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Chapter 2

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Plotinus' Account of Demiurgic Causation and its Philosophical Background

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Demiurgy and causation

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Plotinus' account of the sensible world is based on two assumptions:

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1: the sensible cosmos is rationally ordered and its order depends on the activity of a prior cause;

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2: this order does not reflect any rational design on the part of the cause, since the cause has no reasoning or calculation in it.

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Plotinus therefore rejects intelligent design theology, while at the same time maintaining that our world has an ordered structure, which is the effect of a superior cause.² Here I aim to set this theory against its background.³ I will argue that the debate between Platonic and Aristotelian philosophers during the second century AD played a prominent role in the genesis of Plotinus' account.

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A crucial passage to assess Plotinus' view of demiurgic causation

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is the opening chapter of treatise VI.7 (38).⁴ It contains an exegetical

1 section on the *Timaeus*, where Plotinus considers Plato's account of the
 2 making of the cosmos and the fashioning of the human body. Plato's text
 3 raises a puzzle for Plotinus, for it describes the activity of the demiurge in
 4 terms of discursive reasoning and calculation (λογισμός; *Ti.* 30b4; 33a6;
 5 34b1). Plotinus, however, denies that god – whom in this section Plotinus
 6 equates with the Intellect – produces our cosmos like a human craftsman.
 7 This view often occurs in Plotinus, who generally claims that true and
 8 intelligible causes do not deliberate. Therefore order in the sensible world
 9 derives from a superior nature, but this fact does not require any process
 10 of reasoning (λογισμός) or foresight (προόρασις) on its part (VI.7.128–
 11 32). Plotinus maintains this view in his treatises on providence, where he
 12 distinguishes providence (based on the causation of universal *logos*) from
 13 a kind of foresight based on a process of reasoning (see III.2.2.8–9; III.3–
 14 4; 14.1–2). The same holds for the world soul, whose thought activity
 15 Plotinus opposes to that of discursive and inferential reasoning
 16 (IV.4.11.11–17), and for the demiurgic contemplation of nature: again,
 17 Plotinus separates the causal activity of nature from that which depends
 18 on reasoning and research (III.8.3.13–17).

19 Interestingly, the agent is not the same in all these passages: in
 20 VI.7 Plotinus focuses on Intellect, in III.2 on universal *logos* (the status of
 21 *logos* in this treatise and its relation to Plotinus' usual metaphysical
 22 hierarchy is famously debated),⁵ in IV.4 on the world soul and in III.8 on

1 the lowest productive part of the world-soul, i.e. nature. It may actually be
2 difficult to define the position of the demiurgic cause in Plotinus’
3 metaphysics and this fact reflects a certain distinctive fluidity in Plotinus’
4 gradualist metaphysical hierarchy.⁶ Be that as it may, the distinction
5 between the causation of intelligible substances and a kind of
6 craftsmanlike causation based on calculation or discursive reasoning is a
7 recurring aspect of passages where Plotinus focuses on how true
8 intelligible causes act on the physical world. In fact, this thesis is deeply
9 rooted in Plotinus’ philosophy and is connected to a key aspect of his
10 theory of knowledge, i.e. that intelligible beings should be conceived of
11 adequately and according to the principles proper to them (see VI.5.2),
12 whereas discursive and inferential thinking is typical of our embodied
13 souls (see IV.3.18.1–7; IV.4.6.10–13; IV.4.12.5–48).⁷ In the background
14 of this view lies Plotinus’ account of emanative causation, based on the
15 so-called ‘double *energeia*’ theory.⁸ The central idea of this theory is that
16 real causes act without undergoing any affection and in virtue of their own
17 essence (the first *energeia*, i.e. the internal act that constitutes their own
18 nature). According to the first *energeia*, real causes are what they are and
19 ‘abide in themselves’ (see *Ti.* 42e5). However, an external act (the second
20 *energeia*) flows from them in virtue of their very nature, as a sort of by-
21 product, without entailing any transformation or diminution on their part.
22 The secondary act can never be separated from its origin and is like an

1 image of it, whereas the first activity stands as a paradigm. Plotinus’
2 favourite images of fire emanating heat through its environment and of
3 light-propagation are intended to convey these features of causation. It is
4 this model of gradualist or emanative causation which replaces that of
5 artisanal causation in Plotinus’ thought.

6 Rather than exploring Plotinus’ theory of causation, I wish to
7 focus more narrowly on his attitude to Plato in the opening part of VI.7
8 and try to spell out the background of his position.⁹ There Plotinus aims,
9 so to speak, to neutralise Plato’s account insofar as it suggests that god’s
10 causality is an activity based on provident calculation. Accepting such an
11 account without qualification would entail that god is conceived of
12 anthropomorphically, something Plotinus does his best to avoid. His
13 solution is as simple as it is radical: for he reads Plato’s words as a
14 metaphor suggesting that our sensible world is ordered *as if* it were
15 produced by the rational plan of a provident craftsman (λογισμός;
16 προόρασις: VI.7.1.29–32); but this is not what happens in reality, since
17 our world is nothing but a lower and spatially extended image, which
18 unfolds what exists ‘all together’ at the intelligible level. This process of
19 derivation implies no planning or foresight on the part of god: what
20 depends on god derives somewhat automatically from his very nature, so
21 that the same essential content that exists without succession or deficiency
22 in god is split and comes into existence at the level of the corporeal and

1 extensional world (VI.7.1.54–7). Accordingly, Plotinus reads the artisanal
 2 model of causation set out in Plato’s *Timaeus* as a metaphor expressing
 3 the derivation of the sensible world from its higher principles.

4 Plotinus’ approach to demiurgic causation has puzzled interpreters.
 5 It is worth quoting some remarks by Jean-Marc Narbonne, who has
 6 recently explained Plotinus’ metaphorical reading of Plato as a reaction
 7 against Gnostic cosmology:

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8 [T]he opposition appears to be categorical, even literal, between
 9 the Platonic statement according to which the Demiurge proceeds
 10 through reasoning..., and Plotinus’ solemn declaration stating that
 11 the universe was not produced “as the result of any process of
 12 reasoning [οὐκ ἐκ λογισμοῦ γενομένου]...” (47 [III 2], 3, 4). How
 13 might this declaration be interpreted? Undoubtedly, for Plotinus,
 14 these are distinctions between the different types of reasoning,
 15 such as that which is simply a way of expressing or manifesting
 16 the intelligence at work in the eternal and stable generation of
 17 things, and that which serves as a pretext for the introduction of
 18 contingency, change, and even conflict in the world. It is only with
 19 this second type of reasoning that Plotinus in fact disagrees and
 20 not with the first—as long as it is correctly interpreted. The
 21 problem with the second type is real, however, precisely because
 22 an exegesis of the *Timaeus* did exist at Plotinus’ time, which

1 depicted Plato's reasoning demiurgy as a form of contingency, by
2 emphasizing its arbitrary character. These exegetes were, of
3 course, none other than the Gnostics who became so problematic
4 for Plotinus that he was driven to open controversy with them in
5 Treatise 33. (Narbonne 2011^{Ref316}: 118–19)

6 This reading is unpersuasive. Certainly Plotinus' account of demiurgic
7 causation conflicts with a literal reading of the *Timaeus* and this is a
8 crucial fact to be taken into account when assessing his interpretation of
9 Plato. *Pace* Narbonne, however, this situation is not unique. Plato's
10 *Timaeus* indeed plays a prominent role in Plotinus' philosophy and
11 references to this dialogue are ubiquitous in the *Enneads*.¹⁰ Yet, Plotinus'
12 interpretation is opinionated to say the least. For example, Plotinus
13 neglects the mathematical background of the dialogue, to the extent that
14 he virtually ignores the atomic triangles. Plotinus' account of bodies is
15 actually based on a creative re-interpretation of Aristotle's hylomorphism,
16 whereas Plato's geometrical atomism finds no place in this account.¹¹ The
17 same holds with the mathematical structure of the soul: while Plotinus
18 often refers to Plato's account of the composition of the world soul (*Ti.*
19 35a ff.), he basically ignores its harmonic structure. Therefore, Plato's
20 emphasis on the mathematical *composition* of the soul is simply left out.¹²
21 The overall picture to be drawn from this scenario is that Plotinus'

1 interpretation of the *Timaeus* is extensive but very selective, and that
2 Plotinus' reading is profoundly shaped by his own agenda.

