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Bruno Centrone*

Ricordo di Enrico Berti

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Il 5 gennaio 2022, dopo lunga malattia, è mancato, all'età di 86 anni, Enrico Berti.

Nato a Valeggio sul Mincio (VR) il 3 novembre del 1935, studiò all'Università di Padova, laureandosi in Filosofia nel 1957 con Marino Gentile con una tesi su *Genesi e sviluppo della dottrina aristotelica della potenza e dell'atto*. Nel 1963 risultò vincitore di un concorso a cattedre, e dal 1965 divenne professore ordinario di storia della filosofia antica, poi di storia della filosofia all'Università di Perugia, dove insegnò sino al 1971, quando si trasferì nuovamente a Padova; qui rimase sino al suo pensionamento come professore emerito nel 2010. La sua attività di docente si è però svolta anche a livello internazionale, in università europee e americane (Lugano, Ginevra, cattedra Perelman Bruxelles, Santa Fè in Argentina). Accademico dei Lincei e "Doctor honoris causa" dell'Università Nazionale e Capodistriana di Atene, Berti è stato inoltre Presidente della Società Filosofica Italiana (1983–1986; 1995–1998), dell'Institut International de Philosophie (dal 2011 al 2014), ambasciatore internazionale dell'Università di Padova (dal 2011). Tra i numerosi premi e riconoscimenti da lui ottenuti si può qui ricordare, quale più degno di nota, il titolo di Grande ufficiale dell'Ordine al merito della Repubblica Italiana, ricevuto nel 2013.

Come Berti stesso non ha mai smesso di ricordare, l'impronta del suo maestro Marino Gentile ha segnato profondamente e ininterrottamente la sua attività, sia come storico della filosofia, sia come pensatore, a partire dalla prima importante monografia del 1962 su *La filosofia del primo Aristotele*, ricostruzione sistematica della prima fase della filosofia aristotelica tra il 367 e il 347, in prevalenza fondata su ciò che rimane degli essoterici pubblicati e di trattati come il *peri ideon* e le *Divisioni*. Con alle spalle l'importante lavoro di Gentile su *La dottrina platonica delle idee-numeri* (1930), il punto di partenza era evidentemente costituito dall'Accademia e dalle dottrine orali di Platone. Pur collocandosi nel solco delle tesi evoluzionistiche di Jaeger, in quanto fortemente interessato a genesi e sviluppo storico del pensiero aristotelico, Berti apportò correzioni in punti decisivi, alla luce delle acquisizioni di Düring, per quanto riguarda ad esempio il rapporto di Aristotele con Alessandro, ma soprattutto quello con Platone, documentando già nel

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primo periodo l'abbandono della dottrina delle idee e lo sviluppo dei temi essenziali della filosofia aristotelica (dottrina della sostanza, della potenza e dell'atto, del motore immobile). I risultati originali conseguiti in questo lavoro, sia nella datazione dei singoli scritti, sia per quanto riguarda l'interpretazione filosofica, assicuraronero da subito a Berti un posto di prim'ordine nel panorama internazionale degli studi aristotelici.

La filosofia di Aristotele è sempre rimasta al centro degli interessi di Berti, sia dal punto di vista della ricostruzione storica, sia quanto alla possibilità di una sua riattualizzazione nel dibattito filosofico contemporaneo. In questa prospettiva si colloca ancora, nella prima fase della produzione scientifica di Berti, la monografia *Il De republica di Cicerone e il pensiero politico classico* (1963), in cui si analizza l'influenza dell'idealismo platonico, mediato da Aristotele, sull'interpretazione ciceroniana della storia di Roma, vista come processo tendente all'*entelechia*. Lavoro, questo, condotto, più che con intenti storico-filologici, in una prospettiva squisitamente filosofica, interessata agli sviluppi del pensiero politico e volta a mettere in luce la decisiva mediazione aristotelica.

Una tappa decisiva negli studi aristotelici di Berti è costituita dalla monografia *Aristotele. Dalla dialettica alla filosofia prima* (1977), in cui si prosegue il lavoro di ricostruzione di genesi e sviluppo del pensiero aristotelico, dalla reinterpretazione della dialettica platonica e critica alla dottrina dei principi sino all'elaborazione della dottrina delle categorie e delle quattro cause, che sfocia nella teoria della sostanza individuale e nella proposta di una nuova ontologia e di un sistema compiutamente sviluppato, ma 'aperto'. Anche in questo caso opera sullo sfondo l'idea di Marino Gentile secondo cui, nell'evoluzione spirituale di un filosofo, a una prima fase di problematizzazione segue generalmente il momento della sistematizzazione, che va compresa e spiegata alla luce della prima. La problematicità come struttura fondante del pensiero teorizzata da Gentile, la filosofia come un "domandare tutto che è tutto domandare", rimase sempre fondamentale sia per il Berti storico che per il filosofo. Nella monografia del 1977 sono al centro dell'attenzione gli aspetti ontologici e metafisici della filosofia aristotelica, che rimarranno costantemente il principale interesse di Berti. Un'idea centrale di questo lavoro, che avrà un ruolo importante anche in seguito, è che la teologia aristotelica rappresenti solo una parte della scienza dell'essere in quanto essere, che si occupa di dio in quanto questi rappresenta *una* tra le cause prime. E l'analisi della trasformazione della dialettica platonica operata da Aristotele risulta decisiva nell'interpretazione della dialettica aristotelica, in seguito sempre meglio elaborata nel senso di un metodo che, pur non possedendo scientificità apodittica, può produrre dimostrazioni di un certo tipo e permettere acquisizioni conoscitive rilevanti.

Con l'opera dello storico volta alla ricostruzione del pensiero di uno dei padri della filosofia occidentale si è venuto via via sempre più coniugando in Berti il tentativo di applicare con successo a problematiche contemporanee concetti e metodi della filosofia aristotelica, opportunamente riattualizzati e adattati a contesti specifici. La presenza di Berti nel panorama filosofico italiano del '900 è manifesta già a partire da lavori come *La contraddizione* (1977) (cfr. poi *Contraddizione e dialettica negli antichi e nei moderni*, 1987, nuova edizione, 2015), e altri numerosi saggi sul medesimo argomento, che si collocano all'interno di un dibattito stimolato negli anni '70 da una rinomata *Intervista politico-filosofica* di Colletti circa la reale natura della contraddizione e della dialettica. In questo contesto diventava inevitabile un chiarimento di significato che assumesse come principale punto di riferimento Aristotele e il principio di non contraddizione.

Di orizzonte ancora più ampio sono i contributi dati da Berti a un tema decisivo per la riflessione filosofica contemporanea, quello della crisi della ragione e delle forme di razionalità praticabili dall'uomo, in particolare a fronte della cosiddetta riabilitazione della filosofia pratica di Aristotele. Il titolo del volume *Le ragioni di Aristotele* (1989), raccolta di lezioni tenute presso l'Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici di Napoli, rimanda alle molteplici e differenti forme di razionalità teorizzate da Aristotele, caratterizzate da procedure e metodi propri a ciascuna di esse, dotate di differenti gradi di rigore, ma tutte suscettibili di controllo intersoggettivo e dunque ancora attuali e capaci di costituire un modello orientativo in diversi ambiti del sapere e dell'agire umano. Vengono qui in primo piano, in una polemica non troppo implicita verso la filosofia analitica, la semantica ontologica, intesa come indagine preliminare alla formulazione di tesi filosofiche e alla loro fondazione, grazie alla quale Aristotele elabora compiutamente le sue dottrine più importanti; e la dialettica, intesa come metodo non rigorosamente dimostrativo, distinto dall'apodittica, ma con grandi potenzialità euristiche, come è per il caso dei principi e, in parte, della stessa dimostrazione della sostanza immobile. Rispetto al tema proprio della *Rehabilitierung*, la *phronesis* come forma di razionalità non scientifica che presiede all'ambito della prassi, Berti ha insistito sull'importanza, in contesti pragmatici, di un'ulteriore forma di razionalità, il metodo diaporetico-confutatorio, consistente nel confronto tra opinioni difformi, che porta, a partire da una situazione problematica e tramite un procedimento elentico, al prevalere di una tesi, sempre sulla base di un patrimonio di opinioni condivise (gli *endoxa* aristotelici). L'applicazione di varie forme di razionalità, nella consapevolezza dei limiti propri di ciascuna di esse, consente di pervenire a verità consistenti e accessibili all'uomo.

Anche sul tema della verità Berti ha infatti preso posizione nel dibattito contemporaneo tra analitici e continentali, che ha avuto riflessi anche in Italia tra le opposte correnti analitiche ed ermeneutiche (cfr. *La ricerca della verità in filosofia*, 2014 e vari altri contributi). È possibile per Berti raggiungere qualche verità

accertabile con sicurezza e stabile nell'ambito di una filosofia concepita come 'metafisica', nel senso antico e aristotelico di un sapere distinto da altre forme di scienze, ulteriormente caratterizzata come metafisica 'debole', o ancor meglio, per distinguerla dal cosiddetto 'pensiero debole', come metafisica 'umile', in cui si conciliano unità e pluralità del vero: la prima nel senso hegeliano del vero come intero, la seconda nel senso della legittimità di interpretazioni differenti ma potenzialmente tutte in parte vere. Ancora una volta la lezione di Marino Gentile si coniuga qui con l'eredità aristotelica, opportunamente riattualizzata.

Questa connotazione primaria della metafisica nel senso di una risposta che trascende la domanda senza estinguerla va di pari passo, sul piano più strettamente storiografico, con la negazione della possibilità di intendere la metafisica di Aristotele nel senso di un'onto-teologia. Sul punto Berti è tornato a più riprese e in vari contributi, in particolare in un confronto critico con la tradizione interpretativa che va da Brentano e Natorp ad Heidegger, nonché ad altri interpreti del '900, sostenendo con vigore che la metafisica di Aristotele è piuttosto filosofia prima, cioè ricerca del primo tra i molti sensi dell'essere, al quale l'essere non si riduce. Il dio di Aristotele, il primo tra gli enti, non è l'ente per essenza, l'*ipsum esse subsistens* (poiché l'essere – come l'uno – non è essenza di nulla), ma è pensiero di pensiero, essendo il pensiero la forma più alta di vita di attività, di forma, di sostanza. Sempre sul tema del dio aristotelico, il motore immobile, va sottolineato un mutamento nel corso degli anni della posizione di Berti, che testimonia l'apertura e la disponibilità all'autocritica propria di uno studioso sempre pronto a tornare su argomenti ampiamente trattati e a rivedere le proprie posizioni. Dopo avere condiviso in più occasioni l'interpretazione tradizionale, risalente ad Alessandro d'Afrodizia e consolidata nel '900 da Ross, secondo cui la causalità del primo motore è di natura finale, Berti è successivamente pervenuto a sostenere l'attribuzione al motore immobile di una causalità di tipo efficiente-cinetico, interpretando in modo nuovo gli elementi testuali su cui si appoggia l'interpretazione tradizionale e ricostruendone le origini storiche per mostrarne l'infondatezza.

Se rimane vero che gli interessi di Berti sono stati prevalentemente rivolti all'ontologia e alla metafisica, non si possono non ricordare suoi vari contributi riguardanti tematiche attinenti alla bioetica o alle scienze, al corpo, all'ontologia della persona, di cui è qui impossibile offrire un elenco esaustivo. La produttività scientifica di Berti è stata, in effetti, impressionante (a un sommario esame, più di 40 volumi monografici, escluse le numerose traduzioni in lingue straniere, e circa 900 articoli), e non è possibile neanche tentare di offrirne una selezione ragionata, a parte i contributi la cui citazione in questa sede è servita a individuare un percorso intellettuale, e che ne danno solo una pallida idea. Le varie raccolte di

Studi aristotelici (1975) e *Nuovi studi aristotelici*, in molteplici edizioni rivedute e ampliate (2004, 2005, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012) contengono i contributi più importanti. Va però quantomeno ricordato che all'attività di ricercatore Berti ha saputo unire quella di divulgatore, particolarmente efficace in forza della straordinaria chiarezza di esposizione che lo ha sempre contraddistinto, confermandone l'eccellenza anche dal punto di vista strettamente didattico. Accanto a vari testi di manualistica scolastica, di ampia diffusione, contributi relativamente recenti quali *In principio era la meraviglia. Le grandi questioni della filosofia antica* (2007) e *Symphilosophiein. La vita nell'Accademia di Platone* (2012) si distinguono per la capacità di rendere accessibili anche i contenuti teorici più ostici senza mai banalizzare e senza alcuna concessione agli aspetti che, come alcuni sono portati a supporre, potrebbero fare facile presa sul grande pubblico.

A proposito della straordinaria produttività scientifica di Berti non può però in nessun caso essere passata sotto silenzio l'impresa della nuova traduzione della *Metafisica* di Aristotele per Laterza (2017), giunta in una fase della vita in cui non ci si aspetterebbe una prestazione di questo genere da uno studioso di quel livello e tanto più degna di nota in quanto l'attività di traduttore non era stata tra quelle da lui primariamente praticate sino a quel momento (cfr. comunque la cura del *Protreptico* di Aristotele, risalente al 1967, poi rivista e perfezionata nel 2000). Non si trattava, in questo caso, semplicemente di proporre un'ennesima traduzione che si aggiungesse a quelle esistenti, lasciandosi preferire per ragioni di vario genere. Certamente la traduzione fornita da Berti è, oltre che rigorosa, ben accessibile alla lettura, ma si distingue particolarmente per alcune proposte coraggiose e innovative. La novità sostanziale è rappresentata dalla scelta di basarsi principalmente sui manoscritti della famiglia *alpha*, a scapito di quelli della famiglia *beta*, influenzati in maniera decisiva, come riconosciuto dagli studi più recenti, dal commento di Alessandro di Afrodisia; scelta che offre molteplici sostegni testuali al rifiuto, già ricordato, della secolare interpretazione della metafisica aristotelica nel senso di una teologia razionale.

Del Berti aristotelico vanno ancora ricordati gli importanti contributi da lui forniti in vari *Symposia* aristotelici, sia come partecipante e relatore (fu sempre invitato e prese parte a quasi tutti gli incontri), sia come organizzatore ed editore (cfr. gli Atti dell'*VIII Symposium* sugli *Analitici secondi* tenutosi a Padova nel 1978, ed. 1981). È poi doveroso ricordare la presenza decisiva di Berti nel Comitato Scientifico della rivista *Elenchos*, fondata da Gabriele Giannantoni, per lungo tempo l'unica rivista di filosofia antica in Italia, nonché la sua partecipazione alle attività del Centro di Studio del Pensiero Antico del CNR, nel quadro di una internazionalizzazione che a partire dagli anni '80 del secolo scorso assicurò agli studi di filosofia antica italiani una posizione di sempre crescente rilievo.

A chiusura di questo breve ricordo di una delle figure più rilevanti del panorama storico-filosofico italiano del '900, è forse opportuno citare le parole dello stesso Berti a proposito di un tema decisivo già menzionato, capaci di illuminare aspetti che oltrepassano la dimensione puramente scientifica: “Il Dio di Aristotele potrebbe anche essere detto Spirito, dopodiché sarebbe difficile negare che esso possa essere un Dio a cui ‘l’uomo non può né rivolgere preghiere né offrire sacrifici’ o dinanzi al quale non può ‘né cadere in ginocchio pieno di riverenza’, ‘né produrre musica e danzare’. L’evangelista Giovanni, infatti, che per i credenti ha un’ autorità non minore di quella di Paolo di Tarso, riporta come parole di Gesù il detto: ‘Dio è spirito e quelli che lo adorano devono adorarlo in spirito e verità’.”

Douglas R. Campbell*

The Soul's Tool: Plato on the Usefulness of the Body

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Abstract: This paper concerns Plato's characterization of the body as the soul's tool. I take perception as an example of the body's usefulness. I explore the *Timaeus*' view that perception provides us with models of orderliness. Then, I argue that perception of confusing sensible objects is necessary for our cognitive development too. Lastly, I consider the instrumentality relationship more generally and its place in Plato's teleological worldview.

Keywords: body, Plato, *Phaedo*, soul, *Timaeus*

Plato believes that the soul uses the body for a variety of purposes.¹ For instance, in the *Timaeus*, the gods create the body as a vehicle for the soul (69c); in the *Cratylus*, the soul uses the body for language (400c); and, in the *Alcibiades*, the body is characterized as the soul's tool in general (128a–131a). This paper is focused on one respect in which the body is useful for the soul: perception. Perception is a special case because, as we shall see, it is *necessary* for the soul to achieve its perfection. Indeed, the soul needs the body, but not in a way that makes abandonment of the body any less desirable or possible: on the contrary, abandonment of the body is in every way desirable, and it is possible only after using the body in the right way.

Plato develops the language of ὄργανον ('instrument' or 'tool') as a way of characterizing the relationship between the soul and body. It marks an important moment in the history of psychology. After all, Aristotle's discussion of the soul's instruments in *Generation of Animals* is indebted to Plato's work.² Yet, it is understandable that the position gets disregarded in contemporary discussions of

1 All translations of Plato and Aristotle are my own. I have consulted the translations in the bibliography, such as Ross (1961), Barnes (1984) and Cooper and Hutchinson (1997).

2 The central passage is Aristotle's *Generation of Animals* II 4.740b25–34, where he explains that the nutritive soul uses hot and cold as its "tools" in causing growth, explicitly similar to the way that the products of art are made by the tools of the artist. See Freudenthal (1995) and Gelber (2020) for more on this passage.

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whether the mind is identical or reducible to the body. For Plato's position that the soul needs the body as a tool is inseparable from his teleological worldview: it tells us for the sake of what the soul is attached to the body.³ It is perhaps surprising, in light of pessimistic descriptions of the body as our tomb, that it can be useful for us too.⁴ The usefulness of perception highlights an important part of Plato's psychology: the body is both a tomb *and* a tool. Perception disturbs the soul by disrupting its motions, but it also can prompt the soul to contemplate the Forms.

In Section 1, I argue that the *Timaeus* presents perception both as a cause of psychic disorders and as a tool for correcting those disorders by providing us with models of orderliness. I then argue that perception of confusing sensible objects is necessary for our cognitive development too. I conclude by examining the *instrumentality* relationship more generally and its place in Plato's teleological worldview.

1 Perception: What It Is, and Its Advantages

Each episode of perception happens in two stages. For my purposes here, it is sufficient to say that in the first stage, an object external to us causes a disturbance to be conducted through our body (*Ti.* 43c1–3). In the second stage, the disturbance reaches the soul (43c4–d3). In the background of Plato's account of perception is the view that each of the four so-called elements is made up of polyhedrons. Fire, for instance, is composed of *tetrahedra*. This informs how the body perceives things as hot or cold. The fire in something hot acts on our skin by cutting and dividing it, entering our body then (*Ti.* 61e–62a). We perceive sourness when the earth in what we eat is rough against our tongues; the less rough, the tangier the taste (65d). Colors are analyzed as flames that flow from objects (67c–d). Odors are more complicated: we cannot smell any of the elements. Plato thinks that our nostrils are too narrow for earth and water but are too wide to properly capture fire and air (66d). Instead, we perceive only the transitions between the elements.⁵ Bodies produce odors when they decay, become damp, melt, or evaporate. In

³ An anonymous reviewer for *Elenchos* distinguishes between two kinds of tools: those which are *necessary* for the completion of a task and those which are unnecessary in the sense that the user could use something else to complete it. We might think of the discussions of hypothetical necessity and συναίτιον that occur in contemporary scholarship; see, for instance, Johansen (2020). For an instance of the latter kind of tool, see Pradeau (1998) on the marrow in the *Timaeus* and its relationship to the soul.

⁴ For example, see *Phaedo* 82e, *Cratylus* 400c, *Phaedrus* 250c, and *Gorgias* 493a.

⁵ Air, fire, and water transform into each other. Earth does not, since it is made out of cubes, and cubes cannot transform into the other polyhedrons.

general, when there is some transition between water and air, an odor is produced that *can* fit into our nostrils.

Plato does not talk about sense-data or sensory information being transmitted in these episodes. He talks instead of *motions*. For example, he speaks about more or less “penetrating” motions being produced by color-flames (68a–b). Sound is the percussion of air in the ear-canal, but hearing is the *motion* (κίνησις) that the percussion causes, which is transmitted from the head to the liver (67b–c).⁶ These motions seem to be transmitted through the blood. When Plato explains how the rational kind of soul is disturbed by perception, he says that the violent motions join with the “perpetually-moving stream” (τοῦ ῥέοντος ἐνδελχῶς ὄχετοῦ) in our body to reach and then stir the soul (43c–d). It might be at first be surprising, then, that the gods seemed to have designed the blood-stream exactly for this purpose: the gods connected the whole body with the veins so that no part of us was kept in the dark about what we perceive (77d–e).⁷

The motion that is conducted through the body reaches reason, whose circles have orbits that ideally are copies of the world-soul’s, and then throws them off-course (43d–44a). Perception exists as one cause of psychic disorders, alongside nutrition, bile, and phlegm. Yet, on the other hand, perception occupies a unique and perhaps unexpected status among these causes. For it seems that the gods deliberately created our bodies as capable of perception. This is not true of, say, nutrition: we need to nourish ourselves because the gods were incapable of furnishing us with a less needy body. In designing our bodies, the gods made certain concessions to necessity, but making us capable of perception does not seem to be one of them. For the gods deliberately designed our bodies with this in mind: consider that in the *Timaeus*, some perceptions are *good* for us. See the following passage:

The god invented sight and gave it to us in order that we might observe the revolutions of intelligence in the heavens and apply them to the revolutions of our own thought, since there is an affinity between them (*Ti.* 47b–c).

The same idea recurs throughout the dialogue: we must “correct the motions in our head that were corrupted at the time of our birth by learning the harmonies and revolutions of the cosmos” (90d). Perception is as useful for us as it is dangerous,

⁶ See Lautner (2005) for a larger discussion of the mechanics of hearing in the *Timaeus*.

⁷ This is borne out by the way blood-vessels are present in every perceptive part of the body. Our tongue’s “tasting instruments” are, in fact, blood-vessels and extend to the heart (65c–d). Sound is the percussion of air that hits not just the brain and ear but also the blood (67b). One might interpret 67b differently and argue that not every sound has to be transmitted to the soul by means of blood but instead that the percussion of air strikes the brain and is transmitted to the soul directly without the mediation of blood.

but it is easy to miss this. Brisson (1997, 166), for instance, says “the contemplation of the universe and, above all, of the celestial movements is supposed to preserve the excellence of the soul. Otherwise, sensation may transform the soul into something bad.” He sets up a contrast between contemplation of the universe and sensation – but in such passages as 47b–c, the relevant kind of contemplation is an instance of sensation. It might at first be tempting to think that astronomy in the *Timaeus* is metaphorical for contemplation of the intelligible, especially following crucial passages in the *Republic* (e.g., 529) where Plato denigrates empirical astronomy and takes up something more philosophical.⁸ Yet, this line is not consistent with what he says about the invention of *sight* or with the reason we are reborn as land animals with heads close to the ground.

So, perception plays an important role in restoring our soul’s orbits back to their original condition, but it also was a culprit in ruining those orbits in the first place.⁹ The reason why perception is both dangerous and useful to the soul has to do with how reason responds to the perception-motion. Let us consider the case of sight. There is a visual stream that is the coalescence of the fire from our body and the fire from an external object and that is transmitted through our eyes; this perception-motion transmission is then conducted through the blood and reaches the soul.¹⁰ The damage to our soul is done when the motion strikes the circles of the same and different that are spinning around inside our heads. There is nothing useful about that: it is a purely destructive event. What comes next might help us, though. If what we have observed are the heavenly bodies, then awareness of their motions will help us imitate them in our own lives (47b–c; 90d).

There is a sense in which this claim is what we would expect Plato to say. The *Timaeus* also says that we care for our body by making it like the cosmic receptacle: we must always keep it moving to keep it in good shape (88c–d). Assimilation to the structure of the cosmos is a central idea in the *Timaeus*. The world-soul is a

8 We could, however, see something like this distinction at *Ti.* 91d, where people are punished in the cycle of reincarnations for relying too heavily on empirical astronomy. Ultimately, I think this can be explained by considering, as we shall see below, that relying on sensation is an important *step* in our cognitive development, and the people who will be reborn as birds, according to *Timaeus*, are considerably more advanced in their development than people reborn as land animals or shellfish, but their problem lies in having spent too much time at the level of empirical study. An anonymous reviewer for *Elenchos* points out that we might be able to understand the apparent disagreement between the *Timaeus* and *Republic* on this point in terms of the dialectical contexts and the identity of the speaker; specifically, consider that *Timaeus* is said to be the “best astronomer” (ἀστρονομικώτατον) and is accordingly well-disposed to empirical astronomy.

9 Of course, perception certainly makes other contributions to our embodied lives as well, such as it enables us to get around reliably and survive.

10 I disagree with Fletcher (2016) 432 when she says that “*Timaeus* does not associate sight itself with any of the negative effects attributed to αἴσθησις elsewhere in the dialogue.”

model for our own souls, so it makes even more sense in this case for the latter to imitate the former. When scholars note the importance of observing specifically the heavenly bodies, they are indisputably getting at an essential part of the dialogue's ethics. However, when they say that observing the celestial bodies is the *only* way for perception to be useful for us, they make a mistake, and it is a mistake that obscures something difficult about the usefulness of perception.¹¹

The gods invent hearing for the same reason that they invent sight: it is so we can restore the order in our souls. Here is what Plato says:

We can give the same account of sound and hearing [as was given concerning sight]: they have been given by the gods for the same reason and for the sake of the same goal. For speech was designed for the same purpose, and it makes the greatest contribution in achieving it. As much music that uses audible sound is also given for the sake of harmony. Harmony, when it has an affinity to the motions in our souls, was given by the Muses not to the one who uses it for irrational pleasure, which people nowadays think it is useful for, but to the one who uses it with intelligence, as an ally in restoring the orbits to an unharmonious soul and bringing it into symphony with itself. Rhythm has been given to us too as assistance on account of the disorderliness and the lack of grace in the conditions of most of us (47c–e).

Remarkably, one could read this passage and forget that hearing is *also* a cause of the disorders that the Muses want to correct by giving it to us. We learn here that we can restore the harmony of our soul not only by observing the heavenly bodies but by listening to orderly sounds. This passage still supports the view that the objects of useful perception are *examples* we should follow in restoring harmony, and these objects are not restricted to the heavenly bodies. There is more going on here. The claim that speech is the most useful part of hearing means not only that we hear other people's speech as orderly examples we should follow, but also that hearing speech prompts *us* to be orderly in *our* speech. Conversations do not merely provide a model for us to follow but, additionally, require us to impose some order on our thoughts when participating.¹²

This passage about hearing complicates the picture on which it is perception specifically of the heavenly bodies that is useful for us. That picture was initially attractive because the motions of the heavenly bodies are the same motions we should restore in our own soul. The passage about hearing forces us to widen the account to include all cases of orderly objects of perception, which explains why hearing and sight are the two senses most privileged by Plato. However, the

¹¹ E.g., Fletcher (*ibid.*): "However, it is through sight, and *in no other way*, that human beings are able to perceive and appreciate the order of the universe ..." (emphasis added). As we shall see, hearing is also a way of perceiving order.

¹² Consider also the *Republic's* views about the mixo-Lydian and syntono-Lydian musical modes on our development (398e).

problem that will occupy us in the next section is that Plato throughout the corpus argues that the perfection of our soul depends on observations of *confusing and disorderly* sensible objects. The *Timaeus* is exceptional by stressing perception of order, but there is a moment where Plato shows that this other view is present here, too:

For this reason, we must distinguish between two kinds of causes: on the one hand, the divine; on the other hand, the necessary. As for the divine, we must search for it in all things for the sake of possessing a fulfilling life (εὐδαιμόνωνος βίου), as much as it is possible for our nature. We must search for the necessary for the sake of the divine, since we have determined that, without the necessary, the divine causes, about which we are serious, cannot be understood or partaken of on their own (*Ti.* 68e–69a).

We must investigate the necessary before we can understand the divine.¹³ The divine in the *Timaeus* includes the heavenly bodies: elsewhere, we are told that we should imitate the motions of the god (47c) and that our happiness depends on it (90c–d); this is consistent with Plato thinking that the created world is a god (34b, 92c). This passage widens the scope of objects that we must perceive beyond just the orderly. One of the aims of 68e–69a might be to explain why so much of the dialogue is dedicated to discussions of necessity. Whereas the appeal of studying the orderly cosmos is natural to someone who strives to imitate that order, it is harder to see why we would have to study the necessary. Looking first at the theory of recollection and then the *Republic*'s account of summoners will shine some light on how perception of disorderly objects can be useful.

2 Recollection and the Need for Perception

Recollection is described in the *Phaedo* as the process whereby we come to have in mind a Form by perceiving things that strive to be, yet fall short of being, that Form.

¹³ Strange (1999) 406 argues that the reason why we have to first pursue the necessary is that “Necessity is prior to Reason in the order of discovery and, at least within the framework of creation story, of time, since it ‘precedes’ Reason’s creation of time.” I do not see how priority in time would *explain* this idea, though. Plato is presenting a radical thesis: we have to study the cosmic principle that is responsible for disorder and chaos in order to discover the divine and achieve our happiness; this comes after forty pages of saying that we should ignore the sublunary world and imitate the superlunary. Necessity, in fact, undoes God’s effort to order the cosmos in the *Statesman* (269d). It should not be lost on us that Plato argues there is a development: first, we study the necessary; then, we study the divine and are happy. This is important for the connections I draw to other accounts of our cognitive development in the corpus (e.g., the theory of recollection, and the *Republic*'s account of summoners) below. See Morrow (1950), and Mason (2006) for more on necessity and chaos in the *Timaeus*. See Carone (2004) on the *Statesman*'s myth.

At the heart of the theory is our ability to recognize objects as, say, beautiful or just, despite that this ability could not have been acquired while embodied.¹⁴ After years of philosophical training, an expert might be able to even explicitly compare sensible objects with the Forms that they fall short of, thinking “what I see wants to be like something else that exists but falls short and is unable to be like that thing” (74d).¹⁵ This knowledge cannot have come from perception because we never perceive the other object in the comparison, the Form. What we encounter are only the deficient sensible objects that want to be like the Forms. This fits with the dialogue’s opening denouncement of perception as deceptive and affirmation that the Forms will be grasped only by those who approach them without the body and with reason alone (65–66).

Yet, that opening denouncement does not seem to fit with how important perception is in the process of recollection.¹⁶ Plato’s discussion of equal sticks and stones brings this to light vividly.¹⁷ There, he says: “as long as when you *see* one thing, you have something else in mind, whether similar or dissimilar, it would necessarily be recollection” (74d–e; emphasis mine).¹⁸ On the one hand, we recover the knowledge we lost at our birth by “using our senses” (ταῖς αἰσθήσεσι χρώμενοι) (75e). On the other hand, philosophers can grasp the Forms only when “not dragging perception into their reasoning at all, and when they are using their pure thought itself by itself” (αὐτῆ καθ’ αὐτὴν εἰλικρινεῖ τῆ διανοίᾳ χρώμενος) (66a). Let us for now note this problem, and we will return to it shortly.

The theory of recollection is also presented in the *Meno*, where it is developed as a theory of learning that escapes Meno’s paradox.¹⁹ The paradox is that we

14 Cf. Kelsey (2000) 118: “The basic idea is that if we use a certain piece of information in circumstances in which that information cannot be acquired, we must have acquired that information before we came to be in those circumstances.”

15 Scott (1995) 60 and Ackrill (1973) 194–5 make a lot of the first-person pronoun here.

16 Bedu-Addo (1991) discusses this problem at great length. The solution proposed there is that there are, in fact, two kinds of recollection in Plato’s dialogues. I do not think we need to make such a distinction to explain it, as we shall see.

17 See Sedley (2007), and Ademollo (2007) for thorough studies of this passage.

18 There are further questions, such as whether perception is a *necessary* part of recollection, since this passage is saying only that recollection *is* triggered by perception. See Osborne (1995) 221ff. for an argument that recollection is always triggered by perception. Much depends on whether the diagram shown to the slave-boy in the *Meno*, discussed briefly in the main text below, is an essential part of that episode. Modrak (2006) 134 thinks that the inclusion of the diagram shows us only “that perception in concert with reasoning may be a tool for recognizing the truth.” Irwin (1974) 769 n. 4 denies that the diagram is essential and that the *Meno*’s episode is at all empirical. Vlastos (1965) 147–8 and 151–2 thinks that the episode is empirical, but that perception still is not essential. I think that the diagram *is* an essential part of the *Meno*, but in the following section of this article, we will further explore the place of mathematical objects.

cannot search for either what we know or what we do not know (80d–e). If we know it, then there is no need to search for it. If we do not know it, then we do not know what to look for. The theory of recollection is proposed to explain the possibility of *de novo* inquiry – precisely by denying that it is *de novo*. We begin with some latent awareness.²⁰ The process of recollection in the *Meno* is illustrated by a question-and-answer session, rather than by an episode of perception triggering the recollection, as we might expect from the *Phaedo*.²¹ Still, perception *does* play an important role: the visual diagram that Socrates and the slave-boy use is present for a reason. Some scholars have denied this to the point that they believe the inclusion of the diagram is evidence that the slave-boy is conducting the inquiry improperly.²² However, I think that it is a desideratum of interpretations of the *Meno* that they paint generally the same picture as the (perception-dependent) one in the *Phaedo*. For the *Phaedo* refers to the *Meno* when it comes to recollection. In the former, Cebes and Simmias are familiar with the theory of recollection, and the text seems to implicitly call back to the earlier dialogue or perhaps even draw upon the same Pythagorean or Orphic source (72e–73b). When Socrates is reminding Simmias about the theory, he even says that perception triggers recollection (73c). To say that perception is not a feature (or even that it is a *bug*) of the theory in the *Meno* generates an inconsistency at a point in the corpus when Plato clearly relies on consistency and familiarity.

Perception is important, but the theory of recollection is built on the impossibility of explaining our cognitive lives if we think we had *only* perception.

19 Many commentators on the *Meno* have denied that we do need recollection to solve the paradox, but I am taking it as uncontroversial that Plato himself disagrees. For examples of this trend, see Taylor (1956) 135–6; Shorey (1965) 157; Klein (1965) 92; Philips (1965) 78; Eckstein (1968) 29–30; Grube (1935) 12; and Weiss (2012) 49–76. On the other side, see Hansing (1928); Gulley (1954) 194–5; Moravcsik (1970) 53; Irwin (1974) 753; White (1974) 289; Nehamas (1985) 29; Kahn (1996) 159–61; Dancy (2004) 221–36; Scott (2006) 87–94; Charles (2010) 128; and Benson (2015) 50. See also Gerson (1999) for an analysis of the recollection argument.

20 It is not stated outright what the awareness is of. Cf. Gulley (1962) 19, who says there is “no explicit association between recollection and ‘forms’, and no evidence in that dialogue that Plato had given any consideration to the question of the metaphysical status of ‘forms’ as contrasted with particulars.” Whether Plato really was unaware of the Forms depends on the date of the composition of the *Meno* and whether Aristotle’s testimony regarding Plato’s development is credible. See Bedu-Addo (1983) 229–30 who defends that Plato had already formulated the theory of Forms by the time of the *Meno*.

21 I do not have the space to consider here the *Phaedrus* but see especially 250b–d.

22 See Brown (1967) 63 and 66, who says that Plato presents the visual diagram “critically, as a sophistic counterfeit of geometry, a kind of ocular geometry” and that “it makes some difference whether the square in question is sensibly present to the men working out the argument. Such a consideration is foreign to the mathematical argument as such; ‘the square itself’ is what is being argued about, not this or that square ‘present to us’.”

Instead, the *Phaedo* claims that we acquired knowledge of the Forms of justice, beauty, and so on, before we were born, lost it at the moment of our birth, and then ought to spend our lives recovering it (75c–e). The *Meno* and *Phaedrus* back this claim up. In the former, Socrates appeals to what he has heard about the soul’s immortality and the afterlife from priests (81b–e). In the latter, Socrates tells a complicated myth on which disembodied souls move in the circles of the gods in chariots and try to glimpse the Forms: those who see them can enter into a human body, and during their lifetime, they can use “reminders” of the Forms to recollect what their souls saw before they were born (249a–250b).

I take it that the heart of the theory of recollection is captured by the *Meno*’s claim that the “truth of the things that are (τῶν ὄντων) is always in our soul” (86b).²³ We are meant to use perception to trigger the process of recovering these things, and this is not foreign to the *Timaeus*’ idea of restoring our original condition: there is something buried in us that we ought to recover. The *Timaeus* left the usefulness of perception at the notional level, whereas the theory of recollection develops it at greater length, but we are left with a question that we briefly explored earlier in this section: it is not clear how perception manages to do this, especially following the denouncement of perception earlier in the *Phaedo*. Scholars have puzzled over this for decades.²⁴ Hackforth (1955, 75), in fact, responds by denying that perception is what triggers recollection. Gulley (1954, 199) argues that the “inconsistencies are due to Plato’s failure to realize the full implications of [the theory of recollection].”²⁵ I will argue in the next section that there is no tension or inconsistency at all: perception is useful for restoring the correct condition of the soul, or (equivalently) for facilitating recollection precisely *because* its objects are deficient, which is why perception is denounced in the *Phaedo*. This account is meant to add to the *Timaeus*’ discussion: *Timaeus* focused on orderly objects, whereas the *Phaedo* and, as we shall see, the *Republic* focus on disorderly objects.

23 Cf. Kahn (2006) 130–1 for a similar identification of the heart of the theory of recollection: “if we separate out the myth of reincarnation, the prosaic thesis of recollection reduces to [...] the claim] the truth of beings is in the soul.” See also Leibniz’s *Discourse on Metaphysics* §26 (Leibniz 1991), where he says he would endorse the theory of recollection so long as it was “stripped of the myth of pre-existence.”

24 For example, see Bluck (1955) 62–3; Morgan (1984); and Bedu-Addo (1991) 27ff (“Socrates claims, apparently in flat contradiction to what he has just said about the worthlessness of the senses to the philosopher in his pursuit of knowledge, that, in fact, it is only through sense-experience [...] that we recollect the Forms”).

25 Cornford (1952) 51–2 and (1957) 5–6 makes virtually the same move.

3 Summoners

The pivotal text for us is the discussion of the summoners (τὰ παρακαλοῦντα) in *Republic* VII (522–525).²⁶ These are objects (or, more precisely, properties that objects have) that summon our understanding by confusing the soul. For example, one finger might be longer than a second finger but shorter than a third. Our soul would be confused by the combination of shortness and length in one and the same finger: the finger in question is both short and long. In contrast, the property of *being a finger* is not a summoner since a finger does not appear to the soul to *also* not be a finger in the way that it appears to be both tall and short. These perceptions are “adequate” (ἰκανόν) (523b). Plato thinks that a discussion of summoners is crucial for understanding the soul’s cognitive development in the *Republic*, which portrays education as a reorientation of the soul. Summoners accomplish just this reorientation. There is, however, a difficult question of *what* summoners summon. Socrates gives an array of answers: they summon our νοῦς (523d4, 523d8, and 524b4), our διάνοια (524d2), and our λογισμός (524b4).

The abundance of answers reflects the variety of possible summoners. Summoners help our soul move upwards on the divided line. There, the lowest category is imagination (εἰκασία), then belief (πίστις), then thought (διάνοια), and the highest is reason (νοῦς). Our soul can be summoned from, say, belief to thought or from thought to reason, but the summoners in each case will be different. Someone who has stagnated at the level of πίστις might be confused by sensible objects and have their διάνοια summoned, but someone who has graduated to διάνοια would be confused not by sensible but by mathematical objects, which would summon their νοῦς instead.²⁷

The *Republic*’s discussion bears this out: Plato spends more time discussing mathematical summoners than sensible objects. He initially defines summoners in

26 By presenting the account of summoners in following up the theory of recollection, I am not supposing that summoning is identical to recollection. The two theories are just similar enough that they are useful for discovering how perception of deficient objects can improve our cognition. However, I do want to resist claims such as Mohr (1984) 34’s that “there is no explicit mention or even a hint of the doctrine of recollection in the *Republic*.” Something *like* the theory of recollection is cryptically suggested at 498d: Socrates hopes Thrasymachus will remember their conversation in a future incarnation. The myth of Er too relies on the possibility of remembering things from previous lives (619–621b).

27 The relationship between the objects of διάνοια and νοῦς is unclear and enigmatic. At times, Socrates speaks as if the difference between the two modes of cognition relies on their methodology (i.e., the two modes have the same objects but in the former, the objects’ existence is merely hypothesized, and in the latter, they are discovered non-hypothetically) (510b), but other times, he speaks as if the two modes have distinct objects (e.g., 511c).

terms of perceptions but then uses that schema to understand how to reach the highest mode of cognition, which first requires a lengthy study of mathematics.²⁸ For most of the time that someone is enrolled in Plato's education system, they will have already turned towards mathematics and away from the sensible world, which explains why the focus in this section is on mathematics. The phenomenon of summoning is clarified by sensible objects, which are more obviously contradictory in nature than mathematical objects are. Summoning is said to occur "whenever perception no more presents one thing than its opposite" (523c).²⁹ The example of a finger being long and short, or of Helen of Troy being beautiful and ugly, illustrates this well (525a). The conclusion that Plato draws from this is that the art of calculation is essential for the philosophers-in-training because it will lead their souls upward.

However, by focusing too much on the way that Plato plans to use summoners in his education system, we miss that the confusion that prompts summoning is ordinary. The text says that summoning can initiate our cognitive development: sight, for example, perceives big and small *together* in the same sensible object, which prompts us to reflect on how this can be, and it is "from these cases that it first (πρῶτον) crosses our mind to ask what the big is and what the small is" (524c). The more decisive evidence that the confusion is ordinary is that the properties Plato lists as examples are all ordinary: e.g., dark, pale, thick, thin, hard, and soft (523e). The fact that there are also complicated mathematical properties such as one and unlimited reflects that summoning is useful at multiple stages of our education, and the ambiguity of what is being summoned (e.g., νοῦς or διάνοια) captures this too.

28 Bedu-Addo (1991) 30 makes much of how long our cognitive development takes: "Plato has in mind two quite different types of recollection, namely (i) recollection as a *gradual process of learning* [...] and (ii) immediate recollection of Forms." (He thinks that the account of summoning in the *Republic* is the theory of recollection, perhaps dressed up a bit differently, but the same for all intents and purpose except that it is a different kind of recollection, one that takes longer). However, our cognitive development always takes a while in *every* dialogue. There is never an immediate grasp of the Forms: the process takes decades in the *Republic*, goes through multiple stages in the *Symposium*, and in the *Phaedo*, we cannot get knowledge of the Forms until we are dead; the process is life-long. The slave-boy in the *Meno* does grasp the answers to Socrates' questions quickly, but he does not have knowledge (85c–d) and his awareness is not of the Forms.

29 Another helpful account of summoners: "I define as summoners those things that impinge on the respective sense (αἴσθησιν) at the same time as their opposite, whereas reason is not stirred by those that do not" (524d). Given how much of the discussion of summoners is couched in the language of αἴσθησις, how there could be mathematical, non-sensible summoners might seem to be a problem. See Franklin (2012) 485–97 for a solution to this problem.

Yet, it does not follow from the ordinariness of the confusion that summoning happens frequently. The discussion of summoning begins with this remark about the art of counting:

It [that is, the art of counting] might very well be one of the subjects we were seeking after that lead to reasoning (νόησιν), but nobody uses it correctly, even though it is in every way suited for dragging someone towards being (523a).

If mere perception of something both big and small led to cognition of the Forms, then everyone would be a philosopher, so here Plato explains why very few, if anyone, have the highest kind of cognition: summoners are not being used to summon. This anticipates an important point, namely, that it is not the perception that is doing the work. It is the reflection prompted by the perception. Lovers of sights and sounds, for instance, are living as if in a dream (476c). The summoners might rouse them from this dream – and, indeed, the *Republic's* theory of cognitive development explains how this rousing happens – but it will not be because they perceive enough beautiful things. It will be because they reflect on how those things can be both beautiful and ugly.

It is in this context that Plato has been accused of misunderstanding how relations work.³⁰ The criticism is that Plato infers from 'x is beautiful in comparison to y' and 'x is ugly in comparison to z' that x is both beautiful and ugly and thus that the sensible world is filled with contradictions, and that this move is illegitimate. The problem is treating a relation as though it were a property. This criticism is mistaken, at least as far as concerns the discussion of summoners, and seeing how it is mistaken clarifies how summoners work. Plato's claim here is that perception presents a finger to us as, say, *thick*. The content of the perception is an unqualified report. We do not ordinarily perceive things *as bigger* than other things, unless we are perceiving one thing right next to another.³¹ Consider as well when we taste some food: we do not taste the food as *more* delicious than some other food. We taste the food as delicious. When Plato is talking about properties here, he is talking about them as perception reports them to us.

30 For example, see Russell (1945) 150, who inaugurates this critical tradition in the 20th century, but it seems that Aristotle had earlier developed a similar line of reasoning in the Περὶ Ἴδεῶν. The criticism is preserved in Alexander's commentary on the *Metaphysics* and is surveyed by, e.g., Owen (1965) and Rowe (1979).

31 Perceiving two things right next to each other is common. It happens, for instance, with fingers. In these cases, it is not the perception of, say, one finger that is salient; it is the simultaneous or near-simultaneous perception of multiple fingers that prompt the comparison. If we could isolate from the perceptual episode the perception of one finger, we would see that we are not making a comparison in that moment, considered in itself.

It is true that we can resolve the confusion caused by perceiving a finger as both big and small by specifying *in relation to what* (πρός τι). This does not mean that Plato is mistaken when he represents perception of bigness as perception of a property instead of a relation. In fact, the discussion of summoners requires that he not be making this elementary mistake. We are *supposed* to resolve the confusion by thinking about what perception tells us. We are *supposed* to specify πρός τι. This is the cognitive action that ought to follow confusing perceptions: we should think about the big and the small and use them to make sense of what we perceive.³² The criticism that Plato has treated a relation as a property does not hit its mark, for his point was that perception reports relations as properties, and the confusion that this generates is resolved by further reflection on how this works and, eventually, the Forms. It is precisely because the relational nature of, say, thickness or deliciousness is so unclear that our reason is *summoned* when the soul reflects on it. We need the Forms to make sense of what we perceive.

It is also unclear how we should understand perception's report that, say, this finger is big or this finger is small. Scholars have sometimes interpreted the position in this passage to be that perception alone, with no help from anything else in the soul, can make judgments.³³ This is usually paired with a view that Plato first distinguishes between perception and belief only in the *Theaetetus*.³⁴ This interpretation misreads Plato's vocabulary. His choice of verbs here matters: he will often speak of perception as *presenting* (δηλώω) two opposed properties. Perception presenting something to us does not entail that it has made a judgment, whatever that might mean. Yet, the other reading is correct that there *does* have to be a judgment here. Summoning is a description of a familiar moment: we are

32 Consider the final refutation of the view that knowledge is perception in the *Theaetetus*, during which Socrates gets Theaetetus to agree “that it is through touch that the soul perceives the hardness of that which is hard, and likewise the softness of that which is soft,” which I take to mean that perception detects certain relative properties but “that as regards their being, the fact that they are, their opposition to one another, and the being, again, of this opposition, the matter is different. Here the soul itself attempts to reach a decision for us by rising to compare them with one another” (186b). I interpret Socrates' point to mean that there are some things, in contrast, that the soul cannot detect through sensory organs, such as their being and the fact that their hardness and softness are opposed to each other; the soul has to compare them, independently of perceptual organs. This is in line with the point being made in the *Republic*: our soul has to make comparisons; perception does not.

33 Burnyeat (1976) and (1990) 58, as well as Sedley (2004) 113, are examples. Kahn (2006) 128 disagrees.

34 Adam (1902) 109 opposes this view by arguing that “the sort of contradictory judgments that are here ascribed to [...] αἴσθησις have already been attributed to δόξα in 479b–479e.” Cherniss (1957) 244 n. 71 argues that Plato always thinks that αἴσθησις is mere sensory awareness, and whenever he speaks like αἴσθησις makes judgments, this is just a loose, informal way of talking.

presented with something, make a judgment about it, and then think ‘wait, that cannot be right’, and then think through our initial judgment and confusion. The hope is that we end up in a better condition than where we started, and in the *Republic*, this is ensured by the regimented education system that guides our reflection and revision. If we do not make any judgments, we have nothing to think through. It just does not follow that perception alone is making the judgment, especially when Plato’s vocabulary does not suggest that.³⁵

Perception is useful for us because confusion (ἀπορία) is useful for us. There is something familiarly Platonic, or Socratic, about using ἀπορία as a constructive pedagogical tool. When we consider the character Socrates’s use of ἀπορία generally, we see that he tends to use it to *initiate* a process of learning.³⁶ Summoners are the first step. They provide a template for the kind of education that the ideal city’s guardians should receive. They might even provide a helpful way of thinking about Platonic dialogues. Some scholars have recently argued that the contradictions within and between Plato’s texts are not unlike the way that sensible objects are apparently contradictory, and that these contradictions are intended as prompts for us to think for ourselves.³⁷

It would be a mistake to think that *everything* we perceive is a summoner. I said above that there are so-called adequate sensible properties that are not always accompanied by their opposites, such as *being a finger*. Moreover, there is the discussion of model sensible objects in the *Timaeus* that we explored in the first section: the harmonies that we perceive in the cosmos and that we hear furnish us with a model for restoring our own disordered souls. We might even, for a moment, think that Plato is *optimistic* about the sensible world, but, in fact, his point is that our cognitive development is so important that we should use every tool at our disposal. Let us imitate harmonious music and the motions of the celestial bodies when we can. The ordinary person, however, will not be naturally disposed to see the celestial bodies as something we should or even can imitate at all. To get to that higher stage in our development, we should first be summoned by the confusion of the sensible world. The confusion is the way that perception harms us. The

35 An anonymous referee for *Elenchos* helpfully points out that we might think of this in terms of κρίσις (i.e., non-propositional *discrimination*). See Campbell (2021) for a discussion of κρίσις in plant souls in the *Timaeus*.

36 The Eleatic visitor in the *Sophist* talks about confusion and refutation in this way (230a–231a).

37 Byrd (2007) argues that the dialogues themselves are summoners. Reale (1997), among others, argues that the ἀπορία among the dialogues prompt the reader to think. It is important to both Reale and Byrd that the dialogues provide us with idealized conversations, such that when we revise our thinking, we have in front of us already a sound model for us to follow. It is possible that Plato’s own statements on the value of perception are meant to form a summoner, too.

invitation to think through the confusion, hopefully with guidance, is the way that it helps us.³⁸

4 The Soul's Instrument

Now that we have seen that perception is useful for our soul's perfection, we should discuss the body generally as the soul's instrument.³⁹ We need the body to be presented with sensible objects that trigger recollection in the *Phaedo*. We need the body so much, in fact, that we might forget that the reason we need the body in the first place is that *embodiment* disrupted our psychic functioning. At the end of the second section above, we saw that scholars have puzzled over how the *Phaedo* could value perception so little while also holding it up as the spark of recollection. Plato's reasoning makes sense if we view the disruptive moment in perception as *prior* to the constructive moment when we reflect on perception's confusions. Moreover, the larger point is that perception is *instrumental*. The discussion of summoners in the *Republic* advances this idea by speaking explicitly about *correctly using* ontological deficiency as a tool for our soul's perfection.

We know from the *Timaeus* that our bodies are created by the gods and that each part of our body achieves a purpose for us: the eyes, for example, allow us to see the heavenly bodies and thus do philosophy. Some of Plato's writings, though, give the impression that the soul itself is somehow responsible for the body being what it is. Indeed, there are times when Plato speaks like our soul determines our body in some specific, focused way. Consider the way that Thersites' soul "clothes itself as a monkey" in the myth of Er (*Resp.* 620c). Another example is living in a way that earns a reincarnation as a shellfish (*Ti.* 92b). The general principle is that we choose our own bodies, and thus that our soul and body are well-suited to each other. Thersites had lived such a buffoonish life by criticizing Agamemnon in the *Iliad* that he would never have chosen any other body: there is an appropriate kind

38 If space permitted, it would be fruitful to consider the way that perception and embodiment are essential to the accounts of cognitive development elsewhere in the corpus. Fierro (2019) explores, for instance, the role of the body in the *Symposium's* ascent to beauty. See also Bedu-Addo (1976, 1977) for more on the *Republic* on our development beyond the account of summoning. While perception figures in other accounts of cognitive development, it sometimes does so differently (i.e., not always the consideration of contraries, such as in the *Symposium*).

39 In addition to the passages identified at the start of this paper, consider the *Theaetetus*. At 184c, Socrates and Theaetetus agree that we do perceive things *through* our sensory organs (denoted by $\delta\acute{\iota}$ with a genitive object) rather than *by means* of them (denoted by the dative of instrumentality). The famous wooden-horse image at 184d explicitly confers to the sensory organs the status of instrument ($\acute{\omicron}\rho\gamma\alpha\nu\omicron\nu$), which, I think, bears out the discussion in this paper.

of *fit* between body and soul here. The body depends on the soul in the way that, if Thersites' soul had been different, so would his body be different.

That we have exactly the body that we need to have is what Plato captures by saying that the body is our tool or instrument. The eschatological and theological contexts here are essential. In the first section above, Plato argued that the gods gave us eyes so that we could see the motions of the heavenly bodies and apply them to the disordered motions of our own soul. This is a clear example of our having the body that we need to have. When we consider myths in which we ourselves choose our bodies (such as the myth of Er), we choose the bodies we *think* we need to have, in the sense of what bodies we think are good for us, whereas the human body constructed by the gods is the only one that is, in fact, useful for us. The body of a shellfish is a punishment precisely because it is not useful for us. Atalanta was a famous huntress who chose to be reborn as a man because she wanted the honors that she thought she could get only as a man (*Resp.* 620b). Agamemnon chooses to be an eagle because he hates humanity (*ibid.*). These are examples of people choosing bodies that they *think* they need: the bodies are useful for getting what they want out of life, whether that is honor or just avoiding being born by a woman, like the misogynistic Orpheus when he chose to be a swan (620a).

It is an interesting historical fact, then, that Aristotle in *De Anima* criticizes proponents of reincarnation for not developing a tight enough relationship between soul and body:

Something absurd follows for this account concerning the soul and for most others, for they attach the soul to the body and place it in the body without specifying the cause of this or what the body is like. However, this might seem to be necessary: for on account of their relationship (κοινωνία), one acts and the other is affected, and one moves and the other is moved, none of which belongs to (ὑπάρχει) things that just happen to be related to each other. But these accounts merely try to say what the soul is, without specifying the body that is about to receive the soul, as if it were possible, like the Pythagorean myths say, for the soul to be clothed in any body whatsoever. For each body seems to have its own distinct form and shape, but what they say is nearly the same as saying that carpentry could clothe (ἐνδύεσθαι) itself in flutes; for it is necessary that a craft use its tools (τοῖς ὀργάνοις) and that a soul use its body (I 3.407b14–27).

Plato is the target of this criticism. Firstly, there is the reference to the myth of Er: Thersites' soul clothed itself in the body of a monkey, which Aristotle thinks is almost as absurd as saying that carpentry could *clothe* itself in flutes. There cannot be such a mismatch between soul and body, the criticism says. Secondly, the words 'this account' in the first sentence single out Plato's psychology, especially in the *Timaeus*, which was the focus for the past few pages in the same chapter and which

Aristotle had named specifically as his target at the start of the round of criticism (I 3.406b26).

The criticism is that Plato and others who believe in reincarnation allow bodies and souls to be mismatched. A belief in reincarnation as other kinds of animals requires a belief that bodies and souls are so separable that a soul can go from being in the body of a human to being in the body of a monkey or a shellfish. Aristotle is not criticizing other theories on which a human soul will be reincarnated necessarily as a human again and again.⁴⁰ The first part of the criticism claims that Plato does not adequately explain the relationship (κοινωνία) between soul and body; there is, therefore, a lack in Plato's psychology.⁴¹ The second part is that, without specifying this relationship, Plato misses the fact that the soul uses the body like a craft uses its tools and that we cannot explain how the two move and affect each other.

I submit that Aristotle's criticism misses its mark: it might successfully undermine Pythagorean theories, which he also identifies as a target here, but it misrepresents Plato's psychology. The foregoing discussion of perception confirms that we have exactly the body we need to have: the body's perceptual capacities are designed for the soul's well-being. As well, the liver is designed to help reason rein in the appetites (*Ti.* 71a–b). The spleen exists as a napkin to clean up the liver (72c). The coiled intestines allow us to go longer without food, or else we would be such a slave to our appetites that doing philosophy would have been impossible (73c). The lower gods are carrying out the Demiurge's order that they "make our species as excellent [ἄριστον] as possible" (71d). The lower gods "bound organs inside the body out of complete forethought for the soul" (45b). Accordingly, we can point to every single constituent of the body with reference to how it serves our soul. The most interesting for us in this study has been the eyes, which let our soul perceive the heavenly bodies and so restore our soul's original condition. Aristotle is missing this *teleology* or *instrumentality*. Some scholars have claimed that at the heart of Aristotle's criticism is a complaint that Plato cannot explain why our souls do not end up in, say, a book.⁴² If this is the right interpretation, then Aristotle is missing the way that the gods have carefully designed

⁴⁰ Of course, Aristotle would be opposed to a theory of reincarnation on which a man is reborn as a woman or a slave is reborn as a free person. He would have other reasons, too, for criticizing reincarnation wholesale, but my comments here are directed at the specific criticism at the end of I 3.

⁴¹ I am endorsing what Shields (2016) 132 calls the "weaker reading" of the criticism, on which Aristotle is saying that the theories under consideration are incomplete, as opposed to the "stronger reading," on which they *cannot* explain how souls and bodies interact.

⁴² E.g., Shields (2016) 133: "We might think that an old leather-bound edition of Machiavelli's *The Prince* could come to bear the departed soul of Richard Nixon. Aristotle regards this sort of view as worthy of ridicule."

the system of reincarnation and the way that we choose our own bodies.⁴³ There is no randomness so long as we bear in mind the *teleology* of soul-body relationships.

I suspect that part of the disagreement is that Aristotle believes that one function of the soul is to manage the body, whereas Plato thinks that the body functions as the tool of the soul.⁴⁴ The various bodily systems were set up by the gods in order to serve the soul; the soul does not contribute to that. Of course, there is another class of bodies that our souls are *not* suited for in the same sense, even though we might end up in them: namely, animal bodies. There is no doubt that animal bodies frustrate the soul's activity much more than being born in a human body, but that is precisely the point. The gods have designed the system of reincarnation such that there is a perfect *fit* between soul and body yet again, but it is not a helpful, constructive sort of fit. Instead, it is punitive. A human is reborn as a shellfish whose "penalty for extreme stupidity is the extreme dwelling place" (92b). Another fate is being reborn as a land animal whose head is close to the ground because they did not spend the time as a human studying the cosmos (91e). It is not only that this is a punishment but that these are the bodies we *choose*: we choose to be a land animal by choosing to neglect the cosmos. Thersites chooses to be a monkey because he is just that buffoonish. He is suited for this body in the sense that it reflects who he has made himself, although his soul's proper activity is not served by this body. The gods have carefully provided for animal bodies as much as for human bodies, but the aim of the provision is different: instead of carefully stewarding the soul back to its original condition, animal bodies punish us for our choices.

It is for this reason that focusing on the *instrumentality* of the body for the soul is key. The ethical dimension of this relationship stresses that the body is something that our souls use and ought to use well. There is a protreptic quality to this account. The most important statement of this as Plato's position comes in the

43 On the final page of the *Timaeus*, Plato explains that "both then and now, living things change into each other in all these ways, as they change by having or losing reason or unreason (*ἀνοίας*)" (92c). The language of 'all these ways', just following a discussion of how the gods have made unthinking people become shellfish, and so on, makes it clear that reincarnation is not random and instead is a god-designed system with rules.

44 The soul manages the body for Plato only in the sense that it helps to take care of it (e.g., by means of exercise). *Timaeus* 88b–d implores us to care for the body in order that the soul might be able to do the work for which it needs the body, such as delivering a lecture. However, this turns out to be another way of talking about the body as the soul's tool: the body needs to be kept in sufficiently good condition in order to be useful for the soul. There is a cosmological sense in which the soul takes care of bodies too (cf. *Phaedrus* 246b and *Laws* 896e–897a), but this does not bear on the biological systems that the *Timaeus* is discussing, which exist for the sake of providing for the soul (cf. *Ti.* 45b).

Alcibiades (129e) at a point when Socrates is convincing Alcibiades to care for himself.⁴⁵ The body is not what we are, but it is our tool. There is something defective about a person who cares for the body as an end in itself or as his or her self, rather than caring for it as an instrument. People who use their soul to satisfy the needs of the body, instead of using the body to satisfy the needs of the soul, have made a great error. Plato does not have the worked-out vocabulary that would allow him to think about the soul-body relationship as necessary or contingent. What he settles on instead is a middle position of instrumentality: a relationship that is so tight that our body is as well-suited to our souls as possible but weak enough that we can aspire to the permanent separation of soul and body.

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⁴⁵ Another example is *Clitophon* 407e–408a.

