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# Light on Creation

Ancient Commentators in Dialogue and Debate  
on the Origin of the World

edited by

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## Preface

Ancient Greek philosophical tradition and Jewish and Christian authors have long shared an interest in reflecting upon the origin and creation of the world. The first found inspiration in Plato's *Timaeus*, the others in the Genesis account of the creation. But the two were at times also in touch with each other, even if, overall, the "transfer of knowledge" was generally one-directional – from philosophy to Jewish and Christian theology.

The present collection of essays contains a selection of the papers that were read at an international conference held 4–6 February 2015 at the Arts Faculty of the KU Leuven. The conference was organized in the framework of a broader research project entitled 'From Chaos to Order. The Creation of the World. New Views on the Reception of Platonic Cosmogony in Later Greek Thought, Pagan and Christian'. Its aim was to study a number of representative works and authors from the Greek (primarily Platonic), Hellenized-Jewish and ancient Christian traditions that have all addressed (aspects of) the topic, using various genres to formulate the results of their reflection. The organizers had a double aim. They wished to offer a forum for furthering the dialogue between specialists in the respective fields; and they wished to do this by studying in a comparative perspective both a crucial topic shared by these traditions and the literary genres through which this topic was developed and transmitted. Indeed, the two reference texts have been studied in antiquity both in a selective way, through citations or specialised essays (such as Plutarch's *De animae procreatione in Timaeo*), and in a more systematic way through "verse-by-verse" explanations, often of considerable length, either in the format of homilies or of exegetical commentaries.

The book is divided into three parts. The first one deals with the so-called Middle- and Neoplatonic tradition. Mauro Bonazzi (Milan) studies the creative reception and re-interpretation of previous traditions in the debate on the eternity of the world in the late-first and second century. Sarah Klitenic Wear (Steubenville, OH) offers a general survey of Syrianus' views on the creative role of the demiurge. The two other essays in this part focus on Proclus. Lorenzo Ferroni (then Leuven) analyses the textual tradition of Proclus' Commentary *in Timaeum II* and demonstrates how new insights into the complicated text transmission of Proclus' commentary have important implications for the reconstruction of the text and the understanding of its contents. Gerd Van Riel (Leuven) deals with Proclus' theory on the causes of perceptibility, an issue that relates to the meta-reflection on the discussion about such topics as creation itself.

The second part is dedicated to the Christian tradition and contains papers on several of the more important Christian authors who dealt with the *Hexaemeron*. David C. DeMarco and Volker Henning Drecoll (both Tübingen) contribute papers on the use of Scripture in Basil of Caesarea's Homilies on the *Hexaemeron* and on his exegesis of the heavenly spheres as depicted in the Genesis account. Samuel Pomeroy (Leuven) discusses the literary and theological context of John Chrysostom's teachings on the creation of man as illustrated from his *Homilies on Genesis* (esp. *Hom.* 8–9). David L. Dusenbury (Leuven) studies the status of Jewish Scripture as well as of the information taken from Jewish tradition in Nemesius of Emesa's treatise on the creation of humankind. Benjamin Gleede (Tübingen) reads John Philoponus' *De opificio mundi* as his goodbye to the tradition he hailed from and looks critically into attempts to make him a champion of the Monophysite cause. Paul M. Blowers (Johnson City, TN) identifies the principles behind the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* as developed by Maximus the Confessor. The last two papers in this part deal with Anastasius Sinaita. Clement Kuehn (New Haven, CT) gives a critical reading of Anastasius' commentary on the *Hexaemeron* as an epic commentary, looking for parallels with and influences from the Homeric tradition. Dimitrios Zaganas (Leuven) illustrates how Anastasius has digested and reworked the whole Patristic commentary tradition on the creation account in Genesis into a brilliant new synthesis that would prove to become a standard work in Byzantine scholarship.

The third part has been given the title "Some Other Voices" and deals with figures and movements that combine elements from various traditions. Gregory E. Sterling (Yale, New Haven, CT) studies the somewhat puzzling concept of "the passive cause" and the role of matter in Philo of Alexandria's understanding of creation. Claudio Moreschini (Pisa) searches for the interplay between Christian and non-Christian elements in Calcidius' views on the *creatio ex nihilo*. Gerard P. Luttikhuis (Groningen), finally, discusses the specificity of Gnostic cosmology and its dependence on the broader Greco-Roman tradition.

The papers were all followed by extensive discussions. These focused on the nature and dynamics of the often close relationship between the various traditions, on the way Jewish (Philo) and Christian authors struggled to integrate the best of the Greco-Roman tradition into their own commentaries without giving up the priority of the Genesis account, on the remarkable lack of interest from the Neoplatonists in the way Jews and Christians "intruded" in a field (philosophy) they sovereignly continued to consider as "their own", and also on how Christian authors were trying to step up for their rights in discussing these topics while at the same time constantly being on their guards to fence off the "territory" and preserve it from "heretic" influence from the inside (the Gnostics and other movements claimed to be "heretical"). Aspects of this discussion are also reflected in the papers that have been collected here.

The editors wish to thank all contributors for a fruitful cooperation that has resulted in what they hope will be perceived as a helpful collection of essays, all while realizing that an exhaustive treatment of such a large and crucial topic remains a desideratum, if not a mere chimera.