3 The example of mathematics is particularly clear. Plotinus departs
4 significantly from what we find in the *Republic*, where the dianoetic
5 thought of mathematics is set out as 'mediator' (μεταξύ) between opinion
6 and understanding' (*R.* 6.511d). This passage probably lies behind
7 Plotinus' view that our discursive self has a middle position between
8 sense-perception and the Intellect (*V.*3.3.36–40). Plato, however,
9 famously connects 'geometry and the sister arts' to dialectic (the upper
10 sections in the line analogy: *R.* 6.509d), in that they differ from opinion
11 and are relative to the intelligible; hence the crucial position of abstract
12 mathematical disciplines in the *curriculum* of philosophers in the ideal
13 city (*R.* 7.525d-531e). None of this is to be found in the writings of
14 Plotinus, who is instead inclined to bring together mathematics and the
15 visible world of bodies (the *lower* part of Plato's line), since both involve
16 a kind of quantitative, extensional multiplicity which differs from that of
17 intelligible substances (see *IV.*3.2.24–9).¹³ The conflict with Plato's words
18 is, in this case, no less striking than the conflict concerning demiurgic
19 causation. And indeed, Plato's overall thesis about the philosophical and
20 ethical significance of mathematics finds no echo in Plotinus.¹⁴ To sum
21 up: Plotinus' metaphorical reading of demiurgic causation patently
22 conflicts with the literal meaning of Plato's *Timaeus*, but this fact fits with

1 Plotinus' overall approach to this dialogue. As we shall see below, in
2 developing his peculiar reading of Plato, Plotinus was actually deeply
3 influenced by the philosophical debates of the second century AD, and
4 especially by some Peripatetic criticisms of Plato and his followers.

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5 **Plotinus and the second-century school debate**

6 Narbonne's reading is also questionable in one other respect. At the end of
7 the passage quoted above, he asserts that the reason why Plotinus departs
8 from a literal reading of Plato's demiurgic causation is to be found in his
9 reaction against Gnostic cosmogony. This statement needs substantial
10 qualification. Certainly, Plotinus rejects the Gnostic account of
11 cosmogony as involving a gross misinterpretation of Plato's demiurge,
12 which emphasizes the arbitrary and anthropomorphic character of his
13 activity (see II.9.6).¹⁵ Indeed, Plotinus' theory of intelligible causation (as
14 opposed to that which involves reasoning and calculation) plays an
15 important role in his critical discussion (see II.9.2 and II.9.8). Yet there is
16 simply no reason to infer from this fact that Plotinus' account was
17 *determined* by his polemic against the Gnostics.¹⁶ Rather, it seems that the
18 anti-Gnostic passages in II.9 refer cursorily to philosophical views which
19 Plotinus develops elsewhere in more detail. As a matter of fact, allusions
20 to the Gnostics are absent or marginal in passages where Plotinus delves
21 into intelligible causation and argues in favour of his theory. Instead, these
22 passages often display very interesting allusions to Peripatetic theories,

1 which have completely escaped Narbonne. Some recent contributions
2 have convincingly downplayed the Gnostic aspects in Plotinus' account of
3 nature in treatise III.8 while at the same time emphasizing the importance
4 of the Aristotelian background.¹⁷ As we shall see below, the same applies
5 to Plotinus' discussion in VI.7. It is arguably this Peripatetic background
6 which makes it possible to understand something more about Plotinus'
7 theory and its genesis (and in particular the idea that demiurgic causation
8 does not entail *logismos*).

9 A recently (2008) discovered fragment from Diogenes of
10 Oinoanda's inscription (NF 155 = YF 200) sheds new light on the ancient
11 debate about Plato's demiurge (Hammerstaedt and Smith 2008^{Ref195}: 24–
12 6). This text is one of the 'Maxims' from the Epicurean inscription and it
13 provides a most interesting criticism of Plato's cosmology. This is the
14 translation of the fragment given by Hammerstaedt and Smith:

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15 Although Plato was right to acknowledge that the world had an
16 origin, even if he was not right to introduce a divine craftsman of
17 it, instead of employing nature as its craftsman, he was wrong to
18 say that it is imperishable.¹⁸

19 The existence of an Epicurean polemic against Plato's *Timaeus* is a well-
20 known fact. Until now the evidence included Epicurus' criticism of the

1 theory of elements in Περὶ φύσεως book 14 (*PHerc* 1418) and Velleius’
2 objections against Plato’s demiurge in Cicero’s *De natura deorum*.¹⁹
3 Velleius criticizes both Plato’s account of craftsmanlike causation and the
4 unacceptably asymmetrical view that the world had a beginning but will
5 have no end (*ND* 1.18–20). The newly discovered fragment from
6 Diogenes supplements the evidence from Cicero and gives further details
7 on the Epicurean rejection of Plato’s demiurge. Furthermore, the
8 objections against Plato are consistent with the extant evidence
9 concerning Diogenes’ criticism of Stoic cosmology as entailing that god
10 created the cosmos for his own sake and that of human beings (see *NF*
11 126/127 VI 14, fr. 20 I.10, II.12). Diogenes (or rather his source) indeed
12 takes Plato to be correct in assuming that that our world is generated. *Pace*
13 Plato, however, this does not entail that it is the work of a divine
14 craftsman: the only true craftsman is nature, as Diogenes emphasizes.
15 And, of course, Plato is wrong to say that the world is imperishable while
16 being generated.

17 Diogenes’ inscription dates from (possibly the second half of) the
18 second century AD. The parallel with Cicero shows that Diogenes draws
19 from the earlier Epicurean tradition and there is little if any evidence for
20 implicating him in contemporary debates. Yet it is interesting to set
21 Diogenes’ new fragment in parallel with some fragments of Atticus, a
22 Platonist philosopher of the same period.²⁰ We know that Atticus

1 vehemently rejected Aristotle's philosophy and the conciliatory efforts
2 made by those who attempted to use Aristotle as a sort of guide for
3 interpreting Plato. Atticus devoted a whole work to the refutation of those
4 Aristotelising opponents (whatever their identity may be), and a number
5 of fragments of this work can be found in Eusebius' *Preparation for the*
6 *Gospel*.²¹ One of the most striking features of Atticus' criticism is the
7 parallel he draws between Epicurus and Aristotle (*apud Eus. P. E.* 15.5.1–
8 14 = fr. 3 des Places), as both of them deny god's concern for our world
9 and ultimately reject providence. Atticus' defence of Plato is based on a
10 close and literal reading of the *Timaeus*. He takes the world as having
11 been 'really' generated in time, and regards the demiurge's activity as that
12 of a craftsman who is capable of producing things and cares for his
13 products by intervening on them.²² It is on account of his view of
14 demiurgic causation that Plato 'makes all things connected with god, and
15 dependent on god' (εἰς θεὸν καὶ ἐκ θεοῦ πάντα ἀνάπτει: fr. 3.16 des
16 Places, trans. Gifford), a claim immediately substantiated by Atticus with
17 references to Plato's *Laws* (4.715e–716a and 10.885b7), *Timaeus* (29e1–
18 3; 30a4–5) and *Phaedo* (62b1; 97c4).

