

HUMAN NATURE



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IS THE SOUL OF SOCRATES ETERNAL?

(On the problem of explanation of the individual qualities in Plotinus)

In an early treatise V 7 (18 in chronological order) “On the question whether there are ideas of particulars?” Plotinus proposes to adopt the ideas of particulars as a condition to return to the world of intelligible. “– Is there an idea of each particular thing? – Yes? If I and each one of us have a way of ascent and return to the intelligible, the principle of each of us is there. Is Socrates, that is the soul of Socrates, always exist, there will be an absolute Socrates in the sense that, as so far as they are souls, individuals are also said to exist in this way in the intelligible”¹. That is, if the soul of Socrates is eternal, there must be the idea of Socrates and all other individuals. However, conception of ideas of particulars contraries to the Platonic doctrine, since the idea always stands as “one over many”, one idea is sufficient for the emergence of multiple copies.

Before turning to the arguments in favor of the ideas of individuals, let us try to find the preconditions for the origin of such a theory. Plotinus needs to explain not only the question of ascent, but also different individual qualities, i.e. to solve the problem of individuation. He could not attribute the differences in the individual qualities to matter, as Aristotle did. The first matter cannot be considered as a source of individuation, since it does not have any qualities, it is able to report things nothing but numerical differences (for example, there are two fires, while the idea of fire is just one). Nonnumeric differences require further explanation. These differences may be explained by the lack of realization of the forms in matter. Thus, Plotinus understands, for example, ugliness (I 8, 11–14). The source of all individual differences should

¹ Translated by H.A. Armstrong.

be intelligible, because the world of intelligible contains everything, which really exist. Does it mean that Plotinus was to take the ideas of particulars? If we study his philosophical system, we see that it is designed as follows: on the top of his metaphysical structure is the One, transcendental unity, standing over thought and being. The Mind is below it, it is “one-many”, because the thought needs no less than two – thinking mind and the object of thought, this is the origin of multiplicity. Soul is below the Mind, it is “one and many”, and finally the corporeal world, which is just many (see V 1). As a result, the development of original unity gives a diverse and spatially separated sensual world. Thus, an explication of higher principles cannot assume the presence of ideas of individuals. The only basis for development of the theory of ideas of particulars is the principle of completeness of the intelligible world, which means that there could be nothing that would not have a place in the intelligible, so the possibility of the ideas of particulars still remains.

Let us consider the main arguments in favor of the ideas of particulars. They are concentrated mainly in the first chapter of the treatise V 7. Plotinus raises the question of the existence of ideas of particulars in the context of the possibility of return to the intelligible. Plotinus uses the term ascent – ἀνάγωγη. For different living beings ascent may be different, for example, to philosophers it is the dialectic method (I 3, 1 “On Dialectics”). For Plotinus not only every person, but also every living being can return to the intelligible world, it means that all creatures have some base there. Is the individual soul such a base? Moreover, if it is eternal there is the idea of such soul. However, Plotinus sees the difficulty in this theory, because it contradicts with conception of reincarnation: “If Socrates does not always exist, but the soul which was formerly Socrates becomes different people at different times... then there will not be this particular person also in the intelligible world”. We know that Plotinus believes in the idea of reincarnation. Therefore, there will be no ideas of Socrates and other particulars. Plotinus shifts focus from the idea of particular to the particular soul. The reborn soul contains all the individual characteristics of all people, which it animated. “If the soul of each individual possesses the rational forming principles of all the individuals which it animates in succession, then again on this assumption all will exist there”. It is not enough to postulate just one idea for all man. We must look for intelligible principles of the individual qualities in the particular soul. Plotinus does not take the position that each particular needs its own idea, but all particular qualities should be in the particular soul. “There cannot be same forming principle for different individuals, and one man will not serve as a model for several man different from each other not only by reason of their matter but with a vast number of special differences of form”. Therefore, Plotinus argues that individuation is not a product of the difference in the place or the matter; it is the result of differences that have a place in the intelligible. The aim of this short and controversial treatise is to revise the school known problem of the existence of ideas of particulars. Plotinus does so in the context of his well-

developed metaphysical system. Plotinus has never considered the concept of ideas of individuals as a solution of problem of the presence of person in intelligible realm, considering that such a foundation is “unfallen part” of the soul. “Unfallen part” of the soul is the eternal soul, which always has its place in the intelligible world.

Keywords: ancient philosophy, individual qualities, matter, idea, ideas of individuals, soul, problem of individuation, Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus

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