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The Second Half of the Fourth Century



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# Didymus the Blind and the Metaphysics of Participation

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## ABSTRACT

Earlier modern scholarship has tended to date Didymus the Blind's doctrinal contributions toward the end of the fourth century. More recently, some scholars have begun to question the assumption that Didymus' thought must be derivative and consequently later than the thought of those figures commonly thought to be more influential (e.g. Athanasius and Basil). This has resulted in a significantly earlier dating for Didymus' *On the Holy Spirit* (c. 360/5). A concomitant project with rediscovering the genius of Didymus is to read him as significantly more philosophically subtle than might previously have been assumed. In service of exploring the potential of Didymus' originality and contribution to late fourth-century doctrinal debates, this paper develops recent scholarship on Didymus' philosophical resources by proffering a fresh analysis of *On the Holy Spirit*, especially by continuing to entertain the question of Didymus' most proximate philosophical resources. Didymus argues in §50-6 of *On the Holy Spirit* that the Spirit is *capabilis*, and, 'because of this, uncreated' (§54). His conclusion in §56 explains §54 by claiming that a substance's being *capabilis* entails its being *inconuertabilis*, and its being *inconuertabilis* entails its being *aeternum*. And if the Holy Spirit is a participable, immutable, and eternal substance, then the Holy Spirit cannot be identified with created substances such as angels. The metaphysics of participation forms a significant basis of Didymus' discourse. The key technical term (*capabilis*) in Didymus' argument is traceable to μέθεξις and cognates, which introduces to a reading of Didymus' theology the notion of participability and suggests a Platonic context; his terminology is close to that of Proclus – but Didymus predates Proclus by half a century. This article therefore explores intriguing resonances in Porphyry and Iamblichus to ascertain whether Didymus has indeed been reading the Platonists carefully or may be drawing on a philosophical commonplace otherwise available to him.

## Introduction

This is a condensed presentation of ongoing research on the philosophical resources of Didymus the Blind's trinitarian doctrine.<sup>1</sup> Though my presentation

<sup>1</sup> One impetus for my revisitation of Didymus the Blind as a trinitarian theologian is Alasdair Heron's dissertation, which offers a thoroughgoing assessment of 'dogmatic' texts potentially authored by Didymus. Though *De Spiritu Sancto* is not a disputed text, Heron's dissertation is worth noting here for its exploration of the question of authorship of other Didymean texts, such as *De trinitate* and Ps.-Basil, *Adversus Eunomium* IV-V. See Alasdair Heron, *Studies in the Trinitarian*

has been allotted to a section on ‘Origen and Origenism’, Didymus’ spiritual and intellectual master will be conspicuously absent from my analysis. That is not because I do not think Origen played a significant role in Didymus’ intellectual development.<sup>2</sup> Quite to the contrary, precisely because Didymus’ thought appears so characteristically ‘Origenist’, scholars have tended to presume that Didymus was merely following in the footsteps of Origen at every key juncture – even to the point of assuming that Didymus knew no pagan philosophy in his own right. I am reminded of a parable, of sorts, which my teacher, Michel Barnes, is fond of telling his students. A drunk man, stumbling around in the dark, has lost the keys to his house. He sees a lamp post on the street with some light beneath it and gets down on hands and knees to search for the keys, never to find them – but that is because they are not in the light of the lamp post. Sometimes we have to go looking where there isn’t any light to find what we are seeking. Please consider what follows as just such a search.

### Didymus’ *De Spiritu Sancto*

I am focusing on Didymus’ earliest work, the *De Spiritu Sancto*.<sup>3</sup> It exists only in Jerome’s Latin translation, which Alasdair Heron has argued is relatively