19 Famously, Aristotle conceives of nature as teleologically ordered
20 and regards god as the cause of motion. Furthermore, Aristotle claims that
21 ordered astral motions ensure regularity in the sublunary region (see *GC*
22 2.10). Atticus takes these aspects of Aristotle's philosophy as efforts to

1 develop a notion of providence while at the same time removing all
 2 intervention from a divine and artisanal cause external to nature. On his
 3 view, however, this is just a mischievous attempt to dissimulate a
 4 complete denial of providence. Atticus' parallel between Aristotle and
 5 Epicurus is meant to substantiate this claim:

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6 For if according to Epicurus providence disappears, although the
 7 gods according to him employ the utmost solicitude for the
 8 preservation of their own goods, so must providence disappear
 9 according to Aristotle also, even if the heavenly motions are
 10 arranged in a certain order and array (fr. 3.66–71 des Places trans.
 11 Gifford).²³

12 Very interestingly, Atticus contrasts the administration of human affairs
 13 by Aristotle's nature (φύσει τινί) with that conducted by God's reasoning
 14 (θεοῦ λογισμῶ: fr. 3.85 des Places). Only a provident God, who is
 15 capable of both producing this world and intervening in it, can ensure
 16 order and providence. This cannot be achieved by Aristotle's nature. A
 17 further crucial aspect of Atticus' criticism is his emphasis on the existence
 18 of an animated power (δύναμις ἔμψυχος) that pervades the whole, binding
 19 and holding all things together (Eus. *P. E.* 15.12.3 = fr. 8.18 des Places).
 20 This is precisely the role of the world soul: Atticus once again emphasizes
 21 the contrast between this idea and Aristotle's nature (fr. 8.8–10: πρὸς

1 οὐδὲν τούτων ἡμῖν Ἀριστοτέλης ὁμολογεῖ. οὐ γὰρ εἶναι τὴν φύσιν
 2 ψυχῆν). The criticism of Aristotle’s cosmology is distinctive of Atticus’
 3 approach, but his reading of the *Timaeus* is not unparalleled.²⁴ Although
 4 the issue of the generation of the world was debated in Middle Platonism,
 5 and interpreters of Plato were famously split among those who read
 6 Plato’s *Timaeus* literally and those who favoured an allegorical
 7 interpretation, there was seemingly no disagreement about the fact that
 8 God acts on the world as a craftsman.²⁵ Pre-Plotinian Platonist
 9 philosophers argued that natural order reflects the reasoning of the
 10 demiurge. Thus according to Alcinous the demiurge ‘proceeds through a
 11 most admirable providence and administrative care (δίαταξιν) to create the
 12 world, because “he was good” (*Ti.* 29e)’ (*Did.* 12.167.13–15, trans.
 13 Dillon).²⁶ Galen’s Platonising teleology too is based on his account of
 14 providential nature as a benign craftsman (see esp. his *De usu partium*:
 15 e.g. *UP* III.507 Kühn).²⁷ Atticus’ emphasis on the *logismos* of the
 16 demiurge, then, simply reflects what was then the current (and indeed
 17 most natural) way of reading Plato’s *Timaeus*, although the criticism of
 18 Aristotle and the parallel between Aristotle and Epicurus are distinctive
 19 features of his approach.

20 The parallel between Epicurus and Aristotle can be taken to
 21 confirm Atticus’ superficial knowledge of Aristotle’s philosophy.²⁸
 22 Comparing Aristotle and Epicurus (to Aristotle’s detriment) could also be

1 a mere rhetorical tactic for denigrating Aristotle with no genuine
2 philosophical interest. Yet at the time of Atticus there still was a living
3 Epicurean tradition and Atticus' polemical tone does not rule out the
4 possibility that his objections have some real ground. Prudence is
5 necessary, but the least one can say is that the recently discovered
6 fragment of Diogenes' inscription fits very well with Atticus' polemical
7 argument. As a matter of fact, the similarity between Diogenes' criticism
8 of Plato and Atticus' *Aristoteles interpretatus* is striking, as both entail a
9 replacement of Plato's demiurge with a non-craftsmanlike *physis*. Atticus
10 has, therefore, some good reason for regarding Epicurean and Aristotelian
11 philosophers as forming a common front against the supporters of divine
12 artisanal causation in nature, i.e. Plato and the Stoics, and this despite the
13 obvious differences between Epicurus' and Aristotle's accounts of
14 nature.²⁹

15 This background helps explain some features of Alexander of
16 Aphrodisias' cosmology. In a number of well-known texts, Alexander
17 challenges Plato's views on demiurgic causation. Yet at the same time
18 Alexander carefully defends the existence of order in nature, while
19 arguing that order in the sublunary region does not depend on
20 craftsmanlike reasoning. Furthermore, in *Quaest.* II.3 (a work possibly
21 directed against Atticus, or against someone who has levelled criticisms
22 against Aristotle closely reminiscent of those of Atticus), Alexander

1 develops a problematic account of the ‘divine power (θεῖα δύναμις)’ in
2 nature, derived from celestial bodies: this power acts on the composition
3 of bodies and on account of it bodies acquire a certain psychic principle
4 (*Quaest.* II.3 49.3 Bruns).³⁰ Probably a Platonist opponent would not have
5 been persuaded by Alexander’s defence of Aristotle.³¹ However,
6 Alexander’s combined attempt to reject demiurgic causation while
7 maintaining the existence of providence marks a crucial step in post-
8 Hellenistic accounts of causation and can plausibly be seen as a source of
9 Plotinus’ account. Alexander’s rejection of craftsmanlike causation is
10 indeed so radical that he does not refrain from defining nature as an
11 ‘irrational power’ (ἄλογος...δύναμις, *apud* Simpl. *in Ph.* 311.1 Diels; see
12 Alex. Aphr. *in Metaph.* 104.3 Hayduck).³² Furthermore, in order to
13 illustrate how natural motion is transmitted from the first mover,
14 Alexander adopts the mechanical analogy of a marionette whose parts are
15 connected with strings (see Alex. Aphr. *apud* Simpl. *in Ph.*, 311.8 ff.).³³
16 No choice or plan is involved in this process and Alexander develops the
17 distinction between nature and art both in his treatise *On Providence*,
18 preserved in Arabic (see *Prov.* 79 Ruland), and in his commentary on the
19 *Metaphysics* (*in Metaph.* 104.3–10 Hayduck).