Geert Roskam  
Joseph Verheyden





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## I. The Middle- and Neoplatonic Tradition



## Middle Platonists on the Eternity of the Universe

MAURO BONAZZI

*Quae philosophia fuit, philologia facta est*, Seneca famously complained to Lucilius.<sup>1</sup> The message was clear: an attack against the vain desire for erudition, *philologia*, that was progressively taking the place of what once was a desire for wisdom, *philosophia*. Seneca did not explicitly mention his targets, but the parallel with other letters (most notably letters 58 and 65) makes it more than plausible that the new Platonism, that is, the new form of systematizing Platonism that developed from Antiochus onwards, was one of these.<sup>2</sup> And reasonably so, if one considers the importance of exegesis and of the argument *ex auctoritate (Platonis)* in the Platonist tradition. A revealing example of this tendency is the debate that developed around the problem of the eternity of the universe, a problem discussed over centuries by all philosophers. In early imperial Platonism, especially in the case of the supporters of the eternalist thesis, this debate appears to be reduced to an exegetical issue over the correct meaning of Plato's *Timaeus* on the basis of the arguments developed in the Old Academy by Speusippus, Xenocrates and Crantor. For some scholars,<sup>3</sup> this might be taken as a welcome proof of the perennial tradition of Platonism, which is regarded as a monolithic tradition sharing the same cardinal tenets from the very beginning to the end of its history. Agreeing with this view, other less sympathetic readers might be tempted to share Seneca's complaint: really, this is not philosophy anymore. But is this so? Is it true that Early Imperial Platonism was simply a matter of exegesis and depended on the passive adoption of arguments developed previously and elsewhere? By focusing on the position defended by the Platonist supporters of the view that the universe is eternal, I would like to show that things are not so simple.

During the Hellenistic centuries it was taken for granted that, according to Plato, the universe was created. As is well known, this had also been Aristotle's interpretation of Plato. In the Early Imperial centuries, however, the dominant view was the opposite: with the remarkable exception of Plutarch and Atticus the

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<sup>1</sup> Seneca, *Ep. ad Luc.* 128,23.

<sup>2</sup> See recently, G. BOYS-STONES, 'Seneca against Plato. Letters 58 and 65', in A. G. LONG (ed.), *Plato and the Stoics* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), 128–46.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. H. J. KRÄMER, *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Platonismus zwischen Platon und Plotin* (Amsterdam: Schippers, 1964).

majority of Middle Platonists attributed an eternalist thesis to Plato (and therefore endorsed it), according to which the universe has to be regarded as eternal, with no beginning in time. This had also been the view of Old Academics such as Speusippus, Xenocrates and Crantor. A closer examination of the texts of the Early Imperial Platonists vis-à-vis the arguments of the Old Academy will show, however, that along the affinities there were also important differences, which enable us to reconstruct a different and more interesting situation.

## I. The Old Academics and Middle Platonists on the Eternity of the Universe

The Old Academy basically advanced two arguments.<sup>4</sup> The first and the most famous one is explicitly attributed to Xenocrates and was probably shared also by his predecessor Speusippus. We can call it the ‘didactic argument’; it concerns the language adopted in the *Timaeus*, which in many passages appears as implying a creation in time. Taking for granted that Plato endorsed the eternalist thesis, Xenocrates explained away such a vocabulary as merely a didactic device: given the difficulty of the problem, he argued, Plato used metaphorical language for reasons of clarity. The parallel is with geometrical entities, as Aristotle remarks: like geometricians construct figures, Plato and his followers constructed the universe for didactic reasons, “facilitating understanding by exhibiting the object, like a figure, in the course of formation.”<sup>5</sup> This argument was later approved by Crantor and became canonical from the beginning and to the end of the empire,<sup>6</sup> in different expressions: διδασκαλίας χάριν, σαφηνείας ἔνεκα, θεωρίας ἦνεκα, but also, more simply, λόγῳ (as opposed to χρόνῳ).<sup>7</sup>

The second argument is explicitly attributed to Crantor but can probably be traced back to Xenocrates. Once again it is acknowledged that the language suggests a creation in time, but this is explained in a non-temporal way. As Proclus writes, the universe is taken to be eternal, but it “is said to be generated because it is brought into existence from another cause and it is not self-generated and

<sup>4</sup> For an exhaustive analysis see M. BALTES, *Die Weltentstehung des Platonischen Timaios nach den antiken Interpretationen*, vol. I (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 5–22.

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle, *De caelo* 1,9,279b32–280a1 (= Speus. fr. 94 ISNARDI PARENTE; Xenocr. fr. 153 ISNARDI PARENTE; transl. GUTHRIE): “Some of those who hold that the world, though indestructible, was yet generated, try to support their case by a parallel which is illusory. They say that in their statements about its generation they are doing what geometricians do when they construct their figures, not implying that the universe really had a beginning, but for didactic reasons facilitating understanding by exhibiting the object, like a figure, in the course of formation.”

<sup>6</sup> For a useful list of passages, see H. CHERNISS (ed.), *Plutarch. Moralia*, vol. 13.1 (Cambridge, MA – London: Harvard University Press, 1976), 168–9.

<sup>7</sup> See M. BALTES, *Der Platonismus in der Antike*, vol. V: *Die philosophische Lehre des Platonismus. Platonische Physik (im antiken Verständnis) II* (Stuttgart – Bad Cannstatt: Frommann – Holzboog, 1998), 426.

self-subsistent (ὡς ἀπ' αἰτίας ἄλλης παραγόμενον καὶ οὐκ ὄντα αὐτόγονον οὐδὲ αὐθυπόστατον).<sup>8</sup> In other words, *genetos* does not refer to a temporal creation but to the universe's dependence on a higher cause for its existence. Scholars debate over the relation between these two arguments, whether they both come from Xenocrates and whether they form two parts of the same account, the second laying the foundation for the first. Leaving aside these interesting problems, it is important to remind that this argument too will be often used by imperial Platonists, as we will see. The problem is to establish how they used it.