*Writings of Didymus the Blind: His Authorship of the Adversus Eunomium IV-V and De Trinitate* (Tübingen, 1972). Quotations from Didymus’ *On the Holy Spirit* are based on the *Sources Chrétiennes* edition: *Traité du Saint-Esprit / Didyme l’Aveugle*, ed. Louis Doutreleau, SC 386 (Paris, 1992). I have made use of an unpublished manuscript of an English translation of Didymus’ *On the Holy Spirit* by Mark DelCogliano, Andrew Radde-Gallwitz and Lewis Ayres. As of this writing, it is now available as Mark DelCogliano, Andrew Radde-Gallwitz and Lewis Ayres, *Works on the Spirit: Athanasius the Great and Didymus the Blind* (New York, 2011). My thanks to all three of these authors for sharing their earlier work with me, and especially to Mark DelCogliano and Michel Barnes who provided helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Origen’s influence is probable, if not certain, when it comes to Didymus’ use of the metaphysics of participation, especially in *De Spiritu Sancto*. Lewis Ayres would direct us to *Contra Celsum* 6.63-4, where Origen remarks that God ‘is participated in rather than participates’. See Lewis Ayres, ‘The Holy Spirit as the “Undiminished Giver”’: Didymus the Blind’s *De spiritu sancto* and the development of Nicene pneumatology’, in D. Vincent Twomey SVD and Janet E. Rutherford (eds), *The Holy Spirit in the Fathers of the Church: The Proceedings of the Seventh International Patristic Conference, Maynooth, 2008* (Portland, 2010), 57-72, 62. Terms like *capax* and *participatio* span the breadth of *On First Principles*. To cite one example, Origen’s characterization of sanctification in *De principiis* I 1.1 deploys the very same causal mechanism of a form-power to speak of the Son as Word and Wisdom that Didymus uses in *De Spiritu Sancto* to speak of the Holy Spirit. However that may be, with this article, my hope is to bracket, for the moment, the default position of treating Didymus as though he were merely Origen’s heir. I want to hold out the possibility that Didymus was not slavishly following Origen, but that he was putting Origen’s influence to use in the light of current philosophy and that philosophy’s deployment by contemporary Christian theologians, both ‘orthodox’ and ‘heretical’.

<sup>3</sup> Earlier scholarship placed Didymus’ doctrinal work toward the end of the fourth century, but more recently, Mark DelCogliano has argued that *DSS* was authored contemporaneously with

Athanasius' *Letters to Serapion*, in the late 350s or early 360s, whereas previous scholarship dated the work to c. 381. See Mark DelCogliano, 'Basil of Caesarea, Didymus the Blind, and the Anti-Pneumatomachian Exegesis of Amos 4:13 and John 1:3', *JTS NS* (2010), 1-15. DelCogliano is arguing for a return to Heron's early views on dating the *DSS*, expressed in Heron, *Studies in the Trinitarian Writings of Didymus the Blind* (1972), 169-70, but which Heron later abandoned. I will quote Heron's position at length for the reader's reference since his thesis is not commonly available: 'It used to be believed that *DSS* had been written at about the same time as Basil's work with the same title: i.e. c 374-5. The recent investigation by Frln Staimer has however shown beyond all doubt that such a dating is much too late: *DSS* is rather to be located at about the same time as Athanasius' *Letters to Serapion*, thus probably in the late 350s or the (very) early 360s. (This incidentally also means that it is the first systematic treatment of the subject, and that Didymus must be recognised as having been a much more original and pioneering spirit tha[n] had been thought.) Some of Frln Staimer's arguments in favour of this dating may be mentioned here...: the doctrine of the Trinity in *DSS* is still in an early and undeveloped state as compared with the position after the Synod of Alexandria and the *Tomus ad Antiochenos*, written in 362 (Staimer, op cit, 114; 132-133); the question of why the Spirit is not a second Son, or even a grandson of the Father is handled (1084 C f) in a way which represents no real advance on Cyril of Jerusalem's *Catecheses*, written in 348, and is certainly less adequate than the treatment in *Ep ad Serap* I 15 ff and IV (Staimer, 107-110; 121; 123-7); and the opponents with whom Didymus is dealing resemble the Tropicci, against whom Athanasius wrote, in that they do not appear to have been influenced by Eunomius, and still recognise that the Son is God (Staimer, 127-132). These factors indicate a date before 362, and before the *Letters to Serapion* became available to Didymus; and if the *Letters* are dated (as they usually are) in 358-9, *DSS* should be placed in the period of c 355-58 (Staimer, 126-7). The only element in Frln Staimer's case which seems a little doubtful is her reliance on the date of the *Letters* as supplying a *terminus post quem non*: their date is somewhat uncertain, and in any case, they may well not have reached Didymus until some time after they were written. But even if, for this reason, 358 should not be taken too seriously as the latest date for the composition of *DSS*, it still seems safe to conclude that the work must have been written before c 362. And it was of course written by Didymus in or near Alexandria (unless he had for some reason left Alexandria at that time: but there is no evidence that he ever did).'