20 Alexander certainly maintains that rational structures and
21 regularities exist in the sublunary region. This holds especially for natural
22 species, which exist in virtue of their hylomorphic forms (human beings

1 beget human beings: see *in Metaph.* 103.33 Hayduck); the eternal and
2 regular character of these forms is connected to the cyclical motions of
3 celestial bodies. What Alexander rejects is the Platonic view that such
4 rational structures should be seen as depending on a demiurgic and
5 reasoning cause that produces cosmic order by contemplating an external
6 paradigm. This paradigm instead simply coincides with the hylomorphic
7 immanent form, insofar as it is taken as the goal of natural motion (*in*
8 *Metaph.* 349.6–16 Hayduck). Predictably enough, Alexander (*Prov.* 33.1
9 ff.; 87.5 ff. Ruland; *Quaest.* I.25 41.8 ff Bruns.; II.19 63.15 ff. Bruns)
10 regards natural regularities (such as the processes of coming to be and
11 perishing, and the continual existence of sublunary natural species) as
12 connected to (and depending on) cyclical celestial motions. Therefore, the
13 hylomorphic structure of the sublunary region, and the cosmological
14 relation between this region and regular celestial motions, make it
15 possible to account for natural order without having to conceive of nature
16 as a demiurgic and reasoning power. It is extremely interesting that
17 Epicurus' name crops up again in the discussion: Alexander argues that
18 the Epicureans denied finality in nature since they mistakenly connected it
19 to choice and reasoning (κατὰ προαίρεσιν...καὶ λογισμὸν, *apud Simpl. in*
20 *Ph.* 372.9–15 Diels), (correctly!) noting that things in nature do not
21 happen this way. Yet, as Alexander immediately adds, the situation is
22 different, since nature produces for the sake of some end, although this

1 happens without reasoning (ἡ φύσις ἔνεκά του μὲν ποιεῖ, οὐ κατὰ λόγους
2 δέ).³⁴

3 As other scholars have already remarked, Alexander’s criticism of
4 demiurgy in his treatise *On Providence* is similar to Plotinus’ position.³⁵
5 Certainly, Plotinus repeatedly argues that the material world results from
6 ‘action’ or ‘production’ on the part of intelligible principles (see Plotinus’
7 usage of the verbs ἐργάζεσθαι and ποιεῖν in II.7.3.9; IV.4.12.29–41;
8 VI.3.15.28, etc.) and this conflicts with the Peripatetic theory. As noted
9 above, however, ‘production’ here should not be taken to mean demiurgic
10 or artisanal production, for Plotinus’ primary concern is to strip
11 intelligible causality of any anthropomorphic connotation. True principles
12 do not actually engage in any reasoning or calculation and their causal
13 action merely depends on their essential nature, without involving any
14 deliberation or choice between different alternatives. Both in Alexander
15 and in Plotinus λογισμός and cognate expressions refer to that which does
16 *not* explain order in nature. Both authors reject the idea that teleology
17 should be explained anthropomorphically, i.e. as a plan devised by nature.
18 And both Alexander and Plotinus regard nature as an ‘irrational’ power,
19 although Plotinus adds the crucial qualification that the irrational power of
20 nature is nonetheless a kind of contemplation.³⁶ Indeed, the differences
21 here are also very significant. Alexander rejects Plato’s demiurge in
22 favour of a cosmological account of teleology which does not involve

1 separate Ideas of the Platonic sort and is based on the theory of the
2 immanent specific form. This is certainly not the case with Plotinus, who
3 rather develops a distinctive account both of Plato's metaphysical
4 essential causes and of the theory of participation. Plotinus' Platonist
5 views on natural kinds and on their derivation from intelligible causes are
6 certainly very different from Alexander's hylomorphic essentialism.³⁷ Yet
7 Plotinus' correction of Plato's account of demiurgic causation in the
8 *Timaeus* can be seen as incorporating some features of the Peripatetic
9 position; and the background of second-century AD school debates
10 between Platonic and Peripatetic philosophers helps explain why Plotinus
11 discarded the most obvious reading of Plato's text.

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12 **From demiurgy to gradualism: Plotinus' account of the**
13 **nature of man**

14 The suggested reading is further confirmed by Plotinus' detailed
15 discussion of Peripatetic views in the same texts where he focuses on
16 demiurgic causation. It is as if Plotinus felt it necessary to demarcate his
17 position from two equally misleading views: the traditional reading of the
18 *Timaeus*, involving a kind of anthropomorphic activity on the part of true
19 causes, and the Peripatetic view which rejects craftsmanlike causation but
20 also discards Plato's paradigmaticism altogether. Plotinus' own middle path
21 between these alternatives leads precisely to his theory of ontic
22 gradualism and emanative causation. As noted above, some recent studies

1 have elucidated the Peripatetic background of Plotinus' views about
2 nature, contemplation and demiurgy in III.8 in interesting ways.³⁸ I do not
3 wish to dwell on this issue here, but rather to focus again on VI.7. In
4 VI.7.2 Plotinus moves on to Aristotle, after his initial discussion of the
5 demiurge, and in particular after having just qualified the nature of the
6 Intellect by using the term 'cause' (*αἰτία*) (VI.7.1.57).³⁹ In order to explain
7 the Intellect's causal nature, Plotinus adopts the characteristic Peripatetic
8 distinction between ὅτι and διότι or διὰ τί,⁴⁰ while arguing that this
9 distinction can only acquire an adequate foundation within a Platonist
10 account of reality. In fact, Plotinus grants the Peripatetic view that at least
11 some things 'here below' can ultimately be seen as identical with their
12 essence and that form is the 'cause of being' for each sensible thing
13 (VI.7.2.11–17). However, he claims that this is not sufficient to
14 understand how something may be genuinely identical with its cause.⁴¹
15 For in order to adequately grasp this identity, we cannot start from things
16 here below, whose structure is necessarily extensional. Extensional things
17 cannot but form a plurality whose parts are external to each other,
18 although they are certainly connected to the other parts of the same
19 ordered whole (see VI.7.2.30). But a thing and its form can never be
20 completely identical within such an extensional context. In order to
21 account for the unity between things and their causes, then, we must
22 ultimately abandon the extensional world of bodies and focus on Form

1 itself (αὐτὸ τὸ εἶδος; VI.7.2.18, i.e. not as the form of a certain body). But
2 in so doing, we must go beyond hylomorphism and examine the very
3 nature of the Intellect. ‘There’ things are perfectly unified and it is only in
4 that context that each object can genuinely be seen as being identical with
5 its cause.

6 At the end of this argument Plotinus claims that ‘when you state
7 the cause, you state everything’ (VI.7.3.13–14: αἰτιολογῶν πάντα λέγεις).
8 Although the details are open to debate, Plotinus’ general account conveys
9 the idea that everything in our world (with the exception of spatial
10 extension) is ultimately the effect (or rather the extensional unfolding) of
11 intelligible causes.⁴² Accordingly, all features in our material world derive
12 from intelligible principles, so that we actually know these beings as a
13 whole by considering their cause. This conclusion, however, raises the
14 obvious puzzle that the intelligible realm should pre-contain features that
15 appear to be peculiar to the corporeal world, such as perception in human
16 beings. This puzzle is raised in VI.7.3.22–33 and it sets the context for
17 Plotinus’ discussion about the nature of the human being in the following
18 four chapters (VI.7.4–7). Here I cannot provide a full interpretation of this
19 long and difficult section, which includes Plotinus’ celebrated discussion
20 about the ‘three men’ (i.e. the three ontic and cognitive levels that
21 characterise the nature of human beings: see VI.7.6). I would only like to
22 emphasize again how Plotinus’ reading of Aristotle shapes his account of

1 the Platonic hierarchy of being and, in particular, his view about the
 2 relation between the soul and enmattered form. It seems to me that this
 3 account provides Plotinus' answer to the exegetical puzzle about Plato's
 4 *Timaeus* raised in the first chapter of the treatise.⁴³

5 Plotinus starts his discussion by focusing on man 'here below'
 6 (VI.7.4.3) and mentions three hypotheses about the nature of 'this man':

Ext

7 (1) Is this man a *logos* other than the soul which makes this man
 8 and provides him with life and reason? (2) Or is the soul of this
 9 kind the man? (3) Or the soul which uses the body of such a kind?
 10 (VI.7.4.7–10)⁴⁴