The first evidence is Plutarch's report on Eudorus commenting on Xenocrates' and Crantor's account of the generation of the soul in Plato's *Timaeus*.<sup>9</sup> To be sure, we have the report (Plutarch) of a report (Eudorus), and this passage is probably much more a testimony on Xenocrates and Crantor than on Eudorus. Still a couple of things are to be noted. First, it is remarkable that Xenocrates (and Crantor as well, one may add) are presented as following the Pythagorean tradition. Second, it is interesting to observe that the term employed to state the eternalist thesis, λόγῳ, is not very common.<sup>10</sup> These two small elements are interesting because they can be found in another text of this same period, that is, Pseudo-Timaeus' *On the nature of the universe and of the soul*. As is well known, this is an apocryphal text, a paraphrase of Plato's *Timaeus* which was supposed to be the original text followed by Plato. It was meant as a sort of introduction to Plato's *Timaeus*: where Plato is ambiguous (and the *Timaeus* is often ambiguous) the author of this treatise offers what he regards as the correct reading of the dialogue. This is also the case with the problem of the generation of the universe. In the *Timaeus* it is not clear whether Plato was supporting the eternalist or the creationist thesis. Pseudo-Timaeus, which is the model Plato was supposed to be following, makes it clear that the first option is the correct one:

πρὶν ὧν ὠρανὸν λόγῳ γενέσθαι ποτ' ἦσθην ἰδέα τε καὶ ὕλα καὶ ὁ θεὸς δαμιουργὸς τῷ βελτίονος (pseudo-Tim. *De nat. univ. et an.*, § 7, 206.11–12; see Plato, *Tim.* 37e1, 52d4).

<sup>8</sup> Proclus, *In Tim.* 1, 277, 8–10 (= Crant. fr. 5,2 ΜΕΤΤΕ). The reference text is Plato, *Timaeus* 28c2–3.

<sup>9</sup> Plutarch, *De an. procr.* 1013AB (= Xenocr. fr. 158 I.P. = Crant. fr. 10 M. = Eudor. fr. 6 MAZZARELLI; transl. CHERNISS): "All these interpreters agree on the view that the soul did not come to be in time and is not subject to generation, but that it has many faculties, and that Plato in analysing its essence into these for theoretical reasons (θεωρίας ἕνεκα) represents it verbally (λόγῳ) as coming to be and being blended together. It is their position that he had the same thing in mind concerning the cosmos as well: he knew that it was eternal and ungenerated, but seeing that the manner of its organization and management would not to be easy to discern unless one presupposed its generation and a conjunction of the generative factors at its beginning, he had recourse to this procedure. Such being on the whole what they say, Eudorus thinks that neither of the two lacks likelihood; but to me they both seem to miss utterly Plato's opinion if one must use plausibility as a standard, not in promotion of one's own doctrine but with the desire to say something that agrees with Plato."

<sup>10</sup> M. BALTES (ed.), *Timaios Lokros. Über die Natur des Kosmos und der Seele* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 48.

The occurrence of *λόγω*, the same term we also find in Plutarch / Eudorus, clearly refers to the “didactic device”. But in pseudo-Timaeus there is also a novelty, the importance of which will soon become clear. In comparison to Xenocrates the author refers to God as one (and the most important) principle. We will soon come back to this novelty.

As for the second argument, a parallel comes from Alcinous’ *Didaskalikos*:

When he says that the world is ‘generated’, one must not understand him to assert that there ever was a time when the world did not exist; but rather that the world is perpetually in a state of becoming, and reveals a more primordial cause of its existence (“Ὅταν δὲ εἴπη γενητὸν εἶναι τὸν κόσμον, οὐκ οὕτως ἀκουστέον αὐτοῦ, ὡς ὄντος ποτὲ χρόνου, ἐν ᾧ οὐκ ἦν κόσμος· ἀλλὰ διότι αἰεὶ ἐν γενέσει ἐστί καὶ ἐμφαίνει τῆς αὐτοῦ ὑποστάσεως ἀρχικώτερόν τι αἴτιον) (Alc. *Did.* 169, 32–5; transl. DILLON).

Interesting is the combined presence of *arche* with *aition*. This is not without consequences, because *arche* in the jargon of the *Didaskalikos* refers once again to God, the most important *arche*, as is explicitly stated in the following line, where Alcinous speaks about the world soul (... καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν δὲ αἰεὶ οὐσαν τοῦ κόσμου οὐχὶ ποιεῖ ὁ θεὸς ἀλλὰ κατακοσμεῖ, 169, 35–7). Alcinous’ account is therefore slightly different as compared to Crantor. The latter put the emphasis on ontologico-metaphysical grounds (in other words his argument was based on the notion of cause without specifying what concretely this cause amounted to); in Alcinous the argument, though virtually identical, appears more cosmologically and theologically oriented: the universe is ἐν γενέσει, in the process of becoming, and depends on a higher principle, that is the God who governs everything.