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Aristotle on Efficient and Final Causes in Plato

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Abstract: In *Metaphysics* A 6, Aristotle claims that Plato only recognises formal and material causes. Yet, in various dialogues, Plato seems to use and distinguish efficient and final causes too. Consequently, Harold Cherniss accuses Aristotle of being an unfair, forgetful, or careless reader of Plato. Since then, scholars have tried to defend Aristotle's exegetical skills. I offer textual evidence and arguments to show that their efforts still fall short of the desired goal. I argue, instead, that we can reject Cherniss' assertion by re-examining Aristotle's exegetical and methodological assumptions.

Keywords: Platonic causes, Aristotle's criticisms of Plato, *Phaedo*, Aristotle's four causes, causality

Aristotle's four causes – material, formal, efficient and final – are one of his most famous and influential contributions to philosophy.¹ The origin of the conceptual distinction, however, remains rather obscure. If we believe Aristotle's account in *Metaphysics* A 3–10, previous philosophy supports his views on the number and nature of these causes but does so in an incomplete, unclear and often misguided manner. For example, Plato fails to properly explain the causal relation, recognizes only two types of causes (material and formal) and considers them in a problematic way.

But even a passing look at Plato's dialogues tells a different story. In various places Plato identifies and discusses the role of all the elements that constitute the basis for Aristotle's fourfold typology. Thus, even when they disagree about the

¹ I systematically translate αἰτία and its cognates with the term 'cause.' Beware, however, that the semantic field of αἰτία is broader than modern notions of cause and includes 'responsibility,' 'guilt,' 'blame,' 'fault,' 'accusation,' as well as 'reason,' 'explanation,' 'mode of explanation,' 'causation,' and 'causal account.' On this topic see Frede (1980), Vlastos (1969), Sedley (1998) 114–27, and Natali (2013).

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nature of the causes, it is difficult to understand why Aristotle would deny that Plato identifies the correct number of causes.

Modern scholars offer contrasting answers to this question.² After a detailed review of the relevant texts, Cherniss (1944) 450–67 accuses Aristotle of being an unfair, forgetful or careless reader of Plato, observing that his proposals make many of the mistakes he criticizes.³ Since then, scholars have defended Aristotle's exegetical skills. In some cases, the exoneration is only partial. Annas (1982), for example, shows that Aristotle's criticisms of Plato regarding efficient causes may not be based on the most charitable reading of the *Phaedo* but is not a misinterpretation. In turn, Johansen (2010) argues that despite first appearances Aristotle was justified in denying final causes in Plato's *Timaeus*. In contrast, Menn (2012) 2010–4 seems to clear Aristotle from all accusations. He suggests Aristotle's claim is not that Plato fails to recognize efficient and final causes in general, but rather that he does not use his first principles – the one, the great and the small – as final or efficient causes.

Even though I agree we should resist Cherniss' conclusions, Annas' arguments in support of Aristotle are insufficient for explaining his criticisms to Plato in *Metaphysics* A 6 – as she recognizes at the beginning of her paper.⁴ In the case of Johansen and Menn, I find their arguments ultimately unconvincing. First, because it seems undeniable that Plato distinguishes what Aristotle calls final causes in *Phaedo* and *Timaeus*. I will also supply compelling passages in *Symposium* and *Philebus* where Plato uses intelligent agents as productive causes and distinguishes the aim of their actions as a crucial feature of the causal account. Moreover, I shall show that Aristotle's interpretation of Plato in *Metaphysics* A 6 applies to causes in general. Finally, some of the arguments defending Aristotle depend upon his disagreements with Plato regarding the nature of causes. But these cannot be the reason he denies efficient and final causes in Plato; if so, he would deny Plato all causes.

The aim of this paper is to explain why Aristotle ignores passages that seem clearly to contradict his assessment of Platonic causes in *Metaphysics* A 6 – and doing so without having to throw Plato or Aristotle under the bus. After reviewing the evidence and previous attempts and arguments that might help to solve this

² Johnson (2005) 118 reminds us that the problem was already noticed in antiquity by Alexander (*In Metaph.* 59.28–60.2). Here I shall limit myself to the discussion occurring in modern scholarship.

³ For further criticisms of Aristotle's interpretation of Plato see Vlastos (1969) 303–5. For a more charitable take, see Steel (2012). See also Ross (1924) 176–7, 179 and (1936) 38.

⁴ Annas (1982) 312 acknowledges how surprising and odd are Aristotle's criticisms in *Metaph.* A 6 regarding efficient causes in Plato more generally, especially given passages in *Ti.*, *Phdr.* 245c–e, *Leg.* 891e and 896b, *Phlb.* 23c–31b, *Soph.* 265–266, and *Plt.* 270a–b, 273a–e.

problem, I propose a reinterpretation of the evidence and reflect upon Aristotle's exegetical and methodological assumptions. In a nutshell, when it comes to causation, it seems that Aristotle gives pre-eminence to arguments in the last part of the *Phaedo*, dismisses other passages as poetic metaphors, and his recognition of the number of causes requires not only identification at a conceptual level but also a consistent use of the causes.

The following presents how Aristotle describes the four causes and how *Metaphysics* A 3–10 offers an argument to justify his typology (Section 1). It then focuses on Aristotle's interpretation of Plato's causal theory (Section 2) and presents some of the Platonic passages that appear to contradict what Aristotle says in *Metaphysics* A (Section 3). Finally, it discusses previous arguments and strategies to explain *Metaphysics* A 6 and outlines my proposal to resist Cherniss' conclusions (Section 4).

1 Aristotle's Four Causes

Aristotle describes the four causes in various places. The original formulation appears in *Physics* II 3.194b23–195a3 (cf. *Metaph.* Δ 2).⁵ He says a cause could be 1) “that out of which a thing comes to be and which persists” (τὸ ἐξ οὗ γίγνεται τι ἐνυπάρχοντος), i.e. the material cause; 2) “the form or the archetype” (τὸ εἶδος καὶ τὸ παράδειγμα), i.e. the formal cause; 3) “the primary source of the change or rest” (ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς μεταβολῆς ἢ πρώτη ἢ τῆς ἡρεμῆσεως), i.e. the efficient cause; and 4) the “end or that for the sake of which a thing is done” (τὸ τέλος· τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶν τὸ οὗ ἕνεκα) i.e. the final cause.⁶ For Aristotle, these types of causes are four ways in which one can answer a “why?” or “because of what?” (διὰ τί) question that paves the way to acquiring knowledge (*Ph.* II 3.194b16–23). He also points out that a thing can result from several causes and some things can cause each other reciprocally, but only if taking into consideration a different sense (or type) of the cause or causes. In addition, the same thing could cause contrary results depending on its presence or absence (*Ph.* II 3.195a4–14). Aristotle's examples reveal the four types of causes are very broad, encompass various kinds of things, and depict various levels of generality and accuracy.

In *An. post.* II 11.94a20–23, Aristotle offers an interesting variation of the material cause: “if certain things hold [then] it is necessary for this [i.e., another thing] to hold [too]” (τὸ τίνων ὄντων ἀνάγκη τοῦτ' εἶναι). Jonathan Barnes (1975) 226–7 argues

5 See Natali (2013), who argues that *Metaph.* Δ 2 is a copy of *Ph.* II 3.

6 Transl. by R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye in Barnes (1991a). The four causes are also listed or discussed in *Gen. corr.* II 9, *Metaph.* α 2, *An. post.* II 11, and *Metaph.* A 3–7.

that the unorthodox formulation stands for a sophisticated and special case of the material cause. The problem with the standard formulation seems to be that simply citing the matter of something is not always explanatory. Barnes argues it is only when certain matter necessitates the effect that we can talk about a material explanation.⁷

Finally, Aristotle also specifies that, in a sense, the formal, final and efficient causes might often (but not always) coincide. For example, a man is the formal, final and efficient cause of another man in the sense that a man is the offspring of a man, and the end of the generation process is a man (fully developed) specified in terms of the form or archetype of a man (*Ph.* II 7.198a22–32).

In *Physics* II 3, Aristotle seems to make little effort to justify his fourfold distinction. It seems too quick when, after merely listing the four ways of speaking about causes, he immediately concludes “This then perhaps exhausts the number of ways in which the term ‘cause’ is used” (τὰ μὲν οὖν αἴτια σχεδὸν τοσαυταχῶς λέγεται, *Ph.* II 3.195a3–4).⁸ In his commentary to this chapter, Ross (1936) 37 famously complained that “we do not know how Aristotle arrived at the doctrine of the four causes; where we find the doctrine in him, we find it not argued but presented as self-evident.” He exaggerates, but it is still common to think, like Barney (2012) 73, that at least in *Physics*, “the system of the causes is more explained than argued for.”⁹

One might reply that Aristotle developed his doctrine from previous views (ἔνδοξα), either from everyone or from philosophers at the Academy.¹⁰ Charlton (1970) 99, for instance, argues that Aristotle does not justify the distinction because he is only referring to the everyday uses of ‘cause.’¹¹ This seems to be suggested, for example, by the uncompromising language Aristotle uses to introduce the four causes.¹² But this proposal is difficult to believe because, as Natali (2013) 51–7 notes, Aristotle’s causes leave out many common uses of the

7 I still wonder, however, whether the material cause of *An. post.* is just a special case of the material cause, as Barnes suggests, or a different, more nuanced formulation of the material cause altogether. For further details see Barnes (1975) 225–33.

8 See also *Ph.* II 3.195a26–27.

9 See also Hennig (2009) 137. The reason for not justifying the four causes as the only types of causes in *Physics* might also have a programmatic explanation. The study of nature needs to describe and make use of the four causes but the justification of the doctrine or system of the four kinds of causes might more properly belong to first philosophy. This also could explain why in *Metaph.* A we do not get a demonstration but an inductive and defeasible argument.

10 For the types of ἔνδοξα, see *Top.* I 1.

11 See also Irwin (1988) 95, 98.

12 See λέγεται at *Ph.* 194b24, 195a4 and *Metaph.* 1013a24 and σχεδόν at *Ph.* 195a3 = *Metaph.* 1013b4.

term αἰτία.¹³ Instead, Natali suggests that Plato's causal distinctions in *Timaeus* and subsequent discussion in the Academy could have paved the way for a discussion of many types of causes.¹⁴ Thus, he argues, by the time Aristotle proposes his list, he is not concerned with justifying the existence of many kinds of causes but with proving there are only the four he proposes.¹⁵ But even if the introduction of the four causes in *Physics* II 3 is compatible with this picture, we do not find there more than a meagre suggestion of the distinction's origin.

In contrast, others suggest that already in *Physics* I Aristotle develops his doctrine of the four causes. The idea is that the doctrine of the first principles – i.e., form, privation, and what underlies – provides the arguments for the distinction between matter and form and already hints at the efficient and final cause which Aristotle further develops in book II.¹⁶ But, although it is true that Aristotle distinguishes, develops or introduces each of these concepts in the context of discussing change and the order of nature, he does not present them there as a system of four types of causes, nor does he offers any argument for this conclusion.¹⁷

However, in *Metaphysics* A 3 (983a33–b5), Aristotle launches an explicit survey into previous philosophy to verify and support the number and causes he has identified in *Physics* II:

13 Mansion (1961) 40 also argues that in *Physics*, Aristotle makes an induction from language. She suggests, however, that it may be a combination of common language, philosophical language, and Aristotelian usage.

14 Aristotle refers to the four causes not simply as the way people speak of causes but as εἶδη (*Ph.* 195a27; *Metaph.* 994b28) or γένη (*Metaph.* 996a19).

15 In the second part of *Ph.* II 3 Aristotle distinguishes six modes of causation, and in II 4 he discusses whether chance and spontaneity are causes. Finally, in II 7, he concludes that there are no more types of causes than the four he proposes.

16 See, for instance, Politis (2004) 55 and Quarantotto (2018) 2. See also Lennox (2018), who argues that *Ph.* I 9 lays the ground for book II, but who explicitly accepts that book I does not answer whether the principles of change are also causes and elements (Lennox 2018, 244). In a similar line, see Bostock (1982). Even when *Physics* I and *Metaphysics* A have many parallels, Crubellier (2019) 56 also acknowledges that “in *Physics* I Aristotle does not consider the different kinds of causes, as he does in *Metaphysics* A – maybe just because this distinction has to be set out and explained in book II – which gives to *Physics* I a quite different character, although it seems to deal with the same sort of topics as *Metaphysics* A and uses much the same doxographical material.” For the relation between principles and causes, see *Metaph.* Δ 1.1013a17.

17 Even if we find much of the information required for the argument that there are four types of causes in *Ph.* I, Aristotle does not put together the pieces and argue for this conclusion there. Let me illustrate my point in the following way. It is one thing to distinguish red, yellow, and blue from each other, and even describe some of their properties, and another to argue that these are the three primary colours.

We have studied these causes adequately in our work on nature, however, let us call to our aid those who went to the investigation of being and philosophized about the truth before us. For obviously they too speak of certain principles and causes; to go over their views, then, will be of profit to the present inquiry, for we shall either find another kind of cause, or be more convinced of the correctness of those which we now maintain.¹⁸

The discussion of previous philosophers serves as a defeasible argument for Aristotle's classification. It shows how all previous proposals can be understood as incomplete and unclear ways to describe the types of causes found by Aristotle. Crucially, it shows that no one really introduces other kinds of causes. In *Metaph.* A 7 (988b16–18), Aristotle concludes the survey he began in A 3: “All these thinkers, then, as they cannot pitch on another cause, seem to testify that we have determined rightly both how many (πόσα) and of what sort (ποῖα) the causes are.”¹⁹ These last lines make clear that Aristotle's concern in *Metaph.* A 3–10 is to offer a reinterpretation of previous proposals through the lenses of his own conceptual distinction rather than just reporting their views. Notice that for his argument to work Aristotle must state that previous philosophy already recognizes, albeit imperfectly or vaguely (see ἀμυδρῶς at A 7.988a23), causes that fit into his fourfold schema and no other. The threshold for recognising these four types of causes in previous philosophers is set very low. With this in mind, let me now have a closer look at what Aristotle says about Plato.

2 Aristotle on Platonic Causes in *Metaphysics* A 6

Aristotle begins his discussion of Plato in *Metaphysics* A 6. The overall assessment is not especially heartening. The chapter downplays Plato's originality and takes a ruthless approach towards the weaknesses of his proposals. Aristotle's evaluation is brief and very general but also acute and sophisticated. Although one should be careful with Aristotle's interpretations and criticisms of other philosophers, it is also true that he tends to be very careful when discussing and ascribing views to Plato. Besides, since he studied in the Academy for two decades and read many of the dialogues, people often credit him as an especially important and reliable

¹⁸ All translations of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* by W. D. Ross in Barnes (1991b) with minor modifications. I take it that when Aristotle says, “we have studied adequately” (τεθεώρηται ... ἱκανός in A 3.983a33) the four causes, he means he has explained them not necessarily offering an argument to show there are only four types. This point is also made by Barney (2012) 73. I shall return to this passage in Section 4.

¹⁹ This, of course, does not mean that justifying the four causes is the only or main aim of *Metaph.* A 3–6. See Menn (2012) 202, 209. For a different take on why Aristotle only proposes four causes see Hennig (2009).

witness. For these very reasons his assessment of Platonic causes seems so startling.

Aristotle argues that Plato's philosophy develops from three main sources. The first is Cratylus and the Heraclitean doctrines. According to Aristotle, Plato agrees that all sensible things are in a perpetual state of flux and therefore there is no knowledge about them. But Plato also agrees with the teachings of Socrates who seeks the universal in ethical matters and tries to define them. As a result, since sensible things were always changing, the common definitions do not apply to them but do to entities of another kind, which he calls "ideas". The Pythagoreans are Plato's third source. Aristotle argues that Plato simply rebranded the Pythagorean notion of "imitation" (μίμησις), originally used to explain the relation between things and numbers, into "participation" (μέθεξις), claiming that sensible things exist by participation in ideas. He also agrees with the Pythagoreans that the one is a substance (οὐσία) and not a predicate of something else (and thus has an independent, separate existence).²⁰

Aristotle objects to many aspects of Plato's conception of causes, but I shall only mention two. First of all, Plato never really explains what he means by participation. According to Aristotle (and many contemporary scholars) forms are causes.²¹ Thus, not explaining participation amounts to not explaining the causal relationship at all. This leads to a two-world problem where we cannot find a causal connection between forms and their sensible participants.²² If the causal connection is missing, a serious epistemic problem also arises: knowledge of the forms becomes impossible given that it seems to require some causal relation between forms and us.²³

²⁰ See also *Metaph.* B 4.1001a4–12, where Aristotle claims that Plato and the Pythagoreans identify the one and being. Plato discusses the relation between the one and being in the second hypothesis of the *Parmenides* (142 b–155e). The passage establishes that if one is (ἐν εἰ ἔστιν), it must partake of being (οὐσία) (142b5–6), and from there the characters of the dialogue seem to derive the series of numbers and infinity. However, in the dialogues, Plato never identifies the one and being. On the contrary, in *Republic* VI (509b8–10), Plato distinguishes them by claiming that "the good is not being, but superior to it in rank and power" (οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ἀλλ' ἔτι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος). For detailed commentary on the first part of *Metaph.* A 6, see Steel (2012).

²¹ See, for example, Sedley (1998) and Bailey (2014).

²² As Johansen (2010) rightly notes, Aristotle is criticising Plato for similar reasons offered in the *Phaedo* against Anaxagoras.

²³ Plato himself discusses the epistemic problem in *Prm.* 133a11–135c4. Although he recognizes the gravity of the difficulty, some scholars think he offers a solution either in the second half of the *Parmenides* or in the *Sophist*. See, for example, Rickless (1988) and McPherran (1986).

The second objection – the one that most interests me – accuses Plato of using only two out of the four types of causes: the formal and the material. The text reads as follows (*Metaph.* A 6.988a7–17):

Plato, then, declared himself thus on the points in question; it is evident from what has been said that *he has used only two causes, that of the essence and the material cause* (δυσὶν αἰτίαις μόνον κέχρηται, τῇ τε τοῦ τί ἐστι καὶ τῇ κατὰ τὴν ὕλην) (for the Forms are the cause of the essence of all other things, and the One is the cause of the essence of the Forms); and it is evident what the underlying matter is, of which the Forms are predicated in the case of sensible things, and the One in the case of Forms, viz. that this is a dyad, the great and the small. Further, he has assigned the cause of good and that of evil to the elements (τὴν τοῦ εὖ καὶ τοῦ κακῶς αἰτίαις τοῖς στοιχείοις ἀπέδωκεν), one to each of the two, as we say some of his predecessors sought to do, e.g., Empedocles and Anaxagoras.²⁴

This passage concludes an argument that runs from *Metaph.* A 6.987b19–988a7. Interpretation of the entire argument is difficult because a brief outline of Plato's metaphysics mixes with comparisons to the Pythagoreans (*Metaph.* A 6.987b19–988a7). However, the main points of the passage are clear enough. According to Aristotle, Plato thinks that the one and the dyad (the great and the small) are elements of all things. The one is the cause of the essence of the forms, and the forms are the cause of the essence of everything else, while the dyad is the underlying matter of the sensible things and the forms. Even if Plato assigns the one as the cause of good (εὖ) and the dyad as the cause of evil (κακός), Aristotle takes them as formal and material, respectively, not as final or efficient causes. Thus, Aristotle concludes, Plato only uses two types of causes.²⁵

According to this picture, Plato becomes a perfect example of all that Aristotle finds problematic about previous discussions of causes. Even if he recognized two types of causes instead of only one, just like previous philosophers, Plato offers an incomplete and confused causal account. His successors in the Academy seem to have done, in Aristotle's view, nothing better. Thus, the narrative of *Metaphysics* A is clear: Aristotle seems justified in distinguishing four and only four types of causes. He is the first person to clearly distinguish them all and the first one to introduce the final cause. Philosophers are yet to discover causes that fail to fit into his fourfold typology. That, at least, is what Aristotle would like us to think.

²⁴ See also *Ph.* I 4.187a13–20. Aristotle makes similar remarks in his treatise *On the Good* (see Alexander, *In Metaph.* 55.20–56.35, 59.28–60.2, 250.17–20; Alexander *apud* Simpl. *In Ph.* 151.6–11; see also 453.25–30).

²⁵ Notice that Aristotle's argument is not about Plato's terminology but about his use (even in a vague or imprecise way) of the four causes (see κέχρηται at 988a9).

3 Plato on Efficient and Final Causes

Let me now briefly fact-check Aristotle. In various dialogues, Plato offers subtle and complex arguments discussing causation. The following points out some of the most relevant passages to contrast with Aristotle's assessment. This, I believe, will suggest that Aristotle's assessment is a bit hasty, unfair or inaccurate. I shall come back to save Aristotle from those accusations later. But for now, and if we agree to anachronistically apply conceptual distinctions to past philosophers as Aristotle does, then there is no reason to think Plato only recognizes two out of the four types of causes.

In various places, Plato discusses and distinguishes what Aristotle calls efficient causation: a cause that initiates movement and generates or destroys sensible particulars. Although in some places Plato seems to attribute this causal power to forms,²⁶ in others he talks about intelligent, divine and human craftsmen that, provided they have all the prerequisite means for acting, produce most of what can be seen in the cosmos. In the *Phaedo*, for example, Plato distinguishes between the real causes of generation and destruction and the necessary means for something to be a cause (*Phaedo* 99a5–b4):

If someone said that without having such things – bones, sinews and whatever else I have – I wouldn't be able to do what I have decided, he'd be telling the truth. However, saying that it is on account of them that I do what I do, rather than because of my choice of what is best, despite the fact that I act because of intelligence – that would be a profoundly careless way to talk. Imagine not being able to make the distinction that the real cause is one thing, while that without which the cause could never be a cause is something else!²⁷

Plato distinguishes between material prerequisites (bones and sinews), an intelligent agent (Socrates), and the agent's choice of what is best (refraining from running away, i.e., the goal of an action). You may object that the passage in the *Phaedo* happens before Socrates announces his famous 'second voyage' which we know Aristotle understands as restricting causes to forms only. But in *Timaeus* we also read that without the agency of some cause it is impossible to explain generation and destruction. The paradigmatic example of this type of cause in *Timaeus* are not forms but a divine intelligent craftsman (see *Ti.* 28a4–b1):

²⁶ See *Phd.* 100d6 and *Hp. mai.* 297a–c. For interpreters who defend that forms are productive causes, see, for example, Fronterotta (2007) and (2010) 16–9, Natali (2003), and Ferrari (2003). I discuss Aristotle's criticism of this possibility in Section 4.

²⁷ Translations of *Phaedo* by Sedley and Long (2011).

Now everything that comes to be must of necessity come to be by the agency of some cause, for it is impossible for anything to come to be without a cause. So whenever a craftsman looks at what is always changeless and, using a thing of that kind as his model, reproduces its form and character, then, of necessity, all that he so completes is beautiful.²⁸

Later in *Timaeus* 46c7–e6 and 68e6–69a7 Plato speaks only of two types of causes – the divine and the necessary. Although the latter reminds us of the material cause (especially as formulated in *An. post.*), the former refers not to forms but the productive agency of the divine, intelligent demiurge.²⁹ This divine cause is closer to Aristotle’s efficient cause than to formal causation. Moreover, the intelligent agency of the demiurge aims and produces what is beautiful and good (καλῶν καὶ ἀγαθῶν at 46e4).³⁰ So even if the good, in the sense of that for the sake of which a thing is done, is not called a type of cause, Plato distinguishes it as a crucial element in the causal account. Thus, even if the twofold classification of causes in *Timaeus* expresses Plato’s final thoughts on the matter (which would be a highly contentious claim), it would still be problematic to say, as Aristotle does, that he fails to use and recognize the efficient and final cause, at least imperfectly.³¹ But perhaps this evidence alone is insufficient to let Plato off the hook. You may complain that the demiurge in *Timaeus* is not meant literally, and thus cannot be counted as an efficient cause. But other passages make the same point.

One of the clearest pieces of evidence is *Philebus* 23c–27 b.³² There, Plato’s Socrates argues that an efficient cause is clearly distinct from other basic ontological kinds. In the passage he distinguishes four kinds of things. The first two are the unlimited and the limited. The third one – a mixture of the first two – stands for generated things (*Phlb.* 16d, 23c). But Socrates also notices the need for a fourth kind (*Phlb.* 23c12–d8):

²⁸ All translations of *Timaeus* by Zeyl (2000).

²⁹ See also *Ti.* 46c7–e6 where Plato talks about “auxiliary causes”, and *Ti.* 47e–48a where he refers to “the Straying cause.” As I understand it, these are the roles taken by necessity. When the primary cause, namely the soul or intellect, persuades necessity, it plays an auxiliary role. However, if deserted by intelligence, it produces “haphazard and disorderly effects” which are called the straying cause. Apart from the two causes, the receptacle also seems to have the capacity to have causal interactions. In this case, however, the receptacle is only reactive to the activity introduced by the different powers present in it. Plato never calls it a cause, but it is a required element in a full causal account of the cosmos (see *Ti.* 49a–53b).

³⁰ *Ti.* 75d5–e2 suggests that in this context, what is beautiful and good consists in accommodating what is necessary and what is best: “Our makers fitted the mouth out with teeth, a tongue and lips in their current arrangement, to accommodate both what is necessary and what is best.” Theophrastus’ interpretation of Plato seems to follow this passage closely. See below footnote 60.

³¹ Remember that Aristotle’s criticism is not that Plato failed to properly label the four causes but that he only used two of them (see δυνοῖν αἰτίαι μόνον κέχρηται ... at 988a7, quoted in Section 2).

³² See, among other examples, *Soph.* 265c, and *Resp.* 530a5–7.

Socrates: Let us now take these as two of the kinds, while treating the one that results from the mixture of these two as our third kind. But I must look like quite a fool with my distinctions into kinds and enumerations!

Protarchus: What are you driving at?

Soc.: That we seem to be in need of yet a fourth kind.

Prot.: Tell us what it is.

Soc.: Look at the cause of this combination of those two together and posit it as my fourth kind in addition to those three.³³

A bit later (*Phlb.* 26e1–27b3), Socrates explains the fourth kind and how he distinguishes it from the other three:

Soc.: But now we have to look at the fourth kind we mentioned earlier, in addition to these three. Let this be our joint investigation. See now whether you think it necessary that everything that comes to be comes to be through some cause (ὄρα γὰρ εἴ σοι δοκεῖ ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι πάντα τὰ γιγνόμενα διὰ τινα αἰτίαν γίγνεσθαι).

Prot.: Certainly, as far as I can see. How could anything come to be without one? (πῶς γὰρ ἂν χωρὶς τούτου γίγνοιτο;)

Soc.: And is it not the case that there is no difference between the nature of what makes and the cause, except in name, so that the maker and the cause would rightly be called one? (τὸ δὲ ποιῶν καὶ τὸ αἴτιον ὁρθῶς ἂν εἴη λεγόμενον ἕν;)

Prot.: Right.

Soc.: But what about what is made and what comes into being, will we not find the same situation, that they also do not differ except in name?

Prot.: Exactly.

Soc.: And isn't it the case that what makes is always preceding in the order of nature, while the thing made follows since it comes into being through it? (add a question mark) (Ἄρ' οὖν ἡγεῖται μὲν τὸ ποιῶν ἀεὶ κατὰ φύσιν, τὸ δὲ ποιούμενον ἐπακολουθεῖ γιγνόμενον ἐκείνῳ;)

Prot.: Right.

Soc.: Therefore, the cause and what is subservient to the cause in a process of coming to be are also different and not the same?

Prot.: How should they be?

Soc.: It follows, then, that what comes to be (τὰ γιγνόμενα) and that from which it is produced (ἐξ ὧν γίγνεται) represent all three kinds?

Prot.: Very true.

Soc.: We therefore declare that the craftsman who produces all these must be the fourth kind, the cause, since it has been demonstrated sufficiently that it differs from the others? (Τὸ δὲ διὰ πάντα ταῦτα δημιουργοῦν λέγομεν τέταρτον, τὴν αἰτίαν, ὡς ἰκανῶς ἕτερον ἐκείνων δεδηλωμένον;)

Prot.: It certainly is different.³⁴

³³ I use Dorothea Frede's translation as it appears in Cooper & Hutchinson (1997).

³⁴ See also *Phlb.* 30c, 28d7–8. Compare with Philolaus' fragment 3 (Stobaeus 1.21.7d = DK 44 B6) and notice that Philolaus does not rule out an agent that explains how harmony is imposed. Unfortunately, from the surviving evidence it is difficult to know what exactly Philolaus' thoughts about efficient causes were. In contrast, the *Philebus* leaves no doubt that a productive cause is a basic ontological kind needed to explain generation.

The fourth kind in the *Philebus* seems to pre-empt Aristotle's complaint that Plato only recognizes the formal and material cause. This kind of cause is the maker or craftsman (τὸ ποιῶν at 26e7; δημιουργοῦν at 27b1), which always precedes its effect (27a5–6), it is necessary for anything that comes to be (26e2–4; see also *Ti.* 28c2–3, quoted below), and is distinct from what comes to be (τὰ γιγνόμενα) and that from which is produced (ἐξ ὧν γίνεταί; see 27a11–b2). The fact that the cause has to be a fourth kind makes clear that the agent behind the mixtures differs in nature from the other two original kinds and cannot be reduced to them.³⁵ Plato, after all, seems to distinguish efficient causes.

In various passages, Plato also distinguishes what Aristotle calls final causes. In the *Timaeus*, the demiurge knows and acts according to an end. At 28c2–29b1, the text seems to offer undeniable evidence of final causes:

We maintain that, necessarily, that which comes to be must come to be by the agency of some cause. Now to find the maker (ὁ ποιητής) and father of this universe is hard enough, and, even if I succeeded, to declare him to everyone is impossible. And so we must go back and raise this question about the universe: Which of the two models (παραδείγματα) did the maker use when he fashioned it? Was it the one that does not change and stays the same or the one that has come to be? Well, if this world of ours is beautiful and its craftsman (δημιουργός) good then, clearly, he looked at the eternal model. But if what it's blasphemous to even say is the case, then he looked at one that has come to be. Now surely it's clear to all that it was the eternal model he looked at, for, of all the things that have come to be, our universe is the most beautiful, and of causes the craftsman is the most excellent. This, then, is how it has come to be: it is a work of craft, modelled after that which is changeless and is grasped by a rational account, that is, by wisdom.

The craftsman and its aim (i.e., to create the most beautiful universe by looking at the eternal model) are two distinct things that cannot be reduced to each other. When Plato talks about intelligent agents he always does it in the context of a teleological activity. Craftsmen have a model, a plan and thus a goal in mind (to create a copy of the model). In fact, for Plato, intelligence always orders in whatever way is best. But the close connection between agents and their aims does not imply any confusion or conflation between these elements of the causal account.

³⁵ In addition, many other Platonic passages confirm that for Plato the soul possesses an efficient capacity. See, for instance, *Chrm.* 156e; *Leg.* 892a–b, 896c–d; *Grg.* 465c–d; *Phdr.* 246b; *Phd.* 80a, 94b–e and 105b–106d. However, see *Metaph.* Λ 6.1071b31–1072a3 where Aristotle complains that souls cannot account for the eternity of movement. This is based on a literal reading of the creation of soul in *Timaeus*. I shall come back to this issue below in Section 4 and in footnote 60.

If this is not enough for doubting Aristotle's assessment, there is even stronger evidence of final causes in Plato. In the *Symposium* (205e7–b3), for example, Diotima establishes the good as the motivating factor in human action:

[...] what everyone loves is really nothing other than the good (τὸ ἀγαθόν).
Do you disagree?"
"Zeus! Not I," I said.
"Now, then," she said. "Can we simply say that people love the good?"
"Yes," I said.
"But shouldn't we add that, in loving it, they want the good to be theirs?"
"We should."
"And not only that," she said. "They want the good to be theirs forever, don't they?"
"We should add that too." "In a word, then, love is wanting to possess the good forever."
"That's very true," I said.
"This, then, is the object of love," she said. "Now, how do lovers pursue it? We'd rightly say that when they are in love they do something with eagerness and zeal."³⁶

Note how the good is set as the goal of the lovers' actions, and the source of the motivation does not require a reference to anything else. In *Philebus* 20d7–10, Socrates states the same point about the motivational power of the good: "Now, this point, I take it, is most necessary to assert of the good: that everything that has any notion of it hunts for it and desires to get hold of it and secure it for its very own, caring nothing for anything else except for what is connected with the acquisition of some good." Later, in *Philebus* 53d3–e7, Plato comes closer to the terminology Aristotle uses to explain the final cause:

Soc.: Suppose there are two kinds of things, one kind sufficient to itself, the other in need of something else (τὸ μὲν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό, τὸ δ' αἰεὶ ἐφιέμενον ἄλλου).
Prot.: How and what sort of things do you mean?
Soc.: The one kind by nature possesses supreme dignity; the other is inferior to it.
Prot.: Express this more clearly, please.
Soc.: We must have met handsome and noble youths, together with their courageous lovers.
Prot.: Certainly.
Soc.: Now, try to think of another set of two items that corresponds to this pair in all the relevant features that we just mentioned.
Prot.: Do I have to repeat my request for the third time? Please express more clearly what it is you want to say, Socrates!
Soc.: Nothing fanciful at all, Protarchus; this is just a playful manner of speaking. What is really meant is that all things are either for the sake of something else or they are that for whose sake the other kind comes to be in each case (τὸ μὲν ἕνεκά του τῶν ὄντων ἔστι αἰεὶ, τὸ δ' οὐ χάριν ἐκάστοτε τὸ τινὸς ἕνεκα γιγνόμενον αἰεὶ γίγνεται).³⁷

³⁶ Transl. by A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff in Cooper & Hutchinson (1997).

³⁷ Compare with Aristotle's description of the final cause in *Ph.* II 3.194b32–33: τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶν τὸ οὐ ἕνεκα ("that for the sake of which a thing is done"), and *Metaph.* α 2.994b9–10: τοιοῦτον δὲ ὁ μὴ

Plato's distinction between means and ends – things for the sake of something else and things for whose sake the first kind comes to be – splits things at the most general level. This passage is not a myth, the distinction is not abandoned, nor is there any evidence it collapses into another type of causation. The passages quoted suggest that Plato recognizes and makes use of what Aristotle calls efficient and final causes – even if Plato conceives the causal process and the nature of the causes in a different way.³⁸ We then return to the original question: why would Aristotle insist that Plato only recognizes two out of the four causes? Why would he claim that Plato's failed to use two of the causes instead of simply saying he is wrong about the nature or the extension of the final and efficient causes? After all, Aristotle's justification of the number and nature of causes in *Metaphysics A* does not really require the denial of efficient and final causes in Plato. Even if he wanted to highlight his contribution and original take on the topic, Aristotle could have simply said no one before him put these distinctions together in a clear complementary system of causal explanation.

4 Assessing Aristotle's Reading of Plato

These passages suggest Aristotle could have read Plato more charitably. But even in the worst case, if we recall how Aristotle explains his motives for criticising Plato and other members of the Academy, we can rule out wilful misinterpretation.³⁹ In this section, I shall begin by explaining why I am unsatisfied with previous

ἄλλου ἕνεκα ἀλλὰ τᾶλλα ἐκείνου (“that sort of end which is not for the sake of something else, but for whose sake everything else is”). See also *Phlb.* 53e and 54c, *Leg.* 903b4–d3, *Grg.* 467d, and, although probably inauthentic, *Ep.* II 312e.

38 Or even in an imperfect or vaguely way for Aristotle's standards. Remember that the threshold set by Aristotle in *Metaph.* A 7 is very low (see the end of Section 1). And if the threshold is as low as Aristotle announces, we could even mention *Phaedo* 97b8–d1. In that passage, Socrates distinguishes between an active ordering *nous* and its aim of producing what is best (βέλτιστον). Although Plato does not call the best a cause, Socrates uses it in his causal account and distinguishes it from *nous*. These elements do not collapse into one nor one reduces into the other. On the contrary, both seem essential for the causal account. Thus, Aristotle could have acknowledged that Plato recognised the final and efficient cause here, even if he rejected or dismissed them after the ‘second sailing.’ Against the idea that the ‘second sailing’ rejects teleological causation, see Vázquez (2020) and (2022).

39 See *Eth. Nic.* I 6 (1096a11–16); see also *Metaph.* α 1.993b12–19.

strategies to explain Aristotle's assessment of Plato in *Metaph.* A 6. Although it might seem tempting at this point to agree with Cherniss and regard Aristotle as (unintentionally) unfair, careless or, in the best case, a forgetful reader of Plato. In the second half of this section, I shall resist this conclusion by rethinking how Aristotle reads Plato.

First, let me discuss a couple of passages people think can be of help here. In *Metaph.* A 7.988b6–15, Aristotle qualifies his claims from A 6. He now admits that some philosophers consider the final cause but only accidentally:⁴⁰

That for the sake of which actions and changes and movements take place, they assert to be a cause in a way, but not in this way, i.e., not in the way in which it is its nature to be a cause. For those who speak of reason (νοῦς) or friendship (φιλία) class these causes as goods; they do not speak, however, as if anything that exists either existed or came into being for the sake of these, but as if movements started from these. In the same way those who say the One (τὸ ἓν) or the existent (τὸ ὄν) is the good, say that it is the cause of substance (ἡ οὐσία), but not that substance either is or comes to be for the sake of this. Therefore, it turns out that in a sense they both say and do not say the good is a cause; for they do not call it a cause *qua* good but only incidentally.

For Aristotle, those who say the one is the good, fail to show an essential connection between oneness and goodness. If so, their claim that the one is the cause of substance would not be any better than the person who says that a musician is the cause of the house. Aristotle defends this claim in *Metaph.* N 4, where he objects to identifying the good with the one.⁴¹ He offers two main objections. First, if the self-sufficiency and self-maintenance of the good depends on it being one, then all units would become species of good and there would be a great profusion of goods. Secondly, the great and small would be the bad itself, and thus the bad would be just the potentially good.⁴² Needless to say, Aristotle finds these two consequences unacceptable.

Aristotle does not explicitly say that Plato identified the one with the good, but this is certainly the impression he gives. Like in A 6, in A 7 Aristotle criticises two groups of philosophers, one is formed by Empedocles – who speaks of φιλία – and Anaxagoras – who speaks of νοῦς. In A 6, the members of the second group are Plato and the Pythagoreans, so it is tempting to assume that these are also the

40 In fact, later in *Metaph.* A 10.993a14 Aristotle admits: “in a certain sense all [the causes] have been said before.”

41 See *Metaph.* N 4.1091b13–15, where Aristotle reports that some philosophers who maintain the existence of unchangeable substance say that “the one itself is the good itself” (αὐτὸ τὸ ἓν τὸ ἀγαθὸν αὐτὸ εἶναι). See also *Eth. Eud.* I 8.1218a25–30.

42 See *Metaph.* N 4.1091b16–1092a8. See also *Metaph.* N 6 and *Eth. Nic.* I 6.

people criticised in A 7 and by extension in N 4.⁴³ Moreover, according to the later tradition, Plato in his lectures *On the Good*, identified the good with the one.⁴⁴

Johansen (2010) 186–91 takes the arguments in A 7 and N 4 as directed to Plato and refers to them to defend Aristotle’s refusal to recognize final causes in Plato’s *Timaeus*. According to him, Aristotle’s objection in A 7 (988b6–15, quoted above) presents the following general pattern:

X is a final cause of actions, changes, movements, etc., only if, (a) X is the cause of Y (actions, changes, movements, etc.), and (b) X is good, and (c) X qua good is the cause of Y.

Nous, Friendship, the One or Being satisfies (a) and (b), but not (c). Therefore, *Nous*, Friendship, the One, or Being is not a final cause.⁴⁵

Although the argument applies to the way Plato may have thought about the nature of the good, the passages from *Timaeus*, *Symposium*, and *Philebus* quoted in the last section would still contradict Aristotle’s claim that Plato only considers the final cause accidentally (all this assuming A 7 and N 4 do refer to Plato).⁴⁶ Looking back at the *Symposium* (205e7–b3), we find an instance where the good is the final cause of the agent’s actions qua good. No reference to the one is added or needed to understand the motivational force of the good. Moreover, *Timaeus* 46e4 and 28c2–29b1 show that producing a good, desirable and beautiful cosmos is the goal of the demiurge’s actions. Therefore, even if Aristotle’s criticism of the good and the one had some weight, this cannot justify his claims about the simple recognition of the number of causes in Plato, especially since Aristotle sees no problem, at least in *Metaphysics* A,⁴⁷ in recognising formal causes in Plato, even when he thinks forms do not exist at all.⁴⁸

Let me now consider whether Stephen Menn’s (2012) 208–14 argument avoids these problems. He calls attention to the general aim of *Metaphysics* A: to obtain knowledge of the first principles or original causes (τὰ ἐξ ἀρχῆς αἴτια).⁴⁹ Aristotle subordinates and restricts his discussion of causes to the advancement of this

⁴³ See Johansen (2010) 180.

⁴⁴ See Aristoxenus, *Harm. El.* II 30–31; Simplicius, *In Ph.* 453.25–455.14.

⁴⁵ Johansen (2010) 180.

⁴⁶ But this may not be the case. One could argue that in A 6 the claim is slightly different. There, the one is the cause of good not identical to it. The Platonic passages cited in the previous section and the fact that Aristotle never ascribes the identification of the one and the good directly to Plato could also mean that Aristotle is aware this is not exactly Plato’s view.

⁴⁷ In *Metaph.* A 10.1075b27–28, for example, Aristotle doubts the causality of forms even if they were to exist.

⁴⁸ To be fair, Johansen focuses on Aristotle’s criticisms of Plato in relation to the *Timaeus*, and his concluding remarks acknowledge that Plato’s philosophy might offer enough elements for a comeback. But I believe this speaks in my favour. Johansen’s argument cannot explain Aristotle’s general claims in *Metaph.* A 6.

⁴⁹ *Metaph.* A 3.983a24. Menn (2012) 203 translates it as “the causes from the beginning.”

aim.⁵⁰ Then, Menn argues, Aristotle's claim is not that Plato fails to recognize efficient and final causes in general but only that he does not use his first principles – the one and the dyad – as final or efficient causes:

Aristotle knew the *Timaeus*, and it seems outrageous to say that Plato isn't there giving final-cause explanations. Furthermore, in the dialogue both the demiurge and the world-soul seem to be in some way efficient causes; and the *Phaedrus* and *Laws* explicitly call the soul an ἀρχὴ κινήσεως, and are to all appearances the source for Aristotle's own use of this phrase – how can he say that Plato doesn't use this kind of cause? Aristotle's claim seems to be, not that Plato did not use formal and efficient causes, but rather that he did not use his ἀρχαί – the one and the great and small, as described in A6 – as final or efficient causes.⁵¹

Menn's reading sounds attractive. It gives Plato the credit he deserves, and, at the same time, it seems to protect Aristotle from Cherniss' accusations. Although for Menn Aristotle “would not have much grounds for boasting about the discovery of the four kinds of causes”, he instead can boast “that he can trace things back to the first ἀρχή as their final cause and that previous philosophers, including Plato, have fail to do so.”⁵² Unfortunately, at closer inspection, this interpretation is unconvincing and does not really absolve Aristotle.

I agree with Menn on his assessment of Plato and on the general aim of *Metaphysics A*. In fact, regarding causes, the beginning of A 3 (983a24–26), cannot be clearer. Aristotle states: “we have to acquire knowledge of the original causes (for we say we know each thing only when we think we recognize its first cause).” But remember that later in the same chapter, Aristotle calls the aid of “those who have attacked the investigation of being and philosophized about truth before us. For obviously they too speak of certain principles and causes (λέγουσιν ἀρχάς τινας καὶ αἰτίας)” (983b2–4). This suggests that the historical survey is not about first principles and first causes, but about principles and causes in a looser sense. Add to this the fact that *Metaph. A* 3–6 echoes Socrates' autobiographical passage in *Phaedo*, which is not about first principles but about the causes of generation and destruction. The discussion of causes in A 3–6, then, does not seem confined to original causes, even if that is the ultimate aim of *Metaphysics A*.

Besides, when Aristotle says that Plato only uses two types of causes, he not only mentions Plato's two first principles, but also forms, which he takes as formal causes.⁵³ But why would he mention forms as causes if he is only concerned with

⁵⁰ See also Barney (2012) 71–3.

⁵¹ See Menn (2012) 210–1.

⁵² See Menn (2012) 212.

⁵³ Notice τὰ γὰρ εἶδη τοῦ τί ἐστὶν αἴτια τοῖς ἄλλοις (“for the Forms are the cause of the essence of all other things”) at *Metaph.* 988a10–11, which comes right after the claim that Plato only used two causes.

original causes? Moreover, Aristotle presents his conclusion as the result of his summary and assessment, earlier in A 6, of Plato's metaphysics more generally.⁵⁴ This summary not only includes forms, but also the participation of sensible things in those forms, and the introduction of mathematical objects. Yet nowhere does he mention efficient or final causes playing any role. And if he did recognise these types of causes, as Menn implies, but decided to omit them from this summary, it would have been disingenuous. Fortunately, there is no need to assume such a thing.

Aristotle's argument in A 6 (987b18–21) is that forms are the causes of all things, and thus, their elements are the first principles of all things: "Since the Forms are the causes of all other things, he thought their elements were the elements of all things. As matter, the great and the small were principles; as substance, the One."⁵⁵ The inference depends on recognising forms as the only causes and understand forms exclusively as formal causes. Then, contrary to what Menn suggests, it seems that Aristotle's claim is precisely that Plato did not use final and efficient causes at all.

Furthermore, in Menn's interpretation, the historical survey in A 3–6 cannot work as an argument to justify the number and nature of Aristotle's causes in general. But that sounds like a very high price to pay. But, even if we conceded that Aristotle is only talking about first principles in *Metaph. A*, the passages quoted from *Philebus* still contradict what Aristotle claims. The productive cause that Socrates introduces as a fourth kind is identified as a primitive and irreducible ontological and cosmological element from which the mixture arises. In addition, the distinction between things "for the sake of something else" and "that for whose sake the other kind comes to be in each case" seems also to apply at the most general ontological level.⁵⁶ Thus, in Menn's interpretation, Aristotle would still be subject to a charge of forgetfulness regarding these very relevant passages.

Menn does not discuss these passages from *Philebus*, but when he explains why Aristotle does not consider the ἀρχὴ κινήσεως in *Phaedrus*, he argues:

The *Phaedrus* says that soul does not come-to-be, but of course the ideas also do not come-to-be in time, and yet, according to A6, they must somehow atemporally arise from the one and the great and small, and, if Plato is to make his different accounts consistent, so must souls and

⁵⁴ See φανερόν δ' ἐκ τῶν εἰρημένων ("it is evident from what has been said") at *Metaph.* 988a8–9.

⁵⁵ Remember that at *Metaph. A* 6.987b9–14, Aristotle complains that Plato failed to explain participation.

⁵⁶ Although maximum generality is not the only feature that characterises Aristotle's first principles, remember that his threshold to recognise his causes and principles in the predecessors is very loose.

the demiurge – indeed, the Timaeus has an account, although not a very satisfying one, of how souls arise from more primitive things. And, Aristotle says, Plato uses the one proximately only as a formal cause of the ideas, even if some of its effects, or the effects of its effects, are in turn efficient or final causes of posterior things.⁵⁷

In *Philebus*, however, the fourth kind cannot arise from any of the other kinds in any way, not even atemporally. At 26d7–9, Socrates explicitly says that anything derived from the first two kinds (limit and the unlimited) is a member of the third kind (the mixture). Yet, he goes on to posit a fourth kind, what makes, as necessary for anything to come to be (26e1–4), and distinct from the other kinds (27b1–3). Thus, it seems that “if Plato is to make his different accounts consistent”, he would have to ignore the *Philebus*. And if Aristotle, for consistency’s sake, ignored these claims in *Philebus* too, he is guilty of a careless reading of Plato, as Cherniss claims. Moreover, Menn has to assume that Aristotle is not only a unitarian reader of Plato, but also that he is willing to subordinate Plato’s dialogues to the doctrine of the one and the dyad to the point of ignoring and supplying dubious premises.⁵⁸ Menn’s proposal, therefore, is in the best case insufficient to clear Aristotle of Cherniss’ accusations.

Now, consider more closely Aristotle’s refusal to recognize efficient causes in Plato. In some passages, Aristotle shows he has no clear idea of where to place an efficient cause in Plato’s metaphysics.⁵⁹ In *Metaph.* A 6 (991a8–11), he discards that forms can play the role of efficient causes: “Above all one might discuss the question what on earth the Forms contribute to sensible things, either to those that are eternal or to those that come into being and cease to be. For they cause neither movement nor any change in them.”⁶⁰ Later in A 9 (992b7–9) he also discards the great and the small: “And regarding movement, if the great and the small are to be movement, evidently the Forms will be moved; but if they are not, whence did movement come? If we cannot answer this the whole study of nature has been annihilated.” Aristotle, in fact, finds it intolerable that, in his view, Plato posits

⁵⁷ Menn (2012) 211, the emphasis is mine.

⁵⁸ There is, for example, no evidence either in Plato or Aristotle to support Menn’s claim that the demiurge of *Timaeus* must somehow arise from the one and the great and small. And such suggestion is of course, not the only way to make Plato’s accounts consistent. But even that already assumes a certain systematic and dogmatic reading of Plato that is unclear whether Aristotle shares.

⁵⁹ Although in *Gen. corr.* I 2.315a29–33 he comes close to admitting that Plato discusses the efficient causes of the elements.

⁶⁰ See also *De anima* I 3.407b5–12, where Aristotle claims that Plato leaves obscure the cause of the movements of the heavens. Compare Aristotle’s interpretation with that of Theophrastus who sees a material and an efficient principle in Plato. See Theophrastus Fr. 230 FHS&G = Simplicius, *In Ph.* 1.2 184b15; transl. Sedley (2002) 42.

forms as the cause of becoming. At first sight it seems odd that Aristotle claims both that Plato proposes forms as causes of becoming and that he fails to recognize efficient causes. Could the problem just be a different understanding of the nature of the efficient cause?

The issue hangs upon Aristotle's interpretation of *Phaedo* 95e–107b, explicitly discussed in two places. In *Metaphysics* A 9 (991b3–8) he states:

In the *Phaedo* the case is stated in this way – that the Forms are causes both of being and of becoming; yet when the Forms exist, still the things that share in them do not come into being, unless there is some efficient cause; and many other things come into being (e.g., a house or a ring), of which we say there are no Forms. Clearly, therefore, even the other things can both be and come into being owing to such causes as produce the things just mentioned.⁶¹

The passage makes clear that Aristotle believes Plato's *Phaedo* posits forms as the only causes of being and becoming, and that he sees two problems with it. First, he argues, the existence of a form does not by itself guarantee the generation of things that share in that form. Unless one also posits an efficient cause, nothing explains why, at a certain moment and place, something that shares in a form comes to be. Second, he continues, some sensible things have come to be but have no corresponding form. Therefore, Plato makes two mistakes. Forms cannot be causes of becoming because they are not efficient causes and, even if they were, they cannot account for all the generated stuff we find in the world. In this argument Aristotle assumes Platonic forms are passive. But then, in *Generation and Corruption* II 9 (335b9–24), he puts things the other way around: even if Platonic forms were active, they cannot work as efficient causes because they, remaining always the same, would perpetually and continuously cause the same effect. In the sensible world, the sensible particulars share in forms only intermittently. A flower's beauty, for example, will only last for a couple of days, not forever. Therefore, Platonic forms are useless to explain the flower's beauty.

Annas (1982) has convincingly argued that Aristotle bases his criticisms on a perfectly possible reading of the Greek text and, strictly speaking, cannot be taken as a misinterpretation of Plato – even if other more attractive interpretations are possible. She acknowledges, however, that Aristotle's ruthless criticisms hang on combining a literal reading of the text, a demand for great terminological precision and a strict reluctance to supply missing premises. As mentioned at the beginning, even if we agree with Annas, her defence of Aristotle only applies to his reading of the *Phaedo*, and the claims in *Metaphysics* A 6 are not restricted to this dialogue. Thus, Aristotle's reading of the *Phaedo*, alone, does not justify his denial of efficient causes in Plato more generally. A response

⁶¹ See also *Metaph.* A 6.991a8–11.

to this could be that Aristotle combines this interpretation of the *Phaedo* with a reticence to take the demiurge as something better than an obscure metaphor. But, as I have insisted, the passages in *Philebus* and *Symposium* demonstrate this is not enough either.

On Aristotle's behalf, we could say that the main target in *Metaphysics A* is not Plato's dialogues but his so-called 'unwritten doctrines.' Aristotle is aware to some extent that these views differ from what Plato writes in his dialogues (e.g. *Ph.* IV 2.209b11–16). But this idea is not really helpful. There is no clear indication that Aristotle is referring to these doctrines;⁶² even less that he refers to them exclusively. Moreover, we know Aristotle has read all of the dialogues quoted in the previous section. If these passages offer a better proposal about causation and first principles than the unwritten doctrines, then he should have directed his criticism against these texts. And even if these unwritten doctrines represent Plato's views more accurately, one expects Aristotle to notice that the dialogues offer a closer point of comparison with his four causes. He could have qualified or restricted his criticisms. Alternatively, he could have complemented the unwritten doctrines with compatible claims in the dialogues. But he did not. Then, how could we make better sense of Aristotle's claims in *Metaph.* A 6? What premises or assumptions could we provide to offer a charitable interpretation of Aristotle that considers Plato's passages on causation in *Philebus* and *Symposium*?⁶³

62 The reference to the one and the great and the small could, for example, derive from the *Philebus* (see 25c9–11). The connection to the 'unwritten doctrines', however, is not impossible. As noted in footnote 24, the arguments in *Metaph.* A 6 seem to be like those offered in Aristotle's lost treatise *On the Good*, a response to Plato's seminars on the good. See Simplicius, *In Ph.* 151.6–11 and Philoponus, *In De an.* 75.34–76.1.

63 Other arguments on Aristotle's behalf have been proposed but I also find them unconvincing. Johnson (2005) 118–27, for instance, discusses some of the passages in *Philebus* and *Laws* concerning final causes. Johnson argues that Plato employs the notion of 'for the sake of which', but not as a cause – i.e., "not as a cause in complete explanations of specific things that yield what Aristotle considers scientific knowledge" (Johnson 2005, 127). However, this makes Aristotle's criteria for recognition of final causes more demanding than his criteria for accepting the other causes. Furthermore, Johnson's arguments only prove that Plato and Aristotle disagree about the nature of that 'for the sake of which', not that Plato fails to use it as a cause. Similar arguments apply to Bolton (2015). Sedley (2007) 114, in turn, thinks Aristotle is justified in claiming that "none of his predecessors, Plato included, have anticipated his discovery of the final cause, i.e. made goals themselves causes." But Sedley's argument only considers the *Timaeus*. He worries that accepting final causes in *Timaeus* compromises the dialogue's restriction to two causes – the divine and necessary causes. However, if that were the reason, Aristotle would have accepted that the demiurge was an efficient cause. In any case, even if Sedley were right about the *Timaeus*, the other Platonic passages would remain problematic.

Perhaps Aristotle assumes that the *Phaedo* takes pre-eminence over later dialogues when it comes to causation. If so, the conclusions in *Phaedo* play a more important role than the arguments found in any other dialogues. Perhaps he supposes the *Phaedo* contains Plato's final word about causation or offers his most important attempt to deal with the number and nature of causes. It is not unreasonable to think he would consider one dialogue as the exegetical key to read the rest of the Platonic corpus. Later Platonists did this with the *Timaeus*. Alternatively, Aristotle's unitarian reading of Plato might assume that the contribution of the late dialogues subordinates to the doctrines and arguments already defended in the middle dialogues, unless, of course, Plato argues otherwise. Such procedure could be construed as an attempt to read Plato charitably.

Imagine I am talking with my friend Susan, and she goes on and on telling me how much she loves her partner, Peter. A couple of weeks later, Susan shares with me an anecdote. At some point, she explains Peter's involvement in the story and tells me that she hates him. On the face of it, her previous claims about Peter stand in some tension with what she tells me now. However, given the tone and context of both encounters, I immediately assume that she is not serious about hating Peter; even if she just said so and I cannot completely rule out the possibility she had a change of heart.

Similarly, Aristotle might have assumed the conclusions of the *Phaedo* are the most careful and serious analysis of causation. After all, Plato's discussion of causes in the *Phaedo* is lengthy and detailed; the dramatic stakes cannot be higher. If Aristotle assumes the arguments in *Phaedo* have pre-eminence and are the exegetical key over whatever is said elsewhere, that will explain why he denies efficient and final causes in Plato and why he does not even bother to exhaustively discuss all the passages that seem to contradict his claim. In this way, Aristotle's reading of *Phaedo* would guide even his understanding of the one and the great and the small.

Priority in time, extension, and dramatic context, however, may not be sufficient reason to prefer the *Phaedo*'s arguments. Why would Aristotle discard Plato's arguments elsewhere? If you look for Aristotle's uses and comments about the *Timaeus*, for example, he simply seems to ignore the role of the demiurge in most of them. However, in *Metaphysics* A 9 (991a19–27), he contemplates the possibility of a producer (τὸ ἐργαζόμενον) that looks at ideas to explain generation and corruption:

But further, all other things cannot come from the Forms in any of the usual senses of 'from'. And to say that they are patterns (παρδείγματα) and the other things share (μετέχειν) them is to use empty words and poetical metaphors. For what is it that works, looking to the Ideas? (τί γάρ ἐστι τὸ ἐργαζόμενον πρὸς τὰς ἰδέας ἀποβλέπον;) Anything can either be, or become,

like another without being copied from it, so that whether Socrates exists or not a man might come to be like Socrates; and evidently this might be so even if Socrates were eternal.

Aristotle's language seems to refer to the divine demiurge introduced in *Timaeus* 28c–29b (quoted above). A maker (ὁ ποιητής) that looks at an eternal model (παράδειγμα) to create the cosmos and all the things inside of it. There, Timaeus appears to assume that efficient causes are intelligent makers.⁶⁴ Aristotle's criticism is that Plato's resort to a divine demiurge that looks at the forms as models amounts to nothing more than a poetical metaphor. Many things, he argues, generate naturally without the need of any external creator. Thus, positing demiurges is uneconomical because the natural world can be explained without them, but worst, even accepting them turns out to be insufficient to account for all of the natural generations and destructions. If Plato's demiurge is not meant literally, then perhaps the *Timaeus* is compatible with Aristotle's interpretation of the *Phaedo*. But what about the *Philebus* and *Symposium*? In particular, the passages provided on final causation still appear difficult to accommodate.

At this point we could supply Aristotle's comments on Plato with one final assumption. To admit that someone correctly recognized one of his four causes Aristotle seems to demand more than simply distinguishing the different causal elements. One possibility is he requires that the types of causes do not collapse into each other. If this is correct, even if Plato recognizes teleological motivation in *Philebus* and *Symposium*, Aristotle might still think that for Plato the final and efficient cause collapse into formal causation, given his interpretation of *Phaedo* and *Timaeus*. However, it is not entirely clear if Aristotle complies with this demand himself.

Fortunately, the explanation might be simpler. Aristotle could be well aware that Plato understands that a causal account requires an efficient and a final cause at a conceptual level, but then fails to reliably pin down the kind of entity that can really act as these different types of causes. After all, as I have shown, Aristotle thinks that Plato saw forms as efficient causes. But in Aristotle's eyes, this mistake is so intolerable that he refused to count that as a recognition of efficient causes. Similarly, even if Plato understood final causes at a conceptual level, Aristotle could have been disappointed that he never saw *Nous* as a final cause, as he does in *Metaphysics* Λ. Thus, even if Plato gets it right in some passages, in Aristotle's view, his flagrant categorical mistakes and unexplanatory metaphors in other places, and the lack of explicit amendments to the *Phaedo*'s arguments could justify his assessment regarding the number of causes in Plato. If so, Aristotle's criticism

⁶⁴ As Frede (2012) 290 points out, Aristotle's language in A 6 also reminds us of *Cra.* 389a–b and *Resp.* 596a–597d. In the latter, see especially 597d7–8, where Plato's Socrates claims that the divine craftsman is by nature the maker of everything.

amounts to saying that Plato only employs two of the causes consistently. If this is what he means he is not completely wrong. It does not matter anymore that in the *Symposium*, *Philebus* and other dialogues Plato distinguishes the efficient and final elements of causation. He is not consistent in his employment of these types of causes, providing Aristotle sufficient ammunition to argue that he fails to properly recognize them.⁶⁵

There is, of course, no definitive evidence to prove that Aristotle reads Plato in this way. But I argue conversely. Given the evidence we have, it is better to suppose that Aristotle gives pre-eminence to the *Phaedo* and demands from Plato a reliable use and identification of the causes, rather than agreeing with Cherniss and claiming he was forgetful or careless. Given this is an argument for the best explanation, it is, of course, defeasible. But I find no evidence to contradict my proposal. Its advantages over previous attempts at explaining Aristotle's rejection of efficient and final causes in Plato should also be clear. We can now reread Aristotle's criticisms to Plato as diligent attempts to make sense out of the Platonic corpus. At the same time, we can better appreciate that in Plato we already find all the basic elements and distinctions that allow Aristotle to construe his causal theory. In a sense, we can even say that the four causes have clear Platonic antecedents, even if Aristotle is unwilling to admit Plato employs efficient and final causes.