Heron places the order of authorship of potentially Didymian Trinitarian works like this:

DSS	DTSpS	CE	DT
c. 355-362	c. 360-365	c. 375-380	c. 390-400

Little is known of Didymus' life, which is usually dated to the years 313-398 on the basis of Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 4. There, 'it is stated that Didymus died at the age of 85 ten years after Palladius' arrival in Egypt. C. Butler, *The Lausiaca History of Palladius*. TSt 6, 1-2, Cambridge, 1904, fixes Palladius' year of arrival as 388 (1, 180) and this gives 398 as the year of Didymus' death, and 313 as that of his birth (cf Butler, op cit, 2, 187 n 12). Both Leipoldt, *Didymus*, 4 and Bardy, *Didyme*, 3-4 accept this dating. The only alternative evidence is that of Jerome, *De Vir Ill* 109, ed Richardson, 50 – but the reading there is uncertain, and could mean that Didymus was either 80, 83, or 85 when Jerome composed that work in 392-3 (the first of these would of course accord well with Butler's chronology from Palladius)' (A. Heron, 'Studies in the Trinitarian Writings' [1972], 262-3). It is assumed that, due to Didymus' blindness, he led a sedentary life in the environs of Alexandria and did not travel although it is not certain at what point, exactly, Didymus developed his blindness. That is not to say that his works did not travel, since *DSS* at least travelled to Rome, where Jerome translated a Greek version. Whether Jerome met Didymus on a pilgrimage to the desert or not is an open question. Didymus' influence is a subject of debate that indirectly affects dating of his work. Decisions about influence in a narrative of historical development are difficult because it is tempting to read a lack of influence in later periods as indicative of a lack of influence in earlier periods. In this case, Didymus does appear



wooden and reliable as a witness to the Greek that lay behind it.<sup>4</sup> Didymus first presumes a doctrine of divine simplicity: ‘God is ... not made good by another, but subsists as such.’ This presumption leads to the conclusion that ‘God is capable of being received but not capable of receiving.’ This conclusion in turn presupposes a hierarchical scheme of participation: any form of ‘goodness’ that is able to be shared in by some lower form does not gain anything from those lower forms of goodness. ‘That which is essentially good cannot be capable of receiving external goodness since it is what bestows goodness on other things’ (13). In the treatise as a whole, Didymus sets himself the task of answering the question: *is the Holy Spirit holy in and of himself, or is the Holy Spirit holy ‘through participation in another’s sanctity’?* (19) Didymus announces that ‘the point I want to make is that [the Holy Spirit] himself subsists in those goods which are conferred by the Lord’ (11; 32).

Didymus is at pains to differentiate the Holy Spirit from the angels. His opponents considered the Holy Spirit as an angel, a created being, and not a member of the Trinity. Against this, Didymus maintains that the language of ‘pouring forth’, used in *Romans 5:5* and *Joel 2:28*, is reserved by Scripture for divine beings as opposed to creatures, such as angels. God sends, and does not ‘pour forth’, angels (*DSS* §49-50). A being that is ‘poured forth’ is a being that is ‘participated in by others’ (*DSS* §50). This leads, then, to an excursus on participation itself, which Didymus articulates in terms of what has been translated in Latin as *capax*, *capiens* and *capabilis*, explained by Jerome in a gloss. Then Didymus establishes the Holy Spirit’s divinity by linking a substance’s being *capabilis* to its being *inconuertibilis*.<sup>5</sup> Didymus concludes that the Spirit is *capabilis*, and, ‘because of this, uncreated’ (§54). The conclusion in §56 explains §54 by claiming that a substance’s being *capabilis* entails its being *inconuertibilis*, and its being *inconuertibilis* entails its being *aeternum*.

to fall off the map in the fifth century, and his association with Origen destined his *corpus* for extirpation, but that does not necessarily mean he was not a key figure in late fourth-century debates. If Jerome’s assessment means anything, it is likely that Didymus was indeed rather influential in Alexandria and Rome. Didymus’ theology may be situated within a doctrinal nexus that includes at least the following potential contexts or trajectories: (1) the inheritance of Origen’s legacy; (2) Athanasius as a theological contemporary; (3) Jerome’s translation of *De Spiritu Sancto*; (4) some Pseudo-Athanasian material as influenced by if not authored by Didymus; and (5) the Cappadocians as potential collaborators/heirs.

<sup>4</sup> Alasdair Heron, ‘The Holy Spirit in Origen and Didymus the Blind: A Shift in Perspective From the Third to the Fourth Century’, in A. Martin Ritter (ed.), *Kerygma und Logos* (Göttingen, 1979), 298-310. Because Jerome translated Didymus’ *De Spiritu Sancto* before Jerome turned against Origen, and since Rufinus translated Origen’s *De principiis* into Latin, Heron suggests that we compare the Latin of the one to the other in order to see to what extent Didymus relied upon Origen (298). Based on internal evidence and Jerome’s motive to show how the Latins had been unwittingly borrowing from the Greeks, Jerome’s translation of Didymus is reliable (299).

