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The Curious Case of the "Mathematicals" in Greek Antiquity

Plato assigned to mathematics an ontological status intermediate between the realm of Forms and the physical world, and Aristotle based on this tripartition of being an influential classification of knowledge. But Plato placed something else between the intelligible world and physical objects, namely soul; whence, in later centuries, repeated attempts—strange in our eyes—to actually identify soul with the objects of the mathematical sciences. In this endeavour, astronomy—one of the four disciplines considered “mathematical” since the 5th century—played a special role. I shall try to sketch the interplay among these ideas, a story that reaches into late antiquity.