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⁶⁵ Notice that this is not the complaint raised by Aristotle in the *Metaph.* A 7 passage. There the problem with the one (or being) is that although it is nominally identified with the good, and is said to be the cause of substance, it is not its cause qua good, and thus cannot count as a final cause. But this only means that the author of this theory is not talking about the final cause at all. It is not even an inconsistent use but just an incidental reference to the good and the formal cause of substance. If Plato is the author of this theory, he could simply reply that although he was not talking about final causes there, he did recognize them in other places. Thus, even if we were to suppose that the identification of the good and the one was held by Plato, and moreover, that it was the most important of his doctrines, we would still wonder why Aristotle forgot the passages I have quoted from *Symposium* and *Philebus*.

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Degrees of Culpability and Voluntary Actions: *Eth. Eud.* II 9 and *Eth. Nic.* V 8 on the Voluntary

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Abstract: In *Eth. Nic.* V 8, Aristotle provides a classification of damages an agent may do, establishing degrees of culpability. In doing so, Aristotle recalls what he said about voluntary and involuntary actions in the preceding books about voluntary and involuntary actions. In this paper, I defend the thesis according to which the *Eudemian* account on voluntariness is consistent with the classification of damages Aristotle provides in *Eth. Nic.* V 8, arguing that one of Aristotle's concerns in dealing with voluntariness is the legal practices of his time, which we can regard as strongly linked to his discussion on moral responsibility. Thereby, I challenge David Charles' view that the account of voluntariness featured in the book on justice differs both from the *Nicomachean* account and the *Eudemian* one.

Keywords: *Nicomachean Ethics*, voluntary, responsibility, justice, errors

1 Introduction

In *Nicomachean Ethics* book V, on justice, Aristotle provides a classification of damages or errors an agent may commit. Firstly, he distinguishes between voluntary and involuntary damages, thus grounding the classification in the agent's attitude at the time of the action. In doing so, Aristotle recaps some of the main features of voluntary and involuntary actions, which he had already discussed in the preceding books. However, the book on justice is indeed a common book and Aristotle discusses voluntary and involuntary actions both in the *Eudemian Ethics* and in the *Nicomachean*. Consequently, we can ask which of the two accounts on voluntary and involuntary actions, the *Eudemian* or the *Nicomachean*, Aristotle was referring to when establishing the classification of

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damages in *Eth. Nic. V* and when recalling the main features of his account on voluntariness.¹

The aim of this paper is thus twofold. On one hand, I aim to reconstruct the classification of damages that Aristotle offers in *Eth. Nic. V* 8. I will highlight what distinguishes the four kinds of damages, focusing specifically on knowledge/ignorance, one of the two criteria for involuntary actions.

However, as *Eth. Nic. V* is a common book, I will also defend the thesis according to which the *Eth. Eud.* account on the voluntary and the involuntary, and specifically the account on ignorance, is consistent with Aristotle's classification of damages in *Eth. Nic. V* 8, to which Aristotle refers at the end of his discussion on voluntariness in *Eth. Eud. II*.

In order to do so, in Section 2, I will examine Aristotle's account of voluntary and involuntary actions in *Eth. Eud.*, providing a reconstruction of the ignorance criterion. In Section 3, I will deal instead with Aristotle's classification of damages in *Eth. Nic. V*. Finally, I will highlight the reasons why we can consider the two accounts mutually consistent, and hence argue that one of Aristotle's concerns in dealing with voluntariness was related to the legal practices of his time, which we can regard as strongly linked with his discussion on moral responsibility.

2 The *Eudemian Ethics* on Voluntary and Involuntary Actions

2.1 Some Remarks on Forced Actions (*Eth. Eud. II* 8)

In *Eth. Eud. II* 8, Aristotle deals with force, stating that an action is forced if something external moves a thing, or brings it to rest against its own internal tendency (*Eth. Eud. II* 8.1224b7–8). The discussion on forced actions in *Eth. Eud.* is, however, far more complicated. In my reading of chapter 8, I will argue that Aristotle distinguishes between three kinds of forced actions: (a) forced actions in the strict sense, (b) actions accomplished under duress or necessity and (c) actions due to overwhelming emotions.

¹ I disagree with Charles' (2012) interpretation, according to which we have to distinguish three different accounts on voluntariness, the one featured in *Eth. Eud.*, the one at *Eth. Nic. III* and the one in *Eth. Nic. V*, which is regarded as a middle step between *Eth. Eud.* and the more refined account featured in *Eth. Nic.* Although Charles' interpretation cannot be discussed at length here, one of my aims is to show that *Eth. Nic. V* is not a middle step between the *Eth. Eud.* and *Eth. Nic.*'s accounts on voluntariness but that is largely consistent with *Eth. Eud. II*.

In the case of forced actions in the strict sense (a), the starting point of the action is external (*Eth. Eud.* II 8.1224b12–15). So, an agent A, whose hand is taken by another agent B, who strikes a person C with agent A's hand, acts, i.e. strikes the person, involuntarily. The starting point of the action is indeed not in A but in another agent, i.e. B. A neither wants nor chooses nor thinks it would be good to strike C but is forced to strike C by B, who is external to A, being another agent. Consequently, A's action is forced (in the strict sense) and involuntary.

Instead, in the case of actions accomplished under duress (b), we have to consider three main features, which we can infer from Aristotle's discussion (*Eth. Eud.* II 8.1225a2–8):

- (1) the external threat;
- (2) the agent as the starting point of the action;
- (3) the agent's perception of the threat.

We can imagine the case of a man who, compelled to do something bad by a tyrant who is holding the man's whole family captive, does what the tyrant asks him to do.² In this case, we have the external threat, i.e. the tyrant; the agent is the starting point of the action; and the agent perceives the threat. Aristotle, however, claims that the status of actions of this kind is doubtful, as some may claim to have acted involuntarily because they were forced, while others may argue that, in such cases, the agents acted voluntarily because they could have endured the pain. Furthermore, Aristotle claims that among the actions accomplished under duress, some are voluntary, others involuntary (*Eth. Eud.* II 8.1225a9–12), and the distinction is ultimately based on whether their occurrence was up to the agent or not.

In my interpretation of this passage, the status of actions accomplished under duress ultimately depends on whether the action was up to the agent, *ep'auto*. Actions accomplished under duress are involuntary if they share a feature Aristotle more clearly ascribes to actions due to overwhelming emotions (*Eth. Eud.* II 8.1225a19–22): an action is forced and hence involuntary if it exceeds our natural capacity for endurance. In the case of overwhelming emotions, the agent loses control over the action because the emotion is overwhelming and uncontrollable. It exceeds what the agent's nature can endure.³ Also in the case of actions

² The example is actually featured in *Eth. Nic.* III 3.1110a5–8.

³ Kenny (1979) 42–3 claims that actions accomplished under duress should be distinguished into two different cases: if the agents plays some role in finding herself in the threat, then the action is still up to her, otherwise not. For instance, if she entered a terroristic organization and then she is threaten that if she does place a bomb, she will be killed, the action is still up to her and she is responsible because it was up to her to enter in the terroristic group in the first place. She is at least *synaitia*. However, here Aristotle does not mention co-responsibility and co-causation (against *Eth. Nic.* III 7.1114b22–24 where he openly mentions *synaitia*). Moreover, in the following

accomplished under duress, the agent would do anything to escape the pain and the evil she is threatened with. What exceeds our natural capacity for endurance is not *eph'hemin*, i.e. it does not depend on us, and if something does not depend on us, it falls outside the sphere of voluntariness.

We can then identify two conditions which, if met, make an action forced and hence involuntary: (1) an action is forced if something external moves or brings to rest a thing against its own internal tendency; (2) an action is forced if it exceeds our natural capacity for endurance. So, actions due to overwhelming emotions exceed the agent's natural capacity for endurance and they do not depend on the agent because, what exceeds our natural capacity for endurance does not depend on us. Surely, this brief recap does not exhaust the width and depth of Aristotle's account on force in *Eth. Eud.* II 8. However, since forced actions do not play a central role in Aristotle's classification of damages, I will, for the moment, skip the discussion on force in order to focus on ignorance, which is more relevant to our present enquiry.⁴

2.2 Ignorance and Involuntary Actions in *Eth. Eud.* II 9

In chapter 9,⁵ Aristotle deals with involuntary actions due to ignorance of some relevant features or circumstances of the action. First of all, Aristotle contrasts voluntary actions, carried out knowing the circumstances of the action itself, and involuntary actions, carried out ignoring the very same circumstances.

To act with knowledge of the person acted on or (ῥ) the instrument or (ῥ) the aim seems to be contrary to acting in ignorance of the person and (καί) the instrument and (καί) the thing because of ignorance, not accidentally. (Sometimes a person knows that it is their father but not in order to kill him, but to save him, as in the case of Pelias' daughters; or a person knows that this is a drink but believes it to be a philtre or wine when it was really hemlock.) All that is done because of ignorance of the person and the instrument and the thing is involuntary; the opposite, therefore, is voluntary. (*Eth. Eud.* II 9.1225b11–16, transl. by Kenny, modified)

of the text (*Eth. Eud.* II 8.1225a14–17), Aristotle mentions an example in which a human being claims to have acted under duress because she did not want to be caught in some kind of game: this, Aristotle states, is ridiculous. I take this example as making a link between actions accomplished under duress and actions due to overwhelming emotions. The alternative must be unbearable otherwise it would be ridiculous to claim to have acted under duress.

⁴ For a wider discussion on the topic, see also Aronadio (2013), Echeñique (2012), Sauvé Meyer (2011).

⁵ I am deeply indebted to Woods (2005) analysis of *Eth. Eud.* II 9 so that I should probably quote it at every page to give him a full recognition on the impact of his analysis on this paper.

The overall meaning of the text seems rather clear: acting with knowledge of the person, the instrument or the aim, Aristotle claims, seems opposed to acting in ignorance of the person, the instrument and the thing; and while acting with knowledge is voluntary, acting in ignorance is involuntary. However, upon a closer reading, two features strike to our attention.

On one hand, Aristotle contrasts acting with knowledge of the person or the instrument or the aim to acting in ignorance of the person and the instrument and the thing. So, Aristotle links the items one knows with a disjunction and the items one ignores with a conjunction. It seems, then, that the action is voluntary if the agent acts with knowledge of at least one item; on the contrary, an action is involuntary if the agent acts in ignorance of all three the aforementioned circumstances of the action. Understood in such terms, the criterion seems to be too demanding.

Secondly, the lists of items an agent might know or ignore are slightly different. Indeed, Aristotle contrasts acting with knowledge of the person (ὄν), the instrument (ἄ) and the aim (οὐ ἔνεκα) to acting in ignorance of the person (ἄν), the instrument (ἄ) and the thing (ὄ). We should then ask whether ‘the aim’ and ‘the thing’ refer to the same item or not.

Concerning the first issue, i.e. the switching from a disjunction to a conjunction, Aristotle seems to oppose acting with knowledge of at least one item to acting in ignorance of all the items. Consequently, knowing even one of the circumstances would be a sufficient condition to make the action voluntary. Apparently, then, an agent must ignore each and every circumstance of the action itself in order for the action to be involuntary. However, as I have previously stated, the criterion thus phrased would be too demanding for the agent. I propose, following Kenny’s interpretation (1979, 54), to read the *kai* as disjunctive.⁶ The use of *kai* as a disjunction is not unusual in Greek. For instance, Aristotle uses *kai* as a disjunction in the *Politics* (B 3.1262a8, Δ 4.1292a21) and in the *Metaphysics* (N 2.1089b3). If we accept the reading of the *kai* as a ‘or’ when Aristotle speaks of acting in ignorance, then, ignoring one of the items would be a sufficient condition for involuntary actions.

⁶ Also Woods (2005) 136 remarks that “it is rather surprising that he here contrasts ignorance of *all* of a specified list of things with knowledge of *at least one* of them”, thus concluding that “this looks like a slipper.” Dalimier (2013) 125 translates the passage as follows: “on a connaissance de la personne [...], du moyen et de la finalité [...]”; on est dans l’ignorance de la personne, du moyen, ou de l’acte lui-même.” Likewise, for Solomon (2014) 65 “to act with knowledge of the person acted on, instrument and end [...] seems contrary to action in ignorance of the person, instrument, or thing.”

Concerning the second issue, i.e. whether we should understand ‘the aim’ and ‘the thing’ as referring to the same item, we first need to ask what it means to ignore ‘the thing’, in Greek the *ho*.

If we look at the Greek text, we can see that Aristotle mentions the circumstances an agent may know or ignore using relative pronouns: the agent can ignore the ‘who’, the ‘by which’ and the ‘that/which’. So, to know or to ignore the *ho*, the thing, is to know or to ignore what the agent is doing, i.e. the action itself considered as a whole. Roughly speaking, the agent must know that she is doing X when she is doing X.⁷ We can thus reasonably conclude that knowing – or ignoring – the thing includes the knowledge – or the ignorance – of the aim. If then the thing refers to the action considered as whole, all specific circumstances (instrument, person and aim) can be included in the *ho* and, consequently, also the aim. I do not take here the thing and the aim to refer to the same item, as I will say in the following of the text, but I do consider the knowledge of the action as a whole to be inclusive of the knowledge of the aim. Consider Aristotle’s example of Pelias’ daughters at 1225b4–5ss. Pelias’ daughters know the person they are acting on, i.e. their own father, but they ignore the instrument and the aim. In the Greek myth, Medea deceives Pelias’ daughters by giving them a *pharmakon* which, she says, would help their father not to die, but later the *pharmakon* turns out to be a poison, which kills him instead. So Pelias’ daughters think they are saving their father while they are actually killing him. Did they act voluntarily or involuntarily? Did they know what they were doing at the time of the action? The answer is ‘no’. We can assume that Pelias’ daughters’ description of the action would be: “we are giving our father a potion in order to save him”. Indeed, the complete description of the action includes all the circumstances of the action itself and also the aim. So, to return to the issue as to whether the aim and the thing both refer to the same item, although they do not refer to the same aspect of the action, knowledge of the thing does involve knowledge of the aim. In this respect, then, no relevant difference between Aristotle’s two lists of circumstances can be identified.

We have now dealt with the two main difficulties which arise from Aristotle’s text. However, we still need to consider a third difficulty.

Aristotle argues that acting with knowledge of the circumstances in which the action is accomplished is opposed to acting in ignorance of the circumstances ‘not accidentally’. Scholars have offered different interpretations of the expression,

⁷ A reference to the action in its entirety can also be found in *Eth. Nic.* V 8.1135a32. A similar point is also made by Echeñique (2012) 160.

with regard both to its reference and its actual meaning. We can sum up these interpretations in three main points (Woods 2005, 136–7):

- (A) ‘not accidentally’ refers to ‘opposed to’;
- (B) it refers to ‘ignorance of the person, the instrument or the thing’;
- (C) it refers to ‘because of ignorance’.

A) According to the first reading, Aristotle is saying that acting with knowledge is essentially – and not merely accidentally – opposed to acting in ignorance. However, if we take the expression as referring to ‘opposed to’, Aristotle would not be saying anything different from what he had already previously stated, i.e. that acting with knowledge is opposed to acting in ignorance. The need for a further clarification of this point would be difficult to explain or justify and the text would also appear redundant.

Concerning the other two readings (B, C), I take them both as emphasizing some relevant features of involuntary action due to ignorance. Also, they are not incompatible with one another.

B) According to the second reading – ‘not accidentally’ refers to ‘ignorance of the person, the instrument or the thing’ – Aristotle is claiming that, while ignorance may be sometimes accidental to the action, actions are involuntary only if the agent ignores some essential features and circumstances of the action itself. For instance, an agent might know the person under one description and ignore it under another description. As an example, Oedipus ignores that the man standing in front of him is his father while, at the same time, he knows the man in front of him as ‘an old man with grey hair’. Oedipus, then, knows his father only accidentally. If a court were to establish whether Oedipus is a parricide or not, only the description ‘the man is my father’, which Oedipus ignores, would be relevant to the court’s final judgement.⁸

C) Finally, the third reading – ‘not accidentally’ refers to ‘because of ignorance’ – highlights that the ignorance must be relevant to the action itself and not merely accidental. Moreover, if the ignorance has to be relevant to the action as a whole, then the agent must ignore the particular circumstances of the action, which make up the complete description of the action itself. Roughly, this amounts to a situation where the agent, later informed about the actual circumstances of the action, exclaims: “if I had only known that before, I would have acted differently!”. Evidently, this last reading does not exclude the second one, but rather includes it.⁹

⁸ See also Heinaman (1986) 132.

⁹ *Ibid.*

Woods,¹⁰ in his commentary on the *Eudemian Ethics*, claims that Aristotle, at least in this passage, is most probably unaware of the problem of the multiple description of the same object.¹¹ I would argue, on the contrary, that Aristotle is well aware of the issue and that this is one of the main reasons for the presence of the expression ‘not accidentally’. Consider Oedipus’ case again. Oedipus, as we have seen, voluntarily kills the old man with grey hair he meets on the road. However, the old man with grey hair is his father. Hence, someone might infer that Oedipus voluntarily killed his father, by simply replacing one description with the other. Aristotle’s reference to non-accidental ignorance serves the purpose of preventing this inference. In our example, then, even though the two descriptions are extensionally equivalent and both refer to the very same object, they cannot be used to freely replace each another. If someone were to accuse Oedipus of parricide, the relevant description would be ‘the man is Oedipus’ father’, and this is exactly one of the circumstances Oedipus ignored at the time of the action. In contrast with Woods’ reading, then, the expression ‘not accidentally’ specifically prevents the free substitution of extensionally equivalent descriptions.

Consequently, merely accidental ignorance is insufficient to make an action involuntary: an agent might either ignore several particular circumstances at the time of the action or she might have merely accidental knowledge of some features which are irrelevant to the action itself. Furthermore, given the possibility of multiple descriptions, an agent can be praised – or not blamed or punished – under one description of the action, and blamed under another. Oedipus can still be charged with murder, although he cannot be charged with parricide. An agent might accomplish X involuntarily and in ignorance while, at the same time, accomplishing Y voluntarily, as in Oedipus’ example, where X and Y are different descriptions of the same action.

2.3 Acting in Ignorance and because of Ignorance

Up to this point, I have left aside another aspect of *Eth. Eud.* II 9 which is indeed relevant for understanding involuntary actions due to ignorance.

¹⁰ Woods (2005) 136.

¹¹ *Ibid.*: “He does not show any awareness of such facts as that the identity of the person affected by an action may be known under one description but not under another, unless this is the point of *incidentally*.” Although later relying on the Oedipus’ example, Woods does not actually believe that the example explains the use of ‘not incidentally’ here: he rather believes ‘not incidentally’ to imply that ignorance should really affect the person’s action and not only be incidental to what the person did (Woods 2005, 137).

When Aristotle introduces the expression ‘not accidentally’, he states that acting with knowledge is opposed to acting ignoring and *di’agnoian*, i.e. because of ignorance:

Acting in ignorance of the person and the instrument and the thing because of ignorance (δι’ ἀγνοίαν), not accidentally. (*Eth. Eud.* II 9.1225b5–6, transl. by Kenny, modified)

For an action to be truly involuntary, the agent must not only act in ignorance but also because of ignorance. What is the difference, then, between the agent acting in ignorance and because of ignorance? Heinaman (1986) argues that acting in ignorance and acting because of ignorance do not genuinely differ. However, later in chapter 9, Aristotle restates that an action is involuntary when the agent acts in ignorance and because of ignorance (*Eth. Eud.* II 9.1225b10–11). Furthermore, Aristotle uses here the construction *dia* followed by the accusative (*di’agnoian*), which he also uses later in the chapter to draw attention to cases where the agent acts in ignorance not because of ignorance, but rather because of negligence, pain or pleasure. At *Eth. Eud.* II 9.1225b10–15, Aristotle distinguishes two cases in which the agent can be said to act in ignorance: 1. an agent acts in ignorance if she does not possess knowledge; 2. an agent acts in ignorance if she does not use a knowledge she has. However, an agent cannot be rightly said to have acted in ignorance if she did not use a knowledge she had, because of negligence, e.g. Furthermore, Aristotle states, an agent can be blamed if she did not get a knowledge when it was easy and necessary to get it, and she did not because of negligence, pain and pleasure. All this textual evidence points to a real contrast between acting in ignorance because of ignorance and acting in ignorance because of other motives, reasons or causes. For instance, Oedipus acts in ignorance and because of ignorance in killing his father at the crossroads: he could not possibly know that the man in front of him is his father, so the ultimate cause of his action is ignorance itself. By contrast, if a doctor gives her patient a medicine to which, unknown to her, the patient is allergic and this causes her patient’s death, we can say that the doctor acted in ignorance but because of negligence, because she should have carried out analyses to ascertain her patient’s reaction to the drug. So if acting in ignorance because of ignorance is not equivalent to acting in ignorance because of, e.g., negligence, we need to consider the agent’s epistemic mistake not merely in itself, or absolutely, but in relation to the cause of the agent’s epistemic defective state.

Aristotle’s reference to the cause of ignorance, then, is relevant to involuntary actions. Moreover, the mention of *di’agnoian* serves two purposes: on one hand, it refers back to ‘not accidentally’; on the other, it anticipates the ending of chapter 9.

Concerning the first point, if my interpretation of ‘not accidentally’ is correct, *di’agnoian* is intended to mean that, in the case of involuntary actions, the agent acts without the necessary information, which, if possessed, would have changed the agent’s course of action: roughly, the cause of the agent’s action is ignorance, with the result that the agent’s defective epistemic state is the ultimate cause¹² of the action and it is not merely accidental to the action itself. In other words, Oedipus is an involuntary parricide because he does not know the relevant description of the man he kills (and does not have the means to acquire that information and that knowledge) and thus acts not only in ignorance but because of ignorance.

Furthermore, when we perform an action, there are actually many (irrelevant) features we ignore, so we always act in ignorance to some degree. For instance, when someone is driving a car, she knows and must to know the rules of the road, but she could, at the same time, ignore how asphalt is made or the chemical formula for gasoline. Aristotle would consider ignorance of this kind irrelevant to the action itself and merely concomitant. An agent acts involuntarily not only if she acts in ignorance but also if ignorance is indeed the ultimate cause of her action, i.e. if she acts in ignorance and because of ignorance, *di’agnoian*. So if our driver were to rear-end a car, we could not possibly say that she acted in ignorance and involuntarily because, while driving, she ignored the chemical formula for gasoline or the physical laws of friction.

Moreover, even if the agent ignores or is mistaken about e.g. the instrument, we still have to ask ourselves if the agent possessed, at the time of the action, the relevant description of the instrument. For instance, if an agent wishes to kill a rival by poisoning but is mistaken about the kind of poison she is using, believing it to be hemlock and ignoring that it is actually arsenic, in this case too the agent’s ignorance will be irrelevant to the action. Ignorance is here accidental because the relevant description of the instrument is ‘the drink is poison’ – and not ‘the drink is hemlock’ or ‘the drink is arsenic’. In this case too, then, the agent can be said to act in ignorance but not because of ignorance: the agent’s ignorance of the specific kind of poison used is not relevant for avoiding the charge of ‘murder by poisoning’, nor is it relevant for avoiding blame from one’s social community.

¹² When I say that ignorance is the cause of the agent’s action I do not take here ‘cause’ in its proper Aristotelian sense: ignorance, being a privation (of knowledge) cannot cause, in the Aristotelian sense, the agent’s action; what I here mean is that the agent acts, according to her desire, without the relevant information; the agent’s action and desire would have been different, had she possessed knowledge. In the case of involuntary actions due to ignorance, the only reason why the agent acts the way she does is because she does not have relevant information about the action itself and its circumstances.

Thus the adverb ‘accidentally’ is meant to exclude that the agent acted involuntarily both in cases in which (1) the agent acts in ignorance but ignorance is merely a concomitant state and (2) cases in which the agent acts in ignorance but ignorance is irrelevant to the action itself because what the agent ignores is irrelevant for revealing the real nature of the action itself.¹³ In these two cases, the agent will still be responsible for the action, which is ultimately voluntary. So if an agent may act in ignorance and still accomplish a voluntary action, the reference to the *di’agnoian* actually adds another necessary condition for an action to be involuntary, which leads us to the second remark.

2.4 Acting in Ignorance because of Negligence, Pleasure or Pain

Concerning the second point, I have argued that *di’agnoian* also refers to the ending of chapter 9, where Aristotle states that the agent who fails to use knowledge and the agent who fails to acquire knowledge can still be blamed for her ignorance if ignorance is due to negligence, pain or pleasure:¹⁴

The person who has it (*scil.* knowledge) but does not use it could be in some cases said to be justifiably¹⁵ ignorant, but not so in other cases, as where the failure to make use of the knowledge is due to negligence (δι’ ἀμέλειαν). Likewise, a person might also be blamed for not having the knowledge, if he did not have it and it was easy and necessary to attain and the failure to do so was due to negligence, pleasure or pain (δι’ ἀμέλειαν ἢ ἡδονὴν ἢ λύπην). (*Eth. Eud.* II 9.1225b11–16, transl. by Kenny, modified)

13 The main difference between (1) and (2) is due to the fact that, in the first case, the agent ignores something which is not directly linked to the action itself. For instance, if I do ignore the number of Saturn’s satellites, I am acting in ignorance but this kind of ignorance is irrelevant to the action I am performing. In the second case, however, the agent ignores the real description of the instrument, i.e. the drink is hemlock, and thinks that the drink is actually arsenic. However, here the relevant description of the drink is not that the drink is arsenic or hemlock but that the drink is poison. It seems to me that the two cases should be considered separately although they both refer to ‘accidental ignorance’.

14 *Eth. Eud.* II 9.1225b16.

15 Kenny (2011) translates the adverb *dikaios* as referring to the *legoito*. Inwood and Woolf (2013), on the contrary, takes the adverb as referring to *agnoon*. While in the first case, the adverb seems to qualify how we can describe the agent and the action, in the second case it seems to point to the conditions that might justify or not the agent’s ignorance. I follow here Inwood’s translation because it emphasizes the fact that the agent is indeed in ignorance but his or her ignorance is not justifiable because of his or her bad habits.

Roughly speaking, the agent can still be blamed for ignoring some relevant circumstances of the action if ignorance is due to a some relevant disposition such as negligence. If the agent acts in ignorance because of negligence, pain and pleasure, despite the action being involuntary, the agent can still be blamed for the habit that has led to ignorance in the first place, because she should have possessed knowledge of the relevant circumstances but failed because of a relevant ethical disposition, which is the ultimate cause of the agent's action. Conversely, the expression *di'agnoian* identifies cases where no other relevant ethical disposition leads the agent to accomplish the action besides an epistemic mistake. Indeed, if some relevant ethical disposition causes the epistemic mistake and the factual ignorance, the agent is blamable, although she acts in ignorance.

However, it may be worth noting that, in the passage quoted, Aristotle does not expressly say that actions performed in ignorance owing to relevant ethical dispositions are voluntary. He rather claims that actions accomplished in ignorance and because of ignorance are involuntary and that actions accomplished in ignorance and because of negligence, pain or pleasure are blameworthy. On the other hand, blame and praise can be ascribed only to voluntary actions. We cannot blame the agent if she acted involuntarily. In *Eth. Eud.* II 6.1223a9–15, Aristotle says that we can praise or blame an agent only for those actions for which she is actually responsible.¹⁶ A similar statement can be found in *Eth. Nic.* III 7.1114a21–31. There, Aristotle claims that we do not blame an agent because of her ugliness if that ugliness comes from nature. If nature is responsible, blaming the agent for her ugliness is inappropriate. However, if the agent has become ugly because of her behavior, she is indeed blamable. Praise and blame, then, can be ascribed to the one who is actually responsible for the action because the action was *ep'auto*.

If we return to our passage from *Eth. Eud.* II 9, we face the problem of actions performed in ignorance yet still blameworthy. On one hand, the agent acts in ignorance and so the action seems to be involuntary. On the other, Aristotle says that actions of this kind are blameworthy, so they would appear to be voluntary. Are these actions, then, voluntary or involuntary? I would argue that these actions are indeed involuntary. However, although the action in itself can be said to be involuntary, because the agent acts in ignorance, the ethical dispositions which have caused ignorance are not involuntary. Consequently, the agent can still be blamed because the starting point of the action is voluntary. In this case, though, we trace the blame back not to the agent's action but to the starting point of the action, i.e. the habit or ethical disposition which is the cause of ignorance. Failure

¹⁶ *Eth. Eud.* II 6.1223a10–12: ψέγεται γὰρ καὶ ἐπαινείται οὐ διὰ τὰ ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἢ τύχης ἢ φύσεως ὑπάρχοντα, ἀλλ' ὅσων αὐτοὶ αἴτιοι ἐσμέν.

to acquire or exercise knowledge can be ascribed to the agent if an ethically relevant disposition caused the failure itself.

We can now summarize the main points in our interpretation of *Eth. Eud.* II 9. An action is involuntary if the agent acts in ignorance and ignorance is relevant to the action itself. Furthermore, the agent acts involuntarily and escapes praise or blame, punishment or retribution, not only if he acts in ignorance but also if no other ethical disposition, besides ignorance itself, can be identified as the cause of his action.

So an action is involuntary if:

- the agent acts in ignorance (*Eth. Eud.* II 9.1225b5);
- ignorance is not accidental to the action (*Eth. Eud.* II 9.1225b6);
- the agent acts in ignorance and because of ignorance (*Eth. Eud.* II 9.1225b5–6, b10).

3 The Classification of Damages in *Eth. Nic.* V 8

3.1 Initial Remarks on *Eth. Nic.* V 8

At the beginning of this paper, I claimed that voluntariness is indeed relevant to the discussion in *Eth. Nic.* V. Indeed, in *Eth. Nic.* V, Aristotle provides a classification of damages or errors an agent may commit. A similar classification also appears in the *Rhetoric* (I 13), where Aristotle highlights that legislators and judges need first to establish if the agent can be accounted responsible for her own actions. Indeed, one of the main points in both classifications is the distinction between voluntary and involuntary damages.

If an agent makes a mistake and acts involuntarily, the judge should take her attitude into account, in order to establish a fair punishment, if a punishment is required. Therefore, Aristotle twice addresses the question of whether, from a juridical standpoint, an agent can be punished and, if so, how severely she should be punished, depending on her attitude at the time of the wrongdoing. The classification of damages, then, is clearly linked with Aristotle's account of voluntary and involuntary actions. The account on voluntariness thus becomes pivotal for a deeper understanding of this passage and, conversely, what Aristotle tells us in this chapter may be of help in trying to determine whether this passage is consistent with the account in *Eth. Eud.* Before dealing closely with damages and their classification, both in *Eth. Nic.* and in *Rhet.* Aristotle recalls the main features of his account of voluntary actions, which also allows him to distinguish between acts of justice (or injustice) and the just (or unjust). He indeed states that an agent can accomplish an unjust action without performing an act of injustice, properly

said. The difference lies in the agent's attitude and dispositions at the time of the action. Firstly, then, just and unjust (*dikaion* and *adikon*) are said to be qualities, so an action can have the quality of being just (or unjust). However, the quality of the action in itself does not tell us if the agent is just or unjust. In order to determine this, we have to take into account the causes, reasons and motives behind the agent's action. Therefore, Aristotle establishes a difference between just and unjust – considered as qualities – and acts of justice or injustice (*dikaioma* and *adikema*). For instance, if an agent acts involuntarily and the action happens to be unjust, then the action is only unjust. If, however, the agent acts voluntarily and the action happens to be unjust, then the action is an act of injustice.¹⁷

An unjust action, or a just one, is marked off by being voluntary or not; for if it is voluntary it attracts blame and is at the same time an act of injustice; but if there is no element of voluntariness, then an outcome may be unjust without being an act of injustice (*Eth. Nic. V* 8.1135a20–23, transl. by Kenny, modified)

An agent, then, acts unjustly or justly whenever she accomplishes such acts voluntarily; when she acts involuntarily, she acts neither unjustly nor justly but in an accidental way. In such cases, then, the agent actually accomplishes an action that might be said to be unjust, i.e. 'unjust' can be predicated of the agent's action. So we can say that the agent *adikei*, but only accidentally because she does not act voluntarily.

For example, if I open the car door and a fugitive who is running away from the police gets hit by the car door, falls on the ground and is caught, without me wanting this or even considering the chance that my car door might hit someone, then I happen to have accomplished a just action without having accomplished an act of justice. Indeed, I have stopped the fugitive involuntarily and, consequently, my action cannot be defined as a *dikaiopragema*. Voluntary actions, on the contrary, are acts of justice or injustice and can also attract blame or praise, insofar they are voluntary. According to Aristotle, then, we first need to determine whether the agent acts voluntarily or involuntarily. However, Aristotle also states that an agent might act unjustly without being unjust. People who have intercourse with married women act unjustly, but if they act out of passion, they are not unjust, properly speaking. Instead, if they act out of choice, they can be said to be unjust, because their unjust habits are the cause of their actions. So in order to correctly

¹⁷ A brief remark on my translation of Aristotle's terminology in *Eth. Nic. V* 8: I am translating *dikaion* as 'just', *adikon* as 'unjust', *dikaiopragema* as 'act of justice', *adikema* as 'act of injustice', *adikein* as 'to act unjustly' and *dikaiopraghein* as 'to act justly'. On the polysemic use of 'justice' and 'injustice' in *Eth. Nic. V* see Masi (2019).

distinguish between different kinds of actions, we have to consider the agent's attitude at the time of the action, as well as the causes of the action.

3.2 The Definition of Voluntariness in *Eth. Nic. V 8*

At this point, Aristotle recalls the definition of the voluntary, in a long and complex passage, which I will analyze in sections:

[A] By voluntary I mean, as was said earlier, something within his power [B] that a man does knowingly, not ignoring the person, the instrument and the aim. He must know, for instance, whom he is striking, with what, and with what aim and each of these not accidentally and it must not be forced. [C] If, for instance, one man takes another's hand and strikes a third party, the agent does not act voluntarily, for the act was not in his power. It is possible that the person struck is his father, and that he knew that he was a man and that he was one of the present company, but did not know that he was his father. A similar distinction may be made about the aim and about the action in its entirety. [D] What is done in ignorance, or not in ignorance but without one's power, or is forced, is involuntary. (Many natural processes, it should be said, are things we do and undergo knowingly and yet they are neither voluntary nor involuntary: examples are growing old or dying.) (*Eth. Nic. V 8.1135a23–b2*, transl. by Kenny, modified)

In section [A] of the aforementioned passage, Aristotle states that the voluntary is among the things which are up to us and depend on the agent. This statement is indeed in contrast with some scholars' interpretation, according to which the voluntary and the *eph'hemin* are basically coincident classes of objects.¹⁸ In *Eth. Nic. III*, Aristotle states that if acting depends on the agent (if it is *ep'auto*), so does refraining from acting, and that if the 'yes' depends on the agent, then so does the 'no' does.¹⁹ In *Eth. Eud. II 6*, he argues that it depends on the agent to X or not to X (where X is an action).²⁰ It is only in relation to things which are up to us that we can ask the question of whether the agent has acted voluntarily or not. We do not ask, for instance, if a human being is ageing voluntarily or involuntarily, simply because ageing is not something which depends on the agent. However, we may ask if a human being is killing someone voluntarily or involuntarily, because

¹⁸ I will not deal here with this problem: however, according to Donini (1989) 3–21, in *Eth. Nic. III*, Aristotle takes the *eph'hemin* and the voluntary to be coincident classes. It could be objected that at 1111a22–24 Aristotle states that, among the *eph'hemin*, only actions accomplished with knowledge are voluntary, so that the voluntary will be a subclass of the things which depends on us. I thank the anonymous referee for this suggestion.

¹⁹ For a discussion of the passage, see Bobzien (2014a, 2014b).

²⁰ For a discussion on *eph'hemin*, determinism and deliberation in Aristotle, see Nielsen (2011, 2012, 2017), Sauvé Meyer (2014).

'killing someone' is indeed *eph'hemin*. In book V, then, Aristotle clearly states that the voluntary is among the things which depend on us.

Secondly, in section [B] Aristotle states that an agent acts voluntarily if she acts with knowledge and not ignoring the person, the end and the instrument of the action. An agent might ignore the instrument of the action, if, for instance, she thinks she is giving someone a potion and then wrongly gives the person a poison. Furthermore, an agent might ignore the end of the action if she wants to save someone but what she does results in killing the person. And an agent might ignore the person, if the person is the agent's father but he is believed to be just a random stranger. The list of items of which an agent has knowledge is identical to the one provided in *Eth. Eud.* II 9.1225b1–2.

Furthermore, here, Aristotle again uses the expression "not accidentally". In *Eth. Eud.* II 9, this phrase played a pivotal role, as we have seen, because it clarified that ignorance must be relevant to the action and justified the impossibility of freely substituting extensionally equivalent descriptions. This feature also recalls a fundamental juridical concern: charges must be coincident with the action the defendant claims to have accomplished. For instance, defendants do not always deny that the action they are accused of has happened through them, but sometimes they deny that charges correspond with the description of the action they have actually accomplished. In *Rhet.*, for instance, Aristotle recalls this problem by stating that sometimes an agent might confess to have stolen something but not to have profaned a place in doing so, as in the case of a thief who has stolen goods she did not know belonged to a temple (*Rhet.* I 13.1374a9–17).

In this case, the defendant would probably plead guilty to the charge of theft while, at the same time, pleading innocent to the profanation charge, because she ignored that the stolen property belonged to the temple. On the contrary, in the case of accidental ignorance, i.e. ignorance irrelevant to the action, the agent's ignorance would be insufficient to make the action involuntary. An agent can ignore several circumstances at the time of the action. As we have seen, if someone wanted to kill a rival through arsenic poisoning and happened to give the victim another kind of poison, ignorance of the instrument would be almost irrelevant to the killer's murder charge. In this case, specific knowledge of the poison used would not have changed the agent's mind or criminal plan. Furthermore, justice and injustice, considered as qualities, can be merely accidental to the action itself: if someone gives back a loan because of fear, he does not act justly, insofar as 'being just' is merely accidental to the action itself. The agent did not give back the loan because it was just and noble, but only because of fear.

Voluntariness can thus help distinguish between actions which happen to be just and proper acts of justice, *dikaiopragemata*. An action is voluntary *iff*, being among the things which are in the agent's power, it is performed with knowledge of

the particular circumstances and – as stated in section [C] – not by force (as in the case of the man whose hand is taken by another man in order to strike a third one).²¹

Finally, we come to section [D], where Aristotle recaps his conclusion on voluntary and involuntary actions:

What is done in ignorance, or not in ignorance but without one's power, or is forced, is involuntary. (Many natural processes, it should be said, are things we do and undergo knowingly and yet they are neither voluntary nor involuntary: examples are growing old or dying.) (*Eth. Nic.* V 8.1135a32–b3, transl. by Kenny, modified)

So, an action is involuntary *iff*:

- the agent does not know/ignores the particular circumstances;
- the agent is forced;
- the agent has knowledge but the action is not up to the agent herself, as in the case of natural processes, e.g. dying or ageing, of which human beings are evidently aware despite the fact that these processes are not up to them.

3.3 Aristotle's Classification of Damages in *Eth. Nic.* V 8

However, Aristotle introduces yet another distinction in relation to voluntary actions. He distinguishes between agents who actually choose the action and agents who act without previous deliberation and without *prohairesis*, as in the case of those who act out of passion. In *Eth. Nic.* V 8, this distinction is mirrored in Aristotle's classification of injuries. After having recalled the main features of voluntary actions and after having made the first distinctions, Aristotle finally deals exhaustively with the classification of damages.

In interactions between people there are three kinds of injury: mistake, misadventure, and injustice. Mistakes (*hamartemata*) are injuries inflicted with ignorance, when the victim, the action and the instrument and the aim are not what the agent supposed. Perhaps he did not think he was throwing anything at all, or not this missile, or not at this person or with this aim, but either the aim happened not to be what he thought – maybe he threw it with the aim only to prick and not to wound – or else the victim and the missile was other than he thought. A misadventure (*atychemata*) is when the injury takes place contrary to reasonable expectation; if the injury could have been foreseen, but takes place without malicious intent, it is a mistake. (The difference between the two is that in a mistake the origin of the cause is internal to the agent, whereas in a misadventure it is external.) When a man acts knowingly, but without

²¹ The example Aristotle uses here to illustrate a case of forced action is the very same we find in *Eth. Eud.* II 8.1224b12–14: “If for instance one man grabs another's hand and makes it strike a third party, against both his will and appetite.” On the contrary, there is no mention of the same example in *Eth. Nic.* III.

deliberation, his act is an injustice (*adikema*). The actions I mean are those that are due to anger or other passions that are necessary or natural to human beings. When people do such harmful and wrongful acts, they do act unjustly and their deeds are unjust, yet this does not mean that they are themselves unjust or wicked, since the injury does not originate in depravity. But when a man inflicts an injury out of choice, then he is an unjust (*adikos*) and depraved man. (*Eth. Nic.* V 8.1135b11–26, transl. by Kenny, modified)

Firstly, Aristotle states that injuries or damages are of three kinds. However, the *Nicomachean* classification is quadripartite: Aristotle claims that damages are of three kinds because one genus has the same name as one of the species. At the beginning of his analysis, Aristotle distinguishes damages into two genera:

1. damages which are accomplished in ignorance or with ignorance (*hamartemata*);
2. damages which are accomplished with the agent knowing.

In relation to the first genus, however, we can make a further distinction between *atychemata* and *hamartemata*:

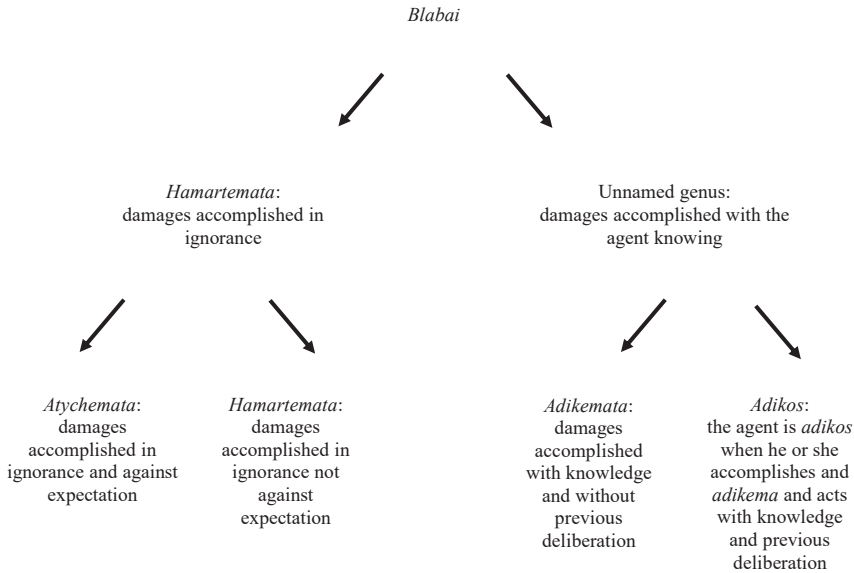
- 1a. *atychemata*: damages accomplished in ignorance and against any expectation, whose first cause is external;
- 1b. *hamartemata*: damages accomplished in ignorance and not against expectation, whose first cause lies in the agent.

Hamartemata, then, is the name of the genus and also of one of the species: *hamartemata* are damages accomplished in ignorance (genus) and they are also damages of a specific kind which are accomplished in ignorance and which do not occur against expectation.

Among (2) we can instead distinguish between:

- 2a. *adikemata*: damages accomplished with knowledge but without previous deliberation, e.g. damages due to impetuosity;
- 2b. *adikos*:²² the agent is here defined as *adikos*, i.e. unjust, when the agent commits an *adikema* knowingly and with previous deliberation, acting from choice (*ek prohaireseos*).

²² Here, I closely follow Aristotle's naming of the different kinds of damages. However, it is surprising that, in defining the kinds of errors and damages, Aristotle introduces, as the last kind of errors, an adjective which is intended to define the agent's moral character rather than the action he or she has accomplished. I take it to imply that agents who are said to be *adikoi* have actually accomplished an *adikema* but the *adikema* has come from previous deliberation; consequently, all damages accomplished with knowledge may be defined as *adikemata* but while the first group identify cases in which the agents act without deliberation, the last case defines agents who have acted deliberately, so that we can say that they do accomplish an *adikema* being *adikoi*.



Consider the following diagram, which helps understand Aristotle's classification:

Also Dyer (1965) and Sorabji (1980, 278–9) argue that damages must be distinguished in four species or kinds. However, Dyer argues for a different distinction: 1. *hamartemata* (*met'agnoias*); a. *paralogos*: *atychemata*; b. *me paralogos*: *hamartemata*; 2. *adikemata*; 3. *adikos*. I claim however that Aristotle firstly distinguishes between what occurs in ignorance and what occurs with knowledge and only later he distinguishes, inside these two genres, the other categories or classes of damages. Consequently, *adikemata* and *adikos* falls among damages accomplished with knowledge – which are voluntary damages – and, so, they fall under the same genus.²³

In order to clarify my interpretation of Aristotle's classification of *blabai*, I will first examine errors accomplished in ignorance and then errors or damages committed knowingly.

²³ Dyer (1965), on the contrary, seems to claim that, while *hamartemata* and *atychemata* are two kinds of damages which can be brought under the same genus, *adikos* and *adikemata* are distinctions which cannot be seen as falling under the same genus, i.e. damages accomplished voluntarily.

3.4 *Hamartemata* and *Atychemata*

Firstly, Aristotle states that *hamartemata* (understood here as a genus) are damages accomplished in ignorance (*met'agnoias*). Richard Sorabji has thus argued that in *Eth. Nic.* V 8 there is no reference to the distinction between acting in ignorance and acting because of ignorance which appears in *Eth. Eud.* II 9 and *Eth. Nic.* III.²⁴ According to Sorabji's interpretation, damages accomplished with ignorance, *met'agnoias*, are intended to cover every case of an action performed in ignorance. I would argue that a reference to negligent ignorance appears at 1135b16, where Aristotle mentions involuntary actions that occur *paralogos* and *me paralogos*:

A misadventure (*atychema*) is when the injury takes place contrary to reasonable expectation (*παράλογως*); if the injury could have been foreseen (*μη παράλογως*), but takes place without malicious intent, it is a mistake.

In the passage quoted, Aristotle distinguishes two kinds of *hamartemata*. First, we have *atychemata*. *Atychemata* are damages which occur *paralogos*, 'contrary to reasonable expectation', as, for example, in the case of a driver who is driving at an average speed while a passer-by, wanting to commit suicide, throws herself under the wheels. The driver could not have possibly foreseen the sudden appearance of the passer-by and the incident itself. While *atychemata* happen *paralogos*, in the case of *hamartemata* the agent could have foreseen the consequences of her actions but did not, so that the agent does not act *paralogos*. If a javelin thrower is indeed throwing the javelin while there are people in the arena and the javelin hits and kills someone, then the action is a *hamartema*. Hence, the difference between a *hamartema* and an *atychemata* lies in the agent's acting *paralogos* or *me paralogos*. We need to ask, then, what *paralogos* really means and whether we can legitimately interpret the term as meaning 'contrary to reasonable expectation'. My claim is that *paralogos* not only means 'contrary to reasonable expectation' but also that Aristotle's reference to the reasonable expectation concerns precisely negligent ignorance, contrary to Schofield's view according to which there would be no reference to negligence in the text from *Eth. Nic.* V 8. It could be objected that what an agent can expect can be due to an indefinite number of reasons, e.g. access to the information, past experiences, and so on, and this would make the inclusion of negligence hard to sustain.²⁵ In this case, an agent might not expect the action's outcome because, e.g. she did not have access to some relevant information. However, in the case of *hamartemata*, the agent does not act against the

²⁴ Sorabji (1980) 274.

²⁵ I wish to thank the anonymous referee for this suggestion.

expectation but the mistake is nonetheless involuntary: in Aristotle's words, the agent acts in ignorance but her mistake does not happen against expectation. This makes for me hard to believe that Aristotle has in mind cases which does not involve negligence, because it would be hard to explain how an agent can act in ignorance and yet not against expectation. Moreover, Aristotle later states, as we shall see, that the difference between *atychemata* and *hamartemata* can be traced back to the source of ignorance itself: if the cause of ignorance lies in the agent, then we have to trace some disposition inside the agent that can explain why the agent acted the way she did. Moreover, Aristotle himself in *Eth. Eud.* II 9, states that if access to the information was easy and necessary and the agent did not acquire that information or knowledge, then the agent is to blame. Even if it is undoubtedly evident that Aristotle does not openly mention negligence (or cases where the agent can still be blamed for her actions and ignorance because it was necessary and easy for her to acquire knowledge), it is nonetheless true that the term *paralogos* refers to negligence. However, two different readings of *paralogos* have been suggested: 1. some scholars²⁶ hold that *paralogos* means only 'contrary to expectation'; 2. other scholars claim that *paralogos* is more correctly interpreted as 'contrary to reasonable expectation'. For instance, Daube²⁷ has claimed that *paralogos* cannot be used to suggest a reference to negligence and that it is better translated as 'contrary to expectation'. Schofield²⁸ has objected to this remark by defending the translation of *paralogos* as 'contrary to reasonable expectation', while claiming, at the same time, that he substantially agrees with Daube's statement according to which negligence here plays no role. The term *paralogos* would not be referring to the case of an agent who could or should have expected the outcome of her action, but simply to the psychological state of the agent at the time of the action. However, Sorabji²⁹ has objected to Daube's interpretation with some important remarks. First, if the agent is acting in ignorance, thus not knowing and understanding what she is really doing, how can someone legitimately state that what she does is not contrary to expectation, i.e. that it is not unexpected, but consistent with her expectations? In other words, how could it be possible for the agent to make a mistake in ignorance yet in a psychological state such that the agent's action is, at the same time, perfectly consistent with her mental representation of the action? Daube indeed solves the problem by shifting from one description to the other: Oedipus kills the man in front of him not unexpectedly, but kills his father in ignorance. However, this shifting from one description to the

26 Daube (1969) and Dyer (1965) 251.

27 Daube (1969) 133–49.

28 Schofield (1973) 67–8.

29 Sorabji (1980) 281.

other seems rather unwarranted. Moreover, if that was the case then how could we be able to distinguish a *hamartema* from an *adikema*? If the outcome is expected, it would fit the description of *adikemata*. For these reasons, I would suggest that *paralogos* fits better with the translation ‘contrary to reasonable expectation’ and thus refers to damages and errors due to negligence. In this sense, I would argue that it is exactly the reference to acting *paralogos* that points to negligent ignorance. Although I am not denying that *Eth. Eud.* II 9 and *Eth. Nic.* V 8 present certain differences in the way the features of voluntary and involuntary actions are expressed and phrased, as in the case of negligent ignorance, I would argue that all the conditions mentioned in *Eth. Eud.* II 9 for involuntary actions due to ignorance can also be found in *Eth. Nic.* V 8 and that the term *paralogos* actually covers some of those conditions, such as negligence. Moreover, Aristotle states that the cause of the ignorance lies in the agent herself.

The difference between the two [*scil.* between mistakes, *hamartemata* and misadventures, *atychemata*] is that in mistake the origin of the ignorance³⁰ is internal to the agent, whereas in misadventure it is external. (*Eth. Nic.* V 8.1135b18–19, transl. by Kenny, modified)

I understand this remark as offering an explanation of what Aristotle means by saying that misadventures occur contrary to reasonable expectation, while mistakes do not. The difference lies in the agent’s disposition, which is what causes her ignorance in the first place. In misadventures, the origin of the ignorance is external to the agent, meaning that no responsibility may be ascribed to the agent. However, in mistakes the cause and the origin of the ignorance lies in the agent herself, so that although she acted in ignorance and thus involuntarily, she is more culpable because the origin of that ignorance can be traced back to her and to her fallacious disposition, as in the case of negligence.³¹

30 I here follow Jackson and Susehml’s reconstruction of the passage, which replaces the *lectio* ‘*aitias*’ with ‘*agnoias*’. As Frede (2020) 633 also notes, this reading is more consistent both with the Arab tradition of the text and with Aristotle’s own language: the expression ‘principle of the cause’ has no parallel in Aristotle’s texts, where he often uses *aitia* and *arche* as interchangeable terms. For a full discussion, see Jackson (1879) 110–1 and Frede (2020) 633.

31 It may be argued that the parenthetical remark does not offer an explanation as to what Aristotle means by *me paralogos*, but adds a second condition for the definition of mistakes and misadventure. However, I find this argument unpersuasive. If we were to link the first condition, i.e. *paralogos* and the second one, i.e. the *arche*, we will have the following cases: 1. the agent acts *paralogos* and the *arche* is external; 2. the agent acts *paralogos* and the *arche* is internal; 3. the agent does not act *paralogos* and the *arche* is external; 4. the agent does not act *paralogos* and the *arche* is internal. While the first and the third cases respectively correspond to the definition of misadventures and mistakes, I find it hard to understand how an agent can be said to have acted contrary to reasonable expectation when the cause of the ignorance lies in the agent itself. Even

However, whereas in *Eth. Eud.* II 9 Aristotle does not explicitly draw the conclusion that actions due to negligent ignorance are involuntary, in *Eth. Nic.* V 8 he clearly states that among involuntary actions, some are forgivable and others unforgivable:

Not all involuntary actions are excusable. Those that people perform not only in ignorance but also because of ignorance are excusable. There is no excuse, however, for actions that are performed in ignorance, but not because of ignorance but because of a passion that is neither natural nor human. (*Eth. Nic.* V 8.1136a5–9, transl. by Kenny, modified)

This passage is particularly instructive in making a point on involuntary actions: in fact, we would be tempted to say that an involuntary action is not blameworthy because it is involuntary and praise and blame tracks voluntariness. In other words, an agent cannot be blamed if she acted involuntarily. However, here Aristotle establishes that some involuntary actions are forgivable and others not. Moreover, an involuntary action performed in ignorance and because of ignorance is excusable. However, involuntary actions performed in ignorance but not because of ignorance are not excusable. If praise and blame depend on responsibility (as stated at *Eth. Eud.* II 6.1223a10–12) and voluntariness, claiming that actions may be involuntary *and* blameworthy can be considered a contradiction. However, if we distinguish the action in itself and the action as following from the agent's habits, we can solve this puzzle. As in *Eth. Eud.* II 9, when Aristotle deals with actions due to negligent ignorance, blame is not ascribed to the action itself but rather to the habit or disposition which caused the agent's state of ignorance. The action itself is not considered blameworthy – indeed, it is involuntary – but the habits that caused the ignorance are – as these habits are morally significant and relevant. The agent can actually be said to be responsible for these habits and she can be blamed for them. *Eth. Nic.* V 8.1136a5–9 makes a similar point: some actions are involuntary, insofar as they have been accomplished in ignorance, but because they were accomplished because of a passion neither natural nor human, they are not excusable.³² If this is the case, we can try to apply the same strategy to *hamartemata* and *atychemata*. We can say that differences between *hamartemata* and *atychemata* boil down to differences between the dispositions which have caused them: in the former case, habits can be blamed and thus the action can be

more problematically, how can an agent act in a way that is not contrary to reasonable expectation when the origin of the ignorance is external?

³² Even though this kind of actions does not fall neither in the *hamartemata* nor in the *adikemata*, I take this passage as making a point Aristotle also makes elsewhere in the *Ethics*, i.e. that we can distinguish the action itself from the origin of the action, e.g. agent's habits, passion, etc. (see also Jackson 1879, 115–6).

regarded as unforgivable; in the latter case, on the contrary, the action can be forgiven because the ignorance is not caused by any ethically significant disposition and the agent acts *paralogos*. The source of *hamartemata* is indeed in the agent herself and can be identified with the moral disposition which determines the absence of knowledge. By contrast, as far as *atychemata* are concerned, the source of the ignorance cannot be ascribed to the agent, because she acts contrary to any reasonable expectation and so any failure in terms of knowledge cannot be said to stem from either negligence or vice, pain or pleasure. The agent's lack of knowledge must not be ascribed to the agent herself, but rather to an external cause: if the agent had possessed that knowledge, she would have refrained from acting the way she did; so, ultimately, what has happened is merely a misfortune.

As regards negligent mistakes, then, despite the fact that the action in itself can be said to be involuntary, the agent can be held responsible for her state of ignorance; consequently, she can be blamed, not forgiven, in relation to the cause which led to the ignorance itself.

However, Sorabji³³ argues that *met'agnoias* actually covers every case of ignorance which makes an action involuntary. According to Sorabji, this feature of *Eth. Nic. V 8* thus differs from *Eth. Eud. II 9*. Although *Eth. Eud. II 9* and *Eth. Nic. V 8* share the idea that every action accomplished *met'agnoias* is involuntary, in *Eth. Nic. V 8* a *hamartema* is said to be more blameworthy than an *atychema* – despite the fact that they are both involuntary. It follows then that, in *Eth. Nic.*, Aristotle distinguishes degrees of culpability in involuntary actions. According to Sorabji's interpretation, this last feature is absent in *Eth. Eud.*, where Aristotle does not claim that ignorance *tout court* and negligent ignorance reveal different degrees of culpability. However, if my account of *Eth. Eud. II 9* and *Eth. Nic. V 8* is correct, the difference in culpability established between *hamartemata* and *atychemata* actually reflects the difference in culpability established between ignorance and negligent ignorance, i.e. between acting in ignorance because of ignorance and acting in ignorance because of certain ethical dispositions. Moreover, Aristotle himself states that when the agent acts in ignorance but not because of ignorance, the agent can be blamed. So if the agent can be blamed in some cases but not others, it is clear that Aristotle actually distinguishes between different degrees of culpability in *Eth. Eud. II 9*.

3.4.1 *Adikemata* and *Adikos*

Although *adikemata* and *adikos* both fall under the category of voluntary damages, the difference between the two is grounded in the absence (or presence) of

³³ Sorabji (1980) 274.

premeditation. In the text, two formulas indicate premeditation: ἐκ προαίρεσεως and ἐκ προνοίας. The Greek word *pronoia* appears at *Eth. Eud.* II 10, where Aristotle, after a discussion on the *prohairesis*, states that legislators have a grasp on the truth but they, yet lack precision in distinguishing between voluntary actions, involuntary ones and premeditation.³⁴ The word *pronoia* refers to a legal background, insofar as the word is found in orations as a technical term which indicates the mental representation of an event or harmful intent or, according to some scholars, premeditation itself.³⁵ Besides, Aristotle uses the expression ἐκ προαίρεσεως as synonymous with ἐκ προνοίας, despite the fact that his detailed account of *prohairesis* in *Eth. Eud.* II 10 is meant to more accurately define the notion of choice within the framework of his ethical thought. The word *pronoia* is a technical legal term, but lacks the specific nuances that Aristotle introduces in his account of choice. Roughly put, despite the fact that Aristotle uses the two formulas as quasi-synonyms, his account of *prohairesis* helps to refine the concept of *pronoia* as well. After having dealt with choice, Aristotle can replace the formula *ek pronoias* with the formula *ek prohaireseos* precisely because he can be sure that now the term *pronoia* reflects all the nuances he has assigned to choice.

Adikemata are voluntary mistakes: the agent acts with knowledge, but the source of those actions lies in the agent's passions. On the contrary, when an agent makes a mistake while being *adikos*, even though mistakes of this kind are voluntary, they have their origin in the agent's deliberate choice. Hence, this kind of mistakes is revealing with regard to the agent's habits:

But if a man harms another by choice, he acts unjustly; and it is unjust acts of this kind, where there is a violation of proportion and of equality, that make the man that commits them an unjust man. Similarly, to be a just man you must act justly by choice; if you act merely voluntarily, then it is only your action that is just. (*Eth. Nic.* V 8.1136a1–5)

Committing an *adikema* is not enough to make the agent unjust or bad: the agent acts because of passions and this line of conduct is typical of acraties and incontinent agents. On the contrary, *adikoi* agents commit the most culpable actions, because they act from vices, and bad and unjust habits.³⁶

³⁴ *Eth. Eud.* II 10.1226b36–1227a1.

³⁵ Concerning the identification of *pronoia* with premeditation, or with harmful intent or with direct intent, scholars offer different interpretations. Some, such as Lee (1937), Loomis (1972) and MacDowell (1963), hold that the Greek *pronoia* ought to be interpreted as harmful intent. Others, such as Pepe (2008, 2015), claim that *pronoia* is best understood as direct intent.

³⁶ I do not believe that here Aristotle is saying that committing an *adikema* acting from deliberation will make the agent bad: I rather believe that Aristotle is speaking of already fully responsible agents so that while *adikemata* which come from impetuosity do not come from the

In *Eth. Nic.*, then, only damages which follow from choice come from the agent's bad habits and so they make the agent actually unjust and bad. Indeed, any deliberate choice reflects the agent's desire and deliberation.³⁷ By contrast, *adikemata* are voluntary damages which come from impetuosity, the characteristic of an agent who lacks self-control and acts from passions and desire. Although they are voluntary damages, they do not have the same degree of severity because, when an agent commits an *adikema*, passions and lack of self-control may be the cause of the action, rather than bad habits or dispositions.

4 Conclusions

As stated at the beginning, this paper aims to show that the *Eudemian* account on voluntariness is largely consistent with the account of the voluntary and the involuntary and with the classification of damages provided in *Eth. Nic. V*. First, both accounts agree as to the list of items of which there can be ignorance and knowledge, i.e. the person, the instrument and the aim. Furthermore, the reference to 'the thing' in *Eth. Eud. II 9* is consistent with the mention of 'the action in its entirety' at *Eth. Nic. 1135a32*. Besides, there is another point of convergence between the *Eth. Nic.*'s and the *Eth. Eud.*'s account of voluntariness, namely the emergence of the issue of the free substitution of equivalent descriptions. In both accounts, the clause 'not accidentally' reveals a fundamental concern with regard to voluntary and involuntary actions, i.e. that an action may be considered voluntary under one description and involuntary under another, as in the case of Oedipus. This issue not only concerns moral responsibility considered in itself, but, as we have seen, also appears to be a juridical problem: charges must be consistent with the description of the action available to the agent at the time of the action itself.