<sup>5</sup> That is, unless §56 is a continuation of Jerome’s gloss.

These terms and the metaphysics of participation form a significant basis of Didymus' discourse. The *Sources Chrétiennes* edition of *De Spiritu Sancto* reports a total of 30 instances of a form of *capabilis*, *capax*, and *capio*, and a total of 28 instances of a form of *particeps*, *participabilis*, *participatio* and *participo*.<sup>6</sup> Heron has suggested that the distinction between what is *capax* and what is *capabilis* is fundamental to Didymus' theology as a whole.<sup>7</sup> Again, Didymus is laboring against a prevalent angelomorphic pneumatology. And if the Holy Spirit is a participable, immutable, and eternal substance, then the Holy Spirit cannot be identified with created substances such as angels.

Didymus' distinction is clarified by Jerome as follows:

Didymus calls a substance *capibilem* when it is received by many and bestows on them a share in himself. But a substance is *capacem* when it is filled through communion with another substance, and *capiens* something else, it itself is not received by another.<sup>8</sup>

At first blush, this 'triad' appears similar to the common Neoplatonic division of the unparticipated [*non capabilis*], the participated [*capabilis*], and the participant [*capax et capiens alium*]. Might we then be able to link Didymus' terminology with that of the Greek Neoplatonists? One scholar has noted 'Proclean parallels' in Didymus' *De trinitate* and has used these parallels to question

<sup>6</sup> Doutreleau, 425, 437. The combined references of each set of terms is as follows. *capabilis*, *capax*, *capio*: 10, 9; 13, 2; 13, 7; 17, 4; 17, 7; 18, 3 (twice); 18, 4; 18, 5; 34, 9; 43, 6; 51, 1; 54, 1; 55, 1; 55, 2; 55, 4; 55, 5; 56, 1; 56, 3; 94, 3; 172, 3; 228, 12; 236, 4; 237, 4; 265, 2; 267, 2; *particeps*, *participabilis*, *participatio*, *participo*: 3, 6; 7, 11; 14, 1; 14, 7; 18, 2; 18, 5; 20, 13; 25, 6; 26, 2; 32, 1; 36, 5; 38, 2; 50, 5; 73, 15; 78, 8; 80, 4; 92, 2; 92, 5; 142, 2; 196, 4; 231, 5; 236, 3; 264, 5; 265, 1; 265, 6; 267, 2; 267, 4; 268, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Didymus 'emphasizes an absolute contrast between God and creatures; but on the ground of that contrast he also sketches a kind of correlation in which the divine fullness of being fills those creatures who participate in God' (A. Heron, 'The Holy Spirit in Origen and Didymus the Blind' [1972], 301). God is simple and infinite, whereas creatures – even invisible creatures – are composite and circumscribed. Three further distinctions between God and creatures follow from this: (1) God is what he is by nature or 'substantially', whereas creatures possess goodness, holiness etc. by participation; (2) God is what God is immutably because God is simple, whereas creatures are what they are mutably; and (3) God is *capabilis*, whereas creatures are *capaces* (sg.: *capax*). This last difference requires some explanation since these terms translate to 'comprehensible' and 'capacious', respectively. Jerome helps us here: '[Didymus] calls *capabilis* a substance which is received by several others, and gives them a part in itself; and *capax* one which is filled through the communication of another substance, and which, receiving another substance (*sc.* into itself) is itself not received (*sc.* by another)' (302). Didymus argues that the Father, Son, and Spirit are each *capabilis*, not *capax*. The Trinity makes creatures good by allowing them to share in the Trinity's simple goodness. 'This making holy, good and wise is not simply a matter of some external operation of God upon creatures, nor of the mere infusion of qualities into them. It is a genuine participation in God, enabled by a genuine communication of himself, a real "indwelling" in created beings' (303). Such participation is neither automatic nor irreversible (304).