Another testimony concerning these debates is Taurus’ classification of the different meanings of the term *genetos*. Surely, Taurus remarks, Plato used this adjective for the universe, but everything depends on the meaning of that term. *Genetos* has four different meanings. The most important ones, the ones favoured by Taurus himself, are the third and the fourth. The third refers to the nature of the universe, the fourth to the nature of the cause:

The cosmos is said to be ‘created’ as being always in process of generation (καθὸ αἰεὶ ἐν τῷ γίνεσθαι), even as Proteus is always in the process of changing in different shapes. [...] One might also call it ‘created’ by virtue of the fact that it is dependent for its existence on an outside source, to wit, God, by whom it has been brought to order (ὅτι καὶ τὸ εἶναι αὐτῷ ἀλλαχόθεν ἐστὶν καὶ παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ, πρὸς ὃν κεκόσμηται) (Philop. *De aeternitate mundi* = T22B LAKMANN = Fr. 23 GIOÈ; transl. DILLON).

The analogies with Alcinous are clear.

To this passage one may add many other testimonies which do not explicitly name Crantor but basically endorse his argument and in a way complete it. An interesting, but controversial, text is another passage from Plutarch, this time referring to the views of his teacher Ammonius. The problem at stake, viz. the famous Platonist *ainigma* concerning the meaning of the tenet that “God is al-



ways doing geometry,” is not relevant for us. What deserves our attention is what Plutarch says when he touches on the issue of the generation of the universe. After introducing the usual triad of God (“the best of causes”, τῶν αἰτίων ἄριστον),<sup>11</sup> matter (“the least ordered of substances”) and Form (“the most beautiful of patterns”), he attributes to Ammonius the following view:

Now God’s intention was, so far as possible, to leave nothing unused or unformed, but to reduce nature to a cosmos by the use of proportion and measure and number, making a unity of all the materials which would have the quality of the form and the quantity of matter. Therefore, having set himself this problem, these two being given, he created a third and still creates and preserves throughout all time that which is equal to matter and similar to form, namely, the cosmos. Being continuously involved in becoming and shifting and all kinds of events, because of its congenital forced association with its body, the cosmos is assisted by the Father and Creator, who, by means of reason, and with reference to the pattern, gives limits to that which exists (τρίτον ἐποίησε καὶ ποιεῖ καὶ φυλάττει διὰ παντός τὸ ἴσον τῇ ὕλῃ καὶ ὁμοιον τῇ ιδέα τὸν κόσμον· αἰεὶ γὰρ ὦν διὰ τὴν σύμφυτον ἀνάγκην τοῦ σώματος ἐν γενέσει καὶ μετατροπῇ καὶ πάθει παντοδαποῖς ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ δημιουργοῦ βοηθεῖται τῷ λόγῳ πρὸς τὸ παράδειγμα τὴν οὐσίαν ὀρίζοντος) (Plut., *Quaest. conv.* VIII 2, 720BC; trans. MINAR – SANDBACH – HELMBOLD).

This text is less clear than one might hope and two different readings have been proposed by Jan Opsomer and Matthias Baltes.<sup>12</sup> Insisting on the value of the aorist ἐποίησε, Opsomer has argued that Ammonius, like Plutarch, endorsed the creationist thesis. On the contrary, by insisting on the emphatic position of αἰεὶ, moreover in connection with ἐν γενέσει (like Alcinous, see *supra*),<sup>13</sup> Baltes has favoured the opposite reading. All in all, I would side with the latter, but the testimony is admittedly controversial.

Finally a passage from Philo’s *De providentia* (unfortunately lost in its original version) also deserves to be mentioned. Philo of Alexandria, as is well known, was a staunch defender of the view that the universe was not eternal. In many passages he introduces and critically engages with the opposite view. The most famous case is the treatise *De aeternitate mundi*. Another interesting testimony comes from the beginning of his *De providentia*, chapters 6–8. One reason, Philo reports, for the view that the universe is eternal is that it is impossible that God, who is the cause of the order of the universe, is sometimes active and sometimes not. The language clearly refers to Platonism (the standard *Dreiprinzipienlehre* is adopted) and the text at the background is once again the *Timaeus* (see 29e), of which it offers an eternalist interpretation.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Plato, *Tim.* 29a.

<sup>12</sup> J. OPSOMER, ‘M. Annius Ammonius, a Philosophical Profile’, in M. BONAZZI – J. OPSOMER (eds.), *The Origins of the Platonic System. Platonisms of the Early Empire and their Philosophical Contexts* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 123–86, here: 141–2 n. 89; BALTES, *Weltentstehung*, 93–4.

<sup>13</sup> BALTES, *Weltentstehung*, 86 also quotes Philo of Alexandria, *De aeternitate* 14; Opsomer refers to *De Is. et Os.* 374DE, where *aiegenes* is intended to hold after the creation.

The same argument also occurs elsewhere in Philo's *corpus*, where he speaks *in propria persona*. Take for example *Leg. All.* I 5–6 (transl. COLSON – WHITAKER):

God never leaves off making, but even as it is the property of fire to burn and of snow to chill, so it is the property of God to make (θεοῦ τοῦ ποιεῖν): nay more by far, inasmuch as He is to all besides the source of action. Excellently, moreover, Moses say 'caused to rest' not 'rested'; for He causes to rest that which, though actually not in operation, is apparently making, but He himself never ceases making.

As Baltes has correctly remarked, Philo's use of this argument is incoherent, given his commitment to the view that the universe was created.<sup>14</sup> Clearly such an argument was introduced in defence of the eternalist thesis. Snow is always chilling and fire is always burning; likewise God is always creating.