11 Plotinus' use of *τοιούτη* (as referring to the soul) and *τοιόνδε* (as referred
 12 to the body) is interesting. In his hypotheses (2) and (3), Plotinus suggests
 13 that man is identical with his soul: man can in fact either be a soul 'of this
 14 kind / of a certain sort' or 'the soul which uses a body of this kind / of a
 15 certain sort'. Both views are clearly indebted to Plato's *Alcibiades* (129e-
 16 130a; 130c) and Plato's anthropology in the *Alcibiades* shapes Plotinus'
 17 discussion in VI.7.4–7 (see, in particular, VI.7.5.24).⁴⁵ Yet the use of
 18 *τοιούτη* / *τοιόνδε* as referring to both soul and body cannot be traced back
 19 to Plato and points to Aristotle's account of the soul in *de An.* 2.1.412a16–
 20 28, where the soul is said to be the actuality of a body 'of such and such a

1 kind' (τοιόνδε: 412a16; τοιοῦτο: 412a21), i.e. a body having life
2 potentially within it. According to the same pattern outlined above in
3 relation to nature and providence, Plotinus integrates into his psychology
4 Aristotle's view about the hylomorphic relation between soul and body
5 (organic bodies are alive in virtue of their formal component), while at the
6 same time profoundly transforming it: for the aspect in virtue of which the
7 body 'of such a kind' is alive, is, according to Plotinus, a mere trace or
8 shadow produced by the soul, whereas soul proper (i.e. the ultimate source
9 of the body's life) is not part of the hylomorphic compound (see
10 IV.4.18.4–10; 18.30).⁴⁶

11 Plotinus, therefore, does not merely consider the hypothesis that
12 man is a soul, or a soul which uses a body, but adds the further remark
13 that soul and body must be of such and such a kind, i.e. that soul and body
14 must be structured in such a way as to constitute a human being and not
15 some other living being. How can this peculiar structure be accounted for?
16 Plotinus' answer to this problem leads him to transform the Peripatetic
17 notion of 'composite' in chapter VI.7.5: for unlike Aristotle he claims that
18 man 'here below' is in fact the composite not of soul plus a body of such a
19 kind, but the composite of soul (i.e. the intelligible principle which
20 provides man with life and knowledge) plus a *logos* of such a kind (i.e. the
21 intelligible forming principle which accounts for the features of bodies).⁴⁷
22 Here, again, Plotinus' critical allusion to *de An.* 2.1 is evident. In fact,

1 Plotinus incorporates the Peripatetic idea that human beings are composite
2 and that the soul alone does not suffice to account for their nature. Yet
3 what must be added to the soul is not a certain body, but a certain
4 intelligible forming principle which accounts for the features of that body,
5 i.e. *logos*, which is, in its turn, an activity of the soul (VI.7.5.3–4).⁴⁸ In so
6 doing, Plotinus transfers, so to speak, Aristotle’s hylomorphic account
7 into a different framework of thought, according to which even the nature
8 of human beings ‘here below’ is completely constituted at the intelligible
9 level (where ‘intelligible’ should be taken to mean not merely the world of
10 Forms, but the different degrees or levels that constitute Plotinus’
11 intelligible realm). It is extremely interesting to examine in some detail
12 how Plotinus comes to this conclusion, for a careful reading of his
13 argumentation sheds further light on his approach to Aristotle’s
14 hylomorphism.

15 Plotinus starts (VI.7.4.12–31) by considering the first hypothesis
16 on his list, i.e. that man is a *logos*. First he equates *logos* with some kind
17 of definition or ‘formal determination’ that should express the nature of its
18 object (i.e. man, a living being composed of soul and body). The standard
19 example for this definition is ‘rational animal’, and this is indeed the
20 definition mentioned in VI.7.4.12.⁴⁹ A *logos* conceived of in this way,
21 however, does not show at all what man here below really is (i.e. his
22 essence or nature), but simply describes the factual structure of concrete

1 beings composed of body and soul. This kind of *logos* or definition, then,
2 has no explanatory power. Plotinus' polemical reference to Aristotle's
3 view of definition is evident here (see the parallel in II.7.3.8–10): for
4 Plotinus argues that even if we grant that we should focus on forms in
5 matter (i.e. even if we provisionally accept Aristotle's position), this kind
6 of definition is nonetheless insufficient, since it accounts for beings
7 composed of matter and form (τόδ' ἐν τῷδε, VI.7.4.22–3, see Arist.
8 *Metaph.* 7.5.1030b18; 7.11.1036b23), whereas it is incapable of grasping
9 form alone. But *according to the Peripatetics themselves* definition should
10 be able to grasp the essence of things (VI.7.4.26–8). Their account of
11 *logos* as definition is therefore insufficient even according to Peripatetic
12 standards, since it is incapable of adequately grasping the essence of man,
13 even if one regards enmattered forms as the proper object of definitional
14 *logos* (VI.7.4.24–5). With his usual philosophical acumen, Plotinus thus
15 points to a major difficulty in Aristotle's theory of form and definition in
16 *Metaph.* 7, namely the issue of whether a definition of form should
17 include material features or not.⁵⁰ Plotinus exploits this puzzle to his own
18 advantage, since he suggests that the only way of solving the problematic
19 status of Peripatetic definitions points to a different meaning of *logos*, i.e.
20 not as the definition of concretely existing human beings, but as a
21 principle which produces human beings and accounts for their nature: this

1 is what Plotinus calls τὸν λόγον τὸν πεποιηκότα at VI.7.4.25. The *logos*
2 itself is ‘one which makes the rational living being’ (VI.7.4.31).

3 Next Plotinus dwells on the status of the productive *logos* and, in
4 doing so, introduces the soul as the essential constituent of the nature of
5 man (VI.7.4.31–VI.7.5.8). Plotinus suggests that in order to define the real
6 nature of man we should replace the derivative term ζῶον with the
7 original form ζωή: Ζωή τοίνυν λογική ὁ ἄνθρωπος (VI.7.4.33). According
8 to Plotinus ‘life’ is necessarily connected with ‘soul’, so that the two may
9 even be conceived of as identical to one another (see IV.7.11.9–12).
10 Therefore, replacing ‘living being’ with ‘life’ ultimately leads to the
11 identification of the nature of ‘man’ either with an activity of the soul or
12 with the soul itself (VI.7.4.35–6). But this raises a further problem
13 (VI.7.4.37), since the same soul can pass from man into different living
14 beings (Plotinus admits reincarnation and claims that human souls can
15 pass into irrational animals and even plants: see III.4.2.11–30). If this is
16 the case, the soul alone cannot be identical with man: for example, if the
17 soul were the same thing as man, we could not regard human beings as
18 being essentially bipeds, since human souls can reincarnate as animals
19 with four legs. At the beginning of VI.7.5 Plotinus solves this predicament
20 by claiming that man is not soul alone, but something composed of soul
21 plus a *logos* ‘of this kind’ (VI.7.5.3). As noted above, in this way Plotinus
22 incorporates and transforms Aristotle’s hylomorphic account of man as an

1 ensouled living being: for the nature of human beings includes not the
2 body, but the formative principles that are responsible for the bodily
3 structure of human beings.⁵¹ These formative principles are nothing but
4 activities (ἐνέργειαι) of the soul, and could not exist without the soul
5 which acts within them (VI.7.5.4–5).⁵²