<sup>8</sup> DSS 55; DeIcogliano, Radde-Gallwitz, Ayres, 13. '*Capibilem substantiam uocat, quae capiatur a plurimis et eis sui consortium tribuat; capacem uero eam quae communicatione substantiae alterius impleatur, et capiens aliud, ipsa non capiatur ab alio.*'

*De trinitate*'s Didymean authorship. Indeed, Proclus teaches a 'triadic structure within each order of reality [that] is due to the distinction between the "Unparticipated" (ἀμέθεκτον), the "Participated" (μεθεκτόν, μετεχόμενον) and the "Participant" (μετέχων).'<sup>9</sup> And there is a 'triad' in Jerome's gloss on Didymus: (1) that which may be participated in (*capabilis*), (2) that which may participate in another (*capax*), and (3) the thing doing the participating (*capiens*). But this is not exactly the triad of Proclus' *Elements*: there is no equivalent for Proclus' ἀμέθεκτον here, and Didymus does not use the Latin equivalent, *incapabilis*, in *DSS*.<sup>10</sup> Didymus could agree with the Pseudo-Dionysian use of Proclus' participation theory to the effect that God is 'that which does not participate in anything else', but it is not so clear that Didymus would go so far as to say that 'nothing else directly participates' in God.<sup>11</sup> Not only does Didymus *not* mention the 'Unparticipated' in this context. The trouble with seeing Didymus' use of this distinction as having come from Proclus is that Didymus authored the *De Spiritu Sancto* at least two decades before Proclus was born.<sup>12</sup> But already in the *DSS* we have a metaphysics of participation functioning as a proof for the Holy Spirit's divinity. My question, then, is: Where is Didymus getting his account of what counts as 'participable' and how does participation function for him in this context?<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Balás, 5. Proclus articulates this distinction in propositions 23 and 24 of *The Elements of Theology*, and so, the doctrine would seem to be logically prior to the doctrine of the undiminished giver articulated in propositions 26 and 27. If Proclus' scheme or order is any clue, then it might appear that, while it is true that Didymus teaches the doctrine of the undiminished giver, the distinction Jerome explicates in paragraph 55 is more logically fundamental, and therefore, not precisely the same thing.

<sup>10</sup> See below, on Iamblichus. The Latin equivalent to μεθεκτόν is seen most evidently in a gloss at *DSS* 265: *quod participatione capiatur*. I am siding with DelCogliano, Radde-Gallwitz and Ayres against Doutreleau's reading of τὸ μετοχικό here.

<sup>11</sup> William J. Carroll, S.J., 'Participation: The Link to the Divine in Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite', in William J. Carroll and John J. Furlong (eds), *Greek and Medieval Studies in Honor of Leo Sweeney, S.J.* (New York, 1994), 76.

<sup>12</sup> Proclus was born c. 411, and Didymus must have written the *De Spiritu Sancto* prior to 381, when it is known that Ambrose used the work for his own *De Spiritu Sancto*. However, there is no reason to think that Didymus' *DSS* could not have been written much earlier, even as early as Athanasius' *Letters to Serapion*, in the late 350s or early 360s. See M. DelCogliano, 'Basil of Caesarea, Didymus the Blind, and the Anti-Pneumatomachian Exegesis of Amos 4:13 and John 1:3' (2010), 13.

<sup>13</sup> Given how Didymus uses participation in his argument for the Spirit's divinity, Ayres frames Didymus' participation terminology in terms of the Christian tradition's appropriation of the doctrine of the undiminished giver (L. Ayres, 'The Holy Spirit as the "Undiminished Giver"' [2010]). Ayres points to *DSS* 11, 13, and 17-8 for the appearance of this doctrine in Didymus. These passages presume a definition of divine goodness as simple and not capable of participating but only of being participated in (= *capabilis*). Whether the metaphor can be traced to Didymus' original Greek expression seems justifiable in terms of a Platonic understanding of *methexis*. Based on the first appearance of the doctrine in Philo (at *De opificio* 6.23, 24.72, 23.69, and *De gigantibus* 24-8), Ayres claims that 'the foundation of the doctrine is the principle that the divine

We could of course reach all the way back to Plato himself, who initiated ‘participation’ talk most notably in the *Parmenides*, and whose nephew Speusippus, according to E.R. Dodds, was ‘already well started on the road to Neoplatonism’ with a doctrine of ‘One beyond Being’.<sup>14</sup> I suggest that Didymus took advantage of the causal nature of the forms: the Holy Spirit, as the divine form-power, indwells the human soul and *causes holiness* to be in it.<sup>15</sup> I will