An analysis of the available testimonies, therefore, shows that it was not simply a matter of passive reception. Philosophy was taken to consist primarily of the exegesis of authoritative texts, the *Timaeus* above all. Moreover, Early Imperial Platonists, when promoting a return to a dogmatic and systematizing Plato, took over arguments of the Old Academy. But this does not exclude, contrary to what is sometimes assumed, that they also elaborated the arguments they had inherited from tradition. The comparison with the Old Academy shows that the differences are no less remarkable than the affinities. A distinctive move of the Old Academics was to 'demythologize' the *Timaeus*. Early Imperial Platonists adopted the arguments of the Old Academy but in the context of a new theological concern. The eternalist thesis is now strictly connected to God and his nature (that is, his being always active). This has been rarely noted, but it is a remarkable novelty that explicitly produces the view of the *creatio continua* (that is the view according to which God is always engaged in the creation). In other words, it clearly appears that Early Imperial Platonists creatively adapted their arguments to the new context in which they were active.

## II. Middle Platonists and the Hellenistic Debate

What is worth stressing is therefore the new emphasis on the theological problem. The eternalist thesis is now strictly connected to God, his nature and his activity. This is not without interest, for it clearly shows that Early Imperial Platonism results not only from the adoption of old arguments (Plato and the Old Academy) but also from a more personal and theoretical engagement with the problems. Indeed, this new emphasis on the role of God is not an isolated fact,

<sup>14</sup> BALTES, *Platonismus V*, p. 467. It is remarkable that examples such as those of fire and snow will become canonical in later authors, see Plot. 1,7[54],1,25; 4,3[27],10,1; 5,1[10],6,27; 5,4[7],1,24; 6,9[9],9,6; Origen, *De princ.* 1,2,4. The most interesting parallel is Atticus, fr. 3b DES PLACES.

which is only connected to the debate on the eternity of the universe. On the contrary, the emphasis on the theological dimension of philosophy, is the problem *par excellence* in Early Imperial Platonism. In other words, Early Imperial Platonists placed the question of the generation of the universe in a broader context.

This is the decisive problem if we want to have a correct understanding of Early Imperial Platonism. As a matter of fact, in recent years scholars have become increasingly more aware that it would be misleading to consider Platonism only as the result of the exegesis of Plato's dialogues, because no less important is the confrontation with the other philosophical schools. The theological problem is a typical example of this. It is often assumed that this theological reshaping is the exclusive contribution of Imperial Platonists, who thus reoriented previous discussions during the Hellenistic centuries, when a theological and religious attitude was not central to the philosophical debate. But this is patently mistaken if we consider the centrality of the theological concern in Stoicism and also its religious attitude. Many scholars have shown that the reshaping of Plato's thought as a sort of theological philosophy also depends on the confrontation with the Stoics. Consider for instance the notion of cause, *aition*, which played a very important role in Plato's school and later played an equally important role in Imperial Platonism. It was Stoicism, as Frede and Mansfeld have brilliantly argued,<sup>15</sup> that for the first time made cardinal the equivalence of God with *aition* in its most eminent sense and, no less important, took it in the sense of active / efficient cause. With regard to the Hellenistic background, therefore, what is distinctive of Early Imperial Platonism is not so much the emphasis on God as on the *transcendent* God, because the philosophical importance of God and the strict union between philosophy and theology was already established in Stoicism.

The next step to take, then, a step rarely taken, is to consider whether the Platonists' view was indebted to other schools also on the specific issue of the eternity of the universe, and, if so, how deeply. This is an interesting question if we consider the eternalist thesis, because it is too rarely considered that the endorsement of the eternalist view was not distinctive of Platonists only. Admittedly, in the Hellenistic period, it was basically agreed that the universe was created in time and that this was Plato's position. But it is interesting to note that towards the end of this period, philosophers from different traditions came to endorse the eternalist view. Did the arguments *pro* and *contra* of the Hellenistic philosophers exert any influence on the Platonists? Or to be more precise, can we find in them traces of the arguments that we found in Early Imperial Platonists? And in case of a positive answer, what conclusion to draw from it?

<sup>15</sup> M. FREDE, 'The Original Notion of Cause', in *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 125–50 and J. MANSFELD, 'Plato, Pythagoras, Aristotle, the Peripatetics, the Stoics, and Thales and His Followers "On Causes" (Ps.-Plutarchus *Placita* I 11 and Stobaeus *Anthologium* I 13)', in A. BRANCACCI (ed.), *Antichi e moderni nella filosofia di età imperiale* (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 2001), 17–68, here: 35.

A first candidate is the Peripatos. And predictably so, given the importance of the eternalist thesis in the Aristotelian tradition. This view was constantly supported in the Peripatos, and it is interesting to note that towards the end of the Hellenistic period new arguments were produced in its favour, most notably by Critolaus around the half of the second century BC.<sup>16</sup> Most of these arguments are strictly connected to Aristotle's philosophy and do not appear to involve a theological commitment.<sup>17</sup> A possible exception is provided by the joint reading of the two following testimonies, as David Hahm suggested:

Critolaus in his contention also used an argument like this: that which causes itself to be healthy is disease-free; and that which causes itself to be awake is awake. If so, also that which causes itself to exist is eternal. But the cosmos causes itself to exist, if indeed it does so for everything else. Therefore the cosmos is eternal (καὶ τὸ αἴτιον αὐτῷ τοῦ ὑπάρχειν αἰδιόν ἐστιν· αἴτιος δ' ὁ κόσμος αὐτῷ τοῦ ὑπάρχειν, εἴ γε καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἅπαν· αἰδιός ἄρα ὁ κόσμος ἐστίν) (Critolaus *ap. Phil. Alex. De aet.* 70 = Crit. Fr. 12 W.; transl. ΗΑΗΜ).