6 Plotinus distinguishes between different levels in the soul: the
7 nutritive soul (φυσική, VI.7.5.10), a higher soul that ‘makes a living
8 being’ (5.10) by entering into proximate matter and ‘making shapes in
9 body according to itself’ (5.14), and finally a higher and ‘more divine’
10 (θειότερα, 5.21) soul. This tripartition is reminiscent of the Aristotelian
11 distinction between nutritive, sensitive and rational soul. Yet unlike
12 Aristotle, Plotinus does not distinguish between different levels in the soul
13 based on their function or kind of activity. The whole section actually
14 aims to show that in some sense the highest and reasoning soul *can* be
15 said to perceive. Furthermore, in VI.7.6.19–20 the formative and sensitive
16 soul (what Plotinus here calls the second man) also appears to include the
17 activity proper to the discursive and embodied soul (as opposed to the
18 higher soul that does not leave the Intellect). What distinguishes each
19 level of the soul is not so much its kind of activity, as the degree of
20 ‘clarity’ or luminosity of its activity. This view is characteristically
21 Plotinian insofar as Plotinus sometimes sets out the ‘vertical’ hierarchy of
22 intelligible principles (Intellect, world soul and nature) as an intensive

1 hierarchy of degrees of life with different levels of ‘clarity’ (see
2 III.8.8.16–24). In other words, while different levels of the soul may well
3 perform the same life activities, they will do so in different ways and with
4 different degrees of intensity. Hence the soul which makes the living
5 being is ‘clearer and more alive’ than the nutritive one (VI.7.5.10–11),
6 whereas the divine soul has ‘clearer sense-perceptions’ than the lower soul
7 (5.22–3); in turn, the perceptions of the lower soul are ‘dimmer’ than
8 those of the higher soul. It is indeed somewhat difficult to make sense of
9 this view, but Plotinus’ analysis of the various levels of perception (from
10 the lowest and unconscious *petites perceptions* to the highest and clearest
11 perceptions, which are actually intellections) provides a good example of
12 it.

13 Plotinus dwells on the different ontic degrees of man and on their
14 mutual relation in VI.7.6, where he sets out his famous distinction
15 between three ‘men’ and their cognitive activities. Interpreting this
16 exceedingly difficult section is a task that lies beyond the scope of the
17 present article. Suffice it to say that Plotinus’ gradualism emerges there as
18 the positive side of both his metaphorical account of Plato’s demiurge and
19 his criticism of Peripatetic hylomorphism. At the end of his discussion,
20 Plotinus argues again that those features that characterise human beings
21 ‘here below’ (including perceptions) are nothing but lower manifestations
22 of a higher and intelligible nature: ‘these sense-perceptions here are dim

1 intellections, but the intellections there are clear sense-perceptions’
2 (VI.7.7.30–1).

3 The sketchy account just provided shows that Plotinus’ criticism
4 of Aristotle in VI.7.2–5 is connected with his account of demiurgic
5 causation in VI.7.1. Plotinus agrees with the Peripatetic criticism of
6 craftsmanlike causation, but does his best to demarcate his position from
7 hylomorphic essentialism. His sophisticated discussion of essence and
8 definition, therefore, completes his account of demiurgic causation. In a
9 way, Plotinus’ attitude towards Peripatetic philosophy is similar to
10 Alexander’s attitude towards the Epicureans. Alexander does his best to
11 differentiate his position from that of Epicurean philosophers precisely
12 because the Peripatetic and Epicurean views could be seen as similar
13 (since both entail the replacement of Plato’s demiurge with nature –
14 though Peripatetic and Epicurean philosophers obviously conceive of
15 nature in very different ways from each other). Likewise, Plotinus’
16 metaphorical interpretation of Plato’s demiurge and his account of
17 causation are very similar to Alexander’s view. Plotinus, however,
18 certainly does not wish to replace demiurgy with hylomorphism and his
19 critical discussion of Aristotle’s essentialism in VI.7.2–5 shows that his
20 metaphorical account of demiurgic causation holds within a fully Platonic
21 framework according to which things ‘here below’ derive from intelligible
22 causes and are just lower images of extra-physical essences. Moreover,

1 Plotinus argues that hylomorphism presents certain internal difficulties
2 and inconsistencies, which can only be solved via the assumption of
3 'Platonic' intelligible causes.

4 I do not wish in any way to deny the existence of a Gnostic
5 background to Plotinus' discussion. Plotinus' sections on demiurgic
6 causation and the 'three men' can indeed be seen as a response to Gnostic
7 speculations. It may well be the case that Plotinus conceived of the first
8 section of VI.7 as his alternative (or implicit response) to the Gnostic
9 views on the cosmos and man.⁵³ But it cannot in any way be proven that
10 Plotinus developed his theories against a Platonic-Gnostic background: as
11 I hope to have shown, much goes against this hypothesis. Rather, Plotinus
12 makes creative and sophisticated use of the philosophical school debates
13 that raged in the second and early third centuries and develops his
14 distinctive 'version' of Platonism against this philosophical background.
15 In his anti-Gnostic polemic (see esp. II.9), he simply employs his views
16 about demiurgy and causation as a resource against Gnostic cosmology
17 (since Gnosticism, in his view, is nothing but a misleading form of
18 Platonism: see esp. II.9.6). It might well be the case that Plotinus'
19 'spiritual experience' was close to that of the Gnostics.⁵⁴ However,
20 Plotinus' philosophical arguments point in a different direction.

X

21 **Endnotes**

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- ¹ I wish to thank Pierre-Marie Morel and Francesco Verde, who were kind enough to read a first draft of this paper. Thanks are also due to David Sedley and Christopher Noble, for their extremely valuable remarks, and to Brian Prince, for checking my English. All mistakes are my own.
- ² Here I will not go into Plotinus' complex attitude to teleology. Suffice it to say that Plotinus rejects a horizontal account of natural teleology according to which the sensible world is so and so arranged for the sake of certain good ends (see VI.7.1 ff. and Plotinus' criticism of Aristotle's account of motion in VI.1 [42] 16). Instead, Plotinus accepts a vertical account of teleology, so to say, which is connected to his views about emanation and conversion, according to which each thing is in need of, and is directed towards, what is higher and better (see III.8.7.17-18: τέλος ἅπασιν ἢ ἀρχή). See Thaler [2011^{Ref447}](#); Chiaradonna [2014a^{Ref80}](#).
- ³ For an in-depth discussion of Plotinus' arguments against divine planning, see Noble and Powers' contribution in this volume.
- ⁴ All translations of Plotinus are taken from Armstrong's Loeb edition of the *Enneads*, with some slight changes (see Armstrong [1966^{Ref17}](#)–88). References to the Greek text follow Henry and Schwyzer's Oxford edition (*editio minor*: see Henry and Schwyzer [1964^{Ref211}](#)–82).
- ⁵ See Armstrong [1940^{Ref15}](#): 102–5 (the account of *logos* in III.2 and III.3. conflicts with Plotinus' usual theory of metaphysical principles, since *logos* comes to be something like a fourth hypostasis). Criticism in Rist [1967^{Ref371}](#): 90–7.
- ⁶ See Opsomer [2005a^{Ref335}](#). I dwell on this issue in Chiaradonna [2014a^{Ref80}](#).
- ⁷ On the position of *logismos* in Plotinus' account of the soul, see Karfik [2011^{Ref245}](#)–12. Plotinus' views have been taken to show a certain inconsistency: for in demarcating the soul's activity from that of the Intellect, Plotinus sometimes does not refrain from ascribing a kind of transitional and incomplete thought-activity to the universal soul (see III.7.11.15–17), and this conflicts with what he says elsewhere about its non-inferential thought activity (see the discussion in Karfik [2012^{Ref246}](#)).