(or the first principle in a given account of the cosmos) gives without loss (or while remaining in itself).’ A *locus classicus* for the doctrine among Platonists is *Timaeus* 42E, in which the demiurge, having created ‘all these dispositions’, ‘continued to abide by the wont of his own nature.’ Ayres tells us that it is the phrase ἔμμενεν ἐν τῷ ἑαυτοῦ that becomes normative for Plotinus and Proclus. The archetypal image for expressing the doctrine is fire’s ability to spread without loss, e.g., a lamp lighting another lamp without losing its own light. Numenius uses this image to articulate the nature of knowledge. Plotinus uses it to describe ‘the relationship between the One and Nous.’ As I have already noted, Proclus teaches the doctrine in propositions 26 and 27 of *The Elements of Theology*, which follows hard on the heels of claims about participability in propositions 23 and 24. In support of the doctrine of the undiminished giver, Athanasius, quoting *Hebrews* 6:4, says: ‘He, therefore, who is not sanctified by another, nor a partaker of sanctification, but who is himself partaken, and in whom all the creatures are sanctified, how can he be one from among all things or pertain to those who partake of him? For those who say this must say that the Son, through whom all things came to be, is one from among all things.’ See C.R.B. Shapland, trans., *The Letters of Saint Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit* (New York, 1951), 123. Shapland’s note observes: ‘So Didymus argues ... that it is a proof of the Spirit’s deity that He is μεθεκτόν, for creation cannot be essentially participated by the rational soul. cf. also his *de Sp.S.*25, and *ps.*Basil, *adv.Eun.*V.713A.’ Later on (at 1.27), Athanasius repeats his thesis that ‘the Holy Spirit is partaken and does not partake’. Given their proximity in Alexandria and in terms of authorship, whether Athanasius has read Didymus or Didymus has read Athanasius is a question worth raising, but I will not attempt to answer it here. The resemblance in argument from participation might best be explained by Origen’s common influence, but that does not settle the issue. For an excellent treatment of the role and function of participation in Athanasius’ theology on the whole, see Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought* (New York, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> E.R. Dodds, ‘The *Parmenides* of Plato and the Neoplatonic “One”’, *The Classical Quarterly* (1928), 129-42, 140.

<sup>15</sup> Aristotle’s criticism of Plato’s ‘theory of forms’ is such a large topic that I will not take it up here. Lloyd P. Gerson, *Aristotle and Other Platonists* (New York, 2005), 1-23, in advocating for the provocative thesis that ‘perhaps the reason Aristotle appears to be a Platonist is that in fact he is one’, at least demonstrates that today scholars are not content with simplistic modern oppositions of Aristotle to Plato (see 209-41 for a canvassing of the problem of Aristotle on the ‘theory of forms’). The ‘Aristotle’ that fourth-century Christians knew was not necessarily, at any rate, the ‘Aristotle’ of modern critical history, mediated as his corpus was by commentators like Porphyry. H. Apostle notes in his glossary to the *Metaphysics* that, ‘usually, A is said to participate in B if “B” or its definition is a predicate of A, directly or derivatively, but “A” is not a predicate of B. Plato held that sensible things participated in Ideas, but said little about the nature of participation’ (Hippocrates Apostle, *Aristotle’s Metaphysics* [Indiana, 1966], 469). Thus, in Aristotle’s corpus, participation becomes primarily a logical affair. This view appears to constitute a kind of modern consensus: ‘While Aristotle rejects the Platonic theory of ideas, he uses, nevertheless, rather extensively the verb μετέχειν to express primarily the logical relationship between concepts of different universality, but also the more ontological relation between the imperfect and the perfect possession of a quality or mode of being’ (Balás, 3). If this view of

present (briefly) two Platonists who elaborated such causal theories, and who present promising leads for clarifying Didymus' thought: Porphyry and Iamblichus.

### Porphyry (*apud* Nemesius)

Nemesius of Emesa presents an interesting case: he provides a quotation of the mid-third-century Porphyry's philosophy, but he himself was writing as a near-contemporary of Didymus. Nemesius' *Nature of Man* invokes the metaphysics of participation.<sup>16</sup> Now, Nemesius' writing may post-date Didymus' *De Spiritu Sancto* by a decade or two, but it indicates pagan doctrines current in Christian circles prior to its authorship, which would be about the time of Didymus' writing.

The context of Nemesius' discussion is that of christology.<sup>17</sup> He articulates an appropriation of the doctrine of the 'undiminished giver', by which Christ 'both is infused and remains altogether unmixed, uncompounded, uncontaminated and unchanged, not affected with them but only acting with them.'<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, Nemesius underwrites this version of the 'doctrine of the undiminished giver' by using Porphyry's participation doctrine, as follows:

It is not to be denied that a certain substance can be received for the completion of another substance, and can be a part of [this] substance while retaining its own nature together with completing another substance, and, while becoming one with another, can retain its own unity and moreover, while itself untransmuted, it can transmute those things into which it comes so that they gain its activity by its presence.<sup>19</sup>