Contrary to some scholars' interpretation, I have argued that references to negligent ignorance can be found both in *Eth. Eud. II 9* and in *Eth. Nic. V*, although they are phrased differently. While in *Eth. Eud. II 9* references to negligence are expressed by the term *ameleia*, in *Eth. Nic. V* negligence is referred to through the adverb *paralogos*. Both references, however, show that an action may be considered involuntary even though the agent can be blamed for the ethical disposition which has led to the action. Indeed, in both accounts Aristotle addresses the fact that an agent acts involuntarily if she acts in ignorance and because of ignorance

agent's vices (such as injustice), *adikemata* which come from deliberation do tell us something about the agent's moral character, i.e. that he or she acts from vices.

³⁷ *Eth. Eud. II 10.1226b16–20; 1227a3–5.*

(*Eth. Eud.* II 9.1225b6; *Eth. Nic.* V 8.1136a7). In all other cases, although the agent acts involuntarily, she is still blamable. These features of involuntary actions due to ignorance are mirrored in Aristotle's classification of damages, which establishes not only different kinds of injuries but also different degrees of culpability. While in the case of misadventures the agent does not bear moral responsibility for the action, in the case of mistakes, which are actually involuntarily, the agent could have foreseen the outcome of the action and if she did not, she is to blame. Moreover, also in voluntary damages, the agent can be culpable to different degrees. If the agent acts out of passion, she commits an *adikema*, an act of injustice, but she is not yet *adikos*. The agent's action, considered in absolute terms, i.e. independently of the motives and causes of the action itself, does not tell us anything about the agent's habits and moral character. In order to consider the agent's moral character, we need to establish if the action comes from choice, *prohairesis*, or from passion, lack of self-control, etc. An agent who acts out of passion, then, is less culpable than an agent who acts from choice and only the latter one can be considered properly *adikos*, unjust.

Finally, references to laws and legislators (as in *Eth. Eud.* II 10) indicate that Aristotle is well aware that his inquiry on voluntariness and moral responsibility cannot be separated from the social context and community, made up of citizens and legislators. Blame and praise, but also punishment and retribution, are linked with voluntary actions and moral responsibility from the very beginning of Aristotle's account on voluntariness. In *Eth. Nic.* V, juridical issues, such as degrees of culpability, become plainly tied to the voluntary and the involuntary. Moral responsibility and voluntariness urge us to take into account also social responses to agents' actions. Voluntariness is pivotal not only because it concerns individual responsibility, but also because it affects the social community as a whole, along with its social and legal practices.

The *Nicomachean* classification of damages is therefore largely consistent with the account of voluntary and involuntary actions in *Eth. Eud.* II 9. Aristotle's account on voluntariness and moral responsibility is also closely linked to justice and legal practices: legislators must distinguish between different cases and degrees of culpability if they wish to pursue equity and fairness. Aristotle is thus aware that his inquiry on voluntary and involuntary actions finds application in the legal field. The pivotal role and the central position of the book on justice in the overall context of the *Ethics* architecture and the occurrence of two classifications of damages (in the *Rhetoric* and in the *Nicomachean Ethics*) show that this connection between legal practices and voluntariness is not merely an incidental consequence of dealing with moral responsibility, but a fundamental issue in Aristotle's ethical thought.

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Antiochus of Ascalon's 'Platonic' Ethics

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Abstract: This article focuses on the Platonic version of the doctrine of *oikeiosis* set forth by Piso in Cicero's *De finibus*, Book V. The article aims to show that: 1) Cicero's account, while clearly having Stoic features, is also consistent with the eudaimonistic character of Socrates' and Plato's ethics; 2) the replacement of *oikeiosis* with "assimilation to god", attested in a passage of the Anonymous Commentary on Plato's *Theaetetus*, derives from the intent to remove Epicurean egoistic connotations from Plato's ethics; according to the Anonymous, the Stoic *oikeiosis* alone would not suffice to attain this purpose.

Keywords: Antiochus of Ascalon, ethics, Cicero, Platonism, Stoicism

1 Platonism, Aristotelianism and Stoicism

The aim of this paper is to elucidate some points in which Antiochus's ethical thought, as it can be reconstructed from book V of Cicero's *De finibus*, is more or less in agreement with Plato's philosophy. As is well known, according to Antiochus there was a compact group or *philosophi antiqui* or *veteres*, including Plato himself and his Academic pupils Aristotle, Speusippus, Xenocrates and Polemo, who roughly shared the same philosophical framework. Polemo, in particular, was Zeno's teacher and – as Cicero plainly states in *De finibus* V – to Antiochus it was far from clear why Zeno decided to change his mind and found a new school: according to Cicero's Antiochus, Zeno's philosophy (and ethics in particular) often employed a different language to express what were essentially the same principles. However, while it true that in *De finibus* V Plato, Speusippus, Xenocrates and Polemo are at times quoted by name, scholars generally agree that the basic framework of the ethical theory expounded by them is Aristotelian, even though it may be mixed with doctrines borrowed from the Stoics.¹

1 Cf. Barnes (1989) part. 86–9; Annas (1993) 419: "Antiochus [...] produced an ethical theory which synthesized Stoic and Aristotelian ideas, and which, he claimed, represented the true Academic tradition, shared by Academics, Peripatetics and Stoics (though the Stoics perversely altered the

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The thesis I would like to present:

- 1) the foundations of Antiochus' ethical theory are actually to be found in some relevant Platonic texts, and (more in general) a Platonic background is at work behind it;
- 2) the hypothesis that the ethics of Antiochus is based on unplatonic assumptions derives in great part from the fact that it is compared with the interpretation of Plato developed from Middle Platonism up to Neoplatonism;²
- 3) while Antiochus' ethics can be interpreted as a development of Socratic-Platonic ethics,³ which is both eudaemonistic and naturalistic, with the advent of Middle Platonism the foundation of Platonic ethics became 'theological';

terminology"); Irwin (2012) 151; and above all the recent and accurate work Tsouni (2019) devoted entirely to this topic: "We are thus invited [sc. from the way in which Cicero organizes the dialogue and arranges the parts between the characters] to take the claim of Antiochean authority at face value and assume that Piso's account presents accurately the Antiochean positions which, in the case."

2 From a general point of view, I therefore agree with Prost (2001) 245 that as far as ethics is concerned "les Stoïciens et les Péripatéticiens (proprement dits) sont critiqués dès qu'ils s'écartent de la vérité héritée (selon Antiochus) de Platon", and that "l'éthique d'Antiochus, considérée en elle-même, n'est pas alignée sur le stoïcisme". However, behind this general agreement, significant nuances are to be found. According to Prost, Antiochus strove to assimilate his own opinion to those of Plato, but he met serious problems, since it is very difficult "d'appliquer à une pensée antérieure un cadre conceptuel qui n'est pas le sien" (253). What I would like to show, instead, is that Antiochus did not strive to conform (*a posteriori*) his thought with that of Plato, but simply found the main grounds of his own ethical theory in Plato's texts – which, with Barnes (1989) 78, I assume he had access to.

3 By Socratic-Platonic ethics I mean the ethics endorsed by Socrates in Plato's dialogues of Plato. This ethics is characterized by eudaemonism (its goal is the agent's happiness) and by intellectualism (knowledge is both a necessary and sufficient condition for the implementation of virtue), from which derive the paradoxical claims that vice is ignorance and that no one does evil voluntarily. I have repeatedly tried to show – see e.g. Trabattoni (1996, 2004, 2014, 2021) – that this ethics – no matter to what extent it can be traced back to the historical Socrates – was entirely incorporated into Plato's ethics, and maintained by him until the end of his philosophical career (as shown by *Tim.* 86b and *Leg.* 731c, which confirm the Socratic principle that no one does evil voluntarily). I have also argued that although the tripartition of the soul present in the dialogues, starting from the *Republic*, even if it could definitely be proven to be non-Socratic, can easily be integrated into the ethical framework just described. The result of this analysis is that there exists in Plato a Socratic-Platonic ethics in which the contributions made by each of the philosophers are indistinguishable, and in which an essential role is played neither by the theory of Forms (the notion that virtue coincides with knowledge is compatible with the view that the Ideas are not the object of this knowledge) nor by assimilation to the divine (as demonstrated for example by the *Euthyphro* and the first books of the *Republic*, according to Plato it is moral value that determines the nature of the divine and not the other way around).

- 4) this transition from the early interpretation of Plato's ethics to the later one is highlighted in the *Anonymous Commentary on the Theaetetus*, where the author affirms the need to replace the Antiochean οἰκειώσις with ὁμοίωσις θεῶ.

The 'Platonists' aversion to the doctrine of οἰκειώσις has been carefully scrutinized by George Boys-Stones in an article published a few years ago⁴ (to which we will later return). Boys-Stones does not include Antiochus among the Platonists for both chronological and terminological reasons, which it is unnecessary to investigate here.⁵ It is enough for us to stress that the Academy was Plato's school, and that Antiochus – regardless of whether or not he can be defined as an Academic – is usually acknowledged to be the philosopher who restored the dogmatic interpretation of Plato. Instead, we cannot avoid addressing (if only briefly) the *vexatissima quaestio* of the relationship between Antiochus and Stoicism. As is well known, scholars are divided “tra due opposte interpretazioni generalissime e inconciliabili, quella che vede in Antioco essenzialmente uno stoico [...] e quella che cerca di dar conto anche di una persistenza in lui di un platonismo che ingloba e subordina a sé nozioni e dottrine stoiche.”⁶ From a general point of view, I prefer the latter hypothesis, also in consideration of the simple fact that Antiochus, as D. Sedley wrote, “emphatically did not consider himself a Stoic.”⁷ But I do not need to further discuss this point here, because the consonances between Antiochus and the Stoics concern above all logic and physics,⁸ while as regards ethics his opposition to Stoicism is evident and widely recognized.⁹

As far as references to the Platonic texts are concerned, obviously they too have already been detected. According to Tsouni, for example, while “the explicit Peripatetic character of *De finibus V* strongly suggests that the Peripatos had for Antiochus a special authority, at least in the domain of ethics”, this is “compatible with the use of occasional ‘Socratic’ elements in Plato's ethical account, which

4 Boys-Stones (2014).

5 “It is [...] misleading to refer to Philo, Antiochus or Eudorus as ‘Platonists’ because *their* use of Plato [...] was contained in a context that was self-consciously Academic, and always referred to as such in antiquity”, Boys-Stones (2001) 101.

6 Donini (2012) 147. For a general overview on this debate Sedley (2012), *Introduction*, and Prost (2001).

7 Sedley (2012) 3.

8 Prost (2001) 245.

9 The assumption according to which “Antiochus is a ‘Stoic’ in *all* areas of philosophy [...] does not fit with the obvious anti-Stoic staging of the Antiochean account in Cicero, when I comes to the domain of ethics; in *On Ends* the Antiochean speech is offered as an *alternative* to Stoicism and as a representative of a different school of thought, namely that of the Platonic-Peripatetic camp of the Old Academy” (Tsouni 2019, 6).

seem to derive from the Platonic aporetic dialogues.”¹⁰ I believe, however, that the Platonic background of Antiochus’ ethics goes further than the occasional consonances with some aporetic dialogues. As I will try to demonstrate below, Antiochus was able to see broad similarities between Plato’s ethics and the Peripatetic one, because he grasped (in my opinion correctly) the naturalistic and eudaemonistic character of Socratic-Platonic ethics, before Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism downplayed it in favour of an ascetic and contemplative perspective.¹¹ In other words, the Aristotelian garb in which Antiochus presents the ethics introduced by Socrates and Plato is not the result of the confusing of two different points of view, but an interpretation of Platonic ethics that still deserves to be taken into consideration. Moreover, Antiochus has a special interest in endorsing Peripatetic reformulations of Plato’s ethics, inasmuch as this choice allows him to oppose Stoic ethics without thereby compromising his Platonic approach. Whenever an Aristotelian point of view strikes Antiochus to be in contrast with Plato (as is the case with Theophrastus, as pointed out by Prost), he criticizes and rejects it.

2 The οἰκείωσις Theory and Its Origin

One of the most important points of Piso’s exposition is the οἰκείωσις theory, which is also the first (and most prominent) topic I am going to deal with. Since Piso, in introducing it at V 23, explicitly says that the Stoics inherited it from the *veteres*, a large debate has arisen among scholars on the issue of whether it was really anticipated by some previous thinkers. The main candidates to have been suggested here are the Peripatetics, either Aristotle himself or his pupil Theophrastus. According to both Carlos Lévy and François Prost,¹² however, this interpretation has proven unconvincing. Let us read some lines from Lévy’s book *Cicero Academicus*: “L’on trouve chez différents philosophes antérieurs aux Stoïciens des éléments qui sont comme des indices annonciateurs de la théorie de l’οἰκείωσις et qui n’ont cependant la cohérence systématique de celle-ci.”¹³

¹⁰ Tsouni (2019) 8–9. Among these dialogues Tsouni quotes *Apology* (*ibid.* 42), *Meno* (106) and *Alcibiades* (120).

¹¹ “Ever since ancient Platonists such as Eudorus, Philo and Alcinous, Plato’s notion of ‘becoming like god’ (ὁμοίωσις θεῶ) or ‘following god’ (ἀκόλουθος θεῶ) has been understood to be a flight from this world to a higher one” (Armstrong 2004, 172). According to Armstrong, however, not only in *Timaeus*, *Philebus* and *Laws*, “rather than fleeing from the sensible world, becoming like this god commits one to improving it” (171); but it is also true that “these images of flight and purification do not properly capture Plato’s evaluation of the earth and the human body even in the *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus*.”

¹² Lévy (1992) and Prost (2001).

¹³ Lévy (1992) 383.

In particular, the Peripatetic hypothesis, put forward many years ago by von Arnim and more recently endorsed by Giuseppina Magnaldi,¹⁴ has not won most scholar's approval, so that the Stoic origin of the theory "est aujourd'hui la plus communément acceptée."¹⁵

But, one could ask, what about Plato? Can we really be sure that it is impossible to detect in the dialogues any elements of a theory that anticipate Stoic οἰκείωσις in a way that goes beyond "des indices annociateurs de la théorie?"¹⁶ Let us begin with the *Anonymous Commentary on Plato's Theaetetus*.¹⁷ In a well-known passage of this work¹⁸ the author ascribes the οἰκείωσις theory to both Socrates and the sophists introduced by Plato in his dialogues (VII 20–30). This information is included in a very interesting section of the *Commentary*, devoted to a general survey of the οἰκείωσις theory, whose main purpose lies in criticizing both Epicurean and Stoic ethical doctrines. More in particular, the *Anonymous* aims to show that Plato did not derive his concept of justice from οἰκείωσις, but from ὁμοίωσις θεῶν (VII 15). The *Anonymous* appears to be aware that the Stoics admitted two types of οἰκείωσις: οἰκείωσις in its proper meaning, which refers to the well-being of the agent, and an οἰκείωσις of second order, directed towards the well-being of one's neighbours.¹⁹ Such a distinction was especially common in so-called Middle Stoicism, and clear references to it are also present in the *De finibus* (though the two kinds of οἰκείωσις are expounded by Cicero in separate sections: III 16–19 and III 62–68). But the *Anonymous* maintains that the two types of οἰκείωσις do not have the same degree of intensity, as is plainly shown by the case of shipwrecked persons who, faced with an unavoidable choice between saving their neighbours or themselves, normally pursue their own good (V 20–VI 25). Indeed, the self-

14 Magnaldi (1991).

15 Lévy (1992) 382; see also Prost (2001) 248. According to Tsouni (2019) 94 Piso "starts his exposition of Aristotelian/Peripatetic ethics with an *oikeiōsis* argument" in which "Antiochus adapts the Stoic argument in order to offer a different model of how the telos is grounded in natural appropriation." But this does not mean, of course, that this doctrine has an Aristotelian origin; it shows, on the contrary, that it has been borrowed from the Stoics, and then reshaped according to the Peripatetic background.

16 I admit that *the elements* of a theory are not *the whole of the theory*, and that therefore both Stoic *oikeiōsis* and the version of it accepted by Antiochus present several aspects one cannot find in Plato. But what I intend to show is much more limited, namely: Socratic-Platonic ethics traces a path according to which good and happiness can be achieved through the development of the natural tendencies of human beings; the latter can be oriented towards virtue through a correct identification of the good as what naturally belongs to man.

17 There is no agreement among scholars on the dating of this text. In general, I agree that the author's interest in Hellenistic philosophy suggests the first century BC as the likely period of its composition (cf. Boys-Stones 2014, 146–7 n. 30).

18 See *ibid.* 309–11.

19 On the double οἰκείωσις see Alesse (1994) 130, and the bibliography quoted in n. 211.

oriented οἰκείωσις is “natural and not rational” (φυσική ἐστὶν καὶ ἄλογος), while the neighbour-oriented one is “natural but not without reason” (φυσική μὲν καὶ αὐτή, οὐ μέντοι ἄνευ λόγου). But, according to the *Anonymous*, such a ‘non-rational’ inclination is clearly incapable of turning into virtue, no matter how long or careful its process of development may be.

The Stoics, instead, argue that justice arises from οἰκείωσις, saying that οἰκείωσις directed towards the well being of the last of the Misians is equally powerful as the οἰκείωσις directed towards one’s own well being (V 30). But, as we have just shown, this idea is clearly disproven by the evidence. In so far as human actions are ruled only by οἰκείωσις, in critical situations right and virtuous behaviour cannot be taken for granted. The Epicureans, in their turn, simply deny that there is a neighbour-oriented οἰκείωσις. Then, the result will be identical: justice, or virtue, can’t originate from οἰκείωσις, inasmuch as it is impossible for the natural sphere of self-oriented needs and desires, which is not matter of choice (VII 25), to turn into virtue, which clearly is not an egoistic end. In order to attain virtue, therefore, a different source of action is required, this time not stemming from below (namely from the sphere of needs and desires which is the substance of οἰκείωσις), but attracting man from above: i.e. the striving to imitate god.

So, we can easily understand the exact purpose of the *Anonymous* in describing Socrates as a holder of οἰκείωσις. Immediately before quoting Socrates and the sophists, he qualifies οἰκείωσις with the adjective πολυθρύλητον (i.e. “something which is often spoken of”), and this suggests that the attempt to associate οἰκείωσις with Socrates was very common. But he takes care to specify that “it has been introduced not only by Socrates, but also by the sophists present in the Platonic text” (VII 20–25). Having stated in the previous lines that the οἰκείωσις theory is not enough to generate justice, or virtue, now the *Anonymous* goes on to explain that such a theory is not peculiar to Socrates or Plato, but is also common among the sophists. He can show, therefore, that the inadequacy of οἰκείωσις to ensure a fully virtuous attitude in human beings is not a feature inherent to Socratic-Platonic ethics, but rather a basic and lower degree of it, whose existence was possibly acknowledged both by Socrates and the sophists. Plato’s ethics, instead, also has at its disposal a higher and stronger cause of action, namely ὁμοίωσις θεῷ; and it is precisely this cause that allows men to attain a full degree of justice and virtue, and to rid themselves of the self-oriented behaviour inevitably connected with the notion of οἰκείωσις.

3 Eudaimonistic Background

We will check in a moment whether this picture of Plato's ethics is reliable or not. Now it is more important for us to investigate the possible reasons that might have led the *Anonymous* to ascribe the οἰκείωσις theory to Socrates. As rightly pointed out by Lévy, a few quotations of οἰκείον and οἰκείωσις taken from the *Charmides* and the *Republic* are not enough to explain the *Anonymous*' information.²⁰ But we can perhaps make some progress by focussing our attention on the sophists. Our task might seem even more difficult in this case. But it actually is not. The most likely reason why the *Anonymous* has coupled Socrates and the Sophists as holders of the οἰκείωσις theory is that both posited happiness as the beginning of every ethical theory. Take into consideration, for instance, the Socrates *versus* Callicles dialogue in the *Gorgias*: no matter how fierce the struggle between the two might be, both start from the identical vantage point, namely the view that the correct and rightful end of human ethical actions consists in pursuing the well-being of the agent. Their disagreement concerns the way by which to reach such an end, not the end itself. We can find one sense, then, in which an οἰκείωσις-like position must indeed be attributed to Socrates, inasmuch as his ethics is clearly founded on the eudaimonistic principle: a principle that is plainly confirmed at the beginning of one of the two protreptic interludes of the *Eutydemus* (278e3), where Socrates opens his dialogue with the young Cleinias stating that "we men are all striving for happiness."

Socrates' emphasis on the happiness-motive has something in common with the primary role ascribed to *physis* (in contrast to *nomos*) by a considerable part of the sophistic movement. And it is precisely such acknowledgement of the unavoidable constraints of nature that is at the core of the οἰκείωσις exposition provided both by the *Anonymous* and by Cicero's Piso. The former, as we have seen, says that the self-oriented οἰκείωσις is natural and not rational, while the latter underlines the natural tendency of every animal, from the very beginning of its life, to love and preserve itself in the best condition allowed by its natural constitution (V 8, 24). Moreover, in *De fin.* V 29, 86–87 Piso not only says, quoting Theophrastus, that *omnis auctoritas philosophiae [...] consistit in vita beata*, but also adds that *beate enim vivendi cupiditate incensi omnes sumus*. And such a statement seems very close to a literal translation of the *Euthydemus*' sentence quoted above: ἀρά γε πάντες ἄνθρωποι βουλόμεθα εὖ πράττειν [...] (or, even better, of the sentence we read at 282a1–2: ἐπειδὴ εὐδαίμονες μὲν εἶναι προθυμούμεθα πάντες). So, the eudaimonism of Cicero's Piso is plainly close to that of Plato's Socrates.²¹

²⁰ Lévy (1992) 383.

²¹ I cannot agree, therefore, with Karamanolis' supposition (2006, 13), that Antiochus borrowed the notion of a close connection between philosophy and happiness from the Stoics: for he could well have inherited it directly from Socrates, Plato, or the latter's Academic successors.

4 The ‘Platonic’ οἰκείωσις

The problem now is to check whether Socrates’ eudaimonism is able to develop into Platonic virtue. This is the crucial point of the οἰκείωσις theory, the only one that enables a transition from “des indices annonciateurs de la théorie de l’οἰκείωσις” to a full development of it. As rightly observed, once again, by Lévy, this is the very point on which the Stoic οἰκείωσις was more often ridiculed by the Platonics, since Stoicism “semble avoir eu quelque mal à faire admettre le passage de la tendance naturelle égoïste [...] à l’instinct social.”²² But, as far as the Antiochian οἰκείωσις theory expounded by Piso in *De finibus* book V is concerned, it seems that the evidence from Plato’s texts might provide some interesting support.

In the dialogues we can find more than one instance in which Plato retraces the path that leads from *eudaimonia* to virtue. Take, for example, the development of the *Republic* from book 2 to book 10: the assumption that Socrates intends to prove at the beginning of book 2 (in order to disprove the defence of Trasimachus’ thesis just put forward by Adeimantus and Glaucon), and which will have been fully proven by the end of the dialogue (its closing words being εὖ πράττωμεν), is that the natural human desire for happiness can be satisfied if, and only if, it turns into the practice of virtue and justice. And this means, in Hellenistic terms, that virtue is the result of the right development of the natural οἰκείωσις.

But what is even clearer is Diotima’s argument in the *Symposium*. Let us sum up the points established by her, beginning from 204d:

- The object of love is the beautiful.
- He who loves the beautiful desires to be in possession of it.
- The beautiful and the good are the same.
- The result of the possession of the good is the happiness of the holder.
- Once happiness has been reached, the inquiry has come to an end, since men have no higher aim than happiness itself.

Later on in the dialogue, Diotima explains that the natural love inherent to mortal nature can and must be brought up from its initial interest in sensible beauty to the contemplation of the beautiful itself, namely the Form of beauty. But contemplation is not the end of the story. The one who succeeds in seeing the perfect Idea of beauty will be able to generate true virtue, instead of mere semblances of it (212a).

The line of reasoning just sketched involves the main distinctive features of the οἰκείωσις theory. The first impulse is a natural wish to be in possession of beauty, goodness and happiness, and of preserving them as long as possible. This impulse

²² Lévy (1992) 386.

is directed at first towards the most simply and easily available good things, namely sensible goods. But, through proper education, such an impulse can turn into virtue, understood both in the Socratic sense of wisdom (the contemplation of the ideas) and according to its more common meaning as virtuous behaviour within one's community (the generation in the beautiful, 206e).

In this way Socrates/Diotima has succeeded in showing that men's natural inclination, following their prime impulses and desires, shifts without interruption from those goods we may call – adopting Hellenistic terminology – the *πρώτα κατὰ φύσιν* to virtue, which is to say the full possession and practice of the real good. Is true that, properly speaking, such a process is never called *οἰκείωσις*. But the similarity is striking.²³ Moreover, there is a passage in which Diotima deals explicitly with the *οἰκείον*. With an implicit polemical reference to Aristophanes' speech, Diotima argues that people don't love the *οἰκείον qua οἰκείον*, but the *οἰκείον qua good*. This statement amounts to saying that the identification between the good and the *οἰκείον* may be correct, provided that the *οἰκείον* is grasped on the grounds of the good and not vice-versa. But such a condition is also at work in the *οἰκείωσις* theory, where the real good don't coincide with what seems *οἰκείον* or good at first sight: only after a long process of development and education can men realize that their wish for their own *οἰκείον* cannot be fulfilled by a blanket use of what appears *πρώτα κατὰ φύσιν* at first sight, but only by virtue.

5 Antiochus: The Unity of 'Ancient' Ethics

Our reasoning, if correct, allows us to shed some light on Antiochus' interpretation of the *antiqua philosophia*, including the possible role which Plato himself could have played in it. As is well known, Antiochus takes the definition of the *telos* from the Academic Polemo. See for instance *De fin.* II 11, 34: *Polemoni et iam ante Aristoteli ea prima visa sunt, quae paulo ante dixi. ergo nata est sententia veterum Academicorum et Peripateticorum, ut fine bonorum dicerent secundum naturam vivere, idest virtute adhibita frui primi a natura datis*. Moreover, Polemo is quoted, in the *De finibus*, almost only as the holder of the *telos* formula which Antiochos ascribes both to the Academic and the Peripateticians (*cum enim superiores, e quibus planissime Polemo, secundum naturam vivere summum bonum dixissent [...] IV 6, 14*), while Zeno is charged with having borrowed it from the Academics: *mihi autem*

²³ I am well aware, even here, that the analogies do not suppress the differences; but the analogies that I intend to emphasize are limited to what I have already observed in note 16.

aequius videbatur Zenonem cum Polemone disceptantem, a quo quae essent principia naturae acceperat [...] (IV 16, 45).

As we have seen in the first passage just quoted, according to Antiochus Polemo did not come up with the *telos* formula himself, but claimed that it was a doctrine shared by both Platonic and Peripatetic philosophy, understood as a single tradition. So, since the definition of the *telos* as *frui primi a natura datis* shows a close connection with the οἰκείωσις theory, Antiochus feels compelled to argue that such a theory is not a Stoic particularity, and has no qualms about using it as a milestone of both Academic and Peripatetic ethics. Indeed, Antiochus could have drawn a reasonable link between Socrates's eudaimonism and Plato's theory of eros on the one side, and the οἰκείωσις on the other. If we read Pison's exposition of Antiochus' doctrine of οἰκείωσις in *De finibus* V we can find a lot of allusions both to the self-love inherent to every animal by nature (see for instance the very beginning, 9, 24: *omne animal se ipsum diligit*) and to an *appetitus animi* (9, 24, 26) that sounds very much like a rough translation of the love of the beautiful and the good with which Diotima deals in the *Symposium*. As far as the *telos* formula is concerned, Antiochus could instead have based it on Plato's Socrates' authority, which in the *Euthydemus* defines virtue as the correct use of goods, including material and external goods such as wealth and health.

Let us now focus our attention on the general picture of ethics that can be inferred from the conjunction between Antiochus' οἰκείωσις theory and his *telos* formula. Antiochus clearly supports a strongly eudaimonistic ethics, in which virtue is not the product of a generous attitude towards one's neighbours, but the result of human striving for the *vita beata* (which, in the absence of *bona corporis*, is not *beatissima* however: see *De fin.* V 24, 71). According to him, such a picture is accepted by all Academic and Peripatetic philosophers up to Polemo, and the modifications introduced by the Stoics, when they do not simply amount to terminological differences, really achieve no other result than making it worse. We can easily understand, therefore, why Polemo is the most important character of the story for Antiochus (while for modern scholars he is a rather colourless figure). Polemo was not only heir to the best Academic and Peripatetic ethical tradition, but was also the philosopher who transmitted this tradition to the Stoics (*via* Zeno); and Antiochus was ready to admit that the Stoic arrangement of this ethical tradition, and in particular the translation of it in terms of the οἰκείωσις theory, was far from useless. It was a pity, however, that the Stoics did not acknowledge that they were only expounding the ethics of the *antiqui* in a different way, but strongly insisted that they had worked out a new theory, sensibly different from the *veteres'* one. And it was exactly in elucidating and stressing such a difference that the Stoics had gone wrong.

But maybe the Polemo-Zeno succession is not the whole of the story. At the end of the *De finibus*, when relating an anecdote concerning Arcesilaus, Piso refers to him as *noster*, as he was pupil of Polemo (V 31, 94). Now, it is possible to show that also Arcesilaus had some acquaintance with the same eudaimonistic ethical theory which Antiochus ascribed to the ancient Academicians and Peripateticians. In a well-known passage of Plutarch (*Adv. Col.* 1121B–1122D) we read that the philosophers who suspend judgement can nevertheless act, because no judgement is required for acting, but only an impulse directed towards the “apparent οἰκεῖον.” This does not mean, as I have attempted to show elsewhere,²⁴ that the ephectic philosopher cannot make any use of reason at all. Based on a testimony of Sextus Empiricus (*Adv. Math.* VII 158) it can be shown, moreover, that reason has the task of providing men with what is the end of life, namely happiness. So, we can suppose that also Arcesilaus admitted a kind of ethical development that leads from the *πρώτα κατὰ φύσιν* to virtue, entirely within an eudaimonistic framework.

The οἰκείωσις theory, however, does not exhaust Antiochus' ethical thought. Starting from a passage of *De finibus* V which clearly marks a turn in the line of reasoning adopted until now (V 17, 46: *nunc autem aliud iam argumentandi sequamur genus*), Piso introduces the Aristotelian idea that “each part of our nature, both mental and bodily, possesses its own peculiar faculty” (*ibid.*). This amounts to saying that there is a perfection, concerning both body and soul and each of their individual faculties, which directs actions towards ends desirable for their own sake, and not for the sake of happiness (see *Eth. Nic.* I 7.1097b1–3). The final outcome of such a reasoning is that “morality [...] is an object of our desire, not only because of our love of self, but also intrinsically and for its own sake” (V 22, 61).

With this, the picture of Antiochean ethics is roughly complete. Its more apparent feature is a combination of Socrates' and Plato's eudaimonism, according to which virtue is the result of the human natural striving for happiness (if properly understood), and Aristotle's naturalism, according to which virtue is the result of human beings' spontaneous tendency to put their own potentialities into action. Antiochus could reasonably hold that the definition of *telos* which he claims to have borrowed from Polemo, and in which the notion of ‘nature’ plays a central role, covers both sides of this picture. What Antiochus intends to stress in relation to both the Academic and Aristotelian line of reasoning is the idea that not only virtue arises directly from a careful development of the first natural desires (a principle on which he agrees with the Stoics), but also that such natural desires, inasmuch as they are natural, can never lose their status of goods. So, in

²⁴ Trabatttoni (2005).

opposition to the Stoics, there is no stage of ethical development in which the *πρώτα κατὰ φύσιν* become indifferent, nor can it be granted that they are insignificant for the definition of happiness.

6 Replacing *οἰκείωσις* with *ὁμοίωσις θεῷ*

But let us leave the Aristotelian commitments of Antiochus' ethics aside, and go back to the notion of *οἰκείωσις*. As is well known, at a certain point Platonic and/or Academic philosophers diverged from the Socrates-Plato-Polemo-(Arcesilaus)-Antiochus line, and introduced a definition of *telos* grounded no longer on the desire to accomplish one's natural *οἰκεῖον*, but on the striving to become similar to God. Indeed, among so-called Middle Platonist philosophers there is a striking agreement in identifying the *telos* formula as *ὁμοίωσις θεῷ*.

Until a few decades ago, the prevalent hypothesis was that such a formula was introduced for the first time by Eudorus of Alexandria. Carlos Lévy has shown that this is a far from compelling hypothesis. Lévy has also pointed out that we have traces of the idea of *ὁμοίωσις θεῷ* in the Academic tradition as it emerges from Cicero's writings. But, according to him, *ὁμοίωσις θεῷ* did not become the standard formulation of Plato's *telos* because "attribuer explicitement à Platon une formule précise du souverain bien [...] pouvait sembler en faire un dogmatique."²⁵ This explanation, however, does not help explain the silence of Antiochus (who never refers to the idea of *ὁμοίωσις θεῷ*), since he was the main philosopher responsible for the dogmatic turn of the Platonic-Academic tradition. So, Lévy supposes that Antiochus avoided mentioning *ὁμοίωσις θεῷ* because of the great influence exerted on him by Stoicism, and his intention "de le ramener dans le giron du platonisme."²⁶ But if the connections we have attempted to draw between the ethical theory expounded by Piso in *De finibus* V and some eudaimonistic lines of reasoning present in Plato's dialogues are justified, the true answer might lie elsewhere: Antiochus may simply not have favoured an interpretation of Plato's ethics that could be summed up by the *ὁμοίωσις θεῷ* formula. Besides, he already had a formula for the *telos* that was clearly Platonic to his eyes, namely the one he claims to have borrowed from Polemo. Indeed, Antiochus was firmly convinced of the basic unity of the Academic tradition, and therefore was strongly interested in showing that the all Platonic philosophers converged on the same definition of *telos*. Polemo's formula had the double advantage that its proponent had been the last heir to Academic tradition and that it suited Peripatetics as well. So we may

²⁵ Lévy (1990) 61.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 64.

conclude that even if Academics from Arcesilaus to Carneades may have been familiar with the ὁμοίωσις θεῶ formula, they did not give it the same meaning as Middle Platonist philosophers, while in all likelihood Antiochus did not accept the formula at all. The real problem, then, is not to find out who replaced the original *telos* formula with the new one, but to uncover the reasons for such a shift, because it is very likely that this decision was related to the overall interpretation of the Platonic tradition.

The main testimony on this subject, no matter the source of the doctrines it presents, is the above-mentioned *Anonymous Commentary on Plato's Theaetetus*. As we have seen, according to the *Anonymous* the notion of οἰκεῖον leads to a dead end, inasmuch it does not succeed in preserving the non-egoistical features required by the 'Platonic' notion of justice (or virtue). It is worth noting that the *Anonymous* (or his source) tried to show that the οἰκείωσις theory involves a complete obliteration of the differences between Stoic and Epicurean ethics. In short, the *Anonymous* can by no means admit that an egoistical drive to pursue one's own happiness could ultimately develop into virtue, understood in its full and proper meaning.

The boundary line separating Antiochus and Arcesilaus (and the tradition they intend to follow) from Middle Platonist philosophers therefore seems to reflect a very influential interpretation of Plato's ethical theory, which in turn mirrors a broader picture of his philosophy as a whole. According to this interpretation, metaphysical principles must govern man's life from above and prescribe a line of thought and action that does not take into account the real data of human experience – indeed, they may even be opposed to them. But this way of reading Plato is far from obvious. According to a different, and in my opinion much more plausible, perspective,²⁷ Plato's metaphysical principles are an attempt to fulfil human beings' natural desire to understand the world in which they live and to attain happiness within it, as far as this is possible.

Let us test this hypothesis against the problem of ὁμοίωσις θεῶ. According to Julia Annas, "becoming like God, or assimilating oneself to Good, is not meant as an alternative to the idea that virtue is sufficient for happiness; it is just a specification of what happiness is. Moreover, the idea is also not intended as an alternative to the idea that virtue is sufficient for happiness: for it is explicated, in many of the passages in which it occurs, by the thought that becoming like God is what becoming virtuous is." However, as Annas points out immediately afterwards, with ὁμοίωσις θεῶ "we seem here to have the idea that virtue turns a

²⁷ This is a key point of my overall interpretation of Plato, that I have outlined in many papers and books. See for instance my last synthetic exposition in Trabattoni (2020).

human life into something different in kind.”²⁸ Indeed, from a Platonic point of view one could hardly say that the model of God provides any independent information about virtue or goodness. Let us consider, for instance, the well-known discussion between Socrates and Euthyphron about the sacred: it is possible to affirm that the sacred is what the gods like if, and only if, its meaning is inferred in an independent way; and the gods like the sacred precisely because it is sacred (and thus good) by its own nature. Moreover, it is not enough to say that becoming like God is the same as becoming virtuous: we must go on to say that virtue is identical to goodness, and goodness to happiness. But if such qualifications are actually needed to make sense of ὁμοίωσις θεῶ, then this formula risks turning into an indifferent verbal expression, whose real meaning is “what enables men to fulfil their desire for happiness.” In other words, if the οἰκειώσις theory can directly and easily be understood as a proper description of Socratic/Platonic eudaimonism (as I have tried to show), and if we can only make sense of ὁμοίωσις θεῶ by finding an indirect way to ensure that this latter formula has the same meaning as the former, then there can be little doubt as to what should be preferable to one who endorses the eudaimonistic character of Academic ethics, as Antiochus indeed does.

Besides, Annas’ interpretation of ὁμοίωσις θεῶ is open to the two following objections. It should be noted, firstly, that this interpretation is hardly consistent with the way in which the *Anonymous* justifies the replacement of Polemo’ and Antiochus’ *telos* with ὁμοίωσις θεῶ: the new formula seems have been intentionally worked out in order to counter the eudaimonistic/egoistical character of the old one. Secondly, even if we concede that ὁμοίωσις θεῶ has been introduced as the only real means to fulfil the human desire for happiness, the happiness it involves still has a strong otherworldly character, such as to confirm Annas’ supposition that “virtue turns a human life into something different in kind.” In this way, however, Plato’s intention to find a virtue or good that gives rise to a kind of happiness fulfilling the desire of men as they are in their present natural condition (as far as such an end is attainable to mortal beings), would be lost.

We can say, then, that the replacement of a *telos* grounded on the notions of οἰκεῖον and φύσις with a *telos* grounded on the notion of ὁμοίωσις θεῶ reveals a shift from a Platonism interested in the achievement of a good ethical and political life to a Platonism strongly marked by an ascetic, non-political or even frankly otherworldly inspiration. It is true that in Plato’s writing we can easily find some evidence in favour of such tendencies, such as for example the *Phaedo*; and it is certainly no coincidence that the ὁμοίωσις θεῶ formula is taken from a text, the

28 Annas (1999) 53.

Theaetetus' digression on the philosopher's nature, in which the ascetic side of Plato's thought is much more evident than elsewhere. But it is equally true that an ethical and political commitment is much more prominent in Plato's philosophy, as can easily be grasped by considering the key role it plays in long dialogues such as the *Republic* and *Laws*. So, especially if we look at Antiochus' 'Platonism' in the light of the further developments which ultimately led to the Neoplatonic systematization of the philosopher's thought, his insistence in upholding a picture of Plato's ethics not only closely dependent on notions such as οἰκεῖον and φύσις, but also strongly committed to a nuanced appreciation of bodily needs, provides further arguments in support of the idea that the ascetic interpretation of Plato's thought is by no means the most reliable one.

A very different reconstruction of the problem discussed here can be found in the above-quoted article by George Boys-Stones. In his view, the preference assigned to ὁμοίωσις θεῷ over οἰκειώσις by Platonists such as Alcinous and Apuleius is inevitable, insofar as οἰκειώσις is intended to establish ethics on an empirical basis; but, despite what Plotinus (I 2) argues, it does not entail "a substitution of the 'contemplative' [life] for the practical": according to these philosophers, "through assimilation to god, we *supplement* and *perfect* our activity." Certainly, the active life and the contemplative are not alternative options for Alcinous, but are rather complementary – indeed, the same holds true for Plato. However, they are not complementary in the sense that the contemplative life supplements the active life; rather, they are complementary because contemplation enables man to acquire that knowledge of the good that allows him to act well (i.e. virtuously). Boys-Stones himself alludes to this function of contemplation at the end of his essay, where he identifies assimilation to God with the contemplation of the Idea of the Good, which in turn gives virtue that solid foundation which the empirical perspective adopted by both the Stoics and the Peripatetics is incapable of guaranteeing. But these two explanations are incompatible. For it is one thing to say that assimilation to God perfects *the practice* of virtue, quite another to say that it coincides with *knowledge*, which is the condition for the practice of virtue, and therefore anterior to such a practice.²⁹

²⁹ The same ambiguity can be found in Alcinous. In chap. 2 (153, 2–9) he argues that assimilation to God consists in acquiring the same kind of knowledge as the divine intellect has (which is to say knowledge of the Forms, since the latter are god's thoughts according to the Middle Platonists). In chap. 28 (181, 19–182, 14), instead, ὁμοίωσις θεῷ is identified as the practice and acquisition of different kind of virtues (in accordance with several Platonic texts). But the two statements are inconsistent, and reflect a tendency to detect an allusion to the contemplative life in the *Theaetetus* passage. However, this is an incorrect interpretation, because in the passage just quoted ὁμοίωσις θεῷ is the practice of virtue, not a kind of knowledge. Of course, as I have just said, some

Be that as it may, the *Theaetetus* passage supports neither the first nor the second interpretation. In this passage, assimilation to God coincides neither with the *perfecting of virtue* nor with *knowledge of the good*: it simply coincides with the *practice of virtue*, which according to Plato means assimilation to God, since in his view the divine, while not serving as a norm for virtue, paradigmatically possesses (*pace* Plotinus) those virtues that man must strive to practice as far as possible. If we leave this passage aside, however, it is certainly true that according to the Platonists virtue finds its metaphysical foundation in the Idea of the good, a concept foreign to both the Stoics and the Peripatetics. But this foundation does not at all contradict the ‘Platonic’ version of οἰκειώσις outlined in the previous pages, since the need for a metaphysical justification does not rule out the fact that the elements to be justified have an empirical nature, as in the case of human beings’ natural inclinations or tendency to pursue the kind of happiness which coincides with the promotion and development of such elements. In other words, from a Platonic perspective the doctrine of οἰκειώσις still holds, insofar as it prescribes that knowledge of the good brings out that goodness which is *proper* to man, and which coincides with his happiness. This is the goodness which is crucial to make things good, as described in the *Republic* (VI 484c-d); the human goodness that is the focus of the *Philebus*, etc.; it is not a divine goodness that leads man to a condition or happiness other than the human one (of course, as long as the soul is bound to the body). By specifying, in the *Theaetetus*, that assimilation to God coincides with the practice of virtue, Plato prevents the possible ascetic turn that the idea of assimilation to God might suggest, showing that assimilation to God is the only way to assimilate oneself to one’s own nature, to enable genuinely human goodness to flourish. Therefore, assimilation to God does not amount to the negation of human impulses and desires, or their replacement with divine ones; rather, it is the only way in which human nature can regain what belongs to it. For a Platonist, then, opposition to οἰκειώσις is not something necessary to preserve the consistency of Plato’s system: it is, instead, the first step along a path that, with Neoplatonism,³⁰ will lead to the creation of a non-Platonic rift between human life and divine life, between the active life and the contemplative, between the ethical ideal and the ascetic one. If the telos is οἰκειώσις, the knowledge of the good is also

knowledge of the Forms is a condition for the possibility of acting virtuously. But Plato does not identify this knowledge with ὁμοιωσις θεῶν: this identification depends on the thesis according to which the forms are the thoughts of God, which is nowhere to be found in Plato.

30 According to Baltzly (2004) 299, Annas (1993) is right in observing that there is in Plotinus (but already among Middle Platonists) “a tension between the ethical and spiritual ideals implicit in the ‘assimilation to god’ formula.” But he thinks (*ibid.*) that Proclus “concepts of humans and gods is sufficiently different from that of Plotinus to effect some amelioration of the tension” just quoted.

required; but, at the same time, the primacy of goodness over the divine is affirmed. If, on the contrary, the telos simply coincides is assimilation to God, the opposite occurs.

7 Different Meanings of ὁμοίωσις θεῶ

The topic of ὁμοίωσις θεῶ enables us to look at the history of early Platonism from a wider point of view. It is worth noting that our sources sometimes connect this formula with Pythagoras' saying ἔπου θεῶ: this is the case, for instance, with Stobaeus II 7, 49, 16–18 and Alcinous' *Didaskalikos* 181, 36–37 (but the Pythagorean saying is even echoed by Cato's presentation of Stoic ethics in *De fin.* III 22, 73: *sequi deum*). Moreover, according to Stobaeus' testimony (no matter whether it may be traced back to Eudorus, Arius Dydimus or others), ὁμοίωσις θεῶ "is the *telos* not only for Plato but also for Socrates and Pythagoras; Plato has, however, made the formula more precise (δηρῶσε) by adding the words κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν."³¹ Stobaeus' source then goes on to explain that the addition κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν does not mean "as far as possible for a mere mortal" (that is what Plato obviously wanted to mean), but "according to that part of us which is capable of this, namely the intellect, and its particular virtue, wisdom."³² So, the reason why Stobaeus' source chose to adopt the ὁμοίωσις θεῶ formula becomes quite clear. The portrayal of Pythagoras as the forerunner of the Platonic tradition is intended to affirm its strongly dogmatic and religious character, while the specious interpretation of κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν has the purpose of ruling out the possibility of lending Plato's philosophy even the slightest sceptical veneer. This is precisely the strategy that, according to Lévy, was adopted by Academic philosophers, who in all likelihood combined the ὁμοίωσις θεῶ formula with a clear awareness of the fact that there is an insurmountable distance between human beings and gods.³³ Such a distance, in its turn, has the double consequence of viewing human knowledge from a more or less markedly sceptical perspective, and of keeping human concerns within the boundaries of the present world, as it is impossible for men to achieve perfect and enduring wisdom in their lifetimes. We should also add that the inclusion of Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism within the Platonic tradition was used as a powerful means of turning it into a strictly dogmatic and other-worldly system throughout almost the whole history of ancient Platonism, from the early Middle Platonists up to the last Neoplatonists.

³¹ I am quoting Göransson (1995) 190.

³² See Dillon (1996) 123.

³³ Lévy (1990) 60–2.

As far as Antiochus is concerned, obviously one cannot argue that he was in some way attracted to scepticism. But it is worth noting that he neither counts Pythagoras among the Platonic authorities nor adopts the ὁμοίωσις θεῷ formula. This shows that Antiochus' Platonism was far removed from the ascetic trend launched by the Middle Platonists and then carried on by the Neoplatonists. But it also shows that his commitment to the present world and the goals that philosophy can attain within it has nothing to do with the pious attitude which, according to Lévy, was possibly endorsed by the Academics (Lévy points out that our sources ascribe to Arcesilaus the saying that only the gods, and not men, are wise). Finally, and most significantly, we can also exclude that Stoicism exerted any crucial influence on Antiochus' commitment to an ethical theory grounded on the pair of notions οἰκεῖον/οἰκείωσις, on the proper use of natural goods, and more in general on the close linking of happiness and virtue. It is undeniable that Antiochus' ethical vocabulary has Stoic overtones; and it is most likely that this reflects a conscious choice on his part. But the reason for this attitude does not lie in his supposed philosophical allegiance to Stoicism. It lies, rather, in his polemical aim of showing, against the Stoics, on the one hand that the Academic tradition already contained all that was required to promote virtue as the natural result of the pursuit of happiness understood as the οἰκεῖον good; and, on the other hand, that the Stoic theory of οἰκείωσις had only made things worse, by introducing the awkward difference between a self-serving and altruistic οἰκείωσις, by stressing that natural goods are not really good and so on. Antiochus' ethical theory, in fact, is exactly as one would expect it to be: it offers a syncretistic image of the Academic tradition (from Socrates onwards) which Antiochus endorsed, where Aristotelian indifference to eschatological perspectives is incorporated within a common eudaimonistic (and Socratic) background. Within this framework, moreover, there is also room for a kind of ὁμοίωσις θεῷ deprived of any ascetic or otherworldly commitment: one that simply coincides, according to a well-known passage of the *Nichomachean Ethics* (X 7.1178a2–8), with human striving for knowledge and contemplation: *vitae autem degendae ratio maxime quidem illis [sc. the Peripateticians] placuit quieta, in contemplatione et cognitione posita rerum, quae quia deorum erat vitae simillima, sapiente visa est dignissima* (*De fin.* V 4, 11). The happiness which philosophy can really grant is, once again, limited to one's present life.

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La materia e la creazione del mondo nel *De opificio mundi* di Filone di Alessandria

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Abstract: Following the traces of some references to pre-existing matter in the *Septuagint*, the article analyses the interpretation of Gen 1, 2a in Philo of Alexandria's *De opificio mundi* with a focus on his omission of the ἀκατασκεύαστος character of the earth. Philo's interpretation is closely linked to his conception of emptiness and to his pioneering defence of a creation *ex nihilo*. In his cosmology, which is articulated as a dual interpretation of the *Genesis* and Plato's *Timaeus*, the matter plays an essential role. Philo justifies its existence on Aristotelian-Stoic grounds, highlighting the process of gradual refinement whereby matter passes from being a rough ὕλη to being an elaborate type of οὐσία.

Keywords: Philo of Alexandria, Plato's *Timaeus*, creation of the world, matter, emptiness

1 Introduzione

Al centro del Περὶ τῆς κατὰ Μωυσῆα κοσμοποιίας (*Sulla creazione del mondo secondo Mosè*), opera nota con il titolo latino di *De opificio mundi*, Filone di Alessandria (c. 20 a.C.–c. 49 d.C.) presenta la cosmogonia ebraica in chiave platonico-stoica.¹ Principale punto di riferimento filoniano sono i versetti di Gen 1, 1–3, 24, che egli recepisce assai probabilmente nella traduzione greca dei *Settanta*.² Nel *De opificio*, con cui inizia la sua raccolta di opere nota con il titolo moderno di *Esposizione della legge mosaica*, Filone, però, procede diversamente dalle altre opere dedicate al *Genesi* e probabilmente appartenenti a un primo periodo della sua attività letteraria, ossia il *Commentario allegorico* e le

¹ Per questa versione del titolo dell'opera, l'editore L. Cohn segue il manoscritto *Vindobonensis theologicus graecus* 29. Per le questioni relative al titolo dell'opera si veda Runia (2001) 96–7.

² Cfr. Passoni Dell'Acqua (2003) e Kamesar (2009) 65–72.

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Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesis.³ In queste due tipologie di opere, composte, secondo M. R. Niehoff, durante la sua gioventù ed entrambe destinate a un pubblico ebraico, Filone procede con un'interpretazione del testo biblico per lemmi e ricorre ampiamente all'allegoria.⁴ Anche se, in generale, la cosmogonia mosaica non è un tema estraneo a queste opere, se Filone si è occupato di Gen 1, non ne sono rimaste tracce evidenti, dal momento che le *Legum allegoriae*, opera con cui inizia il *Commentario*, cominciano con l'interpretazione di Gen 2, 6, mentre le *Quaestiones* con quella di Gen 2, 4.⁵ La presente distribuzione dei versetti genesiaci in queste opere ha generato un *qui pro quo* che si è perpetuato nel corso dei secoli. Nonostante gli espliciti rimandi interni al *corpus* e l'evidenza della tradizione manoscritta, fin dall'*editio princeps* del 1552 a cura di Adrien Turnèbe, il *De opificio* con la sua analisi della cosmogonia genesiaca è stato erroneamente posto all'inizio del *Commentario* secondo un'abitudine non abbandonata neanche nell'edizione ottocentesca di Leopold Cohn e di Paul Wendland, e di cui conseguentemente pagano il fio tutte le traduzioni moderne che si sono basate su di essa.⁶ Nel *De opificio* il testo biblico ha una funzione diversa rispetto al *Commentario*, dal momento che, essendo stato composto verosimilmente dopo l'ambasceria filoniana del 38 d.C. a Roma presso

3 Per quanto riguarda la biografia e la datazione delle opere filoniane, seguiamo l'impostazione data in Niehoff (2018), che, seppure non universalmente accettata, a nostro avviso, introduce una nuova e interessante prospettiva. M. R. Niehoff ha ipotizzato che l'ambasceria che Filone condusse a Roma nel 38 d.C. abbia rappresentato una sorta di spartiacque nella sua produzione letteraria, che, a partire da questo momento, sembra essere stata soggetta a nuove influenze culturali e filosofiche, tra cui *in primis* andrebbe considerata quella dello stoicismo romano. Si vedano De Luca (2021) 21–4, 29–41, 191–201 e 295–303 per come, anche a nostro avviso, la composizione del *De opificio* andrebbe collocata dopo l'ambasceria di Filone a Roma. In De Luca (2021), in particolare, abbiamo provato a individuare le tracce filosofiche, letterarie e culturali, che l'ambasceria a Roma potrebbe aver portato con sé, nella nota immagine filoniana del Dio architetto (*Opif.* 17–20), in cui Filone sintetizza, a nostro avviso per un pubblico non ebraico, la sua cosmologia, mostrandola appunto 'per immagini' e rendendola così particolarmente efficace dal punto di vista comunicativo. Si vedano De Luca (2020a) 64–5 e (2020b) 98 n. 26 per il peso che Niehoff (2018) potrebbe avere anche rispetto al ruolo della provvidenza e del λόγος nella cosmologia filoniana.

4 Niehoff (2018) 173–208.

5 Runia (2001) 10–21 e (2021).

6 Le uniche traduzioni a seguire il corretto ordine delle opere nel *corpus* sono quella in tedesco, a cura dello stesso Cohn, e quella in ebraico moderno. Purtroppo oggi anche il lettore italiano trova il *De opificio*, nella traduzione di C. Kraus Reggiani, collocato all'inizio del *Commentario* curato da R. Radice (1994 e 2011). Inizialmente, però, nel 1979 Kraus Reggiani aveva pubblicato la sua traduzione del *De opificio* insieme a quelle del *De Abrahamo* e del *De Iosepho*, mostrando la continuità del *De opificio* con due delle otto opere che fanno parte del gruppo dell'*Esposizione*. Per il *De opificio* nell'*Esposizione*, si vedano i passi filoniani di *Praem.* 1–3. Cfr. Runia (2001) 1–4, 40–3 e De Luca (2021) 35–41.

l'imperatore Gaio Caligola, è destinato a una differente tipologia di pubblico. In quest'opera Filone non si rivolge più a ebrei dotti, che ben conoscevano la Scrittura, ma a un pubblico greco-romano a cui vengono presentati in maniera filosofica i caposaldi della tradizione giudaica. Non siamo più davanti a citazioni esplicite del *Genesi* né a un commento allegorico ispirato, costruito sui singoli termini di un determinato versetto, e i richiami alla Scrittura sono necessari soprattutto a imporre un ordine narrativo alla trattazione cosmologica e a mettere in primo piano i cinque pilastri del giudaismo: Dio esiste; Dio è uno; il cosmo è generato; il cosmo è uno; Dio è provvidente (*Opif.* 170–172).⁷

Nel *De opificio* il commento allegorico per lemmi è sostituito dalla presentazione di una cosmologia, che, oltre a essere per sua essenza di natura giudaica in quanto è basata sul *Genesi*, è contestualizzabile all'interno delle interpretazioni stoiche del *Timeo* di Platone. Rinomate testimonianze ne sono state riscontrate in Posidonio o nell'Antioco di Ascalona delle testimonianze ciceroniane, e ne sono state ipotizzate tracce anche nei frammenti dell'ebreo alessandrino del II sec. a.C. Aristobulo.⁸ Dopo i magistrali studi di D. T. Runia, non può più essere trascurata l'imponente presenza del *Timeo* nel *De opificio*, che, citato parallelamente al *Genesi*, viene assimilato in chiave giudaica secondo la mediazione della Stoa.⁹ Fulcro dell'opera è un sistema cosmologico triadico in cui il Dio ebraico, assunti i connotati demiurgici, crea il mondo delle idee, che coincide con il suo *logos* e che non ha realtà a Lui esterna.¹⁰ Sulla base del modello intellegibile il Creatore costruisce il mondo sensibile, la cui esistenza è garantita dalla presenza al suo interno delle stoicheggianti "essenze seminali".¹¹ L'adesione di Filone al platonismo era stata enfatizzata da Isidoro di Pelusio (IV–V sec. d.C.), che, messa in luce la sintonia tra Filone e Platone, affermava: ἢ Πλάτων ἐφιλώνισεν, ἢ Φίλων ἐπλατώνισεν ("o Platone filonizza o Filone platonizza").¹² Il *De opificio*, infatti, può essere considerato come un'interpretazione del *Timeo* κατὰ ζήτηματα, come quelle sviluppate fin dai primi successori di Platone,

7 Tali cinque δόγματα, alla base della teologia filoniana, sono affermati in tono polemico-apologetico. Come è lo stesso Filone a dirci, il primo è rivolto contro gli atei, il secondo contro i promotori della δόξα politeistica, il terzo contro coloro che credono che il cosmo sia ingenerato ed eterno (ossia Aristotele e i suoi seguaci), il quarto contro coloro che hanno sostenuto l'esistenza di plurimi o infiniti mondi (atomisti ed epicurei) e, infine, il quinto contro chi ha escluso la provvidenza dal cosmo (atomisti, Aristotele ed Epicuro). Cfr. Runia (2001) 394. In particolare, per l'argomento a favore della provvidenza, si veda De Luca (2020a) 65–70.

8 Reydams Schils (1999) 41–83 (Stoici antichi), 85–115 (Posidonio), 137–9 (Aristobulo), 135–65 (Filone), 117–33 (Antioco e Cicerone). Per il *Timeo* e lo stoicismo, si veda anche Reydams-Schils (2013) e Alesse (2018) spec. 49–50. Cfr. De Luca (2021) 191–201.

9 Runia (1986) spec. 480–5 e Radice (1989) spec. 196–201.

10 Per il *logos* nel *De opificio*, De Luca (2020b) e (2021) 226–35.

11 In particolare, si veda *Opif.* 17–20 a confronto con *Opif.* 43.

12 *Ep.* III 81 (Migne). Si veda Runia (2012) e, per Isidoro e Filone, spec. Runia (1991).

e focalizzato, in particolare, su *Tim.* 27a1–31b3.¹³ Dibattuto è il rapporto di Filone con la tradizione medioplatonica, di cui, se in alcuni casi è stato considerato debitore per il tipo di attenzione rivolta al *Timeo*, in altri ne è stato considerato precursore per aver descritto le idee come “pensieri” di Dio.¹⁴ Nel *De opificio*, così come nelle altre opere dell'*Esposizione*, un posto d'eccellenza spetta anche alla tradizione stoica, che diviene più rilevante rispetto ai suoi scritti precedenti anche in funzione dei nuovi destinatari non ebrei a cui l'opera è rivolta. Dello stoicismo Filone riprende concetti e lessico e, come attesta la capillare presenza dei rimandi filoniani negli *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, ne è anche considerato un testimone affidabile.¹⁵ A oggi non è stato stabilito di quale tipo di tradizione stoica Filone sia maggiormente debitore, se dello stoicismo antico, medio o addirittura romano, e ciò sembra essere dovuto al fatto che, per la maggior parte dei casi, Filone riprende idee e immagini che sono trasversali allo stoicismo e, quindi, diffuse già a partire dagli Stoici più antichi.¹⁶ Negli ultimi anni sempre maggior peso è stato attribuito alle analogie con il suo tardo contemporaneo Seneca, con cui ha in comune, per esempio, l'attenzione rivolta alla provvidenza.¹⁷ L'intensificarsi dei riferimenti allo stoicismo nelle sue ultime opere, oltre che al riconoscimento dei valori giudaici nella teologia e nell'etica stoica, potrebbe essere dovuta anche alla ricerca di una maniera efficace di comunicare con il proprio pubblico greco-romano. La tradizione stoica, infatti, sembra fornire a Filone la strategia comunicativa per arrivare direttamente a degli interlocutori non familiari con la cosmogonia ebraica, a cui, però, Gen 1, 1–3, 24, sarebbe potuto risultare più comprensibile se presentato come la sessione ‘fisica’ della Scrittura e

13 De Luca (2021) 72–3. Si veda Runia (1986) 372–99 per i passi del *Timeo* più usati da Filone.

14 Runia (1986) 507–19, (1993), (1999) spec. 157 n. 19 e Radice (1989) 229–37 e (1991). Si veda il recente Ferrari (2021) sul Dio filoniano come ποιητής καὶ πατήρ in relazione al medioplatonismo.