[According to Critolaus] God is mind derived from aether, which is not subject to being acted on (νοῦν ἀπ' αἰθέρος ἀπαθοῦς) (Stob. I 1, 29b = Critol. fr. 16 W.; transl. ΗΑΗΜ).

Taken together these two texts make it tempting to see a "reference to an heavenly divinity," as Hahm has suggested. Indeed, this is the conclusion if the material of the heavens is etheric divine mind that is responsible for the orderly movements of the heavens themselves and therefore for the order of the entire universe. The consequences, however, are remarkable, for there would be no longer any room for the incorporeal eternal principle of *Metaphysics* XII. Rather "Critolaus' assertion that the cosmos is responsible for its own existence also narrowed the gap between the Peripatetics and the Stoics."<sup>18</sup> It is far from sure that Hahm's reconstruction of Critolaus' position is correct. But if it were, it is clear that the difference with Platonists is great: Platonists would have never assented to this eternally self-maintaining universe. Critolaus' support of the eternity of the universe reveals a scientific attitude that can be traced back to the new interest in Aristotelian physical theory, an interest that can be paralleled also in other contemporary Peripatetics,<sup>19</sup> but much less among the Platonists. The comparison with Critolaus is not very promising.

<sup>16</sup> See R. W. SHARPLES, 'Philo and post-Aristotelian Peripatetics', in F. ALESSE (ed.), *Philo of Alexandria and Post-Aristotelian Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 55–73 and D. ΗΑΗΜ, 'Critolaus and Late Hellenistic Peripatetic Philosophy', in A. M. IOPPOLO – D. SEDLEY (eds.), *Pyrrhonists, Patricians, Platonizers. Hellenistic Philosophy in the Period 155–86 BC* (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 2007), 47–101 (esp. 84).

<sup>17</sup> Critolaus argues for instance that human race has always existed, and therefore the world has always existed, cf. Philo of Alexandria, *De aet.* 55.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. SVF II 633 = 53X LS.

<sup>19</sup> Most notably, Xenarchus, on whom see A. FALCON, *Aristotelianism in the First Century BCE. Xenarchus of Seleucia* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012). A. FALCON, 'The Reception of Aristotle's Physics in Antiquity: Pseudo-Ocellus and the Doctrine of the Eternity of the World in the Late

Another possible source of influence was Stoicism, as its importance in the development of Early Imperial Platonism is now widely acknowledged.<sup>20</sup> Admittedly, at first sight Stoicism does not appear to be a likely candidate, capable of influencing Platonism. Chrysippus regarded his cosmology, and more precisely the thesis of the conflagration (*ekpyrosis*), as implying the view that the universe is eternal.<sup>21</sup> But this doctrine was so idiosyncratic and object of so many attacks that it is difficult to envisage a positive relation between it and the Platonist view.<sup>22</sup> It is, however, worth reminding that, even within the Stoic school, the doctrine of the periodical destruction and reconstitution was a controversial thesis that eventually came to be doubted or rejected by many Stoics (not all, for it seems that Posidonius continued to support it).<sup>23</sup> Panaetius was the most famous critic, but not the only one, for we are informed by Philo's *De aeternitate* that Boethus of Sidon also developed a set of arguments against it.<sup>24</sup> Some of these arguments aim at technical aspects of the Stoic doctrine. Others, however, are of more general interest, as the third in Philo's list, which states that "if the world is destroyed in the conflagration, God will be inactive."<sup>25</sup> Such an argument presupposes the idea of *creatio continua* that we have already found in Platonism:

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Hellenistic and Early Post-Hellenistic Period (2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Century BC); in *Méthexis* (forthcoming) also suggests that Critolaus might have influenced pseudo-Ocellos.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. for instance G. REYDAMS-SCHILS, *Demiurge and Providence. Stoic and Platonist Readings of Plato's Timaeus* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999) for an interesting analysis of the Stoic and Platonic cosmologies.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. for instance J. MANSFELD, 'Theology', in K. ALGRA – J. BARNES – J. MANSFELD – M. SCHOFIELD (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), 452–78, here: 468.

<sup>22</sup> Moreover, in the doxographical tradition they were listed among those who endorse the world's creation and its destruction; see Philo of Alexandria, *De aeternitate* 8–9. One possible exception is Severus, as argued by R. SORABJI, *Time, Creation & the Continuum* (London: Duckworth, 1983), 271.

<sup>23</sup> On late Hellenistic Stoicism see now the overview of C. VEILLARD, *Les stoïciens II* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2015), 71–6, 135–42, 183–8.

<sup>24</sup> This Boethus is not to be confused with the Peripatetic Boethus; more or less contemporary of Chrysippus he was active in the second half of the second century BC. On Philo's testimony see A. A. LONG, 'Philo on Stoic Physics', in F. ALESSE (ed.), *Philo of Alexandria and Post-Aristotelian Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 121–40 and SHARPLES, 'Philo and post-Aristotelian Peripatetics'. Other Stoics who doubted or rejected the doctrine of *ekpyrosis* are Diogenes of Babylon (the teacher of Boethus, see *SVF* III, *Diogenes Babylonius*, 27 again from Philo's *De aeternitate* 77) and Zeno of Tarsus (*SVF* III, *Zeno Tarsiensis* 5).