Aristotle is correct, then it seems strained to consider Didymus' Platonizing model of ontological participation as owing in any way to a Peripateticizing stream *strictu sensu*. Nevertheless, given more time and space, analysis of 'participation' in Alexander of Aphrodisias may prove necessary. *Methexis* and its cognates are heavily theorized in his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, and it is not implausible that Didymus could have had access to Alexander's works. The index to Alexander's first book on the *Metaphysics* lists the following appearances: *metekhein* – (participate) – 32, 3; 51, 10; 52, 1; 89, 10-7; 90, 5-91, 31; 94, 18.20; 95, 2; 98, 5.20; 100, 30; 101, 3.18-22; 105, 12.13.20; (share in) – 4, 17; *methekhotos* – (capable of being participated in) – 89, 5; *metaskhesis* – (participation) – 86, 3; 89, 13; 125, 1; *methexis* – (participation) – 50, 21; 51, 4.5.6.8; 97, 20; 105, 4; *metokhê* – (participation) – 84, 17.20; 100, 27.31; 101, 17; 105, 14; 121, 8.13; *metousia* 4, 17 (W.E. Dooley, S.J., trans., *Alexander of Aphrodisias on Aristotle's Metaphysics I* [New York, 1989], 216).

<sup>16</sup> Sharples, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Sharples, 84.

<sup>18</sup> Sharples, 84.

<sup>19</sup> Sorabji, trans. 85; Greek from Moreno Morani (ed.), *Nemesii Emeseni De Natura Hominis* (Leipzig, 1987), 43: οὐκ ἀπογνωστέον οὖν ἐνδέχασθαι τινα οὐσίαν παραληφθῆναι εἰς συμπλήρωσιν ἑτέρας οὐσίας καὶ εἶναι μέρος οὐσίας μένουσαν κατὰ τὴν ἑαυτῆς φύσιν μετὰ τὸ συμπληροῦν ἄλλην οὐσίαν, ἔν τε σὺν ἄλλῳ γενομένην καὶ τὸ καθ' ἑαυτὸν ἐν διασώζουσιν, καὶ τὸ μείζον αὐτὴν μὲν μὴ τρεπομένην, τρέπουσαν δὲ ἐκεῖνα ἐν οἷς ἂν γίνηται εἰς τὴν ἑαυτῆς ἐνέργειαν τῆ παρουσίας.

Porphyrus stresses the ability of one substance to *be contained* by another substance even as that substance maintains the ability to ‘transmute those things into which it comes so that they gain its activity by its presence.’ Does the metaphor of ‘containment’ explain Jerome’s use of *capax* to translate Didymus? Lewis and Short’s primary definition of *capax* is ‘capacious’, or, able to contain something else. And Didymus defines that which we might say ‘participates’ as being ‘filled’, as *capiens*, as containing the substance which is *capabilis*. With *capabilis*, and whatever Greek lay behind it, perhaps Didymus has coined a term to stand in for a substance that ‘can be a part of [another] substance while retaining its own nature together with completing another substance’ (εἶναι μέρος οὐσίας μένουσαν κατὰ τὴν ἑαυτῆς φύσιν μετὰ τὸ συμπληροῦν ἄλλην οὐσίαν). This would present a rather clever use of pagan philosophy to explain both (a) how the Holy Spirit, as a ‘participated entity’, is uncreated, as well as (b) precisely how the Holy Spirit does what it does, namely, sanctify creatures.

### Iamblichus

Some Platonists speculated about participation not only between sensible particulars and forms, but among the forms themselves. Iamblichus is the epitome of such speculation. Dillon explains that Iamblichus’ scholastic, emanative metaphysics, which had developed since Plotinus,

created the necessity for three aspects or ‘moments’ of each [noetic] hypostasis which represented (a) the hypostasis in its purest form, as opposed to (b) the hypostasis as participated in by a lower level of being, and (c) the hypostasis as reflected *in* the lower level of being; the three levels were termed ἀμέθεκτος (unparticipated), μετεχόμενος (participated) and κατὰ μέθεξις or ἐν σχέσει (in participation or relation).<sup>20</sup>

What is most interesting about Iamblichus’ doctrine for our purposes is that he (as well as Syrianus and Proclus after him) was willing to entertain the notion that forms participate one another. Speculation about the relationship amongst forms as noetic or spiritual entities would be at once interesting and dangerous in Didymus’ view. His opponents seem to have taught that the Holy Spirit was one noetic creature among many. If the hypostatic forms can participate one another in a grand spiritual hierarchy, and if it is not that *only* sensible particulars – or *created* entities – participate the (uncreated) forms, then characterizing the Holy Spirit as ‘participated in’ would not be sufficient to prove his divinity. Given those terms it would be reasonable to suppose that the Holy Spirit, as a participated form, is an angel, a noetic *creature*. To mitigate against such a conclusion, Didymus would need to be careful to distinguish the Holy Spirit

<sup>20</sup> Dillon, 33.



from identification with the forms as *created* noetic entities participable in one another, and to do so, he would want to downplay any Iamblichean mechanism of intra-formal participation. Something like this motivation would clarify Didymus' deployment of participation theory in *De Spiritu Sancto*.