15 Si consideri, però, che molti dei passi filoniani fatti corrispondere agli *SVF* non sono stati accolti nell'edizione dei frammenti crisippea a cura di R. Dufour. Si veda, per esempio, il caso di *Opif.* 8–9, noti paragrafi del *De opificio* dal forte respiro stoico dove Filone afferma l'esistenza di due cause, una attiva e una passiva, che regolano ogni cosa (= Chrys. *SVF* II 302, p. 101 ma assenti in Dufour). In questo caso è lo stesso Runia (1986) 481 n. 32 a sottolineare come *Opif.* 8 sia stato erroneamente inserito da von Arnim nella sua raccolta, dal momento che se la terminologia è stoica, il modo in cui Filone spiega i due principi è più vicino alla prospettiva ‘creazionistica’ del *Timeo*. Nonostante l'ampia presenza dello stoicismo, d'altronde Long mette in guardia a non sopravvalutarla: “Philo found himself in a philosophical environment that looked to Stoicism as something like a *lingua franca*. No one would take Plutarch or Plotinus or Alexander of Aphrodisias or Sextus Empiricus to be Stoic sympathizers, but they were all unavoidably influenced by Stoic terms and ideas. Was Philo more deeply shaped by Stoicism? I think he probably was, but in ways that were largely episodic and unsystematic” (Long 2008, 139–40).

16 De Luca (2021) 132–5.

17 *Ivi*, 134. Si vedano Niehoff (2013) e (2018) spec. 47–68, 74–7 e 101–2 e Radice (1989) 281–319. Per Filone e Seneca sulla πρόνοια in rapporto alla teodicea, oltre a De Luca (2020a), si vedano, Frick (1999) 185–9, Runia (2017) e Radice (2020).

nei termini di un *Timeo* stoiceggiante. È a tal fine che probabilmente Filone è ricorso a una chiave di lettura platonico-stoica, piuttosto diffusa in quegli anni.

All'interno di questa sintesi di tradizioni distinte, che si è perpetuata all'incrocio di sacro e profano, un ruolo assai problematico spetta alla materia. Come messo in luce da G. E. Sterling, nel *corpus Philonicum*, che conta trentasei opere oggi pervenute, si possono distinguere diverse posizioni a seconda che si rivolga la propria attenzione a un'opera piuttosto che un'altra. Nei suoi studi Sterling mette in luce diversi tipi di concezioni creazionistiche che possono essere ricavate dal *De providentia*, dal *De aeternitate mundi* e dal *De opificio mundi*, pur tenendo presente che solo quest'ultimo ci è giunto per esteso, nella sua lingua di composizione, e ne è stata accertata unanimemente l'autenticità.¹⁸ Il *De aeternitate mundi* e il *De providentia*, invece, anche se ormai sono considerati perlopiù frutto della mano di Filone, ci sono rimasti solo parzialmente e oltretutto il *De providentia*, a eccezione di alcuni frammenti in greco, è fruibile nella sua interezza solo nelle traduzioni armena e latina.¹⁹ Sterling riassume lo *status quaestionis* in tre linee principali di interpretazione: (i) Filone sarebbe sostenitore di un'idea di *creatio ex nihilo*, secondo la quale anche la materia sarebbe stata generata (Wolson, Baltes, Sorabji e Radice), (ii) di una *creatio ex materia ingenita*, che implica la coeternità di Dio e della materia (Weiss), e, infine, (iii) di una *creatio aeterna* (Winston), per cui la materia non sarebbe tanto il risultato dell'atto creativo di Dio bensì un suo 'riflesso automatico', ossia un momento logico privo di realtà temporale.²⁰ Già nel 1992 Sterling aveva messo in luce come, a suo avviso, la concezione creazionistica filoniana, per via del suo carattere metafisico-ontologico, non poteva essere svincolata dalle interpretazioni medioplatoniche del *Timeo*.²¹ A suo avviso Filone avrebbe dato espressione a una forma di *creatio simultanea*, secondo cui Dio avrebbe forgiato il mondo noetico e quello sensibile simultaneamente e al di là di qualsiasi *creatio temporalis*. La creazione simultanea di cui parla Sterling non corrisponde a un impulso creazionistico ma a un ordinamento causale improntato al *Timeo*, in cui non è da

18 In Sterling (1992) spec. 35–9, in particolare, sono messi a confronto *Opif.* 7–13, 26–28, 65–68 e 170–172, *Aet.* 13–19 e *Prov.* I 6–8.

19 Cfr. Runia (2017).

20 Si trova una discussione esaustiva di queste tesi in Sterling (1992) 16–21 e (2017) 244, in cui sono citati tutti i riferimenti bibliografici completi. Per le problematiche relative all'origine del mondo in Filone si veda Calabi (2008). Come emergerà tra poco, noi sosteniamo la presenza nel *De opificio* di un'idea di creazione *ex nihilo* della materia intellegibile, mentre per quanto riguarda la materia sensibile, come si vedrà, la questione risulta essere più complessa. Cfr. *infra*, pp. 121–5.

21 Sterling (1992) 35: “Philo argued for γενητός on metaphysical-ontological lines. He therefore stands in continuity with Crantor, Eudorus, Pseudo-Timaues and in anticipation of Alcinoos, Albinus and Taurus. Since Eudorus and Pseudo-Timaeus were both active in Alexandria Philo's position is not surprising.”

escludersi l'eternità della materia dal momento che, secondo lui, Filone non avrebbe riconosciuto un inizio temporale al processo di creazione del modello intellegibile.²² Sterling torna di nuovo sulla questione nel 2017, distinguendo, contro l'idea di *creatio ex nihilo* sostenuta da H. A. Wolfson, tra il processo creativo simultaneo che si può evincere da *Prov.* I 7, dove si afferma che il Creatore ha ordinato la materia nel momento stesso in cui la concepiva, e la concezione di una materia, ricavabile, in particolare, da *Opif.* 7–12, 15–35, 29–32 e 170–172, dove essa, pur preesistendogli, appare come subordinata a Dio che la ordina *ex nihilo*.²³ Le divergenze che si possono riscontrare tra un'opera e un'altra sono motivate da Sterling in riferimento ai diversi referenti a cui *De providentia* e *De opificio* potrebbero essere stati indirizzati: il primo agli studenti di una scuola filoniana, mentre il secondo a un pubblico più ampio.²⁴ Egli, inoltre, giustifica tali distinzioni anche nell'ottica dello sviluppo del pensiero filoniano e, ipotizzando che la composizione del *De opificio* abbia preceduto quella del *De providentia*,²⁵ propone che Filone, a partire da una posizione più strettamente in linea con le interpretazioni medioplatoniche del *Timeo*, sia poi giunto a una concezione più originale e meno in linea con il platonismo.²⁶

Partendo da un'analisi del ruolo ambiguo di Gen 1, 2a LXX nel *De opificio* e, più in generale, nel pensiero di Filone, mostreremo la resistenza con cui viene accettato e tramandato l'aggettivo ἀκατασκεύαστος ('non elaborato') a cui i *Settanta* affidano il compito di descrivere lo stato embrionale in cui si trova la terra al momento della creazione. L'omissione di questo aggettivo da parte di Filone potrebbe essere un segnale di come per lui sia da escludere l'esistenza di una materia primordiale, preesistente all'atto creativo. Nel *De opificio* Filone sviluppa una concezione articolata della materia, in cui viene riconosciuta una certa gradualità di composizione per la materia sensibile e che, nonostante la costante presenza del *Timeo*, spesso finisce per discostarsi dalla χώρα platonica per mostrarsi più affine a una concezione della materia aristotelico-stoica. Il punto di forza di Filone consiste nel trovare un linguaggio comune alle tradizioni giudaica e greco-romana ed, essendo al confine tra due mondi, mediatore tra culture diverse, una monoteistica e una politeistica, egli si ritrova inconsapevolmente ad anticipare il creazionismo cristiano, in cui solo con Agostino sarà affermata con forza quell'idea di *creatio ex nihilo*, di cui già negli scritti filoniani si possono riscontrare *in nuce* delle tracce.²⁷

²² Ivi, 35–6; 40–1.

²³ Sterling (2017) 253–4 versus Wolfson (1962) I 300–10.

²⁴ Sterling (2017) 256.

²⁵ Sterling comunque riconosce che non si hanno prove della precedenza dell'una sull'altra. Niehoff (2018) 69–90 e 245–6, invece, considera gli scritti filosofici di Filone, di cui anche il *De providentia* fa parte, come precedenti alle opere dell'*Esposizione*.

²⁶ Sterling (2017) 256.

²⁷ McMullin (2010); Sockice (2010); Wolfson (1966a). Cfr. Sterling (2017) 256–7.

2 “La terra era invisibile e non elaborata” (Gen 1, 2a): tracce di materia preesistente nella traduzione dei *Settanta*

Nonostante la sua origine sia avvolta da un'aura leggendaria, è probabile che la traduzione dei *Settanta* sia stata voluta dalla comunità ebraica di Alessandria, che, prima della salita al trono di Caligola e dell'affermarsi della sua politica anti-ebraica, era ben integrata tra la popolazione locale. Gli ebrei alessandrini ricevevano una παιδεία greca e, immersi nella vita della diaspora, andavano perdendo giorno dopo giorno la conoscenza dell'ebraico. Lo stesso Filone pare averne avuto una conoscenza limitata, dal momento che tutte le sue opere sono state scritte in greco e che egli manifesta la sua familiarità con la lingua ebraica solo in maniera sporadica, soprattutto ricorrendo a etimologie di nomi ebraici di personaggi e luoghi biblici.²⁸ L'esigenza di vedere tradotta la *Torah* in greco diventava sempre più impellente per tutta la comunità e, secondo la pseudoepigrafa *Lettera di Aristeo a Filocrate*, la traduzione sarebbe stata voluta dal re Tolomeo Filadelfo (285–247 a.C.) in persona, ma più verosimilmente da Tolomeo Soter (366–283 a.C.), che ambiva a raccogliere nella Biblioteca di Alessandria tutti i libri mai stati scritti fino ad allora, incluso il Libro degli Ebrei.²⁹ Anche se si trattava di una traduzione, dovevano esserne garantiti il carattere legislativo e l'ispirazione divina. Per questo motivo, non solo la *Lettera di Aristeo* ma anche il *De vita Mosis* di Filone insistono nel presentarla secondo tratti straordinari, sottolineando che venne eseguita da settantadue saggi provenienti da Gerusalemme, i quali realizzarono la traduzione in settantadue giorni solo dopo aver partecipato per sette giorni a sette simposi, durante i quali il re li interrogava su questioni di ordine etico-morale.³⁰

28 Cfr. Schwartz (2009) 18, Calabi (2013) 18 e Koskeniemi (2019) 131–49. Per le etimologie filoniane si vedano, per esempio, *LA* III 96, 102, *Plant.* 26–27 e *Somn.* I 206 (etimologia del nome di Besalèl), *Somn.* II 250–254 (etimologia di Gerusalemme) o *Ios.* 29 (etimologia di Giuseppe). Per le non rare etimologie di nomi in ebraico è stato ipotizzato che Filone potesse aver attinto a delle 'liste etimologiche' che circolavano tra gli interpreti ebrei della Scrittura. Si vedano Pearce (2007) 35 e Runia (2004).

29 La *Lettera* è un testo di datazione incerta e generalmente si pensa che sia stata composta negli ambienti giudaici di Alessandria tra III sec. a.C. e I sec. d.C. Cfr. Calabi (2011) 27–9.

30 La *Lettera di Aristeo* e il *De vita Mosis* filoniano differiscono nel riportare le modalità in cui sarebbe stata effettuata la traduzione: secondo la prima, i settantadue saggi effettuarono la traduzione riuniti tutti insieme in un unico luogo e arrivarono alla medesima soluzione confrontandosi l'un l'altro, per il secondo, invece, essi produssero la stessa traduzione senza procedere ad alcun confronto. Cfr. De Luca (2021) 101–2.

Nella *Settanta* forte è la contaminazione della filosofia greca, che filtra attraverso la resa espressiva dei termini ebraici. Un caso emblematico è rappresentato da Gen 1, 2a LXX (Rahlf's), dove, dopo il noto *incipit* Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν (“In principio fece Dio il cielo e la terra”), si dice ἡ δὲ γῆ ἦν ἀόρατος καὶ ἀκατασκευάστος (“ma la terra era invisibile e non elaborata”).³¹ Con ἀόρατος καὶ ἀκατασκευάστος viene tradotta l'espressione ebraica *tohu wabohu* (“informità e vuotezza”), che è un *hapax legomenon* composto da due sostantivi che in ebraico hanno il medesimo significato e che rimandano allo stato desertico della terra delle origini.³² M. Kister ha notato come nel testo ebraico, usualmente detto ‘massoretico’ o ‘masoretico’ poiché concordato dai rabbini in base alla *masorah* (“tradizione”), in realtà non ci siano ragioni per credere che la terra, così come gli altri elementi nominati all’inizio del *Genesi*, siano stati creati da Dio: già nel testo ebraico mancherebbero esplicite tracce di una *creatio ex nihilo*.³³ D'altra parte, però, P. Merlo ha sottolineato come gli elementi nominati all’inizio del *Genesi* non descrivano una concreta realtà esistente prima della creazione bensì l'assenza di essa.³⁴ Bisognerà aspettare il filosofo medievale Maimonide per vedere teorizzata esplicitamente in ambito

31 Cfr. Harl (1986) 87, Alexandre (1998) 76–80 e Rösel (1994) 25, 31–3. Le prime due traducono Gen 1, 2a LXX con “Or la terre était invisible et inorganisée”, mentre Rösel “Die Erde aber war unsichtbar und unbearbeitet.” Alla fine del XVIII sec. L. C. L. Breton, invece, traduce “But the earth was unsightly and unfurnished” (Breton 1794). Si veda De Luca (2021) 104–5.

32 Si veda la traduzione interlineare di Reggi (2008) 11. La coppia *tohu wabohu* è tradotta in inglese da R. Alter con ‘welter and waste’: “the Hebrew *tohu wabohu* occurs only here and in two later biblical texts that are clearly alluding to this one. The second word of the pair looks like a nonce term coined to rhyme with the first and to reinforce it, an effect I have tried to approximate in English by alliteration. *Tohu* by itself means ‘emptiness’ or ‘futility’, and in some contexts is associated with the trackless vacancy of the desert” (Alter 2019, 11). Per le ulteriori occorrenze di *tohu wabohu*, Alter si riferisce a Is 34, 11 e Ger 4, 23 (cfr. Kister 2009, 230–2). Nelle altre traduzioni greche del Pentateuco, tutte sviluppate nell’arco del II sec. d.C. e che sono note per essere più fedeli all’originale ebraico, si legge: Aquila: Ἡ δὲ γῆ ἦν κένωμα καὶ οὐθέν (“ma la terra era vuoto e nulla”); Teodoziona: Ἡ δὲ γῆ ἦν θέν καὶ οὐθέν (“ma la terra era qualcosa e nulla”); Simmaco: Ἡ δὲ γῆ ἐγένετο ἀργὸν καὶ ἀδιάκριτον (“ma la terra venne generata inoperosa e indistinta”). Si veda Philop. *De op. II incipit*, 2 e 5 (pp. 200–1, 184–91, 196–201 Scholten). Nella *Vetus latina*, basata sulla traduzione greca, troviamo *invisibilis et incomposita*, mentre nella *Nova vulgata*, improntata sul testo ebraico, *inanis et vacua*. Cfr. Kister (2009) 240.

33 *Ivi*, 241.

34 Merlo (2008) 77–8. In particolare, in relazione al testo massoretico Merlo propone di intendere Gen 1, 2 come un’incidentale preceduta da una proposizione temporale secondaria (Gen 1, 1) e seguita dalla principale (Gen 1, 3). La sua traduzione di Gen 1, 1–3 è: “Quando Dio creò il cielo e la terra, (mentre) la terra era [...], allora Dio disse.” Merlo (2008) 75 e 79–80.

ebraico la prima forma di una ‘big bang theory’ giustificata da un punto di vista teologico e filosofico.³⁵

L’espressione ἀόρατος καὶ ἀκατασκεύαστος sembra rievocare il *Timeo* platonico e uno stato primordiale in cui la terra rappresenta ancora un ingrediente allo stato grezzo che è stato formato ma che non è stato ancora elaborato. La traduzione di *tohu* con ἀόρατος è stata giustificata con la volontà dei traduttori di rimandare all’invisibilità della terra poiché essa era ancora coperta dall’oscurità o dall’acqua.³⁶ Ma, come è stato notato, l’aggettivo ἀόρατος potrebbe essere inteso come un retaggio di una materia preesistente, strettamente connesso al *Timeo* e, in particolare, a *Tim.* 51a7, dove la χώρα è descritta come un ἀνόρατον εἶδος τι καὶ ἄμορφον (un genere invisibile e informe).³⁷ L’aggettivo ἀόρατος, inoltre, ricorda anche *Tim.* 52a3 dove è il modello eterno a essere ἀόρατον. D’altronde, come vedremo, Filone, così come diversi autori cristiani, interpreteranno l’ἀόρατος di Gen 1, 2a LXX proprio in connessione alla creazione intellegibile in cui viene prodotta l’idea della terra.³⁸

Più problematica è la scelta di tradurre *bohu* con il raro aggettivo ἀκατασκεύαστος, con cui vengono accentuati gli echi della presenza di una materia preesistente nella *Settanta*. I traduttori non presentano γῆ come caos e vuoto bensì come una sorta di ‘fango’ delle origini, che può essere inteso come anteriore rispetto a Dio e modellato da Lui in un secondo momento. Gen 1, 2a è l’unica volta in cui ἀκατασκεύαστος viene usato nella *Settanta*³⁹ e potrebbe avere un’eco peripatetica. Lo troviamo nelle *Divisioni* attribuite da Diogene Laerzio ad Aristotele, dove sono le mura (τὰ τεῖχη) della città a essere ἀκατασκεύαστα, e,

35 Cfr. *Guida dei perplessi* II 13 (Munk), dove Maimonide, scagliandosi contro Epicuro e gli Epicurei, mette a confronto una prima opinione, abbracciata dallo stesso Maimonide, secondo cui la creazione del mondo è avvenuta a partire dal nulla puro e assoluto, la seconda opinione che è quella dei filosofi, secondo cui il mondo non è venuto all’esistenza dal nulla e non si corrompe nel nulla, tra i cui sostenitori viene annoverato il Platone del *Timeo* e, infine, una terza opinione che è quella di Aristotele, dei suoi seguaci e dei suoi commentatori, che, oltre all’esistenza di una materia preesistente, hanno sostenuto anche l’eternità del mondo, che non ricade né sotto la generazione né sotto la corruzione. Cfr. Soskice (2010) 34–7 e Davies (2010).

36 Kister (2009) 231. Cfr. Philop. *De op.* II 2, dove a proposito del διὰ τί Mosè abbia detto che la terra è invisibile, in relazione a Gen 1, 9 si dice che è tale perché è sommersa dall’acqua e di ciò si trova riscontro anche nell’ordine in cui sono stati creati gli elementi (si veda spec. pp. 184, 13–186, 14 Scholten). Per le interpretazioni letterali e allegoriche di Gen 1, 2a in ambito cristiano, si veda van Winden (1997a) 107–15, dove l’autore si focalizza soprattutto su Calcidio.

37 Alexandre (1998) 77 e Rösel (1994) 32–3.

38 Cfr. *infra*, pp. 119–21. Cfr. *Opif.* 29. Come nota Alexandre (1998) 76, alcuni tratti dell’esegesi di Filone di Gen 1, 2a ritornano, nonostante le differenze, in Origene e Agostino.

39 Ci sono delle occorrenze di ἀκατασκεύαστος anche nella versione greca dell’apocrifo libro di Enoch (datata al I sec. d.C.) in relazione al luogo dove avviene la punizione degli angeli (1En 21, 1–2 Black). Si veda Kister (2009) 233–4.

inoltre, nelle *Ricerche sulle piante* di Teofrasto dove è sottolineato come possa sopraggiungere la morte se l'antidoto all'aconito, pianta nota per la sua tossicità, è ἀκατασκεύαστον.⁴⁰ Anche se senza precisi riscontri testuali, come, invece, accade nel caso di ἄορατος, anche l'uso di ἀκατασκεύαστος è stato visto in relazione alla χώρα del *Timeo*, dal momento che, così come nel testo massoretico, anche nella traduzione greca del *Genesi* non è affermata chiaramente un'idea di una *creatio ex nihilo* che potrebbe essere evinta solo dalla formula ἐν ἀρχῇ con cui si inaugura la produzione divina di cielo e terra (Gen 1, 1 LXX).⁴¹ È stato sottolineato come in età ellenistica il creazionismo giudaico fosse polarizzato in due posizioni, rappresentate da Sap 11, 17, dove si dice che Dio “fondò il mondo a partire dalla materia informe” (κτίζει τὸν κόσμον ἐξ ἀμόρφου ὕλης), e da 2Mac 7, 28, dove si dice che “Dio li fece a partire da < cose > non esistenti” (οὐκ ἐξ ὄντων ἐποίησεν αὐτὰ ὁ θεός), alludendo con αὐτὰ al cielo, alla terra e a ciò che è in essi contenuto.⁴² Per via dell'ambiguità della questione, nella *Settanta* l'associazione di ἀκατασκεύαστος con una materia preesistente non appare fuori luogo, anche se alto è il rischio di compromettere l'immagine di Dio come l'unico creatore di ogni cosa. Va notato, poi, che nella *Settanta* il verbo κατασκευάζω, da cui l'aggettivo ἀκατασκεύαστος deriva, non è mai utilizzato in senso creazionistico. Per un simile uso bisognerà aspettare la *Lettera di Aristea* e i frammenti del peripatetico Aristobulo, e se ne può riscontrare un utilizzo consolidato solo a partire da Filone. Egli utilizza il lessico della κατασκευή in senso creazionistico-produttivo

40 [Ps. Arist.] *Divis. Aristot.* 18 (p. 37, col. 2, 4–12 Mutschmann). Nella *Divisione* sulla συμβουλία (il consiglio), che viene diviso in tre specie, una derivante dal passato, una dal presente e una dal futuro, a proposito del presente si dice οἷον τὰ παρόντα πράγματα ἐμφανίζουσιν, ὅτι ‘ἐὰν τὰ τεῖχη ἡμῶν ἀκατασκεύαστα ᾧσι καὶ ἡμεῖς ἄοπλοι ᾧμεν, οἱ δὲ πολέμοι ἅπασι τούτοις κατεσκευασμένοι, σκοπῶμεν δὴ ὅπως πολεμεῖν δυνησόμεθα’ (“per esempio [quando questo] rende evidenti le azioni presenti, cioè ‘se le nostre mura non sono pronte e noi [stessi] siamo senz’armi, mentre i nemici hanno provveduto a tutte queste cose, riflettiamo su come potremo fare guerra”). In Diogene, invece, più sinteticamente si afferma che τὰ δ’ ἐκ τῶν παρόντων, οἷον ἀποφαίνειν τεῖχη ἀσθενῆ, δειλοὺς ἀνθρώπους, σῆτον ὀλίγον (“ciò che si trae dal presente è per esempio mostrare che le mura sono deboli, gli uomini vili, i viveri scarsi”, DL III 106, 4–6 Dorandi). In entrambi i casi trad. Rossitto (2005) 114–5 (si vedano anche 302–3). In Theophrast. *Histor. plant.* IX 16, 6 Hort si dice: Καὶ γὰρ οὐδὲ ταχεῖαν ποιῆσθαι τὴν ἀπαλλαγὴν οὐδὲ ἐλαφρὰν, ἀλλὰ δυσχερῆ καὶ χρόνιον, εἰ μὴ ἄρα διὰ τὸ ἀθεράπευτον εἶναι καὶ ἀκατασκεύαστον ὡς δεῖ (“E infatti < dicono che > la morte non è prodotta né veloce né leggera, ma sgradevole e lenta, se dunque, per il non essere curato, < l'antidoto > non è neanche preparato come si deve”, trad. mia).

41 Rösel (1994) 73–87. Di diversa opinione è Runia (2001) 165 che, qui *versus* Rösel, in questo caso non considera plausibile una dipendenza dei *Settanta* dal *Timeo*. Cfr. Niehoff (2013) 89–90, Alexandre (1998) 76–80 e Harl (1986) 87.

42 De Luca (2021) 243. Si vedano Kraus Reggiani (1979) 32, Alexandre (1998) 77, Kister (2009) 245–6 e Sockice (2010) 31.

e forse proprio per questo motivo potrebbe aver avuto delle resistenze a riprendere e commentare l'aggettivo ἀκατασκεύαστος di Gen 1, 2a.⁴³

3 L'interpretazione filoniana di Gen 1, 2a: l'assenza del carattere ἀκατασκεύαστος della terra e il concetto di vuoto

La sola volta che Filone cita per esteso Gen 1, 2a LXX è in *Aet.* 19, che rappresenta l'unica occasione, di cui si ha testimonianza, in cui utilizza l'aggettivo ἀκατασκεύαστος. In *Aet.* 19, però, Filone, contrapponendo la posizione di Mosè a quelle di Aristotele, degli Stoici e di Esiodo, non si sofferma a commentare Gen 1, 2a e non dedica alcuna attenzione ad ἀκατασκεύαστος, che si limita a riportare nella sua citazione letterale. Nelle altre opere Filone commenta sempre solo l'invisibilità della terra senza mai alludere al suo stato di 'non elaborazione'.⁴⁴ Assordante è l'assenza di qualsiasi riferimento al carattere ἀκατασκεύαστος della terra nel *De opificio*, dove egli si sofferma a commentare solo la natura invisibile di γῆ.⁴⁵ In *Opif.* 15 Filone descrive la creazione intellegibile e, in linea con la *Settanta*, che in questo caso è fedele al testo ebraico, distingue tra la ἡμέρα μία (giorno uno) e tutte

⁴³ Per l'uso di κατασκευάζω in senso creazionistico, per esempio, si vedano *Arist.* 234 (Pelletier), dove durante l'interrogazione del decimo saggio da parte del re, si afferma che ogni cosa è elaborata (κατασκευάζεται) da Dio o Aristob. Fr. 5 Radice (= Eus. *PE* XIII 12, 10 Mras = Fr. 2, 74 Denis), che inizia dicendo che ὁ θεὸς τὸν ὅλον κόσμον κατεσκεύακε ("Dio ha elaborato l'intero cosmo"). De Luca (2021) 136–41.

⁴⁴ Filone si occupa più estesamente di Gen 1, 2 anche in *LA* I 33 e *Gig.* 22, dove si concentra sullo πνεύμα. Nell'indice di *Biblia patristica* è segnalato anche il caso di *Fug.* 10, in cui alludendo ad Anassagora si dice: ἕτεροι δ' εἰσι τῆς ἀμείνωνος μοίρας, οἱ νοῦν ἔφρασαν ἐλθόντα πάντα διακοσμήσαι, τὴν ἐξ ὀχλοκρατίας ἐν τοῖς οὖσιν ἀταξίαν εἰς ἀρχῆς νομίμου, βασιλείας, τάξιν ἀγαθόντα ("ma vi sono altri, di levatura superiore, secondo i quali è sopravvenuta una Mente a dare una disposizione a tutte le cose, instaurando in luogo del disordine che imperversava nell'universo a seguito dell'oclocrazia l'ordine di un'autorità legittima quale è la regalità", trad. C. Kraus Reggiani), (per l'implicito riferimento ad Anassagora, si veda spec. Radice 2011, 1501 nn. 6–7). In *Prov.* I 22, invece, all'interno di un *excursus* dossografico sulle opinioni di coloro che hanno sostenuto l'esistenza di una materia preesistente, si precisa la posizione di Mosè, secondo cui l'acqua, le tenebre e l'abisso citati in Gen 1–2 LXX non esistevano *ante mundum*. Echi di Gen 1, 2 sono stati visti anche in *QG* II 4 e 5, dove, in relazione alla costruzione dell'arca di Gen 6, 14 e Gen 6, 15–16, si rimanda all'origine e all'incorruttibilità del cosmo.

⁴⁵ Tra i paragrafi del *De opificio*, citati in *Biblia patristica*, in cui Filone si sarebbe occupato di Gen 1, 2 LXX, seppure trascurando il carattere ἀκατασκεύαστος, troviamo *Opif.* 22, 29–30 e 32, che sono discussi da noi nelle pagine che seguono.

le altre ἡμέραι, contraddistinte dai numerali ordinari.⁴⁶ L'uso del cardinale per il solo giorno 'uno' è giustificato da Filone appellandosi al fatto che in esso sia avvenuta simultaneamente la creazione di tutte le idee, sulla base di cui nei restanti cinque giorni sono stati forgiati i corrispondenti sensibili.⁴⁷ Il settimo giorno, invece, Dio si riposa e si dedica alla contemplazione di ciò che ha creato. Come si evince da *Opif.* 17–20, le idee, a differenza di quanto accade nel *Timeo*, sono state plasmate da Dio e risiedono nel suo λόγος, come i pensieri che affollano il suo 'progetto' creativo e a cui viene data una consistenza sensibile durante il resto della creazione.⁴⁸ In *Opif.* 26–29 Filone sollecita un'interpretazione causale, e non temporale, dell'ἐν ἀρχῇ di Gen 1, 1, che, a suo avviso, deve essere considerato non κατὰ χρόνον (secondo il tempo), ma κατ' ἀριθμόν (secondo il numero), in quanto "in principio creò" equivale a dire che Dio "per prima cosa creò il cielo."⁴⁹ Del tempo, infatti, non c'è traccia prima che inizi il processo creativo e, per Filone, che sta interpretando il *Genesi* attraverso il *Timeo*, il tempo inizia a scorrere solo nel momento in cui Dio ha prodotto il cielo e gli astri che lo illuminano.⁵⁰ La creazione delle idee avviene al di là del tempo e deve essere intesa κατ' ἀριθμόν perché, pur essendo simultanea, implica la stessa τάξις (ordine) che si riscontra nelle ἐπινοίαι (intenzioni) di Dio. Secondo Filone le idee sono state create secondo la gerarchia esposta in Gen 1, 1–2 e alla formazione del cielo incorporeo (οὐρανὸς ἀσώματος) segue quella della terra invisibile (γῆ ἀόρατος), delle idee di aria e di vuoto, dell'essenza incorporea (ἀσώματος οὐσία) dell'acqua e del soffio e, infine, della luce, che rappresenta il "modello incorporeo e intellegibile" (ἀσώματον καὶ νοητὸν παράδειγμα) del sole e di tutti quanti gli astri. Come parte del catalogo delle prime idee create da Dio, Filone sembra essere interessato a mantenere solo il carattere ἀόρατος della terra e la presenza di questo aggettivo nella *Settanta* diviene il pretesto per mettere in evidenza lo stato noetico di γῆ.

L'omissione filoniana dell'aggettivo ἀκατασκεύαστος potrebbe trovare una giustificazione nel rimando in *Opif.* 29 all'idea di vuoto, a cui Filone allude subito dopo il cielo, la terra e l'aria intellegibili. La creazione dell'ἰδέα κενοῦ sembra rievocare quel vuoto originario a cui il *bohu* del testo ebraico si riferiva e che tra i suoi significati vede proprio quello di 'vuotezza'.⁵¹ Come abbiamo detto, Filone sviluppa la sua interpretazione del *Genesi* basandosi sulla traduzione dei *Settanta*,

46 De Luca (2021) 112–3. Si veda Sterling (2005).

47 Nel *De opificio* sono numerosi gli *excursus* aritmo-logici di stampo neopitagorico che Filone sviluppa a partire dal numero che caratterizza ogni giorno creativo. Il più esteso è quello sull'ebdomade che occupa ben 40 dei 172 paragrafi dell'opera (*Opif.* 89–128).

48 De Luca (2021) 191–236 e (2020b). Per le idee come pensieri di Dio, Radice (1991).

49 Per il tempo in Filone, si veda Alesso (2004).

50 Cfr. *Tim.* 37d5–e3 e 38b6–c6. Si veda Runia (1986) 215–22.

51 Nell'*Etymological Dictionary* di E. Klein è tradotto con 'emptiness, chaos'. Klein (1987) 65.

in cui, però, manca qualsiasi esplicito richiamo non solo all'aria ma anche al vuoto. In questo caso Filone all'ἀκατασκεύαστος greco, forse troppo vicino all'immagine di una materia preesistente, potrebbe aver preferito il *bohu* ebraico. È probabile, infatti, che egli conoscesse il celebre inizio della *Torah*, almeno sotto forma di tradizione orale, anche in ebraico. Quando in *Opif.* 29 Filone passa a interpretare l'abisso di Gen 1, 2b LXX, dove si dice καὶ σκότος ἐπάνω τῆς ἀβύσσου (“e l'oscurità <era> sopra l'abisso”), afferma che Dio chiamò (ἐπεφήμισε) l'idea del vuoto ἄβυσσος e aggiunge che πολύβυθον τό γε κενόν καὶ ἀχανές (“il vuoto <è> molto profondo e immenso”), forse distinguendo tra l'idea di vuoto e il vuoto sensibile. Poco più avanti, in *Opif.* 32, all'interno della descrizione del ‘giorno uno’ e, quindi, ancora all'interno della creazione intellegibile, Filone giustifica il fatto che in origine l'oscurità era sopra l'abisso dicendo che τρόπον τινα ὁ ἀήρ ὑπὲρ τὸ κενόν ἐστίν, ἐπειδὴ πᾶσαν τὴν ἀχανῆ καὶ ἐρήμην καὶ κενὴν χώραν ἐπιβάς ἐκπεπλήρωκεν, ὅση πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τῶν κατὰ σελήνην καθήκει (“in qualche modo l'aria è sopra il vuoto, poiché, essendo salita sopra, ha riempito tutta l'immensa, deserta e vuota regione, che si estende dalle zone sotto la luna fino a noi”). Come è lo stesso Filone ad affermare in *Opif.* 29 e in *QG* II 85, l'aria, così come accade per gli Stoici, è nera e, a suo avviso, va a riempire il vuoto di cui sembra che dobbiamo presupporre un'esistenza solo momentanea: esso esiste fintantoché non viene riempito d'aria.⁵² In questo modo, però, il vuoto intellegibile sembra sussistere – seppure per pochi istanti – all'interno del cosmo e non al suo esterno.

Anche se Filone afferma chiaramente la creazione dell'ἰδέα κενοῦ, dopo quella del cielo, della terra e dell'aria, nel *De opificio* la presenza di τὸ κενόν a livello sensibile non viene tematizzata.⁵³ Per provare a comprendere meglio il ruolo del vuoto sensibile all'interno della sua cosmologia dobbiamo ricorrere ad altre opere di Filone dove, seppure sia d'obbligo ricordare l'asistematicità con cui egli procede, si può distinguere tra una negazione del vuoto a livello onto-teologico e la simpatia per una posizione di tipo stoico secondo cui il vuoto si trova all'esterno del cosmo e lo circonda. In opere del *Commentario allegorico* come *LA* I 44, III 4, *Post.* 6 e *Somn.* II 245 Filone insiste nel sottolineare come tutto sia pieno di Dio e come non possa sussistere alcun luogo che sia da Lui lasciato vuoto. In *Plant.* 6–7, altra opera, come le altre facenti parte del *Commentario*, che sembra essere stata

⁵² Si noti che *QG* II 85 corrisponde a Chrys. *SVF* II 562, p. 177. È, invece, assente nella raccolta a cura di R. Dufour (2004). Si veda anche Chrys. *SVF* II 429.1, pp. 140–141 = Plut. *De Stoic. repugn.* 43, 1053E9–F2 Westman = F 444 Dufour.

⁵³ Cfr. *Prov.* II 55–56, dove Filone, paragonando Dio a fondatori di città come Alessandro Magno, afferma che *similiter et Deus, quin novum quidpiam elaborasset, de novo magnam istam urbem mundum creavit, ac una cum eo locum etiam oriri fecit* (“De même Dieu, sans avoir produit le vide a créé à partir de lui cette grande cité qu'est le monde et, en même temps, a fait naître aussi le lieu”, trad. M. Hadas-Label).

composta durante un primo periodo della produzione letteraria di Filone, si dice che dato che è conveniente che il più grande Demiurgo abbia plasmato la più grande e perfetta delle opere, ossia questo mondo, esso deve essere stato composto da parti perfette.⁵⁴ La terra, l'acqua e il fuoco lo occupano interamente e ἀνάγκη τοῖσιν ἐκτὸς ἢ κενὸν ἢ μηδὲν εἶναι (“<è> necessità che, di conseguenza, fuori ci sia o il vuoto o nulla”). Il cosmo non vacilla e non sprofonda nel vuoto perché è sorretto dal λόγος che è il più solido e stabile sostegno dell'universo (τὸ ὀχυρώτατον καὶ βεβαίωτατον ἔρεισμα τῶν ὅλων).⁵⁵ È forte il riecheggiamento di motivi stoici e della concezione di un vuoto sensibile che circonda il cosmo e che non è riscontrabile al suo interno.⁵⁶ Filone è lontano dall'aver una visione atomistica del vuoto ma, seppure solo a livello intellegibile, il vuoto ideale finiva per occupare uno 'spazio' interno al cosmo, e, come si può evincere da *Opif.* 32, esso è presentato come una regione riempita d'aria e priva di corpi.⁵⁷

Rispetto a quanto si legge in *Plant.* 6–7, Filone, però, sembra contraddirsi in un'altra opera, anch'essa parte del *Commentario*: in *Her.* 228 si dice che il cielo, simboleggiato dalla *menorah*, il candelabro ebraico a sette braccia, non è contenuto (περιέχεται) da nessun corpo e, in particolare, neppure ὑπὸ κενοῦ (dal vuoto) come vorrebbe la ἐν τῇ ἐκπύρωσει μυθευομένη τερατολογία (il racconto fantasioso sull'ecpirosi). È nota l'avversione filoniana per la conflagrazione cosmica, che risulta essere incompatibile con la sua idea di un cosmo che viene alla luce per mano di Dio e che è incorruttibile.⁵⁸ Lo stesso Filone loda esplicitamente quegli Stoici come Boeto di Sidone e Panezio che da tale tesi hanno preso le distanze e che risultano più inclini ad abbracciare l'incorruttibilità del cosmo.⁵⁹ Diverso è il caso di *Aet.* 21, opera più vicina al *De opificio* per luogo e tempo di composizione, in cui, esclusa l'ipotesi che il cosmo possa essere considerato corruttibile per una causa interna o esterna, si ipotizza che, seppure si debba considerare che esista qualcosa di esterno al mondo, esso deve essere un vuoto (κενόν), da intendersi come ἡ ἀπαθὴς φύσις, ἣν ἀδύνατον παθεῖν τι ἢ δρᾶσαι (“la natura impassibile, che <è> impossibile che subisca o faccia qualcosa”).

54 Per la frammentazione del cosmo sensibile in parti, cfr. De Luca (2021) 267–9.

55 *Plant.* 8.

56 Cfr. Zeno *SVF* I 95.1, p. 26 (= Aët. I 18, 5; 20, 1 Diels) dove si dice che secondo Zenone e i suoi seguaci il vuoto non risiede nel cosmo ma al di fuori, dove esiste in misura infinita. Per il vuoto nello stoicismo, Algra (1995) 261–340. Per altre testimonianze filoniane sul vuoto nello stoicismo, si rimanda ad *Aet.* 102–103, dove Filone riporta la concezione stoica del vuoto secondo cui ἐκτὸς τοῦ κόσμου (fuori dal cosmo) ci sarà solo uno κενὸν ἄπειρον (vuoto infinito).

57 Cfr. De Luca (2021) 77–8.

58 Si veda *Aet.* 7–9 dove, tra tre diverse posizioni analizzate circa l'origine e la corruzione del cosmo, viene scartata la prospettiva stoica, secondo cui il mondo è generato ma si corrompe ogni volta che si chiude un ciclo cosmico. Cfr. *Prov.* II 1 dove, però, viene presa in considerazione l'idea della distruzione del cosmo. Cfr. Sharples (2008) 55–66.

59 *Aet.* 76–77.

Poco dopo, in *Aet.* 78 (= Boeth. *SVF* III 7, p. 265) Filone attribuisce una posizione simile a Boeto e i suoi seguaci, secondo cui se il mondo fosse stato generato ma fosse corruttibile, sarebbe stato generato ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος (lett. “a partire da ciò che non è”), cosa che, però, apparirebbe massimamente fuori luogo anche per gli stessi Stoici dal momento che non è possibile trovare una causa, interna o esterna, della corruzione del cosmo.⁶⁰ Secondo il Boeto della testimonianza filoniana ἐκτὸς γὰρ οὐδὲν ἔστιν ὅτι μὴ τάχα που κενόν (“fuori, infatti, non c’è nulla se non forse il vuoto”), dal momento che gli elementi costituiscono l’intero universo e la ragione non può accettare che la distruzione derivi dal non essere. Se intendiamo *Her.* 228 come uno ‘sfogo’ contro i sostenitori dell’ecpirosi, in linea generale Filone sembra assumere l’esistenza del vuoto sensibile e ciò risulta essere coerente con quanto afferma nel *De opificio* dove, tra le prime idee create da Dio, troviamo quella del vuoto. Filone, quindi, in *Opif.* 29, commentando Gen 1, 2 LXX senza nominare il carattere ἀκατασκεύαστος della terra ma aggiungendo il riferimento all’ἰδέα κενοῦ, potrebbe aver voluto implicitamente richiamare il *bohu* (“vuotezza”) del testo ebraico, ricavando dalla terra desertica delle origini ben due idee originarie, l’idea della terra invisibile e l’idea del vuoto. I due caratteri ἀόρατος e ἀκατασκεύαστος della terra di Gen 1, 2a potrebbero essere stati da lui appositamente separati, riassorbendo il secondo nell’idea di vuoto e, dunque, preferendo il *bohu* ebraico all’ἀκατασκεύαστος greco.

Alla luce del silenzio che avvolge la ‘non elaborazione’ della terra in tutto il *corpus Philonicum*, l’assenza di questo aggettivo sembra essere intenzionale. R. Radice ha notato come Filone potrebbe aver omesso appositamente di nominare l’aggettivo ἀκατασκεύαστος perché esso sarebbe potuto apparire come troppo vicino alla realtà sensibile (creata solo a partire dal secondo giorno creativo) e, quindi, non coerente con lo stato ideale che caratterizza la terra originaria.⁶¹ Ἀκατασκεύαστος poteva mettere a repentaglio la perfezione delle idee, in cui, come pensieri divini creati d’un sol colpo e simultaneamente, non è previsto uno stato in cui non siano ancora stati elaborati. Filone ci mostra come prima che Dio facesse (ἐποίησεν) le idee di terra e di vuoto non ci fosse nulla e, da quanto si può evincere dal *De opificio*, egli si fa portavoce di un creazionismo *ex nihilo* intellegibile: prima che inizi la creazione noetica, non c’è nulla. Per come la terra delle origini è stata presentata dalla *Settanta*, come creata da Dio ma ancora ἀκατασκεύαστος, essa sembra risultare poco digeribile agli occhi di Filone e forse, proprio per questo motivo, egli potrebbe aver deciso di omettere quell’ἀκατασκεύαστος che poteva essere frainteso come un richiamo a una materia preesistente e a una massa informe ancora tutta da plasmare.

⁶⁰ Per lo stoico Boeto, spesso confuso con l’omonimo peripatetico, si veda Alesse (1997) spec. 366–75 e 382–3 per la testimonianza fornita da Filone in *Aet.* 78–84.

⁶¹ Radice (1987) 248–9.

Il silenzio di Filone circa la ‘non elaborazione’ originaria della terra è riscontrabile anche in diversi autori ebrei e cristiani che, però, non sempre hanno inteso, come Filone, la terra di Gen 1, 2a in termini intellegibili.⁶² Un caso emblematico è ciò che accade nello storico ebreo Flavio Giuseppe che all’inizio delle *Antichità giudaiche*, illustrando la cosmogonia mosaica, cita Gen 1, 2 LXX omettendo il carattere ἀκατασκεύαστος della terra e menzionando solo la sua invisibilità, che considera dovuta al fatto che γῆ sia rimasta nascosta da una tenebra profonda finché Dio non ha creato la luce (AI I 27–28 Niese). Vale la pena notare che Flavio Giuseppe, però, non riporta neanche l’aggettivo ἀόρατος e che si limita a parafrasare Gen 1, 2a LXX dicendo che la terra “non va sotto la vista” (ταύτης <scil. γῆς> δ’ ὑπ’ ὄψιν οὐκ ἐρχομένης). Subito dopo, forse secondo l’implicita sostituzione di ἀκατασκεύαστος con un riferimento alla materia, Flavio Giuseppe chiama in causa la ὕλη: καὶ γενομένου τούτου κατανοήσας τὴν ὅλην ὕλην διεχώρισε τὸ τε φῶς καὶ τὸ σκότος καὶ τῷ μὲν ὄνομα ἔθετο νύκτα, τὸ δὲ ἡμέραν ἐκόλεσεν [...] (“e accaduto ciò, avendo considerato la materia intera, <Dio> separò la luce e l’oscurità e a una attribuì ‘notte’ come nome, mentre chiamò l’altra ‘giorno’”). Negli autori cristiani le tracce di ἀκατασκεύαστος sono rare e Gen 1, 2a LXX è spesso connesso al ruolo che svolge la materia. Nell’*Apologia per i cristiani* Giustino, mostrando la precedenza di Mosè su Platone, contrappone ciò che egli deduce dal *Timeo*, ossia che “Dio ha prodotto il cosmo avendo trasformato la materia che è informe” (ὕλην ἄμορφον οὖσαν τρέψαντα τὸν θεὸν κόσμον ποιῆσαι) (cfr. *Tim.* 29e–30b; 51a–b; 69 b–c), alla cosmogonia mosaica espressa in Gen 1, 1–3 LXX.⁶³ Anche se complessivamente Gen 1, 2a LXX è citato letteralmente due volte nell’opera (*Apol.* I 59, 3 e 64, 3), il carattere ἀκατασκεύαστος della terra, in realtà, non viene commentato e Giustino sembra connetterlo solo indirettamente all’azione che Dio svolge sulla materia.⁶⁴ È più esplicito Clemente quando, in chiave polemica, dice che ἄλλως τε ἢ λέξις ἡ προφητικὴ ἐκείνη “ἡ δὲ γῆ ἦν ἀόρατος καὶ ἀκατασκεύαστος” ἀφορμὰς αὐτοῖς ὑλικῆς οὐσίας παρέσχηται (“soprattutto quel noto versetto biblico ‘ma la terra era invisibile e non elaborata’ ha offerto a essi <scil. i filosofi greci> dei pretesti <per parlare> della sostanza materiale”).⁶⁵ In un frammento del commentario perduto al *Genesi* di Origene, come si attesta anche nel *Contra Celsum* VI 49, 9–20 (Borret), il versetto di Gen 1, 2a LXX viene impugnato a riprova della creazione divina della materia per attaccare coloro che hanno creduto che la natura corporea (σωματικὴ φύσις) fosse ingenerata (ἀγέννητον).⁶⁶ Lo stesso accadrà anche in Basilio che commenta Gen 1, 2a LXX affermando che Dio ha creato la materia (Basil. *Homil. in hexaem.* II 2–3 Giet).

⁶² Per l’interpretazione della terra genesiaca in rapporto alla materia, van Winden (1997b) spec. 134–8 (per Filone 126–30).

⁶³ Iust. *Apol.* I 59 Minns-Parvis.

⁶⁴ Nell’*Apologia*, però, non è chiaro se per Giustino la materia sia creata o meno. Cfr. *Apol.* I 67, 8.

⁶⁵ Clem. *Strom.* V 14, 90, 1 Früchtel.

⁶⁶ *Comm. in Gen.* Fr. D3 9 Metzler (= Eus. *PE* VII 20, 9 Mras).

Filone, con la sua omissione di ἀκατασκεύαστος, potrebbe aver anticipato quell'attenzione cristiana a una connessione implicita tra Gen 1, 2a LXX e la materia, mostrandosi forse come precursore del creazionismo *ex nihilo* che in quegli anni si diffonderà nel nascente cristianesimo.⁶⁷ Egli, inoltre, è il primo monoteista a inaugurare quella lunga tradizione di attacchi ai sostenitori dell'eternità del cosmo *a parte ante* che sarà florida in ambito cristiano e che trova una delle sue più animate espressioni nella polemica antipagana di Giovanni Filopono che scrisse almeno tre *De aeternitate mundi*, due indirizzati contro Aristotele e uno contro Proclo.⁶⁸ Per Filone, però, a differenza degli autori cristiani (ecclesiastici e non) il mondo non ha una fine e Mosè, così come, a suo avviso, Platone nel *Timeo*, ha affermato l'indistruttibilità del cosmo (*Aet.* 19).⁶⁹

4 Creazionismo e materia nel *De opificio*

Oltre che per il creazionismo *ex nihilo*, che Filone, però, giustifica in primo luogo a livello intellegibile, egli anticipa i creazionisti cristiani anche per aver messo in evidenza le criticità che il sostenere l'esistenza della materia in un mondo creato da Dio implica.⁷⁰ Sebbene siano numerosi i casi liminari nel *corpus*, nel *De opificio* Filone, a differenza dei suoi predecessori greci, non afferma mai apertamente l'esistenza di una materia eterna e in questo caso sembra discostarsi dal *Timeo*, dove il ricettacolo non appare come un prodotto del demiurgo ma sembra preesistere all'azione ordinatrice divina.⁷¹ Una prima difficoltà nel tratteggiare la posizione filoniana sulla materia consiste nel fatto che egli, oltre che dalla tradizione platonica e stoica, in questo caso attinge anche dalla tradizione aristotelica, dando luogo a un ampliamento consistente dei suoi referenti filosofici che rende ancora più complessa

⁶⁷ Soskice (2010) 33–4 sottolinea il ruolo cruciale di Filone nella storia del creazionismo *ex nihilo*: “Philo, our main source for Hellenistic Judaism in the first century AD, is interesting here. He is not entirely consistent, but the basic tenets of *creatio ex nihilo* are already present in his writing: God has created the world out of non-being, creating as well as moulding formless matter. God, he believes, has created time itself.” A testimonianza di ciò, Soskice rimanda a *Fug.* 46 e *Mos.* II 267.

⁶⁸ Cfr. Wolfson (1966a).

⁶⁹ Cfr. *Tim.* 32c5–33b1. Tra i cristiani, si confronti, per esempio, l'uso opposto del *Timeo* fatto da Giustino che afferma la corruttibilità del cosmo sulla base di *Tim.* 28b e 41a. Si veda Wolfson (1966a) 352.

⁷⁰ Cfr. McMullin (2010) 16, dove, tra le problematiche messe in risalto da Filone che risultano cruciali per la storia del pensiero cristiano, viene annoverata l'origine della materia. Si veda anche Sorabji (2010) 208–9 per la collocazione di Filone tra gli autori che hanno avuto una visione problematica circa la creazione della materia. Cfr. Wolfson (1966a).

⁷¹ Per i paragrafi 4 e 5 di questo articolo si veda anche De Luca (2021) 269–93. Cfr. Sterling (2017) 243–57. Per Filone, la materia e il *Timeo*, si vedano Radice (1989) 347–51 e Runia (1986) 451–6.

la sua sintesi tra mondo giudaico e mondo greco-romano.⁷² Così come accade per il platonismo, Filone riprende la filosofia di Aristotele attraverso il filtro della Stoa, la quale svolge un ruolo cruciale nella concezione filoniana della materia.⁷³ Nonostante nel *De opificio* egli abbia, in generale, una disposizione prevalentemente negativa verso Aristotele, il quale viene criticato in maniera implicita a più riprese per aver sostenuto che il cosmo fosse ἀγένητος καὶ ἄιδιος (*Opif.* 7 e 171), Filone non manca di rievocare la tradizione aristotelica proprio in quelle occasioni in cui il *Timeo* appare più inconciliabile con la prospettiva cosmologica giudaica.⁷⁴ A rendere spinosa la concezione filoniana della materia, poi, troviamo il fatto che il *De opificio* è un'opera ricca di metafore e per orientarsi nel labirinto delle immagini filoniane si deve distinguere tra il suo uso di una terminologia 'tecnica' relativa alla materia, reso evidente dal suo ricorso a termini come ὕλη e οὐσία, e il suo linguaggio delle metafore, che viene coniato per far comprendere più chiaramente il messaggio cosmologico giudaico ai suoi interlocutori greco-romani. Il risiedere al confine tra tre mondi, simbolicamente rappresentati da Gerusalemme, Alessandria e Roma, si rispecchia nella sua disposizione ambigua nei confronti della materia, che viene denunciata dall'asistematicità che le sue opere tradiscono. Come abbiamo visto prendendo in esame la posizione di Sterling, Filone sembra quasi cambiare opinione da un'opera a un'altra e non sempre risulta essere coerente neppure all'interno di una stessa opera.⁷⁵ Spesso, inoltre, egli ci restituisce una rappresentazione metaforica della materia che appare diversa a seconda che le si attribuiscono significati simbolici positivi o negativi. Come ha notato F. Alesse, nella polemica antiatomista e antiedonista di Filone nei confronti di Epicuro la materia è paragonata alla sabbia del deserto, luogo privo di vita spirituale in cui diventano evidenti le conseguenze negative che la fisica atomistica può avere sull'etica.⁷⁶ Nel *De opificio*, invece, essa è positivamente rappresentata dai materiali di costruzione dell'architetto, a cui il Dio

72 Per Filone e Aristotele, Sharples (2008) e Lévy (2011).

73 Il rapporto di Filone con l'aristotelismo andrebbe contestualizzato anche nell'adesione del suo predecessore Aristobulo alla filosofia del Peripato che, per il poco che sappiamo, venne riletta in chiave stoica. Per l'interpretazione stoica della filosofia di Aristotele, Bénatouïl (2016). Radice (1989) 351–3 sottolinea come Filone, per la sua concezione del principio materiale, non riprenda Aristotele in sé per sé, bensì mediato dallo stoicismo: molti motivi aristotelici, infatti, potrebbero essere giunti a Filone proprio tramite gli Stoici. Già Bréhier (1950) 260 notava come, da un punto di vista morale, “le péripatétisme chez Philon n'est d'ailleurs nullement pur d'éléments stoïciens” e che “le péripatétisme se trouve interprété en un sens tout stoïcien.”

74 Cfr. Trabattoni (2009).

75 Cfr. *supra*, pp. 109–10.

76 Alesse (2008). Cfr. Radice (1989) 345–6. Si veda anche De Luca (2021) 270. Per altre immagini metaforiche della materia, si veda Alesse (2009) 259, dove, in rapporto a ciò che poi accadrà in Marco Aurelio, viene analizzata la descrizione di Filone della materia come un fiume scorrevole e straripante. Per Filone, in particolare, Alesse rimanda ai casi di *Gig.* 12, *Somn.* I 147 e *Det.* 100.

del *Genesi* è paragonato. In *Opif.* 18 Dio, dopo aver fondato la πόλις νοητή, la città intellegibile in cui sono contenute le idee, costruisce la μεγαλόπολις sensibile “a partire dalle pietre e dal legname” (ἐκ λίθων καὶ ξύλων) e in *Opif.* 142 si dice che questo mondo è stato fabbricato ἐκ λίθων καὶ ξύλων ὕλης (“a partire dalla materia di pietre e legname”).⁷⁷ Nella cosmologia di Filone, che è sviluppata in funzione dell’etica, la materia non ha una connotazione etica negativa e in *Opif.* 136 si afferma chiaramente che, a differenza di quanto si risconterà in ambito medioplatonico, essa è ἀνυπαίτιος (senza colpa).⁷⁸

Il silenzio di Filone circa il carattere ἀκατασκεύαστος della terra appare coerente con la sua ostilità verso l’idea di una materia increata a livello intellegibile e, quindi, preesistente rispetto a Dio. Per Filone il mondo noetico, immateriale e incorporeo, è costituito dalla sostanza intellegibile che Dio ha creato subito in una forma perfetta. Ma se Filone sembra sostenere con fermezza un creazionismo *ex nihilo* intellegibile, diversamente accade nell’ambito sensibile, dove egli sembra quasi essere più orientato verso una *creatio ex aliquo*. A rendere la questione più intricata, inoltre, c’è il fatto che nel *De opificio*, a nostro avviso, confluiscono ben due diverse tendenze verso la materia sensibile, una maggiormente creazionistica e affine a quanto possiamo riscontrare a livello intellegibile, e l’altra più vicina a un’impostazione di tipo eternalista. Filone è più orientato verso l’una o l’altra disposizione a seconda che siano dominanti i riferimenti alla *Settanta* o al *Timeo* e questa plurivocità di significati, come abbiamo detto, entra in gioco proprio quando egli ha più difficoltà a conciliare la tradizione biblica con la cosmologia di Platone. Della prima tendenza fa parte la consapevolezza che Dio sia il creatore di ogni cosa, inclusa, quindi, la materia sensibile. Quest’ultima appare nelle vesti di un’amalgama di terra e acqua, le quali rappresentano le copie sensibili della terra e dell’acqua intellegibili create nel giorno uno. D’altra parte, però, poiché il creazionismo *ex nihilo* sembra essere tale solo a livello intellegibile, Filone non disdegna la rappresentazione di una materia sensibile come preesistente rispetto a Dio, e in alcuni casi sembra presentarci la materia sensibile come non creata. In questa tensione tra creazionismo ed eternalismo si sviluppa tutta la varietà, ma anche la ricchezza, della concezione filoniana della materia sensibile, verso cui egli ha un approccio differente rispetto a quanto accade sul piano intellegibile.

In particolare, la *creatio ex nihilo* della materia può essere vista come suddivisa in tre fasi in cui Dio la crea come ὕλη, poi le conferisce una forma dandole lo statuto

⁷⁷ Cfr. De Luca (2021) 269–74, dove viene analizzato il rapporto nel *De opificio* tra l’uso della preposizione ἐκ e l’aitiologia filoniana, ispirata alle quattro cause aristoteliche e alla teoria stoica dei principi.

⁷⁸ Cfr. Runia (1986) 451–6 e Radice (1989) 354–8. Per la negatività della materia nel medioplatonismo, per Plutarco si veda Ferrari (1995) 74–113, (1996) e (2014), per il *Didaskalikos* Vimercati (2007), e per Numenio Vimercati (2012).

di οὐσία e, infine, le attribuisce quei caratteri d'eccellenza che rendono ordinata e bella la forma dell'οὐσία. La ὕλη, come una sorta di fango delle origini composto della terra e dell'acqua sensibili, così come gli elementi di cui è costituita, appare come creata e rappresenta il materiale di costruzione che attende di ricevere una forma. Di ὕλη è fatto non solo il cosmo intero ma anche il suo primo cittadino, ossia l'essere umano. Per la compresenza al suo interno di asciutto e bagnato, in particolare, in *Opif.* 38 la terra viene descritta come un φύραμα, l'impasto di farina e acqua con cui viene fatto il pane o la miscela usata nelle costruzioni, e come una κόλλα, un glutine in cui secco e umido sono in proporzione.⁷⁹ In *Opif.* 136 Filone sottolinea come Dio abbia formato il corpo del primo essere umano, che è γηγενής (“nato dalla terra”) e ὁ παντὸς τοῦ γένους ἡμῶν ἀρχηγέτης (“il principiatore di tutta la nostra specie”), a partire da una ὕλη non-mista (ἀμιγῆ), non-adulterata (ἄδολος) e pura (καθαρά), inoltre flessibile (ὀλκή) e ben lavorabile (εὐεργός), che corrisponde alla γῆ νεόκτιστος (terra di nuova fondazione) che si è generata dalla separazione delle acque (cfr. Gen 1, 9–10 LXX). Dio ha plasmato la “statua antropomorfa” (ἀνθρωποειδῆς ἀνδριάς) con grande cura e non prende la polvere (χοῦς) da una parte a caso della terra, ma dalla sua parte migliore. Dio, infatti, si avvale della parte massimamente pura e completamente raffinata della materia (ὕλη), che si adatta al massimo grado alla preparazione artigianale (κατασκευή).⁸⁰ A questo stadio, però, la ὕλη appare ancora come in uno stato grezzo e solo in un secondo momento sarà sottoposta a una prima fase di elaborazione da cui essa risulterà come un'οὐσία che ha ricevuto una forma ma che è ancora caratterizzata da passività e dall'assenza di qualità, non essendo ancora né bella né ordinata. Solo successivamente l'οὐσία sarà ordinata e ‘qualificata’ da Dio, andando a coincidere, così come accade già nello stoicismo, con il mondo intero.⁸¹

Nel *De opificio* Filone sembra distinguere tra ὕλη e οὐσία e potrebbe aver ripreso tale distinzione da Aristotele, verso cui sembra essere in debito anche per l'uso del termine ὕλη come strategia interpretativa del ricettacolo del *Timeo* (cfr. *Phys.* IV 2.209b11–210a13).⁸² Nella differenziazione filoniana tra ὕλη e οὐσία riecheggia *Metaph.* Z 3.1029a26–30, dove si dice che la sostanza non può essere identificata con la materia e che solo la forma e il composto di materia e forma rappresentano più autenticamente l'οὐσία.⁸³ Se è plausibile riconoscere in Filone un uso differenziato di ὕλη e οὐσία, in questo caso egli si distanzerebbe dagli

⁷⁹ Cfr. *Opif.* 131.

⁸⁰ *Ivi*, 137.

⁸¹ Per esempio, si veda Chrys. *SVF* II 316.1, p. 114 (= F 325 Dufour = DL VII 150, 1–6 Dorandi).

⁸² Cfr. *Metaph.* A 6.988a11–14. Si vedano Berti (2007) 25–36 e Happ (1971) 95–130.

⁸³ Cfr. Motte & Somville (2008) 343–404. Nella *Metafisica* si allude all'οὐσία come τὸ σύνολον fin da *Metaph.* B 1.995b31–36. Si noti che Filone non riprende mai l'espressione aristotelica di πρώτη ὕλη (cfr. *Metaph.* Δ 4.1014b27–1015a20 e Θ 7.1049a18–36). Cfr. van Winden (1997b) 134–5.