<sup>25</sup> Boethus *ap.* Philo of Alexandria, *De aet.* 83–4; transl. COLSON: "Moreover if all things are as they say consumed in the conflagration, what will God be doing during that time? Will He do nothing at all? That surely is the natural inference. For at present He surveys each thing, guardian of all as though He were indeed their father, guiding in very truth the chariot and steering the bark of the universe, the defender of the sun and moon and stars whether fixed or wandering, and also the air and the other parts of the world, cooperating in all that is needful for the preservation of the whole and the faultless management of it which right reason demands. But if all things are annihilated inactivity and dire unemployment will render His life unworthy of the name and what could be more monstrous than this? I shrink from saying, for the very thought is a blasphemy, that quiescence will entail as a consequence the death of God, for if you

there is no conflagration, for God is always active, in the sense that He takes care of the universe all the time.

It is worth remarking that Boethus' argument does not appear *ex nihilo*. On the contrary, some passages in Cicero make plausible the hypothesis that he was somehow exploiting anti-Stoic criticisms in order to defend the Stoic system. The two most interesting texts come from Cicero's *De natura deorum* and *Lucullus*. In the first one the speaker is the Epicurean Velleius, and Stoicism and Plato are singled out (and criticized) together. Both are presented as endorsing the view that the universe was created in time; this thesis is said to be incompatible with the hypothesis that it was God (or the gods) who created it. For otherwise what would God have done before: slept for centuries? Or shall we conclude that he is lazy and does not want to work?<sup>26</sup>

Do you maintain that Plato had the slightest acquaintance with natural philosophy, when he believes that anything which had a beginning can last forever? [...] Now if your Stoic Pronoia, Lucullus, is identical with this, my question remains the same as before: what agents were there, what scaffolding? What were the planning and arrangement? But if your deity is different, why did Pronoia make the universe mortal rather than eternal as Plato's God did? The question I put to both of you is this: why did these world-builders suddenly emerge after lying asleep for countless generations? (Cicero, *De nat. deor.* I 20–1; transl. WALSH).

A similar objection also occurs in the *Lucullus*, where the speaker is Cicero on behalf of the sceptical Academy. In a long section devoted to underlining the many substantial disagreements on natural questions between the different philosophical schools, Cicero opposes the Stoics to Aristotle. The Stoic is convinced of the perfection of this world; but “nevertheless a time will come when this world will be burnt out with heat”:

When your Stoic wise man has told you those facts [...], in will come Aristotle, pouring forth a golden stream of eloquence, to declare that he is doting, since the world never had a beginning, because there never can have been a commencement, on new and original lines, of so a glorious structure (*neque enim ortum esse umquam mundum quod nulla fuerit novo consilio inito tam praeclari operis inceptio*). [...] I ask you for what reason did the deity (*deus*), when making ... (Cic. *Luc.* 119–20; transl. RACKHAM).

These two passages are of interest for two reasons. First of all, with regard to the first text, Boethus and Stoicism. And second, with regard to the *Lucullus*, the reference to Aristotle. As for the first point: leaving aside the polemical tone, the affinity with the Platonist testimonies is remarkable. What conclusion can we

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annihilate the perpetual motion of the soul you will annihilate the soul itself also and, according to our opponents, God is the soul of the world.”

<sup>26</sup> On the same lines Lucretius, 5,168–73. On the Epicurean theme of the *Deus otiosus* see J.-M. FLAMAND, ‘*Deus otiosus*. Recherches lexicales pour servir à l’histoire de la critique religieuse d’Épicure’, in “ΣΟΦΙΗΣ ΜΑΙΗΤΟΡΕΣ. Chercheurs de sagesse”. *Hommage à Jean Pépin* (Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes, 1992) 147–66.

draw from this parallel? As far as I know, nobody has paid attention to the affinities between these testimonies and the Platonist texts. All in all, it is tempting to say that these debates also played some role in the development of the eternalist thesis as it was endorsed by Early Imperial Platonists.<sup>27</sup> As we have already remarked, the Platonists' new emphasis on God as first principle was also indebted to the Hellenistic debates; and as in the case of this general issue, one might observe that such influence also extended to the specific question of the generation of the universe. It is tempting therefore to conclude that Platonists were aware of these debates and criticisms and that, when endorsing the eternalist thesis, they were somehow taking them into consideration and reacting to them.

As for the reference to Aristotle, the situation is more delicate. It is important to remember the double life Aristotle had in antiquity: there were the so-called esoteric treatises, which became object of great attention precisely from this period onwards; but there are also the exoteric texts, treatises and dialogues written for wider audiences, which were much more popular in this period than the esoteric texts, especially outside the Peripatos. The reference of the *Lucullus* is universally acknowledged to come from one of these texts, the *Peri philosophias*. As a further confirmation of the importance of this text in the Early Imperial age with regard to the generation of the universe it may be added that it also plays a central role in Philo's *De aeternitate*; its relevance for these debates has already been underlined. In fact, the contents of Aristotle's *Peri philosophias* and its real influence are a controversial issue (it is sure that in the third book the eternity of the universe was defended; but it is far from clear that one of the arguments in defence of it was the emphasis on the active character of God). One important step was taken by Effe, who has argued that all the testimonies on the relation between the eternity of the universe and the notion of the God eternally active should be traced back to this text.<sup>28</sup> In other words, whereas in the *On heaven* the eternalist thesis mainly rests on physical and logical arguments (for instance the demonstration that generated and corruptible, ungenerated and incorruptible are coextensive), here there is also a place for God. If his theory is correct, we should take into consideration the hypothesis that Early Imperial Platonists were also influenced by this text (possibly through the Hellenistic testimonies).<sup>29</sup>

This is a delicate problem. Without pretending to be able to definitely settle the issue, there are some more texts, not often taken into consideration, which seem to suggest that Aristotle did play some role in the development of Platonism. We

<sup>27</sup> BALTES, *Weltentstehung*, 30–2 emphasizes the role played by the Epicurean criticisms. In general, on the 'idle argument', see SORABJI, *Time*, 249–52.