## Conclusion

I will conclude with a word about the authorship of the *De trinitate* attributed to Didymus. One might suppose that, because it draws on 'Proclean distinctions' that came about only in the fifth century, it cannot be by Didymus.<sup>21</sup> However, the *De Spiritu Sancto*, whose Didymean authorship is beyond doubt, places significant weight on the metaphysics of participation. Nevertheless, one might argue that the *De trinitate* bears witness to 'Proclean' influence in light of its use of ἀμέθεκτος, a characteristically Proclean term. However, that term is used only once, so far as I have found, in the Didymean corpus: in the disputed text of *De trinitate*, Book II. Recall that Iamblichus identifies that which is ἀμέθεκτον, or unparticipated, with the purest form of a hypostasis in the noetic realm. However, the author of *De trinitate* argues that to be unable to be participated in *in the rational soul* is the characteristic of a creature – a somewhat unexpected application of the term. The use of the term here is something of a malappropism: it means that the *creature* is *not participated* precisely because the creature *participates in* God.<sup>22</sup> This is neither Iamblichus' nor Proclus' sense of ἀμέθεκτον. Furthermore, if it turns out to be the case that Didymus' opponents in *De Spiritu Sancto* did employ some form of Iamblichean intra-formal participation as a means to undermine the Spirit's divinity, then Didymus may have wanted to downplay Iamblichean metaphysics in

<sup>21</sup> This argument would rest on the presupposition that Christians read and were influenced by pagan intellectuals, but not *vice versa*. I appreciated David Brakke's suggestion that it may well be that Proclus read and was influenced by Didymus or Christians like him. However, the tendency in scholarship has long favored the unidirectional influence of pagan intellectuals on Christian thinkers. In the face of such scholarly tradition, then, it would be my burden to prove Didymus' influence on Proclus, and I have not attempted to make that case here. As a case in point, Carlos Steel gave a presentation on the relationship between Christianity and Platonism at the University of Chicago's *Lumen Christi Institute* in November 2011, in which he explicitly presumed that pagans did not read Christians as materially significant sources.

<sup>22</sup> ὅτι μεθεκτὸν οὐσιωδῶς ἐστὶ· θεοῦ δὲ μόνον ἴδιον τοῦτο· ἢ κτίσις ἀμέθεκτός ἐστιν οὐσιωδῶς τῇ λογικῇ ψυχῇ, ὡς ἐνοικίεσθαι αὐτήν· μόνου γὰρ θεοῦ ἴδιον τὸ οὕτως μετέχεσθαι. τὸ δ' ἅγιον πνεῦμα μεθεκτὸν οὐσιωδῶς ὑπάρχει ὡς ὁ πατήρ καὶ ὁ υἱός, καθὰ ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ εἴρηται λόγῳ. 'That [the Holy Spirit] is essentially able to be participated; but this is the property of God alone. The creature is essentially ἀμέθεκτός [not able to be participated] in the rational soul, since it is indwelt; for to be participated in this way is a property of God alone. But the Holy Spirit is essentially able to be participated (μεθεκτόν) like the Father and the Son, just as was said in the first account.'

that context. Such a motivation may explain Didymus' avoidance of the Iamblichean doctrine of an 'Unparticipable' noetic hypostasis in *De Spiritu Sancto*, in spite of the fact that Didymus clearly thinks that an entity's being participated in makes it superior to that which participates in it.

However that may be, it is not my aim to settle the question of *De trinitate*'s authorship here. Rather, I wish to make the larger point that the answer to that question will be wrapped up in a thoroughgoing analysis of both Didymus' thought as a whole – across the biblical commentaries and the dogmatic treatises – and its deployment of participation terminology. Equipped with an assessment of the role of the metaphysics of participation in all of Didymus' undisputed works, we will be in a better position to assess the authorship of spurious writings like *De trinitate* and Pseudo-Basil *Adversus Eunomium* IV-V.