.6; fr. 4.3 Des Places). Platonists indeed were concerned with Aristotle’s criticism in De caelo to the effect that the world of the Timaeus cannot be everlasting if created (De caelo 283a11–23), and instead suggested from very early on that the world is said to be created only for pedagogical reason, while in fact is uncreated that is ungenerated but still has a main principle that accounts for its existence, namely the divine craftsman. This is what Xenocrates (fourth BCE) apparently argued.⁷⁰ This non-literal interpretation of the Timaeus revives in late antiquity with Platonists such as Calvenus Taurus (second CE) and especially Porphyry. The latter wrote a (no longer extant) commentary on the Timaeus, where he apparently argued for such a position.⁷¹ This is exactly the position that Eusebius dislikes; he sympathizes with the literal interpretation of Plato’s cosmogony (according to which, God created the world at some point), which he finds in Atticus, since a similar view on the same issue is the one that he assents to as a Christian. On this interpretation, Plato appears to be in agreement with the Scriptures.⁷² By discrediting Porphyry’s non-literal interpretation of the Timaeus, Eusebius achieves two goals, first to support his claim of Plato’s drawing on Hebrew wisdom, and second, to further support his thesis that Greek philosophers such as Aristotle disagree with Plato and thus also with Scripture.

The above discussion, however, may suggest that Eusebius sympathizes with Plato because the latter, in some interpretations, turns out to agree with Christianity, not because Eusebius has some specific philosophical reasons for such a predilection. Here we need to remember that Eusebius belongs to a tradition of thought that goes back to Origen, one that does not distinguish between the two options. Christian thinkers needed to take a stance on a number of important philosophical issues, and this was not an easy task. In their eyes Plato turns out to be in agreement with Christianity on several of these issues, but this was the case given a certain interpretation of Plato. Plato’s philosophy could not be approached without any mediation given the wealth of conflicting interpretations by the time Christian thinkers appear. This means that the Christians had to choose among the available interpretations of Plato if they wanted to rely on his philosophy and if they wanted to claim Plato as an ally. For that reason they had to delve into the debates of ancient Platon-

⁷⁰ On Xenocrates’ interpretation of the Timaeus and his views on principles, see Dillon 2003, 98–136.
⁷¹ The fragments are collected by Sodano 1964. For a discussion, see Karamanolis 2006, 277–284.
⁷² On this issue, see Lyman 1993, 91f., who makes some interesting remarks about Eusebius.
ists and choose the interpreters who suited them best. This could be done in many ways. Some Christians did that in a detached way. Some others, however, assumed the Platonist point of view because it helped them conceptualize their own issues and also fight against some detractors of Christianity, such as the Platonist Celsus and Porphyry, with their own weapons.

One might still argue here that the Christian sympathy for Plato is merely an apologetic move. It may look even more so if we remember that the Christians wanted to fend off the charge that Christianity is a novelty by means of showing their similarities with Plato. This may well be so. It is perfectly conceivable that Eusebius wanted to demonstrate that Plato’s main doctrines are found already in Scripture. But again it was on certain interpretations that this could be shown to be the case, and such interpretations were dictated by a number of criteria. One of them was philosophical plausibility and charitability; Christians had to opt for what was philosophically defensible and plausible. The alleged truth of Scripture or Plato is not a given but a quality that the interpreter should be in a position to demonstrate. The Christians could not carry out this task of interpretation of Scripture and also of Plato unassisted, but neither was it possible, given the number of interpretations available of both. With regard to Plato, Eusebius sided with certain interpretations, mainly those of Origen, which supported theological positions on issues like that of the relationship of the divine persons, which the Christians needed to address. It is this fact that motivated Eusebius’ selection of Platonists and his treatment of them. Similar was the motivation of his criticism of Aristotelian philosophy, which was viewed in a favorable light by some Platonists who interpreted either Plato or Aristotle (or both) in ways different from those approved by Eusebius.

5. Conclusion

The discussion above has shown that Eusebius is not a Platonist whose drive was to interpret Plato alone, as was the case for contemporary pagan Platonists. His motivation rather was to interpret Plato for the sake of Christianity. But his motivation is due to a certain understanding of Plato’s philosophy, according to which the main doctrines of Plato’s philosophy are very similar to Christianity. To the extent that this is the case, he considers Plato’s philosophy as being essentially true as such. In this capacity Eusebius shows features of a brand of Platonist identity. There is a number of other features which point to this philosophical identity. He distinguishes between an intelligible and a sensible realm in ways similar to those of Platonist interpreters like Numenius and he endorses a hierarchical ontology that is again quite similar to that of Numenius and Plotinus. Besides, Eusebius favors a literal interpretation of the Timaeus, which he finds in Platonists like Atticus. Furthermore, he sides quite strongly with Plato against Aristotle, and by doing this he again takes sides in an ongoing debate among Platonists. On the last two issues he opposes Porphyry, the
author of *Against Christians* and one of his main adversary. Porphyry’s position on these two issues may have provided additional reasons for Eusebius’ hostility to him.