- ⁸ Plotinus sets out this theory in a number of passages, esp. V.1.6.28–53; V.2.1.12–18; V.3.7.13–34; V.4.2.21–7; V.9.8.11–19. Furthermore, the theory is alluded to in many other texts. There is a vast debate on Plotinus’ ‘double activity’ and its sources. Here I only refer to Emilsson [2007^{Ref147}](#): 52–68.
- ⁹ The literature on VI.7 is abundant. I have especially profited from both the commentary by Hadot [1988^{Ref194}](#) and the annotated translations by Tornau [2001^{Ref453}](#) and Fronterotta [2007^{Ref166}](#).
- ¹⁰ References to the *Timaeus* cover no less than 7 columns in Henry’s and Schwyzer’s *Index fontium* (see Henry and Schwyzer 1982: 361–4). This list is certainly not complete: for additions see e.g. Riedweg and Gritti [2010^{Ref370}](#). Also, see D’Ancona [2012^{Ref109}](#): 948–9.
- ¹¹ Pace Magrin [2010^{Ref279}](#), Plotinus’ reference to Plato’s σχήματα in III.6.12.12 is no exception: see Chiaradonna [2012^{Ref79}](#): 196–8.
- ¹² See IV.1 (21); IV.2.1–2; IV.3.19; IV.9.2. I follow the interpretation given by Schwyzer [1935^{Ref398}](#). The criticism addressed against Schwyzer by Phillips [2002^{Ref348}](#): 245–6 seems unconvincing to me. Also, see Mesch [2005^{Ref301}](#).
- ¹³ See Chiaradonna [2014b^{Ref81}](#) for further details.
- ¹⁴ Plotinus’ reference to ‘mathematical studies’ (μαθήματα) as preparatory to philosophical thought in I.3.3.5 is too cursory and conventional to provide a genuine counterexample. On Plato’s view, see Burnyeat [2000^{Ref62}](#).
- ¹⁵ The interpretation according to which Plotinus’ treatise II.9 is part of an anti-Gnostic *Großschrift* (see Harder [1936^{Ref199}](#)) including treatises 30–3, has mostly been discarded. A *status quaestionis* can be found in D’Ancona [2012^{Ref109}](#): 905–6. See, also, Narbonne [2011^{Ref316}](#): 1–4.
- ¹⁶ Narbonne appears to take Plotinus not to be denying that there is reasoning on the part of the Demiurge, but only that there is the sort of arbitrary demiurgic reasoning endorsed by the Gnostics. But Plotinus is pretty clear that he is denying reasoning (as standardly understood), not just some peculiarly erratic form of reasoning (I owe this remark to Christopher Noble).
- ¹⁷ See D’Ancona [2009^{Ref108}](#) and Morel [2009^{Ref308}](#). As D’Ancona ([2009^{Ref108}](#): 365) rightly notes, ‘Nul ne doute que cette thèse [i.e. Plotinus’ view of productive

contemplation], une fois établie, puisse servir aussi pour contrer les doctrines de ces platoniciens d'emprunt que sont les Gnostiques aux yeux de Plotin : l'action non délibérée et toujours parfaite de la nature, qui se révèle être une forme de θεωρία, s'oppose en effet diamétralement aux doctrines de ceux qui soutiennent que le démiurge du cosmos est méchant et que le cosmos aussi est mauvais... Pourtant le traité III, 8 [30] ne semble pas viser ces derniers, si ce n'est dans la mesure où, eux aussi, sont les tenants d'une fausse conception de la causalité des principes'.

¹⁸ Hammerstaedt and Smith 2008^{Ref195}: 25. The Greek text is as follows:

καλῶς Πλάτων
ὁμολογήσας γε-
νητὸν εἶναι τὸν
κόσμον, ὃ εἰ καὶ μὴ
καλῶς ἐδημιούρ-
γησεν αὐτόν,
τῇ φύσει δημι-
ουργῶ μὴ χρη-
κάμενο{ι}ς, ὃ κα-
κῶς ἄφθαρτον
ἔειπεν.

vacat

¹⁹ On Epicurus' Περὶ φύσεως book 14 see the recent discussion in Verde 2013^{Ref466}: 333–45. The text is edited by Leone 1984^{Ref264}.

²⁰ On Atticus, see Baltes 1983^{Ref27}; Moraux 1984^{Ref307}: 564–82; Zambon 2002^{Ref518}: 129–69; Karamanolis 2006^{Ref242}: 150–90. Fragments in des Places 1977.

²¹ Atticus' work is referred to as Πρὸς τοὺς διὰ τῶν Ἀριστοτέλους τὰ Πλάτωνος ὑπισχνουμένους *apud* Eus. *P. E.* 11.1.2 = fr. 1 des Places, but it is controversial whether this was the title of the treatise: see Karamanolis 2006^{Ref242}: 151. On the identity of Atticus' adversary, see Zambon 2002^{Ref518}: 138 (who argues in favour of a Platonist opponent) and Karamanolis

- [2006^{Ref242}](#): 153–7 (who argues in favour of an Aristotelian opponent). Part of Atticus' fr. 3 des Places is translated by Sharples [2010^{Ref411}](#): 202 (= 22 N).
- ²² The fragments about the temporal generation of the world are preserved by Proclus' *in Timaeum* and probably derive from Atticus' lost commentary to this dialogue (see fr. 19–25 des Places). On Pr. *in Ti.* I 276.31–277.7 Diehl (fr. 19 des Places) and I 381.26–381.12 Diehl (fr. 23 des Places), see Dörrie (†) and Baltes 1998: 112 and 414–15 (*Bst.* 137.5 and 137.6). On the preservation of the world through the demiurge's artisanal intervention, see Eus. *P. E.* 15.6.11–14 = fr. 4.64–109 des Places.
- ²³ εἴπερ γὰρ καὶ κατ' Ἐπίκουρον τὸ τῆς προνοίας οἴχεται, καίτοι τῶν θεῶν κατ' αὐτὸν πᾶσαν κηδεμονίαν ὑπὲρ τῆς σωτηρίας τῶν οἰκείων ἀγαθῶν εἰσφερομένων, οὕτως ἂν οἴχοιτο καὶ κατ' Ἀριστοτέλην τὸ τῆς προνοίας, εἰ καὶ τὰ κατ' οὐρανὸν ἐν τάξει τινὶ καὶ κόσμῳ διοικεῖται. The polemical remark about Epicurus' denial of providence is current in ancient authors and is also to be found in Plotinus (II.9.15.8–10).
- ²⁴ Atticus' criticism was actually followed by Harpocration, probably a pupil of him (see Procl. *in R.* II 377.15–378.6 Kroll = Atticus fr. 25 des Places, Harpocration fr. 13 Dillon / 21 T. Gioè, *Bst.* 137.7 Dörrie and Baltes), and Galen (see Phlp. *Aet. Mun.* 600.1–601.16 Rabe, from Galen's lost treatise *On demonstration*, book 4).
- ²⁵ On the debate about the generation of the world, see the excellent survey in Dörrie (†) and Baltes 1998: 84–146 (texts) and 373–465 (commentary). Further discussion can be found in Noble and Powers' contribution in this volume
- ²⁶ See the parallels in Whittaker [1990^{Ref496}](#): 110 n. 224.
- ²⁷ See Sedley [2007^{Ref402}](#): 239–43.
- ²⁸ It is very difficult to detect any serious textual work on Aristotle's treatises behind Atticus' objections: the hypothesis that he was not very familiar with Aristotle's works is plausible. See Moraux [1984^{Ref307}](#): 570–1, 580.
- ²⁹ The disputed philosophical allegiance of the anti-Stoic philosopher Diogenianus (known through Eusebius) confirms further the analogy between

the Epicurean and the Peripatetic views on fate: *status quaestionis* in Sharples 2010^{Ref411}: 234.