Stoici, secondo cui, invece, ὕλη e οὐσία sono da identificarsi.⁸⁴ Gli Stoici potrebbero aver usato il termine ὕλη per indicare l'οὐσία influenzati da *Tim.* 35a2–c2, in cui Platone distingue tra i tre diversi tipi di οὐσία che coincidono con l'identico, il diverso e l'essere.⁸⁵ Al contrario, invece, Filone potrebbe aver fatto un uso diversificato dei due termini poiché dovettero apparirgli come legati a due concetti che sono correlati ma, al tempo stesso, distinti, dal momento che l'οὐσία rappresenta uno sviluppo della grezza ὕλη, che sarebbe stata creata in precedenza.⁸⁶

La ὕλη esiste solo a livello sensibile, mentre non se ne trova alcuna traccia sul piano intellegibile. L'οὐσία, invece, sussiste sia a livello noetico che a livello sensibile, ma, sul fronte intellegibile, non ritroviamo quella gradualità che caratterizza la composizione materiale sensibile, divisa nei tre stadi di materia, materia + forma e materia + bella forma. Tale gradualità, infatti, non sembra avere alcun senso per l'οὐσία intellegibile, perché la creazione noetica è simultanea. In *Opif.* 29 Filone parla delle idee come composte di un certo tipo di οὐσία che è descritta come ἀσώματος e, in particolare, essa contraddistingue le idee di acqua, di soffio (πνεῦμα) e della luce, modello del sole e di tutti gli altri astri. In *Opif.* 49, poi, egli distingue tra le sostanze sensibile e intellegibile, e, all'interno dell'*excursus* aritmologico di stampo neopitagorico sul quarto giorno creativo, afferma che il numero quattro ἐκ τῆς ἀσωμάτου καὶ νοητῆς οὐσίας ἤγαγεν εἰς ἔννοιαν ἡμᾶς τριχῆ διαστατοῦ σώματος τοῦ φύσει πρῶτον αἰσθητοῦ (“ci condusse dalla sostanza incorporea e intellegibile alla nozione di corpo a tre dimensioni, primo percettibile per natura”). Nel quarto giorno, infatti, dal cielo noetico Dio passa alla creazione del cielo sensibile. Sul piano intellegibile, quindi, possiamo riconoscere l'esistenza di un'οὐσία noetica, senza materia, che rappresenta l'ingrediente di cui sono fatte tutte le idee e all'ἀσώματος καὶ νοητῆ οὐσία corrisponde – potremmo dire – il mondo noetico inteso come la totalità delle idee, la cui differenziazione è funzionale solo a spiegare la creazione sensibile, mentre di per sé non sussiste. Se, da una parte, la sostanza intellegibile appare come ciò che caratterizza simultaneamente tutte le idee e che è già perfetta, d'altra parte la sostanza sensibile rappresenta il risultato di un processo creativo graduale in cui dalla grezza ὕλη si giunge all'οὐσία caratterizzata da quella bella forma di cui noi tutti troviamo riscontro ammirando la bellezza di questo mondo.

⁸⁴ Si veda Alesse (2007) 155 per Posidonio come sostenitore di tale identificazione.

⁸⁵ Sedley (2002) 70–2. In Alesse (2007) 154 si rimarca, in relazione a Posidonio, che “gli Stoici avrebbero scelto di attingere il termine tecnico di ὕλη da Aristotele ma lo avrebbero caratterizzato anche come οὐσία sotto l'influenza della cosmogonia platonica e accademica.”

⁸⁶ Per la distinzione di ὕλη e οὐσία, si veda anche *Mos.* I 65, dove, in rapporto al rovetto ardente di Es 3, 1–22, si dice che esso è rimasto integro senza consumarsi, come se fosse una sostanza (οὐσία) impassibile e non ὕλη (materia o, letteralmente, ‘legno’) combustibile, ma si servisse del fuoco come nutrimento.

5 Un'interpretazione aristotelico-stoica del *Timeo*

Solitamente non si è distinto nel *De opificio* tra l'uso di ὕλη e di οὐσία e tra le allusioni filoniane alla materia: materia sono di norma inseriti molti passi in cui non si parla di materia ma di sostanza.⁸⁷ A nostro avviso, però, è fondamentale distinguere tra i due concetti perché Filone, accanto a un creazionismo *ex nihilo* intellegibile e sensibile, secondo cui la ὕλη raggiunge la sua forma perfetta nell'οὐσία, troviamo dei casi in cui egli sembra essere più incline a un'idea di 'materia' affine al ricettacolo del *Timeo* di Platone. In questi casi, come vedremo, però, la ὕλη scompare per lasciare il posto alla sola οὐσία.

Opif. 8–9 sono tra i passi più citati dell'opera filoniana e sono stati spesso presi come testimonianza dell'interpretazione del *Timeo* che dovette essersi sviluppata in seno già alla Stoa antica. Filone, all'inizio dell'opera, presentando Mosè come colui che per primo ha scalato le vette della filosofia, afferma che il profeta fin dal principio seppe che era indispensabile che tra gli esseri esistano la causa attiva e la passiva (τὸ μὲν δραστήριον αἴτιον, τὸ δὲ παθητόν), dove la prima è da identificarsi con l'intelletto dell'universo (ὁ τῶν ὄλων νοῦς), che è massimamente puro e autentico, superiore alla virtù, alla scienza, al bene e al bello, mentre la seconda è inanimata e inerte in se stessa (ἄψυχον καὶ ἀκίνητον ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ), ma, messa in movimento, sagomata e animata dall'intelletto (κίνηθην δὲ καὶ σχηματισθὲν καὶ ψυχωθὲν ὑπὸ τοῦ νοῦ), si è trasformata (μετέβαλεν) nell'opera più perfetta, ossia questo mondo.⁸⁸ Ribadendo, come spesso accade nell'opera, la precedenza di Mosè, primo filosofo, rispetto ai filosofi greci, Filone mette in luce come tutto sia in balia di due cause che sembrano coeterne e, finché τὸ δραστήριον provoca un mutamento in τὸ παθητόν, che si lascia cambiare in qualcosa di più perfetto, si distinguono solo per essere una attiva e l'altra passiva.⁸⁹ In *Opif.* 21–22 Filone mette in luce quel passaggio, 'attivato'

⁸⁷ Cfr. Sterling (2017) 243–57; Runia (1986) 451–6, 461–7; Radice (1989) 347–61. L'ambiguità tra i due termini è evidente anche dal caso di *Opif.* 171 dove, in conclusione dell'opera, si dice che Dio "si è servito di tutta la materia (ἀπάση τῇ ὕλῃ) allo scopo della generazione del mondo nella sua interezza." Τῇ ὕλῃ è la *lectio* scelta dall'editore Cohn, che in questo caso segue il manoscritto *Laurent.* LXXXV 10 (seppure correggendo ὕλη in ὕλη), ma tutti gli altri codici hanno οὐσία. Si vedano Cohn-Wendland-Reiter (1962–1963) I 60 e Runia (2001) 95 n. 43.

⁸⁸ A nostro avviso, per via del respiro stoico di questi passi filoniani, nell'espressione τὸ δὲ παθητόν andrebbe sottinteso il termine αἴτιον, esplicitato subito prima per indicare il principio attivo. Per la nostra interpretazione di *Opif.* 8–9 in relazione alle interpretazioni stoiche del *Timeo*, si veda De Luca (2021) 198–9, 232–3, 282–4. Secondo Runia (2001) 116–7, invece, non deve sottintendersi il termine αἴτιον perché Filone, in contrasto con i suoi contemporanei greci, deliberatamente non parla di due cause o principi ma la causa per lui sarebbe solo una, quella attiva, che coincide con il Dio della tradizione giudaica.

⁸⁹ Per l'eccellenza di Mosè rispetto agli altri filosofi, si veda, per esempio, anche *Opif.* 131. De Luca (2021) 46–53.

da Dio, che avviene all'interno della sostanza: da priva di ordine (ἄτακτος), priva di qualità (ἄποιος), priva di vita (ἄψυχος), dissimile (ἀνόμοιος),⁹⁰ piena di diversità (μεστή ἑτεροίτητος), di discordanza (ἀναρμοστίας) e di dissonanza (ἀσυμφωνίας) l'οὐσία subisce il rivolgimento e la trasformazione (τροπήν καὶ μεταβολήν) nelle cose opposte e migliori, ossia in ordine (εἰς τάξιν), qualità (ποιότητα), vitalità (ἐμψυχίαν), omogeneità (ὁμοιότητα), identità (ταυτότητα), buona armonia (τὸ εὐάρμοστον) e sinfonia (τὸ σύμφωνον).⁹¹ Filone, sulla base di *Tim.* 29e2, descrive Dio come il Padre e il Creatore che è buono e non invidioso e che non fu ingeneroso (οὐκ ἐφθόνησεν) rispetto a una sostanza (οὐσία) che non contiene niente di bello di per sé, ma che è in grado di diventare ogni cosa.⁹² Possiamo identificare τὸ παθητόν αἴτιον di *Opif.* 8–9 con lo stato privativo che caratterizza l'οὐσία di *Opif.* 21–22 prima che, per mano di Dio, subisca le τροπή καὶ μεταβολή. In questo caso il parlare di sostanza e non di materia lascia presupporre che Filone si stia riferendo al composto di materia e forma e non alla mera ὕλη. Il fango delle origini viene ordinato nell'οὐσία e Dio, animandola dall'interno in quanto λόγος, la fa uscire dalla sua primitiva imperfezione trasformandola in questo mondo. Nel *De opificio* la creazione sensibile rappresenta un graduale processo di miglioramento e nella lunga lista di aggettivi evocati in *Opif.* 21–22 Filone dà prova della sua capacità di sintesi tra tradizione platonica e stoica. Per citare alcuni dei casi più evidenti, la τάξις richiama l'ordinamento demiurgico del *Timeo*, mentre il rimando alle ποιότητες e al passare della sostanza da uno stato ἄψυχος alla ἐμψυχία rievoca lo stoicismo.⁹³

Il “rivolgimento e la trasformazione” dell'οὐσία filoniana avviene perché Dio l'ha creata come già potenzialmente perfetta. Ciò si evince anche poco dopo in *Opif.* 23, dove la sostanza viene identificata con la φύσις.⁹⁴ Dio ha beneficiato con doni inestimabili e abbondanti la natura (φύσις) che, priva del dono divino, non può avere in sorte nessun bene di per sé. Filone, però, precisa che Dio non beneficia in proporzione alla grandezza dei propri doni, che sono illimitati ed infiniti, ma in proporzione alle capacità (δυνάμεις) delle cose che sono state beneficate: le

90 L'aggettivo ἀνόμοιος è un'integrazione del filologo inglese Jeremiah Markland del XVII–XVIII sec. per evitare che le due liste fosse squilibrate. Runia (2001) 145.

91 Si veda Runia (2001) 145–6 per un confronto di *Opif.* 21–22 con *Opif.* 8–9.

92 Cfr. Ferrari (2021).

93 Per *Opif.* 21–22 e la lista degli aggettivi, Sterling (2017) 250–2, Runia (1986) 144–8 e Radice (1989) 354–8. Per la τάξις nel *Timeo*, si veda, per esempio, Plat. *Tim.* 30a5–6, dove l'attività demiurgica è descritta come il condurre il visibile ἐκ τῆς ἀταξίας εἰς τάξιν (dal disordine all'ordine). Per quanto riguarda lo stoicismo, Diogene attribuisce a Zenone, Cleante e Crisippo l'idea che la sostanza, o materia, fosse 'senza qualità' e che il dio eterno attraverso di essa abbia prodotto ogni cosa. DL VII 134 Dorandi (= Zeno SVF I 85, p. 24; Cleant. SVF I 493, p. 110; e Chrys. SVF II 299, p. 111). Si veda Alesse (2007) 154–63.

94 Per l'identificazione οὐσία-φύσις in Aristotele, cfr. *Metaph.* Δ 3.1014b16–4.1015a19, *Ph.* II 1.192b8–193b21 e 1.193a24–25. Motte & Somville (2008) 217–9.

potenze (δυνάμεις) di Dio sono oltre misura, ma ciò che è generato (τὸ γινόμενον), essendo troppo debole per accoglierle, avrebbe dovuto rinunciare al dono divino se il Creatore non avesse distribuito in modo idoneo a ciascuna cosa ciò che le spettava. L'οὐσία imperfetta di *Opif.* 21–22, chiamata φύσις in *Opif.* 23, equivale a τὸ γινόμενον e, per Filone, appare, quindi, come creata. Essa può essere vista in relazione al principio passivo degli Stoici, che però non è creato ma eterno. Filone, oltre che dallo stoicismo, dove il concetto di δύναμις è correlato alla materia, sembra essere stato condizionato anche da *Tim.* 50b5–c2, in cui il ricettacolo è descritto in termini di 'potenza', e da *Metaph.* Θ 6.1048a25–b9, 7.1049a5–9 e 9.1051a3, dove la potenzialità è associata sia alla sostanza che alla materia.⁹⁵ Stoicismo, platonismo e aristotelismo sono assorbiti da Filone secondo il filtro del giudaismo e in *Opif.* 23 l'οὐσία-φύσις è caratterizzata dalla 'capacità', attribuitagli da Dio, di ricevere il dono creativo e passare, così, da una perfezione potenziale a una perfezione in atto. Nell'elaborazione dei concetti di materia e sostanza di Filone il *Timeo* ha un ruolo fondamentale ed egli sembra avere ben presente *Tim.* 49a1–6, dove, tra i generi del modello eterno, intellegibile e sempre identico a se stesso, e quello della copia, soggetta alla generazione e visibile, viene distinto un terzo genere che ha la proprietà di essere ὑποδοχή (ricettacolo) e τιθήνη (nutrice) di ogni generazione.⁹⁶ Esso costituisce sia il 'materiale' di cui è fatta ogni cosa (*Tim.* 50c2–4) sia il 'luogo' in cui si verifica la generazione del sensibile (*Tim.* 52a8–b5) ed è chiamato anche χώρα. Il ricettacolo non si allontana mai dalla δύναμις che lo caratterizza, dato che accoglie tutti i corpi senza mai, però, esserne condizionato (*Tim.* 50b7–8). A differenza delle idee, con cui ha in comune l'eternità, come mostrano gli esempi dell'oro e delle essenze profumate, non può essere pienamente determinato perché altrimenti influenzerebbe ogni cosa che entra in esso. Insieme a un *Leitmotiv* tipico dello stoicismo, l'essere ἄπιος del primo tipo di οὐσία filoniana sembra richiamare proprio l'indeterminazione del ricettacolo platonico che, essendo eterno, invisibile e informe, rappresenta ciò in cui vengono accolte le imitazioni sensibili, che trovano così un luogo ospitale in cui essere generate e un materiale di cui essere costituite.⁹⁷

Come si può evincere da *Opif.* 21–23, anche l'οὐσία filoniana, che, però, aristotelicamente dovrebbe essere intesa come 'sinolo' di materia e forma, per certi aspetti rappresenta una sorta di 'ricettacolo', di cui viene rimarcato il

⁹⁵ Si veda Alesse (2007) 148 n. 18 per come il concetto di δύναμις correlato alla materia ritorni nella tradizione stoica fin da Zenone.

⁹⁶ Ferrari (2007).

⁹⁷ Cfr. Alesse (2007) 151–2 n. 29, per i principali riferimenti sugli Stoici e Aristotele in relazione alla teoria stoica dei principi. In particolare si veda Sandbach (1985) 31–7, per un'analisi della ἄπιος ὕλη stoica in rapporto ad Aristotele. Si noti che Filone parla esplicitamente di ἄπιος ὕλη solo in *Fug.* 9 in relazione a Gen 31, 20–21, mentre più frequenti sono i suoi riferimenti all'ἄπιος οὐσία.

carattere passivo e in cui vengono accolti gli enti creati da Dio. Nel *De opificio* non viene mai usato il sostantivo ὑποδοχή ma in *Opif.* 22 Filone utilizza il verbo δέχομαι per dire che l'οὐσία, di per sé priva di qualsiasi qualità positiva, τροπήν καὶ μεταβολήν ἐδέχετο τὴν εἰς τάναντία καὶ τὰ βέλτιστα (“accoglieva’ il rivolgimento e la trasformazione nelle cose opposte e migliori”). In *Opif.* 23, poi, Filone sottolinea come τὸ γινόμενον, che coincide con l'οὐσία primitiva, sia troppo debole per δέξασθαι τὸ μέγεθος (“aver accolto la grandezza”) delle potenze di Dio. L'uso filoniano del verbo δέχομαι nel contesto della qualificazione dell'οὐσία sembra essere più che una coincidenza e potrebbe rappresentare un ‘omaggio’ al *Timeo* di cui, se Filone non può riprendere l'eternità della χώρα, sembra rievocare le qualità ricettive, chiamate in causa, in questo caso, per mostrare come l'οὐσία sia in grado di accogliere di buon grado le trasformazioni imposte da Dio.⁹⁸

Anche se in Platone οὐσία non è un termine tecnico come accade in Aristotele, nel *Timeo* è possibile riscontrare quel carattere intellegibile che potrebbe aver condizionato la sostanza noetica del *De opificio*.⁹⁹ Nel dialogo platonico con οὐσία, da una parte, s'intende ciò che caratterizza la sola dimensione noetica in contrapposizione a quella sensibile (*Tim.* 29c3 e 37e5), mentre, dall'altra, con questo termine vengono descritti, in relazione all'anima cosmica, i tre ‘generi’ dell'universo (*Tim.* 35a2–c2), nonostante, poche pagine dopo, οὐσία rappresenti specificatamente uno solo degli ingredienti che confluiscono alla formazione dell'anima del mondo (*Tim.* 37a5).¹⁰⁰ Oltre all'associazione già platonica dell'οὐσία con la sfera intellegibile, Filone, in particolare, per il suo concetto di sostanza noetica potrebbe aver avuto in mente anche *Tim.* 50a7–b2 dove il ricettacolo è descritto come un ἀνόρατον εἶδος [...] μεταλαμβάνον [...] τοῦ νοητοῦ (genere invisibile che partecipa dell'intellegibile).¹⁰¹ Ma dal momento che il concetto filoniano di οὐσία νοητή non è particolarmente sviluppato nel *De opificio*, è difficile dire se Filone si sia voluto rifare intenzionalmente a determinati passi del *Timeo*. Più in generale, Filone mostra l'esigenza di dover giustificare ciò che riscontra a livello sensibile anche sul piano intellegibile, che, per lui, resta

⁹⁸ Radice (1989) 349 e Runia (1986) 286.

⁹⁹ Ferrari (2017) 70–1 distingue in particolare tre significati del termine οὐσία in Platone in relazione alla sfera ontologica: (1) l'essere in generale opposto al non essere; (2) l'essere proprio delle idee; (3) l'essenza individuale di un'idea. Per l'οὐσία nel *Timeo*, Motte & Somville (2008) 175–86.

¹⁰⁰ Proprio questa sfaccettatura di οὐσία, a cui ci si appella per caratterizzare i tre generi, secondo Sedley, potrebbe essere alla base dell'ἄποιος οὐσία stoica: Sedley (2002) 70–2.

¹⁰¹ Ferrari (2007) 4 rimanda ad Arist. *Ph.* IV 2.209b33–210a2 per la polemica contro Platone sul perché le idee e i numeri non siano in un luogo, dal momento che il luogo è τὸ μεθεκτικόν (ciò che partecipa).

precedente dal punto di vista causale. Assodata l'esistenza dell'οὐσία sensibile, risulta necessario riconoscerne l'esistenza anche già nella dimensione intellegibile. Nella sua nozione di οὐσία νοητή non ci sono tracce della 'materia intellegibile' aristotelica, legata agli enti matematici e nel *corpus Philonicum* non si parla mai di ὕλη νοητή ma solo di οὐσία νοητή.¹⁰²

Filone, a differenza dei suoi predecessori, sulla base del *Genesi* sviluppa una concezione della ὕλη come creata che viene organizzata e formata come οὐσία in due fasi e che, solo nella seconda fase, assume quello stato di perfezione che la fa sussistere come cosmo. Utilizzando e combinando le proprie fonti cosmologiche in funzione creazionistico-giudaica, egli non riprende l'identificazione stoica di ὕλη e οὐσία bensì in questo caso risulta essere più fedele ad Aristotele, che distingue tra i due concetti. Dagli Stoici, però, Filone riprende la descrizione dell'οὐσία nei termini di passività e attività. Come la sostanza stoica, l'οὐσία filoniana, che, però, è creata e non eterna, necessita di essere permeata e 'attivata' dalla divinità affinché possa acquisire quelle migliori qualità che possiede in potenza.¹⁰³ Filone, proprio dallo stoicismo, recupera la sua proprietà sintetica, dal momento che già gli Stoici sembrano aver sintetizzato nella loro idea di materia le tradizioni platonica e aristotelica, presentandola come un sostrato modellabile che ha in sé la potenzialità di divenire qualcosa di diverso. Cicerone ricorda che per gli Stoici *materiam enim rerum ex qua et in qua omnia sint, totam esse flexibilem et commutabilem, ut nihil sit, quod non ex ea quamvis subito fingi convertique possit* ("la materia delle cose a partire dalla quale e nella quale sono tutte le cose, è totalmente plasmabile e trasformabile, affinché non ci sia niente che non possa in qualunque modo all'improvviso essere forgiata a partire da essa ed essere convertita").¹⁰⁴ Nel *De opificio* la tradizione stoica risulta essere il principale collettore delle tradizioni filosofiche a cui Filone guarda e rappresenta il filtro attraverso cui egli recupera molti degli assunti platonici e aristotelici che confluiscono nella sua cosmologia e nella sua visione della materia.

6 Conclusioni

La misteriosa assenza dell'aggettivo ἀκατασκευάστος nella cosmologia di Filone sembra essere connessa alla sua esigenza di non entrare in conflitto con il

¹⁰² Per la 'materia intellegibile' in Aristotele, in particolare, si veda *Metaph.* Z 10.1036a9–12; 11.1037a2–5; H 6.1045a33–36; K 1.1059b14–21. Si vedano Happ (1971) 581–649 e Helmig (2007).

¹⁰³ Cfr. Chrys. *SVF* II 311, pp. 112–113 (= F 320 Dufour = Sext. Emp. *M* IX 75 Mau-Mutschmann) e Chrys. *SVF* II 1047, pp. 308–309 (= F 1055 Dufour = Alex. *De mixtion.* 226, 10 Bruns).

¹⁰⁴ Cic. *ND* III 92 Pease (= F 1112 Dufour = *SVF* II 1107, p. 322). Cfr. Radice (1989) 352. Cfr. Zeno *SVF* I 88, p. 25 (= Chalcid. *in Tim.* 292 Waszink); Chrys. *SVF* II 314, p. 113 (= F 322 Dufour = Plotin. *Ennead.* VI 1 27 Henry-Schwyzler); Chrys. *SVF* II 320, p. 115 (= F 331 Dufour = Plotin. *Ennead.* II 4, 1).

creazionismo *ex nihilo* a cui egli potrebbe essere uno dei primi autori a dare una – seppure ancora flebile – voce. Il creazionismo filoniano non è semplicemente evinto dal *Genesi* bensì Filone lo elabora guardando al *Genesi* con un occhio fisso al *Timeo* e alla tradizione stoica. La necessità di rimarcare il ruolo creativo di Dio, produttore delle idee e di questo mondo, entra apparentemente in conflitto con la sua esigenza di giustificare il ruolo della materia nel cosmo. Filone reinterpreta il *Timeo* tramite gli strumenti fornitigli dalla Stoa, di cui fa parte anche la sua ripresa di un aristotelismo non puro e che, proprio grazie alla mediazione dello stoicismo, egli riesce a conciliare con la tradizione platonica e con l'antieternealismo giudaico. Nel *De opificio* le fonti filosofiche non hanno tutte lo stesso peso e se del *Timeo* si mette in luce l'autorità in ambito cosmologico, Filone non è meno in debito verso lo stoicismo, da cui, oltre a determinati concetti e a un certo lessico, riprende il metodo 'interpretativo' delle filosofie platonica e aristotelica. A partire dalla Stoa, Filone sviluppa un approccio – potremmo dire – 'concordistico' alla Scrittura, essendo orientato alla mediazione dei dogmi del giudaismo attraverso alcuni assunti recuperati dal platonismo e attraverso il ricorso anche ad Aristotele.

La presenza del *Timeo* e della tradizione stoica in un'opera come il *De opificio*, scritta dopo il soggiorno di Filone a Roma e indirizzata a un pubblico 'pagano', non può non essere contestualizzata nell'esigenza filoniana di ricorrere a un linguaggio che fosse familiare al suo pubblico e che fosse in grado di presentare il *Genesi* come la prima e la più eccellente cosmogonia in cui è possibile trovare anche una risposta all'origine del principio materiale. Per ribadire la coerenza della cosmogonia biblica, Filone, però, è costretto a fare una selezione di ciò che viene affermato nel *Genesi* e nella sua cosmologia non trova spazio quella terra ἀκατασκευάστος di Gen 1, 2a che appariva ben poco conciliabile con la creazione noetica e che troppo rievocava l'esistenza di una materia preesistente. All'interno della sua concezione di una produzione graduale della materia, il ricorso alle fonti filosofiche greche è funzionale alla necessità di presentare la filosofia mosaica a dei destinatari non ebrei per mostrare la cosmogonia di Mosè come se fosse un '*Timeo* ebraico'. Filone, però, non chiama in causa platonismo, stoicismo e aristotelismo solo a meri fini comunicativi: figlio di un'Alessandria caratterizzata dall'incrocio di culture distinte, vi ricorre con disinvoltura e naturalezza, quasi la filosofia greca fosse per lui l'unica strategia comunicativa possibile. D'altronde il suo Mosè è un Mosè che parla in greco e che parla il linguaggio della filosofia che lui stesso, come primo filosofo, avrebbe fondato.

Abbreviazioni delle opere filoniane

<i>Abr.</i>	<i>De Abrahamo</i>
<i>Aet.</i>	<i>De aeternitate mundi</i>
<i>Agr.</i>	<i>De agricultura</i>
<i>Anim.</i>	<i>De animalibus (= Alexander)</i>
<i>Cher.</i>	<i>De cherubim</i>
<i>Conf.</i>	<i>De confusione linguarum</i>
<i>Congr.</i>	<i>De congressu eruditionis gratia</i>
<i>Contempl.</i>	<i>De vita contemplativa</i>
<i>Decal.</i>	<i>De decalogo</i>
<i>Deo</i>	<i>De Deo</i>
<i>Det.</i>	<i>Quod deterius potiori insidiari soleat</i>
<i>Deus</i>	<i>Quod Deus sit immutabilis</i>
<i>Ebr.</i>	<i>De ebrietate</i>
<i>Exsecr.</i>	<i>De exsecrationibus (= Praem. 127–172)</i>
<i>Flacc.</i>	<i>In Flaccum</i>
<i>Fug.</i>	<i>De fuga et inventione</i>
<i>Gig.</i>	<i>De gigantibus</i>
<i>Her.</i>	<i>Quis rerum divinarum heres sit</i>
<i>Hypoth.</i>	<i>Hypothetica</i>
<i>Ios.</i>	<i>De Iosepho</i>
<i>LA</i>	<i>Legum allegoriae</i>
<i>Legat.</i>	<i>Legatio ad Gaium</i>
<i>Migr.</i>	<i>De migratione Abrahami</i>
<i>Mos.</i>	<i>De vita Mosis</i>
<i>Mut.</i>	<i>De mutatione nominum</i>
<i>Opif.</i>	<i>De opificio mundi</i>
<i>Plant.</i>	<i>De plantatione</i>
<i>Post.</i>	<i>De posteritate Caini</i>
<i>Praem.</i>	<i>De praemiis et poenis</i>
<i>Prob.</i>	<i>Quod omnis probus liber sit</i>
<i>Prov.</i>	<i>De providentia</i>
<i>QE</i>	<i>Quaestiones et solutiones in Exodum</i>
<i>QG</i>	<i>Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesin</i>
<i>Sacr.</i>	<i>De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini</i>
<i>Sobr.</i>	<i>De sobrietate</i>
<i>Somn.</i>	<i>De somniis</i>
<i>Spec.</i>	<i>De specialibus legibus</i>
<i>Virt.</i>	<i>De virtutibus</i>

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Götter als Seelen? Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis von Numenius, Fr. 30 des Places

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Abstract: The present paper deals with a syntactic ambiguity in Numenius' Fr. 30, 9 and proposes a new reading. According to most scholars, in this fragment Numenius tries to identify Egyptian gods and human souls descending into generation. Instead, I argue that, since theology and psychology are different topics in Fr. 3, Numenius is rather talking about the interrelation of gods and souls in the process of metempsychosis.

Keywords: Numenius, Middle Platonism, metempsychosis, theology, syntactic ambiguity

Im Zuge seiner allegorischen Ausdeutung der von Homer beschriebenen ithakesischen Nymphengrotte (*Od.* 13, 102–112) macht Porphyrios an mehreren Stellen der Schrift *De antro nympharum* Gebrauch von Vorarbeiten der Mittelplatoniker Numenius und Kronios.¹ Numenius wird unter anderem in der Diskussion um die Frage herangezogen, warum Homer die Grotte als Heiligtum für eine bestimmte Art von Nymphen – nämlich Najadennymphen – konzipiere (*De antro* 10 S. 124, 153–126, 167 Dorandi = Numenius, Fr. 30).² Nach Porphyrios' Auskunft hat sich Numenius dafür ausgesprochen, Najadennymphen als Entsprechung für in die materielle Welt absteigende Seelen zu verstehen. Die erklärenden, argumentativ äußerst gedrängten Zusätze für diese Deutung, die Porphyrios referiert, erwecken auf den ersten Blick allerdings den Eindruck einer recht kursorisch zusammengetragenen Anthologie aus diversen religiös-philosophischen Traditionen des Mittelmeerraums.³ Als

¹ Aus *De antro* stammen neben Fr. 30 auch noch die Numeniusfragmente 31–33 und 60. Alle Numeniuszitate folgen der Nummerierung und Zeilenzählung von des Places. Eine gute Übersicht grundlegender Literatur zu Numenius' Werk bietet Domaradzki (2020) 139, Anm. 1. Vgl. zum "Platonicus minor" Kronios zuletzt Lakmann (2017) 158–62, 580–95; Männlein-Robert (2018) 658–9.

² *De antro* wird im Folgenden nach Dorandi (2019) zitiert; die Übersetzung und der begleitende Kommentar zu *De antro* 10 wurden von Fabienne Jourdan bearbeitet (vgl. Dorandi 2019, 8).

³ Vgl. zu Numenius' Offenheit gegenüber außerplatonischen religiös-theologischen Strömungen Numenius, Fr. 1a.

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besonders heikel erscheint der Versuch, die genannte Interpretation mithilfe eines Spezifikums der ägyptischen Ikonographie zu fundieren. Dem Urteil Karin Alts zufolge verschreibt Numenius sich einer “absurde<n> Mißdeutung”, wenn er in diesem Zusammenhang in Fr. 30, 6–10 ägyptische Gottheiten, zuvörderst den Sonnengott Re, zu Entsprechungen für menschliche Seelen erklärt.⁴ Dieses nach wie vor dominierende Verständnis der entsprechenden Passage⁵ lässt den gedanklichen Duktus von Numenius’ Überlegungen trotz verschiedenen Erklärungsversuchen in der Tat noch immer ungereimt erscheinen. Es lädt daher zu einer neuerlichen Betrachtung der Passage ein, die womöglich zu einer günstigeren Einschätzung des Argumentationsganges führen kann.

Vorab sei der Kontext von Numenius, Fr. 30 in der Porphyrioschrift *De antro* skizziert: Porphyrios fragt zu Beginn seiner Untersuchung in einem ersten Schritt, ob die homerische Nymphengrotte ein realer Ort oder eine poetische Fiktion sei. Er gelangt im Anschluss an Kronios zu der Ansicht, dass Homer mithilfe seiner Beschreibung der Grotte “etwas auf allegorische Weise sagen und verrätselt andeuten” wollte (ἀλληγορεῖν τι καὶ αἰνίττεσθαι).⁶ Um die allegorische Bedeutung der Höhle zu erschließen, referiert Porphyrios dann im Vorfeld des Fragments die reiche Tradition der Höhlensymbolik. Das “ewig fließende Wasser” (=die instabile Materie) im Inneren der Grotte (*Od.* 13, 109) wertet er als Indiz dafür, dass die Nymphengrotte als Symbol für den sinnlich wahrnehmbaren Kosmos fungiere (*De antro* 5–9). Die Struktur der Grotte und das Grotteninterieur wiederum dienen nach Porphyrios’ Verständnis dazu, das innerweltliche Metempsychosegeschehen zu verbildlichen. Mit dem Rekurs auf Numenius leitet Porphyrios in

4 Vgl. Alt (1998) 472. Domaradzki (2020) 144 spricht zuletzt etwas zurückhaltender von einer “boldness of interpretation”.

5 Vgl. die nachstehenden Übersetzungen und Kommentare: Duffy et al. (1969) 13: “We must understand that these represent souls hovering over moisture ...”; Lamberton (1983) 27: “the Egyptians depicted all their gods standing not on dry land but rather in a boat – the sun along with the rest of them – and these are to be thought of as the souls ...”; Simonini (1986) 51: “... gli Egiziani collocano gli esseri divini non sulla terraferma, ma tutti su una barca, sia il Sole sia, in generale, tutti: bisogna sapere che questi sono le anime ...” (im Kommentar, *ad loc.*, 119–20) spricht Simonini von einer “Ausweitung” der Schiffsvorstellung auf die Seelen; Le Lay (1989) 71: “Il faut regarder ceux-ci comme les âmes planant sur l’humidité”; Alt (1998) 472; van den Berg (2005) 110–1: “We must understand that these represent soul hovering over moisture.”; Akçay (2018) 140; (2019) 90: “the Egyptians make all divine beings stand not on solid ground but all on a floating vessel, both the Sun and all the others. These should be understood to be the souls ...”; Jourdan (2015) 433: “même le Soleil et, simplement, tous les *daimones*, quels qu’ils soient, il faut le savoir, representent les âmes qui volent sur l’humide, les âmes qui descendent dans la generation.”; Jourdan in Dorandi (2019) 125–7: “... tous les *daimones* dont il faut savoir que, quels qu’ils soient, ils sont les âmes volant sur l’humide.”; Domaradzki (2020) 142: “... the Sun and absolutely all the others, and that these ought to be understood as the souls who float upon moisture ...”.

6 Vgl. Porph. *De antro* 3 S. 116, 25–27 Dorandi.

De antro 10 daraufhin die ausführliche Allegorese der in Homers Höhlenbeschreibung erwähnten Details ein – beginnend mit den als Seelen verstandenen Najadennymphen.

Bereits die erste Überlegung, die Numenios zur Begründung der Identifikation von Najadennymphen und Seelen anführt, bereitet erhebliche Deutungsschwierigkeiten: Eine nicht näher bestimmte Gruppe von Theologen und/oder Philosophen habe die Ansicht vertreten, in die Welt des Werdens herabgestiegene Seelen säßen “am gottbehauchten Wasser” (Fr. 30, 4: τῷ ὕδατι ... θεοπνώω ὄντι).⁷ “Deshalb” habe der Prophet (d.h. Moses [Gen 1, 2]) gesagt, Gottes Geist/Hauch schwebte über dem Wasser (Fr. 30, 6: ἐμφέρεσθαι ἐπάνω τοῦ ὕδατος θεοῦ πνεῦμα). Der Leser stößt hier sogleich auf mindestens drei Probleme: (a) Über welches Wasser spricht Numenios bzw. in welchem Sinn spricht er über Wasser? (b) Welches Sinnverhältnis und welche inhaltliche Bedeutung kommen dem prädikativen Ausdruck θεοπνώω ὄντι zu? (c) Wie genau eignet sich Numenios das leicht modifizierte Genesiszitat aus der *Septuaginta* an (ursprünglich: πνεῦμα θεοῦ ἐπεφέρετο ἐπάνω τοῦ ὕδατος)?

Angesichts der Kürze des Fragments lassen sich nicht alle diese Fragen mit letzter Sicherheit klären. Aber der Reihe nach zu den einzelnen Problemen und ihren Erklärungsmöglichkeiten: Wasser bzw. Feuchtigkeit im eigentlichen Sinne spielen im zweiten Teil des Fragments (Fr. 30, 10–17) eine wichtige Rolle (dazu unten). Wasser ist allerdings sowohl in der platonischen Tradition im Allgemeinen als auch bei Numenios (Fr. 33, 8–9) und in der unmittelbaren Umgebung in Porphyrios’ Schrift (*De antro* 10 S. 124, 147–151 Dorandi) im Speziellen ein beliebtes Symbol für die instabile Materie bzw. den ‘Fluss’ des Werdens in der sinnlich wahrnehmbaren Welt. Gerade im Rahmen der einleitenden, sehr stark theologisch orientierten Diskussion (Fr. 30, 4.6: θεοπνώω ... θεοῦ πνεῦμα) bietet es sich an, ein metaphorisches Verständnis von Wasser in Erwägung zu ziehen. Nach Numenios’ Vorstellung kommt es dem zweiten bzw. dritten Gott zu, der “fließenden” Materie eine gewisse Stabilität zu verleihen (Fr. 11, 13–16: συμφερόμενος δὲ τῇ ὕλῃ δυάδι οὐσῆ ἐνοῖ μὲν αὐτήν, σχίζεται δὲ ὑπ’ αὐτῆς, ἐπιθυμητικὸν ἦθος ἐχούσης καὶ ῥεούσης). Diese partielle Stabilität ermöglicht es den Seelen, innerhalb der materiellen Welt ebenfalls einen stabilen Sitz zu finden (Fr. 30, 3–4: προσιζάνειν). Die Seelen nehmen einen bestimmten materiellen Platz ein bzw. können sich überhaupt nur dort befinden, weil die Materie gottbehaucht ist. Der begründende Ausdruck θεοπνώω ὄντι bedeutet demnach eine basale Strukturiertheit der Materie und hängt mit der nachfolgenden Überlegung, in deren Zentrum das Genesiszitat steht, gedanklich eng zusammen.

⁷ Des Places (2003) 81 geht davon aus, dass Numenios ‘die’ Pythagoreer im Sinn habe. Gemeint sein könnten aber auch die vorher genannte “Theologen”, die Homers Nymphengrotte für ein Symbol des sinnlich wahrnehmbaren Kosmos halten (*De antro* 9 S. 124, 138 Dorandi).

Das Genesiszitat wiederum steht sowohl mit Numenios' erstem Beleg als auch mit den darauffolgenden Ausführungen in Verbindung. Es erklärt bzw. bekräftigt, dass das zu Beginn genannte Wasser gottbehaucht (θεοπνώω) ist, weil ein göttlicher Hauch (πνεῦμα) über ihm schwebt. Numenios selbst verwendet den Terminus πνεῦμα nur hier. Daher ist es schwer zu sagen, ob er unter πνεῦμα θεοῦ eine Wirkung Gottes (welches Gottes?) versteht, oder ob die Formulierung als Periphrase für "Gott" verstanden werden darf. Die beanspruchte Erklärung (Fr. 30, 5: διὰ τοῦτο) für das Adjektiv θεοπνώω wird jedenfalls nur dann geleistet, wenn Numenios sich mit der Formulierung πνεῦμα θεοῦ auf ein wirkliches göttliches Prinzip bzw. dessen Wirkkraft bezieht.⁸ Als weltgestaltendes Prinzip würde es sich bei diesem Gott im numenianischen System, wie schon gehört, um den demiurgischen (zweiten) Intellekt handeln. Anders als der Gott der Genesiserzählung darf Numenios' Gott bei seiner stabilisierenden Tätigkeit aber nicht nur über dem Wasser schweben, sondern muss in das Wasser/die Materie hineinwirken, was wiederum das gegenüber der Genesiserzählung modifizierte Präfix in Numenios' bemerkenswerter Formulierung "über dem Wasser im Wasser schweben" (ἐμφέρεσθαι ἐπάνω τοῦ ὕδατος) erklärt.⁹ Diese Erklärung stimmt gut mit dem Numeniosfragment 50 zusammen, gemäß dem enkosmische Götter (κατευθύοντες τὴν γένεσιν θεοί) der Substanz nach gegenüber der Materie transzendent bleiben (οὔτε τὴν οὐσίαν ... συμμιγμένην), während ihre Wirkkräfte sich mit der Materie vermischen (τὰς δὲ δυνάμεις καὶ τὰς ἐνεργείας ἀναμιγμένας).

Die nachstehend thematisierten ägyptischen Gottheiten werden in Fr. 30 sodann mittels der koordinierenden Konjunktion τε und der begründenden Junktur διὰ τοῦτο funktional auf eine Ebene mit dem πνεῦμα θεοῦ der Genesiserzählung gestellt (Fr. 30, 5–7: ... διὰ τοῦτο ... τοὺς τε Αἰγυπτίους διὰ τοῦτο). Numenios thematisiert im Zuge des nächsten gedanklichen Schrittes nun den Umstand, dass Gottheiten in der ägyptischen Ikonographie auf Barken dargestellt werden. Dieses Spezifikum soll auf irgendeine Weise mit dem Abstieg der Seelen in Verbindung stehen. Im Zentrum der Deutung steht in diesem Zusammenhang die nachfolgende Passage:¹⁰

⁸ Es führt daher wahrscheinlich in die Irre, wenn man mit Domaradzki (2020) 143 und wohl auch Alt (1998) 472 davon ausgeht, Numenios nehme auch das Genesiszitat als Beleg für die Vorstellung vom Abstieg der Seele in Anspruch und habe die Seelen mit dem πνεῦμα θεοῦ identifiziert. Die Themen des Seelenabstiegs und der an diesem Prozess beteiligten göttlichen Ordnungskräfte sind innerhalb von Fr. 30 zu differenzieren.

⁹ Vgl. Jourdan in Dorandi (2019) 195.

¹⁰ Die ausführlichsten und instruktivsten Auseinandersetzungen zur Textgestaltung und inhaltlichen Deutung der zitierten Passage bieten Serra (1993) 1154–6; Jourdan (2015) sowie der an dieser Stelle im Wesentlichen an Jourdan (2015) anknüpfende Kommentar von Jourdan in Dorandi (2019) 195–6.

τούς τε 6

Αἰγυπτίους διὰ τοῦτο τοὺς δαίμονας ἅπαντας οὐχ ἰστά-
 ναι ἐπὶ στερεοῦ, ἀλλὰ πάντας ἐπὶ πλοίου, καὶ τὸν Ἥλιον
 καὶ ἀπλῶς πάντας· οὔστινας εἰδέναι χρή τὰς ψυχὰς
 ἐπιποτωμένας τῷ ὕγρῳ τὰς εἰς γένεσιν κατιούσας· 10

Die Verständnisschwierigkeiten, die sich in den verschiedenen Übersetzungen der Passage spiegeln, resultieren aus mehreren syntaktischen Ambiguitäten. Probleme bereitet in dem zitierten Passus, den Porphyrios in der *oratio obliqua* wiedergibt, einerseits die Frage nach dem Bezugswort von οὔστινας, andererseits die Frage nach der syntaktischen Fortführung des Satzes im Anschluss an das verallgemeinernde Relativpronomen. Bisher sind in erster Linie zwei Deutungsmöglichkeiten des Relativsatzes ausführlicher diskutiert worden: (a) die Ägypter wissen, dass die in die sinnlich wahrnehmbare Welt herabsteigenden Seelen über dem Wasser schweben; (b) die ägyptischen Gottheiten sind/repräsentieren die in die sinnlich wahrnehmbare Welt herabsteigenden Seelen, die über dem Wasser schweben. Diese stark differierenden Verständnismöglichkeiten spiegeln die inhaltlich-syntaktischen Ambiguitäten bzw. die Deutungsprobleme des Relativsatzes eindrucksvoll wider.

Variante a) hat Serra (1993) 1154–1156 ausführlich verteidigt:¹¹ Das Pronomen οὔστινας bezöge sich demzufolge auf τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους. οὔστινας würde sodann als Subjektsakkusativ des von χρή regierten Akkusativ mit Infinitiv (εἰδέναι) fungieren, der in diesem Fall ein Akkusativobjekt mit prädikativem Partizip bei sich führt (τὰς ψυχὰς ἐπιποτωμένας). Gemäß dieser Deutung würde Numenius also anhand eines beliebten Motivs der ägyptischen Ikonographie folgern, dass die Ägypter die Vorstellung von über dem Wasser schwebenden Seelen kennen. Bedenklich (wenngleich nicht völlig ausgeschlossen) erscheint die Annahme eines weiten Hyperbatons von οὔστινας zu Αἰγυπτίους gegenüber dem möglichen Bezug auf das unmittelbar voranstehende Pronomen πάντας. Als gravierender Nachteil erweist sich sodann allerdings der Verlust eines gedanklichen Konnexes des Relativsatzes zum Vorsatz. Denn inwiefern könnte aus der religiösen Praktik der Ägypter, ihre Götter auf Barken darzustellen, erschlossen werden, dass sie um die

11 Vgl. bereits Buffière (1956) 692 sowie nach van Kasteel (2012) 281 neuerdings wieder Baumbach (2019) 43: “diese (= die Ägypter) wissen notwendigerweise, dass die Seelen über dem Feuchten schweben, wenn sie zum Werden hinabgehen”. Serra führt diese Deutung bis auf die lateinische Porphyriosübersetzung Gessners (1542) zurück (vgl. Gessner 1542, 22: *item Aegyptios eandem ob causam omnes daemones non in aliquo solido, sed in navigio collocare, similiter et solem, et breviser omnes: nimirum quod sciant animas ad humorem advolare ...*).

über dem Wasser schwebenden Seelen wissen? Man wäre gezwungen, Numenios hier einen unvermittelten Sprung und eine ungelenke Übertragung einer bildlichen Komponente aus dem theologischen/religiös-ikonographischen in den psychologischen Bereich zu unterstellen.¹²

Variante (b) geht dagegen davon aus, dass οὔστινας auf πάντα, also die ägyptischen Gottheiten, zu beziehen sei. Im Relativsatz regiert χρή den unpersönlich gebrauchten Infinitiv εἰδέναι (“man muss wissen, dass”), an den sich sodann (elliptisch) ein kopulatives Partizip (ὄντας) mit dem Prädikatsnomen τὰς ψυχὰς anschließt.

Gegen dieses etablierte Verständnis des Satzes sprechen folgende Erwägungen: Wie Numenios ausdrücklich sagt, handelt es sich bei den auf Barken dargestellten Entitäten um Gottheiten (δαίμονες). Es ist gänzlich unklar, wie unter dieser Prämisse die Identifikation der Gottheiten mit ins Werden herabsteigenden Seelen funktionieren kann, zumal Numenios in Abbréviation eine Interpretatio Graeca vornimmt und den der Sache nach gemeinten ägyptischen Sonnengott Re mit Helios gleichsetzt.¹³ Er rechnet also offenbar in diesem Punkt mit einer weitreichenden Übereinstimmung der ägyptischen und griechischen Göttervorstellungen.¹⁴ Dass Numenios gerade den vornehmsten und der Idee des Guten “äußerst ähnlichen” Himmels-gott (Plat. *Resp.* VI 506e, 508a) als menschliche Seele verstanden haben könnte, ist vor dem vorauszusetzenden platonischen Hintergrund schwer zu glauben.¹⁵

¹² Vgl. für eine ähnliche Kritik bereits Jourdan (2015) 442, Anm. 53.

¹³ Die von Jourdan in Dorandi (2019) 196 angeführten Belege für die Identifikationsmöglichkeit von Seelen und Dämonen in der vorsokratischen Tradition und bei Platon vermögen nicht abschließend zu überzeugen, da der Identifikationsprozess in den aufgeführten Fällen in die entgegengesetzte Richtung verläuft. Ob eine gewisse Göttlichkeit der Seele behauptet wird, oder Götter zu Seelen herababgestuft werden, dürfte aber kein trivialer Unterschied sein. Eine weitere Konsequenz der Identifizierung von Göttern und Seelen wäre die Annahme, Re sei (im Sinne der einleitenden Gleichsetzung [Fr. 30, 1–3: absteigende Seelen = Najadennymphen]) als Najadennympe zu verstehen. Verschiedentlich wird versucht, die Übersetzungen und erklärenden Ausführungen zu nuancieren, um die Identitätsaussage abzuschwächen: Vgl. Duffy et al. (1969) 13: “... these *represent* souls hovering over moisture ...”; Lamberton (1983) 27: “... these *are to be thought of* as the souls ...”; Jourdan (2015) 433: “tous les *daimones*, quels qu’ils soient, il faut le savoir, *representent* les âmes ...”; Domaradzki (2020) 144: “that the Naiad nymphs are souls resting on water *is reflected* in the Egyptian images of their deities ...”. Für eine derartige Abschwächung besteht aber keine textliche Evidenz.

¹⁴ Man wird nicht annehmen können, dass Numenios den Ägyptern eine konzeptuelle Fehlübertragung des Barkensymbols (von den Seelen auf die Götter) unterstellt. Er schätzt die Weisheit der Ägypter wie alle Platoniker gemäß der topischen Auffassung Ägyptens als eines Landes ältester Weisheit hoch. Vgl. Numenios, Fr. 1a; Dörrie and Baltés (1990) 166–77, 427–53.

¹⁵ Bedenken gegen eine Gleichsetzung von Göttern und herabsteigenden Seelen ergeben sich ebenfalls aus der Rezeption der ägyptischen Ikonographie bei Plutarch und Iamblich, die

Hinzu kommt, dass die von Numenios verwendete Schifffahrts-/Steuermannmetapher in platonischer Tradition eine durch den Weltaltermythos des *Politikos* (268d–274e; bes. 272e) geprägte theologische Metapher ist. Ein Blick auf Numenios, Fr. 18 zeigt, dass auch Numenios die Metapher in sein Bildinventar aufgenommen hat:¹⁶ Der Mittelplatoniker bringt dort im gedanklichen Anschluss an den *Politikos* einen entsprechenden Vergleich zur Anwendung auf den Demiurgen. In Fr. 18 wird (anders als bei Platon) auch das Schiff (ναύς) des göttlichen Steuermanns erwähnt, das, wie Baltes sicherlich mit Recht vermutet, hier die Distanz und Souveränität des Demiurgen gegenüber der Materie verbildlicht, die ihm bei seiner ordnungsstiftenden Funktion innerhalb der sinnlichen Welt zukommt.¹⁷

Weitere Bedenken gegen die Identifizierung von Göttern und Seelen bereitet in diesem Zusammenhang der Umstand, dass die Seelen in unmittelbarem Anschluss an Fr. 30, 6–10 mehrfach feucht/durchnässt (Fr. 30, 11: ὑγρῆσι, 14: [δ]ειρούς),¹⁸ 15: δύγρους) genannt werden. Numenios rechnet in ganz platonischem Sinn damit, dass menschliche Seelen im Gegensatz zu den göttlichen Gestirnen vergleichsweise große Schwierigkeiten haben, ihre Souveränität gegenüber der Materie zu

derartiges weder selbst annehmen noch überhaupt kennen: Vgl. Plut. *Is.* 34, 364C–D; Iambl. *De myst.* 7, 2 (dieser mit Betonung einer in der Schifffahrtsmetapher implizierten Transzendenzvorstellung – die Sonne verwalte den Kosmos auf eine von ihm gelöste Weise [χωριστώς]). Auch christliche Schriftsteller, die das Motiv rezipieren, wissen offenkundig nichts von einer Identifizierung von Göttern und Seelen: Vgl. Clem. Al. *Strom.* 5, 42, 2; Eus. *Pr. Ev.* 3, 11, 48.

16 Das Fragment entwickelt einen ausführlichen Vergleich zwischen einem Steuermann, der über das Meer navigiert, indem er seinen Blick gen Himmel auf die Sterne richtet und dem Demiurgen, der die Materie ordnet, indem er seinen Blick auf den “oberen Gott” richtet.

17 Vgl. Baltes (1999) 18, Anm. 66; anders z.B. Krämer (1964) 74: “Er ruht unmittelbar auf der Hyle auf ... Alles deutet darauf hin, daß der Demiurg, der mit der Hyle in direkten Kontakt tritt ...”. Für Baltes’ Deutung spricht, dass sowohl auf der Bildebene (Numenios, Fr. 18, 2: ὑψίςυγος) als auch auf der Sachebene (s. die ungewöhnliche Junktur ὑπὲρ νέως [“über dem Schiff”] in Numenios, Fr. 18, 9 gegenüber gebräuchlichen Verbindungen wie ἐν νηί/ἐπὶ νεώς) die erhabene Stellung des Steuermanns und seine Distanz gegenüber der Materie betont wird. Vgl. ferner auch Numenios, Fr. 50.

18 Genau genommen nicht von den Seelen, sondern von den in der körperlichen Welt befindlichen Menschen. Numenios projiziert hier eine nachhomerische Bedeutung in das homerische Dislegomenon. Vgl. z.B. Jourdan in Dorandi (2019) 197–8. Auch an dieser Stelle ist aber wohl weniger von einer Fehlinterpretation der zugrundeliegenden Odysseestelle 6, 201 auszugehen (so wiederum Alt 1998, 473), wo das Adjektiv “lebend” bedeutet, sondern vielmehr von einem Versuch, eine latent präsente zweite Bedeutung des Adjektivs hervorzuheben. Vgl. Jourdan (2015) 448–9, die darauf aufmerksam macht, dass bereits die Homerscholien über eine tiefere Verbindung der beiden Bedeutungen des homonymen Adjektivs spekulierten, insofern Wasser Grundlage des organischen Lebens sei. Vgl. Pontani (2015) 195.

bewahren.¹⁹ Dass der auf einer Barke positionierte Sonnengott in diesem Sinne durchnässt werden soll, passt schlecht ins Bild. Es liegt vielmehr nahe, dass Numenios das $\pi\lambda\omicron\iota\upsilon\nu/\nu\alpha\upsilon\varsigma$ -Element als funktionales Analogon innerhalb seiner eigenen und der ägyptischen Verbildlichungen versteht. Denn Fr. 30 enthält wie gesehen neben dem verbindenden Bildelement auch den Gedanken der Ordnungsfunktion des Göttlichen.

Die thematische Verbindung von ordnungsstiftender göttlicher Kraft und dem Abstieg der Seele in die materielle Welt ist, wie man zusammenfassend feststellen kann, für den ersten Teil von Fr. 30 (1–10) zentral. In diesem Teil ließ sich im Zusammenhang mit den einleitenden Überlegungen ein vor dem platonischen Hintergrund des Numenios nicht ungewöhnlicher metaphorischer Gebrauch des Begriffsfeldes “Wasser” konstatieren. Der zweite Teil (Fr. 30, 10–17) ist dagegen durch eine funktionale Verschiebung des semantischen Feldes “Wasser”/“Feuchtigkeit” gekennzeichnet. Numenios behandelt in Fr. 30 nämlich, anders als es Porphyrios’ einleitende Bemerkung suggerieren könnte, nicht nur den Abstieg der Seele in die Welt des Werdens ohne weitere Qualifizierungen (Fr. 30, 2–3: $\epsilon\iota\varsigma \gamma\acute{\epsilon}\nu\epsilon\sigma\iota\nu \kappa\alpha\tau\iota\acute{o}\upsilon\sigma\alpha\varsigma$). Es geht ihm auch um die bevorzugte ontologische Affinität der Seele zu Wasser bzw. Feuchtem, die in Numenios’ Psychologie aber auch bei Porphyrios sowohl für die Beseelung von Embryonen als auch für die Verbindung der inkorporierten Seele mit dem Körper eine wichtige Rolle spielt.²⁰ Man wird also eine Engführung der in platonischer Tradition beliebten Wassermetaphorik (=der fließenden Materie), die für den Gedanken der Gestaltung der Materie durch den Demiurgen einschlägig ist, und einer von jeglicher Metaphorizität freien argumentativen Relevanz des aktuellen Wassers konstatieren dürfen. Diese

¹⁹ Möglicherweise lassen sich in Fr. 30 zwei Stadien der Inkorporierung unterscheiden: Im Zuge des Abstiegs schweben die Seelen zunächst “über” der feuchten Substanz, an die sie sich binden (Fr. 30, 10: $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota\pi\tau\omicron\omega\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\alpha\varsigma \tau\tilde{\omega} \upsilon\gamma\tilde{\omega}\tilde{\rho}\tilde{\eta}$), die inkorporierten Seelen (Fr. 30, 15: $\tau\omicron\upsilon\varsigma \acute{\epsilon}\nu \gamma\epsilon\nu\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\epsilon\iota \acute{\omicron}\nu\tau\alpha\varsigma$) sind sodann als “feucht” qualifizierbar.

²⁰ Vgl. Numenios, Fr. 30, 16–17 sowie Fr. 36 mit Wilberding (2011) 58, Anm. 14. Der kursorische und daher nicht ganz durchsichtige Hinweis, Blut sei den Seelen “lieb” (Fr. 30, 16: $\phi\iota\lambda\omicron\varsigma$), lässt verschiedene Assoziationen zu: Einerseits ist Blut nach mittelplatonischem Verständnis der Träger des pneumatischen Seelenwagens. Vgl. Halfwassen (1994) 114–9. Numenios hat sich mit dem für den Metempsychoseprozess zentralen Thema des Seelenwagens wohl auch befasst, sofern man mit Leemans (1937) *Test.* 47 (dort. S. 105, 10–19; 106, 18–110, 20) bereit ist, einen längeren Abschnitt aus Macrobius’ Kommentar zum *Somnium Scipionis* für Numenios’ Lehrmeinung zu halten, als es des Places erlaubt (Fr. 34 mit S. 116–117, Anm. 3) – vgl. zum Problem der Zuteilung auch Baltes (1999) 12–6. Andererseits ist bei der Bemerkung in Fr. 30, 16–17 womöglich an die in pythagoreischer Tradition verbreitete Ansicht zu denken, dass Blut die Seele ernähre (vgl. etwa Diog. Laert. 8, 30).

gedankliche Doppelung hat auch in den Interpretationen der Passage zu gewissen Divergenzen geführt.²¹ Gerade aufgrund ihrer Neigung zum aktuellen feuchten Element sind aber die herabsteigenden Seelen als Najaden und nicht als Oreaden oder dergleichen zu denken, wie aus Porphyrios an das Fragment anschließenden Erklärungen noch wesentlich deutlicher hervorgeht.²²

Die bisherigen Vorüberlegungen führen auf eine dritte Möglichkeit hin, den Satz Fr. 30, 6–10 zu verstehen:²³ Als inhaltlicher Bezug von οὐστῖνας fungiert πάντας – so wie es auch die Satzstellung nahelegt. Die Konstruktion innerhalb des Relativsatzes ist ein Akkusativ mit Infinitiv und persönlich gebrauchtem Infinitiv εἰδέναι. Subjektsakkusativ sind die Götter (οὐστῖνας), Akkusativobjekt zu εἰδέναι mit partizipialer Erweiterung die Seelen (τὰς ψυχάς)²⁴ – siehe unten für eine vollständige Übersetzung des Fragments, dass die basierend auf diesen syntaktischen Erwägungen.²⁵ Fr. 30, 6–10 besagt demnach, dass Helios und alle anderen auf Barken dargestellten Gottheiten Kenntnis der auf dem Wasser schwebenden Seelen haben (müssen). Die Bezeichnung δαίμων ist insofern passend gewählt, als Helios als Gestirngott ein kosmischer Gott, also nach Numenius kein Gott im ausgezeichneten Sinn ist. Es verwundert ebenfalls nicht, dass den

²¹ Vgl. etwa van den Berg (2005) 111, der etwas zu pauschal meint, Wasser “repräsentiere” in Fr. 30 die “Welt des Werdens” (“represents the ‘world of becoming’”). Vgl. für das wörtliche Verständnis im Zuge der Einkörperung ausführlicher Porph. *De antro* 11 S. 126, 174–187 Dorandi.

²² Vgl. Porph. *De antro* 11.

²³ Ferner besteht (zumindest theoretisch) noch die Möglichkeit, dass bei ansonsten identischer syntaktischer Konstruktion τὰς ψυχάς als Subjektsakkusativ des Akkusativs mit Infinitiv und οὐστῖνας als Objektsakkusativ fungieren, wie es des Places (2003) 81 und Penati (1985) 38, der sich des Places ohne weitere Begründung anschließt, bevorzugen (d.h. die Seelen müssen die Götter kennen: “... les dieux absolument, que doivent connaître les âmes ...”; “... tutti; tutti quelli che le anime ... bisogna conoscano.”). Auch in diesem Fall wirft die Frage nach der gedanklichen Verbindung der beiden Sätze Bedenken auf (weder des Places noch Penati kommentieren ihre Übersetzung): Es ist allerdings nicht leicht einzusehen, warum man den herabgestiegenen Seelen ein (notwendiges) Wissen um alle Planetengötter zuschreiben sollte. Sehr stark vom Originaltext entfernt und deshalb nicht in die Diskussion einbezogen ist Taylors Version (Raine and Mills 1969, 303): “The Egyptians likewise on this account place all daemons, not connected with any thing solid or stable, but raised on a sailing vessel; and it is known that humor invades the sun itself, and all animals descending into generation”.

²⁴ Serra (1993) 1155 bestreitet zu Unrecht die Möglichkeit, εἰδέναι im Sinne von “jem./etw. kennen” zu übersetzen: Vgl. LSJ s.v. εἰδέναι II. B.