<sup>28</sup> B. EFFE, *Studien zur Kosmologie und Theologie der Aristotelischen Schrift 'Über die Philosophie'* (München: Beck, 1970), 30; SORABJI, *Time*, 281–2.

<sup>29</sup> As J. PÉPIN, *Théologie cosmique et théologie chrétienne: Ambroise, Exam. I 1,1–4* (Paris: PUF, 1964), 480–1 claims (arguing, moreover, that the notion of *creatio continua* was first developed by Aristotle, in the *Peri philosophias*).

are not dealing with a detailed reading of the esoteric treatises, but rather with the adoption of some Aristotelian tenets taken in a loose sense. These parallels come from the *corpus* of Pythagorean apocryphal works. In recent times there is a growing consensus that one may circumscribe a group of treatises that belong to the same context of the Early Imperial Platonism: they share the same basic doctrines and they are characterized by the adoption of Platonic and Aristotelian terms and doctrines (taken broadly). The most famous are the already mentioned pseudo-Timaeus' *On the nature of the universe and of the soul* and pseudo-Archytas' *On Categories* and *On Principles*. For the debate on the generation of the universe another of these texts deserves to be taken into account, viz. the mysterious Aristiaeus (but perhaps the name is a corruption for the more famous Archytas). In a fragment from a treatise *Peri armonias* we read:

Insofar as it is principle, it is before everything and ungenerated and complete (ἐπει δὲ ἀρχά, ἅτε διή οὔσα ἀρχά, πρὸ παντός τέ ἐστι καὶ ἀγέννητος καὶ αὐτοτελής) [...]; clearly therefore the principle is ungenerated in itself and eternal and cause of generation and of movement (δῆλον δὴ, ὡς αὐτὰ καθ' αὐτὰν ἄ ἀρχὰ ἀγέννητός τέ ἐστι καὶ αἰδῖος καὶ αἰτία γενέσιος τε καὶ κινάσιος) [...]. Given that what is immortal is what does not tire, and that what does not tire is what does not weaken, and this is God, and since God is of this sort [*ie* immortal], since he moves everything and the all, it is clear that the universe is eternal. If indeed there were a principle of the creation, the mover itself would be tired and take a pause. But if the mover were tired and took a pause, then, since it is corruptible and generated, it too would have a limit for his movement and the universe too would have a limit for its formation. Therefore it is necessary that either we abolish generation or we accept that there is generation from not-being or it remains that this cosmos is immortal and will never become old (ἐπει δὲ τὸ ἀθάνατον τὸ ἀκάματον, τὸ δὲ ἀκάματον τὸ μὴ κάμνον, ὁ δὲ θεὸς τοιοῦτος, κινέων γε τὸ ὅλον καὶ τὸ πᾶν, φανερόν, ὡς αἰδῖος ἂν εἴη ὁ κόσμος. Εἰ γὰρ ἀρχὰν λήψεται διακοσμοσίας, ἔκαμέ ποκα τὸ κινέον αὐτὸ κατ' ἄμπαυσιν διακοσμοσίας. Εἰ δέ γε κάμνοι καὶ ἀμπαύοιτο τὸ κινέον, φθαρτὸν καὶ γενητὸν ὑπάρχον, καὶ αὐτὸ πέρασ ἐξει κινάσιος, καὶ τὸ ὅλον δὲ καὶ τὸ πᾶν διακοσμάσιος, ὥστ' ἀνάγκα ἦτοι γένεσιν ἀναρεῖν, ἢ γενῶν ἐκ τῷ μὴ ὄντος, ἢ τόνδε τὸν κόσμον καταλείπεται ἀθάνατον καὶ ἀγήρατον εἶμεν) (Arist. *De harm.* 52, 10–53, 2).

This is an important text, presenting as Pythagorean doctrines and arguments that clearly belong to the late Hellenistic and Early Imperial centuries. Moreover, the reference to the *kinoun* can legitimately be taken as a reference to Aristotle, as the parallel of pseudo-Archytas' *On Principles* confirms.<sup>30</sup> In this context, its strategical role is clear, as Moraux already remarked: “it is evident that the argument was directed against the *Timaeus*' doctrine, or better against the literalist interpretation of the generation of the universe.”<sup>31</sup> Like pseudo-Timaeus, this

<sup>30</sup> Ps.-Archytas, *De princ.* 19, 27 THESELEFF. On this text see M. BONAZZI, ‘Pythagoreanising Aristotle: Eudorus and the Systematisation of Platonism’, in M. SCHOFIELD (ed.), *Aristotle, Plato and Pythagoreanism in the First Century BC. New Directions for Philosophy* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), 160–86.

<sup>31</sup> P. MORAUX, *Der Aristotelismus bei den Griechen*, vol. 2 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1984), 204. Other testimonies are Philolaus *On the soul* and pseudo-Ocellus (see *supra*).





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