- ³⁰ Unfortunately, the Greek text is far from being clear: see Fazzo and Zonta 1999^{Ref149}: 209 n. 36. On this difficult and aporetic *Quaestio*, see the discussions in Moraux 1967^{Ref306}, Donini 1996^{Ref133} (= Donini 2011: 125–38), Rashed 2007^{Ref363}: 288–91. English translation in Sharples 1992^{Ref408}: 93–98; Italian translation in Fazzo and Zonta 1999^{Ref149}: 195–217. On Alexander’s likely polemical allusions to Atticus, see Sharples 1990^{Ref407}: 90–1.
- ³¹ See the remarks in Donini 2011: 133.
- ³² See on this Sharples 1982^{Ref405}; Genequand 1984^{Ref171} (who suggests that Alexander reacts against Galen’s account of nature); Accattino 2003^{Ref1} (with a criticism of Genequand); Adamson 2007^{Ref2}. On Alexander’s *On providence*, see the translations in Fazzo and Zonta 1999^{Ref149} and Thillet 2003^{Ref450}. The discussion in Rashed 2007^{Ref363}: 278–85 and 294–304 is fundamental. Sharples 2010^{Ref411}: 196–210 provides a survey of the Peripatetic debate about providence.
- ³³ On this analogy, see Rashed 2007^{Ref363}: 278–85 and Rashed 2011^{Ref364}: 151–2, whose interpretation I follow.
- ³⁴ Note that Alexander’s treatise *On providence* opens with a criticism of the Atomist position: see Alex. Aphr. *Prov.* 1.5 ff. Ruland. On Alexander’s reading of Epicurean philosophy, see now Rashed 2011^{Ref364}: 110–13, 356–7 and *passim*.
- ³⁵ See Thillet 2003^{Ref450}: 46–54, esp. 49. On Alexander’s account of providence and its posterity among late antique and Arab philosophers, see Adamson 2007^{Ref2}. More details in Chiaradonna 2014b^{Ref81}. Needless to say, Plotinus does not mention Alexander in his treatises (no philosopher later than Epicurus is mentioned in the *Enneads*), but Plotinus was certainly familiar with Alexander’s works (see Porph. *VP* 14.10–13; further details in Chiaradonna 2008^{Ref78} and D’Ancona 2012^{Ref109}: 973–5). The least one can say is that Plotinus and Alexander display a common attitude to demiurgic

causation, and this fact points to a common school background. Yet I am inclined to think that Plotinus was familiar with Alexander's discussion.

³⁶ See Alex. Aphr. *apud* Simpl. in *Ph.* 311.1 Diels (ἄλογος...δύναμις) vs Plot. III.8.13.12–14: Πῶς δὲ αὕτη ἔχει θεωρίαν; Τὴν μὲν δὴ ἐκ λόγου οὐκ ἔχει· λέγω δ' ἐκ λόγου τὸ σκοπεῖσθαι περὶ τῶν ἐν αὐτῇ. On Plotinus' attitude to the Peripatetic account of θεωρία in III.8 see D'Ancona [2009^{Ref108}](#). I should emphasize again that Narbonne [2011^{Ref316}](#): 122–7 neglects these parallels. His account of Plotinus' contemplation is, then, one-sided and unconvincing.

³⁷ For further details on Plotinus' theory and his attitude to Aristotle's hylomorphism, see Schiaparelli [2010^{Ref392}](#); Wilberding [2011b^{Ref501}](#); Chiaradonna [2014a^{Ref80}](#) and [2014b^{Ref81}](#).

³⁸ See above, n. 19.

³⁹ The bibliography on VI.7.2 is abundant. See, in particular, D'Ancona [1992^{Ref107}](#); Schroeder [1992^{Ref397}](#) and the annotated translations by Hadot [1988^{Ref194}](#) and Fronterotta [2007^{Ref166}](#). I am especially indebted to Schiaparelli [2010^{Ref392}](#). What follows is just a sketchy account of this chapter. Further details can be found in Thaler [2011^{Ref447}](#) and Chiaradonna [2014a^{Ref80}](#).

⁴⁰ See Arist. *A.Po.* 2.2.90a15 and *Metaph.* 8.4.1044b14. At VI.7.2.12 Plotinus refers to the Aristotelian example of the eclipse.

⁴¹ καὶ πειρωμένοις οὕτως τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι λαμβάνειν ὀρθῶς συμβαίνει. "Ὁ γὰρ ἐστὶν ἕκαστον, διὰ τοῦτό ἐστι. Λέγω δὲ οὐχ, ὅτι τὸ εἶδος ἐκάστῳ αἴτιον τοῦ εἶναι—τοῦτο μὲν γὰρ ἀληθές—ἀλλ' ὅτι, εἰ καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ εἶδος ἕκαστον πρὸς αὐτὸ ἀναπτύττοις, εὐρήσεις ἐν αὐτῷ τὸ «διὰ τί» (VI.7.2.14–19). P. Hadot [1988^{Ref194}](#): 89 and 201 and Schiaparelli [2010^{Ref392}](#): 481 argue (in my view convincingly) that the generic πειρωμένοις refers in fact to Aristotle and the Peripatetics. This would not be an isolated case: see VI.7.4.26–8; VI.1.1.29–30.

⁴² For further details and discussion I would refer again to Chiaradonna [2014a^{Ref80}](#).

⁴³ What follows is a very cursory account. Further details can be found in the notes *ad loc.* by Hadot [1988^{Ref194}](#) and Fronterotta [2007^{Ref166}](#). Horn [2012^{Ref219}](#):

226–7 provides a reading of VI.7.4–5, whose conclusions are different from my own.

- ⁴⁴ ἄρα ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος λόγος ἐστὶ ψυχῆς ἕτερος τῆς τὸν ἄνθρωπον τοῦτον ποιούσης καὶ ζῆν αὐτὸν καὶ λογίζεσθαι παρεχομένης; Ἡ ἢ ψυχὴ ἢ τοιαύτη ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐστίν; Ἡ ἢ τῷ σώματι τῷ τοιῷδε ψυχὴ προσχρωμένη; Here I will mostly leave the term *logos* transliterated. The exact meaning of it is a *crux* of Plotinus scholarship and I cannot dwell on it. For further details, I would only refer to Hadot [1988^{Ref194}](#): 217–20; Kalligas [2011^{Ref240}](#); Wilberding [2011b^{Ref501}](#); Gerson [2012^{Ref177}](#).
- ⁴⁵ On Plotinus’ reading of Plato’s *Alcibiades*, see Aubry [2007^{Ref20}](#).
- ⁴⁶ See on this Noble [2013^{Ref321}](#).
- ⁴⁷ See VI.7.5.2–3: Τί κωλύει συναμφοτέρων τι τὸν ἄνθρωπον εἶναι, ψυχὴν ἐν τοιῷδε λόγῳ.
- ⁴⁸ According to Plotinus, features in the intelligible *logos* include ‘corporeality’: see II.7.3, where there is a further critical allusion to the Peripatetic account of essence and definition (II.7.3.8–10).
- ⁴⁹ This definition is famously later than Aristotle and it plays a crucial role in Alexander of Aphrodisias’ account of essence and definition (e.g. *Alex. Aphr. in Top.* 46.6–14 Wallies): see Rashed [2007^{Ref363}](#): 153–5.
- ⁵⁰ See the contrasting views of Frede [1990^{Ref162}](#) and Peramatzis [2011^{Ref346}](#).
- ⁵¹ This is parallel to what Plotinus argues about the relation between soul and *logoi* in V.7.1.8–10.
- ⁵² The connection between *logos* and *energeia* is characteristically Plotinian: see Gerson [2012^{Ref177}](#): 20.
- ⁵³ For this reading, see Corrigan [2000^{Ref100}](#): 160, 176–7.
- ⁵⁴ See Narbonne [2011^{Ref316}](#): 151.

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