²⁵ Nur Petty (1997) 53; (2012) 67 ist bisher in diesem Sinne von den üblichen Übersetzungen abgewichen (“... even the Sun and quite simply all of them: it is necessary that they view the souls which are descending into generation ...”), allerdings ohne dies im Kommentar ad loc. näher zu begründen. Bemerkenswert ist mit Blick auf diese Vorschläge auch die recht freie Übersetzung Trabuccos (1918) 12: “... les Égyptiens ne plaçaient pas tous les daimones sur un élément solide et stable, mais ils les situaient tous les sur un navire, même le soleil et tous ceux en un mot qui doivent assister au vol, sur l’élément humide, des âmes qui descendent dans la génération”.

kosmischen Gottheiten nach Numenios' Ansicht ein Wissen um die innerkosmischen Prozesse und eine strukturierende Funktion zukommen. Die beiden Aspekte können den Planetengöttern in mittelplatonischer Tradition mit vollem Recht zugeschrieben werden.²⁶

Eine abschließende Überlegung zugunsten der vorgeschlagenen Übersetzung lässt sich mit Blick auf die thematisch an Fr. 30 angrenzenden Numeniosfragmente anstellen: Dass die ägyptische Ikonographie das Symbol der Barke insbesondere mit dem Sonnengott Re verbindet, dürfte für Numenios ein willkommener Hinweis auf die Übereinstimmung mit der eigenen Deutung gewesen sein, in der gerade Helios eine wichtige Rolle spielt. Bekanntlich verfassten bereits Numenios und Kronios allegorische Schriften zur Deutung der homerischen Nymphengrotte. Die beiden Mittelplatoniker verstanden die Nymphengrotte ebenso wie nach ihnen Porphyrios als "Bild und Symbol des Kosmos" (Fr. 31, 1: εἰκόνα καὶ σύμβολον ... τοῦ κόσμου).²⁷ Eine nachdrückliche Bedeutung kommt im Rahmen ihrer Allegorese der Verbindung des sinnlichen mit dem intelligiblen Kosmos und den wechselseitigen Durchgangsmöglichkeiten innerhalb der komplexen Metempsychoseprozesse zu.²⁸ Homer scheint das Thema – setzt man die Identifikation der Nymphengrotte mit dem sinnlichen Kosmos voraus – in verrätselter Form durch die Erwähnung von zwei Höhlenöffnungen zur Sprache zu bringen (*Od.* 13, 109–112). Diese beiden Öffnungen identifiziert Numenios nach dem exegetischen Prinzip *Homerus ex Homero* mit den andernorts erwähnten (*Od.* 24, 12) "Toren der Sonne" (Fr. 31, 1–6; Fr. 32, 1–2: Ἡλίου πύλας). Numenios' Deutung zufolge entsprechen die Höhlenöffnungen dem nördlichen und südlichen Wendekreis der Sonne und den Wendepunkten der Sonne in den Tierkreiszeichen Krebs und Steinbock. Sie fungieren als Ausgangs- bzw. Zielpunkt der ab- und aufsteigenden Seelen. Kein Planetengott wird im Rahmen von Numenios' astrologischen Ausführungen (soweit dies die Fragmente erkennen lassen) so oft genannt wie Helios. Mit einigem Recht greift Numenios daher in Fr. 30 aus argumentationslogischen Gründen Helios als prominentesten Vertreter der Planetengötter auf, die in das Metempsychosegeschehen involviert sind, und daher die Seelen kennen.

²⁶ Vgl. zur ordnungsstiftenden Funktion der Planetengötter z.B. Ps.-Plut. *De fato* 572F–573A; Alcin. *Didask.* 14, 6–7; zu deren Erkenntnisfähigkeit Alcin. *Didask.* 25, 7; dazu ferner die extensive, mäandrierende Diskussion zur Wahrnehmungsfähigkeit der Gestirne und des Planeten Erde bei Plotin (*Enn.* IV 4, 6–42, die nach einer zwischenzeitlichen Einräumung von Sinneswahrnehmungen (*Enn.* IV 4, 30: αἰσθήσεις) an die Gestirne zuletzt das Wirken des Alls durch eine Theorie der kosmischen Sympathie erklärt. Die Sonne und die anderen Gestirne wirken gemäß *Enn.* IV 4, 37–42 nicht, indem sie die irdischen Vorgänge betrachten, sondern indem sie nach "oben" zu ihren Prinzipien blicken.

²⁷ Vgl. zu Kronios Lakmann (2017) 582–7.

²⁸ Vgl. dazu neben Numenios Fr. 30 Numenios, *Frr.* 31–35.

Im Ergebnis hat die vorliegende Betrachtung – so ist zu hoffen – in zweifacher Hinsicht zu einem verbesserten Verständnis von Fr. 30 beigetragen. Sie bietet erstens eine möglichst unpräventiöse Lösung für die syntaktischen Ambiguitäten von Fr. 30, 6–10 an, die keine syntaktisch oder semantisch problembehafteten Zusatzannahmen machen muss. Sie trägt auf diese Weise zweitens zu einem deutlicheren Bild der Funktion des Rekurses auf die ägyptischen Gottheiten in Fr. 30 und somit auch zu einer Erhellung der Argumentationsstruktur des Fragments bei. Eine stärkere Differenzierung wurde im Rahmen der Argumentation zudem hinsichtlich (a) der Engführung des metaphorischen und eigentlichen Gebrauchs der Wasservorstellung sowie (b) der thematischen Verbindung des Seelenabstiegs mit der strukturstiftenden Funktion göttlicher Akteure erreicht. Von dem Vorwurf einer absurden Missdeutung ist Numenios freizusprechen.

Folgender Übersetzungsvorschlag ergibt sich aus den Überlegungen:

Νύμφας δὲ ναΐδας λέγομεν καὶ τὰς τῶν ὑδάτων προεστῶ-
 σας δυνάμεις ἰδίως, ἔλεγον δὲ καὶ τὰς εἰς γένεσιν κατ-
 ιούσας ψυχὰς κοινῶς ἀπάσας. ἤγοῦντο γὰρ προσιζά-
 νειν τῷ ὕδατι τὰς ψυχὰς θεοπνόῳ ὄντι, ὡς φησιν ὁ Νου-
 μήνιος, διὰ τοῦτο λέγων καὶ τὸν προφήτην εἰρηκέναι 5
 ἐμφέρεσθαι ἐπάνω τοῦ ὕδατος θεοῦ πνεῦμα· τοὺς τε
 Αἰγυπτίους διὰ τοῦτο τοὺς δαίμονας ἅπαντας οὐχ ἰστά-
 ναι ἐπὶ στερεοῦ, ἀλλὰ πάντας ἐπὶ πλοίου, καὶ τὸν Ἥλιον
 καὶ ἀπλῶς πάντας, οὔστινας εἰδέναι χρὴ τὰς ψυχὰς 10
 ἐπιποτωμένας τῷ ὑγρῷ τὰς εἰς γένεσιν κατιούσας· ὅθεν
 καὶ Ἡράκλειτον ψυχῆσι φάναί τέρψιν μὴ θάνατον ὑγρῆσι
 γενέσθαι, τέρψιν δ' εἶναι αὐταῖς τὴν εἰς γένεσιν πῶσιν,
 καὶ ἀλλαχοῦ δὲ φάναί ζῆν ἡμᾶς τὸν ἐκείνων θάνατον
 καὶ ζῆν ἐκεῖνας τὸν ἡμέτερον θάνατον· παρὸ καὶ διερούς 15
 τοὺς ἐν γενέσει ὄντας καλεῖν τὸν ποιητὴν τοὺς διύγρους
 τὰς ψυχὰς ἔχοντας. αἶμά τε γὰρ ταύταις καὶ ὁ δίυγρος
 γόνος φίλος, ταῖς δὲ τῶν φυτῶν τροφή τὸ ὕδωρ.

Najadennymphen nennen wir speziell auch die über das Wasser herrschenden Kräfte; so nannte man aber auch allgemein alle Seelen, die ins Werden absteigen. Denn man glaubte, dass die Seelen am Wasser säßen, weil es gottbehaucht ist, wie (5) Numenios sagt, und er meint, dass der Prophet deswegen gesagt habe, der Geist Gottes schwebt über dem Wasser, und dass die Ägypter deswegen alle Gottheiten nicht auf festes Land, sondern auf ein Boot stellen, sowohl Helios als auch überhaupt alle Gottheiten, die wissen müssen, dass die Seelen, die in die Welt des Werdens hinabsteigen, (10) auf dem Wasser schweben. Daher sage Heraklit, für die

Seelen bedeute es Vergnügen, nicht Tod, feucht zu werden. Das Vergnügen aber sei für sie der Sturz ins Werden; andernorts sage er, dass wir ihren Tod lebten und sie unseren Tod. Daher nenne der Dichter (15) die in der Welt des Werdens befindlichen Menschen auch feucht, da sie nasse Seelen haben; denn Blut ist ihnen lieb und der nasse Samen, die Pflanzenseelen aber haben Wasser als Nahrung.

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Severus on *Tim.* 30a: New Approaches and Perspectives. Porphyry, *PM* 87–95; Eusebius, *PE* 13.17

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Abstract: This paper aims at re-evaluating the significance of Peripatetic features in Severus' exegesis of the *Timaeus* through a comparison between Severus' doxography in the *PM* and the fragment of his treatise on the soul quoted by Eusebius. Indeed, until now, the scholarly literature has been inclined to consider Severus as a plain anti-Aristotelian and pro-Stoic Platonist. However the recent edition of the Porphyrian lost treatise *On Principles and Matter* allows us to grasp more clearly to what extant Severus' view on the nature of the soul and on the bodily motion is grounded on an in-depth knowledge of the Peripatetic debates of his time.

Keywords: Severus, soul, motion, *dynamis*, pre-cosmic disorder

The recent edition by Yury Arzhanov of a long portion of Porphyry's lost treatise *On Principles and Matter* (*PM*), translated into Syriac, constitutes a seminal event in the study of ancient Platonism and its reception. The last part of the text, especially §§73–97, provides an extensive doxography of new Middle Platonist fragments. Among them we find an account of the teaching of both Longinus and Plotinus, who are presented as the last members of two distinct Platonic exegetical chains, each of which contributed to Porphyry's education. One chain, to which Boethus the lexicographer and Longinus belong, is philological, while the other, embodied by Severus and Plotinus, is philosophical.¹ The doxography also includes testimonies of authors of whose works no fragments have yet been found, such as Boethus,² who is said to have influenced Longinus' interpretation of *Tim.* 30a, which claims that Plato is dealing in this passage with a disorderly pre-cosmic

1 *PM* 95 (transl. Arzhanov 2021).

2 Photius (*Bibl. cod.* 154–155, 100a14–24).

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matter.³ This reading, which is akin to that of Atticus, is opposed to Severus' interpretation, according to which, in *Tim.* 30a, Plato is not discussing matter, but rather the un-ordered motion of the primary bodies. In order to define the specific nature of this motion, Severus draws on Aristotle's analyses of the status of privation in *Metaphysics*, Book five.

This paper will thus focus on the Syriac testimony on Severus, which is set in parallel with an extract quoted in Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica* (*PE*) 13.17. Its aim is to re-evaluate the importance of Peripatetic features in Severus' exegesis of the *Timaieus*. Indeed, until now, scholars have been eager to consider Severus to be a plainly anti-Aristotelian and pro-Stoic Platonist.⁴ This appraisal was partly rooted in his interpretation of the world cycles in the myth of the *Statesman*,⁵ but also in the fact that he uses Stoic categories in his exegesis of *Tim.* 27d. Thus, at the beginning of *Enn.* VI 2 (43),⁶ Plotinus addresses his interpretation of *Tim.* 27d, according to which, in the sentence τί τὸ ὄν ἀεί, γένεσιν δὲ οὐκ ἔχον, καὶ τί τὸ γιγνόμενον μὲν ἀεί,⁷ ὄν δὲ οὐδέποτε, *τι* is a genus that is common to both intelligible being and becoming.⁸

However, the discovery of the doxography of the *PM* sheds new light on Severus' attitude towards the Aristotelian tradition. My aim here is twofold: First, I would like to show that the doxography provides support for Gioè's hypothesis,⁹ according to which Severus – in interpreting the physics of the *Timaieus* – relies on in-depth knowledge of the Peripatetic debates. Second, I will examine to what extent these fragments contribute to tracing back the genesis of the Porphyrian interpretation of *Tim.* 30a and to grasp the doctrinal background of the discussions within the school of Plotinus.

1 Soul and Body in *PE* 13.17

Previously, the only testimony relating to Severus' doctrine concerning the motion of primary bodies was an extract quoted by Eusebius in Book 13 of the *PE*. At the end of *PE* 13.16, after having indicated how Plato is in agreement with Hebrew wisdom, Eusebius turns to a new aspect of the survey of Platonic philosophy, concerning those points where Plato departed from the doctrines of Moses and fell

³ *PM* 95–97.

⁴ See especially Dillon (1996) 263–4; Sedley (2005).

⁵ Procl. *In Tim.* I 289, 7–13.

⁶ *Enn.* VI 2 (43) 1, 21–25. See Sedley (2005) and Chiaradonna (2020) 120.

⁷ The presence of ἀεί is here controversial. It is not certain that Plotinus does read τὸ γιγνόμενον μὲν ἀεί. On this, see Chiaradonna (2020) 118 n. 1.

⁸ This critique was later taken up and developed by Proclus (*In Tim.* I 227, 13–17).

⁹ Gioè (2002) 425–33.

into error. The first issue is related to his doctrine of transmigration, and the second one to his interpretation of the nature of the soul as a composite reality. The opposition in *Tim.* 41d between the divine and mortal parts of the soul is described, in *PE* 13.16.18, as an opposition between a “divine and rational part” and an “irrational and passive part.” Next, Eusebius introduces the critique that “Severus the Platonist” addresses to the doctrine of the soul’s composition.¹⁰ Severus does indeed point out that the claim that a “mortal” substance has been “interwoven into” the impassive nature of the soul is deeply flawed.

In this passage, Severus argues against the view that the soul is constructed by God out of two opposing elements, as is the case with intermediate colours, e.g. grey, which is the result of mixing white and black. In doing so, he takes a position in Middle Platonist debates relating to the unity-in-multiplicity of the soul.

This is what we have to say about the soul which Plato says is constructed by God out of impassive and passive substance, like one of the intermediate colours made from white and black: it must happen that when, in time, they separate out, the soul is destroyed, as is the compound intermediate colour when in time each of the component colours reverts to its own natural state (ἐπὶ τὴν οἰκείαν φύσιν). But if this is right, we have shown the soul to be destructible, not immortal.¹¹

Severus shows, on the one hand, that the soul is not a composite, and, on the other, that, properly speaking, there is no passive part of the soul. Indeed, if it is agreed that the soul arises from a mixture, then, in time, it must disappear as the opposites revert to their proper state. In support of this assumption, he draws on the doctrine of the unity of the soul as presented in the *Phaedo*, according to which “what is uncompounded alone is not liable to dissolution.”¹² The question of the unity-in-multiplicity of the soul is indeed a central issue in Middle Platonist exegeses: when Plato declares the soul to be immortal, does this mean it is entirely immortal or does only its rational part survive the dissolution of the body? This question is linked to the question of whether the irrational parts belong to the soul itself.¹³ While this issue falls outside the scope of this paper, I would like to recall that

¹⁰ *PE* 13.17.7. Johnson (forthcoming) points out that only Atticus and Severus were labelled “Platonists” by Eusebius, for entirely different reasons: Atticus, because he is, in Eusebius’ eyes, the best spokesman for Plato’s agreement with Hebrew philosophy, insofar as he considers that the heart of Platonic doctrine to lie in ethics. Severus, on the other hand, is called a “Platonist”, insofar as, in defending a unitary view of the nature of the soul, he openly criticises Plato’s way of speaking about the soul in *Tim.* 41d and *Tim.* 69c–d.

¹¹ *PE* 13.17.1. Translation G. Boys-Stones.

¹² Plat. *Phaed.* 78c1–4.

¹³ Atticus, e.g., denies that the irrational parts belong to the soul, properly speaking. He thus distinguishes the rational functions from the other ones, linked to the body, which constitute “irrational life” (Procl. *In Tim.* III 234, 9–18) and dissolve after death.

during the imperial era, many solutions, such as the use of the Aristotelian model of the *dynameis*, were advanced to address the Platonic problem of the unity of soul across its many functions.¹⁴

Alcinous, for example, claims that the human soul is divided into three parts: the rational part, stemming from the Demiurge, and two mortal parts (the spirited and the appetitive), added by the young gods.¹⁵ Alcinous, who does not state precisely whether the human soul results from the collation of two different kinds of soul or not,¹⁶ merely indicates that these three parts, corresponding to three potencies (τριμερής ἐστὶν ἡ ψυχὴ κατὰ τὰς δυνάμεις, καὶ κατὰ λόγον τὰ μέρη αὐτῆς τόποις ἰδίους διανενέμηται), are located in different places in the body.¹⁷ Severus, by contrast, unambiguously indicates that the *dynamics* of the soul are of a single substance. He emphasises, more strongly than any other Middle Platonist, the unitary nature of the soul which is totally incorporeal and impassive (ἀπλοῦν δὲ καὶ τῇ αὐτῇ φύσει ἀπαθὲς καὶ ἀσώματον), and hence immortal.¹⁸

But neither [the position] of Plato is right nor that of the rest – as we shall try to establish by reason, setting out the powers that are active in us (τὰς ἐν ἡμῖν ἐνεργοῦσας δυνάμεις).

If Severus' position is part of an internal debate within Middle Platonist circles, it is possible that his interpretation of the non-composition of the soul also echoes the polemics which opposed Alexander of Aphrodisias to Galen, who articulates the Platonic model of the tripartition to the Aristotelian doctrine of the potencies of the soul in a quasi-corporeal way. Indeed, Galen endorses the Aristotelian definition of the soul as a form related to the organic body, but he equates the hylomorphic form to the mixture of the elementary qualities. On his view, the soul arises from the composition of the four elements.¹⁹ Alexander opposes this position, holding that the soul is not a mixture, but rather a power which “supervenes” (ἐπιγινόμενον) on a particular kind of blend.²⁰ This is precisely why the soul, whose unity precedes that of the body, cannot be defined as a harmony, as Alexander points out, following Aristotle.²¹ According to both Aristotle and Alexander,

¹⁴ On this, see Emilsson (1994) 5334–6.

¹⁵ Alc. *Did.* XXIII 176, 7–11.

¹⁶ This may be inferred from Alc. *ibid.*, and XXV 178, 24–26. See Deuse (1983) 91–2 and Emilsson (1994) 5535.

¹⁷ Alc. *Did.* XXIV 176, 35–37.

¹⁸ *PE* 13.17.4. See Emilsson (1994) 5536–7.

¹⁹ Gal. *Quod animi mores*, IV 783 Kühn. For an in depth-discussion on this point, cf. Chiaradonna (2021).

²⁰ Alex. *De an.* 25, 2–4. Translation V. Caston. On this issue, see Caston (2012) 9–12.

²¹ Arist. *De an.* I 4.407b32–408a2.

any theory of the soul as a harmony of opposites turns out to be a kind of corporealism.²²

In this context, I would like to advance the hypothesis that Severus' interpretation provides a Platonic alternative to the doctrine of entelechy, taking into account the Peripatetic claim²³ that every attempt to think the soul along the lines of the tripartite model ends up fragmenting it and destroying its unity. Thus, Severus turns back to the doctrine of the *Phaedo*, claiming that only a genuinely separate substance can truly be simple and immortal. In a sense, this interpretation paves the way for Plotinus' account. Indeed, *Enn.* IV 7 (2) deploys a wide range of arguments in support of the incorporeality and immortality of the soul. If we have a look at the general structure of *Enn.* IV 7 (2),²⁴ we can see that Plotinus initially takes advantage of the weapons deployed by the Aristotelians against the champions of corporealism, claiming that forms are incorporeal powers (δυνάμεις),²⁵ then criticises the *harmonia* model of the Pythagoreans, before finally turning the accusation of corporealism against the Peripatetics themselves. In order to show that the entelechy doctrine, which makes the soul "something belonging to the body"²⁶ is not able to ground its substantiality (and thus its immortality), Plotinus polemically describes Aristotelian entelechy as a mere configuration of the body.²⁷ This allows him to claim, by contrast, that only the Platonic definition of the soul is capable of making the soul into a genuine substance (*ousia*), that is as a simple and impassive reality, possessing its own life and existence, independently of the body.²⁸ Thus, he can conclude that

²² On the reception of the *harmonia* model by Alexander, cf. Castelli (2021).

²³ The indication given in *PE* 13.17.7 (Ταῦτά μοι ἀπὸ τῶν Σευήρου τοῦ Πλατωνικοῦ Περί ψυχῆς προκείσθω) is rather vague and may refer to what Severus wrote about the Platonic soul. It can also be assumed that Severus composed a treatise *On the Soul* on the model of the Aristotle's or Alexander's *De Anima*. This would then have constituted a response to Alexander's position and a Platonic plea in favour of the unitary nature of the soul as an incorporeal and immortal reality, based on the *Phaedo*'s arguments. This hypothesis is all the more likely that the *Phaedo* is quoted by Eusebius in *PE* 11.27.6 under the designation "Περὶ ψυχῆς."

²⁴ See also *Enn.* II 9 (33) 5, 16–20. Emilsson (1994) 5336–7, following Deuse (1983) 104–5, has studied Severus' reworking of the Aristotelian lexicon of the faculties of the soul. He also points to a parallel between the method employed by Severus to demonstrate the simplicity of the soul in contrast to the compound nature of the bodies, and that developed by Plotinus at the beginning of *Enn.* IV 7 (2) 1–2.

²⁵ *Enn.* IV 7 (2) 8¹, 11–16.

²⁶ Arist. *De an.* II 1.412a21–22; II 2.414a21.

²⁷ *Enn.* IV 7 (2) 8⁵, 2–9.

²⁸ *Enn.* IV 7 (2) 9.

everything which is dissoluble has come into existence by being put together, and is naturally liable to be disintegrated in the same way in which it was put together. But the soul is a single and simple nature which has actual existence in its living; it cannot then be destroyed in this way.²⁹

In *PE* 13.17, Severus opposes to the non-composite nature of the soul the nature of bodies which are liable to dissolution. The text indicates then that when, in time, a separation of the parts takes place, each element regains its *oikeia physis*.³⁰ This formula echoes the Aristotelian doctrine of natural place,³¹ but Severus rewrites and adapts it in a Platonic context. The elements do not return to their natural “place”, but rather regain their own natural state. Severus goes on to indicate that “all things in the world have been arranged by God out of the nature of these opposites”, the Demiurge having “impressed upon them friendship and concord (φιλίαν αὐτοῖς καὶ κοινωνίαν ἐμποίησαντος αὐτοῦ).”³² By linking together the opposing elements, the Demiurge expresses his good will, in virtue of which the world – which is dissoluble in itself – remains indissoluble (and perpetually safe).³³ The question of the motion the elements, which is to be found at *PE* 13.17.2, is at the heart of Severus’ commentary on *Tim.* 30a, which contains an in-depth analysis of the disorderly motion of the primary bodies that is deeply indebted to Aristotle’s discussions on the status of privation.

2 The Use of Aristotelian Concepts in the Exegesis of *Tim.* 30a

In §§87–95 of the *PM*, Severus is presented as having developed an interpretation of *Tim.* 30a that paved the way for Plotinus and Porphyry. It consists in distinguishing two logical phases in the demiurgic productive activity: one in which matter is informed, the other in which the primary bodies are brought into order.³⁴ What is at issue in this doxography, for Porphyry, is to stress the difference between the

²⁹ *Enn.* IV 7 (2) 12, 12–15. Transl. A.-H. Armstrong.

³⁰ *PE* 13.17.1. On this point, see Boys-Stones (2018) 194.

³¹ Arist. *Phys.* IV 1.208b8–22. It is worth noting that Plutarch, in the *De facie* (927A–D), developed a Platonic theory of natural place, within the context of the anti-Stoic polemics: for each element its natural place is where the demiurge has determined it to be. For more on this, see Opsomer (2017). I am indebted to an anonymous reader for this suggestion.

³² *PE* 13.17.2. Transl. E. H. Gifford slightly modified.

³³ Procl. *In Tim.* III 212, 6–11.

³⁴ This interpretation runs all the way to Proclus, who mentions it and makes it his own in *In Tim.* I 382, 12–383, 9.

informing of matter, by means of which the bodies are produced, and the ordering of bodies, by means of which the universe is generated. Porphyry contrasts Severus' interpretation to that of Atticus, who claims that in this section Plato explains how the Demiurge, who contemplates the Forms, takes over the pre-cosmic matter moved by an irrational soul and brings it into order.³⁵ This opposition between two readings of *Tim.* 30a is seen by Porphyry as representative of two very different methods of interpreting Plato's texts.³⁶

Atticus is a deeply anti-Aristotelian author, who opposes the tendency to harmonise the doctrines of Plato and Aristotle that emerged in the 2nd century AD. On his account, Plato "sets out with complete clarity of expression"³⁷ in *Tim.* 30a that the world was generated when the Demiurge took hold of the disorderly matter. He rejects Aristotle's claim that the world is ungenerated, a claim that went hand in hand with the rejection of divine providence understood as benevolent intervention.³⁸ Thus, in Atticus' eyes, Aristotle's doctrine was fundamentally incompatible with Plato's position, as is obvious to every exegete who is able to grasp the high clarity of the *Timaeus* passage relating to the *kosmopoiesis*. Another distinctive feature of his exegesis consists of "clinging tenaciously"³⁹ to the wording (*lexis*) of the Platonic texts: Proclus thus reports that Atticus played on the Platonic use of the past tense to indicate that what the Demiurge takes over is matter and not bodies. Indeed, claiming that Plato, in *Tim.* 28b, identifies what is visible with the generated bodily nature, Atticus points out that in *Tim.* 30a3–5, Plato speaks about "all that *was* visible, moving in a discordant and disorderly fashion" – and not about all that *is* visible.⁴⁰ Hence, according to Atticus, what this section is discussing is an ungenerated reality, namely pre-cosmic matter, whose motion is caused by the soul.

Porphyry, by contrast, denies that matter, which is indeterminate and inanimate, could be in motion. In claiming that, in *Tim.* 30a, Plato deals with the pre-cosmic motion of matter, Atticus fails to differentiate between the level of bodies and that of matter.⁴¹ More generally, the question of the soul as cause of the chaotic movement of pre-cosmic matter is at the heart of Porphyry's polemic against Atticus: on the one hand, Porphyry stresses that the soul, as a divine entity, can never be irrational and, on the other hand, points out that matter, which is absolutely indeterminate, can never be set in motion. Thus, in the *PM*, Atticus'

³⁵ *PM* 73–75. On this point, see Michalewski (2020).

³⁶ *PM* 86–87.

³⁷ *PE* 15.6.3.

³⁸ *PE* 15.5.

³⁹ Procl. *In Tim.* I 381, 26–27.

⁴⁰ Procl. *In Tim.* I 284, 6–14.

⁴¹ *PM* 86.

interpretation of *Tim.* 30a is opposed, from §87 onwards, to that of Severus, who distinguishes the informing of matter, through which bodies are constituted, from the ordering of natural bodies, through which the universe is produced.

By assigning motion to the primary bodies rather than to matter, Severus attributes it to an entity that has already received a determination. In the pre-cosmic state of the world, there is no chaos, but rather a mere absence of order. To provide support to the distinction between chaos and privation of order, Severus relies on Aristotelian developments concerning the contraries that have intermediaries,⁴² which he adapts in an original way to the interpretation of *Tim.* 30a. *PM* 92 thus provides a discussion of the privative aspect of the prefix α -in the term ἀτάκτως (*Tim.* 30a3), which is indebted to the analyses conducted by Aristotle in *Metaphysics*, Book five,⁴³ according to which privation designates, among other, an intermediary state between the perfect possession of a quality and its complete absence. It is in this sense that “not everyone is good or bad, or just or unjust, but there is also the middle state.” But Severus inserts the topic of the intermediate character of privation into a broader cosmological framework, in order to develop an interpretation of the un-ordered state of the pre-cosmic elements.

The disorder in them should be understood as privation of order, as if they have yet partaken neither in the order which was due to them and to the world nor in the disturbance and confusion which are contrary to order in potentiality and in kind and which are the beginning of evil.⁴⁴

Recalling the case of contrary qualities that can have intermediaries, Severus takes the examples of beauty or order, which do not merely have opposites, i.e. ugliness and disorder, but also intermediate states that lie between the two extremes. Pointing out that a “non-beautiful” thing is not necessarily ugly, but can simply be bereft of beauty, Severus indicates that also in the case of what is “un-ordered,” there are intermediate states between order and chaos.

Now, we must understand that all those things that are said by the way of privation and negation – e.g., ‘unattractive’, ‘unseen’, ‘unordered’, and all the like – either signify to a greater extent something contrary or that which is intermediate to the extremes. Thus, when we say ‘unattractive’, sometimes we denote the ugly, and sometimes the intermediate to the ugly and the beautiful. [92] Similarly with the terms ‘unseen’ and ‘unordered’, we do not always designate the contrary or the opposite, but sometimes the intermediate to them. For when a bunch of plants is intended to be planted in some order, we also call them unordered,

⁴² Arist. *Metaph.* I 7.1057 a18–b34; *Cat.* 10.12a20–25.

⁴³ Arist. *Metaph.* Δ 22.1022b30–1023a7. The use of *Metaphysics*, Book Δ, especially in the context of Platonic exegesis, is already seen in the writings of the pseudo-Pythagorean Archytas *On the Opposites*. On this point, cf. Ulacco (2017) 13, 79.

⁴⁴ *PM* 90.

not because they possess disturbance and confusion, but because they do not yet possess the order which they acquire when being planted.⁴⁵

This series of examples aims to show several things: first of all, that the privation of order characteristic of the pre-cosmic motion is not a state contrary to order, but rather an intermediate state between chaos and order. Next, it shows that if the motion of these bodies is said to be “deprived of order”, this is with reference to the ordering project of God. This interpretation of the nature of the disorder of the primary bodies exhibits certain similarities with that of Porphyry,⁴⁶ even if Severus understands the anteriority of disorder with respect to order in a temporal sense.⁴⁷

Moreover, the discovery of this new testimony relating to Severus allows us to confirm the hypothesis of M. Baltes, J. Dillon and A. Gioè,⁴⁸ according to which the formula “the world in absolute terms (κόσμος ἀπλῶς)” – which is at issue in Severus’ interpretation of *Tim.* 28b as reported by Proclus⁴⁹ – designates all of the elements in the pre-cosmic state, in opposition to the generated world (γενητός οὖν ὁ κόσμος). The adverb ἀπλῶς would thus be taken to refer to the original state of the elements, namely a state in which they move in an un-ordered way, before the Demiurge gave them order and proportion.

3 Severus and its Legacy

The analysis of this testimony enables us to discern more clearly the place that Porphyry attributes to Severus in the landscape of imperial Platonism.⁵⁰ As *PM* 95 indicates, the analysis of the nature of the disorder of the primary bodies in *Tim.* 30a serves as a dividing line in the Middle Platonic tradition between those who adhere to a literal reading of Plato, adopting, like Atticus’ disciples, the methods of grammarians and lexicographers, and those who, like Severus, pave the way for Plotinus’ interpretation. This indication is all the more valuable given that the *Enneads* provide little information about how Plotinus himself might have interpreted *Tim.* 30a.

⁴⁵ *PM* 91–92.

⁴⁶ Procl. *In Tim.* I 394, 25–31; Philop. *Aet. mun.* VI 164, 18–165, 16; *PM* 86–95.

⁴⁷ Procl. *In Tim.* I 289, 7–9.

⁴⁸ Baltes (1976) 104; Dillon (1996) 262; Gioè (2002) 408.

⁴⁹ Procl. *In Tim.* I 289, 7–9: “Let us examine Severus, who says that in absolute terms the cosmos is everlasting, but that the present one which moves in the way it does is generated (ἐπισκεψώμεθα Σευήρον, ὃς φησιν ἀπλῶς μὲν αἰδίον εἶναι τὸν κόσμον, τοῦτον δὲ τὸν νῦν ὄντα καὶ οὕτως κινούμενον γενητόν).”

⁵⁰ *PM* 94–95.

In referring to Plotinus as the intermediary link between Severus and himself, Porphyry reveals not only what his doctrine concerning the motion of bodies owes to his predecessors, but also indicates that critical discussion of the *Timaeus* was a fundamental component in Plotinus' oral teaching. This aspect is, however, scarcely visible in the *Enneads*. Only a handful of allusions – notably at the beginning of *Enn.* I 8 (51) 4 – make reference to this section of the *Timaeus*. The context of chapter 4 is that of a demonstration that aims to show that neither the evil that exists in bodies nor that which exists in the soul is the primal evil.

The nature of bodies, in so far as it participates in matter, will be an evil, not the primal evil. For bodies have a sort of form which is not true form, and they are deprived of life, and in their disorderly motion, they destroy each other.⁵¹

Only the mention of a motion deprived of order, proper to the primary bodies, contains an allusion to *Tim.* 30a. Plotinus makes clear that the nature of bodies does not possess a “true form” and that it is “deprived of life”: in other words, the nature of bodies, in itself, is neither ordered, nor living, nor really determined. Life, order and determination come from the soul, and bodies only participate in them to the extent to which they depend on the soul. The sentence indicates that disorder is a characteristic inherent in the nature of bodies.⁵² J. Phillips, taking the expression “not true form” as a reference to the “traces” in *Tim.* 53b, attributes to Plotinus the doctrine that there is a first participation of matter in the images of the Forms, which is responsible for the disordered motion – a doctrine which is comparable to the one subsequently developed by Proclus.⁵³ However Plotinus speaks of the “nature of bodies” as it is in itself, before passing on, in the following sentence, to examine the nature of the soul. This suggests that Plotinus is thinking here not of a proto-constitution of bodies,⁵⁴ but, more generally, of the state of bodies when considered separately from the soul.

This question calls for a more extensive discussion, which I intend to undertake in a further study. For the moment, I would simply like to suggest the following. Porphyry considers *Tim.* 30a to be a passage whose interpretation separates out two streams of Platonists: those who, like Atticus or Longinus, incorrectly hold that what is at issue is a disorderly pre-cosmic matter, and those who have understood that the passage concerns the un-ordered motion of bodies. *PM* 95 indicates that Severus and Plotinus anticipate Porphyry's interpretation of *Tim.* 30a. That said, if Plotinus discussed the Middle Platonic exegeses of *Tim.* 30a

⁵¹ *Enn.* I 8 (51) 4, 2–4. Transl. A.-H. Armstrong.

⁵² Kalligas (2014) 230.

⁵³ Phillips (2008) 117–21.

⁵⁴ Jourdan (2010) 223–4.

in his seminars and had confronted the theses of Severus and Atticus by opposing them to each other – as can be deduced from a parallel reading of the *Vita Plotini* (*VP*)⁵⁵ and *PM* 95 – he makes almost no mention of it in his treatises. This silence can be explained by a deliberate reluctance on the part of Plotinus to take a position on these debates, which are linked to the artificialist model of divine causality.

In light of the foregoing analyses, we may conclude that the recent edition of Porphyry's doxography enables us to substantially refine and correct the prevailing interpretation, according to which Severus was a Platonist who was essentially influenced by Stoicism. As an exegete commenting on those sections he deems philosophically important, Severus relies on a critical appropriation of both Stoic and Peripatetic doctrines to carry out his analyses. This method is at work in passage quoted in *PE* 13.17, where Severus alludes both to Middle Platonic and Peripatetic discussions about the composition of the soul, in order to defend the unity of the soul and its complete impassivity – adopting a perspective that was subsequently taken up by Plotinus. That said, the reappropriation of Aristotelian elements is also at the heart of Severus' doctrine of the motion of bodies. Thus, on the path leading to a fully correct exegesis of *Tim.* 30a, Severus⁵⁶ represents, in Porphyry's eyes, an important step: to be sure, he does not yet perfectly attain the exegetical level of Plotinus, insofar as he considers the present world "which moves in the way it does"⁵⁷ to have really been generated. At the same time, he is right to use the Aristotelian distinction between opposite and privation to say that, in *Tim.* 30a, what is at issue is the privation of order in the primary bodies. He thus opens the way to an interpretation of the *Timaeus* that opposes exegetes such as Atticus or Longinus who, in refusing to endorse an alliance between the Peripatetics and Platonism, remain at a more literary than philosophical level in their reading of Plato.

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55 Porph. *VP* 14, 10–14.

56 *PM* 87.

57 Procl. *In Tim.* I 289, 9.

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A proposito di Giovanni Filopono cristiano e gli studi di Étienne Évrard

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Abstract: The studies of É. Évrard, recently published by M.-A. Gavray (2020), are high quality works which allow to immerse oneself in the context of the Platonic-Aristotelian school of Alexandria in Egypt throughout the sixth century AD. They mostly focus on the figure and work of Joannes Philoponus, with specific attention to the compositional technique of his *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* and of *On the Eternity of the World against Aristotle*. Despite being strongly critical of the Stagirite on some points, also due to his Christian faith (as with regard to the eternity of the world, which he denies), Philoponus deeply assimilated Aristotelian methods, lexicon and concepts. He therefore uses this legacy in his commentary on the first chapter of the biblical text of the book of *Genesis* on the creation of the universe, of living species and of the human being (better known with the Latin title *De opificio mundi*). This work by Philoponus provides a first example of Christian Aristotelianism before the well-known one of the medieval Scholasticism.

Keywords: Joannes Philoponus, Aristotelian exegesis, Biblical exegesis, Christian Aristotelianism, Neoplatonic school of Alexandria in Egypt

1 Introduzione

Marc-Antoine Gavray ha recentemente pubblicato gli studi, editi e inediti, che lo studioso belga Étienne Évrard (1921–2009) ha dedicato al platonismo alessandrino della tarda antichità e, in particolare, a Giovanni Filopono (V–VI sec. d.C.): *Études philoponiennes. Philosophes à l'École d'Alexandrie*. Textes d'Étienne Évrard. Réunis et édités, avec un supplément bibliographique, par Marc-Antoine Gavray. Préface de Jean Meyers, Liège: Presses Universitaires de Liège, 2020. Si tratta di sei lavori, di cui due – i più sostanziosi – vengono qui pubblicati per la prima volta, mi riferisco alla tesi di dottorato in filologia classica discussa da Évrard presso l'Università di Liegi nel 1957, che ha per titolo “L'École d'Olympiodore et la composition du Commentaire à la *Physique* de Jean Philopon”, riportata nel volume alle pp. 71–195; e alla tesi di laurea rielaborata e premiata dall'Accademia

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regia del Belgio nel 1961 “Jean Philopon, *Contre Aristote*. Fragments des livres I et II”, che occupa nel volume le pp. 197–332.¹ Gli altri lavori sono degli articoli pubblicati rispettivamente nel 1953, 1965, 1985 e 1996, a dimostrazione del costante interesse che il filologo e latinista belga nutrì per la scuola platonico-aristotelica di Alessandria d’Egitto tra il VI e il VII sec. d.C. e, in particolare, alla figura di Giovanni Filopono, concentrandosi intorno ai temi dell’eternità del mondo nel contesto alessandrino di un dialogo/confronto tra paganesimo e cristianesimo.²

2 Il profilo cristiano di Filopono e le fasi della sua produzione

Évrard ha ritenuto, contro la ricostruzione di A. Gudeman,³ che Giovanni Filopono sia stato cristiano da sempre e, quindi, non abbia conosciuto alcuna conversione al cristianesimo in età adulta.⁴ Questa prospettiva permette di considerare in modo unitario la produzione di Filopono senza dovervi inserire una frattura tra un ‘primo’ e un ‘secondo’ Filopono. Naturalmente ciò non significa che nella lunga produzione filosofico-esegetica dell’Alessandrino non ci siano stati sviluppi, e anche svolte, ma non in virtù di una sua tarda conversione al cristianesimo di cui – del resto – nessuna fonte antica ci trasmette notizia. Évrard pone l’esistenza di Filopono nell’arco di tempo che va dal 480 circa al 570 circa d.C., collocandolo nel contesto della scuola platonico-aristotelica di Alessandria d’Egitto, dove Ammonio – figlio di Ermia e discepolo di Proclo ad Atene – esercitava il suo magistero ed ebbe come discepoli Damascio, Filopono, Asclepio, Simplicio ed Olimpiodoro.⁵ Il suo insegnamento consisteva, per lo più, in una lettura e in un commento dei trattati aristotelici in un momento storico in cui la filosofia greca ‘pagana’

1 L’originale della tesi di laurea, redatta nel 1942–1943 per l’Università di Liegi, è andato perduto (cfr. Évrard 2020, 19).

2 Gli articoli in questione sono: Évrard (1953), (1965), (1985), (1996) per cui si veda la Bibliografia finale in questo articolo.

3 Cfr. Gudeman (1916). Lo studioso belga confuta lungamente Gudeman in Évrard (1953).

4 Recentemente K. Verrycken ha riproposto la tesi di una conversione in età adulta di Filopono al cristianesimo con relativa svolta nella sua produzione filosofica e teologica, cfr. Verrycken (1990) e (2010). Ad esempio, se si prende il *Commentario alla Fisica* di Filopono, Verrycken ritiene che solo la sua prima versione risalga al 517 d.C., mentre una seconda versione (o anche ulteriori revisioni) sia posteriore e consista nell’aver introdotto passi che contestano l’eternità del mondo e presentano concezioni diverse sul luogo e sull’esistenza del vuoto (cfr. Verrycken 2010, 736–7).

5 La più ampia discussione cronologica della vita e delle opere di Filopono da parte di Évrard si trova in Évrard (2020) 199–214.

conviveva con l'ormai maggioritario cristianesimo. In tal senso la figura stessa di Filopono è emblematica. Egli è parimenti intriso di platonismo e aristotelismo, da una parte, e di fede cristiana, dall'altra. Queste due componenti, sempre presenti, ricevono enfasi diversa nella produzione di Filopono che, per decenni, si dedica dapprima a trascrivere le lezioni del maestro Ammonio e a comporre in prima persona dei commentari ad opere aristoteliche; mentre, successivamente, si adopera a mettere a confronto – in modo a volte polemico, ma non sempre – la filosofia greca e la cosmogonia biblica mosaica.

Évrard individua così un primo gruppo di opere, ovvero di commentari aristotelici, di Filopono secondo il seguente ordine interno: commentari alle *Categorie*, agli *Analitici primi* e *Analitici secondi*, al *De anima*, alla *Fisica* (517 d.C.), al *De generatione et corruptione*, ai *Metereologici*. Évrard distingue un secondo gruppo di opere, d'ispirazione filosofico-teologica, costituito da: *Sull'eternità del mondo contro Proclo* (529 d.C.), *Sull'eternità del mondo contro Aristotele*, *Sulla creazione del mondo secondo il racconto mosaico* (scritto più noto con il titolo latino di *De opificio mundi*, 557–560 d.C.).⁶

La datazione precisa della vita e delle opere di Filopono è oscillante secondo le proposte cronologiche dei vari studiosi che se ne sono occupati,⁷ ma due date sono certe perché basate su espliciti riferimenti storici dello stesso Autore antico: ovvero il 517 d.C. per il commentario alla *Fisica*⁸ e il 529 d.C. per il *Contro Proclo*,⁹ anno quest'ultimo capitale – com'è noto – per l'editto dell'imperatore Giustiniano che pose fine all'insegnamento filosofico impartito presso la scuola di Atene al tempo dello scolarcato di Damascio, scuola dove avevano studiato e/o insegnato Plutarco di Atene, Siriano, Ermia e Proclo appunto.

3 La tecnica esegetica di Filopono nel commentario alla *Fisica*

Nella sua tesi di dottorato (1957) Évrard compie uno studio magistrale (che, per la sua qualità, non si può in alcun modo dire 'datato') sulla tecnica esegetica di Filopono, verificata sul testo del commentario alla *Fisica*. Évrard ivi anticipa a

⁶ Altri propongono per il *De opificio mundi* una datazione più alta, ovvero precedente al 553 d.C.: si tratta di Wolska (1962) e di Schamp (2000). Il *Commentario all'Introduzione aritmetica di Nicomaco di Gerasa* per Évrard si colloca dopo il 529 d.C. Su quest'opera si veda Giardina (1999).

⁷ Un quadro completo dello *status quaestionis* con i relativi riferimenti bibliografici si trova in Giardina (2012).

⁸ Cfr. Philop. *In Phys.* 703, 16–17.

⁹ Cfr. Philop. *CP* 579, 14–15.

Filopono un procedimento esegetico ben strutturato che, prima dello studioso belga, veniva invece rintracciato solo a partire dai più tardi commentari di Olimpidoro. Anzi Évrard arriva a mettere in dubbio l'esistenza stessa di una scuola di Olimpidoro.¹⁰

Tale tecnica di commento è così descritta: il testo di ogni libro della *Fisica* aristotelica viene articolato in pericopi, ad esempio il libro II (su cui si concentra lo studio insieme al libro III) è scandito in nove pericopi, per cui un attuale capitolo nell'edizione di I. Bekker è distribuito su una, due o tre pericopi a seconda dei casi. Ogni pericope è una sezione argomentativa dotata di senso e viene sottoposta a spiegazione, la quale ultima si articola in una prima esegesi teorica complessiva e poi in un dettagliato esame letterale. Da qui l'impressione che Filopono torni due volte sullo stesso testo aristotelico.¹¹ Évrard mostra come varie lezioni (costituite appunto di esegesi speculativa e minuta) siano raggruppabili in unità maggiori, ovvero le sezioni.¹²

Qui si dispiega tutta la maestria filologica di Évrard e la sua estrema padronanza del testo greco. Tale competenza non è mai disgiunta da lucidità teoretica e da una grande capacità di cogliere l'andamento dialettico dell'esegesi filoponiana.

4 Il *Contro Aristotele* e la polemica sull'eternità del mondo

Il volume edito da M.-A. Gavray ha anche il grande merito di aver pubblicato per la prima volta la tesi di laurea di Évrard, premiata dall'Accademia reale del Belgio (1961) ed elaborata sotto la supervisione di Marcel De Corte, che trasmise all'allievo l'impulso di studiare Filopono.¹³ Essa costituisce uno studio a 360 gradi dell'opera polemica di Filopono *Sull'eternità del mondo contro Aristotele*. L'opera viene, infatti, non solo introdotta e descritta, ma anche edita con un apparato critico, è provvista di una traduzione dal greco al francese, infine commentata. Non si pensi che si tratti ormai di una fatica inutile e tardiva dopo la pubblicazione nel 1987 di:

¹⁰ Cfr. Évrard (2020) 167–8.

¹¹ Vale la pena notare che, poiché questo modo di procedere si trova anche in Asclepio, nel *Commentario alla Metafisica* che è scritto *apo phones* dal maestro Ammonio, esso risalga al maestro di entrambi (Filopono ed Asclepio) ovvero ad Ammonio. Per Asclepio e la sua tecnica esegetica si veda Cardullo (2012) in particolare 75–83.

¹² Si veda lo schema riassuntivo elaborato da Évrard (2020) 126 per il libro II della *Fisica*, e (2020) 147 per il libro III.

¹³ Ricordiamo che M. De Corte aveva pubblicato nel (1934) lo studio: *Le Commentaire de Jean Philopon sur le troisième livre du Traité de l'âme d'Aristote*.

Philoponus. Against Aristotle on the Eternity of the World. Translated by Christian Wildberg, che pure ha avuto il merito di far conoscere ad un pubblico più ampio tale scritto di Filopono all'interno della serie *Ancient Commentators on Aristotle* edita da R. Sorabji.¹⁴ Com'è noto, infatti, tale serie non fornisce il testo greco, bensì la sua traduzione inglese con una breve introduzione e note succinte. Diversamente, quanto troviamo nel *Contro Aristotele* a cura di Évrard ha tutt'altro tenore e meriterebbe di essere pubblicato a parte come edizione commentata a sé dello scritto filoponiano.

Ricordiamo che non conserviamo l'originale, ma una serie di frammenti tratti principalmente dai commentari di Simplicio al *De caelo* e alla *Fisica*. Il testo greco vi è riprodotto da Évrard seguendo una serie meditata di criteri per distinguere le citazioni letterali dell'opera di Filopono dalle mere restituzioni parafrastiche o riassuntive. Al testo greco si accompagna un apparato critico delle fonti, in cui sono di volta in volta indicati i passi aristotelici con cui Filopono si confronta (essenzialmente i primi capitoli del libro I del *De caelo*), o passi dal *Timeo* di Platone, nonché passi dagli interpreti aristotelici Senarco, Alessandro di Afrodisia e Temistio a cui Filopono si ispira. È così possibile cogliere già con un primo colpo d'occhio tutta la maestria di Filopono (restituita da Évrard), quale profondo conoscitore non solo di Aristotele, ma anche dei suoi critici e dei suoi commentatori. A Senarco e Temistio infatti Filopono si rifà per le loro obiezioni – che condivide – contro l'esistenza dell'etere. Segue un apparato delle varianti positivo, che indica sia i manoscritti che riportano la lezione adottata nel testo edito sia i manoscritti portatori di varianti. Quindi è proposta una traduzione francese tanto vicina all'originale greco quanto limpida. Ogni frammento filoponiano è accompagnato da un commento che, tra l'altro, cerca di situare il passo all'interno di quella che verosimilmente poteva essere la struttura originale del *Contro Aristotele*. Viene fornita inoltre la spiegazione puntuale di alcuni termini o espressioni nel greco, si offre un'analisi non solo del contenuto del frammento, ma anche del suo andamento argomentativo e dello stile dialettico, cosa quest'ultima che – personalmente – ho molto apprezzato.

Nel *Contro Aristotele* Filopono contesta l'esistenza dell'etere come componente del mondo sovralunare e sostiene che i cieli, al contrario, siano costituiti dai quattro elementi tradizionali e propri del mondo sublunare (terra, acqua, aria e fuoco), con prevalenza del fuoco, il quale è un fuoco celeste che illumina senza bruciare. Inoltre Filopono vi sostiene la naturalità del movimento circolare della sfera sublunare del

¹⁴ Wildberg menziona una volta lo studio di Évrard in una nota: "My own reconstruction of the fragments of the first book of the *contra Aristotelem* agrees largely with the one proposed by É. Évrard, *Philopon, Contre Aristote, livre I*. Mémoire de licence, Université de Liège (unpublished typescript)", in Wildberg (1987) 28 n. 51. Tale testo – lo ricordiamo – è ormai perduto (cfr. Évrard 2020, 11–2).

fuoco e della parte superiore dell'aria. Per Filopono si tratterebbe, infatti, di un moto circolare naturale, e non contro natura, rispetto al moto rettilineo verso l'alto delle parti di aria e fuoco, quando sono distaccate dal grosso delle loro masse e tendono a ricongiungersi ad esse nei loro luoghi propri in alto. Évrard nota anche come a tal proposito Filopono prenda le distanze contemporaneamente da altri Neoplatonici che sostenevano che il moto rotatorio di aria e fuoco nell'estremità superiore della sfera sublunare non fosse naturale, bensì sovranaturale.

Nel *Contro Aristotele* inoltre è ben presente il tema per cui, se il mondo sovralunare è composto degli stessi elementi del mondo sottolunare, allora – come gli enti che abitano quest'ultimo – anch'esso è soggetto a corruzione. Si vede infatti – come ben messo in evidenza da Évrard – lo stretto legame per Filopono tra, da una parte, la polemica contro la composizione dei cieli a base di etere, considerato da Aristotele – a differenza dei quattro elementi sublunari – come impassibile e, quindi, incorruttibile; e, dall'altra parte, la tesi della corruttibilità del mondo che, come ha avuto un inizio nel tempo, così avrà una fine nel tempo, quando sembrerà opportuno al suo Creatore. Nel contestare l'esistenza dell'etere, oltre a rifarsi a precedenti pensatori che avevano espresso dubbi al riguardo del quinto elemento (in particolare Senarco e Temistio), Filopono si appella anche all'autorità del *Timeo* platonico per la composizione ignea dei corpi celesti.¹⁵

Nel *Contro Aristotele* Filopono avanza anche la tesi che il mondo, possedendo un corpo, non possa che avere una *dynamis* limitata, per cui sarebbe incapace di muoversi in eterno. Ulteriore argomento questo a favore della corruttibilità dell'universo.

Évrard non tratta, essendosi fermato – come si diceva – al III libro del *Contro Aristotele*, di quelle parti dell'opera in cui Filopono afferma a chiare lettere che il Demiurgo non solo ha dato origine nel tempo ad un universo corruttibile, ma che lo ha prodotto a partire dal non-essere, operando la cosiddetta *creatio ex nihilo* che – lo ricordiamo – non si affermò da subito negli autori cristiani dei primi secoli e appare piuttosto come un esito codificato tardivamente.¹⁶ In altri termini, contravvenendo al principio parmenideo per cui dal non-essere non può nascere nulla, Filopono afferma invece che il Creatore ha dato esistenza sia alla forma sia alla materia di tutti gli enti sensibili. Abbiamo qui un Creatore, quello biblico, che si differenzia dal Demiurgo del *Timeo* platonico nella misura in cui quest'ultimo –

¹⁵ Cfr. Plat. *Tim.* 40a3.

¹⁶ L'idea di una *creatio ex nihilo* comincia a farsi timidamente strada a partire dall'apologetica cristiana della seconda metà del II sec. d.C. con Taziano e Teofilo, quindi viene chiaramente affermata da Ireneo di Poitiers (IV sec. d.C.). Tuttavia molti autori cristiani continuarono a credere in una materia preesistente, cfr. Moreschini (2005) 78, 82, 85–6. Lo stesso Agostino per lungo tempo non mise in discussione l'eternità della materia prima di arrivare, in seguito, a professare e ad approfondire il concetto di *creatio ex nihilo*, cfr. *ibid.* 440–1.

com'è noto – si limita a plasmare una materia preesistente facendola passare dal disordine all'ordine.¹⁷

Insomma il lettore trova tutto quello di cui ha bisogno per uno studio approfondito e lucido del *Contro Aristotele*, per cui si rimpiange ancor più il fatto che Évrard si sia fermato a commentare solo i frammenti dei libri I, II e parte del III.¹⁸ Lo studioso belga riconosceva che l'opera contava di 6 libri.¹⁹ Notiamo che Gavray ha opportunamente corredato il lavoro di Évrard con una tabella di corrispondenze tra la numerazione dei frammenti filoponiani nell'edizione dello studioso belga e quella nella traduzione inglese di Wildberg.²⁰

5 Il *De opificio mundi* all'interno del gruppo delle opere filosofico-teologiche

Évrard fa notare che il *Contro Proclo* precede il *Contro Aristotele*, che completa quanto lasciato in sospeso e promesso nel primo. Simplicio non lesse il *Contro Proclo*, mentre lesse il *Contro Aristotele*, che volle confutare. Per Évrard il *De opificio mundi* chiude la triade delle opere filosofico-teologiche, pur collocandosi ben più tardi cronologicamente (557–560 d.C.) rispetto ai due suddetti trattati polemici.²¹ A più riprese Évrard segnala, sebbene molto sinteticamente, dei punti di contatto in termini di temi affrontati e di tecnica esegetica tra il *Contro Aristotele* e il *De opificio mundi*.²² Ora noi vorremmo prendere le mosse proprio da questi paralleli per compiere degli approfondimenti a proposito del *De opificio mundi*, opera a nostro avviso tanto poco nota quanto culturalmente potente, essendo il documento antico e raro di un aristotelismo cristiano prima della stagione della Scolastica medievale.²³

17 Cfr. *Tim.* 30a3–6. Nella traduzione inglese sono, invece, raccolti i numerosi passi pertinenti questo tema e presenti soprattutto nei libri IV e VI del *Contro Aristotele*.

18 Cfr. Évrard (2020) 331.

19 Ricordiamo che C. Wildberg, in base a fonti arabe, ha indicato che il *Contro Aristotele* constava di almeno otto libri, dei cui frammenti superstiti fornisce quindi una traduzione inglese completa. Cfr. anche Wildberg (2010²).

20 Évrard (2020) 333–4.

21 Se il *Contro Proclo* è del 529 d.C., il *Contro Aristotele* per Évrard si situa tra il 530 e il 535 d.C. (cfr. Évrard 2020, 212).

22 Cfr. in particolare “Jean Philopon, *Contre Aristotele*, Fragments des livres I et II”, in Évrard (2020) 212–4 e 231–3; “Philopon, la ténèbre originelle et la création du monde”, in Évrard (2020) 345–6.

23 Al riguardo ricordiamo l'ultimo lavoro di Évrard su Filopono: “Aristotele, Philopon, Simplicius et Thomas d'Aquin sur l'éternité du monde”. Cfr. Évrard (1996).

Infatti, nella metà del VI sec. d.C., ad Alessandria d’Egitto, Giovanni Filopono passa dal commentare dei trattati di Aristotele a commentare il testo biblico del libro della *Genesi*, primo capitolo, circa la creazione dell’universo, delle specie viventi e dell’essere umano. Egli porta con sé la tecnica esegetica, ormai consolidata da secoli presso le scuole neoplatoniche di Atene e di Alessandria tra V e VI sec. d.C. e messa all’opera sui testi di Platone e di Aristotele. In effetti è riscontrabile nel *De opificio mundi* di Filopono tutta la gamma della pratica esegetica filosofica neoplatonica, quale lo stabilire con precisione il testo dell’opera da commentare, la sua divisione in lemmi, l’esegesi articolata in una parafrasi letterale in cui si affrontano problemi grammaticali, semantici e sintattici, e in una interpretazione teoretica di più ampio respiro. Si indaga il tema e il fine dell’opera che si commenta (lo *skopos*), il profilo dell’autore (Mosè). La storia del commentario filosofico greco nella tarda antichità resterebbe – a nostro avviso – lacunosa se non si studiasse anche la continuità di metodo esegetico quando i testi spiegati non sono i dialoghi di Platone o i trattati di Aristotele, bensì un testo biblico che comunque andava ad affrontare dei temi sulla natura, l’essere umano e Dio, che riempivano anche i commentari su testi platonici, quali il *Timeo*, e aristotelici, quali il *De caelo* e la *Fisica* (in particolare il libro VIII).

Con la sintesi realizzata da Giovanni Filopono nel suo *De opificio mundi* siamo di fronte a un metodo noto che però produce un risultato nuovo. Filopono infatti parte aristotelicamente dall’assunto che bisogna “salvare i fenomeni”, ovvero rendere conto di tutti quegli enti ed eventi naturali che sono osservabili dall’essere umano tramite i sensi e che le ipotesi che si vanno a formulare debbano essere in accordo con i dati sensoriali ricavati dall’osservazione della natura. Pur in aperta polemica con Aristotele su alcuni punti – come si è visto –, egli nondimeno ne riprende la concezione di un universo sferico e geocentrico.

Ugualmente egli valorizza molto i risultati a cui sono arrivati in ambito astronomico gli astronomi greci Ipparco di Nicea (II sec. a.C.) e Claudio Tolomeo (II sec. d.C.), così come mostra di mettere a frutto importanti conoscenze geografiche. Come ci si poteva aspettare, interpreta il *Timeo* di Platone alla lettera (ma non è il primo a farlo) con il racconto ivi contenuto della produzione dell’universo da parte di un Demiurgo divino, poiché tale interpretazione letterale gli permette di sostenere che anche per Platone l’universo nella sua forma attuale ha avuto un inizio nel tempo ed è di per sé corruttibile, salvo la volontà del Demiurgo di non farlo corrompere. Ma il Demiurgo biblico, per Filopono, va al di là anche del Demiurgo platonico nella misura in cui procede ad una *creatio ex nihilo*. Il Dio di Mosè, infatti, crea tanto la materia quanto la forma degli enti sensibili, senza che né l’una né l’altra preesistano ad essi.²⁴ Non è un caso che la sintesi realizzata da

²⁴ Si veda la nota 16.

Giovanni Filopono abbia visto la luce in quella Alessandria d’Egitto che era un crocevia di popoli e di culture, nonché soprattutto sede di quella Biblioteca che racchiudeva i testi di tutte le scienze, la letteratura e la filosofia greche sin dalla loro origine. Ivi appunto si produsse un’importantissima – quanto purtroppo ai nostri giorni negletta – sintesi d’interculturalità, questa volta non solo tra la filosofia greca da una parte e la sapienza giudaica dall’altra, come era accaduto con Filone Alessandrino (I sec. a.C.–I sec. d.C.) nel suo *De opificio mundi*, ma anche con i contenuti e i valori della più recente fede cristiana.

6 La razionalità del racconto cosmogonico mosaico

Può essere utile a questo punto considerare alcuni esempi tratti dal *De opificio mundi* di Filopono che ne illustrano alcuni punti importanti e anche programmatici. In particolare i passi che vedremo evidenziano che:

- il racconto di Mosè, pur volto primariamente a portare gli uomini alla conoscenza di Dio, non ha nulla che sia in contrasto con i fenomeni naturali sensibili, con la ragione o con le scienze;
- anzi a Mosè si sarebbero ispirati tutti i successivi studiosi della natura, quando hanno fatto delle valide scoperte scientifiche.

Un’esemplificazione concreta del legame positivo tra la rivelazione e le scienze si trova nel cap. I 7 del *De opificio mundi*. Filopono mostra come Mosè abbia detto per rivelazione divina qualcosa che, poi, i celebri astronomi greci Ipparco di Nicea e Claudio Tolomeo avrebbero scoperto sulla base di alcune osservazioni empiriche e sulla scorta proprio del testo mosaico (così almeno crede Filopono per la mera anteriorità cronologica di Mosè rispetto ai Greci).²⁵ Trattasi dell’esistenza di una nona sfera celeste priva di astri, che sormonta e contiene quella (l’ottava) delle stelle fisse. Fino ad allora si credeva che la sfera delle stelle fisse (l’ottava) fosse la più esterna, il dato mosaico per cui ce ne sarebbe stata un’altra ancora più esterna e priva di stelle sembrava infondato, ma il tempo e illustri scienziati hanno dato ragione a Mosè e hanno confermato l’esistenza di detta nona sfera. Inoltre anche la forma sferica del firmamento (e, quindi, dell’universo) è un dato che già le Sacre Scritture avevano espresso e che gli astronomi illustri non hanno fatto altro che confermare.

²⁵ Del resto – com’è noto – già da Giustino si era fatta avanti nel mondo cristiano l’idea che Platone si fosse ispirato a Mosè per quanto riguarda le conoscenze scientifiche espresse nel *Timeo* (cfr. Giustino, *Apol.* I 59, 1).

Filopono, *De opificio mundi*, I 7, p. 16, 4–8 e 11–14 Reichardt (= p. 102, 14–17 e 20–23 Scholten):

τοσοῦτον δέ μοι καί μόνον δεδείχθω νῦν, [5] ὅτι **συμπεφωνήκασι** Μωϋσεῖ Πτολεμαῖος καί πρὸ αὐτοῦ Ἴππαρχος τὴν ἔξωθεν ἀπάντων σφαῖραν τὴν ἀναστρον ὑποθέμενοι. ἔξ αὐτοῦ δὲ μᾶλλον τῆς εὐρέσεως εἰλήφασι τὴν ἀρχήν. περὶ δὲ τοῦ σχήματος αὐτοῦ ὅτι σφαιρικὸν ἐν τοῖς περὶ τοῦ στερεώματος λόγοις εὐκαιρότερον δείξομεν, ὅτι καὶ τοῖς ἱεροῖς τοῦτο λογίσις δοκεῖ.

Ma tanto e solo questo sia da me mostrato ora, ovvero che **hanno concordato** con Mosè Tolomeo e – prima di lui – Ipparco per il fatto di aver posto l'esistenza della sfera priva di astri, che dall'esterno abbraccia tutto.

Anzi, piuttosto, <essi> hanno tratto da lui [*scil.* da Mosè] l'inizio della loro scoperta.

E riguardo alla sua [*scil.* del firmamento] forma, che cioè essa è sferica, lo mostreremo in un momento più opportuno quando tratteremo del firmamento, poiché questo punto [*scil.* la forma sferica del firmamento] è asserito anche dalla sacra rivelazione.²⁶

L'intento selettivo dell'esegesi citata emerge dal fatto che Filopono non si mostra interessato a una trattazione astronomica fine a se stessa circa l'esistenza di una nona sfera priva di astri, quale sfera più esterna di tutte. Egli ne tratta, pur con molta competenza,²⁷ solo per ricavare il dato di un accordo (*συμπεφωνήκασι*, l. 5) tra la scienza astronomica greca, qui rappresentata da Claudio Tolomeo e Ipparco di Nicea, e la rivelazione delle Sacre Scritture. L'esegeta alessandrino non si limita a mostrare il 'non disaccordo' di Mosè con la natura e le scienze greche come accade in altri passi,²⁸ ma afferma positivamente che due illustri astronomi greci risultano in accordo con Mosè.

L'ulteriore dato che viene messo in evidenza è quello di un accordo tra l'astronomia e le Sacre Scritture nel sostenere che il firmamento abbia forma sferica. Di nuovo si persegue una strategia concordista tra l'autorità della rivelazione giudaico-cristiana e i risultati scientifici dei Greci.

7 Il connubio di razionalità e aristotelismo nell'esegesi biblica e il precedente di Basilio

Agli occhi di Filopono, non solo il racconto di Mosè è razionale, ma lo è anche l'esegesi che egli ne fornisce, nella misura in cui anche il commentatore

²⁶ Il testo greco è tratto da Reichardt (1897). Il testo greco di questa edizione è stato ripreso da Scholten (1997) che lo ha corredato di una pregevole traduzione tedesca con note. Infine segnaliamo la traduzione francese, sempre sul testo di Reichardt, di Rosset (2004). Le presenti traduzioni italiane sono mie.

²⁷ Ricordiamo che Filopono fu autore di un trattato sull'astrolabio, cfr. Jarry (2015).

²⁸ Cfr. Philop. *De opificio mundi* I 2, 6, 14–24 Reichardt.

alessandrino rispetta i dati naturali sensibili, le opinioni umane largamente condivise, nonché gli usi linguistici, e si esprime tramite ragionamenti deduttivi. Filopono in questo tipo di esegesi razionale e colta riconosce nelle *Omèlie sull'Esamerone* di Basilio Magno (330–379 d.C.) il proprio precedente e modello. Ma, soprattutto, tale approccio razionalistico deriva a Filopono dalla sua approfondita conoscenza di Aristotele e dall'aver commentato per decenni le opere dello Stagirita.

Come spesso accade, tra un esegeta e il suo autore si instaura un rapporto 'a specchio', per cui il commentatore assume le stesse caratteristiche dell'autore che commenta. Anche nel nostro caso Filopono appare come l'*alter ego* di Mosè nel modo di affrontare le varie questioni.

Nei capitoli III 6 e 7, Filopono loda il fatto che Basilio nella sua spiegazione della *Genesi*, e in particolare della sfericità dell'universo e del suo moto circolare, rispetti i fenomeni sensibili e la logica dei ragionamenti. Basilio inoltre si mostra, su questi punti, in accordo con le prove fornite dagli scienziati greci.

Filopono, *De opificio mundi*, III 6, p. 120, 21–24; p. 121, 8–10 e 19–22; p. 122, 11–12 Reichardt (= p. 294, 9–12 e 21–23; p. 296, 3–7 e 20–22 Scholten):

Βασίλειος μὲν οὖν τοῖς φαινομένοις τε καὶ δεδειγμένοις ἀντιβλέπειν οὐκ ἀνεχόμενος κυκλωτέρῃ τε τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ κύκλῳ φέρεσθαι φανερώς ὁμολογεῖ λέγων οὕτω ...

Basilio allora, non tollerando di opporsi ai fenomeni sensibili e alle prove fornite [dagli astronomi], ammette chiaramente sia che il cielo è di forma sferica sia che si muove circolarmente, infatti così dice ...²⁹

Basilio nel suo *Esamerone* (da cui Filopono riporta varie citazioni alla lettera) aveva affermato con chiarezza due caratteristiche dell'universo: la sua forma sferica e il suo movimento circolare. Certo non si tratta di scoperte da parte di Basilio quanto di ammissioni, che comunque sono fatte a chiare lettere e che hanno il pregio di non essere in disaccordo né con quanto i sensi captano né con quanto gli scienziati affermano.

Ἄκριβεις τε εἶναι τὰς τηρήσεις αὐτῶν εἴρηκεν· οὐ τὰς ἀστρολογικὰς ἢ γενεθλιαλογικὰς ἄπαγε· αὐτὰι [10] γὰρ ψευδεῖς τε καὶ εἰς ἀσέβειαν ἄγουσιν ...

ἀκριβείς οὖν τηρήσεις οὐ τὰς ἀστρολο [20] γικὰς, ἀλλὰ τὰς ἀστρονομικὰς ὁ μέγας Βασίλειος εἴρηκεν, ὅσαι τὰς κινήσεις τῶν ἀστέρων κατενόησαν ἀκριβῶς προποδισμοῦς τε αὐτῶν καὶ ὑποποδισμοῦς ...

²⁹ Cfr. Basil. *Hex.* 1, 3.

E [Basilio] ha anche detto che le loro [scil. degli astronomi] osservazioni sono precise, non quelle condotte dall'astrologia o dall'oroscopia, lungi da lui! Queste ultime infatti sono false e conducono all'empietà ...³⁰

Dunque il Grande Basilio ha detto precise non le osservazioni astrologiche, bensì quelle astronomiche, quante esaminarono con precisione i movimenti degli astri, le progressioni e retrocessioni ... (p. 121, 8–10 e 19–22).

Basilio valorizza la precisione delle osservazioni astronomiche e mostra di saper ben distinguere una scienza autentica, quale l'astronomia, da una pseudo-scienza, quale l'astrologia, intesa come osservazione del cielo meramente a fini predittivi. L'astrologia, infatti, per Filopono conduce all'esito nefasto di azzerare la libera scelta degli uomini e, con essa, il sistema sociale dei premi in rapporto alle azioni virtuose e delle punizioni in rapporto a quelle malvagie. La polemica contro l'astrologia attraversa del resto lo stesso *De officio mundi* di Filopono ed è tanto aspra quanto l'esegeta ritiene che sia pericoloso, sia sul piano epistemico sia su quello etico, ricorrere agli oroscopi. Anche su questo punto, ovvero nel rigetto dell'astrologia, Filopono segue Basilio.

Basilio inoltre ha dettagliato le acquisizioni conoscitive a cui le osservazioni astronomiche (non astrologiche) portano: è grazie ad esse che si sono potuti capire i movimenti dei corpi celesti e distinguerne le varie tipologie (movimenti in avanti e retrogradi). Qui vediamo all'opera la fiducia di Basilio verso le scienze, il loro metodo di osservazione, i risultati conseguiti. Anche per questo Filopono vede nel Cappadoce il suo predecessore, di cui segue le orme. Insomma non vi è dubbio (si parla anzi di necessità) che l'universo sia una sfera che si muove circolarmente.

Ricordiamo inoltre che qui Filopono è in aperto contrasto con gli esegeti biblici della scuola cristiana di Antiochia, per cui l'universo era non di forma sferica, bensì a forma di tabernacolo.³¹

Basilio concorda con gli scienziati anche nel sostenere che al centro di detto universo circolare si trovi la terra.

συνομολογεῖ τε τῆ δόξει τῶν φυσικῶν ὅτι μέσην τοῦ παντός εἴληφε χώραν ἡ γῆ·

e [Basilio] concorda con quanto sostengono gli studiosi della natura, ovvero che la terra risulti al centro dell'universo (p. 122, 11–12).³²

Di nuovo sono ribadite quelle tesi cosmologiche che, già espresse nel testo mosaico debitamente interpretato, avevano trovato conferma nella scienza e nella filosofia greca. In particolare tali tesi sono quelle sostenute da Platone (*Timeo*) e da

30 Per la polemica contro l'astrologia Scholten *ad locum* rimanda a Basil. *Hex.* 1, 4 e, ancor più, a *Hex.* 6, 4–7.

31 Cfr. Rosset (2004) 7–8 e 298–300.

32 Cfr. Basil. *Hex.* 1, 10.

Aristotele (*De caelo*), e condivise da tutta la tradizione platonica e peripatetica, compreso Filopono stesso. Oltre al contenuto, l'attitudine di matrice aristotelica si riscontra sia in Basilio sia in Filopono nella misura in cui si arriva a tali risultati valorizzando l'osservazione dei fenomeni sensibili e mettendosi in continuità con una tradizione scientifica in grado di addurre prove.

Il gioco degli specchi è così ulteriormente arricchito, per cui risulta che (1) Dio ha creato un universo ordinato; (2) Mosè ha redatto un racconto ordinato della creazione divina; (3) Basilio ha fornito un'esegesi ordinata (razionale) del racconto mosaico; (4) Filopono ha, a sua volta, completato l'opera di un'esegesi ordinata (razionale) del dettato mosaico.

8 Conclusioni

Per Filopono la verità ha la forza di far convergere vari approcci conoscitivi: la rivelazione divina, la fede, l'osservazione dei fenomeni empirici, i risultati conseguiti dalla filosofia e dalle scienze. È questa quella *symphonia* che Filopono non si stanca di sottolineare nel suo *De opificio mundi*. L'Alessandrino realizza una nuova sintesi tra fede e ragione, nonché tra tradizioni culturali diverse: quella giudaica, quella greca e quella cristiana.

Se il concordismo è una tendenza importante nella tarda antichità, che si esplicava sia nella ricerca (a volte anche artificiosa e forzata) di un accordo tra Platone e Aristotele oppure tra platonismo e cristianesimo, con Filopono tale fenomeno assume un volto nuovo. L'Alessandrino, infatti, punta a realizzare una convergenza tra rivelazione giudaico-cristiana e le scienze del suo tempo, rivissute alla luce dell'approccio razionalistico proprio di Aristotele. Tale sintesi razionalistica, scientifica e aristotelizzante rimarrà un tentativo isolato al tempo di Filopono, ma si ripresenterà con forza in epoca medievale, nel XIII secolo, con la teologia enciclopedica e aristotelizzante di Alberto Magno e del suo discepolo Tommaso d'Aquino, come Évrard aveva intuito.³³

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³³ Il presente contributo è stato realizzato nell'ambito del PRIN 2017 – “Racconti di creazione come luoghi d'interculturalità dinamica”, di cui la sottoscritta è responsabile scientifica.

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Book Review

Rafael Ferber (2020). *Platonische Aufsätze*, Berlin-Boston: De Gruyter. ISBN: 9783110633344. 400 pp.

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È da salutare con viva soddisfazione la pubblicazione di una raccolta dei principali studi platonici di Rafael Ferber, uno dei maggiori platonisti viventi, quasi tutti già pubblicati in precedenza negli ultimi trent'anni. Al centro degli interessi dell'Autore sono sempre state l'ontologia e la metafisica di Platone (basilari la monografia sull'idea del Bene, *Platos Idee des Guten* del 1984, con successivi e decisivi ampliamenti riguardanti la dottrina delle idee-numeri nell'edizione del 1989, e l'altra, *Warum hat Plato die "ungeschriebene Lehre" nicht geschrieben*, 1991, riedita nel 2007 con una *Retraktation*), ed è per massima parte su questi temi che vertono i saggi qui raccolti. Tuttavia, anche la figura di Socrate occupa un posto centrale in questa raccolta, non da ultimo perché per Ferber anche al suo culmine, rappresentato dal *megiston mathema*, l'idea del Bene, e dai principi della tradizione orale, la filosofia platonica rimane socratica, nel senso da un lato dell'aporeticità, dall'altro del filosofare concepito come *attività* prima che come un complesso di contenuti. Non sorprende dunque l'attenzione dedicata alla questione di quale sapere si possa attribuire a Socrate (*Was und wie hat Sokrates gewusst*, pp. 29–56), che però, come a più riprese viene precisato, non è il Socrate storico, la cui filosofia rimane un enigma irrisolvibile, ma il Socrate platonico, in particolare – e ciò in linea con un'antica posizione dell'interpretazione evolutivista, da cui pure Ferber prende decisamente le distanze – il Socrate del *Protagora*, ma anche del *Gorgia* e in parte del *Menone*, spesso considerato in passato il dialogo che più di tutti rappresenta il momento decisivo di transizione tra due fasi distinte della filosofia platonica. Non è però sostenibile fino in fondo la distinzione – ciò viene precisato ripetutamente – tra il Socrate dei dialoghi giovanili e quello dei dialoghi centrali (pp. 32, 46), o almeno non secondo la più consueta prospettiva, quella che oppone desideri sempre dipendenti dal bene nei dialoghi 'socratici' e desideri indipendenti, dopo la 'scoperta' dell'anima tripartita, con la sua molteplicità di centri motivazionali. Semmai, il punto di svolta può essere costituito dall'introduzione nel *Simposio* della dottrina delle idee separate, da cui il ricorso alla figura di Diotima, perché Platone non avrebbe potuto presuntuosamente presentarsi come maestro di Socrate (p. 91). Questa prospettiva rende conto della continuità tra gli studi qui presentati, nella misura in cui la questione del sapere socratico si salda con quella del fondamento ultimo della

conoscenza secondo Platone, e dunque le relative problematiche sfociano nell'idea del Bene e nella dottrina dei principi.

Quanto al sapere socratico, molto opportuna appare la precisazione che non è attribuibile a Socrate la formula "so di non sapere nulla"; in realtà essa non si trova mai in questa forma nel corpus platonico, ma è attestata solo a partire da Diogene Laerzio (p. 30). Esiste invece un solido *Herzstück* di un sapere categorico professato da Socrate, riassumibile in alcune (se non molte, cfr. *Meno* 98b; p. 31) tesi basilari, presenti soprattutto nel *Menone* e nel *Gorgia*. Socrate ha avuto conoscenza salda di almeno *sette* proposizioni fondamentali non falsificabili: 1. diversità di (retta) opinione e scienza; 2. preferibilità del subire ingiustizia rispetto al commetterla; 3. preferibilità della punizione rispetto all'impunità; 4. felicità del giusto e infelicità dell'ingiusto; 5. identità di sapere e virtù; 6. involontarietà del male; 7. diversità di bene e piacere. Si tratta di verità non empirico-induttive, ma logico-concettuali, analitiche ma altamente informative, tali da ampliare la conoscenza e tutt'altro che tautologiche.

Come si spiega allora che, a fronte di questa proclamata certezza, Socrate insista nella sua dichiarazione di non sapere? Soccorre qui l'idea dell'ironia complessa, sulla linea di Vlastos: la professione di ignoranza, la svalutazione del proprio sapere, è ironica se paragonata al sapere di pretesi saggi quali l'Agatone del *Simposio*, ma rimane valida rispetto al principio supremo.

Dato che Platone sostiene una teoria corrispondentista, non solo coerentista, della verità, per assicurare la verità di queste proposizioni non è sufficiente una *homologia*, ma è richiesto un criterio esterno che, in base alla *Repubblica*, al *Timeo*, alle *Leggi*, può essere solo il sapere divino – ancora una volta, in continuità con l'*Apologia* (23a). Le proposizioni menzionate hanno lo statuto di ipotesi sinché non sono ricondotte al principio ultimo, e dunque, per usare la fondamentale distinzione della *Repubblica*, rientrano nell'ambito della *dianoia*: certezze analoghe a quelle delle matematiche, che sono di conseguenza il massimo che Socrate-Platone può aspettarsi rispetto alle sue convinzioni etiche non negoziabili. La distinzione *dianoia-noesis* della *Repubblica* permette dunque di risolvere l'apparente contraddizione tra la certezza del sapere socratico, o almeno di alcuni suoi nuclei, e la sua professione di ignoranza. Verità irrefutabili possono ancora avere lo statuto di *doxai*. Ciò che è certo è ancora ipotetico nel senso indicato, e l'infallibilità non è condizione sufficiente per individuare un sapere epistemico.

Il problema di fondo si salda allora con quello del fondamento ultimo del sapere, l'idea del Bene e/o l'Uno delle dottrine non scritte. In che misura Platone ha ritenuto di poterlo attingere? Secolare è l'opposizione tra l'immagine di un Platone dogmatico e quella di un Platone aporetico. La posizione complessiva di Ferber propende decisamente verso la seconda, pur se con opportune precisazioni e distinguo.

Tesi basilare della monografia di Ferber sull'idea del Bene e della successiva *Warum hat Plato die "ungeschriebene Lehre" nicht geschrieben* era che il carattere omissivo della descrizione del Bene nell'opera scritta da un lato, e la rinuncia a mettere per iscritto la dottrina dei principi dall'altro, dipendessero non solo da problemi legati alla ricettività dei destinatari, ma da un'intrinseca impossibilità dovuta alla natura dell'oggetto di conoscenza, che porta inevitabilmente a un "approssimativismo teoretico" (pp. 27, 269). Ferber riprende queste tesi (*Ist die Idee des Guten nicht transzendent oder ist sie es doch? Nochmals Platons Epekeina tes ousias*, pp. 115–38 e *Is the Idea of Good beyond Being? Plato's epekeina tes ousias Revisited*), nel ribadire, in opposizione in particolare a Baltes e Brisson, la trascendenza dell'Idea del Bene, al di là della verità e della conoscenza, e dell'essere stesso (non semplicemente dell'essenza), nel solco di una antica tradizione definibile come 'metaontologica', in cui si collocano sia la scuola di Tübingen che interpretazioni di segno opposto. È però proprio questa trascendenza a rendere impossibile parlare di ciò che è al di là dell'essere senza incorrere in contraddizione (pp. 132, 145), e a un'interpretazione deflazionistica dell'*epekeina tes ousias* appare preferibile accettare l'impossibilità di un *logon didonai* del Bene assoluto (p. 133). I principali sostegni testuali sono in questo caso costituiti dalle tesi del *Fedone* a proposito dei limiti propri dell'anima incarnata, dalla dottrina dei quattro elementi della conoscenza della *VII lettera*, con la proclamata impossibilità di cogliere il *ti esti*, essendo solo il *poion* accessibile, e dall'"opinione priva di scienza" (*doxa aneu epistemēs*) che descrive il sapere di Socrate relativo all'idea del Bene nella *Repubblica*. Afferrare l'idea del Bene non significa ancora coglierne l'essenza: la *knowledge by acquaintance* non implica *knowledge by description*. Al punto culminante della sua filosofia Platone rimane dunque socratico.

Anche il *Filebo*, nel quale in questo senso la presenza di Socrate non sarebbe allora casuale, va in questa direzione (cfr. *Plato's "Parhelia": Beauty, Symmetry and Truth. Some Comments concerning Semantic Monism and Pluralism of the "Good" in the Philebus*, pp. 177–96). La difficile conciliazione, in questo dialogo, tra un *monismo semantico* professato da Socrate (il Bene si dice in un unico senso) e un *pluralismo* del Bene, che trova espressione nella triade simmetria-bellezza-verità, si risolve nella distinzione-congiunzione tra un *quasi-monismo* fittizio postulato da Socrate e un pluralismo fattuale: non sappiamo cosa sia in sé il Bene, ma solo dove trovarlo, cioè in bellezza, simmetria, verità. Questa triade di *parhelia* ("Nebensonnen") corrisponde alle 'qualità', i *poia* della *VII Lettera*. Tutto ciò è però solo la porta d'ingresso al Bene (*Phil.* 64c); cosa sia il Bene in sé, il Bene assoluto (*to pantapasi agathon*, *Phil.* 61a) rimane inattuabile all'uomo, sempre inevitabilmente situato tra conoscenza e ignoranza, e sempre dipendente da qualche bene terreno.

Allo stesso modo l'esattezza in sé del *Politico* (cfr. *Für eine propädeutische Lektüre des Politikos*, pp. 197–214), l'*auto to akribes*, identificabile con l'idea del Bene, la misura più esatta di tutte le cose, l'assoluto la cui innegabile realtà rappresenta il principale presidio contro il relativismo dell'uomo-misura, eccede ogni possibile formulazione, ed è dunque conseguente che non si dica mai cosa esso propriamente sia, che di esso si prometta una dimostrazione che non arriverà mai, e che l'annunciato dialogo *Filosofo* non sia mai stato scritto. Ciò impone di considerare il *Politico* un dialogo propedeutico, un esercizio dialettico preparatorio per giovani membri progrediti dell'Accademia più che uno scritto propagandistico (p. 212).

Analoghe considerazioni valgono per le dottrine non scritte, rispetto alle quali Ferber ha modificato sensibilmente nel tempo la sua posizione. Dopo un rifiuto di principio della tradizione indiretta nella monografia del 1985, successivamente ha riconosciuto l'importanza degli *agrapha dogmata* e proposto una ricostruzione della dottrina delle idee-numeri che, nonostante il suo carattere altamente congetturale, avrebbe meritato maggiore attenzione da parte della critica (qui brevemente accennata, pp. 231–2). Nel volume viene riproposto il contributo del 1992 (*Warum hat Plato die "ungeschriebene Lehre" nicht geschrieben? Einige vorläufige Bemerkungen*, presentato al II Simposio platonico nel 1989), preparatorio della successiva monografia, uno dei cui apporti più significativi consisteva nel mettere in evidenza come, fra le tre ragioni addotte nel *Fedro* contro l'opportunità dello scrivere, la principale riguardi la *debolezza costituzionale* della scrittura, distinta dalle conseguenze indesiderate dovute alla *contingente pubblicazione* di un testo. È l'essenza stessa della cosa, la debolezza intrinseca dei *logoi*, più che la considerazione dei soggetti ricettori, a impedire la fissazione per iscritto del supremo oggetto di conoscenza.

La ritrattazione relativa agli *agrapha dogmata* dà qui l'occasione per sottolineare l'onestà intellettuale dell'autore e la sua disponibilità al dialogo e all'autocritica, visibile in alcuni ripensamenti e raffinamenti della propria posizione seguiti a obiezioni e critiche ricevute nel confronto con la comunità degli studiosi. Del tutto inusuale e altamente encomiabile è poi l'utilizzo di letteratura critica ormai dimenticata o per vari motivi (conoscenza della lingua, presuntuosa autoreferenzialità) generalmente ignorata, che negli studi platonici trova difficilmente posto (solo per citare alcuni nomi, Stefanini, Stumpf, Teichmüller, Tietzel, Trendelenburg).

Una serie di acquisizioni complessive di Ferber riguardo l'ermeneutica platonica appaiono opportune e pienamente condivisibili, e andrebbero considerate come definitive. Circa l'unità del pensiero platonico (pp. 9, 175), ci si limita qui a sottolineare una tesi che apporta chiarezza rispetto a interpretazioni diffuse quanto potenzialmente fuorvianti: Platone non abbandona mai l'intellettualismo

‘socratico’. Il punto è argomentato in maniera convincente, non solo sulla base di rimandi ai numerosi passi dei dialoghi tardi in cui la dottrina è ancora evidentemente in opera (p. 47), ma mediante il chiarimento della natura analitica della tesi. Decisivo in relazione a questo tema è il chiarimento della posizione ‘socratica’ sull’*akrasia*: lungi dal negare il fenomeno, Socrate lo identifica con l’ignoranza (*amathia*). L’*akrasia* non consiste nel contrasto tra ragione e desiderio, ma tra due diverse concezioni del bene, una corretta, una falsa (p. 20); la debolezza del volere è in realtà debolezza della ragione; l’identità di virtù e conoscenza è infatti una tesi analitica. La dottrina dell’involontarietà del male non è dunque incompatibile con la concezione dell’anima tripartita presente nella *Repubblica* (p. 100). La maieutica socratica consiste in una trasformazione di verità apparentemente sintetiche in verità analitiche (p. 25), e in questa luce può leggersi anche la dottrina dell’anamnesi. Definitivi dovrebbero essere considerati anche gli argomenti portati contro l’idea di un abbandono o di una modifica sostanziale della dottrina delle idee negli ultimi dialoghi a seguito delle critiche mosse nel *Parmenide*; critiche che vengono rese inefficaci dalla de-sostanzializzazione del sensibile e dalla concezione dello spazio ‘sostanzializzato’ introdotta nel *Timeo* e dalla conferma dell’ipotesi delle idee come la migliore comunque possibile (cfr. “*Auf diese Weise nun gebe ich selbst meine Stimme ab*”. *Einige Bemerkungen zu Platons später Ideenlehre unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Timaios*, pp. 215–37).

Quanto al tema principale che unifica l’intero percorso di Ferber, l’aporetica di Platone, in questa sede sarebbe evidentemente fuori luogo argomentare in poche righe una posizione riguardo a un dibattito secolare quale è quello tra un’immagine aporetica e una dogmatica; e a fronte della posizione complessiva dell’autore sarebbe improduttivo contrapporre ancora una volta alle professioni di ignoranza e alle dichiarazioni di impossibilità di conoscere il Bene in sé e i principi, i non pochi testi in cui si parla del *telos* della *poreia*, di un possesso definitivo della verità, o ripercorrere i passaggi che descrivono la dialettica, procedimento tutto umano, con il suo approdo a risultati stabili, insieme a quelli che permettono di sostenere l’infalibilità della *noesis*. Ci si limita dunque a formulare un dubbio generale, metodico, a proposito della possibilità di vedere nell’aporeticità la cifra più autentica del pensare platonico: mentre ci sono spesso buoni motivi, interni ai singoli dialoghi, capaci di dar conto delle dichiarazioni di aporeticità in riferimento al piano della comunicazione e alla dimensione letteraria, non sembrano esserci altrettante buone ragioni per spiegare i passi in cui si descrive il raggiungimento della meta come effettivo. Perché un aporetico convinto dovrebbe parlare in molti casi come un dogmatico?

La risposta che si può individuare in questi scritti è che il contrasto, in ultima analisi responsabile delle due opposte interpretazioni – di fatto presente nei

dialoghi tra le dichiarazioni di impossibilità di conoscere il bene in sé, le varie professioni di ignoranza, e altre formulazioni innegabilmente più ottimistiche –, può ricondursi alla distinzione tra il filosofo reale, il Socrate platonico, o l'uomo Platone, e la proiezione ideal-paradigmatica rappresentata dalla figura del dialettico e del filosofo-re. È tra questi due poli che oscilla la posizione del Platone storico, su cui non è possibile raggiungere certezze, ma che può semmai essere arrivato “molto vicino” (*eggytata*) e comunque “per poco tempo” (*kata brachy*) alla meta (pp. 104–5).

Fondare stabilmente su queste basi un'immagine aporetica implicherebbe da un lato mostrare che tutti i passi di tono dogmatico in cui si parla del raggiungimento della meta hanno solo valore di paradigma ideale, dall'altro escludere che i passaggi di tono aporetico possano essere spiegati in base al contesto dialogico del momento – come nel caso di *Repubblica VI* –, o che possano fare riferimento a una fase dell'indagine poi destinata a essere superata – come ad esempio nel caso dei *poia* della *VII lettera*, a fronte della successiva illuminazione noetica. Se, come appare plausibile, l'innegabile scarto tra *philosophia* e *sophia* e l'accento ripetutamente posto sui limiti del sapere umano possono spiegarsi come una contrapposizione tra la presenza immediata e totale dell'intelligibile nell'intelletto divino e il faticoso lavoro di natura discorsiva proprio dell'uomo, è certamente legittimo parlare di ‘approssimazione’ come massimo risultato conseguibile, ma le professioni di ignoranza e le dichiarazioni di difficoltà di conseguire una conoscenza relativamente stabile e non doxastica ne escono in parte ridimensionate; la fatica del procedimento ha pur sempre un termine, e l'*episteme* ha natura discorsiva. La difficoltà di conservare ciò che si è conseguito, la precarietà del sapere umano, su cui Platone insiste sino alla sua ultima opera, va ugualmente distinta dall'impossibilità di pervenire a esiti non doxastici. Non tutte le affermazioni su cui si può fondare un'interpretazione aporetica sono insomma dello stesso tenore. Parafrasando la famosa affermazione di Leibniz, renderebbe un grande servizio – non, magari, all'umanità, ma sicuramente alla comunità degli studiosi – chi riuscisse a fornire un'interpretazione convincente e definitiva dei passi dei dialoghi da cui ha avuto origine il secolare contrasto delle interpretazioni. O forse la soluzione è già a portata di mano, dispersa nel vasto mare della letteratura platonica.

Book Review

Ludovica De Luca (2021). *Il Dio architetto in Filone di Alessandria* (De opificio mundi 17–20), Prefazione di D. T. Runia, Milano: Vita e Pensiero. ISBN: 9788834343272. 384 pp.

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Il libro è costituito da una prefazione firmata da David Runia, un'introduzione dell'Autrice e sei capitoli, cui seguono le conclusioni e una ricchissima bibliografia. Tratta dell'immagine filoniana del Dio architetto che guarda al progetto da lui creato nella sua mente per formare il mondo. La creazione è presentata come la fondazione di una città da parte di un artefice: egli inizia con lo studiare il territorio, il clima, la posizione e a delineare nella sua mente un piano della futura città con le sue strade, le case, i templi, gli edifici pubblici. Seguendo il modello intellegibile, l'artefice realizza, poi, il mondo sensibile.

L'uso dell'immagine rientra pienamente nello stile di lavoro di Filone che, in tutta la sua opera, fa ampio uso di metafore, similitudini, allegorie per chiarire la sua visione cosmologica e per analizzare passi biblici di difficile interpretazione. Ludovica De Luca affronta questi temi e ne dà un quadro complesso e ricco. Evidenzia la specificità dell'elaborazione filoniana. Per mostrarne l'originalità, pone in relazione l'uso filoniano dell'allegoria con quello stoico e giunge a ipotizzare che Filone ne farebbe uso per interpretare non solo il *Genesi*, ma anche il *Timeo* e la tradizione stoica. L'ipotesi sembra, però, porre sullo stesso piano carattere veritativo e *auctoritas* di tutti questi testi, il che, per Filone, non si dà. Nonostante l'ammirazione per Platone e gli Stoici, egli non li considera ispirati come la Bibbia. Peraltro, l'attenta lettura dell'uso filoniano dell'allegoria rispetto alle letture stoiche del mito e dei poemi omerici induce De Luca a ipotizzare uno sviluppo dell'uso filoniano dell'allegoria nel corso del tempo e ad evidenziarne un uso consapevole ricco di richiami espliciti ad allegoristi anteriori. Secondo l'A., l'immagine dell'architetto è particolarmente significativa, esprime una visione positiva dell'ordinamento del cosmo, un'idea di ordine e rigore di cui la legge stabilisce i confini e i limiti, tratteggia un mondo legato a razionalità.

L'immagine dell'architetto è stata molto studiata dalla critica, ma i lavori precedenti ne hanno spesso trattato nell'ambito di altri argomenti. Come afferma l'A. nelle conclusioni, mancava un lavoro specifico che ne esaminasse il senso filosofico, il contesto, le fonti di riferimento. Intento di De Luca è fornirne uno studio complessivo all'interno di un'analisi del linguaggio dell'architettura e della

costruzione nel mondo antico, di vederne gli aspetti filosofici, di approfondire gli elementi letterari del testo.

Il lavoro si focalizza su un passo specifico, *De opificio* 17–20, ma da questo si allarga poi e spazia su molti aspetti centrali del pensiero filoniano, fornendo un quadro delle principali tesi presenti nel testo relative a modelli creazionistici, al luogo delle idee, al mondo noetico, alla sfera sensibile, all'immagine della città come cosmo. Evidenzia come Filone inauguri un modo nuovo di fare filosofia. Consapevole del proprio ruolo non solo di esegeta, ma anche di autore, Filone – secondo De Luca – si pone in una “intimità speciale con Mosè, scrittore del racconto divino, e aspira ad arrivare allo stesso Dio” (p. 54). Nella relazione tra Dio, Mosè, Filone, il primo ha creato, Mosè descrive la creazione, Filone ne spiega il significato e il senso in termini filosofici. Nella conclusione di p. 62 De Luca sostiene che, per Filone, la propria opera sola potrà restituire la *Torah* al suo senso originario. Mi sembra un'affermazione forte ed anche supponente da parte di Filone, ove egli la proponesse. Poco più avanti, l'A. sostiene che Mosè – nella lettura filoniana – non ha semplicemente trascritto la parola divina, le ha conferito una chiave di lettura filosofica. Si verrebbe, allora, a postulare che Mosè non parli per ispirazione, non scriva la parola dettagli o mostratagli da Dio. In quest'ottica, andrebbe, però, chiarito quanto detto nel *De vita Mosis* sugli oracoli dati da Mosè solamente dopo averne chiesto a Dio, sul dono della *Torah* sul monte Sinai e sull'ispirazione, sul valore veritativo e universale della *Torah*.

Particolarmente attenta alla terminologia impiegata dall'Alessandrino, ai significati dei termini, De Luca ne approfondisce gli aspetti lessicali e analizza l'uso spesso innovativo di Filone rispetto ad altri autori. Dedicando, per esempio, grande spazio al termine ἀναγράφω o a φιλοσοφία, φιλόσοφος, φιλοσοφείω, visti non solo rispetto alla tradizione greca, ma anche rispetto a 4 Maccabei e al libro di Daniele. L'analisi si svolge, infatti, in una ricerca continua delle fonti di Filone. Evidente è il modello platonico che costituisce il riferimento cardine di Filone: De Luca evidenzia le relazioni tra mondo noetico e sfera sensibile, cita le immagini della città e del sigillo adoperate da Filone. Analizza la presentazione di Dio πατήρ, βασιλεύς, ἡγεμών. Parallelamente, Filone richiama Aristotele e l'uso metaforico della figura dell'ἀρχιτέκτων. Negli *excursus* aritmologici si rivela anche la presenza dei Pitagorici. Nel paragone del cosmo con una città l'Alessandrino ha in mente la tradizione stoica e la sua teorizzazione potrebbe aver giocato un ruolo nel far confluire la filosofia greca in alcuni testi giudaici. Attenta a non tralasciare possibili influssi della tradizione ebraica, De Luca ritiene che l'immagine del mondo intellegibile come progetto di Dio potrebbe derivare sia dal *Timeo* che dal Genesi in cui Dio forma ogni cosa con ordine e misura. Il richiamo all'immagine dell'architetto potrebbe essere relata all'uso di architetto/architettura in 2 Maccabei. L'A. vede l'ἀρχιτεκτονία quale strumento di interpretazione del pensiero

filoniano attraverso 3 livelli di lettura: cultura greca e romana, tradizione ebraica, situazione contemporanea. Secondo l'A., proposito dell'Alessandrino in tutta la sua opera è di rendere la κοσμοποιία comprensibile anche a chi non abbia alcuna conoscenza del Genesi. Di qui una lettura di passi biblici letti con riferimento al *Timeo* interpretato in chiave stoicheggiante e alla tradizione ebraica coeva. Alle spalle anche molti altri testi platonici, aristotelici, cinici, stoici. Più volte De Luca avanza poi l'ipotesi di precisi influssi di autori latini, ipotizza che Filone sia venuto in contatto con opere di Cicerone come il *De natura deorum* in cui c'è un uso metaforico dell'architettura. Si chiede se Filone conoscesse il latino e ritiene che possa aver conosciuto il *De architectura* di Vitruvio. Ipotizza una precisa volontà filoniana di promuovere la religione ebraica tra i non ebrei sviluppando un linguaggio comprensibile a tutti i cittadini dell'impero. Mette in luce l'uso di immagini filosofiche che allarghino la comprensione ai non ebrei, immagini filosofiche proposte a scopo universalistico. Si tratta di un'ipotesi interessante anche se non facilmente dimostrabile.

In un'ottica di allargamento del pubblico di riferimento assume un significato particolare "l'esigenza filoniana di 'pubblicare' i propri scritti. Che ai suoi tempi ci fosse l'abitudine di letture pubbliche di un testo e di studi esegetici nelle scuole di studio è indubbio". L'ipotesi di una lettura pubblica delle opere dell'Esposizione davanti a un pubblico ampio, non ebraico, è affrontata da De Luca in relazione all'uso filoniano del termine ἀναγράφω (pp. 43–6) che l'A. analizza con attenzione sia rispetto al suo impiego rispetto a Mosè e a una sua eventuale 'pubblicazione' della parola divina, sia rispetto all'opera di Filone stesso e a una sua eventuale 'lettura pubblica'. La scrittura di opere filosofiche e letterarie, d'altronde, non è certo una novità, né nell'ambiente greco e romano cui Filone guarda con attenzione, né nell'ambiente giudaico alessandrino. L'A. presenta, poi, la storia editoriale del *De opificio* e riporta diverse ipotesi sull'ordine delle opere, sull'appartenenza a *corpora*, sulla datazione. Particolare rilievo viene dato alle ipotesi di Maren Niehoff di una cesura tra Commentario, composto ad Alessandria in un primo periodo della vita ed Esposizione scritta in seguito, dopo l'ambasceria a Roma.¹

Il secondo capitolo del libro inizia con la traduzione con commento di *Opif.* 17–20, traduzione che permette all'A. di evidenziare il lessico filoniano e di analizzare la terminologia impiegata dall'Alessandrino in relazione a precedenti e coeve utilizzazioni da parte di altri autori. È questo, un aspetto fondamentale dell'analisi e costituisce uno dei punti di maggior interesse del libro, anche se, a volte, alcune spiegazioni esulano dal nucleo centrale della trattazione. Così, per

¹ M. Niehoff, *Philo of Alexandria. An Intellectual Biography*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018.

esempio, la spiegazione dell'origine del termine Eden. La volontà di spiegare termini non essenziali all'economia del discorso rischia – talvolta – di rendere l'analisi meno stringente. Si tratta, comunque, di approfondimenti ricchi e originali.

La traduzione è estremamente attenta alla letteralità e ad usi tecnici, anche a costo di alcune spigolosità. Attenzione viene riservata alle varianti nei vari manoscritti. Inizia poi il commento che si interroga sulla localizzazione del mondo intellegibile. Sono messi in luce riferimenti al *Timeo* e ad Aristotele, ma anche le specificità di Filone che non ritiene ammissibile l'ipotesi di un cosmo eterno. Per l'Alessandrino, non si dà un mondo delle idee esterno a Dio e causalmente precedente. Sono posti in relazione passi del *De opificio* con testi del *De mundo* e di Plutarco. Largo spazio è dato alla formulazione di Dio come πατήρ e ποιητής. Segue un'interessante lettura di termini quali τόπος e χώρα in vari autori: Platone, Aristotele, Epicuro, Zenone ed è evidenziato l'uso 'improprio' che ne fa Filone. L'Alessandrino li usa indifferentemente, prescindendo dall'uso specifico. De Luca chiarisce che si tratta, probabilmente, di un utilizzo metaforico e non 'tecnico': l'unico luogo in cui si può collocare il mondo intellegibile è il λόγος.

Un rilievo particolare ha nel libro l'analisi della terminologia relativa alla costruzione e all'architettura. De Luca ne cerca le tracce in testi della *Settanta*. Si chiede se l'immaginario architettonico del *De opificio* sia legato all'architettura di templi e di sinagoghe, alla formazione di una città. In particolare, analizza Alessandria, la sua fondazione, la sua grandezza, i suoi caratteri. L'immagine filoniana della città è posta a confronto con la visione della *Lettera di Aristeo*. Sono così analizzate alcune metafore relative a Gerusalemme presenti nella *Lettera*.

Nello studio di immagini di città non poteva mancare un discorso su μεγαλόπολις e κοσμόπολις. De Luca ne tratta evidenziando i riferimenti teorici stoici e cinici e ponendo in luce come Filone introduca delle accezioni del tutto nuove dei termini in questione.

Molto interessante risulta l'analisi terminologica di termini usati nell'analogia con l'architettura e i lavori di costruzione e del lessico relativo al guardare con riferimento al guardare al modello eterno. Ai verbi di guardare sono connessi ἀγαματοφορέω e ἀγάλματα, analizzati anche in relazione all'uso di ἄγαλμα nella *Settanta*, all'aniconismo e alle posizioni anti-idolatriche. De Luca mostra come l'uso dei termini in questione rinvii, una volta di più, al *Timeo* che, insieme al *Teeteto* è alle spalle anche di altri termini, come, per esempio, ἔξομοίω. In relazione all'analisi della terminologia della costruzione e dell'architettura e dei suoi usi metaforici, tesi di De Luca è che il lessico dell'architettura venga attribuito da Filone a Dio, a Mosè, a Filone stesso. Vi sarebbe un paragone filoniano tra i tre: Dio architetto del mondo, Mosè dei modelli realizzati da Basalel, Filone del testo in quanto usa l'allegoria per spiegare il testo biblico. I tre sarebbero implicitamente

paragonati perché “con la forza del λόγος, progettano prima di procedere a una realizzazione pratica” (p. 98). L’analogia mi sembra, per la verità, un po’ forzata. È interessante, comunque, il rilievo dell’A. che evidenzia come solamente a Dio spetti la capacità di progettare e realizzare allo stesso tempo.

Il terzo capitolo verte su architettura e giudaismo ellenistico. Se nel capitolo precedente l’analisi ha evidenziato la presenza della cultura greca nel *De opificio* e in particolare, i riferimenti al *Timeo*, il terzo capitolo analizza la presenza di testi giudaico-ellenistici, in particolare della *Settanta*. L’A. riscontra analogie di immagini con il Libro della Sapienza e con 3 e 4 Maccabei anche se è difficile dire se si tratti di semplici assonanze, di influenze reciproche, di produzioni simili in un contesto affine. Per quanto riguarda la dimensione poetica di Dio nel *De opificio*, alle spalle vi sono sia il *Timeo* che la *Settanta*. De Luca introduce una distinzione tra ‘fare’ e ‘creare’, distinzione che trae dall’analisi di Monique Alexandre relativa al testo massoretico, mentre nella *Settanta* si ha solo il verbo ποιέω. Secondo De Luca, in Filone sarebbe presente la distinzione; l’A., però, non la spiega rispetto all’uso di ποιέω; spiega, invece, quella che chiama “una sorta di autonomia creativa assunta dagli elementi” (p. 104) riscontrabile nel linguaggio della *Settanta* che ricorderebbe – in questo – elementi dello stoicismo. Sempre in relazione al *Timeo*, da un lato, alla *Settanta*, dall’altro, De Luca introduce i due modelli della formazione del mondo presenti nel *De opificio*, tecnico-artigianale, l’uno, naturalistico-biologico, l’altro. L’A. evidenzia a più riprese come Filone attinga sia da Platone che dalla Bibbia e rielabori in maniera specifica, di volta in volta attingendo o meno da tali fonti. Lo si vede in relazione all’ordine del mondo, al senso da attribuire alle indicazioni relative alla scansione temporale della formazione del cosmo. In relazione alla formazione, l’analisi prende le mosse dal termine ἀκατασκεύαστος di Gen 1, 2 che sembra alludere all’esistenza di una sorta di materia originaria antecedente l’atto creativo e pone dei dubbi sulla tesi della creazione dal nulla. La tesi è discussa da De Luca anche in pagine successive che esaminano il rapporto di Filone con aristotelismo, platonismo e stoicismo rispetto a materia, ricettacolo, forma. Nella presentazione delle varie posizioni, l’A. dà per scontata una concezione ‘giudaico-creazionistica’ che presenta come ovvia senza, però, spiegarne bene i caratteri. Il discorso potrebbe essere approfondito, come anche l’uso della bibliografia critica sull’argomento. Alcuni chiarimenti emergono dall’analisi di immagini presenti nella *Lettera di Aristeo* e in Aristobulo. In particolare, De Luca vi studia l’uso di ποιέω e di κατασκευάζω in senso creazionistico. Alle pp. 274 e sgg., l’A. riprende il discorso in termini più approfonditi. Ricorda come nella *Settanta* una concezione creazionistica dal nulla sia prevalentemente assente e sostiene che Filone avrebbe una posizione di *creatio ex nihilo* per quanto riguarda il modello intellegibile, una *creatio ex aliquo* in relazione al mondo sensibile. Secondo l’A., conviverebbero nel *De opificio* due posizioni. Da un lato,

Dio, creatore di ogni cosa, avrebbe creato anche la materia, dall'altro, vi sarebbe un'idea di materia coesistente o preesistente rispetto a Dio. Tali tesi sono espone accanto a quelle relative all'idea di vuoto e al vuoto, anch'essi creati da Dio. In tutta la spiegazione De Luca ricorre alla distinzione tra creazione del mondo intellegibile e formazione del sensibile, anche se l'utilizzazione filoniana di un unico verbo, ποιέω, pone parecchie difficoltà rispetto a tali distinzioni. Il κόσμος νοητός è visto anche alla luce di possibili riferimenti o lontananze rispetto alle tradizioni coeve. Vengono presentate le discussioni della recente bibliografia critica rispetto ad assonanze e differenze con altri autori (p. 211). In relazione ad altri autori, da Aristotele a Eudemo di Rodi, è dato largo spazio alla lettura dei termini κοσμοποιία e κοσμοποιέω. In questo ambito l'A. presenta un rilievo interessante che varrebbe la pena di approfondire, il fatto che Filone usi il termine κοσμοποιία solamente in relazione al κόσμος αίσθητός, mai direttamente in rapporto al κόσμος νοητός.

Ancora, parlando di κόσμος αίσθητός, vi è un altro rilievo interessante: l'asserzione secondo cui il κόσμος αίσθητός sembrerebbe essere il vero oggetto del *De opificio* "che mira a mostrarne l'origine, la struttura e la composizione" (p. 261). L'analisi del mondo sensibile e degli aspetti relazionali che lo concernono conduce a una lettura di οὐσία e ὕλη viste anche in relazione a interpretazioni aristoteliche, platoniche, stoiche. L'A. ipotizza che nel *De opificio* compaiano tre fasi: (1) creazione della ὕλη priva di forma; (2) la ὕλη diviene οὐσία caratterizzata da un carattere passivo; (3) l'οὐσία viene ordinata, riceve qualità e bellezza. L'ipotesi di De Luca è che sia riscontrabile nel *De opificio* una sintesi tra tradizione aristotelica e stoicismo in vista di una concezione creazionistica della materia, tenendo sempre sullo sfondo il *Timeo*. Filone farebbe, dunque, un uso nuovo di immagini della tradizione filosofica greca applicandola al Dio ebraico. Alla base dell'operazione filoniana vi sarebbe l'intento di mostrare che la concezione della bellezza e della perfezione del cosmo, del progetto dell'Artefice sarebbe finalizzata a un'attenzione positiva da parte di interlocutori greco-romani (?) nei confronti del giudaismo in un momento di gravi ostilità e persecuzioni contro la comunità alessandrina. Che le tesi filoniane si formino nel confronto con il *Timeo* e lo stoicismo, ma anche molto con Aristotele, soprattutto in relazione al mondo sensibile, mi sembra tesi assolutamente condivisibile. Che alla base del lavoro filoniano vi siano intenti creazionistici riconducibili a ipotesi di *creatio ex nihilo* e, soprattutto, che tutta l'operazione sia volta ad ottenere attenzione da parte di interlocutori romani in situazioni di ostilità, mi sembra tesi assai meno facilmente dimostrabile, anche se De Luca porta testi di appoggio alla sua tesi.

Al termine di una analisi serrata e puntuale, particolarmente attenta agli approfondimenti terminologici e ad evidenziare l'originalità di Filone, De Luca espone alcune delle conclusioni cui è giunto il suo lavoro e riprende l'ipotesi della redazione del *De opificio* dopo il soggiorno filoniano a Roma. In quest'ottica, il

testo potrebbe avere risentito dell'influenza dell'ambiente romano, in particolare l'immagine di *Opif.* 17–20 potrebbe essere stata influenzata da Cicerone e Vitruvio. Si tratta di un'ipotesi interessante che, però, a mio parere andrebbe maggiormente argomentata. Il rilievo di De Luca sulla differenza di tono del *De opificio* rispetto alla *Legatio* e all'*In Flaccum* in relazione a tendenze anti giudaiche del periodo e alla visione filoniana del governo di Roma sembrerebbe, anzi, confermare la problematicità della tesi.

Il libro termina con un'apertura sugli sviluppi dell'immagine del Dio architetto in epoca successiva a Filone. L'A. si interroga se, e fino a che punto, si possa pensare a un influsso di Filone su autori posteriori e fino a che punto eventuali assonanze siano da ascrivere a precedenti fonti comuni o a semplici affinità.

Concludendo, si tratta di un libro di grande interesse, con caratteri di originalità e approfondimenti molto utili anche se, qua e là alcune asserzioni andrebbero maggiormente fondate. Così, per esempio, l'ipotesi di p. 62 secondo cui Filone, consapevole dell'importanza della sua opera, riterrebbe “che sola potrà restituire la *Torah* al suo senso originario”.

Gli aspetti più rilevanti del lavoro sono costituiti dalle analisi lessicali, dagli approfondimenti terminologici, dall'individuazione delle fonti cui Filone è riconducibile. L'intreccio tra tesi appartenenti a vari ambiti teorici è ricostruito con chiarezza esemplare.

Il testo fa un uso molto ricco, consapevole e approfondito della bibliografia. Rarissime le dimenticanze. Forse l'A. avrebbe potuto citare Lucio Troiani a proposito di *πολίτευμα* e Sarah Pearce a proposito dell'Egitto come terra del corpo, ma questi rilievi sono abbastanza irrilevanti vista l'ampiezza dei riferimenti di De Luca. Nell'insieme si tratta un lavoro di ampio respiro, preciso e accurato, che sceglie una prospettiva originale e conduce un'analisi articolata e ricca.

Book Review

Gretchen Reydams-Schils (2020). *Calcidius on Plato's Timaeus. Greek Philosophy, Latin Reception and Christian Contexts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 9781108420563. 243 pp.

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Il lavoro di Gretchen Reydams-Schils rappresenta un contributo fondamentale per la ricostruzione del pensiero di Calcidio e della sua linea interpretativa del *Timeo* di Platone, a partire dalla considerazione secondo la quale il Commentario ha costituito uno dei principali canali di trasmissione della filosofia platonica in età medioevale. L'Autrice ci tiene immediatamente a rilevare come sia difficile sovrastimare l'importanza del lavoro di Calcidio sul *Timeo*; esso, infatti, pur presentandosi come un'interessante attestazione dell'esegesi del testo platonico in età imperiale e della presenza della ricezione del platonismo nell'Occidente latino, è costituito tuttavia da una traduzione non integrale e da un commento che non corrisponde esattamente alla sezione tradotta.

Come sottolinea Reydams-Schils, l'opera di Calcidio costituisce uno di quei casi, piuttosto rari, di un commentario filosofico in lingua latina che può essere accostato per importanza a quelli di altri tre commentatori: Boezio, Macrobio e Marziano Capella; inoltre, non presenta le lacune che riguardano, invece, altri commentari (p. 1). Sempre nell'Introduzione, l'A. dichiara che lo scopo di questo libro è di restituire al Commentario l'importanza e l'attenzione che merita, poiché esso, 'come opera in sé', è quasi del tutto scomparso, finendo per essere considerato un mero punto di vista sulla filosofia platonica. L'opera ha assunto il ruolo di 'strumento' o, ancora meglio, una sorta di "Calcidius pass" (p. 2), sia per studiare la tradizione filosofica precedente, che per analizzarne la ricezione e l'influenza sugli autori successivi. Procedere, invece, da un esame più attento del Commentario in quanto tale, permetterebbe di ripensare i confini culturali e intellettuali del IV secolo d.C. all'interno dei quali Calcidio andrebbe inserito.

Da questo punto di vista, si comprende meglio la prospettiva scelta dall'A. che mette in guardia dai rischi causati da un'interpretazione che spinga a non avere una panoramica completa di quest'opera: un approccio non critico nella considerazione del Commentario come un libro di fonti; un'analisi superficiale del lessico che non consenta di distinguere tra una citazione letterale e un'interpolazione da parte dell'autore che cita il materiale (p. 3). Ed è proprio quest'ultimo aspetto, nelle argomentazioni della Reydams-Schils, a rappresentare uno degli

elementi di particolare interesse nel metodo adoperato da Calcidio, che non si limiterebbe solo a dare conto di un testo, ma si servirebbe piuttosto di una serie di categorie filosofiche per sottolineare il proprio punto di vista ermeneutico.

In questo contesto si inserisce il paragrafo dedicato alla ricostruzione dell'ermeneutica e dell'ontologia calcidiane (pp. 33–6) che presentano delle differenze con quelle neoplatoniche in relazione alle modalità di strutturazione del materiale di riferimento: “Calcidius, for his part, has a strict sense of sequence and rearranges the *Timaeus* so that each section of his commentary reflects a specific step in an ascent of theoretical knowledge” (p. 33).

Il volume si presenta suddiviso in tre parti: nella prima, l'A. si premura di sottolineare l'autorialità del lavoro di Calcidio, poiché il commentatore “uses the stock theme of the obscurity of philosophical texts to define his role more clearly” (p. 9); Calcidio stesso dichiara all'inizio del commento al *Timeo* di dedicarsi soltanto all'esegesi dei punti più oscuri del dialogo; di qui, è evidente la funzione assunta dal commentatore, che non si limiterebbe a quella di un semplice esegeta, preoccupato di fare da intermediario per i lettori del testo platonico, ma, attraverso la selezione dei passi da tradurre e da commentare, avrebbe l'obiettivo di esprimere la sua propria interpretazione.

Dopo aver dedicato il secondo capitolo ad una riflessione sul percorso che Calcidio segue nella lettura del dialogo – richiamando non soltanto la struttura del Commentario, ma anche la collocazione che egli assegna al *Timeo* all'interno del *corpus* platonico: “In his Preface Calcidius explicitly states that he reads the *Timaeus* as a sequel to the *Republic*” (p. 31), poiché se la *Repubblica* affronta il tema della giustizia nell'uomo, il *Timeo* riguarderebbe invece la giustizia naturale nel mondo divino –, il terzo capitolo si sofferma sulla coerenza del Commentario e sulla sua unitarietà.

Alla seconda sezione sono dedicati ben sette capitoli, il cui obiettivo è quello di passare in rassegna le tematiche peculiari del Commentario. Ad ognuno dei paragrafi, infatti, è riservata l'analisi di uno specifico concetto filosofico.

La terza sezione, infine, riguarda l'analisi del rapporto di Calcidio con Aristotele e con lo stoicismo e la ricostruzione delle fonti, in particolare quelle medio-platoniche (Numenio) e neoplatoniche (Porfirio). Ad esempio, in relazione allo Stagirita, Calcidio sembra collocarsi all'interno della tradizione neoplatonica, riprendendo, cioè, i temi aristotelici che si presentano in accordo con quelli platonici.

L'uso del materiale stoico, ben noto all'autore, sembra essere più difficile da definire; nonostante la sua critica apparente, egli farebbe propri alcuni dei principi di tale dottrina per sostenere le argomentazioni che espone. Riguardo alla presenza di Porfirio come fonte di Calcidio, l'A. ritiene che questa non sia un'ipotesi sostenibile; al contrario, Numenio costituirebbe, insieme a Plutarco, il riferimento

privilegiato. Tale riflessione troverebbe conferma, ad esempio, nella trattazione dell'anima cosmica.

La terza sezione pone l'interrogativo dell'appartenenza di Calcidio all'ambito cristiano. Un approccio più utile per tentare di risolvere la questione potrebbe essere quello, anzitutto, di domandarsi che genere di influenza possa avere nella lettura dell'opera di Calcidio la sua appartenenza o meno al panorama cristiano. In effetti, dovremmo partire dalla constatazione che, sebbene il *Timeo* fosse un testo certamente noto ai Cristiani, esso non sembrerebbe tuttavia essere stato conosciuto nelle parti commentate da Calcidio, come dimostra la sezione dedicata all'origine e alla natura dell'anima cosmica, dottrina che sembrerebbe conciliarsi difficilmente con il pensiero cristiano. Pertanto, a ragione, l'A. si domanda: "Who is Calcidius?" (p. 216).

Sembra opportuno, inoltre, soffermarsi sulla considerazione che Calcidio, sulla base dell'interpretazione della Reydams Schills, presenti Platone come colui che possiede la verità e il punto di vista più esaustivo sulla realtà, mostrandosi, al contrario, critico e addirittura indifferente nei confronti della tradizione platonica.

Dalla complessiva articolazione del volume, che qui si è tentato di ripercorrere, emergono i tre obiettivi precipui, dichiarati dall'A. stessa nelle pagine introduttive: (1) la definizione dei temi centrali del Commentario (il tempo, l'anima del mondo, l'anima umana, il divino, la provvidenza, il fato, le forme, la materia e il male) e delle rispettive linee interpretative adoperate da Calcidio nell'affrontarli; (2) la distinzione della voce di Calcidio quale commentatore platonico e autore; (3) la definizione di una nuova prospettiva che consenta di accendere una luce su altre questioni riguardanti l'opera di Calcidio, come l'utilizzo delle fonti stoiche e aristoteliche, e la sua presunta adesione alla dottrina cristiana.

Come opportunamente suggerisce Reydams-Schills, sebbene dalla lettura del Commentario non si possano ricavare notizie più approfondite su Calcidio, dalla sua opera sembra possibile ipotizzare il suo posizionamento nel panorama culturale nel quale si trovò a vivere. Tuttavia, un principio di prudenza suggerirebbe di non ritenere Calcidio indubbiamente cristiano, benché non lo si possa allo stesso modo escludere del tutto. In questo senso, l'ipotesi avanzata da Waszink, in merito alla sua collocazione nell'Italia della seconda metà del IV secolo d.C., pare essere poco convincente (p. 218).

Secondo Reydams-Schills, infatti, se l'autore fosse realmente vissuto nell'ambiente milanese del IV secolo d.C., si sarebbero dovuti presumibilmente rintracciare nella sua opera elementi appartenenti al platonismo successivo tanto a Plotino, quanto a Porfirio, e lo si sarebbe dovuto immaginare ben immerso nelle questioni cristiane dell'epoca (p. 220). L'A. ritiene la voce di Calcidio piuttosto distante da quella degli autori cristiani a lui contemporanei, quali Sinesio e Boezio, e a conferma di ciò si sottolinea il fatto che, nell'epoca di Calcidio, la cui opera

appare priva dei dibattiti sulla Trinità e sulla creazione, il Cristianesimo non avrebbe rivestito ancora un ruolo dominante.

Nelle conclusioni del volume emerge, dunque, con evidenza l'“autorialità” di Calcidio, riscontrabile nella composizione del Commentario tanto nella modalità interpretativa dell'ipotesi platonico, quanto nell'utilizzo del materiale a sua disposizione, aspetto che spingerebbe ad immaginare un accesso diretto dell'autore alle sue fonti. In definitiva, non si può non rilevare come l'A. sia stata non solo brillantemente in grado di dimostrare l'originalità e l'importanza di Calcidio quale autore di un Commentario organico e ben strutturato, ma anche di restituire ai lettori moderni l'immagine di un pensatore autonomo e di un “effective cultural mediator” (p. 220).